

Interface



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Feminism, women's movements and
women in movement

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Cover art

The cover image is a photograph of street art from the Egyptian revolution, this version at Saleh Selim Street, the island of Zamalek, Cairo. The photograph was taken on 23 October 2011 by independent journalist, photographer and blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy who entitled it "Grenade is what you are having for dinner". His blog, and his other photographic works from the revolution, can be viewed at <http://www.arabawy.org>. We thank Hossam for his permission to use the image. The next edition of *Interface* on the Arab Spring, out in May 2012, will include an event analysis of efforts to archive art work and other materials related to the Egyptian Revolution.

About *Interface*

Interface: a journal for and about social movements is a peer-reviewed journal of practitioner research produced by movement participants and engaged academics. *Interface* is globally organised in a series of different regional collectives, and is produced as a multilingual journal.

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Articles marked (P) have been subject to double-blind peer review by one academic researcher and one movement practitioner.

Feminism, women's movements and women in movement

**Sara Motta, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Catherine Eschle,
Laurence Cox**

For this issue Interface is delighted to welcome Catherine Eschle as guest editor. Until recently co-editor of the International feminist journal of politics, Catherine has written with Bice Maiguashca on feminism and the global justice movement, as well as on the politics of feminist scholarship and other themes relevant to this issue.

Introduction

This issue engages with the increasingly important, separate yet interrelated themes of feminism, women's movements and women in movement in the context of global neoliberalism.

The last few decades have witnessed an intensification of neoliberal restructuring, involving the opening of national economies to international capital and the erosion of rights and guarantees won previously by organised labour (Federici, 1999, 2006). Neoliberal policies have driven ever larger proportions of the population into flexibilised and informalised working conditions, and caused a crisis in masculinised organised labour (Chant, 2008; Hite and Viterna, 2005), the collapse of welfare provision for poor families, and the privatisation of public and/or collective goods such as land, housing and education. As a consequence, poverty has been feminised and violence, both structural and individual, has intensified. In the main, women carry the burden of ensuring the survival of their families (Olivera, 2006; González de la Rocha, 2001), combining escalating domestic responsibilities with integration into a labour market that is increasingly precarious and unregulated. Furthermore, their integration is accompanied by accelerated sexualisation of public space, and the concurrent objectification and commodification of women's minds and bodies (McRobbie, 2009). Such conditions serve only to deepen women's experiences of poverty, inequality, exclusion, alienation and violence.

At the same time, feminism seems to be in crisis. Prominent sectors of the feminist movement have become institutionalised and professionalised, including within academia, and in this context serious questions have been raised about how well they can defend women from neoliberalism and about their role in the struggle for a post-neoliberal, post-patriarchal world. The result is a paradoxical situation of defeats and de-politicisation, on the one hand, combined with new forms of re-politicisation, on the other. Women continue to resist, in both familiar and more inventive ways, attempting in so doing to redefine the nature of feminism and of politics and to challenge patriarchal and neoliberal orthodoxies.

In this light, we suggest that there is an urgent need to revisit and reinvent feminist theorising and practice in ways that combine critical understanding of the past with our current struggles, and that create theories both inside and outside the academy to support movement praxis. There are, however, some obstacles to such a project. Feminist theory, which developed out of and for women's activism, at times has been directly linked to and shaped by the dilemmas facing movement organising and at other times has represented a more distant and reflective form of thought. If many activists continue to find it useful in the development of their social critiques and the scrutiny of mobilised identities, the relationship of feminist theory to questions of movement organising is often less clear, as is what feminist theory can offer social movement analysis.

More challengingly, while some women's movements are distinctly and proudly feminist, others avoid the term (even while consciously or unconsciously adopting feminist practices and attitudes), while still more contest its meaning. A range of activist communities, such as trade unions and alterglobalisation, environmental or peace movements, perceive feminist-labelled arguments as marginal to their struggles, at best, and ignore them altogether, at worst. The fraught relationship of activists to the notion of feminism is in some instances a result of the power of patriarchy; all struggles for social change, not just women's movements, are highly gendered, often in hierarchical and damaging ways.

In addition, many new movements - from the "occupy" camps to the recent student protests - seem to be victims of the historical moment and its peculiar dynamics of depoliticisation. In conditions of neoliberalism, the present is fetishised, any sense of the past is eroded, and the possibility of a different future is diminished. Lessons from past feminist struggles, theories and experiences thus often remain invisible, weakening the consolidation of resistance movements against neoliberal capitalist globalisation. Finally, feminists themselves may have contributed to their marginalisation in activist contexts because of their tendency to privilege a partial, white, bourgeois, liberal perspective. Long resisted by black and working class women for its silencing and sidelining of their experiences, voices and strategies, this tendency can make feminism appear less relevant than it should to movements of racially oppressed groups and of the poor.

In this issue of *Interface* we seek to explore the relationship between theory and practice as a means of opening up possibilities for the reconnection of feminist academic analysis to women's everyday struggles, thereby contributing to a more emancipatory feminism and to a post-patriarchal, anti-neoliberal politics. We do so both by re-considering feminist theories in the academy in the light of the strategic demands of political action and by exploring the theoretical implications of women's movements and women in movement. What is more, the issue seeks to expose to critical scrutiny the relationship between feminism and women's organising, on the one hand, and social movement theory and practice more generally, on the other.

To get the issue off the ground, we invited contributions from feminist activists and scholars, participants in and students of women's movements, and social movement researchers interested in women's agency and the gendering of movement activism. In the original call for papers, we set out a range of questions for consideration:

- Is there a distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements and collective agency?
- Can (should) academic forms of feminism be reclaimed as theory-for-movements?
- In what ways and to what extent are social movement actors using feminist categories to develop new forms of collective action?
- Are there specific types of "women's movement/s" in terms of participation, tactics and strategies?
- Has the feminisation of poverty led to the feminisation of resistance among movements of the poor? If so / if not, what are the implications for such resistance?
- Under what conditions does women's participation in movements which are not explicitly feminist or focussed on specifically gendered issues lead to a change in power relations?
- What are the implications of women's participation for collective identity or movement practice, leadership and strategy?
- What constitutes progressive or emancipatory movement practice in relation to gender, and good practice in alliance-building?
- How can social movement scholarship contribute more to the feminist analysis of activism, and how can feminist scholarship help develop a fuller understanding of collective agency?
- Are there specifically gendered themes to the current global wave of movements? Have feminist perspectives anything distinctive to offer the analysis of such movements?
- What can enquiry into contemporary activism learn from historical feminist writing on women's movements and women's role in other movements?

We also specifically solicited contributions for the issue from feminist and / or women's groups, communities and movements, as well as from the individuals within them, asking them to reflect on questions of strategy in the neoliberal context delineated above. While inviting activists to frame their own questions and problematics, we suggested topics such as:

- What does feminist strategy mean today?
- What are the challenges and limitations of feminist strategising in the current moment?

- How do contemporary feminist activists and women's movements draw on the practices and experiences of earlier movements?
- Where do you see yourselves in terms of movement achievements to date and the road still to be travelled?
- What barriers and possibilities for feminist struggle has neoliberalism created?
- Does the decline of neo-liberalism create openings for feminists?
- What movements today could be allies for a transition out of patriarchy?

If these seem grandiose and difficult questions, they are no less important for that. We acknowledge that they cannot be answered definitively in one issue of a journal, much less one editorial. Nonetheless many are touched upon in the pieces that follow, which does not aim to provide final or even fixed solutions, but rather to re-open discussion and suggesting possibilities in theory and in practice for how we can construct a world beyond neoliberalism and beyond patriarchy in our everyday lives, in the academy and across the globe. In this spirit, we dedicate this issue of *Interface* to all those women and their male allies¹ who, though often unrecognised and delegitimised, have tirelessly struggled to create such a world.

In the remainder of this editorial, we offer a series of opening reflections on a few of the questions addressed in the issue that are of particular interest to us. We begin with strategic considerations in order to foreground the dynamics and demands of movement activism in the current conjuncture, before moving to more abstract questions of the relationship between theory and practice and more specifically the insights of feminist theory and the continuing dilemmas it poses with regard to collective, transformative social movement politics. We then turn to what and how feminist activists can learn from feminist histories before examining the issue of who they should build alliances with. The final set of reflections considers the contexts of and trends in contemporary women's organising, its impact on gendered relations and implications for feminist theory, before we introduce the articles and shorter pieces that follow.

What does feminist strategy mean today? What are the challenges and limitations of feminist strategising in the current moment?

The birth of second-wave feminist movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a flowering of theoretical positions linked to specific political strategies. At the risk of oversimplification and reductionism, we can summarize the "map" of feminist approaches as it is commonly explained in overviews of feminist theory (e.g. Tong, 2009; Bryson, 2003). In this account, liberal feminists since the nineteenth century have sought to free contemporaneous society from residual,

¹ See e.g. Anonymous 2011.

pre-modern, patriarchal throwbacks in law and culture, investing in legal, educational and media strategies as a form of feminist civilising process as well as lobbying the state for formal equality within the public sphere. The radical feminists of the 1970s, by contrast, are defined in terms of an emphasis on patriarchy as the foundational system of power from which all other injustices spring, and often depicted as pursuing separatist organising strategies that celebrate and defend women's difference from men, under the headings of political lesbianism and global sisterhood. Marxist feminists usually come next in the list, described as holding to the view that gender oppression will be overcome with the end of capitalism and class society, and distinguished in this from socialist feminists who advocate alliances between women's movements and working-class struggles with the goal of overcoming both patriarchy and capitalism.

Black feminists are then perceived to add racism to this mix, perceiving it to be deeply intertwined with both capitalism and patriarchy within a complex matrix of domination, whilst anarchist feminism, on the rare occasions when it features in overviews of feminist theory, are elaborated in terms of their challenge to the underlying relationship of "power-over" they see as intrinsic to the institution of the state and embedded in everyday life. Most recently, post-modern or post-structuralist feminism has come to the fore in these accounts of feminism, characterised as seeking to move beyond the essentialisms of gendered binaries and fixed identities towards a queering of our practices of self and other.

Despite important points of divergence, most feminists would agree that contemporary society remains systematically shot through with oppression and exploitation in a multitude of different forms. Indeed, the consolidation of the neoliberal project in recent years is widely acknowledged to have worsened the situation for many women and men, as we noted at the start, and to have put feminist aspirations under sustained attack. In this context, it would seem that feminist political strategies have not achieved the emancipatory result for which their proponents were hoping. It is in this context, furthermore, that liberal varieties of feminism have achieved what amounts to a hollow victory, according to prominent feminist critics such as Nancy Fraser (2009), Hester Eisenstein (2009) and Angela McRobbie (2009). On this line of argument, feminist efforts to lobby and work with the state, or to pursue formal equal rights within a fundamentally exploitative labour market, have not only failed to pose an effective challenge to neoliberalism, but also supplied key cultural justifications for its modernising project of individuation, flexibilisation and the pruning of the state. These critics and others imply that a reconsideration of feminist political strategies is long overdue.

Any such reconsideration for us has to acknowledge that the liberal "long march through the institutions" may have brought a wide variety of significant changes in its train, but many of these have served the interests of only the most privileged women. What is more, gendered inequalities are not and have never been reducible to the overt legal, educational and political discrimination that continue to scar some societies. As documented by proponents of other feminist

theories, patriarchal power is bound up with practices of identity production and selfhood, with gendered divisions of labour, with the separation of the private and public realms, and with relationships of power-over that have emotional, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, symbolic, and corporeal dimensions, all of which liberal feminism neglects.

In addition, while it is hard to deny the important contribution of radical feminists in challenging rape and domestic violence, among other oppressions, the pursuit of entirely separatist organising, which many radical feminists advocate, seems ever more disconnected from the daily lives of many women. Moreover, the tendency of radical feminists to privilege patriarchy in their analyses as the most basic form of power has now been thoroughly criticised for ignoring the ways in which gender hierarchies are intertwined with race and class in mutually constitutive ways. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty has argued (1998), notions of a universal sisterhood based on shared experience and identity are thus fatally undermined.

The other political strategies outlined here also have their limitations. Marxist feminism in a narrow sense is marginal outside a handful of states where orthodox communist parties are still significant political actors. Although there has been a resurgence of Marxist feminist thought as part of the Pink Tide, or shift to the left, in Latin America, particularly in Venezuela, it often remains separated from the demands and identifications of women in the barrios. Broader socialist feminist arguments as to the need for alliance-building are often widely accepted in theory, but prove very difficult to implement in practice; just as black feminist struggles, today as in the 1970s, still find themselves caught between entrenched racism of a subtler variety in women's movements and resurgent, often religious, patriarchy in their own communities.

In a different vein, the anarchist feminist desire to move beyond relationships of power-over resonates across contemporary movements yet is rarely explicitly acknowledged by or connected to them. Finally, while the queering of subjectivities and of gendered dichotomies advocated by post-structuralist feminists is sometimes acknowledged in current movement discussion, it remains difficult to actualise in political contexts that seem to demand the taking of a subject position and thus rather marginal as a political practice.

Having said all that, we want to argue that women's groups and feminists remain tenacious, creative and adaptable, capable of reinventing theory and practice for a neoliberal age. Thus despite the contradictory current scenario, there is much remarkable and potentially radical, progressive or emancipatory feminist praxis to be seen if we look hard enough. There is also, we suggest, a resurgence of women's and feminist organising, and feminist theorising, at the heart of a range of social movements today (see, e.g., Eschle and Maignashca, 2010). Much of this is documented in the special section on feminist strategies in this edition of *Interface*, which brings together a wide range of reflections from around the world in order to contribute to a debate on practice which in our view needs to be revived and amplified. Arguably many of the re-articulations about strategy presented in this section are simultaneously

localised and transnationalised, and they articulate a praxis that is often mis-recognised and misrepresented in contemporary social movement scholarship.

Several key themes emerge from our strategies debate, which we will address here in general terms:

1. Plurality beyond liberal feminism and an ethic of recognition

Strikingly, the contributions in the special section embrace organisational plurality, in terms of the authors insisting on both their own right to be autonomous and develop a feminism that speaks to their needs and desires, and their recognition of the right of other feminists and women to similar freedoms. What we might term an ethic of recognition can be said to underlie their understandings of feminist strategy. This ethic is not relativistic, however, nor does it deny the tensions and contradictions between different forms of feminism. Many of our contributors do not feel represented by liberal, bourgeois strands of feminism and do not believe that there are easy alliances to be made with these strands. Rather, by giving voice and legitimacy to feminisms that come from working class and black positionalities, they make visible tensions among feminists and suggest that it is only by taking these seriously that we can collectively think through the possibilities and parameters of our alliances.

2. Experience and voice

In many of the contributions to the special section, we find an emphasis on the strategic importance of enabling marginal voices to speak and of making audible and visible diverse experiences of patriarchy. Structural incidents of silencing, misrepresentation and exclusion are a particular focus of critique. To overcome such patriarchal erasures and forgettings, we are urged to build the conditions within feminist groups and broader activist movements in which women feel sufficiently safe to begin to recount their experiences, find their voices and have their words heard and respected. This is a strategy of reclaiming, centering on dignity, remembering and recognition.

3. Communication

Another fascinating theme, one under-discussed in the wider literature, is that of communication and the fact that it can be gendered, imbued with power relations and assumptions about what certain terms mean and privileging some positionalities and experiences over others. Some of our contributors to the special section focus specifically on how we might overcome patriarchal forms of communication that centre on the elevation of ego, the domination of space and the clash of rival argumentation, by developing instead a praxis that is mindful of others, opens space for a plurality of voices to be heard, and challenges unspoken assumptions about race, class and gender.

4. Women-only spaces and self-care

Whilst not favouring separatist strategies as such, the pieces featured in the section do emphasise the centrality of women-only spaces. Such spaces are viewed as strategically necessary because they offer a safe environment in which patriarchal forms of communication can be challenged and in which women can begin to share experiences, reclaim individual and collective voice(s), and develop theoretical understandings and strategies. Of course, as black feminists, lesbian critics and working class women have long pointed out, women-only spaces may sidestep gendered hierarchies but they do not transcend power per se and indeed, if critical awareness and vigilance is lacking, may replicate and entrench within them diverse axes of oppression and inequality. Moreover, these spaces do not even escape patriarchy entirely. Our contributors view patriarchy not merely as a structure "out there", but as infusing our subjectivities and many of our relationships in ways that are impoverishing, harmful and painful. In this context, the importance of self-care (including fun and pleasure) is also stressed, and women-only spaces are depicted as key sites in which self-care can be both theorised and enacted.

5. Affective, embodied, spiritual and psychological dimensions of the self

Given the theorisation of patriarchy as pervading even our individual psyches, as noted above, the special section in effect reclaims and reworks the famous feminist slogan, "the personal is political". In this vein, our authors talk of the role of feminist love and anger, the importance of psychological healing, the freeing of our bodies and sexualities, and the role of the spiritual in the construction of worlds beyond patriarchy in the here and now.

6. In and beyond representational politics

Finally, there is a clear focus in the discussions and reflections in the special section on shifting our everyday relationships away from "power-over" and towards "power-with". They urge the development of a politics in, against, and beyond policy changes and representational politics, a politics that politicises the personal, the community, the family and that takes social reproduction seriously. With respect to this last point, visceral demands are made for more effective and extensive childcare, education, health care, and food security. Gendered practices within activist communities are politicised and challenged, particularly around questions of intimate partner violence and behaviours that reproduce capitalist, patriarchal relations between movement participants.

Our contributors to the special section on strategy thus offer a plurality of creative, dynamic and disruptive answers to the question of what a feminist strategy could and should look like in the twenty-first century. Taken together, these voices, reflections and theorisations demand the reinvention of feminist

praxis in order to moving it from the margins of scholarly and political activity to the centre of revolutionary thinking and practice.

Can (should) academic forms of feminism be reclaimed as theory-for-movements?

We want to turn now to the relationship between feminist strategies and academic frameworks. Feminism's entry to academia may be considered long delayed if measured against the history of the first wave, but the second wave (in the global North in particular) started with substantial numbers of participants already in education, and often committed to particular careers prior to becoming feminist.² One practical implication of this fact is that, as with other academics connected to and drawing on movements, feminist scholars are embedded in particular disciplines (albeit in critical ways), and engaged in the two-way challenge of advancing feminist perspectives within those disciplines at the same time as striving to carve out their own academic spaces (such as women's or gender studies or feminist theory), to which they bring their specific disciplinary specialities³. Their academic endeavours, moreover, are driven by the emphasis in the university system on abstraction, categorisation and specialisation, increasingly accorded a premium as universities seek to position themselves as globalised, competitive institutions in the neoliberal economy. Academic feminism, then, has its own distinctive dynamics.

What are the characteristics of the knowledge claims produced in this context, and how do they differ from those claims made by activists outside of the university? A long-standing, and still useful, activist distinction separates out *agitation* (convincing people that something is an issue to be outraged and active about), *education* (understanding the background or history and mechanisms of the issue), and *organisation* (putting together the kind of campaign that can win). Feminist agitation does not require academic theory as such, since the knowledge claims articulated to this end can be entirely derived from and articulated within activist circles, though on occasion well-known academics can be useful due to their public recognition.⁴

Feminist education, in contrast, is the *raison d'être* of academic feminism. This is not to deny a long and honourable activist tradition of popular education strategies which have been almost entirely detached from more formalised

² Arguably, this is one reason for the relative numbers of feminist theologians or literary critics as opposed to political scientists or social movements specialists - reflecting more the gendered breakdowns of university specialisation than careers chosen as a result of a movement commitment.

³ For critical reflections of tensions between subaltern knowledges and disciplinary specialties, see Nakano Glenn (2007) and Hill Collins (2007).

⁴ Having said that, the agitational mode dominates in much writing by feminist activists and scholars alike, treating the development of women's movements as a natural response to outrageous circumstances or a history to be celebrated rather than understood.

education structures. It is simply to acknowledge that academic feminism, to the extent that it is relevant to movement tasks, is primarily a matter of education in the sense laid out above: critiquing the gendered presuppositions of literary texts, analysing the mechanisms of gender inequality, or showing the nature of everyday micro-resistance - but not organising it. Lastly, while academic feminists may have a key role to play in feminist organising as sympathetic experts (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991; Barker and Cox, 2002), they rarely make the organisational dimension of feminism the focus of their analysis or theorising.

Having said that, in the last instance academic feminism remains a product of women's movements; there are very few settings where being a feminist is not at some level a disadvantage within the ruthless and emotionally bruising reality that is the norm for most people's experience of academia, and in tension with the demands of academic life. As feminist scholars are forced to fight for their feminist identities and for the legitimacy of their teaching and research, the boundary between activist and academic becomes blurred (Eschle and Miguashca 2006). The project of feminist theory itself, arguably, cannot be understood without reference to a movement which it seeks to make sense of and on which it relies for its very existence (Wainwright, 1994). To this extent, it seems reasonable to ask what can be learned from that theory which is relevant to movements. In this vein, we enquire in the next section into the contributions and limitations of feminist theorising about social movements and collective agency.

Is there a distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements and collective agency? Or: how can feminist scholarship help develop a fuller understanding of collective agency?

It seems to us easier to see the direct, reciprocal implications of academic feminist theory for movements, and of movements for theory, in many women's struggles of the first and second waves: theories and practices of consciousness-raising are closely interconnected, for example, and a similarly close relationship can be seen in analyses and activism on more specific themes such as equal pay for equal work in the liberal tradition, anti-pornography and sexual objectification campaigns in some strands of radical feminism, or wages for housework campaigns and socialist feminist writings. This affinity is perhaps a product of the fact that, before feminists entered the academy in large numbers in the 1970s, the concepts generated to make sense of the issues above were mostly agitational or organising categories. As such, they were geared to alliance-building: theory was as much a tool for convincing people and making connections as it was a badge of affiliation or identity and thus persuasiveness and accessibility were the order of the day.

It was in this context, we suggest, that several distinguishing features of feminist analysis of collective movement struggles and agency first emerged. Perhaps the

most obvious and longstanding element we can identify is the exposure of hidden relations of oppression, and the foregrounding of voices that have been raised against that oppression but largely ignored. Evident in the establishment of women's or feminist libraries, for example, this focus is also found in scholarship on themes such as "hidden from history" (Rowbotham, 1975; Anderson and Zinsler 1988) and "tacit knowledge" (Wainwright, 1994).

Another characteristic of the feminist theorisation of collective struggle is the critical interrogation of power structures between and within movements – including, but not reducible to, patriarchal hierarchies. One of the best-known examples of this kind of analysis (and a model academic-activist dialogue) is then-PhD student Jo Freeman's *Tyranny of structurelessness* (1972), reflecting on her experiences of marginalisation in the early radical feminist movement, and anarchist Cathy Levine's response, *Tyranny of tyranny* (1974). The critique of movement stratification remains a central theme in more recent feminist scholarship, evident in Belinda Robnett's (1997) study of black women's "bridge leadership" in the US civil rights movement, for instance, and in Carol Coulter's (1993) account of the split between academic feminism and working-class women's community organising in Ireland.

Yet another theme to which we want to draw attention has to do with the privileging of some modes of activism over others, in gendered ways. Thus feminist scholars and activists have critiqued the centrality of the male hero in the narratives and practices of nationalist movements, for example, drawing attention to extensive female involvement in such movements (Jayawardena, 1986) and they have crystallised and brought to the fore political practices hinging on motherhood, care-work and cooperation (Pershing, 1996). More recently, this analytical strategy has brought to the fore how the privileging of "heroic" or "spiky" tropes of direct action in contemporary ecological and global justice movements and their association with masculine traits and male bodies, serve to marginalise women within those activist communities (Sullivan, 2005; Coleman and Bassi, 2011).

None of this is to argue conclusively that there is a "distinctively feminist mode of analysing social movements or collective agency", let alone a clear theoretical reflection of the distinctive organising practices often ascribed to women's movements. We want to suggest that there could and should be, but that the glimmerings we present above remain more evident as potential than a fully developed reality at this point in time.

Indeed, the intellectual and political obstacles to articulating a feminist analysis of movement politics have become formidable in recent years. For a start, integration into university structures has rewarded the building of sometimes sectarian theoretical positions in ways unhelpful to the uncovering of affinities between feminist projects or between scholars and activists. Subsequently, the rise of post-structuralist theory within the academy has encouraged the increased abstraction of feminist theorising – and is associated by critics with the detachment of academic endeavour from women's political practice. Hence the practical implications of contemporary feminist theory for transformative,

collective political agency have become rather harder to pin down, as we discuss below.

1. Individual subjectivity and political organising

The problem of the subject "woman" is one that has come to the fore with the growing theoretical influence of post-structuralism. Broadly conceived, this body of work shares a number of characteristics, chief among which are: a rejection of gender as a fixed category; a critique of the construction of binary oppositions and dualisms in discourse; and a belief that origin stories are futile and counterproductive, since an essentialist understanding of male and female lies at their heart. Last but not least, poststructuralists share with working-class, black and socialist feminists an insistence on the need to replace unitary notions of womanhood and female gender identity with pluralistic and complex conceptions of gender as a discursively constituted identity that will be mediated through categories of race, class, age, sexuality etc. and attuned to specific historical, social, political and economic contexts.

Such an approach raises a number of difficulties, chief among which is the tension between the desire to denaturalise essentialist, binary and heteronormative understandings of "woman" (or "man", for that matter) while retaining a feminist political project organised around a coherent, identifiable conception of women and their interests.⁵ After all, the radical deconstruction of the subject appears to deprive feminist politics of the categorical basis for its own normative claims. Judith Butler's influential work, for example, poses the fundamental question for post-structuralist feminism in this way: "What constitutes the who, the subject, for whom feminism seeks emancipation? If there is no subject, who is left to emancipate (1990: 327)?"

Like Donna Haraway (1985) or Rosi Braidotti (1994), far from lamenting the loss of a coherent subject, Butler welcomes the "possibility of complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constituents in their place" (1990: 339). Other theorists have sought to combine "elements of skepticism, particularly about the social formation of subjects [such as women], with elements of a standpoint feminism that has us acknowledging and interpreting what subjects say" (Sylvester, 1994: 52), in effect plumping for a "strategic essentialism".⁶ Still others have sought to

⁵ This problem was familiar to early socialist, anarchist and Marxist feminists. In these traditions, the working class was already understood *both* as a developing social identity *and* as a "class whose purpose is to abolish itself". So too, those organising migrant or colonised women workers and peasants had to find ways of holding together agitational discourses (in which gender, class and nation were addressed as given facts) and more educational ones (in which all three were seen as products of the historical development of society), in effect maintaining a distinction between immediate organising needs and long-term strategy. Present-day writers such as Sylvia Walby (1991) or Silvia Federici (2004), in their very different ways, draw on this theoretical legacy.

⁶ A term coined by Gayatri Spivak.

theorise subjectivity in a way that retains a collective dimension while taking post-structuralist concerns about essentialism seriously. Iris Marion Young (1994), for example, draws on Sartre to conceptualise gender as seriality, and in this way to argue that women constitute a social group on behalf of whom demands can be made.

These strategies for the reconciliation of the deconstruction of "woman" with collective, feminist agency may be diverse and imaginative, but they have not convinced everyone. Indeed, a sense of frustration and bafflement is widespread as to the usefulness of post-structuralist theory for actual mobilisation by or on behalf of women, however they are defined. To put this another way, while the theoretical project to dissolve or radically de-center the idea of a unitary, coherent, fixed, embodied subject that can be known, identified and acted upon is *potentially* radically transformative, the immediate implications for progressive social transformation remain unclear, given the deeply entrenched and naturalized character of such essentialist and binary constructions, and the historical importance that identity and origin myths have played in movement construction and strategy.

2. The complexities of difference

If one problem with the contemporary theorisation of collective agency is opened up by post-structuralism and its radical destabilisation of the individual subject, another emerges from the more politically straightforward idea that gender is but one strand of oppression among many, and alliances need to be made between the different identities that emerge from these distinct if intersecting oppressions. This point was first raised by working-class and anti-imperialist women activists in the late nineteenth century and more recently highlighted by socialist, black and postcolonial feminism. British socialist feminists Hilary Wainwright, Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal (1979), for example, asserted in this vein the need for alliances of the oppressed on grounds of gender, class and race.

These three writers, however, also drew attention to the opposition to this approach within existing left organisations, which made it hard to implement. For their part, many left-wing thinkers in the 1980s and 90s argued that claims about gender, race and class as sources of oppression and mobilisation in their own right were built upon irreconcilable and essentialist identity constructions and thereby not only failed to properly theorise the fact that these identities were the product of the capitalist system, but also undercut and fragmented the more universalist left-wing counter-hegemonic struggle against that system (Hobsbawm, 1996; Gitlin, 1993). In this way, an approach originally intended to centralise the construction of collective action across differences was reinterpreted as undermining the very coalitional politics for which it yearned.

The glossing of differences between women has also been forcefully problematised by Chandra Mohanty. In her important essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), she criticises

particular first world or western feminist discourses for constructing the "third world woman" as a singular, monolithic subject who is passive, ignorant, dependent and victimised. This negative image is created through an implicit comparison with the average western women who is seen as educated, liberal and empowered. As such, this discourse is a symbolic manifestation of western imperialism and reveals the latent ethnocentrism embedded in much of western feminism. Mohanty argues that only when political analyses and strategies reflect the conflicts and contradictions associated with the location of women in multiple structures of power, and facilitate the self-expression of multiple third world female subjects, will effective political action ensue.

Black feminist thinkers have been amongst the most careful in their responses to this critique, albeit in different and not always entirely successful ways. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) highly influential *Black Feminist Thought* argues for the existence of a specific black women's standpoint that is based on a particular life experience and excluded from both patriarchal thinking and also white feminist critiques. In order to avoid the problem that merely incorporating black women's perspective still fails to include other marginalized standpoints and knowledge such as that of immigrant women, for example, Hill Collins elaborates on bell hook's notion of a politics of domination that operates across interlocking, rather than cumulative, axes of oppression.⁷ hooks (1985/2000) argues that the standpoints of black women, emerging as they do at the intersection of multiple axes, enable both a distinct consciousness of the "racist, classist, sexist" dimensions of hegemony and the capacity to envision and create a counter hegemony.⁸ Hill Collins, for her part, argues explicitly that each and every standpoint, including those of black women, yield only particular, partial knowledge and thus a collective process of dialogue across subject positions and a recognition of the matrix of domination is essential.

In a similar vein, Angela Davis' (1981) classic *Women, race and class* stressed the ways in which race and class inequality undermined first- and second-wave feminist organising, leaving black and working-class women as well as migrants and other ethnic minorities largely absent from feminism, both as participants and as constituencies. Davis concludes that the mobilisation of ostensibly universal identity categories in the practice of movement organising weakens movements and narrows their goals. With this argument, Davis has returned us to the nineteenth-century women activists within the working-class movement, whose point of reference was often union, socialist or anarchist organising of

⁷ For her part, Hill Collins (1990) writes "Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigm shift that rejects additive approaches to oppression. Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class and religion, Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of an overarching structure of domination."

⁸ This claiming of privileged standpoint is in fact common in post-colonial theories and echoes Hegels' discussion of the master-slave, where the slave has a more comprehensive view of the world because s/he must take the view of the master as well as her/his own.

unskilled women workers (often themselves migrants) in the face of the narrower mobilising strategies of male-dominated and native craft unions. In this context, the inclusion of women and/or migrants functioned to broaden and universalise left-wing struggle.

Taken as a whole, the defence put forward by theorists who argue for the intersectional analysis of oppressions is powerful and compelling. Yet some problems remain when we consider how their approach can be applied in concrete movement contexts, as we will discuss next.

3. Organising intersectionally

When striving to put intersectional thinking into practice, we immediately run up against the fact that standpoints and identities have a tendency to be articulated in essentialist, fixed ways, displacing more fluid, constructed notions of subjectivity and experience as the basis upon which groups are mobilised. This may be particularly the case in instances where the oppressed seek to form alliances with each other in desperate circumstances, facing extremely powerful opponents. More subtly, we might say that the "strategic essentialism" mentioned above with regard to post-structuralism rears its head again here.

Furthermore, an emphasis on multiple mechanisms of oppression can be used to play off one group against another, and can function to counter mobilization around shared issues or agendas. The de-gendering of policies designed to address women's issues by submerging them into non-gender specific "equality" policies in institutions such as the EU is a case in point. Attention to difference is thus a double-edged sword: insufficient attention leads to false generalisations and an inability to incorporate different situated knowledges; too much renders the task of bridging diverse struggles much more difficult, especially if difference is conceptualised in fixed, essentialist terms.

An additional problem arises when we try to settle on the range of differences that ought to be accommodated in a shared struggle. White second-wave feminists were rightly criticised for failing to take account of black women's experience and knowledge, but at what point can we say that sufficient discrete elements of identity and experience have been taken into consideration, (i.e. immigrant, working class, lesbian)? And is such attention to difference not in fact increasing the distance between potential allies?

Here perhaps the anti-identitarian position embraced particularly by many autonomous activists in the alterglobalisation or global justice movement, which calls for strategies of coalition building that do *not* rest on shared identities or experience offers a solution (Flesher Fominaya, 2007). This possible way forward cannot be granted uncritical support, however, given it may allow dominant identities to be replicated in the movement without challenge, and given that the politicisation of identity has been and continues to be a powerful trigger for mobilisation, including in alterglobalisation contexts (Eschle, 2011).

A final issue to we wish to draw attention has to do with the fact that respect for difference can, in practice, tip over into cultural relativism. Many feminists, including ourselves, would embrace the requirement to pay close attention to the historical, geopolitical and cultural context in which specific manifestations of oppression emerge, along with struggles against them. Yet there is a danger with this analytical strategy that context becomes all: that we ignore wider patterns of power within which specific political spaces gain their meaning; we accept that the subjects produced within those spaces are bounded within and by geopolitical borders; and we refuse to draw any parameters around the diverse claims we are prepared to accommodate or to make judgments about their merit. In this way, cultural relativism triumphs. And feminists have long been wary of cultural relativism, with good reason, given that it has served as a powerful discursive means to deflect attention from women's oppression or to delegitimise feminist efforts to challenge that oppression (for debates among feminists on this topic, see Okin, 1999; Phillips, 2009). The task remains of combining close attention to cultural, historical and political contexts with the identification of those mechanisms of women's oppression that cut across cultural, social, economic and political boundaries and around which movement alliances can be forged.

Nira Yuval-Davis' (1999) articulation of Italian practices of "transversal politics", in which ethnic differences were acknowledged within the context of the effort to work out a shared basis for mobilisation, may offer one way forward here. Another strategy, long adopted within feminist circles, is that of listening to the voices of women who face and fight oppression, building theory in dialogue with those voices, rather than simply theorising from a distance. After all, identities are rarely voluntaristic choices; more often, they are imposed in ways that structure lives in powerful ways and that can only be partially negotiated. For example, as Coulter (1993) observed, working-class community women's organising in Ireland has been caught in the web of a defensive nationalist and ethnically Catholic identity. While the choice of stepping outside that community altogether might exist for service-class professional women, for whom community or family networks play less salient roles, other women have not historically had this freedom, instead being forced to assert their own needs and voices within an ethnic Catholic context but against clerical and fundamentalist definitions of what that means. Such struggles are surely strategically crucial and deserving of our support.

In sum, we have argued that post-structuralist and black feminist theories offer important correctives to arguments that have attempted to theorise the intergration of women into existing patriarchal discourses and structures without fundamentally transforming them. They force us to reconsider the very basis of Western epistemological, intellectual and cultural frameworks. Yet from the perspective of a feminism concerned with movement politics, serious dilemmas remain when making the transition from theory to collective agency-- from how to reconcile the deconstruction of the individual subject with the preservation of collective movement struggle, how to overcome deeply rooted binary thinking about difference and "othering" in society, to how to move from

the identification of diverse subject positions for emancipatory alliances to appropriate organising strategies across those positions. We cannot definitively resolve any of these dilemmas here, but only point to their existence and to the strategies some have adopted to try to think and act their way out of them. In this continuing endeavor, as in others, there may be lessons we can learn from past feminist writings and women's role in other movements, the focus of the next section.

What can enquiry into contemporary activism learn from historical feminist writing on women's movements and women's role in other movements?

Past traditions of feminism are often forgotten, absent from the consciousness of individuals involved in more recent activism. Indeed one of the first intellectual tasks of second-wave feminism was to recover its own, earlier pasts. We suggest that feminism today needs to reconnect to past struggles and the knowledges and theorisations (written, oral, musical, spiritual, emotional) they produced, in order to aid in the reconsideration of some of our assumptions about and practices in the present.

One example from our feminist strategies section, the Sisters of Resistance, offers hints on how this might be done. We explore this contribution in some depth here as the full contribution is in the form of an audio interview.

Sisters of Resistance call on history to help to understand their place in a tradition of women in struggle. Members have been drawn together by a quest to understand the experiences of inequality and violence that shape their everyday lives in conditions of patriarchal capitalism. Similarly alienating experiences in movement spaces have then created the context for their engagement with past feminist generations and experiences. This engagement is not about simply repeating the past or uncovering a model to follow, but rather about facilitating learning and reflection at both the individual and collective level in order to build a feminist praxis of everyday life.

Key elements in this process, according to the Sisters of Resistance example, include witnessing, validation and reflection. Witnessing the historical experiences and struggles of women that have been systematically made invisible is the first step. This helps in the recognition and validation of similar experiences and struggles in the present. When women learn, hear, read, dance to, and share stories about the past they realise that what they feel has been felt in similar ways before, what they experience has been experienced in similar ways by their predecessors and what they are angry about was previously also a cause for rage. We realise that there is nothing wrong with us. We begin to build the grounds for individual and collective voice, and for hope that our lives and our world can be different.

In turn, this opens up space for reflection, which involves taking oneself and one's needs seriously and politicising that which is portrayed and internalised as

individual, natural and inevitable. We come to realise that our doubts about our abilities, our ways of behaving in relationships, our feelings of fear when walking home at night are not just "the way things are". We come to recognise that being exhausted, making the tea, being shouted down by men in the movement performing a particular kind of masculinity are not just "the way things are". We come to see that feeling ashamed of our bodies, denying our desires, deforming our sexuality to men's needs is not the way things should be. In such ways, learning from the past is directly useful to individual as well as collective transformation in the present. It whets the appetite to learn more; to voraciously devour all that other feminists in struggle have written and left for us.

When feminist histories explore women's movements of the past, they consistently highlight the diversity and complexity of the activism that is their focus. There are obvious parallels here with the present. Importantly, historians also point us to women's participation in right-wing movements on the basis of their socially-ascribed identities: as white women in racist movements, for example, or as respectable middle-class women in movements of "moral reform" that policed the poor, and so on. As with other forms of top-down popular mobilisation on the basis of ascribed identities, such right-wing activism has typically inserted women more fully into their given place in the social order. Women in movement, then, are not *necessarily* emancipatory or progressive; we have to look more closely at which women we are talking about, which movements, at the specific context in which mobilisation takes place and at organisational practices.

In addition, feminist historians have shown that women from diverse social locations can experience the same movement struggle very differently. In Britain and the US in the 60s, 70s and 80s, for example, black women might challenge patriarchal behaviour by civil rights leaders and yet insist that these were arguments within a single community-in-movement, refusing to "jump ship" to white-dominated feminist struggles in which they did not recognise themselves or their aspirations. Similarly, their histories of low-paid menial employment have long led working class women to contest the elision of emancipation with integration into the labour market by a feminism dominated by middle class women for whom a career or even a vocation might be a realistic and empowering possibility.

Another important point made in histories of feminism has been the critique of the projection into the nineteenth or even the eighteenth century of the mid-twentieth-century exclusion of women from politics. Whether we examine the migrant women in the "new unions" of the late nineteenth century, or the urban rioters of the eighteenth, we find that forms of political behaviour that we now assume to be characteristically masculine have often become so within relatively recent times.

If there is a common theme that might sum up the historical study of women's participation in social movements, it is *situatedness* - the recognition of the crucial role of local situations, immediate social relationships, cultural

understandings and so on in understanding and facilitating mobilisation. Political projects that lack awareness of the historical context in which they act, the traditions on which they draw and the past mistakes from which they could learn, are doomed to fail - or rather to encounter their own limitations in practice when other women do not recognise themselves or their aspirations in that particular project. Alliance-building, by contrast, proceeds from the feminist practice of listening closely to and learning from the experiences of others, past and present.

What constitutes progressive or emancipatory movement practice in relation to gender, and good practice in alliance-building?

One of the key questions for feminists is who to build alliances with. Their ideological leanings have in part supplied the answer. In Britain and America in the 1970s, for example, separatists argued that women's movements had to rely on their own resources and that there was no scope for emancipatory alliances with others; liberals, at the opposite end of the spectrum, held that there was no fundamental reason why alliances could not even be made with current power-holders within existing structures. Historical and national specificities complicate this matter further. In some contexts, for example, feminism has been able to exercise substantial influence on men's movements (Messner, 1997), whereas in others men's mobilisation has been markedly anti-feminist.

One dramatic example of context driving the character of alliances is supplied by the Republic of Ireland, where the power of the church over women's bodies meant that contraception, divorce and abortion became the central political battlefield and one on which feminists allied with liberals, socialists and cultural radicals of all colours against a common enemy for over three decades. Struggles over LGBTQ rights, and more recently movements of survivors of clerical child abuse, have taken this situation in new directions, but the foundational importance of the critique of the church to feminist choices of alliance partners in Ireland is by no means dead.

Another, perhaps more strategic way of thinking about the issue of which group or movement to join with in struggle is to consider the gendered power structures and political dynamics at work within potential alliance partners. Some organising traditions have patriarchy built into their DNA: not only (most) religious and nationalist movements, but also (most) authoritarian kinds of left and union politics. The struggles of 1968 and subsequent movements - often in direct opposition to orthodox left politics - have left their own traces: a smaller number of organising traditions, particularly on the subcultural and libertarian left, have been shaped by feminism to such an extent that expressions of patriarchal attitudes and behaviour amount to *de facto* self-exclusion. In a crucial middle terrain are movements which are neither constitutively patriarchal, nor significantly feminist in their orientation. Such movements may be political fields in which the patriarchal assumptions and

behaviours of the wider society are reflected and need to be challenged, but also where women's battles can be fought and won, alliances can be made, and so on. Examples range from some indigenous movements, to the direct action wing of the US ecology movement and European alterglobalisation activist communities.

A key practical test in such contexts is how movements respond to sexual violence within their ranks; at its simplest, do they support the victim or the perpetrator? Matters are obviously more complex than this, and internal quasi-legal processes are fraught at the best of times, but there is clearly a fundamental distinction between situations where known rapists are named, shamed, excluded and otherwise sanctioned and those where assaults are denied, covered over or fudged. In a world where perhaps one in four women has experienced sexual assault, how movements respond is often decisive in terms of defining their future direction. "Safe space" policies are an outcome of this, but have to be made to mean something in concrete situations in order to be genuinely assimilated and practiced.⁹

Another test has to do with movement culture and practices. Does a movement institute feminist mentoring or rely on old boys' networks? Does it encourage modes of discussion which privilege heroic rhetoricians or open up space for the conversational, the inclusive and the participatory? Is there a willingness to respond to individual needs as they appear or are such issues relegated to the private sphere? And what kinds of political actor or subject are implied by organisational practicalities, such as the time of day the group meets, the safety and accessibility of the space it meets in, and the modes of performance it deems valuable?

Lastly is the question of the extent to which feminism, like anti-racism or opposition to class inequality, becomes a basic touchstone of a movement's politics. Do organisers think through the implications of their actions in terms of women's participation, and tackling patriarchy in the wider society? Are patriarchal attitudes challenged and gender issues thematised as a matter of course? And so on. Feminists need to consider these and other dimensions of actual and potential movement allies when choosing who to work with and when evaluating efforts to transform movements from the inside.

⁹ In this light, we draw attention to incidences of sexual violence in the "Occupy" camp movement and to the debates among campers/feminists/opponents as to why rapes weren't prevented and how they have been interpreted and responded to. For examples of commentary and interventions, see <http://libcom.org/forums/news/open-letter-glasgow-womens-activist-forum-occupy-glasgow-01112011>, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2011/12/05/occupy-lssexual-harrassment/>, <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/4268>.

Has the feminisation of poverty led to the feminisation of resistance among movements of the poor? If so, what are the implications? Under what conditions does women's participation in movements which are not explicitly feminist or focussed on specifically gendered issues lead to a change in power relations?

We want to end, finally, at the point we started out, by considering the impact of neoliberalism on women's lives and on feminist theory and practice. After all, it is only within the historical context of the gendered and patriarchal political practices of developmentalism and the subsequent descent into neoliberalism that we can reveal the contours of contemporary forms of women's resistance and feminist praxis, and make sense of the impact of this praxis upon power relations.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to spot the similarities between the economic strategies of national developmentalism in the global South, Fordism in the West and state socialism in the East as they developed in the three decades after World War II. In all of these situations, the state was a crucial economic agent in its own right (Lash and Urry, 1987; cf. Offe, 1985). While the political alliances directing the project in each region were significantly different, the powerful organisation of working-class, peasant and other subaltern groups across the board meant that some form of social wage which impacted significantly on the everyday lives of subaltern groups was widely offered as reward, concession or stepping stone. In the West, gender played a subordinate role in cleavage structures defined around other conflicts (for example, in differential church-state allegiances or in preferences for more centrist or conflictual positions within the left and right). In most cases, civil society was firmly controlled by a male-led and dominated political culture and system so "democratically excluding women from power" (Friedman, 1998: 90).¹⁰

In such ways, the practices of politics were highly patriarchal during the post-war decades, reproducing a caste of men as the economic and political elite through systems of tightly controlled interest groups. When middle and upper class women did participate in political life, they were often confined to traditionally feminised political roles and relied even for that on the ability to hand over their domestic responsibilities to other women, usually those much less well off than themselves and marked as racially inferior (Friedman, 1998: 115-128). Rights won in western countries often excluded the needs and demands of poor and black women; in state socialist contexts the state picked up the costs of formal gender equality for all women (for example, through universal creche provision), but without challenging the domestic division of labour. Finally, the poorest of the poor tended to be women-headed households

¹⁰ One significant exception is the longer history of Scandinavian state feminism, where alliances between the women's and labour movement continued through the interwar period.

and women from these were entirely excluded from political life by this patriarchal pact.

The implementation of neoliberal policies, in different periods in different parts of the world, reinforced the gendered nature of inequality and exclusion. In particular, as argued at the outset of this editorial, neoliberalism has further exacerbated the feminisation of poverty, increased domestic burdens for women and generated more precarious and exploitative working conditions. Of course, it could be argued that economic opportunities have expanded for women in conditions of neoliberalism, with its expansion of the service sector and flexibilisation of labour styles, and certainly, some women have benefited greatly from their incorporation into the workforce. This incorporation can be viewed overall, however, as part of a political project to restructure capitalism involving the disciplining and division of the subaltern struggles of the 1970s (including feminist struggles) and to break the social and political power of women (Midnight Notes, 1990: 320-1). In such ways, neoliberalism has contradictory consequences on women's lives and the possibilities of women's political agency (see particularly Hite and Viterna, 2005; Cupples, 2005; Talcot, 2004; Tinsman, 2000).

One such contradiction is that the base of trade unions, in Northern countries in particular, has moved from primarily male workforces in private-sector manufacturing industry to predominantly female workforces in public-sector services. Increasingly, the most powerful unions are not those of miners or metalworkers as much as they are those of teachers, nurses and low-level civil servants. In addition, the growing proportion of precarious labour, combined with the breakdown of survival mechanisms of the working and informalised poor, has resulted in a shift in the site of popular struggle from the formal world of work to the community. As women are at the heart of community they have become central actors in new forms of subaltern politics (see Motta and Nilsen, 2011; Naples, 1998).

What does this politics look like? Women have been forced to find individual and collective ways to survive on the margins of the money economy (Federici, 1992; Hite and Viterna, 2005). They have participated extensively in struggles against the erosion and privatisation of public services, removal of subsidies to basic food stuffs and disintegration of employment. And they have participated in familiar struggles to defend welfare provision and rights that inevitably address the state, whether in purely defensive / nostalgic forms or in struggles "in and against the state" (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). In addition, the following trends strike us as of particular analytical and political interest.

1. The politicisation of social reproduction

Women in movement are often organised around attempts to reclaim collective process in the provision, definition and organisation of health, education and housing. In addition, their coping strategies mean that by necessity they have

often become organisers and thinkers in the struggle for day-to-day survival for themselves, their families and communities. Poor women in particular, who have faced the harshest forms of alienation, oppression and exploitation under neoliberalism, have engaged in a territorialised struggle to determine collectively how best to provide for social reproduction in a way that ensures the dignity and development of their community. These processes have extended the terrain of the political to the community and resulted in the growth of women's social power and autonomy. They have provided an alternative to the gendered, individualised forms of social welfare and reproduction characteristic of capitalist social relations and may in some cases have challenged patriarchal relationships and separations between the community and work, and between women and men.

2. Motherhood, womanhood and family become a terrain of struggle

The gendered roles and identities of women as mothers and housewives have been reinforced by the fact of their increasing care responsibilities in the context of the withdrawal of more socialised forms of welfare provision. However, such roles and identities have never been merely a product of passivity and subordination, nor defended in isolation from other elements of gendered and classed lives. In Latin America, most obviously, family, womanhood and motherhood has become a terrain of resistance. Women's struggles in that context have been characterised by suspicion toward and often rejection of political parties, as well as of the state, and heavily influenced by traditions of direct democracy and community-led change (including longstanding practices of popular education). From the 1980s onwards, they have increasingly politicised the everyday, community and family (Motta, 2009; Fernandes, 2007). In the process of collectively organising social reproduction, motherhood, womanhood and family may be transformed. This is not inevitable, however, as the mobilisation of motherhood may also reinforce restrictive representations of female subjectivity as premised around care and self-sacrifice.

3. Politicisation of the personal

The politicisation of the community, the family and the body involves a recognition of and struggle against pervasive and cross-cutting power relations, including gendered divisions of labour, gendered norms of behaviour, and patterns of power characterised by individualism, competition and hierarchy. Taking these power relations seriously expands the political agenda, so that it ranges from childcare provision, to the forms of communication used in movements, to intimate partner violence within the private sphere. Yet the politicisation of the personal has been very uneven, in terms both of women's daily lives (which continue to be marred by the triple burden of paid, domestic and political work) and women's participation in movements (which is characterised simultaneously by inclusion and marginalisation, welcome and

containment). This results in the development of highly contradictory female political subjectivities. As women build dignity, agency and collective power, they also continue to experience multiple violences and exclusions.

4. The politicisation of the body

The expansive politicisation process described above has implications for how women's bodies are experienced and lived. It encourages challenges to the gendered mechanisation of the female and/or feminine body, its exploitation and commodification under capitalism, and its objectification as a site of reproduction. Furthermore, for women in movement, the body is not merely a site of pain, pleasure for others and exhaustion, but can also be an element in the articulation and valuation of ability to create and defend life. Its use against the oppressive and coercive elements of the state in protests, and as means to protect the community, turns the body into a site of resistance and pride. As mentioned in the strategies section of this editorial, the politicisation of the body can also be accompanied by an emphasis on corporeal care and pleasure in movement contexts.

The implications of these trends are far-reaching. Taken together, they challenge the central traditions of western political thought, resting as these do on a masculinist conceptualisation of the political that excludes or subordinates women, femininity, the private sphere and the body (Sargisson, 1996; Brown, 1988). With few exceptions (John Stuart Mills, Mary Wollstonecraft), classical liberal political theory has not considered women to be political subjects at all, restricting them to a supporting role in the home. While this move finds little explicit defence in contemporary political theory, it has been argued forcefully by feminist critics (e.g. Pateman, 1988) that the foundational exclusion of women from conceptions of liberal democracy continues to restrict mainstream notions of appropriate political spaces, subjects and behaviours today. Moreover, the authoritarian revolutionary tradition, with its focus on the workplace, the party and the state and on representational conceptualisations of the political, also functions to marginalise women. The net effect is to position contemporary women's resistances outside of the political. In contrast, feminist reasoning and women's activism compels us rather to stretch our understanding of what politics is and where it occurs, in ways that encompass the everyday, the private and the informalised world of work (Cupples, 2005; Talcot, 2004; Tinsman, 2000).

There is an urgency to our engagement with such political forms. Although the feminisation of resistance that has accompanied the feminisation of poverty is reconfiguring the composition, character and implications of political struggle and social transformation, it rarely features in scholarly and political analysis. Without an analytical and theoretical engagement with these dynamics, however, we run the risk of reproducing a form of intellectual production which presents a barrier to the development of revolutionary theory and practice. It is

only by focussing on the realities of women in movement that we can begin to grasp the complexity of the feminised political subjectivities being formed and the contradictions and tensions in this process. In this way, we seek to re-write the dominant patriarchal script of politics in solidarity with women in movement, by placing their agency and rationality at the centre, as opposed to the margins. As Mohanty (2003: 516) argues, poor women of the periphery experience a particular form of exploitation and alienation which gives to their struggles a "potential epistemic privilege ... that can be the basis for reimagining a liberatory politics for ... this century". We wholeheartedly support this sentiment and it makes a fitting end to our editorial reflections. We close below by briefly introducing the contributions that follow.

In this issue

We start this issue with two articles that each use the experience of feminists at the World Social Forum to discuss the relationship between feminism and social movements. Janet Conway's "Activist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain: transnational feminists at the World Social Forum" discusses how feminist networks, particularly the World March of Women and *Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur*, have developed their different political strategies within the WSF and developed feminist critiques of the Forum's politics and culture. Lyndi Hewitt's article "Framing across differences, building solidarities: lessons from women's rights activism in transnational spaces" discusses how feminists bridged their own internal differences at WSF and Feminist Dialogues events using frames that both acknowledged diversity and enabled effective alliance-building. Between them these two articles offer a very rich picture of the relationship between feminism and social movements.

By contrast, the article by Eurig Scandrett, Suroopa Mukherjee and the Bhopal research team explores tools for overcoming the silencing of gender within social movements. Their "'We are flames not flowers': a gendered reading of the social movement for justice in Bhopal" discusses the complexities of gender in this movement and highlights the importance of oral history techniques listening to women's voices in bringing out the specifically gendered dimensions of the movement. By contrast Akwujo Emejulu, in "Women and the politics of authenticity: exploring populism, feminism and American grassroots movements", looks at women's role within "New populist" neighbourhood community organising and in right-wing "Tea Party" activism, showing how in both cases the dominant discursive repertoires silence feminist claims-making as disruptive or divisive..

In "A movement of their own: voices of young feminist activists in the London Feminist Network", Finn Mackay explores the new generation of British feminism. The experiences of sociability, collectivity and women-only space appear as important elements in motivating participation, as does outrage at the sexual objectification of women. Melody Hoffmann's action note "Bike Babes in Boyland: women cyclists' pedagogical strategies in urban bicycle culture"

discusses the bicycle advocacy of the Wisconsin-based Pedal Pusher Society, in particular how participants develop techniques to encourage other women both to ride bicycles and to see themselves as part of the cycling community. Finally, Nina Nissen's article "Changing perspectives: women, complementary and alternative medicine, and social change" explores the literature on women and alternative health, arguing that in this context women's use of alternative health challenges dominant discourses of femininity and challenges the social practices of biomedicine.

Feminist strategy for social change

This special section, edited by Sara Motta, brings together a remarkable range of feminist collectives and individuals to discuss what feminist strategy means today.

We start with "Why we need a feminist revolution now": the co-founders of the Sisters of Resistance collective, Sofia Mason and Angela Martinez a.k. el dia, in conversation with Sara Motta on healing, hip hop, spirituality and why we need a feminism relevant to the everyday lives of women.

Belgian feminist activist Nina Nijsten, "Some things we need for a feminist revolution" gives us a check-list of what we need to organise feminist resistance from self-care, our own space and collective struggle.

Feminist activist and academic Rosario González Arias, in "Viejas tensiones, nuevos desafíos y futuros territorios feministas" gives a view from the south on how global neoliberalism reinforces patriarchy and violence against women and why we need a feminism of many voices, across places and generations.

Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia's "Independence vs. interdependence" brings a voice from the realities of poverty and single motherhood from the United States on building community, dignity and voice.

Activist academic Roberta Villalón, in "Feminist activist research and strategies from within the battered immigrants movement", recounts participatory action research with battered migrant women covering US racist and patriarchal capitalism, resistance across boundaries and borders and the uses of activist academic research for feminist strategy building.

Elena Jeffreys, Audry Autonomy, Jane Green (Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association Executive Committee) and Christian Vega (National Representative of Australian Male Sex Workers, Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association) write in "Listen to sex workers; support decriminalisation and anti-discrimination protections" on why we need to listen to the voices of sex workers as opposed to the voices of middle-class advocates on the rights of women who work in the sex industry.

Community activist Jean Bridgeman's "Wise women in community: building on everyday radical feminism for social change" brings her voice on the knowledges

and wisdom of working class Irish women and the limitations of liberal bourgeois feminism.

Activist mother and writer Jennifer Verson, "Performing unseen identities: a feminist strategy for radical communication" discusses why we need a feminist communication that breaks down the raced, classed and gendered assumptions that often frame activist spaces and can result in multiple exclusions and silencings.

Jed Picksley, Jamie Heckert and Sara Motta, in "Feminist love, feminist rage; or, Learning to listen", reflect on the patriarchy in our heads, the need for a space for screaming the rage of experiences of patriarchy and the nature of feminist love and feminist anger.

Finally, Anarchist Feminists Nottingham's "Statement on intimate partner violence" refuses to accept the silencing of the voices and experiences of survivors of intimate partner violence in activist communities. They are clear, loud and proud about how this is a political not merely individual and personal issue.

Other articles

Each issue of *Interface* also includes articles not specific to the main theme. Again we start with a pair of articles which complement each other neatly. Kenneth Good's "The capacities of the people versus a predominant, militarist, ethno-nationalist elite: democratisation in South Africa c. 1973 - 97" highlights the tension between the democratic practices of grassroots community movements and trade union activism within apartheid South Africa and the authoritarian behaviour of the ANC's military leadership in exile and in the new state. Michael Neocosmos' "Transition, human rights and violence: rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony" argues that there is a contradiction between democracy and nationalism in neo-colonial contexts. Using the example of xenophobic violence in South Africa, Neocosmos argues that in such societies most people's experience of state power is one where violent political practices from above are the norm, which legitimises violence more generally.

Roy Krøvel's article discusses "Alternative journalism and the relationship between guerrillas and indigenous peoples in Latin America". In Nicaragua and Guatemala in particular, Northern alternative media were complicit in ignoring violations of indigenous rights by leftist guerrilla movements. Krøvel argues that a simple celebration of alternative media cannot substitute for a critical realist pursuit of adequate knowledge and highlights the case of Chiapas as modelling a better relationship.

Tomás Mac Sheoin's annotated bibliography of English-language research on Greenpeace, ranging from personal accounts through media strategies to specific campaigns and national affiliates will be a valuable working tool for any researchers studying this iconic campaigning organisation.

Lastly, in "‘Everything we do is niche’: a roundtable on contemporary progressive publishing" Anna Feigenbaum brings together some key figures in London-based left presses to discuss the question of what gets published, where to publish and how to write for publication.

The book reviews start with Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally enabled social change: activism in the Internet age* (Piotr Konieczny). Tomás Mac Sheoin reviews two books on major Indian social movements: SV Ojas, Madhuresh Kumar et al.'s *Plural narratives from Narmada Valley* and Eurig Scandrett et al.'s *Bhopal survivors speak: emergent voices from a people's movement*. Finally, we review the new edition of Hilary Wainwright's *Reclaim the state: experiments in popular democracy* (Laurence Cox).

Finally, this issue includes a call for papers for issue 4/2 (November 2012, deadline May 2012) on the theme "For the global emancipation of labour: new movements and struggles around work, workers and precarity". Our next issue (4/1, due out May 2012) will be on "The season of revolution: the Arab Spring" with a special section on the new wave of European mobilizations.

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Activist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain: transnational feminisms at the World Social Forum

Janet Conway

Abstract

This article surveys and analyses feminist knowledges about the politics of global justice as they are being produced through engagement with the World Social Forum (WSF) process at the global level over a ten year period. Among these are alternative genealogies of the global justice movement, critical analyses of its gendered culture and hegemonic masculinities, feminist discourses of intersectionality and transversality, and tensions between gender justice and economic justice. The author argues for the distinctive character of feminist knowledges and their substantive contributions to the politics of global justice, while also recognizing their heterogeneity, contradictions and lacunae, and their relational character vis-à-vis other political currents on the terrain of global justice.

Introduction

This article aims to identify the distinct character and substance of feminist knowledge that is being produced and brought to bear on the anti-globalization terrain through sustained feminist engagement with the World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF is a worldwide process initiated in 2001 that regularly gathers diverse social movements opposed to neoliberal globalization in periodic social forum events in which the self-organizing efforts of the participating groups constitutes the programme of the events. Social forum events are marked by the embrace of pluralism and diversity, which is enacted and advanced through its methodology of open space. Social fora are not intended to produce unified declarations or actions by their participants. Rather, they enact a novel cultural politics fostering exchange across diverse identities and agendas on the anti-globalization terrain and incubating cross-movement collaboration at all scales of activism. The WSF process is globally uneven but is marked by its origins in Latin America and its political orientation toward the Global South. Social forum events at the regional and world levels regularly attract tens of thousands of participants.¹

Feminisms manifest themselves across the myriad issues and sectors apparent in any single forum event, appearing in many guises and languages, in regionally- and culturally-specific ways, and in a vast array of grassroots as well as institutionalized, localized as well as transnationalized, expressions.

¹ The WSF is an incredibly complex phenomenon that defies easy description or explanation. See my forthcoming *Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and Its 'Others'* (Conway 2012) along with Santos (2006), Smith et al. (2008), and Sen et al (2004).

Feminists are located in virtually all the political currents present in the forum and in movements that are not generally identified as feminist. Although women and feminists have populated the WSF in great numbers, they have persistently struggled for voice and visibility. Women regularly comprise half or more of the participants in the WSF yet remain a small fraction of the speakers, leaders, and writers of the WSF. Although this problem has been more successfully confronted at the Mumbai (2004) and Nairobi (2007) fora, it continues to characterize the fora in Brazil (2001, '02, '03, '05, '09) which is the homeplace of the WSF.

Feminists have been more attuned than most to the power dynamics within the open space, to the persistence of social relations of domination and inequality within the forum which mirror those in the world beyond the forum. Feminists see the reproduction of patriarchal practices in the WSF, including violence against women, the marginalization of women as thinkers and knowers, and the dismissal of feminism, as an intellectual and political resource. This has prompted ongoing debates about the terms of feminist engagement with the WSF: whether to create their own autonomous spaces outside or within the WSF, and whether and how to intervene in and over the WSF itself as a whole, both through populating its events and contesting the governance bodies of the WSF as loci of power (Vargas 2003a; Alvarez et al. 2004; Conway 2007b; Vargas 2009).

Despite these myriad challenges, feminisms thoroughly saturate the WSF and many of its constituent movements, in addition to constituting their own distinctive networks. The study which follows focuses on self-identified transnational feminist networks which have a sustained presence and multi-faceted engagement in the WSF as sites for the production of feminist knowledge in the anti-globalization milieu. Focus on sustained feminist engagement in the WSF across place, scale and time has favoured attention to relatively robust transnational networks over small-scale, more localized expressions of women's and feminist agency which come and go in the WSF and are highly dependent on the local context. This article is focused particularly on sustained feminist engagement with the world-scale WSF process.

There is a plurality of such transnational feminisms active in the WSF, expressing distinct political histories, orientations and institutionalizations and representing distinct political projects and feminist visions of transformation. Despite their heterogeneity, I will argue that they are carriers of a collective body of knowledge, pluralistic but identifiably feminist, that they are bringing to bear on the anti-globalization milieu. These knowledges arise most immediately from their praxis on that terrain, but they also draw on larger and longer feminist movement histories. More than any other current of contemporary social and political thought, feminist thought is produced in relation to a complex world-wide movement, is constitutive of its praxis, and needs to be understood in that context. Furthermore, feminist knowledges are also produced in relation to wider social contexts and social forces, including in relation to other liberatory social movements. The contours of these relations

are important to understand in considering the character and substance of particular feminist knowledges, particularly in this historical moment of unprecedented contact and collaboration among diverse social movements on the anti-globalization terrain.

In this article, I introduce the major transnational feminist networks active at the WSF. While broadly politically convergent in terms of their interventions in and over the WSF, these feminisms also exhibit significant differences, notably around who is the proper subject of feminist politics, the status of place and the local scale in transnational feminism, and the privilege accorded to gender in feminist politics over other axes of social differentiation, inequality and oppression. Secondly, I will argue that, notwithstanding their somewhat diverging political discourses and priorities, these feminisms all reflect a historical transition underway in feminism as a global movement - away from the modes of policy advocacy associated with its interactions with the United Nations and associated processes and institutions towards a more activist and movement-building orientation marked by openness to an array of other movements on the anti-globalization terrain. Thirdly, I distil from the practices and discourses constituting this heterogeneous feminist field a bundle of knowledges distinctive to feminism which are now being brought to bear on the anti-globalization terrain. Although the reception of feminist knowledges is uneven across the diverse array of anti-globalization movements, there is also evidence to suggest that the WSF, its methodology and culture of politics, has been deeply influenced by the sustained engagement of these feminisms.

This study is part of a larger body of work on the WSF based on nearly ten years of field research at world-scale events, plus numerous regional, national, and local social fora in the Americas. My research has included observing these feminisms in action at the WSF, participating in their events, meetings and demonstrations, interviewing movement leaders, reading their organizational websites, reports, and newsletter, listening to speeches and reviewing the writings of their leading activist-intellectuals, and seeking to contextualize these discourses and practices both historically and geographically.

I am a long-time feminist and activist, with twenty years of experience in social movements in Canada and ten years of engagement with the World Social Forum process as both scholar and organizer. Compared to those in other contexts, social movements in Canada have had a long history of working together in coalitions. That collaborative experience has influenced the development of social movements, so that feminism has grown up inside the labour movement, indigenous issues are strongly present in environmental movements, and anti-racism has permeated many activisms, among other instances of cross-fertilization (Conway 2004: 99ff.). My understanding of social movements, of feminism in particular, of their mutual transformations under conditions of intense interaction, and of the possibilities and pitfalls of coalition politics has been deeply shaped by this history.

The anti-globalization terrain is a similar context of intense, indeed historically unprecedented, contact among diverse movements on a global scale. On this

terrain, the WSF is a particularly privileged site that allows for study of sustained interaction that is unfolding in a variety of modes and across a great panopoly of activist discourses. Although uneven, these processes of dialogue and collaboration are transforming subjectivities and producing new practices and knowledges which change conditions of possibility for broad-based social justice struggles. Through this study of the production of feminist knowledges and their contribution in the wider anti-globalization milieu, I seek to further our understanding of the transformations underway in social movements under these conditions.

As a scholar-activist at the WSF, I have been studying its new culture of politics and the relations among movements that it is facilitating. I have been particularly interested in feminism because I noticed early on, in both the anti-globalization mobilizations in the global North and in the WSF, the paradox of its simultaneous centrality and marginality in the evolving politics of global justice. Through subsequent accompaniment of particular feminist networks, I have studied feminist positionality in the process at the world level over the last ten years.

Transitions in transnational feminist politics

It is widely acknowledged by feminist scholars and activists that the UN Women's Decade (1975-85) and the series of UN-sponsored global conferences through the 1990s helped facilitate a flowering of grassroots feminisms across the world and their networking transnationally. I contend that transnational feminist practices vis-à-vis the WSF and on the anti-globalization terrain reflect a significant and multifaceted transition in transnational feminist politics from that which took shape in interactions with the UN processes. This transition has been underway since the mid-1990s in response both to the ascendancy of the project of neoliberal globalization and the myriad crises that it has represented for feminist policy agendas, as well as intensifying interaction with diverse other social movements on the anti-globalization terrain, which includes but is not limited to the WSF. In this article, I seek to demonstrate that these transmutations are evident across this diverse feminist field, despite the plurality, diversity and even conflict among different feminisms.

The hallmarks of this transition evident in feminist praxis at the WSF are as follows: A deep auto-critique of the effects of feminist engagement at the UN which has heretofore over-determined the meaning and politics of transnational feminism; a (re)new(ed) commitment to activism and to world-wide feminist movement-building; a (re)new(ed) commitment and capacity for alliance-building with other social movements, including "mixed" movements and women's movements that eschew the label feminist; a resistance to confining feminism and, indeed, other social movements, to sectoral domains and the concomitant claim that feminists have the right, the capacity and the responsibility to formulate holistic visions and strategies for progressive social transformation.

Feminist reflections on feminism's travel through the UN are both appreciative of its gains and lessons and critically aware of its constraining effects on transnational feminist politics and utopian imaginations (e.g. Harcourt 2006). About its limitations, there is a thoroughgoing awareness and auto-critique, for example, of the NGO-form and the complex of gains and dangers inherent in NGO-ization, and the accompanying risks of incorporation into statist and developmentalist projects. Related to this is the emergence of a "transnational activist class" apparent in all expressions of transnational feminist activism, whether at the UN, grounded in particular localities, or instantiated in the global justice movement (Desai 2008:33). The transnational activist class is composed of educated and professional men and women of the middle classes, mostly from the Global North but also drawn significantly from select countries of the Global South, who move freely back and forth between the UN, international NGOs, the academy and government.

UN-focused feminist politics and scholarship about the international women's movement, its leading actors and their agendas, its particular practices and discourses and the critiques of them, overdetermine what is understood now as transnational or global feminism.² One of the problematic effects of this in terms of the anti-globalization movement and WSF is that the diversity of transnationally-engaged but localized feminist practices disappears and other transnational feminist practices, such as the World March of Women discussed below, which are not so marked by the UN history, too often disappear from view and from analytic consideration.

Among the diverse feminisms of the WSF, there is a continuum of positionings, historically and politically, vis-a-vis this history, from celebration to critical appropriation to outright repudiation, which are in some flux. These different relations to this history mark feminist positionalities vis-a-vis each other, the WSF, and other movements. The major networks which have committed to the WSF as an alternative radical domain all share this critique, although to differing degrees and in different terms.

Transnational feminisms at the World Social Forum: broad convergence amid diversity

The World March of Women (the March) and Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur (AFM) have been the most prominent and influential transnational feminist networks in the WSF in that they have been continually present from the WSF's origins, they are active in its governance bodies at multiple scales, they organize their own events in and around the social forum, and they enter into diverse collaborations with feminist and non-feminist others at the WSF. Each of these major feminisms is a transnational network in that each is composed of a number of constituent feminist groups based in different countries. The

²Desai's work self-consciously departs from this. She argues that transnational feminisms takes at least three forms: that focused on the UN conferences, "transnational grassroots activism" and feminist activism around global justice (Desai 2008:33).

Articulación is a regional-scale transnational network based in Latin America, comprised of nine networks in eight countries, mostly in the Southern Cone. The March can justifiably be called global, with 6,000 groups active in 163 countries and present on all continents.

The World March of Women

Although I will argue that there is demonstrably broad convergence between them, these networks have emerged from distinct political histories and evince distinct political cultures, priorities, and discourses. The origins of the World March of Women lie in the organizing of a ten-day mass march in 1994 to protest deepening poverty under neoliberalism in Québec. The March was so successful, both as a grassroots mobilization and as a pressure campaign, that Québec feminists introduced the idea of a world march at a workshop at the United Nations conference in Beijing in 1995. A series of actions orchestrated by local and national scale committees around the world, unified by a shared platform of demands focused both on poverty and myriad forms of violence against women, constituted the World March. The actions began on March 8, 2000 (International Women's Day) and continued over the next eight months, culminating in an action at the United Nations on October 17, 2000 (International Day for the Elimination of Poverty) in which a petition with over 500,000 signatures was presented. Six hundred groups from 163 countries participated. By 2003, 5500 women's groups were participating and by 2005, over 6000 (Dufour 2005: 2,6; World March of Women 2004: 234).

Since 2001, the March has become a prominent presence on the international scene, especially in the spaces of social protest against neoliberal globalization. In the WSF, the World March regularly organizes a multi-national contingent with strong roots in the host region. Their lavender flags and T-shirts are highly visible throughout the streetscapes and events of the forum. The March's commitment to grassroots mobilization, street action and the claiming of public space resonates with many other iterations of the anti-globalization movements, especially among youth, and also characterizes its presence in the WSF. Drumming, chanting, singing, and theatrics enrich and disrupt the spaces of the World Social Forum and "question the practices, codes and consciousness of those who are our 'partners' in the daily fight to make another world possible." (World March of Women - Globalization and Alliances Collective 2005)

In 2005, the March launched its second global-scale initiative, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. Through an elaborate year-long process of articulation and negotiation among its members, the March sought to generate a collective vision, rooted in the 17 demands of the 2000 World March Platform but oriented to alternative proposals (World March of Women 2003). The Charter was targeted at governments and international institutions (UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO) as well as at the March's allied movements and local communities (World March of Women 2003: 3).

A world relay of the Charter, in which it was handed from one women's group to another, "from one world region to another, one country to another, and one village to another" (World March of Women 2003, 2) traversed political borders, bio-regional boundaries and cultural differences. It began on March 8, 2005 in Brazil and ended in Burkina Faso on October 17, 2005 with stops in 53 countries and territories. The round-the-world journey of the Charter concluded with "24 hours of global feminist solidarity," a rolling sequence of one-hour actions beginning in Oceania and following the sun westward around the globe. The relay march was accompanied by the creation of a massive quilt. Women were invited to illustrate their vision with pieces of cloth that were then relayed with the Charter across the world, constructing the Global Patchwork Solidarity Quilt over the course of the world journey of the Charter.

In 2010, another world-scale mobilization was mounted, comprised of actions in 56 countries and involving an estimated 80,000 people. Major regional events were held in Colombia, Congo and Turkey with a strong, shared focus on opposition to militarization and war, on violence against women in zones of conflict, and on strengthening women's protagonism in the resolution of conflicts.³

Articulación Feminista Marcosur

Articulación Feminista Marcosur is a Latin American feminist initiative, a "space for feminist intervention in the global arena", born as a response to the limitations and contradictions of the UN-focused transnational feminism of the 1990s. The Articulación has been known for its strong defense of sexual and reproductive rights and for the visibilization of these issues in the global justice milieu, especially through the WSF process.

In the 2002 WSF, these feminists spearheaded a major Campaign Against Fundamentalisms, linking the economic fundamentalism of neoliberalism with rising ethnic and religious fundamentalisms. Cardboard masks depicting giant lips were sported by thousands of participants in the WSF's many street demonstrations. The accompanying slogan was "your mouth is fundamental against fundamentalisms." In a single symbol, the masks captured the realities of people silenced by fundamentalisms, people who can speak but are afraid to, and those who raise their voices in protest. This mobilization reappeared in 2003 and 2005 WSFs in Porto Alegre, 2004 in Mumbai, and 2007 in Nairobi.

In the context of the WSF, the Articulación has recognized the need for dialogue across difference among feminists. In 2003, 120 feminists from a dozen networks, primarily from Latin America, gathered in a pre-WSF strategy meeting. According to participants, there was widespread agreement on the importance of carrying feminist perspectives into global movements for social change and assuming greater leadership roles, particularly at the WSF. The participants saw feminist analyses on the intersections of race, class, gender,

³See <http://www.mmf2010.info/>.

sexuality, nation and so on, as critical contributions to global social justice movements, including the movement against neoliberalism. Likewise, in their foregrounding of fundamentalism, militarism, and patriarchy, feminist analyses and politics had much to contribute to the discourses of more narrowly economic justice movements. These feminists went on to plan how they might bring the Campaign Against Fundamentalism to the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, India and make links with Indian and Asian networks (Eschle et al. 2010).

This effort bore fruit in the "Building Solidarities: Feminist Dialogues" event hosted by the Indian National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups immediately prior to the 2004 WSF in Mumbai. The event took place over two days, involved 140 women, and successfully broadened regional diversity relative to the 2003 feminist encounter in Brazil. The Feminist Dialogues have been rightly celebrated by some participants as a unique forum for feminists to explore sensitive issues in the global women's movement: North-South dynamics/inequalities; differing priorities around such issues as reproductive rights, violence against women or economic justice; differing choices of scales of activity, institutional venues, and socio-cultural terrains for feminist work; differing assessments of human rights perspectives and strategies; women's engagement with religion and understandings of religious fundamentalisms in different cultural settings.⁴ The Dialogues are also seen as an opportunity to advance feminist understandings of the linkages among neoliberalism, fundamentalisms, neoconservatism, communalism and militarism in the present conjuncture and what this means for women's rights and feminist strategies (Barton in Duddy 2004).

In the WSF, each of these networks, the *Articulación* and the March, is part of distinct clusters of allied feminist groups – a pattern of collaboration and a feminist fault line that only became visible to me in 2007 and after numerous WSF events. The groups of each cluster regularly collaborate in mounting events and supporting one another's initiatives in the WSF but notably do not participate in the others' initiatives. These distinct clusters of feminist collaboration - (1) the Latin American and international groups endorsing the *Articulación's* Campaign Against Fundamentalism⁵ (2) the cluster associated

⁴See Feminist Dialogues Co-ordinating Group (2006, 5–6) for an account of the historical emergence of the Feminist Dialogues. For an account of the developing organizational practices of the Feminist Dialogues, see Gandhi and Shah (2006). For background documents, speeches, and reports of FD events, including audio files and a photo gallery, see <http://feministdialogues.isiswomen.org>. See the *Articulación* web site www.mujaeresdelsur.org.uy for historical documents on the Feminist Dialogues and the *Articulación's* activities at the WSF.

⁵ CLADEM (Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights), REPEM (Women's Popular Education Network), Latin American and Caribbean Health Network; Network of Women and Habitat, September 28th Campaign, Campaign for the Convention on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, all networks which were co-sponsoring the *Articulación's* Campaign Against Fundamentalism (*Articulación Feminista Marcosur* 2004).

with the Feminist Dialogues after 2004 - which overlaps with the first⁶ and (3) the distinct grouping, also heavily Latin American, working in collaboration with the March⁷ - reappear repeatedly before and after Mumbai in the program of the WSF.

As feminists all operating in the male-dominated spaces of the WSF, their efforts are broadly convergent. The AFM and the March co-operate on the WSF's International Council where they bring long-standing feminist concerns about process, inclusion and participation in organizational practices and governance. Feminists across the board are acutely attuned to the gendered power dynamics in the WSF, in both its events and governance structures. They note that women regularly comprise half or more of the participants in the WSF yet remain a small fraction of the speakers and recognized leaders of the WSF. Although this problem has been more successfully confronted at some moments in some contexts, it continues to be a pervasive problem. Feminists thus continually contest the reproduction of masculinist practices in the WSF, including incidents of violence against women in the events, as has happened several times, and the marginalization of women as thinkers and knowers, and the dismissal of feminism as an intellectual and political resource.⁸ As recently as 2008, the March again went on record condemning the sexism that pervades the governance structures and organizational praxis of the WSF, saying "there is no recognition, inside the International Council or in the methodology of WSF, of the present power relationships and a commitment to change them." (World March of Women 2008: 6)

Transnational feminisms at the WSF: axes of difference

While the transnational feminisms discussed here are broadly convergent in terms of their interventions over the WSF, they lead strangely parallel lives within the WSF. The following study arose from my experience at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi in which I detected the presence of two distinct feminist camps, each mounting a series of events in the forum which was largely

⁶ Articulación Feminista Marcosur, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era-South East Asia (DAWN), the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre (Sri Lanka), ISIS International, the National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups (India), and the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ). These seven groups went on to constitute the Co-ordinating Group of the Feminist Dialogues and in 2006 were joined by five more: Akina Mama wa Africa, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (REDLAC), CLADEM and REPEM.

⁷ Agencia Latino Americano de Información (ALAI), Red Latinoamericano Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE - Network of Women Transforming the Economy), South-South LGBT Dialogue, and Women of Via Campesina.

⁸ There have been reports of rape in the youth camps in Brazil and an incident in Nairobi in which a lesbian speaker was booed off the main stage and then chased and physically threatened. See Roskos and Willis (2007), Koopman (2007), and other contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* (8/3) April 2007.

ignored by the other. As I followed each of these feminist pathways through the WSF, I began to discern distinct feminist projects and of sharpening difference and palpable tension between them. Based on a sampling of both these groups of events, I observed some striking differences and my initial conclusions have been sustained as I have followed these feminisms and charted their practices and discourses across place and time in the WSF process. These differences have to do with who are the proper subjects of feminism, the status of place and the local in transnational feminism, and the putatively privileged status of gender in feminist politics. These differences play out in distinct approaches to the feminist politics of movement building, both across diverse feminisms and in relation to non-feminist women's and mixed movements.

By the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, the Feminist Dialogues had taken shape as a transnational feminist project with its own particular politics and aiming to make specific and coherent feminist interventions in the 2007 WSF program. The Co-ordinating Group of the Feminist Dialogues sponsored a number of activities, including workshops on feminist movement building and on feminists' building anti-globalization alliances against fundamentalisms. They also organized a wonderfully dynamic Women's Rally that attracted hundreds of women in a noisy march through the WSF grounds. Many of the marchers sported the cardboard lip masks of the *Articulación's* campaign against fundamentalisms. The Feminist Dialogues' events attracted almost exclusively female audiences, many of them self-identified feminists that I recognized from the pre-WSF Feminist Dialogues event, which had been open only to self-identified feminists (Conway 2007a). Many appeared to be largely professional, urbanized, and middle or upper class women.

In contrast, the March's events were noticeably more mixed in terms of gender and class. One event focused on their Global Women's Charter began with the activists' displaying the March's giant, multi-story quilt draped over a steep outdoor staircase. It succeeded in attracting a different constituency, including lots of men and some of the women vending fruit and drinks in the stadium. The event featured women activists from a local poor people's organization in a public effort to build the World March in Kenya. The World March of Women sponsored a number of additional events: on migration and violence against women; on food sovereignty and the need for alliances between rural and urban women; and on women and work. The World March also worked in coalition with other feminist and non-feminist groups in a variety of ways. The March co-sponsored the IV Social Forum on Sexual Diversity with LGBT South-South Dialogue with its allied Latin American feminist organizations. It collaborated with a diverse group of organizations to host two events on labour and globalization, including Transform Italia, Focus on the Global South, Campaign for the Welfare State, G10 Solidaire and several Italian labour groups and took the lead in organizing the WSF's Social Movements Assembly. The difference in the class and gender composition of the two groups of events was striking even as the substantive foci of the events were at first glance broadly convergent, certainly not at odds.

The status of "place" and "the local" in the practices and discourses of both the World March and the Feminist Dialogues appeared as another noticeable difference. The March is constituted as a co-ordination of place-based "grassroots" feminisms, concretely engaged in specific geographies, on context-specific struggles pertaining to poverty and violence against women, in place-specific terms. The Feminist Dialogues are constituted primarily by self-described transnational feminist networks. In their everyday activities, these networks may be embedded in place-specific ways but their discourses and practices as they instantiate the Feminist Dialogues largely avoid place-based specificities. While speakers associated with the Feminist Dialogues may identify themselves by world region, their discourses about neoliberalism, fundamentalism and militarization tend to be globalist in nature and abstracted from particular struggles on the ground anywhere. A focus on place and the local are preconditions, although not the equivalent, of a grassroots praxis and, I suggest, a significant factor in explaining the distinctive political cultures of the feminisms under discussion.

While the Feminist Dialogues is thoroughly international, its leadership in Nairobi especially in terms of who facilitated and spoke in its WSF events was far more Latin American and South Asian than African or Kenyan. In their political culture, the Feminist Dialogues' events had the character of international meetings that could have been taking place anywhere in the world. Being in Africa seemed largely incidental. The World March of Women, on the other hand, engaged in a thoroughgoing place-based internationalism:

We knew from the outset that the absence of a World March National Co-ordinating Body in Kenya would be problematic for the organization of our activities at the Forum. Fortunately, we were assisted by a young woman who belongs to a feminist theatre troupe that treats various issues of importance to Kenyan society...Thanks to their hard work, the March delegation included women from the poorest neighbourhoods of Nairobi and we now have the foundation to form a March coordinating body in Kenya...

We wanted to use the opportunity presented by the WSF to give a voice to the women's movement of Africa and reinforce its leadership within the World March of Women. Women from some 10 African countries who are active in the March attended the WSF (World March of Women 2007).⁹

Despite its evident internationalism, the placeless cosmopolitanism of the Feminist Dialogues produce a strangely monocultural discourse, a product, I suspect, of the particular transnational circuits of feminist activism produced of the UN processes in the 1990s. Despite its critique and desire to break with the limits of those practices, the Feminist Dialogues reflects the circulation of people and discourses among academia, UN agencies, donors and international NGOs that feminist critics of UN-focused advocacy have repeatedly observed (e.g., Wilson 2007; Desai 2008). In an interview at the pre-WSF Feminist

⁹ In the summer of 2007 and flowing from this contact at the WSF, a chapter of the World March was established in Kenya

Dialogues event, Fatma Aloo of FEMNET, a co-sponsor of the Feminist Dialogues, had this to say:

I was in the process toward Beijing. I hear the same things here. The biggest challenge for the feminist movement is to link with grassroots, the not-privileged. The feminist movement has not even started... they're (gesturing to the room where the event was underway) still stuck in NGOism... also, it's the way this is organized... you would think that being in Kenya - as if there are no feminists in Kenya! - that it would be led by the Kenyans... I am sitting here with Wahu [Kaara, head of the Kenya Debt Relief Network]. Did you see her on a panel? (Aloo 2007)

The Dialogues' more abstracted, academic, and often place-less discourses clearly resonate with educated women inculturated in the transnational discursive and organizational circuits of feminist advocacy. The discourses of the Feminist Dialogues are more analytically sophisticated than those of the March. They are clearly informed by debates and developments in feminist scholarship and theory that are circulating internationally. One could readily discern this at its events but also by exploring its website. Although there are references to the state of the global feminist movement and instances of political exhortation, there is little attention paid to the concrete practices of organizing or coalition building. With the World March, the opposite is true: its practices of organizing are the substantive focus both of its events and the largely descriptive discourses its activists produce about the March itself.

The Feminist Dialogues are fostering convergence among self-identified feminists, cultivating anti-globalization feminist alliances across issues, sectors, and regions, building on the pre-existing transnational feminist circuits, cultures, discourses and ways of doing things developed through exposure to the UN processes, international donor agencies, NGO-ization and politics waged in terms of human rights. In contrast to the Feminist Dialogues' strongly articulated and explicitly *feminist* basis of unity, particularly on rights to abortion and sexual choice, the March is proceeding in practice to build another kind of feminist internationalism through its concrete attention to specific issues of concern to poor and marginalized women in specific places and with less regard as to whether they call themselves feminist, agree on abortion rights, or share the same discourse on sexual rights (Conway 2008).

One further way of situating the political tensions evident among these feminisms is in terms of a persistent dispute among them about the privileged status of gender vis-à-vis other axes of differentiation and oppression in women's struggles and feminist politics. In the context of the WSF, this cleavage plays out in conflicting understandings of gender justice and its imbrication with economic justice, which are reciprocally related to one's conceptualization of feminism, its boundedness as a movement, the domains of its agency, and the character of the world it is trying to confront and (re-)construct. What is at stake here is an *a priori* privilege granted to the body politics of sexuality and reproduction in conferring a feminist identity and determining feminist politics, over other issues with which diverse women's movements have concerned themselves. While the transnational feminisms most committed to (and shaped

by) the WSF process consistently strive to integrate gender and economic justice agendas politically and analytically, these tensions occur in and among these networks as well.

The World March locates a narrow understanding of gender justice in the more institutionalized (read: more politically conventional, less radical, more elite) expressions of international feminist politics. The March strenuously critiques the hierarchical ranking of issues which flows from it and its detrimental effects on the feminist politics of alliance building with the wide diversity of movements on the anti-globalization terrain (including women's movements which eschew the feminist label):

The trajectory of the international feminist movement is marked by a type of institutionalization specific to it that results in different perspectives and political strategies in terms of the priorities of the agenda of constructing alliances. In feminism, there still exist sectors that hierarchically order demands and policies/politics: those which are associated with the body, sexuality, and reproduction are considered as the central and strategic agenda, while those which refer to work or land are associated with practical demands or general struggles. This vision manifests itself in the segmentation of issues, in professionalization, in lobbying, and in [the pursuit of] public gender policies, often disconnected from consideration of neoliberalism or the privatization of the state. (Nobre & Trout 2008, my translation)

Despite intra-feminist tensions on these fronts - which are substantial with deep implications for the future of feminism, including its social composition, its boundedness as a movement, and its relations with other movements - the major feminist networks cited here are all protagonists in and over the WSF who, in their own ways, are actively striving to hold gender and economic concerns together and are seeking to build coalitions with other progressive movements. In fact, all feminisms acting in the anti-globalization milieu are being challenged to reach out beyond their current comfort zones, in thought and action (Borren 2005: 37).

Diverse feminist approaches to movement building

Even among feminist networks similarly committed to the WSF and to building alliances with other movements, differences in feminist visions, analyses, and priorities tangibly shape their appearance and their modes of relating to other movements. Distinct approaches to the WSF and distinct patterns of alliance building with other movements correlate to different feminist traditions and priorities - between those who emphasize a non-negotiable core of feminist politics prioritizing sexuality and reproduction versus those who stress women's gendered economic struggles for food, land, and work. They thus resonate with the intra-feminist debate over the privileged status of gender discussed above, even as they cannot be reduced to that.

The *Articulación* has organized inter-movement dialogues in and around the WSF, both across different currents in international feminism as described

above, and between feminist and other movements. Breaking down sectoral enclosures in which different social movements were discursively confined emerged as a key priority for the organizers of the Feminist Dialogues preceding the 2004 WSF. They went on to host an inter-movement dialogue in Mumbai involving two speakers from each of four movements: women's, sexuality rights, labour and dalit rights/racial justice movements. Each was asked to speak to how their movement had incorporated class, gender, race and sexuality questions, the dilemmas and problems they had confronted and the strategies they had employed. Activists from the other movements were asked to respond. Then the second speaker from the original movement was asked to comment, refute or clarify. This proceeded through four rounds and was moderated. This format was repeated in subsequent years in Porto Alegre in 2005, Nairobi in 2007 and Belem in 2009 (Shah 2005; Gandhi et al. 2006).

Such inter movement dialogues are communicative practices that are critical in fostering intelligibility across difference and are themselves constitutive of movement building across issues, sectors, and regions. These dialogues proceed largely in the terms set by their feminist organizers, notably through analytical discourses of intersectionality which make foundational the recognition of multiplicity - of social subjects, struggles, and strategies - while insisting on the intersectional character of the movements' respective concerns (Desai 2005; Conway, 2011).

The feminists of the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* thus see the WSF primarily as a space for advancing open-ended dialogue across difference among the movements, which they see as foundational for building democratic political cultures. Emerging from post-dictatorship Latin America, the feminists of *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* are preoccupied primarily with the question of democratization, in their societies and in the movements. The defense of diversity and the fostering of a political culture respectful of pluralism are foundational to their feminism and their politics more generally. The boundedness and specificity of feminism as a movement defined around body politics are firmly drawn but, for them, the pursuit of gender justice is understood as a struggle for the democratization of gender relations within a thorough-going and multi-faceted struggle for society-wide democratization and against myriad expressions of authoritarianism. Theirs is indisputably a transversal politics - albeit one that focuses on the body as the site of intersecting social struggles.¹⁰

In some contrast to the "dialogue across difference" approach to movement building in the WSF, the World March of Women aims to advance practical collaboration among movements on concrete issues and campaigns. The March works in sustained, campaign-focused ways - bilaterally with selected other

¹⁰ Although Vargas and AFM explicitly advocate the integration of social and economic rights with women's struggle for gender justice, they also see sexual rights as the most controversial and resisted terrain, including within progressive movements. These feminists argue that the body is at the centre of political debates over individual freedoms, and thus for struggles over democratization (Vargas 2006: 204–5, 2009: 150–52).

movements in advancing concrete issues and collectively with them in the Assembly of Social Movements. Thus the March engages more consistently in the ambiguous spaces of the anti-globalization movement, actively and concretely building trust and partnerships in practice with *non-feminist* but broadly emancipatory movements. The March's coalition-building efforts also rely on dialogue and the negotiation of difference, but these dialogues arise in the context of practical collaboration on concrete issues involving a fuller range of activist partners and practices, in which it is a strong feminist partner which brings its own intellectual, political and mobilizational resources but does not set the rules of engagement.

The March's commitment to building a mass base and engaging in grassroots mobilization, street action and the claiming of public space, their rejection of lobbying and critique of institutional engagement, resonates with other militant movements on the anti-globalization terrain. The March thus approaches the WSF more pragmatically and instrumentally as a "convergence space". Unlike the transnational feminist networks behind the inter-movement dialogues, the March's *raison d'être* is mass mobilization and it exists as a powerful, broad-based and autonomous movement in its own right, rather than a loose network of groups that periodically collaborate. The World March represents a different kind of feminist transnationalism from that of most feminist NGOs active internationally in that, from its origins, it has been oriented to mass movement building --not just among women and feminists, but cross-sectorally with mixed and non-feminist movements with whom it could construct political alliances against neoliberalism. In the diversity of its constituent groups in terms of sectors, scales and modes of activities, in its reliance on "contentious politics" more than lobbying, and in its articulation to the anti-globalization mobilizations, the March represents novel developments in the field of transnational feminist politics, which has been heavily marked by its travels through the UN processes and resulting NGO-ization (Conway, 2007b; Giraud and Dufour 2010).

The discourses and practices of the World March, with their strong emphases on anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, and coalition building with other movements of the left, draw clearly on the legacies of socialist feminism. The class composition and political commitment to popular-sector, "grassroots" feminisms, coupled with its particular orientations to the local and the place-based relative to the transnational, distinguish it from other expressions of transnational feminism under discussion. For the World March of Women, the *raison d'être* of the WSF is to foster convergence among diverse movements and to enhance their capacities to act in alliance with one another. In their view, the WSF provided a productive mode of gathering diverse (even divergent) movements at a time when neoliberal hegemony had paralyzed thinking about political possibilities, and movements were split between those still relating to political institutions and those who eschewed those possibilities. The WSF allowed for a rapprochement between diverging camps (Nobre & Trout 2008).

Common knowledge(s): feminist contributions to the politics of global justice

Although the transnational feminisms at the WSF constitute an internally diverse feminist field, the networks under discussion all reflect the working out in practice of the multifaceted historical transition underway in transnational feminist politics outlined above. While different feminisms exhibit significant differences arising from their distinct political histories, orientations, and institutionalizations, they also draw from a common well of knowledges produced through the transnationalization of feminism in the late 20th century. Despite internal pluralism, tensions and differences, transnational feminism as an identifiable political current is a carrier of distinct perspectives and knowledges onto the anti-globalization terrain. This last section attempts to map these feminist knowledges as they are being brought to bear in/on the WSF.

I identify the following: the feminist analytics of intersectionality and related practice of transversality; feminist interventions about the bounds of acceptable difference; the feminist critique of the global left's critiques of neoliberalism; alternative genealogies of the anti-globalization movement which surface through feminist accounts; and analyses of the gendered cultures of anti-globalization movements. The first three are anchored in the writings produced by activists in the different networks under discussion vis-à-vis their engagement with the WSF process. The convergence displayed here evinces the cross-fertilization at work across feminist difference in a complex and pluralistic movement. The last two are reflective of a more dispersed commentary on the WSF produced by feminist activists beyond the major networks under discussion but not at odds, I think, with perspectives shared by the these networks.

Feminist analytics of intersectionality and the practice of transversality

Like other social forces on the anti-globalization terrain, feminisms are actively and increasingly seeking ways to collaborate with the whole range of emancipatory movements in their various contexts and at various scales. Irene León of ALAI, active with the World March, comments that this signals a transition and expansion in feminist praxis, in feminists' addressing a much broader social agenda and society as a whole (2005: 21). This is true of all the movements. They are being transformed as they interact with each other more intensely and as they contemplate society as a whole - not just their historically more discrete issues or arenas (Burch 2005: 43-44).

This recent shift in transnational feminist politics, in my view, must be further situated in relation to analytical developments in feminism underway since the late 1970s in response to the eruption of women-of-colour and indigenous feminisms, particularly in the US, and to "third world feminisms" in the global arena. These developments have transformed feminist movements and

subjectivities, rendering them more porous to other feminisms and to other equality-seeking movements. As we can see, this has been a historically uneven process, but this more open positioning defines the major transnational feminist networks active at the WSF.

Analytically, feminists have theorized the interactive and intersectional character of domination based on the mutually-reinforcing dynamics of oppressions based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, among other axes of social hierarchy and differentiation.¹¹ Gender relations have come to be understood in ways that intersect with myriad other forms of hierarchy and difference, and the struggle for more equitable gender relations has come to be understood as integrated and aligned with the whole range of movements for equality, rights, and democratization (Vargas 2003a: 918).

In the WSF, these theoretical orientations find diverse practical expression. Among feminists, we can see the efforts to hold gender and economic justice together, as discussed above. Another is through a commitment to transversality. The feminist commitment to transversality is based on standpoint epistemologies, that is that distinct knowledges emerge from particular social locations and that the knowledges of the historically marginalized should be privileged in constructing any emancipatory politics that claims to be acting on their behalf.¹² A politics of transversality holds that women and feminists, along with all historically marginalized voices, should be addressing the whole of a transformative agenda, rather than be relegated to assigned silos based on single issues. One of the ways that racist patriarchy functions, at the WSF and elsewhere, is through restricting various subjects to pre-assigned domains. A praxis of transversality is premised on the conviction that all subjects should speak to all issues, while simultaneously recognizing and ameliorating historical exclusions in amplifying the voices of the historically marginalized (Chancoso 2005: 147; Mtetwa 2005: 134–37).¹³

For prominent feminist networks, the commitment to the transversality of historically marginalized voices is *the* methodology of the WSF (World March of Women 2008: 6), and a process that, in itself, will promote the emergence of new subjects and new questions (Vargas 2003b: 40). In the view of these feminists, such transversal politics entail a complexification and expansion of the anti-globalization movement's agenda and a positive vision of alter-globalization. For these feminists, the commitment to transversality is both a political practice and an epistemological principle but, emergent within it, is

¹¹ For accounts of the history of these developments, see Yuval-Davis (2006).

¹² Epistemological debates have been central to the politics of the second wave of feminism. See Alcoff and Potter (1993); Hill Collins (2000). For more contemporary treatment, see Harding, S. (2008; 2004).

¹³ This understanding of transversality as a practice, which is the prevailing understanding among these feminists at the WSF, is distinct from the meanings of transversal politics in English-language scholarship on feminist politics, in which it refers to practices of alliances across boundaries of difference, initially among women of different races and classes in the US and UK. See Yuval-Davis (1997).

also a vision of another sociality, another social ordering, founded on an alternative regime of truth. This alternative regime of truth is grounded in the valorization of the knowledges produced by marginalized subjectivities and their mutual transformations through deep, sustained, democratic encounter. It is pluralist but not relativist in that it is informed by historical struggles against discrimination. And it is not naive about the operation of power and inequality, including on the putatively egalitarian ground of encounter among emancipatory movements.

Feminist commitments to intersectional analyses and transversal politics have been imported into the WSF, but with uneven effects. As a result of feminist pressure, gender and diversity have been affirmed since 2002 as transversal axes of all the social fora. Latin American feminists link this initiative explicitly to the WSF's agenda of overcoming *pensamientos únicos*,¹⁴ among which they include androcentric and ethnocentric forms of thought (I. León 2005: 13), along with neoliberal and other fundamentalisms. Practically speaking, the transversality of gender and diversity is a strategy to promote the inclusion of different movement sectors in all the thematic areas of the WSF's programme. This principle is important to disrupt preconceptions about who are the experts and in what domains and to allow for fuller, more adequate strategies over more extended fields of action (Mendonça 2005: 108). Beyond rhetorical exhortation, though, it is not clear what the concrete results of this strategy have been in the non-feminist spaces of the forum. Declarations of transversality without concrete organizing strategies can become a license for doing nothing further - and indeed, this has been recognized as a danger within the WSF (M. León 2006).

However, the feminist commitments to intersectionality and transversality have had a number of important effects on *feminist* alter-globalization discourses and, through their persistent interventions, also on the WSF. Firstly, feminists have been central to enlarging the language of shared opposition in the WSF to include explicit recognition of a multiplicity of oppressions, of struggles, and of political subjects. In some contexts, notably in Mumbai in 2004, the WSF has been noticeably transformed as a result (Barria and Nelson 2008: 39-40). Secondly, feminist engagements have produced more complicated theorizations of neoliberalism, as discussed below. Thirdly, feminists' praxis of transversality has put them at the heart of cross-movement dialogues and coalition building in the alter-globalization milieu - and therefore at the very centre of the WSF's *raison d'être*, as described above.

¹⁴This is a phrase in widespread use in the Spanish, Portuguese and French-speaking quarters of the anti-globalization movement. It refers to unitary ways of thinking that suppress the possibility of any alternative to that way of thinking. Neoliberalism is the paradigmatic example. Opposition to *pensamiento(s) único(s)* is definitive of the WSF, although this is rarely recognized in English-language reporting. Feminists have insisted that there are plural examples of such fundamentalist ways of thinking and that they appear in oppositional movements as well as among neoliberals (Vargas 2003a, 914).

Diversity, equality and the bounds of acceptable difference

Central to the claims of major feminist networks in the WSF is the inseparability of the principles of diversity and equality. While the affirmation of diversity has been foundational to the forum, in theory and practice, its relation to equality is less secure. As noted above, while nominally, gender and diversity have long been established as transversal axes of all the social fora, gender equality is far from being realized.

The defense of diversity and pluralism is central to feminist politics in the WSF and more generally. Feminists see this as foundational to the struggle against *pensamientos únicos*. Diverse subjectivities, ways of life and social struggles for dignity are the source of alternative knowledges and therefore essential to making other, better worlds imaginable and possible. In this view, the WSF is creating the conditions for an epistemological revolution: the capacity to know the world in and through its diversity (León, I. 2006a: 335). But this is to be undertaken within a commitment to combat all forms of hierarchy and discrimination. Therefore, it is not a relativist embrace of pluralism or a simple tolerance of endless difference.

This is a post-liberal politics of pluralism in which diversity and equality are insistently held together and which calls for both a rejection of discourses and practices associated with histories of male chauvinism, racism, and homophobia, and affirmative action in the open space in favour of groups historically discriminated against.

Following the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, a group of feminist entities aligned with AFM made a strenuous intervention in the debates about open space in voicing their concerns about the presence of church groups opposed to sexual and reproductive rights. The latter had organized an anti-abortion march, preached against birth control and in favour of abstinence within the forum space. Evoking the principles of diversity and individual autonomy in constructing radical democracy, the feminist commentators affirmed the presence of LGBT movements in the Forum and rejected "fundamentalist manifestations" of those who would deny sexual and reproductive rights. They reiterated that the WSF is a process open to all "that recognize this diversity" but that those who "promote the marginalization, exclusion and discrimination of other human beings, are alien to this process." (Articulación Feminista Marcosur 2007)

Feminists recognize that, as important the principles of self-organization and self-management are to the WSF, allowing these principles alone to structure the open space leads to the reproduction of historic inequalities, exclusions and the over-representation of culturally dominant and materially privileged groups (REMTE and World March of Women 2005). Such principles can thus act at cross-purposes with the intent to create open spaces that enable social diversity to be expressed in ways that are both more representative of the social reality and reflective of the ethos of myriad struggles against discrimination.

While such formulations do not resolve all problems of adjudication across difference among the enormous diversity of movements opposed to

neoliberalism, they do reflect more nuanced and complicated ways of thinking about the praxis of open space: a space that requires both affirmative action and collective regulation in order to protect it as a space hospitable to the world's diverse movements.

The enormous presence of church groups at the Nairobi event, their undeniable presence and legitimacy in poor communities, and their historic roles in human rights and anti-apartheid struggles in Africa, confronted the WSF with a major intellectual and political provocation about the status of religious traditions, discourses and organizations in the movement, and the boundaries of acceptable difference. Many of the leading movements of the WSF, feminisms among them, are rooted in the emancipatory discourses of modernity and are resolutely "secular". They are deeply ambivalent, if not outright prejudicial, toward anything that smacks of "religion".¹⁵ But the question of religion, both in world affairs and in the global justice movement, is not going away and the Nairobi event indisputably put this on the WSF agenda.

Similarly, indigenous movements with their discourses of gender complementarily and their increasingly audible critiques of modernity, confront many feminisms with deep challenges to their long-established formulations. However, feminist discourses emanating from contexts in which there are strong indigenous movements and in which there are histories of concrete cross-movement collaboration demonstrate possibilities for constructive engagement.¹⁶ Notably, these discourses refer more substantively to struggles against racism and colonialism, which are largely absent in other feminist discourses arising in the context of the WSF, notwithstanding the rhetorical inclusion of "race" in analytics of intersectionality.¹⁷

The feminist praxis of dialogue among diversities seeks to confront the interpretive frameworks of all the movements (including feminisms) with what they do not attend to: "In the WSF, feminists are in dialogue and debate to transcend their own limits, democratizing their interactions and avoiding their own 'fundamentalist' or single minded versions of what is possible." (Vargas 2009:159 citing (Feminist Dialogues Co-ordinating Group 2006) "Openness to diversity identifies new dimensions of struggle, not for a better *world*, in the singular, but for other better *worlds* that will reflect many emancipatory perspectives." (Vargas 2009:155)

The fight for inclusion based on a recognition and valorization of multiplicity, while also problematizing the open space as an open market for all in which the most powerful and best resourced actors can dominate, is generating novel political theories, most fully articulated by Vargas and her colleagues at AFM:

¹⁵For a critical discussion of secularism in the WSF, see Daulatzai 2004. For relevant discussion of secular as religion and "religion" as itself a problematic term, see Balibar 2007

¹⁶See numerous contributions to León, I. (2006b), a collection of essays produced following the first Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador.

¹⁷On the absence of "race" in Latin American feminisms and the putative remoteness of colonialism, see Lavrin (1998: 527–529, 531). For critique of the latter, see John (1998: 540).

Feminists have begun to widen their political categories, such as democracy, to make them more complex. The search for a concept of democracy that is plural and radical remains central to their thinking and attempts to recover the diversity of experiences and aspirations that neoliberal model, which emphasizes elections and minimizes the redistributive responsibilities of the state, denies. It nurtures democratic, secular, untutored visions that are transcultural rather than Western and works on different scales and dimensions, incorporating subjectivity into the transformation of social relations and generating multiple sites from which emancipatory democratic agendas can emerge. In this process, struggles *against* material and symbolic exclusions and *for* redistributive justice and recognition create a new politics of the body (Vargas 2009:150).

Feminist critiques of the critique of neoliberalism

Feminists across the political spectrum in the WSF insist that univocal opposition to neoliberalism, capitalism, or imperialism so widely promulgated on the left and in the movements of the WSF is both insufficient and deeply problematic. Feminist engagements have produced more complicated theorizations of neoliberalism itself as a sexist, racist, and homophobic project with uneven effects on human populations beyond those of class, region, or nation, in which the oppression of women and exploitation of their labour is deeply implicated.¹⁸ Feminists have also productively analyzed neoliberalism as a form of fundamentalism, thus linking it with other reactionary social movements and connecting struggles for gender justice against social conservatism with those for economic justice against liberal regimes.

Vargas, of AFM, sees in the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism in the WSF a persistent hierarchical ranking of networks and issues, wherein some are considered more central than others. These are simultaneously epistemological hierarchies. She writes:

It is possible to announce [the articulation of multiple new identities gathered in the WSF] as a democratic political horizon [while] to construct in practice, . . . hierarchies of interpretation of the problems to be solved, as in economics, politics and world power versus subjectivity, diversity, discrimination, rights (2003b: 40)

She argues that such hierarchies of issues and analytical approaches flow from univocal understandings of neoliberalism, which in turn are underpinned by unitary conceptions of globality. The critique of neoliberalism itself appears as a form of *pensamiento único* that is not confronting its own contradictions or exclusions, as it seeks to subsume other affirmative agendas of rights and diversities into itself and thus denies the affirmation of multiple forms of justice and multiple democratizations (Vargas 2003b: 46).

For Diane Matte and the World March of Women, feminism's unique contribution to the WSF and to the movement against neoliberal globalization has to do with "questions at the heart of capitalism, about the basic relationship

¹⁸ See Faría (2005: 127) and Brewer (2010).

between men and women and between individuals and our collective societal relationship" (2005). These feminists insist on attention to women's oppression as a fundamental feature of contemporary social order, central to capitalism even as it predates it. Feminist understandings of the omnipresence of violence against women and old and new forms of commodification of women's bodies and lives shift and stretch critical analyses of neoliberalism. "We want all the movements to inscribe the analysis of patriarchy in the heart of the questioning of neoliberalism and imperialism - today symbolized mainly (but not exclusively) by the WSF" (World March of Women 2008: 4).

For the March, it has been important to be at the forefront of the WSF organizing process, where "it has been a struggle to get feminism recognized as an answer to neoliberal globalization . . . as a social movement that is bringing something that is central" and not simply as one of an infinite number of groups, identities, and strategies. "The central analysis [operating at the WSF] is still Marxist" (Matte 2005). In the March's view, feminism is itself a radical and egalitarian project of social transformation. It has its own specific and essential analytical and mobilizational resources to bring to a heterogeneous field of social struggles.

