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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. Peer-reviewed articles have been subject to double-blind review by one researcher and one movement practitioner.

The views expressed in any contributions to *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily represent those of *Interface*, the editors, the editorial collective, or the organizations to which the authors are affiliated. *Interface* is committed to the free exchange of ideas in the best tradition of intellectual and activist inquiry.

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

General issue

Lesley Wood, Irina Ceric, Laurence Cox, Radha d'Souza, Ana Margarida Esteves, Sara Motta, Jiří Navrátil, Dawn Paley, Eduardo Romanos, Heike Schaumberg, Anna Szolucha, Peter Waterman

2017 is tense and uncertain. Diagnosing the current moment, with its ecological, political and economic crises, and prescribing strategies for transcending and interrupting these crises are challenges that generate discussion and confusion. It is in these sorts of moments that *Interface* seems particularly relevant, as a space to “learn from each other’s struggles” as we all, in our different movements and research contexts, attempt to understand the nature of the present crisis. The issue has no particular theme, imposed from above by us, the editorial spokescouncil, but we have brought together the best of our submissions to reflect on today’s dynamics.

In this issue

Organically, particular clusters of pieces emerged. The first cluster evaluates particular tactics. Appropriately for the crises of the moment, David Hoffman, Danny Lundy, Amanda Anderson and Michael Lanza discuss Internet campaigning strategies with reference to the 2016 US presidential primaries. Chandra Russo’s practice note explores the complexities and reworkings of the safety pin tactic in current activist practice. In his article, Brian Mallon shows and contextualises the rise of direct action in housing activism in Dublin. Phil Hedges’ article draws on Benjamin, Jackson and Hobsbawm to discuss the challenges in writing a history of a rent strike at University College London.

A second cluster of pieces considers the dynamics of movement building in particular contexts. Janine Joyce and Joseph Llewellyn discuss the successes and failures of bicultural and anarchist organising principles in a peace-building project in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Geoffrey Pleyers’ article examines how local food projects in Belgium have developed from a primarily prefigurative approach to a more institutionalised one. Niccolò Bertuzzi looks at the organisation and communication structures of the No Expo network in Milan. Laurence Cox’s paper shows the importance of social movement dynamics in the struggle against water charges in Ireland. Looking at women’s activism in Oaxaca, Alice Poma and Tommaso Gravante show how emotions are central to understanding emancipation in protest. Finally, Georgia Bekridaki and Antonios Broumas’ article explores the resurgence and potential of socially reproductive commons in the Greek crisis.

While many of these pieces involved a favourite topic of *Interface*, movement learning, two pieces focused particularly on this idea. Thembi Lockett, Shirley Walters and Astrid von Kotze recover the long history of popular education in South Africa for today’s movements. Meanwhile Jeffrey Rubin and Emma

Solokoff-Rubin discuss the dialogue they constructed across borders between Brazilian women's movement activists and US students.

Given the current moment, it is not surprising that we also have articles on the repression faced by activists. In this issue we publish an interview with assassinated Mexican activist Miguel Ángel Jiménez Blanco by Kara Andrade, Ernesto Castañeda and Luis Rubén Díaz-Cepeda. Stefano Boni's event analysis discusses successful resistance to building a prison in Venezuela (in Spanish).

Each issue, we also receive a significant number of submissions on environmental movements. This issue, Andreas Bieler's article assesses resistance to neoliberalism in the European Citizen's Initiative "Water and sanitation are a human right". Matthias Schmelzer and Dennis Eversberg analyse the political orientations of the movement for sustainable degrowth in Europe. Lastly, linking a broad range of movements, there is also a short introduction to the new activist/scholar oral history project on People's Global Action.

Within this open issue, we have experimented with a new format. Our special section, guest-edited by Katia Valenzuela-Fuentes, Dominika V. Polanska and Anne Kaun, brings together a number of activist/scholar pieces on the theme of "The right to housing in theory and practice: going beyond the West". Thanks to Jiří, Ania and Alice for their assistance with the editing process. This section opens with its own introduction by the guest editors. Next, Joanna Kostka and Katarzyna Czarnota's discusses the potential for engaged scholarship on the basis of research in Poznan. Bálint Missetics discusses the complexities of organising with homeless people in Hungary. Ana Vilenica (with Ana Džokić and Marc Neelan / Who Builds the City) maps the experience and potential of housing activism in Serbia. Marta Solanas' Spanish-language piece discusses cooperative housing and counter-hegemony in Uruguay and beyond. Klemen Ploštajner asks about neoliberal ideology and the challenges facing housing activism in Slovenia. Andrea Aureli and Pierpaolo Mudu's article discusses the Italian "anomaly" and residential squatting as a mode of political agency. The special section closes with the transcription of an activist panel bringing together people from organisations involved in struggles over housing in Poland, Hungary, Turkey and Mexico.

As usual, we have a bumper crop of book reviews, collected by Bjarke and Dawn. We have reviews of Heather Ann Thompson's *Blood in the Water: the Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy* (Elva Orozco); Andy Blunden's *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* (Bonnie Nardi); Andrew Lamas, Todd Wolfson and Peter Funke's *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements* (Raphael Schlembach); Nicholas Hildyard's *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the Global South* (Alexander Dunlap); Javier Sicilia's *El Deshabitado* (Andrew Smolski); William Carroll's *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice* (Andrew Kettler); Gladys Tzul Tzul's *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena: Mujeres Y Tramas de Parentesco En Chuimeq'ena'* (Meztli Yoalli Rodríguez Aguilera, in Spanish); William Carroll and Kanchan Sarker's A

World to Win: Contemporary Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony (Laurence Cox); Robert Press' *Ripples of Hope: How Ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence* (Richa Biswas); and Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar's *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique and Struggle* (Lika Rodin).

Also in this issue you will find our first event announcement, for the 6th international "Workers' Economy" meeting (Aug 30 - Sept 2) in the Hotel Bauen cooperative, Buenos Aires and an invitation to submit event announcements. Finally we have details of another social movements journal, *Moving the Social*, published by the Institute for Social Movements (Bochum, Germany).

Our current call for papers (for issue 10/1, to be published in May 2018) is on "Political parties, trade unions and social movements: emancipatory reconfigurations of popular organisation", with a special section dedicated to Peter Waterman's activist-scholar life, work and legacy. Peter was still working on the main call for papers when he was taken into hospital. The deadline will be November 1 2017.

Updates from editors

As you can see, this issue brings together a broad set of movements from a diverse (although always incomplete) range of struggles and territories. Starting from these experiences and pieces, we as editors then work to strengthen and produce the issue.

We thought it might be interesting for our readers and ourselves to know more about the names behind the emails of the editors. Given the decentralized, and voluntary nature of the project, many of us have never met "in real life", and we don't know each other well. Here are a few words about what we're up to, from many, but not all of our crew (texts from late May).

In alphabetical order...

Irina Ceric. I am currently involved in skill-building a renewed network of land defender allies in the territory known as British Columbia, on the west coast of Canada. As you may have heard, Canada's photogenic but deeply neoliberal PM has approved numerous pipelines, and resistance continues to build. I am also currently conducting interviews across Canada and the US with activist legal collective members as part of a research project on radical legal support, social movement knowledge production and legal consciousness.

Laurence Cox. I'm involved in the international outreach work for opposition to the G20 meeting in Hamburg this July. The local police are throwing their weight about and seriously irritating a lot of Hamburgers. It's an important protest at a European level in that Blockupy are hoping to use it to rebuild networks of movements against austerity across the continent. There is also a bit of a reconnection internationally around challenging the neoliberal summits, with "BRICS from below" and companer@s in Argentina who are planning for a WTO summit this December and the G20 next year.

Radha D'Souza. It is May Day in London. India Matters UK is on its first protest march since it was founded two months ago to oppose fascism in India. On its first march IMUK is demanding the release of Prof. Saibaba and his comrades sentenced to life imprisonment for demanding social justice for the rural poor and for setting aside the sentences handed out to 13 trade unionists in Maruti-Suzuki's Manesar plant in India. In the past my comrades and I went from one solidarity campaign to the next. Fascists in India are digging their heels in deep, so are we.

Ana Margarida Esteves is currently a Postdoctoral Research Associate at Centro de Estudos Internacionais, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, ISCTE-IUL. She is conducting Participatory Action Research with transition initiatives, solidarity economy networks and integral cooperatives in Southern Europe and Latin America. She is also active in the anti-austerity movement in Portugal and at the European Level, as well as in the European Commons Assembly.

Sara Motta. I, with others, are dreaming into being a radical community education collective The Communiversity Newcastle, and a sacred shared living community here in Newcastle, NSW. We are also trying to keep spaces of meaningful emancipatory scholarship alive in the University at a time of increasingly cruel restructuring. I am writing my second book, a decolonial feminist non-manifesto 'Liminal Subjects: Weaving (Our) Liberation, and

visioning with mother-scholars in Colombia, Australia and Brazil a participatory project 'La Política de la Maternidad/ Reading Motherhood Politically'.

Jiří Navrátil. I'm currently doing a research project on progressive and illiberal political activism in Czech cities and teaching at two universities. Besides this I've been organising a series of discussions and meet-ups with former global justice activists and autonomists over my recent book on the transformation of alterglobalization activism in Central Europe.

Dawn Paley. Yet another difficult week in Mexico. A young woman named Lesvy Berlin Orsorio was killed and her body was left tied to a phone booth on the campus of Mexico's National University (UNAM). The Public Prosecutor of Mexico City sent out a series of tweets after Berlin Orsorio's murder was made public, noting that she was not a student and that she had been drinking earlier in the day. This follows a pattern of victim blaming common in Mexico. Seven women are murdered every day in this country, and Berlin Orsorio's murder sent a strong message, generating a great deal of fear and rage among my compañeras at grad school. ¡Nos queremos vivas!

Eduardo Romanos. I write this editorial with one foot out of Interface after two and a half years of learning. I have only words of gratitude for the authors I have worked with, for my colleagues from the Western Europe team and for the rest of the editors. Thank you for your patience and understanding in this my first experience as an editor. I am glad to have been part of a journal that is a reference for both activists and scholars of social movements around the globe. And I'm sorry to leave it, but my hours are limited. Acting as an editor is an interesting task and at times very rewarding (especially when you see the articles you have been working with published) but also demanding (this shouldn't discourage anyone interesting in joining the project – believe me: it's worth it). Now I will continue to play the role of editor in another journal, which I see as an ally rather than a rival. At the moment I am also the coordinator of a Master's Degree in applied sociology at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid (if anyone is interested, admission is now open!). And I keep on teaching and researching social movements. Among other projects, I am still devoting much time to understanding the great, transformative adventure (still underway) which many of us joined six years ago: the so-called indignados movement. Alongside that, another adventure has transformed me even more for the past three and a half years: my little boy.