This is echoed by Carol Barton from the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice:

In terms of our presence at the World Social Forum, we would make the bold case that you can not really understand the current dynamics in the world, in terms of the global economy, militarism, and the rise of the religious right in many countries and the impact these issues are having on people's lives, without a feminist analysis of patriarchy. It is an integral part of the way geopolitics are being played out... our long term goal is to bring that kind of feminist understanding to the social movements that are trying to challenge the current system. (in Duddy 2004)

Vargas argues that globalization, the sense of the world as a single space, has transformed living conditions and subjectivities for women in ambivalent ways. As many feminists have observed, the neoliberal withdrawal of the state from social provision has increased the burden on women to provide for families. However, economic restructuring has also transformed "tradition", including family forms and gender orders, opening up previously unexamined social practices to critique and negotiation. Thus, she observes, women are enacting new subjectivities characterized by a sense of their own autonomy, individuation, equality, and dignity (Vargas 2003b: 9–11).¹⁹ Feminist attention to the *contradictions* of various social arrangements for women have produced more multivalent understandings of neoliberalism, with many attendant challenges (which have hardly been taken up) for movements aligned against it and for feminists in alliance with those movements.

¹⁹ Vargas is a thoroughly modernist theorist, both in her understandings of capitalist globalization and of democracy. She draws unproblematically on theorists like Nancy Fraser and Chantal Mouffe in her formulations of radical democracy and on Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Manuel Castells in her understandings of globalization.

Alternative genealogies of anti-globalization

Politics opposed to neoliberalism appeared in feminist networks prior to and independent of the eruption of the so-called "anti-globalization" movement in Seattle in 1999 and the appearance of the WSF (Conway 2007b; Moghadam 2009; Eschle et al. 2010: 59ff.). Opposition to neoliberalism was stirring on the ground all over the world from the mid-1980s, including in place-based activism against debt, structural adjustment, and free trade by women's and mixed movements. These activism were influencing debates in transnational feminism, including at the United Nations, from the mid-1990s on.

Feminist genealogies of alter-globalization foreground the historical role of the United Nations in the globalization of social movements and their contemporary convergence against neoliberalism. In terms of the globalization of feminism, the UN Women's Decade (1975-85) and the series of conferences through the 1990s helped facilitate an efflorescence of grassroots feminisms across the world and their networking transnationally - in the days before new communication technologies made this more commonplace. Feminist scholars note that activists in these networks were among the first developing non-hierarchical and participatory transnational political organizations and practices - know-how and sensibilities that they brought into the global justice movement and to the WSF (Desai 2007: 798). Likewise, over thirty years of intense contact, conflict and negotiation across differences of nation, culture, language, religion, race and class, transnational feminists produced new ways of doing and theorizing emancipatory politics at the global scale, which have been imported into the WSF. Numerous authors have noted and analyzed feminist travels through the UN processes and how this has shaped feminist engagements at the WSF (Gouws 2007; Wilson 2007; Desai 2005; Roskos et al. 2007; Klugman 2007; Harcourt 2006) and accounts for differences and tensions among diverse feminisms in the forum.

Feminist writing has brought into view the UN processes, particularly the evolution of the parallel NGO fora, as important precursors of the WSF. These accounts foreground the powerful continuing attraction of the language of rights, reliance on international law, and at the national scale, on the paradigm of citizenship guaranteed by states that are frequently effaced in left politics and theory. These likewise remain largely unrecognized or unproblematized in broader scholarship on the global justice movement which more often takes as its starting point the mass mobilizations initiated in Seattle and focuses on their direct action currents.

In terms of building alliances for global justice, alternative genealogies of anti-globalization point to multiple legacies, discourses, and trajectories that have converged *but, significantly, not merged*, in the present. Different origin stories foreground distinct actors, places, political histories and civilizational legacies each with implications for our understandings of global justice. Recognizing and valorizing multiple genealogies of global justice is foundational for a global politics of solidarity.

The gendered culture of anti-globalization movements

Feminists engaged with the forum have been regularly and rightfully enraged in the face of myriad persistent forms of male domination, discrimination against women, dismissal of feminism, and even violence against women in this putatively open, egalitarian and emancipatory space.²⁰ Critiques of systemic sexism extend from the events themselves, to the organizing processes, to the governance bodies of the forum.

The phenomenon in which feminists and feminisms can be impressively present in a proliferation of grassroots, self-organized and often small-scale activities in the social forum program, as well as in the popular spaces and streetscapes of the forum, while being systematically ignored intellectually and politically in the non-feminist spaces of the forum, has continued to characterize WSFs and is mirrored in the overwhelmingly androcentric knowledge production about the forum.²¹

Feminism problematizes and protests this in terms of gender and sexuality.²² Feminism politicizes the question of knowledge production in terms of who speaks to and for the movement. Feminist attention to bodies, and embodied standpoints – to who is present, who is speaking, whose knowledges are granted authority – is unique in the intellectual and political interventions over the WSF and the anti-globalization movement.

The leaders in the putatively horizontal space of the WSF and those who speak authoritatively about it are gendered male. They are cosmopolitan, multi-lingual in European colonial languages and accustomed to speaking before crowds, often in academic discourses (Freudenschuss 2007: 43). They are light-skinned men of the European and Latin American left, occasionally joined by men of dominant races and classes from other regions. They promulgate univocal analyses of capitalism, in which sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression, when they are acknowledged at all, as in the WSF Charter, are understood as epiphenomena of capitalism (Freudenschuss 2007: 42). Writing about the anti-globalization movement more generally, Mohanty early on observed “the notably ungendered and deracialized discourse on activism against globalization” (Mohanty 2002: 517) and its “implicit masculinization” (Mohanty 2002: 529) as ironically reflecting the hegemonic discourses of globalization.

Feminists have observed a pattern of hegemonic and masculinist practices as the forum has occurred in various places and at multiple scales. Among other things, they have related this to a resurgence of Marx-inspired, capital-centric discourses that have revalorized class struggle and the subsuming of all other

²⁰See, for example Roskos, et al. (2007); Koopman (2007), and numerous other contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* (8/3), April 2007.

²¹Although there were breakthroughs evident elsewhere, notably in Mumbai, the preponderance of WSF events in Brazil mean that Brazilian-based experience overdetermines feminist commentary about the WSF process.

²² Despite feminist discourses of intersectionality, the feminisms of the WSF are virtually silent on race and indigeneity.

emancipatory struggles within its logic. In the process, the authority of those who promulgate such discourses has been reasserted. This expression of hegemonic masculinity has reappeared regularly in many left movements in the West and in anti-colonial nationalisms, in agonistic tension with other emancipatory subjectivities associated with the new social movements of the late 20th century.²³

In the context of pitched struggle for zero-sum victory over an ultimate enemy, which has characterized many expressions of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics, the "left" is constructed as a zone apart from capitalist or other social relations of oppression. Embrace of radicalism (in whatever variant) confers innocence on both the movement and its men as they consider themselves exempt from examining their own gendered, raced and classed positionalities, from acknowledging their own privilege, and recognizing how their everyday practices in the movement and in the forum can reproduce dynamics of oppression or marginalization.

Feminists consistently insist that the movement is not a world apart from the social relations of the world that it is seeking to transform, any more than the "private" sphere of the household and intimate relations can be thought of as insulated from the power relations associated with the "public" sphere. Patterns of domination, marginalization and exclusion, as well as power, authority, and over-representation get replicated in movement spaces unless there is explicit commitment and concrete strategies to disrupt these patterns. The persistent refusal to recognize gender (among other forms of) power and privilege within the movement as well as more generally explains, in part at least, the continuing marginalization of feminism, despite feminism's originary presence and myriad contributions, and widespread rhetorics valorizing diversity and pluralism in the WSF.²⁴

Feminist critique of the anti-globalization movement is an extension of its commitment to critical reflexivity about its own practices. Constructing activist cultures that recognize the complexity and multidirectionality of power, the multiplicity of axes of oppression, and the implication of all subjects in relations of domination is essential to building liberatory potential and circumventing repressive tendencies that reappear continually in all political movements. Cultivating movements that are capable of self-critique and renovation combats the reproduction of oppression and contributes to pre-figuring the more egalitarian social relations which the movement envisions for the world.

²³See Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 for review of the history and reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

²⁴Corporate power is, of course, widely recognized and referenced, as is imperial power, the relation between the two and their capitalist character. However, the class and national origin of leading activists in the WSF is not problematized beyond the occasional acknowledgement of the over-representation of Latin Americans and Europeans. There is hardly any discourse of race or racism in the WSF. To the extent that gender and (to a lesser degree) sexuality are in play, it is due to the persistent efforts of feminists.

Ongoing work of this kind is central to building enduring alliances across difference, especially those marked by historical inequalities.

Conclusion

Most commentators readily situate the WSF in relationship to the anti-globalization movement that coalesced in Seattle. Far fewer acknowledge the founding presence of feminism and its deep and ongoing influence in the WSF and on the wider anti-globalization terrain. According to Virginia Vargas, leading Latin American feminist and activist with *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*:

The WSF represents a dialectical articulation between the global justice movement and the feminist movement in particular. This articulation is not easy; it implies a double strategy for feminisms of committing themselves to collective struggles of the social movements while also transforming their perspectives in relation to feminism, gender, difference and multiplicity. (Vargas 2003b: 34–35, citing Corrêa 2002: 69)

Through this article, I have attempted to make visible this saturating feminist presence, to distill its knowledges, and begin to appreciate their importance and effects on the anti-globalization terrain beyond feminism itself. I have argued that despite the presence of diverse and competing feminist projects and the highly contested character of feminism as a vision and practice of social transformation as evident in the WSF, there is a body of feminist knowledges accumulated over decades of practice in a world-wide movement, that is circulating widely, that enjoys wide acceptance among diverse feminisms, and which they carry into their collaborations in the anti-globalization milieu. This is not to claim that feminism is all-knowing, that the feminist discourses at the WSF or more generally are adequate in and of themselves, nor to claim that feminist knowledges are superior to those of other movements. However, it is to recognize and begin to analyze the cross-fertilizations that are underway on the anti-globalization terrain and to recognize feminism's distinct and open-ended contributions to this process.

Aside from their substantive content as outlined above, feminist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain share a number of characteristics. These flow, I think, from the widespread embrace by feminists across the spectrum of an epistemology of partial, situated and positional knowledges. Feminists thus do not seek to hegemonize the feminist field, in neither its political practices nor its knowledge claims. There is likewise no impulse among feminists to hegemonize the WSF nor the anti-globalization terrain more broadly. In a dialogical fashion, many feminisms in the WSF are seeking to influence the whole range of movements - to have them knit feminist agendas into and alongside their own. At the same time, feminists remain resolutely conscious of the specificity of their own movement and do not presume to speak for an imagined whole that is the global justice movement. In ways that resound with feminist approaches

more generally, the feminist discourses arising from the WSF are located in and produced from self-consciously partial perspectives.

The feminist knowledges encountered through this study all are rooted in practice; they embrace pluralism, they are non-hegemonic and they work through and across difference. Feminists recognize and valorize a pluralism of analyses and strategies among themselves and among the movements. The multiplicity of subjects and struggles produces plural and diverse knowledges of the world and discourses of politics. Critical engagement with difference, arising from social diversity and political pluralism, is at the center of their political projects and their proposals for the WSF. In this, there is a powerful convergence between all feminist currents and the WSF as a political project.

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Framing across differences, building solidarities: lessons from women's rights activism in transnational spaces¹

Lyndi Hewitt

Abstract

This study examines the discursive strategies of contemporary transnational feminist and women's activists in their efforts to manage intramovement diversity. While ideological, strategic, and identity differences within movements are often studied at the local level, I advance this scholarship by undertaking an investigation of intramovement difference that makes central the concerns of a highly diverse, globalized social movement. Drawing on evidence collected through participant observation at three major transnational activist conferences, I use a narrative approach to document key facets of intramovement difference in the contemporary context, and show how activists are employing collective action frames as tools in their efforts to mitigate differences and build solidarities. I find that rights-based frames, oppositional frames, and internally focused frames are all utilized by activists to foster a sense of shared struggle. Such frames encompass a wide range of ideas and are not confined to particular issues or locales. Additionally, they are often deployed in conjunction with acknowledgements of intramovement differences and/or references to diversity as an explicit movement strength.

Introduction and background

In recent years, framing activity in contentious politics has attracted increasing attention and enthusiasm from researchers of social movements (Benford and Snow 2000; Croteau and Hicks 2003; Johnston and Noakes 2005; Snow 2004). The important role of collective action frames in movement emergence, development, and outcomes is now well documented and widely recognized in the field (Benford and Snow 2000; Cress and Snow 2000; Gamson 1992; McCammon et al. 2007; Zuo and Benford 1995).² Another more recent trend in movement

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² Framing refers to the meaning, or "signifying," work in which movement actors engage. Snow and Benford (1988) write that "they frame, or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (198).

scholarship is the explosion of interest in the dynamics of transnational social movements (della Porta et al. 2006; Juris 2008; Khagram, Riker and Sikkink 2002; Moghadam 2009; Smith 2002, 2008; Tarrow 2005). Researchers have utilized existing theoretical tools and worked to develop new ones to deepen our understanding of social movements that cross boundaries of nation, culture, religion, race, and class. This paper examines the convergence of these two vital topics through a study of framing dynamics within the contemporary transnational women's movement. While ideological, strategic, and identity differences within movements are most often studied at the local level (Levitsky 2007; Reger 2002; White 1999), I advance this scholarship by undertaking an investigation of intramovement difference that makes central the concerns of a highly diverse, globalized social movement. I consider how activists confront intramovement differences in their interactions with one another in transnational spaces and, further, how they employ collective action frames in the process. Such lines of investigation have important implications for solidarity in transnational movements and also for feminist theory and action.

As feminists and women's activists across the globe have engaged in diverse forms of collective protest, they have also necessarily confronted the same rocky terrain of intersectionalities and multiple identities with which feminist theorists have grappled (Mendoza 2002; Mohanty 2003; Moya 2001; Narayan 1997; Santiago 2004; Spivak 1999). Such differences continually threaten to splinter women's movements, yet many activists remain committed to finding paths to solidarity. Movement actors have repeatedly disrupted significant boundaries and negotiated cultural, racial, national, religious, sexual, and material differences, ultimately achieving what Manisha Desai (2005) has called "solidarities of difference." The development of strategic discourses, or frames, that connect seemingly disparate issues, such as violence against women, economic development, sexual identity, and militarism has been a vital piece of this process, but to date we have little systematic evidence demonstrating how discursive practices are implicated.

Reitan's (2007) examination of global activism illustrates the continued and often overlooked importance of identity solidarity in transnational social movements. Reitan criticizes scholars who have lauded reciprocal solidarity – relationships of mutual support – at the expense of what she views as the still crucial role of shared identity categories in motivating and sustaining mass-based movement action, particularly in the context of neoliberal globalization. She writes:

Complex transnational movements today are comprised of identity, reciprocal, and altruistic solidarities alike, in different mixes towards different outcomes. But, perhaps more importantly, the identity solidarity that forms the foundation of contemporary, mass transnational networks is decidedly not reducible to "worker,"... It is based upon concrete identities – debtor, peasant, indigenous, youth, woman, and, indeed, worker – that have been activated as political due to their being

threatened in some concrete way by neoliberal globalization touching down in a specific place (55-56).

Taking seriously the insights offered by Reitan and Desai requires us to consider how the identity of "woman" can be activated, shared, and sustained in the face of external threats, even while resisting the homogenization that many feminist scholars and activists fear. An analysis of the discursive practices of women's movement actors promises to shed light on this issue.

My analysis, then, centers on the following question: How, in the face of tremendous intramovement differences, are transnational women's movements using collective action frames as discursive tools in their efforts to manage contestation and build consensus? My endeavor is to highlight the role of frames in constructing relations of solidarity that begin with the threatened identity of "woman," but that simultaneously take into account the multiplicities inherent in that identity.³

I argue here that contemporary women's movement actors continue to make concerted efforts to work with one another despite their differences, and that they utilize particular kinds of frames as tools in this process. This paper first documents the types of frames commonly deployed to transcend the differences that sometimes threaten transnational collaboration among feminist and women's organizations, and then identifies shared characteristics of those frames. To develop my arguments, I draw on evidence gathered through participant-observation during three major transnational conferences: the 2004 World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India, the 2007 Feminist Dialogues (FD) meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, and the 2007 World Social Forum, also in Nairobi. For several reasons, these transnational spaces of activists provide especially appropriate empirical material through which to examine the topic at hand. First, an analysis based on participant-observation of face-to-face political activism makes visible important patterns, ideas, and dynamics that cannot be captured through less engaged methods of investigation. Second, there is a tremendous amount of diversity and difference present in such venues; movement actors and organizations converge from many parts of the world and have a variety of strategies, identities, priorities, and goals. Finally, in part because of this diversity, movement organizations use these spaces to build connections with other organizations focused on global justice issues; they seek to identify and emphasize

³ Frame analysis is not the only viable approach to understanding relations of solidarity among activists. Some aspects of consensus-building are difficult to capture through the lens of frame theory, but I strive to honor the complexities of activist claims as much as possible through a feminist participatory methodology and maintain that the concept of framing is very useful for understanding how ideas are discursively packaged. I view this effort as one important, yet situated, contribution to the larger intellectual and political project of feminism.

commonalities among groups and, in so doing, rely on discourses that promote such commonality.

As Desai (2007) has pointed out, educated, privileged feminist activists are overrepresented in these transnational spaces; however, we must also recognize the ways that such spaces provide a venue for actors to make their voices heard when they have been marginalized within national-level activism.⁴ Some of the participants who come to WSF and FD are well-networked women who frequently participate in transnational conferences, while other participants come from local, grassroots organizations that have managed to find funding in spite of having been marginalized by or shut out of their national-level movements.

This work will illustrate both the obstacles confronting movement actors as they attempt to build alliances, and also the discursive strategies they have developed and used to deal with such challenges. I begin with a brief discussion of the kinds of issues that threaten to divide feminists and women's activists in the contemporary global context; Ackerly (2008) refers to such situations as "terrains of difficulty," while Escobar (2008) has labeled these kinds of tensions "territories of difference." This discussion provides a sense of the challenges movement actors face as they seek frameworks that will both meet external movement goals and build cohesion among movement participants. I then identify and explain three particular types of frames used in attempts to transcend differences and build solidarity among movement actors: 1) oppositional frames, 2) rights-based frames, and 3) capacity-building and movement process frames. After providing examples of these discourses and the ways in which they are being employed, I conclude by laying out theoretical implications of these findings, for scholars of transnational social movements and for feminist activists and theorists.

Data and methods

The data for this paper emerge from participant observation at a series of major global activist meetings, the World Social Forum and the Feminist Dialogues. Now convened biennially and attended by tens of thousands of activists, academics, policy-makers and donors, the WSF is an international conference that serves as "...an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of

⁴ For example, some Indian activists and organizations are critical of Delhi-based feminists' dominance of national-level conversations about women's issues, and thus they find more room for their voices in transnational spaces.

imperialism, and are committed to building a society centred on the human person" (WSF Charter of Principles, <http://www.wsfindia.org/charter.php>).⁵

A diverse mix of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movement organizations (SMOs), and political organizations have used the WSF as a venue to construct and disseminate radical critiques of economic globalization, war and militarism, and a range of other social issues. Feminist activists have had an increasing presence since the first WSF in Porto Alegre in 2001. Immediately prior to the Mumbai WSF in 2004, the first Feminist Dialogues meeting was held as a means of bringing together activists from around the world to discuss feminist issues and challenges, and to infuse the WSF with a gender perspective. Spearheaded primarily by a small group of transnational feminist networks (TFNs) based in the global South, the FD meetings have continued in some form at each WSF since 2004, with the exception of the 2009 WSF in Belem, Brazil.⁶ The Feminist Dialogues describe its key objectives in this way:

In having the meeting before the WSF we hope to achieve a two-way political exchange: firstly, we hope to effectively intervene in the broader WSF process as feminists organizing for change, and to establish strategic and politically relevant links with other social movements. As a site of resistance, the WSF is one of the most dynamic spaces available to us as feminist activists and it is important to participate in it while at the same time retaining our autonomy within the FD (Feminist Dialogues 2006).

A number of prominent scholars studying global social movements and/or transnational women's activism have found the WSF and FD meetings to be an important space and source of data (Conway 2007; Desai 2006; Eschle and Maiguashca 2010; Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Reese et al. 2007; Smith 2008; Smith et al. 2007). They provide an ideal opportunity to observe and interact with many different (and differently situated) movement actors and organizations in one place, and over a relatively short period of time.

An active participant and observer in events at both the WSF and the FD, I documented my observations with extensive field notes on sessions and on informal conversations with participants/activists (Emerson 2001; Lichterman 2002). When possible, I also documented sessions using a digital voice recorder.⁷

⁵ From 2001 to 2005 the WSF was held annually. Beginning in 2006, the International Council made the decision to change the frequency of global meetings to every second year, in part to encourage regional and local social forum meetings during the off years.

⁶ At the 2009 WSF, the leadership of the FD held events within the Forum, rather than convening a separate conference in advance.

⁷ I include the disclaimer "when possible" because, as any previous attendee of the WSF knows, sessions often take place outdoors in a tent or stadium with substantial background noise (e.g., drums, music, speeches), making it very difficult to hear clearly.

My participatory approach to studying feminist activism within these transnational spaces enabled me to observe closely the discursive strategies of women's organizations. Attending to the speech of panelists and audience members, I was able to note and appreciate differences and tensions among groups, and how these differences were rendered visible through different ways of talking about issues. In 2004 I attended 16 sessions at the WSF in Mumbai, India; in 2007 in Nairobi I attended 13.⁸ I observed the speech of plenary speakers, panelists at smaller sessions, and also the questions and comments of audience members, many of whom provided information about their organizational affiliation and/or the political and cultural context of their activism. I particularly noted the use of frames coupled with acknowledgements of intramovement differences in order to discern the types of frames commonly used as tools in addressing the management of diversity and the building of consensus.

There are literally hundreds of sessions one might attend during the forum, and often well over 30 options available during any given time slot. Some sessions are quite large, have ample seating, involve one or more high-profile speakers sitting at a table with microphones; these types of sessions do not lend themselves well to questions and discussion. At the other end of the spectrum, many sessions are small, informal, and conducive to group discussion. Reviewing the WSF programs in advance, I selected sessions to attend based on their engagement with issues of sex, gender, sexuality, feminisms and transnational activism, and gave particular preference to those that explicitly dealt with transnational collaboration, engagement with global governance institutions, or the challenges of intramovement differences.

I attended the Feminist Dialogues meeting only in 2007;⁹ the sessions, consisting of plenary panels, small group breakouts, and open forums took place during the three days immediately preceding the World Social Forum in Nairobi. The FD meetings are organized differently than the WSF in that there are not multiple options for sessions to attend during any given time slot; rather, all participants attended the same plenary sessions, and were then divided into small groups for breakout discussions. In some cases, each of the small groups discussed the same topic; in others, different topics were assigned to each small group. After each breakout session, the small groups reported back to the larger whole through one person who had been elected as the spokesperson. Over the course of the three

⁸ A listing of session titles and sponsoring organizations is included in Appendix A.

⁹ The year 2004 marked the first meeting of the Feminist Dialogues. It was an "invitation-only" event in which invited parties included mostly well-established organizations and individual activists who had at least loose pre-existing connections with one another; I was not invited to participate. Subsequent FD meetings in 2005 and 2007 required participants to make application in advance to be guaranteed a spot, but the proceedings were otherwise relatively open. Interestingly, though, participants were asked to indicate that they self-identified as "feminist."

days, there were a total of seven large group/plenary sessions, two open microphone sessions that included the entire group, and three small group discussion sessions.

For my analysis, I draw on the evidence present in my field notes and recordings, which document my participant-observation of the 2004 and 2007 World Social Forums and the 2007 Feminist Dialogues meetings. The field notes for these three events exceeded eighty pages, and the recordings totaled approximately 27 hours. I began the coding process by examining my notes and recordings for instances of activists' frame utilization, but in addition I looked for references to intramovement differences or tensions. Although I anticipated the presence of frames such as human rights and democracy based on my pre-existing knowledge of the movement, I did not begin the coding process with a formal list of codes; rather, I allowed codes to emerge from the data (Charmaz 2006). Since my driving question deals with frames being employed with the intent of mitigating differences, I especially noted instances in which speakers both employed a collective action frame *and* made reference to intramovement differences or, more specifically, collaboration across or in spite of differences. These references to intramovement differences often appeared as mentions of "local particularities" or "our different experiences."

Beginning with the earliest set of notes and moving chronologically through them, I scrutinized my entire set of notes a total of four times, and then re-visited particular sections as appropriate to ensure the utmost care and precision. While I took note of the number of instances of different types of frames and mentions of intramovement differences, I do not rely heavily on the precise frequency of usage (i.e., specific counts of usage) because of the nature of the data source. Note taking in the field is not a perfect representation of all the speech that occurs in a given session (particularly considering occasional language barriers and hearing difficulties in these venues); therefore, I cannot be confident in a total count of frames used in the sessions. Rather, I rely on a more general estimation of prevalence in my presentation of the evidence (i.e., a frame was frequently used, or not frequently used). The categories of frames that I discuss were present repeatedly and used by multiple activists throughout my field notes; while other frames were present in the data, they were not used as widely or with the intent of addressing intramovement differences, which, again, is the central theme of the analysis.

Sources of intramovement division and the need for shared frames

Historically, many of the intramovement differences emphasized in feminist scholarship stem from regional identities and experiences, intersecting with issues of class and race/ethnicity (Antrobus 2004; Hill Collins 1990; Mohanty 1991;

Narayan 1997). These facets of difference are still present, and still constitute significant concerns for movement actors; however, in the contemporary global context, other sources of difference have also emerged that require theoretical, ethical and strategic consideration. While I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive list, I briefly outline below some of the key tensions voiced by activists: positions on neoliberal global capital, generational schism, sexuality, feminist identity, and local/global status and resource differences.¹⁰

The first concern deals with the orientation of movement actors toward capitalism and neoliberal globalization. While most women's activists are critical of the global market economy and its negative impact on women, some advocate a complete dismantling of the capitalist system while others see themselves as working from a feminist perspective to critique and hopefully reform a largely unmovable system that is not likely to be toppled in the foreseeable future. The most radical perspectives consider any attempt to reform or work within the neoliberal framework as using "the master's tools" (Lorde 1984), and thus doomed to fail. Those with more moderate perspectives tend to voice concern about what happens to people while they "wait for the revolution." In some instances, as INFORM executive director Sunila Abeysekera explained at the 2007 Feminist Dialogues, women's groups have found such different strategic approaches to be virtually insurmountable; movement actors in the moderate camp may view the more radical actors as unrealistic and unnecessarily rigid in their thinking, while the radical groups sometimes view their counterparts as selling out. Over time, these kinds of differences can result in the growth of resentment on both sides, ultimately preventing continued dialogue due to hard feelings.¹¹

Another wedge that is particularly salient for some women concerns generational conflicts. Many young feminists feel that veteran feminists are dismissive of and patronizing toward their ideas. This problem was quite visible at the 2005 meetings of the Feminist Dialogues when less experienced activists were pressured to serve as rapporteurs for the small group breakout sessions; a number of the younger participants felt silenced and undervalued, and were subsequently resentful.¹² Although efforts were made at the 2007 FD meetings to remedy this tension, the generational issue loomed in the background. Several young women voiced dissatisfaction with what they perceived as ongoing exclusion or

¹⁰ These facets of difference were raised repeatedly at the sessions I observed during my work in the field, and many have also been documented in recent scholarship on transnational women's movements (Antrobus 2004; Basu 2000; Conway 2008; Hawthorne 2007).

¹¹ Conway (2008) mentions a similar challenging dynamic between two prominent transnational networks, the World March of Women and *Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur*.

¹² I did not attend the 2005 Feminist Dialogues Meeting, which was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil. My knowledge of the dynamics at this meeting comes from conversations with colleagues who did attend, and from secondary accounts of the event (e.g., Desai 2006; Wilson 2007).

marginalization. One Senegalese activist expressed her continuing concern that the "old guard" is "dominating the discourse of feminism" and has generally failed to link with the new generation of feminist leaders. Given that many seasoned feminist activists share a long history of transnational collaboration and struggle (dating in some cases back to the 1970s), it is not surprising that their tight networks might appear impenetrable to movement newcomers. But what the veteran feminists understand as trust and community with one another, younger feminists sometimes interpret as unreflective exclusion of fresh perspectives in order to retain power within the movement.¹³ It is not necessarily the case that veteran feminists hold vastly different perspectives on issues than the younger feminists, but rather that they are being perceived as controlling, and crowding out new voices from the conversation. The older activists remain concerned about the schism, though, and continue to discuss it openly (e.g., Shah 2004).

It is also widely acknowledged that the notion of sexual rights remains contested among women's movement actors; while autonomous sexual decision-making is widely discussed, sexual identity is still a source of disagreement. For example, Ackerly and D'Costa (2005) document tensions around the inclusion of sexual freedom in the women's human rights framework. They quote a WSF 2004 attendee from Burkina Faso who is active with the World March of Women:

For me, feminism means that I commit myself, with all of my force, with all of my faith, in the struggle so that women succeed in this endeavor... Nonetheless, we've had the time to ascertain that feminism, it means that we have to agree that everything is allowed, and I think that, here on earth, everything is not allowed... But we realized that, in the World March, there is something called sexual orientation. And we, we are not ready to commit ourselves to fight, to ask for the authorization to have a sexual orientation other than what one normally has. I am talking about homosexuality. Whether it is right or not, for us, this is a difficult situation. It is not one of our primary concerns (26).

Her comments reflect palpable tensions and discomfort around women's sexual freedom that often stem from differences in religion, culture, and education. And while her voice represents the beliefs of a legitimate segment of the women's movement, others articulate a different perspective. Gigi Francisco of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) enthusiastically chanted at a 2007 WSF session, "Sex whenever I want! Sex with whoever I want! Pregnancy whenever I decide! Respect our sexualities!" Her arguments suggest a more holistic view of women's sexual autonomy that would enable women to exercise full agency, free from cultural or legal constraint, in determining the gender and sexual identity of their partners as well as the frequency and purpose of their sexual activity.

¹³ Whittier (1995) describes a similar phenomenon occurring among generational cohorts during the second wave of feminist activism in the U.S.

Also note that the activist quoted above interprets sexuality as a North-South difference, but her analysis represents only a partial account of this landscape. Many women and organizations in the global South have long advocated for an expansion in understandings of sexual freedoms and rights, such that same-sex relationships would not be viewed as deviant. One South African activist with the Coalition of African Lesbians expressed her dismay at the prejudice her organization encounters when trying to build alliances both locally and transnationally. A number of lesbians also report that they still feel marginalized within other global justice movements, including feminist ones. They feel that their issues are not taken as seriously, and are troubled at the unwillingness of some to include sexuality as a human rights issue.¹⁴ Hawthorne (2007) discusses lesbians' experiences of marginalization even at the World Social Forum itself, writing that "so too in this 'new world' of diversity, lesbians have been pushed off the tree" (130).

Another interesting theoretical and political fault line within the movement is the necessity of a feminist identity and, further, what constitutes a "feminist" perspective. Movement organizations are making different choices in this regard. Some leaders, such as the organizers of the African Feminist Forum, insist that articulation of an explicitly feminist identity is a crucial political move; the coalition of organizations responsible for putting together this event in 2006 argued that they needed to hold the forum for those who "publicly identify as feminists," not the "I'm a feminist, but..." crowd.¹⁵ They noted that the feminist movement and the women's movement are not the same thing, and they viewed infusing the women's movement with a feminist perspective as an important goal of their organizing. Likewise, one South Asian activist lamented the fact that "gender" workshops are very common in her region, but that feminism and critique of patriarchy are rarely part of the discussions.

Other women's activists and organizations make the intentional choice to avoid the use of a feminist label, at least publicly. Some activists cite fears of being perceived as man-hating lesbians if they identify themselves as feminists. One South African organizational leader reported that this worry is particularly common in the African context; she noted that women want to advocate for themselves, but also to remain respected in their communities and in their marriages, and thus tend to shun any association with feminisms. In other cases, activists report that their reasons stem from cultural perceptions that feminism is a nefarious concept imported from privileged intellectuals of the West; it is not uncommon for women to note that they have greater success mobilizing and achieving their goals,

¹⁴ Several participants in the audience expressed this sentiment during a sexual diversity session hosted by the South-South Dialogue at the 2007 World Social Forum.

¹⁵ The organizing coalition included representatives from DAWN, FEMNET, and WLUML, to name a few.

particularly at local and national levels, when they utilize frameworks that are accepted as indigenous. Activists are then better able to disarm political leaders because the leaders cannot claim outside imposition of ideas.

This brings us to the palpable tensions that are rooted in differences between movement organizations working at the local or national level and those working in transnational spaces (Alvarez 1998; Desai 2007). Susanna George, former executive director of Isis International, writes "There is a vast difference between the priorities of women working locally and those working in the corridors of the UN" (2004: 26). Moreover, there exists the perception, often warranted, among activists working in local and national contexts that transnational venues are dominated by women and organizations with greater privilege in terms of education, resources, and language. Margaret, a women's rights activist in Zimbabwe, shared her concern during an open microphone session at the 2007 FD that "grassroots women" face significant obstacles in getting their interests on the transnational feminist agenda. She noted that there are far too many educated English-speakers advocating on behalf of, rather than with, locally-based activists, and went on to assert that "Anything you do for us, without us, is against us."

Taken together, these types of differences and tensions present very real challenges for alliance-building and, more specifically, for constructing appropriate frames geared toward this goal. But particularly in transnational spaces, feminists and women's activists are looking to find ways of building bridges and working together (Eschle 2005; Hewitt and Karides forthcoming; Vargas 2003). As Nandita Shah noted in a speech delivered during a plenary session of the Asia Pacific NGO forum for Beijing Plus Ten, "In these fragmented times, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 250) writes, it is both very difficult to build these alliances and never more important to do so" (Shah 2004).

A number of movement scholars have cited the heightened importance of "meaning work" in transnational social movements (della Porta et al. 2006; Nepstad 2001; Smith 2002; Snow 2004). Ironically, the characteristics of globalized movements that make shared meanings so crucial are also the very features that make their creation so difficult. Della Porta et al. (2006) identify three such facets of transnational movements: the heterogeneity of movement constituencies, the heterogeneity of ideologies and political positions represented by mobilizing structures, and the geographically dispersed mobilization context. The transnational women's movement faces these broad challenges of heterogeneity and geographic dispersion, as well as the more movement-specific challenges discussed above, in their discursive efforts to promote solidarity. Despite these challenges, as I show, feminists and women's activists continue to call for unifying discourses and to work thoughtfully to construct and utilize them.

Feminist scholar-activist Rosalind Petchesky (2008) argues that we need a feminism that coalesces very diverse bodies; she asserts that discourses effective in

promoting solidarity within a movement full of multiplicity must be intersectional, integrative, and able to encompass local particularities. Ayesha Imam, feminist scholar and organizer with Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), made a similar point at the Feminist Dialogues in 2007, insisting that if feminists are to take on issues together, the issues must be ones that all can “get behind” in their local particularities. Gigi Francisco of DAWN echoed her sentiment and called for integrated feminist approaches: “We must commit to interlinkages despite our differential locations” (FD small group session). Few would argue with the need for such strategies, but developing and implementing them is often difficult. Lydia Alpízar Durán, executive director of the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), underscored this point in her identification of the sweeping post-millennium political and economic changes as one of the great challenges of the contemporary period (FD small group session). She went on to note the urgent need for developing new frameworks to accommodate current issues and their intersectionalities. Women’s groups, then, must adapt their framing practices appropriately to accommodate both internal differences and rapid changes in the movement environment.

Constructing shared frames that account for the kinds of differences, intersections, and particularities discussed above is fraught with obstacles of one kind or another. Consider the example of the politics surrounding access to abortion in different regional contexts. In Latin America, many feminists and women’s activists have fought locally and regionally for women’s access to safe abortion; as activist Nandita Gandhi shared at the 2007 FD, many activists in India have instead struggled with the wide availability of abortion because of the growing number of selective terminations of female fetuses. A frame that is effective transnationally needs to be able to account for these complex situational differences around the issue of abortion, affirming the specific problems in each context, but also maintaining theoretical coherence.

In addition to situational strategic differences, unifying frames must also recognize material and identity differences among women. In the mid-1980s, the theme of “global sisterhood” (Morgan 1984) was temporarily taken up by some transnational feminists and women’s activists as a rallying cry, but was quickly critiqued for its universalizing character and its perceived erasing of differences in race, class, and nation that intersect to create disparate lived experiences for women across the world. Third World feminists, in particular, were concerned that Morgan’s notion of women’s commonality required that women’s race and class be rendered invisible (Mohanty 1997); these pointed critiques prevented the global sisterhood frame from gaining and sustaining broad-based support within the movement. Thus, women’s groups learned that collective action frames that effectively manage difference must not attempt to hide it, but rather should acknowledge and move through it.

Keck and Sikkink's (1998) account of networking around the issue of violence against women demonstrates how the emergence of a shared frame – women's rights as human rights – led to effective collaboration and management of intramovement differences within transnational feminism during the early 1990s. Though women's and feminist activists converged around this common collective action frame by the mid-1980s, relationships between activists from the global North and South were somewhat tumultuous prior to that. Major divisions at that time were attributed largely to disparate understandings of the most pressing issues facing women. While Northern activists tended to use an anti-discrimination/equality frame, Southern activists relied primarily on a frame of economic development/social justice. Southern activists were highly critical of what they viewed as elitist ignorance of their material concerns on the part of some Northern leaders; critiques of imperialism and racism were central to their arguments. The women's human rights frame, coupled with a focus on this issue of violence against women (broadly understood), effectively bridged the gap in priorities and conceptual understandings among women's organizations at that historical and political moment. Weldon (2006) adds that the human rights frame really only became successful once all forms of violence against women – not just those perpetrated by the state – became accepted within the movement as rights violations; she credits Southern activists for expanding Northern perspectives on this issue. Thus, making the frame as broad and inclusive as possible was a crucial step in successfully mitigating difference.

Since the UN conferences of the 1990s, transnational women's organizers have branched out in their strategies, still highly aware of past missteps that fragmented the movement, but also fervently seeking common ground. Nandita Shah, co-director of Akshara India, reflects on the legacies of the past and provides a succinct and clear account of the strategic challenges of the contemporary movement in this way:

We started with a simple and easy analysis: women because they were women, shared social discrimination and oppression, in different degrees perhaps, were linked by a common bond of oppression and struggle. Life in the movement was much easier then. We had a neat analysis and uncomplicated strategies... The women's movement has made an important radical shift. We shifted from notions of sisterhood is global, one women's movement, one category of women to recognizing the politics of difference. That woman, as a biological being, is not the only identity. That for each of us there are multiple, layered, often contradictory identities. The multiple identities appear, disappear or assert themselves at different times in different situations... How can we evolve a common vision without subsuming our specificity and without giving up our differences? How can we assert collective power in a different way and not only through our oppressed identities? (2004: 1-2).

One session at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi further confirmed both the continued importance and the challenges of developing shared frames in contemporary transnational organizing. The session, entitled "Feminist Movement

Building," was exclusively devoted to strategizing around a (potentially new) transnational slogan or campaign that would have broad appeal, but that women's activists could implement in different ways at the local level in order to attend to the specificities of situations. I was struck at this session by the intense consternation around specific word choices and the criteria used for assessing the quality of these messages. For instance, some suggestions that dealt with the need for education were criticized for being too issue-specific and not "cross-cutting" in nature. Other ideas were rejected for fear that their similarity to slogans of other movements might be confusing. The facilitators pushed hard to come to some consensus by the end of the session, so that the women's organizations and leaders present could leave the WSF having co-constructed a message that could be put into action in diverse settings. However, there was no ultimate consensus, no crescendo.

As my anecdote illustrates, thinking through appropriate and effective discursive approaches to consensus-building in the face of diversity is a crucial concern (and a challenge) for transnational women's movements in the contemporary context. Thus, the importance of the question is affirmed: How can movement actors construct frames and identities in a way that promotes solidarity, not giving way to these divisions, strategic or otherwise, but at the same time respecting the variations in positions?

Collective action frames as tools for managing differences

In the sections that follow, I lay out three categories of frames being utilized by contemporary women's movements to promote unity among diversely situated actors and organizations. The data reveal that activists in transnational spaces are commonly using oppositional or "anti" frames, rights-based frames, and movement process/capacity-building frames (internally focused frames) in their solidarity efforts. The popularity of diagnostic discourses such as anti-globalization and anti-fundamentalism rose dramatically in the new millennium, and have been particularly popular among global justice activists participating in the World Social Forum in recent years (DAWN 2004; Reed 2002). Multi-issue frames arguing for human rights have been widely utilized in transnational women's movements for many years (Friedman 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998). By contrast, process-oriented frames focusing on solidarity and movement-building have only recently become more common, and may in fact be a favored approach in the current moment.

Oppositional frames

At a 2004 World Social Forum workshop sponsored by Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), one India-based activist asserted that “anti-fundamentalism is what unites us [feminists].” Her voice represented one of many feminists at the WSF who identified fundamentalism as a religious and political force that is harmful to women in a range of ways. This claim is significant, in part, because it is symbolic of a departure from the human rights discourse so dominant in the 1990s. While very often a commitment to human rights is characterized as the tie that has bound women in their global struggles, in the wake of resurging power among fundamentalist movements and governments (e.g. the Vatican, Iran, Sudan) in the late 1990s and early 2000s, many women’s activists were identifying commonality in their *opposition to* fundamentalism, rather than a *commitment to* human rights or justice for women (DAWN 2004; Reed 2002). Also significant about the claim is the reference to being *united*, indicating an understanding that there are differences among women, but that commonality can indeed be found.

The anti-fundamentalist frame gained momentum to some degree in the late 1990s, but in particular during the early years of the new millennium (DAWN 2004; Howland and Buergethal 2001; Reed 2002). There are several plausible and related reasons why this frame became widely used when it did. First, in the aftermath of the 1995 UN World Conference on Women, many activists felt that feminist concerns had been compartmentalized to the point that building coalitions across issues and cultures was once again very difficult. The Beijing Platform for Action divided women’s issues into “critical areas of concern” which arguably impeded the potential for coalition-building.¹⁶ The anti-fundamentalist frame offered a means of uniting women across cultures, across borders, and across issues of concern. In many cases, the anti-fundamentalist frame also offered a point of convergence for feminists and women’s groups and other progressive causes concerned with militarization, neoliberal economic policies, and sexual rights. Second, the concurrent political success of fundamentalist groups¹⁷ all over the world created a sense of solidarity among feminists that they were battling the same kinds of forces, in spite of other differences. Moreover, the attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 gave rise to a heightened awareness of religious fundamentalism, which further catalyzed galvanization around this issue for feminists.

¹⁶ Ackerly (2006) dubs these “issue silos.”

¹⁷ Examples include the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, the Bush administration in the U.S., and the power of the Vatican in international politics.

The anti-fundamentalism frame and other diagnostic framing strategies,¹⁸ namely those critiquing neoliberalism and militarization, have also enjoyed popularity due to their promotion on the part of women's coalitions such as the coordinating group of the Feminist Dialogues. The "trinity" of women's enemies – religious fundamentalism, neoliberal globalization, and militarization – figured prominently into their conference agendas during 2004, 2005, and 2007 (FD Global Report 2005; FD Global Report 2007; FD 2007 Concept Notes on Sub-Theme 2: Fundamentalism and Body Politics, and 3: Globalisation). Furthermore, the contemporary global justice movement more generally, including the large portion of it that participates in the World Social Forum, has advanced the anti-neoliberalism and anti-militarization arguments as key bases for their collaborative organizing (Blau and Karides 2008; della Porta et al. 2006; Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Smith 2008).

What characterizes these "anti" discourses is their sole focus on the enemy, the problem. Essentially, these are diagnostic frames that do not move to the next step; movement actors can identify common enemies without explicitly suggesting or agreeing upon common solutions. While "anti" frames may be used in conjunction with, rather than exclusive of, prognostic and/or motivational frames, combinations can vary substantially; diagnostic frames may be paired with reform-oriented prognoses or with more radical prognoses, for instance. Diagnostic frames, though, are particularly visible in efforts to promote a sense of shared suffering and solidarity, even if differently manifested, as I observed repeatedly at the transnational conferences of 2004 and 2007.

During both the 2004 and 2007 meetings, opposition to militarization was a dominant message. At an open forum discussion following a session at the 2007 FD, one participant noted that although militarization has different meanings and realities for individuals depending on the context, many women and children are harmed by this phenomenon. She remarked that women regularly face violations as a result of multiple forms of military power, whether through witnessing violence, losing loved ones, or having one's own bodily security threatened. Her comment conveyed a sense that, even though the precise effects of war and militarization vary, there is a common root of people's suffering which can be the basis for solidarity.

Neoliberal globalization is also targeted as a ubiquitous obstacle to women's flourishing. During a session on the opening day of the 2007 FD, a number of participants shared their local experiences with neoliberal forces. One Brazilian-

¹⁸ Diagnostic and prognostic framing are two of the core framing tasks outlined by Snow and Benford (1988). Diagnostic framing refers to the identification of the problem or the injustice at hand along with its causes, while prognostic framing refers to the presentation of a solution to the problem. *Who* is labeled as the enemy and *how* to attack the problem are both highly important and often contentious features of frames.

based activist with *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* discussed the negative impact of neoliberal globalization on unemployment and inequality in Latin America, and also criticized the transfer of social responsibilities from the public to the private sphere. She went on to argue that feminism means nothing without a redistribution of wealth, a virtually impossible goal within the confines of a neoliberal economy.

In a later session, one FD participant lamented that “Neoliberalism spoiled our way of thinking about the future.” Another participant pointed to the exacerbation of health problems for HIV-positive women in South Africa who are unemployed because their jobs have been filled by Chinese women working for next to nothing. A Latin American woman currently working as an activist in South Africa emphasized the different manifestations of the neoliberal economy, but also its pervasive nature, calling it a “giant.”

On the last day of the FD meetings, the references to commonalities in facing neoliberalism continued. One panelist explained that the impact of economic globalization is complex, and that the neoliberal economy is also a source of creation of culture that affects us all; on a more hopeful note, she argued that there are many forms of resistance to neoliberalism in which feminists can engage, including demanding land and water rights or questioning the role of the state in national economies, and she encouraged each woman to find her role in the collective struggle.

Throughout these transnational meetings, women attributed a wide range of problems to the giant that is neoliberal globalization, and pointed repeatedly to the devastation it has caused for women’s economic opportunities. And lest we fall into the trap of separating material issues from so-called identity issues, several South African lesbian activists noted the ways that sexual freedom is located squarely within struggles against neoliberalism and patriarchy. They argued forcefully that the intersecting enemies of neoliberalism, patriarchy, and fundamentalism come together to diminish the life chances of LBT women in developing countries, in particular.

One clear strategic advantage of frames that are solely diagnostic is that they do not require consensus about solutions, or even necessarily issue priorities. There is far more agreement that fundamentalisms, militarization, and neoliberal globalization are problematic for women than there is on what to do about them; Smith (2002) also found this to be true within global justice movements generally. Ayesha Imam’s statement about coming together when/where enemies are common highlights this advantage. Focusing on the problem or the enemy provides a clear indication as to when groups should even try to collaborate, and when they should not. Furthermore, a focus on problems enables activists to express disappointment, frustration, grief, and even rage at the targets they have identified as responsible for their situations; although some might question the productivity

of these emotional expressions, at least in backstage venues they seem to promote meaningful connections among women who otherwise might not come together. Shared diagnoses make clear the shared threatened identity (Reitan 2007).

But for some, these types of frames suffer from an inherent flaw: they fail to articulate what a movement is *for*. The future of a broad movement for social change may be worrisome if participants find that they are only able to collaborate around what they are *against*. If movement actors cannot successfully articulate shared solutions to the problems they identify, they may leave themselves open to criticism from opponents, political leaders, and the public, and thus potentially risk the outcomes they desire; such challenges may be especially problematic as movements seek to gain favorable media attention for their causes.¹⁹ This concern is often extended to the global justice more generally, which has also encountered difficulties coming to consensus on alternative visions to neoliberal globalization (Bello 2007). On the one hand, oppositional frames may serve an important function insofar as they promote dialogue and connection. On the other hand, if commonality can only be found in enemies, the possibility of collaboration in working toward solutions seems tenuous at best.

Rights-based frames

One prominent coalescing framing strategy that the global women's movement has been using for many years, and continues to use, is the broad, intersectional, rights-based frame (Ackerly 2008; Friedman 1995; Hawkesworth 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Unlike the oppositional frames discussed above, rights frames offer a prognosis. Human rights and women's rights frames encompass a wide range of issues and goals, and are thus likely to garner broad support and diminish the visibility of internal differences. Movement groups working on issues such as trade, peace, education, gender-based violence, sexuality, or climate change can easily find nodes of connection. Democracy and justice frames are sometimes used in similar ways, but not with the same prevalence as rights frames.²⁰ It is feasible to frame many, if not all, women's concerns as rights violations. Rights-based frames embody what Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to as "languages that cannot be rejected"; these frames offer claims that are difficult for people to argue with, whether inside or outside of the movement. Such frames were prevalent among individuals and organizations in the transnational activist spaces I observed.

¹⁹ Such criticisms have been levied against the recent Occupy Wall Street protests in the U.S.

²⁰ It is possible that other prognostic frames, so long as they are adequately broad, could be used in the service of promoting solidarity. However, based on the formal and informal discussions I observed and participated in, no other prognostic frame's usage approached the prevalence of rights frames as a means of managing differences. Hence, my claims are limited to the usage of rights-based frames, rather than prognostic frames more generally.

For example, in a WSF session focusing on local impact and implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) affirmed the usefulness of a human rights approach across issues, regions, and political contexts. Panelists included activists working in the areas of sexual rights, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS, in countries such as Bangladesh, Ghana, and Zimbabwe. Each person discussed her/his organization's efforts to use the MDGs in their work, and all noted the shared challenges of fighting for women's sexual health and rights across their different contexts. Furthermore, in the materials disseminated at the session, the WGNRR pointed to the rights protected in the MDGs as a means of holding governments accountable, and also of promoting cross-cultural and cross-institutional dialogue. They advanced the rights-based approach as holistic, integrative framework: "WGNRR seeks to integrate women's sexual and reproductive rights at all levels and therefore supports involvement in broad coalitions."

Similarly, at a DAWN-sponsored panel on democracy and rights, representatives from multiple issue sectors and regions of the world spoke of the importance of protecting women's rights, particularly in the realm of health and family, regardless of the different manifestations of rights violations across cultural contexts. One panelist, an obstetrician for twenty-six years, described an array of women's health problems in the African context (e.g., cultural restrictions on family planning, husbands transmitting HIV to their wives) and noted the applicability of human rights to each specific challenge. Another panelist discussed the violent punishments to which women are subjected for so-called sexual crimes in Iran. Yvonne Underhill-Sen, a Fiji-based activist, was particularly firm in her insistence that the movement must continue to push the women's rights as human rights framework, along with a core belief in interrelated rights. She stated vehemently, "We must ensure that the notion of human rights is upheld." Throughout the workshop, panelist and facilitator Gigi Francisco reiterated the need for access to human rights in multiple sectors, and the importance of rights-based strategies across all these contexts.

The rights-based frames provide a very big tent, enabling many movement actors to join in the use of common language and still feel that their priorities are receiving attention and being validated; it is not surprising, then, that they are still so commonly used in efforts to bridge intramovement differences. They also take advantage of broadly resonant themes in the global political environment (e.g., human rights, democracy, justice), which enables organizations to claim heightened legitimacy when working with one another and with powerful political actors.

But rights frames may not offer a perfect solution for dealing with internal movement differences. One potential strategic problem with rights-based frames is that they can become so dominant within the movement that they marginalize or silence those movement actors who are unable or unwilling to frame their issues

and goals in “cross-cutting” ways (Ackerly and D’Costa 2005). Even if the original intent is inclusive, the fact remains that some groups may be left out because of their failure to embrace the dominant message based in indivisible rights. My earlier anecdote of the strategy session illustrated such a marginalization. There were a number of participants who made forceful arguments about the importance of education or the environment as underlying issues that link firmly to many other women’s concerns. In each instance, these participants’ ideas were politely (or not so politely) dismissed; the reason cited was that these more specific, issue-based frames were not broad enough to encompass the range of local particularities confronting women transnationally. The moderators seemed to want a discursive approach *like* a human rights frame in terms of broad, local and global applicability, but also something new, and perhaps unique, to add to their toolboxes. We must consider, then, what the unintended effects of privileging rights-based frames might be for consensus-building within the movement.

Another potential disadvantage to these types of frames is that their meanings can easily be diluted and/or co-opted, or can be highly contested within the movement.²¹ Sonia Correa, DAWN research coordinator for sexual and reproductive rights, discussed the co-optation problem during a session at the 2004 WSF. Correa highlights the ongoing struggle between the women’s movement and political opponents over the meaning of human rights:

...feminists have never taken human rights for granted from start. We have entered the human rights discourse understanding it is a contextual situation, and we have struggled within it to infuse it with a gender dimension. Human rights are not international law, or in a narrow interpretation of international law. It is the process through which consensus is reached in regard to what human rights are or can be. So we are talking process, we are talking movement, we are talking political action. We don’t think, as Bush administration and IMF, that human rights is rule of law, respect of property, and respect of country. This is a very different approach, and I think this is critical to call attention to.

Internal ideational contestation can also be a challenge for rights frames. It is impossible for a movement organization, much less an entire transnational movement, to come to agreement on the precise boundaries of a frame and then retain control over that meaning. For instance, as I have indicated with the above examples, many women’s and feminist activists for human rights espouse what they call an “indivisibility” approach, but this version of rights is not necessarily accepted by political actors beyond the movement, or even by all activists within the movement. Scholar-activist Rosalind Petchesky advocated for the indivisibility perspective in response to a question about the viability of the human rights frame during a DAWN-sponsored workshop at the 2004 WSF:

²¹ Although co-optation is not unique to rights frames, the likelihood of co-optation by power holders is far higher than for the other two types of frames highlighted in the paper, due largely to its widespread cultural resonance.

...for those of us who have used human rights language and frameworks, with this co-optation of human rights language by the right wing, my first response is to say that we approach human rights differently and we need to be saying it over and over and over again. We approach human rights from a much more comprehensive and what we call 'indivisibility' perspective. For example, on this question of sex work and human trafficking, there is no way on earth we would talk about outlawing criminal [prostitution]; we would immediately have to talk about economic and social human rights... and the conditions in neoliberal globalization, global capitalism, that have created the necessity of sex work for so many people all around the world. So, I think that distinguishes our politics. What's very complicated also though is not just that different people espouse human rights from very different perspectives, but also that different people claim the name 'feminism.' ... We need to think through how we both pluralize feminism and welcome and embrace the many feminisms, and also feel able in public spaces to air our conflicts and differences.

Petchesky's remarks simultaneously illustrate the importance of the specificity with which we understand frames, and also the varied meanings of umbrella concepts like human rights. Implicit in Petchesky's iteration of human rights is an awareness of intersectionality and a fervent belief that all rights are interconnected, but she understands the necessity of continually fighting for that meaning, both within and outside of the movement.

Movement process and capacity-building frames: the new rallying cry?

I intentionally leave this internally focused category of frames for last because it is the most innovative and emergent. Furthermore, it represents an important strategic move beyond "business as usual" that I will discuss in detail after providing some concrete examples. In referring to internal focus and movement process, I am isolating a category of frames that draw attention to the need for and importance of supporting fellow activists and fostering growth in multiple sectors of the movement; I emphasize here the importance of what happens within the movement, rather than outside of it. Visible in process-oriented frames are arguments about nourishing and strengthening the movement (e.g. movement-building and networking), and that reference solidarity and inclusivity. What the messages have in common is an awareness of and attention to the ways in which movement actors work and relate to one another, not necessarily face-to-face, but more abstractly. In many cases, the concept of intramovement difference is explicitly mentioned as a strength. Also inherent in many of these expressions is an understanding that different movement actors play different roles, have different priorities, and that the broader movement needs all such actors in order to succeed. Growth and support at both the individual and organizational levels are thus implicated in these kinds of statements.

The themes of movement-building and transnational solidarity were perhaps the most consistent I encountered during the 2007 transnational meetings; in fact, of the WSF sessions I attended, movement process and building was invoked by panelists or audience members in over fifty percent of them. At feminist conferences in recent years, major portions of time – even entire days – have been devoted to conversations around investing in and building the movement, and/or to fostering solidarity.²² At the Feminist Dialogues meetings and World Social Forum sessions, these themes were visible across many different sessions and organizations. This pattern stands in contrast to the rights-based and issue-based themes (e.g., health, violence) that dominated transnational women's conferences during the previous decade (Meyer and Prügl 1999; Moghadam 2005).

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), which hosted several 2007 WSF sessions on procuring resources for women's movements, promoted the concept of movement-building as much as any organization present. Relying on the assumption that the movement is a collective effort requiring multiple kinds of actors, a key part of AWID's mission is to "strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women." GROOTS International (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood), who also had a strong presence at the 2007 WSF, shared their materials advocating the nurturing of "relationships of mutual support and solidarity among women engaged in redeveloping their communities." South African activist Fikile Vilikazi also noted the crucial importance of alliance-building and networking with one another in the contemporary context.

Nigerian-based scholar-activist Ayesha Imam (WLUMML) emphasized the importance of explicitly "recognizing and reaffirming" differences of religion, language, class, and sexual orientation, and to *build on existing solidarities* when trying to bring people together around common goals. Her remarks suggest a belief in the need for mutual support and growth in spite of differences, which should be thought of as a strength. Also employing the idea of collaborative struggle, representatives from the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights noted that work in support of women "is most effectively and efficiently achieved collectively."

Peruvian scholar-activist Virginia Vargas argued at the Feminist Dialogues that democracy *within* the global movement is perhaps one of the greatest contributions of feminist theory and practice, and shared her view that the challenge before the movement is to "transform ourselves at the same time we transform the world." Wendy Harcourt of Women in Development Europe (WIDE Network) added that democracy (within the movement) must *thrive* on disputes if it is to be healthy.

²² For example, the African Feminist Forum in 2006 and the AWID Triennial Forum in 2008.

Harcourt also invoked the tradition of shared authority in the movement, and argued for the continued importance of learning from all areas of the movement and working in "horizontal" ways. Such views were affirmed and augmented by discussions of diversity at the World Social Forum. One activist working on LGBT rights in Ecuador asserted that "Diversity means not leaving anyone suffering outside [the movement]. Not women, not LGBT persons, not those suffering from racism or economic oppression."

At one Feminist Dialogues session, Philippines-based activist Rodelyn Marte stressed the need for showing solidarity with one another "in times of victory and celebration, as well as during times of struggle." Following up with a particularly moving set of remarks, Fiji-based activist Yvonne Underhill-Sen called on FD participants for an expression of solidarity with "women who do not have the resources to be here." She went on to share her particular worries for a group of women in Fiji who had been unjustly arrested and were still being held in custody, but extended her comments to include all women who were unable to attend the gathering due to various challenges and limitations. Her comments served as an important reminder to all participants that by virtue of being present in this transnational space, we possessed certain privileges – freedom of movement, access to knowledge about the conferences, the economic resources to travel long distances and pay for lodging – that other women did not; but rather than encouraging us to feel guilty for such privilege, Underhill-Sen was suggesting that we can still "be in solidarity with one another," and that such solidarity happens in part through public recognition of those not present.

Viewed alongside one another, these examples illuminate multiple modes of articulating movement values that promote solidarity. I observed that, although there are many differences in what issues are articulated to be most important for women, what solutions are appropriate for tackling these issues, and even in what constitutes feminism, the one thread that appears to be nearly universal is the desire to support one another in the struggle, to foster connection, and to work in ways that strengthen the broader movement (with the understanding that the battle is occurring on many fronts, and thus requires different kinds of actors). Built into this notion is the explicit recognition of and respect for differences in experiences, beliefs, understandings, and strategies. Framing practices focusing on movement process and movement-building tend not to dismiss or ignore difference, but rather accommodate for it.

Smith (2002) explains that transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) support group identities and solidarity that contribute to transnational mobilization. Given the importance of mobilization for the development of social movements, this insight is significant. However, we may be missing something if we assume that fostering shared frames is fruitful solely for growing or sustaining mobilization. Herein lies an opportunity to learn something valuable not just about transnational social movements, but about transnational feminisms more

specifically. In the case of transnational women's movements, movement actors are accountable to the rich traditions of feminist theory and practice, and the many historical lessons they provide. Similarly, they are accountable to the insights that have evolved from years of trying to work together across great chasms of difference; they have learned the dangers of universalizing and compartmentalizing, and do not want to repeat their missteps. As they move forward, they continually incorporate these lessons into their discourse, whether it be in the academy, in the halls of political institutions, or in the streets. What I am suggesting here is that framing across differences is not just a means to mobilizing people, but rather is also about remaining true to deeply held ideals related to the methodology of a movement. In this way, such framing may be a particularly important vehicle for promoting solidarity, which Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue is a key component of collective identity.

What, some may ask, is uniquely feminist about this? Are not other movements (historical and contemporary) committed to egalitarian, horizontal, and intersectional modes of working and thinking? Certainly, such attention to movement process is present among other movements for justice globally (e.g., labor, anti-racist movements). Furthermore, as Waterman (2002) notes, feminists are responsible for disseminating this attention to movement process among their own movement, but also for infusing extra-feminist movements with their methodological perspective:

There can be no doubt of the debt the global justice movement...owes to women's movements and feminist thinkers of the 1970s-80s. The influence can clearly be seen within the CSM [Call of Social Movements] and the [WSF] Charter themselves. Much of the thinking of the new movement (on counter-power resting in a democratic diversity) and behavior (public cultural outrage and celebration) can be traced back to feminists (2002: 8).

In sum, the emergent discourses invoking process, capacity-building and solidarity within the transnational women's movement in recent years may be a crucial tool for dealing with intramovement differences. From the perspective of transnational women's activists, these inwardly focused framing practices hold particular advantages that others lack. These frames are highly inclusive, broadly applicable, indigenously generated, maintain a constructive tone (unlike oppositional frames), and do not require a particular hierarchy of issues or agreement on any one strategic approach. Although such frames are consistent with feminist principles, their use does not require embracing of the feminist label, but rather allows for differences on this point, as well. Furthermore, frames with an inward focus may be just as effective as rights-based or diagnostic frames in terms of building bridges with other movements, as they call attention to shared ways of working. Given these features, it is not surprising that women's activists interested in transnational collaboration are using movement process frames more and more in attempts to transcend their differences.

However, movement process and capacity-building frames may also suffer from a significant shortcoming in that they can be vague. Talk of solidarity and movement-building may generate positivity and excitement, and may also provide a productive tool for keeping differences at bay, but it can be difficult to discern the precise meaning of such frames beyond the surface. What, for instance, constitutes women being in solidarity with one another across the world? How specific are the criteria, in terms of practices, that must be met in order to achieve solidarity or participate in movement-building? These questions may not necessarily prevent the efficacy of process-oriented frames in managing intramovement differences, but are worth considering for other strategic functions.

Commonalities among frames that promote solidarity

The evidence demonstrates that oppositional, rights-based, and internally focused frames are all being utilized by feminists and women's activists in transnational spaces in efforts to work across differences and promote solidarity. Other types of frames focusing on institutional prognoses, economic prognoses, and identity were used far less frequently in the sessions I observed, and the cases in which they were used tended to be quite issue-specific as opposed to accounting for difference.

There are several important characteristics shared by each of these types of frames that reveal patterns in activists' strategies to deal with intramovement differences; in looking at the features that are shared by rights-based, diagnostic, and inwardly-focused frames, we gain insight into the aspects of collective action frames perceived by activists to be effective in promoting transnational solidarity. While making this knowledge visible is not the same as demonstrating a frame's efficacy in dealing with difference, it is important nonetheless. Feminists and women's movement actors are acutely aware of their history of fragmentation and are actively concerned with working collaboratively across differences. Assuming the presence of these underlying concerns, it is unlikely that they would engage repeatedly in framing that is ineffective or harmful in terms of promoting solidarity. Therefore, illuminating what these frames have in common may be a first step on the path toward identifying the features of frames that are in fact effective in transcending differences and promoting solidarity.

First, all of the frames implicated in this process, not just the rights-based frames, are very broad (although not necessarily intersectional, as the rights frame is); in using the term "broad," I mean to convey that they are capable of encompassing a multitude of issues of concern to activists in a variety of material, cultural, and political contexts, and that they stay away from specific prognostic proposals, especially. None are confined to a particular region or issue. Second, the rights-based, oppositional, and internally focused frames are frequently paired with language that explicitly acknowledges and, in many cases, celebrates diversity

within the movement. They do not push difference aside, but rather explicitly call it out and start with it as a premise.

As we note the commonalities in terms of what these three types of frames offer, it is also important to make visible what is absent in the frames. Neither the rights-based, oppositional, or internally focused frames offer an analysis that entails individuals and organizations remaining confined to their particular issues of interest; these frames explicitly reject the "silo" model encouraged by the Beijing Platform for Action. That is, each type of frame described here is not narrow, not exclusive, does not privilege particular regions, or even specific, narrowly defined issues. Moreover, none of these frames suggest that transnational solidarity or cooperation is impossible or not worth fighting for, but rather they indicate an underlying belief in both the desirability and possibility of solidarity in spite of difference.

Discussion

The evidence shows that oppositional frames (most notably anti-neoliberalism, and anti-fundamentalist frames), rights-based frames, and internally focused frames (e.g., capacity-building and movement process frames) are being utilized as tools to deal with intramovement differences. Across a variety of sessions in major transnational activist spaces, these frames emerged as prominent in comparison to other types of frames; they were frequently employed in conjunction with references to the challenges of intramovement differences and/or were often highlighted as ways of promoting commonality even while respecting local particularities.

These findings offer valuable insights for researchers of social movements, especially those who study framing and strategies among transnational movements. Many case studies indicate that prognostic frames are the types of frames that most differentiate movement organizations from one another (Benford and Snow 2000); if that is indeed the case, we would not expect movement actors to rely on prognostic framing as a means of building consensus across differences. The evidence I present here is in part consistent with such assertions, but offers a clarification, as well. While activists did not utilize narrowly defined prognostic frames, such as those relying on institutional and economic solutions, they did utilize prognostic frames that are rights-based and frames that are process-oriented. This finding suggests that there may be additional nuance worth fleshing out in terms of what types of collective action frames amplify commonality versus differences.

My analysis also has implications for thinking about how diverse movements construct collective identity. Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) write that, "...identity constructions, whether intended or not, are inherent in all social

movement framing activities" (185). The shared, threatened identity category of "woman" is implicated by each of the frames I discuss; all women could potentially be harmed at some point by neoliberalism or fundamentalism, have their human rights violated, or feel solidarity on the basis of *being women*, despite other differences that exist among them. However, the frames also underscore a sense of shared struggle due to common enemies and challenges, a shared value of human rights, and a shared desire to provide mutual support, suggesting that both identity and reciprocal forms of solidarity are at work.

There are also useful lessons here for feminist theorists and activists, particularly those concerned with questions around transnational feminisms. While some remain skeptical about transnational cooperation and solidarity among women (Chowdhury 2009; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mendoza 2002), many activists believe this effort is worthwhile. Feminists and women's activists advocating at the transnational level, though working in different contexts, are by and large still striving to identify and capitalize on points of synergy and collaboration. Activists demonstrate an awareness of the seriousness of the differences, as well as the threats posed by those differences, but they refuse to let this be an excuse for inaction. They make visible the inequalities among activists that Mendoza (2002) and Desai (2005) worry about, but continue to seek out and attempt to use different collective action frames as appropriate in their efforts to collaborate.

Lyshaug (2006) describes the following crucial and ongoing problem for feminists: "How can feminists acknowledge and accommodate important differences among women without giving up the unity on which feminism's viability as a political movement depends" (78)? She reminds us that notions of difference and solidarity in transnational feminisms constitute well-trodden ground, but that feminist theorists tend to focus their attention on theoretical and ethical dimensions of these questions with comparatively less focus on what activists are actually *doing*. Thus, my findings are particularly important insofar as they reveal activists' discursive strategies for dealing with this central dilemma that she and others have posed.

Some final words about the scope of this analysis: Although I speculate about the efficacy of particular types of frames in overcoming intramovement differences, based on the empirical material at hand I stop short of making concrete assertions on this point. My data do not enable me to assess the outcomes of utilizing particular frames over others, but rather to document the uses of frames (as they relate to difference) in key transnational spaces at a certain moment. My primary interest has been to capture the language being used by activists, assess the ways in which they are using such language, and draw out insights based on these dynamics. In this spirit, I have demonstrated that: a) feminists and women's activists working in transnational spaces express acute awareness of previous movement fragmentation, as well as contemporary sources of division; b) they also express a desire to work through divisions in a way that acknowledges and respects,

but is not paralyzed by, movement differences; c) they are using particular types of frames in their efforts to promote solidarity; and d) these frames share certain characteristics. Future research should pursue questions of frame effectiveness not only in terms of its consequences for mobilization, but also for transcending differences in the service of transnational solidarity.

Appendix A: World Social Forum seminars and workshops attended²³

2004

"Experiences in Organizing Garment Workers." 17 January, B32, 9-12 noon. Organized by the *Centre for Education and Communication (CEC)*.

"LGBT Alternative Strategies to Exclusionary Globalization." 17 January, A6, 9-12 noon. Organized by *LGBT South-South Dialogue*.

"A Dialogue Between Various Movements on Sexuality Issues." 17 January, Hall 2, 1-4 p.m. Organized by *Rainbow Planet*.

"Changing Faces of Dowry." 17 January, A16, 5-8 p.m. Organized by *Vimochana*.

"Gender and Permanent War." 17 January, B34, 5-8 p.m. Organized by the *Rosa Luxemburg Foundation*.

"The Many Faces of Fundamentalism." 18 January, A7, 9-12 noon. Organized by *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)*.

"Education for Inclusion: A Gender Perspective." 18 January, B50, 1-4 p.m. Organized by the *Gender and Education Office of the International Council for Adult Education*.

"Networking for Women's Human Rights: A Workshop on Collaboration for Activists, Scholars, Policy Makers, and Donors." 18 January, C75, 5-8 p.m. Organized by Brooke A. Ackerly, Vanderbilt University.

²³ In some cases, there is more than one session listed for a given time slot. In such cases, I attended only part of each session. Reasons for this include: 1) when a session ended early and I decided to attend another for the remainder of the slot, and 2) when I found a session to be poorly organized, not well attended, or otherwise unproductive, and thus chose to go to another session for the remainder of the time slot.

"A Dialogue Between Movements: Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges." 19 January, Hall 3, 9-12 noon. Organized by the *National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups, DAWN, AFM, and WICEJ*.

"Overcoming the Public/Private Divide." 19 January, A9, 1-4 p.m. Organized by *APRODEV-ICCO*.

"Overcoming Gender-Based Violence in the Private Sphere." 19 January, A11, 5-8 p.m. Organized by *Bread for the World*.

"Sex Selection: the Hidden Femicide." 19 January, B31, 5-8 p.m. Organized by *Vimochana*.

"Women in Conflict and Peace Building." 20 January, C100, 9-12 noon. Organized by *ActionAid Rwanda*.

"Honour Killings." 20 January, A10, 1-4 p.m. Organized by the *All India Democratic Women's Association*.

"Sexuality, Nationalism and Fundamentalism." 20 January, C73, 1-4 p.m. Organized by *PRISM*.

"Gender Justice and Globalisation." 20 January, C79, 5-8 p.m. Organized by *Gana Unnayan Parshad*.

2007

"Sponsorship, Scholarship, and Human Rights Activism: Building Bridges and Fostering New Leadership." 21 January, 11:30-2 p.m. Organized by *The Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus & the Global Feminisms Collaborative*.

"Gender Equality May Finally Arrive: UN Reform Brings New Hopes." 21 January, 2:30-5 p.m. Organized by *The Women's Environment and Development Organization*.

"Scholar-Activists and the World Social Forum Process." 21 January, 5:30-8 p.m. Organized by *AlterUQAM and the International Network of Scholar-Activists*.

"Revolutionizing Women's Consciousness." 22 January, 8:30-11 a.m. Organized by *Sociologists for Women in Society*.

"Citizenship: Democracy, Retribution, and Rights." 22 January, 11:30-2 p.m. Organized by *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era*.

"Women Under Occupation in the Arab World." 22 January, 2:30-5 p.m. Organized by *Women Network*.

"Campaigning Experiences of the Grassroots Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation." 22 January, 2:30-5 p.m. Organized by *Equality Now*.

"Human Rights Assembly." 22 January, 2:30-5 p.m. Organized by the *Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus*.

"Adapting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Needs of Women and Girls from Different Communities." 23 January, 11:30-2 p.m. Organized by *Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights*.

"Social Forum for Sexual Diversity." 23 January, 2:30-5 p.m. Organized by *LGBT South-South Dialogue, World March of Women, and Via Campesina*.

"Controversy Dialogue on Fundamentalisms and Anti-Globalization Alliance Building." 23 January, 5:30-8 p.m. Organized by *FEMNET and the Feminist Dialogues Coordinating Group*.

"Human Rights and Academic Activism." 23 January, 5:30-8 p.m. Organized by *Sociologos sin Fronteras*.

"Feminist Movement Building." 24 January, 11:30-2 p.m. Organized by *Articulación Feminista Marcosur, INFORM, FEMNET, WLUML, and others*.

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“We are flames not flowers”: a gendered reading of the social movement for justice in Bhopal

Eurig Scandrett, Suroopa Mukherjee and the Bhopal Research Team

We are not dealing with a silent content that has remained implicit, that has been said and yet not said, and which constitutes beneath manifest statements a sort of sub-discourse that is more fundamental, and which is now emerging at last into the light of day.

- Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969.

We are women of Bhopal we are flames not flowers
We will not wilt before your corporate power
With our brooms in hand we're gonna sweep you away
For we'll fight for justice till our dyin' day

- Terry Allan (Copyright, 2003)

Abstract

*This essay is in continuation of the article that Eurig Scandrett and I wrote for the previous issue of **Interface** (Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011). It looks at gender as one of the abstractions that arises from the material condition of the industrial disaster in Bhopal that happened on 3 December 1984, which is often compared to Hiroshima, in the nature of its destruction. Bhopal has also witnessed a grassroots movement, remarkable in its tenacity and its well-defined battle-line against the monolithic power of the State and the Corporation. The survivors' organisations present two interrelated profiles for the movement. One is local and includes a large section of women, who are illiterate and bound by patriarchy. The other is the international face of the movement.*

This essay looks at the role played by women in the movement. At the same time, oral history methodology highlights the vision of a gender sensitive world, which is alien to the material conditions these women live in. While academically we can bring in feminist readings, they do not serve the purpose of relating to women's consciousness and how they visualize their own emancipation. This essay looks at gender as a problematic category that needs redefinition.

Introduction

This essay is a companion piece to the article "Globalisation and Abstraction in the Bhopal Survivor's Movement" (Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011). Both the articles draw upon the research findings of the Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study Group, which undertook an ethnographic study of the social movement in Bhopal.¹ The fight for justice in Bhopal that began the morning after the gas leak on 3 December 1984, and continues to this day, has been described as one of the longest lasting social movements in the world.

In the previous article we looked at an important aspect of social movements, namely the nature of abstractions that emerge from what Raymond Williams has described as the "militant particularism" of most social movements.² We saw in the social movement in Bhopal a divergence in the form of abstractions that arose from different facets of the movement. We argued that "divergent praxis" constituted the "contrasting processes of abstraction" that had to be seen in relation "to the political opportunities afforded by the global structuring of capital" (Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011: 198). Drawing upon Stephen Zavetowski's analysis of the international mobilization of the Bhopal justice campaign, we were able to draw a parallel between the global anti-toxics movement and the global reach of the chemical industry (Zavetowski 2009: 402). This enabled us to explore the dialectical relationship between social movements and material conditions that gave the movement its direction and shape. In the case of Bhopal, we identified three such abstractions that played a crucial role in defining the nature of the struggle for justice: they were environmental justice, class conflict and gender.

Environmental justice brought to the forefront the international face of the social movement in Bhopal. Both symbolically and materially the focal point of the disaster was its location – Bhopal, the state capital of Madhya Pradesh, India. At the same time, a historical timeline showed that the movement, which had sustained itself for over two and a half decades, was witness to the changing political reality brought on by globalisation. Therefore, from the 1990s onwards changing material conditions required a change in the direction of the social movement. The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) became the nodal body, which formed a coalition of survivor's organisations, solidarity groups and campaigners across the world. ICJB took up issues of environmental degradation, corporate negligence and human rights violation. It garnered support from international agencies like Greenpeace and Amnesty, so that

¹ The Bhopal Survivor's Movement Study Group was headed by Eurig Scandrett from Queen Margaret University (QMU), UK, with Suroopa Mukherjee as consultant from Delhi University, and Dharmesh Shah and Tarunima Sen as Research Assistants. It was a yearlong project (August 2007 to September 2008) that looked at the *Ethnography of the Social Movement in Bhopal*. We conducted interviews with individuals who belonged to different survivor groups actively participating in the resistance movement in Bhopal. The interviews were recorded on digital video and audiotape and it followed the format and norms laid down by oral history methodology.

² For a fuller understanding of the concept see Harvey (1995).

Bhopal became a matter of global concern.³ As the Hiroshima of industrial disaster, it was felt that the lessons of Bhopal had to be widely learnt. Therefore, the rallying cry of the worldwide movement for justice against corporate crime was "No More Bhopals."

The class conflict highlighted the abject poverty of the survivor community and the indifference of the urban middle class. It was a reminder of how the poor, who lived in the slums adjacent to the factory, became the expendable population that paid the price for development. Grassroots organisations based in Bhopal, like Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan (BGPMUS, Women Workers Union), Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karamchari Sang (BGPMKS, Stationary Workers Union), and Gas Peedit Nirashrit Pension Bhogi Sangarsh Morcha (BGNPBSM, Destitute Pensioners Front) took up people's cause and locked horns with state and central governments over crucial issues of employment, enhanced compensation money, and proper medical treatment. A lot of importance was given to the grassroots strength of the groups, and their capacity to mobilise the community to participate in joint action programmes. In an important sense the futuristic vision of "No More Bhopals" was drawn from an empirical reality-check of what can best be described as the "continuing Bhopal."

It was with the third category of abstraction, relating to gender, that the Study Group came up with problems of theorising based on material conditions. Any attempt on our part to interpret the interviews we conducted with women survivors from a strictly feminist point of view met with several roadblocks. In the feedback forms that the Study Group shared with each other, gender became an elusive term, and Scandrett and Mukherjee found themselves disagreeing on how to approach gender as an important tool for research purposes. Scandrett's contention was that gender did not become an important abstraction emerging from the militant particularism of the movement; this happened despite the large scale participation of women in the movement, and the increasing use of gendered critique to analyse social movements by activists and feminist commentators.

Mukherjee's approach was based on the work she had done on oral history, which took her through the maze of personal and collective narratives, memories and testimonial gatherings that became an important part of recording people's history in their own voices. In her book *Surviving Bhopal* (2010) she had prioritised women's voices in those areas where they played a major role in defining the social ramifications of an industrial disaster. She was able to show how the voices gained significance in the larger political context of the virtual erasure of the category of women survivors in official documents. The next step was to reconstruct the history of the movement by retrieving women's voices from political oblivion. In the process, she was able to use

³ Bhopal.net will provide a more detailed account of the survivor groups in Bhopal. To get a more analytical study of the groups and their power politics see Bhopal Survivor's Movement Study (2010).

gender in conjunction with oral history, so that ideological subject position and fieldwork methodology found a common meeting ground. She studied the impacted community, not only as a case study of disasters in general, but in terms of what she hopes to explain further in this article, as unmediated narratology.⁴

In this essay we pick up the trail of the argument from where we had left it in the previous article. Once again, following the trajectory of the movement through the historical timeline showed that gender was not a static concept. It critiqued the model of development that denied the long-term effect of the gas on the woman's body. In an important sense, gender brought back the world's attention to the gruesome reality that the second generation, born to gas affected parents, had disabling congenital defects. Thus, woman embodied both in bodily forms and in the history of such accidents the gross injustice that was meted out to people by monolithic systems of power. In this case, people were pitted against the combined power of the state in collusion with multinational corporations. The presence of women in agitational modes of action and resistance became increasingly important for drawing attention to the continuing aftermath of the gas leak.

This essay will also deal with the important question of how ethnographic research used the interview method to create levels of awareness about knowledge formation within a social movement. Since an average gas survivor, male and female, was illiterate, it made oral history an important research tool. Scientific discourses generated by a technological disaster had to come face to face with people's knowledge. Many of the women we spoke to used narratives of pain, loss and intense suffering to reclaim their identity as women who carried the chemical burden in their ravaged bodies. Their stance was self-reflexive at the emotive level, and therefore it inspired the survivors to carry on fighting for their rights.

It is this gendered reading of the Bhopal social movement that will be taken up for analysis in the rest of the essay. We will try to show how the very process of "telling" their stories became enabling for the Bhopali women. Therefore, knowledge making was not about literacy or the written discourse. People's knowledge was seen as empowering, by simply creating non-textual meaning that found expression in messages printed on banners, badges, headbands and on T-shirts, which could easily be understood by the lay person. The idea was to convey important facts and figures both diagrammatically and in terms of easily grasped information in bullet form. A premium was given to the weekly meetings held by the survivor groups, where issues were discussed and information was disseminated by members who held official positions in the

⁴ We experimented with the idea of publishing the interviews directly without bringing in theoretical analysis. The idea was to create a framework by using a historical timeline, representative voices and a thematic arrangement of issues that arose from contingent factors. This, we felt, would give an idea of how unmediated people's perspective is a significant research method offered by oral history. See Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study (2010).

organisation. All members were given an equal chance to ask questions and raise doubts. In an important sense this kind of outreach programme fitted well into the oral history method of interviews that the Study Group was conducting. The grassroots workers too spoke to the community, and replied to queries on matters that needed clarification. A multilayered exchange of information and innovative ideas, fed into the learning process within social movement groups.

Since theorising was inherent in the practice itself, it made the gender-abstraction invisible and yet well entrenched in the material conditions. It is therefore imperative that ethnographic research takes on the onerous task of drawing attention to the kind of knowledge making that brings in the people's perspective. At the same time, oral history uses time-tested methods to make the spoken word as effective as possible. Not only does the spoken word convey the true meaning of struggle and resistance, it also becomes the means for countering official denial and misrepresentation. The focus is on narrative forms, both oral and written, and how they become analytical tools that are part of the protest action.

Gender abstractions and their invisibility in social movements

In this section we will take up the rather intriguing question of the "invisibility" and yet rootedness of gender based abstractions in the material conditions of a post-trauma experience. Why was the women's question neglected in both the scientific and activist discourses that emerged from the Bhopal movement? Right from the beginning, doing research in Bhopal was fraught with danger and uncertainties, given the politically surcharged atmosphere. Also the magnitude of the disaster and its morbidity graph meant that government had to step in to take charge of the crisis situation. An entire bureaucratic setup was put in place, so that relief and rehabilitation schemes became operative with immediate effect.⁵ Therefore, agitational methods used by different survivor groups got discredited for being populist and detrimental for maintaining law-and-order. Needless to say, State repression started almost simultaneously with the implementation of welfare measures.

However, this fire fighting approach on the part of the government continued long after the immediate crisis was over. As a result, long-term rehabilitation, which was the need of the hour, was neglected. Gender surfaced time and again as an important concept, which proved that an industrial disaster adversely affected all those who were already marginalised. It is interesting to observe that

⁵ The Ministry of Bhopal Gas Relief and Rehabilitation was set up in Bhopal. It was placed directly under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers (MOCF), at the central government, with a special Bhopal cell headed by a Director at the joint secretary level, who reported to the Ministry of Chemicals. A Group of Ministers (GOM) was also formed to take policy decisions and oversee the implementation of schemes. Given the fact that nothing was done properly, despite the presence of a powerful body like the GOM, survivor groups put pressure on the government to set up an empowered commission with the power to enforce decisions. Despite the assurance given by the PM (Manmohan Singh) about looking into the matter, the demand has been set aside on flimsy grounds.

women preferred agitational methods for issue-based protests, largely because it drew attention to the particular nature of their plight. At the same time, many of them were less eager to talk of gender as a separate category, simply because they did not believe that a woman's voice will be heard, unless and until it is embedded in a masculine debate. So any attempt on the interviewer's part, to draw attention to feminist discourse by asking certain targeted questions, did not cut much ice with them.

Yet, a closer look at these narratives will show that they are descriptive and anecdotal rather than theoretically loaded. This again ties up with problems faced by the Bhopali women, which prevented them from seeing the role they played in the survivors' organisation as emancipatory. The marginal position of women in the family and in the workplace got replicated in the grassroots organisation. This in turn was tied up with material conditions that inevitably follow a disaster. So an attempt on the part of the impacted community to overcome adversary situations, and begin the slow process of recovering from trauma was met with any number of hurdles and difficulties. Here again, women faced discriminations based on their secondary position in the patriarchal family. Thus, women's narratives spoke about the humiliation they had to face in compensation claims office and in hospitals; they also spoke about indifferent doctors, loud mouthed politicians, predatory touts and middlemen.

The contradictory manner in which gender worked as a conceptual research tool, becomes evident when we look at the demands that were made by survivor groups. No doubt most organisations strategically brought in women's issues in the memorandum they submitted to the government. The government, in turn was eager to appear just in the eyes of the people. So they too made promises to mete out justice for those who had lost everything that night. However, women continued to feel neglected, for demands were made with electoral politics in mind, and though attempts were made to make the demands gender sensitive, in real terms there was no attempt to highlight women's experience of neglect and marginalization. So gender as abstraction failed to connect to a lived reality.

An ethnographic study of a disaster has to relate abstractions to the oral narrative of pain and suffering. Thus, the vocabulary of protest is meant to interpolate abstraction, experience, and narration that is both individual and collective. Only then can we talk about a social movement and the distinct consciousness it helps to create. In this case, there was no doubt that women had entered the field to fight for their rights as women, but none of the women we interviewed saw their grassroots battle as part of any such consciousness. If anything, a woman's strength was viewed as something acquired by compulsion and not choice. No doubt, they spoke with pride about the change in the direction of their lives, and no one was willing to give up on the battle for justice. But this change in consciousness and material conditions had come to them at a heavy price. Therefore, oral history narratives were replete with bruised memories rather than memories that celebrated women's emancipation.

In the case of an industrial disaster, which affects a huge population, rehabilitation schemes identify the family as a basic unit for doling out relief. The members of the family are then classified under different headings. Not surprising that women's position in the family remained secondary, in almost all official documents. Mukherjee has done a fuller analysis of this in *Surviving Bhopal* where she is able to show how prevailing stereotypes get even more ingrained in times of crisis (Mukherjee, 2010: 89).

To begin with, women were cited as the best unit in the family to get a job and other welfare benefits. This was done on the basis that women are traditionally known to be passive, obedient and self sacrificing. Sewing centers were set up to generate employment for gas-affected women, but none of the schemes were sensitive to women's needs. As a result, the added responsibility only made women more dependent on levels of authority. At the same time, they were asked to take on the role of a sole bread-earner at the helm of the family, a role which is traditionally denied to them. Thus, gender issues got diffused in mainstream discourses, rendering them invisible. What was seen as an absence of gender sensitive abstractions was in actual terms an inability to keep women's issues separate from notions of rehabilitation/restitution, which carried its own hegemonic masculine interpretation. As a result, women got disengaged from feminist notions of self-help and empowerment. Even after a few years, when needs based relief measures gave way to the more radically oriented rights-based rehabilitation, gender remained in the background. Any attempts to rewrite the history of disasters from the grassroots perspective, carried the same limitations. Women were not viewed as history makers or as instruments of change.

Identifying research methods conducive for studying gender specific issues

One of the important research methods the Study Group followed was to identify gender specific issues, and then framing them into key-questions, which were asked during the interview sessions. However, structured question-answers often gave way to semi-structured ones, given the contingent factors and the inherent difficulty that women faced in answering questions that were alien to their material conditions. Since women continued to participate in the social movement in large numbers, we began focusing on narratives of "experience" that became an important aspect of oral history practice. We found a lot of data in the form of newspaper cuttings, newsletters, pamphlets, press releases and photographs that was being scrupulously collated in indigenous archives by different survivor groups. In an important sense, the narratives of experience that we gathered through interviews ceased to be just another way of recounting personal stories; instead, it became valuable data for understanding why activism and archiving often go together.

We used some of the photographs and newspaper items as codes to trigger the memory of the person interviewed. Our attempt was to take cognizance of the

material conditions that shaped individual and collective memory, so that women often shared memories that belonged collectively to a particular phase of the disaster. We also encouraged them to remember dates and other factual details, but most often subjective memories of death and loss replaced the more objective mode of recalling events that was public in nature. The most vivid memories were that of the closing down of the Silai (stitching and embroidery) centers, which had given women their first employment opportunity. Each anniversary was marked on the calendar and became the timeline that measured the complete failure of the government to mete out justice to its own people. It is interesting to observe how these memories, which were dictated by a sense of personal loss, could not really accommodate gender abstractions. The only way the women's question was brought into the narratives was through external-aids; the researcher used codes that drew attention to women-oriented issues, without allowing them to get drowned by other mainstream discourses. Yet this was not necessarily how Bhopali women analysed their own problems. Their material conditions did not allow them to prioritise their own plight, over and above that of the family. It resulted in a serious disjunction between memories and the methodological framework within which oral history researched gender.

Sometimes, women did bring in their own objective way of remembering. Thus, many of them spoke at length about their loyalty to organisations that had given them their identity and space for self-development. If our questions indicated the patriarchal nature of these organisations, women argued in favour of men as movement intellectuals, given their own lack of education. Any form of personal enmity or breakdown of relationships was mentioned with a lot of emotional intensity. The Study Group was soon to realise that differences were personal rather than ideological. Therefore, any attempt on our part to bring in western notions of feminism proved to be futile. Most of the women we interviewed had no problems in being under the tutelage of male leaders. So they refused to question their predicament in exclusively gendered terms. Feedback from our research assistants clearly indicated that fieldwork had to concentrate far more on material conditions and not on abstractions.

In *Surviving Bhopal* Mukherjee took into consideration the work done by Indian scholars with feminist leanings on important gender issues, such as women's lack of control over their bodies and the impact of environmental pollution on their lives (U. Ramaswamy et al. 2000 and V. Ramaswamy 2003). However, her contention was that there was virtually no feminist research done on industrial disasters. At the same time, it opened up a nascent area of research, which was pertinent given the global expansion of Multinational Corporations. The few references she found were looking at working conditions in modern factories; surprisingly, very little was written about the threat faced by those who lived in residential areas, in the vicinity of such toxic producing factories (Bannerjee 1991; Avasthi and Srivastava 2001; M. Bhattacharya 2004; Saksena 2004). In most cases of environmental pollution, its effect on women was seen as collateral damage.

However, the contentious issue of knowledge vs ignorance of the threat posed by polluting industries became an important part of knowledge building done by grassroots organisations. But awareness was a matter of hindsight. The Study Group was often surprised to see how far women had become aware of social issues that got linked to an industrial disaster and its aftermath. As pointed out earlier, abstractions that centred on environmental justice and class conflict were easily interpolated with their own experience of having to live in an area which was declared as one of the world's most toxic hotspot. Today the derelict factory has over 5000 tons of toxic waste, which was hurriedly put into sealed containers and still awaits permission for its disposal. The rest of the waste matter, following the breakdown of compound gases, had seeped into the water-table. People were compelled to consume contaminated water in the absence of regular water supply. The major issue that plagued the survivor groups was the all important question of who will do the clean up - government or the company? To date, this has remained a central debate in which women too have participated. Women saw this as a class conflict, which is inherent in the way rehabilitation was carried out. The class of survivors was seen as a burden on the exchequer; they became parasites that lived off the limited resources that a city could offer. Even as the death toll went on rising, and the nature of illness kept getting worse, the Bhopal survivors were seen as a roadblock to the forward march of society.

Mukherjee's contention is that listening to voices engaged in debates over issues that are a part of the agenda of a particular survivor group gives us a clear insight into how dissemination of knowledge becomes a collective exercise. Therefore, a premium is given to useful or relevant knowledge or perhaps information that pertains to the immediate issue at hand. Since we are looking at learning in terms of its utility, we can only talk of it in relation to its relevance. In the Indian context class determines the level and kind of education that are made available to the girl child. Most of the survivors were migrant labourers who had come to Bhopal from adjoining states, and were working in labour intensives areas on a daily wage basis. When they came in the path of the deadly gas, they lost their ability to do any work. As usual women were the worst hit. So any attempt to link people's movement with women's emancipation becomes a futile exercise. Women's narratives are replete with feelings of being ostracised; many were abandoned by their husbands and sons for they could hardly afford to pay the medical bills. Worse still was the exploitation by touts and moneylenders. Many narratives recount the feeling of being betrayed by journalists, doctors, lawyers, academics and politicians.

Wherever women have emerged as the main spokesperson for the group, it is done in a calculated way, so as to project women as the "face" of Bhopal. Needless to say, the media coverage that beams into middle-class homes is tailor-made to suit middle-class perception of women fighting in the streets. So long as these homespun images failed to destabilise a male dominated society, there was very little possibility of bringing gender centre-stage, into the very vortex of the conflict.

However, there was another important question that had to be asked by researchers working in the field. Did gender issues shape the ideological content of the resistance movement? Here there was slight disagreement in the Study Group. On a personal note Mukherjee felt that it did, albeit in an oblique and partial way. She felt that it helped to retrieve gender from a quagmire of orthodox beliefs and make it into a polemical issue. It became necessary for the Study Group to bring in the Indian context, where gender is much less an abstraction of women's rights and much more of a cultural site of contestation, where women are generally silenced. So the ideological premise of oral history, which allows for women to voice their concerns, broke through the wall of silence and retrieved some of the lost voices. In the case of the social movement in Bhopal, women were empowered by allowing them to enter a public domain and share their ideas of a toxic free world with fellow participants in the social movement. It was this transition from an enclosed domestic space to the streets and location of the protest action that gave women survivors a liberating sense of becoming "visible" to the world at large. Mukherjee argued for demarcating the Indian context, in which, however prolonged or brief was the foray into the public domain, returning back to a conservative home was never meant to be seen as a big problem. It was visibility, partial or otherwise, that made women and the attendant women's issues the rallying point of the struggle for justice.

In many of our interviews women spoke about their organisations as extended families. Women had very definitive roles to play within the organisation. They belonged to the rank and file, and their task was to address the basti (slums) people and keep them informed about organisational activities. Women had to attend weekly meetings, which kept them abreast of the larger movement and the nature of the demands that were being made to the higher echelons of power. Women were also encouraged to face the media. It was largely in this context that survivor groups began to concentrate on women related issues, and press for relief and restitution for widows, socially ostracized girls, and women giving birth to children with congenital defects. Environmental justice joined the fray by bringing in issues of poisoned mother's milk, while class conflict drew attention to the poverty stricken, gas affected families where women had become the sole bread earners. Gender became the mediating factor that tied all the issues under a common rubric that drew attention to the failure of justice in Bhopal.

A technological disaster by its very definition uses specialised, scientific knowledge that is far removed from the vocabulary of the survivors. However, the resistant movements used people's knowledge as an instrument of protest. An entirely homespun literature found expression in songs, slogans, and innovative use of signs, posters and banners. It is in these cultural sign systems that gender found its political ramifications. The very pervasiveness of the symbols and its meaning made it a powerful tool of resistance. In many of our interviews we were able to draw attention to evocative narratives of suffering, protesting, learning and gaining selfhood. In an important sense, the baseline of our research was empirical rather than theoretical, so abstractions remain embedded in a plethora of images and voices that in Foucault's terms (see the

epigram at the beginning of the article) is not merely the "silent content" but the "sub-discourse" beneath "manifest statements." (Foucault 1969: 75)

The process of identifying gender specific issues was largely governed by a very important aspect of oral history methodology. The interviewer was as much a part of the politics of engagement. As participant observer she/he was made to enter into a dialogue with the interviewee. The Study Group also felt the need to get away from the middle-class bind that saw research and activism as separate discourses. Activism was discredited on grounds that it could dilute and corrupt serious research. There was a lot of anxiety to keep them apart. We adopted an approach that was diametrically opposite to the one mentioned above.

In our previous paper Scandrett's contention was that feminist abstraction did not contribute to meaning-making within the movement. In this essay, we try to step aside from the main parameters that define feminism, by shifting attention to Foucault's sub-discourse, which becomes an embedded process of meaning-making, where the interviewer and interviewee are both seen as participating in an interactive and shared methodology of learning. In other words, the researcher too becomes involved with the conceptualising of the movement. So it was the researcher's task to bring in the abstractions and then analyze them through the question/answer method. Our research assistants soon discovered that taking the feminist position did not help in eliciting the kind of answers they were looking for. Yet, this did not prevent them from including gender as an important research tool.

It is here that the gap between theory and praxis became a defining quality of the research project itself. The vision of a gender sensitive world was evoked as a utopian model of a better world that could not be realized in the lives of people in any way. So reality was a far cry from what the vision endorsed. Taking part in the agitations and struggle for justice became the only way of freeing oneself from the cynicism of failure. The researcher was invited to participate in the campaign, in an act of solidarity with the cause and fellow protesters. Many of the interviews were actually conducted at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi, at the very site of the protest action. This was clearly meant to remind us that Bhopal can repeat itself in our own backyard. We joined the movement, and as we heard the taped version of the narratives, we realized that we were listening to our own stories.

The interview process became the means for creating a database. The purpose was not only to record people's perspective, but to enable the researcher to formulate ideas on a shared basis. The questions asked and the answers given were to become the learning tools for both research and activism. So, this form of archiving was not just meant to facilitate academic research. Learning was seen as a mode of intervention, so that archiving forgotten data and retrieving it in tape recordings for future use, became an intrinsic part of knowledge building at the grassroots level. Oral history opened avenues for integrating knowledge and practice in a way that was enabling for both the interviewer and the interviewed.

Unmediated speaking voices

In this section we would like to draw attention to a few of the “unmediated speaking voices” and their narratives. The use of the term “unmediated” refers to an important aspect of the interview method. It suggests that the point of view is not dictated by an approach that is alien to the interviewee’s mind set. This is particularly true in the case of an industrial disaster, which has to work out a balance between an official approach and the experiential approach. Things get further complicated when research projects like the kind we were undertaking came with its own academic baggage. In the case of Bhopal, the balance was all the more difficult to maintain, since the experiential approach was dismissed by both State administration and academics as being too subjective and therefore, lacking in authenticity. At the same time, nobody trusted the official approach, for it was mired in different kinds of falsification and gross misrepresentation. So oral history methodology, which defines the researcher as participant-observer talks of balancing subjectivity with the need to be objective. In this context, the “unmediated” speaking voice becomes an important research tool.

Bhopal has always been a very sensitive issue; twenty six years down the line, we are still looking at a community which has neither got proper compensation nor justice. The objectivity that we are talking about is therefore mired in politics. Can the passage of time heal the wounds? Here again, oral history was a reminder that we are looking back at events with hindsight, so that memory “constructs” the events keeping in mind the “objective distance.” However, does this entail an analytical perspective?

Curiously enough, with the passage of time memories appear to be less selective and more speculative in nature. It is in this context that the “unmediated” voices become important. The Study Group was able to talk to people across the line from group leaders, to campaigners and rank and file workers. We tried our level best to elicit frank opinions on differences, conflict of interest and hostility between groups. We discovered that women were more than willing to speak freely about the nature of these differences. As the same time, when subjective opinions become the means for exploring polemical areas of conflict, we were compelled to bring in a larger objective picture of how social movements try to negotiate differences. Needless to say, this is how abstractions are arrived at in a discourse, and particularly in the case of Bhopal, they gain importance because we were looking at mass levels of human rights violation. Using the oral history background drawn from Mukherjee’s repertoire of narratives, we tried to account for the “invisibility” of gender abstraction, by showing how it is embedded in the material conditions of a social movement. The fact that women spoke from experience and not theoretical knowledge did not in any way take away from the serious intent and purpose of what our interviews revealed.

Here are some of the recorded voices; we have taken care to maintain the anonymity of interviewees on request. The quoted passages are drawn from much longer interviews, so it can at best give us a glimpse of issues that have been dealt with in a more expansive way. In most cases we will see how the

personal, oral "narrative" becomes a self-reflective medium which presents individual opinions without losing sight of the representative nature of the argument.

This voice talks of the role played by women in the setting up of survivor organisations (tape 17):

The women of Bhopal initiated the movement and I initiated the BGPMUS. It was registered in Indore and its reg. no. was 3480. We did not know what a union was or what it could do. When ----- began exploiting us it would make me very angry, but I somehow continued to work despite the exploitation because I had a small baby to feed. Soon I raised objections and then they pointed out to me those other women who did not object. They did this to isolate me. So I began talking to these women to motivate them to join me. The women slowly began to get my point and we spoke about this more regularly at lunch/break time... Some supported us and some opposed us, but we went ahead with our plans... Our first meeting was at the Central Library near the Shajahani Park, around 300 women participated... We were underestimated at that time by the government, but they were yet to taste the real power of women.

Interestingly, she talks about the induction of the male member in the Sangathan, who later went on to become the leader, in purely pragmatic terms:

----- was brought in because we needed some assistance with writing and clerical work. We also had educated girls with us, my niece was a graduate, but she did not have any experience in the field of social work to be able to write petitions/applications.

This is how she describes the conflict of interest that became the bane of the social movement:

Once I went to Delhi to meet the members of parliament with our demands for compensation, livelihood and pension. Our demands were met, but the issue of livelihood was messed up by a lot of people who saw it as an opportunity to make money and fame. It is all now just a pursuit of fame or money. I think it is legitimised to get some money for basic expenses, because social work does not pay, but it is not acceptable to amass wealth.

She does take the names of people she blames, but she distributes the blame equally between men at the helm of affairs and the preferred women:

I was really disheartened by what was going on and I resigned because of that... I did not go back to what I had given up because I did not like the lies and deceit in that profession.

Here is what another voice (tape 11) has to say about motivation:

I get motivated when the government perpetrates injustice on the poor. So I might spend the rest of my life fighting for the cause....It might seem that India is progressing, but it is actually being enslaved by foreign multinationals. Everything is becoming so expensive, even water has a price on it. The poor heath of people reflects on what we are heading towards. What kind of development is the government boasting about?

She remembers a "memorable demonstration":

My most memorable demonstration was in Delhi at the Supreme Court after the out-of-court settlement. It was quite unique and we had around 10,000 people demonstrating on rotational shifts between Delhi and Bhopal.... Women are in the forefront of the movement because men work. Women also work but they are more flexible. I used to roll beedis [poor man's cigarette] so I brought my stuff with me to the meetings. Lot of women brought their embroidery work. I cannot talk about struggles elsewhere, but in Bhopal men stay away because they are embarrassed to be associated with women's organisation.... This is my life. If I am sick I am worried to stay back home because I might miss out a rally or demonstration. I inform the people at home if I have to go out and I ask them not to bother about me. I might be away for a long time, get arrested or die.

Another voice talks about the role of learning in a social movement (tape 15):

I have learnt a lot from the movement. Women are much more aware and motivated to fight. Women have started coming forward in all spheres of life. It has changed their perspective and revolutionised their thinking on development and politics and many other issues. A group is formed only after women acquire this understanding and not simply after its registration... I feel there should be something to change the social mindset and the way society looks at women... All I want is a solution to my problem.

Here again is a voice that speaks of another memorable action (tape 19):

This protest action happened in Mumbai. We were shouting slogans like "jhadoo maro Dow ko!" (Beat up Dow with broom sticks). Beware of a woman when she picks up her broom stick! I understood why we were fighting against UCC, which was back in the country under a different name, and it had started a new factory in Mumbai. We were there to prevent a Bhopal like disaster happening in Mumbai... The best way to fight the government is to get rid of it during elections. A vote is very valuable, so I vote every time. An MLA came to seek our votes in our basti. He promised us roads, water supply, electricity, but he failed to deliver after his victory. So we all demonstrated in the corporation office and gheraoed [people held temporarily in their office/workplace] the MLA [Member of Parliament]. I contacted a local press to cover the event. The MLA assured us of action but things remain the same (Tape 19).

Here is a voice that looks at innovative protest action as fun and laughter (tape 5):

On one occasion we went to Bhupal Singh's office and we made a lot of noise, using metal plates and spoons. We took a big contingent of people with us, and locked the door from outside. The police arrived and lathi-charged [beat up with sticks] us and threw us into police vans. Three policemen surrounded me, but I pushed them aside and sat inside the van. Later in the police lock up we had a hearty laugh. They seized our plates and spoons and we said, "Is this what you have stooped down to?" We demanded our utensils back and they had to return them. We started playing with them again. Sometimes actions do bring a lot of joy (Tape 5).

It is interesting to observe how the language and analogies are drawn from everyday life. Then they are transformed into symbols of struggle that are rooted in the cultural milieu. It was the familiarity with symbols of protest that enabled women to use them instinctively without making things contentious.

Specialised knowledge co-existed with layman's knowledge, without diluting the seriousness of the issues. It was a two way process. The movement intellectuals saw to it that the rank and file knew what issues that were going to be raised. At the same time, rank and file workers had to carry out instructions in the best possible way. Their task was to intervene at the grassroots level, in a way that kept them rooted to the larger political reality.

Women might think of themselves as lacking in the ability to do paperwork, but they also talked about the need to fight misinformation, and misuse of knowledge. They participated in actions that unveiled corporate secrecy and false propaganda by the State. The only way a social movement was able to demand transparency from the government was by creating "political awareness" at every level. A question that the research assistants put to all the women who were being interviewed was the following: "Did you know what the Carbide factory was manufacturing at the time of the accident?" The answer was a firm no. A few of the women were able to see their own ignorance in relation to the deliberate attempt on the part of the government and the corporation to "hide" the truth. By making this connection, women were able to talk of their learning as liberating from the shackles of ignorance and shortsightedness.

Most of the interviewees endorsed our project on the grounds that it gave them space to talk about their experience of breaking free from generations of enslavement to lies and moribund ideas. They spoke about the need to keep on fighting for justice till they died. But they did need organizational support and sense of solidarity with all those who were part of the struggle. Any definition of comprehensive action meant lifelong dedicated work at the community level, along with revision of legislations by professionals who were inducted into organizations on a voluntary basis. Lastly, they welcomed writers and researchers who could use their scholarly work to build the right kind of public opinion.

The vision of a gender sensitive and just society

In this section we look at the utopian vision of a just and gender sensitive world, which found expression in some of the narratives collected by the Study Group. Yet nothing in the lived reality of the Bhopal survivors' life spelt hope for such a vision. In that case, where did this vision come from?

Reading through the transcripts of interviews we realised that this vision was integrated with demands made by the survivor groups, which in turn became the bulwark of the struggle for justice in Bhopal. In an important sense, we were looking at a research module that was able to bring narratives, abstractions and politics within a single framework. Thus, the vision of a just society was not extrapolated into the research model by external factors, but grew indigenously from within the movement. This prevented the vision from becoming static or uniformly applicable to societies across the globe. It was far more piecemeal and homespun from memories of pain, loss and despair.

No doubt, every movement asks for abstractions that will define it in a more academic way. So the vision had to be placed within a timeline that traces the social movement from its earlier demands for short-term relief measures to the more radically oriented demands for justice, corporate accountability, setting up of an empowered commission, cleaning up of the toxic site by applying the polluter pays principle, and the right to a life of dignity. A great deal of thought and planning went into scripting these long-term demands. In more ways than one, this vision became an embodiment of all the abstractions we had listed earlier. The next step was to find ways and means by which it could be shaped through collective decision making. So the moot question remained unanswered. If environmental justice, class conflict were able to shape this utopian vision, then why was gender falling short?

It is in the context of this niggling question that we will take another look at gender as a conceptual tool that carried forward the vision of a just society. In the case of Bhopal, this vision included demands made by people who had suffered the horrific consequences of an unjust social system. Justice demanded an equitable distribution of resources, as well as listening to voices that had got drowned by middle class rhetoric. Do these voices include women's voices? Going through our filed list of people we spoke to, we found an even count of men and women. We also discovered that the profile of women who were the spokesperson of their organisations indicated their formal position within the organisation, their proximity to the leaders in the group, the length of their involvement and their contribution to the groups.

We also realized how difficult it was for the impacted community to envisage a gender sensitive society, given the deeply ingrained nature of the prevalent patriarchal society we all live in, in India. It was in this context that the international face of the movement helped women to know more about the world outside. This was particularly so when the survivors met volunteers who came to Bhopal from different parts of the globe. While some of the women we interviewed commented mildly on the alien lifestyle of foreigners, others were more skeptical about the cultural difference. In all probability, women's emancipation was a threat to the male members of the family, and Bhopali women were not willing to take the risk of disturbing their family life.

However, the vision of a gender sensitive society gathered strength through oral history and its multiple narratives. At the same time, we are aware of the fact that personal stories cannot speak on behalf of all the other women, who continued to be hemmed in by patriarchal norms, both inside the family and outside. So the gendered vision of a better world remained an idea that could not be seen as universally applicable. The women survivors of Bhopal did sing feminist songs and held up banners with feminist slogans, but none of this existed outside the movement, and at the end of the day, they went back to their patriarchal homes.

One of the main hurdles faced by the research assistants, when they conducted interview sessions inside the homes of the interviewee, was curiously enough, both a logistic problem and that of patriarchal control. Most houses had barely

one or two rooms, and given the large number of people living under one roof, there was virtually no privacy. So, the researcher was often caught in the bind of having men folks in the family dictating what should be said, or women becoming cautious in the presence of male members of the family. A lot of women's issues relating to the chemically ravaged bodies were deeply private and some women refused to talk on record. The same pattern followed in the grassroots organisations, where permission to speak to the Study Group had to come from male leaders in the group. Thus, we were told that Abdul Jabbar was unhappy that we had interviewed Rabiya Bee because she had fallen out with him. Similar anxieties were displayed by almost all the male group leaders.

Winning the trust of the interviewee became one of the prime tasks of the research assistants. Tarunima came up with a solution, which was time-consuming, but useful for our purpose. She visited the families alone, and discussed their problems privately, without using the tape recorder. She noted down their statements in her field diary, and she and Dharmesh modified the questions, keeping in mind the problem areas. Coming up with contingent plans was an essential part of doing fieldwork with a community that is trying to recover from trauma. But the risk of using modified research techniques was both a functional and ethical problem. It led to greater subjectivity, which in turn became the problem of authenticity. Like it or not, the Study Group had to underplay the academic nature of work done, by bringing in felt stories, based on experiences of trauma. For the interviewee this offered a platform where she/he could speak out without fear of being chastised or discarded for not being authentic. It is this therapeutic role played by the very nature of the "spoken word" that made interview sessions personal in a way that research is never meant to be. At the same time, modified theoretical frameworks kept away from any standardised research methodology, by discovering more indigenous, oral traditions that borrowed ideas and conventions from specifically rooted cultural practice.

Here are some of the interesting conclusions that we arrived at by speaking to women survivors. Our research methods probed into the more realistic picture of why large scale participation of women in the movement, did not guarantee changes in gender practice in the family. More importantly, what impact did our research findings have on the gender regimes in the wider community? Lastly, could the Study Group arrive at alternative feminist positions and discovery of renegotiated femininities that operated from within hegemonic masculinities?⁶ None of these questions can be answered promptly. So in the next section we

⁶ The concept of "emphasised femininities" was popularised by Connell in his (2005) essay, "Hegemonic masculinities: rethinking the concept." Women survivors were known for certain characteristic personality traits, which were not seen as individual acquisitions but more collective in nature. Since the organisations to which the women belonged were largely personality driven, a lot of premium was given to commitment, loyalty and selflessness. Here again women were seen as types and not individuals. Emphasised femininity was the culturally accepted attributes that found a firm footing in social norms, especially when it was placed against hegemonic masculinity.

bring in types of femininity and how they operate in an ethnographic study of an industrial disaster.

Types of femininity

Once again we turn back to Foucault's description of a "silent content" that gets revealed in the celebratory song of empowerment of women survivors who were part of the social movement. By highlighting differences rather than homogeneity in any discursive formation, Foucault encourages us to replace notions of exclusion by ideas of intervention. In his own words: "Each discourse contains the power to say something other than what it actually says and thus to embrace a plurality of meaning" (Foucault 1969: 134).

It was the invisible power of intervention that described the type of women's power that we did get to see in a large section of women who had joined the social movement from its inception, and have continued to remain in the forefront of the struggle to this day. This power suited the patriarchal family, for women entered the battleground without the need to discard their role as daughter and mother. Here I would like to juxtapose Western thinking with Indian variations, particularly in the case of such important issues as "cognitive praxis" (Eyerman and Jamison 1996: 45-93) and "contentious performances" (Tilly 2008: 31-61). The model used by Eyerman and Jamison focuses on the process of articulating the movement identity (cognitive praxis) by key participants (movement intellectuals) within the contexts of articulation (political cultures and institutions). (1996: 4). Are these theories applicable in the Indian context? The answer is both yes and no in a cautious way.

Eyerman and Jamison were talking about an approach that combined material conditions and consciousness in a way that made cognitive praxis strategic and instrumental. However, the Indian way of looking at things rarely allowed for women to play an active role in the public domain. Therefore, consciousness was kept apart from material conditions. What we saw as large scale participation of women in a mass movement, was really a strategic game plan made by movement intellectuals, to use women as the "face" of the disaster and its aftermath. This can be tied up with Tilly's description of "contentious performances." Tilly used the theatrical metaphor of performances and repertoires to describe the "historically embedded nature of contentious politics" (2008: 14). It was the need to appear in large numbers that spoke of women power as collective strength rather than acquiring individual identity. So a lot of importance was given to life experiences, the language and symbols drawn from the cultural milieu and the deliberate organising that goes into making collective claims.

Praxis and performances occupied a liminal space where new types of knowledge making were brought in to serve people. Given the nature of street performances in India, resistance was drawn from our rich cultural traditions. Survivor groups used our age-old, non-violent methods of protest. So satyagraha, hunger strikes, die-in, padyatras [march on foot], peaceful

processions, and candle light vigils become time tested ways of registering protest. Women took the lead in organising these events, and at the same time, they were more than willing to spare their men folk, on the grounds of traditional division of labour between men and women. It is this paradoxical situation that defines women's power in the Indian context.

However, to say that an ideology becomes redundant in the face of contingent factors is to simplify the dynamics of the problem. It was here that oral history offered some ready solutions. As pointed out earlier, women were able to convey complex ideas in simple pictorial images. So it was their rendering of the vision to an illiterate mass population that became an instant hit. In other words, the vision of a gendered and a just society was not patented to belong to the upper class; it grew from within mass struggles. In Bhopal, once women's presence in the mass movement became visible, the next step was to maintain continuity through persistence. If there is one strength that the Bhopal movement can speak about, it is the dogged nature of their belief in fighting the system that had betrayed them. Twenty-six years later nothing seems to have diminished their ardour to carry on with the struggle for justice.

In real terms, this persistence symbolises the invasion of people's power into cultural spaces that were considered sacrosanct for the middle class. Thus, every street action that makes breaking news on television or becomes the headline news in newspapers, acts as reminder of what had gone wrong with the development model. This added to the worldwide recognition that the images of Bhopal have gained, in celebrity photographs, documentary films, and YouTube video clippings have become the strength of the movement. Therefore, Bhopal has got support from different parts of the world. The survivor groups have also realized the possibilities of getting what they want by utilizing the demands of electoral politics. Women were pushed to the forefront of the social movement because their narratives, though marginal in the real distribution of power, had an emotive appeal that made their stories sell. Despite the fact that gender issues relating to specific medical and social problems were ill-addressed in most rehabilitation schemes, women's power soon acquired a market value.

Grassroots leadership depended on women to carry on with the battle for justice. Most women looked up to male leaders for inspiring them. Group leaders were seen as caring, paternalistic, and domineering, which in many ways described hegemonic masculinity as nothing more than the organisational space becoming a replica of a home away from home. Women spoke of their admiration for male leaders purely on the grounds of the sacrifices they had made. So a lot of women power was pledged to serve the leadership by implementing their vision as faithfully as possible. Women hardly complained against the two-tier level of leadership. They did not see themselves in direct conflict with male leaders; nor were they complaining about the way policy decisions were made. But women did talk about another form of organisational betrayal. They felt that organisations allowed for select women to become more prominent than others. So in the final analysis the competition was with other women. The usual complaint was against the marked improvement in the living

condition of these favoured women, as well as greater exposure in the media. This was seen as exploitation of women power, and though it was often dismissed as a strategic decision made to bring the social movement back into the limelight, it did prove to be de-motivating and often took away from these neglected women, their sense of belonging to the social movement.

Concluding remarks

Going back to the historical timeline, we see how the year 1994 had become a watershed in the history of the movement. The government decided to mark the decade as the year of closure. Rehabilitations schemes were closed down, the work-sheds, which had been lying in disuse, were handed over to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) decided to wind up all the research projects they had started. The infamous settlement of 1989 was seen as the maximum bargain that India could manage with a powerful nation and an equally powerful corporation (Baxi 1986).

It was an ominous move in the context of globalisation and India's neo-liberal economic policies. The survivor groups faced a new challenge of opposing a state that was in collusion with the callous and criminal corporation. Every social movement has to strategise its action plans in keeping with material changes. The internationalisation of the Bhopal movement was part of this change, brought on by the new global scenario and the accompanying political opportunities.

A new dimension to the tragedy came to the forefront with the horrific discovery that the chemical waste at the factory site had seeped into the ground water and contaminated the water table. The abandoned factory had become a toxic hotspot and Bhopal qualified as a case study of environmental pollution.⁷ New issues arose about the cleanup of the factory site and the possibility of applying the polluter pays principal. Meanwhile, Union Carbide merged with Dow Chemicals in 2001, so that the offending corporation practically disappeared, and the new company refused to take any liability for the past.

ICJB shifted to macro-level issues relating to environmental pollution. It was felt that the need of the hour was international solidarity, and an increased effort to make Bhopal more visible in the global scenario. BGPMSKS joined ICJB, and activism that had begun in the workplace of the government run stationary sheds acquired a worldwide recognition. Since BGPMSKS was run by two remarkable women leaders, Rashida Bee and Champa Devi Shukla, the social movement concentrated on bringing women to the forefront of the struggle. Bhopal needed new tools to fight its battle. This is where the repertoires and language of activism began to change. What had been a battle for survival at the local level, changed into a full-fledged battle for human rights,

⁷ In this connection see the reports brought out by Amnesty International (2004) and Greenpeace (1999).

and the accompanying principle of justice. This was only possible by restoring principles of equitable distribution and sustainability. Systems of knowledge and technology were no longer viewed as value neutral. A new lexicon was created to promote a gender sensitive, chemical free environment.

It was in this context that the Study Group launched its oral history project by interviewing members of all the organisations that are active today. We discovered that our attempt to understand the local/global nexus brought us close to organisations so that we could get a comprehensive understanding of differences. In the process, we were able to win the confidence of local groups, which in turn helped us to understand micro level issues without losing sight of the macro level concerns. As archival material, which unravels the complex story of human greed, systemic failure, travesty of justice, and the power play between the US and third world countries, it opens up new areas of research in anthropological studies. Since we hope to make these anonymised transcripts available online, we believe that it will further the cause for documenting an event of such magnitude. At the same time, it will promote easy access to primary material in a way that critiques the "corporate veil", and its diabolic effect on a hapless community. A movement that began in the women's selai centres, and continued even after the centres were closed down, becomes representative of women's power and integrity. In the final analysis it is this sustaining power of people's struggle for justice that makes Bhopal a unique case study.

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Can "the people" be feminists? Analysing the fate of feminist justice claims in populist grassroots movements in the United States¹

Akwugo Emejulu

Abstract

In this article I examine the fate of feminist justice claims in the context of grassroots populist movements in the United States. By exploring populism on the left—in neighbourhood community organising—and on the right—within the community organising among the Tea Party—I argue that a "politics of authenticity" is deployed in each movement with strikingly similar effects on the development of feminist consciousness and justice claims in each movement. In left-wing community organising I find that feminist claims are suppressed in order to preserve solidarity among grassroots actors and to be perceived by movement outsiders as patriotic. On the right I demonstrate how women-centric practices are generated through the strategic use of an identity I label "concerned motherhood". For the Tea Party, women appear to have the ability to identify as women for local action but this process seems to threaten both feminism and democracy by women's support for a politics of inequality. I conclude with a discussion about whether feminism and populism can be reconciled and the perils that confront feminist activists in the current upsurge of populist movements around the globe.

Introduction

In the United States, community organising activists typically legitimise their practices in urban grassroots movements by adopting populist principles. For both left-wing and right-wing groups, populism is deployed to spotlight political, cultural and economic elites who, populists claim, are undermining and distorting the will of "the people". For populist claims-making to be successful, activists must discursively construct and reinforce adversarial identities and relations between "us" and "them": the "authentic" and virtuous public versus the selfish and out-of-touch elite. Through these discursive practices, community organising activists argue that popular solidarity across a range of potentially divisive identities such as class, "race" and gender is built and sustained and as a result, groups can be effectively organised and mobilised for actions that will benefit the majority.

In this article, I compare the claims-making and framing strategies by which right and left wing community activists construct some citizens' claims as

¹ I would like to thank Lesley Wood, Catherine Eschle and the two anonymous reviewers for *Interface* for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this article.

authentic expressions of "the people" whilst other claims are labelled as divisive or partisan and are thus silenced from the dominant community organising discursive repertoire. In particular, I chart the fate of feminist justice claims—articulations and practices that seek to transform hegemonic gender roles, in order to "end sexist oppression" and encourage women to organise *as women* to advance equality and justice (hooks 2000: 18). Understanding what happens to feminist claims and practices within community organising politics is important because women are typically the key activists in these grassroots urban movements. As Cynthia Cockburn (1979) and Nancy Naples (1997) note, because of women's location in the private spaces of the family and community they have an intimate connection to the local state through their experiences of local social welfare services. "Women experience themselves and are expected by others, to be the prime caretakers of families, neighbourhoods and communities—and are the ones especially placed to make demands for their protection" (Ackelsberg 2001: 409). Thus, exploring how community organising ideas and practices shape women's understandings of their identity, gender consciousness and the nature of the inequalities they experience is crucial to understanding how grassroots populist politics influence and legitimise the available space for certain forms of identity and activism.

I begin my analysis with a short discussion of populism and how this idea is operationalised in US-based democratic politics. Following Iris Marion Young (1997: 400), by "democratic politics" I mean "a process where citizens aim to promote their interests knowing that others are doing the same...It is also a method for determining the best and most just solution to conflicts and other collective problems". I will then move on to explore the formation and structure of populist discourses and identities in both left-wing and right-wing grassroots movements². On the left, I examine the language and practices of the so-called "New Populist" neighbourhood movement that came to prominence in the early 1980s and still exerts a strong influence on contemporary progressive community organising today (Boyte 1980; Boyte and Reisman 1986; Kling and Posner 1990; Fisher 1994; Leavitt 2003; Kleidman 2004; Martin 2010; Atlas 2010). On the right, I analyse the language and practices of the Tea Party movement. Self-consciously modelled on populist left-wing community organising, the Tea Party is the most high profile counter-movement against

²I use the terms "left-wing" and "right-wing" as broad political categories that encompass a range of ideas and social practices. I do not mean to imply that contemporary political thought reflects a simplistic one-dimensional spectrum of political ideas or that the boundaries between right and left are so easily identified. Nevertheless, in the community organising tradition, these labels are infused with meaning and convey important ideas about authentic grassroots practice. By "left-wing" I include those political ideologies and practices that seek social justice in the form of the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor and the recognition difference in terms of identities among various groups (Young 1990 and Fraser 1997). By "right-wing" I include those political ideologies and practices that seek to preserve the status quo in terms of economic and social hierarchies, oppose state-based remedies for economic and social inequalities and seek to use the state to defend and expand traditional morality and values (Klatch 1988 and Diamond 1995).

Barack Obama's Keynesian fiscal policies (Lepore 2010; Lilla 2010; Zernike 2010). In comparing these two populist movements, I do not wish to imply that these movements are unproblematically unified, coherent and homogenous. Indeed, what is compelling about the "New Populist" neighbourhood movement of the 1980s and the Tea Party of today is that in spite of their disparate and fractured characteristics, they have managed to articulate a fairly clear vision about the common good and mobilise new groups of actors who would not normally participate in community or electoral politics (Boyte 1980; Boyte and Evans 1986; Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). Through my comparative analysis I also do not want to convey that I am comparing like with like. The purpose and ambitions of the New Populists and the Tea Party are very different, but what binds them together is the strikingly similar ways in which they adopt and practice populist politics in the US context—and the complementary ways in which they systematically silence feminist claims from their discursive repertoires.

For both the left-wing and right-wing populist groups, I will explore how the subject position of "the people" is constituted and how particular policy preferences are articulated and legitimised by grassroots practices. I will also be analysing how gender claims are constructed in these discursive landscapes and discuss the implications this has for our understandings of authenticity. I will conclude with a discussion about whether feminism and populism can be reconciled in grassroots movements. Before I turn to explore populism in more depth, I want to first briefly outline my discursive research methods.

Analysing populist discourses

Post-structuralist discourse analysis is concerned with understanding the construction and reproduction of identity within particular discourses through the analysis of talk and texts. Post-structuralism asserts that language's primary function is not to necessarily to describe reality but to ascribe meanings and value-systems about our identities and relationships (Derrida 1974; Foucault 1980; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Words are not simply instrumental ways in which to communicate; they insert themselves between us and reality so that they convey specific cultural knowledge and "truths" which discipline us to think, feel and behave in specific ways.

Following Hansen (2006), I have adopted post-structuralist discourse analysis (PDA) approach to analysing texts, discourses and identities in this article. It is important to note that PDA does not seek to "uncover" hidden truth claims in texts. Instead, the focus is on mapping the formation and structure of discourses in relation to significant historical events and investigating how these discourses simultaneously open up and close down particular identities for individuals and groups at particular moments in time. In terms of grassroots populism in the US, the salient historical moment that typically sparks populist action is an economic crisis (Boyte and Evans 1986; Kazin 1998a). It is no surprise then that left-wing populism is revived by the energy crisis recession of the late 1970s

whilst the Tea Party is organised in the context of the global banking crisis in 2008. These politically significant moments in time set the boundaries of the constitution of grievances, the nature of solidarity within groups and the available identities for mobilisation.

Hansen (2006: 82-6) argues that rigorous text selection and analysis is the linchpin for valid and reliable PDA research. She proposes a clear set of criteria for the selection of texts for analysis. In terms of general criteria, she states that all texts selected should have a "clear articulation of identities", "be widely read" within the field and should have the "formal authority to define a political position" (Hansen 2006: 85). Realistically, however, not all texts selected for analysis are able to fulfil all three criteria and thus should meet at least one of the criteria and be balanced by the selection of other texts that fulfil the rest of the criteria. Hansen (2006: 82-5) then suggests three further characteristics texts should have for selection. Firstly the majority of texts selected for analysis should be from the time periods under study. Secondly, primary texts such as books, newspaper articles and speeches directly related to the topic should be given priority for analysis however secondary texts such as academic work should be included in order to understand the social, political and historical context of the discourse and identity. Finally, to supplement the texts directly related to the topic, conceptual history texts should also be included in order to show how discourses and identities have interacted and changed over time.

I analysed populist discourses through an iterative method of reading a variety of relevant texts in order to understand how the patterns in the language of populist grassroots movements constitute the nature of their grievances, the structure of solidarity, their policy preferences and their social practices for the organisation and mobilisation of subjects. My selection of texts of community organising in the US spans two different time periods. For the New Populist neighbourhood movement, I analysed texts published from 1979 to 1995 and this textual selection was supplemented by a number of more recent texts published in the 2000s to demonstrate the continuity of various discursive practices in left-wing populism. For the Tea Party, my text selection spans from 2008, when the Tea Party was first constituted, to the time of writing in 2011.

Due to the recent establishment of the Tea Party, a comprehensive body of literature analysing its ideas and practices does not as yet exist. However, I have attempted to select texts about the movement that seek to understand it in relation to history, social change and individual biography—as C. Wright Mills (1959) suggests social scientists should approach the sociological analysis of phenomena. I have defined "texts" as books, academic, newspaper and magazine articles and speeches that constitute the discourses of populist community organising. Based on Hansen's method of text selection, these texts have been chosen for analysis based on their clear articulations of discourse and identity (they represent various schools of thought with regard to populist community organising), they are cited widely by other texts (in terms of intertextuality and the linking of texts through extensive citations and the use of interpellation and catchphrases) and they provide a mixture of "official"

discourses (in terms of hegemonic conceptualisations) and oppositional discourses (in terms of re-framing dominant definitions, processes and events). In addition, these texts are a mixture of primary, secondary and conceptual history sources.

By understanding the ways in which populist discourses construct the terms of their politics, it is possible to analyse the identity formations they generate. The final part of my discourse analysis is to trace how populist groups define themselves and who they include in their sense of self and, in contrast, how they define "the other" and who they exclude from their idea of an authentic self. In terms of policy preferences and identity constructions, I focus particularly on how populists legitimise their claims as authentic and the impact this has on other competing identities and claims—especially in terms of feminist justice.

An important critique of a discourse analysis methodology is that "anything goes" in terms of the quality and rigour of analysis offered (Parker and Burman 1993; Antaki et al 2002). An on-going problem with discourse analysis is that mere presentation, quotation or summary of texts is not sufficient in providing a rigorous, systematic, rational, compelling and persuasive analysis. Critics argue that:

The analytic rush to identify discourses in order to get on with the more serious business of accounting for their political significance may be partly responsible for the tendency...to impute the presence of a discourse to a piece of text without explaining the basis for specific claims (Widdicombe 1995, quoted in Antaki et al 2002: 12).

Discourse analysis can often privilege circular logic whereby the selective presentation of texts is used to illustrate patterns in the discourse which in turn justify the existence of discourse in texts. The goal of this article is not to simply identify and analyse discourses and identities and then hold forth about their importance and influence on populist community organising. Instead, I wish to understand the significance of how these discourses and identities interact with and perhaps displace oppositional feminist claims and practices. Thus the focus of my analysis is not simply to argue for the existence of a particular discourse but to explore how the language and practice of populism disciplines social actors in particular ways—ways that undermine a transformational feminist politics of social justice.

With my methodology and methods explained, I will now move on to discuss the idea of populism in further detail.

Populism as strategy—not ideology

Populism is notoriously difficult to define. "We simply do not have anything like a *theory* of populism, or even coherent criteria for deciding when political actors have turned populist in some meaningful sense" (Mueller 2011: 1, emphasis in original text). Sometimes populism is used as a short-hand for dismissing overly simplistic political analyses and policy proposals. Other times it is deployed as a synonym for nativism or totalitarian tendencies in democratic politics. For the

purposes of this paper, I am interested in what populism might mean in the context of democratic politics in the United States. Margaret Canovan (1999: 3) defines populism as the "appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society". She argues that populism is a three-pronged concept: it is an articulation of popular grievances, a unifying call to the sovereign people and a challenge to perceived elite power and influence.

Firstly, populism is an articulation of ordinary people's feelings of disrespect and exclusion from the operation of political, economic and cultural power in society. There is a sense that the everyday ideas and traditions of local people are being ignored or disregarded and as a result, the health and future of the country is imperilled by the practice of elite power. What is important to note here about the articulation of grievances is the explicit link that is made between "ordinary people" and authentic uses of power. If power is wielded in ways that unnecessarily challenge popular belief systems or undermine the "will" of the people, then this power is seen as dangerous and illegitimate.

Secondly, populism is a call to arms for ordinary people. The people are constructed as united and virtuous because of their shared values and beliefs. Because the people are grounded in local institutions and traditions, they are typically the guardians of *real* politics that serve majority interests. Thus "the people" claim popular sovereignty and stewardship of the nation because it is their values, beliefs and institutions that provide the nation with a true sense of itself through authentic expressions of the popular will.

Finally, populism is a revolt against elite power. Canovan (1999) argues that the idea of "elites" should be understood broadly: populists are challenging elites in politics (especially those in mainline political parties), economics (the super-rich and corporate bosses) and culture (cosmopolitan metropolitans, academics and the media class). Elites are seen as disconnected from and contemptuous of ordinary people and their traditions. Because of their lack of grounding in workaday life, elites represent dangerous partisan interests that threaten popular sovereignty. Thus, political, economic and cultural elites have to be dislodged from power because they actively seek to distort and undermine the will of the majority.

What is important to bear in mind here is how, in Michael Kazin's (1998a: 3) words, populist politics are "elastic and promiscuous": populist ideas about grievances, the people and elites can apply to both left-wing and right-wing political thought. This is the power and allure of populism—especially for grassroots political actors. Rather than articulating a coherent set of political ideas and positions like a traditional ideology, populism allows actors to express "idealistic discontent" (ibid: 3) with the current practice of democracy and verbalise "moralistic... normative distinction[s] between 'the elite' and 'the people' " (Mudde 2004: 544). Populism gives actors the opportunity to reflect and re-interpret a generalised "mood" of angst about "politics as usual" and a means by which to disrupt the taken-for-granted ways in which power is exercised by both actors and institutions (Canovan 1999: 6). Because populism

does not advance a particular political ideology as such but advocates a different process by which democratic politics is conceived and practised, I argue that it should be understood as a political strategy for organising and mobilising the public. This is why it can be used, with seemingly little difficulty or contradiction, by both the right and left in grassroots movements at this moment in time in the United States. I will now turn to explore how populism is operationalised in the US context.

Populism is a central concept in US politics; its emphasis on self-rule and democratic egalitarianism is part of the mythology of the founding of the United States and forms the basis of ideas of "American exceptionalism"³ (Kazin 1998a; Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). This mixture of populism and patriotism is important in this context because these ideas crowd out other ways of building solidarity and mobilising ordinary people. Populism displaces various revolutionary ideologies because populism is perceived as an inherently "American" idea whilst revolutionary political ideas are seen as dangerously foreign or even seditious (Kazin 1998b). Because America has already had its revolution for equality and freedom, transformative politics are seen as largely irrelevant to the American political tradition because they seek to alter that which has already been perfected in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Populism does not seek to overturn the basic mechanics of American democracy; rather, it attempts to better perfect what has already been laid out by the Founding Fathers. As Kazin (1998b: 80) notes: "America is viewed [by populists] as an isolated island of civic virtue whose people have to be constantly on guard" against efforts to undermine or radically change it by unpatriotic elites. Thus populism in US politics should be seen as a conservative form of practice. By staying within the bounds of patriotism and by seeking legitimacy by appealing to the status quo, populism does not attempt to revolutionise society but to preserve and even strengthen various social conventions and traditions.

From this discussion about the constitutive elements of populism, we can see how difficult it might be for feminist justice claims to be legitimised within this form of grassroots politics. For the purposes of this paper, I define feminist justice claims as those ideas and political practices that seek to "end sexist oppression" by advancing the political, economic, social and cultural equality for different types of women⁴ (hooks 2000). I argue that generalised appeals to "the people" do not appear to recognise differences and inequalities among and

³ Proponents of American exceptionalism argue that America is a beacon of light and inspiration for other nations because it waged a war of independence based on the principles of individual liberty and equality. The American Revolution was a unique event in that it combined Enlightenment ideas with a revolutionary fervour and this confirms America's distinctive place in human history.

⁴ I use the term 'different types of women' to signal the fact that 'women' are not a homogenous group and that considerable inequalities and conflicts exist between women on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, age and disability (Spelman 1988; Mouffe 1992; Emejulu 2011).

between individuals and groups due to "race", ethnicity, gender and class, and may make it difficult to incorporate feminist analyses or practices. However, since women seem to be key actors in both left-wing and right-wing populist grassroots politics—both in terms of their leadership and their mass actions—it is important to explore in more depth what happens to feminist justice claims when they intersect with populist politics. I will first turn to analyse the so-called "progressive populism" on the left.

Progressive populism and the suppression of feminist justice claims

Progressive populism in the United States traces its roots back to the late 19th century when small farmers and artisans in the South and the West organised the People's Party to counter the growing domination of industrialists and large landowners (Fisher 1994; Kazin 1998a, 1998b). Small farmers were unable to sell their crops at market at a competitive rate and artisans were being deskilled by new industrial production techniques. The People's Party provided a platform for "ordinary people" (in this case, mostly white evangelical Christian men and women) to articulate their grievances about capitalist elites' destructive impact on their livelihoods and the collusion of political elites that allowed this abuse to continue. Simultaneously, Marxist actors and trade unionists were also articulating similar critiques about operation of industrial capitalism and the immiseration of the urban working classes (Fink 1994; Fisher 1994). Throughout the 20th century, left-wing community organising actors have used this analysis of economic exploitation and political corruption as a strategy for organising and mobilising poor and working class communities (Alinsky 1946, 1968; Fisher 1994). These ideas of populism were revived in the early 1980s—a time of right-wing retrenchment and the dismantling of the Lyndon Johnson's Great Society reforms—as a new way to appeal to majority interests within a community and are still used in community organising today (for example see Chambers 2003; DeFilippis, Fisher, and Shragge 2009; Atlas 2010).

The New Populist neighbourhood movement was not unified; it sprung up in different regions across the country and focused on a variety of issues including housing, anti-nuclear protests and large-scale job losses due to factory closures (Boggs 1983: 344). Perhaps the best known manifestation of new populism is the now defunct Association of Community Organisations for Reform Now (ACORN) which was a nation-wide network of grassroots groups working on a range of issues including voter registration and turnout, redlining and loan sharking (Delgado 1986; Fisher 1994; Atlas 2010). Other new populist organisations include Public Citizen, Fair Share, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and Communities Organised for Public Service (COPS). Some of these organisations, such as the Campaign for Economic Democracy (CED) in Santa Monica, California focused on local issues and formal municipal politics whilst others such as Fair Share and Public Citizen sought to build regional networks for social change (Boggs 1983; Delgado 1986). Despite the significant

differences between these organisations, it is possible to identify a progressive populist discursive repertoire that unites them, which I will now turn to discuss.

As Boyte (1980: 7), a key proponent of progressive populism asserts, this new neighbourhood movement represents:

a renewed vision of direct democracy coupled with a mistrust of large institutions, both public and private. Such a democratic vision represents a rekindled faith in the citizenry itself, a conviction that, given the means and the information, people can make decisions about the course of their lives.

In other words, progressive populism is focused on the decentralisation of power to community-based institutions in order to revitalise the practice of democracy in the US. It is populist through its insistence that ordinary people have the ability and capacity to make decisions about their lives and the "public good".

The social practices of progressive populism are constructed as:

cooperative group action by ordinary citizens motivated both by civic idealism and by specific grievances...Citizen activism frequently grows directly from traditional and particular group identities that leftists tend to see as "backwaters" of parochialism—religious and civic traditions, ethnic ties and family relations. In the course of struggle, people often feel deepened appreciation for their heritage, symbols and institutions close to home—a far cry from the abstract cosmopolitanism of the dominant liberal or left imagination (Boyte 1980: 7).

As I described earlier, populism in the US tends to displace revolutionary ideologies because that form of politics critiques and seeks to transform "the people". In contrast, progressive populism constructs traditions and folkways as the authentic basis to build real democracy:

Contemporary citizen organising is more down to earth, more practical, above all more enduring and rooted in the social fabric [of community life]. It seeks to build ongoing organisations through which people can wield power. It is accompanied by a sense of the rightness, creativity and vitality in people's traditions, folkways and culture that 60s radicals were prone to scorn or dismiss (Boyte 1980: 139).

As we can see in the quote above, it is important to note the hostility of progressive populism to revolutionary politics. Socialism, feminism and Black nationalism all appear to be constructed as elitist because they seek to subvert community institutions and traditions. This is crucial to our understanding of populism on the left: it not just party political elites and corporate fat cats that are challenged—groups advancing an explicitly ideological position about the structural nature of social problems and solutions in communities also appear to be branded as elitist.

The structure of the progressive populist discourse hinges on three concepts that drive community organising: the idea of "democracy", a so-called "non-ideological majoritarian strategy", and a focus on organisational "victories" rather than the political education of grassroots actors.

"Democracy" in the progressive populist discourse is understood as "popular power—control by the majority of people, with equality of resources sufficient to make such control realisable—and of direct participation by freely cooperating men and women" (Boyte 1980: 175-6). Democracy is defined as government by and for the people—focusing on the self-governing of free citizens in the interests of the majority. In order to achieve this ideal of self-government the threats to citizen self-rule—elite-dominated institutions—must be limited. As Reissman (1986: 54) declares: "large numbers of people feeling submerged and overpowered by big institutions and big government are attempting to get some control over their lives. They are struggling for empowerment".

In order to achieve this notion of empowerment, populist actors practice a so-called "non-ideological majoritarian strategy". This strategy focuses on building mass-based, multi-class and multi-racial citizen-controlled organisations that are rooted in neighbourhoods, focused on local issues and targeted on winnable issues (Boyte 1980; Delgado 1986; Fisher 1994). "If we are to successfully challenge concentrated wealth and power, we need to begin by building and strengthening autonomous organisations and institutions that are deeply rooted in the experiences and values of people in local communities" (Miller 1986: 132). This strategy is non-ideological because the organisations are built and issues are identified and campaigned on based on the "authentic" interests and concerns of citizens rather than organisers' or outsiders' ideological interpretations of community-based problems and solutions. "Our philosophy is very closely related to our membership's daily life experience. There's no ideology that instructs what we do. People make decisions and they start moving" (Rathke 1979 quoted in Delgado 1986: 190-1).

The strategy is majoritarian because the community organisation is composed of a broad-based constituency which is multi-class and multi-racial and issues are fought for which have broad-based appeal in the neighbourhood. In a contemporary account of progressive populism, Scanlon (2001: 62) argues: "we must choose policy priorities that address the most prevalent economic concerns of US citizens...we must prioritise those policies...which could potentially unify poor, working and middle class citizens". This non-ideological majoritarian strategy ensures that social problems identified by community organising are always framed in terms of the powerful—government and corporations—against the powerless—the (unified and homogenised) people. Potentially divisive issues—especially those related to race and gender—are not pursued because it would compromise the unity and consensus of the organisation. Only issues with a clearly defined enemy and a clear path to success are defined as viable for mobilising and campaigning. As Mike Miller, (1973, quoted in Boyte 1980: 93), a central practitioner of new populism, notes, "grassroots groups must overcome the divide-and-conquer tactics of the powerful; middle-income people are potential allies, not adversaries; tactics should not alienate the public".

It seems that by seeking to build a majority to advocate for a particular community issue requires a broad-based definition of democracy and active

avoidance of elitist ideological domination. Importantly, by supporting the issues and concerns of a numerical majority, this may well lead to an affirmation of the status quo and a marginalisation of issues that challenge established community traditions that reproduce inequalities between different groups.

The final concept of the progressive populist discourse is "victory" which is constructed in two ways. Firstly, building and maintaining a citizen-controlled organisation becomes its own victory for local people—a perpetual self-justification for the process of organising. "This idea of being organised in a constituency-based organisation... is more important than the particular issue we work on. Again, we might lose or we might win and still the need to be organised remains" (Campbell 1979 quoted in Delgado 1986: 202). A permanent organisation, composed of activists ready to react to abuses of power by the state or corporations and who can also advance their own self-interest, is constructed as the most effective kind of power people can wield. Secondly, targeting winnable issues, with a clear enemy and a clear campaign strategy, builds the confidence of citizens and re-enforces the need for a permanent organisation. "An expansion of income transfers and remunerations for domestic labour are not viable policy proposals... populists... must help US families to understand their shared interests in policies that reduce threats to the well-being of all workers" (Scanlon 2001: 66). People will join and actively participate in an organisation that is perceived to be powerful, formidable and effective.

In terms of identity constructions, the progressive populist sense of self is constituted by the way in which it defines "the people". The people are all the same: they are civic-minded, they share the same interests and they are not in conflict with each other over power and resources at the grassroots level. As Wade Rathe (1975 quoted in Fisher 1994, p.148), the former chief organiser for ACORN reflects, "I wanted to build on a majority constituency rather than on a minority, where the next-door neighbours are in it together, not fighting each other". Ultimately, "the people" are reified through the way in which traditions, folkways and community-based institutions are fetishised in the discourse:

Populism...grows from the living fabric of communities seeking to control the forces that threaten to overwhelm them. Populism...is ultimately about values and cultural meanings. Rather than drawing its base from large organisations...in which people are cut off from their family roots and communal ties, populist politics finds its power and vision in the institutions integral to social life: churches, synagogues, neighbourhood organisations, union locals (Boyte 1985:1).

By defining everyone as the same and by emphasising the essential goodness and unproblematic nature of community structures, these constructions aim to make it easier to build solidarity and organise competing groups for collective action. The problem, however, is that the very real conflicts, contradictions and interests between different groups are ignored for the sake of organisation building. This appears to have the effect of closing down other possible identities—especially feminist consciousness and feminist identities.

Controversial issues are avoided or reframed to make them palpable to the majority interests and as a result, crucial minority issues may well be silenced.

Three types of elites represent the other in the progressive populist discourse: government, corporate and revolutionary. As I have demonstrated throughout the previous discussion of the New Populism movement, not a lot of distinction is made between these three very different types of elites because the discourse constructs them as having the same harmful impact: undermining the self-determination of the people. Whether it is domination through corporate power, through the centralisation of state power or through "ideological" language and ideas, all elites prevent the people from making decisions on issues that are important to them. As Fisher (1994, p.139) argues, "unchecked power has become concentrated in the hands of a very small number of people who are at the helm of the major corporations of the nation. Because government remains unaccountable to most people, it too, along with business is part of the problem". Whilst Boyte (1980, p.9), argues that:

the left can neither understand nor successfully participate in the citizen ferment [of New Populism] if it sees [community] groups instrumentally—as constituencies to be rallied behind a left or "progressive" agenda... Dialogue that reshapes left categories means recovering activist traditions outside the liberal, socialist, or communist experience.

Homogenising the idea of the people combined with the othering of revolutionary political elites means that, unsurprisingly, feminist justice claims appear to be silenced within the progressive populist discourse. I want to take a closer look at how this marginalisation takes place as this may form the basis by which feminist organising and claim-making can better challenge dominant practices of community organising. Firstly, feminist justice claims are silenced and gender consciousness is suppressed by the progressive populist discourse through the systematic marginalisation of women's interests and experiences. In practice, we can see how this takes place in many community organisations during the 1980s.

In a pioneering article about women community organisers, Cheryl Hyde interviewed a range of women activists to discuss their views of working in male-dominated organisations. One activist notes: "It's the men...that disrupt [our peace affinity group] because they don't have a sense of what collective work is...[and] they're not comfortable with having [a woman] who is trying to help everyone manage their feelings and their conflict" (Woman activist quoted in Hyde 1985: 81). In a similar vein, the Women Organizers' Collective (1990: 12) argues, "we are trained to be organisers in what is largely taken to be a gender-neutral model. But, as is usually the case, this "neutral" model is not neutral at all, because by claiming gender blindness it ignores issues and concerns specific to women".

On a related note, Adamson (1980 quoted in Delgado 1986: 195-6) discusses the impact of silencing both race and gender in the new neighbourhood movement organisations:

For young Blacks, if you want to get into what's happening in your community, an ACORN or a Fair Share is not the place to do it... The organisations are inadvertently racist... What they do is they treat everybody the same way. If you don't take into account the fact that there are real differences culturally, you're going to have problems... The hierarchy [of these organisations] is reflective of essentially what society is; it's all white and mostly male.

From the quotes above, we can see how the progressive populist discursive practice of constructing "the people" as unified and homogenous appears to suppress gender identity and feminist justice claims. The systematic way in which the discourse silences gender is one of the main reasons for the development of explicitly feminist community organisations during the 1980s and 1990s (Hyde 1985; Ackelsberg 1988; Bookman and Martin 1988; Women Organizers' Collective 1990; Stall and Stoecker 1997).

Secondly, we can see how the deployment of the notion of authenticity in the progressive populism discourse seeks to silence feminist justice claims. For example, feminist arguments such as this from Ansara and Miller (1986: 154-5) pose, I think, irresolvable problems for the discourse of progressive populism:

Important ethnic, racial, class and cultural differences divide "the people"... The new populism of community organisations has not developed either an intellectual breadth or a strategic clarity that would create conditions for a broader appeal to the constituencies that are at the heart of the women's... movement.

Because feminism seeks to transform the relationships, identities and values associated with "women" and "men" this is constructed by the progressive populist discourse as a "special interest" that will split and undermine populists' hard won work of building the unity and solidarity of the people. Sawyer (2004: 13), exploring the fate of state feminism in Canada, argues that populist politics reconstruct feminist justice claims from a "public good" to a "special interest" by severing the link between feminist justice claims and redistributive justice claims: "Doubt was being cast on the authenticity of such [feminist] goals and on the interests and motives of their proponents... [Feminist groups] were no longer regarded as having an authentic democratic role... but rather were depicted as self-interested and unrepresentative special interests".

Within the discursive landscape of progressive populism, we can see similar processes at work: feminist justice claims are constructed as incapable of advancing the people's authentic interests because it only speaks to and supports "special pleaders". Scanlon (2001: 64) argues that rejecting feminist and anti-racist justice claims makes good sense strategically because these ideas have very little popular support; it is reasonable to focus only on authentic issues that will unify a majority: "It is increasingly clear that policies targeted to address racial and gender injustices have insufficient potential to animate a broad-based movement for economic justice... race and gender based policies cannot unify the bottom two-thirds of the US population".

The author goes on to argue that feminist and anti-racist struggles are counterproductive for the left because they alienate potential allies. Better, he

argues, to focus instead on a "working families" agenda that "could allow us to use a unifying language about... the fortunes of common people" (ibid: 64). Because women and minority groups would disproportionately benefit from measures to reduce economic inequality, it is sound politics to jettison ideas and identities that might put this strategy at risk. Furthermore, since most Americans "simultaneously yet rationally hold substantial economic populist sentiments and conservative beliefs...[it] may not be necessary to educate or enlighten many... Americans before speaking to their basic class interests" (Martin 2010: 374). Again, in terms of strategy and reflecting the authentic views of the people, from a progressive populist standpoint, it seems a folly to unnecessarily antagonise potential allies by focusing on issues that might alienate them from the cause of social justice.

From the quotations above, we can see how feminism (and anti-racism) are constructed as "divisive", "political" and/or "partisan" whilst populism is constituted as "unifying", "strategic" and "viable". Progressive populism, in its attempt to build a majority, appears to systematically displace and marginalise identities and practices—especially those related to the development of gender consciousness, feminist policy preferences and feminist justice claims.

To understand this self-censorship by progressive populism we need to recall how populist politics in the US context is seeking to interpellate patriotic ideals. It seems that as long as progressive populism seeks its legitimacy and authenticity in American exceptionalism rather than in transformative social justice ideas, it will continue to suppress gender consciousness and feminist practices in urban movements.

I will now turn to analyse the discourse, identities and social practices of the Tea Party and explore the fate of feminist justice claims within this right-wing discursive repertoire.

The women of the Tea Party: motherhood as anti-feminism

The Tea Party positions itself as the heir to the populist politics of Barry Goldwater in the 1960s and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. During the 1964 Presidential race, Goldwater, a Republican, campaigned as an anti-communist, a free-marketeer and above all, an angry man tired of the tyranny of state over the lives of ordinary people. Here is Goldwater (1964, p.1-2) summarising his political philosophy:

It is the cause of Republicanism to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people... We Republicans... define government's role where needed at many, many levels, preferably through the one closest to the people involved. Our towns and our cities, then our counties, then our states, then our regional contacts - and only then, the national government. That, let me remind you, is the ladder of liberty, built by decentralised power.

Goldwater's failed campaign for the presidency articulated a different emphasis on the role of the state which contrasted with the dominant model used during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations in the 1960s. Rather than the state

being defined as "activist" whereby its role is to intervene in the lives of citizens in order to ensure equality of opportunity and (to a lesser extent in the US context) equality of outcome, Goldwater defines the state in a much more limited way. The state's responsibility is simply to maintain the societal status quo in terms of morality and class, racial and gender hierarchies (Klatch 1988; Diamond 1995). This populist backlash against the social reforms of both the New Deal and Great Society programmes captured the imagination of a burgeoning grassroots right-wing movement (Fisher 1994; McGirr 2002; Lassiter 2007).

When Reagan (1981, p.1-2) comes to power in 1981, he echoes Goldwater's populist ideas and places them at the heart of his Administration:

We suffer from the longest and one of the worst sustained inflations in our national history... In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem. From time to time we've been tempted to believe that society has become too complex to be managed by self-rule, that government by an elite group is superior to government for, by, and of the people. Well, if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?

The Tea Party is organised and mobilised in relation to the banking crisis of 2008 and the subsequent ballooning of national debt (Lepore 2010; Lilla 2010; Zernicke 2010). In order to prevent the meltdown of global capitalism, George W. Bush and then Barack Obama bailed out the financial services industry, large mortgage providers such as Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae and the auto industry, most notably General Motors through the Troubled Asset Relief Programme (TARP) (Lanchester 2010). In addition, Obama and the Federal Reserve instituted a "stimulus" to the economy by pumping new money into banks and infrastructure projects in order to stabilise the market, support job creation and prompt banks to start lending again to businesses. The almost total collapse of the American economy and the subsequent efforts to prevent another Great Depression by increasing government spending to bail out the banks was a salient political moment that sparked the initial Tea Party mobilisation (Lepore 2010; Zernicke 2010). Importantly, Obama's continuation with his other domestic priorities, especially healthcare reform, also galvanised right-wing grassroots actors.

I label the discourse of the Tea Party as "regressive populism" as its goals are concerned with limiting government intervention in the lives of Americans. Zernike (2010: 2) summarises the aims of the Tea Party as organising for "less invasive government, lower taxes, [and] fealty to the view of the nation the founders enshrined in the Constitution". It is important, however, to note that the "Tea Party" is not a unified movement. It is constituted by a number of local and regional groups and has no centralised leadership (ibid: 2010). Certainly, organisations such as FreedomWorks, the Tea Party Patriots and the Tea Party Express and Republican politicians and commentators such as Michele Bachmann, Sarah Palin and Jim DeMint are all seeking legitimacy to speak for and direct Tea Party activities, but, at this moment in time, no one national organisation or identifiable leader has emerged to corral this disparate group of

actors. Regressive populism's social practices are two pronged: organising and mobilising networked community organisations to challenge elite domination in government and transforming the Republican Party to make it more reflective of the authentic will of the people.

The regressive populist discourse is structured by one key idea: a return to the first principles of the Founding Fathers. The Founding Fathers—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and a number of others—are used as a proxy by the discourse to interpellate two inter-related ideas related to retrenchment. Firstly, looking back to the Founding Fathers is a discursive device to build solidarity among Tea Partiers by uniting grassroots actors, rather paradoxically, under a banner of radical individual autonomy. The Founders, regressive populists argue, conceived of America as a place of unfettered freedom whereby individuals could pursue happiness unconstrained by an overweening state. Regressive populism:

fires up emotions by appealing to individual opinion, individual autonomy, and individual choice, all in the service of neutralizing, not using, political power. It gives voice to those who feel they are being bullied, but this voice has only one, Garbo-like thing to say: I want to be left alone (Lilla 2010: 2).

Liberty for regressive populism means a focus on negative rights—the right of citizens not to be interfered with in getting on in life by other citizens or by the state (Diamond 1995: 6-9). In interviewing a number of Tea Partiers across the country, Zernicke (2010: 10) found that “they had a visceral belief that government had taken control of their lives—and they wanted it back... They had a strong faith in the autonomous individual”. For regressive populism, “real” autonomy can only be guaranteed by a limited state.

This notion of autonomy is important as this helps to shed light on the second idea that is interpellated by the promotion of the Founding Fathers: laissez-faire capitalism. It seems strange that in light of capitalism's self-evident destructive activities in the financial sector and its negative effect on the economic well-being of the American public that regressive populism adopts this concept. However, because the guiding principle of the discourse is a libertarian view of negative liberty, this form of autonomy can only be achieved through the practice of free-market capitalism. Capitalism is the symbol and safeguard of negative liberty because it is only in an environment of a decentralised state and a free market that individuals can be radically free to pursue happiness. “Free markets just needed room to work... it was the American people, not the elites in Washington, who knew how to confront the [financial] crisis” (Zernicke 2010: 24). Since the state has been captured and is controlled by self-interested elites—both unrepresentative party political hacks and bureaucratic “pointy-headed” social reformers—the state cannot be trusted to protect liberty. The state is fatally compromised and corrupted. Only the free market, which is ideologically free from elite interference, can guarantee individuals the opportunity to practice freedom.

These structuring devices of the discourse orientate its social practices in terms of community organising. What is interesting to note is how the social practices of the discourse mirror those of the progressive populism. As I discussed earlier, since the Tea Party self-consciously models its community organising work on progressive populism, we see two movements, using similar ideas of populism, similar strategies for organising but mobilising actors for divergent goals. For instance, the elite Washington-based organisation, FreedomWorks, which is seeking to capture and direct the disparate groups which all identify with the aims of the Tea Party, discusses strategies for organising the movement like this:

Don't reject that label [of community organiser]! Embrace that label... true community organisers are what this movement is all made of. We don't like that term because now we have a Community Organiser-in-Chief [referring to Barack Obama who worked as an organiser in Chicago in the 1980s] who got his lessons from Saul Alinsky. I say, let's read Saul Alinsky... and let's use it against them (Steinhauser quoted in Zernicke 2010: 3).

With this explicit adoption of progressive populist practices, regressive populism also uses a majoritarian strategy to unite "the people" and to avoid unnecessary alienation of potential allies. Again, FreedomWorks argues that activists should avoid discussing social issues (especially abortion and gay marriage) and stay focused on arguments for a limited state and individual autonomy: "It's going to split this movement, it's going to distract us... The debt is \$13billion. Why would you focus on gay marriage when that's the real threat to freedom—the debt?" (Steinhauser quoted in Zernicke 2010: 42).

Regressive populism also directs its community organising work towards infiltrating and co-opting the Republican Party to force out so-called Republicans in Name Only (RINOs) to ensure that the Party reflects the authentic interests of the people. This practice of co-optation takes on two forms: primary challenges and transforming local party leadership. Sometimes grassroots actors target centre-right elected officials who are deemed to be ideologically compromised by serving elite interests in Washington rather than the will of their constituents⁵. A primary challenge is instituted when a Tea Party candidate enters a local race in an attempt to displace the incumbent and win the nomination as the Republican candidate. Other times, grassroots actors are organised to infiltrate the Republican party "from below" by running as local party officials and thus attempting to change the nature of the Party from the inside (Zernicke 2010).

Although regressive and progressive populism share similar social practices, in terms of identity constructions, regressive populism is noteworthy—especially in terms of gender consciousness and identity (Klatch 1988; Jetter, Orleck and Taylor 1997; Blee 1998). In the discourse, the idea of the self is constituted in

⁵ For an excellent exploration of how the Tea Party uses primary challenges to pressurise the Republican Party to change, see the *This American Life* (29th October 2010) episode entitled: "This Party Sucks" <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/417/this-party-sucks>

two ways. Similar to progressive populism, the self is constructed as the "authentic people". Within regressive populism, the idea of the people is typically supplemented by appeals to the normalcy of actors involved in the movement:

I don't think people understand how normal these folks are and how diversified. You've got evangelicals and libertarians walking hand-in hand in cause of defence of individual liberties, against encroachments of big government... These folks are as normal as you and me. It could be your mother, your father (Arney 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010: 44).

I suspect that one of the reasons the discourse deploys authenticity and constructs its subjects as "normal" and "real" Americans is to justify why the membership and the leadership of the various Tea Partier groups is highly unrepresentative of the American population. Unlike progressive populism, which was seeking to unite middle and working class Americans of all backgrounds, the Tea Party appears to be dominated by white, educated, middle to upper class men and women who hold far-right views⁶ (Zernicke 2010; Parker 2011). The discursive pattern in regressive populism repeats the tropes of "real America" and "real Americans" as a way to legitimise the interests and social practices of a very narrow group of Americans as the true voice representing of all Americans.

This narrow group of actors taking on the identity of "real Americans", however, appears to be led by women and unlike in the progressive populist discourse, these women seem to articulate a clear gender identity and a right-wing gender consciousness. Importantly, these women appear to have found space within the Tea Party to organise *as women*. Here are a few examples of these expressions:

You know the old saying that if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy... Well, when legislation messes with mama's kids and it affects her family, then mama comes out fighting (Dawald 2010 quoted in Vogel 2010: 2).

Women can be stay-at-home moms and public servants... This isn't about gearing "conservative" towards women and separating the movement. It's not about changing the [Republican] party to suit the identity. It's about reaching out to people like you. (Mott 2011 quoted in Hess 2011: 3).

Barack Obama's fatal mistake was that he came between me and my child's future (Stefano 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010b: 108).

From the language used above, we can see how some women use their identity as mothers to make sense of their activism within the Tea Party. In keeping with the regressive ideas of this discourse, it is not surprising that some women find a seemingly stereotypical idea of "concerned motherhood" as a valuable way of informing their community organising work. Indeed, it seems that the discourse creates space for these types of identities to be generated in order to legitimise

⁶ Trying to understand who Tea Partiers are is a highly contested topic. However, Zernicke (2010), through a New York Times poll and Parker (2011), through a multi-state survey do appear to document that middle to higher income whites holding far-right views are over-represented in the Tea Party whilst various minority groups of any political persuasion are vastly under-represented.

its credentials as an authentic expression of the people. Having women identify as mothers fighting for their families' futures further deepens the populist claims of the discourse.

The other is constructed, unsurprisingly, as cultural and political elites. Ironically, economic elites are not challenged or displaced. It is both the Democratic and Republican Parties and the entrenched liberal elite in the mainstream media and in government bureaucracies that are othered in this discourse. For example, this activist is discussing why she was attracted to the Tea Party and why she started organising: "It was [composed of] very motivated people, people like me... They hadn't spend a lifetime being politicians; they didn't go to the Kennedy School of Government [at Harvard University], they didn't work as a staffer on Capitol Hill" (Stefano 2010 quoted in Zernicke 2010a: 1). As we can see, politicians, east coast liberals and political insiders are all othered by being constructed as inauthentic and incapable of serving the will of the people.

The question remains, however, why regressive populism creates space for at two ideas of the self—the people and concerned mothers—whilst the progressive populist discourse suppresses gender identity and consciousness. Klatch (1988) and Schreiber (2010) argue that, for social conservatives, motherhood is a key identity and institution through which to defend traditional moral values. The way in which regressive populism constitutes this particular identity of concerned mothers also seems to corroborate Zernicke's (2010) and Parker's (2011) findings about the reactionary views of many Tea Partiers. As I noted earlier, this phenomenon of self-censorship on the left can be partly explained by populism's patriotic roots in the US. Left-wing populists have to work harder to prove their pro-American credentials. Some progressive appear to be haunted by the "extreme" rhetoric of 1960s social movements and do not want be labelled as radical as this might derail their political aims. Therefore progressive populism highlights victories of "the people" over broader analyses of systemic change.

However, regressive populism is employing some interesting discursive methods with regards to women in activism and this needs to be explored in further detail. In order to prompt some women into action, the discourse needs to appeal to an essentialised identity that many women deeply value—motherhood. Rather than interpret what Nancy Naples (1992) calls "activist mothering" as solely a progressive activity, it is important to define conservative women's social practices that seek to preserve traditional social relations and reduce the role of the state in the lives of women and their families as activist mothering as well (for an interesting discussion of this which focuses on elite right-wing women's social practices see: Schreiber 2002 and 2008). Women's Tea Party organising seems to generate a gender identity, consciousness and a sense of efficacy which influences their policy preferences.

Although she is discussing left-wing women, Sue Tolleson-Rinehart's (1992: 31) analysis of gender consciousness appears to perfectly describe the conservative women of the Tea Party: "[Gender] consciousness beyond stimulating women's

beliefs about their own political roles, also reorganises orientations toward other issues by motivating women to believe that they have unique perspectives on public problems and can offer unique solutions". Indeed, when Sarah Palin discusses her idea of "Mama Grizzlies" she is attempting to channel a tough-minded identity of motherhood that seeks to mobilise women for political action based on their unique perspectives as women and mothers. By adopting the role of activist mothers, some women actors in the Tea Party seem to be infused with a sense of efficacy and work towards issues that are important to them and their families.

The question remains, however, whether identifying as women and mothers is sufficient for generating a feminist perspective and articulating feminist justice claims within the populist discourse of the Tea Party. Tellingly, the policy preferences of the Tea Party—the rolling back of the state and the unleashing of free-market capitalism—are not compatible with a feminist vision of equality and social justice. What we appear to be seeing in the Tea Party is a familiar and constrained performance of gender in right-wing politics (Klatch 1988; Jetter, Orleck and Taylor 1997; Blee 1998). Rather than generating feminist identities and justice claims, a traditional, moralistic and highly problematic identity of "activist mother" is constituted whereby "mothers' activism may indeed (temporarily) *expand* the base of political participation but with the goal of *limiting* citizenship and constraining democracy (Ackelsberg 2001: 406, emphasis in the original text). Women identifying *as women* and entering public space to be activists in the Tea Party is not necessarily a positive process that will strengthen feminism or support democratic politics since these women appear to be advocating for policies that would reduce the equality for all citizens through the dismantling of key state institutions and social protection systems. A gender identity of concerned motherhood is not enough to generate feminist justice claims by these right-wing women in action.

From my analysis we can see how populism in both left-wing and right-wing community organising silences feminist justice claims and makes it difficult for women to develop a feminist identity that might orientate their actions towards radical social change. In my final section I will turn to discuss whether, in spite of the contradictions between feminism and populism, these two discourses can somehow be reconciled.

The possibilities for reconciling populism and feminism

It is unsurprising to discover how populist community organising discourses and practices suppress feminist justice claims. Because populist actors are concerned with voicing multi-issue grievances about the actions of elites, the discourse of populism is not really designed or equipped to accommodate a sophisticated construction of "the people". That the public feel they are being shut out of their democracy, being bossed around, disrespected and economically exploited by selfish elites is sufficient enough to motivate people

into action. Feminist politics, of course, make complimentary critiques about the problems that plague liberal democracies. As Minnich (1986: 191) argues:

A feminist vision of populism shares... a commitment to the rights of all people and an insistence that these rights are not to be set aside in the interests of any power group. We, too, insist that those governments are legitimate that derive their power from the people... We, too, insist that significant disparities of power in society disrupt the polity and so take our stand with those who lack power is not just a personal problem but a threat to the commonwealth.

Given this shared critique, the question remains whether populism and feminism can be reconciled. On the one hand, it is clear that these two perspectives are incompatible with each other. Populism derives its persuasive power from its ability to unite a diverse group of people under a single banner of grievance against elites. In hegemonic discourses of populism, anything that unnecessarily problematises this unity (in this case, feminism) must be silenced as this weakens the movement for change as solidarity will be compromised. This is why acknowledging power imbalances between people or advocating for specific policy solutions that disproportionately benefit a single group are marginalised.

Populism is a utopian "politics of faith" in the promise of democratic renewal (Canovan 1999, 2004; Arditi 2004). In the US, during this moment in time, there exists a yawning gap between the promise of democracy and what is actually delivered by elites and institutions. Populism, both progressive and regressive, brings into focus the democratic deficit that a significant number of Americans experience. As Arditi (2004:142) argues, populism haunts liberal democracy like a spectre "disturbing and renewing the political process". Thus it seems that populism and feminism cannot be reconciled because populism is not interested in the political, social and cultural concerns of feminism. Populism is the flipside to the operation of politics as usual. It is focused only on re-linking the ideal of democracy to its actual existing practices. This is why populism haunts democracy: it is always fluttering on the edges the democratic machinery of the state ready to strike when machinery of parties, politicians and bureaucracies become self-serving.

On the other hand, several left-wing community organising theorists argue that populism and feminism (and other identity-based movements) can co-exist. Rather than construct progressive populism as solely a practice of redistributive justice, these authors claim that populism can be reconstructed into something they call "transformative populism" (Kennedy, Tilly and Gaston 1990; Kleidman 2004). "Transformative populism [insists] on understanding and valuing diversity and on dealing with all kinds of inequality and injustice and not just the one type that affects the largest number of people in a community...[It builds] popular consciousness that makes it more difficult to shatter or co-opt the coalition" (Kennedy, Tilly and Gaston 1990: 319).

For transformative populists, community organising is constructed as a process by which to support forms of solidarity that encourage an organised and democratic left-wing voice that speaks to the discrete interests and the common private troubles of different groups. By building alliances based on difference,

this form of populism is constructing ways in which a diverse range of individuals and groups can struggle together for expanded social, political and economic rights. Ultimately, transformative populism is characterised as a way in which community-based problems can be linked to and explained by the social, political and economic structures of American society that reproduce inequalities.

While this way of reconciling populism with feminism is persuasive in theory, I am not convinced about how effective it is in the practice of displacing hegemonic forms of populism within left-wing community organising movements. Indeed, as I have demonstrated earlier in this article, progressive populism's dominant practices of suppressing difference—especially feminist claims—are well documented (Sen 2001; Martin 2002; Leavitt 2003). Based on my analysis of texts, I do not think it is possible for feminism and progressive populism to be reconciled without feminist justice claims being set aside for the sake of "solidarity". The logic of populism demands homogeneity and unity among "the people"—this appears to me to be an irreconcilable difference with the feminist project of expanding the idea of politics and political subjects in order to achieve equality and justice for women.

When we consider right-wing populism, the logic of populism continues to pose irresolvable problems for feminism but for different and perhaps more dangerous reasons. The regressive populism of the Tea Party appears to create space for women to adopt a gender identity and develop a form of gender consciousness. However, this identity of "activist mother", whilst providing meaning for some women's actions in public space, is deeply problematic. As Orleck (1997: 5) argues, right-wing activist mothers are not necessarily acting from positions of liberation: "The institution of motherhood... regulates acceptable behaviour, restricts expression and designates appropriate spaces for action... It is against the nexus of power relations that mother-activism must be assessed". Activism to maintain hegemonic gender roles and gender-based oppression may well promote efficaciousness but this form of activism should not be confused with social justice practices that seek to transform what we think is possible for women and men. Women organising *as women* is not necessarily feminist and as feminist actors we must guard against our language and practices being co-opted to legitimise anti-feminist and illiberal activism.

Conclusions

Populist politics are about articulating grievances, building solidarity among "the people" and challenging political, economic and cultural elites. Populist actors promote the concept of "authenticity" to movement outsiders, potential allies and to elites in order to legitimate their actions and transform the dominant practice of power in democratic regimes. Populism in the United States typically displaces revolutionary ideologies because populism is strongly associated with the founding myths of the nation in terms of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness. At this moment in time in the US, community

organising groups on both the left and the right are using populism as a way to mobilise local people and influence the policy outcomes at the local, state, national and international levels. In this article I explored how both left-wing and in right-wing populist discourses—in different ways and for different reasons—marginalise and silence feminist justice claims.

I analysed how left-wing progressive populist actors, concerned with being perceived as patriotic by outsiders, actively undermined and silenced feminist claims. The progressive populist discourse promotes gender neutrality in community organisations to marginalise women who seek to identify as women whilst at the same time operationalising a politics of authenticity to reconstruct feminist claims from "social justice" to "special interest" thus labelling feminism as an unrepresentative expression of elite partisan interests. This silencing of feminism was justified in terms of strategy: because feminist ideas cannot muster a majority in a given neighbourhood, it must be jettisoned for ideas and policies that can deliver a numerical majority to the movement.

In contrast, I also analysed how a right-wing regressive populist discourse as operationalised by the Tea Party used claims about motherhood to mobilise a constituency for action. Drawing on a rich mix libertarian ideas of radical personal autonomy whilst also borrowing organising strategies from progressive populism, this discourse seeks to reverse the New Deal and Great Society reforms by reducing the role of the state in lives of individual Americans. I examined how some women in the Tea Party, spurred on by the language of retrenchment, seemed to articulate a gender identity to make sense of their grassroots activism. Due to the development of a right-wing gender identity which limited women's ideas about themselves and their social role to traditional notions of motherhood, I argued that women in the Tea Party may well be undermining feminism and democracy through policy preferences that seek to reduce the equality of all citizens. Feminists working at the grassroots should be deeply suspicious of populist claims and practices for the organisation and mobilisation of different groups, since, based on my analysis, this appears to necessitate the displacement of feminist identities and justice claims in order to effectively constitute "the people" against "the elites".

Canovan (1999) discusses how democracy has two faces: one of faith and one of pragmatism. Populism, like feminism, can be understood as a politics of faith as it is demanding a transformation in the operation and practice of democracy through the redistribution of political, economic and cultural power from the few to the many. However, populism's construction of a fictitious people render its politics highly dangerous to the very democracy it is seeks to fortify because it denies the indispensable ingredient that gives democracy meaning: pluralism. By ignoring difference, populism cannot bring the promise of democracy into being—the process of different citizens encountering and deliberating with each other in public space to collectively identify problems and make just decisions.

Although much agonised over and debated, contemporary feminisms (and other politics of difference movements) do seek to make democracy meaningful by creating spaces, opportunities and processes for the articulation of different

social perspectives and collective decision-making about the nature of justice. As we move into a winter of discontent, populist movements are sweeping the globe and have, as they are designed to do, captured the imagination and drawn many people into protests in which they might not have otherwise participated. From the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street to *los indignados* to the alarming rise of the far-right in Europe, populist politics are on the upsurge. Feminist activists should be deeply sceptical and on-guard about these populist movements because if "the people" are invoked in ways that deny the plurality of various social experiences and perspectives for the sake of a mistaken belief in or cynical promotion of an abstract ideal of "unity" then feminists may well be left out in the cold.

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A movement of their own: voices of young feminist activists in the London Feminist Network

Finn Mackay

Abstract

A so-called "resurgence" of feminist activism in the UK is currently being reported by journalists, commentators and academics, with young women seemingly at the fore. This is remarkable given the reported backlash against feminism and the widely held view of young people in general, and young women in particular, as politically apathetic. In this qualitative study I focus on eight young feminist activists who arguably form part of this resurgence. All are members of the London Feminist Network, a grassroots, women-only, feminist activist organisation in London, England, UK. Through qualitative interviews I explored their motivations for becoming involved in feminist activism and their perception of the benefits that they gained, including political efficacy. The findings highlight the significance of women-only space in providing such benefits, and expose the impact of sexism in mixed social movements. Sociability and the opportunity to engage in collective political activism emerged as key motivations for joining LFN. Inspirations for joining were often negative, such as the mainstreaming of pornography, and the sexual objectification of women in the media. These were identified as barriers to the equal engagement of women in all political spheres, including social movements.

Introduction

From 1971 to 1978 the women's liberation movement in the UK formulated seven demands, agreed at national conferences. While great strides have been made in all these areas, the demands have not yet been met.

The gender pay gap is still around twenty percent (Redfern and Aune, 2010). Male violence claims, on average, the lives of two women every week in the UK and an estimated one in four women are victim to sexual violence (EVAW, 2007; HO, 2010).

The women's liberation movement arguably offered the best chance of changing the above statistics. Perhaps it still does. This potential and hope increasingly rests in the hands of the younger women who will shape this future; just as the aspirations and anxieties of society generally are often invested in youth as a whole.

For several decades young people in Britain, and many other democratic states, have been viewed as politically apathetic, and blamed for leading falling voter turnout and a general rejection of formal politics evident since the 1960s. In terms of voting, young people are indeed disengaged; though whether this is proof of a general rejection of politics is of course debateable (Kimberlee, 2002).

This supposed tide of youth apathy is often perceived to reach further than the polling booth; it is commonly and frequently asserted that young people are bored with politics generally, turned off by current affairs and uninterested in movements for social change (Henn et al, 2007; Pirie and Worcester, 2000; White et al, 2000). Young women are found to be even less interested in politics than their male peers, and less knowledgeable about political affairs; a gender gap which has also been observed in research on the political participation of older adults (*Electoral Commission*, 2003). Given such evidence it is perhaps not surprising that within debates on the future of feminism, young women are often found lacking. "Young women particularly are frequently dismissed as insufficiently political, as being interested more in shopping than in social change" (Redfern and Aune, 2010: 11).

This context, plus the aggressive cultural and political reaction to the previous threats posed by feminism in the 1970s, what Faludi (1992) calls a "backlash", makes it all the more remarkable that over recent months journalists, authors and academics have begun to comment on a so-called "resurgence" of feminism in the UK, allegedly being led by young women (Cochrane, 2011, 2010; Banyard, 2010; Redfern and Aune, 2010; Walter, 2010; Woodward and Woodward, 2009). Any such resurgence goes some way to troubling negativity about the state of the women's liberation movement in the UK today, and could also challenge the predominant view of youth in general, and female youth in particular, as politically apathetic.

In this article I shall consider the motivations and experiences of some young women who have sought out and pursued involvement in contemporary feminist activism by joining the London Feminist Network (LFN). I shall draw on my findings from qualitative interviews with eight young LFN activists, which I conducted as part of an MSc dissertation in 2010. While academic research has tended to focus on young women who do not identify as feminists (Scharff, 2010; Budgeon, 2001), I am interested in the growing number who do.

These activists have overcome many barriers on the journey to their political identification. The young women I interviewed are alert to the obstructions that

The 7 Demands

1. Equal pay
2. Equal education and job opportunities
3. Free contraception and abortion on demand
4. Free 24hr nurseries
5. Financial and legal independence
6. An end to all discrimination against lesbians and a woman's right to define her own sexuality
7. Freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status; and an end to all laws, assumptions and practices which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women

kept or alienated them from activism in other political spheres, including formal party politics, socialist or anarchist groups and the expanding social movements around environmentalism and globalisation. Thus their stories provide useful insights for scholars and activists who are concerned with the democratisation of all political arenas, from the formal to the informal. Such stories also speak to activists and researchers in the global feminist movement and may echo experiences and challenges elsewhere, contributing to debates on mixed organising and the involvement of men in feminism for example. I hope that presenting and celebrating the insights and contributions of these young activists can draw attention to what social movements may be missing, when women are missed out.

Youth, politics and feminism

Feminism and young women

Feminism is considered to have last been at its height in the UK in the late 1960s and 1970s; what is known as the “second wave” of the women’s liberation movement (Coote and Campbell, 1987). This movement is often described as one of the first of the “new” social movements to emerge in that period, which opened up new avenues for political participation, outside traditional arenas such as political parties or trade unions (Hague et al, 2003). Yet this uprising of women built on a much older history, including what is known as the “first wave” of feminism in the UK in the 1900s (Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller, 2007; Hester, 1992).

Alongside legislative successes in the mid-1970s such as the Equal Pay Act and Sex Discrimination Act, the movement brought male violence against women into the public domain, establishing a legacy of support services and building campaigns against pornography and prostitution (Hague et al, 2003; Bagilhole, 1997). Different schools of feminism emerged, with their own groups and publications, such as socialist feminism, Black feminism, revolutionary and radical feminism (Walby, 1990). Around the country women’s Consciousness Raising (CR) groups were set up, following the lead of the US (Peskalis, 1970). Such women-only groups were also partly a reaction and solution to experiences of sexism in the mixed social movements of the time, as Eschle (2001) points out:

The more radical women of the so-called second wave of feminism in the West were stimulated in part by the trivialisation of women’s concerns and their confinement to lower-status roles within the “New Left” movement, despite its rhetoric of egalitarian democracy (Eschle, 2001:5).

The growth and successes of the second wave are considered to have mobilised a concerted attack, or backlash, against it, which many people believe is still in force today. In her seminal work, Faludi (1992) describes the backlash as “a pre-emptive strike that stops women long before they reach the finishing line” (1992: 14). Largely considered to have taken effect from the 1980s, a climate of increased consumerism and the pervasive influence of neo-liberal economics,

alongside many years of conservative government is seen to have contributed to the strength of this backlash as the women's movement began to fracture (McRobbie, 2009). Since then it has often only been mentioned in claims of its demise, with many commentators happy to declare feminism dead (Redfern and Aune, 2010).

McRobbie (2009) argues that the backlash now takes the form of post-feminism, creating an environment where feminism is only invoked to bedisavowed. In this climate, girls and young women are keen to present as liberated and empowered, so seek to distance themselves from a movement portrayed as necessary for women who are *not*. This is partly made possible due to the success of feminism, in education, employment and legal protection for example. The mainstreaming of the gains that were won mean that many young women have grown up with advantages bestowed by their sisters before them, which appear to them to be common sense, not hard won battles in a liberatory struggle (Budgeon, 2001). Young feminists Baumgardner and Richards elaborate, "the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it – it's simply in the water" (2000:17). This success can then be used against feminism, as proof that it is no longer needed; that society is post-feminism. Against this backdrop a new feminism emerged, originating in the US in the 1990s and calling itself the "third wave".

Third wave feminism is usually credited to Rebecca Walker who founded the Third Wave Foundation in the US in 1993 (Henry, 2004). Third wave is often portrayed as a reaction to what went before, sometimes seen to be based on simplistic critiques of second wave feminism as racist, prudish, restrictive and focussed on women as victims (Scanlon, 2009). As Henry asserts, "third wavers have frequently created a feminism of their own by pitting their wave against the second wave" (2004:37).

It should be pointed out however, that the notion of waves of feminism is disputed. In chronological terms, it is difficult to identify a starting point for feminism. Though here in the UK the suffrage campaigns of the 1900s are usually identified as the "first wave", women resisted the brutality of male supremacy long before then (Hester, 1992). Likewise, between the so-called waves, women were still resisting, including in organised ways (Caine, 1997; Bashkevin, 1996; Byrne, 1996). The term "third wave" can be used purely chronologically, to describe the current observed increases in feminist activism amongst a new generation too young to have been active in the 1970s. However, the term can also be ideological, as explained above, to describe a perceived (often welcomed) shift away from the politics associated with the second wave. As I will explain in my findings, the majority of young activists in my small study did not identify with the term third-wave.

The struggle continues

Recent years have seen a number of books published on the subject of contemporary feminism in the UK (Banyard, 2010; Dean, 2010; Redfern and Aune, 2010; Walter, 2010; Woodward and Woodward, 2009). In November 2009 an *Independent* newspaper article proclaimed that women's groups were thriving in Britain again, as the "Topshop generation" added women's rights to their agenda of shopping, partying and looking pretty (Measure, 2009). Redfern and Aune's (2010) recent book is based on their survey of 1300 feminist activists, nearly half of whom were under 25 and the majority of whom reported being feminists since their teens. In July 2010 the newspaper *The Guardian* ran an article titled "Feminism is not finished" on the "resurgence" of feminist activism across the country, noting young women's involvement in new campaigns against pornography, lap-dancing clubs, rape and all forms of male violence against women (Cochrane, 2010).

These activities that younger feminists are apparently involved in highlight some continuity with the second wave women's liberation movement, as Redfern and Aune's research showed: "85% of our survey respondents think that the important feminist issues today are 'quite similar' or 'very similar' to those of the 1970s" (2010:16). There are also signs of a broad adoption of agendas previously associated more with radical feminism, for example mobilisations against pornography and prostitution, a feature that also emerged in my study (Crow, 2000).

New feminist groups have begun to appear across the UK since the early 2000s. London Feminist Network formed in 2004 and has inspired numerous other Feminist Networks to form across the country. The tradition of Reclaim the Night marching, founded in Britain in 1977, which declined from the late 1980s, was revived in London in 2004 and again, this has inspired towns and cities from Aberdeen to Devon to organise their own local marches against rape and male violence (www.reclaimthenight.org).

The youth problem in feminism

It still appears that any such resurgence is far from a majority pursuit however, with evidence suggesting that most young women today, in line with McRobbie's (2009) thesis, do not identify as feminist. Supporting the charge of individualism that has often been fired at young women, and indeed youth generally, Budgeon's (2001) research with young women in the UK found that although they had sympathy with feminist aims, and expected equal pay, equal access to education and work for example, they saw these as individual achievements and had no identification with the idea of a collective feminist movement. Scharff's (2010) research in Britain and Germany also found that most young women did not identify as feminist, associating the word with homophobic and misogynist stereotypes that have long been used against feminism, namely the spectre of the man-hating, masculine, hairy, lesbian

feminist (see also Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe, 2008; Sharpe, 2001). Such findings over the years have fuelled a focus on younger women as emblematic of the changing, and possibly declining, women's liberation movement (Greer, 2000).

In the West the media has encouraged this view by often presenting debates on the changing form of feminism as "a generational cat-fight" (Bulbeck and Harris, 2007: 221), pitting older feminists against younger women, and young feminists in particular; or simply asserting that feminism is dead for young women today, as Griffin (2001) explains. "Feminism is constructed as irrelevant to young women, and/or young women are represented as antagonistic or apathetic towards feminism, at least in contemporary Western societies" (Griffin, 2001: 182). Segal for example bemoans the "frank rejection of feminism by many young women" (1999: 2). Even when young women do take action, it is often viewed as frivolous and individualistic, more about lifestyle and consumerism than collective social change, as Aapola et al (2005) summarise:

Young women have therefore been depicted as a problem for feminism, either because they are reluctant to call themselves feminists, or because the feminism they are seen to enact is not familiar to those who may feel they are the true torch bearers of the movement (2005: 201).

It's not the winning, it's the taking part – benefits of participation

When people *are* politically engaged in various ways, there is evidence that such activity is beneficial, and good for the democratic health of society, as Parry et al (1992) suggested in their foundational study of political engagement in Britain. "The experience of participation, not only of the results, but of the process itself, is crucial to the vitality of democracy itself" (Parry et al, 1992: 15).

There are of course many different understandings of democracy; the term is widely used but rarely defined (Schmitter and Karl, 1991). At its most basic, it is often used to refer to electoral or political democracy: the presence of political elections – ideally fair and transparent – within nation states (ibid). It can also refer to opportunities for local and national political participation, between intermittent elections, such as the everyday ability for citizens to be heard by accountable decision makers, and to be welcomed and facilitated to play a role in economic and social debate and decision-making; particularly in relation to their community, wellbeing or livelihood, but also in shaping and directing their country and its role in the world. Such participation is what Evans (2003) identifies as the main ingredient of democracy: "The decisive test of a democracy is its capacity to encourage its population to play an active role in its government" (2003: 91).

It is in this sense that I use the term also, while acknowledging the many critiques of the idea and reality of claims to democracy, not least from feminist scholars. Historically and currently, women and other oppressed groups have been barred from the vote and continue to be underrepresented in governments around the world. As Pateman (1989) points out: "For feminists, democracy has *never* existed; women have never been and still are not admitted as full and

equal members and citizens in any country known as a democracy" (Pateman, 1989:210). Ideally, a democratic system should allow "citizens a collective voice and a point of peaceful negotiation over the issues that affect them" (Power Inquiry, 2006: 270). Unfortunately, ideals are often not reality; perhaps the notion of democracy is, as Gandhi said of the civilised West, nothing more than a nice idea, but it is arguably one worth aspiring towards.

Political participation by individuals, either alone, or through organised groups, facilitates a multiplicity of issues onto the public agenda, through formal politics or via social movements. This can be especially important for marginalised groups who do not see themselves represented in their government and who are therefore reluctant to rely on their representatives to represent their voice without some encouragement. Political participation is considered to benefit the individual as well as society, by increasing individual activists' confidence, lifeskills, networks and political experience; a political efficacy which in turn, can increase the likelihood of continuing political engagement into the future (Kimberlee, 2002; Youniss et al, 2002; Parry et al, 1992). Early political experiences are thus seen as highly influential, with the suggestion that such experiences during youth increase the chances of continuing involvement. As Youniss et al (2002) assert, "service and participation in youth organisations during adolescence is found to predict adult political behaviour", suggesting such people are more likely to be politically engaged into adulthood (2002: 125).

Involvement in social movements could be *particularly* beneficial therefore for women, of all ages, who often score lower than men on measures of political efficacy. Large-scale surveys of adults in the UK, such as the British Election Studies and the 2003 Audit of Political Engagement, found women less likely than men to report knowledge about politics, to talk about politics with peers or take leadership roles in political groups (Norris et al, 2004; Rappoport, 1981). Women who are active in social movements, and benefiting in terms of gaining confidence, political awareness and campaigner skills, may therefore be expected to report high levels of political efficacy, and this is something I explore in the case of young feminist activists. Before presenting some of these findings, I shall briefly outline how my research was conducted.

An insider researcher's perspective

As well as researching contemporary feminism in the form of LFN, I am also a participant in this movement. I identify as a Radical Feminist, I founded LFN and the revived London Reclaim the Night in 2004 and played a significant leadership role in the Network until 2010, when I backed away from some of the more direct organisation to focus on my current PhD studies.

There are many different understandings of radical feminism (Gunew, 1991; Walby, 1990; Marychild Claire, 1981). I suggest some recognisable defining features are an analysis of patriarchy, a focus on the significance of male violence against women as both a cause and consequence of women's inequality relative to men, the extension of this focus to pornography and prostitution as

additional forms of male violence against women, a critique of socially constructed gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality and a promotion of women-only political organising. Many attempted simpler definitions of what is a loose, informal and shifting political identity have been far from favourable, with radical feminists commonly maligned as man-haters, biological determinists and ultimately redundant (Byrne, 1996; Gelb, 1986; Campbell, 1980).

As there is no one radical feminist manifesto, no organised political party, no set of demands to sign up to, it is impossible to provide any overarching definition of this identity. My own radical feminism is concerned with all the (arguably) defining features I have outlined above, as well as with how this analysis fits into a broader critique of global capitalism, intersects with oppressions based on categories other than sex, and contributes to anti-racism, anti-imperialism and a concern for the environment and non-human animals.

Being a feminist activist myself, and a participant within LFN, makes this a piece of insider research. Kanuha (2000) defines insider research as "conducting research with communities or identity groups of which one is a member" (Kanuha, 2000: 440). Like any method of social research, insider research has both strengths and weaknesses, but is often viewed as particularly vulnerable to charges of bias. The unique positionality of the insider researcher necessitates an awareness of the challenges this dual role can bring, such as a sense of conflicted loyalties, an unwillingness to publicise negative aspects of one's own community or the difficulties of spotting nuance and significance in beliefs and practices that seem commonplace (Walsh, 2004; Edwards, 2003).

The insider researcher is far from the positivist ideal of an objective and impartial social scientist (Law, 2004; Bryman, 2001). From a feminist perspective this is not necessarily negative. Feminist researchers have contributed to well-known critiques of positivism and objectivity and to reformulations of methodological validity and rigour (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1991). It has been pointed out that no social research is unbiased (Taylor, 1998; Stanley and Wise, 1983). As Maynard argues, all researchers are always present within, and influence their research, "no research is carried out in a vacuum" (1994: 48).

During the course of my research, while being alert to the challenges outlined above, I was also able to benefit from my insider position. For example, I did not have to go through "gatekeepers" to access research participants (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1988). I was also familiar with the culture, codes and language of LFN, giving me some commonality with the research participants, what feminist ethnographer Naples refers to as "a greater linguistic competence" (2003: 46). In short, I experienced my insider position only as a benefit and did not encounter any tensions. This may be partly because LFN is such a large group, few attend every meeting or event and it is possible to attend events and not see the same activists twice; I have not seen most of my interviewees since conducting their interviews. In addition, as none of the interviewees were close

friends or colleagues I did not have to deal with any changes of relationship at the undertaking of a researcher position (Kanuha, 2000).

Study design

I used the qualitative method of semi-structured interviewing, to allow a structured yet flexible interview conversation (Flick, 2006). Interviews lasted one to two hours. Interview transcripts were then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ritchie et al, 2003). The interview method suited my project as I was determined to facilitate the participants to define their own politics and activism, in their own words, rather than limit their responses in a closed, pre-coded questionnaire for example; though this quantitative approach has often been used in studies of youth political participation, and is often critiqued for being reductionist (O'Toole et al, 2003).

The study

I recruited research participants through an initial advertisement on the LFN e.forum in April 2010. Membership of this forum was just over 1600 as of June 2011. LFN describes itself as a women-only, feminist activist organisation, actively working against patriarchy and to end violence against women (VAW) in all its forms. The group uses a broad definition of VAW, including pornography and prostitution as well as rape and domestic violence, while also making links between patriarchy and poverty, racism and war and militarism. Regarding abortion, the group is pro-choice. Patriarchy is defined as a system of male supremacy, in line with Walby's definition as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990:20).

Eleven women responded to the initial advert. The selection of interviewees was mainly based on convenience sampling – those who were available for interview during June – July 2010. I did some purposive sampling in that I selected the youngest respondents and also actively targeted Black women in an effort to diversify the sample. I also selected new activists and those who had not been highly active thus far, again to diversify the sample. However, I was not aiming for a statistically representative sample of all feminist activists within LFN, nor can I claim this for my research (Gomm, 2004). As a piece of qualitative research, I attempt only to relay the voices of these young feminist activists and to treat their accounts as valid in their own right. Each account provides an insight into what made these young women join LFN, how they came to identify as feminists and as feminist activists, what motivates their activism and how they contextualise this in their broader political and social landscape.

The eight activists interviewed were all between 17 and 28 years old; the majority (six) identified as white British, one as British Indian and one as Bangladeshi. Five were in full time university education, one was still at school completing sixth form, the remaining two were both in full time employment in the charity sector. None reported having parenting or caring responsibilities.

Names have been replaced with fictionalised names in order to protect anonymity.

“Guys are told they can create change, but women aren’t” – young feminists speak out

Motivations for becoming interested in feminism

The eight young women I interviewed had diverse routes into LFN and it was often impossible for them to identify when they first became aware of feminism, or when they began to call themselves feminist. They described a variety of influential experiences, what I call feminist triggers.

These were not always the experiences one might expect, the main example being in the case of domestic or sexual violence. The majority (five) had direct experiences of male violence. Two were survivors of rape, two had witnessed domestic violence in childhood, one had lost a family member to domestic homicide and one had recently left an abusive heterosexual relationship. Two recounted experiences that may not appear to be direct forms of violence: one had briefly been involved in pornography and one in modelling as a teenager – however, both described these as forms of male violence. It may be easy to assume that such experiences were prime motivations for becoming involved in feminism, yet each of the interviewees affected insisted that their feminism did not begin with these incidents, but was formed much earlier, often in childhood or their early teens; though they could rarely pinpoint an exact year or age. Indeed, it was common for interviewees to claim that their feminist politics were almost inherent or biological, as if the calibre of political identity can be judged in years, and they did not want to be found lacking.

This desire to claim feminism from an early age sometimes resulted in contradictory accounts. For example, twenty four year old white British student Grace, recalled that she did not openly identify as a feminist until sixth form college, an environment she found radical and alternative compared to her previous school. Despite this, she went on to state that somehow, she had always been a feminist:

I didn't really understand at this point that there were different kinds of feminists at all, but I just knew I was a feminist, there was never a point I didn't call myself a feminist.

Annie, a white twenty two year old NGO worker, also claimed an intrinsic feminist identity:

I was definitely always a feminist, there's degrees of understanding and it just increased incrementally over the years, I don't think there's any one monumental event.

These contradictory accounts perhaps reflect the difficulty of identifying a personal “start date”, for a political identity that is attached to a largely informal movement, with fluid and informal boundaries, as Norris (2002) highlights:

(I)t is far more difficult to pin down evidence for the more informal sense of belonging and identification with social movements – feminists, pacifist groups, environmentalists – where it is often difficult to know what it means to ‘join’ even for the most committed (how many feminists who sympathise with the women’s movement can be counted as card carrying members of NOW or equivalent bodies?) (2002: 142).

Some of the activists did acknowledge a time when they were not feminist, or not aware of feminism, and they highlighted their feminist triggers in their feminist awakening. Two cited politicised female school teachers who influenced them and Bella, the youngest at 17 years old, had benefited from studying feminism in A-Level politics at her sixth form college. One of the activists, Catriona, a white British, 18 year old politics student, felt she was drawn to feminism before other social movements because gender inequality was most obvious to her, being female and experiencing it herself:

I’d become aware of a lot of other social issues through feminism, because I’m the one that’s disadvantaged, so that’s about feminism, whereas I’m advantaged in other ways, so, I think that was the one that I realised.

Only one activist spoke of being influenced by a feminist mother. Deepti, a twenty one year old MA student, who identified as British Indian, recounted that she had always been familiar with the term “feminist” but it took her own feminist trigger to make it resonate with her. In her case it was reading Ariel Levy’s book *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (2006) when she was eighteen:

She [her mother] called herself a feminist, so, like, I always heard that word. But then I read *Female Chauvinist Pigs* and I just loved it ‘cos it was so accessible, ‘cos there was a whole group of us and we were 18, and we were, like, oh my god I’m acting like a female chauvinist pig, so it took a little trigger. But I just think, throughout, my mother’s always said the word “feminist”, but, like, I thought I was a feminist, but now I think I know I’m a feminist.

Supporting Inglehart’s (1977) theory of a shift to postmaterialist values, one of the interviewees, Hirni, a 28 year old lesbian working in the women’s sector who identified as Bangladeshi, stated that she was involved in feminism, as well as other social movements, because she felt she could be, and therefore should. She felt that her comfortable living standards freed her to join political campaigns, which were often linked to her own identity – lesbian and gay rights, women’s rights and anti-racism. As she put it, she felt it was a privilege to be able to take political action on issues she cared about:

‘Cos, like, I feel quite privileged in my life, like, living in the West we don’t have to worry about water, food, you know, the basic things... I don’t want to do nothing, and I’m lucky ‘cos I can do something, so, like, I want to. Those two things motivated me.

Two activists, unknown to one another, described similar feminist triggers, and were unusual in being able to pinpoint the motivating incident and year. Catriona identified a particular incident while watching MTV some time in 2006:

Obviously I'd always watched music videos, but, like, one day I was just looking at them and I was thinking, really, that's just not right, the women are hardly dressed. And, I guess it was just like a clicking sort of thing; and there were other things, like the pay gap and stuff, and I just thought: wait a minute, you never see women politicians and managers and stuff, but you see lots of naked women, and I thought, well why is this? And you know, I think I would have identified as a feminist at that time.

Eleanor, also aged 18 and a white British student, reported a similar feminist trigger:

I can remember actually, a particular incident. I was just watching TV, and it was something like "Home and Away" or one of those teen things, and just at the end they had this thing with pole dancing, and it was just, like, really disgusting.

When Eleanor discovered that her peers did not share her discomfort, and that many of her male friends admitted to using pornography, she was motivated to seek out feminist groups through the internet, hoping to find others who shared her views; believing that feminism generally was opposed to pornography:

Yeah, I googled "feminism" because, I think it was after that incident, I just thought, I really hope I'm not the only one who thinks like this.

It is interesting that Eleanor associated feminism with an anti-pornography stance, since this is not a universal view within feminism (Assiter and Carol, 1993). Where did she get this view? She reported having no feminist role models, and unlike some of the other interviewees did not claim a life-long feminism. She explained that she became interested in feminism while at secondary school through reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (2009). When asked what being a feminist meant to her she replied,

It's just like, being really passionate about women's rights and wanting equality and being against all this sexualisation and degradation of women in the media and believing women should have the right to have an abortion and be equal.

Searching for feminist groups on the internet, Eleanor found LFN and another UK activist organisation called "Object", who explicitly campaign against pornography: these discoveries confirmed her view that feminism was against pornography and thus that it was a movement she wanted to be part of.

Pornography was an important issue for all but one of my interviewees, a parallel with the second wave, when feminist anti-pornography groups were at their height (Long, 2011). Perhaps related to this, as mentioned earlier in this article, none of the activists identified as third-wave feminists; some said they did not know what the term meant, but most associated it with a post-feminist ideology and so were opposed to it, as illustrated by this quote from Deepti:

I hate all this bullshit about the third wave, saying that there's a wave means that, like, everything's changed, like we've got our rights and now we'll just go onto the next thing, but we're nowhere near the next stage, like, we're still trying to get basic rights from the 70s. And people saying "oh we're the third wave", like it's all won and this is the lipstick generation, and it's like they've forgotten what feminism's all about.

Eleanor stated that she did not know much about third-wave feminism, but she believed it did not take a strong stance against pornography and the “sex industry”.

I definitely, like, I don't get these, like, “pro-sex feminists” who are like, pro-prostitution, and I'm like, that's not sex.

This viewpoint led these activists away from third-wave feminist groups, and their politics around the “sex industry” led them to search for groups that explicitly took a stance against those issues.

As Eleanor stated of pornography,

I don't hear many people speaking out about it, it's, like, just accepted.

They found the stance they were looking for in LFN and the majority (6) did so through searching on the internet, emphasising the importance of an online presence for LFN in terms of recruiting new members and also, the relevance of taking, and publicly stating on the group website, an oppositional position to the “sex industry”.

The activists welcomed the opportunity to express their views on what they saw as the mainstreaming of pornography in youth culture. They were relieved to find others who shared their views, making them feel less isolated and this drew them to become further active within LFN, as Grace described:

You don't feel isolated, you're not completely crazy, you know, ranting and raving. Because it always happens when I have a conversation with a group of people who don't believe me, and I think – hang on, am I saying something wrong. And then, like, I go back to the group and I say – is what I'm saying unreasonable? And they say – no, you're absolutely right. And that kind of encouragement and support is really important.

All the activists were overt about their feminist identity and although they were proud feminists, they were aware of negative stereotypes associated with feminism (Scharff, 2010; Budgeon, 2001). In line with the perception of young women as reticent or hostile towards feminism, some of the activists had no feminist friends and had to deal with anti-feminism from peers on a regular basis.

I am a feminist, but... : resisting negative stereotypes

Given the backlash against feminism, and the reported rejection of the women's liberation movement by younger women, it is interesting that none of the activists associated feminism with negative connotations, though they were often affected by them, as school student Bella described:

everyone already called me the crazy feminist.

Why had these young women not believed the stereotypes? As indicated earlier, they all recounted early feelings of attachment to feminism and they associated it positively with women's rights.

I would have called myself a feminist around my 20s because I knew what that was, and that was fighting for women's rights, and I'd always associated that with feminism (Hirni).

As the activists read more about feminism and became engaged with LFN and other feminist groups, they became aware of different types of feminism and began to shape or reinforce their own distinct feminist identity. For example, three activists identified as Radical Feminists, often alongside an identity as a Socialist or "Leftie". Two identified as Socialist Feminists and one as a Liberal Feminist. They gave a variety of accounts as to what drew them to identify with identities such as these. Socialist or left-wing family members were mentioned as an influence, but so were conservative parents, who motivated an interest in alternative lifestyles and politics. All but one of the activists identified as "left-wing".

Several of the activists believed that their lack of investment or interest in mainstream young femininity might also have freed them to pursue their feminist politics.

Maybe 'cos I'm less of a stereotypically girly girl, like I never read those girl's magazines, I don't watch "Twilight" or those teen rom coms (Eleanor).

I didn't want to be like the other girls, like, wearing pink and stuff (Bella).

Seemingly the activists understood that identifying as a feminist may provoke others to question their femininity, and they had second-guessed this, in a way, by claiming that they did not care to identify with mainstream versions of femininity anyway – so had nothing to lose.

Once identifying as feminists, all the interviewees sought out and joined feminist groups, including LFN. The most significant motivation recounted for joining groups was to meet like-minded people; but these activists also wanted to take action, beyond merely internet chat.

I quite openly say to anyone I am a feminist, and I sort of felt I was the only one, and I wanted to meet someone else sort of like-minded, I really just wanted to be a part of something, I thought if I care about it this much and get into arguments and stuff everyday about it then I really want to do something and help and well, at least do something you know (Bella).

Fiona, a white twenty two year old student, noted the importance of meeting like-minded others too, and of having the opportunity to engage in collective political activism:

Meeting others is important, erm, and also, 'cos, for political activism, and learning more things (Fiona).

The political is social, and other benefits of activism

As indicated, all the activists described experiences of isolation due to their feminist views and opinions:

sometimes I can feel really, really alone and depressed, like I was the only one that thought like this (Eleanor).

Being involved in feminist activism countered these experiences, as Catriona described when asked what was best about LFN:

I'd say meeting people, definitely. And just talking to people who have similar views in a world where not a lot of people do is kind of quite empowering and just nice.

As well as sociability, all the activists, like Fiona above, mentioned their thirst for knowledge as a motivation for involvement, and increased knowledge as a benefit. They did recount some negative aspects to this, particularly around violence against women, as Annie explained:

There are days when, you know, I wish I never knew about stuff, but there's no going back, once the light's turned on, there's no going back.

However, all said they would rather be aware than ignorant, and they experienced their knowledge and awareness as another motivation for their activism, describing the sense of responsibility it brought:

The more you know, sometimes the more responsibility you feel (Hirni).

All the activists noted that as well as increased knowledge, their confidence had also grown and in many cases they gained experience they felt would benefit them in their lives, such as working with the media, doing public speaking or designing leaflets for example.

Like, now I feel more powerful in my life, 'cos of my involvement. I've got involved in more things and I feel more positive (Hirni).

The activists also felt involvement had increased their political knowledge and experience, as well as their appreciation and understanding of the role of formal party politics. All the activists of voting age reported having voted in every general election since they were eighteen; all expressed a deep commitment to doing so. Several used feminist blogs and comments on the LFN e.forum to help them make sense of political current affairs. They also found out about other political campaigns through LFN meetings and the e.forum, joining LFN delegations to demonstrations in defence of Gaza, or against cuts to public services for example.

It's definitely improved my knowledge of politics to a huge level, without a doubt, to a level that people that aren't in activism just don't have (Catriona).

The activists stated that it was easier to gain political knowledge, skills and experience in the feminist movement, partly because it is often a women-only space, which I shall address in more detail later. Perhaps because of their involvement in activism, the interviewees did not report feeling politically powerless; quite the opposite.

Despite their individual sense of political empowerment, the activists recognised many ways that politics in general could be alienating for women, including young women, and they specifically identified three interlinking

barriers to women's political participation: images of women in the media and culture, restrictive gender roles in society and sexism in mixed political movements.

Barriers to politicisation

Images of women

One barrier mentioned by all was the mainstreaming of pornography and negative images of women in the media. The activists felt that images of women as sex-objects reduced women's aspirations generally, not just politically:

The only place where women are overrepresented, is when they're naked; so it's kind of, you know, monkey see, monkey do, kind of thing, on a very basic level (Deepti).

They felt sexual objectification portrayed women as unsuitable for political roles of any form, whether in Westminster or in social movements:

It's just, kind of, makes women take on this role of, erm, mere sexual object. And, erm, sex objects don't normally have brains for politics (Catriona).

The limits of gender roles

Representations of women in popular culture were linked to another barrier: gender roles and stereotypes. All interviewees felt that politics was viewed by society as a masculine domain and that femininity was therefore seen as incompatible, a perception which, as some did discuss, perhaps contributed to their own disavowal of mainstream young femininity as a precursor to their interest in politics. Although they said they did not believe that politics was inherently masculine *themselves*, they thought the assumption could inhibit women from participating in politics, including in social movements, as Grace illustrates:

It's just seen as a male thing, it's seen as unseemly for you to be strident. Like you're militant, but, like, if you're a guy you're just involved, but if you're a girl, you're like, massively militant.

Complying with feminine gender roles was therefore cited as a direct barrier to engaging in collective, organised politics, formal or informal, stopping women from taking visible leadership roles or engaging in confrontational activism in social movements:

The patriarchal system's like, pushing the idea that women have to be this way, and if you're not, then you're unfeminine, or uncouth, and maybe that's why they still aren't as active as they should be. There's still that bird cage restriction, and in that sense, women don't want to be seen as raucous and unfeminine. Which is partly why they do the background stuff, like letter writing (Deepti).

Fiona emphasised the effect of not seeing women in public roles:

When I was younger, there was this, an unwritten thing, that everything was a man thing; like doing talks, and being a musician, and all these kind of things I wanted to do, were man things. Guys are told that they can create change, but women aren't.

Sexism within mixed protest movements

The activists had many critiques of formal party politics, and were well aware of women's underrepresentation in the Westminster government – nearly 80% male after the 2010 general election (parliament.co.uk). But as well as critiques of formal politics, the activists also had criticisms of social movements, commenting on the underrepresentation of women in activist groups for example, where they felt women were also marginalised:

I don't think we're taken seriously, our voice is still, like, only half of a man's. Men have more authority than us, and there's no point pretending that doesn't affect us, it does (Hirni).

Hirni felt that this alienated women already within social movements and discouraged others from joining or aspiring to high profile positions, therefore maintaining their underrepresentation. She gave the example of experiences in environmental groups:

In the environmental movement, like, how men just assume power, like, without no question, like, without no argument. And so women don't want to be involved, of course they don't. But, like, there are women that want to be there, and there are women in the environment movement, but they're just, like, hidden, you know.

Several of the activists spoke of feeling silenced in mixed political groups. As Grace and Fiona explained:

they're run by men, and to get a voice, even if you don't want to be that actively involved, it's literally they don't even take you seriously, you're just the token woman in that group (Grace).

Women aren't generally allowed their own voice, like, in a lot of the groups, women could join, but wouldn't have their voices heard (Fiona).

All the activists recounted experiences of feeling patronised by men in activist groups. Several mentioned anarchist and socialist groups as these were the groups they had most experience with, often through college and university:

With my friendship groups, all my male friends are, like, anarchists or socialists, but, like, their girlfriends aren't involved. But, it's about patronising, like, I've been so patronised. And it's just things like that, like, you're not even invited to take part, or like, if you are, it's like come along and we'll tell you how it is, and like, how socialism solves feminism (Grace).

The activists experiences of sexism within mixed activism meant they appreciated the women-only space of LFN and felt this avoided the slippage into prescribed gender norms that could happen in mixed social movements:

Like on the anarchist scene, or like, "manarchist" scene, the women's jobs like making tea and the men, like, leading (Fiona).

I'm not opposed to mixed groups, but when it turns into, like, guys taking the lead or, like, women making the coffee, you know, I find that very difficult (Annie).

Like me personally, I feel that men can be quite restrictive, like, not 'cos they necessarily intend to be, but just, like, 'cos they are (Eleanor).

Consequently, in women-only space the activists felt that women had more opportunities, motivation and confidence to share a variety of roles, including leadership roles. Partly this was because they felt men dominated such opportunities in mixed groups, but also because they felt that with men present women were more likely to defer to them, and that this gendered, formulaic process was not conducive to women developing their own skills and confidence:

In a whole space of women, everyone is equal I think, so like, leadership, is more likely to happen, definitely within a women-only group more likely. People are starting to see it, and seeing a whole group of women marching, joining it or watching it, it's like wow. I think women need that image right in front of them, to think its ok for them, that there isn't a gender stereotype you have to stick to (Deepti).

LFN has made me see that women, you know, I mean I always knew we could do it, but I felt kind of intimidated, but now, like, you know, maybe I can actually be educated and I can actually do things (Fiona).

In another reference to the politics and organisational tactics of second wave feminism, many of the activists spoke of the importance of consciousness-raising (CR). The opportunity to experience and benefit from CR was another reason the activists valued women-only space and they felt that the same experiences could not be gained in mixed political groups:

I think obviously, like, you know, a lot of people are going to want to talk about, you know, their personal experiences, and a lot of women feel they can there in women-only. So, having men there makes it a harder situation, like, more work, so, like, women-only space is hugely important (Annie).

Even if there's a few men, like, women might be more reserved in what they think and, well, not just what they think, but what they, like, say out loud, and I think there's a lot more, like, willing to go further if there's not men there. And also safer, like, with regard the issues feminism talks about, like rape and porn, they're going to feel safer with just women there and that's really important (Eleanor).

I think, I think sort of, for sharing experiences and stuff like that it can sometimes be important to have a women-only environment (Catriona).

Most of the activists felt that the women's liberation movement should always be led by women and Hirni offered a challenge to men to prove their commitment to feminism; by organising on their own:

I think the good men understand, and allow women to have women-only spaces. It's vital because, I'm sorry, but if we left our liberation in the hands of men we wouldn't really have it, you know, what have men done for women's liberation

here in this country? Like, even in Bangladesh, like, thousands of men marched in the streets against the acid attacks against women, so, like, I haven't seen anything like that here, why don't they do that? So, maybe they'll get there eventually, but, like, I think they've had the chance and they haven't done it. So why would we leave it in their hands? I think it's up to us to do it for ourselves.

Once engaged in LFN, the activists felt there were numerous opportunities to get involved in activism of various sorts, both individually and as a group.

Individual and collective political acts

As research by O'Toole et al (2003) highlighted, what is "political" is highly subjective, and people may be engaged in political activities without calling them that, or engaged in activities that some political scientists would not rate as "political". My interviewees mentioned a broad variety of creative actions and campaigns in the feminist movement that they described as political and as feminist. Several engaged in random acts of subvertising, such as "stickering".

"Stickering" is when activists share template sticker slogans, such as "this degrades women", which can be printed onto address labels and then stuck over posters advertising plastic surgery, diet clubs or any adverts where women are considered to be sexually objectified. The activists saw this as a political act because they believed it might influence others:

The stickering; I do that, I've never been caught or stopped yet; but, you may never know what influences that may start, people maybe think twice about their ideas, like things on magazines and on the tube (Annie).

Another area where they felt they had political power was in influencing their friends and colleagues and they also saw this as a form of political activism:

I know my flat-mate wasn't a feminist before I moved in, and, like, 'cos of the conversations we've had, she's joined all sorts of feminist networks and writes letters (Annie).

The activists all agreed that both individual and collective political acts are important and that both are constructive. They were very reluctant to demean anyone's personal style of political activism and felt that being politically engaged in any way was valuable, whether on one's own or in a group, from writing to an MP to burning down GM crops:

I think definitely both is necessary, like, one person deciding to boycott Israeli goods is still worth it, like, we may not be able to see that, but of course it is (Hirni).

However, perhaps reflecting their positive experiences in feminist groups, and their motivations for seeking out feminist groups in the first place, all the activists felt that ultimately, collective politics were the way forward for them, and had the most potential to change society:

It's really difficult to make a difference by yourself, like, that's why I've always been into the collective, and that's why I, like, really believe in the sisterhood, absolutely (Deepti).

Beyond the usual barriers: benefits from engagement in feminist activism

Sociability and collectivity

My findings support the assertions of Kimberlee (2002), Roker (2007) and Parry et al (1992), that political participation can bring a myriad of personal benefits for those involved, and possibly wider social benefits. The main benefits (and also motivations) noted by the interviewees were the opportunity to socialise and to work collectively with others who shared their politics.

This finding is an exception to trends observed in the literature on social movements regards the increasing individualisation of social movements and political expression. The shift to post-materialist values and a climate of neo-liberalism is considered by many scholars to contribute to a decline in collective political organising, in favour of individual styles of political expression (Stoker, 2006). As discussed at the start of this article, youth are often seen to lead this trend (Coleman, 2005; Haste, 2005; Bentley et al, 1999); thought to result in an environment where, as Stoker warns, "people fail to appreciate the inherent collective characteristics of politics in an individualised world" (2006:188).

Applying these concerns directly to the feminist movement, Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe (2008) assert that, "the idea of feminism as a collective movement with clear common goals fits uneasily with the rhetoric of individualism, where the focus is on identity politics and self-realization through lifestyle choices" (2008: 269). These fears were not realised in these young interviewees however, who all prioritised collective political organising over individual acts and cited the opportunity for collective organising as a *main* motivation for, and benefit from, participating in feminist groups.

The gaining and sharing of knowledge and skills

As well as the benefits of sociability and collectivity, the activists mentioned gaining new skills, political knowledge and confidence. All interviewees had become involved in other political campaigns through LFN. Roseneil (1995) has argued that the experience of political activism can often make future participation more likely: "past activism provides individuals with political and organisational skills, some sense of political efficacy, and, very often, solidarity networks which draw past activists into new involvements" (1995: 47). Youniss et al (2002) also suggest that activism breeds further activism, and are hopeful about the legacy of early political experiences. "Youth who get engaged in social movements form a select pool of adults from which come many life long civic activists and leaders" (2002: 131). This is perhaps what Parry et al (1992) had in mind when they referred to the benefits for democracy of political efficacy.

Another benefit of political efficacy is that it can aid understanding of the workings of formal politics and perhaps make engagement more likely, albeit to varying degrees. Unusually, compared to the findings of much quantitative data on youth attitudes to formal politics, particularly those of young women (Pirie

and Worcester, 2000; Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995), the interviewees were all politically engaged, reporting high levels of political efficacy. All the activists stated that their activism aided, and motivated, understanding of the workings, role and significance of Westminster politics, which was one of the reasons they gave for voting; perhaps the most direct example of a benefit to democracy. Two were undertaking Politics degrees, reportedly, directly inspired by their feminist activism. These young women are therefore at least a part of the select pool that Youniss et al (2002) described.

The benefits of women-only space

All the interviewees spoke positively about women-only space. This is not an issue widely addressed in much of the literature on social movements or on equality of political participation. The activists cited more opportunities to take leadership roles, liaise with the media, organise events and to simply be heard, and treated, as an equal, in women-only space. Sexism in mixed social movements is of course not new; as mentioned at the outset of this article, the adoption of women-only space by second wave feminism was partly a reaction to sexism in the rising social movements of the 1960s (Eschle, 2001).

My interviewees, regrettably, painted a similar picture of mixed political organising today, highlighting the difficulties of overcoming engrained gender roles and expectations. From their accounts, there seems much still to be done to make mixed social movements the truly progressive spaces they seek to be. Arguably, a higher state of alert is needed to the existence and impact of sexism in all political groups and more attention should be paid to this in scholarship on social movements.

In a reference to second wave CR groups, the activists also found women-only space a safe place to share and discuss their experiences of patriarchal oppression, including sexual violence. This is an important strategic consideration for the feminist movement, given that so much of its activism is aimed at such oppression and has always been informed by women's experiences, as Taylor (1998) points out. "The women's movement historically has mobilised out of women's most fundamental everyday experiences of gender oppression" (1998: 365). I would argue that this issue is particularly pertinent today, as more and more feminist organisations and feminist activist groups in the UK become mixed spaces.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to explore some of the reasons why these young women joined LFN and sought involvement in feminist activism. I have also considered some of the benefits they reported from their involvement. Sociability and collectivity emerged as prime motivations for engagement in feminism, but their activism was more than just a social occasion. They all

spoke of wanting to get active, and several aspired to take an increasing role in LFN organisation and leadership in the future.

The sexual objectification of women in popular culture was a negative motivator to activism, cited as a trigger of feminist consciousness, even above experiences of male violence, which the majority had been affected by. Their understanding of male violence included pornography and prostitution, one of many connections with second wave feminism, particularly radical feminism (Crow, 2000).

Once engaged, their feminist activism took many forms. Particularly appealing were opportunities for individual political expression, often in concert with others, wrapped around a collective core. Pragmatic use of opportunistic, spontaneous individual acts, such as stickering, increased their level of political activity as a whole and did not detract from collective organising, though wider evidence suggests this is unusual (Gallego, 2007; Stoker, 2006). All the activists were clear that their engagement in feminist activism had led to increased political knowledge and broader levels of political activity across other social movements.

Women-only space was considered highly conducive to the development of political efficacy and activists recounted increased opportunities, particularly in leadership roles. Men were felt to dominate these roles in mixed spaces, partly due to direct sexism and partly due to the impact of gender stereotyping, which limited women's aspirations and level of engagement. I have therefore asserted that women-only space is still, and should remain, a relevant and strategic method of organising for the contemporary women's movement. Outside of this movement also, there is arguably a need to investigate the potential benefits of women-only self-organisation, a topic not usually addressed in social movement literature.

The experiences of these young feminists raise many other areas for further research and attention both by social movement scholars and activists. Not least, the presence and impact of sexism, the difficulty of overcoming gender roles and the challenge of ensuring that progressive social movements are welcoming and inclusive. This study suggests that the skills and talents of women are being missed while activist groups remain oblivious or wilfully ignorant of the efforts needed to achieve internal liberation. While progress towards this would be no easy task, it could encourage the contribution of women and challenge injustices closer to home than those many groups are fighting against.