Heike Schaumborg. I am writing these lines having just attended yet another multitudinal demonstration in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires. Today's mobilisation was against the "2x1", an invalidated law that aimed to discourage unnecessarily protracted detention, and which was shamefully revived in a

recent High Court case but to benefit those standing trial for crimes against humanity committed during the country's brutal military dictatorship (1976-1983). This case would have set a precedent that could have seen many of those responsible for genocide walk free. But public outcry persuaded Congress to quickly repudiate this law just hours prior to the protest. Regardless, the multitude turned out to protest and celebrate its victory. It followed a busy month of a militant teacher's strike, mass mobilisations against gendered violence, evictions of workers' cooperatives, redundancies, and a powerful general strike on 6 April. This energetic show of defiance affirms that we can change the world! Let that message ring loud and clear at capitalism's planned and upcoming fiestas hosted by the City of Buenos Aires: the WTO meeting this coming December, and the G20 and G30 next year.

Bjarke Skærlund Risager. Having recently moved from one continent to another with my young family, I'm trying to get my bearings in a new (political) climate. My PhD dissertation on the spatial production of European social movements in the context of economic and democratic crises is on hold while I'm on parental leave with my one-year-old.

Ania Szolucha. I am working on the ground to document the impacts of shale gas developments in Lancashire, UK which, most recently, include the increase in policing with all its effects, lock-ons and other direct actions at the fracking site that is currently under construction. I am also trying to assemble a comprehensive history of shale gas in Poland.

Lesley Wood. Last night I spent the night sleeping on the concrete outside the Toronto Mayor's condo building. The organization I work with is trying to put pressure on the city to better fund both homeless shelters and support affordable housing. Like many 'global' cities, Toronto has become affordable only for the rich.

Farewells and welcomes

With this issue we are bidding farewell to no fewer than four *Interface* editors: Elizabeth Humphrys, Alice Mattoni, Richard Pithouse and Eduardo Romanos. Elizabeth was a founding editor whose contributions were central to keeping the journal going, and whose beautiful covers have been the first thing most readers have seen. Alice has been a long-time member of the western European group as well as lead editor on numerous special issues. Richard's connection with the struggles of South African shanty-town dwellers and their razor-sharp theorising has brought a very important dimension to *Interface*. Lastly Eduardo's involvement in the western European group and his sharp understanding of a wide range of different social movements has been a great

contribution. We are immensely grateful to everything they have brought to the journal, and many of us will continue working with them in other contexts.

Meanwhile, Dawn Paley - radical journalist, media activist and researcher - has joined us as a book reviews editor and is already bringing a huge amount to the project; and Alexander Waters – activist and PhD student – has joined the Australia / New Zealand group as well as helping with our website work.

We had a fantastic response to our call for new editors for the western European group, and are working with a number of people who will hopefully join us as full editors by our next issue.

North American editors wanted

Interface's editorial collective for the US and Canada is looking for one new editor to join the current editors, Irina Ceric and Lesley Wood. We handle articles sent in by people across a very wide range of social movements, academic disciplines; find reviewers when needed and take part in special issue projects from time to time as well as helping to run the journal as a whole. Interface is a voluntary project: we see this as an important contribution to helping movements learn from each other and to develop dialogue between researchers and movements outside the constraints of conventional academic journals.

We're looking for someone familiar with and involved in US movements (Irina and Lesley are both based in Canada) and who is excited about working with words and ideas; ideally scholar/activists who have time and enthusiasm to contribute, but we're also open to people outside academia altogether who have strong writing/editing/theoretical skills. We're hoping to find people who complement the existing editors in terms of movement interests and involvement, languages, countries and disciplines/intellectual traditions (we don't have to agree on everything!). We're informal and comradely but also organised in how we work together.

If you're interested, please email both Irina and Lesley (ljwood AT yorku.ca and irina.ceric AT gmail.com) by July 20th with a few paragraphs about yourself and why you'd like to do this / how you see it fitting into what you want to do politically or intellectually. Do also please let us know how we can get the best sense of your work – a CV, a website link, a sample of your writing...

Peter Waterman, 1936-2017

Finally, and sadly, not long after writing his own contribution to these editors' updates, our long-standing international / transnational editor Peter Waterman died at the age of 81. This editorial is followed by his obituary, but it seems appropriate to close this editorial, the last one he will co-sign, with his own, typically casual update written in between medical appointments:

Peter Waterman. I am less active academically (being long retired) and politically (in the sense of activism) than cyberspatially. This is firstly with the free, online social movements journal, *Interface*. Cyberia, as I call it, is the promised land - or cloud - for us 80-year-olds. And whilst it is also a 'disputed terrain', Cyberia permits a range and flexibility of relationships that has never previously existed. Just more or less completed my third compilation of scattered papers which, like the two previous ones, will be available at a token price or free on line. Oh, and Cyberia welcomes the under-80s also.

Peter Waterman 1936 – 2017: in memoriam

Laurence Cox

Our friend, comrade and co-editor Peter Waterman, who has just died in the Hague aged 81, lived many lives to the full. After over a decade within the movement, Peter broke with orthodox communism after 1968. As a labour studies academic he contributed important insights on the development of a “social movement unionism” and new labour internationalisms. After his retirement in 1998 he contributed extensively to the World Social Forum and other processes of networking emancipatory social movements across the planet.

Peter was born into a London Jewish Communist family in 1936. His father, born Nasibirski, later Wasserman and finally Waterman, was a Polish Jewish leftist who arrived in England as a stowaway and worked in many trades, at one point as general manager of the major UK Communist bookstore Collets. His mother, whose East End parents were interchangeably known as Shatitsky and Gold, was a trained secretary who spent much of her life working at low or no pay for leftist groups, working with Willie Gallacher and being arrested for protesting the Rosenberg executions in the House of Commons. She would go on to write two semi-autobiographical novels.

After much Young Communist activity and a one-year course in journalism in London, Peter became the English (and de facto chief) sub-editor of the monthly of the International Union of Students in Communist Prague (1955-8). Following compulsory UK military service (1959-60) he studied at the union-identified Ruskin College, Oxford, during which time he married Ruthie Kupferschmidt and became the father of two children, worked as a truck-driver and went on to do a bachelor's degree at Oxford University. Ruthie also had many jobs, lastly as a Montessori teacher; after retiring with a disability she became an artist.

With a family to support, Peter worked as a labour educator for the World Federation of Trade Unions, again in Prague (1966-9), where he witnessed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the crushing of the Prague Spring. The experience left an indelible impression on him, and he “left both the Communist World and the World of Communism” as he put it. To the end of his days, Peter remained deeply hostile to Stalinism and other forms of statist organisations that claimed to act for human liberation – and kept his ability to recognise them in new disguises.

But he also felt strongly that what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander – and challenged other left projects that he saw as repeating these mistakes, be it unquestioned loyalty to a party line, mythologising leaders or blurring the truth in pursuit of the supposed greater good. In this sense Peter embodied the experience of 1968 and the New Left – and represented the spirit

of a left that is capable of learning from its mistakes. If at times he was a purist or as one critic put it, “an anti-sectarian sectarian”, his provocations came from an abiding commitment to liberation as a practice.

The crushing of the Prague Spring had propelled Peter out of orthodox communism and into a great freedom of spirit, independence of thought and commitment to honesty: more than once he gently pulled me up on something I had said and I had to admit that it was more rhetoric than reality. He brought these qualities, along with his great energy and engagement, to the question of how the labour movement could transform and renew itself, how the World Social Forum and other parts of the global justice movement could avoid falling into the traps that had defeated a previous generation, and how the 21st century left could inhabit cyberspace. In all of his work he kept the goal of human emancipation central, resisting pressures to think in approved ways or to be bound by organisational logics, and he left few stones unturned in the attempt to communicate widely and effectively – as well as chattily and at length.

Remaking himself in many dimensions, Peter now did a one-year Master’s in West African Studies, Birmingham (1969-70) and first became an academic at Ahmadu Bello University in Northern Nigeria (1970-72). He moved to the Hague in 1972, where he stayed, teaching and researching at the Institute of Social Studies initially on Third World unions, later on labour and other social movements, their internationalisms and on (computer) communications around these. A “long-distance internationalist”, as he subtitled his autobiography, Peter kept on learning from different countries and cultures without ever settling down in one. With his Jewish birth family, his children in the Netherlands and Gina in Peru, his many lives in England, Czechoslovakia, Nigeria and the Netherlands, and his companer@s and colleagues around the world, he was was a “rootless cosmopolitan” in his own words, a true citizen of the world and its many movements.

In particular, from this period Peter continued to reflect on what needed to be learned from struggles in Latin America, Asia and Africa in particular. He founded and edited the *Newsletter of International Labour Studies* through the 1980s, and was (co-)author of numerous books and articles. His PhD (Non-Western Studies, Nijmegen, 1983) was on the political and theoretical significance of portworker and dockworker relations in Lagos (Nigeria). During this period, especially the first half of the 1980s, he made a number of trips to India, some with Ruthie, meeting with like-minded researchers, teachers, and trade unionists. Ruthie was commissioned by the movements in Bhopal to do a sculpture in honour of the victims of the Bhopal Gas tragedy, something that Peter was always proud of.

In 1986 Peter and Ruthie separated and he began to engage seriously with feminism, leading him to add a strong gender critique to the focus on class issues he had started from and the concern for race and imperialism he had learned in Africa. Peter brought all of these concerns and more into his influential academic arguments around “social movement unionism” and the “new labour internationalisms” – the question, which he did much to put on the

agenda of trade unionists and scholars alike, of how labour struggles were remaking themselves, in the majority world, among women workers, in rural struggles, in non-traditional forms of employment and so on, and in the new wave of capitalist globalisation – and how existing labour organisations could engage with and learn from these changes. Many of the political and intellectual questions he raised, then and later, remain alive and significant today.

In 1990 Peter began a wonderfully colourful relationship with his longtime compañera, the international feminist writer/activist Virginia (Gina) Vargas, which seemed to bring him alive in a new way. Peter and Gina married in 2012, with one ceremony in the Hague and another in Lima organised by Gina's daughter Alejandra Veas and one of Gina's networks, the *Mujeres por la Democracia*. He divided his time between the Netherlands and Peru when not travelling internationally.

On retirement in 1998 Peter continued his involvement with labour internationalism, always seeking to support emancipatory directions, arguing for the need to see beyond existing union institutions to new forms of organising and relationship with the wider community and other movements. These broad perspectives brought him to engage more closely with other kinds of social movements, in particular with what he would later call the global justice and solidarity movement. From the early 2000s he played an important role in the latter, particularly in debates around the World Social Forum that brought together movements across the world against neoliberalism. Peter's great commitment to nonsectarian and dialogical communication was a real strength here, as was his commitment to balancing optimism of the will with pessimism of the intellect and avoiding a new kind of mythmaking.

He observed of his final collection of essays that it revealed a return of emphasis towards labour internationals and internationalism: in keeping with this he had hoped to organise a special issue of *Interface* on the theme of manifestos, perhaps following his own efforts towards a global labour charter earlier in the century. Consistent across this long trajectory was less a search for an organisational ideal to uphold at the expense of all else and more a concern to discover the forms that struggles for emancipation were taking in concrete places, and how they could be joined up without losing this radical edge.

In retirement he wrote and edited extensively, making as much as possible of his work available free online. An early enthusiast for what he called Cyberia, Peter engaged actively with many different forms of online social movement media. He brought his great talent for networking, honed in many different international movements, to linking his newfound dot.comrades to one another in creative and transnational ways. He was always relaxed enough to find some humorous or ironic side of things, even in tragic circumstances, something which made working with him easy and pleasurable in a world of often intense sectarian conflict.

Peter was in wide demand as an activist thinker: he had invitations for teaching, lectures, and seminars from universities and/or movement-oriented bodies in

Peru, South Africa, Sweden, Finland, Hong Kong, Germany, South Korea, the US, Ireland, and the UK. His writing has been published in Dutch, English (UK, USA, Canada, India), French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese and Spanish. He also put great effort into the infrastructure needed for committed scholarship, updating his own previous work, editing collections of what he saw as important voices or contributions, publishing annotated bibliographies and the like.

Peter was an active collaborator of Jai Sen's Indian Institute for Critical Action - Centre in Movement (CACIM) in New Delhi, where they co-edited books on the World Social Forums; of the *Global Labour Journal* and *UnionBook*; and *DemocraciaGlobal* in Peru as well as many other labour- and movement-linked projects and mailing lists. In these contexts he was a continually probing, provocative and challenging presence, seeking to assert the need for independence of thought and avoid organisational closure, but doing so with great grace and charm and a deep commitment to the wider picture of human emancipation. More than one companion@ has spoken of his ability to reconnect after what seemed like a permanent falling-out.

Since his death tributes both public and private have been coming in from trade unionists, activists in other social movements and scholars across the global South as well as in the North. They mention his endless curiosity, his warmth and enthusiasm, and his generosity. Face to face and in the virtual space where many people knew him, Peter was gregarious, chatty and witty. People found him deeply responsive and engaged despite his many commitments and increasing health issues.

In recent years Peter was a leading light of *InYerFace* (as he sometimes put it), where he and I collaborated with David Landy on the international / transnational section and where he kept the whole journal on its toes by constantly arguing at right angles to many of us. He was an extraordinary presence at *Interface* – continually provocative where he disagreed, but with a generosity of spirit and a supportiveness for the wider project that is rare to find. For a younger editorial collective his different and often wider vision, and his refusal to be bound by institutional procedures were a huge gift, and the grace with which he handled our differences and disagreements was liberating in a world of tight perspectives:

"I don't want or need to puff *Interface*. I think the site speaks for itself. But I have found this a simultaneously laid-back and efficient publication, in which a bunch of people, some of whom have never met each other, and most of whom are heavily involved in surviving within neo-liberalising universities, seem to both take on and carry out various necessary editing, designing and other tasks. If this is the rose-garden promised by the global justice and solidarity movements that it is inspired by and writes about, it is not without its prickles. Or its prickly team members – of which I have occasionally been one."

After one internal argument he wrote, apologising for his own part in it and thanking others for their criticism:

“IFace happens to be, it seems, a community in which such openness and frankness can be found - something which I have not earlier found during a lifetime of activism, political or academic.

Let it continue to be so.”

If *Interface* manages to live up to this at times, it owes much to Peter’s presence.

In 2014 Peter had published his autobiography, *From Coldwar Communism to the Global Emancipatory Movement: Itinerary of a Long-Distance Internationalist*, online; it is reviewed by David Featherstone in the previous issue of *Interface*. While completing his final collection of essays, Peter was the driving force behind that issue, on social movement auto/biographies, to which he characteristically contributed or co-wrote several pieces, all in different formats. His piece “Of icons, of myths and of internationalists” says something important in response to the tendency to mythologise internationalist “myths and icons”:

“In reference to the active or outstanding bearers of internationalism, I strongly suggest that we consider them as neither saints nor sinners but rather as *compañer@s* (an androgynous Spanish-language form that can mean friend, workmate, associate, sexual partner, or political comrade). A *compañer@* is, surely, someone one dialogues with, not someone either glorifies or lies about - or to. Today the Internet makes it increasingly possible to both talk about and sometimes even to those we admire.

It seems ... that the creation of a new internationalism requires not so much the right ideology (in the sense of a pre-existing discourse backed by one or other kind of authority) but a particular kind of behaviour, a way of relating to other people, and to their ideas. And here we return to the necessity and possibility of a growing number of people and peoples (armed with information, disposed to tolerance and flexibility, culturally sensitive, equipped with technology, committed ethically) creating global solidarity communities of their own. In order to achieve this, I think we need to publicise internationalist (h)activists in such a light that the public response may be ‘I admire her/him’, but might be ‘I should do that’, ‘I could do that’ and (previously here unconsidered) ‘I think I could enjoy doing that’.”

Peter was very much a *compañero* in this sense: someone to talk and argue with, someone busy creating a global solidarity community online, and someone who enjoyed doing it to the end. It is hard now to get used to his voice *not* chipping in at surprising moments with a perspective at right angles to everyone else.

Suffering from heart problems and leukemia, Peter eventually decided to forego further treatment and died peacefully in the early hours of June 17th. In keeping with his own practice, his many comp@s, friends, colleagues and comrades have been publishing tributes online and are working collectively to develop a Wikipedia page. Peter archived his own work online, and it will probably now be brought together in one place: a partial bibliography is below. Our current call for papers includes a special section for work in the spirit of his political and intellectual projects as well as personal tributes and memories. As a number of people have said, the real tribute is to keep these struggles and questions alive: on the page (or more likely the screen), in the world and also in our own activism and scholarship.

Peter is survived by Gina; his children Danny and Tamara, and his grandchildren Joëlle and Nick. He is sorely missed around the world.

Many thanks to Jai Sen, Raphael Hoetmer, Patrick Bond, Orsan Senalp and other Interface editors for their comments and assistance with this piece.

A (very) partial Peter Waterman bibliography

Many, but not all, of Peter's works are available free online. This is particularly the case for his own essays and collections, often published directly online with social movement organisations of various kinds.

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Interface 2/2 (November 2010): special section on labour communications
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/2010/11/interface-issue-2-volume-2-voices-of-dissent/>

Interface 4/2 (November 2012): For the global emancipation of labour: new movements and struggles around work, workers and precarity
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/2012/11/interface-volume-4-issue-2-for-the-global-emancipation-of-labour/>

Interface 5/2 (November 2013): Tenth issue celebration
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/2013/11/interface-volume-5-issue-2-tenth-issue-celebration/>

Interface 6/2 (November 2014): Movement internationalism(s)
<http://www.interfacejournal.net/2014/12/interface-volume-6-issue-2-movement-internationalisms/>

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More of Peter's work can be found via links on his academia.edu profile at <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=eo6Qa4AAAAJ&hl=en> and elsewhere in "Cyberia": hopefully a complete, linked bibliography will appear in due course.



Call for papers volume 10 issue 1 (May 2018)

Political parties, trade unions and social movements: emancipatory reconfigurations of popular organisation

Heike Schaumberg, Laurence Cox and Peter Waterman

The May 2018 issue of the open-access, online, copy left academic/activist journal *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>) will focus on the theme of organisational re-configurations between political parties, labour and social movements.

There will also be a special section in honour of our co-editor Peter Waterman (1936-2017), who was working on this call for papers when he was taken into hospital. Contributions on other themes, as always, are also welcome.

Organisational reconfigurations in the neoliberal crisis: political parties, labour and social movements

As is widely recognised, uprisings and social movements during the crisis of neoliberal capitalism have tended to articulate rejections of almost all that was before: the art of domination and representation by the powers that be, their economic and political practices, and the organisational configurations associated with existing structures. Yet despite this initial ‘anti-politics’ (Dinerstein, 2002), what has received less attention is that these movements and uprisings subsequently generated a frenzy of new organisations, new kinds of organisation and coordination platforms, while traditional left-wing parties and trade unions also experienced some membership growth and diversification. To a greater or lesser extent, this dynamic can be observed in many countries throughout this century so far, from Argentina and Bolivia to Egypt and even the UK.

This re-organisation, ignited by massive mobilisations and other impulses ‘from below’, occurred following the widespread neoliberal dismantling of working-class social, political and trade union organisations (Gambina, 2013; Schaumberg, 2013). The savagery of neoliberal disorganisation, however, did not stop short of affecting even the state and the political establishment. The same appears to be true for the processes of re-organisation, in some countries and maybe generally, whether they follow eruptive uprisings or express general globalisation trends. If these processes do express the deeper historical dynamics of a system in long-term crisis, they represent something more than political interventions by individuals or small groups.

Processes of such large-scale re-organisation entwine with local history. In some countries, they have benefitted the Far Right. A widely shared concern on parts of the academic left is that an earlier wave or cycle of contention against neoliberal capitalism has given way to the rise of the Right: from the growing electoral importance of the Front National in France, Temer's constitutional coup in Brazil early this year, Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution plunging into violent chaos, the electoral success of the neoliberal business elite lead by Mauricio Macri in Argentina late 2015, or Donald Trump's electoral victory in the US.

Often such analyses tend to identify the weaknesses or strategies, and ideological and/or organisational principles of the parties of the left and/or the revolutionary left as the main problem. But if we understand this party-political left to be a part of, rather than external to, the historical processes then arguably it only reflects the weaknesses of the class(es) and social groups it claims to organise and represent.

More broadly still, if we understand parties, trade unions and social movement organisations as so many different ways in which popular struggle articulates itself (Cox and Nilsen 2014), we can reasonably ask whether and how non-party forms of social movement have learned from the difficulties of the party form, if they have advanced on its successes and avoided its failures. We can also see long-standing debates about the organisation of labour – the limitations and weaknesses of trade unions, the relationship with “labour's others” (Waterman 2014), the possibilities of wider emancipatory labour struggles and “social movement unionism” – in terms of this shared question of how popular struggles organise themselves in the 21st century.

This call for papers invites contributions that explore empirically how in this crisis these various tools of struggle are re-arranged and re-configured by impulses ‘from below’. Beyond the rhetoric which treats “the Left” as a single homogenous actor uniquely responsible for the future of popular struggle, we want to capture what we suggest are more complex processes of political re-configurations at this moment in time, and thus help generate constructive analyses of the contemporary political condition of working-class and other movements of oppressed groups and the quality of the tools at their disposal.