In conclusion, the women's liberation movement appeals to these young women today for many of the same reasons it appealed to their predecessors forty years ago. Experiences of sexism in mixed social movements, the impact of male violence and a resentment of the demeaning portrayal of their sex in the media and wider society, all gradually turned to an anger and political consciousness which led them to feminism as a form of resistance and protest. They described feminist political activism as educational, empowering and a source of friendship and support. Although they gained a lot, they also gave much back, in

their time, energies and commitment to multiple causes and movements. Their passion bodes well for the future of the women's liberation movement, and arguably for society as a whole.

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Bike Babes in Boyland: women cyclists' pedagogical strategies in urban bicycle culture

Melody L Hoffmann

Abstract

"Where are the women?" is one of the most common questions asked by those dedicated to expanding the number of cyclists on the road. Some common answers are: women do not like to ride on busy streets, are concerned with their appearance, do not feel strong enough to commute on a bicycle, and are faced with societal norms about their place in the private sphere that conflict with the independence of the bicycle. In this action note, I look at a group of women cyclists who are using various techniques that encourage women to ride bicycles and become part of a cycling community. This action note describes the Pedal Pusher Society (PPS). The group is located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but its strategies would be helpful in many contexts. Readers who are not involved in bicycle advocacy should benefit from learning about the group's pedagogy by focusing on how they attempt to create a new space for women to enter the cycling community. I argue that activists need to recognize the inherent exclusionary environment in many social movements and must work to craft new spaces that directly address the reasons why particular groups of people are attracted to social movements.

Background



I have been following the work of PPS since its inception in 2005. Self-defined as "Milwaukee's premiere women and trans bike gang," PPS is currently composed of mostly white, middle-class women who meet up once a month to socialize and ride their bikes. Broadly speaking, PPS is a space for women cyclists to meet each other, support each other, and build personal confidence in a burgeoning urban bicycle community. PPS communicates primarily at the monthly rides and through its email mailing list. The group throws a popular annual adult prom with proceeds going to a community organization. PPS has produced two parody music videos and one prom commercial that have garnered significant online exposure, mostly through YouTube. Since PPS's

inception, the group has also received a lot of local media attention, especially around its videos and annual proms.

PPS has made it clear that it does not wish to be identified with the dominant bicycle culture. Co-founder Susie Seidelman explains, "our intention was not to carve out a place for ourselves in the dominant bike culture, but rather to create something different and new." The group fosters a collective identity that supports and fuels the group's bicycle activism, which is partially maintained vis-à-vis its online media presence. PPS maintains an important space in an automobile-privileged urban setting that discourages bicycling. The group helps women to see the potential strength and empowerment in utilizing a bicycle in urban spaces.

Context

Women who attempt to traverse the urban bicycle community often run into subtle and implicit sexism. As an experienced cyclist, I have found that in the Midwest, almost all women cyclists complain about the machismo present in bicycle shops. While there are plenty of bicycle shops that do not perpetuate this stereotype (in Minneapolis, The Hub and Sunrise Cyclery are known for being women-friendly spaces), many women avoid bicycling because of the hurdle of talking with bicycle shop employees.

The ways in which men can problematically impact women cyclists' lives was the impetus for PPS. The group attempts to create a space for women cyclists by harnessing new media technology to promote the group's mission, activism, and pedagogy. I explore their pedagogical potential by discussing its website, local media exposure, and DIY videos.

Description

pedalpushersociety.org

PPS's website is its strongest online pedagogical tool. It is an information-based site that explains its politics, goals, and past and future events. Reoccurring messages on the site include: encouraging women-identified cyclists to join PPS and creating an empowering and supportive space for women cyclists. The website also challenges normative conceptions of women cyclists and men's complacency in the marginalization of women in dominant bicycle culture.

PPS is explicit about how it negotiates new ways of thinking about dominant bicycle culture and women cyclists. The most overt political material on the site is about sexism in bicycle culture. On its website, PPS responds to men in the dominant bicycle culture who have rejected the notion of a women bicycle group:

Some men have stated that they feel like our exclusion of men in the Pedal Pusher Society is 'reverse-sexism.' By its definition sexism, racism and hetero-centrism are the combination of prejudice plus power, meaning that sexism is the

combination of social stigmas about women (prejudices) and male privilege and the power that is inherent in that privilege. Thus, those without male privilege cannot be sexist.

This section establishes the attitude and intelligence behind the group that are grounded in feminist theory. This statement sends a message that members have no tolerance for men's criticism about being excluded from the bicycle community. PPS's feminist sentiments help other women cyclists find the words to explain why women-only groups are not sexist. This statement is a pedagogical tool women can carry with them, and also makes men reevaluate what they deem to be sexist. PPS's discussion of sexism suggests that women have to grapple with issues in social movements that do not concern, but are perpetuated by, men.

Beyond PPS's attempt to envision new ways of thinking about women's place in dominant bicycle culture, PPS also tries to envision new ways for men to think about their role in creating change in the dominant bicycle culture. PPS uses its website as a venue to teach men about their own privilege. The website's section titled "Men & the PPS" explains that "PPS is challenging the male dominated bicycle culture and more largely, male privilege as a whole, but those who have male-privilege have the power to change how it's leveraged personally and systematically!"

Through its website, PPS encourages men to speak up when they witness sexist behavior and to talk with one another about how their privilege affects their lives. A popular anti-gender normativity poster is featured alongside a suggestion for men, which reads, "For every girl who is tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong, there is a boy who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable."

PPS assumes that men will visit its site for curiosity sake. The group takes this opportunity to possibly teach men about the oppression of women that runs deep in the dominant bicycle culture. The pedagogical moments on PPS's website are unlike the dominant bicycle culture's representations online. Of course this has much to do with the fact that dominant bicycle culture is oblivious to the marginalization of some of its members. Co-founder Susie argues that PPS has proven to be very threatening to some male cyclists, as their exclusion from any area of bicycle culture is unprecedented. Therefore, PPS's online presence has the ability to create effective change and/or dialogue in the larger bicycle activist movement.

Local media coverage

Beyond its website, PPS uses its local online media coverage as a pedagogical tool to promote bicycle activism and women cycling confidence. Members are often asked to speak about being women cyclists. Members describe the benefits and the obstacles they face bicycling in urban spaces. PPS understands the urban streets to be a barrier for women cyclists due to safety concerns. Safety concerns include fear of vehicle aggression and urban violence. In "Meet the

Pedal Pushers” PPS member Shea explains how she uses her bicycle as a safety mechanism.

I think as a woman I’m particularly sensitive to staying safe and very aware of my surroundings once the sun goes down in Milwaukee. It’s unfortunately not uncommon for crazy stuff to go down. My bike gives me more freedom to be able to travel where I please, even at night, providing my confidence that I have a dependable, speedy way to get home. (Petersen, 2009)

Shea reaffirms the struggle women have with public safety by stressing the benefits bicycle riding has in building confidence “once the sun goes down.” PPS member Leslie says that riding a bicycle makes her “feel safe all the time” (Petersen, 2009). These PPS members are role models for other women cyclists by emphasizing that a bicycle is a means to confidence and safety. They are modeling a lifestyle where riding a bicycle is naturalized, as other modes of transportation are not offered as alternative means of confidence.

The bicycle is also seen as a form of empowerment. PPS co-founder Laura believes that “being on a bike is empowering for people of all genders – it lets you take control over how you get from point A to point B” (Petersen, 2009). This local media exposure is a form of education for readers. Women who are concerned with their public safety may not only find kinship but also consider using a bicycle as a safe form of travel and find it to be an empowering mode of transportation.

PPS also addresses women’s concerns with vehicle aggression on their website, in the media and in their videos. The ways in which PPS addresses vehicle aggression appears most notably in their music videos as discussed in the next section on shared consciousness.

DIY music videos

PPS’s video productions benefit women cyclists and the larger bicycle community. First, the music videos address the fear of vehicle aggression. Second, the making of the videos work helps in recruitment. And third, members challenge stereotypes of women cyclists and promote group cohesion as a means to cycling confidence. The videos teach women viewers that a group of women cyclists can fight sexism, male violence, and vehicular aggression. The video productions reach beyond the confines of dominant bicycle culture which works towards the group’s goal of creating a space separate from that dominant culture. And most obviously the videos are a way to make women visible in a community where they are often made invisible.

PPS has produced two music videos and one commercial. “Eye of the Tiger a la The Pedal Pusher Society”¹ is a montage of 15 PPS members biking through Milwaukee, carrying their bicycles through crowds, and dancing with their bicycles. PPS co-founder Susie explains the impact the “Eye of the Tiger” video

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8Ae1OCrle8>

had on the group:

Most of the participants had never ridden with us before, but were connected to the group through common acquaintances. We used the shoot as an excuse to get these people involved and it worked. Many of the people in that video have become some of our most active members.

Furthermore, the video garnered nation-wide exposure in the touring Bicycle Film Festival of 2008. The video acts as a localized recruitment tool but also signifies that women are organizing their own spaces in the urban bicycle community. "Eye of the Tiger" is a pedagogical tool to use in promoting confidence in women cyclists. There are multiple scenes that show the women riding as a group through Milwaukee, often taking up entire street lanes. A few women are shown performing dance moves while holding their bicycles over their heads. These images teach fellow women cyclists that they are not invisible in the bicycle community and that confidence in cycling may be increased by riding with a group. PPS women are clearly having fun and unafraid to take over street lanes and are shown to have no problems with vehicles when doing so. PPS members are sending the message that bicycles are traffic, too, and there is no need to ride dangerously close to parked cars. This video has the potential to inspire women to ride with such confidence.

PPS's second music video² is "Beat It a la the Pedal Pusher Society," a remake of Michael Jackson's "Beat It" music video. This video showcases the rebel attitude of the group. Two rival women gangs come together to watch the fight of their leaders, who are bound by their wrists using bicycle tire tubes with bicycle chains as weapons. Two women, donned in PPS shirts, break up the fight by starting a dance routine. The remainder of the video is 20 PPS members performing the actual "Beat It" dance routine from the original music video. PPS's video also includes a sub plot of two women cyclists taunting a male cyclist by verbally teasing him and yanking off his hat while he is riding. I read this scene as a fantasy of revenge for all the taunting men have done to women on bicycles. In this video members are again seen biking in groups, but what is more prevalent in this video is the demeanor and style of the women.

The women present a campy spectacle of male toughness and an alternative to it. Various scenes show PPS members spoofing stereotypical "tough guy" spaces. For example, a group of women dressed in motorcycle biker gear are shown at a bar drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and playing pool while maintaining body language that denote arrogance. The alternatives to male toughness include the bikers engaging in a bicycle chain fight that resembles ballet moves and the rival gangs breaking into a dance routine. Pedagogically, both videos argue that women can occupy spaces and roles that are inaccessible to them in dominant society. The women's counterhegemonic display (or lack) of femininity in these videos challenges stereotypes of women that by parodying the need to maintain freshness and beauty while riding.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToOiXPGSQas>

In addition to the music videos, PPS produced a commercial for its 2009 prom³. In the commercial, the group focuses on spoofing hyperfemininity, and constructs alternative forms of femininity and sexiness. PPS members are shown preparing for the prom to the soundtrack of Pink's "Get the Party Started." PPS co-founder Susie believes that these video productions and prom are creative ways to get people involved in the group. This commercial illustrates not only another shared experience for PPS but a pedagogical tactic in dismantling stereotypes about the group: "I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about who we are and what we do, so this sort of helps to clarify it. [PPS's prom] is about trying to make Milwaukee's underground cycling community that much more fun," Susie explained in a local *A.V. Club* article, "Why the Pedal Pusher Prom will be 'the most awesome night of your life'" (Wolf, 2009).

All three videos bring an artistic element to bike activism which changes the sphere of bicycle culture and claims new spaces for women outside of the dominant bicycle culture. The new spaces that PPS claims show that women behave and develop their subcultures differently than men. PPS understands that progress will not be made by pushing the dominant bicycle culture to accept women. In Milwaukee I have observed more evident progress in fostering an energetic women cyclist community by crafting a bicycle culture that women have created and desire to be a part of.



PPS members on the streets of Milwaukee. Photo: Third Coast Digest

Conclusion

I have summarized PPS's pedagogical model in list form so readers can see how the group's strategies address exclusionary practices in the larger bicycle community and can be readily applied to any social movement struggling to

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K63TJ9XpDsY>

foster space that encourages a wide breadth of participants.

PPS's Pedagogical Model:

1. Acknowledge the exclusionary behaviors and instruct people how to talk about their exclusion.
2. Talk directly to those who may be responsible in perpetuating the exclusion and suggest ways to correct this behavior.
3. Address concerns the excluded people have with joining the social movement.
4. Demonstrate ways to simultaneously diminish concerns and use the social movement for their personal growth.
5. Experiment with recruitment tactics; focus on untapped tactics that may appeal solely to those being excluded.
6. Use any type of media to create visuals of those typically excluded from participating in the social movement as a group.
7. Counter stereotypes of the excluded group that may hinder their involvement in the social movement
8. When possible, allow those excluded to create their own spaces in the social movement.
9. Have fun.

About the author

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Challenging perspectives: women, complementary and alternative medicine, and social change

Nina Nissen

Abstract

This article presents an analytical review of literature that examines women's practice and use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). To interrogate this body of literature, I draw on new social movement scholarship and a feminist understanding of the notion of "the personal is political". Although women's prominence in CAM is consistently noted, our understanding of the relationship between CAM and gender remains underdeveloped and our knowledge about the role of CAM in social change processes is limited. My focus is therefore on the interplay between women's practice and use of CAM, personal transformation and social change. This exploration demonstrates that women's practice and use of CAM presents an opportunity to fulfill and confront traditional gender roles and dominant discourses of femininity. Furthermore, I illustrate that women's practice and use of CAM contributes towards promoting and achieving social change through the changing of the customary social practices of biomedicine, the development of new epistemic paradigms, the shaping of new working practices, and the creation of alternative communities. In conclusion, I suggest that when gender constitutes an integral part of analysis and theorising, combined with a broader understanding of 'the political', new insights and perspectives on women and CAM emerge. These also further our understanding of health social movements.

Introduction

Background

The use of therapies designated as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in Europe, Australia and North America is well established (Harris and Rees, 2000), and the popularity of CAM is linked with a wide range of factors, including disappointment with biomedical healthcare and the rise of chronic health complaints, dissatisfaction with the doctor-patient relationship, post-modern values, and personal world views (Astin, 2000; Bakx, 1991; Furnham and Vincent, 2000; Kelner, 2000; McGuire 1988; Schneirov and Gezcik, 2003). Some social theorists associate the growth of CAM with patterns of consumerism and life style choices (Coward, 1989; Giddens, 1991) and have characterised it as "narcissistic self-absorption that reflects the anxieties of an increasingly atomized society" (MacNevin 2003: 22). Others view it as masking and perpetuating wider social inequalities (Berliner and Salmon 1980; Coward, 1989). Berliner and Salmon (1980), for instance, argue that CAM practices

commodify the personal problems and alienation experienced by individuals in western cultures by helping individuals to adjust to society while disregarding existing social relations from which much disease originates. Indeed, Coward maintains that CAM constitutes "the perfect solution of a personal politics of the body with a peaceful co-existence within existing economic structures" (Coward, 1989: 204). Similarly, Baer (2004) argues that CAM practices are a form of holistic health that excludes any recognition of social and economic determinants in the creation and maintenance of health.

Against this roughly sketched background, and while carrying out research on CAM, I asked myself: Can we assume that such practices primarily maintain a societal status quo and reproduce a culture of individualism without collective impacts? In my own research, the prominent picture of CAM as maintaining a societal status quo was continuously challenged. Women CAM practitioners repeatedly stressed their intention to facilitate personal and social change through CAM and their patients told of the profound changes produced through their use of CAM. Here I was on familiar ground: a feminist, I had practised an alternative therapy for many years and had heard many stories by women patients of how their use of CAM supported them to think and feel differently about themselves and how this enabled them to make extensive changes in their lives. Despite the familiar ground, I was also puzzled. The majority of my research participants did not identify themselves as feminists, so would not have, I assumed, the same or similar commitments to producing social change as myself.

Together, these experiences, thoughts and challenges prompted me to search for ways of thinking and exploring women's practice and use of CAM that would reflect the practices and experiences of women in CAM more closely than presented so dominantly in much of the literature. As part of this endeavour, I engaged with new social movement (NSM) theories, which argue that by redefining the body, health and illness CAM promotes cultural innovation and social change that reflects individuals' needs for freedom, expression and creativity (Melucci, 1989, 1996a/b; Stambolovic, 1996). I also re-read the literature on the practice and use of CAM, searching out specifically studies on women's practice and use of CAM. Reading "across" the papers with a focus on gender and NSM theories in mind, a number of shared key themes emerged from this body of literature. This enabled me to see a picture of women's practice and use of CAM which differs from the prominent presentations sketched above in important ways. These themes and ideas are presented in this article.

The aim of this article is two-fold: First, by focusing on women's practice and use of CAM, I want to examine the interplay between CAM, women and change processes, and second, I want to invite a broader perspective on understanding CAM than is currently prominent in much of the sociological and anthropological literature on CAM. On the basis of the literature reviewed, I suggest that women's practice and use of CAM presents an opportunity to fulfill

and confront traditional gender roles and dominant discourses of femininity.¹ I further argue that women's activities in the field of CAM promote social and cultural change in healthcare and beyond and contribute to a broader "culture of challenge" (Scambler and Kelleher, 2006). Accordingly, women's practice and use of CAM forms, I suggest, part of other health social movements that create new healthcare practices and norms and propose new paradigms of knowledge.

To support my assertions, I weave together three strands of literature on women's practice and use of CAM. These are presented in three sections. In the first section, I examine historical and ideological overlaps between women's health and women's alternative health movements. In the second section, I focus on the clinical encounter between women practitioners and women patients, and examine the related issues of empowerment, control and responsibility in CAM. These two sections reflect some of the feminist critiques of biomedical healthcare and I examine how these critiques are addressed and play out in women's practice and use of CAM.

The third section examines why women, more than men, are attracted to CAM, and I then explore the ways in which women's practice and use of CAM produces, as I suggest, personal transformation. Here, I focus on the socio-cultural consequences for women of their practice and use of CAM and engage with key aspects of Melucci's (1989; 1996a/b) new social movement theory. In so doing, I do not review literature that examines clinical outcomes or assesses whether CAM or an individual CAM therapy "works" or how it works for particular physical complaints or diseases. In a fourth and final section, I draw out the implications of CAM for wider social change. To this end, I interrogate how the multiple personal change processes I have identified as being generated and/or visible in women's practice and use of CAM lead to and sustain social change beyond the lives and experiences of individuals. This section again draws on Melucci's (1989; 1996a/b) new social movement theory, particularly on how he conceptualises social change processes.

The challenges of CAM research

Several challenges arise when exploring CAM. A central difficulty is the absence of an agreed understanding of CAM. The modalities commonly designated as CAM represent a diverse spectrum of epistemologies and practices, ranging from the more mainstream (such as osteopathy, acupuncture or reflexology) to the esoteric (such as spiritual healing). This highlights that "CAM" is a heterogeneous category and CAM therapies are difficult to categorise. Many different definitions of CAM have been put forward, including the following: CAM are those therapies not included in biomedical healthcare provision²; CAM

¹ In understanding femininity I follow Young (2005: 31) to refer to "a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves."

² <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/whatisacam/>

as diagnosis, treatment and/or prevention which complements biomedicine (Ernst, 2000). Attempts have also been made to categorise CAM therapies according to available evidence that supports its effectiveness and safety, and also levels of professionalisation (House of Lords, 2000).³ These definitions and categorisations are highly political since they are underpinned by notions of legitimacy of different CAM therapies, from the perspective of biomedicine and legislators.

The shifting of definitional boundaries over time and across different locations exacerbates the difficulties associated with defining CAM. Many different local terms for CAM are in circulation, including (to name but a few) *sanfte Medizin* or *medicines douces* (gentle medicine/s) in German and French (respectively), *alternativ behandling* (alternative treatment) in Denmark, *medicina non-convenzionali* (non-conventional medicine) in Italy, or *medicina natural* (natural medicine) in some Spanish speaking countries. The diversity of terms and healing practices included under the term CAM thus indicates that the 'need' or interest in an umbrella term derives less from CAM practitioners or users but rather from legislators interested in the regulation of CAM therapies, and/or researchers who examine CAM as a social phenomenon (Baer 2004). Wherever possible, I identify local contexts and the specific CAM therapy discussed; otherwise, I use the generic CAM as used in most sociological literature. The majority of studies drawn on in this article explore CAM therapies outside of biomedical provision.

An additional difficulty is that the literature on CAM is highly undifferentiated and unspecific concerning CAM users and practitioners. Although women users and practitioners, like their male counterparts, are far from homogenous, there is a tendency to refer to a generic "user" or "practitioner" without further demographic detail (for an exception, see e.g. Upchurch and Chyu, 2005). In addition, little is known about how, in the CAM context, gender intersects with other social differences such as class or ethnicity, and how gender issues and any intersections might change over time in specific socio-cultural contexts and/or in relation to individual CAM therapies (for an exception, see e.g. Baer, 2001). It is through using the category of gender and by focusing on women's practice and use of CAM that different perspectives and new insights emerge. In this way, I hope to contribute to more nuanced explorations of these important issues.

What do we know about CAM users and practitioners?

A number of studies have established how many and what types of people use CAM therapies (Astin 2000; Eisenberg, Kessler et al. 1993; Eisenberg, Davis et al. 1998; Kelner and Wellman 1997; Thomas, Nicholl et al. 2001; Upchurch and Chyu 2005; Vickers 1994). Consistently, these studies find: a predominance of

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld199900/ldselect/ldsctech/123/12303.htm#a2>

women users; users who are in higher income groups; the middle-aged; and those with higher educational levels (Wootton and Sparber 2001). Initial use frequently aims to address chronic, painful and non-life-threatening illness which biomedical treatment had failed to resolve (Cant and Sharma 1999; Furnham and Vincent 2000; Kelner and Wellman 1997), though reasons for continuing CAM use may differ from initial motivations (Little 2009). A majority of users combine the use of CAM with biomedicine (Kelner and Wellman 1997; Sharma 1992; Thomas, Nicholls et al 2001). In the US, people's commitment to environmentalism, feminism and interest in spirituality and personal growth in particular are identified as strong indicators for the use of CAM (Astin, 2000).

Limited information is available about CAM practitioners, though women practitioners are said to outnumber male practitioners (Cant and Sharma 1994) and ratios vary with healing modality (Baer 2001; Cant and Sharma 1994). Indications are that those therapies with full-time training and a science-orientated curriculum, such as chiropractic and osteopathy, draw significant numbers of male practitioners, compared to "talking" therapies like naturopathy, homeopathy and Western herbal medicine which are practised by more women than men (Andrews 2003; Baer 2001; Nissen 2010). In the UK, 66% of chiropractors were men (in 1994), and in Canada 90% of the profession are men (Cant and Sharma 1999: 75). By contrast, in 2005 approximately 80% of registered Western herbal medicine practitioners were women (Nissen 2010).

More research is however needed that examines who CAM users and practitioners are in greater detail, taking a range of social differences into consideration as well as variations across different countries.

Shared roots: women's health and women's alternative health movements

Women's health and women's alternative health movements share a history, ideology and practices that challenged biomedicine's knowledge base and aimed at the democratisation of healthcare. Underpinning this is a critique of the legitimacy and power of the biomedical expert over women's bodies and women's lives that focuses on the nature of knowledge production and the meanings of different knowledges about the body (Kuhlmann 2009; Phillips and Rakusen, 1978; Ruzek, 1978; Weisman, 1998). These issues are explored in this section. Of particular interest here is the overlap between the two movements, for example around their commitments to recognise women as individuals with unique lives and experiences.

The women's health literature that emerged from the 1970s increasingly emphasised the need to prioritise women's self-knowledge and experiences. Women's personal knowing of their bodies and their experiences of health services shaped the critique of patriarchal biomedical practices, knowledge and authority, and highlighted the medicalisation of women's bodies and lives (Kuhlmann 2009; Oakley, 1980; Phillips and Rakusen, 1978; Ruzek, 1978). The

role and power of the biomedical expert in understanding women's bodies and determining healthcare was frequently noted. Power relations in (bio)medicine were seen to disregard women's subjective experiences and contribute to entrenching gender, class and racial inequalities (Doyal, 1995), leading to the counter-assertion that women must define their own experience.

Feminist reconceptualisations of women's health and healthcare foreground the centrality of women's bodies in women's oppression, and serve to examine how health is influenced and constructed by social and material circumstances and how experiences are shaped by institutions, practices, discourses, technologies and ideologies. Contextualising health within the lives and experiences of individuals and foregrounding both the diversity of women's experience and the interdependence of women's health on local and global communities became integral commitments of feminist health activists and scholars alike (Davis, 2007; Doyal, 1995; Kuhlmann 2009; Lagro-Janssen, 2007; Ruzek, Olesen, and Clarke, 1997).

While the women's health movement was challenging biomedicine's knowledge base and campaigning to transform the ideology, organisation and delivery of healthcare, women's alternative health movements also emerged (Ruzek, 1978; Weisman, 1998). A number of overlaps between women's health movements and women's alternative health movements can be noted, particularly the central commitment to identify and address women's health needs within the context of women's unique lives and experiences. In addition, women's alternative health movements often invoked three distinct and interrelated elements in their critique of biomedicine: women's history and their historical work as healers; women's distinct knowledges and ways of knowing; and nature (Bix, 2004; Feldberg, 2004).

Historical accounts of women as traditional healers added a particular perspective to understanding women's (alternative) health movements. Explorations of the rise and fall of women's healing traditions (Bourdillon, 1988; Ehrenreich and English, 1976) became central to efforts of women's health movements and alternative women practitioners to situate political action and critique biomedicine (Feldberg, 2004). The affirmation of the historical base for women's healing offered a powerful counter-ideology to biomedicine and unified the two movements in their approach to knowledge and healing practices (Bix, 2004; Feldberg, 2004).

Like the women's health movements, women's alternative health movements stressed women's distinct knowledges and personal ways of knowing about the body, providing a challenge to the knowledge base of biomedicine, predicated on women's unique and special wisdom (Feldberg, 2004). Self-help, central to many forms of alternative healthcare, further promoted the centrality of subjective knowledge and suggested that individuals could heal themselves (Feldberg, 2004). This mirrored feminist critiques of biomedical authority and expert knowledge.

Women's alternative health movements also laid claim to providing a fundamentally different kind of care that did more than cure – it healed (Feldberg, 2004). Adopting a “narrative of care”, women's alternative healthcare “relied on gentle products of nature [and] women's connection with the earth and its people” (Feldberg, 2004: 188). Practitioners of natural childbirth and herbal medicine in particular blended feminist interpretations of medical history with natural and spiritual principles, defining their practices as recovering their foremothers' legacies (Stapleton, 1994). In this way, alternative healthcare aimed to integrate women's personal needs with social and environmental commitments, enabling women to reconcile political action with social and spiritual change (Bix, 2004; Feldberg, 2004).

From the 1960s and 1970s up to the present, and as CAM has become a socially accepted phenomenon, it has undergone significant changes. These changes and moves have led to an apparent loss of CAM's “critical edge” as it becomes increasingly male dominated through ongoing institutionalisation and commercialisation (Schneirov, 2003) and the professionalisation and co-option of CAM into biomedical healthcare provision (Flesch, 2007). While much scholarly attention has been paid to explore these processes, women's everyday CAM practices have become increasingly submerged and invisible. This is not to suggest that developments related to the normalisation of CAM are unimportant, or that women are not involved in them (see e.g. Lee Treweek 2010) only that they present one particular perspective. By contrast, I suggest that much of women's practice and use of CAM, as presented in the literature examined here, retains a distinct character where the early critical values and attitudes to social practices (such as considering patients as individuals and the principle of egalitarian relationships) and towards social norms and expectations (for example gender roles or ecological sustainability) continue to be deeply embedded, even though they may not be connected to explicitly feminist commitments.

Women's practice and use of CAM: the clinical encounter and issues of power

The practice of medicine has been identified by feminist health activists and scholars, as well as others, as a site for the production and maintenance of social power. It has been argued that in most biomedical healthcare practices the ill person is transformed into a non-contextualised, diseased body, underpinned by the biomedical classification of reported symptoms as “subjective” and observed clinical signs as “objective” (Foucault 2003). This classification is said to lead to the disregard of patients' experiences, for example in the patient-doctor communication (Fisher 1988). Accordingly, throughout the literature on women's health many call for the need to listen to and prioritise women's self-knowledge and experiences. Indeed, some scholars argue that the growth of CAM reflects dissatisfaction with the doctor-patient encounter, particularly by women, and has led to a turn towards CAM which is said to be underpinned by more participatory practitioner-patient relationships than biomedicine (Bakx,

1991; R. C. Taylor, 1984; Kelner, 2000). How the CAM clinical encounter is described and experienced by CAM practitioners and patients, and how issues of empowerment and control play out by women practitioners and users are therefore the focus of this section.

Women working in partnership: the CAM practitioner-patient relationship

CAM practice is said to support a “partnership” model of interaction whereby patients typically collaborate with their practitioner, taking an active role in the healing process (Kelner, 2000; Sharma, 1994). Mitchell and Cormack (1998) suggest that a partnership in CAM should lead to healthcare that is negotiated and agreed between practitioner and patient. Furthermore, to individualise treatments, many CAM practitioners require diverse information from each patient regarding diet, lifestyle, social and personal relationships (Johannessen, 1996; Nissen, 2008; Scott, 1998; Sharma, 1992, 1994). In this way, patients are respected as experts and active partners and their health and needs contextualised within their lives.

A number of studies on women and CAM instantiate this general conceptualisation of the CAM practitioner-patient relationship. Barry (2003), for example, in exploring how UK women homeopaths and women patients share personal and professional knowledges in homeopathic consultations, concludes that the process of sharing knowledge contributes to an egalitarian relationship, while also directly altering women’s views of health, the body and illness. Her conclusions are supported by other UK studies of women’s use and practice of homeopathy (Scott, 1998), a variety of CAM therapies (Sointu, 2006b) and Western herbal medicine (Nissen, 2008). These studies demonstrate the importance to women patients of being listened to, having more time than in biomedical consultations, and the emotional support being offered by women practitioners.

For instance, Barry’s (2003) and Nissen’s (2008) ethnographic studies illustrate how women bring a tradition of “woman talk” (Devault, 1990) and other stereotypically female values such as empathy to their interaction, where women’s experiences are contextualised, and health and illness are explored within networks of relationships and responsibilities that characterise women’s lives (Lagro-Janssen, 2007; Ruzek, Clarke, and Olesen, 1997). In this emphasis on everyday lives, shared experiences, and relational values and practices, these homeopaths and herbalists challenge biomedical practices and knowledge production while reinforcing egalitarian relationships. According to Sointu (2006b) “recognition” offers the key to understanding women practitioner-patient relationships in CAM.

[D]ifferent levels of recognition that pertain to affirming the self, as well as to legitimizing identities and complaints, often come together to endow the client with a sense of empowerment and control. (Sointu, 2006b: 507)

In general, CAM practitioner-patient interactions tend to be perceived as devoid of tension and little is known about how differences of opinion between practitioners and patients are managed, such as those identified by Frank (2002) around the duration and cost of consultations by German homeopathic physicians. An exception is Nissen's (2008) study which demonstrates the centrality of narrative strategies in ongoing herbalist-patient negotiations and the contestations of unfolding stories. Narrative strategies are used by women herbalists and women patients alike, it is argued, to forge a "partnership of healing" that facilitates knowledge sharing and the building of consensus, but also accommodates differences and disagreements about how to approach and understand health problems.

The above studies point towards practitioners' commitment to egalitarian relationships. This suggests practitioners' willingness to relinquish a degree of control and the recognition of patients' authority which potentially lessening power asymmetries and becomes a key element in patients' empowerment.

Multiple tensions: women's empowerment through CAM?

Empowerment is a frequent theme in healthcare, including in CAM. The idea of empowerment is grounded in the "social action" ideology of the 1960s and the self-help movement of the 1970s, though notions of empowerment are complex and often lack clear definition (C. H. Gibson, 1991; Rissel, 1994). In healthcare, empowerment is understood as a collaborative process associated with the ideal of patient involvement in decision-making (Hewitt-Taylor, 2004; Jacob, 1996). To achieve shared decision-making, two bodies of knowledge need to be reconciled: medical knowledge and patient's subjective knowledge. This contrasts with an approach to healthcare based on the concept of power as expert knowledge (Fisher 1988; Ruzek 1978). Tensions however arise if empowerment is understood predominantly as the promotion of healthier "lifestyles", disregarding the fact that health is socially determined and contextualised (C. H. Gibson, 1991; Nettleton, 1996). These tensions around empowerment and control are also reflected in studies of women's practice and use of CAM.

In an Australian study of women users' perceptions of diverse CAMs used during the menopause empowerment constitutes a central concept (Gollschewski, Kitto, Anderson, and Lyons-Wall, 2008). The authors define empowerment as having the knowledge, skills, attitudes and self-awareness necessary to influence one's own behaviour. Central to this is women's need to be informed. Knowledge in turn facilitates women's informed choices and self-management of their symptom experience. This resonates with how some women herbalists envision healing with Western herbal medicine in the UK (Nissen, 2008). The key to healing, according to one practitioner, is "education and empowerment" (Nissen 2008: 208). In their relationships with patients, these herbalists employ a concept of power as the "power to empower" (Candib,

1994). This has implications beyond the practitioner-patient relationship and women's healthcare.

Women users in Barry's (2003) UK study of homeopathy and Nissen's (2008) UK study of Western herbal medicine note the importance of increasing self-care and self-knowledge as the basis for initiating changes in their personal, social and professional lives, using their emerging sense of power to create new identities for themselves as women. The importance of identity work undertaken by women engaging in natural health practices is also emphasised by Thompson (2003) who suggests that CAM's therapeutic ideology enabled his women participants to contest the implications of their biomedical diagnosis and to reconstruct their chronic illnesses as an opportunity for discovering their inner potential (see also Sointu 2006b).

These very different studies point towards the importance of women's empowerment through their use of CAM, whether this relates to women making informed choices and being more in control of their healthcare decisions, or to women's increasing self-knowledge and opportunities for identity work. Some writers, however, remind us that individual empowerment should not be confused with economic or "real political power" (Kitzinger, 1993). Others assert that while empowerment will not create social change in itself, strategies of empowerment offer "the potential to initiate [...] the possibility for social change through relationships that engage, transform and empower" (Candib, 1994: 153). In addition, some feminist scholars argue that when women improve the ways they manage their health, more autonomy in healthcare is experienced. As Ruzek (1996: 126) points out: "The fact that women can modify their behaviour [...] mean that women can exert some control over their own lives." These tensions highlight different perspectives on empowerment, all of which are valid and important to consider. Overall however, a focus on individual empowerment at the expense of societal factors is not specific to alternative health but is a frequent tension in healthcare generally (Gibson 1991; Jacob 1996; Christensen and Hewitt-Taylor 2006).

The thorny issue of "responsibility": practitioner and user perspectives

Individuals' expectations about their role in healthcare are predicated on being proactive, empowered and responsible in seeking healthcare (Baarts and Pedersen, 2009; Hughes, 2004). These expectations link with broader societal trends in which active involvement in healthcare reflects health policy developments and constitutes part of the ongoing engagement with processes of identity construction (Hughes, 2004; Sointu, 2006c). Others have argued that they relate to a distinct governing of subjectivity (Rose, 1990) or a new health consciousness and increasing "healthism" through the modification of lifestyles (Crawford 1980). CAM in particular has been charged with increasing narcissistic individualism and the promotion of a your-own-fault dogma (Coward, 1989; MacNevin 2003). Empirical studies of these issues in the

context of CAM however present a more nuanced picture. In the following, I first explore the perspectives of CAM practitioners, and then turn to CAM users' perspectives.

McClellan (2005) in his study of crystal and spiritual healing in England examines practitioners' discourses of blame and responsibility. These discourses, he suggests, are a central component of the healers' ideology, alongside an individualistic approach to health and illness. The healers' focus on the individual in explanations of health is interpreted less as being a result of a socio-political climate of "victim-blaming" but rather a manifestation of the need to redress the denial of the individual and subjectivity in biomedicine (McClellan, 2005: 630). The twin ideologies of blame and responsibility, McClellan (*ibid*) argues, are located in the wider context of socio-cultural transformations characterised by shifts to postmodernity or "late modernity".

Tensions between blame and responsibility are heightened when a discrete physical disease is transformed into a problem involving all areas of a person's life (Sered and Agigian, 2008). Sered and Agigian (2008) describe CAM practitioners' etiological frameworks for breast cancer as a discursively constructed "holistic sickening" and suggest that it underpins the meaning of holistic healing characteristic of CAM. While CAM counteracts the perceived depersonalisation of biomedical treatment, the therapeutic promise thus constructed can imply open-ended, albeit individualised, healing processes. Nevertheless, the "if it works for you" approach of CAM healing also serves to enhance a sense of agency and control among CAM users (McClellan, 2005).

Indeed, women CAM users stress opportunities for personal control and responsibility for their health as an important reason for seeking or continuing CAM healthcare. Women associate personal control in healthcare with the belief "that it is good to be able to sort things out for yourself", "the desire to have ownership and control over [...] experiences and treatments used" (Gollschewski, et al., 2008: 156) and "not to be told what to do" (Vickers, Jolly, and Greenfield, 2006). Hence women emphasise their active participation in treatment and care as central to their healthcare choices. This resonates with findings that initial CAM use is frequently prompted by chronic and painful illness that biomedical treatment failed to resolve (Kelner and Wellman, 1997), leading to a search for more effective healthcare and, once identified, its ongoing use (Baarts and Pedersen, 2009; Little, 2009).

An understanding of empowerment as women's control and agency emerges that is grounded in resisting biomedical constructions of disease and patienthood (Thompson 2003) and "a fresh and sustained sense of bodily responsibility that induces new health practices" (Baarts and Pedersen, 2009: 719). By actively seeking out CAM, women invest in their own care and in the process of healing (Hughes, 2004), imagining their lives and themselves in the future (Baarts and Pedersen, 2009). In doing so, CAM can be suggested to promote women's nurturing tendencies that are turned onto oneself, subverting traditional gender roles and social order (MacNevin, 2003; Nissen, 2008; Sointu and Woodhead, 2008).

In summary, women's practice of diverse CAM therapies confirms their commitment to participatory and egalitarian relationships, together with approaches to their practice that are influenced by women's shared life experiences and values. Issues of empowerment, control and responsibility in women's practice and use are characterised by multiple tensions, some of which are similar to tensions also noted in biomedical healthcare practices. Women CAM users draw on CAM ideologies and health practices to take charge of their healthcare and to critically engage in re-shaping their identities and lives. As such, women's practice and use of CAM can be described as a form of "progressive individualism" (Scott 1998) that resonates with a feminist agenda. What kind of personal and/or social changes are produced through CAM is explored next.

"The personal is political": women, CAM, and personal transformations

The politicisation of health, postmodern values and social movements associated with feminism, the environment, spirituality and personal growth have played significant roles in the growth of CAM (Astin, 2000; Coulter and Willis, 2007; Melucci, 1989, 1996b). To examine these issues in the context of women's use and practice of CAM, I first explore why women, more than men, are attracted to CAM, and then I focus on the personal transformations that are suggested to result from women's CAM use and practice. In this exploration and its interpretation, I draw on Melucci (1989, 1996a/b) who argues that the politicisation of everyday life and issues relating to quality of life, self-realisation, participation and identity are central to an unfolding "new politics" (Buechler, 2000). He further suggests that social change is brought about through symbolic explorations, expressions of identity and the creation of new cultural norms and practices that pose subversive challenges to political systems.

What is the attraction of CAM for women?

Sointu and Woodhead (2008) link the increasing popularity of CAM, especially among women, with trends in contemporary culture that involve conceptualising the person holistically. The growth of CAM and other "holistic spiritualities" that aim towards "the attainment of wholeness and well-being of body, mind and spirit" (Sointu and Woodhead 2008: 259), they suggest, can be explained, partly, "in terms of their ability both to legitimate and subvert traditional practices and discourses of femininity" (Sointu and Woodhead 2008: 268). Holistic spiritualities, they posit, offer women, and some men, ways of negotiating contemporary dilemmas of selfhood, "including the contradiction between 'living for others' and forging 'a life of one's own' " (Sointu and Woodhead 2008: 268).

CAM practices involve, Sointu (2006b: 507) argues, "the misrecognised turning to discourses and practices that are capable of offering [women users] a sense of self-worth, acceptance and understanding", often through an implicit sense of shared marginality between patient and practitioner that relate to experiences of being women. In doing so, CAM practices enable women to "perform and embody ideals such as self-responsibility and self-actualisation; discourses of wellbeing both reproduce and resist traditional representations of femininity" (Sointu, 2006c: 345). In understanding CAM experiences as embodiment and as "making the body present" (Baarts and Pedersen, 2009), the body offers an arena for self-fulfillment and pleasure beyond the male gaze and women's traditional role of caring for others (Sointu, 2006a; Sointu and Woodhead, 2008). CAM's concern with the cultivation of women's self-nurturing can be seen as a "symbol of women's rebellion against their 'essential' roles of care" for others (Sointu and Woodhead 2008: 273). At the same time, in supporting and encouraging women's self-care and self-fulfillment, CAM recognises and affirms the centrality of the body, health, appearance and physical and emotional sensations as valid areas of attention and care. It encourages women to value themselves as women, as deserving of care and attention.

Thus the argument made by Sointu (2006a/b/c), and Sointu and Woodhead (2008) links closely with the above explorations of women's CAM practitioner-patient relationship, and women's experiences of CAM as empowerment, control and responsibility. It also foreshadows women's experiences of CAM as opportunities for self-care, self-knowledge and identity work, which is turned to next.

Women's CAM use: opportunities for self-knowledge and transformation of self and identity

Women's use of CAM as opportunities for self-reflection, self-discovery and transformation of self and identity emerges as a key theme from several studies (Baarts and Pedersen 2009; Barry 2003; McGuire 2008; Nissen 2008; Scott 1998; Sointu 2006b; Thompson 2003). These authors note that when a woman's new ways of thinking about her body, self and personal life, initiated through her experience with CAM, integrate with broader ways of "being holistic" in all areas of her life, personal and social change begin to merge. That is, some women challenge, resist and change the very circumstances which are counterproductive to their health and/or resist traditional representations of femininity. By using the body to resist and oppose social pressures, women's CAM use can provide resources for managing 'the aches and pains of everyday life' (Rostgaard, 2009), resist biomedical constructions of disease and patienthood, and/or support an emerging sense of power to transform one's self and identity as a woman.

The potential for transformation of self and identity through women's personal engagement with and experience of CAM, and the embodied nature of everyday self-care practices are also illustrated in studies of healing (McGuire, 1988) and

the exploration of alternative health networks in the US (Schneirov and Geczik, 2003). These studies further suggest that the new meanings resulting from the practice and use of CAM, frequently by women, shape powerful connections to others, create new ways of perceiving and being in the world, question biomedical expertise and challenge materialist values. Indeed McGuire (1988) and Schneirov and Geczik (2003: 149) suggest that as individuals experience self-care practices, they move from seeing "illness as a private trouble to illness and health as social problems". This experience, leads to a growing sense of and identification with being part of an alternative community where new value commitments emerge. A similar move is also noted, for example, in women's self-help movements (Taylor 1999) and early breast cancer movements (McCormick 2003).

Like the studies that examine women's practice and use of CAM, Flesch (2010) in exploring the study of acupuncture in the US also notes tensions between traditional notions of femininity and emerging understandings of self for women acupuncture students. Women are attracted to acupuncture as a holistic, compassionate and nurturing medicine, primarily due to their self-perception of being 'innate healers' (Flesch, 2010: 21). Yet women also perceive of themselves as pioneers: they advance a marginal field of medicine (both acupuncture and CAM generally), increase women's access to professional spheres, such as CAM, and aim for financial independence through their work.

Similarly, Gibson (2004) observes in her UK study of the professionalisation of osteopathy, aromatherapy and reflexology, that for women in particular CAM practice presents a twofold opportunity: to reclaim healing from biomedicine and to construct flexible working patterns that facilitate the notion of work as livelihood where personal worldviews and commitments blend with economic aspirations and necessities. While such cultural innovations may challenge traditional gendered work patterns in the public sphere, they may also reinforce women's often vulnerable dependence on part-time work and on other (frequently male) household income (Nissen, 2010).

The search for meaning, quality of life and self-realisation focused on the body that is characteristic of many CAM therapies is also integral to the "new politics" of new social movements. In CAM, women's personal "inner" journeys of change begin to blend with cultural and social change. Thus, CAM becomes more than a distinctive philosophy of health, healing and healthcare and more than an expression of "a new consciousness of the importance of the individual in achieving health" (Coward, 1989: 11) or narcissistic individualism (MacNevin 2003). Rather, CAM becomes a catalyst for change, as one woman notes: "[Western herbal medicine] helps me to focus on changing the way I'm actually living my life – in terms of having exercise, changing my diet and also trying to deal with other issues" (Nissen, 2008: 243). When women change the contexts in which their lives are embedded, the politics of self-actualisation (Giddens, 1991) fuse with resistance to and challenges of gender inequality and oppression (Buechler, 2000). The "personal" of women's lives becomes "political", and cultural and political change merge (Buechler, 2000).

However, the everyday act of "doing CAM" can also be problematic, especially given the multiple demands and challenges women encounter in their everyday lives (Nissen, 2008) and when considering temporal dimensions of CAM use (Broom and Tovey, 2008). More work examining the lived and long-term experiences of CAM users is therefore needed to establish how common or typical the observations presented here are, and/or how they might differ for women and men, for different women and men, and in the context of different CAM therapies and their practice and use in different countries.

In summary, women's practice and use of CAM encourages reflexive, caring and relational attitudes toward oneself, one's body, and emotional and social life. In doing so, I suggest, women's practice and use of CAM provides personal and cultural resources and social networks for producing self-knowledge, resistance to traditional meanings of femininity, and the re/construction of self-identity. This points towards important shifts in everyday socio-cultural values. How such shifts may link with wider social changes is turned to in the following section.

"The personal is *political*": women, CAM and social change

At the beginning of this article I posed the following question: Can we assume that CAM practices primarily maintain a societal status quo and reproduce individualism without collective impacts? It is to this issue of collective impacts of CAM that I now return. As in the previous section, I draw on Melucci's (1989; 1996a/b) new social movement theory. Of particular importance is his conceptualisation of social change which, he argues, is brought about through symbolic explorations, expressions of identity and the creation of new cultural norms and practices. These, he suggests, pose subversive challenges to political systems. In the following exploration of the wider social changes resulting of women's practice and use of CAM, I focus first on the impact of CAM in particular, and then on its impact in conjunction with other social movements. I conclude this section by asking whether women's practice and use of CAM constitutes an effective challenge to the prevailing gender system.

In the previous section, I suggested that women's practice and use of CAM points towards significant shifts in socio-cultural values. But do such shifts imply and/or generate wider social change? In 1988, McGuire predicted that the value changes pursuant to CAM would have "far-reaching consequences for the sociocultural and politico-economic spheres in modern life" whereby even "institutions of the public sphere themselves may have to change to accommodate these individualisms" (McGuire, 1988: 257). The following examples of the impact of CAM consumer movements in shaping healthcare provision illustrate the increasing accessibility of CAM, both in terms of availability and reaching a wider range of people. Klawiter (2005), in her exploration of the experience of one woman cancer patient in the US, demonstrates the huge changes in CAM provision that have taken place over the last decades. While "feeling isolated and powerless" in the late 1970s, 20 years

later the same woman felt like “the captain of a well-functioning team” comprised of various CAM and biomedical professionals. Likewise, Goldner’s (2004) study demonstrates that sustained lobbying of health insurance companies by initially individual CAM users can culminate in collective pressure that leads to changes in healthcare institutions which make CAM more widely accessible.

CAM as a health social movement also interacts with other health movements in producing change. Alternative health movements, women’s (health) movements and disability movements are credited with challenging and changing the customary social practices of biomedicine (Brown et al., 2004; Kuhlmann 2009). Women’s health and women’s alternative health movements in particular critiqued the doctor-patient relationship and biomedical models of health and contributed significant impetus to reconceptualising health and healthcare. Holistic health models, social models of health, and person-centred clinical methods have led to institutional change in the provision of healthcare (Kuhlmann 2009). Likewise, women’s health movements, alternative health movements and other embodied health movements have challenged and changed biomedical knowledge. Such ongoing challenges continue to prompt the “medical modernisation” of biomedicine, leading to innovation in health knowledge (Hess, 2005). At the same time, the democratisation of science through lay/expert collaborations helps to improve science practices, advance the health of the public and reshape the priorities of science and biomedicine (McCormick 2009). In this way diverse movements and their practices produce new knowledge and new ways of seeing the world, which individually and collectively challenge the status quo and existing power structures (Cox and Fominaya 2009).

The observations made here are consistent with considering CAM as a (new) social movement that responds to the needs of individuals in the context of post-modernity or late modernity (Coulter and Willis, 2007; Melucci, 1989, 1996a/b; Stambolovic 1996) and supports social change in healthcare and beyond. But is women’s use and practice of CAM also a challenge and form of resistance to the prevailing gender system? Abu-Lughod (1990) cautions against “romanticiz[ing] resistance”. Instead, she suggests to use resistance as a “diagnostic of power” to interrogate power in specific situations and trace how power relations are formed historically. While women’s contemporary use and practice of CAM highlights, as outlined in this paper, women’s resilience and creativity in refusing to be dominated by systems of gender power, casting a wider net of explorations permits the broader workings of power to be interrogated.

The struggle of biomedicine for professional dominance has been recognised as predominantly a gender struggle (Bourdillon, 1988; Ehrenreich and English, 1976). Similar struggles are occurring with regards to CAM. Flesch (2007) argues that the increasing male domination of CAM via biomedicalisation and co-optation of CAM into biomedical provision converges with processes of professionalisation to define the health work of women. Conversely, women’s

increasing exclusion speaks to the marginalisation of women's role as CAM providers (Flesch 2007). This role is however not without ambiguities, since "[t]he very qualities of CAM that make it an alternative to conventional medicine are, paradoxically, the same qualities that lock women into caring roles devalued by society and by the medical profession" (Flesch 2007: 170).

These dilemmas, as well as the tensions and dilemmas identified throughout this article, suggest that women's use and practice of CAM might destabilise traditional gender roles rather than overcome them. As such, women's CAM practices can be seen to represent a form of dissent and resistance and simultaneously a lived and embodied vision of alternative identities and communities (McGuire 2008) that are characteristic of "new politics" and NSM.

Conclusions and an emerging research agenda

Healthcare practices are political actions which legitimate or challenge practices, norms and ideas, as well as existing knowledge that reflect socio-cultural, political and economic structures. CAM is no exception to this. The interrogation of the interplay between women's practice and use of CAM, personal transformation and social change explored through this review of literature on women and CAM highlights that when gender constitutes an integral part of analysis and theorising, combined with a broader understanding of "the political", new meanings and perspectives emerge. The explorations presented suggests the following conclusion: Women's diverse practices and uses of CAM offer an opportunity to fulfill and confront traditional gender roles and discourses of femininity, and can provide new resources for personal transformation and the promotion of women's autonomy. Furthermore, women's practice and use of CAM contributes towards promoting and achieving wider social change. This takes place, for example, through: the destabilising of traditional gender roles; the changing of the customary social practices of biomedicine; the creation of new epistemic paradigms; the development of new working practices; and the shaping of alternative communities.

As noted throughout this article however, many of these aspects, and the issues related to them, go hand in hand with tensions and dilemmas concerning multiple dimensions of power – from personal and inter-personal, to social, cultural, economic and political. Therefore, considerably more work that takes these issues into consideration is needed. For instance, gender (and other social differences) and subjectivity are integral to processes of change, and this paper has centred specifically on women, noting the impact of CAM on women's traditional gender roles and identity work. Future explorations of men's practice and use of CAM and/or individual therapies may equally identify challenges to their traditional gender roles and normative patterns of masculinity (see e.g. Sointu 2011) that tend to perceive emotional expression, asking for help and caring for one's body and health as feminine (Courtenay, 2000; Magnuson, 2008).

Furthermore, the heterogeneity of CAM users, practitioners and therapies calls for more work to establish how common my conclusions are, for example in a wider range of situations, such as: how they might differ for women and men; for different groups of women and men; between different CAM therapies; in different kinds of CAM healthcare settings, including CAM that is integrated into biomedical provision; and in a wider range of countries. Rather than drawing on existing definitions or categorisations of CAM, other ways of thinking about CAM therapies might usefully come into play here. These might include: therapies which are associated with extensive conversations (e.g. homeopathy, Western herbal medicine, naturopathy); "science-oriented" therapies, such as chiropractic, osteopathy, acupuncture; "body therapies" such as massage, reflexology, shiatsu; distinctive philosophies, such as Ayurvedic medicine or traditional Chinese medicine; esoteric approaches, including crystal therapy and spiritual healing. Such considerations might then help to identify which kinds of CAM therapies have the potential to be empowering to its users, what kind of personal and/or social change they may support, and whether the setting in which CAM is practised (e.g. in biomedical healthcare or in private practice) influences the practitioner-patient relationship and impacts on how CAM users experience issues around, power, empowerment, control and responsibility in their engagement with CAM.

Related to this, and also to ongoing critiques of CAM (e.g. Baer 2004), is the question of how CAM practitioners understand the notion of holism and how different constructions of holism inform the practice of a CAM therapy and whether this has implications for users' experiences of CAM and/or a specific therapy (see e.g. Nissen 2008; 2011).

As noted, CAM is not an isolated healthcare practice or a health social movement that is unrelated to other movements. The centrality of foregrounding the body and the embodied nature of knowledge production is shared with women's health movements and also critical to other embodied health movements (EHM), including disability, breast cancer, and AIDS movements, and local and national toxic waste protests (Brown, et al. 2004). As such, EHM, similar to women's practice and use of CAM examined here, pose critical challenges to political power and biomedical authority and have contributed to transforming individual experiences and the provision and practice of healthcare (Brown, et al., 2004; Klawiter, 2005). Like CAM, EHM also critique, resist and change existing scientific and biomedical knowledges and practices. It is here in particular that overlaps of CAM with other movements of social change can be identified. More work is however needed to provide in-depth knowledge of how CAM (and individual CAM modalities) functions as a (new) social movement and what contributions are made to social and epistemic changes.

Examining these and other issues makes a more complex picture of CAM and potential change processes possible and furthers our understanding of health social movements. By focusing on women's use and practice of CAM, I hope to have contributed to this rich research agenda.

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About the author

Nina Nissen is an anthropologist with a particular interest in so-called complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). She has practised and taught an alternative therapy - Western herbal medicine - for more than 20 years in the UK and the Caribbean and is actively involved in feminist activism. Her research interests include feminist practice and scholarship, and the interplay between healthcare practices, gender and personal and social change processes. She is currently a post-doctoral research fellow at the Institute of Public Health, University of Southern Denmark, where she is researching EU citizens' attitudes and needs regarding CAM. nina.nissen AT gmail.com

Why we need a feminist movement now

Sisters of Resistance

This audio file has Sisters of Resistance co-founders, Sofia Mason and Angela Martinez a.k. el dia, in conversation with Sara Motta on healing, hip hop, spirituality and why we need a feminism relevant to the everyday lives of women. Sisters of Resistance blog is online at <http://sistersofresistance.wordpress.com/> To contact the Sisters of Resistance you can use any of the following: [sistaresista AT gmail dot com](mailto:sistaresista@gmail.com); Twitter: [@resistasista](https://twitter.com/resistasista); Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/SistersOfResistance>

You can download the file from:

<http://www.interfacejournal.net/2011/12/sisters-of-resistance-audio-file-download/>

You can listen to the file online at:

<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sisters-of-Resistance-audio.wma>

This is a .WMA file which should be playable on ALLPlayer, VLC media player, Media Player Classic, MPlayer, RealPlayer, Winamp, Windows Media Player and Zune Software among others.

Duration 1 hr 1 min; 14.3 MB

Some things we need for a feminist revolution

Nina Nijsten

Abstract

To work towards a feminist society, a strong feminist movement is a sine qua non. This paper discusses ten tools and tips that are useful for the creation of a dynamic and powerful movement. Collective activism, non-hierarchical organising, networks, meeting, spaces, means, education, media, protest and alternatives and fun and rest can help feminist activists in their struggle to have their voices heard and their demands applied.

Introduction

Everything looked so promising in the 1970s, an era of hope for radical feminist changes. Feminist bookstores, consciousness-raising groups, women's healthcare projects, feminist writings and research, feminist media and culture, activist collectives, women's houses, women-run publishing houses, huge protest marches and other projects. Alternatives as well as resistance and criticism to move our society towards a more equal and women-positive place. The feminist activism of the so-called second wave is a source of inspiration for me because at that time women gathered in large numbers to take action together, create projects that envisioned their feminist future and think radically and critically about gender, power and oppression.

But somehow it ended, and although some of these radical initiatives are still there, maybe in a somewhat other shape, a lot of it is gone too. Work and knowledge has disappeared (like the magazines and books that were written at the time and are hard to find today) or forgotten (like analyses about sexism and patriarchy and experiences with activism and alternatives). We do have equal opportunities institutions now, women's lobby organisations and official gender studies courses. But is this better? Can they give us everything we long(ed) for? And what about autonomy, participation and accessibility? Do we want a open radical autonomous democratically organised mass movement or a few professional specialists (politicians, university researchers, journalists) who will do the work for us?

I miss and I missed the second wave – I was born too late – but the feminist struggles of those days serve as an example to me. My activism in a radical feminist collective that's influenced by radical left, LGBTQ and anti-racist movements and in a national women's rights organisation that was founded in the early 1970s, as well as my experiences in anarchist and anti-globalist groups, reading about

feminism's past, discussing with other feminists, writing for a feminist blog, corresponding with feminist zine writers and attending feminist festivals shaped my views on feminist activism. For me, feminism is about ending sexist oppression, and even though previous generations of feminists have not (yet) succeeded in this mission, I believe they were on the right track.

In the second wave of feminism several do-it-yourself methods, democratic organisation structures and radical alternatives were developed and applied. Some of these are also used in radical left and alterglobalist groups today. This text was inspired by those visions and strategies. It's about the idea that we have to – and we can – do it ourselves, as a feminist movement. I offer a few basic tips for building a movement, some ideas and tools to “arm” ourselves, a start to make our ideals real and a checklist for our journey towards a feminist society. The ten “things” that are listed are useful to pay attention to when starting a feminist action group or contributing to building an autonomous movement. A lot of it probably sounds logical and obvious and a lot of it might already be put into practice locally – it just needs to be expanded, connected and made visible. We have to trace what we already have, what we're working on and what we still need.

The tips in this text are only a beginning though. There's more needed to reach a feminist utopia and we have to continue discussing and thinking about feminist strategies. I'd like to learn from the experiences of previous generations of feminists to know which strategies work and to avoid the mistakes of the past. We need a feminist movement that is strong enough to resist and survive a conservative backlash, a network that stretches beyond generations and geographical regions. So it's time to (re)organise and co-operate again and build an autonomous feminist movement. No more little waves followed by backlashes: it's time for a flood!

10 things to build a movement

- (1) collective activism
- (2) non-hierarchical organising
- (3) networks
- (4) meetings
- (5) spaces
- (6) means
- (7) education
- (8) media
- (9) protest and alternatives
- (10) fun and rest

1. Collective activism

The previous generations of feminists have struggled to make this world a better place for women and create a more egalitarian non-sexist society. But there remains a lot to be done and if we don't act, nothing will change. Therefore, if we want to end sexist oppression, we have to organise ourselves and take action, together. From the 1960s on, feminists gathered and formed small groups in which they could discuss and plan projects and actions. Such groups combined the forces of individual feminists. Together they could make much more happen than each on their own.

Sexism is a structural issue, not just an individual problem – as we know “the personal is political”. So we can't fight sexism on our own, as separate individuals. You can stand up for yourself, speak out, make the people around you aware about feminist issues and engage in certain little projects or solo actions, but this isn't enough to make real change. Together with other people you can do more and achieve more. The resources, woman-power and knowledge will be greater when combined. Actions organised and carried by a larger group appear more powerful and because of this also more effective. More voices making demands and having their say can push harder on the agenda. Besides, collective action gives courage and support for the activists themselves: we can learn from each other and encourage each other. It's much more motivating and pleasant to work together because you'll feel stronger as a group and understood as an individual, as I've noticed in the groups I'm involved in. I didn't feel alone with my feminist concerns and ideas – they didn't seem odd, utopian or extreme and they weren't ridiculed, there was support for not fitting in society's gender norms and for little rebellious acts (not shaving my legs for example) and the enthusiasm to take action together against injustice and gender discrimination (like sexist billboards, street harassment and so on) is always inspiring. So it's vital to organise ourselves in geographic or thematic groups, collectives, platforms and federations.

2. Non-hierarchical organising

Feminist organisations nowadays are often hierarchically structured organisations. But if we want to end inequality, shouldn't we be setting an example? In a world that consists of patriarchal institutions and companies in which only a few are in power, tell others what to do and decide over everyone else's faith, feminist organisations should try to investigate alternatives for hierarchical organisational models. Having women in the position of manager, director or coordinator just isn't enough. Feminist groups can be small-scale experiments to practice living and working together a larger feminist society. So they should be structured and organised in an egalitarian, democratic and non-hierarchical way. Organising in feminist groups should reflect feminist ideals of sisterhood and equality. Our ideals can not be postponed until “after the revolution”. If you fight against inequality,

then it's only normal that you don't accept unequal decision-making power and hierarchical structures in your own group.

Not only formal hierarchies, but also informal hierarchies which produce invisible elites and power positions should be avoided or removed. The small groups in the 1960s/1970s I mentioned before often suffered from the existence of informal leaders who weren't officially elected, but who still took on more decision-making roles and representational tasks because the unofficial hidden hierarchical structure of the group based on friendships and privileges allowed this to happen (Freeman 2002). The structure of groups should not only be intentionally non-hierarchical but also be consciously structured and open. Non-hierarchy can not be assumed to happen automatically.

There are lots of techniques and roles that have been developed to help organisations work and discuss in a non-hierarchical way and avoid informal leadership as well: clearly defining how decisions are made, agreed division of tasks, rotation of leadership roles (like facilitators for meetings and spokespersons), rounds during meetings, temporarily splitting into smaller groups (when the group becomes too big to discuss and not everyone is able to speak), workshops to unlearn master suppression techniques¹, hand gestures to communicate easier and faster, talking sticks or cards to avoid that some people talk all the time and others don't have the chance to speak, writing down the agenda before the meeting starts, writing down the minutes of the meeting, taking breaks, sharing useful skills and resources, self-criticism and self-evaluation, etc. We can learn a lot from the experiences of second wave feminist groups, radical left collectives and anarcho-feminist activists who both defied sexism in anarchist groups and hierarchical structures in feminist organisations.

3. Networks

One collective isn't going to pull the plug out of patriarchy, but when there are a lot of them working together, we increase our power. And we will need that power, because it's hard to undo thousands of years of anti-feminist socialisation and the institutionalisation of misogynist norms and behaviours.

The number of feminist groups and projects in the world is infinite, but most of them are not connected or don't even know each other. Just like it's better for individual activists to organise themselves collectively, collectives are stronger together than separately. This working relationship should also be structured in a non-hierarchical co-operative manner and local collectives should keep their autonomy. Such networks are useful for sharing information and local news, exchanging ideas, setting up projects or campaigns together, offering support,

¹ <http://hem.bredband.net/b125645/Artemis/Techniques/> (accessed 31.08.2011)

inspiration and solidarity. Where formal networks don't exist yet, groups can co-operate and network informally, supporting each other's actions, distributing each other's publications and keeping each other informed about plans and activities.

4. Meeting

In a time of faceless internet activism and a lack of visibility of our movement in the media, we might feel alone and disempowered. We can hardly grasp the real size, diversity, creativity and strengths of our movement, if we don't see and meet all those feminists who are out there. The feeling of isolation and being misunderstood by our surroundings can not be solved only by forming feminist facebook groups or discussing on blogs. When we meet in real life, we get a better idea about how big, diverse and powerful the feminist movement is and we'll be motivated to keep on fighting. Meeting each other is important to build a strong network.

Meeting other feminist groups and activists can happen at feminist gatherings and meetings such as feminist action camps, open women's studies conferences, international festivals like Ladyfest, alternative book fairs, brainstorm/skill-sharing weekends, activist meetings, radical summer schools, women's film festivals, international women's day activities and demonstrations. I've always found attending such gatherings inspiring and could bring fresh ideas to my group back home. In the second feminist wave, events like this brought lots of women together and sustained the movement. Today, there exist lots of feminist events and activities and you can organise your own where you invite and meet other feminists. Don't forget to bring your address book!

5. Space

Public space is generally not women-friendly. Women are traditionally encouraged to stay at home, on their own. But we need to reclaim public spaces and create some of our own where we feel safe and welcomed. This world has few (public) places where women, lesbians, queers, transpeople and girls feel totally at ease, at home, free and safe. A woman needs a room of her own as a creative workplace, said Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room Of One's Own*, but women and feminists also need free spaces for ourselves as a group and a movement. That's why feminist spaces are needed: collective rooms of our own.

Spaces where we can be ourselves, where we can relax and meet each other, where activities can happen and plans can be made, where we can talk, organise, educate and learn, find and give support, and inspire each other. Examples of such spaces are women's centres, lesbian cafés, anti-sexist squats, women's art galleries, feminist book shops, women's herstory archives and feminist libraries. The existence of feminist collective spaces can have an enormous influence on the

growth of our movement. We need meeting spaces, workplaces and "safe havens". I've seen that groups and projects rise when there's for example an activist squat or friendly community house to get together. Whenever such locations are known to be feminist-minded and places where feminists meet, it's a lot easier to find other feminist activists (Enke 2007) and plan actions and projects together.

6. Means

Action groups and non-profit organisations need means: financial means, material and a workplace or meeting space (see 5.). To fund our campaigns, buy equipment, print publications and so on, we need to look at ways to raise money. This isn't always easy and may involve some ethical discussions about who to accept funding from and where to spend it on.

Government funding or grants are one possible – but not the only – solution. Even though the State is part of patriarchy, the government's money is better spent on feminist projects than on something like the army. So why not try to send an application? The only risk to keep in mind is that your organisation may become dependent and soften its viewpoints and campaigns. Sponsorship of feminist-friendly enterprises and women's funds (such as Mama Cash²) is another possibility. Other ideas for collecting financial means are benefit concerts/parties, an art auction, selling merchandise (T-shirts, stickers, benefit CD), garage sales, membership fees and donations. There are also ways to save money: look for someone who can make free copies or maybe there are some old sheets and paint on your attic to make banners and flags.

7. Education

Education is crucial for social/left movements, including the feminist movement. It can erase inequalities based on schooling, teach skills and knowledge that isn't taught in school and raise awareness about feminist and other social justice issues. Traditional education often replicates gender norms and doesn't teach feminist values, theory or herstory. By offering alternative additional forms of education, we can try to counter these gaps and shortcomings. The transmission of skills and knowledge can be organised in for example workshops, lectures, interactive presentations, group discussions, educational walks, alternative media and film screenings.

Consciousness-raising groups and reading groups are two other methods commonly used by feminists which serve the purpose of education and raising awareness very well. In consciousness-raising groups, which were popular mainly

² <http://www.mamacash.org> (accessed 31.08.2011)

in the second wave, women share experiences and personal stories to discover the fact that their personal problems as women are political. Consciousness-raising groups can make women aware of the system of sexism and the necessity of feminist activism. Such gatherings of women can also lead to planning and organising actions to counter the sexism that was discussed. A feminist reading group looks similar to a consciousness-raising group, but it starts from an essay or a book instead of from personal experiences. The conversations can be theoretical, activist/strategic, personal or a combination of those three.

The group discussions in reading groups, consciousness-raising groups and workshops can contribute to making and sharing DIY research and theory about gender, emancipation, politics and society. The production of knowledge should not be left to so-called experts, professionals or observers/outsideers. Because we as feminist activists experience our activism first-hand and have valid opinions that deserve to be heard, we should document and analyse our collective experiences in the patriarchal system and our resistance to it and write down, share and publish our own feminist theories, criticisms, herstory and strategies. This kind of theory production and distribution is accessible and inclusive too, something that's lacking in academic surroundings.

8. Media

Patriarchal propaganda is targeted at us daily in the shape of advertisements, films, TV soaps, magazines, papers, video clips and so on. Through repetition of sexist messages in the mainstream media, sexism is being normalised. The "malestream" media is never neutral nor objective, even though they claim to be. Certain messages, images and speakers are chosen and others are silenced or ignored, and this choice is influenced by cultural norms, hegemonic opinions, economic interests and political ideologies. Feminists criticise the content of mainstream media (gender stereotypes, women's issues being ignored, etc), its representation of women, the working conditions in the media industry and the exclusion of women at decision-making levels.

As feminists we can react to the sexism in the mainstream media in different ways: feminist journalists can try to change the mainstream media from within, activists and pressure groups can analyse and criticise the media industry and feminists can make their own media. Creating our own media means being able to voice and spread our feminist opinions and ideas. It can target the feminist movement itself or a broader audience. Feminist media can be made in any medium – zines, blogs, film, radio, self-published books, etc – and subject-wise it can be very diverse: f.e. sharing experiences and theories about sexism in society, talking about what your ideal feminist world would look like or reporting on actions and projects. Feminist media can also be feminist poetry, posters and street-art, music and theatre. All of them create a forum on which feminist ideas are expressed, spread and discussed.

In the previous decades, magazines such as *Schoppenvrouw* (Belgium) or *Spare Rib* (UK) and riot grrrl zines were an alternative for traditional consumer-oriented women's magazines which focus on beauty, attracting men and housekeeping. They also offered a means of communication among feminists and between feminists and the broader society. Nowadays, digital media such as blogs can reach huge numbers of people craving for feminist literature, but paper media still flourish.

9. Protest and alternatives

So now we know how to organise ourselves and what we need, but what will we do in our groups and networks? How will we fight patriarchy, misogyny and sexism and create the world we dream of?

When working towards a feminist society we need activism that questions and fights against what's wrong in our current society (i.e. protest) *and* activism that builds something new and creates a better world here and now (i.e. alternatives). We have to be critical of sexism and other forms of oppression and their manifestations. We point to shortcomings and injustices in our society and make visible what has been normalised and naturalised (like gender roles and racist prejudice) in order to change it. It is important to raise awareness about violence, discrimination and oppression and to show that this can and should stop. Some examples of actions that can be used to resist and protest sexism are: blockades, occupations, street theatre, adbusting, protest letters, DIY media, Take Back The Night marches, boycott actions, radical cheerleading, strikes, a noise demo, filing complaints and placing huge banners on buildings or lamp posts.

When we speak out against something or criticise something, we might need to offer possible solutions or suggest what we want instead. Instead of "waiting for the revolution", feminist activists and collectives can experiment with, develop and build feminist alternatives that reflect the image of what a feminist world could look like. Whatever is missing, we can do, create or make it happen ourselves, right now. For example: feminists in the second wave have taught courses about women's history or female artists when this wasn't part yet of the curriculum at regular schools, they have founded women's houses and shelters and they've written alternative women's magazines. Other examples are Jane and Women On Waves (who both carried out abortions in places and times where this was/is illegal)³ and *Our Bodies Ourselves* (a collectively written book that encouraged women to examine their own bodies and demystified healthcare). Creating alternative non-sexist language is relevant too for feminists, such as the word *Ms* – to replace *Miss* and *Mrs* which refer to women's marital status – that was invented

³ Jane, also known as the Abortion Counselling Service Of Women's Liberation, is a group that was part of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. Women On Waves are pro-choice activists from the Netherlands who travel with a boat to the coasts of countries where abortion is illegal to perform abortions for women in need. At the same time they criticise the anti-abortion laws.

by American feminists and has now become a common word in English vocabulary. Gender neutral words like *se* – to replace *she* and *he* – are added by transfeminist activists. All of these alternatives can serve as an inspiring example for others – showing that things can be different.

10. Fun and rest

For me, feminist activism is a lot of fun. It's exciting, relaxing and empowering. The feminist movement offers an open, warm and safe space where I feel at home and where I can be myself and make friends. It gives me energy and inspiration – especially when everyday sexism can be so frustrating and disempowering. I enjoy going out at night with markers and stickers in my pockets, brainstorming and making plans with friends, laughing about each other's anti-sexist jokes, sharing experiences and learning, writing for a feminist publication and receiving feedback from readers, visiting feminist festivals and meeting feminists from other places... I love creative activism: making banners, designing funny stickers, drawing feminist comics, doing craft-street-art actions, painting feminist slogans on T-shirts, watching performances of feminist theatre, playing in a feminist band...

But sometimes activism can make you stressed and exhausted. The road to revolution can be long and hard because of set-backs, backlashes or continuously negative comments. Sometimes you need a break from the action and the constant fight against patriarchy. Sometimes you feel alone, powerless, worn-out... Then it might be time for some rest. It's better to take a break or holiday or go slower than completely burn out and quit activism. This freedom to withdraw as long as necessary to refuel your batteries has to be supported by the movement, because activism shouldn't be self-sacrifice. Feminist activists have the responsibility to look after each other and make sure we don't get discouraged. Sometimes feminist free spaces can be resting places too and going to a women-only/queer party, watching a feminist film or just a hug can already help a lot!

Conclusion

After decades and centuries of feminist activism, there remains so much to be done to transform this world into a place where everyone is free and equal. The struggle we are facing to oppose and eradicate sexism and patriarchy, along with ableism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, classism, capitalism and other forms of oppression, is not an easy one. We need to end oppression and inequality not only in our society, but also question such behaviours, power relations and privileges in our own movement and in ourselves. These are difficult challenges, but they must be dealt with if we want our feminist dreams to come true.

Building a sustainable movement by working on the ten "tools" I've outlined is only a beginning. We always have to rethink what we need and what we want. Once we

have a network consisting of millions of feminist collectives, organisations and consciousness-raising groups, alternative media, educational projects, sufficient financial means, spaces and events to meet, diverse forms of activism and time to take a break, we can keep going and look to the future. But we have to keep in mind, we can't do without any of them if we want to succeed in ending patriarchy. Equal Opportunities Ministries and gender studies programs are not enough. So in order to move forward, we have to look back at previous waves of feminism, learn and take inspiration from their ways of organising and taking action.

Checklist

- individual awareness and change
- feminist action groups
- non-hierarchical organisation structures and democratic decision-making policies
- networking and co-operating with other groups
- gatherings and meetings
- (financial) means
- free spaces
- education, skill-sharing and awareness-raising
- feminist media
- protest actions and campaigns
- alternatives
- rest
- fun
- database of local, regional and international feminist initiatives
- ending sexism

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Viejas Tensiones, Nuevos Desafíos y Futuros Territorios Feministas

(Rosario González Arias)

Abstract

El trabajo analizará en primer lugar cuatro retos que enfrentamos actualmente las mujeres como son el mito de la igualdad formal, la violencia misógina (representada en los feminicidios y en los conflictos armados), el sistema prostitucional y la vulnerabilidad de género ante los problemas medioambientales. En segundo lugar, se abordarán algunos conflictos presentes hacia el interior del movimiento feminista, como la pérdida de autonomía o de radicalidad. Se proponen también ciertas conexiones y puentes que desde el feminismo se pueden tender con el resto de mujeres, con las nuevas generaciones, o con los varones. Por último se plantean las propuestas de agencia y resistencia que nos permitan seguir explorando nuevas travesías feministas, conectando teoría y práctica, superando la lógica binaria patriarcal y en general desarticulando las lógicas de dominación de todos los sistemas de poder, sean patriarcal, colonial, capitalista, religioso o heteronormativo.

La experiencia situada

Para comenzar en primera persona, diría en primer lugar que como feminista he ido evolucionando en un proceso paralelo al del propio feminismo, ese universo diverso en permanente progreso, difícil de reducir al singular, aunque a menudo así lo hagamos por cuestiones puramente prácticas, como en este texto para aligerar su lectura. El feminismo me ha facilitado una mirada crítica que es, de entrada, un compromiso con el mundo, porque para mí implica la propuesta de una práctica política nueva; en este sentido entiendo toda teoría necesariamente involucrada con el compromiso político y ético, por eso en mi caso el feminismo va de la mano de la crítica al neoliberalismo, junto con el ecologismo, el antirracismo, el antimilitarismo, la antihomofobia y otros movimientos sociales con los que he colaborado en diferentes momentos de mi vida (grupos feministas de España, México o Inglaterra, movimiento por la insumisión al ejército en España, coordinadora ecologista, o SOS Racismo, entre otros). Creo que mi práctica profesional como abogada, docente o investigadora está igualmente permeada de esta mirada crítica. Diría además que parte de mi ética personal y política descansa en un compromiso activo con la incertidumbre, una herramienta metodológica que me facilita nuevas vías a explorar; así por ejemplo, la multiplicidad y complejidad de la posición (entendida como la relación entre lo individual y estructural) lejos de ser un problema ha constituido un recurso con el que trabajar (en la línea planteada por Erica Burman) pues mi experiencia situada me ha hecho tomar conciencia de la opresión y discriminación que históricamente padecemos las mujeres, a la vez

que me hace ser consciente de los privilegios que puedo gozar en un determinado momento y espacio por otros datos de mi biografía personal que no he elegido. Haber vivido en países europeos y latinoamericanos me ha permitido ver las trazas del neocolonialismo en los primeros y de qué modo el capitalismo impacta de forma diferenciada en los segundos, el Sur político, donde la desarticulación social, la violencia, el miedo o la pobreza operan de forma más intensa que en el viejo continente colonizador. Afortunadamente para mí, la experiencia mexicana también me ha revelado el valor político de la autonomía zapatista, el *"para todos/as todo"* y en general el reconocimiento de que otro mundo es posible, lo que nos abre múltiples posibilidades para la acción y el cambio social.

El mito de la igualdad¹

"Se llevaron la justicia y nos dejaron la ley"
(Frase del movimiento 15M en España)

El neoliberalismo es un sistema que no ofrece opciones de vida dignas y libres con carácter universal, es decir, no garantiza condiciones igualitarias para el conjunto de la población, pues el bienestar de unos descansa inevitablemente en las carencias del resto, favoreciendo en consecuencia la discriminación de los grupos más vulnerables, como las mujeres (aunque en sentido estricto no somos un grupo social, sino la mitad del mundo).

De acuerdo con Analía Aucía² en términos modernos el ejercicio de poder social, económico y político ha sido desigual – ya no sólo diferencial – entre los sexos. Esta tradicional discriminación se traduce en el rezago de las mujeres en el ámbito público y la sobrerrepresentación en el privado; en el primer caso está pendiente su participación efectiva e igualitaria en educación, actividad económica y política, mientras que en lo relativo a las relaciones privadas sigue postergada la implicación de los hombres al 50% en las tareas domésticas y familiares, donde ellos siguen ausentes³.

Junto con la discriminación social cotidiana convive un tipo de sexismo "institucional" o estructural ejercido desde los gobiernos, a veces de forma directa y expresa, otras por la ausencia de poder. En este sentido es curioso comprobar cómo la debilidad institucional propia del neoliberalismo se traduce en formas de poder, de abuso de poder institucional, sobre las mujeres; los sistemas liberales capitalistas se caracterizan por defender un modelo de Estado no intervencionista, una institucionalidad mínima frente a un mercado fuerte,

¹ El concepto de igualdad no es pacífico dentro del feminismo, así para Carla Lonzi (2004) la igualdad es un principio jurídico mientras la diferencia es un principio existencial, básico de la humanidad, y por tanto de mayor calado y trascendencia; esta autora resta importancia a la idea ilustrada de igualdad por ser lo que se le ofrece a los colonizados en el campo jurídico y lo que se les impone en el terreno cultural: una superchería legalizada.

² *"Género, violencia sexual y contextos represivos"* en Vasallo 2011.

³ Sobre el Índice de Equidad de Género se puede consultar <http://www.socialwatch.org/es/>

pero paradójicamente, la falta de intervención del poder disciplinario propio del Estado, facilita en Latinoamérica abusos de las autoridades e instituciones ante su falta de control y sanción, es decir un abuso de poder institucional facilitado precisamente por la ausencia de poder institucional, como por ejemplo se ha visto en el fenómeno de Ciudad Juárez. Además la violación sistemática de los derechos humanos de las mujeres, cuando es el propio Estado quien la realiza, se refuerza ante el clásico conflicto del derecho internacional de soberanía nacional vs. supranacionalidad, pues finalmente los instrumentos internacionales a favor de las mujeres (sean tratados, resoluciones o sentencias) devienen inaplicables y se convierten en papel mojado ante la imposibilidad de obligar a su cumplimiento en la práctica, si no hay voluntad estatal para ello⁴.

Podemos decir que la igualdad formalmente declarada no está realmente garantizada, es simple retórica jurídica, lo que pone en cuestión el supuesto carácter democrático de nuestras sociedades. En este sentido y de acuerdo con Gemma Nicolás (2009) la epistemología feminista constituye una reacción al positivismo cientificista androcéntrico y en consecuencia una crítica a las nociones liberales de los derechos. Un ejemplo de ello sería precisamente el concepto clásico liberal de igualdad formal, a partir de esa idea rousseauiana del contrato social como ficción de igualdad, donde no estaban las mujeres, generando lo que Pilar Rodríguez denomina ilusiones ópticas de igualdad intersexos.

El feminismo nos ha enseñado los límites de la igualdad formal, pues la igualdad de trato no equivale a igualdad de estatus. Así se explica, por ejemplo, que según diferentes organismos internacionales dos terceras partes de los 1.500 millones de personas que viven con 1 dólar o menos al día sean mujeres; que sólo perciban el 10 % del ingreso total, a pesar de que las dos terceras partes de las horas del trabajo mundial están a su cargo; o que produciendo el 50 % de los alimentos en el mundo sólo sean propietarias del 1 % de la tierra⁵.

De igual manera hay países considerados democráticos que no admiten en sus "democráticas" constituciones que una mujer asuma la jefatura de estado (caso de Japón o Lichtenstein), o que postergan a las mujeres en la sucesión a la corona frente a sus hermanos varones menores (caso de Dinamarca, Reino Unido, España o Mónaco entre otros). Claro que resulta contradictorio exigirle igualdad a una institución política tan discriminatoria como es la monarquía, la cual frente a la universalización del estado moderno (en el que existen los

⁴ Así está pasando en México con las tres últimas sentencias de la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos que hasta la fecha continúan con un saldo de incumplimiento grave por parte del gobierno responsable: caso "Campo Algodonero" condenando al Estado por tres feminicidios en Ciudad Juárez (dos menores de edad) y los casos "Fernandez Ortega" y "Rosendo Cantú", condenando por las torturas y violaciones sexuales de dos mujeres indígenas (una menor de edad) por parte de soldados del ejército mexicano.

⁵ Todo lo cual ha permitido acuñar el concepto de feminización de la pobreza.

derechos con carácter general) sigue representando la particularización medieval (en la que existían los "*privi-legis*, es decir, leyes privadas, no generales).⁶

La violencia que no cesa

*"El escenario de desorden y de inseguridad urbana,
ayer como hoy, es un escenario masculino"*
(Tamar Pitch 2003: 251)

La violencia, inevitable en un sistema neoliberal basado en la competitividad de personas y naciones, tiene una incidencia especialmente significativa sobre la vida de las mujeres. La existencia de ejércitos, guerras, dictaduras, genocidios, fanatismo religioso, nacionalismos radicales, *hooligans* de fútbol, o considerar el boxeo un deporte, o la tauromaquia un arte, nos hablan de un uso de la violencia extendido y aceptado. Pero hablar de violencia es hablar de violencia masculina, pues en términos generales son hombres quienes mayoritariamente la realizan. Según Luis Rojas (1997: 189)

Nuestra sociedad ha construido tres firmes racionalizaciones culturales para justificar y defender la agresión verbal y física: el culto al 'macho', la glorificación de la competitividad y el principio diferenciador de 'los otros'.

Ello explica que persistan en el planeta diferentes formas de violencia contra las mujeres; así, de acuerdo con Sen (1996) y con datos de UNIFEM, entre 113 y 200 millones de mujeres están demográficamente "*desaparecidas*" en todo el mundo, víctimas de abortos selectivos e infanticidios o por no haber recibido la misma cantidad de comida y atención médica que sus hermanos varones. Además según el mismo organismo más de dos millones de niñas son mutiladas genitalmente cada año. La lista de ejemplos se podría ampliar con la trata de mujeres, violaciones sexuales, las numerosas muertes maternas por partos mal atendidos o por abortos practicados en condiciones de riesgo, los matrimonios forzados, la *suttee* (incineración en vida de la viuda) en la India, la práctica de atar los pies a las niñas en China (que según algunas autoras tendría en occidente su equivalente simbólico en los tacones) las mujeres "jirafa" de Tailandia, los abusos sobre mujeres privadas de libertad o en conflictos armados, las desapariciones y asesinatos en serie como los de Ciudad Juárez⁷ (esa nueva versión mexicana de Jack el Destripador) o lo que Toni Morrison, feminista y premio Nóbel de literatura, denomina el burka moderno: la cirugía plástica que impide saber quien es quien.

⁶ Tomo esta idea de los *privi-legis* de Oscar Correas (2003).

⁷ Desde 1993 (en que empezó a registrarse el número de feminicidios) hasta el año 2010, se han contabilizado más de mil asesinatos de mujeres sólo en Ciudad Juárez; la magnitud del fenómeno viene dada no sólo por la frecuencia de los crímenes sino también por la alarmante impunidad en que se comenten, pues según diversas organizaciones más del 77% quedan impunes. Según datos oficiales del Ministerio Público, sólo en el año 2010 (el peor hasta la fecha) fueron asesinadas en la ciudad 306 mujeres, mientras 90 figuran como desaparecidas porque sus cuerpos no han sido encontrados.

Aunque se podría escribir mucho sobre cada una de estas modalidades de violencia contra las mujeres, me detendré en dos: los feminicidios y las guerras.

A) El término feminicidio hace referencia al asesinato de mujeres por el simple hecho de serlo; en palabras de Russell y Radford (2006) *"cuando las mujeres son asesinadas no es accidental que sean mujeres"*. De acuerdo con la OMS, la violencia de género es la primera causa de muerte o invalidez para las mujeres entre 15 y 44 años en todo el mundo y ha sido definida por la ONU como el crimen contra la humanidad más extendido, tolerado e impune (Torres y Antón 2010). Creo que en este sentido Ciudad Juárez representa el paradigma internacional de la violencia misógina⁸, no en vano México tiene el dudoso honor de ser el primer país del mundo en feminicidios de un total de 135 países que no están en guerra⁹; además ha sido condenado internacionalmente en 2009 en el caso conocido como "Campo Algodonero", en el que el alto Tribunal de Derechos Humanos consideró que el secuestro, tortura, violación y asesinato de tres mujeres fueron propiciados por la indiferencia y menosprecio sexista del Estado que favorece que sigan existiendo, al no haber prevenido, investigado, ni sancionado tales feminicidios, que hasta la fecha continúan impunes junto con otros cientos ante la debilidad institucional del país. La impunidad de los feminicidios en México contrasta fuertemente con los datos de mujeres (la mayoría indígenas pobres) procesadas por abortos involuntarios que son calificados como homicidio agravado por parentesco para tratar de justificar penas de hasta veinte años de prisión; el doble estándar con que se aplica la ley pone en evidencia el sexismo institucional y que la discriminación de las mujeres en México forma parte de una política de Estado.

B) En lo relativo a las guerras y conflictos armados, el escritor uruguayo Eduardo Galeano¹⁰ ha lanzado una pregunta retórica que muestra su inevitable nexo con el sistema capitalista actual,

¿Es justo un mundo que cada minuto destina 3 millones de dólares a los gastos militares, mientras cada minuto mueren 15 niños por hambre o enfermedad curable? ¿contra quién se arma, hasta los dientes, la llamada comunidad internacional? ¿contra la pobreza o contra los pobres?.

Pero también en esta cuestión las diferencias de género surgen de nuevo al conjugarse con el sistema patriarcal. Así se explica por ejemplo que apenas en 2008 la ONU haya considerado la violación de mujeres como arma de guerra, en atención a que el fenómeno había alcanzado *"proporciones inexplicables"* según su Secretario General. Como nos muestra Analía Aucía¹¹, ya en el contexto

⁸ Para Judith Walkowitz (2006) el imaginario del miedo en Juárez proyecta el problema de la violencia doméstica sobre el escenario de la calle. Este pensamiento se entiende a partir de la idea de que el hogar patriarcal es el lugar más letal para las mujeres pues las estadísticas comprueban que ser mujer joven y casada aumenta el riesgo de muerte (Russell y Radford 2006).

⁹ Datos de UNIFEM de noviembre 2010.

¹⁰ La Jornada, 9 mayo 2009.

¹¹ *Op. cit.* En este trabajo de CLADEM sobre la violencia sexual en el marco del terrorismo de Estado se analiza cómo durante el Plan Cóndor, desarrollado en las décadas de 1970 y 1980 en

de la Segunda Guerra Mundial las tropas nazis, los soldados soviéticos y el ejército imperial japonés llevaron a cabo violaciones masivas de mujeres, a pesar de lo cual ni en los Tribunales Militares Internacionales de Nuremberg ni de Tokio llevados a cabo contra Alemania y Japón en los años 1945 y 1946 respectivamente, los procesados fueron juzgados y castigados por los actos de violencia sexual. De igual manera durante la guerra de Argelia el ejército francés ejecutó violaciones masivas a mujeres árabes, y en la guerra de Vietnam, los soldados estadounidenses perpetraron violaciones masivas de mujeres vietnamitas. No es hasta los Tribunales Penales Internacionales de Ruanda y Ex-Yugoslavia que se juzga y condena por primera vez la violencia y tortura sexual, considerándolas crímenes de lesa humanidad¹².

De acuerdo con la misma autora, históricamente los conflictos y contextos represivos tienen una impronta masculina: son decididos por varones, para luchar por intereses que son representados por varones, y llevadas a cabo fundamentalmente por varones. Podríamos decir que el concepto de "guerra", concepto intrínseco al hacer militar, está basado en experiencias masculinas de vida,

La violencia de género se fundamenta en todas las estructuras sociales donde predomina el poder masculino, incluido el Estado cuando ejerce un control jerárquico y patriarcal. Y si bien esta violencia es estructural, la coyuntura de los enfrentamientos armados la profundiza en cuanto que estas circunstancias vuelven todavía más vulnerables a las mujeres (pag. 30).

El sistema prostitucional

"La pregunta no es: por qué mujeres "optan" por la prostitución sino por qué tantos varones optan por comprar mujeres y niñas/os en prostitución"
(Asamblea Raquel Liberman contra la explotación sexual de Argentina)

La prostitución de mujeres está tan extendida y socialmente "normalizada" que actualmente cualquier posicionamiento en contra de su "regularización" es tachado de puritanismo, aunque provenga de posturas feministas avanzadas o progresistas, pues dentro del propio movimiento feminista el tema es controvertido. En lo personal entiendo los argumentos que honestamente se plantean a favor de la regularización desde un sector del feminismo, pero me temo que desafortunadamente la marginación social que enfrentan las mujeres prostituidas no se mitigará así. Creo es un asunto que tiene implicaciones importantes para todas las mujeres (por simbolizar socialmente el uso del cuerpo femenino como instrumento de placer) no sólo para aquellas prostituidas, quienes lógicamente no pueden posicionarse en contra de la

varios países del Cono Sur de América, el ejército y cuerpos policiales empleaban la violencia sexual como una modalidad de tortura especialmente dirigida contra las mujeres detenidas.

¹² En lo relativo al contexto latinoamericano se puede consultar también el trabajo de CLADEM (2007) sobre la situación de las mujeres en distintas formas cruentas de agresión sexual en Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua y Perú.

prostitución porque eso equivaldría negar parte de su identidad, como afirman Carmen Vigil y M. Luisa Vicente (2006).

En mi opinión denominar "trabajo sexual" a una actividad que implica explotación laboral y sexual no deja de ser un giro lingüístico que suaviza semántica el término, pero que en nada cambia la realidad que esconde: reducir a las mujeres a objetos del mercado sexual masculino.

La prostitución es un comercio que pone al servicio del hombre blanco (que puede pagar para conseguir cuerpos que no se resistan, aprovechándose de las necesidades ajenas) nuevos entretenimientos sexuales¹³; porque el sistema prostitucional no se entiende sino es al amparo del sistema patriarcal, neoliberal y colonial¹⁴. En el capitalismo, regido por la ley del mercado del "saber vender y venderse", cualquier ocupación que permita una magra subsistencia se convierte en trabajo aunque sean contratos de explotación y servidumbre. La propia OIT (Organización Mundial del Trabajo) en su publicación *The Sex Sector* (1998) a cargo de Lin Lean Lim, afirma que "*la existencia de la llamada "industria sexual" es un hecho justificado por el dinero que produce*" (Sara Torres, *Palabras Cruzadas*, en CLADEM 2003: 14-15).

No creo que las propuestas de "regularización" dentro del mercado laboral, mediante contratos, cotizaciones a la seguridad social, pago de impuestos, acotación de zonas dentro de las ciudades para su ejercicio, controles y cartillas sanitarias para las mujeres (curiosamente no para los clientes), etc., sean realmente liberadoras para las mujeres y que más bien se disfraza como progreso social lo que en realidad es el mantenimiento de su explotación sexual y laboral, un negocio muy rentable (el tercero después del narcotráfico y la venta de armas) que mueve millones de dólares en el mundo y que encubre la trata de mujeres y niñas. Coincido con Cecilia Lipszyc¹⁵ en que el término "trabajo sexual" no es neutro, las palabras no son inocentes, tienen detrás propuestas, no sólo jurídicas sino, sobre todo, políticas, de política sexual. En este sentido, y de acuerdo con Foucault, el dispositivo de la sexualidad forma parte de las microprácticas de poder en el proceso de formación del sujeto moderno, que incluiría discursos científicos, medidas legales, organización de espacios, etc (Valladares 2004). De ese modo la construcción de la sexualidad por parte del Estado se lleva a cabo a través del Derecho, uno de los sistemas normativos que actúa como "dispositivo de poder", y que es la institución encargada de la regulación de los placeres, que norma el ejercicio de la sexualidad por excelencia. Por eso sólo a partir de una ficción jurídica puede defenderse que, como plantea la misma autora, hechos que en cualquier trabajo son considerados acoso o abuso sexual (toqueteos, violaciones, insinuaciones verbales, requerimientos sexuales indeseados) sean convertidos por arte de

¹³ No por casualidad los dispositivos de control social sobre la prostitución no rozan ni de lejos a los varones clientes-prostituyentes, para quienes nada se reglamenta.

¹⁴ En el caso español más del 75% de las mujeres prostituidas son inmigrantes.

¹⁵ "*Mujeres en situación de prostitución: ¿esclavitud sexual o trabajo sexual?*", en CLADEM 2003.

magia en parte del "trabajo" de un sector determinado de mujeres, la mayoría pobres e inmigrantes. El Derecho es discurso y en ello radica precisamente su poder disciplinario y preformativo, en virtud del cual se puede transformar una agresión en una actividad comercial, un delito en un contrato, a partir de un giro lingüístico, de un recurso discursivo que equipara la aceptación de dinero por parte de la mujer con su consentimiento, haciendo abstracción de la historicidad y poniendo entre paréntesis el contexto económico y social de desigualdad entre las partes que propicia dicho consentimiento (cuando precisamente en términos legales el consentimiento sólo es efectivo si se presta entre iguales).

Problemas medioambientales y vulnerabilidad de género

La evolución del sistema capitalista ha ido de la mano de un desarrollo industrial sin límites y consiguiente explotación de la naturaleza a cargo del *homo predador*, provocando la degradación medioambiental que actualmente padece toda la humanidad. Sin embargo el análisis de la crisis ambiental global incorporando la perspectiva de género permite vislumbrar nuevas brechas también en este ámbito, como se ha visto en diversos desastres naturales. Las sequías y desertificación, por ejemplo, afectan de forma preponderante a las mujeres pues son quienes a nivel mundial tradicionalmente se ocupan de la obtención y gestión del agua para la alimentación e higiene del grupo social y por lo mismo sobre quienes más impacta su escasez. De igual manera las inundaciones, siendo fenómenos opuestos a la sequía, han revelado que la mayoría de las víctimas son mujeres como ha sido el caso del terremoto en Pakistán o el huracán Stan (80% y 72% del total de personas fallecidas respectivamente, de acuerdo con Ursula Oswald) por causas relacionadas nuevamente con los roles de género, como es el cuidado y protección de los otros (el *ser para los otros*, antes que *ser para sí*) que en caso de emergencia las lleva a priorizar la salvaguarda de su familia y pertenencias antes que su vida; posiblemente además el tradicional confinamiento al hogar les limite los recursos personales para salir en busca de ayuda y supervivencia ante un siniestro, a diferencia de lo que les sucede a los hombres. Además, como se ha visto recientemente en el terremoto de Haití, las mujeres vuelven a ser revictimizadas en el proceso posterior de reconstrucción tras una catástrofe natural, con el aumento de número de violaciones sexuales en los campamentos de supervivientes.

Los desafíos hacia el interior del movimiento feminista

"El feminismo despierta un antifeminismo virulento"
(Michelle Perrot 2008: 210)

En paralelo a los problemas que las mujeres vienen enfrentando en el contexto actual, el propio movimiento feminista también ha venido resintiéndose hacia su interior algunas visicitudes y puntos de fuga.

Así por ejemplo diversas autoras han señalado como principales problemas de los feminismos actuales la pérdida de democracia interna por el surgimiento de liderazgos, estrellismos y "tentaciones imperiales", o la pérdida de radicalidad y autonomía a cuenta de los financiamientos internacionales. Desde estos planteamientos se afirma que al haber pasado a ser actores sociales dentro de las estructuras centrales del poder, la "profesionalización" surgida en el seno del feminismo oficial o institucionalizado ha creado un modo de hacer política feminista que en la práctica ha generado la despolitización del movimiento¹⁶. A decir de Francesca Gargallo (2006) en los últimos años el movimiento feminista se ha caracterizado por el surgimiento de lo que ella denomina "expertas de género", grupos mayoritarios de mujeres, empoderados desde la academia y la política, frente a los cuales resisten minorías críticas desde las trincheras de la autonomía. La categoría de género o la participación política han sido aceptadas acríticamente dentro del movimiento feminista, por cumplir con las exigencias de la cooperación internacional, lo que ha conllevado la burocratización y consiguiente pérdida de radicalidad y crítica del feminismo actual¹⁷. Para la autora esto sucede a la vez que se establece la idea de mercado y democracia como mecanismos de control (político, económico y militar) junto con la colonización occidental de otras culturas, igual que las mujeres fueron colonizadas por la universalización de la cultura y el poder masculinos; cree que a partir de los años 90, con la incorporación del sistema de género en las academias latinoamericanas para ponerse al nivel de sus interlocutoras estadounidenses, se va instaurando la lógica binaria propia de la cultura occidental y reflejo del sistema patriarcal, que ha construido su poder sobre la separación, como un sistema taxonómico. En la misma línea Amalia Fischer (2002) entiende que esa forma molar de hacer política reproduce la subjetividad patriarcal y va de la mano del vedettismo y la burocratización. De ese modo algunas feministas han aceptado el financiamiento, la negociación con gobiernos, los liderazgos y la institucionalización (en ONGs, Estado, academia, etc..) y en consecuencia el precio o riesgo que se ha corrido es que el trabajo feminista se termine transformando en mercancía y que su carácter transformador se difumine; ya no hay movimiento sin financiamiento, lo que fomenta un activismo pragmatista y desarrollista, funcional al sistema¹⁸.

¹⁶ Precisamente el ámbito político ha sido uno de los espacios de toma de decisiones y de poder reservado tradicionalmente a los varones, por lo tanto permeado por intereses y valores androcéntricos opuestos a los planteamientos críticos y emancipadores de las teorías feministas.

¹⁷ Creo que el uso y abuso del concepto de género, cuando en realidad se está haciendo referencia al feminismo, sería una prueba de ello.

¹⁸ La autora analiza la injerencia de la ayuda internacional al desarrollo dentro del movimiento feminista latinoamericano, que no deja de ser un reflejo de las relaciones coloniales de EEUU y España hacia América Latina, principales países gestores de dicha ayuda.

Conexiones y puentes desde el feminismo: otros tiempos, otros colectivos

"Vamos lento porque vamos lejos".
(Lema del movimiento 15M en España)

El feminismo tiene tres siglos de historia y sigue siendo pertinente, a pesar de que en el imaginario colectivo perdura la errónea creencia de que sus postulados están cumplidos, lo que a menudo opera como justificación política para no ir más allá y freno social a cualquier intento de reclamo, neutralizando su mensaje.

En el pasado Emma Goldman, feminista ácrata, afirmaba que *"de poco le puede servir a la mujer su estrenada independencia y consiguiente libertad para escoger su profesión, su horario de trabajo, y finalmente sus condiciones de explotación laboral"*¹⁹. Al mismo tiempo en México tenía lugar Primer Congreso Feminista de Yucatán 1919, en el que dos de las reivindicaciones laborales eran: no prueba de embarazo e igual salario. Pienso que cien años después de estas ideas sobre la doble discriminación de las mujeres en el sistema capitalista patriarcal continúan vigentes.

Para mi el feminismo significa justicia, progreso y cohesión social, sin embargo el deseo de universalizar sus postulados ha chocado con diferentes barreras que convendría descifrar si queremos que sea asumido como imprescindible. Sólo analizaré algunas pues entiendo que la lista para construir redes en colectivo no debería estar cerrada para ningún grupo que busque un cambio social en positivo.

Fronteras entre mujeres

Sin duda el primer puente que tendríamos que tender como feministas sería hacia todas aquellas mujeres que aún no se reconocen en el feminismo. Y no me refiero a aquellas convencidas de la necesidad de derribar los muros patriarcales que el machismo cotidiano levanta y que por diferentes motivos optan por no involucrarse activamente. No estoy pensando en militancia exactamente, sino en identificarse de alguna manera con los principales postulados feministas, al margen de cómo se articulen esas ideas emancipadoras a título personal. Pienso más bien en la gran cantidad de mujeres que viven absolutamente ajenas a los principios que defiende el feminismo y que incluso se posicionan expresamente en contra de ellos. El patriarcado ha conseguido adeptas también entre las propias mujeres, precisamente porque es un sistema (formado por discursos, prácticas e instituciones). Así se explica que como dice Michelle Perrot el feminismo no siempre goce de buena fama, y *"muchas mujeres se cuidan de él como de una arruga en la cara (...) a pesar de todo lo que le deben al movimiento"* (2008: 198). Cuesta entender que aún haya mujeres opuestas a

¹⁹ *"La Tragedia de la Emancipación de la Mujer"*, en Goldman 1977.

algo tan básico como exigir “iguales derechos que para los hombres”, si nos atenemos a la definición simplista dada por el diccionario de la R.A.E.²⁰; pero es lógico, porque como dice Encarna Bodelón (2008) cada vez que una mujer desafía al patriarcado está poniendo en cuestión siglos de normalidad y dominación.

La siguiente fundamentación teórica tomada de Cecilia Lipszyc ayuda a entender lo anterior,

siguiendo a Fanon, Foucault y Bourdieu y los conceptos de la producción de consenso: el primero, sobre lo aprendido por el colonizado que lo lleva a pensar como el colonizador, el segundo, sobre los múltiples mecanismos de disciplina en la producción de conocimiento y conductas de una sociedad, y el otro, en el término de violencia simbólica que, retomando a los anteriores, sostiene que el dominado no dispone de categorías de pensamiento para pensarse en su relación con el dominador, por lo cual los tres autores sostienen que el dominado piensa como el dominador en términos de lo “natural”. (*op. cit.*:59)

Foucault vincula este poder disciplinario, que atraviesa los cuerpos y graba la norma en las conciencias, con el *modus operandi* del capitalismo pues “*el capitalismo moderno necesita para su desarrollo capitalista sujetos que actúan de acuerdo a un determinado ethos impregnado de una determinada mentalidad empresarial*” (Susana López, 2008:125-127).

Fronteras generacionales

A menudo se ha hablado de la desconexión del feminismo con las nuevas generaciones. Queda la sensación de que tras los años 60 y 70, donde el movimiento ocupó las calles y las casas, el feminismo ha sido cooptado o desplazado hacia los grandes despachos (en forma de legislación, proyectos técnicos, planes políticos y similares) o hacia las aulas (en forma de programas de estudios de género y eventos académicos especializados) por lo que las jóvenes, con todas esas supuestas conquistas alcanzadas y sin referentes inmediatos y cercanos no tendrían ahora necesidad de organización. También pudiera ser que las divisiones entre las propias feministas, no sólo por las corrientes tan distintas sino incluso por los desencuentros hacia el interior de ellas, no han facilitado el camino hacia las nuevas generaciones de feministas, que se hallarían perdidas entre tantos grupos o, lo que sería peor, desmotivadas ante las luchas de poder y liderazgo dentro de ellos.

Lo cierto es que en términos generales corren malos tiempos, pues el pensamiento neoliberal ha jugado bien sus cartas de desmovilización y despolitización social; el individualismo y el consumo desaforado del norte, junto con las penurias y miserias del sur (además del llamado “cuarto mundo” en las sociedades opulentas) están logrando de algún modo que los movimientos sociales, no sólo el feminismo, tengan difícil el relevo generacional. Pareciera que la juventud se haya dividida (y fragmentada) entre

²⁰ Institución por cierto nada sospechosa de androfobia, siquiera sea por la composición casi exclusivamente masculina de sus miembros a lo largo de toda su historia.

quienes confortablemente instaladas/os en sus burbujas del estado de bienestar viven ajenos/as a las problemáticas sociales y quienes ante tanta adversidad cotidiana tienen que destinar toda su energía vital a la supervivencia de cada día. Además en los últimos tiempos el sistema no ha escatimado recursos para tratar de desarticular diferentes movimientos alternativos, mediante la persuasión²¹ o incluso mediante el uso de la fuerza policíaca, militar o paramilitar, que en el caso del feminismo se ha cobrado la vida de numerosas activistas en Latinoamérica (caso de Colombia, Guatemala y México recientemente).

Sin embargo, afortunadamente, al margen de posturas pesimistas, lo cierto es que una joven vanguardia está entrando con fuerza en el feminismo, sacudiendo sus sólidos cimientos con la vitalidad de nuevos discursos y prácticas. No somos las primeras ni seremos las últimas, la herencia política del feminismo está asegurada aunque con necesarias e interesantes renovaciones, como serían algunas de las siguientes propuestas: el ciberfeminismo, conformado mayormente por jóvenes que proponen nuevas formas de comunicación y acción política feminista a partir del uso de las nuevas tecnologías, reivindicando la presencia de las mujeres también en el ciberespacio. El feminismo post-colonial que reivindica las identidades fronterizas (negras, mestizas, latinas etc..) frente al modelo feminista hegemónico de la mujer blanca; en este sentido trata de descolonizar el feminismo occidental de su etnocentrismo, cuestionando las versiones sesgadas, reduccionistas, homogéneas y paternalistas que ha construido tradicionalmente el imperialismo en torno al resto de mujeres. El ecofeminismo en términos generales surge como una propuesta alternativa al sistema de desarrollo no sustentable de la sociedad de consumo, en el que las mujeres, junto con otros grupos socialmente vulnerables como los pueblos indígenas, sufren las principales consecuencias de la depredación ambiental y pérdida de la biodiversidad. El transfeminismo por su parte es un intento por ampliar el sujeto político del feminismo hacia la diversidad de mujeres, habilitando un espacio común en el quepan todas; para ello parte de la idea de que las diferencias sexuales binarias (hombre/mujer) son producciones culturales, por lo que reivindica la existencia de infinitas identidades, a la vez que rechaza el feminismo blanco, burgués y heterosexual del movimiento feminista clásico.

²¹ Precisamente en la sociedad de consumo resulta interesante analizar el doble papel que juegan las mujeres, al ser consumidoras de determinada mercancía que a su vez les facilita convertirse ellas mismas en un objeto de consumo más: pechos de silicona, uñas de acrílico, labios de colágeno e incluso la "virginidad" se pueden comprar para construir cuerpos dóciles que representen un tipo de feminidad ideal al servicio del hombre. Sin duda los medios de comunicación, a través de la frecuente objetivización sexual y ridiculización de las mujeres contribuyen a persuadir a favor de ese modelo.

Fronteras intersexuales²²

Frente al movimiento feminista propio de los años 60-80, que era exclusivo de mujeres por la necesidad de preservar espacios para la construcción colectiva libres de la omnipresencia hegemónica de los varones, se ha ido abriendo paso poco a poco voces feministas que defienden el feminismo como un proyecto de toda la sociedad, que como tal no debería seguir reduciéndose exclusivamente a grupos de mujeres, sino incluir a todas las personas, también a los hombres (Amalia E. Fischer 2002); así entendido el proyecto transformador feminista constituiría un asunto colectivo y social, no exclusivo de un solo sexo, pues tiene un efecto multiplicador en el bienestar de toda la sociedad. Por ejemplo la lucha contra la violencia machista o a favor de la despenalización del aborto no deberían ser temas exclusivos de mujeres, los hombres también deberían reclamarlos como propios por ser materia de derechos humanos y afectarles directamente²³. De este modo han ido apareciendo grupos de varones, que aceptando su co-responsabilidad como grupo social en la discriminación sufrida por las mujeres, se reconocen como pro-feministas y se comprometen activamente en tratar de revertir un fenómeno social que sin duda también les incumbe. Porque al lado del feminismo, inevitablemente, se despliega la historia de los hombres y un tipo de masculinidad hegemónica frente a la que también comienzan a construirse resistencias.