Understanding the new struggles

In this regard, we can see that the turn from neoliberal “business as usual” to a more aggressive right-wing assault is sparking new forms of popular opposition,

¹ Including casual/ised workers, urban residential communities, child workers, rural labour/communities, indigenous peoples, women workers, homeworkers, domestic workers, im/migrant workers, petty-producers/traders/service-providers, sex workers, the un/under-employed and the high- and low-tech precariat – in other words the groups which conventional union organising has often struggled with when it has not simply ignored or excluded them.

perhaps distinct from those of recent waves of resistance. The Temer government is in turmoil, partly paying the price of the anti-corruption charges it used to attack its opposition, awakening a labour-backed response linked with local social movements. In Argentina, the Macri government has been facing growing challenges from organised, as well as informal, labour, social movements and a far left web of traditional and ‘independent’ parties that keeps adjusting its internal patterns and relations. Many of these social movements have persisted since the late 1990s, and have spurred other smaller or temporary interest groups into action.

In the US, Trump’s electoral success has produced sustained opposition across a wide spectrum of civil society as well as intensifying the conflict between different party-political strategies for opposition. In the UK, the rise of Corbyn and Momentum defies political common sense by showing the revitalisation of an established centre-left party through popular mobilisation. Elsewhere in western Europe the last few years have seen the reconfiguration of pre-existing forces on the further left, building on movement links to achieve unusual levels of electoral success; new electoral and extra-electoral formations with often startlingly innovative forms drawing on social movement ways of operating; pre-existing parties and trade unions reorienting themselves towards popular struggles; and so on. The relationship between social movements and political parties in Europe has clearly become a live and interesting question in the context of more recent waves of movements, with a range of outcomes.

This follows earlier trends in South America where insurgent movements early this century had bargained to defend gained space and restored left reformism to government power as an implicit compromise, hoping to defend the space gained for collective action. In South America as in western Europe, left parties’ relationship to movements and states has taken a great variety of forms, and the “party turn” itself has been contested strongly in several countries.

This is a space of experimentation and conflict, and it is not obviously the case that what works (for a given value of “works”) in one country or continent will work well elsewhere. As the examples above also indicate, how established institutions (party systems, labour and civil society organisations, even states) work vary hugely across the world, and it is not self-evident that the same forms or relationships will work elsewhere. These trends do not prescribe future developments that might take place at a different moment of the global crisis and in places with distinct economic and geo-political realities. It is certainly too soon to judge the long-term outcomes of these re-organisational efforts, but we can attempt to identify and analyse the processes currently happening and discuss their transformative potential.

Our assumption is that current oppositional movements are to a greater or lesser degree imbued with the collective aspirations that were initially formulated by uprisings and mass movements earlier this century; but they are doing so under new circumstances, not least the background of earlier victories and defeats, and in a situation of a now deepening global economic and

hegemonic crisis. The new organisational questions thus express the longer-term question in popular movements of “What should we do?” What lessons can be learned from the struggles so far? How can we intervene to make them more effective? How can we win on shorter-term struggles? And so on.

From Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil to Egypt, Tunisia and southern Europe, movements in this century have reclaimed public spaces, housing, education, health and what they termed dignity through real work and efforts at workers’ control over the means of production. These movements prioritised collective interests over personal gain and in so doing, have questioned, for example, traditional forms of leadership and made efforts to generate new organisational and relational forms and methods. As social and historical formations, they have taken issue with the dominant capitalist notions of “politics”, “leaders”, “democracy”, and “work”. The ways in which these ideas and collective practices have matured would be an important concern for this Interface issue.

This call for papers thus proposes to look with fresh eyes at the contemporary world of collective struggle in the aftermath of the uprisings of the early 21st century, exploring the resulting connections and re-configurations of social movement organisations and ‘events’ or ‘processes’ by taking on board the broader historical forces at work, as well as their impacts on global processes of political re-configuration. By social movements we refer to all forms of social movement organising including, not least, the labour movement (Barker et al. 2013). Indeed, various scholars have identified the role of labour in uprisings for example in Argentina (Iñigo Carrera and Cotarelo, 2003; Palomino, 2005; Rauber, 2005; Marshall and Perelman, 2008; Manzano, 2013; Schaumberg, 2014 ; Schaumberg, 2015), Spain (Narotzky, 2016), and Egypt (Alexander, 2014), while its central role in the protest movements is well-known in countries such as Bolivia (Webber, 2011) and Greece (Schaumberg, 2015). They interact in complex and energetic ways with non-labour based social movements. However, studies that have dedicated their attention to this issue are still very marginal and almost appear anecdotal rather than empirically and theoretically grounded.

If, as is widely accepted, neoliberalism targeted the organisations of labour, then its crisis has propelled the working class (in the broadest sense of this term) to restore, reclaim or remake its organisations in order to defend itself in this context. This often obscured working class activity, and the actions by individuals sustained within this class often over prolonged periods of time, that gave rise to many of the social movements we see today around the world. How these movements now interact with and transform its ‘traditional’ organisations and vice versa, is the main concern of this issue.

But these processes are highly uneven across the world as they are combined, coloured by local historical developments that have shaped political cultures and configurations, and continue to impress upon global movements with their own particular trajectories. Different left traditions and imaginaries have played a powerful role in the revolts, but there is no monolithic development, as the

rise of right-wing movements in some parts of the world, that of the left in others, and other, less easily categorised situations, such as Venezuela, testify.

We are interested in contributions to this issue that tackle this more complex picture of re-organisation from below; the emerging organisational solidarities, alliances, merges, and fragmentations between different types of working class and other subaltern organisations such as social movements, civil associations, coordinating platforms, political parties and trade unions. We are especially interested in contributions that are carefully researched and/or speak from an active engagement with these processes of re-organisation and will help raise the level of debate, both empirically and/ or theoretically, about the contemporary challenges for the working class, social movements and the left locally and globally. Given the exploratory nature of this focus, raising deeper questions is just as important as formulating coherent answers.

Proposed themes for contributions to the special issue

Possible themes for contributions might include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Relationships between labour movements, political parties, and other social movements: a) solidarities and alliances, b) fragmentation and competition;
- 2) Are trade unions still important? Challenges for rank and file democracy, the emergence of alternative trade unions, other forms of labour organising: pros and cons, interactions between trade unions and other social movements;
- 3) Appropriation of methods as between different social and labour movements and political parties;
- 4) Ideological legacies and conflicts that influence contemporary movement thinking, strategies and tactics;
- 5) Nature of the capital - labour relation and implications for working class organisation (in the broad sense, including all types of social movements);
- 6) Theories of class and their relevance for today's re-organisation;
- 7) Alternative conceptualisations of labour, economics, reproduction etc.;
- 8) New debates around power and the subject and nature of politics;
- 9) The role of riots and uprisings in working-class re-organisation;
- 10) Negotiating the state: social movements and welfare programmes, the defence of welfare, etc;
- 11) Alternative social movement practices and ideas today;
- 12) Shared organisational trends and challenges.

Special section: Peter Waterman, 1936-2017

In memory of our long-time editor, comrade and friend Peter Waterman, there will be a special section in this issue dedicated to Peter's activist/scholar life, work and legacy.

We are open to contributions in all formats, including biographical commentary and reminiscences (a form on which he had much to say, not least in our last issue); research and discussion on his intellectual and political contributions; and work "in the spirit of Peter Waterman" (using the themes and approaches he emphasised).

Without myth-making or iconisation, we are aiming for a dialogue of critical solidarity with his life and work which highlights his contribution to our movements and our thinking about movements.

Possible emphases include (but are not limited to) the remaking of labour struggles, relationships between different kinds of popular movement and actor, the practice of critical internationalism, the challenge of democracy within the "global justice and solidarity movement", as Peter put it, and the possibility of human emancipation.

Principles for contributions

Interface is a journal of practitioner research, meaning that we welcome work by movement activists as well as activist scholars, and work in a variety of formats which suit these different kinds of writing as well as our very varied readership – which includes activists and researchers across the world, connected to many different movements and working within very different intellectual, theoretical and political traditions.

We are interested in pieces in many formats – peer-reviewed articles and interviews with movement activists, research and teaching notes, book reviews and key documents and other formats that work well for their purposes – that tackle some of the questions raised above.

All contributions (including for the special issue and the special section) should go to the appropriate regional editors by the deadline of November 1, 2017.

Please see the editorial contacts page

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) – and use the appropriate template. Please see the guidelines for contributors

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) for more indications on content and style.

General contributions

As always, this issue will also include non-theme related pieces. We are happy to consider submissions on any aspect of social movement research and practice that fit within the journal's mission statement

(<http://www.interfacejournal.net/who-we-are/mission-statement/>). Pieces for *Interface* 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. In addition to studies of contemporary experiences and practices, we encourage analysis of historical social movements as a means of learning from the past and better understanding contemporary struggles.

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 (refereed) 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, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Czech, Danish, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) for details of who to send submissions to.

Deadline and contact details

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published in summer 2018, is 1 November 2017. For details of how to submit pieces to *Interface*, please see the "Guidelines for contributors" on our website. All manuscripts should be sent to the appropriate regional editor, listed on our contacts page.

Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/guidelines-for-contributors/>) and should be used to ensure correct formatting. *Interface* is a completely voluntary effort, without the resources of commercial journals, so we have to do all the layout and typesetting ourselves. The only way we can manage this is to ask authors to use these templates when preparing submissions. Thanks!

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Lessons for Internet campaigning from the US 2016 presidential primaries

**David C. Hoffman, Danny Lundy,
Amanda Anderson and Michael Lanza**

Abstract

This is a report based on observations of the websites and the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages of what were the nine leading candidates in the US presidential primary races between January 15th and February 10th of 2016. During this period each site was observed daily. Using these observations, the authors created an overview of the social media use of each campaign, a list of observed best practices or “lessons,” and some question for future research. We found that the average number of daily posts between January 15th and February 1st were associated with campaign strength, but that different candidates had extremely different social media profiles from the very beginning. We consider the following strategies, observed in one or more of the campaign sites, to be best practices: 1) Project a strategic image by coordinating a variety of campaign elements; 2) Use website elements to promote real-world action; 3) Use postings to highlight and respond to real-world events; 4) Build credibility and community by displaying campaign followers. We also observed that sometimes campaigns fail despite exemplary social media usage.

Keywords: Social media, US presidential primary elections, communication strategy, campaign websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump

Many studies have documented how social media and web-based engagement platforms have changed the way political and cause-based campaigns operate (Auger, 2013; Bekafigo, *et al*, 2013; Bor, 2014; Hawthorne, *et al*, 2013; Serazino, 2014). All major national campaigns now have an online presence. The expansion of new media has facilitated entirely new modes of political engagement. Nothing quite like Twitter and Facebook existed in the past, and both have become important tools in politics and activism, largely birthed in the 2008 Obama campaign. Advocates and candidates have turned to social media especially to engage younger citizens who have traditionally been political bystanders.