Agencias, resistencias y nuevas travesías feministas

*"Lo que ha sido construido históricamente
puede ser destruido políticamente."
(Michel Foucault)*

Parece haber un consenso en el feminismo acerca de que nos encontramos en la tercera ola, aunque no haya coincidencia acerca de qué cambios la iniciaron ni cuál fue su fecha de inicio (años 60 ó 90 dependiendo de cada autora). Pero para que esa afirmación tan global sea cierta requiere de una matización temporal y espacial: tercera ola sólo en algunas partes del mundo, en algunos espacios, en algunos momentos porque en la realidad práctica de cada día conviven feminismos de diferentes velocidades, o como dice Amelia Valcárcel *"la agenda feminista está abierta por páginas diferentes en cada lugar del mundo"* (2008: 12). Así se explica, por ejemplo, que junto a las teóricas queer que desde un contexto urbano, occidental y "académico" plantean el post-feminismo, aparezcan desde las montañas del sureste mexicanos las mujeres zapatistas, situadas en un "abajo y a la izquierda", tomando las armas pero también la palabra para reivindicar la "Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres" que rige

²² A partir de las formulaciones teóricas del movimiento queer la referencia a los sexos debe entenderse ampliada a todos los existentes, más allá del binomio sexual tradicional mujer/hombre.

²³ Como le oí en una ocasión a un hombre, el problema de la violencia machista contra las mujeres es tan grave que si fuera al revés ya se habría hecho algo para solucionarlo hace tiempo.

en los municipios autónomos de Chiapas desde 1993, y que entre otros derechos les reconoce el de "*no ser obligadas por la fuerza a contraer matrimonio*" (art. 7).

Esta idea nos sirve también para entender la necesidad de vincular la teoría con la práctica feminista, el concepto con la realidad histórica en palabras de Linda Alcoff (1988), porque como todo movimiento social el feminismo implica un proyecto de crítica política y transformación social, no se ocupa sólo de describir la realidad, sino también de transformarla. Requiere desarrollar resistencias frente al poder, abrir posibilidades para la acción en diferentes direcciones.

En este sentido, y de acuerdo con Paula de Dios (2008) "*la igualdad que nos venden es la igualdad dentro de las estructuras de poder establecidas, dentro del mercado organizado por el poder patriarcal capitalista*"; ante ello la creatividad feminista inventa alternativas y entiende que la igualdad no es que me permitas hacer lo que tú haces, sino que "*desactivemos las dinámicas actuales que machacan a casi todas las personas que las mantienen*".

Una manera de intentarlo sería, como proponen Amalia Fischer o Francesca Gargallo, superando la lógica binaria presente en nuestro sistema de categorizaciones patriarcal occidental, que deja fuera todo lo imprevisto o casual, imposible de clasificar o definir, porque categorizar implica olvidarse de la complejidad y las multiplicidades, es optar por los universales y por el pensamiento lineal. Y precisamente los grupos minoritarios (en realidad minorizados) descansan en dualismos conceptuales que refuerzan la noción de minoría como "el otro", creando oposiciones binarias que dejan el centro de poder intacto de acuerdo con Susana López (2008).

La estrategia feminista pasaría entonces por revisar que nuestros discursos y prácticas no caigan en las lógicas de dominación de los sistemas de poder, sea éste patriarcal, colonial, capitalista, religioso, heteronormativo, etc., estando alertas a no reproducir las formas masculinas interiorizadas, hablando en nombre de todas, como si no fuéramos diversas y plurales.

Por otro lado, reivindicar la diversidad supone también estar presentes en nuestra comunidad, sin dejar de estar conectadas en lo global; la articulación internacional de estrategias feministas locales nos da la oportunidad de tender puentes y establecer redes de resistencia más allá de imaginarias fronteras políticas entre los pueblos. Creo que la red feminista CLADEM, en la que colaboro, puede ser un modelo de cómo coordinar a nivel internacional grupos de trabajo nacionales de dieciséis países de la región latinoamericana y caribeña, combinando la formación con la acción, ésta a través de su participación en litigios internacionales sobre derechos humanos de las mujeres, el monitoreo para exigir el cumplimiento de los Estados de los instrumentos internacionales, y el lanzamiento de distintas campañas para mejorar la condición social de la diversidad de mujeres (actualmente "Por una

educación no sexista y antidiscriminatoria" y "A favor de la Convención Interamericana de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos")²⁴.

Coincido con Susana Chiarotti²⁵ en que las feministas actuales no somos ni la vanguardia iluminada ni las representantes de las mujeres, no somos ni las únicas ni las primeras, no dimos inicio a esta historia, pero podemos aspirar a ser una minoría significativa o activa; no buscamos el poder pero nos enfrentamos al poder y nos organizamos para producir cambios a través de la palabra²⁶. Porque nuestra revolución es pacífica y la palabra es la principal arma de construcción masiva de que disponemos, un discurso contestatario y propositivo nos permitirá, parafraseando al zapatismo, construir "un mundo feminista en el que quepan muchos mundos".

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²⁴ Para más información se puede consultar <http://www.cladem.org/>, disponible en tres idiomas.

²⁵ "¿Somos las feministas una minoría significativa?", en CLADEM 2010.

²⁶ Un obispo de Argentina dijo que no les importaba el aborto clandestino, lo que no querían es que se discutiera el tema públicamente: o sea que los debates tienen un valor revulsivo (*ibidem*).

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Feminista activista y académica. Estudió Derecho en la universidad de Oviedo-España, ciudad donde ejerció la abogacía durante doce años y colaboró con colectivos feministas, ecologistas, antirracistas, pacifistas y de insumisión al ejército. A lo largo del año 2011 participa en el Feminist Research and Reading Group (FRRG) de la Manchester Metropolitan University (Inglaterra). Actualmente es docente en la Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro (UAQ-México) actividad que compagina con la redacción de su tesis de doctorado sobre violencia de género en la Universidad de Oviedo. En México ha impartido diversos talleres y cursos sobre transversalización de la perspectiva de género, violencia de género y derechos humanos. Colabora en el Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Género de la UAQ, y en el Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM), red feminista con más de 20 años de existencia que utiliza el derecho como herramienta de cambio para mejorar la condición socio-jurídica de las mujeres en Latinoamérica y el Caribe. CLADEM cuenta con estatus consultivo en el Categoría II ante las Naciones Unidas desde 1995, ante la UNESCO desde 2011 y goza de reconocimiento para participar en las actividades de la OEA desde el 2002. En México CLADEM forma parte del *Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio* y del *Foro Nacional por el Derecho a Decidir de las Mujeres*.

Independence versus interdependence

tiny (Lisa Gray-Garcia)



Capitalism pushes the cult of individualism. But true wealth comes from family, connectedness and giving (and that doesn't mean presents...)

I hold the world... or try to... on my broken back... I have carried worlds and toasters – the guts of a hundred evictions, couches and king-sized beds and everything else - ... on my broken back I have carried the love of some people and the disdain of others the hate of a thousand landlords, welfare workers, and a few hundred angry creditors... and my broken family... ..on my broken back...

— excerpt from *My broken back* by tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia

Interdependence – what is it really? In a capitalistic society raised on the cult of independence and the notion that an individual's personal advancement are the most important thing to strive for, how can we really comprehend — or more importantly, practice — true interdependence?

What are our personal models of interdependence? And as we approach the co-opted and colonized Christmas holiday — or what I now have dubbed Capitalismas — how will those of us trying to be practitioners of interdependence translate some sense of spirit and true care-giving to our families and communities?

Mine is a story of survival common to many families subsisting in poverty all over the world. My mother was a poor woman of color who was one paycheck away from homelessness. When she lost her job and became disabled it was necessary that I drop out of school in the sixth grade, at age 11, so I could work to support us.

Contrary to Western (US) capitalist standards where healthy families are made up of individuals whose personal advancement and fulfillment are considered paramount, I am honored that I could help my family, that I could help my mother, and like poor children all over the world, I am aware that without my help she would not have made it.

I learned by default that the core concept of interdependence is sacrifice, sacrifice not for one's self, but for others - not in a minimal, time limited, "I've got to go on with my life, you are holding onto me, holding me up, or just plain holding me" kinda way - but in a selfless, "I love you, you raised me, you are my elder, my child, I am there for you" way.

These values didn't come to me easily. For the first part of my life I was raised on US television, US schools, watched re-visionist, Euro-centric history perpetrating US values of independence, ageism, separation, and individualism. It wasn't until my early twenties when I was blessed to study with ethnic studies scholars that I began to articulate my values about family and togetherness, eldership and care-giving, to realize that my struggle to care for my mom by any means necessary could be viewed as resistance and heroism, or just plain normal. It was here that I started to claim my own voice.

Everything began to re-defined, rooted out and examined, especially notions of mental and community health. I re-examined my own organic decision to care for my mama as an adult within new contexts: From a western psycho-therapeutic perspective, my mom suffered from a mental illness. But from the perspective of almost every non-western culture from Asia to Africa and all in between, nobody is ever left alone, the way they are in the U.S. Here, alone-ness, "independence" is valued as a virtue, a strength, a form of normalcy, a barometer for sanity — whereas in other cultures togetherness, the group, the collective, is the norm. So, from a non-western belief system — or "deep structure" as they say in Black psychology — did my mama really have a mental illness, was there even such an "illness", I wondered, or did we as a society have an insane and twisted notion of what sanity was? Perhaps my mother's worst problem was that she had no extended family.

My work as communications director at Justice Matters, a non-profit research and policy institute, has included involvement in the creation of a racial justice education framework, a framework that promotes parent and community

involvement, intergenerational teaching and learning, eldership and interdependence. These are revolutionary concepts within a US educational system.

A system based on dominant US culture alone inhibits community love and care-giving, pathologizes togetherness as co-dependence, perpetuates isolation, and at best, ghettoizes people in need, people alone, people no longer seen as productive. And just in case you are fraught with any kind of pain or guilt for your lack of caring, involvement or sacrifice for your elders or family, you can resolve it with a Capitalism's gift

To truly comprehend, integrate and practice interdependence, we must look into our own lives, families and communities. Are you encouraging or enabling, even if by default, an elder in your life to be incarcerated in a senior ghetto or have separated yourself from your children's lives and/or education? Are you making decisions based solely on what fits with your time, your future, your success? And finally, at this time of year when we are supposedly filled with some sense of spirit and love rooted in an indigenous, Christian, Jewish, or pagan tradition, the most important question remains:

What, if any, connections, efforts or real sacrifices, are you making in your life for others?

About the author:

Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia, poverty scholar, poet, lecturer, revolutionary journalist, Taino/Bori-ken daughter of Dee and mama of Tiburcio. She is also the co-founder of POOR Magazine and the author of Criminal of Poverty: Growing Up Homeless in America, published by City Lights Foundation. She is currently working on a second book, Poverty Scholarship: A People's Text for release in 2012.

Feminist activist research and strategies from within the battered immigrants' movement

Roberta Villalón

Abstract

Feminists of color within the battered women's movement have had a critical role in addressing the particular needs of immigrant survivors of gender violence in the United States. The Violence Against Women Act and nonprofit organizations providing services to survivors have long recognized the special vulnerabilities of battered immigrants. However, serious formal and informal obstacles continue to prevent the most destitute from accessing their rights as immigrant survivors of violence. Based on activist research at a nonprofit legal organization in Texas, I uncover how intersecting gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class inequalities have not only permeated the immigration provisions of the Violence Against Women Act, but also been reproduced by advocates working at nonprofit organizations. In addressing the qualities of activist scholarship as a means for feminist praxis and social change, I discuss the nuances of collective processes of knowledge creation, and explore how to overcome possible nodes of resistance in implementing strategies to dismantle exclusionary institutions and practices. Given the increasingly detrimental circumstances affecting immigrants, I end by sharing some thoughts on how to further feminist goals for equality.

Introduction

As we traverse a historical time of widespread social mobilization across nations from both the Global South and the Global North, we cannot lose the opportunity to join forces and struggle for immigrants' rights, gender equality, nonviolence and justice. This is an ideal moment to recharge the battered immigrants' movement in the United States particularly because the rise of anti-immigration policies since the eruption of the economic crisis in 2008 has been significantly detrimental for immigrant survivors of gender violence. Economic strains and anti-immigrant measures have become additional constraints for battered immigrants since employment opportunities have declined, exploitative work conditions have worsened and immigration controls have increased. Moreover, battered immigrants have been facing multiple other problems, such as empowered abusers whose threats of deportation become real (given the changes in immigration laws); ambivalent law enforcement officers who instead of protecting immigrant survivors of violence may be forced to collaborate with immigration officers in detecting

victims' status; and a generalized sense of fear with its paralyzing and isolating effects.

At the same time, most nonprofit organizations providing services for battered immigrants have faced serious budget cuts that curtailed their ability to serve the increasing number of survivors approaching them. These dire circumstances are not only critical for immigrant survivors of gender violence, but also for the battered immigrants' and battered women's movements, whose efforts and achievements of the last forty years are being taken to pieces, slowly but surely. It is our responsibility to continue with the struggle not only to defend what has been accomplished over time with so much labor and sacrifice, but also to continue protecting all survivors of gender violence.¹

I have been committed to the struggle to end gender violence in general, and violence against immigrant women in particular since 2002. My interest and active engagement in these issues is threefold. First, it has emerged from my own history as a random survivor of state violence against my family during the Argentine military regime of the 1970s, during which women suspected of political activism were specifically targeted and tortured by state military forces (CONADEP 1984, Ciollaro 1999, Villalón *Forthcoming*). Second, it has grown from my own involvement in an abusive relationship during a time when this kind of violence was not considered to be a legitimate social problem, but an unfortunate private issue, and concomitantly, social awareness, services and public information were meager in Argentina.²

Third, it has been based in my experiences as a Latina immigrant in the United States. On the one hand, these experiences have counted with the 'benefits' of being first, an authorized foreign student, and later on, a legal permanent resident. On the other hand, these experiences have been shaped by an acute awareness of the various effects of living in a highly discriminatory cultural and institutional context depending on one's location within the intersecting grid of gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, religious orientation, political beliefs, nationality, immigration status, social class, age, and body capacities. These three motivations, together with an increasingly anti-immigrant context, worsening economic conditions, ever-growing social disparities, and a still very insidious heteropatriarchal social order both within and beyond U.S. borders, have kept my involvement in the movement against gender violence alive.

¹ For a lengthier analysis of this situation, see Villalón (2010b).

² While a few support centers for battered women existed before 2009 (when comprehensive anti-gender violence legislation was enacted), their resources and accessibility were minimal, and typically devoted to survivors of physical violence as opposed to verbal, emotional, economic, and, overall, psychological abuse.

In this essay, I will share information that I find to be fundamental for us to consider as we raise our demands for the rights of battered immigrants to be respected, and think of how feminist politics and praxis can continue to further the struggle against gender violence. I will begin by looking back at the battered women's movement and the role that feminists of color have had in shaping the cause to address the needs of immigrants. Then, I will present main findings of my research project on Latina survivors of intimate partner violence, which attest to the barriers that stand in the way of this group of survivors' search for justice. Finally, I will close with ideas on furthering the struggle to end gender violence against immigrants and protect all survivors, while reflecting on the key role that feminist activist research has had in contributing with the creation of strategies for change.

Feminisms of color and the battered women's movement

The battered women's movement formed in the mid-1970s. Since then, feminist activists, advocates and survivors have been central in redefining intimate partner violence: first as a crime and a social problem grounded in patriarchal ideologies and institutions, and later as a human rights violation from which all people should be protected (Schechter 1982; Bunch and Fried 1996; Schneider 2000).³ At the same time, the movement's ideological and practical debates have been critical in shaping policies, programs and public discourse on how to better address the needs of survivors while struggling to end gender violence as a whole. The position of feminists of color⁴ within the movement has been particularly significant to tackle

³ Previous to the battered women's movement, other movements (such as the temperance movement, the women's campaign for divorce, the civil-rights, the feminist, and the anti-rape movements) influenced the understanding of and policies on what later on became to be conceptualized as family violence (Gordon 2002).

⁴ Although the term *feminists of color* may be problematic because of its "homogenizing tendencies," it has been used with the aim of indicating "common struggles" among various feminisms who opposed "the deficient and exclusionary tenets of white middle-class Western feminisms," recognized that "their particular civil rights struggles transcended U.S. borders and resonated in the human rights, socioeconomic, and political survival struggles of the rest of the hemisphere and other parts of the third world," and "fostered a national and international dialogue on the intersections of gender, [sexuality], race, and ethnicity, on the power differentials between developed and developing countries" (Acosta-Belén and Bose 2000, 1114-1115). I adopt a transformative feminist of color perspective, responding to Anzaldúa and Keating's call to "bridge," to "define who we are by what we include," to do "away with demarcations like "ours" and "theirs";" to honor "people's otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view, belief system, skin color, or spiritual practice. Diversity of perspectives expands and alters the dialogue, not in an add-on fashion but through a multiplicity that's transformational" (Anzaldúa 2002, 3-4).

with the specific vulnerabilities and needs of immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence.

While feminists of color activists and advocates have recognized the value of universal conceptualizations of gender violence, they have stressed the importance of keeping in mind how gender violence interacts with sexual identities, race, ethnicity, national and immigration backgrounds, socioeconomic status, bodily capacities and the like. They have shown how the intersection of all of these structures of oppression influences the kinds of violence perpetrated and the resources available to overcome abusive conditions. Accordingly, they have worked to elaborate strategies and laws that better address the needs of battered immigrants (Crenshaw 1995; Richie 2000; Garfield 2005; Sokoloff and Dupont 2006).

Indeed, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which is the main piece of legislation protecting survivors of gender violence in the U.S. since 1994, was designed to protect all victims regardless of background, and included regulations for special groups, such as indigenous survivors, women in rural areas, and battered immigrants. The latter have been given the opportunity to access social services and legal protections conducive to breaking free from violent relationships, stabilizing their immigration status and obtaining citizenship without the active sponsorship of the abusive spouse. Thus, law enforcement authorities and governmental and nongovernmental service providers have been trained on gender violence and immigration issues, and slowly, they have become more sensitive to cultural diversity. As a consequence, assistance for immigrant survivors has improved.

However, serious barriers continue to prevent the most underprivileged immigrants from accessing justice as survivors of gender violence (Sokoloff and Pratt 2006; Villalón 2010a). Hence, the need for battered women's and immigrants' rights activists and advocates to focus on how to persist in and improve their efforts to dismantle pervasive exclusionary institutions and practices.

Feminists of color have challenged mainstream theories of gender violence by taking into account the specific cultural, social and institutional contexts of the community where the women live or used to live, as well as by 'building knowledge from below,' that is, in collaboration with the people about whom the research is being developed (Chakrabarty 2000; Menon and Bhasin 1998). These strategies have intended to counter hegemonic, Western, readings of oppression, which have perpetuated "new forms of colonialism" and have been "out of touch with the realities experienced at the grass-roots level" (Newland 2006, 403). Inspired by this framework, I embarked on an activist research project at a local nonprofit organization in Texas, U.S., that I called the Organization for Refugees of

America/Organización para Refugiados de America (ORA).⁵ At ORA, I was able to learn about the actual experiences of Latina survivors seeking relief through VAWA as well as actively contribute in addressing their needs and those of the advocates working for them.

Activist scholarship "can be thought of as an approach to doing research, one with a very specific aim -the creation of social change- and one that involves creating particular kinds of relationships among all of those involved in the research process" (Esterberg 2002, 136). As opposed to following a prescription on how to apply this methodology, which would produce "constraining" results (Hale 2008, 3), activist researchers are led by fundamental principles with the goal "to produce an analysis that retains the integrity of political processes, specific events, diverse actors, and social context while revealing the broader processes at work that may not have been visible to the individual participants or even to the researcher at the time they were engaged in the struggle or when they conducted the research" (Naples 2003, 31).

Three main principles are (a) the "open and democratic" (Esterberg 2002, 136), as well as reflective, relationship between researchers, participants and research projects in which they are all involved, (b) the collaborative way in which knowledge is produced by researchers in dialogue with the traditionally called "research subjects" (who indeed are "knowledgeable, empowered participants" (Hale 2008, 4) with and about whom the research is being developed), and (c) the political implications and applications of developing the research project, which are usually related with provoking social change and bettering whatever oppressive circumstances are affecting the group of people involved in the study.

In following such guidelines, not only did I develop activist research at the Organization for Refugees of America (ORA), but also have I continued with my involvement with the battered immigrants' rights movement to this day. I have kept an active public agenda to share my research not only in academic settings (like professional meetings, university courses and affairs, and scholarly publications), but also in open community events including adult literacy classes, workshops, and seminars in meetings and trainings for immigrants, nonprofit advocates, and governmental service providers. Similarly, I have joined advocates' and activists' networks where I have regularly participated in online discussions and in-person gatherings. Moreover, as a response to the rising anti-immigration environment, I carried out a qualitative study on how the economic crisis and restrictive immigration policies enacted since 2008 have affected immigrant

⁵ All the names used here are pseudonyms. I also changed dates and locations for security and confidentiality purposes. Immigrants and ORA staff and advocates provided me with their informed consent to participate in this research and be referred to in publications of my authorship. This research obtained IRB approval.

survivors of gender violence and service providers in the United States. Lastly, I have been working on new research on two issues very much related to gender violence and social inequalities –military repression in Argentina and human trafficking in the Americas- from a feminist of color perspective.

My long-lasting and ongoing commitment to activist research praxis reflects one of the main assets of feminist theories and methodologies: the acknowledgement of politics as being inherent to the production and implementation of knowledge. Feminist scholars, particularly those engaged in activist research projects, understand their role in contributing to elaborate and/or apply strategies for action as an intrinsic part of their work. Accordingly, they have been sensitive to the call for being transparent, reflective, persistent and respectful in their relationships with the members of the community and/or organization with whom they are developing the project.

Activist research at the Organization for Refugees of America

At the time of my research, ORA was the only organization in Central Texas that provided legal services to underserved immigrants⁶ and was not affiliated with a religious group. Located in a border state with one of the largest numbers of documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States,⁷ and with a high proportion of incidents of family violence in terms of its population,⁸ ORA devoted four of its five legal programs to immigrant survivors of different kinds of abuse (domestic, sexual, extortion, false imprisonment, human trafficking, and political, racial, ethnic, religious, gender or ideological persecution). An overwhelming

⁶ In order to be eligible for free services, immigrants had to have earnings below 125 percent of the officially defined poverty line (that is, annual earnings lower than 17,500 dollars for a household of two in 2008, according to the official guidelines of USCIS – www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnnextoid=6a096c854523d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=4f719c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD (accessed 1.3.2009).

⁷ According to data released by the Office of Immigration Statistics of the United States Department of Homeland Security. See, for example, the reports of 2007 at www.dhs.gov/ximgtn/statistics/ (accessed 17.11.2011).

⁸ Calculation based on data available at the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the United States Department of Justice (www.ojp.gov/bjs/intimate/ipv.htm#contents), the Texas Council of Family Violence ([www.tcfv.org/pdf/dvam07/Year%202006%20Family%20Violence%20Statistics\(HHSC\).pdf](http://www.tcfv.org/pdf/dvam07/Year%202006%20Family%20Violence%20Statistics(HHSC).pdf)), and the United States Census Bureau (factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ThematicMapFramesetServlet?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-tm_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_M00092&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-_MapEvent=displayBy&-_dBy=040#?306,337) (accessed 07.08.2006).

majority of ORA's clients was from Mexico and Central America, but the organization served immigrants from all over the world.

ORA, with its ethnically diverse staff, presented itself as an inclusive organization providing services to all immigrants, regardless of ethnic, religious or political background, or language of origin. In this way, ORA allowed me to explore the workings of culturally sensitive organizations, which had been both celebrated as safe havens for immigrants (Abraham 2000; Menjivar and Salcido 2002), and questioned as colonial and patriarchal by many feminist researchers (Menon and Bhasin 1998; Mindry 2001; Ong 2003; Rudrappa 2004).

Its organizational history also made it a vivid case study. ORA's transformation from a politically radical, volunteer-based grassroots group focused on legal and social change as well as advocacy, into a politically moderate employee-based legal nonprofit organization focused only on the provision of services was representative of the kind of institutionalization processes that most nonprofits have gone through in the last thirty years (Fox Piven and Cloward 1977; Perlmutter 1994; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; Kivel 2007). Since the 1980s, nonprofit organizations have become increasingly important in the provision of social services and implementation of community development programs as a result of policies intended to reduce the size of the state and its welfare capacities (Trudeau 2008). An essential piece of the so-called "shadow state" (Wolch 1990), nonprofit organizations have grown in their function as institutions providing "the arena, the mechanisms, and the point of institutional access through which the offer of citizenship is extended and social integration can be accomplished" (Lake and Newman 2002, 110). In this context, nonprofit organizations devoted to immigration matters have been located at the crux of citizenship access, particularly when they serve poor immigrants who are in compromised situations due to precarious labor conditions, unstable immigration status and other taxing circumstances.

At the same time, gender violence-based legislation like VAWA has underscored the importance of the role of nonprofits as intermediary organizations between immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence and official immigration authorities. Indeed, battered immigrants have been strongly encouraged to obtain the formal assistance of advocates, social workers, counselors and legal representatives in order to seek relief through VAWA (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2005; WomensLaw 2009). While these services can be obtained through the private sector, poor battered immigrants have to rely on community and nonprofit organizations offering services at low or no cost. Consequently, these organizations have become the one (and usually last) resort for survivors seeking escape from lives of abuse and dependency under current conditions. The power that nonprofit workers have had to facilitate or impede battered immigrants' access to citizenship has concomitantly grown in its significance.

For two years, I worked as a volunteer intern in ORA's battered immigrant assistance program, which consisted of providing legal services free of charge to low-income immigrants who qualified as applicants for relief under VAWA. Immigrants who are married to U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents are entitled to apply for citizenship, but their U.S. or resident spouse is the one who must initiate and sponsor the application process. Abusive spouses usually employ this power to control their immigrant partners. Thus VAWA allows immigrant spouses to apply for residency and become citizens without the active help of their abusive resident or citizen partners. In order to do so, an immigrant survivor must prove that she or he was married to (or in a common law union with) a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident in good faith, resided together as wife and husband, was subject to domestic violence and/or extreme cruelty during the marriage in the U.S., and has been a person of good moral character (that is, has a clean criminal record).

Once the VAWA self-petition is approved by immigration authorities, the battered immigrant is granted deferred action on deportation procedures and is allowed to apply for an employment authorization (renewable yearly) while she waits for her legal permanent residency application to be processed and approved. If the battered immigrant was married with an undocumented immigrant, or was separated but not divorced from a previous spouse while engaged in the abusive relationship, she can apply for a U visa instead. This visa offers temporary legal status for up to four years, meaning deferred action on deportation procedures, and authorization to work in the United States for one year with the option to renew the permit twice. After three years of continuous and lawful presence as a legal permanent resident in this country, VAWA self-petitioners and U visa holders may be able to apply for citizenship.⁹

At ORA, I worked with staff in providing services to battered immigrants, including screening interviews, collection and translation of their immigration and abuse histories, and preparation of citizenship applications. After my work day, I recorded my field observations, and throughout the research, I conducted unstructured personal interviews with ORA staff. Naturally, I complemented the activist research, participant observation and interviews with archival research and secondary sources, both of which helped frame my primary data collection and locate the exclusionary social processes affecting Latina survivors of intimate partner violence in their search for relief at nonprofit organizations like ORA. In following another fundamental aspect of activist scholarship, I shared my findings in a collaborative fashion with ORA staff, other battered immigrant advocates, and

⁹ For more information, see www.womenslaw.org/laws_state_type.php?id=10270&state_code=US#content-10401 (accessed at 17.11.2011).

the community of Latina immigrants and survivors of gender violence during and after my field research.

While I was developing the project, I frequently talked about my observations with ORA staff to check not only their accuracy, but also that my labor was conducive to addressing the needs of both the organization and the battered immigrants. After I completed a write-up of my findings, I presented my analysis to ORA staff, first in writing, and later, through a workshop and individual and group interviews. All of these instances added a reflective layer from the perspective of ORA staff, which tested the validity of my analysis and was critical to furthering the understanding of the processes at play at the organization.

I also conducted workshops at battered immigrants' advocate trainings and meetings where participants (nonprofit and governmental immigrants' advocates) reflected upon the barriers standing in the way of battered immigrants' quest for citizenship, and proposed means that they had used or could use to avoid or take them apart. These workshops provided me with yet another opportunity for contextualizing my work at ORA by obtaining other advocates' perspectives on how they helped (or not) immigrants in their organizations, what they expected from immigrants as they were obtaining services, and how they tried to overcome organizational and legal limitations. Moreover, these opportunities allowed me to strengthen the links between academia and community (a primary goal of activist research) so that the findings did not linger uncontested by those who were intimately involved on these matters beyond scholarly circles.

As I developed this activist research project I was able to confirm its potential as a revealing methodological tool because of the kind of processes that I was able to uncover given my in-depth involvement with battered immigrants, the nonprofit organization and broader networks of advocates and activists. I also confirmed the potential of this methodological approach given its collaborative and applied character: I was able to not only find out how exclusionary institutions and practices emerged at the local level, but also think about and elaborate suggestions on how to dismantle such discriminatory processes together with advocates and Latina survivors.

The fact that these strategies were created in collaboration with those who were part of the community with whom I was developing my research had two major, interrelated, consequences. First, the traditionally hierarchical, oppressive or colonial dynamics of scholarship (derived from the dichotomy expert vs. research subject) were significantly reduced. Second, the chances for the collaboratively created learning to be critically adopted by those who needed it the most (in this case, Latina battered immigrants and their advocates) significantly increased (Naples 2003; Esterberg 2002; Hale 2008).

At the same time, it is important to note that the practice of the collaborative and applied qualities of activist research can be quite challenging. While there is a chance that the strategizing and implementing phases of feminist activist research projects may occur in unison to community collaborators, there is also a chance that the working relationship between feminist activist researcher and community collaborators may dissolve. Feminist activist scholars have to consider how members of the organization and community may react to controversial, critical or negative findings; how the working relationship between scholar and community collaborators may change; and how the project and its findings may survive beyond the potential emergence of tensions.

Research findings

The findings of my activist research project pointed to “the continuing need for fundamental social change” (Lehrner and Allen 2009, 661) given that I uncovered how gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class inequalities not only have permeated the immigration provisions of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), but also have been reproduced by advocates working at nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, I found serious nods of resistance to dismantling such exclusionary institutions and practices, which spoke to the limitations of what had been considered radical achievements in the battered immigrants' movement and the more general struggle to eliminate gender violence.

Formally, immigrant survivors are bound by the immigration provisions of VAWA, which by mirroring the broader family-based immigration law system, prioritize heterosexual, economically self-sufficient, married U.S. citizens as arbiters of citizenship for immigrant spouses. Therefore, even if battered immigrants can self-petition for citizenship through VAWA without the sponsorship of their abusive spouses, their ability to do so depends on (a) their marital status and sexual identity, (b) their abuser's nationality and immigration status, and their own country of origin, and (c) their socioeconomic capacities.

First, the marital status and sexual identity of abused immigrants determine the options available for them. VAWA provides full protection for married, heterosexual immigrants by allowing them to self-petition for citizenship as survivors of abusive relationships. However, VAWA partially protects battered immigrants who are not married or in a common law union with their abusive partners, or who are separated but not divorced from a previous spouse while being involved with the perpetrators. This group of immigrant survivors may be able to obtain certain immigration benefits through a U visa, which in comparison to a VAWA self-petition for citizenship, is a less certain and more difficult process to traverse given the fact that immigrants must collaborate with the police in the investigation of the crime.

Battered LGBTQ immigrants are the least protected of all: because their 'non-heterosexual' intimate relationships are not considered legal at the federal level, they cannot self-petition for citizenship through VAWA. They can only apply for a U visa as survivors of violent crimes like rape, sexual assault, abusive sexual contact, and sexual exploitation (but not domestic violence) committed against them in the U.S. Besides the complications and disadvantages of U visas relative to the benefits of VAWA self-petitions for citizenship, battered LGBTQ immigrants face the still predominant socio-cultural barriers rooted on sexism and homophobia (Luibhéid 2002; Calvo 2004; National Resource Center on Domestic Violence 2007).

Second, the national origin and immigration status of the abuser determine the options available for battered spouses, no matter the intensity of the abuse. If perpetrators are United States citizens by birthright or naturalization, their victims can obtain legal permanent residency as soon as their VAWA applications are approved. If abusers are legal permanent residents, their victims can also apply for residency. However, the waiting period to obtain such status varies depending on the nationality of the battered immigrant (ranging from less than a year to more than eight depending on the length of the backlog that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has in processing petitions from the applicant's country of origin). The longer petitioners have to wait for their residency, the longer the path towards obtaining their citizenship.

The noncitizen status of the abusers damages their victims in terms of not only the length of the process, but also its certainty. On the one hand, if the abusive resident is deported (that is, loses his status as legal permanent resident) due to an incident of domestic violence, the survivor has two years to file a VAWA self-petition, or else her chances to gain legal status perish. On the other hand, if the abusive resident is deported due to other reasons before the VAWA application of the battered immigrant is approved by USCIS, all chances to gain legal status for the applicant end instantaneously.

If abusers are neither United States citizens nor legal permanent residents (that is, if they are unauthorized immigrants), victims cannot self-petition for citizenship but rather apply for a U visa. The battered immigrant has to collaborate with the police on the scrutiny of her abuser's deeds against her. The police have to certify to USCIS that the battered immigrant was victimized and that she has been helpful with law enforcement in the crime investigation. If the police issue such certification, the battered immigrant may proceed with her U visa application. After three years of continuous and lawful presence in the U.S., U visa holders may apply for legal permanent residence. Thus, the U visa provides immigrant survivors of violence with the longest and most uncertain path to stabilize their status and reach the benefits of becoming U.S. citizens.

Third, the socioeconomic standing of battered immigrants shapes the chances they have to access VAWA's help. On the one hand, the costs associated with the application process are high because of USCIS fees, and the charges of supporting documentation and legal representation. While this burden has been partially lifted by the assistance of pro-bono lawyers and nonprofit legal organizations like ORA, the remaining expenses delay or impede the application process for the immigrants most in need.

On the other hand, VAWA applications require immigrants to possess and provide documents, bills, payment receipts, and health reports, and to trust official authorities, such as policemen, and government bureaucrats. These requirements also weed out the neediest immigrants, who either lack the ability to collect personal documents and receipts to prove identity and common residency with the abusive spouse, may not ever have possessed such papers, or may not have been able to systematically file them or access them because of their controlling abusers. Simultaneously, police reports (or the collaboration with the criminal investigation in the case of U visas) and the inclusion of psychological evaluations are a threatening obstacle for the applicants, who not only fear the police, but also find counseling too much of a foreign and demanding practice. As a result, the poorest immigrants continue to find the process unaffordable, complicated, and thus, unattainable.¹⁰

All together, the formal barriers that stand in the way of battered immigrants' access to citizenship replicate long-standing gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies of the United States. So, as much as the immigration provisions in VAWA have made a positive impact on many survivors, inherited biases from the broader family-based immigration system limit the reach of the benefits. The state utilizes immigration laws to sustain its sovereignty (by regulating which individuals are welcome to join a given population), build nationhood (by setting citizenship ideals), and control productivity (by stimulating or preventing foreign laborers to legally join its working force) along gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class lines.

In the United States, immigration laws have historically prioritized men over women, married over non-married, heterosexual over LGBTQ, white over non-white, European over non-European immigrants, Christian over non-Christian, citizen over foreigner, and richer over poor (Haney López 1996; Glenn 2002; Hing 2004; Ngai 2004). Confined by these laws, the spirit of VAWA--to protect all survivors of intimate partner violence regardless of their background--is truncated by such overarching exclusionary ideals and institutions.

Besides these formal barriers inscribed into the law, additional ones informally emerge at the level of the nonprofit organization. As I developed activist research

¹⁰ For a full explanation of these formal barriers, see Chapter 3 of my book (Villalón 2010a).

at ORA, I found that advocates created tacit parameters that guided their dealings with battered immigrants seeking services. They expected battered immigrants to present themselves and behave in particular ways in their frequent interactions with them, and in their potential meetings with immigration officers and/or law enforcement authorities. By observing ORA staff's practices, thoughts, feelings, and case management decisions, I found that immigrants who had certain characteristics (those who were compliant, tidy, constant, resolute, autonomous, responsible, deferent, considerate, discreet, redeemable, considerably recovered from the battering, and if applicable, good parents) were prioritized by nonprofit staff, regardless of their traumatic past and eligibility under VAWA.

Immigrants who fit the 'ideal client' profile were supposed not only to be easier to handle throughout the application process, but also to have simple, solid cases that immigration authorities would most likely approve. This attitude corresponded with the organization's emphasis on service provision (over political action or social change), as well as its concern with satisfying funders' requirements in order to secure funding. From ORA's perspective, a high volume of clients with approved VAWA self-petitions was indicative of success and promising of institutional survival, even if these came with the cost of excluding "trouble clients".

These informal barriers, coupled with the formal ones, affected all immigrant survivors of intimate partner violence. However, my research showed that it was the least privileged immigrants who encountered the most hurdles along the way, regardless of their histories of abuse. Latina immigrants of color who were native to Mexico, unauthorized, in violent relationships with legal permanent residents or other unauthorized immigrants, and/or LGBTQ found greater disadvantages. Furthermore, battered immigrants were significantly delayed or even prevented to access citizenship if they were extremely poor, had few, if any, years of formal education, had complicated migration or criminal backgrounds, and/or were unable to fit within the nonprofit organization's 'ideal client' profile.

While there was no doubt that the formal barriers were affecting all immigrant survivors of gender violence given their embeddedness in the immigration provisions of VAWA, I checked whether the informal exclusionary processes at play at ORA were extraordinary or common to other community organizations. By doing research on the situation of other nonprofits as well as sharing my findings in networks of battered immigrants' advocates, I corroborated that these informal barriers (or the potential of them emerging) were also to be found in other locations. The interrelated processes of institutionalization, bureaucratization, and marketization of the battered immigrants' movement had generated organizational dynamics that moved advocates away from counter-hegemonic politics into a more compliant (and sometimes apolitical) attitude. Such shift had contradictory results: grassroots movements incorporated as nonprofit organizations began to be able to provide services to a higher number of immigrant survivors. However, by

losing their political edge and becoming more selective in regard to their "clientele", these groups risked becoming subservient recipients of private and public funding, and nongovernmental arms of official policies –two roles that would lead them to uncritically reproduce structures of inequality.¹¹

Strategies for change

After finding such problematic processes at play, the main research question that emerged was: What could be done to resist such exclusionary practices in order to better serve the needs of immigrant survivors and continue to further the struggle to end gender violence for immigrant and all survivors? I was able to develop some strategies by sharing my analysis in workshop format and interviews with ORA staff and other advocates involved in the battered immigrants' movement.

In summary, I suggested "alternative actions for change"¹² based on the understanding that a revived conviction in the power of individual's beliefs and actions, as well as of social mobilization, was crucial. A number of pervasive, conservative and paralyzing myths had to be discredited, including that "nothing can be done against the powers that be," that "one's actions don't matter," that "political activism was a waste of time," and that "nonprofit advocates should not be expected to do a better job." I also argued that getting rid of such fallacies was going to bring the opportunity to change detrimental practices and institutions.

While I provided some strategies to avoid and dismantle formal and informal barriers to access citizenship, I emphasized that the only way in which substantive change would occur was if nonprofit staff recognized the barriers as problematic, believed in their own potential to influence policy and modify counterproductive informal practices, and created its own interpretation and courses of action. Moreover, I maintained that new beliefs and understandings would be reflected in individuals' social interactions and collective action, which eventually should be articulated in structural arrangements designed to find a new balance between the provision of services and the struggle to change inequitable social conditions that stand in the way to end violence against (immigrant) women.

In regards to formal barriers, I suggested nonprofit staff to think about the practical and political levels. Practically, ORA (or whichever nonprofit) could decide on instituting an organizational policy to inform immigrants about legal loop holes and provide advice on how to skip the formal barriers that may be avoidable (for example, by being transparent about the length and full cost of the

¹¹ See Villalón 2010a, 79-89.

¹² For a longer exposition on all of these strategic suggestions please refer to Chapter 5 of my book (Villalón 2010a).

application process, the need and cost of providing supporting documentation, the advantages of being employed in some capacity and keeping a clean criminal record, the relevance of providing a stable and updated mailing address, and the conveniences of attending counseling sessions, to mention a few). Politically, the nonprofit organization could redefine its stance and strategies to challenge biases in gender violence and immigration policies while being faithful to its inclusive mission and wise in regards to its financial solvency (which may require the renegotiation of their ties with public and private funders).

Advocates could push policy-makers to change VAWA's biased immigration provisions by, for example, (1) equalizing the kind of benefits available (and the application process to obtain them) for all survivors regardless of their married, non-married, separated or divorced status; (2) making the benefits of these laws equally available to all survivors regardless of their sexual orientation; (3) erasing the different routes to citizenship by providing every survivor with the same length and certainty of process regardless of the citizenship and immigration status of the abuser (this includes eliminating U visas, or, if these were non-negotiable, making them equivalent in process to VAWA self-petitions, that is, more accessible and less threatening); (4) eliminating the requirements and fees that make the application process inaccessible for the poorest survivors, and in the instances where this is not possible, assuring that full support is available for them to comply; (5) issuing an instant protected immigration status for all applicant survivors to avoid the risks of deportation during the long process of collecting the documentation, sending out the application and having it reviewed and approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); (6) guaranteeing confidentiality (and making non-confidentiality punishable) of survivors' immigration status, reports and testimonies given to governmental and nongovernmental authorities and service providers; (7) increasing the budget available for advocates, particularly those devoted to the most destitute populations, and making the application process for these funds more accessible in order to allow organizations from within these communities to compete for resources; (8) promoting (and funding) holistic social services and/or facilitating connections between organizations and specialists in the community for survivors to meet their various needs comprehensively; (9) refreshing and creating new outreach programs and public education in regards to gender violence and the rights of (immigrant) survivors, mainly in underserved communities; and (10) keeping policy-makers and government officials in touch with the realities of survivors of intimate partner violence and service providers through frequent memos, meetings, and specialized trainings.

Besides addressing formal barriers, nonprofit advocates could also look into how to dismantle informal barriers standing in the way of battered immigrants' access to justice. First, they would have to evaluate the characteristics, origins and effects of their selective work practices and think about strategies to take care of these. For

instance, advocates may look into the consequences of their frustration with immigrants who do not fit the "ideal client" profile. They may decide to refer "trouble clients" to other nonprofit organizations known by their "tolerant staff" or their commitment to serve the most destitute survivors in order to avoid blocking the immigrants' search for citizenship. Contrarily, they may find their selective practices problematic and decide to create plans of action to change them. If advocates believe that funding constraints are a main explanation of the development of a good client profile, they may think about how to renegotiate terms with funders or explore alternative funding options. If nonprofit workers think that their intolerance for "criers" and/or immigrants who change their mind about moving forward with their application is not problematic, the organization may plan for further training on the psychological and social conditions framing survivors of gender violence (all of which lead to emotional distress), as well as arrange for assistance from social workers and specialized counselors (these services could be offered on site on a pro-bono basis or as an exchange with the school of social work and the psychology department of surrounding universities).

Alternatively, advocates may find that (at least part of) the source of the problem with "trouble clients" is based on immigrants' lack of knowledge about the intricacies of the VAWA application process. Accordingly, advocates could provide improved informational packages, or organize support sessions for applicants (volunteers could collaborate with these activities). If nonprofit workers identify that fear of retaliation by immigrants' abusive partners is a deterrent to help undecided survivors, institutional policies to safeguard staff and immigrants could be implemented (such as the design of safety rules and measures to prevent and stop violent episodes). Additionally, if advocates find that immigrants' children are distracting during appointments, child care options should be tinkered with given the particularly constraining circumstances of the immigrants (like creating a program to have volunteers taking care of the children, or organizing an area with toys in the waiting room).

As I shared all of these strategies for change with ORA staff and nonprofit advocates, I framed my analysis within the broader context of the immigration system and nonprofit organizations, while emphasizing the important role that these organizations and their advocates played in providing services and access to citizenship to underserved immigrants. Key to these exchanges were my invitation for them to express their thoughts on my analysis as well as to brainstorm ideas on how to tackle with those formal and/or informal barriers that they identified as being problematic. In the case of ORA, staff was attentive and found my analysis accurate and sensible. They carefully listened and thoughtfully shared their comments and questions.

First, ORA's advocates agreed with my depiction of their role as "gatekeeper[s] of citizenship" between the state and the immigrants; a role that emphasized their

enormous power and responsibility in being the ones who could either open or close survivors' access to stabilizing their immigration status and becoming autonomous individuals in the U.S. (Villalón 2010a, 89). Then, as I explained the problematic formal barriers of VAWA's immigration provisions, they expressed their discontent but, because these barriers were inscribed in the law and inherited from the broader immigration system; many advocates took the position that while unfortunate, these hierarchies were unavoidable. They also claimed that despite its biases, VAWA at least provided some battered immigrants the opportunity to break free from abuse and become citizens; in other words, they found that the disadvantages were counterbalanced by the advantages of VAWA's immigration provisions.

The section on informal barriers was the one that triggered most of the reaction on the part of ORA's workers. Among laughter and jokes, they spoke up and confirmed that they "dreaded working with clients who cried a lot; clients who brought and could not control their kids in appointments; clients who called too much (many times per week, more than once a day), and clients who were too demanding (the ones with higher economic status)."¹³ If clients behaved this way, advocates explained that they "didn't rush to make appointments with them."¹⁴ As ORA's advocates' voiced their experiences and feelings on this matter, they seemed to find a certain sense of relief about the consequences of leaving these clients unattended – even if before this opportunity they may have informally shared their frustrations about what I identified as 'trouble clients', it seemed to be the first occasion for them to view it as an institutional issue. ORA's workers also expressed their disorientation on how to dismantle the organization's informal barriers. Lucy, for instance, said "I realize that these client preferences ended up reinforcing the barriers you are talking about (particularly social class). But, I'm not sure what we can do about it."¹⁵

In response to this, I shared my suggestion of setting time apart to discuss these matters at the organizational level; a suggestion that was received with enthusiasm. I also pointed to the importance to think about ORA in the broader context of nonprofits, since the dynamics affecting the organization were not extraordinary but common to many others. They were curious to read on what was going on in other institutions, so I offered references to articles, reports, and books written about and by other organizations that had identified and been working on comparable issues. Additionally, I suggested that fostering network communication through trainings or conferences with similar groups could help as

¹³ Field notes from Report/Workshop to all ORA staff, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

¹⁴ Field notes from Report/Workshop to all ORA staff, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

¹⁵ Field notes from Report/Workshop to all ORA staff, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

well. I signaled the relevance of keeping both a reflective and a political attitude with regard to their work given their power as gatekeepers of citizenship. The contextualization of ORA's case among other nonprofits calmed some of the anxiety resulting from hearing such a critical report.

However, the initial enthusiastic reception of the workshop was tamed in my individual and group interviews with staff members who used to work at ORA while I was doing field research. Cathy told me that the analysis "made sense but it was very difficult to address when working – abstractly was OK, but practically was impossible."¹⁶ Similarly, Jenna believed that my analysis seemed right, even if "it was hard to hear."¹⁷ However, she did not think that change was necessary; "We do a very good thing."¹⁸ Jenna and Cathy resisted my proposal to address the informal disparities at ORA. Cathy explained, "I don't think this would work. It wouldn't be welcomed. People would be like... 'What the fuck?!?' if I asked them to spend time talking about dropped cases while they have been working plenty on other cases that had been selected and approved."¹⁹

Cathy and Jenna acknowledged that the formal barriers inherited in VAWA were problematic, however they expressed that it was not their responsibility to deal with those. While they would not resist other advocates' efforts to make immigration policies more inclusive, they were not interested in joining the struggle. They added that if ORA staff were requested to engage in political activism, this work would have to be calculated as part of their labor rather than left unpaid.²⁰ If ORA compensated these efforts, and there was enough time left to take care of the same number of cases, then ORA staff interested in politics could become actively involved. So far, the slight political activism that ORA staff had engaged in (like signing online petitions or joining community rallies) had gone unpaid while their regular case work was put on hold. ORA staff felt that this trade-off was unfair both to their clients and themselves.

In retrospective, the mixed reactions of ORA's advocates were indicative of the worth of going through the challenging phase of sharing findings with them. Their responses allowed me to check the accuracy, as well as modify, improve and expand the analysis. Indeed, their reactions were crucial for the collective elaboration of strategies and their implementation (given the uncovering of interpersonal and

¹⁶ Personal interview with Cathy, Central Texas, July 1, 2008.

¹⁷ Group interview with Cathy, Jenna and Maggie, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

¹⁸ Group interview with Cathy, Jenna and Maggie, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

¹⁹ Group interview with Cathy, Jenna and Maggie, Central Texas, July 11, 2008.

²⁰ This position reflects the change of grassroots social change organizations to nonprofit social service providers' organizations. See Hawk 2007.

institutional dynamics that could prevent change from happening). Specifically, as I observed that ORA seemed to be reluctant to push for legal change to modify the formal barriers inherited from the larger immigration system or to engage in actions to dismantle the informal barriers emerging from their own inequitable practices, I wondered how the knowledge gathered could still contribute to the struggle for inclusion of all battered immigrants.

I realized that one of the main ways to overcome interpersonal, organizational and political barriers in activist research projects was by broadening the front of action. My activist research project did begin at ORA, but did not have to end when I did the aforementioned final workshop or interviews with ORA staff. Thus, I got involved with battered immigrant networks and women's rights organizations which had a membership inclusive of activists and advocates, such as Arte Sana, ALAS, Mujeres del Movimiento, Casa de Esperanza, the National Immigration Project, Asista, and Women's Worlds, and proactively joined meetings and offered to do workshops to discuss and continue to learn about these topics with advocates, activists, immigrants, and survivors in the community.²¹ All of these additional layers of activist research became data which I analyzed and included as part of the study. Indeed, by opening the front of action, I was able to not only overcome some of the resistance to acting upon the collectively produced knowledge at the original research site, but also contextualize, refine and enrich this knowledge by continuing with the dialogue with other individuals and organizations of keen interest.

Concluding remarks

Despite its challenges, there was not a moment when I doubted the richness and potential of activist research and feminist praxis to positively influence social and political change. Before, while, and after taking on activist research projects, feminist scholars should keep in mind that "personal and cultural narratives are not disinterested, objective questionings of identity politics, but impassioned and conflicted engagements in resistance" (Anzaldúa 2002, 2). Hence, in order to develop activist research, scholars ought to believe in the ideological reasons beneath this methodology, evaluate its particular relevance to the subject matter at hand, and be prepared to become politically committed to the work. Moreover, scholars should be truthful in their relationships with the members of the community and/or organization with whom they are developing the activist research project. An open attitude, transparency and humility will allow scholars

²¹ Concrete examples are the seminars I conducted at Arte Sana's 2008 and 2010 National Conferences, workshops open to the community at St. John's University, and also a presentation at the Asylum Office of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

to gain and maintain access to the community, as well as to build a constructive, long-lasting and ethical working relationship.

At the same time, activist researchers ought to be faithful in how to incorporate the views, opinions, and voices of the community members to the analysis: having talked with "them," or worked with "them" is not enough and does not automatically provoke a change in the understanding of otherness or the oppressive structures of power (Mani 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998). This is particularly important given that one of the purposes of activist research is to counter hegemonic practices in research and beyond; a purpose that would be voided if researchers reinterpret, omit, or ignore community members' perspectives. Accordingly, activist researchers should be conscious of the possibility of disagreeing with the community collaborators, as well as finding resistance or indifference to ideas that they believed had emerged from their working relationship with them. If such tensions occur, it is the responsibility of activist scholars to critically take care of frustrations and disputes while incorporating them as data to be later analyzed as part of the greater project. Hence, researchers should not take conflict as a deterrent or a failure, but as an intrinsic part of activist methodologies. Scholars ought to be persistent, reflective and critical so their analyses will bear fruits despite the challenges that may emerge during the research project.

Finally, feminist activist researchers should keep in mind that this kind of projects are relational processes of knowledge creation, and that as such, they must be conceived as collective, complex and long-term endeavors that are expected to become larger than their own protagonists and locations. This knowledge is destined to change the standpoint of researcher and community members, and consequently of their relationship. If such changes mean that their links come to an end, activist scholars should remember that the best activist research projects continue to develop and have an impact beyond their original sites and members since in the end, the most important goal is to advance the political and practical issues at hand.

The careful and critical use of activist research is particularly useful when addressing controversial, complex, mobilized, politicized, and of course, unfair social issues. The worth of engaging in activist research nowadays is indeed increasing, because of not only the dire circumstances in which the majority of the population in all countries, South and North, presently are, but also the highly discriminatory and exploitative situations in which most immigrants (especially women) find themselves in the world. Indeed, in reaction to deteriorating conditions, many battered immigrants' advocates and survivors of gender violence have been raising their voices by expressing their concerns and discontent, and suggesting policy changes. However, these claims remain marginal. It is my belief that the current situation and the non-promising perspectives for the future may be

used as an opening for making these demands heard, and having more advocates and members of the community joining collective efforts to end violence against immigrant women.

Advocates have found that "more and more people have joined the conversation, that more people have become politically active. Even immigrants approaching the organization (especially if they are not eligible for benefits) ask 'What can I do to change these conditions?'"²² Some immigrant rights' activists have been joining Occupy Wall Street and similar protests across the U.S. simply pointing to the fact that immigrant workers are part of the 99% being exploited for the benefit of the elite that is sustaining the current system of economic and social inequalities. Given the links between the economic crisis, anti-immigration policies, and gender violence, there are plenty of reasons why we could bet on reinvigorating alliances between immigrants' and battered women's rights movements for justice, so the Violence Against Women Act is improved to meet the needs of all immigrant survivors, and experts on these issues are involved in the push for and design of comprehensive immigration reform that eliminates systemic biases to exploit destitute migrant workers.

We usually forget how much our actions matter to the maintenance and defiance of the social structures that surround us, but as Berger and Luckmann (1966) theorized, we all construct the reality in which we live in. Particularly, in regards to the social inclusion and exclusion of immigrants, and as Garfield claimed, "knowing what we know"²³ about gender violence, we should recall that "formal laws and legal rulings create a structure that legitimates the granting or denial of recognition. However, the maintenance of boundaries relied on 'enforcement' not only by designated officials but also by so-called members of the public" (Glenn 2002, 52). We are all responsible, and we can all do something. Taking an essentialist approach would be highly detrimental to the advance of the struggle for equality (that is, thinking that only battered immigrants (of color) could do this work, as opposed to thinking that every person who is aware of the issues and keeps a critical and proactive attitude about discrimination could be of help).²⁴ The moment for action is now. Let's value and join ongoing efforts. Change is possible, and overdue.

²² Personal interview with advocate, New York, June 24, 2011.

²³ Garfield (2005) entitled her book about African American women's experiences of violence and violation in such way to stress the value of the knowledge that these women have on their victimization and survival as well as to motivate the readers to act against injustice (as opposed to deny it, now that they have learned (again) about it).

²⁴ In adopting this non-essentialist stance towards change, see Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002.

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Originally from Argentina, **Roberta Villalón** is a professor at Saint John's University, New York City, U.S. Her background in political science and international relations, together with her expertise in Latin America, Latin American immigrants and Latin@s, and feminist theory and praxis, has shaped her sociological perspective distinctively. Her book, *Violence Against Latina Immigrants: Citizenship, Inequality and Community* (2010, NYU Press), articles like "Neoliberalism, Corruption and Legacies of Contention: Argentina's Social Movements, 1993-2006," *Latin American Perspectives* (2007, 34:2), and forthcoming book chapters such as "Framing Extreme Violence: Collective Memory-Making of Argentina's Dirty War" in *Inequality and the Politics of Representation: A Global Landscape* edited by Celine Pascale (Pine Forge/Sage), and "Accounts of Violence against Women: The Potential of Realistic Fiction," in *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Kick Their Asses!: Feminist Perspectives on Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy* edited by Donna King and Carrie Smith (Vanderbilt University Press), illustrate her global feminist politics. Roberta continues to be involved in immigrants' and women's rights community organizations as she develops new research on human trafficking and social movements in the Americas, as well as on the processes of justice and reconciliation as trials on the last military regime have been reopened in Argentina. Please visit <https://sites.google.com/site/robertavillalonphd/home> for further information, or email her at villalor AT stjohs.edu.

Listen to sex workers: support decriminalisation and anti-discrimination protections

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1. What does feminist strategy mean today?

Today, feminist strategy means self determination, people speaking for themselves, not being spoken for.

Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association, is the national peak body of sex workers and sex worker organisations, with membership open to all sex workers, past and present, its only \$20 a year or \$50 for three years, tax deductible, and the forms can be downloaded from the Scarlet Alliance website (Scarlet Alliance, 2011). Scarlet Alliance embodies over two decades history of formal sex worker peer organising in Australia by the funded and unfunded sex worker groups across the country (Saunders, 1999). Those groups do outreach, community development, health promotion, STI and HIV prevention, support for people affected by anti-trafficking policies, industrial relations advocacy, financial and economic justice advocacy, housing, welfare, legal and police referrals, health and human rights policy.

Over 20,000 occasions of direct, hands on service delivery to sex workers in Australia are performed in any given year and these organisations participate in their national peak body to ensure that all of this information is turned into strong messages of representation at a national level. We take our sex worker peer education, sex worker organising, activism and politics very seriously. This is not an academic indulgence. Sex worker activism is not a career path. Sex workers are not engaging in activism to further our careers, and we are not engaging in activism to try to salvage the whore stigma in our lives and professionalise our CV. Activism is not a cop out from the day to day

¹ This contribution is the result of authoring, workshopping and discussion by members of the Scarlet Alliance Executive Committee, members of VIXEN in Victoria, and volunteers at Hustling to Health, the street outreach and drop-in sex worker peer education program on Friday Nights at the RhED office in St Kilda. A reading, group discussion and editing workshop was held at Hustling to Health on the night of Friday 27th of May 2011. The edited article was then presented in full as a speech to the *Feminist Futures Conference*, Melbourne, Saturday 28th of May 2011, and subsequently published in part by *The Scavenger* (Jeffreys, Elena "Why feminists should listen to sex workers," *The Scavenger* 11 June 2011), and in part by *Overland* (Jeffreys, Elena, 'On whether the Left should support stricter regulation of the sex industry,' *Overland Blog*, 24 June 2011). The submission to *Interface* reincorporates these two papers and reworks the themes related to questions suggested by the editor, Sara Motta, about feminist strategies for change.

discrimination we face as sex workers. Our sex worker activism could also be called labour organising, and without it we wouldn't have any rights.

Everything that sex workers have won in terms of work conditions, dignity, health and access to services, we have won because we have fought for it ourselves.

Our feminist strategy today is to run our own organisations, our own services, define our own health, human rights and political agendas, create our own political organising spaces and to respond directly to the issues that affect us, including HIV and trafficking.

2. What are the challenges and limitations of feminist strategising in the current movement?

The challenges facing the sex worker rights movement are the same as the challenges any marginalised population struggling for social and political acceptance faces. We are struggling to be heard in a landscape that not only marginalises our bodies, but also marginalises our voices.

There is nothing ostensibly "wrong" with sex work, porn, stripping, online web cam, phone sex or BD/SM that isn't wrong with any other industry or workplace under capitalism. Anti-sex work feminists who want to rescue the world from sex work, and the moving and still images that the sex industry produces, are essentially arguing that we, sex workers, should not work in this job. This is out of step with all the arguments for decriminalisation; arguments which are based on strong evidence, not morally driven advocacy (Himel 2010).

Unfortunately, increased regulation of sex work is supported by most abolitionist anti-sex work feminists. Such increased regulation includes criminalising clients (like Sweden, now a honey pot for corruption), banning porn (like Malaysia) and filtering the internet (like China). All of this increased regulation is ignoring sex work organising globally who are arguing against such policies. Abolitionist demands are in direct opposition to those articulated by sex worker advocates. Abolitionist feminists who are not supporting decriminalisation of the sex industry, that is, a *decrease* in the regulation of sex work so that it is in line with the regulation of other occupations, are also not supporting sex worker organising (Harcourt, O'Connor et al 2010).

Sex worker organising is as old as the profession. The current wave of formalised sex worker organising began thirty years ago and, in Australia is conducted by funded and unfunded member organisations of the sex worker led and run peak body Scarlet Alliance (Saunders 1999). Sex worker organisations, groups and networks in every state and territory in Australia deliver a combined annual total of over 20,000 occasions of services to sex workers in Australia. All of the staff and volunteers in these groups are sex worker peer educators; current or past sex workers who also do outreach and in-house information exchange and advocacy with members of their own community. This organising is credited for sex worker occupational health and safety, high condom use and

the lowest STI and HIV rates in the world. Sex workers are organising for decriminalisation; conservative governments prefer to install police into our (already) overregulated workplaces.

The time is right to ignite the feminist love affair with sex worker workplace organising – without political compromise or apology.

In March 1987, the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria (PCV) was the first organisation of sex workers in the world to receive government funding. Forming around the demands for decriminalisation of sex work, the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria backed onto the Marcia Neave led inquiry which had, in 1986, recommended decriminalisation of the sex industry in Victoria. Instead of decriminalisation however, regulation-heavy licensing was perceived to be more politically palatable and so was implemented rather than decriminalisation. The name of the legislation, the Prostitution Control Act, demonstrated the political compromise, at the time “controlling” sex workers was much higher a priority than protecting any of our rights.

The very active Prostitutes Collective Victoria had successfully organised criminalised sex workers; after licensing controls were introduced a key sex worker organiser moved into the Miscellaneous Workers Union intending to organise a more receptive legal sex industry. It didn't produce massive numbers of union members and within 18 months the sex worker organiser was dumped by that union. The LHMWU still has demarcation over the industry.

The problems with organising under a licensed environment were only the beginning of the problems sex worker organisers in Victoria were facing in the wake of the introduction of licensing controls.

The newly introduced licensing controls meant that sex workers in the Australian state of Victoria were, and still are, operating in a heavily criminally regulated environment. This is very different to the decriminalised environments of New South Wales or New Zealand, where regulations are attached to civil penalties, not criminal penalties. In New South Wales and New Zealand, decriminalisation means that sex workers are regulated by the same civil instruments as any other business or worker; for example, industrial relations laws, planning laws, tax laws, occupational health and safety laws and general business laws. In the decriminalised jurisdictions of New South Wales and New Zealand, sex workers experience the same human rights and industrial controls as other workers in other industries.

By contrast sex workers in Victoria are subject to specific criminally sanctioned regulations and controls that relate *only* to the sex industry, not to any other job in Victoria. *Only* sex workers face mandatory HIV and STI testing, *only* sex workers face criminal sanctions if working in a workplace that is non-compliant with brothel licensing laws, *only* sex workers have to apply for criminally sanctioned exemptions if choosing to work from home. These criminal penalties not only affect sex workers' every-day lives, they also affect the way this industry is perceived. This had a material impact on sex worker organising in Victoria in the 1990s.

Despite the massive achievements of the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria and the historic significance of this important organisation, sex workers as a community and the funds we had attracted drew an unhealthy level of interest from the health and community sector, stemming from a perception that sex workers were politically unable to run their own collective, and that the funds we had lobbied for could be better spent by people who were not sex workers. This perception was not helped by the very public failures sex workers were facing within the formal union structures in Victoria at this time, and the new complexities that the licensing system had introduced into sex workers lives generally. The collective was taken over and is now managed by a community health service. This was a political compromise that meant health services to sex workers continue to be delivered, but without the organising focus that the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria had embodied. The new project, called Resourcing for Health and Education (RhED), has elements of peer education (namely the Hustling to Health street outreach program on Friday nights, and the associated activities), but falls short of implementing affirmative action across the other staff positions.

This reflects a general positioning of professional “helpers” within sex worker health services, a trend Scarlet Alliance rails against. By employing professional “helpers” within sex worker projects we are portrayed as hapless victims in need of rescue and assistance in order to justify the government funding flowing our way. This is not how or why sex worker organisations were established in Australia, but continues to be the trend in Australia; “organising” is being replaced with “helping”.

For example, street-based sex work was almost decriminalised in 2002, with the proposed introduction of safe houses and removal of police from their workplace (AGSPAG, Attorney General’s Street Prostitution Advisory Group). The City of Port Phillip supported decriminalisation but political machinations at a parliamentary level baulked. The political compromise was to shelve all recommendations thus allowing the only policy change to affect street sex workers to be increased police powers. Attention has been directed to “help” street based sex workers leave their work, whether they want to or not, in the form of police diversionary programs that RhED is funded to deliver. This ongoing focus on criminal approaches leaves sex worker organising in a long-term policy blind spot.

Scarlet Alliance argued in 2008/09 to the then Victorian State Labor Government that regulation of sex work should leave the jurisdiction of the Justice Minister for the Health Minister, and that Victoria should decriminalise sex work. All evidence shows that decriminalisation is the best system of regulation (Abel, Fitzgerald et al; Collaery 1991; McDonald 2008; Donovan, Harcourt et al, 2010; Harcourt, O’Connor et al 2010; Himel 2010; Jeffreys, Matthews et al 2010). The Labor Government in Victoria said no. The newly elected Liberal Government in Victoria has introduced legislation into Parliament to move the portfolio from the Justice Minister to the Police

Minister (Premier of Victoria, 2011). This shows that the trend towards increased policing is getting worse in Victoria, not better.

Sex workers and allies have argued for thirty years that mandatory HIV and STI testing is discriminatory, not in the interests of public health, not cost effective and should be abolished (Scarlet Alliance 2007; Wilson, Heymer et al. 2009). In 2010 the then Labor Government suggested a political compromise of handing the responsibility of determining the frequency of testing to the health department. The now Liberal Victorian Health Minister has recently scuttled even that political compromise (Medew 2011) and, for sex workers, unfortunately nothing has changed.

Despite all evidence showing that sex workers in Australia consistently maintain lower rates of STI infection than the general population (Kirby Institute 2011, pg 8, 17, 26,) and high compliance of safe sex practices, monthly sexual health checks remain Government mandated in Victoria (see above). The perception (by the general public, media and government) and stigmatisation of sex workers as a group that risk our health and by implication risk the health of others, unfortunately supports laws that further discriminate against and stigmatise sex workers in Victoria. Victorian sex workers must, at present, spend personal time "outing" themselves in public spaces (for example a doctor's office or health clinic) to obtain documentation allowing us to work in the licensed sex industry in Victoria. For sex workers choosing to work in a brothel in Victoria, this health certificate is then turned over to a manager or owner, who, for a new worker, may also demand other identifying documents (passport, drivers license, proof of residence) before allowing us to work. This is an unnecessary, expensive, risky and invasive practice.

Private workers must either register with the BLA (Business Licensing Authority) as Exempt Escorts - supplying legal name and address, photo identification document/s and all working names & phone numbers. Or if wishing to work as an Exempt Prostitution Service Provider (a small owner-operated brothel, with up to one other person) a worker must first inform the real estate/owner and council, then register with the BLA. Their premises must be in an industrial zone, it must be 200 metres from a school or church and 100 metres from the nearest residence. Once registered, sex workers obtain a PCA number which allows them to advertise their services legally in Victoria. This is a ludicrously long winded, invasive and ultimately prohibitive process that does not have sex workers' privacy or safety needs in mind. There is no real incentive to participate in this process, yet one remains illegal until doing so.

Despite licensing of the sex industry in Victoria, advertising is restricted. Sex industry businesses and workers are not able to place advertisements either describing their services or picturing their workers or themselves, other than head & shoulders shots. This, again, is ludicrous because head and shoulder photos are the most identifying and least confidential way of representing yourself visually. In a jurisdiction where sex workers are not protected by anti-discrimination law, there is no incentive to out yourself in public via your photos. Sex industry businesses or individual workers may not advertise

through broadcasting or television and may not advertise to employ sex workers. To advertise a position vacant in a brothel is considered in criminal law the crime of "inducing a person to work." This illustrates yet again how licensing is not in any way a step towards legitimising the day to day activities of sex work. Instead licensing systems entrench the social stigma and fear of our work. And street sex work remains illegal.

Not surprisingly, although there are varying estimates of the level of compliance within the overall sex industry in Victoria - all are low.

Government and media rhetoric regarding low compliance often tend towards the extension of regulatory schemes, towards the punitive.

To treat any population as requiring of surveillance and worthy of less rights - in effect to hold sex workers separate in law from the rest of society and then to expect them to accept and comply with these laws - is unreasonable, unrealistic and ultimately discriminatory.

Sex work is work. Sex workers in Victoria know this; we are waiting and working for the law to catch up with us. In New South Wales where sex work is decriminalised, these rights have been realised, and in each state and territory the rights that sex workers have vary. We are subject to different legal environments depending on where we live and where we work; the example of Victoria however highlights particular problems when legal environments are created without sex workers' needs in mind.

The challenges and limitations of feminist strategising for sex workers are the same of any population struggling for acceptance and social justice- we must be listened to, not ignored, we must be treated as equal to any other worker, not pathologised or victimised.

3. How do contemporary feminist activists and women's movements draw on the practices and experiences of earlier movements?

Evidence-based approaches supported by sex worker organisers, such as full decriminalisation of our work, have been regularly compromised or opposed by feminist "concern" about whether sex work is a good job or not, harmful or not, a "feminist" issue or not. While sex workers *scream* for human rights, many feminists are confused, and/or support increased regulation because they support abolition of sex work. The result is that regulation of sex work is generally supported by a supposedly feminist anti-sex work abolitionist agenda. And in Victoria, Australia, they are regulations that are totally inappropriate, born from political compromise, without the voice of sex workers, with incredibly low compliance, and with devastating outcomes for sex workers.

Sex worker advocates argue that licensing promotes non-compliance resulting in this two-tiered industry. Brothel work is now (optimistically) only 50% compliant with the laws in Victoria (Chen, Donovan et al 2010). The proposed

new legislation in Victorian parliament might give Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) compliance officers the same powers of entry as police. Over-regulation from an enthusiastic Business Licensing Authority (BLA) and CAV has resulted in mandatory HIV and STI testing for licensed brothel workers in Victoria (see above). This is a health policy abomination and a breeding ground for corruption, including, but not limited to, corruption by doctors (Donovan, Harcourt et al. 2010).

Migrant sex workers have been the very worst hit by bad laws and barriers to sex worker organising. Victoria is a good example of anti-sex work feminist "concern" contributing to sex workers' marginalisation within the anti-trafficking laws. The anti-trafficking policy response in Victoria has seen the implied criminality of migrant sex work, through high profile media campaigns that conflate all migrant sex work with the crime of human trafficking. Instead of supporting migrant sex workers to organise, the efforts to jail one single Thai brothel owner utilised all on the ground resources in Victoria in the last decade, spending years in court and millions of tax-payers dollars. Various informants from that case were eventually tried themselves.

Everyone who was involved had their lives ruined. The sex worker witnesses became expensive objects, "helped" by welfare agencies within an inch of their sanity, waiting, for years, for justice they had never personally fought for. Having been picked up in a raid where they stood to lose their substantive work visa if they didn't become witnesses for the crown, they had every choice removed from their lives by our criminal justice system; their freedom of movement, their freedom to associate, their ability to simply be, all denied in the name of creating one single inmate. Their work conditions had not been fair. But neither was the way they were treated by the courts, nor the way that not one cent went into sex worker organising. Yet anti-sex work feminists championed those laws. And in Victoria they are about to do so again.

In 2009, organisations that claim to "rescue" sex workers in Victoria demanded forced entry to sex work workplaces, police involvement in the regulation of brothels, and the right of Consumer Affairs Victoria compliance officers to have the same right of entry into workplaces as police. The current Victorian Government legislation complies with these demands and will potentially become law by mid-2012. Anti-trafficking policies hurt sex workers; Victoria is living proof. Yet anti-sex work feminists continue to support criminal justice interventions into sex workers lives.

Support for sex worker organising has become a forgotten dream. Instead, the focus is on mobilising police and rescuers against sex industry bosses. Meanwhile corruption is rife – like paedophiles volunteering for parish childcare duties, those seeking to exploit sex workers have taken up the anti-sex work trafficking rhetoric with a vitriol that make sex workers' skin crawl. The anti-trafficking head of the Swedish police was jailed for running brothels and assaulting sex workers in his "other" life (Anthony 2010). One of Yarra Council's supporters of the "rescue industry" is now under investigation for his alleged role as a stand-over man profiting from Asian-run brothels in that area (Heard

2010). His prison sentence was reduced when he agreed to co-operate with police in order to prosecute brothel operators (Beck, 2011). The end result of this is that sex workers, whose workplaces are the ones that will be raided and their jobs lost, are the ones who will ultimately be punished, uncompensated and unsupported. Increased regulation causes increased corruption and has decreased opportunities for formal sex worker organising. Migrant sex worker issues have been ignored in the fight for higher feminist "moral" ground.

The current sex worker movement recognises the material outcomes that have arisen from the failure of the feminist movement to listen to us. We draw strength from similar situations in other historic feminist movements where the marginalised communities have refused to allow the feminist movement to speak on their behalf. For example, racism in predominantly white and academic feminist movements has been addressed in some sectors by the assertion of people of colour within feminist circles to have their voices heard. In the same way migrant sex workers in Australia demand to be heard by feminist groups that are predominantly led by people who are not migrants, and people who are not sex workers. The necessity to not only include, but to be *informed by* those directly affected by an issue, is a concern that faces all social movements; including refugee rights movements, anti-racism movements. This is a complex question that faces us all, not the least those of us who are organising in the sex worker rights movement.

4. Where do they see themselves in terms of movement achievements to date and the road still to be travelled?

Our challenge, as sex worker advocates, is to understand why, within feminist circles, the arguments we put forward for decriminalisation and sex workers rights are not *believed* to be genuinely representative of sex workers. Our challenge is to understand why our voices are not being heard.

Some within feminist movement have labelled those of us who do the advocacy in the sex worker rights movement as "privileged" and "happy hookers" who are unable to understand the hardships that sex workers who are not "us" face.

Our message to those feminist is:

Do not assume *anything* about the sex workers you are meeting in advocacy situations.

Do not assume *anything* about the sex workers you meet on Facebook, who you see in the media, who you see doing advocacy.

Do not assume we have not been victims of assault, discrimination, family breakdown, abuse, violence, bad work conditions, domestic violence, poverty, police corruption or crime.

We are people, just like you, who have faced everything in a life that any human being faces. We have a right to privacy about trauma we have experienced in our lives.

But as sex workers we also face deep-seeded stigmas which mean that if we don't disclose to you our stories of tragedy and the demeaning experiences we have faced, we run the risk of not being believed by you.

This is what we call feminist attachment to "tragedy porn": A desire in the feminist movement to hear, and enjoy hearing, tragic stories of hardship from sex workers.

When we don't tell them, we face the accusation that we are covering up the "truth" about sex work.

For example when we speak about the low prevalence of incidents of trafficking in the sex industry, we are accused of being in denial about migrant sex workers' lives.

When we present actual statistics about drug use in the sex industry, we are told that we are ignoring or lying about drug use in sex work.

We are expected to *perform* stereotypical narratives of tragedy porn for feminist audiences and when we don't we are disbelieved. Sex workers don't want to be only believed when we *perform* these normative stereotypes about sex work.

Why do you only believe a sex worker when they are telling you about a *bad* day at work, but have trouble believing a sex worker who tells you that decriminalisation and human rights will improve our workplaces, and increased regulation will not?

The goal of the sex worker rights movement is to be heard *for ourselves*, to be self determined and to be recognised as politically autonomous. Where sex workers have been listened to, such as within the HIV response in Australia, the outcome has been incredibly productive. Where sex workers have been ignored, such as the trafficking response in Australia, the outcome has been counter-productive to sex workers rights. This alone tells us an evidence based story of how to build policy and responses to sex work that can actually increase, rather than decrease, our health, dignity and human rights.

5. What barriers and possibilities for feminist struggle has neo-liberalism created?

There is no doubt that neo-liberal frameworks have given a platform to tragedy porn and provided barriers to sex worker voices that are not performing tragedy porn.

Neo-liberalism can be framed as a particular set of ideas and pressures that are identified as stemming from the private sector and being "foisted" onto Government, Community and society generally. The work of Susan Strange however identifies the neo-liberalist aspects of globalisation as being as much a product of Government as the private sector (1996). Democratically elected Governments have willingly and forcefully pushed our public institutions further and further into behaviours that mimic economic rationalist thinking, until those institutions, today, can be defined as behaving as products of neo-

liberalism, as if any other way of operating is invalid. The community sector is no different. However as sex workers we recognise that the historical underpinnings of the characteristics of feminist modes of working within the community sector pre-date neo-liberal philosophies. This next section explores those ideas.

The role of the feminist "helper" in relation to sex workers was built within welfare infrastructure in post-industrialised Western Europe and the UK (Agustin, 2007: 96-133). The goal of "rescuing" lower class sex workers literally brought feminists out of the kitchen and into esteemed "work", albeit mostly volunteer. It must be acknowledged that the work, while giving status to women who had previously been socially invisible, had catastrophic consequences for those who were "helped." For sex workers, social exclusion, discrimination, jailing, and deportation from the UK in the 1970s is the key example.

The current day examples of such approaches include the routine deportation of migrant sex workers from Australian sex industry workplaces during the Howard Government conservative era response to trafficking 2003-2007. During this time migrant sex workers who were picked up in brothel raids lost their substantive visa and were deported unless they assisted police with trafficking investigations. This led to the deportation of many sex workers, some who had been affected by trafficking, and many who had not.

This "help" was unwanted, unwarranted, cruel, and was framed as a response to trafficking issues in Australia. The road to the laws that allowed for such deportations was made easier by feminists from contemporary "helping professions" who advocated to bring in harsh anti-trafficking laws, and supported the laws when they were being discussed by Parliament (Agustin 2007: 33.). The Howard Government brought in the laws, and those laws have hurt migrant sex workers. The laws were supported by people who feel it is their life calling, and career (whether in a paid capacity or not) to "help" migrant sex workers.

Those of you who work in the helping professions need to recognise that by "helping" you gain privilege, money, employment, status and a position of power. By assisting others you gain a role in society that would not be there except for the needy other; in our case, sex workers.

The modern manifestation of the "helping" professions in relation to sex workers, particularly migrant sex workers, has a new moniker: The rescue industry. The rescue industry has money making capabilities and creates career opportunities for feminists. The term "rescue industry" is explained and explored in detail by Laura Agustin in her book *Sex at the Margins* (2007). This book is recommended reading for anyone who is endeavouring to fully understand both the history and the theoretical underpinnings of the helping professions and the rescue industry.

In Australia, sex workers have witnessed "helpers" set up organisations with the aim of "helping" sex workers within a feminist framework, and "helping" sex workers affected by trafficking. The key claim of these groups is that no one was

doing such work, and as such they formed to meet an identified demand, of sex workers who needed their “help”. This claim, made by one of the founders of a rescue industry organisation, at the Feminist Futures conference in Melbourne, May 2011, is ignorant to the decades of work already done by sex worker communities. Such “helping” groups, and their political clout, have the capacity to be quite successful in attracting funding.

These groups would have no validity and no cause to attract funding if it were known to funders that sex workers can actually help ourselves and we don't need abolitionist feminists to do it for us. The self organised work that sex workers are already doing in terms of peer education service delivery, as outlined in the first section of this article, is made invisible by the rescue industry.

A disturbing element of the rescue industry is that they demand, require, and cannot do without tragedy porn. It doesn't fit the rhetoric of the rescue industry if sex workers present to these services, or in public spaces, and *don't* tell a tragic story.

Now why would feminists be so threatened by sex workers living our lives with strength that they would *disbelieve* a sex worker's political ideas because that sex worker hasn't shared stories of negative experiences in sex work? Middle-class feminist “helpers” gain status by positioning us as victims and themselves as saviours. This is nothing new, and this phenomenon, starting in the mid 19th century, was how many middle-class white women managed to get themselves out of the house and into the realm of public life in western democracies, including Australia. Without the Damned Whores there was no need for God's Police – feminists who have claimed to be rescuing sex workers were given platforms, celebrated, they influenced policy, and found themselves a voice in Australia during the last two centuries.

Will feminists deconstruct the roles of “helper” – “victim” through a feminist lens? Or will we replicate these roles, seeing only through the lens of self interest? Sex workers recognise that it is in anti-sex work feminists' interests not to listen to sex workers when we speak from our strength. As explained by *Women's Views on News* author Lindsay Carroll, “There is currently a climate of fear amongst London sex workers due to police activity that is driven by hype and misinformation promoted by NGOs with a financial vested interest in the anti-trafficking industry, who are ideologically opposed to commercial sex” (2011). Within the neo-liberal environment anti-sex work feminists justify their claims to the moral feminist high-ground by mobilising “tragedy porn,” placing themselves in the role of the “helper” and receiving financial reward.

This is particularly current in feminist spaces, where the rhetoric is literally for sale; the worse the tragedy porn, the more funding it attracts. For example, the rescue industry in Australia are known for using tragedy porn in advocacy spaces, to the media, to politicians, even to the funders themselves, in order to convince politicians that there is an unmet need that justifies rescue industry funding. It demeans sex worker, but it makes money.

Feminists – this is your neo-liberalist problem. Sex workers – this is our neo-liberalist problem. Tragedy porn is dollars for the rescue industry. Every new trafficking case in Australia is a new tragedy for exploitation by the rescue industry. And when sex workers try to address these issues in feminist spaces we are faced with a dilemma: speak of our sex work tragedy and be believed, or speak of our strength and be dismissed. If you challenge the theoretical basis of the usefulness of tragedy porn in advocacy and social change settings, you will be branded a pimp, a trafficker, an enabler, and you run the risk of being seen as a person or group who disbelieves the negative experiences individual sex workers have had.

Sex worker shouldn't have to use feminist discussion spaces as a public counselling or debrief space for the difficulties of our lives just so that we will be believed us when we say we want human rights.

And sex workers don't want the feminist community to reward, clap, praise a person when they breakdown describing all the negative experiences they have had in their lives in relation to sex work. People who need counselling and support to work through trauma in their lives *shouldn't have to perform their grief for you* in order to access basic human rights, assistance or justice. In meetings, conferences, service delivery spaces, not-for-profit organisation environments, community development projects, within a feminist service delivery environment, in a counselling session, or any compromising situation when seeking support, political or otherwise, or in any kind of space that is outside sex worker only spaces; sex workers deserve respect and deserve to be listened to. On our terms. As empowered, organised, strong, vocal people.

If you don't believe us because we don't perform our tragedies for you then you are participating in a sick circus with sex workers as the non-consensual entertainment.

6. Does the decline of neo-liberalism create openings for feminists?

Sex worker peer education is our labour organising; a critical approach that sees sex workers supporting ourselves (Mawulisa, 2002). Peer education is the sex worker response to neo-liberalism and the sex worker contribution to the decline of neo-liberalism. In places in the world where neo-liberalism is palpably on the decline (for example some countries in South America), sex worker organising is incredibly strong. Sex worker leaders such as Elena Reynaga represent these movements. She is the General Secretary of AMMAR, the Female Sex Workers' Trade Union of Argentina and President of RedTraSex, the Latin American and Caribbean network of sex workers' organisations. In her words:

It is through our organising that we sex workers have mounted effective responses to the HIV pandemic... [Yet] a large part of the money available for HIV/AIDS is spent outsourcing management because many agencies refuse to give funds directly to community-based organisations.

Yes, it's true; most of us didn't get the chance to go to school.

But we were able to advocate for changes in laws that criminalise us...

...and we were able to stand up and face those who wish us to stay ignorant. How could we possibly not manage our own organisations?

It is time we began to be trusted.

Outsourcing the management of funds is a policy that contradicts the autonomy of sex worker organisations. Evidence shows that most effective responses to HIV are sex worker-led. Our programs combine peer outreach with advocacy for sex workers' human rights and we fight strongly for the repeal of laws that repress or criminalise sex work.

We are the experts when it comes to peer outreach within our community. Orquideas del Mar, a sex worker organisation in El Salvador reached 2,000 sex workers in the last year. Ecuador reached more than 8000 sex workers and Argentina reached 9,000.

Another successful example is the Brazilian Network of Prostitutes. They collaborated with the government on a public health and rights campaign called "No shame girl, you're a professional!" They won the inclusion of "prostitute" among the list of recognised professions of the Brazilian Ministry of Labour. They even took their fight all the way to parliament where they pushed for a law that would abolish discrimination against sex workers.

In other words, the most effective responses have been achieved in places where sex work is actually recognised as "work" and where, we, sex worker organisations, manage our own funds (Reynaga, 2008)

Janelle Fawkes of Scarlet Alliance defines peer education:

Peer education describes the sharing by one or more sex workers of information, skills, techniques, and negotiation strategies with another sex worker(s)...Peer education is supported by a community development framework using empowerment, sex-positive attitudes, and a shared interest in systemic advocacy and representation. The success of these frameworks in providing sex workers with a nonthreatening and nonjudgmental environment is illustrated by the number of sex workers who engage in peer education via their sex worker organisation. (Fawkes, 2006: 350-351)

Janelle explains the pedagogy of peer education:

A new worker entering the Australian sex industry is likely to be informed about the benefits of visiting the sex worker organisation or may experience new worker training directly delivered by a sex worker organisation. Sex worker organisations have a presence in sex industry workplaces via magazines, outreach visits, brochures, media activities, political representation, and public profiles. Some sex workers volunteer for their local sex worker organisation. Many more become advocates for sex worker peer education and occupational safety and health rights within their workplace, ensuring that new workers are mentored and that workplace conditions are improved. These peer educators draw on information from their sex worker organisation that may have been developed and added to by their peers over many years. In this way, knowledge spreads through the industry, either directly from or as a result of strong peer education strategies delivered by sex worker organisations. (2006: 351)

Fawkes goes on to warn of the elements of community organising that can hinder peer education:

Sex worker peer education is undermined when the strategy is isolated from a sex workers' rights framework or when sex worker peer educators are not housed within a sex worker community organisation. Peer education cannot exist separately from a supportive sex worker community organisation. Peer education that is not genuinely community-based is not only ineffective but results in a loss of support from sex workers. A community development frame-work requires continued participation by the sex worker community for the long term. Models that simply add a few low-paid sex workers to the bottom rungs of an organisation that is otherwise driven and directed by non-sex workers do not effectively engage sex workers. Unless sex workers feel some ownership over the organisation and can participate over the long term, an organisation will become irrelevant...

Community development in this context involves skills building, mentoring, and/or resourcing members of a community to facilitate involvement, sharing and increasing of skills, knowledge, and capacity, and community involvement and relationships with other sex workers. Sex worker organisations around the world have deployed community development activities, including sex worker community publications, organisation and participation in community events such as gay pride day, working groups and political forums addressing issues that affect sex workers, informational workshops on everything from taxation to sadomasochism, language classes and performance groups (such as Debby Doesn't Do It For Free.) All of these activities complement the usual array of safe sex, occupational safety and health, and workplace negotiation skills that are delivered through peer education by sex worker organisations. (Fawkes 2006)

This is why we support sex workers organisations. Critically organising for ourselves (Jeffreys, 2011). This is why we won't perform our tragedy for you. Because to live our lives with strength, you need to accept us at our best. We want the feminist movement to stop punishing us for our strengths, stop rewarding us for our pain, stop gaining privilege on the back of our needs, and to listen when we speak. We will continue to speak out about our rights, you need to hear us. If you deny our experience, you deny our existence. We already organise for ourselves.

7. And what movements today could be allies for a transition out of patriarchy?

The feminist movement could and should be a great ally to the sex worker movement for a transition out of patriarchy. Sex workers are already fighting bad laws, we don't need to be fighting sections of the feminist community as well. Porn workers, strip club workers, private sex workers, small businesses – all face devastatingly over-regulation that is illogical and detrimental to organising. Sex workers are organising against bad workplace practises, but while the entire industry is treated as clandestine, criminalised and undesirable, who is listening? If feminists aren't listening, who will?

We want non-sex workers to recognise sex worker organising. Don't speak for us. Don't make a career out of us. Don't write about us. Be our ally by letting us organise and speak for ourselves. We are campaigning for the full decriminalisation of all sex work. Support us on our own terms.

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Wise women in community: building on everyday radical feminism for social change

Jean Bridgeman

Introduction

This paper looks at the hidden discourse of women which takes place in the private sphere away from the public eye, and explores the self-articulated knowledge of women in their particular community and the political content of such a discourse. The women in this study were able to bring their personal everyday experiences of oppression and social inequality into discussion through questioning wider power structures, particularly vivid where the structures of gender and class intersect. Once they were encouraged to ask questions about the way things are in their own lives and their community they started to reflect on women's position within society at large and it immediately became apparent that women have different views on power, and on feminist perspectives depending on their social standing and access to resources and needs.

So this paper brings new questions to what might be considered old problems. It asks these new questions by highlighting how women today talk about power behind the backs of the powerful in order to make changes in their lives. This has been academically held as a feminist deconstruction of gender but this paper differs in that it provides the critical perspective of working-class women on feminist thinking who do not so much deconstruct their gender as construct collectivity, sociability and dignity. The paper highlights how women share common threads of solidarity when it comes to calling on their own wisdom (living knowledge) and how this solidarity is steeped in the early feminist arguments of the older women in their lives. You will see contradictions in these early feminist arguments because often women's work and women's roles in their communities meant different things when viewed through the eyes of class. For many working-class women who spent long days doing physical labour, feminism was another strain of thinking from the public sphere to which they did not contribute. Instead they had their own everyday version of "women's work", life and struggle.

The article draws from working class community education with the "Wise Women community group" who participated in critical pedagogical learning and weaves their narratives throughout.

Voices past and present

The good thing about doing an ethnographic study in a working-class neighbourhood, and being a working-class woman myself, is that you really have a head start in the research inquiry when it comes to understanding peoples oppression, and in this case, the realities of working-class life. The real

advantage here is the researcher does not so much have to depend on Weber's method of "Verstehen"¹ to understand people's particular experiences and perspectives, like placing one's self in the shoes of those being researched, but rather the researcher can immediately connect with common-held perspectives and experiences, ways of life and the realities of life as it is spoken about behind closed doors. The common perspectives I refer to here are held by working-class women who engage in a hidden political discourse which extends to many public issues but yet remains hidden and shared only with other womenfolk because they can freely express their opinions among each other without further oppression for doing so. Fundamental to this political discourse is living everyday practice of feminism rather than institutionalised feminism. I remember in the 70s my own mother's view that she considered women to be no more than slaves, particularly when they got married:

Remember you're nobody, you're just a slave to the man you marry.

She would warn me about falling for the traps set out by those in power by saying things like,

Don't fall for that thinking, like when you hear them say "marriage is no bed of roses it has to be something that is worked on together". Well, there is no such thing. It's a myth, the man has the power, there is no negotiating.

My mother would draw from her own experiences and put them forward as giving advice and words of warning about how I had a choice to be my own person, have my own career, and not be pressured into things like she was. She would often talk about the pressures that were on her to marry at a certain age, and have children while she was still considered to be young enough to have them. For my mother, you couldn't be a feminist and a good wife at the same time and indeed when this type of thinking is situated historically in the 1970s this statement sums up the difficulties of identity for Irish women during a particular rapid phase of social change. Indeed Marxist explanations of the origins of women's oppression throw light on the development of class society, founded upon the family, private property, and the state. According to Engels, "with the rise of private property, monogamous marriage and the patriarchal family new social forces came into play both in society at large and in the family setup. Thus women, once governesses of society, were degraded under class formations to become the governess of a man's children and his chief housemaid" (Reed 1970)

Friends of my mothers were not always in agreement with feminist thinking and, as a young girl, I was often caught in the crossfire of talk on gender issues. For example, whilst most of the women would agree that once born into the world a female, then the social positioning bestowed upon them was in

¹ Max Weber (1949) introduced interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*) into sociology where it has come to mean a systematic interpretive process in which an outside observer of a culture (such as an anthropologist or sociologist) relates to an indigenous people or sub-cultural group on their own terms and from their own point-of-view, rather than interpreting them in terms of his or her own culture.

subordination to men and what followed were diverse views and changing beliefs on what they considered feminist thinking to be:

Feminism, it's all about women's lib, it's "fancy stuff", there's more to be worrying about than who's doing the cooking or doing the washing up.

Although such mutterings often gave way to raised voices and women leaving my mother's house abruptly, what was considered important to them and what these arguments were facilitating was to find ways to deal with other oppressions they were also experiencing in their lives, such as surviving and managing poverty and learning how to remain justifiably proud when having to depend on social welfare. These women would talk about being the stronger of the species when it came to problem-solving crises (particularly food, clothing, medicine and cures, as well as keeping an eye on each other's children when something had to be done) in the family and community and would consult with women "only" for advice on those matters. (My mother always said my aunt, her sister, could open a cupboard and it would be bare and she'd still be able to make a dinner for her family – 7 of them!)

Second wave feminism often assumed a universal female identity and over-emphasized the experiences of upper-middle-class white women (Walker 1995) In fact, working-class women have been known to dismiss feminism because they felt their oppression was brought about by more than the structure of gender and they have blamed feminist thinking for leaving class inequality out of the framework of power and subordination. On the other hand, some working-class women considered feminism to be only for rich middle class women and often gave rebellious responses when asked if they considered themselves feminists,

It's not for us, it's the wisest of women who don't say what they do, and they just do what they do, with what they know.

However, although views varied among the women and they differed in their beliefs around feminist thinking, what was apparent was how the women readily talked among themselves and relied on each other's advice in combating inequalities. This dialogue took place mostly in the privacy of the women's homes around kitchen tables with numerous pots of tea at the ready, hidden from the public eye and consisted of sharing and encouraging a thinking that was outside the box (so to speak). Once the women grew in confidence and got used to discussing personal issues with each other they began to articulate that which stretched beyond their own personal experiences into more critical discussions on wider public issues.

Threads of solidarity

Radical feminism today places more emphasis on the strengths of women and, in particular, women's ways of coping and connecting with each other. The value is placed on how women rely on their own inner qualities, their wisdom, and shared experiences in combating oppression (Daly 1978) particularly when

it comes to mothering and being a mother. Speaking from the Wise Women community group, the women felt that working-class mothers, and single mothers, were placed top of the list for scrutinising, and blamed for being bad parents having a bad effect on society. In our society the mother in general is seen as the mastermind in contributing to the social order at the micro level. Thus, the women felt that everything to do with bringing up children hinges on the role of the mother irrespective of how social structures can restrict their and their children's opportunities.

Of course there are many varying situations in women's lives and in their mothering roles, where hardship is made all the more harrowing by not being able to speak out because of fear of public scrutiny and the opinion of parental failure or blame that women expect to have bestowed on them by knowledge groups (teachers, GPs, etc) when problems appear with their children (Lawler 2000)

We are used as scapegoats! And if we do look for help, with say money problems, or with the kids in school, those in power are quick to blame situations on our lack of skills and offer us parenting courses. It nearly always turns out that you come away asking where I went wrong. And "I must be a bad person and mother".

Such issues as these came up a lot in the Wise Women group sessions. And although there was a variance in experiences from women who had attended parenting class, inherent in the women's views we can see class expectations and judgement of class position. Here oppression takes the form of a working-class mother believing that she does not have the qualities inherent to parent her child properly and needs to be educated about how she should do this. In the wise women group, the women were able to question such oppression because they understood the nature of this class expectation. They spoke about their shared beliefs in not being able to speak out, other than among themselves, about circumstances or problem issues that arose in the family and in their caring roles. The women took on the role of "we'll fix it ourselves" and supported each other with this type of strategy.

Where else can you really talk about how it is? Like we share things that really tell us what the hell we are up against, for example, when I began work last year as an assistant in administration in the local school. I was registered as auxiliary staff, we thought it was a fancy word and one of us looked it up in the dictionary and its definition is "female slave." So it's things like this we share in private, its stuff we know and tell each other about.

Talking about power, behind the backs of the powerful

The women spoke about how talking among each other and sharing their experiences was helpful because it meant using their "better wits" as they put it. This allowed for their own living knowledge to be shared in relation to inequalities in their lives and in this opening up they could see that their experiences of oppression was a collective experience linked to wider social structures. Paradoxically, being able to collectively perceive actual power

relations gave them a sense of empowerment and a hope for changing things rather than feeling they were being blamed for the social inequalities they were experiencing.

The women explained that in organising and facilitating programmes such as parenting courses for example there needed to be a recognition given to what they had come to call "reality politics". Some women made specific comments which help understand what was meant by this:

It's the mother that knows best about what we have decided to call a "politics of reality" because it holds at its core the understanding that we women do not bring up our kids in a cupboard, but instead we're living in poverty most of the time, living with unemployment and the knowing that there will be none to gain in the near future, and that our kids' chances of opportunities and achievement are hindered due to these issues and more which are never mentioned by politicians. This means we know well we have to work all the harder in breaking down the barriers because if it's left to existing powers, run mostly by men, it will never happen.

The reason this paper came about was because I wanted to put across my findings on what I have termed women's hidden political discourse. It is not an explicit discourse of politics; it is not about feminist or class activism. It is a discourse of managing, which according to the Wise Women is essentially political; it is inherently about gender and class issues. I guess in a way I'm trying to make sense of, or rather take a fresh look at, the familiar. By this I mean the kind of critical discourse women engage in within the home away from the public eye and which is a discourse I have come to know having been around, and learning from, this talk since my own childhood. As a working-class woman doing highly reflexive ethnographic and pedagogical research I have tried to look at this hidden discourse in an "out of" familiar light in order to understand it more clearly and relate it to a wider audience.

In conclusion then, this paper asserts that working-class women in particular, who are situated as powerless within the general patriarchal system, operate a hidden discourse behind the backs of their oppressors. A good explanation of this way of surviving oppressive power can be found in studies by Scott (e.g. 1990) and what he has termed "hidden transcripts" or a critique of power that is spoken behind the backs of the dominant. The key aspect in relation to this here is the attention I have given in this paper to the critique of power as told by the Wise Women group themselves. And that the hidden transcript is not just idle talk but a way of re-instating agency, by sharing opinions, and trying to make sense of both mine and other women's lives in understanding where our lives connect with existing power structures. This is what makes wise women's talk political. It is a way of sharing personal life experiences and everyday struggles, and relating them to wider social and political issues. C. Wright Mills (1959) recognised this as bringing personal troubles out into public debates. So it is timely now, more than ever, to include women's voice in left politics in Ireland so that women's living knowledge might be sought to contribute to more public and political dispute concerning women's oppression and how we might transform that oppression.

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Performing unseen identities: a feminist strategy for radical communication

Jennifer Verson

When I think about the moments over the last year that have taken the joy out of resistance for me, they involve hoping to build a group of people to work with and instead having to struggle within my own community just to be seen as somebody who is poor, who is an immigrant and who is trying to raise a child. We must accept that in groups even where people look the same, there are diverse identities that shape people's privilege and reality. Class and culture like gender are not fixed. They are performed. As activists, feminists, survivors and fighters we need to include the staging of these in order to invert an artificial view of the homogeneity of the spaces where we meet. This will help us to create systems and resources to profoundly support each other so every person can contribute to their highest potential.

We gather in idealistic spaces which we hope to enter with our best selves, but something is holding back these spaces from reaching their full potential. Noticing the things that are not working in the places where we gather is potentially a rich and radically motivating exploration

Where we gather

Meetings. It seems that the foundations of radical social change are built on meetings of groups of people to talk and make plans. Who comes to meetings?¹ Often meetings are filled with "activists". Activist is often a term for somebody centrally involved in a social movement, but as there is a continuous desire to involve more people in organizing and change, so meetings are realistically not comprised solely of activists but include a diversity of people from all walks of life. More often than not this can result in differences in understanding (and opinion) around the definitions and practices of feminism, sexism, patriarchy, and systemic misogyny (as well as consensus, class, and anarchy).

These differences may be rooted in the tension within feminism around the critique of essentialism on the one hand and the tendency in horizontal movements to erase privilege on the other. People inside the feminist movement have grappled both critically and personally with the catch 22 situation that as soon as you assert that "society should stop oppressing women", "women" instantly become a group of people who share the same traits. While the experience of sexism, sexual discrimination, misogyny and exhaustion at having to live within patriarchal institutions is felt and experienced by most females in

¹ The current culture of holding meetings on weekday evenings systematically excludes people who are raising children. If parents and carers are to be included at the core, organizing crèches and child friendly meetings should be fully integrated into the culture of social movements, not only as the responsibility of people who care for children.

some form, "women" are so diverse that mapping experiences onto feminist theory and practice is not easy or clear. The desire to map personal experience onto larger statements about the nature of "women" results in something that can be termed essentialism. What exactly is essentialism? According to Alison Stone:

The (false) universalisation of claims about women in effect casts particular forms of feminine experience as the norm, and, typically, it is historically and culturally privileged forms of femininity that become normalised in this way. Essentialist theoretical moves thereby end up replicating between women the very patterns of oppression and exclusion that feminism should contest. (2004, 41)

False universalisation is experienced on the ground in the day-to-day decision-making and actions that go on in political movements, social centres, community gardens, and a myriad of grass-roots projects that are embedded with in the movement for social change. This has the impact of excluding all those women who do not share this experience and position. Whilst giving voice to one performance of gender it excludes and silences many others.

My question is how can these patterns of oppression, exclusion and silencing be dismantled and replaced. I want to look at the Class and Feminism workshop that took place during the DIY Feminist Festival this year in Manchester as an example of a model that could be used to subvert essentialism and its resulting exclusions. I would like to look at what can be borrowed from queer theory - a critical framework which emerged in the 1990s which has been used to dismantle the binary construction of male and female and hetero and homo sexual - to shore up the idea that class, like gender, is performative, not fixed but a complexity of human actions and reactions that only exist when they are enacted.

Understanding the performativity of class can then serve as a bridge to thinking about the idea of performing other unseen identities and how this might disrupt exclusionary spaces and open the possibility of authentic communication and inclusion. It will also enable an exploration of the effect of not performing personal narrative has on the self and the communities of resistance that we participate in.

Finally, I will look at horizontal models of organization and decision-making used within grass-roots social justice movements and question if these inadvertently produce an essentialist notion of "activism" and "activist". Can the processes modelled at the DIY Feminist Festival serve as an example for how to subvert such essentialism through the systematic performance of both marginalized and mainstream identities?

Class and feminism as a model

The DIY Feminist Festival was organized by Feminist Action, a group of people who were involved in the Manchester University occupations and decided to organize themselves around feminist and gender issues. The Festival consisted of two days of workshops and was attended by over 100 people.

The workshop on class and feminism was convened by Carly Jan and Shannon Major. They began by each one presenting a short biography to the assembled group to explain why and under what terms they considered themselves to be working class.

we acknowledged that people get funny about being middle class, like we're blaming them, or looking down on them, we spoke quite a lot about how NOT to make them feel undermined or demonized, as political feminists... we didn't want to be like "this IS what working class is and we feel that every one we know is middle class, and you are making us feel bad as working class people" - but then we discussed it more, and figured... we have to just be open and honest -- the truth is always going to be confronting, and challenging... and we shouldn't sacrifice our genuine concrete feelings and concerns for the potential political upset in others... if that makes sense? -

I think it did work because people reacted quite shocked like they'd never really seen anything like that before.. I think it's because we also spoke really colloquially and avoided being too politically spoken.. we wanted it to be "grass roots" ABOUT grass roots issues.. about personal experiences, no pretense, no political context.. just facts feelings and experiences. I think it was refreshing in a movement that can seem far too politically internalised (!) (Jan 2011)

Importantly, the project started from a personal sense of "feeling bad as working class people". Feeling bad and silenced as working class people was the result of essentialist assumptions, identities unseen and unheard by a community of people who are expected to be supportive. The solution was to take the authority of the workshop to publicly explain "facts, feelings and experiences". Carly and Shannon staged/performed their identity in a way that explicitly chose to both build bridges with other feminists and not relinquish control of their narrative. They took control of their own definitions of identity, and didn't rely on certifying it either through outside experts or in a dialogical process of questions and answers with others. The audience, though they were different, were not treated as hostile, but comrades in a common cause of ending patriarchy. They used their cultural power as teachers/facilitators to create both safety and a sense of authority that facilitated actively processing the reality of class and cultural difference.

Theory and methodology of performing class

It seems ironic to want to use more critical theory to support an argument that people who are involved in social justice work are not understanding each other. I am buying into a culture of discourse where the thoughts of an individual need to be justified by weaving webs of support with canonical knowledge. I am attempting to line up a group of very smart people behind me to justify something simple that I want to say: choosing how you want to define yourself and saying this in public will help create healthier radical communities. Yet I feel that this is a reclaiming of feminist and queer theory for the needs of feminist praxis, not for the needs of institutionalised knowledge machines.

If I were to read all of Judith Butler's books, what I would find at the end is a theoretical model that would support the real time process of diverse groups seeing each other. It is in this seeing and understanding of deeply complex identities that humans can work together to create radically non hierarchical egalitarian societies and movements.

When conflict arises it is tempting in a group of mixed genders and classes to create artificial divides between the men and the women, working class, middle class, and upper class: to look at others' identities as fixed and take sides accordingly. Queer theory suggests that gender is not fixed but comes into being by being "performed"; on this theoretical structure groups can see that taking sides in this way is an artificial and essentialist move. Judith Butler says that she tries to think of

performativity as *that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names*. Then I take a further step...and suggest that this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation. (Osborne et al.1994)

In "Performing Working-Class Identity in Composition: Toward a Pedagogy of Textual Practice" Donna LeCourt references Butler in her argument that class is performative:

there is "no gender identity behind the expressions of gender," then discourse becomes central to understanding not only gender's socially constructed nature but also how "that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). What I am suggesting is that class identity works similarly. (2006, 39)

It is possibly a contentious point particularly among Marxists that class is a cultural construct, and that it is through recitations and repetitions in discourse that what is being performed actually comes into existence. There are some words in our vocabulary for people who operate in the class queer world: class traitors, trustafarians, downwardly mobile, up their own arse. People who transgress the normative of their inherited social role are just as much up for derision as those who transgress gender roles. This is not meant to undermine struggle against capitalism, rather to suggest that it is not necessarily the historically defined working class that is key agent in social transformation. Through queer theory we can see patriarchy and capitalism as systems that we can all work together to dismantle. Individual identity is mobile, complicated and being continuously revised but media, governments and corporations methodically create, disseminate and enforce sexist, racist, and classist cultures of homogeneity and closure.

Class as a bridge to think about performing other invisible identities

Carly and Shannon performed their identities in order to foreground class assumptions that alienate people and that are regularly erased. Understanding the performative nature of class may help open a discussion around other

unseen identities that are not being performed within our communities. These may be narratives of religion, culture, migration/nationality, disability, loss, disease, abuse, and violence that people choose not to stage or perform.

Why aren't these narratives performed and what is the effect on the social movement, community and on the individual? Chally Kacelnik, feminist writer and blogger, explains it well when she speaks about the issue of passing as an abled person when her disability is not easily visible. She offers a first hand narrative of the issue of "reading" people who don't fit into boxes i.e. those that are not openly performing identity:

I realised it wasn't so important that I figure out someone's identity if I was just having a chat with them in a line or some such. If I don't need to know, I don't need to know. Someone else's comfort is more important than the satisfaction of my curiosity. This is particularly true for the people who don't fit into boxes so neatly, or for those who wish to keep their identity under wraps. For instance, I myself am regularly nervous about being outed by careless friends about my disability status, because I often can't afford to lose the credibility and respect passing as abled gives me. (2009)

Kacelnik illuminates some critical issues: the social desire to read people and place them in boxes; the reality that one can resist this desire; and that the performance of identity for those who don't fit into boxes is an active choice whose decision needs to remain with the individual.

This leads to a possibility of looking at the performance of difference within the historical problematic of "passing". While the practice of people performing alternative identities is ancient, the discourse of racial passing emerged in literature during the Harlem Renaissance examining the politics and poetics of light-skinned African-Americans "passing" as white (Larsen). The discourse of passing is also part of the disabilities rights movement as noted above by Kacelnik. Writing from the perspective of transsexual women's reality Andrea James explains the problematic:

Passing implies a binary of pass or fail. It also implies a deception, as if you're passing yourself off for something you are not. Thinking of ourselves this way is very unhealthy. We are female. We are transsexual women (2011)

Taken together we can see that the core issues may be that of agency and the right of the individual to decide how and when they want to define themselves.

There is however, another key issue within our movements is that there is no structured, unemotive, no nonsense context that is "safe" and "authoritative" to perform unseen identities.² These may be narratives of class, religion, culture, migration/nationality, disability, loss, disease, abuse, and violence that critically shape people's reality but that are not easily read.

² During a general assembly at the Occupy London Stock Exchange I witnessed a white activist stand at the microphone and talk about the group becoming more diverse and reaching out, when I looked around me and saw old and young, rich and poor, immigrants, biracial people, Jews, Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, orphans.

What happens when there is no opportunity to perform an authentic narrative of the self? Leigh Goodmark in her article "When Is A Battered Woman Not A Battered Woman? When She Fights Back" examines how the institutions that have been created by the battered women's movement promote victim narratives. People who fall outside of the victim narrative are either advised to adapt their story or are rejected by the movement. Importantly this is more often than not lesbians and heterosexual black women who are most likely to fight back, because they lack other recourse.

In this context Goodmark is able to map the effect of not performing an authentic narrative has on women who fight back. She explains how from earliest childhood stories are used to order the world around us and that particularly for victims of domestic violence, the voicing of the personal narrative enables a the storyteller to hold on to her sense of self. "If the battered woman is denied her ability to tell her story, 'self' can never be realized." (2007, 5-6).

The narrative additionally forms a framework for communal relationships: "We establish relationships based on the stories we tell about ourselves, our history, our likes and dislikes, goals and aspirations. Bonds develop when the stories we share resonate with others." She illuminates the consequence of this lack of performance has on a community. She refers to Robert Cole's work and his belief that "Narratives can be instrumental, as well - offered for their ability to show others what we need and how they can help us." (Cole 1989, 20-21)

In this light we might see the inability to stage invisible narratives not so much as a choice but as an enforced silence in an environment that doesn't include structures and processes where all participants can easily and comfortably perform difference. When narratives of difference are not performed authentic solidarity and mutual aid can't exist because "need" as well as "resources" are erased.