The move toward the use of social media and the internet in political and cause campaigns is somewhat justified by the fact that there appears to be a positive correlation between social media presence and electoral success. Studies

observing mentions of political parties on social media, specifically Twitter, and vote count show a strong positive correlation (Tumasjan et al, 2010; DiGrazia, 2013). The more candidates are mentioned in social media, the more likely they are to be elected. This does not necessarily mean that social media mentions cause electoral success: it might be that political popularity manifests itself both in social media mentions and in electoral success, and thus social media. However, in the wake of Donald Trump's presidential victory, it is difficult to believe that social media are not at least contributing causes of popularity and success.

Although no credible campaign now lacks an online and social media presence, and the overall strength of that presence is correlated to electoral success, other aspects of the general optimism for internet campaigning seem to be unfounded. For instance, Boulianne (2015) concludes from a meta-analysis of 36 studies of social media use by campaigns that success in voter outreach on the internet and social media has a "minimal impact" on political participation. Xenos (2007) explains that while Americans are increasingly using the Internet to acquire information, individuals that engage in political activities online, like donating to a campaign, or participating in an online deliberation, are the Americans already predisposed to engaging in political activities. The implication is that those predisposed individuals will continue to use the Internet for political purposes and become more politically active, while the others' participation remains constant. Although Obama's Facebook Likes and page activity positively correlate with his 2008 Presidential Election win, supporters may be using Facebook and other social media sites as a place to gather and share support of a candidate rather than as a forum to discuss substantive issues (Woolley et al, 2010). And the same is likely to be true of Trump supporters' social media use. Furthermore, while young adults may be using social media increasingly to participate in some form of political discussion, their activities are sometimes referred to as "slacktivism" (Vitak et al, 2011). Slacktivism describes online participation, such as signing petitions and joining online groups, that leads to little real world impact. Vitak suggests that while these actions may have little political impact, activities that increase political engagement of young adults, like debating on Facebook, might act as a forum to train youth to develop civic skills. However, Kushin et al (2010) argue that political self-efficacy, the sense that an individual can have a true impact on the political process, is not associated with social media usage. Increased political self-efficacy and situational political involvement (one's ability to discern an issue's relevance in social situations) are positively associated with Internet sites that are more reflective of traditional media sources rather than social media sites.

One negative effect of social media on political participation and outlook appears to be their contributing to the phenomenon of "fandom politics." Social media generally covers similar issues as traditional media (Metzgar et al, 2009), however, because social media sites operate with no strict hierarchy, party representations on social media sites have become increasingly populist

(Chadwick et al, 2016). The proliferation of social media and the rise of populist movements online have allowed for the rise of “fandom politics,” (Bronstein, 2013) which allow supporters to engage in a form of political participation that has more in common with cheering for a local sports team than with rational political interest. Fandom politics relies on supporters discouraging dissent within the party while reinforcing affective loyalty to the party candidate. The rise of fandom politics may explain Donald Trump’s success in the 2016 Republican Primary and eventual presidential victory. To counter negative media stories, Trump embraced social media and released “tweetstorms” (Wells et al, 2016). These tweetstorms allowed Trump to rewrite history, possibly creating an alternate story, and encouraging his supporters to further his narratives by retweeting or sharing.

One of the challenges facing the study of internet campaigns is that social media platforms and the internet itself change so rapidly that many strategies become dated soon after they are deployed, and new possibilities are constantly emerging. For the purpose of keeping up with the latest trends in the internet and social media politics and activism, we made observations of the websites and the Facebook, Twitters, and Instagram pages of what were the nine leading candidates in the US presidential primary races between January 20th and February 10th of 2016. The candidates were Hilary Clinton (D), Bernie Sanders (D), Martin O’Malley (D), Donald Trump (R), Ted Cruz (R), Marco Rubio (R), Ben Carson (R), Chris Christie (R), and Jeb Bush (R).

During the period of the study we observed each site on a daily basis, tracking the number of postings, Facebook likes, and Twitter and Instagram followers. We also took initial screenshots of the sites, and then took new screenshots each time major elements were changed. At least once during or soon following the observation period we took an inventory of the content of each of the sites. The inventory was informed by the work of Denning (2000) who identified “five modes” of internet activism: collection of information, publication of information, dialogue, coordinating action, lobbying decision makers. Warren *et al* (2014), find that the activists they interviewed use the internet in all five ways. We created an expanded list of nine functions that social media and web-based engagements can fulfill for campaigns, and then looked at the specific ways that the sites performed each.

Here is a list of the nine functions and the information we collected from each candidate in connection with each function in our inventory:

1) *Collection of information*: Campaigns collect information about supporters and potential supporters both by asking them to voluntarily provide it and by tracking data about site visits, likes, re-tweets, etc. We collected information about whether the candidates requested email and regular mail addresses, surveyed user opinions, asked for Facebook likes and Twitter and Instagram followers, and asked users to add their names to lists of volunteers and committed voters.

2) *Image Maintenance*: Campaigns, candidates, and organizations create and maintain a public image in a huge number of ways, including choice of logo and tag line, pictures, media clips, biography and self-description, and even merchandizing choices. We collected information of the campaigns' logos, slogans, use of pictures of the candidate and followers, endorsements, whether they chose to be designated a "politician" or a "public figure" on Facebook, and merchandise. See the appendix for the image data for the top three candidates from each party.

3) *Publication of information*: In a way that is ideally harmonious with image and brand strategies, campaigns publish information about the candidates, events, policy positions, and the opposition. For instance, campaign sites typically have an "Events" button that leads to a page of upcoming events, and a "Bio" button that lead to a biography of the candidate. We collected information about whether and how candidates announced events, and about the volume of their social media posting between January 15 and February 1.

4) *Public Dialogue*: Candidates invite public dialogue and try to steer online conversations through posts and tweets, likes and shares, comments and responses. We attempted to collect information about the volume of shares, and likes of individual posts for each candidate, but found that it was beyond our capacity to track this.

5) *Changing Public Opinion*: Campaigns try to win supporters and turn opinion against their opponents through providing information, making arguments, displaying strength of support, attacking opponents, and by other means. We got a general sense of the content of candidate posts, but found that it was beyond our capacity to do a systematic content analysis of all the ways candidates attempted to influence public opinion.

6) *Coordinating Online Action*: Many campaigns seek to get supporters to do things which can easily be done on their computers without leaving their homes, such as like and share posts, sign petitions, and make contributions with credit cards. We collected information about whether candidate sites asked users to share content, donate, or sign an online petition.

7) *Coordinating Offline Action*: Many campaigns also seek to get their supporters to do things in the "real" offline world, like vote, show up at rallies, and put signs up in their yards. These tasks most frequently require more commitment than online actions. We collected information about whether candidate websites asked users to vote, attend events, or volunteer.

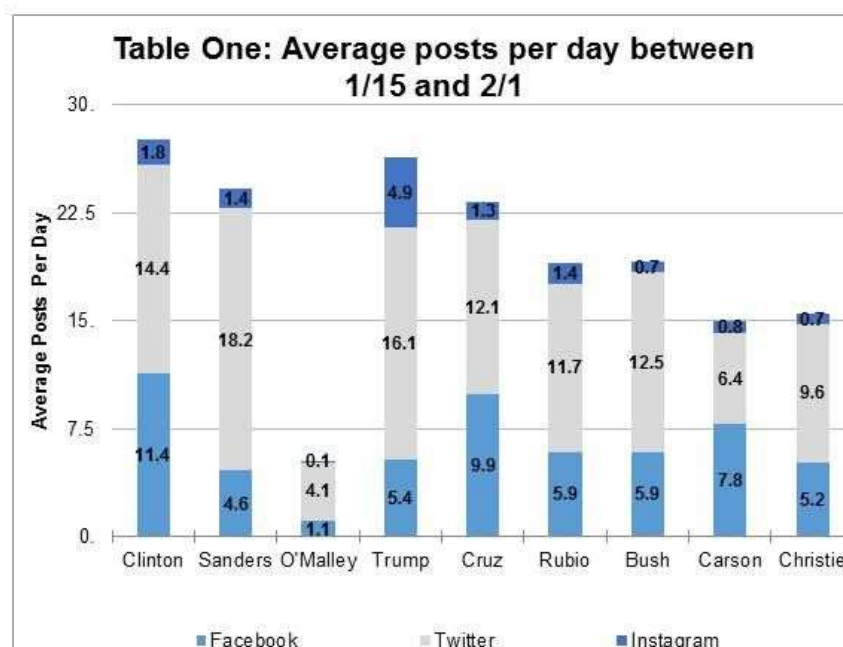
8) *Lobbying Decision Makers*: Cause campaigns frequently have a central aim of influencing elected officials and other decision makers. But even political candidates sometimes make a show of encouraging or dissuading public figures, including other candidates, concerning high-profile decisions. Trump, for instance, at least made a show of trying to convince Clinton to use the phrase "radical Islamic terrorists." We did not attempt to collect information about this function.

9) *Fundraising*: Finally, now more than ever, campaigns need money. Social media and web-based campaigning has been particularly successful at providing the means for many individuals to make small donations.¹ We collected information about whether candidate websites had a donation button, and whether and how they solicited donations.

Much of what we observed was not particularly remarkable. Most of the sites had candidate biographies and pictures, had buttons to donate and volunteer, and solicited the email and street addresses of supporters. However, the exercise has enabled us to offer a useful overview of the online presence of each of the campaigns, as well as a number of lessons about good and bad practices that were apparent in our observations. Because this is an exploratory and practice-oriented study, we did not do rigorous quantitative analysis of variance or run significance tests, but we are able to offer some descriptive statistics about each campaign. We believe that this study raises a number of questions that might merit further study using such techniques.

Campaign Overviews

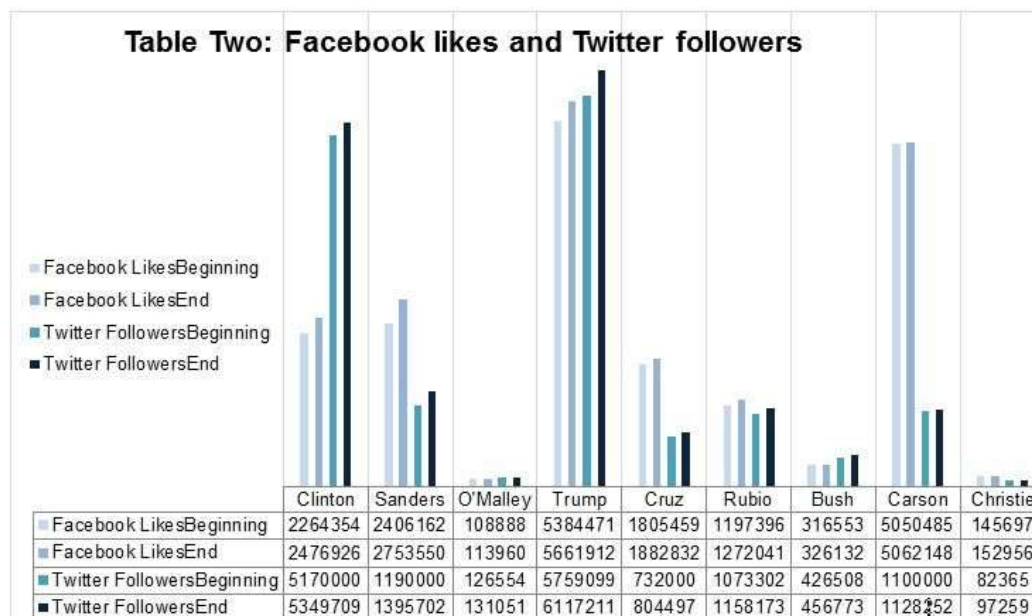
We calculated the average posts per day for the period between January 15 and February 1, both total and by social media platform. The results are presented in Table One.



¹ The Federal Election Commission provides data on amounts and sizes of campaign contributions (see <http://www.fec.gov/disclosure/pnational.do>).

There are two striking things about these results. The first is that the overall number of posts seemed to be closely related to the overall success of the campaigns. Clinton, Trump, Sanders and Cruz, in that order, had the highest daily averages, and were ranked in the polls in the same order. We are not at all claiming that more posting creates success, indeed the relationship may be just the opposite, with the biggest and best funded campaigns being able to afford enough staff to generate a lot of daily posts. But it is also true that a well-funded campaign that neglected social media would be missing an important marker of success. Secondly, we noticed that the most successful “outside” candidates, Trump and Sanders, had the strongest presence on Twitter. It is unclear whether the short format of Twitter tweets and the lure of following the hashtags of strangers has a particular affinity for anti-establishment politics, or if this is just a feature of the current election. But, as of now, it appears the establishment is being dismantled 140 characters at a time.

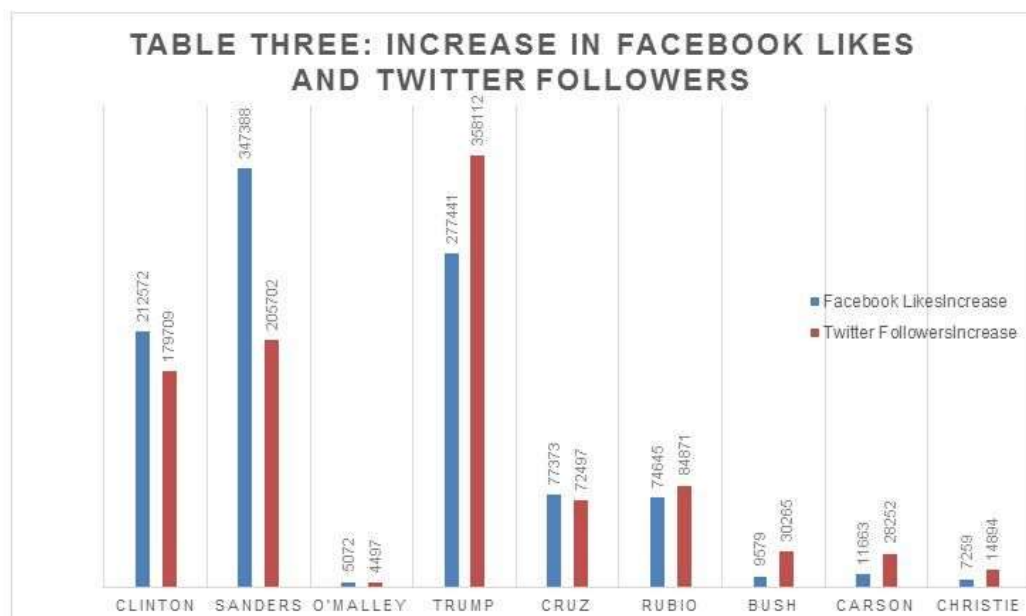
In addition to counting daily posts, we also collected data on the number of Facebook likes and Twitter Followers at the beginning and the end of the study period (January 15 to February 10). These data are presented in Table Two.



Two features seem noteworthy: 1) The number of posts per day, shown in Table One, seems to have little to do with the number of likes and followers in Twitter and Facebook. Clinton has far more Twitter followers than Facebook likes, but tweets only moderately more. Sanders had more Facebook likes than Twitter followers, but was for more engaged on Twitter. This is also true of Cruz. 2) Different candidates have markedly different social media profiles. Caron’s Facebook presence was second only to Trump, but his Twitter following was just

about average for the field. Trump displayed strength in both Facebook and Twitter, while many other candidates were far stronger on one platform than on the other. The meaning of these observations is unclear, but it certainly raises some provocative questions about whether the success of candidates with various segments of voters might be predicted by social media profiles. For instance, perhaps Trump's strong early showing on both Facebook and Twitter were indicative of his unexpected success going forward. So too perhaps was the ability of Clinton, Sanders, and Trump to add likes and followers.

Table Three shows the increase in Facebook likes and Twitter followers for each candidate in raw numbers.



The biggest increases seem to be associated with the strongest campaigns and the highest overall daily posting rates, but again the increases on Facebook and Twitter are not consistently proportional to daily postings on those platforms. Especially in light of the ultimate results of the presidential election, we feel that the rate at which candidates were able to increase their following is perhaps an especially good indicator of popular support for them.

Lessons for internet activists

We drew a number of lessons for internet activists from our observations of the websites and social media accounts of the nine campaigns. These lessons are based on the inventories of the websites and social media accounts of the candidates that were built around the nine functions, as we have described above. The full data that we collected on the image of selected candidates can

be found in the appendices. As we analyzed the data we had collected it became clear that the nine functions are highly interconnected. The same site content can easily play a role in fulfilling two or more of the functions. For instance, choices about merchandizing contribute both to fundraising and to image maintenance. The following lessons, then, are best practices that became apparent as we shifted through the data from the survey that we had organized around the nine functions of web-based engagement and social media use for campaigns.

Lesson #1: Project a strategic image by coordinating elements

Many campaigns coordinated such elements as logo, slogan, pictures, self-descriptions, merchandise and endorsements to build candidates' images. We believe that it is generally a good practice to have all elements work together to promote a consistent image. For example, Ben Carson's campaign built on his background as a doctor in several ways. His slogan was "Heal, Inspire, Revive," suggesting that he would heal the politically ill nation as he had healed physically ill patients. His was the only campaign to offer scrubs for sale as part of the campaign merchandise. The popular "These Hands" meme associated with the campaign featured pictures of Carson and his followers holding their palms open to show the words, "These" on one palm, and "Hands" on the other. Between Carson's palms is the word "Heal." Hillary Clinton's campaign used different elements to highlight her in traditional feminine roles. Her Twitter blurb put her roles as wife, mother, and first lady before those of Senator and Secretary of State. On Instagram, she lists herself as a "doting grandmother, among other things." Pictures of her with Bill and or Chelsea are frequent, and among the merchandise she offers is a pillow with the phrase "A Woman's Place is in the White House" embroidered on the front in needlepoint. Other elements of Clinton's campaign complement her foregrounding of feminine roles with the suggestion of strong leadership. Such elements include the slogan "I'm with her," and the logo with its strong graphic element of a bold arrow crossing an "H." Ted Cruz attempted to project a woodsy conservatism (not to mention strong support for the NRA) by featuring camouflage hunter's hats and mugs and through the prominent endorsement of Duck Dynasty's Phil Robertson.

One minor but interesting point about candidate image: Facebook provides the option of a candidate choosing either the designation "politician" or "public figure." Most career politicians chose the designation "politician." Republican outsiders Carson and Trump plausibly called themselves "public figures" rather than "politicians," but surprisingly, and less plausibly, so did Jeb Bush.

See the appendixes for full data on image for the top candidates.

Lesson #2: Use website elements to promote real-world action

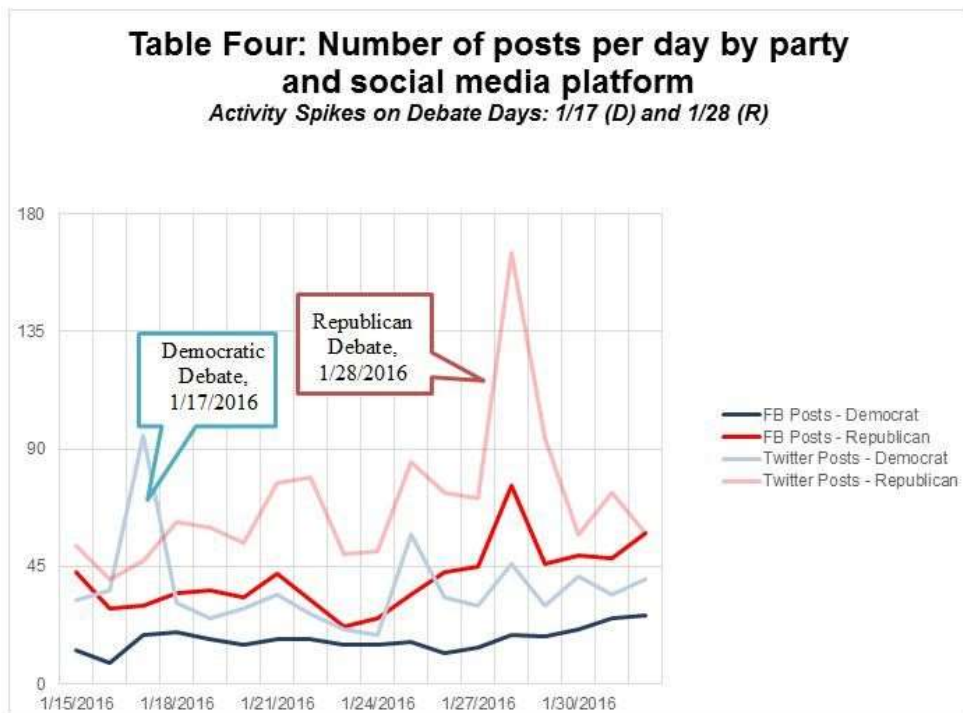
Campaigns worked through social media and candidate web sites to promote specific real world actions. In this way, the online and social media campaigns worked to counter “slacktivism.” The most important real-world action that a political campaign can hope to promote is, of course, voting. Clinton’s campaign worked across platforms to count down to election, reminding anyone who visited her campaign page, Twitter or Facebook sites how many days it was until the primary. The banners on all these sites were updated every day to read, “3 Days to Iowa,” “2 Days to Iowa,” and “1 Day to Iowa” as appropriate. All these sites also thanked voters after Clinton’s (narrow) Iowa victory. We observed the same pattern with the run-up to the New Hampshire primary, in which Clinton placed behind Sanders. Although no other campaign had as systematic a cross-platform countdown to the primary, a good number did post instructions on how to participate in the Iowa caucuses.