When it doesn't happen: Zuck Off

The DIY Feminist Festival had many ups and downs. Sessions were filled with a complex mixture of second wave feminists, students and academics with a solid grounding in queer theory, old punk rockers, young communists, anarchists, and more. The Zuck Off workshop was convened in order to discuss the protests of Ken Zucker. Ken Zucker is deeply disliked by many people for his work with "Gender Identity Disorder" and his belief in diagnosing children who are displaying "'gender incongruence' such as rejecting toys or clothes considered to be associated with their gender (e.g. a girl's rejection of feminine clothes)" (BPS Psychology of Women Section 2011, 14)

As the workshop started the person who convened it did not choose to actively address personal identities in any way. It soon became apparent that among workshop participants there was not a collective understanding about the difference between sex and gender, that "sex" refers to biological and

anatomical structures that a person is born with, while gender is something that is socially constructed.

The difference in knowledge and language that was not actively addressed resulted in confrontations between group members. The discussion became quite heated and eventually one participant challenged another to state how they read their gender. When the first person misread the gender of the person that challenged her, she was chastised.

Both of the people were feminists, one did not have any exposure at all to queer theory. The loose framework of the workshop resulted in them being placed in oppositional positions, rather than in horizontal positions challenging the greater forces of patriarchy and hetero normativity.

The structures implemented in class and feminism could have established a different method of educating each other and moving forward.

What would have happened if the workshop facilitator performed her own gender identity, explained the terms and processes that she used and then invited others to let the group know what pronoun that would like to be addressed with? Facilitation tools that actively include moments and times to define terms in an accessible way can be important for creating safe and inclusive spaces. A good facilitator will use a "go around" where everybody has a chance to speak, but at the moment is there a commonly used model where there is a quick and concise way to explain important terms in a colloquial fashion?

In mixed groups do we help give people skills on how not to be sexist in an up front and non confrontational manner? Is there a hand signal for stop patronizing me? Is there a way to stage identities that is inclusive, or do we need to create structures where people can teach themselves how to talk to people from different cultures, classes, and backgrounds?

There is no one size fits all solution; rather we need a context specific implementation of the "performing identity" strategy.

The problem with the old models

Raj Patel and Kala Subbuswamy, eloquently writing in *Restructuring Resistance*, are able to quite clearly explain how anarchist principles can be problematic:

The principles of decentralisation and autonomy adopted by many within radical movements can also, unintentionally and remedially, be exclusionary. Many radical groups have anarchist principles behind them - non-hierarchical, consensus decision-making, often no formal structure. One problem with this is that it is often used to dismiss talk of what "the movement" can do about issues of race and gender, on the grounds that we're not a movement, we're a collection of individuals and so we can't make decisions about the "movement". (2001)

The suggestion that non-hierarchical consensus decision making creates an environment that enables racism and sexism (classism and able-ism) to continue to exist is an uncomfortable yet vital assertion. How it happens may be a replication of how essentialist notions of women emerged within feminism.

In the desire to create a method of resisting oppressive structures in education, government and leadership, horizontal models created a notion of direct democracy which made everyone equal but erased differences. It could be that these models were appropriated from contexts where there was a greater homogeneity along class and race such as the Zapatista Movement, or a common spiritual unity such as the Quakers and not enough thought has been put into equalizing privilege in post colonial European contexts.

These processes are being used on the ground in grassroots in social movements but offer no clear methodology to deal with gender, class, or race privilege. Radical education and organizational forms need some sort of road map and process for dismantling privilege in our communities.

Can staging difference in the places where we gather be a critical strategy in dismantling the privilege that we have inherited from colonialism? Will radically democratic forms be more effective when we acknowledge that there is still inequality between those that are participating in them?

Feminist strategies

I know "embrace the post modern" is not the best rallying call for a movement. but it is post modern theories that deconstruct binary differences that can help us form a framework where it is logical for a "feminist" to work with white working class men who don't have a background in feminist understanding while confronting white middle class women with outdated ideas of feminist essentialism.

I started by saying that there were differences in languages that we speak. Our box-like identities are built with these languages (through the notion of performativity) and we all too often use them to recreate social hierarchies that are based on outdated ideas of "essentialist" identities; we use them to decide who is friend and who is foe.

I can see Marcel Marceau performing his stuck in a box routine and wonder if the notion of performing identities in our spaces in a conscious way may help us see the boxes that we have built, and once they are seen they can be dismantled, stepped out of or simply leaned against.

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Feminist love, feminist rage; or, Learning to listen

Jed Picksley, Jamie Heckert and Sara Motta

I have a new appreciation of the song Mr Jones by Counting Crows. It joined Blondie's "Room with a view" for me this week, as I saw/heard/thought how it might be all about the gaze of desire; looking with appreciation. In "Room with a View" Blondie sings about wanting to just stare at her beautiful man-lover. In Mr Jones, the man laments his position as a man in a narrow patriarchal world, where if your aim is to be desirously gazed upon, it's easier to be a woman. The song holds the pain, the bad-deal for men in patriarchy; whereby all the beautifulness, all the stare-at-able glory has been allocated to women. In order to be gazed upon with appreciation in today's mainstream western world, the man has to go through a bizarre lens - like an international pop-career, or a deliberate self-sexualisation or post-patriarchal liberation (like Dalí or Picasso). The other route is being a professional sport's person, whereby your manhood is sufficiently secure through your football-field prowess, that you can get away with (David Beckham's...) sarongs. Far fewer men than women are "allowed" to be pictured, adored or "beautiful" in the public gaze, which the singer of "Mr Jones" would rather be on the other side of.

This piece of the bad-deal of patriarchy, the uneroticised-man's part was first properly lit up for me by a mighty queer who lamented having spent 15 years learning how to make love to a woman, before he finally learnt how to ask a woman to make love to him, and (more years of practice required), how to receive that desire - how to give away enough power, to be powerfully appreciated!

My own definition of patriarchy, is the elevation of hardness, fixedness, speed, loudness and action over softness, flexibility, pauses/rest, quiet and reflection. I know this is just a slither of understanding from one instant of impermanent me, which doesn't even directly engage with sexism, disempowerment or oppression of other sorts, but I find it a good guide right now for confronting the patriarchy that I experience inside my own head.

I think it's radical in our culture to seek perspective, introspectively, about our own behaviours. Loud, bossy, interrupting and excitable behaviour is sometimes just brushed aside as individual character, but if it's the dominant feel of a sub-culture or a meeting, then surely that constitutes or contributes to the anti-empowerment features of hierarchy or patriarchy, that - we anarchists assert - we can do without.

When I'm being a loud, hurrying, assertive leader in a meeting, agreeing a plan or during the erection of a marquee, I sometimes catch my blokey self with dissatisfaction - I internally accuse myself of just re-enforcing patriarchy.

When I described this in a "Confronting Patriarchy" discussion, one guy said "hang on, isn't that [taking power] actually subverting patriarchy because you are a woman?"

I said "No. It's not a matter of sex or gender, it's a matter of style". I believe that there are quieter, gentler, slower more learning-focussed ways to do things - not just this fast, loud, hard effective version that I catch myself falling back on. Being a female leader might confront a particular shade of "sexism", but it doesn't touch "patriarchy" in the wide and tricky meaning of the word that we're developing in discussions like this.

Back to personal character though, in the worlds I live in, is it really a problem that I am sometimes bossy, hasty, loud and controlling? I think it would be pretty exhausting to be like that all the time, and maybe the dissatisfaction I sometimes feel in that mode is merely a warning about the onset of the exhaustion. *Sometimes* I am happy to be openly confused, inviting other opinions, creating pauses and making big space for a rethink. *Sometimes* I shut up entirely, sit back and do the silent facilitation of taking notes, drawing maps or just listening attentively.

Perhaps "confronting patriarchy" is as simple as accepting and practising such individual *diversity of approach*. And watching out for the deluded aspiration to be a superhero of awareness all the time! This writing is a bloom of knowingly momentary confidence - I'll change my mind tomorrow.

Right now, I reckon that diversity is sanity.

- Jed Picksley, *Earth First Summer Gathering, August 2011*

From time to time I visit sexualised male spaces. I love those queer utopian elements of gay saunas and beaches. Here, men can make intimate connections which cross the usual social divides, meeting those they might never consider talking to in the outside world. These connections might be brief moments of intensity or the beginning of a love affair or a lifelong friendship. Here, those elements that Jed and others note that patriarchy denies are celebrated: embodiment, rest, opening ourselves to receiving love and pleasure. Whether that is muscles softening in the heat of a steamroom, a bodymind relaxed by the gentle repetition of waves on the shore and sunlight on skin, or the opening of a body to the sensuous attentions of others, there is a certain release, a letting go.

Of course, it isn't always that easy. Oh no. Those patterns we might call patriarchy aren't instantly released. They don't dissolve just by entering a different space. Learning to notice them, to let them go, can be a challenge for many of us. And I do try to be compassionate, like Jed in her piece above.

But sometimes, I just get angry. Furious in fact. Men making assumptions about my desires, deciding in advance that I must be up for "it" just because I'm in that space. "We all come here for the same reason", he says to me. Do we, I ask?

Sometimes, often times, I just like to have a sauna or lie on the beach without being expected to wear any clothes. The trade off is that sometimes, often times, I say no to stop someone in their assumptive tracks. Sometimes I have to say it repeatedly, getting louder each time. I've grabbed wandering hands, pushed insistent bodies away and even shouted a couple of times. My god, haven't they heard of feminism? Don't they have the simple awareness that their desires may not be the same as mine? Sure, it's nice to be appreciated for male beauty without having to become a pop star or a footballer, but it's even nicer to wait and see if the appreciation is mutual before following eyes with hands. Or, at least let hands be tentative, gently questioning rather than roughly asserting.

And then I hurt my knees and I saw it all differently.

I thought it was fine, doing those advanced hip opening stretches in yoga class. Yeah, I can crouch on all fours and then get my knee up over the top of my supporting elbow. Yeah, I'm that flexible. Yeah, I'm pretty advanced in my practice. I think my body is ok with this. It's kinda uncomfortable, but it's ok. I think.

That night my knees let me know in no uncertain terms that they were unhappy. They had not given consent. Their desires had not been listened to. "We need to talk", they said irritably, "about our relationship."

Oh, that anger and scorn that I had felt toward those men who hadn't understood my desires suddenly turned inwards. I'm supposed to be some sort of expert on listening and intimacy. I'm supposed to be a good queerfeministanarchist and I'm training to be a yoga teacher. How could I have made such a mistake? What if I've ruined my knees forever? I beat myself up for not being a superhero of awareness.

Ah, patriarchy in the head.

I spoke about it with a teacher at the yoga retreat that weekend. He said something like, "It's difficult when you think you have the go ahead." His compassion took a while to sink in. It was an invitation to be gentle with myself and to remember not to give too much emphasis to thought. "I 'think' my knees can take it" isn't the same as checking in with them, gently exploring, listening with great care.

A strong workout can be great and bodies do love to be challenged physically. It's how they grow, how they become strong. The challenge, as Jed points out, is to notice desires for strength over gentleness. There need be no judgement. Simply an observation. And then perhaps an exploration of what can be adjusted for even greater freedom and spaciousness. What gives support, strength, integrity? What effort can be let go? The flipside is watching out for the attraction of weakness, the need for the state/authority/strong-man to protect/educate/define us. What strengths might we deny in ourselves in attempt to be the same as others? Is this what we mean when we say equality?

The diversity Jed calls for, it seems to me, comes not from trying to vary our style, trying to be a good feminist or good anarchist or whatever, but by listening

within ourselves. Why might I be drawn to showing off how flexible and strong my body is in a yoga class or how clever my analysis is in a meeting? Perhaps I simply want some loving attention. Can I listen to that? Can I give myself that without demanding attention from others? Then, my own needs fulfilled, I can listen to discover what gifts I have to offer others. Then I can receive the gifts of others with simple pleasure.

- *Jamie Heckert, Poole, Dorset, Southwest England, September 2011*

The patriarchy in my head. Patriarchy as way of being, of exercising power over others, of silencing voices, of taking away others' ability to speak and of denying ourselves.

How to get to the point of being differently, of speaking that which is silenced, denied, taken for granted, of being heard and seen.

The words and emotions stuck in the throat, in the gut, not wanting to be the one that asks the question that makes others feel uncomfortable, not wanting to be the one that cries again and leaves the room as others look uncomfortably at the floor, afraid to feel for what might happen.

Confronting the patriarchy that causes pain and is exercised through violence against my self and my loved ones, a violence that is multiple and sadly often expressed by individuals exercising power over others and yet in doing so denying something of themselves and their possibilities.

How I agree with Jed and Jamie that to confront and transform this we have to construct other ethics of being, of touching, of seeing and feeling based on an embrace of plurality and dialogue. And how in our visualising and actualising of this it needs to be embodied and affective, gentle, soft and tender. How beautiful. Tears well up in my eyes.

Yet others' way of being, softness, ethics of affirmation leaves me, or makes me feel in my day to day, that there is little room for rage and anger. When the anger comes I ask myself is this the patriarchy in my head, are these emotions and actions that speak over others? Am I re-enacting that violence that denies through my rage? How can we have a feminist anger? How do I find space to express that rage?

Ironically the fear of expressing anger and rage also plays into the patriarchal framing of public space and of female identities; that we should be rational and calm, unemotional and disembodied, that as women we care for others but not ourselves. So where amongst these contradictory thoughts and emotions do I/we find a place and a space for a feminist rage?

I wrote a post on facebook the other day asking the question "how do we create a feminist practice of everyday life?" Jamie commented "gently". I scroll down to his reflections on Jed's reflections and see the word gently again with the word anger.

Be gentle with myself. Perhaps not expect too much. No quick answers and final fixes. Patience, pauses, reflections.

Sometimes the anger can't be contained. A feminist practice of everyday life has to have space for anger and rage, for screaming. Perhaps it is possible to do this in a way that is affirmative and a recognition of self, a speaking and feeling honestly that lets go of fears about what others might think and feel without re-enacting violence. Visualising this affirmation I take a deep breath, a beautiful affirmation of ones self. No more denial, no more shame and no more fear.

Maybe to create spaces and relationships of collective affirmation, softness, reflection, pauses, gentleness we need to recognise the rightfulness of rage and to be able to embrace and transform that rage into voice and courage.

How might we open these types of conversations in our communities? How might we build the languages and the tools to create spaces for a feminist rage and anger as a moment and experience of affirmation of self and desire, a statement of being here?

- Sara Motta, Nottingham, October 9th 2011

Safe space for a Feminist Rage!? Crikey, what a proposal. The unboundless, bounded; at least 400 years of resentment invited for expression. This space will not be for everyone – so many hopes, such high ambition that alas, no “support group” could hope to be enough, and the freedoms we want to explore might only happen one friendship at a time. One note at a time. One article, one conversation, one experimental agreement at a time.

The blooming and gleeful complication, the personalisation and exploration of my thoughts circled back to me has been satisfying and exciting. Welcoming and daring me to say more, to go further.

Rather than “cap” this writing with a closed circle though, rather than return to my voice, I'd prefer to open the circle wider. Let these pages be a place for other voices. Let the questions and answers, the experiments and experiences spiral out of control. More editions, more writing, more reading aloud, discussing with daring, off the page and into practice.

Off into the future please, spread it about.

And into the past. Like a right nerd I want to include a reading list! This exploration does not begin in the present. As long as borders, (patriarchy, oppression, hierarchies, violence...) have existed, resistance has risen to meet them. Go, meet.

- Jed Picksley, from the pages of *The Modern Antiquarian* by Julian Cope, *Ten Women who shook the World* by Sylvia Brownrigg and Ursula Le Guin's note-rich translation of the *Tao te Ching*. October 17th 2011

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Statement on intimate partner violence within activist communities

Anarchist Feminists Nottingham, UK

Intimate partner violence within our communities is an issue that affects us all. It must be addressed. We can no longer ignore it.

We are the women who work with you, organise with you, and are your friends. We write this statement to bring this issue to light and raise a community response to this all-too-common occurrence.

We work together to create communities that are safe spaces of resistance. We recognise that we are traumatised by the large-scale violence inflicted upon us by the state and capitalist society. Yet we must also recognise the ways that our communities are wounded by the interpersonal violence rooted in patriarchy and sexism that occurs between intimate partners.

Interactions within activist communities often mirror the relationships of oppression that we try to fight, where what is respected are masculine forms of power. There is an assumption that people who identify as activists will automatically treat each other with respect. We have found this to be untrue. In fact, this assumption actually serves to further normalise and invisibilise unequal power dynamics, and enable the denial of their existence and their detrimental effects. This often happens in cases of intimate partner violence.

When a survivor reveals abuse, they should be believed, supported and offered as much protection as possible. Their safety, concerns, choices and wishes should be prioritised and respected. With the survivor's consent, perpetrators should be confronted.

The survivor's needs and wishes must be at the forefront when they are leaving an abusive relationship. However, the process of prevention, confrontation and protection requires a community response where we all take responsibility for what happens next. The attitude that issues of abuse are between the survivor and perpetrator alone is isolating for survivors and also prevent a real change in attitudes towards violence in relationships.

Therefore we believe that the community as a whole has a responsibility for confronting perpetrators and offering connections to resources and support. We believe that justice looks like community accountability, ensuring the survivor's safety and honouring them and their wishes.

As people who wish to create a world free from domination and oppression, we envision communities in which survivor's concerns are taken seriously, where they don't have to live in fear or shame or silence.

We want a community in which people are held accountable for their actions, not only at meetings, but also behind closed doors. We want survivors to feel confident to come forward about abuse and know that their communities will

support them and that they will not be judged, blamed, or shamed for sharing their experience and pain. We also want perpetrators to be willing to engage with a process of change.

Note: We are using gender neutral language but recognise that most intimate partner violence is committed by men.

The capacities of the people versus a predominant, militarist, ethno-nationalist elite: democratisation in South Africa c. 1973 - 97

Kenneth Good

The international and domestic settings

From around 1970 to 1990 popular democracy made notable advances in many parts of the world against entrenched dictatorships, both communist and anti-communist, from Poland and the GDR (aka Stasiland) through Portugal, Chile and the Philippines. In Poland, the Solidarity trade union achieved a membership of some ten million at its height; the Stasiland surveillance state was swept away, not just with the fall of the Berlin wall, but after a series of large demonstrations in the cities proved to the people that their rulers possessed neither efficacy nor legitimacy; in Lisbon, a "Carnation Revolution" led by the military fresh from contact with national liberation forces in Portugal's African colonies, backed by communist and other popular tendencies at home, brought an end to a long-established, quasi-fascist dictatorship; and in the Philippines, a successful mass uprising against the US-backed regime of Ferdinand Marcos, presented the modern idea of "people power" to the world.

South Africa was part of this popular democratic upsurge too, as an advancing capitalist economy, produced new skilled black working classes possessed of the capacities to form trade unions and other community groups ready and able to push for democratisation beyond the electoral confines of the liberal / representative model.

But these domestic popular aspirations had to compete for attention in the outside world with an externally based armed struggle led by the African National Congress (ANC) whose leaders were mostly in exile and in prison. Two quite different processes of change were thus in contention in and around the country: the popular one stressing openness and accountability of elites to the people, and the other emphasising armed struggle led by established nationalist elites with, it is now quite clear, decidedly hegemonic and secretive tendencies. The latter forces aimed at liberation from an apartheid system almost universally condemned, and it was led by such renowned figures as Nelson Mandela, who was to spend 27 years in prison before his release on route to state power a few years later.

While the supporters of democratisation in the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the trade unions did not directly seek to challenge the historic role of the ANC, the latter, as the 1980s wore on, showed an increasing intolerance for the values upheld by the UDF, like criticism and self-criticism of elites and non-violence. To the outside world, it was Mandela and the armed struggle led by the ANC which constituted the totality of change in South Africa. The ANC, it is now

clear, aimed at the elevation of its armed struggle as justification for its long-term rule, and the obliteration of the aims and achievements of the democratisation movement. It is the aim of this paper to disentangle the two inter-twined processes, to accord to the democratisation process the distinctions it deserves as a world-historical aspiration of its time, and to reveal some of the true costs of the ANC's armed struggle not least to the young men and women who served as its rank-and-file.

The well-springs of democratisation

South Africa possessed in the early 1990s a relatively industrialised and diversified economy. As the country approached the year of majority rule, 1994, industry contributed some 37 per cent of gross domestic production (GDP), of which manufacturing represented 25 per cent. It was easily the strongest capitalist economy in Africa. Its GDP of some \$133 billion ranked it around thirtieth in the world, or twenty third in terms of purchasing power. In regard to employment, agriculture contributed about 10 per cent of the national total, industry 25 per cent and services 64 per cent. There was a well developed infrastructure built upon roads, railways and sea and air ports, extensive urbanisation, and technological and scientific resources superior to anything else in Africa. Despite the manifold distortions and wastefulness of the apartheid system, the developmental capacities of the state were high.¹

The exigencies of advanced capitalist development offered big opportunities to black workers. In the 1950s they had been confined to unskilled labour, but a burgeoning economy and an ever-growing state bureaucracy required increasing numbers of black clerical and junior executive workers, and thus in turn a big increase in black secondary and tertiary education. Between 1965 and 1975, the numbers of black pupils attending secondary schools rose almost five fold to some 319,000. Industrial capitalists made their own contribution to new class formation from the end of the 1960s, reorganizing the labour force towards reliance upon black skilled workers, and pressured the state into corresponding policy changes; from the early 1970s, government made "far more money available for urban black schools". In greater Soweto, for instance, there were eight secondary schools in 1972; 20 by 1976, with a three-fold increase in their student intake, and 55 by the end of 1984.

The 1980 census had revealed that a majority of the black population were under 21. Secondary student numbers rose from 600,000 in 1980 to more than one million in 1984, boosted by a new school building programme at that time.²

¹ Good, "Accountable to Themselves: Predominance in Southern Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35, 4, 1997, pp. 547-8, and Tom Lodge, "South Africa: Democracy and Development in a Post-Apartheid Society", in Adrian Leftwich (ed.), *Democracy and Development: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 196.

² Jonathan Hyslop, "School Student Movements and State Education Policy: 1972-87", in William Cobbett and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa*, Sheffield and London, Africa World Press and James Currey, 1988, pp. 184-85 and 191.

In consequence, secondary schooling was transformed from being the privileged resource of a black elite into a “mass phenomenon” with an “urban school-based culture and consciousness”.

High school students in the conglomerate of Soweto were well placed to draw together literate youths on a large scale, utilising networks of extra-mural associations, and assuming, graphically in June 1976, political leadership; protests against inferior education and enforced Afrikaans teaching, met police repression and spread nationwide.³ New activist local leaders emerged. Popo Molefe, for example, was born in 1952 to a father who was a day labourer and his mother a domestic worker; all the family, he later recalled, were “extremely poor”. He was trucked to Soweto from Sophiatown when the latter was declared a white area in 1955 and achieved Standard 10 (the leaving certificate).⁴ He helped organize the march of 16 June. Murphy Morobe was born a little later in Soweto to a father who was a driver. In 1976 he was in Standard 10 at the Morris Isaacson High School, and also helped organize the student demonstration. Both were active in various groups and became prominent in the UDF.

Access to tertiary education also broadened. In 1960 there were fewer than 800 blacks at universities, excluding distance-learning programmes offered by the University of South Africa (UNISA), but by 1983 there were about 20,000 at university with another 12,700 enrolled at UNISA. Within the twelve year period, 1958-70, the numbers had arisen in excess of 200 per cent.⁵ A big step forward in black student organization came in 1969 with the formation of the South African Students Organization (SASO) led by Steve Biko and a harbinger of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). SASO, in Gwala's view, transformed black universities into “major sites of political struggle” and connected students to the wider political struggles. By 1972 SASO was represented on all black campuses and it had an estimated membership of about 6,000.

Biko's ideas were radical and profound. He aimed to revitalise a demoralised older generation, and he believed, according to Halisi, that political action had to approximate to a new way of life. Mass education could be extended by committed intellectuals with a knowledge of popular culture who would energise the oppressed. But for an emancipatory politics to achieve success, new values and practices would have to be *prefigured* in the opposition movement.⁶

³ Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991*, Cape Town and Oxford, David Philip and James Currey, 2000, p. 11.

⁴ Steven Mufson, *Fighting Years: Black Resistance and the Struggle for a New South Africa*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1990, p. 43.

⁵ Seekings, *op.cit.*, p. 12 and Nkosinathi Gwala, “State Control, Student Politics and the Crisis in Black Universities”, in Cobbett and Cohen, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

⁶ Gwala, *op.cit.*, p. 176 and C.R.D. Halisi, “Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy: An Interpretation”, in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness*, Cape Town and London, David Philip and Zed Books, pp. 101 and 108-9, his emphasis.

Natal Medical School offered Mamphela Ramphele not only socially important knowledge and skills, but also, she said, "an environment for the transformation of my life". She became an activist in SASO and a close collaborator with Biko, and the 1970s were for her "a time of immense personal growth." She went ahead through various community activities, "growing up the hard way."⁷

Black workers employed in manufacturing mushroomed in number from 308,000 in 1960 to 781,000 in 1980. In the country's industrial heartland of Gauteng, the workforce rose from 169,000 to 375,000 and by the latter year around Johannesburg "unskilled labour accounted for less than half" of all black employment there.⁸ By the 1980s black workers had become the dominant social force in manufacturing.

What these big changes represented politically was the emergence of key new social categories, the overlapping groups of youth and students, and of skilled and semi-skilled urban workers, each of whom, and particularly the latter, possessed a capacity for organization and action. This was their vital new acquisition within an advancing capitalist economy. Organization was precisely what the Levellers and Diggers had so gravely lacked in 1650 in the English Revolution. Gerrard Winstanley had sought to establish a living communism of small cultivators on England's unutilised lands, but he knew, notes Hill, "the danger of appealing to an uneducated democracy, and could not find in contemporary conditions of society the social force which would put through the changes necessary even to make the common people aware of what might be done."⁹

Black students and workers were altogether of a different mind and capability in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, and it was their potential strengths which made them dangerous to established nationalist elites. When Thabo Mbeki, senior leader of the ANC in exile, became aware in the early 1970s that Black Consciousness was beginning to radicalise young men and women, he did not welcome this as a creative development but as a potential challenge to the ANC's proclaimed vanguard position and strategy of armed struggle. He started to identify the leadership of the movement, working towards their incorporation into the established party and the dilution of their ideas.¹⁰

⁷ Ramphele, *A Life*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1996, pp. 57, 65 and 72.

⁸ Seekings, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁹ Christopher Hill (ed.), *Winstanley: The Law of Freedom and Other Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 40.

¹⁰ Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for instance, was vice-president of SASO when he recruited her to the ANC with instructions to enlist others in the Movement and influence their debates. Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki*, Rivonia, Zebra Press, 1999, p. 39.

The UDF

The internal dynamics nevertheless continued to develop and gather momentum. From the late 1970s, a ramifying range of community groups had arisen, first in Soweto and the Eastern Cape and then nation-wide, campaigning around issues such as housing, rents, bus fares and education. These struggles, says Swilling, steadily consolidated a political culture emphasising principles of non-collaboration with government institutions, non-racialism and, he notes, "democracy and mass-based direct action aimed at transforming urban living conditions." In January 1983, Allan Boesak called for the formation of a front to oppose specific apartheid constitutional changes, and after a series of regional conferences, the United Democratic Front was launched in Cape Town in August. Boesak says that fifteen hundred people were present, representing 500 organisations and all sectors of society. The listing of the Front's eventual affiliates included trade unions, youth and student movements, women's and religious groups, civic associations, political parties and a range of support and professional groups. Within the next few years, the Front embraced almost 1,000 affiliated groups. Because of the UDF's capacity to provide national political and ideological coordination to these affiliates, radical political action "assumed an increasingly organised form", says Swilling, "enhancing its power and effectiveness."¹¹

As previously with the BCM, the arrival of the UDF was not welcomed by the ANC. It "came as a shock to Thabo and the rest of the ANC leadership", note Hadland and Rantao, and they quote Mac Maharaj adding, "they didn't believe it would happen." The well-informed Shubin agrees, and recalls an ANC friend telling him soon after: "If some of our people say that the UDF was made by us, don't believe them."¹² The distortion, however, was unquestioningly accepted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with possible impact on its findings (discussed further below). It is part of the ideological obfuscation that surrounds the UDF that it is still confidently asserted that the UDF was "essentially a front for the outlawed liberation movement."¹³

The UDF did not look, sound or act like the highly centralised, secretive ANC.

It had three levels of leadership: national, regional and local, with much or most action concentrated in the lowest tier. A National Executive Committee (NEC) was composed of three presidents, a secretary, a publicity secretary, treasurer and representatives of the regions. Initially only the secretary, Popo Molefe, and

¹¹ Mark Swilling, "The United Democratic Front and Township Revolt", in Cobbett and Cohen, *op.cit.*, pp. 90-91, and Allan Boesak, *Running With Horses: Reflections of an Accidental Politician*, Cape Town, Joho Publishers, 2009, pp. 115 and 157.

¹² Hadland and Rantao, *op.cit.*, p. 49, and Vladimir Shubin, *ANC: A View From Moscow*, Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1999, p. 250.

¹³ Allister Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball, 2003, p. 178. In another false construction, the UDF was merely "the ANC's predecessor and, in part, its internal surrogate in the 1980s." R.W Johnson, *South Africa's Brave New World: The Beloved Country Since the End of Apartheid*, London, Penguin Books, 2009, p. 19.

the publicity secretary, Patrick Terror Lekota, were paid and full-time. Mohammed Valli Moosa was soon added as assistant secretary, and eventually the number of officials grew to "about eighty." The NEC made administrative decisions, and in 1985, given the great difficulty of convening large conferences, a National Working Committee became in practice the top policy making body. Local UDF affiliates "maintained their autonomy."¹⁴

For Boesak, who became the elected patron of the Front, it was the spirit of the new group which provided its distinctiveness. "Spontaneity was one of the strong points of the UDF", he says, "and this would time and again catch the government, and by the same token, the ANC, off guard." As its affiliates grew in number, "every town, every township with any kind of organisation" wanted to join. From the very beginning, he goes on, "the UDF knew (and the ANC feared) that much action in the course of struggle was performance going to be spontaneous', unplanned and uncontrolled. "It was also the UDF's hallmark of authenticity, and it was unavoidable in a truly people-driven movement." The UDF coordinated its affiliates, brought them under a reasonably strong national umbrella, and provided a platform and political stature.

Small associations also gained access to funding, some of which came through the Foundation for Peace and Justice (FPJ) which Boesak headed.¹⁵ Above all, he adds, there was "the power of the UDF to inspire". Within a year, the UDF became a formidable organisation with support at levels and among people that no organisation in South Africa had ever achieved before.¹⁶

According to Swilling, the most important and politically sophisticated leaders in the UDF came from the ranks of BCM of the early and mid-1970s. These included he says Mkhuseleli Jack from Port Elizabeth, and Popo Molefe, Terror Lekota and Aubrey Mokoena from Johannesburg. Many UDF activists of the 1980s had been politicised earlier within BCM. Activists also came from the experiences gained in the construction of community, youth, trade union and student organisations during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and these people became increasingly important during the mid-1980s. According to Swilling, two other characteristics of the UDF's leadership stood out: its "heterodox social and class composition', and the fact that it was both multi-class and that a high proportion came from 'poor working-class backgrounds."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ineke van Kessel, *"Beyond Our Wildest Dreams": The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa*, Charlottesville and London, University Press of Virginia, 2000, p. 24.

¹⁵ And which he also exploited. Through the 1990s, Boesak siphoned off funds from Danchurch, Paul Simon, the Swedish Development Agency and other donors, intended for FPJ, to establish a range of private businesses. He was jailed but received a presidential pardon in 2005. R.W. Johnson, *op.cit.*, pp. 19 and 62-63.

¹⁶ Boesak, *op.cit.*, pp. 115 and 157-64.

¹⁷ Swilling, *op.cit.*, p. 96. This balanced assessment should be contrasted with Seekings' contrary insistence: "there were very few UDF leaders with any sustained experience on the shop floor. Workers made it into leadership positions in the trade unions, but not in the UDF," *op.cit.*, p. 311. In another view, "although the UDF was largely a movement of the poor, a disproportionate

Moving from an initial reactive phase to pressing state initiatives, and from the Front's failures to cope with the levels of mobilisation that arose, the UDF established by early 1985 "the beginning of strong working relationships between community organisations, student movements and the trade unions." Swilling enumerates them at some 400,000 students and 800,000 workers.¹⁸

Mkhuseli Jack became a prominent community activist and a UDF leader with both feet firmly on the ground. He was born in the Eastern Cape in May 1958, the son of a farm labourer and a domestic worker. He led protests in Port Elizabeth in 1975 for youths from rural schools—including himself-- to be admitted to city schools, and after three months the schools relented. He was arrested in 1976 for protesting against the poor quality of black education, and shortly after he was among the founders of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the high school equivalent of Biko's SASO, later the UDF's largest affiliate with 42 branches. In 1983 he was elected to the executive of the Port Elizabeth Civic Organisation (PEBCO), where he became known, according to Mufson, for his good nature, pragmatism and self-confidence.

As a spokesman for the consumer boycott movement in the city, the 28 year old Jack "strode about as though he were mayor". White businesspeople negotiated with the UDF for safe passage for their vehicles, while the Front also fixed prices for staple commodities in black-owned stores to prevent price gouging during boycotts, and issued permits to street vendors. He was said to have an instinct for what ordinary people wanted and the burdens they could bear. The first consumer boycott was called off after four months, to the apparent annoyance of some national UDF leaders (who wanted to stage a so-called "Black Christmas"); but when businesspeople urged him to bring a second boycott to an early end in November 1985, Jack declared: "We must talk, but not yet. It isn't the mood of the people." He was frequently detained from 1976 onwards, including two six-month stints in solitary confinement and torture in the form of "the helicopter".¹⁹

Matthew Goniwe also seems to have typified the activist, community-based core of the UDF. Born in 1948 in Craddock in the Eastern Cape, he was the son of a domestic servant and a firewood trader, a former political prisoner, who became a magnetic young teacher and headmaster. He founded the Craddock Residents' Association (CRADORA) in 1983, in opposition to rent increases in the town's Lingelihle township, home to 17,000 people. He set about organising the community. The township was divided into seven zones, and about 40 cadres travelled from house to house to explain CRADORA's purpose and to encourage

share of the original national leadership came from a radicalised middle-class intelligentsia". Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s*, London, Hurst and Company, 1992, p. 55. Much depends of course on whether class is defined by family origins or current position, and there is the bias of the observer, which seems present in some of Seekings' judgements.

¹⁸ Swilling, *op.cit.*, pp. 101-03 and Boesak, *op.cit.*, Preface.

¹⁹ Mufson, *op.cit.*, pp. 121-25 and Lodge and Nasson, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

attendance at public meetings and in electing representatives from each street. The representatives then underwent training to “emphasise that as leaders they had to be exemplary in every respect.” This was the time-consuming but effective process of mobilising participation in the street committee system. If CRADORA called a meeting at four in the afternoon, the entire population of the township would be assembled by six. The system created, in Goniwe’s words, an activist gridiron so dense that “even the family is seen as a structure of the organisation.”

Goniwe’s legacy was to create over six months a string of tightly coordinated, small-town community movements. He helped to launch civic associations and youth organizations in Adelaide, Fort Beaufort, Cookhouse, Kirkwood, Hanover, Colesberg, Alexandria, Kenton-on-Sea, Steytlerville, Motherwell and Noupoot. It was such deep organisations that made the UDF “a formidable force in the small towns and villages of the windswept Karoo plateau.” While Goniwe was a member of the ANC, he appeared to have been influenced by Biko’s ideas. Shortly before his death he wrote: “if we are instruments of change, we must epitomise the society we want to bring about. People see in us the society we want to bring about.”²⁰

As many activists indicated but only a few analysts realised, much more than just resistance against apartheid was going on. In Mufson’s important recognition: as millions of blacks were swept into political activity, participation on a scale, he stressed, never before witnessed, “they were not only trying to destroy a repressive system, but attempting to create a new nation.”²¹ Key characteristics of the new society they were striving to establish were democracy and open, popular participation. Writing in the later 1980s, Swilling, like Boesak, reported that there were very few black communities where UDF affiliates did not exist. The strength of the UDF, furthermore, “derives primarily from the popularity and organisational capacity of its affiliates,” even though they differed considerably in size and effectiveness. The Front’s national executive did not constitute a significant organisational force, partly because most of the leadership had spent years in detention or hiding, but the UDF’s activities were nonetheless rooted among the exploited people. When the UDF was hardly one year old, a survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council found that the largest single reason why people supported the UDF—expressed by 35.6 per cent of those surveyed—was that it “fights for democracy”. The second main reason—identified by 17.1 per cent of respondents—was that “it solves our problems”.²²

A few years later, democratisation assumed organisational forms, as alternative organs of people’s power were promoted by many UDF activists. The concept of

²⁰ Lodge and Nasson, *op.cit.*, p. 75 and Mufson, *op.cit.*, p. 2. He and three other CRADORA leaders were abducted, killed and their mutilated bodies left by the roadside.

²¹ Mufson, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

²² Swilling, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-07.

people's power,²³ or rudimentary organs of self-government, emerged in late 1985-1986. The dynamic was first observed in Craddock, where CRADORA began taking over some of the state's defunct administrative roles, such as the payment of pensions, setting up a literacy programme and a child and family welfare centre. The process was endorsed by Popo Molefe, and from early 1986, the Front's theoretical journal *Isizwe* stated that the call "the people shall govern", enshrined in the Freedom Charter, was "*beginning to happen in the course of our struggle*. It is not for us to sit back and merely dream of the day that the people shall govern. It is our task to realise that goal now." Involved were street committees and people's courts, and services such as dispute settlement, policing, refuse collection and health care. UDF leaders acknowledged that they were learning from the creativity of the masses."²⁴

By 1987, the UDF's conceptualisation of democracy embraced an awareness of the inadequacies of liberal parliamentary representation, taking it well beyond the ideas and practice of the liberal model. Existing parliamentary institutions were insufficient, not just because they excluded the bulk of the people, but for more substantive reasons. For *New Era*, a Cape Town publication affiliated to the UDF, democracy meant "the ability of the broad working masses to participate in and control all dimensions of their lives", not just "some liberal pluralistic debating society". Many UDF statements accepted, say Lodge and Nasson, that real democracy implied popular participation, where leaders were the bearers of a popular mandate and were accountable directly to the organisation's membership. Two further propositions were entailed: community-based self-governing initiatives would establish the foundations of democracy before a formal transition to majority rule, and that such emerging structures would be non-hierarchical.²⁵

Morobe presented a comprehensive statement of the UDF's thinking in 1987: he accepted that "parliamentary-type representation in itself represents a very limited and narrow idea of democracy".²⁶ The UDF's view of democracy was much broader and deeper, it involved participatory forms and it was being built

²³ The term people power first entered international discourse in the Philippines c. early 1986 in the rising mass opposition to the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Amado Mendoza Jr, "'People Power' in the Phillipines, 1983-86", chapter in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 179.

²⁴ Swilling, *op.cit.*, pp. 104-05 and Seekings, "The Development of Strategic Thought in South Africa's Civic Movements, 1977-90" in Glenn Adler and Jonny Steinberg, *From Comrades to Citizens*, Basingstoke and New York, Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 71-73, original emphasis.

²⁵ Lodge and Nasson, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-32.

²⁶ Murphy Morobe became acting publicity secretary of the UDF after the arrest of Lekota. He was detained in mid-1987 under emergency conditions, but regained freedom in late 1988. His paper, "Towards a People's Democracy: The UDF View", was delivered on his behalf to the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa in May, and then published in part in the *Review of African Political Economy*, 40, in December 1987.

dynamically in the here and now. Democracy was “one of the aims or goals of our struggle” and also

the means by which we conduct the struggle. This refers to the democratic character of our existing mass-based organisations... By developing active, mass-based democratic organisations and democratic practices within these organisations, we are laying the basis for a future democratic South Africa.

The creation of democratic *means* is for us as important as having democratic *goals* as our objective... What is possible in the future depends on what we are able to create and sustain now. A democratic South Africa will not be fashioned only after transformation of political power to the majority has taken place... The creation of a democratic South Africa can only become a reality with the participation of millions of South Africans in the process - a process which has already begun in the townships, factories and schools of our land...

Our democratic aim is therefore control over every aspect of our lives, and not just the right (important as it is) to vote for a central government every four to five years... A democratic solution in South Africa involves all South Africans, and in particular the working-class, having control over all areas of daily existence - from national policy to housing, from schooling to working conditions, from transport to consumption of food... When we say that the people shall govern, we mean at all levels and in all spheres, and we demand that there be real, effective control on a daily basis... In other words, we are talking about direct as opposed to indirect political representation, mass participation rather than passive docility and ignorance, a momentum where ordinary people can do the job themselves, rather than waiting for their local MP to intercede on their behalf... 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.²⁷

The Front's participatory democracy not only invested faith in the capacities of working-class men and women to govern themselves, but also adopted a highly critical approach to the power and action of their own political elites. In the “basic principles of our organisational democracy”, the UDF presented vital and creative measures for combating elitism within its own ranks and other democratic bodies:

1. Elected Leadership, at all levels, periodically re-elected and recallable; “No single individual must become irreplaceable”;
2. Collective Leadership; “leadership skills, experience and knowledge must be spread, not hoarded”;
3. Mandates and Accountability; leaders must “operate within the delegated mandates of their positions and delegated duties”;
4. Reporting and Reporting Back (by leaders to the membership); and

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

5. Criticism and Self-Criticism of and by elites; “we do not believe that any of our members are beyond criticism, neither are organisations and strategies beyond reproach”. These principles, he said, were “fundamental weapon[s] of our struggle”.²⁸

Under worsening circumstances the Front strove to uphold its democratic norms. Pressures built up on the Front as state violence escalated, children as young as six were deliberately killed by police, and youthful activists responded with cruel punishment against informers real and imagined. Boesak relates that he was taken by “utter surprise at the speed of events” as “our own brutalisation” began. Between 1984 and 1987 there had been rather more than 300 deaths through “necklacing” but in just six months in 1986 there were 220. For Boesak, the principle of non-violence ranked for the UDF along side that of spontaneity, inspiration and democratisation, where it raised immense problems for the means and ends equation, of the good future society arising in the practice of the here and now. Violence was antithetical to the establishment of democratic norms and institutions.

Others took a different view, and he quotes Cheryl Carolus, a leading figure in the Front—later close to the ANC—observing: “Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword.” Support for Carolus’s thinking came from Winnie Mandela when she said, on 13 April 1986 in Munsieville, that it was “with our boxes of matches and our necklaces” that liberation would be achieved.²⁹ Violent struggle had been most authoritatively and exclusively endorsed by the ANC at its Kabwe Conference in Zambia in June 1985 when Joe Slovo, then chief of staff of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), affirmed that there was “No Middle Road”, and the only acceptable strategy was the revolutionary overthrow of apartheid.³⁰ The democratisation movement was seemingly on notice.

These developments impacted heavily on the internal dynamics of the UDF.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85. Morobe’s organisational democracy represented an implicit rebuttal to the influential strictures of Michels who had famously asserted that while “organisation was the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong”, simultaneously “who says organisation says oligarchy”. Organisation inevitably gave birth to “the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators.” He exposed his own highly elitist intentions when he also said that an important reason for oligarchical domination was “the perennial incompetence of the masses”. Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, New York, Dover Publications, 1959, pp. 21-22 and 401, 407.

²⁹ Her full statement, recorded on videotape, was: “We have no guns—we have only stones, boxes of matches and petrol. Together, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches and our necklaces we shall liberate this country.” Emma Gilbey, *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1993, pp. 145-6. In 1996 the ANC declared that necklacing was “never the policy of the ANC or UDF/MDM”, and suggested that it had been initiated by the [apartheid] state for propaganda purposes. They also noted that young MK cadres vigorously defended the practice. ANC, “Statement to the [TRC]”, 19 August 1996, pp. 122-24.

³⁰ Boesak, *op.cit.*, pp. 167-183 and Lodge and Nasson, *op.cit.*, pp. 91 and 142

By late 1987, most of its activists were either in prison (70 per cent of detainees then were believed to be members of UDF affiliates), in hiding or dead, and the Front's national and regional leadership had been "decapitated";³¹ it was banned shortly after, but regrouped as the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) later in 1988. State repression ensured that power shifted in practice within the UDF to key officials—Valli Moosa as acting general secretary, Morobe in charge of publicity, and Azhar Cachalia as national treasurer. Decisions could rarely be made at this time on the basis of mandated positions, and the national leadership necessarily exercised "considerable latitude".

The Front nevertheless "maintained an impressive level" in terms of its leaders reporting back to the membership and in the recognition of the importance of criticism of leadership and their own self-criticism—the UDF's leaders were in fact "among the most focussed of its critics". It was Molefe, for instance, who reported to the 1985 national conference that the organization was "trailing behind the masses"; and Moosa, as acting secretary in Molefe's absence, who informed the 1987 national general council that the Front had been unable to maintain its regional structures.³² And it was in the same principle that elites should be accountable to the people for their actions, that Morobe and Cachalia publicly condemned the depredations in Soweto of Madikizela-Mandela, touted as the Mother of the Nation, in February 1989, considered in detail below.

The trade unions and COSATU

But the UDF was not alone inside South Africa in upholding democratisation as its primary concern. The ANC's decision in 1961 to embark upon an externally based armed struggle had centralised political attention upon the apartheid state and its supposed overthrow, and a decade of quiescence resulted. This changed dramatically, however, in early 1973, when over 100,000 black workers in Durban and Pinetown embarked on a series of spontaneous strikes against their work conditions signalling, in Webster and Adler's terms, the emergence of "a democratic movement within the country harnessed to independent working-class organization." Thereafter, in uneven fashion and with many setbacks, the unions embarked on a "radical reform strategy", utilising their organisational capacities to both mobilise and restrain their members in negotiations with the state and capital for agreed upon settlements. Through the late 1970s, Freidman stresses, they "survived", and demonstrated to their members that they had a voice in an economy in need of skilled black workers. Through incremental means they gradually forced the powerful "to share decisions they [we]re

³¹ Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transition*, London and Cape Town, Zed Books and UCT Press, 1998, pp. 58-59 and Lodge and Nasson, *op.cit.*, p.88.

³² Seekings, *The UDF*, pp. 305-06.

accustomed to take alone." This was a broad and reformist democratisation far more radical and practical than the strategy pursued by the ANC.³³

The trade union leader, Alec Erwin, wrote in 1985 that they aimed to win "both full democracy and non-racialism", building them now in the factories and townships, "through organisations whose leaders were accountable to their members and in which activists shared their skills with workers." Unions would be "laboratories for democracy" where workers made their own decisions and resisted anyone who tried to decide for them.³⁴

Embedded in the capitalist economy, employment, union membership and trade union density all grew rapidly 1979-1986:

Year	Employment (non-agric.)	TU membership	Density (%) ³⁵
1979	4,560,868	701,758	15.4
1980	4,712,051	808,853	17.1
1981	4,868,951	1,054,405	21.6
1982	4,915,636	1,225,454	24.9
1983	4,839,555	1,273,890	26.3
1984	4,900,571	1,406,302	28.7
1985	5,036,393	1,391,423	27.6
1986	5,093,918	1,698,157	33.3

In November 1985 the country's biggest black unions merged to form the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). It was South Africa's largest and most potent popular organisation, with 450,000 dues-paying members, soon to be doubled in number. It immediately called for wider union rights, equal pay for equal work and the introduction of a national minimum wage, and emphasised its political goals including disinvestment by foreign companies, the withdrawal of troops from the townships and the unbanning of COSAS. Its president was Elijah Barayi, a 53 year old personnel assistant at a gold mine, and its general secretary was Jay Naidoo aged then not quite 31.³⁶

³³ Glenn Adler and Eddie Webster, "Introduction", in Adler and Webster, *Democratisation in South Africa, 1985-1997*, Basingstoke and New York, Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 1-3, Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987, pp. 120-1, and Friedman and Mark Shaw, *Power in Partnership?: Trade Unions, Forums and the Transition*, in Adler and Webster, *op.cit.*, 190-2.

³⁴ Quoted in *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 499.

³⁵ Ian Macun, "Growth, Structure and Power in the South African Union Movement" in Adler and Webster, *op.cit.*, p. 60

³⁶ He was an experienced unionist, and associated with the UDF, but daunted initially that "a person of Indian ancestry [should be] leading an almost exclusively African organisation." But

COSATU, says Mufson, united “the most powerful forces and personalities” in the black unions. Firstly, the unions which had been part of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) which arose in the wake of the 1973 Durban actions. The second component in COSATU was unions affiliated with the UDF, which had grown quickly after the labour reforms of 1979 but remained largely only at a regional level.

The third element was the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Its importance was more than the fact that it was the country’s largest union. It had potency as well as size. Half a million workers had laboured in the gold and coal mines that built South Africa’s industrial economy, bringing, for instance, 606 tons of gold to the surface in 1986, accounting for 42.3 per cent of the country’s foreign exchange earnings. Mining was no ordinary job. In the 1980s about 600 miners died every year, and the experience of hazard and death affected and drew together all miners and their union. James Motlatsi was trapped by a rock fall deep underground in a gold mine, and it took other miners over an hour to dig him out; three weeks later he was back at the same job: “When you work in the mining industry, you will end it like a soldier. If someone is trapped and killed you just take him out and continue with the same job.”

Motlatsi seems to have been representative of his class and times. He had entered the mines at age 19 in 1970, travelling from his village in Lesotho, working his way up the ladder of mining jobs, from “lasher”, cleaning drains underground, to “box attendant”, hauling rock away from the work-face, to “timber boy”, building the packs of material that supported the mine ceiling, then as a machine operator drilling rock. Four years had brought him a wage of just 82 cents a shift. He went on as a winch driver, team leader and a position in the personnel department. The latter was safe but corrupt—bribes, he found, were often taken from job-seekers--and the job “he hated most”.

In 1982, he read of moves to establish a mineworkers union, and a friend put him in touch with Cyril Ramaphosa, a young lawyer in Soweto.³⁷ Together they formed a seven-person planning committee, and within weeks recruited 18,000 members. Three months after their first meeting, a congress of 1,800 workers elected Motlatsi the first president of the NUM, Elijah Barayi from Cradock as vice-president, and Ramaphosa as secretary general, then the only full-time official. The latter, according to Butler, immediately sought links with wealthy unions in Scandinavia, Britain and the United State, while he and Motlatsi together built up the union’s organisational strengths. By the mid-1980s, the

he found “a total embrace of my commitment” and that “non-racialism was the social fibre woven into the fibre of the movement.” Jay Naidoo, *Fighting for Justice: A Lifetime of Political and Social Activism*, Johannesburg, Picador Africa, 2010, p. 100.

³⁷ Ramaphosa was born in Johannesburg in 1952; his legal studies at the University of the North were cut short by eleven months in solitary confinement. He gained knowledge of project, financial and strategic management through the Urban Foundation, and he built a wide range of contacts in business and politics. At their first meeting, Motlatsi “could see he was even younger than me—although he spoke very well. He seemed nothing special.” Anthony Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa*, Johannesburg and Oxford, Jacana and James Currey, 2007, pp. 105-06 and 141.

NUM was a huge organisation, with a "multimillion dollar" annual budget, and nearly 300,000 dues-paying members, "bringing substantial internal funding to the union."³⁸

But the NUM's real strength derived from the nature and importance of mining: as Marcel Golding, a journalist at the Union, wrote at the time, "the life of a miner is terrible": he awakes around 2am to prepare to go on shift at 4am. He works "for eight hours in an eighty-two-centimetre hole in a crouched position with rock above your head that can cave in at any moment. Around you is heat at an unbearable temperature and noise like the sound of a drill." He works under a white miner who shouts abuse, and at the end of the day, goes back to living conditions miserable almost beyond belief, a concrete cubicle in a hostel room 18 feet by 25 feet shared by twenty men.

In sum, miners worked in a terrifying environment, under the constant threat of arbitrary dismissal, and they were "paid a pittance".³⁹

The NUM, says Mufson, "radically altered" such labour relations "by suggesting that miners no longer act as willing participants in their own exploitation". Like Black Consciousness among students, trade unionism "fomented a revolution in the minds of workers." Their assertive mood was present at the NUM's fifth congress in February 1987, when the union bussed shop stewards from all over the country to a hall in Soweto. Huge banners hung from the ceiling, one with the words "Socialism Means Freedom," another "Organise or Starve."

Their anger and determination was evident in the three-week walkout by the 300,000 NUM members at almost the same time. It was the biggest strike in the country's history, and it revealed the effectiveness of union organisation that, against big handicaps, commanded the loyalty of a work-force unafraid to voice its demands.⁴⁰

The action was preceded by months of negotiations. The union demanded an average wage increase of 55 per cent, to meet an inflation rate of some 17 per cent and to narrow the gap between white and black miners, then cut their demands to 40 and then 30 per cent as deadlines neared. The Chamber of Mines, representing the companies, offered increases between 16 and 23 per cent depending on job categories. Anglo American, the largest mining house, whose workers represented 70 per cent of the NUM's membership, offered more money. But for three weeks the miners stayed out, displaying a determination exceeding their leaders' expectations. In late August, Anglo fired 45,000 workers including Motlatsi, while other companies sacked another 15,000. Two days later, the NUM accepted an offer it had previously rejected. "We made a tactical retreat. It was better than starting from scratch", said Motlatsi.⁴¹

³⁸ Mufson, *op.cit.*, pp. 139-45 and Butler, *op.cit.*, pp. 143-46.

³⁹ Quoted in Mufson, *op. cit.*, p. 148, comment from Butler, *op.cit.*, 147-48.

⁴⁰ Mufson, *op.cit.*, pp. 148-9.

⁴¹ At the centre of the NUM negotiating team, says Butler, was the special double-act between Ramaphosa and Motlatsi, the former controlling the relations with the mining companies and

The costs were high. Eight miners were killed by police and security guards, 500 injured and 400 arrested. Although only 20 per cent of unionists were in fact fired, 70 per cent of shop stewards were lost. But during the strike some 50,000 miners applied to join the NUM, and despite the inadequate settlement, an impressive show of trade union force had been made. Bobby Godsell of Anglo American allowed that "the NUM showed it can take guys out for a long time." Labour laws demanded a protracted bargaining process which had allowed the companies time to stockpile gold and coal and make contingency plans. But, aside from the police shootings, the state had not intervened throughout the three weeks. Godsell paid further respect to the miners and the union, and their key role in democratisation: "Labour relations are a little patch of post-apartheid South Africa, because it is where blacks have some real power...Our relationships with unions are based on an acceptance of common dignity, because we recognise the black worker's *power*." They had in fact bargained terms of employment with the most powerful corporate chiefs in South Africa,⁴² and in so doing advanced democratisation further.

The trade union movement strived to achieve its ideal of democratisation both in general and in its organisational detail. Mufson believes that the idea of the mandate began with the trade unions and spilled over into other organisations. The equally important principle of leadership accountability and recall, had seen community groups learning from FOSATU. In some townships, union shop stewards played important roles in community groups. If the commitment to workers' control was initially sometimes a show, to the rank and file it was real. Union leaders ignored it at their peril. The old FOSATU unions and the NUM, he states, maintained strong worker-education programmes for the rank and file. The president of every union was required to be a full-time worker. The NUM's full-time professionals, such as Ramaphosa and Golding (as a negotiator) earned the same amount as top mineworkers: \$500 to \$700 a month. The relationship between ordinary workers and their domestic political leaders altered qualitatively through the 1970s and 1980s: earlier, organizers had to coax workers to join unions, but in the latter period workers "displayed boundless enthusiasm and expectations".⁴³ Trade union membership continued to grow strongly in size.⁴⁴ South Africa's union density figures of some 59 per cent was one of the highest in the world.

the latter the domestic situation, gauging the likely reactions of the membership to the concessions the former was making or extracting, and agitating or soothing by turn the NUM's representatives. *Op.cit.*, pp. 153-4.

⁴² Mufson, *op.cit.*, pp. 149-54. Godsell's emphasis.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 155. A point made in memorable terms by Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*.

⁴⁴ Membership figures are rounded up. Webster and Adler, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

Year	TU membership	Density (%)
1989	2,130,000	39.9
1990	2,459,000	46.3
1991	2,719,000	52.3
1992	2,906,000	57.1
1993	2,890,000	59

The ANC, armed struggle and the subordination of the people

The underground South African Communist Party (SACP) resolved in August 1960 to create an armed force. The move was, according to Barrell, a joint venture of some ANC leaders and the SACP, and they moved very much from the top down, chiefly in abstract and theoretical terms rather than close regard for the practical social and political realities. At the top of the high command was Nelson Mandela, and around him were Joe Slovo, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni, and very soon Joe Modise. In 1963, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) outlined its intended strategy: guerrilla struggle would be initiated by groups of fighters being infiltrated into rural areas (some 300 recruits had supposedly already been sent abroad for training), where they would be joined by thousands of auxiliaries recruited internally. These rural groups would attack state targets, complemented by urban sabotage and what was called political agitation. Only minimal efforts were made, however, to organise among the peasantry, and the role accorded to the urban working-class was simply to supply MK recruits under SACP auspices.

The capture of the bulk of MK's high command in July 1963, however, smashed MK inside South Africa and destroyed much of the ANC, leaving a remnant in exile and prison. The ANC thereafter saw armed struggle as the means to rebuild its internal political presence and challenge apartheid. By 1965, there were some 800 MK guerrilla trainees chiefly in Tanzania, the Soviet Union and, before the Sino-Soviet split, in China. Modise was MK commander, following the capture of his three predecessors. For the ANC and SACP, MK was supposed to "revive the spirit of revolt" at home but, as Barrell puts it, exile "created a special set of problems." The frequently urban lifestyles of the exiled party leadership, in say London and New York, and the harsh conditions faced by the cadres in remote rural camps, differed considerably, and grievances among the latter were ignored or suppressed. At times, a gulf opened up between the ANC leadership and the MK rank and file.⁴⁵ But the depths of this gulf, and how badly

⁴⁵ Howard Barrell, *MK: The ANC's Armed Struggle*, London, Penguin Books, 1990, ch. 1 and pp. 18-22.

the elite responded to the needs and values of the soldiery, has only recently begun to be properly considered.⁴⁶

Yet there were some early signals of forthcoming strategic and leadership problems. MK's hopes of building a supposed "Ho Chi Minh trail" to South Africa via Rhodesia—attempted, for example, in the Wankie Campaign in August 1967—was an early indication of the gross inadequacies of planning and the detachment of the top commanders from the soldiers; the Luthuli Detachment did not have enough weapons or men, maps were out of date and knowledge of the terrain was inadequate, even their food was short. Under constant attack from superior Rhodesian and South African forces, such inadequacies forced Chris Hani and other members of the Detachment to retreat into Botswana, where they were imprisoned for up to two years.

When they returned to Lusaka, however, Hani found that the leadership did not seek to learn from their experiences or even to debrief them. He therefore put his name on a memorandum which accused the ANC of cynicism and indifference, and Modise, specifically, of authoritarianism and arbitrariness, creating a culture of sycophancy in MK. His interests were greatest, they said, in his Zambian commercial enterprises. A military tribunal in Livingstone voted for the execution of the signatories, but the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) decided on their suspension. Hani's biographers note his sense of betrayal at this exclusion. The party's conference at Morogoro in Tanzania in 1969 was, according to Barrell, "a very angry assembly of men and women" who had lost confidence in many members of the NEC, opening a dangerous chasm between leadership and rank and file. But Hani himself had growing stature, and he was elected to the SACP's central committee the following year.⁴⁷

The 1976 Soweto uprising, Barrell states, "caught the ANC unprepared", unable to offer protective military activity, national political guidance, or even such basic necessities as food and clothing.⁴⁸ Over two years, some 3,000 to 4,000 students went into MK abroad.⁴⁹ The experiences of MK recruits in the 1980s, especially in Angola, at the hands of their commanders, were a travesty of their ideals and expectations.

Joe Modise was born in Doornfontein, Johannesburg, on 23 May 1929. He joined the ANC Youth League in his early twenties, and participated in resistance to forced removals in Sophiatown and in various criminal activities noted below. When the ANC was banned, openings quickly came and were

⁴⁶ It was later officially claimed that senior ANC leaders "trained and lived in the camps with the recruits", but no details or evidence were provided in support of this assertion. ANC, "Statement to the [TRC]", 19 August 1996, p. 87.

⁴⁷ Janet Smith and Beauregard Tromp, *Hani: A Life Too Short*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball, 2009, pp. 93-105 and 110-125 and Barrell, *op.cit.*, pp. 23 and 26.

⁴⁸ The latter was flown in from the Soviet Union to Angola. Irina Filatova, "The ANC and the Soviets", *Politics Web Online*, 10 August 2011.

⁴⁹ Barrell, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-33. The higher estimate is Hyslop, *op.cit.*, p. 187 and the lower Barrell.

retained seemingly without regard for his performance. He was appointed to the MK high command in 1961 and became commander in 1965, and around 1963 he began to conduct operations from abroad while undergoing military training at much the same time in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

From the early 1960s until formal negotiations began with Pretoria three decades later, MK appears to have been effectively under Modise's control.⁵⁰ Over that period, as a commentator has phrased it, "it is hard to find a significant MK success for which Modise could claim credit." MK's soldiers were consistently ill-prepared and under resourced, and the main charges against the commander from within Umkhonto were "inertia" and a "lack of concern for MK troopers." Unlike Chris Hani, he was known to be "never in the camps", as he devoted prime time to his business interests in Lusaka and elsewhere. "I never heard a good word about him", one ANC exile said in the 1980s, while another was at a loss to explain his enduring power and seniority within the armed struggle.⁵¹ It will be argued below that Modise not only retained but magnified his negative characteristics—his militarism, greed, irresponsibility in office--during the transition to majority rule and throughout his time as Nelson Mandela's Defence Minister.

When the TRC made its investigations into the liberation movements from 1960 to 1990, it recognised that the ANC was an internationally recognised body conducting a legitimate struggle against the apartheid state. Nonetheless it made the vital distinction between a "just war" and "just means", and it went ahead to find that the ANC, and its organs like the National Executive Committee (NEC) and MK, "committed gross violations of human rights in the course of their political activities and armed struggles, acts for which they are morally and politically accountable."⁵²

For brevity's sake, and in an endeavour to do justice to available material and the people concerned, only certain incidents will be concentrated on here: the mutinies among MK members in Angola around 1984; the abuse and killing of some 16 young men and women at the hands of Winnie Mandela in Soweto in the late 1980s; the killing of MK commander Thami Zulu in Lusaka in November 1989; and Operation Vula (from *vulindlela*, or "open the road") circa 1988-1990. These different events occurred in proximate sequence, and all were characterised by decision-making by aloof, arrogant political elites and the extreme subordination of ordinary people, as rank-and-file, vulnerable youth or loyal members, and the friends and relatives of those victims. Much is now known about these terrible occurrences but much remains hidden chiefly by the now ruling elites. Collectively they throw light on how and why the democratisation movement was caused to fail 1988-94.

⁵⁰ Linda Ensor, "Controversial Leader was at Forefront of Liberation Struggle", *Business Day*, 28 November 2011. Enlarged upon below.

⁵¹ Drew Forrest, "A Man With an Ambiguous Past", *Mail and Guardian*, 6 December 2001.

⁵² TRC *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, p. 325.

MK and the betrayal of the “Soweto generation”

The issues in the mutinies among MK soldiers in Angola in 1984, according to Trehwela, were an end to involvement in counter-insurgency warfare against UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) forces, their redeployment to South Africa, and the immediate suspension of the activities of the ANC's security apparatus, known variously as National Security (NAT) and *Mbokodo* (the grindstone / the stone that crushes). The soldiers levelled their strongest criticism against three NEC members, all directly involved in MK. They held Joe Modise most responsible for MK's failure to engage effectively with Pretoria; secondly, Mzwandile (or Mzwai) Piliso, the chief of Mbokodo,⁵³ responsible in their eyes for the suppression of dissent and democracy in the ANC; and thirdly, Andrew Masondo, previously jailed on Robben Island, who had joined the ANC leadership in exile after 1976, where he allegedly abused young women, and was a key figure in the running of the prison camp called Quatro (camp 32). The mutiny had been brewing in various MK camps in Angola since the late 1970s, and its mainspring was “the suppression of democracy by the ANC leadership.”⁵⁴

After a series of mass meetings and discussions with figures like Hani—who sided firmly with the loyalists—a Committee of Ten drew up their demands which concentrated on the suspension of Mbokodo and an investigation into affairs at Quatro; and the convening of a fully representative democratic conference to review the development of the struggle, prepare new strategies and hold elections for the NEC. The committee was chaired by Zaba Maledza (his MK name), a former Black Consciousness activist in SASO who had subsequently served prominently on the ANC's radio programmes, and at least two of its members were women.

The mutineers were ruthlessly crushed. Some were executed by firing squad, a group of about 15 who tried to escape were beaten and shot in the bush. Another group were kept naked and tied with ropes for three weeks at the prison in Pango, until Gertrude Shope, the visiting head of the ANC's Women's Section, was said to have ordered an end to the tortures and executions. Zaba Maledza died in an isolation cell in Quatro.⁵⁵

The hearings of the TRC deepened understanding of these events. Discipline and security were initially handled by MK command structures, headed as noted from 1965 by Modise. Mbokodo was established in the mid-1970s,⁵⁶ and it was

⁵³ Officially described as “the most senior leader in charge of all camps in Angola”, appointed head of NAT in 1981. ANC, “Further Submissions and Responses by the ANC to Questions Raised by the [TRC]”, 12 May 1997, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Paul Trehwela, *Inside Quatro*, Johannesburg, Jacana Media, 2009, pp. 8-11. The book is largely a compilation of essays first published in 1990.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-29.

⁵⁶ Elsewhere the ANC said that it set up a “fully-fledged Security Department in 1969” tasked with the physical protection of ANC resources and the screening of new recruits. ANC, “Statement to the [TRC]”, 19 August 1996, p. 105.

responsible for many of the violations of human rights carried out by the ANC in exile. Significant violations took place at Quatro and others occurred elsewhere in Angola, at ANC headquarters in Lusaka, in Botswana and in Tanzania and Uganda.

The TRC noted the bitterness felt by those who were loyal to the ANC and the causes it represented and who felt betrayed by the ANC's failure to deal openly with the abuses. Joe Seremane's brother, Timothy Seremane (aka Kenneth Mahamba), was executed in Quatro, and he testified in July 1997: "I want somebody to come and tell me what my younger brother actually did that he deserved to be shot like an animal being put down after being brutally disfigured so that his best friends could not recognise him... suddenly nobody has ever known him, suddenly nobody has a record to show what kind of trial he had..."⁵⁷

The Commission heard that a supposed spy scare in the ANC in 1981 had led to paranoia about infiltration by apartheid agents, and in this context a number of MK members were detained and tortured; some died as a result, while a few were executed; Mbokodo claimed credit before the TRC for uncovering spies in 1981. Barely two years later, a rebellion among MK soldiers in Angola—the *Mkatashinga* mutiny of 1984—led to further violations. Mutineers at Viana camp were persuaded to end their protests by Chris Hani.⁵⁸ The leaders were then detained; 32 were imprisoned in Luanda where two died between February and July that year. Three months after Viana, there was a further mutiny at Pango, crushed by loyalist MK members assisted by Angolan troops. Some were allegedly tortured, seven were executed, and the rest were transferred to Quatro, before Shope intervened. But some were held for years without trial, and the Commission received statements from detainees who were tortured and assaulted between 1986 and 1991.

The Skweyiya Commission of Inquiry, reporting to ANC president Nelson Mandela in August 1992, heard that detainees were held for three to seven years without trial, some in solitary confinement, in overcrowded unhygienic cells, where food deprivation was used as a punishment. They also found that maltreatment at Quatro was persistent and brutal. Before internment, torture was used to extract confessions. According to the TRC, the Skweyiya report contained a confidential list of Mbokodo members believed responsible for the violations.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Final Report*, vol 2, ch. 4, pp. 347-8.

⁵⁸ Hani's biographers say that he was army commissar in 1985 and chief of staff some three years later, so "charged with life and death." They also claim that he "never quite recovered from Pango and the events thereafter", and quote him saying with perhaps characteristic ambivalence: "I thought we should not use torture or beatings against those we thought were our enemies. I annoyed a lot of people in the NEC, but I was not the only one speaking out... But I think I was the most consistent because I had seen it myself, I'd been to Quatro." Smith and Tromp, *op.cit.*, pp. 153 and 187.

⁵⁹ *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, pp. 349-50. The Chair of the Skweyiya Commission was Advocate Thembile Louis Skweyiya, SC, assisted by Ms B. Mabandla and Advocate G.J. Marcus. Both the

The Motsuenyane Commission was appointed by Mandela in 1993 with broader terms of reference.⁶⁰ It held public hearings, and among those it heard were eleven alleged perpetrators. It concluded, in August 1993, that while victims of abuses have been heard and catalogued, "they have not yet received the full measure of justice due them [sic]."⁶¹

Before what was termed a "recall hearing" of the TRC on 12 May 1997, the ANC acknowledged that a code of conduct was only introduced in 1985, and before then the tribunals which sentenced people to death were *ad hoc* and did not allow the accused any form of legal representation.

A number of official listings in 1996-97 offered rough and approximate statements of deaths suffered and perpetrated by the ANC. An appendix to the ANC's Final Submission contained the names of some 900 people who died in exile, but it said that the list was not entirely accurate. The TRC commented that many deponents who had relatives missing in exile could be accounted for in this listing.⁶² The Commission also noted that Piliso admitted to the Skweyiya tribunal that he had ordered the beating of suspected agents in 1981 in order to obtain information, as he said, "at any cost." Mac Maharaj, senior ANC figure, observed that "we made no provision for legal defence of the accused in 1981 and 1982."⁶³

The ANC also submitted, as a further Confidential Appendix, a list of MK members who died violently, they said, "after committing breaches of discipline"; included here were 22 names under the heading "Agents executed on order of tribunals." The name Timothy Seremane (aka Mahamba), already noted, was here.⁶⁴ The August 1996 Statement supposedly provided the names of all ANC members who died in exile between March 1960 and December 1993. Some of the numbers and the categories of their deaths read strangely. While the total of deaths from "natural causes", world-wide over 33 years, was 379, those who "died at the hands of the enemy" totalled only 231, plus an additional 99 who were killed as a result of "UNITA ambushes"—330 deaths in battle over three decades is no tribute to the combativeness of MK, while 99 killed by UNITA is an implicit recognition of the scale of the fighting which MK cadres had denounced as wasteful and diversionary. Deaths in Angola also included a category of "Accidents" (other than in Training or in Motor Vehicles) numbering

Chair and Ms Mabandla were ANC members. "Report of the Commission of Inquiry Into Complaints by Former [ANC] Prisoners and Detainees", 1992, pp. 1, 3 and 19.

⁶⁰ Proceedings before Skweyiya were not open to the public or press, and they were dependent on the willingness of witnesses to come forward—in their own words, this was "their greatest shortcoming", since many ex-prisoners remained fearful of their safety. "Report", p. 2.

⁶¹ *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, pp. 351-52.

⁶² *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, p. 352,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 354-55.

⁶⁴ According to the ANC, Mahamba was camp commander at Pango where, in 1981, he beat a cadre, Ndunga, to death; the commander had allegedly been an agent of Pretoria since 1976. "Statement to the [TRC]", 19 August 1996, p. 108.

27, while that of "Suicides" in Angola totalled 41, by far the largest such number world-wide—the next largest number of suicides were in Zambia, only six; implied testimony to the extreme traumas of the Angolan camps. Those "Executed by Order of Our Military Tribunal" in Angola totalled 34. This list too was officially described as "not complete",⁶⁵ as it rather obviously was.

Andrew Masondo, political commissar of MK at this time, told the TRC that he was a member of a review committee that sentenced Gabriel Moshoeu to death. This victim appeared rather typical of those swept up in the "spy scare". Masondo stated that they had information that Moshoeu "joined the enemy" while in combat with MK in Rhodesia. He had disappeared in the course of battle, and later reappeared. In Masondo's words: "They investigate, they find out that he had had contact with the enemy...When he got to Angola he was court martialled and sentenced to death."⁶⁶

Gabriel Mthembu, described as camp commander, testified that Gabriel Moshoeu was tried by an *ad hoc* tribunal comprised of Joe Modise, Andrew Masondo and Mzwai Piliso, and admitted that "he might have been beaten in the process of investigation when people were trying to get him to confess given the overwhelming nature of evidence against him."⁶⁷

The TRC heard that a second mutiny occurred on 13 May 1984 at Pango where some seven MK personnel were killed in fighting by the mutineers. On 18 May, those described as loyal ANC members recaptured the camp killing eight named individuals in the process; another was said to have "committed suicide with a pistol" and another died because "he refused treatment [for malaria]." Another seven named men were said to have been executed following an investigation, and a further nine were sentenced to death, though the number of these who were killed is uncertain.⁶⁸

The ANC's own summarised account of these events is as follows: since 1979, Quatro was its "formal detention centre." In 1981, a "rash of bizarre incidents of indiscipline" occurred. Protests followed in late 1983 and early the next year which were defused with no loss of life. There was also a mutiny at Viana transit camp which was put down with the death of two mutineers. A "far more serious mutiny" at Pango in 1984 was "suppressed mercilessly", and seven cadres were sentenced to death.⁶⁹

Torture directly involved top people in MK and Mbokodo, and its use was not restricted to the first spy scare period. At the "recall hearing", the ANC acknowledged the use of torture. Before Skweyiya, Piliso said that he had taken

⁶⁵ "Statement" 19 August 1996, pp. 137-64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁶⁹ It said that each camp contained a minimum of 1,200 cadres, and that food in the camps and qualified medical attention was extremely inadequate. "Statement", 19 August 1996, pp. 108-111.

part in the beating of suspects in 1981, when MK personnel were interrogated over some two weeks. They were beaten on the soles of their feet in Piliso's presence. Among victim statements presented to the Commission were the following. Diliza Mthembu was one of the "Soweto generation" who had left to join the ANC in 1976. Detained for over four years at Quatro and at Viana, he was given electric shocks, suffocated with gas masks and beaten all over his body with sticks; Gordon Moshoeu was also detained for four years. Among the abuses he endured at Quatro was having wild chillies smeared, he testified, "on his private parts and anus"; Kenneth Sigam had melted plastic poured on his back, and he was hit on the head with a steel rod. After six years at Quatro, he was held in Tanzania, eight months of which were in solitary confinement, and not released until 1991; Ronnie Masango had disagreed with the decision to deploy MK against UNITA, and was detained for fourteen months in Luanda, where he was beaten and kicked all over his body; Daliwonga Mandela was held at the ANC so-called "Green House" in Lusaka, tortured daily for six months, and threatened with death, he claimed, not only by Modise, but also by Alfred Nzo, Steve Tshwete and Jacob Zuma, all senior figures in the ANC then and later; and Ms Ntombentsha Makanda, detained in Lusaka in 1980 and 1985, when she was kicked and punched with her hands tied behind her back, and sexually abused.⁷⁰

The TRC concluded on the evidence presented to them that torture was routinely used by Mbokodo from 1979 to 1989. They noted that members of MK selected for intelligence were trained in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Gabriel Mthembu, for example, had trained in counter-intelligence, including the thorough screening and assessment of new recruits, and he claimed that the standard of training in the GDR was high.⁷¹

Official opinion and some facts presented at the Recall Hearing in May 1997 merit attention. The ANC asserted that "no systematic or widespread" abuse had occurred, and rejected with contempt the suggestion that any cadre was trained specifically in torture. It claimed that some of those involved in the 1984 mutinies had long histories of destructive behaviour, and some also had—as the Stuart Commission had revealingly phrased it—"illusions of power and leadership."⁷² It allowed, again following Stuart, that "nearly all petty offences [in the camps] had been dealt with in a destructive manner" since 1979. Following the Kabwe Conference, at which 40 per cent of the delegates were supposedly from the camps, Piliso was "removed" as head of NAT and Andrew Masondo was "censured by the leadership". It also allowed that "most of the excesses" took place between 1981 and 1985, but reiterated that "no 'extra-legal

⁷⁰ Skweyiya presented three detailed examples of the use of torture to extract confessions, and they noted what they called "staggering brutality" at Quatro, where "violence for the sake of violence" prevailed. *Report*, pp. 11 and 14.

⁷¹ *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, pp. 361-66.

⁷² The Stuart Commission comprised Hermanus Loos ("James Stuart"), Aziz Pahad, Sizakele Sigxashe and Mtu Jwili, and the latter two became heads of directorates in a restructured NAT. It reported to the NEC in March 1984.

executions' were carried out in areas where the ANC leadership had control". Quoting further findings of the Stuart Commission, it admitted that the conditions in its camps were dreadful: "the total isolation from the outside world, the desperation and frustration of not being deployed, ma[d]e it practically impossible for cadres to survive (politically, morally and psychologically) in the camps for several years." But in answer to a specific question from the TRC, it confirmed that Piliso and Masonde indeed "retained senior posts in the post-1994 administration": "to continue punishing these officials endlessly would be contrary to humane practice".⁷³ Piliso's responsibilities for the gross abuse of cadres would appear to rank second only to those of Joe Modise.

Despite the weight of evidence, the ANC at the end of the 1990s, did its best to avoid accountability. Party president, Thabo Mbeki, took the TRC in late 1998 to court to prevent the release of its Final Report, but the High Court of the Western Cape ruled that the Commission had adequately considered the ANC's responses to its findings. State President Mandela appeared to agree partially with his party comrades when he received the Report, as he observed, "with all its imperfections". Bishop Desmond Tutu expressed his "devastation" at Mbeki's action, and the Commission noted that a "great deal of acrimony" was created between itself and the ANC by the attempted interdiction. Nonetheless, in a statement to a special sitting of parliament convened to discuss the Report, Mbeki, as deputy state president, reiterated his complaints.⁷⁴

In a section entitled "Holding the ANC Accountable", the TRC endeavoured to clarify its position after the handing over of the Final Report. They rather overgenerously declared that, while the ANC "at a leadership level made frank disclosures, the same cannot be said for the welfare desk": in more than 250 instances, where the Commission tried to verify information supplied by victims and their families, they were "unable to obtain any response" from the party.

The TRC reconfirmed its findings: under international law, "the fact that persons died in custody at the hands of the ANC places responsibility for their deaths on the ANC." Chiefly two categories of people had suffered at the hands of the ANC and its military/security structures: suspected "enemy agents" and "mutineers". People were routinely tortured, charged and convicted by tribunals, without due process, sentenced and executed. The subsequent failure of the ANC to communicate properly with the families of victims "constituted callous and insensitive conduct." The forms of torture detailed by the Motsuenyane commission involved the deliberate infliction of pain, severe ill-treatment in prison and solitary confinement, and the deliberate withholding of food, water and medical care.⁷⁵ These practices amounted to gross violations of human

⁷³ ANC, "Further Submission and Responses", pp. 12-14, 16 and 17, and 19-21.

⁷⁴ Good, *The Liberal Model and Africa*, pp. 128-9 and *Final Report*, vol 6, ch 3, p. 643.

⁷⁵ The findings in the three reports, the TRC, Motsuenyane and Skweyiya are cumulative and, particularly in the latter case, the detail is sometimes important. The denial of food at Quatro was not only systemic but "unconscionable and pernicious". While the diet of detainees was chiefly "diluted tomato puree and rice", the camp had adequate quantities of tropical fruit which

rights. Motsuenyane also found that "adequate steps were not taken in good time against those responsible for such violations." Thus: "The information that the Commission received subsequent to the submission of its five-volume Final Report has confirmed that the Commission was correct in making the findings that it did."⁷⁶

But on the TRC's own evidence, as well as on other analytical and biographical material, the ANC and MK leadership had shown no accountability to its own members, most culpably to the youth who joined its ranks after June 1976, whose supposed mutinies resulted from their leaders' refusal to heed their justified complaints. There was little accountability either to the uninformed and grieving relatives of the victims, and to the South African people. A leader like Joe Modise, criticised in detail by both Hani and the mutineers, persisted in his derelict and corrupt conduct over three decades, and then gained, as did others, high ministerial office. The TRC was overly helpful to the ANC in allowing the admission of lists of named violators as confidential appendices, beyond the reach again of relatives and an uninformed public. And Mbeki was prepared to take extraordinary eleventh hour measures to try to suppress one of the best available insights into what the ANC's armed struggle actually represented. Whatever "imperfections" the Report contained, one not inconsiderable failure was its inability to discern the reality of the origins and role of the UDF; the TRC simply assuming without supporting evidence that the ANC "played a direct role" in their establishment,⁷⁷ undermining their autonomy and obscuring the democratisation that most characterised them and South African domestic politics of the 1980s.⁷⁸

Skweyiya had been firmer on both the issues of elite accountability and assistance to the victims. They strongly recommended "urgent and immediate attention be given to identifying and dealing with those responsible for the maltreatment of detainees." Those who were detained without trial "should have the allegations against them unequivocally and unconditionally withdrawn", and "a clear and unequivocal apology" given to them. All who were detained in ANC camps should receive monetary compensation. Since it was clear that "many people" suffered in the camps, an independent body should be established to document the abuses.⁷⁹

grew freely in the vicinity, out of bounds to detainees. Additionally, the camp commanders had a plentiful supply of food, which included specially supplied tinned products; "Any food left over after the commanders had their fill was fed to the pigs." *Report*, p. 10.

⁷⁶ *Final Report*, vol 6, ch 3, pp. 658-61. The Final Report ultimately comprised seven volumes.

⁷⁷ *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 4, p. 340.

⁷⁸ Allegations of biases and organizational weaknesses in the TRC are strong. There was, for example, a large pro-ANC majority among the 17 Commissioners while there were none who were identified either with Inkatha or the then Democratic Party. The TRC's vital research unit was neither well qualified nor experienced. Johnson, *op.cit.*, pp. 273-75.

⁷⁹ *Report*, p. 19.

Instead, the ANC endeavoured to enforce secrecy and non-accountability. As they left Quatro, both prior to 1988 and during the evacuation from Angola, surviving prisoners were “threatened with death if they ever were to relate to anyone the events that had transpired during their internment.”⁸⁰ When the first group of 32 ex-detainees arrived in South Africa in August 1991, they were publicly labelled by the ANC as “the most notorious” suspected agents, though they had never been tried or found guilty of an offence, and the party endeavoured to impose a “moratorium on accusative statements” upon them. They and others like them experienced, according to Skweyiya, a double punishment; lengthy imprisonment without trial for unproven crimes and “ostracism upon their release”⁸¹

The Crimes and Immunity of Madikizela-Mandela

With Nelson Mandela in prison and other leaders in exile, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela assumed, says her biographer, that the leadership role was automatically hers: “I was ready to deputise for Nelson”, she allegedly wrote. In her semi-official role as wife of the ANC leader, and as her reputation as an opponent of apartheid spread, she became regarded internationally as *de facto* First Lady, as her association with Danielle Mitterand of France and Lisbeth Palme of Sweden appeared to suggest. In 1986, with her return to Soweto from harsh banishment conditions in Brandfort in the Free State, she acted, according to the TRC, “as an operative” of MK, supposedly providing assistance to cadres infiltrating into the country, and appearing publicly in military uniform. Trehwela notes the “extraordinary status” she acquired, and sees its substance in her role “as oracle to the unseen leader on Robben Island.” But in Soweto in the late 1980s, her actual following was composed chiefly of homeless children.⁸²

She had received for some time financial support from foreign sources—one cheque, for instance, from a UN anti-apartheid committee, was apparently for \$100,000—some of which may have gone into the building of a 15-room mansion in Orlando West (aka “Winnie’s Palace”). In 1986-87 this became home to the Mandela United Football Club (MUFC), which she founded. Fear and intimidation radiated from this gang and their creator. On 28 July 1988, the house was burnt down by high school pupils, while residents watched in silence. But terrorism continued out of her new residence in Diepkloof,⁸³ as the fate of

⁸⁰ Todd Cleveland, “We Still Want the Truth”, paper first presented to the African Studies Association, Washington, DC, December 2002, Trehwela, *op.cit.*, frontispiece.

⁸¹ *Report*, p. 9.

⁸² Gilbey, *op.cit.*, pp. 68, 133-34 and photographs; TRC *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 6, p. 555, and Trehwela, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47. Chris Hani’s contribution to the promotion of Madikizela-Mandela’s pseudo- revolutionary image in 1990 is noted below under Operation Vula.

⁸³ Intimidation reigned inside and outside her residence. According to Gift Ntombeni, a follower, gang members manned her gates at all time, recording complaints, and hunting down and assaulting culprits. Members “would not even dare” defy Madikizela-Mandela: “if you did, you

four abducted youths, Lolo Sono, Stompie Seipei, Pelo Mekgwe and Thabiso Mono, acquired publicity in early 1989. Dr Abu-Baker Asvat was shot dead in his surgery on 27 January and soon after the body of Seipei was identified.⁸⁴ These killings were flagrant and interconnected but only two, it emerged, among other barbarities. Asvat had been summoned to examine the boy on 1 January, after he had undergone a prolonged period of "Break Down" in Madikizela-Mandela's hands—the victim was repeatedly thrown into the air and allowed to fall to the floor—and the physician pronounced him brain damaged and in dire need of hospitalisation; she and her accomplices decided instead to dispose of Seipei.⁸⁵

With the police barely active, the leadership of the democracy movement spoke out on 16 February; it was the prime example of the UDF's unflinching criticism of elites. Flanked by COSATU president, Elijah Barayi, and by UDF co-president Richard Gumede, Murphy Morobe of the MDM-UDF, read a public statement directly linking Madikizela-Mandela to Seipei's killing, and affirmed that the football team and "the reign of terror" which it carried out was "her creation." He went on: "We are outraged...and not prepared to remain silent when those who are violating human rights claim to be doing so in the name of the struggle." The MDM therefore "distance[d] itself from Mrs Mandela and her actions."⁸⁶

The TRC held a Special Investigation into the MUFC, restricted to a seven-month period between August 1988 and the end of February 1989 (however the Commission noted some cases outside this period). They found that "the residents and associates of the Mandela household, including Ms Madikizela-Mandela herself, were implicated directly or indirectly in... assaults and abduction, and the murder and attempted murder of at least a dozen individuals." The investigations involved public hearings in late 1998, which included testimony from Morobe, Cachalia and Madikizela-Mandela. Former security police were interviewed. The public hearings were, however, constrained by time limitations which restricted cross-examinations.

Among the assaults were the following. The torture and mutilation of Peter Makhanda and Phillip Makhanda; on 26 May 1987, the brothers were taken by force to the back rooms of the Mandela home, where they were assaulted and

were branded an informer." Her house was known as "Parliament", people were assaulted in the "Fish Oil Room", and a shack where abducted boys were kept was called "Lusaka". Bodies were often left lying near the jacuzzi, and the bedroom of her daughter, Zinzi Mandela-Hlongwane, was used for pleasure and for stashing guns. Both Zinzi and her mother, he said, were "capable of anything". She closely associated with the police, shoot-outs sometimes flagrantly occurred, yet Madikizela-Mandela was never questioned or charged. Good, *The Liberal Model*, p.117.

⁸⁴ Stompie was aged around 13, and two years earlier had been the youngest detainee in the country. He was self-taught, could recite the Freedom Charter in its entirety, and liked to carry a briefcase in emulation of his hero, Allan Boesak. Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

⁸⁵ Good, *The Liberal Model*, pp. 98-99.

⁸⁶ Good, *The Liberal Model*, pp. 98-99. Morobe's statement was dubbed "unprecedented public criticism" by the TRC, *Final Report*, vol 2, ch 6, p. 556.

had ANC slogans carved into their bodies by MUFC members, the wounds exacerbated with battery acid. Ms Phumlile Dlamini was assaulted by Madikizela-Mandela and MUFC members in late 1988. The TRC determined that she was taken from her house on more than one occasion and that Madikizela-Mandela and her followers were responsible for the assaults.

The abduction and killing of Lolo Sono and Anthony Tshabalala: Nicodemus Sono, the father of Lolo, testified that on 13 November 1988, Madikizela-Mandela and her driver came to his house, and he saw Lolo sitting in the back of her vehicle, his face swollen and bruised. Madikizela-Mandela told him that Lolo was a police spy, and that an MK cadre had been killed because of him. Despite Sono's pleas for his son's release, Madikizela-Mandela declared: "I am taking this dog away. The movement will see what to do with him." The Commission found that Lolo Sono was severely assaulted at the Diepkloof residence with the knowledge of Madikizela-Mandela. They found that he was killed by Jerry Richardson, her close confidant. Sibuniso Tshabalala's fate was "linked to that of Lolo Sono", assaulted at the same place and murdered by Richardson. The allegations regarding both men "were unfounded and false." Jerry Richardson himself "was a police informer."

Ms Koekie Zwane was the girlfriend of an MUFC member, and she died of multiple stab wounds on 18 December 1988. She too was an alleged informer, and was murdered by Richardson. The latter applied to the TRC for amnesty and stated that Koekie was killed on Madikizela-Mandela's instructions. The Commission also found that four youths, Thabiso Mono, Pelo Mekgwe, Kenneth Kgase, and Stompie Seipei were abducted from the Methodist manse in Soweto on 29 December 1988 by Richardson and other followers on the instructions of Madikizela-Mandela. The boys were accused of engaging in sexual relations with the Rev Paul Verryn, who ran the manse, and Seipei was singled out as an alleged informer. All four were assaulted in Diepkloof, and Madikizela-Mandela "initiated and participated in the assaults." Seipei was "last seen alive" at her residence, and as the Commission oddly phrased it, she "failed to act responsibly in taking the necessary action required to avert his death."⁸⁷

The killing of Dr Asvat on 27 January 1989 and the assault on Seipei were inter-related. Evidence exists that shortly before the latter's death, Asvat, known as "the people's doctor", told Madikizela-Mandela: "This boy is seriously ill... You must take him to hospital." Asvat also vehemently refused to provide her with confirmation that an abducted youth had been sodomised. Asvat was shot dead in his surgery by Zakhele Mbatha assisted by Thulani Dlamini without robbery occurring. Both men told the TRC in considerable detail that they were promised R20,000 by Madikizela-Mandela for the murder. Ebrahim Asvat, brother to the slain doctor, also told the Commission that the written statement of the two killers (eventually sentenced to 30 years jail) implicating Madikizela-

⁸⁷ *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 6, pp. 556-570. The Commission repeatedly expected or hoped that Madikizela-Mandela would act responsibly, as they recorded their findings of her near constant lies, evasions and criminality. This tendency reached a crescendo in Bishop Tutu's effusions at the end of the hearings, noted below.

Mandela was never produced in court, and that the police were unwilling to pursue the matter. The TRC said that Madikizela-Mandela had "deliberately and maliciously slandered Verryn" in an attempt to divert attention away from herself. But they too seemed reluctant to take matters further, They found that the death of Asvat and the linking of his death with the sexual abuse allegations "raised serious concerns which the Commission was unable to unravel." They appeared to pin the blame on the police; the detectives investigating Asvat's murder were "hasty" in their assumptions and "negligent" in their subsequent work.⁸⁸

But of greater importance were the lies and evasions of the woman concerned and how she was consistently supported in these endeavours by senior-most persons in the ANC. Katiza Cebekhulu was a participant and material witness in the events concerning Asvat, and he was, in the findings of the Commission, "taken out of the country and placed illegally in a Zambian prison at the request of the ANC". They note that President Kenneth Kaunda had "admitted that the ANC requested his assistance with Cebekhulu." Madikizela-Mandela was "involved in at least the initial hand-over" of the man, who was then held for three years without trial.⁸⁹ Aubrey Mokoena was once prominent in the UDF, and by 1997 an ANC MP and parliamentary committee chair. He had accepted Madikizela-Mandela's lies about the four abducted youth, and told the TRC in 1989 that "Mama" had been so overcome by the "altruism" of a social worker that she had mistakenly associated with thugs. The Rev. Frank Chikane had been a member of the ineffectual Crisis Committee which Nelson Mandela set up to contain the scandal, and in 1997 was deputy head of the Deputy-President's Office; he too liked to refer to Madikizela-Mandela as "Mama", and acted evasively before the TRC. Cyril Ramaphosa had also been a member of the Crisis Committee, but repeatedly declined to offer his testimony to the TRC. Before the public hearings began on 18 November 1997, Dullah Omar, Minister of Justice, voiced his support in the terms which Madikizela-Mandela was herself inclined to use, that the struggle exonerated everything: murder charges against her were not comparable to the atrocities of the former minority government, and they had to be seen in the context of apartheid.⁹⁰

The views and actions of Morobe and Cachalia were totally different. Appearing before the TRC in November 1997, they recalled the situation a decade earlier, when they were acutely aware that Madikizela-Mandela's victims were chiefly weak and vulnerable boys and girls, and that the UDF had campaigned for the release of children from government detention. Stompie Seipie's body had been discovered, and "community anger was at boiling point", Cachalia said. As national leadership of the UDF we knew we had to do something bold and imaginative. The public statement of 16 February 1989, Morobe admitted, had a profound effect on him both "as an individual [and] on my relationship with

⁸⁸ Good, *The Liberal Model*, pp. 121-2 and *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 6, pp. 571-2.

⁸⁹ *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 6, p. 576.

⁹⁰ *The Liberal Model*, pp. 120-21.

Mrs Madikizela-Mandela (though always coming to me in undercurrents)... [But] this was an issue of principle that my organisation had to confront." Cachalia added: "It was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made." A part of me, he said, now wants to forget the nightmare; "but another part says we cannot go forward until there's some accountability." This was not just an issue of the past but of the present and future in South Africa. Cachalia recommended that anyone found guilty by the TRC of gross human rights violations should be debarred from holding public office thereafter; the penalty of lustration.⁹¹

But the evasions continued, and over four days of hearings Madikizela-Mandela could watch, on the summary of Antjie Krog, powerful men "bend over backwards to avoid saying anything bad about her." Tutu went further and added his own and the Commission's prestige to a gratuitous endorsement of her claims. It was as if Morobe and Cachalia and the relatives of her victims had not spoken:⁹² "Many, *many* love you. Many, *many* say you should have been where you ought to be. The First Lady of the country... I love you very deeply... You are a great person."⁹³

On the TRC's conclusions, Madikizela-Mandela's methods were similar to those of Mbokodo, in their pursuit of agents, spies and informants, and their reliance on torture and killing. "Those who opposed Madikizela-Mandela and the MUFC or dissented from them were branded as informers, then hunted down and killed." She was "politically and morally accountable" for gross violations of human rights. But their conclusions on the role of the ANC was muted and repeatedly qualified. It "must bear some responsibility", they said, "for not taking a more determined stance regarding the controversy surrounding Ms Madikizela-Mandela, particularly in the period following the unbanning of the organisation. The apparent complicity of elements within the ANC to obstruct the course of justice by removing witnesses and co-accused...is a case in point."⁹⁴

But the TRC ruled out Cachalia's specific recommendation of lustration, on the grounds that "it would be inappropriate in the South African context." It offered no clarification of this conclusion. The Skweyiya Commission, however, had earlier reached a contrary position, finding unambiguously and pertinently that "no person who is guilty of committing atrocities should ever again be allowed

⁹¹ *Ibid*, pp. 119-20.

⁹² While the Commission as noted attributed 12 killings to her and the MUFC, Trehwela's estimate is 16 murders, *op.cit.*, p. 49. David Beresford offered another listing of some 14 actual and attempted murders in the *Mail and Guardian*, 21 November 1997 (reproduced in *The Liberal Model*, p. 122).

⁹³ Tutu's emphasis. According to the TRC's deputy chair, Alex Boraine, Madikizela-Mandela had challenged the integrity of the Commission, and Bishop Tutu went too far in his conciliation of her: "His hugging of [her] during the hearing, and his declaration of love and admiration, left the Commission wide open to the charge of bias." Cited in the *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 1 October 2000, and *The Liberal Model*, p. 228.

⁹⁴ *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 6, pp. 580-1.

to assume a position of power. Unless the ANC is prepared to take decisive action, the risk of repetition will forever be present.”⁹⁵

The Killing of Thami Zulu, Lusaka, 16 November 1989

The killing of Muziwakhe Ngwenya (aka Thami Zulu or TZ) was complex, calculated and callous, and it resulted from the involvement of top ANC leaders, Modise, Hani and Jacob Zuma, with Thabo Mbeki in a supportive position. He was born in Soweto and educated there, in Swaziland and briefly at the University of Botswana from whence he joined MK. After training in the Soviet Union, he was a commander in southern Angola, where the experienced Ronnie Kasrils described him as “an exceptionally handsome individual [who] looked every inch a soldier.”⁹⁶ His capacities were also recognised by Hani who appointed him regional commander of MK operations in Natal, a hard fought theatre on all sides. He successfully stepped up MK’s attacks, but his career ended abruptly after two disastrous incidents in 1988, in which some nine or more infiltrators from Swaziland were massacred. Zulu’s deputy, Cyril Raymond (aka “Ralph” or “Fear”), and his wife, Jessica, were summoned to Lusaka. Raymond “subsequently died in detention”, reportedly drowning in his own vomit, “after refusing to sign a confession to being a South African agent.” Zulu was formally detained, without being informed of the basis for this action. Jacob Zuma was a member of Mbokodo, 1985-88, and became its deputy director in 1988. After some twelve years in Swaziland and Mozambique, he had moved to Lusaka in early 1987 where he became “Chief of the Intelligence Dept”.⁹⁷ According to Mac Maharaj, the operational principle within the enclosed spheres of security and intelligence in Mbokodo and the ANC, around 1988, was that “no one was beyond suspicion.”⁹⁸

Zulu spent 14 months in detention, part of which was spent in an isolation cell lying all day on a mattress on the floor. After two months of interrogation, Mbokodo had found no conclusive proof of his collaboration with the enemy, but recommended that he should be “disciplined for criminal neglect” in the

⁹⁵ *Report*, p. 19.

⁹⁶ Ronnie Kasrils, *Armed and Dangerous: From Undercover Struggle to Freedom*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball Publishers, revised and updated 2004, p. 125.

⁹⁷ He had become a member of the NEC in 1977. Jeremy Gordin, *Zuma: A Biography*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2008, pp. 33 and 91.

⁹⁸ David Beresford, *Truth is a Strange Fruit*, Auckland Park, Jacana, 2010, pp. 266-7, and Padraig O’Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa*, Viking, New York, 2007, p. 268; for example, senior members of the SACP suspected that Cyril Ramaphosa worked for the CIA, and Maharaj’s wife, Zarina, was suspect because she worked for the British High Commission and the United Nations. Pallo Jordan was a member of the NEC, regarded in the party as an intellectual and a critic of the authoritarianism of Mbokodo. He was detained in 1983. According to Zarina Maharaj, he “was locked up for six weeks in Lusaka in a corrugated iron hut and nearly died of dehydration.” He has refused to discuss his detention and treatment. O’ Malley, *op.cit.*, p. 220, and the Skweyiya Report, p. 18.

case of the June 1988 deaths. At the TRC's Recall Hearing, the ANC specifically denied that he had been tortured or subjected to cruel or degrading treatment.⁹⁹ But on the findings of the Skweyiya Commission, Zulu had gone into Mbokodo as "a large, well-built slightly overweight person, and came out gaunt, frail and almost unrecognisable." He was released on 11 November on orders emanating from the office of ANC president Oliver Tambo, following a medical examination at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH) in Lusaka which showed he was HIV positive. He was taken to stay at the house of a long-time friend, Dr Ralph Mgiijima, head of the ANC Health Department. He died four days later.

When the TRC considered the case they had evidence from Skewiya and other sources to draw on, including evidence from a former Civil Cooperation Bureau intelligence officer that Zulu may have been "killed by MK". They also had a medical report noting that "his death was brought about by poisoning which must have been taken in within a day or at most two days prior to his death." Thabo Mbeki testified at the "recall hearing" in May 1997, that it was accepted that our investigations into the extremely high casualty rates in the MK forces under his command constituted "sufficient grounds for his recall". He declared that: "At no time was he tortured or subjected to any undue pressure."¹⁰⁰ Mbeki accepted that the former commander died of poisoning, but insisted that it was a matter of conjecture as to who administered this poison. Nonetheless he concluded that: "Our own security department has reason to believe that an agent or agents of the regime was responsible." The TRC's findings were equivocal and negative: Despite the fact that no conclusive evidence that Thami Zulu was a South African agent had emerged, the TRC "was unable to make a conclusive finding."¹⁰¹

Trewhela and Beresford suggest that conclusions can in fact be reached about how Zulu was poisoned. Samples of his blood and stomach contents showed traces of diazinon, an organic phosphorous pesticide, and the equivalent of some three pints of beer. Diazinon is pungent, it does not dissolve in water or tea but is soluble in alcohol. A forensic scientist in London, shown these samples, concluded that "three pints of beer taken within a twenty-four hour period and each containing a teaspoon full of diazinon could have been fatal." But it would have had to be taken within the one or two day period as noted. Skweyiya accepted that this was the likely way in which Zulu was killed. For Trewhela, the murderers were thus to be found among those who had access to Zulu between 13 and 15 November. And "if poison was administered in three bottles of beer, those who supplied it were almost certainly members of the ANC and perhaps very senior members." Arguably there would have had to be

⁹⁹ ANC, "Further Submissions and Responses", pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ This claim was also made a year earlier, when the ANC said that Zulu was never imprisoned and spent most of his time in party residences separate from the rest of the community. "Statement", 19 August 1996, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ *Final Report*, vol 2 ch 4, pp. 358-9. Kasrils' conclusion, however, is firm: "I do not believe he was a police agent." *Op.cit.*, p. 261.

understanding and some degree of trust between Zulu and the potential poisoners if the former was voluntarily to drink beer with them over a period.

On the known record, the last days of Zulu proceeded as follows. On Sunday 12 November, Mgjima himself was taken ill and rushed to hospital for emergency operation. On 13 November, he phoned Hani from hospital and asked him to check on Zulu. Hani accompanied by Modise entered Mgjima's house and found Zulu unwell. On evidence provided earlier by Hani to journalists Phillip van Niekerk and Beresford, two MK men known to be loyal to Hani were sent to the house to look after Zulu. The identity of these men has not been revealed. On 14 November Hani returned, and Zulu, on Hani's account, "appeared to be worried that the Security Department [Mbokodo] is going to finish him off" if he fell into their hands. On 15 November Hani called an unnamed doctor to attend to Zulu, and he again left two MK men to keep watch at his bedside, where he suffered attacks of vomiting and diarrhoea. On 16 November Thami Zulu was rushed gasping for breath to UTH, where he died aged 35.¹⁰²

Beresford notes the "missing" 15 years in Jacob Zuma's biography, between 1975 when he left South Africa for training in Russia and 1990 when he was among the first of the notable exiles to return. Zuma's biographer states that there is "very little information" about those crucial years; one of Zuma's main task then was "running Swaziland/Natal operations", and he purposefully "did not want to be known."¹⁰³ Beresford states that these silences "justif[y] an assumption, if not a presumption of guilt." What knowledge did he have about the deaths of Zulu and Cyril Raymond? He was in legal terms "at all material times in a position to know, which in turn attracts an assumption that he did know." Politically, at the top of ANC intelligence, he was in a position to know, and he had direct experience in the area where Zulu had operated.¹⁰⁴ At the very least, why did he not act to secure the release of Zulu from the organization of which he was deputy director?

Thabo Mbeki believed in 1997 that Thami Zulu was a suspected agent of Pretoria, falsely declared that he was neither tortured nor pressured during the 14 months that dramatically altered his health and appearance, and firmly

¹⁰² Hani's biographers' approach to Thami Zulu's death is superficial and unbalanced. They refer to the "writing of disgraced former ANC cadres", without consideration of these writings or the nature and causes of their supposed disgrace. They conclude with reference, again unexamined, to "anti-ANC former cadres [who] have insisted on casting aspersions on Hani." But they agree that it was "Hani, who, together with Joe Modise, saw Zulu in the hours before his death." *Op.cit.*, p. 199.

¹⁰³ Further, "he still will not talk in detail about the operational events of those days." They are "the property" of the ANC, he characteristically proclaims. Gordin, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁴ The current quasi-legal concept of "wilful blindness" perhaps supplements that of the presumption of guilt. First used in the Enron trials in the United States, it accepts that if it can be demonstrated that key information was available, and that it was part of an executive's job to know of such information, then that person did in fact know. The notion is current in the case of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland and their paedophile priests, and appears relevant to the responsibilities of Rupert Murdoch for malpractice on the part of editors and journalists under him in News International, over whom he exercised notoriously high levels of control.

implied that Pretoria's agents poisoned him. For Beresford, however, Thami Zulu "had all the courage of a warrior but lacked the knowledge as to where the enemy lay." Perhaps, more precisely, he was denied knowledge through the lies and prevarication of an Mbeki and Zuma, and the duplicity and ambivalence of Modise and Hani. If the latter's funeral oration at least was true, MK held no real doubts about Zulu's loyalty and competence. He was buried in Swaziland in November 1989, with the mourners limited to family. A statement signed by Modise and Hani, respectively Commander and Chief of Staff of MK, declared: The "Glorious army of our people salute you... we remember your efficiency and competence... we recall with sheer pride and emotion... this giant and gallant fighter."¹⁰⁵ Or the lies were compounded further, as they continued to be over coming years and decades. What is certain is that the missing information concerning Zulu's killing remains in the hands of the ANC. When Skewiya reported to Mandela in 1992 it recommended that "secret ANC internal reports" about his death "should be made public".¹⁰⁶

Operation Vula

This significant politico-military intervention came in the midst of the talks which the imprisoned Nelson Mandela had initiated with Pretoria, after he was moved from Robben Island to more private conditions at Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town in 1985, from where he wrote to Kobie Coetsee, minister of justice, asking for a meeting to discuss talks between the ANC and the government. "It was clear to me", he subsequently wrote, "that a military victory was a distant if not impossible dream. It was time to talk." Between around 1985 and Mandela's release in February 1990 at least 48 meetings between Mandela and government representatives followed. When informal talks were succeeded by formal negotiations, 1990 through 1994, the detailed settlement which was then hammered out, on O'Malley's reasoned judgement, "was within the framework [the informal talks] had established."¹⁰⁷ Over much the same earlier period, Thabo Mbeki had held his own separate and largely secret discussions with official and non-official government representatives in various world capitals.

But as late as August 1989, president Tambo in Lusaka remained unclear about who Mandela was talking to and what he was saying. (319) Even more, other senior ANC figures did not believe that a military victory was either distant or impossible. Vula was a clandestine military-political operation with dual aims, devised and substantially implemented by a very small and highly secretive elite. Vula would locate senior ANC in South Africa, chiefly to "take overall charge of the struggle", and simultaneously, in Maharaj's words, "to move towards a people's war." (251)

¹⁰⁵ Trewhela, *op.cit.*, pp. 103-06 and Beresford, *op.cit.*, 185-87, 266-68, and 295-96.

¹⁰⁶ Cited in Trewhela, *op.cit.* p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, pp. 301-2. Where references in this section are to this book, only page numbers are noted in the text.

This was to be the implementation of Slovo's formulation at Kabwe, which accorded a deeply subordinate, highly abstract and contentious role to the people: those who were simply referred to as "the risen masses" would be turned by unstated means into "organised groups of combatants", while an externally based "core" elite would function as an "officer core"; it would culminate with the "seizure of state power".¹⁰⁸ President Tambo in Lusaka was in overall charge, assisted by Joe Slovo. The latter, Maharaj and Hani agreed fully about the need and feasibility of "people's war." By early 1987, Tambo and Slovo had selected Maharaj to go back into the country and head the operation to establish an infrastructure of sophisticated, autonomous communications "separate from anything else on the ground", and "on-the-spot military recruitment and training and caching of arms." Chris Hani was also selected, along with, on Maharaj's expectations then, Jacob Zuma, as a third NEC (and SACP) member.

The years 1986-88 were spent in preparations. This work "fell almost entirely on [Maharaj's] shoulders." Siphiwe Nyanda, who claimed a strong active-service record, was his deputy, and Vladimir Shubin was brought into the small loop by Tambo and Slovo as "our key link on the Soviet side". Maharaj had lived outside South Africa from 1977-88, and his own military experience was scant; his training had been limited to 1962. He therefore took "a refresher course" in the GDR and Cuba, along with training in Moscow on urban warfare. "Pressure was mounting on the ANC" from inside and outside the country in 1987-88, "and we needed to do everything to hasten the struggle at home". (245-53)

Taking overall charge meant in fact that Vula "infiltrated the MDM" in order to "seduce MDM leaders", to "hijack their revolution-in-the-making", and allow the exiled ANC leaders to return with ease and simply appropriate the organisations of the mass democratic movement. Vula was intentionally "subversive" of domestic democratisation. It wasn't there, in Maharaj's words, to "support the establishment of people's committees", because "repression directed at the masses needed to be countered by MK", and rudimentary organs of people's power also needed to be defended. "Vula's rationale was that authority needed to be asserted", and this could only be done if leaders from the NEC came in and worked with domestic figures at every level. (247-8) What Allan Boesak understood as the militarisation of the UDF was well underway. Vula was a secret arms importer, bringing in and storing across the country, "huge quantities of arms", and simultaneously "a propaganda and crisis management operation in dealings with the MDM."

From around late 1988, Maharaj was in close contact with leaders of the MDM, particularly, he says, with Jay Naidoo, Ramaphosa, Valli Moosa, Frank Chikane, Sydney Mufamadi and Murphy Morobe. These were told not to disclose they were working with him and interacting with the ANC. This "core committee" set

¹⁰⁸ Citations based on conference documentation by Tom Lodge, "The Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action in the Movement Against Apartheid in South Africa, 1983-94", chapter in Roberts and Ash, *op.cit.*, p. 223.

the political agenda, he claims, for both COSATU and the UDF, in consultation with Vula and Maharaj. (262, 265 and 281)¹⁰⁹

The latter states that in late 1988, Vula's "primary mission" was still to build the long term capability of MK to "fight a protracted people's war." He reports that for Slovo, in June 1990, three months after the unbanning of the liberation parties and Mandela's release, "the real thing" was still people's war. Hani was at least as enthusiastic a proponent of the strategy, and the three along with Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, were together on the Politburo of the SACP in 1988-89. Complicating the clandestine activities and relationships further was Operation Bible, whose role supplemented or duplicated Mbokodo's in aiming "to identify apartheid agents within the upper echelons of the movement". Bible reported to Zuma both before and after he became deputy director of Mbokodo—Gordin adds that "it had fallen under Zuma in 1988-89".¹¹⁰ Maharaj says that "a symbiotic relationship evolved between between Vula and Bible." (268, 271 and 318)

Hani's exhortation to violence was expressed directly to ordinary people in highly fanciful and adventurist terms. Existing MK elements in the northern border areas with Zimbabwe and Botswana had difficulty sustaining themselves against strong SADF units. Hani nevertheless called on unarmed, untrained people to organise themselves into small mobile units against the same powerful forces. It was incumbent on all freedom loving South Africans to realise that revolutionary violence was the answer. "We know our people are disadvantaged... But we are saying to our people, use every weapon you can lay your hands on... use everything that is available... to inflict casualties on the enemy." Mobile units should use "sneak and surprise" tactics emanating from within communities, schools, factories and home to "run, hide, trap and strike at the enemy." He proposed creating "grenade squads" and ensured, his biographers claim, that these were armed "as far as was possible". Even after the adoption of the Harare Declaration by the Organisation of African Unity in August 1989, and the decisive movement towards Namibian independence, and then the rapid shift to negotiations, Hani retained his fixation: "Armed struggle is the mobiliser, the inspirer", he insisted.¹¹¹

United Nations resolution 435 on independence in Namibia, necessitated closure of ANC camps in Angola, and implementation of the transition began in

¹⁰⁹ Naidoo offers some corroboration that these were indeed Maharaj's aims and methods. He was invited to a surprise meeting with the Vula leader in Overport, Durban, at some unstated time probably in 1988, to learn that Maharaj was on a secret mission "of consolidating the underground." Naidoo found him "highly secretive and manipulative", and Vula's trademark was "conspiracy and intrigue." Maharaj "truly believed that he was the 'kingmaker'" and "his sense of political self-importance ignored much of the home-grown strategic capability within COSATU." Naidoo stressed, he says, that while he was prepared to work as before with the ANC: "I would never take orders from him or anyone else" outside the [trade union] constituency he represented." Naidoo, *op.cit.*, pp. 151-2.

¹¹⁰ Gordin, *op.cit.* p. 91.

¹¹¹ Smith and Tromp, *op.cit.*, pp. 165-66 and 213.

April 1989. Uganda was the only other country offering MK temporary re-location into what were known to the ANC to be overcrowded holding centres, with little or no pretence of military readiness.¹¹² The known preference of the soldiers was to go to South Africa. Hani was ready nonetheless to persuade them to fall into line with another distant re-location, offering them “lots of Coca-Cola” and false promises about accommodation and food in east Africa. Not until 1992 did the first contingents leave Uganda for South Africa. But his role and influence descended into the populist-revolutionary absurd after his arrival in Johannesburg in April 1990 on temporary indemnity. He quickly formed “a tight partnership” with Madikizela-Mandela. In his biographers’ hyperbole: “their iconic pairing—both wearing MK fatigues and boots... striding side by side in a choreographed suite—aroused the expectant nation’s imagination.” As they themselves allow, “there was indeed a similarity between the characters of [The Lady] and Chris Hani.”¹¹³

People’s war was given its last brief and bloody expression at Bisho in the Ciskei Bantustan on 7 September 1992, under the theory of “rolling mass action” and “the Leipzig option”. The government of Brigadier Oupa Gqozo was deeply unpopular and supposedly ready for toppling; for Kasrils, a leading Vula operative, just a “pint-sized individual with an outsized military hat.” Along with Hani, Steve Tshwete and Ramaphosa, they led around 80,000 unarmed marchers against awaiting Ciskei troops, intending, as Tshwete declared on the spot, to “drive the pig from the barn.” The leaders, with Kasrils and Ramaphosa at their fore, narrowly escaped injury, but 29 other demonstrators were killed and more than 200 injured, some seriously, in sustained gunfire.¹¹⁴

The assault plan had been endorsed without dissent by all 68 NEC members, and in a “collective decision on the ground”, Ramaphosa would try to talk his way past the barricaded soldiers while Kasrils would make a flanking charge”. The latter was initially unapologetic for the deaths and injuries. “One cannot regret what one does in good faith in the best judgement of the collective leadership. Casualties take place all the time... We can’t regret trying to go forward.”¹¹⁵

De Klerk’s inclusion of MK and the SACP among the unbanned organizations in February 1990, and the absence of stiff conditionalities, also “came as a surprise” to Mac Maharaj. Other events, domestic and foreign, brought further problems. Oliver Tambo’s stroke in the previous August, produced “a leadership vacuum in the ANC” just when decisiveness was pre-eminent. The eventual

¹¹² Both moves apparently seen by Maharaj as buttressing the commitment to sustained people’s war in South Africa. O’Malley, *op.cit.*, pp. 314-15.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-05 and 214-15.

¹¹⁴ Butler, *op.cit.*, p. 296.

¹¹⁵ Beresford, *op.cit.*, p. 278 and Kasrils, *op.cit.*, pp. 263-73. Raymond Suttner, another planner and participant, subsequently admitted that “we miscalculated”, and some of our marchers “may have provoked the shooting.” After Bisho, Ramaphosa said, “we felt we did not need to take risks that could lead to the loss of life”. Butler, *op.cit.*, p. 297.

acting appointment of Alfred Nzo as brought no rejuvenation since he lacked Tambo's decisiveness and strategic vision. Maharaj "never met with Nzo regarding Vula", and to the end the NEC remained unaware of the existence of the operation. Over scarcely a year to mid-1990, seismic change proceeded, and "suddenly", in Maharaj's consistently belated perceptions, people's war "seemed like an archaic conception."¹¹⁶

The Demise of the UDF

But the other main aspect of Vula's mission, the appropriation of the democratic movement represented prominently by the UDF, went remorselessly ahead. Attacked by internal critics like Aubrey Mokoena, that the Front was led by "a cabal" of shadowy, largely Indian influences—Madikizela-Mandela maintained this line of attack down until her last appearance in 1997 before the TRC, where she repeatedly referred to Morobe as "Murphy Patel" without admonition from the chair—Mokoena insisted that there were "important differences" between the ANC and UDF, and the latter's very existence "undermined" the party. For Peter Mokaba, another of Madikizela-Mandela's staunch allies, the Front was simply "redundant" in the growing environment of negotiations and incipient transition.¹¹⁷

Options facing the UDF supposedly narrowed to two between the end of 1990 and March 1991. One was to disband entirely as its existence was detracting from the ANC's predominance. The other, says Seekings, was to become a coordinating front for organisations in civil society concerned with development. Such groups were at their height in the early 1990s. "Molefe and other national leaders", he adds, "clearly favoured the second option." But many other figures were being pulled into top positions in the ANC; among them then, Lekota, Archie Gumede, Trevor Manuel and Cheryl Carolus. When Molefe addressed the Front's National General Council in March 1991, he acknowledged that its leaders no longer operated on the basis of sufficient mandates, and accountability was low because of the irregularity of meetings. But the probably biggest causal factor is only referred to obliquely by Seekings. The remnants of the UDF's leadership faced a "burden of resentment and hostility", and the advocates of the transformation option floundered.¹¹⁸

Later in 1996, well after the event of the enforced dissolution, the ANC made a belated, realistic and positive assessment of the UDF's origins and role. It was then acknowledged to be "essentially separate" from the ANC, and its formation in the early 1980s had indeed "transformed the political landscape." It represented a "maturing of ideological orientation" in the country, "based on

¹¹⁶ O'Malley, *op.cit.*, pp. 323-25 and 333.

¹¹⁷ Seekings himself says that the "prominence" of certain Coloured and Indian activists in the Front "easily fuelled racist allegations about cabals." *Op.cit.*, pp. 218-20, 227 and 312.

¹¹⁸ He stresses in fact "widespread hostility", but nowhere explains the actual cause and content of the ANC's hostility. *Ibid.*, pp. 276-83 and 284.

local initiatives and conditions." The success of the Front was based on its ability in linking together diverse social and community organisations.¹¹⁹ This statement appears to have had no effect on Mandela's thinking at Mafikeng in December 1997, below.

Maharaj was a featured speaker at the disbandment of the Front in March 1991. He seemed to make it clear that this was in fact more than an appropriation of the leadership and structures of the UDF, and that an erasure of its values and achievements, especially in democratisation and non-violence, was intended. He began with the words, "I am a soldier", and extolled the ideas of the armed struggle directed from outside throughout his speech. The "deliberate fashioning of a revolutionary dream of violence", as Boesak understood things.¹²⁰ Nothing that had been happening under the UDF "had given the ANC pause," nor had the prospect of a negotiated settlement, promoted by Mandela since the mid-1980s, deterred them from pursuit of people's war.¹²¹

At the core of armed struggle was of course MK, directed against a powerful and unscrupulous enemy. The Soviet military high command certainly did not underestimate the enemy: the ANC faced "a huge well-adjusted [war] machine, able through its strategy, tactics and technical capacities to counter practically the whole African continent."¹²² The ANC, by contrast, was consistently inclined to underestimate its enemy, and MK's performance was in consequence unimpressive. Between 1976 and 1982, its attacks numbered less than 200. Command structures were external, and there were never more than 500 MK soldiers deployed inside the country. For Lodge, this was essentially symbolic warfare (though simultaneously hard reality for the foot soldiers in the camps) designed to promote the ANC's popular status. Through the 1980s, South African police "continued to anticipate with precision" the arrival of guerrillas from across the border, especially from Swaziland; the average survival time of a soldier in the bush was six months.¹²³ MK operations were concentrated in the Witwatersrand and Durban, the closest to external supply lines, while the Eastern Cape remained "by far the best organised UDF region."¹²⁴

Barrell provides an assessment for the period until the eve of Vula. Some 4,000 youths had gone into exile within 18 months of June 1976, and "most" had

¹¹⁹ "Statement". 19 August 1996, pp. 10 and 84.

¹²⁰ Popo Molefe also believed that the revolutionary takeover of the state was an implausible plan. Lodge, "The Interplay", p. 222.

¹²¹ He actually called it a "desperate measure", neglecting the care and planning which Vula had invested into the appropriation of the UDF. Boesak, *op.cit.*, pp. 184-86.

¹²² Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*, London and Scottsville, Pluto and the University of KwaZulu Natal Press, 2008, p. 248. He was quoting the redoubtable "Comrade Ivan".

¹²³ Hani testified to Skweyiya that "we had sent people into the country and 60 per cent were either arrested or killed." Paranoia and hysteria was generated in MK and "people like Thami Zulu were victims of that situation." Report, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Lodge, "The Interplay of Violent and Non-Violent Action", *op. cit.*, pp. 215, 224 and 229.

joined MK.¹²⁵ By the end of 1987, MK had trained more than 12,000 soldiers, some 6,000 of whom had supposedly been deployed internally. Police figures claimed 694 of these were captured or killed. But in late 1987, there was no evidence to suggest that 5,000 or more MK cadres were *active* inside the country: "perhaps as many as 30 per cent had, in effect, abandoned their missions", some, for instance, joining the private criminality of Madikizela-Mandela. The weaknesses he notes were derivative of "a lack of strategic agreement and clarity within the ANC."¹²⁶ This was evident at the outset in the Wankie campaign but it became crucial in the mid-1980s when strategy oscillated between secret elitist talks with Pretoria and an accelerating pursuit of people's war, as Mbokodo's tactics and command failings further undermined MK's capacities, and the global and regional environments rapidly changed. The Soviet Union and its East European allies had been the ANC's most reliable backers since the early 1960s, financially, and in military equipment, training and logistics,¹²⁷ but the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 represented the final end of all that.¹²⁸ President F.W. De Klerk correctly saw it as terminating the ANC's armed struggle, and moved towards negotiations in less than three months.¹²⁹ Slovo, Maharaj and Hani took much longer to react.¹³⁰

Marais noted widespread disgruntlement at rank-and-file level at the Front's demise in March 1991,¹³¹ but Seekings claims that it bequeathed to the ANC a robust culture of debate and self-criticism. Few assertions could be further from the truth as regards the political culture of the ANC. Stern non-accountability

¹²⁵ Gordin, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

¹²⁶ Barrell, *op.cit.*, p. 64. His emphasis on active.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65. Shubin offers a partial audit of the training and equipment provided to the ANC, 1963-90, in *The Hot "Cold War"*, p. 249.

¹²⁸ The collapse of the GDR (aka Stasiland) was not a sudden event. The fall of the wall was preceded by a march of some 70,000 people around the Leipzig Ring on 9 October, and that was the third major demonstration since 25 September. These large protests in key public places in the cities showed the people that the repressive regime "possessed neither efficacy nor legitimacy." Charles S. Maier, "Civil Resistance and Civil Society: Lessons From the Collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989", chapter in Roberts and Ash, *op.cit.*, pp. 261 and 274. The Stasi, which elements in Mbokodo admired, represented probably the most developed surveillance state of all time. At its height it had 97,000 employees and 173,000 informers among a population of 17 million people; when part-time informers are included there was one informer for every 6.5 citizens. (In Hitler's Reich there was one Gestapo agent for 2,000 people, and under Stalin one KGB agent for 5,830 people.) The Stasi's operating principle, not unlike Mbokobo's, was "dictator-logic": "once an investigation was started into someone that meant there was suspicion of enemy activity": as their operatives said: "We investigate you, therefore you are an enemy." Anna Funder, *Stasiland*, London, Granta Books, 2004, pp. 57 and 199.

¹²⁹ Lodge, "The Interplay". p. 230.

¹³⁰ There were many antecedents to change in the communist world, in the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 within the Soviet hierarchy, his commitment soon after to non-intervention in central European states, and the withdrawal of all Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989.

¹³¹ Marais, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

prevailed as noted throughout MK in the 1980s and beyond. For Jacob Zuma, rising rapidly in December 1996, nothing in the country, including specifically the constitution, was "more important" than the ANC and its leadership; "once you begin to feel that you are above the ANC you are in trouble." And the ANC had always maintained, he added, that certain big issues could only be resolved in talks involving national leaders.¹³² Closure, non-accountability, predominance and elitism were the values actually upheld by the party.

Most of those norms were uppermost in the transfer of power in 1994. From the beginning of formal negotiations, says Waldmeir, the ANC and the National Party (NP) ensured that 'the cards were stacked against' the smaller parties and groups. Under the working device of "sufficient consensus", the two largest parties had agreed, in Ramaphosa's terms, "if we and the [NP] agree, everyone else can get stuffed."¹³³ The preceding talks process had tended to confer recognition on the ANC elite in prison and exile, and to deny it in consequence to the popular internal forces represented by the UDF and COSATU. According to Naidoo, there was "anxiety" in the latter that the ANC "would move quickly to sideline the internal movement", and their Central Executive Committee had discussed the possibility of being represented independently in settlement negotiations. Two seats at CODESA were supposedly offered to them by the ANC, but he and others in the Federation felt this was insufficient; this "was a mistake", he says, which reduced COSATU to "being a bystander in the negotiations."¹³⁴

Although the Founding Elections saw a turnout of about 85 per cent of eligible voters, the outcome was highly elitist. Around 3-5 May 1994, as the counting process faced collapse, the leaders of the ANC, NP and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) intervened to produce results acceptable to themselves; With the assistance of auditors and accountants, votes were "awarded"—the word used by Judge Johann Kriegler, chair of the Independent Electoral Commission—among the three party chiefs. The results were mathematically perfect, and a Government of National Unity within an orthodox liberal electoral system, was realised, and a miraculous Great Man theory of political change was firmly installed.¹³⁵

Tolerance for corruption within its own ranks was another of the values actually upheld by the ANC, and few were more prominent here than Joe Modise. He was rewarded for his failures in MK by President Mandela, who gave him the

¹³² Cited in Good, "Accountable to Themselves: Predominance in Southern Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35,4, 1997, pp. 563 and 569.

¹³³ Patti Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa*, Harmondsworth, Viking, 1997, p. 241, and Good, *The Liberal Model*, pp. 102-03.

¹³⁴ Naidoo, *op.cit.*, pp. 214-15.

¹³⁵ The ANC got 62.7 per cent of the votes; the NP 20.4 per cent and thus six seats in cabinet and a deputy presidency; and the IFP 10.5 per cent and three cabinet seats. The Democratic Party, excluded from the award process, contended that some 1.46 million votes were fraudulent.

defence ministry with Kasrils as his deputy.¹³⁶ He spearheaded the start-up of the largest arms procurement programme in the country's history, possibly worth in total between R45 and R100 billion, thinks Feinstein, and in mid-1999 he moved smoothly—within three months—from the cabinet to the board room, taking the chair of two arms companies, Conlog and Labat Africa. This had not happened over night; Modise had long seen the defence portfolio in the first ANC government as a passport to great wealth.¹³⁷ From the beginnings of the transition he had quickly developed, notes Ensor, “a rapprochement with the apartheid military establishment”, and his “vision” of South Africa’s military capability offered the generals the modern equipment they desired in a policy that inter-linked foreign investment with economic development.

As early as 1996 he claimed that without a strong defence force, “no right thinking person would invest in South Africa.” Job creation through investment would come to naught without a strong military arsenal.¹³⁸ His plans for what became the big procurement package, he publicly explained, were built on both his old MK role and his new defence portfolio. Over three decades in exile he had made contact, he explained, with influential people around the world: “Add to that my experience as minister of defence, when I travelled... marketing Armscor products, and you will agree that I have built enormous contacts.”

Such ramifying contacts certainly represented sizable benefits to Modise. During 1998, one of the arms bidders, British Aerospace, donated R5 million to the MK Veterans Association, whose Life President was Modise, another allegedly bought him millions of shares in Conlog, and he reportedly also received “between R10 million and R35 million in cash from a variety of bidders.” This is almost certainly only a small part of the web of corruption surrounding Modise. Judgements on Modise’s now known record are scathing. In Feinstein’s view he was “almost universally perceived as incompetent and enveloped in allegations of corruption”, while for Bernstein he was “one of the most corrupt men” to have ever held high office in South Africa.¹³⁹ But not within the ANC government. At his death in late 2001, Joe Modise received the Order of the Star of South Africa—the highest civilian award—and he was extolled by President Mbeki: “A mighty tree has fallen”, he declared.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Possibly after Mandela’s first choice for defence, his old interlocutor Kobie Coetsee, faced “MK objections”. Drew Forrest, *op.cit.*

¹³⁷ Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

¹³⁸ Ensor, *op.cit.*; Forrest, *op.cit.*; and Norman Chandler, “Defence Revamp ‘to Protect Foreign Investment’”, *The Star*, 16 August 1996.

¹³⁹ Good, *The Liberal Model*, p. 143; Andrew Feinstein, *After the Party: A Personal and Political Journey Inside the ANC*, Johannesburg and Cape Town, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2007, pp. 78, 155 and 208; and Beresford, *op.cit.*, p. 266. See also Ferial Haffajee, “Cadres Cash In: “MK Inc” Companies Secure R4 bn in Arms Subcontracts Alone”, *Financial Mail*, 4 May 2001.

¹⁴⁰ Cited in Feinstein, *op.cit.*, p. 236. Not surprisingly, given his career—as among other things, car thief, bank robber, drug dealer, and diversified arms trader—and the principle of universal distrust that he helped to instill in the ANC, Modise is accused today of being a double agent of Pretoria; on “overwhelming” evidence, Johnson states. *Op.cit.*, pp. 30-31 and 50.

A predominant, militarist, ethno-nationalist party

The unacceptability of all criticism was comprehensively and vehemently expressed by party president Mandela in his report to the ANC's 50th national conference in Mafikeng in December 1997. To highlight only relevant aspects of his five-hour long address: he referred to sections of the non-governmental (NGO) sector which claimed that their distinguishing feature was to be "a critical 'watchdog' over our movement, both inside and outside of government." While pretending to represent an independent and popular view, these NGOs actually worked to "corrode the influence of the [ANC-led] movement." Some of the argument for this "watchdog" role, he said, "was advanced within the ranks of the broad democratic movement at the time when we all arrived at the decision... that it was necessary to close down the UDF." The situation then was that certain elements which were assumed to be part of our movement, had "set themselves up as critics of the same movement, precisely at the moment when we would have to confront the challenge of the fundamental transformation of our country... and the determined opposition of the forces of reaction."

The dissolution of the UDF also came about because of efforts at the time to "set up an NGO movement separate from and critical of the ANC." But the past three years in government have taught us the lesson that "there are NGOs and NGOs. As a movement, we have to learn to make this distinction." Similarly, "it has become perfectly clear that the bulk of the mass media in our country has set itself up as a force opposed to the ANC... to campaign against both real change and the real agents of change, as represented by our movement, led by the ANC."

The "role of the opposition parties" was entirely negative and reactionary, "in their effort[s] to challenge and undermine our role as the political force chosen by the people to lead our country". Experience confirmed that the National Party "has not abandoned its strategic objective of the total destruction of our organisation and movement." The then Democratic Party (DP) had tried to present itself as "the most effective parliamentary opposition", but it remained an "implacable enemy" of the ANC, capable only of "vilification of the ANC." The most recent grouping to join "the miserable platoon of [our] opponents", the United Democratic Movement led by Bantu Holomisa, had the same objective of the NP—the "destruction of the ANC".

Opposition to the ANC was thus weak and pitiful, and simultaneously implacably destructive. Those whom the ANC could not co-opt would be forced into silence. Almost any political party, civic group or institution which opposed or acted independently of the ANC was, by that fact alone, racist, committed to preserving the legacies of apartheid and against social transformation. The leadership gathered at Mafikeng, he said, in whose hands "rests much of the future of our country for many years", must understand that the country remains essentially structured in opposition to transformation.

Accomplishment of our task "requires that we should all be made in the metal of

revolutionaries." Experience also showed that transformation demands "the better deployment of especially our most experienced cadres" [sic].¹⁴¹

"Cadre deployment" was the method adopted at Mafikeng to deepen and extend the ANC's predominance. Every member of the ruling party was committed to defending and implementing the will of the party leadership, wherever he or she was deployed, even if it meant, as Zuma noted, acting outside the constitution and the law. Transformation necessarily involved extending the power of the national liberation movement over all levers of power: the military, police, bureaucracy, intelligence services, judiciary, parastatals, the media, and agencies like the public broadcaster and the central bank. As Zuma also indicated, the individual party member's thoughts and opinions were irrelevant; they are simply loyal cadres. Within a year of Mafikeng, the ANC adopted a "cadre policy and deployment strategy", and established national, provincial and local deployment committees to ensure that all cadres remained "informed by and accountable to" the party leadership.¹⁴² The idea of a free thinking critical cadre under these circumstances is as likely as it was for the cadres of the MK through the 1980s.

COSATU survived the ANC's appropriation of the democratic movement, densely embedded in the capitalist economy and possessed of strong and tested organisation. After 1990, trade unions, according to Lodge, "played a very important role in rebuilding the ANC's branch level organisation, and in demonstrating disciplined popular support for the positions ANC negotiators adopted" in negotiations with the De Klerk government. They emerged around the mid-1990s as "formidably strong organisations", having "imprint[ed] their own programmatic concerns on the political settlement, strengthening its democratic content."¹⁴³

Such upbeat assessments may be at least partly true, but they remain only part of the relevant equation. COSATU and the unions had placed trust in the capacities of the people in their work-places and communities, and they had implanted the principles of accountability and mandates and recognised the reliance of their own leadership on periodic re-election by the rank and file. But, despite their organisational and democratic strengths, they had been no more successful than the UDF in criticising the increasingly predominant ANC elite. The historic record shows that the necessary accompaniment to trust in the capacities of the people is a sharp and constant distrust in political elites. Opportunities had existed in the months preceding Mandela's release and the trade unions, which might have moderated such anti-democratic and a-historical perspectives from a position of strength, failed to do so. The UDF-MDM strongly criticised elitism and the established ANC belief that length of

¹⁴¹ Extracts from "50th National Conference: Report by the President of the ANC, Nelson Mandela", pp. 17-35, 51 and 73, and Good, *The Liberal Model*, pp. 114-15.

¹⁴² Gavin Davis, "Cadre Deployment is Never Okay", *Politicsweb.co.za*, 24 November 2010.

¹⁴³ Lodge, "The Interplay", pp. 227 and 229.

service was the principle qualification for office.¹⁴⁴ But by 1994, with the Great Man principle firmly emplaced, people overly venerated the returned leaders, as Bantu Holomisa observed, and the unions which might have moderated such false perspectives from a position of strength failed to do so.

Their moderation won the unions scant support from the ANC. Mandela's attitude at Mafikeng seemed burdened with resentment and hostility reminiscent of what was directed against the UDF. In various ways over the past three years, COSATU had been "doing more than represent the mere trade union interests of its members." Some among their leadership had asserted a role "separate and apart from and in some instances, in contradiction with the... leadership of our broad democratic movement." Analyses showed, he said, that union leaders had sought "sometimes strident conflict and contest" between themselves and "the leadership of the democratic movement." Mandela's thinking was rooted in two significant presumptions: the trade unions "are in a relatively privileged position" as the employed and organised workers in our country, while the preponderant ANC, he claimed, "represents [both] the people as a whole, and the African working masses in particular."¹⁴⁵

Towards the end of the 1990s, the myth of the armed struggle had been successfully inter-linked with the ANC's pre-eminence, and the idea was authoritatively asserted that rule by the heroes of the struggle was itself essentially democratic. This presumption was not challenged then, but as new social formations arose through the late 1990s, it has begun to receive serious examination around two important realisations: that "the ANC has created an anti-politics machine in which black people... feature as nothing more than objects of state policies or, worse, passive recipients of state-led service delivery."¹⁴⁶ Another rejoinder asserted directly that "the ANC did not set me free", and it began to review the actual domestic events of the 1980s: "While the ANC was detaining the likes of Jordan or torturing young women in its camps, it was people like my young friends and relatives under the banner of the [MDM]", who were "rendering the apartheid state unworkable... It was Trevor Manuel and Popo Molefe and others in the UDF, and Jay Naidoo at COSATU, who led our mothers on marches and stayaways. Meanwhile, the ANC was detaining and then poisoning the young leader Thami Zulu."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ According to Meredith, it was recognised then that Mandela "possessed a strong authoritarian streak and a preference for taking action on his own responsibility, for dealing directly with other leaders". Martin Meredith, *Nelson Mandela: A Biography*, London, Penguin Books, 1997, pp. 413 and 446.

He had of course amply demonstrated these tendencies throughout the talks process c. 1985-90.

¹⁴⁵ "50th National Conference", pp. 77-78.

¹⁴⁶ Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, Auckland Park, Jacana Media, 2009, p. 20.

¹⁴⁷ Justice Malala, "The ANC Did Not Set us Free", Timeslive, 3 October 2010. He was immediately attacked by Pallo Jordan, and the ANC officially labelled Malala a disgrace to journalism.

The significance of the South African process

Democratisation in South Africa in the 1980s was significant because it arose as a structured, class-based element within an advancing capitalist economy. The students, skilled and semi-skilled workers acquired a capacity for autonomous organizational development that helped make the UDF and COSATU the largest popular movements ever seen in the country, and in the case of the latter, distinctive among trade unions world-wide. Large numbers of dedicated community workers were quickly attracted behind the banner of the Front as they tried to make democratisation a reality in townships and villages. Over some three to five years, both formations developed principles for promoting the accountability of their leaders to the rank-and-file and for upholding mandates given to them by the membership, while stressing at the same time that no leaders were irreplaceable, and all should be subject to criticism. The UDF's Principles of our Organizational Democracy was perhaps the most sophisticated expression of this democratic thinking, and a potential negation to the purportedly universalistic Iron Law of Oligarchy.

Since January 2011 a great wave of protest and incipient democratisation has swept North Africa and elsewhere, and despots, once feared and loathed in almost equal measure, have been ousted. Huge demonstrations regularly occurred in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and sustained civil war, with crucial NATO backing, brought an end to the brutal regime of Colonel Gaddafi. But in late October, as Tunisians went to the polls to elect a constituent assembly, no coherent indications of long-term democratisation had yet appeared in North Africa to supplement and extend the brave action of individual protesters. The existing indications suggested an on-going tussle between Islamists and secular modernists, while still powerful military establishments waited on the sidelines. Perhaps only in Chile was sustained protest being registered for issues other than regime change. In actions unseen since the end of the Pinochet dictatorship a generation earlier, many thousands of students were braving water cannons and tear-gas and demanding educational reforms--specifically the introduction of free university education for all--and occupying their schools and colleges across the country in this popular and potentially potent cause.

After teenage girls began the occupation of Santiago's prestigious Carmela Carvajal primary and secondary school in May, their first move was to hold a vote. About half of the enrolment of 1,800 students participated, and the yays outnumbered the nays 10 to one. Ten times the police have seized the school since then, and each time the students have taken it back again. In October around 200 state elementary and high schools as well as a dozen universities were occupied, and weekly protest marches attracted between 50,000 and 100,000 students across the nation. Counts of support for the students were an estimated 6 out of 10 Chilean adults, while the approval ratings of the government of President Sebastian Pinera (himself a billionaire) ranged from 22% to 30%. The correspondent of the London *Guardian* said that the students had "transformed the nation's political agenda", and centre stage in this process was 23-year old Camila Vallejo, president of Chile's leading student body (or

"Fech") and a member of the youth arm of the Communist party (the JJCC). October polls recorded 70% of Chileans backing the students' demands.¹⁴⁸ The students' action appeared to have dynamism and strong socio-political potentiality.

This paper has shown how the ANC asserted its political and economic domination over the UDF in the early 1990s, and it has endeavoured to restrict the political influence of COSATU since. But the class forces which underlay both formations remain, as positive forces for progress in the future. The country's distinctiveness in democratisation similarly remains. In Tunisia and Egypt the world has seen the bravery of individual protesters, but in South Africa it was largely organised working classes which strove for the furthest extension of democratic rights, beyond merely choosing among competing elites at regular elections, into the empowerment of people in their daily lives in work-places, schools, and communities. The social forces which produced these aspirations remain latent still.

About the author

Kenneth Good has taught and carried out research in Papua New Guinea and at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, as well as in Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa. He was Professor of Political Studies at the University of Botswana in Gaborone for 15 years, until 2005, when he was declared a Prohibited Immigrant and summarily expelled from the country. In May 2010, the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Gambia found comprehensively in his favour. Although legally bound by this decision, the Botswana government is yet to meet its obligations.

Good has published widely, including *The Liberal Model and Africa: Elites Against Democracy* (Palgrave 2002), and *Diamonds, Dispossession and Democracy in Botswana* (James Currey and Jacana Media 2008). His interests are broad, focussed upon democratisation and development; poverty and inequalities; corruption and non-accountability; the rights of indigenous peoples (esp the San/Bushmen); and southern African politics and development. Most recently, his research, writing and teaching has concentrated on the comparative and historical analysis of democratisation. At present he is adjunct professor in Global Studies at RMIT in Melbourne, visiting professor in Political and International Studies at Rhodes University, and an honorary fellow at Melbourne University. He can be contacted at kenneth.good AT rmit.edu.au

¹⁴⁸ Jonathan Franklin in Santiago, *The Guardian*, 7 and 8 October 2011.

Transition, human rights and violence: rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony

Michael Neocosmos¹

As we don't know the difference between a mosque and a university, because both are from the same root in Arabic, why do we need the state, since states pass just as surely as time? (Mahmoud Darwish)

Abstract

Rather than seeing the prevalence of systemic political violence in Africa as resulting from a purportedly difficult "transition to democracy", this article insists that accounts of such violence must be sought within the modes of rule of the democratic state itself. In particular, the manifestation of a contradiction between democracy and nationalism in a neo-colonial context, takes many different forms which cannot be resolved consensually given existing modes of rule and the enrichment of the oligarchy at the expense of the nation. Xenophobic violence in South Africa is used to illustrate the argument. It is shown that a distinction between domains of politics (including modes of rule) must be drawn. In particular, this means distinguishing between a domain of "civil society" and one of "uncivil society". It is within the latter that most people relate and respond to state power. Within that domain, the state does not rule people as citizens with legally enforceable rights, but simply as a population with various entitlements. In this domain, violent political practices by the state tend to be the norm rather than the exception, so that violence acquires a certain amount of legitimacy for resolving contradictions among people. The overcoming of systemic violence (itself a political choice) can only begin to be conceived via a different thought of politics as subjective practice.

Introduction

The courage, inventiveness and organisation of the people of North Africa in Tunisia and Egypt, as the new year of 2011 was turning, have evidently disproved (if refutation were needed) the thesis of "the end of history". In doing so they have provided renewed enthusiasm for "people power" and a popularly

¹ I am very grateful to Tshupo Madlingozi and Richard Pithouse for helpful comments and suggestions, as well as for pointing me towards some important literature. All errors and omissions are mine. Earlier shorter versions of this paper were presented at the Rhodes University Sociology and Politics Seminar and at the CODESRIA General Assembly in Rabat, Morocco in 2011. I am grateful to those organisations for funding my attendance and to the participants at both events for useful comments. The introduction was originally published in *Pambazuka News* 523 31/03/2011. <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/72163>

driven process of mass mobilisation in which people can not only force the resignation of dictators and seemingly the (partial or full) collapse of authoritarian states, but crucially also demand a greater say in the running of their own lives. In standing up against oppression in this manner, people have asserted that they are no longer victims but full blown political subjects². Yet the appearance of the masses on such a broad scale on the political scene for the first time since independence cannot be assumed to mean that they will remain there, and not only because coercive military power has yet to be transformed. Given the fact that this process is generally understood as one of "democratisation", it becomes sooner or later systematically accompanied by an invasion of experts on "good governance", "democracy", "empowerment", "civil society" and "transitional justice" *inter alia*. All these experts purport to provide advice to the struggling people on how to come to terms with past atrocities, in order to consolidate their hard won gains, via a transitional judicial process of reconciliation between erstwhile enemies in order to produce a functioning democracy³. As Rosemary Nagy puts it:

The question today is not *whether* something should be done after atrocity but *how* it should be done. And a professional body of international donors, practitioners and researchers assists or directs in figuring this out and implementing it (Nagy, 2008: 275).

In fact in an interview in early April 2011, one such practitioner, the president of the *International Center for Transitional Justice* (ICTJ), David Tolbert noted:

Obviously we're living through a truly extraordinary moment in the Middle East. It's not something most experts would have predicted two or three months ago, and it opens enormous opportunities in terms of transitions. That's true in Tunisia and Egypt, and hopefully across the Middle East and North Africa more generally. We've sent missions to Tunisia and to Egypt, and we're gearing up to work in both of those countries⁴.

In particular, these experts intend to pursue such "opportunities" because they and their funders are ostensibly concerned with the plight of victims of violence⁵. But they rarely conceive people from the Global South as knowledgeable rational subjects of their own history, but as sad pathetic victims in need of "empowerment" who thus require the benevolent support of the West

² During the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo in February 2011, the TV channel Al Jazeera referred to the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt as "people power" on numerous occasions.

³ See for example Larbi Sadiki, 2011.

⁴ See <http://ictj.org/en/news/features/4540.html>. The *International Centre for Transitional Justice* (ICTJ) is an international NGO based in New York City founded by the South African liberal TRC vice chair Alex Boraine. It was reported in April 2011 that President (then in waiting) Ouattara of Côte D'Ivoire had pledged to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission presumably as soon as he consolidated his power by force of arms; see <http://af.reuters.com/article/ivoryCoastNews/idAFLDE7371YH20110408> accessed 13/04/2011.

⁵ Opportunity to spread the gospel of transitional justice? For pursuing careers or to spread the faith? Does the business language constitute a Freudian slip? See Tshepo Madlingozi, 2010.

upheld since the eighteenth century by an ideology of "trusteeship"⁶. As experts from Western governments, multinational agencies and international NGOs (the so-called "international community") descend from on high like clouds of locusts, voraciously eating up the new shoots of "people power", it may be important to rethink some of the assumptions upon which such theories of transition – perhaps most explicitly outlined in the notion of "transitional justice" – are founded⁷. These are so common and so pervasive in their apparent ethical "goodness" that they rarely elicit criticism.

Fundamental to this thinking is the assumption that democracy – understood as a form of state of course, not as a popular practice – must be accompanied by a "culture of rights" which itself is seen as inimical to the deployment of violence and enabling of (multicultural) tolerance. The reason being the belief that democracy implies an acceptance by all contenders for power of "the rules of the game", that a consensual value system based on the mutual respect for each other's rights (and identities) and the rule of law, excludes violence as a way of resolving differences. The reason is also that the commitment to such a consensus, built during a period of transition through the judging of past abuses (gross violations) of human rights through legitimate legal procedures, can lead to (elite) political reconciliation and consequently to (popular) social peace. The core assumption therefore is that "transition" is to be understood as a process of change from a state of authoritarianism and violence to a state of democracy and peace, the idea being that violence should decline as a "transition to democracy" and a "culture of rights" are gradually realised.

A number of characteristics of this form of reasoning are evident even at this stage of the argument. It is manifestly a variant of the old historicist notion of change from the "traditional" to the "modern" made (in)famous by the hegemony of modernization theory in the immediate postcolonial period in Africa in particular. What appears to be "the past", seen as an undifferentiated whole, is simply defined negatively in relation to an idealised (future) state of affairs. Much as the term "traditional", the predicate "authoritarian" refers here to any form of state - irrespective of its historical location - which deviates from the Western liberal-democratic model, now global in its scope. It includes most obviously the past "communist" states in Eastern Europe, the old militaristic states in Latin America as well as African post-colonial states whose secular nationalism diverged from the neo-liberal ideal until around the late 1980s when formal universal suffrage was adopted by elites worried at the prospect of losing their power under democratising pressures from "above" (by the "Washington Consensus") and from "below" (by the popular masses). African states in particular were seen as having embarked at the time on a "transitional" process of "democratisation" as "multi-party elections", "good governance", "civil societies" and "human rights" were promoted *inter alia* through the use of

⁶ See Michael Cowen and Bob Shenton, 1996.

⁷ The seminal text here is Ruti Teitel, 2000; but see also Richard Wilson, 2001, and more recently Audrey Chapman and Hugo Van der Merwe, 2008. There is an extensive bibliography on this topic.

“political conditionalities” by the “Washington Consensus” as part of a process of incorporation into the globalised “New World Order” of neo-liberal capitalism and democracy⁸.

When “political conditionalities” proved insufficient, it was (and still is) always possible to (threaten to) enforce such democracy, human rights and incorporation into the global order through the deployment of military might, more or less justified by notions of “humanitarian” intervention. This may simply have lengthened the process of “transition” but was never meant to alter its final outcome. In fact the “transition” is apparently a never ending one as the ideal of the West is rarely attained. The present then is turned into an ongoing “transition” to an always receding future, all along guaranteeing careers in the business of “good governance”. Moreover, the theoretical foundation of human rights discourse (HRD), on which this whole reasoning was constructed, is that people are seen only as victims, in particular as victims of oppressive regimes, and not as collective subjects of their own liberation. As such the law, along with its trustees (governments, transnational and national NGOs, multinational agencies), is understood to be their saviour⁹. The neo-colonial relationship here should be apparent, not because HRD is in itself inherently colonial, but because it is a form of state politics which is applied to neo-colonial conditions with all the zeal of a “democratizing mission” (Wamba-dia-Wamba, 2007). It is these conditions which require elucidation and analysis.

The construction of indices as measures of democracy and the training by Western NGOs of experts from Africa in the use of these, much in the same way as indices had been constructed in the past in order to measure development, evidently shows how politics has been reduced to a technical process, for only a technique can be quantitatively measured¹⁰. Democratisation which ultimately has its roots in the struggles of people from all walks of life for greater control over their daily lives – hence in the self-constitution of a *demos* - is now transformed into a technical process removed from popular control and placed into the hands of experts such as “human rights lawyers”, “social entrepreneurs”, “governance professionals” and “gender mainstreamers” who together staff an industry whose tentacles hold up the liberal global hydra of the new imperial “democratising mission” on the continent. Rather than a transition from authoritarianism to democracy, what occurred on the African continent during the 1990s can be more profitably understood as a process of systematic de-politicisation, a process of political exclusion.

If we agree with the philosopher Jacques Rancière (2003: 202) that “politics begins exactly when those who ‘cannot’ do something show that in fact they can”, when those who have hitherto been excluded affirm their inclusion, then it

⁸ This process was referred to as the “second liberation” of Africa. See Michael Neocosmos, 2010b.

⁹ See M. Wa Mutua, 2001, 2002, Chatterjee, 2002 and Neocosmos, 2006.

¹⁰ See Neocosmos, 2010b. The German NGO *Inwent* for example has specialised in constructing and training in the use of such indices.

is not too difficult to visualise “de-politicisation” as a reversal of this process. More specifically this reversal consists of a political process whereby those same people are to be convinced – through the deployment of national legal strategies - that they really are clearly victims of violence, that they therefore could not have undertaken anything significant, new or different after all, despite what they may or may not have thought, as it would have all happened anyway and that in any case their suffering is now (largely) over¹¹. Everyone should return to their allotted place in the social structure and vacate the field of politics, leaving it to those who know how to follow unquestioningly the rules of the game (of the state): the trustees of the excluded. In fact if historicist categories are preferred, this process could be described as a never ending “transition” from the inventive politics of popular agency to the oppressive technicism of state and imperial power.

A core feature of this process in South Africa in particular has been the emphatic and open construction of people as victims rather than (and after many had been) political subjects, through an emphasis on legal procedures which apparently only recognise juridical agency but not political agency (Neocosmos, 2006a). Being a victim, one can then lay claim to state largesse. At the root of what may be called this “politics of de-politicisation” is a technical understanding of transition inspired by a legal notion of change from in-justice to justice founded on a liberal notion of development from the in-human to the human as reflected in legal rights. Together the technicism of state politics and the idea that the law is in a position to change society for the common good, set out the parameters of a transition to renewed political exclusion – a return to socially allocated places and identities within the hierarchy of power.

The relative success of this process has in the past relied *inter alia* on people’s lassitude with violence and demands for justice which they have so long been denied, on the physical and emotional exhaustion of daily militancy, and on the fetishism of power. The latter promises a world in which the difficult questions and problems of “decision-making” can and should now be left to professionals eminently qualified, and hence paid, to do so. Yet it is apparent that this largely technical process gives rise to political exclusion which is not overcome by the creation of a “vibrant” civil society of “stakeholders”, for the latter’s politics are in harmony with those of the state given that such politics are founded on place, interest and identity (Neocosmos, 2010, Chatterjee, 2002). The result is that violence does not necessarily disappear along with the construction of a democratic state. A new oligarchy is formed (or the old one is reconstituted) precisely as a result of the de-politicisation of the masses and their political exclusion, so that the authoritarianism against which people had rebelled in the first place is likely re-created, although now within the context of a somewhat different mode of rule and different forms of political exclusion.

¹¹ This political subjectivity is an example of what Alain Badiou (2009:108) refers to as a “reactive” subjectivity, e.g. “the reactive subject is all which orients the conservation of previous economic and political forms... in the conditions of existence of the new body”.

Of course such de-politicisation in practice is simply replicated within, as well as enabled by thought and subjectivities, as analysis becomes focussed on visualising the world through state categories. Such categories (governance, civil society, power, interests, democracy, law, reparations, etc) objectify politics by "representing" the social and thereby stress the immutability of given social places, cultures, identities and hierarchies to such an extent that state thinking becomes constructed as natural and the immutability of place as an incontrovertible fact evident to all. The inevitable conclusion is that there can indeed be no alternative to the politics of the state. Contrary to this reasoning, we must think beyond place; we must attempt to think what I have referred to elsewhere as "excess" over the categories of existing divisions and identities (Neocosmos, 2011: 198).

In this article I shall be concerned to show how the neo-colonial state in Africa exhibits characteristics which, in addition to its neo-liberal features much emphasised in the current sequence by political economy¹², give rise to a fundamental contradiction between human rights, multiculturalism and the rule of law on the one hand and state nationalism and the current concerns of national consciousness - often founded on state-propagated notions of the (newly acquired) rights of the indigenous - on the other. While democracy is said by the state to be its guiding principle, nationalism is partially collapsed into vulgar nativism and corrupt practices - from which is derived for example the oligarchy's "right to steal" justified in terms of the national interest (private accumulation is said to be in the public interest) - but it is also manifest in popular struggles against such practices, most clearly in North Africa in the current sequence. This overall contradiction is manifested in different ways in different cases but appears to be a universal feature of the state in Africa in the current period of globalised neo-liberal politics¹³.

This contradiction, which is a product of state politics in the neo-colony, is largely insoluble through elite consensus, partly because national grievances are irresolvable through the medium of human rights discourse, and partly because the oligarchy is provided with legitimised forms of enrichment at the expense of the nation. It thus regularly finds expression in forms of violence which seem largely incontestable within the framework of the neo-colonial state without the deployment of more state (or multi-state) repressive violence. These violent contradictions arguably currently include the repressive violence of the state in Zimbabwe where the state sees human rights as little more than an imperial conspiracy, the recent conflict between presidents in Côte D'Ivoire (where one relied on international support for his legitimacy and the other denounced foreign intervention), as well as the ongoing popular upsurge against the compromised nationalism of the North African secular and militaristic authoritarianisms.

¹² See David Harvey 2005, chapter 3, and also Abu Atris 2011.

¹³ It is significant that the ubiquitous signifier at the protests of Tahrir Square in Cairo was the Egyptian flag which made the evident point that the protestors were affirming a new nation which the Mubarak regime no longer represented.

They also include the case of xenophobic violence in South Africa - itself the archetype of a successful transition to democracy - which erupted in the public sphere in all its chauvinistic starkness in May 2008. Despite its popular character, this xenophobia was founded on a state politics of fear (Neocosmos, 2008, 2010a). South Africa had also experienced a mass popular uprising against an authoritarian regime lasting approximately from 1984 to 1988 which was also referred to as "people's power" (Neocosmos, 1998). From 1990, this was followed by an explicit and extensive "transition" which systematically depoliticised and closed down popular political agency in favour of state politics, *inter alia* by transforming political agents into victims of human rights abuses via the now famous *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* process.

In this case, which I shall discuss below at some length, HRD has arguably provided one of the conditions of existence of xenophobic violence as HRD is simultaneously opposed to a resolution of the national question and inimical to the self-empowerment of the politically excluded. This is fundamentally because HRD is not so much concerned with the inclusion in the field of politics of the excluded, as with legal redress. It is not so much concerned with encouraging militancy (or even less radically with enabling an "active citizenship") as with producing the political passivity of victims: it thus privileges state solutions and through prioritising the law, reduces all political thought to state subjectivity. In this manner, people become transformed from subjects of history to victims of power and subjected to oppression until they re-discover their political agency with a renewed Idea of freedom in a later sequence.

It follows that to attempt to understand political change in Africa through the medium of a transition from authoritarianism to democracy privileges the thinking of state politics. As a result, such a perspective can only fail to make sense of the increase in certain pervasive forms of violence in neo-colonial (*post-democratic*) African states. Such forms of violence are not an indication of regression to authoritarianism or of loss of momentum in an ongoing democratic transition or even of a (supposedly "pre-democratic") "culture of violence"; neither is this violence pathological. Rather, they are a necessary outcome of the combination of neo-liberal capitalism and state democracy in a context of neo-colonialism wherein a dominant form of oppression and indeed of resistance can only be national in content¹⁴.

My critique of the neo-liberal relationship between democracy and violence, along with its view of "transition", thus extends well beyond the usual radical left critique which consists in stressing that human rights and transitional justice fail to acknowledge the issues of structural violence, social justice and re-distribution (e.g. of land and other resources) in favour of the historically

¹⁴ This does not preclude the existence of other forms of violence, neither does it assume that liberal-democratic states do not exercise violence on certain of their citizens; however the fact remains that the extreme violence and mass slaughters of the Western (neo-) liberal state take place beyond its borders and are well hidden from its own populations apart from in controlled images.

dispossessed¹⁵. This perspective ultimately boils down to “extending” the neo-liberal conception of rights to include social, economic or cultural rights much along the lines propounded by T.H. Marshall in the 1960s¹⁶. This radical nationalist critique is thus limited and fundamentally statist because founded on notions of legal redress, so that it remains well within the terrain of a depoliticised technical process. At best it may advocate a modification of the state and a form of justice which is not founded on the power of victors but which would ensure greater social inclusion in the interest of all survivors¹⁷. Rather, social justice issues constitute only a part of a much broader national political question which is systematically reproduced in a neo-colonial context by the politics of state and empire, and which is thus irresolvable via the deployment of state nationalist thinking.

Given the disastrous politics of both state nationalism and state democracy in Africa which are both founded on the immutability of place, the solution to this question can only begin to be constructed by bringing the politics of affirmation back in to thought in order to re-politicise what has become a fundamentally depoliticised subjectivity. In this manner politics can be (re-) apprehended as subjective thought detached from social location and hence as capable of transformation rather than as the objectively immutable “truth” of power and institutions. In other words the lessons of popular mass politics in North Africa must be allowed to percolate into the domain of the subjective so that a politics beyond the state can become and remain the object of thought.

Transition, human rights discourse, violence

How then are we to think around the issues of “transition” in a context in which violence has been deployed according to political subjectivities which are state founded, not in the sense of what the social location of the perpetrators may be, but rather more in terms of who the originator of the ideology deployed by the perpetrator is? It should be noted first of all that the question is not asked in this manner by transitional justice theory (TJT). For TJT the issue is thought around a number of social “actors”. These include victims, perpetrators, saviours and the state itself. The state can be both a perpetrator and a saviour, NGOs and Western powers are usually seen as saviours, some collective organisations (gangs, armies, ethnic organisations, etc) are seen as (savage)

¹⁵ Including the more sophisticated versions such as Robert Meister’s and Mahmood Mamdani’s. See Meister 2002a and 2002b; Mamdani 1996 and 1998; see also Nagy, 2008.

¹⁶ See T.H. Marshall, 1964, and for a critique in the context of Africa, Neocosmos, 2006.

¹⁷ In a recent lecture at the University of the Western Cape, Mahmood Mamdani advocated a notion of “survivor’s justice” as opposed to the “victor’s justice” derived from the Nuremberg model. The former is necessitated by the fact that victims and beneficiaries have to live together. The idea is important but it is not at all clear which social force(s) would have an interest in upholding such a notion and what kind of political practice would enable it. In actual fact this idea seems to suggest the existence of a politics beyond interest (i.e. beyond social location) which is what I am arguing for here.

perpetrators and the majority of the population are seen as victims. The fundamental idea is to enable through the law (i.e. the state) some kind of "consensus-building" in order to reconstruct state institutions of a non-particularistic character and to found them on shared liberal-democratic values and the rule of law. There is little space here for thinking political subjects.

People only enter the domain of political "transition" as represented by their trustees (states, NGOs, multinational agencies); they do not exist as independent actors within this domain of thought except as victims, who are "passive actors" if such a thing is indeed possible. The core conception of trusteeship is that of the state, whether in the form of the law, legal systems, the rule of law or electoral systems and political actors or even history. As Teitel puts it, "the problem of transitional justice arises within a bounded period, spanning two regimes" (2000: 5). The former is "evil" or "illiberal" (2000: 3), the latter is liberal, democratic and good; the former is characterised by violence, the latter by the rule of law. The core concept of the transition between the two is the legal idea of "justice" which "is alternately constituted by and constitutive of, the transition" (2000: 6). The "role of law in periods of political change" affects and is affected by change through its various forms such as: "punishment, historical inquiry, reparations, purges and constitution making" (2000: 6).

Central then to this discourse and reasoning is a linear change from one idealised state form to another. It is this which defines a "transition". "Transnational histories generally imply a displacement of one interpretive account or truth regime by another, even as the political regimes change, *while preserving the narrative thread of the state*" (115, *emphasis added*). Rituals of history-making are part of what constructs the transition, they divide political time, creating a "before" and an "after". "How the history is told over time is a delicate matter. The historical narrative constructs the state's understanding of its political order. Transitional historical justice is linked up to the preservation of a state's political identity over time" (2000: 117).

History in TJT aids the law to transform society so that transitional "justice" becomes a technique of change: "TJ is an *instrument* of broad social transformation, and rests on the assumption that societies [read states - MN] need to confront past abuses in order to come to terms with their past and move on" (Andrieu, 2010: 2, *emphasis added*). Transitional justice is then seen as a political intervention to construct a new state, but it is a technical intervention by the state itself (along with empire) often explicitly directed against the popular or "informal" structures of power set up by the people themselves within the context of their emancipatory struggles. It thus amounts to a self-transformation process by the state which thereby is primarily concerned to assert its dominance and sovereignty. Interestingly the state itself is not subjected to any analysis whatsoever within TJT; it is simply taken as given. Moreover, whether and how this "transition" in fact "impacts" on society will largely be the result of a distinct process altogether, one which cannot be derived automatically from such changes at the level of the state. This is

especially so if people do not or cannot constitute themselves as a people in society, which they are usually prevented from doing¹⁸. But this is to think well beyond the limits of TJT for which the terms “democratic state” and “society” tend to be used interchangeably so that experts speak of “societies in transition”. To sum up, although TJT is primarily if not exclusively concerned with legal changes, it sees the goals of TJ as:

nothing less than the transformation, or the regeneration, of a whole society. It involves political, economic, cultural, sociological and psychological actions: prosecutions, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, lustration, public access to police and government records, public apology, public memorials, reburial of victims, compensations, reparations, literary and historical writings, and blanket or individual amnesty (2010: 3).

It should be clear that the state along with various other self-appointed trustees of the people's welfare such as NGOs, are always and without exception the prime movers of the process of transition and the outcome, whether by state actors or NGO activists, is always said to be a democratic state. As the ICTJ puts it, in the 1980s and 1990s “activists and others wanted to address the systematic abuses by former regimes but without endangering the political transformations underway. Since these changes were popularly called ‘transitions to democracy’, people began calling this new field ‘transitional justice’ ” (ICTJ, 2011).

At the same time, it is the law which is the primary mechanism of transformation, i.e. of the creation of a democratic state. This is made absolutely clear for example by Richard Wilson (2001) in the case of South Africa in the 1990s where he notes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) “was part of a general and long term orientation within state institutions which asserted the state's ability to rein in and control the informal adjudicative and policing structures in civil society” (2001: 21). In particular he notes that in addition to enforcing state sovereignty (over informal justice) and hence the continuity of “the rule of law”¹⁹, the TRC could only operate within a discourse of human rights. Apart from anything else, human rights discourse (HRD) thus came in handy as a consensual bridge between the reformed colonial racist traditions of the outgoing White nationalist elite and the reformed African nationalism of the incoming one. HRD:

was indeterminate enough to suit the programs of both the NP (Nationalist Party) and the ANC (African National Congress), who came together to form a power sharing arrangement. The ascendancy of human rights talk thus resulted from its inherent ambiguity, which allowed it to wield together diverse political constituencies. Constitutionalism became the compromise arrangement upon which the ANC and the NP could agree a “sufficient consensus” (2001: 6).

¹⁸ “...before considering the act by which a people submits to a king, we ought to scrutinize the act by which people become a people, for that act, being necessarily antecedent to the other, is the real foundation of society”. Rousseau, 1979:59, *emphasis in original*.

¹⁹ I emphasise “continuity of the rule of law” as, despite the fact that the laws of the apartheid state were racially discriminatory, the legitimacy of that state and its laws were never questioned by the incoming ANC and the new democratic state; see Mamdani, 2000.

Robert Meister shows very well how beneficiaries and not only perpetrators are let off the hook by HRD and why this is so in a post-cold war era. He states: "social melodramas allow the continuing beneficiaries of injustice to pity victims without fearing them because the victim's grief is disconnected from a sense of grievance" (Meister, 2002b: 123). The disconnecting of grief from grievance is what the TRC in South Africa achieved *inter alia* although for Meister this is an effect of HRD in general and not of its particular application to a specific context. The idea of building a consensual state was founded on the notion that the evil of apartheid is now over and its effects into the present need not be delved into: "the cost of achieving a moral consensus that the past was evil is to reach a political consensus that the evil is past" (Meister, 2002a: 96)²⁰.

At the same time the TRC process would serve to promote a "human rights culture" which itself would militate against the deployment of violence in society and for its (legitimate) restriction to the state which itself would be bound by the rule of law. Violence is then understood as the antithesis of democracy; when it does unfortunately exist it is seen as a leftover from authoritarianism, or as an effect of transition, or else as simply pathological, not as a product of the democratic state itself. This logic can be seen in the assumption of the supposed change in South Africa from "political" violence in the 1980s and 1990s to "criminal" violence post-apartheid. This invocation of increases in criminality explains little to nothing as it is equated with pathological conditions regularly asserted by the state, while of course the empirical (let alone the theoretical) distinction between political and criminal violence is quite tenuous to say the least (Harris, 2006: 10ff). Interestingly although Bronwyn Harris, in her detailed review of the connections between violence, transition and democracy in South Africa, rightly notes that this equating of the violence of the past with political violence and that of the present with criminal violence "has the consequence of minimising or downplaying the criminal nature of early violence", she strangely omits the obverse conclusion namely that this dichotomy also has the effect of downplaying the political nature of present-day violence (Harris, 2006: 11-12).

Concurrently, by reducing all violence to crime, the state is able to criminalise popular social movements which often contest the state's *modus operandi*, and is thus able to legitimise both their exclusion from the field of politics and the exercise of police (or para-state) violence against them. The strange equating of democracy in South Africa with the absence of political violence is a myth which is sustained by the neat separation between different modes of rule deployed by the democratic state. As I shall show below, the democratic state rules via distinct modes of rule within different political domains so that different mechanisms of enforcing and responding to power are consequently deployed in various socio-political locations. For one of these modes of rule - that deployed over the working-people - the exercise of (illegal) state violence is central.

²⁰ Robert Meister addresses the contradictory character of Human Rights Discourse in detail in his latest work; see Meister, 2011.

The neo-colonial character of the state in Africa

It is quite apparent that the shift in economic thinking to a neo-liberal dogma along with its application throughout the world from the mid-seventies onwards, has led *inter alia* to a specific form of state and state thinking which is hegemonic throughout the newly globalised world. This combination of neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy has not bypassed Africa. The character of the state in Africa has been radically transformed from a national and developmental state to a “postnational” and “post-developmental” state form (Neocosmos, 2010b; deAlwis et al., 2009). This suggests that the manner in which the state functions and rules today is radically different from the way it functioned in the immediate postcolonial period. There are four major distinct characteristics of the new state form which are worth briefly sketching here²¹.

The neo-liberal state

The first of these concerns what Harvey has called a “neoliberal state”, evidently influenced by the neoliberal character of the economy. One of the core features of this state is not simply the often emphasised “withdrawal” of the state from the market, or its privatisation of national social assets and its introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s and 90s, or for that matter the reduction of its functions to ones of policing an increasingly poor population. Rather perhaps more fundamentally, what has become apparent does not concern policy but the structural change which has wiped away the erstwhile distinction between public and private interests (or public and private administration for that matter). As Harvey puts it, “business and corporations not only collaborate intimately with state actors but even acquire a strong role in writing legislation, determining public policies, and setting regulatory frameworks (which are mainly advantageous to themselves)” (Harvey, 2005: 76-7). Unlike in the 1970s, one can no longer speak in terms of the “relative autonomy” of the state from the interests of (finance) capital. African authoritarian states with a veneer of democracy (usually reduced to elections) have been extremely adept at instituting World Bank celebrated neoliberal economic policies. Abu Atris recently noted with reference to the popular protests against corruption in Egypt that:

To describe blatant exploitation of the political system for personal gain as corruption misses the forest for the trees. Such exploitation is surely an outrage against Egyptian citizens, but calling it corruption suggests that the problem is aberrations from a system that would otherwise function smoothly. If this were the case then the crimes of the Mubarak regime could be attributed simply to bad character: change the people and the problems go away. But the real problem with the regime was not necessarily that high-ranking members of the government were thieves in an ordinary sense. They did not necessarily steal

²¹ The following can only be a brief sketch. The state in Africa is in desperate need of serious detailed theorisation and analysis beyond the vulgar essentialisms of Africanist prejudices: “politics of the belly”, “neo-patrimonialism”, “parasitism” etc.

directly from the treasury. Rather *they were enriched through a conflation of politics and business under the guise of privatization*. This was less a violation of the system than business as usual. Mubarak's Egypt, in a nutshell, was a quintessential neoliberal state (*emphasis added*) (Atris, 2011).

It is this collapse of the distinction between the general or national interest on the one hand and the private interest on the other - or that between state and capital which amounts to the same thing - which has developed into one of the dominant features of the state in Africa (and indeed elsewhere); it is this diminishing distinction which is the foundation of corruption and the looting of treasuries and which constitutes a systemic feature of the state in its neo-liberal form. It is totally corrupting of the edifice of the state itself which as a result can no longer be said to represent the national or general will/general interest or the "common good". In South Africa for example it is reflected in major donations by business people to the ruling party - the ANC - in return for having been awarded lucrative contracts through an only apparently neutral tender process. The provision of gifts to individual politicians for favours is against the law; providing donations to parties is not. It is also reflected in individual corruption as those connected to the state can enter into BEE (*Black Economic Empowerment*) deals with White capital, buy shares of privatised companies dirt cheap, and make huge fortunes from one day to the next. The end result is that South Africa has a large number of new millionaires and has, since the introduction of democracy, now overtaken Brazil as the most unequal society in the world, while at least half of its population of 48 million are said to live below the poverty line.

The democratising mission

Another fundamental feature of the state in Africa derives from what Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba has rightly called the "democratising mission" of the West. After the colonial "civilising mission" and its post-colonial "developmental mission", the West has now insisted since the mid to late 1970s on "democratising" the state in Africa in its own image. This process, largely achieved through the medium of political conditionalities, has focussed on the trappings of the democratic state: elections of the executive through universal suffrage, constitutions, the advocating of multi-partyism and the funding of civil society organisations. The drivers of this process have been Western states, multinational agencies and international NGOs. This has been accompanied by the deployment of a human rights discourse and "humanitarian interventions" by both states (or their proxies) and NGOs. It is this process which has evidently shown the new features of the current democratic imperial system. Chatterjee notes that:

The theorists of the new empire have talked of still more wonderful things. This empire is democratic. It is an empire without an emperor. The people are sovereign here, as it should be in a democracy. That is precisely why this empire has no geographical limits. This is not like the empires of old where territories have to be conquered by war to add to the size of the empire. Now empire

expands because more and more people, and even governments, looking for peace and for the lure of economic prosperity, want to come under its sheltering umbrella. Thus empire does not conquer territory or destroy property; rather, it encompasses new countries within its web of power... The key to empire is not force but control. There is always a limit to force; there is no limit to control. Hence empire's vision is a global democracy... We can see the exercise of control right in front of our eyes... Even such a deeply political matter as punishment for alleged violations of human rights has now become the jurisdiction of new international judicial institutions. The trial of Milosevic is the most dramatic example of this (Chatterjee, 2002: 100)²².

This is not all, while supra-national courts such as the International Court of Justice or the International Criminal Court in the Hague are set up by agreement between states in multinational fora, there is also another much more subversive and insidious aspect to the establishing of the hegemony of human rights discourse: the operations of "international civil society". Chatterjee continues:

If the protection of human rights is a function of empire, then that task is being carried out not simply by the international courts. It is being done daily, and diligently, by numerous such international NGOs as *Amnesty International*, *Médecins sans Frontières*, or *Oxfam*, whose able and committed activists probably have never suspected that they are, like little squirrels, carrying the sand and pebbles that go into the building of the great bridgehead of empire. But that is where the ideological foundations of empire are being laid²³.

John Laughland goes even further noting that "today's human rights activists... are inspired by a punishment ethic... which often prefers war over peace in the name of 'justice' " (Laughland, 2008: 257). We should never ever forget of course that given that in Africa the state acquires its legitimacy primarily from the West and only very much secondarily from its people, violent conflict - such as that in Zimbabwe for example - as a result of which people are experiencing the destruction of their livelihoods and increased repression, is more often than not restricted to an opposition between the whole panoply of neo-colonial politics (including HRD) on the one hand and authoritarian state nationalism on the other. This has meant that it has been difficult to construct a popular politics independent of both, while the discourse of (especially urban) popular

²² It is important to note that Milosevic after dying during his trial at the ICTY (reputedly of poisoning) was later found not guilty of genocide by the International Court of Justice in February 2007. It should also be recalled that the NATO intervention and bombing of Kosovo was said to be a "humanitarian" action justified on the grounds that Milosevic was an international criminal. See John Laughland, 2007; Laughland also notes elsewhere that: "political trials are the continuation of war by other means", Laughland, 2008:252. This is because, he continues, "the acts adjudicated in trials of heads of state or government are *political acts*, not private ones" (*emphasis added*).

²³ Chatterjee, 2002:100-101. One of the most important works on the role of international and local NGOs in structuring the contemporary form of neo-colonialism is to be found in Peter Hallward's brilliant detailed analysis of the undermining of the Haitian people's attempt at political independence under Aristide by NGOs; see Peter Hallward, 2007, especially chapter 8.

opposition has been squarely located within a human rights framework and connections with multinational NGOs.

The African state – which has been singularly unable to genuinely represent the nation since independence – owes its survival primarily to whether it conforms to Western precepts. Today this means whether it is labelled “democratic” or not by the West, i.e. whether it fulfils a number of measurable criteria, and not by whether democracy is rooted among the people. After all during the period of the so-called “Cold War”, democracy and its attendant notion of human rights was never the main criterion for judging African states; arguably the centrality of human rights in the assessment of African states only became apparent after 1975. It has been argued that this emphasis was the result of an explicit strategy by the United States in its attempt to respond to the USSR’s popularity on the continent (Mamdani, 1981). Yet it can also be shown that this emphasis became dominant after the end of “Third Worldism” in Europe; i.e. after the end of the view of Africans as agents of their own liberation and hence the apparent end of their contribution to forging alternatives in World History (in particular with the liberation of the ex-Portuguese colonies and the end of the Vietnam war). The disillusionment of ex-student radicals in particular with the post-colonial state and “Third Worldism” led to the replacement of the idea of Africans as subjects of history by the notion of Africans as victims of history, incapable of exercising agency: victims of natural disasters, of pandemics, of oppressive states, and ultimately of their own supposedly authoritarian cultures (Liauzu, 1982).

The Kenyan intellectual Wa Mutua has outlined this point extremely clearly. For him we can understand the politics of human rights in Africa through a metaphor of “savage-victim-saviour”. Indeed Wa Mutua shows that the “victims” of the “savagery” of the African state (which it is assumed has its roots in African culture as the state is supposedly “neo-patrimonial”, “prebendal”, “venal”, etc) require their “saviours” from the West. As Wa Mutua explains, “although the human rights movement arose in Europe, with the express purpose of containing European savagery, it is today a civilizing crusade aimed primarily at the Third World... Rarely is the victim conceived as white” (Wa Mutua, 2002: 19, 30). The metaphor of a “civilising crusade” is particularly apt, as a formalistic conception of democracy, disconnected from any popular roots in African culture and simply grafted onto a largely untransformed colonial state, is at the heart of the West’s current relations with Africa and Africans, in the same way as a “development mission” had been at the core of these relations post-independence and a “civilising mission” the hegemonic ideology during the colonial period itself.

Modes of state rule

The third important feature of the African state today can be said to concern the different modes of rule which the state deploys in various political domains. It is important to understand that the state does not exercise its rule in a uniform manner throughout society. Its way of ruling, of controlling the population and

managing difference and hierarchy, varies most obviously in Africa between urban and rural modes of rule, but it also differs within urban areas. While the former distinction has been theorised by Mahmood Mamdani, the latter, which is my main concern here, is most clearly outlined by Partha Chatterjee following upon a political distinction central to the work of the early *Subaltern Studies Collective* in India and particularly to that of Ranajit Guha²⁴. Chatterjee's argument although developed in relation to India is meant to apply to postcolonial countries in general including Africa, to "most of the world" as he puts it. Central to Chatterjee's argument is not so much a spatial distinction but more fundamentally a distinction between modes of ruling citizens and populations. Following the work of Michel Foucault on "governmentality" which he saw as "a particular mentality, a particular manner of governing that is actualized in habits, perceptions and subjectivity" (Read, 2009: 24) i.e. as a particular mode of rule as well as a way of being in society (Foucault 2000), Chatterjee argues that:

the classical idea of popular sovereignty, expressed in the legal-political facts of equal citizenship, produced the homogeneous construct of the nation, whereas the activities of governmentality required multiple, cross-cutting and shifting classifications of the population as the targets of multiple policies, producing a necessarily heterogeneous construct of the social. Here, then, we have the antinomy between the lofty political imaginary of popular sovereignty and the mundane administrative reality of governmentality: it is the antinomy between the homogeneous national and the heterogeneous social (2002: 36).

This antinomy found its way into the colonial state which exercised its governmentality while ignoring sovereignty, while after independence, the nationalist conceptions of citizenship and sovereignty:

were overtaken by the developmental state which promised to end poverty and backwardness by adopting appropriate policies of economic growth and social reform... The postcolonial states deployed the latest governmental technologies to promote the well being of their populations, often prompted and aided by international and nongovernmental organizations (2002: 37).

The first conception led to a domain of politics which emphasised the law and citizenship; in fact it named "civil society" such a formal and largely middle-class legal domain of contestation. The second refers to a domain of politics where rules are bent, political relations are often informal (if not downright illegal) and where the majority are only tenuously rights-bearing citizens; the majority of the population are to be found in the latter kind of relation to the state. It is not that they are excluded from the domain of politics altogether, only from the domain of civil society which forms the core of the democratic - rights-based - relationship to the state. Chatterjee refers to this second mode of rule and state-society relations as "political society", although I think it better to refer to it as "uncivil society". It is "un-civil" not in any moral or normative sense, but because citizenship is here not the primary manner of relating to the

²⁴ See Mamdani, 1996; Chatterjee, 2002 and also Ranajit Guha, 2000.

state; in fact the majority of the population in this domain do not arguably possess a (full, unquestioned) right to rights.

Interestingly, Chatterjee points to a conceptual distinction between rights and entitlements here: "rights belong to those who have proper legal title... those who do not have rights may nevertheless have entitlements; they deserve not compensation but assistance in rebuilding a home or finding a new livelihood" (2002:69). The idea then is a distinction between the rights of property owners and the entitlements of the poor which the state recognizes for whatever reason, even if it is not able to provide, say housing, for all due to financial constraints. The former suggests a core commitment to legal processes both by the state and the people (the rule of law), the latter does not²⁵. It is the case, in South Africa at least, that people in uncivil society are cognisant of their entitlement to the delivery of services by the state and protest, often violently, when these are not satisfied²⁶. The promise to satisfy these entitlements is also what enables the powerful (local politicians and power brokers) to set up patronage relations within uncivil society.

It follows that in this domain the rule of law is largely absent and ethnic politics, patronage relations and violence can develop as part of everyday life. In fact it is within this domain that what has been dubbed a "culture of violence" can be established, although to call it a "culture" implies an ingrained trans-generational subjectivity which is largely unchangeable in its essence - a flawed assumption. At times violence spills out into civil society itself and it is only then that it becomes noticed (by the mass media for example); otherwise the state ensures that it remains contained and beyond civil experience. The origins of uncivil society are clearly colonial as Chatterjee recognizes, but in neo-colonial society, such a mode of rule is neither ethnically, racially, nationality or

²⁵ In some countries un-civil society is regulated by completely different sets of laws. In Botswana for example a state reconstructed national "customary law" is deployed exclusively for control of the working-people in urban as well as in rural areas. One notorious feature of this "customary law" is the systematic use of flogging for derisive offences such as stealing a pork pie from a supermarket. There is even a specific force to police such law. It is easy for accounts of Botswana's liberal democracy to completely overlook this core feature of the state for, as with all liberal accounts, research remains exclusively within the domain of civil society. Of course this "bifurcated" mode of rule was central to the colonial/apartheid state. See Mamdani, 1996. The point however is that distinctions between forms of rule are not restricted to the urban-rural divide.

²⁶ According to a Wikipedia entry on protests in South Africa, "South Africa... has one of the highest rates of public protest in the world. During the 2004/05 financial year about 6,000 protests were officially recorded... and about 1,000 protests were illegally banned. This meant that at least 15 protests were taking place each day in South Africa at this time... the number of protests has escalated dramatically since then and [it was reported] that '2009 and 2010 together account for about two-thirds of all protests since 2004'... the number of protests was ten times higher in 2009 than in 2004 and even higher in 2010. Just under 40% of all protests take place in shack settlements". See also Alexander 2010. For this author the "underlying causes" of these protests are economic, and he sees no need to provide a discussion of agency. Generally, the politics of these protests stress community interests (rights and "service delivery") and many are led by ANC members, so that they rarely adhere to an axiom of political equality. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest_in_South_Africa (accessed 24/04/2011).

even class specific; although its essence is still colonial, it is irreducible to socio-economic characteristics. Yet at the same time, although distinct, these two modes of rule are interconnected as it is on uncivil society that the pyramidal edifice of the political oligarchy is ultimately founded, a feature which illustrates the neo-colonial character of our states.

The main point however remains that we can establish in Africa also the existence of (at least) two forms of state-society relations: "civil society" and "uncivil society" in which politics is conceived according to distinct subjectivities. Each is fundamentally enabled by two different structural modes of rule which allocate people to their political "places". People whose primary relation to the state is found in uncivil society face extraordinary obstacles when they wish to assert their rights directly as citizens and attempt a movement beyond their political place, for their political existence is outside the domain of rights – civil society. The functioning of the mode of rule itself in uncivil society is such as to enable the distortion/diminution, if not the extinguishing, of the meaning of citizenship itself. Given that people in this domain do not have automatic access to the right to rights²⁷, if they wish to be heard as citizens, they are commonly forced to accept the mediation of trustees (usually NGOs) who would speak for them in civil society for it is only there that the rule of law operates reasonably consistently. Yet as with any form of state politics, these obstacles can be successfully overcome by the affirmation of a politics beyond place and the re-assertion of the rights of citizenship; as such rights are largely denied, such a politics can end up contesting the character of state politics itself. It is imperative to stress this last point, for in the absence of an affirmative politics, repressive violence, indeed a so-called "culture of violence", is simply allowed to fester so that its prevalence is misunderstood as a natural effect of poverty. Yet in uncivil society this organised dissent and resistance, which bravely attempts to confront the networks of patronage relations, ethnic power and local corruption through democratic collective action, is often unashamedly criminalised by the state and subjected to state violence which is itself, more often than not, criminal in nature.

A growing body of literature is gradually uncovering the functioning of state-society relations within uncivil society, especially within those countries subjected to liberal democratic systems of "governance". In South Africa where this literature is burgeoning for example, one author had the following to say regarding the huge sprawling apartheid created township of Soweto outside Johannesburg:

The relative short history of Soweto has been marked by a progressive collapse of state authority; an often violent struggle against representatives of the state waged in the name of liberation; a breakdown of paternal authority within families; the establishment and eventual collapse of alternative political structures within local neighbourhoods; and a general rise in crime and insecurity (Chabedi, 2003: 357).

²⁷ On "the right to have rights" see, of course, Hannah Arendt, 1973. Arendt understood that the state could exclude people from rights within its own borders.

Post-apartheid generated inequalities have ensured that:

The expected benefits of democracy failed to materialise for the majority of the population... For every person who "progresses", there are many who are left behind. Yet counterposed to the new dynamics of progress and social mobility is what might be called a moral centre of gravity wherein poverty and greater need result in claims upon public resources and notions of *entitlement to state assistance*. To be poor, then, is to be more deserving, yet to be rich is to be envied. To be envied is to be exposed, for from the envious can come all the malignant forces of witchcraft and sorcery, not to mention more mundane forms of violence (2003: 366, *emphasis added*).

In exhibiting these characteristics, Soweto is no different from most urban townships in the country. In the absence of any organised democratic resistance, such conditions constitute a perfect enabling environment for the development of patron-client relations, and the politics of "strongmen". Whereas HRD is helpful to organising in civil society as it creates legal space for NGOs and social movements, in uncivil society human rights are frequently blamed for the collapse of parental authority, for the apparent sexual freedom of women and for the perceived threats by outsiders/foreigners to community entitlements²⁸. There is also increasing evidence that the police themselves act more as the personal agents of municipal councillors - people with power in the local community - rather than as upholders of the law; and that their preferred *modus operandi* is one of terrorising the poor while avoiding any open confrontation with organised criminal gangs. In their 2007 report on local politics in the Durban area, Mark Butler and Richard Pithouse (2007) note:

The evidence permits only one interpretation: the local state acts in a systematically criminal manner towards its poorest residents on the assumption that this behaviour is within the norms of a shared social consensus amongst the social forces and institutions that count. That elite consensus is that rights formally guaranteed in abstract principle should not, in concrete practice, apply to the poor.

At election time in many poor communities, "opposition politics is not tolerated at all and communities are run as 'vote banks'". It is not unusual for this intolerance to be backed up with armed force on the part of local party leaders or for them to receive the active support of the police. The chronic nature of political authoritarianism at the base of our society invariably becomes acute around elections" (Pithouse, 2009). Many of the poor are aware of this issue:

as we are [moving] towards local government election the politicians are busy telling people to go in their numbers to voting stations to vote for people who will not even listen to the people who have put them into power. The people on the grassroots are people who don't count in this society except when it is time to vote. The politicians are making all kinds of promises when they want our

²⁸ Municipal Councillors and Ward Committees together often operate like traditional chiefs and their henchmen in their control over local communities. They are the ones who most frequently seem to see HRD as an obstacle to their powers, hence their recourse to violence. See Jared Sacks, 2010 and Laurence Piper and Roger Deacon, 2008.

votes. But when we ask them to keep those promises they tell the police to arrest us, beat us and shoot us (AbM, 2011b).

In fact Pithouse speaks in terms of two “forms of democracy”, one kind for the elite and another for the poor. Such observations are of course common throughout the continent and are by no means unique to South Africa. What is perhaps more prevalent today in South Africa than in the rest of the continent (excepting the current North African experiments in popular power), is the existence of a number of important attempts to affirm an alternative politics of equality. These have been met by the state with varying degrees of violence totally detached from legal procedures.

In the forefront of the struggle to affirm such a politics is the shack-dwellers movement from Durban called Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). AbM has developed an alternative politics outside both the “political society” of parties and the “civil society” of NGOs. It has placed itself outside civil society by stressing its self-organisation, internal democracy and an axiom of equality. It is however not averse to utilising the legal system when tactics demand it and it won a celebrated victory against the province of KwaZulu-Natal’s attempt to introduce legislation which was intended to clear informal settlements from the prime land they occupy in the city of Ithekweni (Durban) (known as the “Slums Act”), and which was planned to be replicated in all nine provinces²⁹.

As a result of its alternative politics, AbM has been subjected to ongoing police brutality and a campaign of vilification and attack by the local state. This culminated in an attack by organised informal para-state forces and by police in September 2009 evidently directed by local and regional ANC politicians. The violence left 2 people dead, a thousand displaced while members’ shacks were burnt to the ground in one of their main settlements, “Kennedy Road”³⁰. In a truly 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” (AbM, 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 interlocutors or “stakeholders”. AbM themselves were clearly aware of the fundamental political reasons for the attack:

The reason why our movement was attacked in Kennedy Road in September 2009... is well known. We were attacked because we were exposing corrupt councillors, organising the unorganised and running our own projects such as crèches, clinics, feeding schemes, community gardens. We were attacked because we were creating job opportunities for the unemployed. We were attacked because we were fighting nepotism, comradism (sic), and the politicization of service delivery. We were attacked because we organised ourselves outside of the control

²⁹ For the documents relating to the Slums Act as well as the South African Constitutional Court judgement see <http://abahlali.org/node/1629>

³⁰ The detailed events of the attacks can be found in Chance, 2010.

of the party and its councillors. We were attacked because we thought that urban planning should be a bottom up and not a top down project. And, yes, we were attacked because we challenged the constitutionality of the then Slums Act which humiliated the Provincial Legislature. We were attacked because we took this democracy seriously. We were attacked because we believed that we had the same right as any other person to think and speak and act for ourselves in this democracy and because we acted on that belief day after day and year after year... The only way to be poor and to remain safe in this country is to limit your participation in this democracy to voting in elections. The day that you decide to organise yourself and to express yourself outside of party structures and elections is the day that you must give up your safety (AbM, 2011a)³¹.

The point then is that a genuinely democratic politics which attempts to contest the patronage relations prevalent within uncivil society, and thus to claim the same rights as those within civil society, can lead to systematic (democratic) state violence against the people due to the fact that such politics threaten the mode of rule and the vested interests of the local oligarchy. Indeed a politics which takes democracy seriously threatens the basis of uncivil society itself and with it the political "place" to which the working-people have been allocated³². Nevertheless such genuine democratic politics are rare; more often than not popular rebellions take place within the limits of state political subjectivities as we shall see in the case of xenophobic violence in South Africa in May 2008.

The postnational state

The final feature of the state in Africa can be understood in terms of its characterisation as a "postnational state" for which human rights are often seen as obstacles to entitlements in uncivil society, and the latter only as the entitlements of the indigenous. The idea of the "postnational state" is meant to suggest a systematic change in state political subjectivity post-1980 in Africa (and elsewhere), to the extent that the state today can be said to represent the nation less and less in favour of particularistic interests as I have already noted. Moreover, this change is apparent in the abandonment of a state project of

³¹ One example of the way in which councillors exercise their power over residents of poor communities concerns the fact that they are often in charge of nominating those who receive employment. This happens in situations when construction companies set up their sites, as they are obliged by legislation to employ a percentage of members from the local community. Councillors then are usually entrusted with selecting potential workers. They stipulate that only card-carrying members of the appropriate party will be chosen. Abahlali have been resisting this in areas where they have some influence by nominating people through drawing lots in order to ensure fairness. Councillors and party members have reacted by violently attacking AbM. This constitutes one example of what AbM refer to as "the politicisation of service delivery" and is one of the reasons behind attacks on the organisation.

³² It is particularly noteworthy that the attackers of AbM formulated what they saw as the issue in ethnic terms. Thus their slogans concerned "recapturing" the community for "Zulus" from the "Pondos" who had supposedly taken it over. The use of ethnic slogans clearly stressed and attempted to re-establish the identities of place and the power of ethnic interests which AbM has been so successful at overcoming. See Chance, 2010.

nation-building and national construction prevalent in the immediate post-independence era and organised around "development" and the state provision of basic welfare needs³³. This state project served to unify people under one overarching mode of rule at least in urban settings, although the rural-urban contradiction was not overcome. Today however, the "postnational" state is fundamentally "post-developmental", meaning that the state no longer sees its role as leading a process of national development and emancipation from poverty and economic dependence from which the whole population should benefit³⁴. With notable exceptions such as Congo-Zaire, central to the politics of the African state in the immediate post independence era (1960s-1970s) had been precisely such a state-led process of emancipation and economic development; the two were understood as fundamentally synonymous within state nationalist discourse (Neocosmos, 2009b). The collapse of this development process into a neo-colonial project during the 1970s, allowed for the complete abandonment of the idea of national development in the 1980s, for its national content had dissipated. The neo-liberal integration into the globalised world system has led to a situation wherein "the emancipatory potential once embodied in the nation state as a political community of citizens is no longer all that evident" (de Alwis et al, 2009: 35).

The state in Africa no longer thinks in terms of a national project of development, let alone any other form of national emancipation. Hegemonic discourse maintains that the oligarchy apparently fulfils the national interest by enriching itself through access to the neoliberal state and capital, (the two being largely indistinguishable) while the poor are unable to attain what they consider to be their national entitlements, given an increasingly corrupt civil service and the fact that they are relegated to an uncivil society where patronage relations reproduce a crude politics of power. In this context, nationalism can easily collapse into chauvinism as entitlements are seen, in desperate socio-economic conditions, to depend on indigeneity. On the other hand it can be noted that a process of national renewal is precisely what the citizens of Egypt and Tunisia have been struggling for through their mass movements.

Given the mass poverty and the (partial or whole) exclusion of large sections of the population from the rights of citizenship, the "national question" has remained unresolved. This is particularly obvious in the case of some Southern African ex-settler colonies such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, where land, jobs and housing which were fought for as rights for all during liberation struggles, have yet to be provided to the citizenry. For example the failure of the state imagination is so extreme in the case of South Africa that the president of that

³³ Today the expression "nation building" seems to have been dropped as a public signifier, in South Africa at least, in favour of an emphasis on "social cohesion" with all its conservative and functionalist assumptions associated with vulgar pre-1968 American sociology. Unlike "nation-building" which suggested some form of popular agency, "social cohesion" is merely a state "law and order" concern and suggests a fear of social unrest.

³⁴ See Neocosmos, 2010b where I outline in some detail the hegemonic political subjectivity of this new state form.

country could only think of a major sporting event such as the Football World Cup to provide a modicum of subjective "nation-building"³⁵. Unfortunately the idea of the nation has been reduced to one of indigeneity as various attempts at nation-building around African notions of "ubuntu" have dismally failed to grab the popular imagination. This is not surprising given the level of corruption and self-enrichment among members of the new oligarchy. In fact this form of accumulation is precisely ideologically founded on notions of liberal human rights and inviolable access to property *inter alia*. In this sense the new oligarchy simply joins its counterparts from other countries round the world in living the "good life" of the wealthy.

In other words, while human rights provide the ideological foundation for accumulation and access to resources by the oligarchy along with the legal space to organise in civil society, they do not enable the entitlements of the mass of the population in uncivil society to be satisfied, as these are dependent on state largesse, not on rights as such. Given the fact that the new Black elite stress their indigeneity and nativism in order to justify access to rights and resources, the poor follow suit by also stressing nativism in order to acquire what they see as their own entitlements. Unlike the oligarchy and the middle class, the poor are dependent solely on discretionarily deployed state largesse in order to acquire their entitlements; indigeneity is their only asset and, for them, the sole ideological justification for such entitlements. A complex contradiction therefore develops between a discourse of rights and one of national entitlement.

The failure to find an alternative to the post-independence idea of development has therefore meant the absence of any national state project and the total subservience to empire through the emphasis on "good governance", "democracy" and "human rights" as state slogans. At the same time these names have proven unable to provide a collective conception of the nation other than on the basis of a crude nativism and chauvinism, so that the poor can only rely on nativism in order to acquire their entitlements. It is this failure which seems irresolvable other than by recourse to violence as it is founded on political exclusion from the domain of rights, i.e. from the dominant field of politics. It is thus around the idea of the nation and its people - around an analysis of the specific politics with which people are confronted and how they react to them, rather than poverty as such - that any conceptions of "transition" and violence have to be understood in the neo-colony. In order to begin to develop an understanding of these processes, they must be firmly located within the political subjectivities which directly concern the nation for it is the equating of citizenship rights with the entitlements of the indigenous which gives them shape. I want to end by illustrating this point through a discussion of the case of xenophobic violence in post-apartheid South Africa.

³⁵ See *Mail & Guardian* online <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-07-06-world-cup-investment-paid-off-says-zuma>

Human rights discourse and xenophobic violence: the case of South Africa

The “truly extraordinary moment” in North Africa and elsewhere recognised by all, has shown, if nothing else, that secular nationalism is not dead as a vehicle of emancipatory politics. It is precisely the national consciousness of the youth and young workers of these countries which constituted the core political content of those movements. Such nationalism was affirmed in opposition to the pseudo-nationalism of the state which was seen to have betrayed its own people. In Africa then, emancipatory nationalism must be re-affirmed both against the view of those who see it as necessarily oppressive of difference and against those who distort it into a statist conception by systematically de-politicising it, as Fanon in particular clearly saw. In order to think the possibility of this re-affirmation, politics need to become again the object of thought.

The difficulty in the context of South Africa - as for much of the rest of the continent - concerns the provision of an explanation for the transformation of national consciousness from an emancipatory inclusive discourse, to one of exclusion and chauvinism manifested in xenophobic violence, particularly in May 2008³⁶. To ask this question is of course to jettison the notion that nationalism is necessarily oppressive of divergent views and authoritarian by nature. It is crucial in this respect to distinguish between popular emancipatory nationalism and state nationalism. The former is purely politically affirmative; the latter is founded on naturalised socio-historical notions of indigeneity; the former's politics tend to be inclusive, the latter's exclusive. The most sophisticated thinker of this distinction on the African continent was Frantz Fanon. In his work one finds not only a recognition of this distinction, but also an account of the transition from the first form of nationalism to the second (Neocosmos, 2011). Fanon thinks the emancipatory character of popular nationalism as follows: “The living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent and enlightened praxis of men and women. The collective construction of a destiny is the assumption of responsibility on a historical scale” (Fanon, 1990: 165, *translation modified*).

For Fanon then the nation is constructed in practice, in political struggle by people – one is tempted to say “ordinary people” – themselves. However this is not a “spontaneous” occurrence. What is a spontaneous subjectivity is the Manichean dualism of the good embodied in the native versus the evil embodied in the settler. But the nation is not simply to be equated with natives. In fact many settlers “reveal themselves to be much, much closer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation” (1990: 116) while many natives are to be found on the side of colonial power; “consciousness slowly dawns upon

³⁶ The dominant accounts of the May 2008 pogroms insist on the centrality of structural factors (poverty, inequality) and are hence simply deterministic, denying agency to perpetrators; the arguments which follow are taken from my book *Neocosmos*, 2010a, especially the epilogue, pp. 117-149.

truths that are only partial, limited and unstable" (1990: 117). The nation is constructed in action and this is not a nation which is simply reflective of social entities such as indigeneity, ethnicity or race. It is a nation which is made up solely of those who fight for freedom (including "foreigners", Fanon himself being a foreigner in Algeria); it is a purely political conception; an affirmation on the part of those who consider themselves the nation much as the occupants of Tahrir Square in Cairo in February 2011: "The colonized's challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute" (Fanon, 1990: 31, *translation modified*).

On the other hand "nationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors, stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed" (1990: 163). This process Fanon accounts for in terms of the rise of a "national bourgeoisie" which acquires control of the nationalist movement, its politics and the state itself; this national bourgeoisie is:

only a sort of greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or inventiveness. It remembers what it has read in European textbooks and imperceptibly it becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature (1990: 141).

But there is much more in Fanon than a simple moral critique of the post-independence African bourgeoisie. What he suggests is that this newly formed class and its state contemplate the nation through nativist lenses. It is now indigeneity which defines the nation because it is through a claim to being indigenous that the national bourgeoisie can acquire the businesses and positions of the departing colonizers. Whether their concern is accumulation or whether it is one of asserting a "narrow [racially-based] nationalism" (1990: 131), "the sole slogan of the bourgeoisie is 'Replace the foreigner'" (1990: 127, *translation modified*). As a result:

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... the foreigners are called to leave; their shops are burned, their street stalls are wrecked... (1990: 125).

The nation now refers to something else than a purely subjective affirmation; it refers to a social category founded on indigeneity. Who is and who is not an Algerian, a Ghanaian, an Ivorian, now becomes defined in terms of a state politics founded on asserting indigeneity: place of birth, history, religion, race or ethnicity (i.e. descent). We can note then that it is not simply a class politics which is at stake here, one representing economic interest, but more broadly a politics associated with ascribing the nation to an objective social category of the indigenous; a politics concerned with maintaining divisions, hierarchies and boundaries: in sum a state politics. It is thus the state which defines the nation

in social terms and is unable to sustain a purely affirmative politics. The nation is now a representation of the social, no longer a presentation. At the same time it becomes apparent that this statist way of defining the nation is gradually naturalized in thought, as given by history and communitarian "belonging" (birth, descent, etc). The result as Fanon makes clear is collapse into xenophobia and chauvinism: "we observe a permanent see-saw between African unity which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion and a heartbreaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form" (1990: 126).

A similar process can be shown to have taken place in South Africa from 1990 onwards which eventually culminated in massive pogroms against African "foreigners" in May 2008 when 62 people were killed and thousands were displaced and herded into refugee camps. But unlike in the Africa of the early 1960s which Fanon was observing, the South African nation came into being through a new state form within a new world political sequence. It is this new state form which modifies the conditions of production of xenophobic politics and the collapse of nationalism into chauvinism. These conditions, which included the promotion of HRD, produced a politics of fear which largely accounts for the rise of xenophobia and its attendant violent expression throughout the country.

The TJ industry in general and the TRC process in South Africa in particular went about producing victims. As Madlingozi (2010: 210) has rightly pointed out, "whether it is through "fact finding" reports, conference papers, academic journal articles, "field notes", or more egregiously, funding proposals, the core task of a transitional justice entrepreneur is to speak about or for victims". While the TRC did indeed give a platform for victims of "gross human rights violations" to tell their stories, the latter had first to agree to their victimhood. The TRC in fact compiled a register of such victims. Victims were thus constructed, not simply given. Being interpellated (in the Althusserian sense) by the state power as a victim, one acquires a victim's identity unless one consciously resists it³⁷; only a minority are able to do so:

They just want us to be victims and tell our stories so they can help us. I am sick of telling my story. It makes them feel good to show that they are helping us. They don't really want to change things and what good does telling our stories over and over do? They are just white professionals who want to keep their jobs.
(Western Cape Khulumani member, cit. Madlingozi, 2010: 213).

Such comments though are rare, at least in public. Yet in South Africa as previously in Algeria, the people had constituted themselves into a nation through an affirmative politics which stressed national unity and a firm opposition to the apartheid state which was founded on enforced separation; it also had a "truly extraordinary moment". For example here are a couple of observations on popular forms of organisation in South Africa from the 1980s:

³⁷ See Louis Althusser, 1971. Even a full academic discipline of "victimology" has recently been created.

We... 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... 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 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 (Morobe, 1987: 81-2).

The battle in the factories... has also given birth to a type of politics which has rarely been seen among the powerless: 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).

How can we then elucidate the trajectory of South African nationalism from an emancipatory (non-identitarian) conception founded on popular agency in the 1980s, to a chauvinistic one based on victimhood in the 2000s? There is little doubt that this political change resulted from the hegemony of state politics from 1990 onwards, very much along the lines outlined by Fanon for an earlier period³⁸. Yet although necessary, this argument does not constitute a sufficient explanation for democratic South Africa was born during a new political sequence as I have noted; moreover this only accounts for xenophobic politics as such, and not for the violent form it took. Given the dominance of HRD, one could have expected a reduction in violence and indeed this is what neo-liberal theory and TJT assumed. In order to provide a fuller answer, our account must follow the features of the African state as outlined above.

Clearly then we should begin from the idea of the worldwide "democratising mission" which saw the day during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is apparent that South Africa and its TRC process have become paradigmatic for the whole transitional justice industry. Not only does this process seem to have avoided the collapse of the country into internecine violence, but it now provides a model for other similar situations throughout the world. In fact it is supposed to be one of TJ's "success stories". Yet the situation is not so rosy. There been no fundamental reconciliation between so-called "racial groups" in South Africa; the Western notion of multiculturalism - the local version was called the "rainbow nation" - has not led to any form of "creolisation". The new African bourgeoisie has allowed itself to simply parrot White norms and values including an adherence to South African exceptionalism which fetishes commercialisation and an arrogant superiority of South Africans in relation to the rest of the African continent (Neocosmos, 2006b). The ethno-philosophy of "ubuntu" which had the potential of becoming a unifying national conception

³⁸ For details see Neocosmos, 2009a. The new state in South Africa dates from 1990 and not from 1994; 1990 is the date of the entry of the ANC formally into the state, 1994 is simply that of the first elections by universal franchise.

has not been pursued other than finding its way into a couple of judgements of the Constitutional Court in the 1990s. Moreover, the TRC has been criticised for having mainly benefitted perpetrators rather than victims. This comes across quite clearly from the experience of an NGO (Khulumani) which was set up to defend the rights of "victims" and thus found itself in the invidious position of accepting the appellation:

Khulumani was created in order to enable victims and survivors to access the TRC and to make sure that their rights in terms of the TRC Act were protected. Throughout the TRC process Khulumani helped victims obtain and fill out applications and appeals, coordinated meetings with TRC officials, and provided individual and group counselling for victims as they delivered their testimonies. The organization hoped that the official process of truth telling would help them reclaim their dignity. However, for a variety of reasons, the TRC process has left a bitter taste in the mouths of Khulumani members. Khulumani members repeatedly point out that the TRC was a "perpetrator-friendly" process; it betrayed victims in that the promises regarding reparations and truth recovery were never met; and they felt that they were forced to forgive perpetrators while perpetrators and beneficiaries of the apartheid system did not show any remorse (Madlingozi, 2010: 214-15)³⁹.

As Madlingozi shows, being a victim does not enable one to access one's rights; only political organization can begin to achieve this. Madeleine Fullard and Nicky Rousseau also show that the TRC process failed to transform what they call the "habits" (ie. state practices) of the past, by simply relating the contempt with which power treated the powerless during the process itself, an evident continuity from the past if there ever was one. They also note that having the experience of victims officially recognised, was a major achievement for the commission, but these experiences were apprehended ultimately as excesses by individual perpetrators (rather than as the necessary outcome of oppressive state structures and subjectivities) so that "undoubtedly, the TRC failed to adequately situate the gross human rights violations that it addressed in the wider context of apartheid". It is understood then that "those who came to the TRC were not organised political activists... but were most often very poor township residents swept up in the conflicts", they got little or nothing from the process, either in terms of much compensation but more importantly neither in terms of a small victory over power, because of a number of factors including the absence of effective prosecution of perpetrators. They were simply recognised for a while and then cynically discarded.

The impression one gets from Fullard and Rousseau is that it has been "a government choice to keep the TRC on the backburner". In fact, the legitimacy of the apartheid state was never challenged by the new state after 1990, and one could be forgiven for underlining the congruence of interests between apartheid and post-apartheid elites in the maintenance of the system of power as they combined into a new oligarchy. As the authors euphemistically state, this

³⁹ Khulumani has a membership of 55 000, all victims of human rights abuses under apartheid; the overwhelming majority are poor.

failure could have something to do with “a more general muting of... transformative impulses” (Fullard and Rousseau, 2003: 90,97). It is difficult to show surprise at the failure of the TRC to cater for the interest of victims; the production of victims by the state politics of the TRC could not have done so independently of its liberal intentions, for this would have required a different kind of political thinking. Thus is popular affirmation replaced by a politics of supplication.

Given that victims of past apartheid abuses including those organised by NGOs are overwhelmingly poor, they find themselves in an ambivalent position vis-à-vis human rights discourse. On the one hand HRD insists on some idea of reparation, on the other they are at the mercy of power (the state, the law) in acquiring such reparations. The fact that these do not materialise or else do so infinitesimally, only confirms the contempt of the state for victims (Chapman and Van der Merwe, 2008: 285-86). They do not materialise partly because the victims find themselves in their relations to the state within uncivil society, so that they have to be represented by trustees who speak for them within the domain of rights: civil society. Their rights therefore cannot be accessed more or less automatically as those of the middle class in civil society; they have to be mediated by trustees. In the absence of trustees they have to struggle simply to be taken seriously by power whose primary way of relating to them is outside the domain of rights. The fundamental issue then does not concern the provision of reparations, but a completely different way of thinking politics so that people can be able to recover their agency directly and relate to the state as collective subjects, not as dependent victims who must be represented.

The evidence for the absence of the rule of law in uncivil society is overwhelming. In a recent article in a daily newspaper, Steven Friedman, one of South Africa's more observant commentators, summed up the distinction between different forms of state rule very well:

In the areas where most of the poor live, local power holders – such as party bosses or municipal councillors – do not like being challenged by citizens demanding a say in how their neighbourhoods are governed. And often they enjoy links with the police, which ensure that life can be made very difficult for those who stand up to them... For suburbanites, the problem [of policing] is that [the] police do not do enough – it is assumed that if they did more, they would protect lives and properties. For people at the grassroots it is often that they do too much, because they are seen not as protectors but as predators⁴⁰.

The difficulty with Friedman's view is that if people are being denied their rights on a systematic basis, then it is problematic to refer to them as “citizens”; this appellation has to be modified and we cannot assume, as he does, that they

⁴⁰ See Steven Friedman in *Business Day* <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=140782> accessed 20/04/2011. A recent report on violence in South Africa states inter alia: “The police are... critically important protagonists in collective violence, both when they are absent from scenes of mass violence, and when they themselves engage in collective violence against protesting communities”. See Von Holdt et al., 2011: 3.

relate to the state in a domain of civil society⁴¹. In fact the character of the mode of rule in uncivil society can also be illustrated in the context of the rise of xenophobic chauvinism in South Africa. Some brief illustrations will have to suffice. One concerns an incident in Zandspruit, a township outside Johannesburg, in October 2000⁴². A short while after the United Nations Conference Against Racism and Xenophobia had been held in South Africa, Zandspruit, an informal settlement near Johannesburg, erupted, in an orgy of looting and destruction, which miraculously had no fatalities, 1000 Zimbabweans were made destitute and residents had torched more than 100 shacks belonging to Zimbabweans⁴³. Local residents had accused Zimbabweans of being involved in crime and taking their jobs. According to the City of Johannesburg itself, Zandspruit is an extremely poor area where 1 600 families reside in over-crowded conditions with only basic infrastructure⁴⁴. The news media all moralised on the appalling acts of xenophobia, but few went beyond platitudes. It soon emerged however that the Department of Home Affairs had been aware of the tensions in the settlement for several weeks. One of their spokesmen, Leslie Mashokwe, stated that residents had asked the police to take steps against Zimbabweans whom they had accused of stealing their jobs and killing residents⁴⁵.

A number of committees were formed in the community in order to deal with trauma, re-housing and complaints. In response to the Zandspruit residents' complaints three weeks previously, Mashokwe was quoted as saying that: "officials from the departments of home affairs and labour launched a joint operation called Operation Clean Up with the local people and moved into the area to root out the illegal immigrants". He was reported to have said that between 600 and 700 "illegal immigrants" were rounded up and deported to neighbouring countries including Zimbabwe and Mozambique; but a few days later residents noticed that the "illegals" had returned, they rushed to the police station to report the matter, and on the way back they decided to "handle it on their own"; they called a community meeting in which they gave "foreigners" ten days to leave or "face the music". The foreigners did not leave so residents burnt them out. Of course a number of perpetrators were then arrested and taken to court, but the important aspect of the story was that state officials from

⁴¹ Franco Barchiesi has recently argued that work became the "normative premise of virtuous citizenship" during the post-apartheid period, thereby presumably leaving those without work outside civil society in the eyes of the state; see Barchiesi, 2011. He points out that, in the narratives of workers he interviewed, "images of decent work... are deeply linked with ideas of family respectability, strict gendered division of household tasks, masculine power and national purity, where "disrespectful", crime-prone youth are kept out of the streets and under control, women are confined to domesticity, reproductive care, and migrants don't 'steal' national jobs"; see Barchiesi 2010.

⁴² For details see Neocosmos 2010a:87-88.

⁴³ See *Mail and Guardian*, 23rd October 2000.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.vukaplan.co.za/project2.html>

⁴⁵ The following account is taken from the *Mail & Guardian* of 29th October 2000.

two government departments had been directly involved in xenophobic raids aided by the local population.

Only one article made the connection between these events and the statements of the *Draft Bill on Immigration* which had emphasised "enforcement at community level" of the "detection, apprehension and deportation" of undocumented migrants⁴⁶. Mashokwe was later reported to have said that his department condemned the attacks as did the cabinet, the SACP and COSATU, while the ANC did so in *ANC Today* its virtual mouthpiece; coming so soon after the United Nations *World Conference on Racism*, this was predictable⁴⁷. To my knowledge, no South African state institution or representative has so far been taken to court for incitement to commit a crime, and yet it seems abundantly apparent that there may have been some case to answer by the Departments of Home Affairs and Labour in the Zandspruit incident. This should have been the logical outcome of a consistent "culture of rights".

The Draft Bill on Immigration was the brainchild of the Minister of Home Affairs at the time, Mangosuthu Buthelezi; the provisions which were designed to enable "community enforcement" of the law by "good patriots" who would "root out" "illegal foreigners" were later thankfully excised from the final Immigration Act. Yet this has helped to create an alliance of state institutions such as the police and local community leaders so that *Community Policing Forums* (CPFs) can end up being controlled by "strongmen" who can whip up anti immigrant hysteria. It seems that in many cases CPFs were expected to act as vigilantes to "root out" supposed "illegal immigrants" while in May 2008, the pogroms in Alexandra township outside Johannesburg started after a CPF meeting after which residents as well as hostel dwellers decided to take the law into their own hands.

"Community policing" so-called was thought up in the 1990s as a way of building trust between community and police and in fighting crime after an apartheid period during which relations between urban communities and police had totally broken down. Yet given the frequent commonality of attitudes (as well as of interests) between community leaders and police in combating the crime of "illegal immigration", the supposed neutrality of the police towards all community members is easily compromised⁴⁸. "Community leaders" have power not only over other community members but also it seems over the police whom they can order to engage in various activities which are in their interests. It is common practice for councillors for example, to order police to engage in coercive actions, particularly against the poor, as it is common for MPs to order

⁴⁶ See *Business Day* 29th October 2000. The Draft Bill on Immigration has helped to create and legitimise a culture of xenophobia in un-civil society.

⁴⁷ See <http://mail.unwembi.co.za/pipermail/anctoday/2001/00020.html>

⁴⁸ The police have an interest in arresting as many people as possible as they are promoted on the basis of the number of arrests made and not on the number of convictions. See *Neocosmos*, 2010b:125-27.

councillors around⁴⁹. In fact, research on the xenophobic violence of May 2008 for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) showed precisely that it was the politics of leaders at community level which largely determined whether community members engaged in xenophobic violence or resisted it⁵⁰.

The postnational character of the South African state has been apparent in the fact that there has been little attempt to construct a nation (other than the weak attempts at stressing an ethno-philosophy of "ubuntu") after the rejection of the social-democratic type state project of post-apartheid development known as the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP). After its rejection in 1996 under the Mandela presidency and its replacement by a purely neo-liberal economic programme, the final nail was put into the coffin of nation-building. From that moment, the only conception of the nation was indigeneity and no form of state emancipatory project became the object of thought. As the new bourgeoisie scrambled to access capital through the state, such access was provided primarily by means of linkages to white capital through state-brokered deals known as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and through the awarding of government tenders, rather than the privatisation of state assets *per se*.

However, debate regarding access to such opportunities has revolved around who is the most native. Indigeneity then becomes the way to claim resources, jobs, and all other perceived entitlements. This has thus led to a debate on who is more indigenous, and hence to nativism, the view that there is an essence of "South Africaness" which is to be found in "natives". Hence what follows from this conception is a stress on the "native" which itself leads to privileging the twin ideas of birth and phenotype ("race") as the essence of the indigenous and hence as the basis for personal accumulation and legitimate private acquisition in the general interest (Neocosmos, 2010a: 143-144). Hence while an adherence to neo-liberalism and human rights discourse conform to the need of the new Black bourgeoisie to form a joint oligarchy with their White counterparts within civil society, in the absence of any alternative popular nationalism, the rhetoric of nativism also provides the legitimate basis for claims to entitlements in uncivil society.

At the same time, along with the stress on indigeneity, the idea of the migrant has been subjectively uncoupled from that of labour. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of "migrant labour" was the central way of conceiving migrants, today they are thought of as "illegal immigrants" or "asylum seekers". In the 1970s and 80s, the apartheid system was understood as founded upon cheap migrant labour so that at liberation, one of the dominant pressures was to sedentarise labour (Neocosmos, 2010a: 66-77). As a result African migrant labour was discouraged if not systematically stopped. The separation of

⁴⁹ On "community policing" in South Africa see Julia Hornberger, 2008. It is also common for police to illegally destroy the informal shelters of shack dwellers and to participate in illegal "forced removals". Examples abound.

⁵⁰ See Jean Pierre Misago et al., 2009, and also the commentary in Neocosmos, 201a: 130-33.

migrancy from labour provision has also meant its separation from the economy and hence from a contribution to the economic development of the nation. Hence, migrants are seen today as coming to steal (jobs, housing, etc) and not as providing anything to the country. Together with a South African exceptionalism held by people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds according to which South Africa is superior to the rest of the African continent due to its levels of industrialisation, its democracy and its "miraculous" transition, this discourse constructs Africans as the "others" of postapartheid South Africa; it thus sees itself as having the "right to exclude". The deployment of violence then becomes understood as a legitimate right exercised to defend the coincidence of national and personal economic interests.

The combination of all these factors then has made it possible to construct a politics of fear of Africans, or "Afrikagevaar"⁵¹. There develops a "right to exclude" or even a "right to kill foreigners" in order to defend the nation and "freedom" which the government – due to its adherence to HRD - is either unwilling or unable to do: "We are the ones who fought for freedom and democracy and now these Somalis are here eating our democracy"⁵² and again:

The government is now pampering them and taking care of them nicely; as long as the foreigners are here we will always have unemployment and poverty here in South Africa... there is too much of them now, if the government does not do something people will see what to do to solve the problem because it means it is not the government problem, it is our problem (cit. Misago et al. 2009: 28).

The origins of this politics of fear are clearly the state politics applied in South Africa from 1990 onward. Its three main components are systematic state xenophobic discourse and practice, nativist ideology and a hegemonic conception of South African exceptionalism (Neocosmos, 2008, 2010a: 141-147). None of these have been affected by neo-liberal notions of human rights and their centrality in the South African constitution and legal system more generally. Rather, because HRD is inimical to the construction of political subjects and can only think in terms of legal subjects, it has contributed to the systematic de-politicisation of the people with the result that within uncivil society, the dominant political subjectivity remains precisely a state politics of patronage, violence, fear and xenophobia. The politics of xenophobia - for it is a political choice we are talking about - is one determined (in the strong sense) by the structure of the state and the antinomy between civil and uncivil society. It is only an alternative politics such as that affirmed by AbM which emphasises that – "*an action can be illegal. A person cannot be illegal. A person is a person wherever they may find themselves*" (AbM, 2008) - which has the capacity to shift subjectivity, but at the extreme cost of being subjected to state

⁵¹ State politics in South Africa have been focussed on fear since the 1970s, although at the time what was stressed was the fear of Blacks and Reds (i.e. communists). The appropriate terms were then "Swartgevaar" and "Rooigevaar". That the state is still able to whip up hysteria in order to assert its rule speaks volumes on the continuity in state politics from apartheid days. See Neocosmos, 2008, 2010a:141-147.