Beside getting out the vote, campaign websites also encourage followers to turn out at candidate rallies and appearances. While the campaign pages of Clinton, Cruz, Carson and others provided clear information about upcoming events, only Trump’s site “sold” free tickets to the events. We felt this was probably an effective way of encouraging participation and turn-out because it requires that prospective attendees make a commitment to attend while they are on the site, and provides them with a printable ticket to remind them to show up.

Lesson #3: Use postings to highlight and respond to real-world events

Table Four displays an analysis of postings per day that shows that candidates had the highest number of social media postings on the days of their part debates (1/17 for the Democrats and 1/28 for the Republicans).

Candidates used social media posts to highlight the positives aspects of their own performance, and also to call attention to the gaffs and failures of their opponents. The trend was more pronounced on Twitter than on Facebook, especially among Democrats. In light of the ultimate result of the presidential election it is interesting that Republican candidates out-posted Democratic candidates by a large margin. This is no doubt because there were more Republican candidates, but the volume of posts they generated, regardless of the reasons it was generated, might itself have been an advantage going forward into the general election.



Lesson #4: Build credibility and community by displaying campaign followers

Without exception, every campaign site prominently featured pictures of the candidate addressing large crowds. Such photos display the fact that crowds of people are in fact willing to show up at events to support the candidate and thus build that candidate's credibility and make it more likely that more people will support him or her. Nothing draws a crowd like a crowd.

In addition to displaying the crowds that candidates were able to attract, some campaign sites also built a sense of community by showing individual supporters or small groups of them. Instagram was an especially useful platform for the display of such photos. While Trump and Cruz's Instagram pages were taken up largely with themselves, each other, their wives (and later, each other's wives), Clinton's and Sanders' Instagram pages had many pictures of followers and gave good representation to followers who were women, African-American, Hispanic, and of young followers too.

Lesson #5: The web campaign is just one part of the overall campaign

Sometimes, best practices in the use of social media did translate into electoral success, but frequently they did not. Clinton's well-coordinated cross-platform strategy to mobilizer her supporters to vote did not win her New Hampshire, nor, ultimately, the presidency. Carson's well-crafted image and strong

following on Facebook did not carry him to victory. Clearly, social media has changed the political process from the door-to-door salesman approach of politicians of old, but has not replaced it completely. Johnson, *et al* (2010) reinforce this sentiment, crediting Obama's success to blending old and new political tactics: "...Obama did not win the presidency because of Facebook...his nomination campaign especially was a well-run, traditional political machine that would have made a 1950s pol proud" (p. 555). Social media have proven effective and necessary in political campaigns, but the political process has not yet evolved to completely eliminate the need for traditional tactics. And while a strong social media performance is a mark of a strong overall political campaign, it does not guarantee success.

Some final observations and questions for further research

There was one prominent practice engaged in by many of the campaigns that the authors were, at best, ambivalent about. The main campaign website of many of the campaigns featured a sort of "pre-front page" that asked potential supporters to provide their name and email before they could even see the campaign site (although there was usually some not-very-obvious way of bypassing this landing). This technique seems to be intended to gather the names and emails of as many potential followers as possible by making it difficult not to provide this information. However, we found it annoying that we could not use the sites to find out about the candidates without making a commitment to the candidate. We wonder how many potential supporters were alienated by this rather aggressive information-gathering tactic.

Beyond this single feature, our observations have raised a number of questions that might merit future research. These questions include the nature and strength of the relationship between social media followings, poll numbers, and election results. Trump's strong early performance in social media now seems to have been indicative of his future success, but it is unclear whether Twitter followers and Facebook likes are as important as the sheer number of mentions of a candidate in posts, or the liking and sharing of political posts. The rate at which candidates increased their followings struck us as an especially important indicator of their potential, but this hypothesis is in need of more rigorous confirmation. It might also be worth asking whether the differing strengths of candidates by social media platforms is associated with popularity among different segments of the voting public. And it would be interesting to know whether social media standing was a leading or lagging indicator of public opinion as measured through polls. All these questions would require more data and rigorous quantitative analysis to answer. It would also be interesting to test the effectiveness of some of those best practices we have written about through experimental means. For instance, is the pre-front page technique really more effective than other means of gathering follower information? How many potential followers does it turn away? An experimental study could easily be designed to answer such questions.

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Appendix 1

Candidate	Party	Logo Description	Slogan(s)	Facebook Description	Politician or Public Figure on Facebook	Twitter Description	Instagram Description	Key Endorsements	Signature Merchandise	Look and Feel
Clinton	D	Uppercase letter "H" with an arrow inside pointing forward	"I'm With Her"	Wife, mom, grandma, *kids, women advocate, FLOTUS, Senator, SecState, icon, pantsuit aficionado, 2016 presidential candidate.	Politician	Wife, mom, grandma, women+kids advocate, FLOTUS, Senator, SecState, hair icon, pantsuit aficionado, 2016 presidential candidate. Tweets from Hillary signed	Hillary Clinton: Doting grandmother, among other things. #hillary2016	Bill & Chelsea, Katie Perry, Demi Lovato, Lena Dunham, Cory Booker, Madeline Albright, Jamie Lee Curtis, Eric Garner's Mother and others	Stitch throw pillow, "A woman's place is in the White House," shirts, lots and lots of buttons, signs, bags, you name it.	Bright blue tones; pictures of Clinton reaching out to supporters and standing close to people; many banners feature supporters without Clinton.
Sanders	D	Last name in white or blue or other coloring, with a star replacing the dot in the letter "i"; Red, white and blue slight waves underneath, "2016" below that.	"A Political Revolution is Coming" "Bel on Bernie" "A Future to Believe In" "Feel the Bern"	This is the official campaign page for Bernie 2016.	Politician	Join our campaign for president at http://bernieanders.com . Tweets by staff.	Bernie Sanders: We're gonna have fun. We're gonna make a political revolution. We're gonna transform America. Other than that, not much. Berniesanders.com	Ben Jealous, Emily Ratajkowski (model), Red Hot Chili Peppers, Harry Belafonte, Kieth Ellison, Eric Garner's daughter, Susan Sarandon, Roule Grimalva, state political officials	Shirts, mugs, signs, the usual	Blue tones; many pictures of Sanders speaking to crowds, making dramatic gestures with his arms

Appendix 2

Candidate	Party	Logo Description	Slogan(s)	Facebook Description	Politician or Public Figure on Facebook	Twitter Description	Instagram Description	Key Endorsements	Signature Merchandise	Look and Feel
Trump	R	Last name in white, block lettering; all uppercase.	"Make America Great Again"	This is the official Facebook page for Donald J. Trump	Public Figure	"MakeAmericaGreatAgain #Trump2016"	None	Yes, Sarah Palin, Jerry Falwell Jr., Willie Robertson (from Duck Dynasty), Aissa Wayne (John Wayne's Daughter)	Extensive collection of gifts, apparel, signage, headgear, cups, pins ect.	Big and bold; big close ups of Trump; big slogan; big crown
Cruz	R	Name with no space between first and last. "2016" above the "z" in last name, flame in red, white and blue with a star before the name.	"TRUSTED" "Courageous Conservatives" "Reigniting the Promise of America"	US Senator from Texas and candidate for the Republican nomination for President of the United States	Politician	Father of two, @heidscruz's husband, US Senator, fighter for liberty, candidate for President with @CarlyFiorin a for vp to bring back Jobs, Freedom & Security	Ted Cruz: US Senator and candidate for the Republican nomination for President. cruzcrew.com/28 CxTJo	Phil Robertson (Duck Dynasty), Glen Beck, Steve King (US Rep), Senator Mike Lee	Hunters' Gear, hats, mugs, signs	Stark and Dramatic: Cruz alone is the spotlight; Cruz speaking to a crowd; black and white photos.
Rubio	R	Lowercase, soft lettering, outline of us replaces the dot in "i", first name is red, last name in blue, "a new american century" written beneath.	"A New American Century"	I'm running for President of the United States to ensure A New American Century.	Politician	US Senator for Florida. Follow @SenRubio Press for more updates.	None	Nikki Haley, Tim Scott, Trey Gowdy, John Kyl--SC primary coming up-- local politicians, Pawn Stars, personality, George Pataki	Hats, scarfs, the usual plus gift cards and store memberships.	Pictures of Rubio speaking or standing against red, white and blue backgrounds.
Carson	R	Bold, black uppercase lettering, first name in red, last name in blue; "for president 2016" and "Heal, Inspire, Revive" written beneath in red, blue and light blue.	"Heal, Inspire, Revive." There was no tie in to the "These Hands" campaign on the websites.	Official Facebook page of Dr. Ben Carson.	Public Figure	The Official Twitter Page of Dr. Ben Carson. Connect on Facebook: http://www.faa-cebook.com/realben Carson	Dr. Ben Carson: Hear the story leading up to the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. Click here: crsn.co/PrayerBr eakfast13	None	Usual, plus scrubs and onesies	Fornal studio portraits: sitting and standing, empty backgrounds. Features a portrait photo holding handwritten sign saying "In God We Trust."

Safety pin solidarity: a lesson in tactics

Chandra Russo

A few days after this year's US presidential election, I was invited to wear a safety pin at a student organized speak-out at my university. The students had convened this space to process their confusion, grief, anger and fear. A campaign waged on explicit white supremacy and sexual violence seemed a harbinger of events to come. In the ten days after the election, the Southern Poverty Leadership Center had counted 867 hate-based incidents. Those handing out safety pins were predominately students of color and queer identified folks, although the university I teach at has a majority white student body. They explained that in choosing to wear the safety pin we would be signaling ourselves as allies to those whose vulnerability had been highlighted or targeted throughout the campaign. These include folks of color, immigrants, Muslims, and those who are queer identified. Attentive to the students' testimonies, I did not think much before attaching the pin to my sweater. Wearing a pin "as a sign of solidarity" seemed a reasonable request. Within a day or two, however, it was clear to me that the safety pin tactic was a deeply contested one.

The safety pin is a symbolic statement, akin to other forms of bystander tactics intended to display solidarity with an aggrieved community. Ribbons worn on one's person are one of the most common iterations of this kind of tactic. For instance, celebrities, most of whom were not themselves HIV positive or gay-identified, debuted the red AIDS awareness ribbon when attending the 1991 Tony Awards. The safety pin is akin to this ribbon in that it is meant to signal the wearer's ideological commitment to a cause and solidarity with the most directly affected.