⁵² Nafcoc leader, Khayelitsha, Cape Town, *Mail & Guardian* September 5-11, 2008.

violence as we have seen. There was no xenophobic violence in 2008 in the areas of Durban where AbM had a strong presence. In fact AbM currently affirm the only subjectivity in South Africa which has the capacity to authorise a mode of politics beyond both state nationalism founded on indigeneity and state democracy founded on the victimhood of human rights discourse:

Our politics starts by recognizing the humanity of every human being. We decided that we will no longer be good boys and girls that quietly wait for our humanity to be finally recognized one day. Voting has not worked for us... Our politics is about carefully working things out together, moving forward together... We do not allow the state to keep us quiet in the name of a future revolution that does not come. We do not allow the NGOs to keep us quiet in the name of a future socialism that they can't build. We take our place as people who count the same as everyone else. Sometimes we take that place in the streets with teargas and the rubber bullets. Sometimes we take that place in the courts. Sometimes we take it on the radio. Tonight we take it here. Our politics starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politics because it comes from the people and stays with the people. It is ours and it is part of our lives (Zikode, 2008).

The xenophobic politics which dominate in many African countries (as indeed elsewhere in the World) are an obvious indication that we have yet to achieve our freedom (Žižek, 2008: 35, 87). The French revolutionary Saint-Just (2004: 551, *my translation*) put it clearly in 1793: "the homeland of a free people is open to all men of the world". We have yet to think through the kind of politics which will enable us to achieve that freedom in today's world.

Conclusion: towards the thinking of political subjectivities

The thinking of politics as subjectivity is not an easy matter as one must attempt, to use Alain Badiou's language, an analysis from the point of the "in-existent" rather than the "existent"⁵³. This thinking must be in excess of the given categories of social divisions, including identities. The "in-existent" here are of course the politically excluded of uncivil society, those who do not count, or in Rancière's terminology "the part of no part" (Rancière, 1999: 9). I have attempted to make sense of the effects on subjectivity of a process of de-politicisation of thought (of the de-politicising or technicisation of politics) as an effect of human rights discourse, transitional justice and attendant neo-liberal conceptions and practice. In particular if we wish to understand violence in the neo-colony, we need to start by understanding the state politics of exclusion. Political exclusion occurs as a result of a subjective exclusion founded on a notion of the rights of the indigenous which is simply defined by the state as

⁵³ For example: "There exists in any world in-existent multiples on which the world confers a minimal intensity of existence. But any creative affirmation is rooted in the identification of these in-existents of the world. Fundamentally, what counts in any real process of creation, irrespective of its domain, is not so much that which exists as that which in-exists. One must learn from the in-existent" (Badiou, 2011, *my translation*).

founded on a social category⁵⁴. But this right is itself made possible by a systematic process of de-politicisation – through the replacement of political agency by juridical agency - wherein people gradually become incapable of thinking for themselves and simply follow state ideologies like zombies. As a result it is not simply “foreigners” who are excluded from rights; large sections of the population in what I have called “uncivil society” are also subjected to political exclusion where they do not possess the right to rights; they are in fact “in-existent” in the domain of civil society.

Subjective exclusion is of course backed up by the deployment of state violence particularly in the domain of uncivil society, but such violence is also deployed by those who are unable or unwilling to think beyond state subjectivities. This form of exclusionary violence is thus systemic in the sense that it is a direct effect of state politics. In South Africa the currently dominant form of violence (post-1994) can clearly be referred to as “systemic violence” in order to distinguish it from other forms of violence in Africa such as riots or revolutionary violence (e.g. North Africa, Burkina Fasso), the carving out of imperial and local fiefdoms (e.g. DRC, Somalia) or inter-party or ethnic violence (e.g. Kenya, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Sudan). Unlike the idea of structural violence, the idea of systemic violence, as used here, has identifiable perpetrators⁵⁵. Systemic violence in South Africa in the present political sequence is primarily deployed against the *politically* excluded/political minorities: the poor, women, children/infants and African outsiders/foreigners, i.e. broadly speaking the working-people.

Hence it is political exclusion – i.e. exclusion from the field of politics - and not social exclusion and the identitarian development of social boundaries as such, which must feature at the core of any analysis⁵⁶. The idea of “political exclusion” as used here is not that dissimilar from that of “political minority/majority” as distinct from “numerical minority/majority” used quite commonly in political science. Political presence is clearly distinct from

⁵⁴ I have argued at length elsewhere that indigeneity (autochthony) is not a question of history, of parenthood or of race, or descent, let alone “blood”; it is not natural, it is simply defined and constructed by state power and (unless resisted) actualized in subjectivity. It can be redefined according to circumstances; see Neocosmos, 2010a:144.

⁵⁵ Most analyses equate structural and systemic violence, e.g. see Žižek, 2008. I am concerned to distinguish the two because systemic violence, while not enacted by exceptional “evil individuals”, is at the same time not a simple effect of structure. Political choices do exist, this is the point.

⁵⁶ A report of in depth empirical research on violence in seven South African townships has noted: “It seems political entrepreneurs thrive in conditions where people are feeling excluded from mainstream political processes” (Von Holdt et al. 2011:68). It is precisely these so-called “political entrepreneurs”, those I have referred to above as “power brokers”, who have access to state resources who are able to mobilize people for collective violence. In order to avoid misunderstanding I should perhaps also note that by “political inclusion” I am not referring to variants of corporatism where inclusion takes place under statist conditions. A genuinely democratic state can only be one which enables the inclusion, in the field of politics, of politically independent popular organisations.

numerical size or social presence. The point is to emphasise, not so much the social location of the excluded, but their political location, meaning in this context their difficulty or incapacity to have their voices heard within the formal political sphere which in this instance is the domain of civil society. It is thus political exclusion/inclusion which is theoretically prior to social exclusion/inclusion and which is a central condition of the latter's existence; and it is this which ultimately explains the collapse of emancipatory nationalism into a xenophobic simulacrum of itself.

Of course to say that violence is systemic is not to make a sociological observation; perpetrators, as I have emphasised, are not exclusively state agents. Systemic violence often takes place between the poor themselves (e.g. xenophobic violence, gender violence). However it is political exclusion, i.e. exclusion from the field of politics, rather than (transition to) democracy which must be seen as the "independent variable", so to speak, in any understanding of the deployment of violence. Violence only comes to be seen as a legitimate way of resolving contradictions among people because popular-democratic politics are excluded from the political domain of uncivil society. Given such exclusion, an affirmative politics is not being heard. This is precisely what is happening to the politics of Abahlali base Mjondolo which all trustees (including state and NGOs) are desperately trying to silence so that they do not feature in the national political process. All the evidence points to the fact that, as a result, systemic violence is on the rise⁵⁷. Clearly this phenomenon is not to be viewed simply as an effect of increases in levels of poverty and inequality which themselves are dire. At the same time of course, violent riots and protests also occur in South Africa and throughout the continent, but these are arguably reactive to systemic violence while being regularly portrayed by the state as pathological, or simply as a demand for services or entitlements gone out of control due to the involvement of agitators. In North Africa however, they have been able, as we have witnessed, to challenge aspects of a mode of rule itself.

Thinking beyond the confines of transition theory is imperative in order to attempt to move beyond the subjective limits of neo-liberal capitalism and liberal democracy, beyond those of state democracy and state nationalism. This is necessary if we are to derive from the inclusive affirmative politics of the North African events, the kind of thinking required to understand changing political subjectivities. Emancipation from neoliberal capitalism in Africa must still begin from affirming the secular nation, although in different ways from the manner it was conceived in the 1960s. But if it is valid to characterise the African state as postnational in form, then it follows that state political subjectivities are unable to help us think an emancipatory politics. If no emancipatory politics can emanate from thinking within the parameters of the

⁵⁷ Systemic violence is at its most extreme arguably in rural areas but that is where it is the least visible. A particular mode of rule based on "tradition" operates in that context as Mamdani (1996) has shown.

state, as the poet recognises, such political subjectivities must be sought elsewhere, among people. This is the main lesson of Egypt and Tunisia today.

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Alternative journalism and the relationship between guerrillas and indigenous peoples in Latin America

Roy Krøvel

Abstract

Academic study of alternative journalism is dominated by an approach that celebrates alternative media for its capacity to “empower” citizens. Existing literature on alternative media and alternative journalism often highlight its potential for creating “spaces” where alternative voices can be heard and its value is seen in its contribution towards the construction of alternative “narratives”. While it is important to celebrate the role of alternative media, it is equally important to remain self-critical in order to learn from past experiences, especially when they raise important ethical questions on the type of alternative narratives or alternative truths produced and the solidarity actions these truths and narratives helped bring about. This is the case with much of the reporting in the alternative media on indigenous issues and rights during the civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, in Chiapas, Mexico.

This article will try to engage critically with the history of European and North American alternative media reporting on indigenous issues in these countries during the 80s and 90s. The purpose is not to discuss empirical findings, but to reflect on theories that can guide future studies on alternative media and alternative journalism on the wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. This article will discuss the usefulness of theories and understandings of alternative media and journalism that builds on postmodern and post structural versions of social constructionism. The article offers a critique of postmodern and post structural versions of social constructionism in studies of alternative media and alternative journalism. The critique builds on previous critiques of social movement theory and research made by scholars writing from a critical realist perspective.

Introduction

Academic study of alternative journalism is dominated by an approach that celebrates alternative media for its capacity to “empower” citizens (Atton, 2009: 274). Existing literature on alternative media and alternative journalism often highlight its potential for creating “spaces” where alternative “voices” can be heard and its value is seen in its contribution towards the construction of alternative “narratives”. This form of “empowerment” is here loosely understood as a process that happens when new “narratives”, insights or understandings make it possible for individuals and communities to participate and influence actively the decisions that affects their daily lives.

While it is often justified to celebrate the role of alternative media, it is equally important, from the perspective of someone who has been and still is engaged in solidarity movements and alternative media, to remain self-critical in order to learn from past experiences, especially when they raise difficult ethical questions on the validity of the alternative narratives or alternative truths they produced. This is in my view the case with much of the reporting in the alternative media on indigenous issues and rights during the civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, in Chiapas, Mexico.

I was deeply engaged in alternative media, reporting on and from the conflicts in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico (Krøvel, 1999, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). I was (and still am) engaged in solidarity activities with social movements in the region; among other things living and coordinating projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador. This paper is therefore not written by someone positioned on the "outside" and independent from alternative media and the solidarity movement. Rather, it is based on the premise that solidarity matters. It is possible to do something that means something in the struggle for liberation or rights or whatever word we choose to describe the struggle. Alternative journalism and alternative media also matters for me because it produces information that helps us and plays a pivotal role in the production of alternative knowledge or understandings. Alternative media is important and can have an effect on the lives of those engaged in the alternative media and the audience of alternative media. But more importantly, it will have an effect on the lives of those the alternative journalists report on.

Therefore it is critical to evaluate the effects solidarity had on the lives of those affected by the solidarity. Did it have the effect we wanted? What type of solidarity did the production of alternative information make possible? Research on alternative media and journalism can and should help us understand such questions. In the case of alternative media and solidarity with Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico in the 80s and at least for much of the 90s it is important to note that the vast majority of alternative journalists reporting to an audience in Europe and North America were not members of the societies they reported on and from. Even if we accept that alternative journalists and media empowered those engaged in the alternative media and those who received the alternative information, the most important question remains: Did the alternative media (seen in the context of the solidarity movement) play a role in empowering the "peoples" of Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas? Or rather, did the alternative media help empower the right "peoples" and organizations?

Much has changed since the early 1980s regarding the understanding of indigenous peoples. Revolutionary organizations in Mexico (EZLN), Guatemala (URNG) and Nicaragua (FSLN) have tried to come to terms with the growing confidence of indigenous peoples and indigenous organizations in the region. Leaders of revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and Guatemala have on several occasions asked for forgiveness for the many mistakes made during the civil wars. In Chiapas, Mexico a new type of revolutionary organization has

emerged, combining elements from a Cuban inspired Marxist history with elements from indigenous culture and indigenous *cosmovisión*. In Chiapas indigenous and mestizo leaders of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) have also engaged in critical self-evaluation of past experiences of cooperation and conflict between a Guevara inspired ("foco") organization and indigenous peoples.

The growing global indigenous movement also had a profound effect on social movements in the global North, instigating a process of learning and thus re-imagining of the concept and understanding of "indigenous peoples" (or "Indians") and indigenous rights, although there has been comparatively little self-critical engagement with the role played by the global solidarity movement and alternative media during the civil wars (Brysk, 2002).

The overall goal of the paper is to offer a critique of existing theories on alternative media and journalism and their usefulness as guides for future research based on the experiences from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas. A good theory will guide research towards important issues or social problems and help us formulate research questions and design a suitable methodology. It will also give perspective to the analysis of research findings. But theories should not be taken to be more than what they are. They should be submitted to constant and critical evaluations against other forms of knowledge, experience and praxis. To some extent this paper is the outcome of my personal ongoing evaluation of existing theories in light of my own experience and knowledge as a practitioner of alternative journalism and later teacher and researcher of journalism. How well suited are they to guide research towards issues I find particularly important? Existing theories on alternative media highlights participation, alternative voices and narratives - all real aspects of alternative media experiences. My concern, however, is that they fail to guide research sufficiently towards other and for me more important aspects of alternative media and journalism.

I will present my argument from a critical realist perspective. Following Bhaskar, this means accepting the value of a multiplicity of ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies (Archer, Bhaskar, Centre for Critical Realism and International Association for Critical Realism, 1998; Bhaskar, 2010). Theories necessarily make some issues and phenomena more salient than others. Therefore, care must be taken to avoid reductionism. Further, according to Sayer, people's relation with reality is one of concern, and understanding these concerns should always be a key issue in research (Sayer, 2010, 2011). Research on alternative media must therefore include aspects of importance and concern for those engaged in it.

Paraphrasing the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, research could start by trying to understand "what makes alternative journalists tick?" (Eriksen, 2009; Laming, 2004). As an alternative journalist engaged in solidarity movement with Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico, I can attest to the importance of both participating and "giving voice to the voiceless". But while such aspects were of some importance to me and many of my friends, they

are certainly not sufficient to explain the activities. More is needed to explain alternative media and journalism in the solidarity movement with the liberation struggles. For us, I believe, solidarity activities were driven primarily by the hope of contributing to change. We wanted to help *empower* excluded and marginalized groups, as I remember it. Or at least reduce the scope for Western interference on the side of reactionary forces fighting against liberation movements. I believe this hope of contributing to a process of emancipation best can be anchored what Bhaskar calls the potential for universal solidarity (Bhaskar and Hartwig, 2010). We have, as humans, a capacity for universal empathy, but we need information, knowledge, experience, in short a learning process, to activate the potential for universal solidarity. Here, alternative media and journalism have the potential of contributing to the learning processes. But the information and knowledge must also be true. I agree with Collier that "the best way to live a morally better life is by coming to have truer ideas about life" (Collier quoted in Sayer, 2011, p. 150). Producing alternative information and alternative narratives are not sufficient. The alternative information and narratives must help us in the learning processes that might lead to "truer ideas about life".

My concern, as a researcher, then, is that many existing theories are not sufficiently capable of guiding research towards such hope and concern. And that our understanding of alternative media and journalism will be poorer for it.

In order to develop the critique of existing theories, I must first map out a history of the struggles of Mexico and Central America, although this struggle is not the main goal for this article. This first part of the article should rather be seen as an attempt at describing what is or was; an ontology which makes it possible later to criticize epistemologies. This ontology expands and elucidates my concern regarding the theories on alternative media, but more importantly, it is also as an argument for the *importance* of researching such issues. My goal in this section is not to convince the reader that my version is the only possible version; the version I will give is far from being a comprehensive account of the civil wars and the activities of the alternative media. Instead, it is my point here to demonstrate that any serious attempt to understand solidarity in the context of the civil wars in Central America must include such concerns as those I will briefly map out in later. They are real and must be dealt with. Theories that fail to guide research explicitly to ask critical questions related to these important aspects of the reality of solidarity and alternative media must themselves be subjected to critical evaluations and subsequent reformulation or refutation.

Existing literature and theoretical perspectives

According to Atton, the normative ideal of alternative journalism argues "that reporting is always bound up with values (personal, professional, institutional) and that it is therefore never possible to separate facts from values. This leads to the epistemological challenge: that different forms of knowledge may be produced, which themselves present different and multiple versions of 'reality'"

from those of the mass media. These multiple versions demonstrate the social construction of news: there is no master narrative, no single interpretation of events", which, understandably, leads to questioning the "regime of objectivity" (Atton, 2009: 272). This raises two key questions that need clarification before moving on to the literature on the civil wars of the region: What is a "regime of objectivity" and how can we define "alternative journalism"?

A variety of definitions of alternative journalism and alternative media is found in the literature (Coyer, Dowmunt, and Fountain, 2007). For the sake of simplicity, this paper will start from Atton's definition: "a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of "doing" media" (Atton, 2004: ix). This definition includes a broader range of activities outside a narrow definition of "media". Also, many definitions of alternative media and journalism underline the close and sometimes symbiotic relationship with social movements (Cox, Mattoni, Berdnikovs, and Ardizzoni, 2010). It is useful here to draw on Downing's definition of "radical media", a concept often used more or less synonymously with alternative media: Radical media aim to challenge existing powers, to represent marginalized groups, and to foster horizontal linkages among communities of interest (Downing, 2001).

The "regime of objectivity" in journalism can best be understood based on literature used to educate new generations of journalists. According to one much used textbook "objectivity" in journalism has been understood and defined in many ways (Harcup, 2009). A pragmatic view is often taken, describing "objectivity" in journalism as a ritual, something closely related to checking whether or not a story "holds". This pragmatic understanding of "objectivity" in textbooks normally emphasis the need for evaluating conflicting claims in order to uncover the "truth". Evaluating conflicting claims is part of daily routine for journalists (Harcup, 2009). This includes looking at both sides of a story, assessing conflicting claims, assessing the credibility of sources, looking for evidence, and not publishing anything believed to be untrue.

This ideal for journalism is compatible with what Goldman has called "the veritistic cause" against distortion of truth (A. Goldman, 1999, p. 186). According to Goldman, the pursuit of truth can be enhanced by "good interpersonal argumentation" in addition to "well-designed technologies and institutions of public communication" (A. Goldman, 2009). In some text books for journalism studies, in contrast, the evaluation of conflicting claims in "pursuit of truth" has moved to the background in the discussions of objectivity. For Schudson and Anderson, the main question is how "objectivity acts as both a solidarity enhancing and distinction-creating norm and as a group claim to possess a unique kind of professional knowledge" (Schudson and Anderson, 2009).

This article will in particular discuss and offer a critique of the usefulness of theories and understandings of alternative media and journalism that builds on postmodern and post structural versions of social constructionism. The critique builds on previous critiques of social movement theory and research made by

scholars writing from a critical realist perspective. Jenneth Parker has criticized the ways in which an “uncritical view of pluralism” imported from postmodernism has had an impact on progressive social movements (Parker, 2005: 251). “Postmodern uncritical pluralism is incapable of taking marginalized knowledge claims seriously precisely because it does not provide any reason to distinguish between claims – it is relativistic” (Parker, 2005: 253). Not providing reasons to distinguish between claims undermines the potential for formulating effective critiques of dominating narratives or dominating forms of knowledge. I agree with Parker that “knowledge claims are essential aspects of movement activity” and that “critique of the workings of power in knowledge requires an epistemological basis” (Parker, 2005: 258). Similarly, relativistic pluralism also makes it impossible to engage critically, distinguishing between knowledge claims made by the movements themselves.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that social constructionists are properly put on the left spectrum of politics, seeing themselves as allies of the oppressed, as demonstrated by for instance Ian Hacking (Hacking, 1999: 95). My intention here is to criticize the usefulness of postmodern or poststructuralist versions of constructionism, where analysis is easily reduced to celebrations of the alternative in “alternative voices”, “alternative spaces” and “alternative narratives”, leaving little or no ground for evaluation of the validity of the claims and the knowledge. This distinction between what Hacking calls grades of constructionist commitment (1999: 19) is necessary in order to be able to formulate a critique of the “alternative narratives” or understandings produced by alternative journalists, which in its turn is necessary in order to reflect on the cases where alternative knowledge and alternative narratives work to oppress marginalized groups.

Jake Lynch and others writing from the perspective of “peace journalism” have tried to formulate a philosophical basis for an alternative journalism especially relevant for this paper as it deals with journalism on conflict and war. According to Lynch, his version of “peace journalism” is grounded in critical realism (Lynch, 2008). Defining critical realism, Lynch quotes Wright’s definition: “A way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower (hence ‘realism’), while also acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known (hence ‘critical’)” (Wright quoted in Lynch, 2007: 6). From a critical realist point of view all claims about natural and social reality are fallible, but not equally fallible. It is thus necessary to attempt to evaluate the validity of statements in relation to notions of causalities and social or natural ontology.

Based on the deep ecology of Arne Næss (Næss, 1966, 1973, 1999) and critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008) a number of thinkers have recently developed concepts and philosophies helpful when dealing with problems related to pluralism. According to Næss, richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realization of the values defined in deep ecology, and are also “values in

themselves" (Næss and Mysterud, 1999: 356). In a philosophical debate with Austrian-born philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend both agreed on the importance of learning when confronted with diversity and in particular in the form of indigenous peoples and their systems of knowledge. Feyerabend criticized the Western bureaucratic logic which he saw as incapable of understanding indigenous peoples and their systems of knowledge (Feyerabend, 1999). Anyone trying to meet and understand indigenous peoples therefore had to accept the fact that you need to be able to learn and change to be able to understand. It is not possible to meet and understand indigenous peoples based on inflexible, monolithic theories or truths. Næss, in his reply, underlined the case of the Sami in Scandinavia and concluded that the real loser from a failure to learn and understand would in the long run be the dominating culture. It would become poorer because of loss of richness and diversity of life-forms (Næss, 1999).

Both the guerrillas and the international solidarity movement in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas were, in my view, faced with a situation where they needed to learn and to change as they were confronted by indigenous peoples and their systems of knowledge. Existing concepts, understandings and theories were, of course, based on analysis of existing knowledge, which normally included very little or no knowledge of the indigenous peoples and their world views. In most cases indigenous peoples were collapsed into existing categories like "peasants" or merely seen as exploited and excluded without much capacity for having agency.

Finally, when discussing the "global solidarity movement" here, I refer to existing studies available on the Zapatista uprising and a global network of solidarity organization. When I discuss the international solidarity movement with Guatemala and Nicaragua, I mainly refer to a handful of studies that sometimes only briefly deals with the international solidarity movements, for instance Stoll, Gordon, Hale and Ekern. This is a field where more investigation is needed. While some of these studies refer to experiences as activists in or researchers of North American solidarity movements, I personally have more experience with the European solidarity movement. I must therefore be careful to avoid generalizations when I try to conclude or formulate hypotheses on the information produced by the solidarity movements.

The difficult relationship between guerrillas and indigenous peoples

The purpose of this attempt to map out the main events of the conflicts between armed organizations and indigenous groups is to describe what I believe is a general trend in this process of change: First, limitations in knowledge, understanding and categories in revolutionary organizations resulted in misunderstandings, conflict and provoked resistance from indigenous groups. Second, resistance and organization "from below", from indigenous communities, was the driving force in the process of change locally and

nationally. Third, local indigenous groups and organizations had to seek international alliances.

Fourth, revolutionary organizations had different and often pragmatic reasons for learning and changing. Fifth, this was a multifaceted process where "hardliners" (here understood as those who resisted change in politics towards and understanding of the role of indigenous peoples) were pitted against those seeking compromise or accord with indigenous groups. Sixth, as this was, in general, a process driven by resistance from "below", it is perhaps not surprising that the process of reflection and learning reached "Northern" solidarity movement only gradually and later. Seventh, a substantial section of the "Northern" solidarity movement continued to support "dogmatic" views within the revolutionary organizations, as in the case of Guatemala in the 90s when the overwhelming majority of recourses came from international supporters, thereby postponing a necessary process of learning and self-criticism.

Let us now look closer at the unfolding of the process of change in each of the three cases.

Mapping the conflict in Nicaragua

In Nicaragua a violent civil war on the Atlantic Coast between mainly Miskito and some Kriol armed groups and the Sandinista Army broke out as the initial support for the Revolution in the region smoldered and gradually became more conflictive during the first two year after the revolution (1979). The conflict with indigenous and Kriol groups was very costly both in economic and political terms for the Sandinista government, and military overstretch was a real threat as the army faced military organizations attacking from across the borders to the north and the south, as well as from the inaccessible forests and mountains in the interior of the country. The violence on the Atlantic Coast gradually came to an end when local Sandinistas took the lead in peace process, often negotiating directly with indigenous and Kriol communities and commanders. The process led to a new Nicaraguan constitution which formally acknowledged that Nicaragua was a multiethnic country and granted autonomy to the peoples living on the Atlantic Coast.

Former (and current) president, Daniel Ortega, has on various occasions asked for forgiveness for the mistakes made during the civil war against the indigenous population. The probably most criticized human rights abuses took place when the Sandinista Army "evacuated" approximately 100 Miskito and Mayangna villages along the Rio Coco River and forcefully resettled the population in a "model village" named "Tasba Pri".

We have ample support for the main lines of the conflict described above from both academic research on the conflict between Sandinistas and indigenous groups and in self-critical retrospective analysis from the Sandinista leadership. Charles Hale and Edmund Gordon are just two prominent examples of researchers who have delivered convincing arguments on how inflexible theoretical perspectives and lack of knowledge led the Sandinistas to make

numerous mistakes that contributed significantly to a downward spiral towards all out civil war on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (Gordon, 1998; Hale, 1994). This is, in my view, amply demonstrated by the lack of attention and ignorance of these questions in the writings of leading Sandinistas before the revolution (Fonseca, 1964, 1985). Perspectives from ethnic minorities on racism in Nicaragua can be found in Hooker and Sujo (Hooker, 2001; Sujo Wilson, 1998). Excellent examples of probing retrospective criticism and self-criticism from Sandinista leaders can be found in the work of Ramirez (Ramírez, 1999), Eduardo Cardenal (E. Cardenal, 1980), Fernando Cardenal (F. Cardenal, 2008), Cunningham (Kain et al., November 2006) and others. Criticism of the international solidarity movement and alternative media can be sought in Ekern and Gordon (Ekern, 1998, 1999).

A more detailed study of alternative journalism from Nicaragua during these years would undoubtedly uncover a somewhat more complex or multifaceted picture, including a few reports in the alternative media that were sympathetic towards indigenous resistance to Sandinista policies. Some alternative journalists and media began a process of re-thinking indigenous issues and rights before others. This should not, however, lead us to obscure the dominating tendency: The international solidarity movement took too long to respond to the calls for justice and rights from indigenous and other minority groups in Nicaragua. The most important question in relation to alternative journalism and media then becomes: Why did it take it take so long before alternative journalists and media started producing information and alternative knowledge that facilitated solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua?

The dominant frames: an illustration

An excellent collection of propaganda and PR posters from Nicaragua and at least 24 other countries (some posters are unidentified) was published in Managua recently (Bujard and Wirper, 2009). Looking through the hundreds of posters documented here, a pattern of dominant frames and leitmotifs emerges. After losing hundreds of young and dedicated fighters during the years of revolutionary war against the dictatorship, we should not be surprised to find that a substantial portion of posters is dedicated to remembering and honoring martyrs like Carlos Fonseca, Leonel Rugama and others. As the civil war with CIA-supported troops led and dominated by former members of the National Guard broke out, it is likewise easy to understand why images of war and warfare enters other realms of society, as seen for instance in posters depicting farmers on tractors branding machineguns or villagers going about their daily business armed and vigilant. With the civil war came militarization of the society. In the struggle against US-imperialism, there is no alternative, the posters say; you have to be "with us or against us".

The same themes and narratives dominate the international posters as well. The posters are militant, celebrating armed resistance to US-imperialism or showing victims of imperialist aggression. They speak of "freedom of a people" (The

Nicaraguan people) (poster from Ireland, p326) or the survival of a people (poster from Sweden, p327). The dominant frame is US imperialism; "Blood money" (poster from England, p. 326), "US backyard" (poster from Denmark, p.327) or aimed more directly against President Ronald Reagan (poster from Iceland p. 327), just to mention a few examples. In this life and death struggle against US imperialism, as it is portrayed, other questions or nuances that do not fit in with the dominant narrative become invisible. Paraphrasing Entman, some elements of the perceived reality are made more salient than others. In this "with us or against us" frame of understanding, there is little room criticizing the Sandinista government or questioning Sandinista policies regarding indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities. The "indios" are made invisible.

A (very) brief account of the conflict between guerrilla and indigenous peoples in Guatemala

A similar account of the problems between guerrillas and indigenous peoples in Guatemala can also be told based on existing studies. I will do it only very briefly here to illustrate the main lines of argument presented earlier. A good place to begin would be the report from the UN appointed "truth commission" that investigated human rights abuses in Guatemala during the civil war (Commission for Historical Clarification (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico), 1997). According to the commission the overwhelming majority of human rights abuses were committed against indigenous population by the state security apparatus. "Only" 3 % of the investigated cases were attributed to the armed insurgents, relatively small percentage, but still, considering that the total number of human rights violations counted several hundred thousands, we must conclude that the 3 % amounted to several thousand cases of torture, forced disappearance and killings.

In the process of negotiating a peaceful settlement of the civil war and agreeing to an accord on indigenous rights, the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) acknowledged the need for special rights and protection for the indigenous peoples (Aldana Mendoza, Quiñonez, and Cojtí, 2006; Cabrera, D., and Ediciones Nueva, 1997; Krøvel, 1999). Leaders like Rodrigo Asturias (nom de guerre "Gaspar Ilom") has later admitted that the URNG violence and abuse against civilians in periods amounted to proportions that can only be explained as a systemic problem (Kruijt, 2008). Asturias took the problem so seriously that he wrote a book about it (Ilom, 1989). Other intellectual leaders of the armed organizations also contemplated on what it meant to be a Marxist revolutionary organization in a country where the majority of the peasants and workers belonged to indigenous communities (Moran, 1982; Payeras, 1983, 1991; Payeras, Harnecker, and Simon, 1982). From the diaries and retrospective accounts of Guatemalan guerrilleros we see the profound effect the indigenous issues had on the guerrillas and the development of the war (Macías, 1997; Porras, 2009; Santa Cruz Mendoza, 2004).

In Nicaragua the conflict with indigenous peoples on the Atlantic Coast posed a serious threat of military overstretch for the Sandinista government. The war was extremely costly and virtually impossible to win because of the vast and inaccessible terrain. Also in Guatemala the conflict with the indigenous population and a growing indigenous movement undermined the political and military position of the guerrilla. Kruijt recounts a meeting between indigenous leaders and guerrilla commanders in Quetzaltenango where the indigenous leaders declined to support the guerrilla, a decision which proved to have dire consequences for the armed organizations (Kruijt, 2008). Guerrilleros have told similar stories, explaining how it gradually became more and more difficult to find new recruits. The guerrillas had to start offering small sums of money to Guatemalan refugees in Mexico to come join the guerrilla for a few months (Santa Cruz Mendoza, 2004). After a while also this trickle of new recruits came to a full stop, slowly forcing the URNG to seek a peaceful settlement.

Much has been said and written about the role of the international solidarity movement in this process. I do not agree with David Stoll in his description of two more or less equally bad and thus morally equally responsible parties (Stoll, 1993, 1999). I also find it too much of a simplicity to describe the global solidarity movement as naïve tools used by the URNG to misinform the public in Europe and North America (Hovland, 1996; Stoll, 2008). Leading intellectuals did try to re-think the role of an armed organization in a country with indigenous majority, albeit from a vanguardist position of superiority, as seen for instance in Payeras' reflections on the indigenous issue (Payeras, 1983). The educated guerrilleros had few doubts about their superiority in knowledge and moral right to lead and command the insurgency. It is also correct, as stated by Porras, that the guerrilla initially grew rapidly, probably much too fast, based on support from large segments of the indigenous highland population (Porras, 2009). The relationship between guerrilla and indigenous peoples was not always only confrontational. But Stoll and others have a strong case when criticizing the solidarity movement for being docile and providing uncritical support for the revolutionary organizations.

In retrospect, we should have asked many more critical questions. Were the armed organizations really representing "the Guatemalan people"? Which people? Were they at all capable of communicating with the indigenous peoples in such a way that they could convey the aspirations and hopes of the indigenous peoples? We know now that the guerrilla failed to capture the aspirations of the indigenous peoples. The guerrilla gradually became irrelevant as a vehicle for indigenous peoples struggling for liberation and freedom. Failing to understand indigenous peoples and indigenous issues undermined the efforts to overthrow the regime by armed means.

An alternative: Chiapas and the EZLN

The developments of Chiapas, Mexico is undoubtedly very different from both the Guatemala and Nicaraguan experience, and has already been subjected to a

large number of studies. This short analysis here is intended to illustrate that there was nothing pre-determined or deterministic about the developments in Guatemala and Nicaragua described above. It could have been different.

In a fascinating discussion on the study of history between renowned academics Adolfo Gilly and Carlo Ginzburg and the Zapatista military leader, Subcomandante Marcos, Marcos ends a letter saying: "We didn't actually propose anything. In reality, the only thing we proposed was to change the world; the rest we have improvised. We had our "squared" concepts of the world and revolutions thoroughly dented in the encounter with the indigenous reality of Chiapas" (Gilly, Subcomandante Marcos, and Ginzburg, 1995). This is a topic which Subcomandante Marcos has dwelt on on several occasions, for instance in numerous short stories where he blends indigenous and revolutionary mythology to create a new universe of narratives, combining elements of both (as the story of how Emiliano Zapata came to Chiapas and became an indigenous semi-god). It is also a popular theme with intellectuals reporting from or reflecting on the Chiapas experience (J. Berger, 1999; Regis Debray, 1996; Galeano, 1996; García Márquez, 2001; Hayden, 2002; Klein, 2001; Landau, 2002; Monsiváis, 2001; Saramago, 1999; Taibo II, 1994; Vázquez Montalbán, 1999).

The EZLN was founded by members of FLN, a Cuba inspired Marxist movement with much in common with revolutionary organizations in Guatemala and Nicaragua, but there are several reasons why the FLN and the indigenous population in Las Cañadas (in particular, but also elsewhere in Chiapas) came to form an alliance which over time grew into a new type of organization not seen in Guatemala and Nicaragua.

First, the organizational level among the indigenous peoples in Chiapas and especially in Las Cañadas was already very high when the FLN came to Chiapas. Strong, well organized regional peasant unions already had a long and impressive history of fighting local landowners and local authorities. This was to some extent a result of the work done by Maoist activists from the capital and the central regions of Mexico. The Catholic Church and bishop Samuel Ruiz had also worked ceaselessly offering education and organizational advice. The relative strength of already existing indigenous capacity for organizing was balanced by the evident weakness of the FLN. The leaders spoke of a nationwide revolutionary movement that would lead a popular uprising, but the efforts to organize outside Chiapas was a failure. That gave the indigenous members of EZLN a position of strength which in the long run transformed the power relations of the organization.

The intellectual flexibility of some of the military leaders, and in particular Subcomandante Marcos, who had earlier written a thesis on Foucault and thought at a university in Mexico City, probably also played a role in the transformation of the organization. The transformation would not have been possible without the national and international solidarity campaign that succeeded in halting the military campaigns against the Zapatistas. That created a space where the Zapatistas could experiment and develop new form of

organization and politics based on notions of indigenous tradition. Indigenous issues came to the forefront of the Zapatista discourse, especially during and after the negotiations with government representatives in San Andres in 1995 and 1996, when the Zapatistas invited hundreds of national and international to participate as advisors.

My point here is not to romanticize the Zapatistas (M. T. Berger, 2001). I have elsewhere pointed to the fact that successive neo-liberal governments have declined to fulfill their obligations in relation to Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (Krøvel, 2009). The indigenous peoples of Chiapas remain poor and subjected to racism and systematic exclusion in spite of the global media attention and the global solidarity movement. But still, the EZLN remain faithful to its ideals and continues uncorrupted to struggle for liberation and justice. Remaining uncorrupted is in itself no mean feat.

It should be noted that there are problems, albeit of a different type, with the ways the global solidarity movement represented the Zapatistas and in particular indigenous groups in opposition to the Zapatistas. A relatively large body of literature has been discussing this phenomenon from different angles. Beginning with Nobel laureate Octavio Paz, a long list of Mexican authors have criticized not only the Zapatistas, but also what they perceive to be uncritical embracement of the armed insurgents (Paz, 1994). Paz particularly lamented what he believed was a new and postmodern form of politics, where image and images mattered more than arguments and reason. From a sympathetic perspective, Berger warned against the dangers of romancing the Zapatista struggle (M. T. Berger, 2001). A similar type of argument has been put forward by Hellman. According to Hellman, the global solidarity movement has contributed to producing a "flattened" picture of the actors and events in Chiapas" (Hellman, 2000).

I do not want to diminish the importance of critically examining the validity and trustworthiness of the information produced by the global solidarity movement on the conflict in Chiapas. In fact, many of the same processes seen in Nicaragua and Guatemala can probably be said to be present and influencing the representation of the Zapatistas and the conflict in Chiapas, sometimes leading the global solidarity movement to overlook alternative perspectives or make indigenous organizations with alternative views less salient or invisible in contrast to the Zapatistas. Still, while some criticism has been made against the Zapatistas, it would be wildly unfair to compare the alleged mistakes by the Zapatistas with the type of human rights abuses committed by URNG or FSLN. Nonetheless, the argument remains the same: The quality of the information produced by the alternative media must be evaluated in relation to a notion of social ontology and a theory of generative mechanisms (root causes for exclusion, poverty and war, for instance), not utilitarian arguments based on imaginations of what might or might not be useful in the current political debate.

In my view the Zapatista experience first and foremost demonstrates the possibility, as Feyerabend outlined, of meeting and trying to understand

indigenous peoples not from a position of inflexible and absolute truths, but in a process of communication which will have to result in change and development, as old concepts of the world and the revolution get dented, and new understandings emerge. This was also something that deeply affected the international solidarity movement, as activists tried to combine respect for pluralism, the right to be *different*, with universal notions of freedom, liberation and rights grounded in the best of the enlightenment ideals (for more see (Krøvel, 2009). A number of media projects demonstrate this combination of universal solidarity (Bhaskar) and deep respect for indigenous autonomy. The Irish Mexico Group, for instance, combined a real willingness to learn from the indigenous peoples with colorful reporting back home. PROMEDIOS goes one step further. PROMEDIOS has for several years facilitated workshops so that representatives from indigenous communities can become the reporters themselves. Other, similar projects could also have been mentioned here, but these will suffice to illustrate my point. The solidarity with the Zapatistas demonstrates that another form of solidarity is possible.

Discussing the alternative media in the three cases

A premise for this paper has been that this process of change (coming to terms with indigenous issues and rights) was necessary and important. Based on existing literature I have discussed the chronology of events in the three cases, and concluded that the process was instigated and driven by local communities "on the ground" on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, in the indigenous regions of Guatemala (and refugee camps across the border with Mexico) and in the highlands and Las Cañadas of Chiapas. The movement for indigenous rights was met with significant resistance and also violence from the revolutionary organizations in Guatemala and Nicaragua and abuse from some in the international solidarity movements.

The revolutionary organizations in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas gradually came to terms with the growing self-confidence of the indigenous movement through different routes. A large segment of the solidarity movement, in contrast, was the last to undergo a process of reflection and change regarding indigenous peoples and indigenous rights. After the support from the indigenous communities dried up, up to 90 % of the funding of the guerrilla organizations in Guatemala (URNG) came from sources in the "West". This insistence on prolonging a failed strategy contributed to postponing a necessary process of change in URNG. The experience in Chiapas, in contrast, demonstrates that other possibilities existed. There, the armed insurgents (EZLN) exclusively depended on local indigenous peasants, and they did so to such an extent that it fundamentally altered the power structures in the armed organization.

The three cases forms the historical background for formulating a critique of, first, alternative media and journalism on the conflicts in Central America, and, second, existing theories on alternative media and journalism.

Alternative media and journalism did in general play an important role in informing "Western" audiences on the conflicts and made it possible to produce alternative frames of understandings. Alternative media and journalism were particularly important in Europe and North America as a resource for information because of the geographical distance between most readers (and listeners) and the region. But a failure to critically question the selected "voices" and the "narratives" these voices produced, often made alternative journalists overlook other "voices" that could have contributed towards a more truthful and reliable representation of the conflicts. In reality, this uncritical reporting resulted in a new hierarchy of "voices", some given "space", others systematically ignored.

There was, in my view, nothing deterministic about failure to engage critically with sources of information and narratives. It did not necessarily have to be that way. Many alternative journalists had deep insight into the countries and cultures after living years in the region. They were often in a better position to report fairly and truthfully than many journalists working for mainstream media. It should have been possible for alternative journalist in the alternative media to participate in constructing new understandings of indigenous peoples and indigenous rights at a much earlier stage.

Finally, I must remind the reader that these hypotheses are not the result of an empirical investigation, although it builds on experience as a researcher and alternative journalist in all three cases discussed. This is not to say that we do not need more empirical evidence. In fact, much more empirical research is needed on the role played by alternative journalists, alternative media and international solidarity during the conflicts and wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. But existing theories on alternative media and journalism inform and guide research questions and methodologies. Therefore, it is necessary to have a continuing discussion on the usefulness and value of existing theories as guides for research and interpretation. Are existing theories likely to produce answers to the most urgent questions related to social movements, guerrillas and indigenous peoples in Central America and Mexico?

Alternative media in light of the indigenous experience

Trying to understand the mechanisms behind the developments discussed in this paper, I will venture out to propose three hypothesizes for future testing and analysis. First, I propose that "Western" or "Northern" journalists in the alternative media connected to the solidarity movement were employing Northern concepts and categories uncritically, in much the same way as discussed and criticized by Feyerabend and Næss. The frames of understanding and narratives were constructed on Northern theories on causes and effects of the civil war. Like so many other media narratives, the narratives produced by employing these pre-defined concepts and theories on the conflicts in the region, tended to be in black and white: the good vs. the bad, the protagonists vs. the antagonists. These theories were produced in contexts different from the

multicultural realities of Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico, and were not necessarily suited for the analysis and understanding of the difficult relationship between Marxist guerrillas and indigenous peoples (see for instance Régis Debray, 1978; R. Debray, 1980; Guevara and Deutschmann, 2003). Little reflection was given to the crucial question of whether or not these theories were valid outside the societies where they had been produced (Lysaker and Jacobsen, 2010).

Second, I would have to indicate that the rise of postmodern and post structural versions of social constructionism in social movements, seen in the frequent usage of arguments related to "alternative voices", "opening up spaces" and "construction of alternative narratives", augmented the problems. I agree with Jenneth Parkers that "postmodern uncritical pluralism" is "undermining progressive movements contestation of dominant knowledge" (Parker, 2005: 251). Giving "voice" to the "voiceless" was in itself too often seen as a justification or an argument for printing or representing voices or arguments not heard in mainstream media. The alternative media can of course not "give voice" to anything near all of the "voiceless". The alternative journalists have to choose (journalists as "gate keepers") which voices to give "space" and, as is common in journalism, it tends to be those that look and sound most like the journalists themselves: In this case, university students, trade unionists and leaders of guerrilla organizations. My hypothesis is that alternative journalists did not only make these "voices" and their arguments more salient than other "voices" and arguments (Entman, 1993, 2004), but that they often also adopted their theories and frames of understanding regarding indigenous peoples.

I do not believe that this was uniformly the case with all alternative media and journalism at all times during the period in question. There were, of course, conflicting views and alternative ways of reporting also within the alternative media connected to the solidarity movement. The process of coming to terms with the demands from the indigenous peoples and the growing global indigenous movement took various routes and varying amounts of time (Brysk, 2002). Nonetheless, when trying to understand why this process happened only later and slower in the solidarity movement than among those affected in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico, I believe these possible explanations to be necessary ingredients in any attempt of learning from the experience.

A third possible explanation must also be considered for future research: The conditions under which information were produced affected and framed the information produced in the alternative media in the "West" (Atton, 2009). The alternative media referred to here, catered to the needs of an audience in (Western) Europe and North America. The audience needed the information for certain purposes, for example in debates, protests etc. Certain types of information were more useful in this context than other. Some elements of the reality were more likely than other to be reported. Frames for interpreting the information were constructed so that they resonated with deeply rooted cultural meta narratives. In short, the alternative media was subjected to the same

processes as the mainstream media. The result of these processes was too often to conflate a complex reality into a mono causal explanation, where capitalism and US imperialism played the leading roles as the villain in the story. While this was undoubtedly justified, it also tended to overshadow and erase elements that did not fit the master narrative. It took long, hard and dedicated struggle from indigenous communities to challenge and change this master narrative.

Conclusions

I have tried to analyze the difficult relationship between indigenous peoples and guerrillas in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. I have tried to show that a failure to understand and a lack of willingness to learn contributed to undermining the guerrilla and its struggle in Nicaragua and Guatemala. Similarly, I have argued that the alternative media should have asked more critical questions at an earlier stage.

Taking solidarity seriously means that we must also take seriously the issue of what effect the solidarity activities did have on the lives of the peoples we intended to support in their struggles for liberation, freedom or rights. I have here tried to argue that merely investigating this problem from the perspective of existing theories of the world and revolution will not help us much, as this form of employment of existing theories on indigenous communities and cultures was a major part of the problem in the first place. As Næss has argued, the kind of rational debate and decision-making process of the powerful industrial tradition will prevail if Northern theories or understandings of the world form the basis for the communication (Næss, 1999: 59). An alternative would be to have what Feyerabend calls an "open exchange" guided by a pragmatic philosophy: "The participants get immersed into each other's ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving to such an extent that their ideas, perceptions, worldviews may be entirely changed" (Feyerabend in Næss 1999: 58). It could be argued that this was indeed what happened over the next 25 years of interaction between Northern social movements and indigenous peoples (ideas, perceptions, worldviews were entirely changed). The problem was that it happened too slowly to have any real effect on the type of solidarity displayed with the struggling peoples during the conflicts.

It is not necessary for my main conclusion that the reader here agrees with my version of the history of the development of social movement, guerrilla and indigenous peoples relations. My intention here is to demonstrate that a meaningful analysis of alternative media in these conflicts needs to investigate and engage critically with questions of causality on several levels, including levels of the individuals, communities, structures, economy, culture and societies. It is not enough to merely document and present alternative narratives or epistemologies. Ontology is essential in order to evaluate the quality of epistemologies (Bhaskar, 2010). I am not suggesting that we can have unquestionable, certain knowledge on issues like those I have discussed here, but all knowledge is not equally fallible.

Returning to the theory on alternative media and alternative journalism, we need to ask whether the existing theories are useful tools for deepening our understanding of alternative media and journalism. Existing theories in my view too often employ a language of "narratives", "voices" and "spaces", paying scant attention to the quality of the versions of reality that is being produced. A critical examination of alternative media and alternative journalism related to the difficult and conflicting relationship between guerrilla organizations and indigenous peoples must lead us to move beyond merely celebrating alternative journalism and alternative media for "giving voice" to the "voiceless". Alternative journalists and alternative media must engage critically with notions of social ontology and causalities in order to investigate the validity in claims and statements, also when these are made by "voices" excluded from mainstream media.

So what difference does it make? A critical reader might legitimately ask why we should criticize possible misrepresentations in the alternative media when the overwhelming problem is related to authoritarian regimes, US imperialism and a docile mainstream media. One answer is the belief that solidarity matters. Solidarity has the potential of having an effect on struggles in the global South and must therefore be taken seriously. If the key contribution of international media attention to the struggles in the global South is to be a brake on possible government repression, the information must be reliable. Nothing is more damaging to the solidarity efforts than being proved mistaken in a public debate with opponents. But there is a more fundamental reason why we should care about the quality and reliability of the information produced by the alternative media. According to Næss, we should always meet and confront an opponent by his or her strongest arguments. This is not exclusively in order to facilitate a debate on the issue at stake, but also to ensure one's own learning process. Considering the best possible counter arguments is the best way to ensure the production of robust alternative knowledge capable of serving as a basis for developing valuable solidarity activities. In my view, this should be a key issue for us who believe that solidarity matters.

Several recent contributions to the literature on alternative media try to map out the road ahead for the study of alternative media. According to Cox et al., alternative media do not develop in a void. They "continuously challenge and are challenged by the presence of local, national and transnational media corporations and commercial platforms" (Cox et al., 2010: 2). Atton specifically calls for studies on "the ways people work" and "what use the audience makes of it" (the alternative media) (Atton, 2009: 274). Downing et al. show how radical media can be used to develop identity and solidarity within social movements and local communities (Downing, 2001). These and other studies of alternative journalism and media point to the need for more research of the interplay between alternative media and a wider society.

However, none of these proposals go far enough to capture the interplay between alternative media, alternative narratives, the solidarity actions they help make possible and the results and outcomes of solidarity actions. They are

not likely to yield fruitful results on the important relation between international solidarity, the civil wars and indigenous peoples. None of them is likely to guide future research towards asking important questions on the effects alternative journalism had on indigenous communities. Nor are they likely to guide researchers towards including a wide enough selection of sources to shed light on this complex relationship. Analyses and celebration of alternative media without taking these questions into consideration are not very useful for the long term learning and development of alternative journalism and alternative media.

It is here useful to consider the advice of Norman Fairclough. In an article on the state of art in the research of organizations, he warned against the growing influence of postmodern and post structural versions of social constructionism (Fairclough, 2005). According to Fairclough, these theoretical perspectives are not likely to capture these important aspects of reality. Instead he calls for more research grounded in critical realism. I am not suggesting here that Cox, Atton and Downing are postmodern or post structural social constructionists. On the contrary, Cox et al. for instance point towards promising avenues for future research that will move research beyond post-modern perspectives in which media are a self-contained reality. I merely want to underline the importance of critical engagement with a reality far beyond the media sphere or the social movements.

Critical realism as a meta-theory could facilitate research on wide variety of issues and phenomena related to alternative media, including the value of participation, giving voice to the voiceless, producing alternative narratives and social construction of knowledge alongside investigation of causal mechanisms and notions of ontology. Critical realism as an under-laborer for research invites a multiplicity of ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. The type of research I have suggested here should certainly not be the only type of research undertaken on alternative media. A multiplicity of research questions must be investigated employing a variety of methodologies. However, taking the alternative journalists seriously also means listening to their real concerns about the world, including the hopes, dreams and concerns that drive activists to participate in solidarity with those who struggle to liberate themselves from authoritarian regimes. It remains of utmost importance to evaluate the potential outcomes in the form of solidarity activities made possible by alternative forms of journalism and media. We therefore need theories that lead us to engage much more with truth and the trustworthiness of what is being reported in the alternative media by alternative journalist; much in the same way as we question the trustworthiness of the dominating narratives of the mainstream media.

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About the author

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"Everything we do is niche": a roundtable on contemporary progressive publishing

Anna Feigenbaum with Kheya Bag, Ken Barlow, Jakob Horstmann, David Shulman, Kika Sroka-Miller

Participants

Anna Feigenbaum is an Assistant Professor of Communications at Richmond the American International University in London. She is currently working with Fabian Frenzel and Patrick McCurdy on the book *Protest Camps: Imagining Alternative Worlds* to come out with Zed Books in 2013. You can follow her research at protestcamps.org. She can be contacted at anna.feigenbaum AT richmond.ac.uk

Kheya Bag is Publishing Director of *New Left Review* and an Advisory Board member of *Upping the Anti*.

Ken Barlow is commissioning editor at Zed Books, where he is responsible for commissioning for the Africa, Latin America, Politics, International Relations and Economics lists. He previously worked as an editor at Ebury Press, part of the Random House group.

Jakob Horstmann was until recently Commissioning Editor for Gender, Development, Middle East, Asia and Environment at Zed Books. He now works as freelance editor and writer, offering consultation services for individuals and institutions <http://www.jhpublishing.net/>.

David Shulman is Assistant Commissioning Editor at Pluto Press. He previously worked at Verso Books. He is on the Advisory Board of *Upping the Anti* and works with the periodical *Canadian Dimension* and political magazine *Shameless*.

Kika Sroka-Miller is an Assistant Editor at Zed Books. She is also a graphic designer and has worked as a creative consultant for a number of publishing houses, charities, and other organisations.

The conversation was transcribed and edited by Anna Feigenbaum.

Introduction (Anna)

This summer my co-authors and I signed a book contract with Zed for our co-authored manuscript *Protest Camps: imagining alternative worlds*. Before the Arab Spring, our work on the transnational history of protest camping was generally regarded as "too niche", or "quirky activist stuff for idealists". But by April 2011, as Tahrir Square became an international sign that perhaps another world was possible, the phenomenon of protest camping gained broader appeal.

We were contacted that spring by a number of commissioning academic editors interested in the possibility of turning our on-going research into a book. After

meeting with a handful of publishers, the choice to go with Zed felt like a no-brainer. An independent publisher run as a workers-cooperative seemed like the perfect fit for a collectively written book about collective politics. This decision got me thinking more broadly about the choices we make around publishing as academic-activist researchers. And conversely, about the decisions publishers like Zed make about us and about our work.

To coincide with the announcement of our contract I decided to organise a roundtable, in its most literal sense. One late October evening I was joined for dinner around my table by some of London's most prominent independent publishers. Together we discussed the current state of both the progressive press and the academy, covering a range of issues around publishing politics and markets, from finding the right niches-within-niches to copyediting nightmares.

First Course: making decisions on what gets published

Anna: *My understanding of the distinction between radical academic publishing and traditional academic publishing is that if you are working for Palgrave or one of these big textbook companies you're taking on books just to make money so the way that you assess a book is about how much money you'll make. As long as you can sell 200 copies to a library for £80 apiece, you'll make your money back so it's worth it. There is not much thought given to the content.*

Jakob: You are even taught that. If you go to a publishing training centre and do a course in Financial Planning you get two scenarios. You've got Book 1 and Book 2 and you get these fantastic excel spread sheets to figure out what book you should take and it's a number in the end. There's not even a mentioning of what the book is about. It doesn't matter. It's how much you could possibly make.

Ken: We do have to consider profit and loss. It's not like we just decide if we like a book, we have to do the costing. Essentially we would just go under if we started published exactly what we like. We get a lot of PhD theses with really fluent theoretical stuff but only 20 people are going to buy it. So we do consider the commercial of every book but we balance that against what it gives back as well. The reason a lot of academics like us is that we publish everything in paperback but the flipside of that is we have to sell quite a lot of paperbacks to make it work. If you are doing a hardback monograph you can make money on 200 copies. That's not the case with paperbacks. So we have to know we are going to sell enough copies to make our money back. And also physically we've got 2 commissioning editors so we can't publish many more than 55 books a year. We don't have the capacity to start doing, say, 70, 80 or more books. So we have to choose which 55 we're doing. And we have to sell enough over those 55

books to sustain the company. So sometimes we can do 1 or 2 niche things or sometimes we get funding from research organisations.

David: I would sort of dispute your choice of the word niche in this context. Because niche doesn't equal low sales, the point is finding the right niche. And if you find the right niche you will sell those 1000 copies. And when Ken says you have to sell quit a few to make your money, you'd be shocked at how low that number is.

Ken: I used to work at Random House and we were talking about tens or hundreds of thousands. I mean really commercial non-fiction. I was working on celebrity biography so we would sell hundreds of thousands. At Zed 2,000 is a lot. It's relative.

Jakob: The breakeven point is somewhere around 600 normally.

David: 2,000 would be a success for us. In terms of the balance between money concerns and political commitment I think the line for us would be that we would never publish anything where we would expect to lose money. I think if something was politically important enough to us to publish then we would try to do it in a way that we could at least break even. If something seems so marginal that no one is going to buy it, maybe it just shouldn't be a book.

Ken: Sometimes we get a PhD thesis that is a really specific ethnographic research about a village in Malawi and I'm sure the research is really good but it's just so niche in terms of its subject. But if something is important politically it generally means that enough people will read them so it's not that hard to spot one.

Kika: Because 2,000 people will buy it!

Jakob: We got a PhD submission from a great university in London. The whole book was about transactional relationships with "professional girlfriends." The case study was based on 6 years of research living in one country, but it just focused on that one country. So I spoke to her about expanding it and doing a comparative study and she was really into it, she was going to connect it to stuff going on in the US and the UK, but it couldn't happen because it would take 3 more years of research for each country to get that kind of data.

David: We get a lot of submissions like that in our anthropology series. They come in about a particular community or village or refugee camp and then make a broader social, theoretical claim based on that. But because we have an anthropology series it's actually a strength of those books.

Kheya: For NLR it's not so much the geographical square metres, but what's the treatment of the subject. So for example an article on Ireland becomes a way to talk about what is going on in Europe more generally. You can take something that's niche and use it to talk about a facet of a bigger picture. We actually have a series on city studies; even if the scale is small, the question is "What does this place tell us about the world?"

David: I think one of the things all our presses have in common is that they are all self-consciously international. It's my impression that Zed is very particular about this. You don't have a catalogue that doesn't have all the areas you cover. You're good at making sure you've got all your regions covered. At Pluto ours is more of a broad commitment to internationalism. NLR as well, you don't see a single issue where there isn't an effort to cover more than the Western capitalist core. I think that's the product of a conscious commitment on the part of all of these companies. At the same time, as Kheya was saying, we try to do this in a way that isn't just tokenistic, but gets at the core issues that we are all concerned with.

Ken: Our main areas of focus are Latin America, Africa, Middle East and Asia. We are focused on the global South so we very rarely do books specifically on Europe or the UK. I turn a lot of books down because of that, of course there are exceptions. Our books tend to be comparative unless it's a major country like Brazil. We probably couldn't do *Farming in Uruguay*. It has to be some kind of comparative perspective. That's why a lot of our books are *Gender in Africa* or *Climate Change in Africa*. We'll ask our authors to broaden out. I'll get a proposal and we'll ask, "Can you add other case studies?" How can you prove that your case is applicable elsewhere?

Kheya: My impression is that people are specialising more and more. So twenty or thirty years ago you might have gotten more PhD theses covering a region, but it seem like the way academia works people want to make their names in very specific fields.

Anna: *As PhD students we are trained to write on very specific cases or areas. They will look at our proposal and say, "This is too broad. You need to narrow it down." And we will do the same with our students. The question for me is, How do you balance context with argument? Once you're making a comparative analysis, you want to run that argument through a number of different contexts. But you can't become the expert on more than a couple of contexts of a couple of countries. It's incredibly hard to do it for one! And then two and then even more, at least as a single author which most monographs are. The book is supposed to be bigger, but each context is three more years of study and unless you are going to take 12 years to write a book that is no longer about contemporary politics - something is being compromised on some end. Unless you've got a whole lot of money and research assistants, in which case you're probably not going for radical publishing!*

Jakob: Sometimes what I find sad is that the quality of books is actually being watered down by this. You've got a really interesting subject on one country and we ask them to broaden it out. But maybe they don't know anything about other countries, so they ask their colleagues and put in this token chapter and it's not as strong as the single focus but it needs to be in there for that global aspect. There's also the question of how contemporary we are. The publishing cycle is 12 months after the final manuscript so it won't be up to date. In areas like the Middle East things are changing every two weeks.

David: You've got a book on the Arab Spring on your catalogue cover!

Jakob: This was one of the rare examples of a truly contemporary subject, and it was possible because the author promised to write it within four months.

David: Jakob mentioned as an aside that Zed also has a gender list and I think it makes sense to expand the conversation into subject areas as well geographical areas. And these kinds of things reflect different commitments publishers have as well. I also feel like I have to dispute the way that niche keeps being spoken about. I feel like we are using niche interchangeably with small readership. We can't compete with major presses for something that has a mass readership. Everything we do is niche, so the trick is finding the right niche. The niche that hasn't been filled yet, that specialists will need or those libraries will need. If you are doing a book on land reform in Zimbabwe and you know that book hasn't been done yet, then any library with a budget for Africa will have to buy it. So it's not whether something is more niche or less niche, it's about finding the right niche, the one that is still an issue, and filling it. We always ask authors to give us an idea of the competing literature. Then we'll look into that ourselves and if it doesn't stand out we won't publish it.

Jakob: When I use the word niche I'm talking about the entirety of our readership. So that is one niche. And then there are niches within niches. We try to be one step ahead of what is going on right now.

Kika: We try to be the avant-garde within the niche.

Ken: The trouble is the books that are the niche within the niche within the niche and every niche cuts off readership. Everything is a niche, but it's finding the right niche with a big enough readership.

Kheya: It's also about quality, and making an effective intellectual and political intervention.

Ken: A lot of our active commissioning is going to conferences and making personal contact. If there is an area I'm commissioning on I look at who is speaking on that topic.

Jakob: When you go to conferences you speak to 12 people a day. You didn't take a close look, just saw that it looked interesting and they were at a good university. You talk to high quality people and take what you get from that. And you look for people on contemporary issues. That's how our book on the Arab Spring came into being.

Anna: *Are you all getting a lot of proposals on the Arab Spring?*

David: Pluto gets a lot of proposals on the Middle East. We've gotten quite a few on the Arab Spring. We've rejected all of them so far. But they are from Western journalists that happened to live in Egypt at the time and thinks they can write the most gripping, on the ground report of events, or just someone else who's really enthusiastic. But there's already been such a deluge of books and there are going to be so many more.

Kheya: I saw a book on Occupy Wall Street already! "A major new work on the Occupy movement". How can it be major!?

David: That's the OR book. The press release says it's going to be published on the 3 month anniversary of the camp—if it's still there. That's possible largely because of OR's model. They are 100% print-on-demand. They only sell directly to buyers through their website. They shun Amazon. They make much more on each copy but sell far fewer of each title. Their marketing budget per title is much, much higher than what Pluto or Zed would have.¹ But every other publisher that doesn't use this model has to sell into the trade at very high discounts of 50% or more and another significant discount to their distributor. They base the initial print run on pre-orders. Who knows if it will work or not but their model is based on an analysis of the industry. There's all this money that's being lost to distribution. In their view the direction the industry has to go in is to take the money out of distribution and put it into marketing.

Second Course: making decisions on where to publish

Anna: *Going back to what we were discussing earlier about "everything we do is niche," when I told a colleague of mine that I was publishing with Zed he giggled. And I said "What, have you not heard of it?" And he said, "No, of course I've heard of it. It's where all the idealists publish. It's not a bad reputation; it's that we know you are a certain kind."*

Jakob: Yes, that is what we are going for with our brand identity.

Ken: If you know Zed you know we aren't going to get a right-wing crony. It is idealist, that's the nature of radical publishing. That's inevitable.

David: Not to talk about unpleasant things like "branding" but it is really important here in two different ways. We are competing in two different markets: one is the market for readers; the other is the market for content. So if we want to find interesting people who do interesting work that's also political we have an edge to actually get them to come to us. We have two different edges that get people to come to us. One is that we are associated to the left and radical thinking and cutting edge. And the second is that it is actually a big pull that we are publishing in paperback. No one wants to see their life work relegated to a \$100 or £60 hard cover that no one ever buys. I've spoken to a lot of people who published with Oxford or Cambridge and say, "Oh yeah, that happened to my first one and I want to come to you for my second." They know that the people they are writing for are actually going to be able to afford it.

Ken: Particularly in America there is real issue. We find it quite hard to get younger authors or junior academics. There is a real system for where you can

¹ Verso has since announced that they too will publish an OWS book on the three-month anniversary of the camp. OR is a new press: www.orbooks.com

publish as a junior academics. You have to publish your first book with a university press. So we'll have people say, "Oh, I want to go with you, but my department says I shouldn't." Because of this, a lot of our authors are tenured. They call us their "post-tenure publisher" where they can write the book they always wanted to write and they kind of let rip.

Anna: *I wonder if that will change a little bit because I think the nature of academia, amidst the financial crisis for young academics is really shifting. We now have tons of talented young people, who've finished their PhDs, who've written amazing thesis who are not going to get academic jobs. They are therefore not going to be "I have to publish my first book with Oxford" in robot tenure mode. I keep going to conferences with these amazing postgraduate students that have given up hope on being in a tenure-track job anytime soon, but they could probably write a great book. There are so many unemployed or underemployed PhD students right now.*

Jakob: But none of them will be able to make a living on a book they write for us. We can get amazing quality because people aren't depending on their money. The royalties are really small. So if that's not part of their career are they feasibly going to spend that much time writing a book that's not going to help you with our day job. We also want books by people who are connected to Universities.

Kheya: I think that can go both ways, though. Just because someone makes their living as a writer rather than an academic doesn't mean they won't try as hard. Sometimes people don't try as hard because they are comfortable in their academic job.

David: In general at Pluto we'd say we are an academic press. But some of our most successful books are written by journalists.

Anna: *The best thing I ever heard about Pluto was from one of your authors, Uri Gordon who wrote Anarchy Alive" He was a few years ahead of me and he said, "You publish your book with Pluto, and then you send off three articles on that same research for peer review journals." I think that's a really good piece of advice for junior academics.*

Ken: One of the good things that Zed do is paperbacks, so we can reach a wider audience. But if the decision is not between two academic presses, but between us and a big trade press it would be different. When I used to work at Random House we published Mark Thomas. He would say he just wanted to reach as many people as possible. An extract of the book got published in the Daily Mail. His idea wasn't about the integrity of the medium but getting your message across to as many people as possible. There are readers of the Daily Mail that he would never reach otherwise, a completely different audience. Naomi Klein got a lot of criticism for going with Harper Collins. I can understand wanting to reach a wide audience, but there are questions to be raised there.

Kheya: Would you say that one of the reasons authors go with radical presses is because of feelings of integrity or commitment to the medium?

Kika: There's definitely a debate around the purity of the process.

David: The fact is that Pluto or Zed can be amazed by a marketing budget like OR's but you go with a major press and that's probably pocket change. Look at the *Shock Doctrine*. I saw ads for it everywhere. They were on tubes. People are still talking about that book and I think, good for Naomi Klein. I mean frankly if a small press had a runaway success like that they might have to sell the rights to someone who could handle the marketing publicity and just take a royalty from it.

Jakob: That's why you need the personal connections. The press Paradigm in Denver, it's a really small independent press. And the guy who set it had a really close connection to Chomsky. So they started it up with a just a couple Chomsky books after he was already well known. It's so important for start-ups to have these connections, like we were saying with OR books. This made other authors open to going with them. They do leftist, liberal content.

Kheya: That's kind of how Verso started too. New Left Review was commissioned and edited a number of books which were then published by Penguin.

Final Course: how we write

David: We've talked a lot about what our brand identities means in terms of our politics. I think we also try to maintain certain standards in our writing that go beyond just our political standards.

Anna: *The only reason I know that academics don't go with progressive presses until their second book is because of their CV, their job, the tick boxes. I've never heard anyone say, "I'm going with this university press because they are going to do a much better job with my book."*

Jakob: There are commissioning editors at the bigger presses that don't even read all the books they commission because their targets are so high and they don't have time. I find that really depressing. The commissioning editor is supposed to have a long term vision for the book.

David: The pressures on commissioning editors at big university presses are really high and to do that job well takes a lot of time. Even at a small press, the targets are still high and we are talking about doing close readings of all these proposals and books. My view is that the commissioning editor should at least look at each page of a book. You are responsible for it.

Ken: At least at Zed most of the writing is pretty accessible so you can enjoy reading it as a lay reader. But I can imagine that if you're doing hardback-only academic monographs it could be quit gruelling reading book after book!

David: Also, if you are working on that high priced hardback-only model and you're happy selling a couple hundred copies to a library, the quality of writing

in most of those cases doesn't really matter. It's the originality of the research and the contribution to the field. This is different than in trade publishing where you are depending on word of mouth. In trade publishing you want people to read the book and enjoy it.

Kheya: This is actually a point I wanted to raise. We are making a distinction between "academic", "radical", and "trade". I think NLR would place itself as "intellectual" rather than "academic". It is radical too, but it's not the same as movement publishing. Another journal I work on is called *Upping the Anti*. It's a periodical and the articles are quite lengthy. It's written by activists, for activists and distributed within social movements networks. It looks like an academic journal, but has a different audience.

David: The question of audience is so important for authors. That's why we always ask on the proposal: Who are you writing for? Who do you think is your audience?

Ken: But no matter what subject the book proposal is for, most authors say they are writing for the general audience! When people list "anthropology, geography, history and the general public" it's actually not that helpful. If we don't have a clear idea of the speciality areas, we don't know what lists to send the title to. We want to know if you really think the general public is going to read your book.

David: It can actually make the author sound kind of clueless to assume their book is for the general public. Books like the *Shock Doctrine* or anything by Malcolm Gladwell are accessible to the general public because they make people think that they understand the world for the first time. They also have all these "Eureka moments" throughout them that you connect to.

Kheya: I think that is also a question of style. I went to a workshop by Naomi Klein several years ago. It was a relatively small workshop on political writing. She advised us to "Imagine you are writing as if it is the time before you came to your political understanding." I think that is excellent advice.

Ken: Yes, and if you are writing that way, then it is for the general public. But if you aren't writing like that, you need to know that and be clear about it.

Anna: *I'm not sure that academic authors always know when they are being clear or not! I wonder if we are often just delusional.*

Kheya: I do think that academics are so naturalised to a technical language that they become stylised to a certain kind of writing.

Ken: Yes, and when they've been working on something for three years, it's the most important thing to them. And usually they are only really talking to their colleagues, so they can't understand the context outside of their own academic bubble. It's almost like they can't understand why the general public wouldn't understand what they are writing about. It's kind of a naive arrogance.

Kheya: And then it gets pegged as anti-intellectualism, but it's more of an aesthetic revolt. For example, today I opened up an article in a journal and I just

couldn't make it through the first paragraph. "As we all know (Johnson page number...)" The first two words were a citation! I think the better you understand what you are trying to say, the easier it is to actually get it across in ordinary language. It's about picking the right words.

Ken: Any concept that is worth knowing can be explained simply. The thing I like about Zed is that our authors use case studies to illustrate ideas; they try to find the right words. Maybe I am being too harsh on academic writing, but sometimes I feel that there is a wilful need to obscure, to use the right language because they know they are talking to other academics and not to the public. IR [International Relations] theory is really bad for this. It's academics talking to other academics in theoretical language in a way that is increasingly disconnected from the real world. I think there is just something antagonising about using all of that self-righteous philosophical language. It's like "Extreme Philosophy." It's a really insidious system.

Kheya: I also feel like academics try to coin their own jargon because it's their claim to fame. It's not even because it condenses an idea, it's because they want to be known for it. Another thing is that in the past we had authors who would use pseudonyms and people just won't do that anymore. Now they'd rather publish something tamer to save their career, because they want that publication attached to their real name.

David: And that isn't about intellectual training; it's about careerism.

Kheya: I can understand why it is important as a part of academic training to show that you are reading the literature and that you can cite other people's writing. But after you get through the degree, who cares? I don't need to know that you read all of that.

David: I want to defend excessive citation for a moment. I think an author should be able to introduce other things they've read. You can discuss other texts to shed light on something and move on.

Kika: I also like when books have theory and case studies. When an author introduces a text I haven't read, I am glad the citation is there so that I can follow up on it.

Kheya: Yes, when it is genuinely adding something to the debate it's fine. My problem is when authors just list citations to show they have read or when they try to be theoretical but are not actually furthering our understanding of an issue. Why pretend?

Anna: *It's interesting to hear this because we are trained to speak technically, to cite extensively and to coin our own terms. When you take those citations and that language out, you risk no longer participating in the debates in your field. I think sometimes academics try to participate in both dialogues at the same time and that is where they fail to reach a wider audience. This is why I've started to take on Uri's advice about publishing a book with a progressive press and then publishing in journals where you can work through all of your*

technical theory. I think we can learn to take our research and separate it out like that; we can learn to do both things with it.

Ken: I agree. At Zed we are an accessible academic publisher. That's why I enjoy reading Zed's books. We understand that there are certain academic conventions, but our role is to push people away from being obscure. We want to bring authors to a wider audience, especially if they are writing an activist book that will be for the trade market. We'll spend time with those books to try to get the right tone.

Kika: On that note I think I need to go home—it's already midnight!

Anna: *Yes, let's leave it here. I think we've covered a lot in three hours! Thank you all so much for sharing your insights with me.*

Book Reviews: Interface Volume 3 (2)

Reviews Editor: Aileen O'Carroll

Books reviewed this issue:

Earl, Jennifer and Kimport, Katrina (2011) *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass.

Reviewed by Piotr Konieczny

Ojas, S.V., Kumar, Madhuresh, Vijayan, M.J. and Athialy, Joe (2010) *Plural narratives from Narmada Valley*. Delhi Solidarity Group: Delhi.

Reviewed by Tomás Mac Sheoin

Scandrett, Eurig, et al. (2009) *Bhopal survivors speak: emergent voices from a people's movement: Bhopal survivors' movement study*. Edinburgh: Word Power Books.

Reviewed by Tomás Mac Sheoin

Wainwright, Hilary (2009) *Reclaim the state: experiments in popular democracy*. London etc.: Seagull.

Reviewed by Laurence Cox

Book review: Earl, Jennifer & Kimport, Katrina. *Digitally Enabled Social Change*. MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass.

Reviewed by **Piotr Konieczny**

There is no shortage of voices in the ongoing debate on the online activism. From blogs to traditional media and academia, the use of new media by social movements have proven to be a rich, if controversial arena, with vocal arguments ranging across the two camps of "the Internet revolutionizes everything" and "nothing has changed". Earl and Kimport contribution to this debate is welcome, as they provide some much-needed empirical data, and insightful observations. This is, in addition to a helpful review of existing research and literature (Chapter 2), a welcome introduction for those who want to familiarize themselves with the most recent scholarly debates on the subject.

Definitions are crucial to understanding the matter at hand, and the authors provide a number, which help to avoid confusion. Early on, they introduce a notable distinction between instances of e-mobilizations (where traditional organizations use new media to facilitate offline action, mostly through information sharing), e-tactics (where traditional organizations use new strategies, primarily due to their low cost and high efficiency), and e-movements (a relatively new phenomenon where movements are organized and act entirely online). Subsequently, the authors discuss the rise of a new tools and strategies, or, in the words more familiar to social movement scholars, the raise of a new, digital repertoire of contention.

Several factors facilitate the spread of the new media: their diminishing cost, their increasing user-friendliness (technological affordance), and the ability they grant to people to collaborate in different times and location (the reduction of the need for physical co-presence). Those factors open the gates of activism to people who previously would not be involved, and increase the role and activity of individuals without background in activism and social movements.

This has an impact on the organizational structure of the social movements themselves. Numerous activist websites have only a solo organizer, and no organizational backing. Those solo organizers do not see themselves as activists, viewing their work as so cheap and easy as not deserving the "serious" label of activist. This showcases how things are changing (the "2.0 effects" in social movements), and is perhaps one of the most important arguments that the authors bring to the table. In the digital age, organization can increasingly occur without a formal organizational structure. Earl and Kimport argue that due to lowering costs of new media activism, resources are becoming less important, and the central role of such formal organizations is declining. At the same time, the authors are not exaggerating this trend, and they note that traditional organizations still have an important role to play, particularly in areas when costs are higher, or when organizing is dangerous.

Another important observation is that the boundaries between activists and supporters (for example, site visitors, and online petitioners) are increasingly blurred. Supporters have a looser set of connections and lower commitment, but can still benefit movements: knowing they can stop participation easily, they are also more willing to join in the first place. Through some criticism of the low-cost "clicktivism", Earl and Kimport show that many keep contributing in such fashion, and such low-cost activities can be a first step to more high-cost participation. Collective identity is harder to build online than offline, but the new e-tactics still work without a significant collective identity behind them. They can supersize offline activities (gather more people) or create web 2.0 effects (new, changed processes, for example - organization around non-political causes).

It is interesting to consider the implications of those arguments for social movement theory, particularly for resource mobilization advocates. The use of new media in e-mobilization seems to reinforce this approach, and the use of e-tactics can be a simple illustration of the changing nature of the repertoires of contention. However, the emergence of e-movements, with solo-organizers, and online supporters who are not official members of any movement, neither of whom calls themselves activists, presents a challenge for this and many other established theories. Earl and Kimport do not claim that the "Internet is changing everything", but they make a very strong argument for the fact that several key aspects of social movements are undergoing a transition that is more than just a back-end technology improvement: what is changing are not just the physical tools, or even the tactics, but the very goals, identity and membership of the movements.

With a helpful overview of existing research, good data and thought-provoking observations and arguments, the book is an important addition to the scholarly debate on the changing nature of social movements in the 21st century. Well-written, without an overdose of academic jargon, and with helpful examples of what works and for whom, it is also a useful reading for the activists themselves, whether they are members of a larger organizations, or lone-wolf website masters.

About the reviewer

Piotr Konieczny is a PhD student at the Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh. He is interested in the sociology of the Internet, in particular in topics such as the impact of wikis on individuals and organizations; decision making processes and organizational structure of Wikipedia; patterns of behavior among its contributors; relation between wikis and social movements; and teaching with new media. He can be contacted at Piokon AT post.pl

Ojas, S.V., Kumar, Madhuresh, Vijayan, M.J. and Athialy, Joe (2010) *Plural narratives from Narmada Valley*. Delhi Solidarity Group, Delhi.

Reviewed by **Tomás Mac Sheoin**

In a recent piece on *Sanhati*, Madhuresh Kumar wrote of the 25-year history of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA, Save the Narmada Movement) that it

has seen worst of the state violence; undertaken strenuous and at times life-threatening peaceful direct actions in form of willful submergence in rising waters, fasts; waged struggle at local, national and global levels; participated in numerous Commissions, Court cases; received support and adulation from umpteen individuals and groups, faced the ire of some other sections; earned epitaphs and awards and also labels like "anti-national" and "anti-development".

The expanse and mere size of the movement made it the " 'mother' of new wave of social movements in 80s and 90s" (Kumar 2010). This volume's compilers share Kumar's opinion of the importance of the NBA, claiming it to be not only of national but also of global importance:

The unique strategies of political actions, mobilizations and effective use of Gandhian methods, along with its willingness to support and reach out to different movements across the country, made NBA one of the rarest of people's movements in the recent history of independent India, which is looked upon for inspiration and robust strategies across the globe.' (p. ii).

This significance is testified to by the large number of academic analyses of the NBA that are available, including monographs by Nilsen (2010) and Baviskar's classic account, perhaps the best of its kind published in the last two decades in India, though the NBA was not happy with it. (Baviskar 1995) Indeed traffic between the NBA and academia has been so large that not only has it been the subject of academic analysis (Bose 2004) but the NBA has requested a Scottish academic to draw up research protocols which, while they "seemed ethically sound to me... one of the NBA leaders saw them as a means of censoring that academic work with which the movement disagreed." (Routledge 2003: 67) However, while the story of this major anti-dam movement has been written "innumerable times" it has been largely written about "through the perspectives of the visible leadership". This volume is intended to correct this lack of perspective, by providing in an example of "history from below, an exercise in 'subaltern historiography' " (p.iii) including the views of the *adivasi* (tribal or ethnic groups claimed to be India's indigenous population) leadership not only on the struggle but also on the NBA.

The work under review, produced by the invaluable Delhi Solidarity Group (see <http://delhisolidaritygroup.wordpress.com/>) is the result of an initiative by the NBA, which involves an attempt to ascertain the meaning of the NBA and its struggle for the activists in the affected communities and villages, which will allow the NBA to evaluate its efforts in the opinion of local communities and rethink its strategies internally and externally. While critics might wonder why

it has taken the NBA leadership 25 years to get around to this task and why some such consultation with its *adivasi* cadre was not built into the operations of the NBA from the start, no-one can deny that this is a very welcome project to which much labour has been devoted: this volume contains 14 interviews - with four full-time NBA activists, six (either tribal, valley or area) leaders and four activists interviewed, with three of the interviewees being women, with eight of those interviewed being from Madhya Pradesh, five from Maharashtra and one from Gujarat,- and another 20 are in various stages of editing. As well as the four named compilers, another six comrades assisted with the editing. The book is the result of serious labour and much time: "Each of the life stories has been constructed by a freewheeling conversation individually over a period of six months in the language they were comfortable in. The original interviews have been translated from Pawari, Bhilali, Marathi, Nimadi and Hindi." (p.v)

A few small suggestions can be made in response to the compilers' invitation at the end of the introduction: the glossary could be in alphabetical order, a one-page chronology of the movement would be helpful and a basic description of the NBA's organisation and structure would help readers understand the differences in cadre interviewed in the book (whether Andolan full-timers, activists or leaders). Finally, while this might be difficult to arrange, interviews with *adivasi* leaders who left the NBA (such as those cited in Whitehead 2007) would prove an invaluable addition, not only to social movement analysts, but also to the NBA. In conclusion may I reiterate that this is wonderful work that these comrades are undertaking and they should be praised for it. May this work inspire others to undertake similar work: we will all be the richer for the growth of histories from below of social movements.

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Reviewed by **Tomás Mac Sheoin**

Until recently academic analyses of the movement for justice in Bhopal have been conspicuous mainly in their absence. Compared with the burgeoning literature on another social movement in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (MP), the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) (among many others, see Baviskar 1995, Nilsen 2010, Routledge 2003) by 2009, the 25th anniversary of the toxic gas leak at Bhopal, the literature on the Bhopal movement had hardly reached the sapling stage. Particularly conspicuous has been the absence of academic analyses by Indian authors, with the most useful contributions coming from activists (Ravan 1988, Sarangi 1994), while unfortunately the sober analysis prepared for the Fact Finding Mission to Bhopal (2004) has not been distributed widely. Thankfully around the 25th anniversary a new tranche of literature began to appear, with Zvestowski (2009) looking at the transnational aspects of the movement, the Bhopal Social Movement Study (BSMS) (2009) providing a superb collection of oral and written statements by movement leaders, Mukherjee (2010) looking at women in Bhopal and Scandrett and Mukherjee (2011) looking at abstractions in the movement. To these should be added the very useful short articles written for an Indian website by various participants in the BSMS (Mukherjee 2009, Scandrett 2009a, b & c. and Shah 2009). The most important of these for understanding the movement is the BSMS.

I have previously praised the BSMS for providing a contribution to the literature on social movements. The editors make large claims for the study with which I heartily concur: they "believe that the insights which can be gleaned from the Bhopal survivors' movement will also yield lessons for other movements" (p26). The bulk of the book (168 of 216 pages) is made up of interviews with activists in Bhopal, supplemented by five essays by group leaders, three written in English and two translated into English. The book is the result of a research project which has amassed "over 50 hours of interviews, whilst basic data from rank and file have been gathered for 119 individuals. Film footage has also been collected from rallies, protests, public meetings and dharnas [vigils, sit-ins or encampments] which can be used to analyse participation" (p.25) The editors state "this study constitutes a crucial contribution to the record of this unique social movement and will be a support to the movement in its campaign for justice" (pp.25-26). The interviews provide the most complete self-description by members of a social movement that I am aware of: this is in itself a considerable achievement. ¹The editors plan to make the original interviews and their translations available on the web.²

¹ A recent publication by the Delhi Solidarity Group on the Narmada struggle, *Plural narratives from Narmada Valley*, appears to do the same thing, with one reviewer describing it as 'an

The volume is worthwhile not least for honestly showing the disagreements and tensions between groups in the movement and between various leaders. Here again the editors note "the differences and divisions between the groups appear to reflect the major dilemmas and tensions of any community action or social movement". (p.37). This means "The Bhopal survivors' movement is an encyclopaedic microcosm of the politics of protest and community organising, albeit within a particularly Indian context." (ibid). The disagreements in the movement over strategy and tactics, external funding, national or transnational focus, contact with state agencies and politicians echo similar disagreements in other social movements, while the movement also suffers from personality clashes and leadership power struggles that will be familiar to all participants in and students of social movements.

The BSMS should also be of interest to students of social movements not only because of its portrait of a movement, but also because the book can function as an example of politically committed research, taking part in the argument about what the study of social movements can (and/or should) do. (Barker and Cox 2002, Bevington and Dixon 2005, Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009). The editors' argue that their work as provides useful knowledge for the movement and the oppressed classes in general:

For those of us who explicitly set out to do relevant research, the principal motivation is whether it is useful to the poor, the disempowered, the disenfranchised, the oppressed. Indeed, our aspiration is for research to be 'really useful' as distinct from merely 'useful', that is its usefulness must be judged by movements of the oppressed who are struggling for their own empowerment (p.14).

By documenting, reflecting back and contributing to the Bhopalis' struggle, we hope to contribute in some way to the wider, worldwide struggle for justice, through analysing and interpreting movement activity in such a way that it becomes more successful in putting limitations and restraints on the destructive activities of capital and ultimately undermine its logic (p.27).

The introduction's section on movement-relevant research begins with a call for research to be critical, through the use of critical thinking in the work and about

attempt to write a subaltern history of the NBA'.
http://www.tehelka.com/story_main49.asp?filename=Ws040511BOOKS.asp

² Note 2 on p. 48 states that "Full, anonymised transcriptions of interviews in Hindi and translations in English will be available in print in various locations and on-line from Queen Margaret University archive on <http://edata.qmu.ac.uk>." However while this material is indeed posted at this university site, it could not be described as immediately available: see http://edata.qmu.ac.uk/cgi/search/simple?q=Bhopal&_action_search=Search&_action_search=Search&_order=bytitle&basic_srctype=ALL&_satisfyall=ALL where both sets of items relating to Bhopal are described as "Item availability restricted". An attempt to access the material leads to a request for a sign-in and a password without any information as to how to obtain such. The FAQ on the page results in a 404 File not found response, while the User menu appears intended for those in the institution submitting material, rather than for some poor outsider trying to access material. I am unaware of any depository for the printed materials,

the work, including whose interests it serves. This comes from a debate on whose interests social movement research serves, inspired perhaps partly by the revolt of the research "objects" (Kriesi 1992) and partly by the return of politics to the literature on social movements: "Therefore, in order to have an ethical response to a social world which is structured according to injustices, a world which can allow thousands of the poorest in a poor country to be killed and maimed in a single night in pursuit of profits for shareholders in one of the richest countries, it is necessary to find a way in which that research contributes in some way to challenging these injustices." (p13)

These then are what used to be called *engagé* scholars: they are members of that tendency among social movement scholars who are in solidarity with, if not outright partisans of, their research subjects. This is a growing group, with a strong representation in studies of the anti-globalisation movement, and is not unconnected with the adoption of the traditional anthropological method of participant observation. The editors give a useful description of how to set about producing this really useful knowledge: the two Indian researchers spent ten months in Bhopal from the end of 2007, during which time they successfully gained the confidence of all factions of the movement in Bhopal. Pages 14-26 provide a useful description of the study's methodology that will be an invaluable reference point for any methods course.

The diversity of voices presented is the glory of the book. It presents a wide variety of views on political activism. Compare what Rabiya Bee, first chairperson of BGMUS, (Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan) has to say (p.68):

My friends still ask me to join the movement again but I cannot lie or deceive people so I will not last in the movement in its current state. When we started we were innocent, we did not know how this can be used to make money or gain power. Six years down the line we realised that this was a pimp market.

with Nawab Khan's celebration of the power of the women of Bhopal (p.195),

When women took the lead they shook companies and governments. During the *Jhadoo Maro Dow Ko* (beat Dow with brooms) women attacked the Dow office in Bombay and they also demonstrated at the high security Bombay International Airport. Nobody had attempted that but women from Bhopal have done it.

Now compare Nawab Khan's account with the account given of the *padyatra* (long walk) to Delhi and their reasons for participation by either Razia or Ruksana Bee (the interview is an "amalgam" of their responses):

We got the idea of doing a *padyatra* [march] to Delhi from a big chairman from some political party. We can't remember his name but he came from Delhi and suggested the *padyatra*. So we talked to all the women, and they agreed to go for the *padyatra*. I thought that if I joined it I might get a good, permanent job. Also Rasheeda Bee, our leader, would put pressure on us. She said if we did not join the *padyatra* and did not do what she said, then we would not be able to come and work here any more. So out of fear we did it. (p.182)

However the work is not without problems. There are some surprising factual errors. AP Singh, for example, is described (p.49) as founder and convenor of the original campaign group to form in the aftermath of the disaster Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha [Poisonous Gas Episode Struggle Front, commonly referred to as the Morcha] and on p. 45 as the Morcha's "leader", while in fact the leadership was shared with Anil Sadgopal (of Kishore Bharati) and V. Jha, a local lawyer.³ The constant description of the BGMUS as a "union" rather than an organisation might imply to readers that it's a trade union, while in fact it never registered or operated as a trade union: indeed an interesting question for analysis would be why this was so. The introduction by the editors (48 pages of a 216 page book) isn't as good as it could be: something basic like a timeline or chronology (rather than talk about a timeline) giving the history of the movement would be very useful to those who aren't conversant with the details of the movement's long history, though in their defence they state "even such a seemingly straightforward idea as a chronology of events is contested" (p.27): of course, just because something is contested doesn't mean you don't do it. I suspect in their effort to be neutral and fair to everyone in the movement, the editors have forgotten their obligations to those outside the movement who will actually buy the book.

Further problems relate to issues of hierarchy and power and the book's methodology. Given that the editor's preface (p.3) states "The vast majority of the work has been carried out by two research assistants, Dharmesh Shah and Tarunima Sen" it seems unfortunate that they are not given priority in the list of authors which instead gives the non-Indian academic (Scandrett) first position, followed by the Indian academic (Mukherjee) and only then followed by the two Indian researchers. Here again, while the introduction is credited to all four and written in the editorial "we" the "inputs" (as they're described on p.17) of the Indian researchers are inset in a different typeface. I actually counted the lines they're allocated: Dharmesh has 105 and Tarunima has 55, a total of 160 lines in an introduction of 1206 lines.

Another problem is that the book is top-heavy: there are too many chiefs and not enough Indians. If this is the story of Bhopal from below, the editors may not have gone low enough. Of the 18 adults interviewed for the book, 16 are leaders while only two are rank and file supporters.⁴ This is then the story of the Bhopal movement as experienced by its leaders. Some of the large amount of blank space in the book could have been usefully devoted to interviews with the

³ This is a problem that is not confined to this book. The most recent edition of 777, the newsletter of the Bhopal medical Appeal (which funds the Sambhavna Clinic), which I have seen, claims that Sambhavna managing Trustee (and core BGIA member) "Sarangi set up a relief and campaigning group, Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha" (Winter 2010, p.16) Though I've drawn this error to the attention of Mr Sarangi and a board member of the BMA, at the time of writing the error has not been corrected.

⁴ P23 provides a possible explanation for this focus on leadership, but then also undermines it: "The rank and file, generally, were less well informed about overall movement strategies and historical events, but their perspective on their involvement was essential."

rank and file. We might also note that, as a consequence of the bias towards leaders and in line with the male leadership of an overwhelmingly female movement, ten women are interviewed and eight men.

The book is primarily material for analysis, rather than itself analysis.⁵ As the editors note,

The Bhopal campaign, like many mature social movements, is diverse and these groups often take different tactical approaches to, and adopt differing interpretations of events based on varying ideologies. It has always been the intention of this research to reflect this diversity without favouring one or other perspective and certainly without fuelling any disagreements. (p12)

In the editor's preface, he admits the existence of "strongly expressed and often contradictory claims" in the book, making clear the study's neutral position by stating "We have certainly not attempted to adjudicate between claims". (p.2)

To illustrate this it's worth looking at one contentious issue – funding. On p. 97 Rehana Begum, previously married to Jabbar of the BGP MUS, and now working for MP state emporium [a state government organisation that sells produce produced in the state by a variety of organisations] head office, says:

Now the *sangathan* [organisation] accepts money from the government. The *Swabhimaan Kendra* is the training scheme set up by Jabbar under the *sangathan*... The women who have been selected for training are supposed to receive Rs. 1,500 from under the government scheme... but the organisation only pays [the trainees] Rs. 500 hence making a commission of RS. 1,000 per trainee.

But these charges are not raised with Jabbar: in Jabbar's own contribution he says the following:

Now we have *Swabhimaan Kendra* affiliated to the *sangathan*, which provides training mostly for gas affected women, and a few men, in tailoring, embroidery, weaving, computer skills and so on. We get a little money from the Government for this training but we provide much more than the minimum level of training

⁵ Given this, it is a welcome development that some of these authors have now proceeded to an analysis of the movement (Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011) Unfortunately, while there is much of interest in this article, the analysis remains at the ideological level: the article concentrates on three abstractions or frames, "environmental justice, which privileges the condition of being polluted; class struggle which emphasises the poverty of the gas victims; and gender, which highlights the fact that survivor activists are predominantly female" (p.199). The first of these is associated with the International Coalition for Justice in Bhopal, the second with BGP MUS while the third is associated with no organisation. (The authors have interesting things to say about this on pp.203-204.)

There are also problems of evidence for some of the paper's assertions: thus on p.206 the authors refer to the BGP MUS's "class-based internationalism" and describe BGP MUS leader Jabbar as "an internationalist": there is (as far as I can see) no evidential basis cited in the paper for scaling up the "class-based" frame they impute to Jabbar and the BGP MUS to the international. Finally, their conclusion that "in the Bhopal survivors' movement, different abstractions have led to divisions" may be a case of putting the (ideological) cart before the (organisational) horse. Meanwhile, another publication by all four (Mukherjee et al 2010), which I haven't seen due to the volume's £60 price tag, also appears to be concerned with theory.

which the Government expects. So we are able directly to contribute to peoples' economic rehabilitation.' (pp.82-83).

In his contribution Jabbar also attacks those who accept foreign funding. Thus while Jabbar is given space to attack other groups' funding, he is not confronted with and allowed to answer Rehana's charges regarding his own funding. But neither this specific allegation nor general questions about Jabbar's acceptance of money from the Indian state or his relationships with Indian politicians are raised in the study. Thus Jabbar is allowed criticise the acceptance of foreign funds by other organisations but is never required to justify his own acceptance of funds from the government, or to explain what the difference in these are.

Another issue related to funding, of major importance to Indian movements, is the issue of foreign paymasters. On p. 60 in a paragraph that comes close to felon-setting AP Singh writes,

Many agencies and networks emerged to support Bhopal in Delhi, Mumbai and in other countries, and a huge international funding effort is channelled towards these ends. This process was started after a meeting of international funding agencies and NGOs on November 25th 1985 and concluded with the decision to create an international funding network for Bhopal and activist groups working for Narmada Valley in M.P. This helped Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA –Save Narmada River Movement) to come into existence in 1987. I am concerned that some of the Indian organisations in this network may be connected with Naxalite movements in M.P., A.P., Orissa or Maharastra [Indian states]. If so, it is possible that international funds collected in the name of Bhopal had been diverted to such other organisations.

Regrettably the editors have not pressed AP to provide some - or indeed any - evidence for this remarkable revelation.

I don't want to underestimate the real difficulties in posing such questions to interviewees: given the difficulties involved in getting the confidence of interviewees in the first place, if difficult questions were posed it's quite possible the interviewees would walk away. Yet for social scientists to generate 'really useful knowledge' for a movement they must go beyond simply providing a means of self-presentation to the movement. After all, the work undertaken by this study could reasonably have been undertaken by any adequately trained ethnographer or social scientist: it did not require any specific social movement study skills⁶. The requirement for a critical approach does not exclude the statements of movement leaders and activists: failure to maintain a critical attitude can mean the hunter gets captured by the game, in an academic version of the Stockholm syndrome. Furthermore they need to go beyond the analysis of statements, abstraction and ideological positions to actions and practices, to

⁶ Though, to be fair to these editors, the one previous attempt by an ethnographer (Fortun 2001) could not be considered a success, no doubt partly due to her lack of Hindi. But here again Fortun can be praised for providing a space for a variety of voices in her volume: no less than 100 pages of the volume's 354 pages consist of quotations of partial or full documents or interviews.

examine what movement organisations do and have done and to analyse their campaign strategies and tactics.

What is arguably the most valuable gift a social movement researcher can make to a movement is a critical analysis of that movement, examining strategy and tactics and evaluating which were successful. Here is where the editors possess specialist skills – though their study of other social movements and the literature on social movements – which they can place at the service of the movement. This involves taking a critical attitude to what the movement activists say and examining their practices also. This would involve examination of specific campaigns and require critical judgement or “adjudicating between claims”. This analysis is necessary to learn lessons from the experience of the movement. Basic to this is a critical attitude to both the statements and the activities of the movement. And here is my basic problem with this work: in their concern to accurately reflect the positions of their interviewees and be sure the interviewees’ voices are heard without distortion or interference – laudable aims in themselves – they have allowed the interviewees to determine the direction of the interviews, without a concern to confirm or question the veracity of their statements. The same problem also applies – perhaps even more than in the interviews – to the written contributions.

To encapsulate the problem: to understand and analyse the movement in and around Bhopal, ideological analysis (framing/abstraction – whatever you want to call it) is necessary, but insufficient: the abstractions need to be placed in the context of actual practice/activity/mobilisation/power structures of the groups, to see if the latter confirms the former, Thus if BGPMUS is really a class-based organisation, with a class struggle frame, this should be obvious in its organising as well as in the statements of its leaders. To get to the heart of the matter, our academic analysts have listened to the movement's leaders, but have not been sufficiently critical in their listening and analysis. While this book is a superb achievement, we still await a critical history of the Bhopal movement if lessons are to be learned from its experience. The BSMS is a useful building block for such a history.

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Wainwright, Hilary (2009). *Reclaim the state: experiments in popular democracy*. London / New York / Calcutta: Seagull (2nd edition).

Reviewed by **Laurence Cox**

A new book by Hilary Wainwright is usually a significant event: *Beyond the Fragments* (with Sheila Rowbotham and Lynne Segal, 1979), *Arguments for a New Left* (1994) and the first edition of *Reclaim the State* (2003) all set down significant markers for the social movement left, along with her more specifically trade union-related work from the Vickers workers' report in 1978 to her recent (2009) study of union-led workplace change in Newcastle. Over the last four decades she has been a continually thoughtful and thought-provoking interlocutor for movement activists in a very wide range of contexts, from *New Left Review* and popular planning in the Greater London Council to *Red Pepper* magazine and the Transnational Institute progressive think-tank. The rewritten *Reclaim the State* does not disappoint.

"Detailed attention to the creativity of practice is one of the most fruitful sources of new theory", she writes (p. 14); a position developed in detail in *Arguments for a New Left*, which argued for a politics that respects the tacit knowledge held by ordinary people and articulated in social movements. *Reclaim the State* explores how this can be used to remake the state in its own shape - perhaps not quite in the revolutionary sense Marx argued for in his account of the Paris Commune, but nonetheless in significant ways: like Warren Magnusson's (1996) *The Search for Political Space*, the key context is the city or region where popular movements have gained sufficient power to reshape the local state significantly.

Ambiguous histories

Chapters 1 - 4 of the new edition cover the history and theory of popular movements in struggle towards a participatory democracy: the significance of the present conjuncture in terms of new movements, the ways in which neo-liberalism has co-opted much of the language of participation, her approach in writing the book and a recapitulation of the *Arguments for a New Left* position. These chapters certainly make the case, but there is a difficulty of presentation which is perhaps unavoidable: given that a decent account of participatory democracy has to cover normative political theory, distinguish real from fake participation, account for knowledge and power from below, discuss movement struggles and their (partial) realisation in different kinds of local state arrangement, there is no straightforward way to tell the story for the uninitiated.

The book really takes off (for this reader) with the empirical chapters, which Wainwright discusses in terms of the exemplary case of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting; attempts at remaking the public sphere in (and

despite) "New Labour" Britain; and a series of shorter discussions of radical municipalities in continental Europe. These chapters recapitulate the stories explored in the first edition, but with an additional six years' experience - by no means all encouraging.

The 2004 defeat of the Workers' Party in the Porto Alegre local elections has led to a weakening, fragmentation and professionalisation of the city's famous participatory budgeting process - leaving it certainly as a historical experience and inspiring model, but increasingly weakened in practice.

In Luton, southern England, the success of the radical Exodus collective in pioneering a community takeover of the verbally participatory schemes of New Labour "regeneration" on the Marsh Farm council housing estate led to constant assaults by local government aimed at restoring the power of consultancy and commercial development but the slow achievements of the "organized and strategic activity of the residents" (p. 228).

In east Manchester, local attempts at "redistribution, regeneration and public and community-led public service reform" (p. 277), again putting pressure on the abstract simulation of participation cooked up by central government and this time drawing on long-standing trade union traditions, cooperative organising, environmental and religious groups, achieved some gains but again against a background of state-led pressure for privatisation and commercialisation.

In Newcastle, more dramatically, plans for the gentrification of an old working-class area led to a powerful alliance of community groups and trade unions under the leadership of the public sector union UNISON, which developed strategic alliances, contested the contracting-out of key services and pushed participants to understand the struggle in terms of international conflicts over neoliberalism; a process chronicled in more detail in her *Public service reform - but not as we know it* (2009).

The final empirical chapter discusses a range of continental European experiences: the Norwegian trade union's model municipality experiment; participatory democracy in Italian towns; and participatory budgeting in Seville. The book concludes with an analysis of the political potential of non-state sources of popular power; a restatement of the importance of democratic knowledge; and an argument for the continuing significance of participatory democracy.

Reclaiming or remaking the state?

The book's title was originally intended both "as a challenge to New Labour - and a provocation to my anarchist friends". Her debate with John Holloway (2011) about *Reclaim the state* and his *Crack capitalism* (2010) explores somewhat different arguments, where (to this reader at least) Holloway's critique of politics and Wainwright's defence of state-as-politics left the space of social movement politics *beyond* the state almost untouched, as though to be

political and organised is to be part of the state. But another organisation is perhaps possible...

My feeling on closing *Reclaim the state* was that Wainwright's case is unproven. Those who *have to* fight these struggles necessarily do so, and those she chronicles are doing so well and against great odds, winning at times and losing perhaps more frequently. But for those who can make choices as to where to fight their battles, the book does not convince that the local state is a wise battleground. If a single-country revolution is unsustainable, then a single-city one is even less likely to succeed against the pressures that the national state can bring to bear on any substantial challenge to local power relations; something recognised by the Newcastle anti-privatizers in their focus on national and international alliances and analyses (p. 292).

She argues that "Today's experiments place a far greater emphasis on institutional design and sustainability" (p. 376), as against those of the 1960s and 1970s; but as the book itself demonstrates, one thing is sustainability on paper and another is the ability to actually sustain radical changes to even local power relationships in a hostile national and international context. It may indeed be the case that local transformation can *only* survive in the context of wider revolutionary struggles.

This is not to argue with Wainwright's powerful demolition of the top-down approach of Stalinism and Social Democracy - something which the university-educated left (to say nothing of Left establishments) have much to learn from - or with her arguments for grounding organisation in popular knowledge - for which she is an exceptional spokesperson and perhaps the best current theorist. Indeed the book would be an excellent read to recommend to anyone who still believes in exclusively electoral forms of democracy on progressive grounds.

It is rather to radicalise this argument, *contra* both Wainwright's desire to reclaim the state and Holloway's silence on the question of organisation, to ask how movement politics can remake popular organisation in the image of popular knowledge rather than in the image of the state. To return, perhaps crudely, to the question of democracy: states as we know them are in most cases elite political formations loosely modified to co-opt popular movements (democratic movements, independence movements, socialist movements, feminist movements). A genuinely democratic state would not look like a radical version of present-day Britain; in keeping with Wainwright's *Arguments*, its form can hardly be outlined in advance other than to ground it in workplaces, communities and movement alliances rather than units of top-down administration.

Respecting each other's struggles

Having said this, it should be clear that the kind of grassroots struggles for power chronicled in *Reclaim the state* are a necessary *part* of this kind of democracy, and the inability of schematic forms of thought to recognise them is itself unhelpful. As Wainwright notes, its realities are complex (and not easily

summarised) and often "below the conventional radar" (p. 403). If participatory democracy cannot be achieved at the local or regional level alone, and a war of position will not of itself deliver transformation, neither will a war of manoeuvre which fails to build on many such wars of position within many different institutional and extra-institutional fields, and which attempts to radicalise them and connect the dots.

Translated into everyday political practice, that position which rejects community-based struggles and attempts at participatory democracy *a priori* because of their insufficiently revolutionary character (once from a socialist point of view; these days equally frequently from an ecological or autonomist point of view) is as limited as the position of community activists who fail to make the connections and alliances beyond their own sphere of work. It is demanding, bruising and exhausting; but no more so than that of many other popular movements whose support is needed if gains in one community are to survive.

The besetting sin of twenty-first century Northern politics, perhaps, is its weakness at alliance-building and the tendency to fetishise particular methods and spheres of action. Genuine popular democracy has to start from *respect for each other's struggles* - not uncritical respect, but taking each other's battles seriously, as a basis for critical debates geared towards alliance-building and practical solidarity. *Reclaim the state* is an important step in this direction, shining an unusual and penetrating light on an area of political life all too often ignored by activists in other movements.

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Call for papers vol 4 issue 2 (November 2012)

For the global emancipation of labour: new movements and struggles around work, workers and precarity

Issue editors:

Alice Mattoni, Elizabeth Humphrys, Peter Waterman, Ana
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Once, the labour movement was seen as *the* international social movement for the left (and it was the spectre haunting capitalism). Over the last century, however, labour movements have been transformed. In most of the world membership rates have dwindled, and many act in defence of, or simply provide services to, their members in the spirit of interest or lobbying groups. Labour was once a broad social movement including cooperatives, socialist parties, women's and youth wings, press and publications, cultural production and sporting clubs. Often it was at the core of movements for democracy or national independence, even of social revolution. Despite the rhetoric of "socialism", "class and mass trade unionism" or, alternatively, technocratic "organising strategies", most union movements internationally operate strictly within the parameters of capitalism and the ideology of "social partnership" (i.e. with and under capital and state).

New labour organising efforts are increasingly moving beyond traditional trade union forms, dependence on the state or parties of the left, and have found new forms linked to ethnic or geographical communities, working women, precarious workers, migrants and other radical-democratic social movements.

These changes may relate to the neoliberalisation and "globalization" of capitalism, and its result in restructured industry and employment. They may also relate to the consequent disorientation of the left. Transformations at the political and economic level have not, however, meant the disappearance of labour movement. Multiple new expressions of labour discontent arise from the bases and the margins of the world of work.

New forms of organising and/or a revival?

Firstly, from the *bases* we find movements of workers, often in alliance with local communities or other social movements. They are to be found not only in advanced industrial and postindustrial economies, but also — more dramatically — at the capitalist periphery. Labour movements were important in the recent Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. In the world's second biggest economy, China, labour has been flexing its muscles in the most repressive and difficult of

circumstances. Labour struggle has also begun to revive in the United States, and in the most dramatic fashion with the occupation of the legislature in Wisconsin.

Secondly, we see those who are situated at the margins of labour markets and who experience continuous uncertainty. Increasingly addressed as the "precariat", this includes both high-skilled and low-skilled workers in the rich metropolises of the global North as well as in the slums and fields of the global South. The precarious are younger people, women and migrants, but increasingly those previously full-time workers whose rights and conditions are under attack due to the current economic crisis.

New and emergent movements are taking place at the local, national and transnational level, signaling the ongoing transformation of workers' struggle all over the world. As capitalism reorganises, expands and reinvents, so too does resistance to its exploitation and subjugation. Some trade unions have encountered difficulty in working amongst workers who do not conform to the model of the full-time, male, family-wage-earning worker, and are seeking new ways of mobilizing and organising. This has been equally true amongst landless workers in Brazil, as with "undocumented" or "excluded" labour in California. Both at the bases and at the margins of the labour realms, women, men and youth are experimenting with radical new forms of struggle, new demands, new places / spaces of articulation, and perhaps re-discovering or re-inventing a global movement for "the emancipation of labour".

Some places to start?

This issue of *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* seeks to reflect both this immense richness of experiences and the attempt to articulate what has been learnt in one place in ways that may be useful for activists elsewhere. We are looking for articles that tackle questions such as:

- How are the geography and politics of labour struggles changing in the 21st century?
- What use, and clarity, is there in the distinction between "old" (labour) and "new" social movements?
- Is the historically central link with political parties and the state dead or can it be reinvented, and if so, how?
- Have strategies such as "social movement unionism", "community unionism", "bio-syndicalism", recognising precarity or movements organising informal workers been effective and how far? Where and to what extent are they successful?
- What are the strengths and limits of labour organising among those for whom wage labour is only a part of their livelihood?
- What are the relationships between trade unions on the one hand, and on the other hand solidarity economy movements, organisations working with

precarious and unemployed workers, and identity- or community-based groups and the labour movement?

- How are trade unionists engaging, or failing to engage, with the global justice and solidarity movement?
- Are there new trade union or labour internationalism(s), and what form or forms demonstrate this?
- What is the significance of information and communication technology (ICT), "knowledge workers" and labour's own cyberspace activities to such new worker movements?

We intend to explore such matters in this special issue of the new open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal, *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>).

General submissions

Finally, as in all issues of *Interface*, we will accept submissions on topics that are not related to the special theme of the issue, but that emerge from or focus on movements around the world and the immense amount of knowledge that they generate. Such general submissions should contribute to the journal's mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, 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 thus seek 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 is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Arabic, Catalan, Croatian, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page for details of who to submit to.

Deadline and contact details

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published November 2012, is May 1 2012. For details of how to submit to *Interface*, please see the "Guidelines for contributors". All manuscripts, whether on the special theme or other topics, should be sent to the appropriate regional editor. Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page.