Like the AIDS ribbon, the safety pin might be also be seen as what I think of as entry-level activism, a tactic that seems broadly approachable to people from different walks of life and varying experience with social movement involvement. Putting on a safety pin seems a simple act. I put one on without fully considering the ramifications of doing so. Yet the safety pin is not quite entry level activism in that it is intended to identify the wearer as capable of a literal intervention on behalf of another's "safety," hence the "safety" of the pin. By wearing the safety pin, one self-designates as willing to be called upon to intervene, de-escalate or otherwise provide bodily defense if another person is being harassed or victimized.

The critiques of the safety pin come from multiple directions: from Trump supporters, from those scared they will be used by the hateful to trick vulnerable populations, from those concerned by the dynamics of privilege perpetuated by this tactic, and by those who worry at the lack of preparedness among those wearing them with good intentions (Koopman 2016). While I take up the latter two (and not the former), I am less interested in adjudicating the sanctity of the

safety pin than in considering what its highly contested adoption might tell us about the multi-edged nature of tactics, especially in the age of social media.

I have organized these into the three principles that have crystalized for me through observing various activists engage with the safety pin tactic.

1. Tactics travel

David Meyer and Nancy Whittier (1994) suggest that social movements “spillover.” Across different movements in different times and places, there is often an overlap in collective action frames, organizational structure, leadership and, of course, tactics. Similar dynamics have been called “diffusion” (McAdam and Rucht 1993, Wood 2012). Meyer and Whittier observe how non-violent sit-ins made popular in the civil rights movement were then taken up by students and anti-war mobilizations in the years to come. Similarly, the 1980s anti-nuclear movement borrowed heavily from feminist tactical innovations of the 1960s, the latter seeing the advent of “peace camps,” many of which were women’s only collective living situations. Social movement diffusion is also often cross-national, and can be direct or indirect, with activists either sharing tactical innovations person to person, or movements learning about other group’s tactics through the media.

The safety pin is evidently an instance of this phenomenon. Most sources place the origins of the safety pin tactic with UK residents in the June 2016 aftermath of the Brexit vote and an accompanying upsurge in threats and hateful assaults towards immigrants. The safety pin was understood to be a visible symbol that would demonstrate a stance of solidarity, and many began to tweet images of themselves wearing the pin. The adoption of the safety pin in the UK was itself said to be inspired by Australia’s #illrideiwithyou campaign begun a year and a half earlier (Cresci 2016). After a hostage situation in Sydney in 2014, Australians who feared an Islamophobic backlash tweeted and wore stickers emblazoned with “#illridewithyou” to signal that they would accompany Muslims fearing harassment on public transport (BBC News 2014).

The centrality of Twitter to these tactics takes the concept of movement spillover to another level. In an age of “digitally enabled social change” (Earl and Kimport 2013), activists’ ideas, strategies, and tactics can “go viral” on social media. Our new digital tools eliminate many of the once significant obstacles to tactical diffusion, such as time and space. Beyond the fact of technological advance, however, the travelling nature of these tactics seems to testify to the congruity of certain struggles on the global stage. Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, racist and other xenophobic attacks are on the rise. Many members of dominant publics in these spaces (white, straight, cis gender, etc.) are seeking to respond, to enact solidarity. In many instances, they might fumble in these efforts, and so...

2. Activists argue

Amin Ghaziani (2008) has made this truism into a rich scholarly contribution, turning common sense on its head. Rather than view infighting as threatening to movements' well-being, Ghaziani theorizes it as a key process whereby activists clarify their vision, strategy and sense of "we." Of course, Ghaziani is looking at activists within and across established movement organizations, those who already hold a provisional commitment to their struggle. Although there may not be a unified *movement* debating the safety pin tactic, important and insightful clarifications have emerged through these discussions. These include ideas about the nature of anti-oppression work and the promises and pitfalls of solidarity across power differentials. I'll discuss three critiques of the tactic.

The most salient critique of the safety pin argues that this tactic is a form of white savior slacktivism. This critique has come from white folks and people of color. The central complaint is that by donning a safety pin solely as a symbolic act without further political engagement, folks with privilege get to absolve themselves of responsibility for Trump's win, and perform as if morally righteous while doing little in meaningful deeds to counter systemic racism and hate crimes.

The marketing factor that has accompanied the safety pin has also left many cynical. Safety pins are getting play in some fashion reviews as the new accessory du jour (Perez 2016). They have been turned into a trending item on Etsy, generating sometimes outlandish sums of money for their generally white (and female) purveyors. The safety pin turned consumer good for the profit interests of already privileged individuals seems deeply antagonistic to the safety pin's original intention of solidarity.

Tahirah Hairston (2016) goes even further in her critique of this tactic, suggesting that the safety pin is not only flawed as a movement tool but has also engendered a debate that reaffirms white privilege.

The safety pin is ultimately a bystander form of activism entirely on white people's terms. There are white people telling other white people why it doesn't work. There are white people arguing that it works. There are white people telling people of color they are wrong for questioning the pin's intentions.

Hairston points out that the safety pin, along with the discussion it has generated, centers white people rather than people of color. This is indicative of a larger pitfall that movements often face when conversations about racial justice across racial lines come to buttress, rather than resist, some of the dynamics of white supremacy, such as centering the thoughts, feelings and interest of white people at the expense of everyone else. Nevertheless, the kinds of conversations— and often arguments—ignited by the safety pin seem to have led to more than just the sedimentation of white privilege, or the acrimony of blame and shame. These debates have grown awareness and seeded some useful

tactical innovations. Ghazaini's observation, that when activists argue, their movements might become more strategic, seems to be borne out with the safety pin, at least provisionally.

3. Flawed tactics can be reworked

The safety pin is both like entry-level activism as well as a bit different. It appears broadly accessible but is meant to signal the wearer's willingness to take real risks. The promise in all entry-level activism is its potential to broaden a movement's reach, recruiting new and sometimes unlikely allies. The pitfall is that when tactics become too limited in scale or scope, they can short circuit more meaningful action, becoming a form of slacktivism. The safety pin can be used by those with relative privilege to feel and perform their supposed solidarity while doing little to alter relations of power. Worse yet, as the safety pin is not quite entry-level in the same way as, say, the AIDS ribbon, those with good intentions but limited forethought can put already vulnerable populations in greater danger. I treat these in turn, with an eye to helpful interventions.

Some have sought to combat the pitfalls of safety pin slacktivism by repurposing the safety pin symbol in ways that direct sympathizers towards more useful solidarity work. Self-described Black Femme organizers Marissa Jenae Johnson and Leslie Mac have developed a racial justice business model called the safetypinbox.com that you are likely to find if you type "safety pin" into any search engine. Declaring that the "safety pin show of solidarity was a failure," and enumerating a sound set of arguments for why they believe this to be the case, Johnson and Mac have instead created a way for white people to give monies to Black women organizers while getting educated and organized around racial justice. Paid subscription includes a monthly package, "the safety pin box," a literal box filled with racial justice tasks, ranging from personal education to group level organizing endeavors. Safetypinbox.com connects its subscribers to each other in order to do the bread and butter of movement building: amass power and effect change. Johnson and Mac understand the profits they generate as "reparations monies," allocating some to keep their business running and giving the rest to Black women applicants that do movement work.

Other productive approaches to the safety pin tactic seek to deepen the practice of solidarity, highlighting the fact that the safety pin might not best be considered entry-level activism at all. The safety pin, after all, is not just a nice gesture. It is supposed to signal to vulnerable individuals, often those facing moments of crisis, that you are an ally and that you will intervene to ensure their safety. In this sense, wearing a safety pin as mere symbolism, without a plan of action and knowledge of the incumbent risks, actually endangers you and others. Unlike the many legitimate arguments against the safety pin, blogger Isobel Debrujah is enthusiastic towards those who want to wear the pin. But she is clear that wearing the safety pin requires its wearer be thoughtful about the risks and ramifications of this choice:

If you don't make a plan, you will get yourself or the person you are trying to defend very killed. Let's avoid that. So make a plan.

As Debrujah helps us think through this plan, she is pragmatic. Similar to Johnson and Mac, she invites well-intentioned folks into the fray while asking them to consider what real solidarity requires. She gives folks permission to consider other ways they might want to be allies that do not require the same embodied, legal, social and financial risk. Both of these interventions welcome, rather than shame, potential allies, those who are interested in the safety pin as a symbol of solidarity. Both do so with a good dose of reality and clear steps forward. Both demonstrate that alliance, solidarity, and social justice require commitment, work, and material contribution.

The safety pin is instructive to scholars and activists alike in considering the life course of tactics generally and the prospects for contemporary solidarity movements specifically. Tactics move across movement locations and contexts, evolving as they do. The adoption of certain tactics can be hotly contested, but through argument, even when rancorous, activists may better clarify their aims. In the best of circumstances, the diffusion of tactics along with the debates that ensue, help activists to refine their tools of change. The safety pin tactic is certainly a fraught one. Here is to hoping it can be a beginning in forging the multiple solidarities necessary to challenge current threats to collective safety, justice and well-being.

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A radical common sense: On the use of direct action in Dublin since 2014

Brian Mallon

Abstract

Recent years have seen the emergence of various social movements in peripheral Europe, in response to the challenges of economic recession and neoliberal austerity policies. Many of the tactics shared by these movements constitute what is termed as direct action, with a focus on autonomous, non-institutionalised and often disruptive protest forms. The present research was undertaken in response to a perceived intensified level of contestation, and a shift towards more direct forms of resistance over the past three years in Dublin City. Activists from the Irish Housing Network were interviewed in order to gauge their perceptions and explanations of this perceived shift, in order to shed light on the macro-dynamics of social movements in the city. It was found that interviewees had witnessed an intensification of resistance, and an increase in the use of direct action. Activists attributed increased activity and tactical change to the broader context of a move away from institutionalised paths of contention and a decreased organisational role of the established left. They also pointed to processes of networking, politicisation and changing consciousness in the spread of what were perceived to be more effective and successful tactics than those used by previously dominant leftist groups. Findings pointed to a limited ability of repertoire theory or former studies in Irish social movements alone to describe this shift in dynamics, representing a new context in which to understand emerging movements, and raises a number of potential questions for further research in what is a relatively underdeveloped field.

En los últimos años se ha observado en la Europa periférica el surgimiento de varios movimientos sociales que abordan las dificultades supuestas por la crisis económica y políticas de austeridad. Algunas de las tácticas compartidas entre estos movimientos constituyen lo que se denomina como acción directa, siendo centradas en formas de resistencia autónomas, no institucionalizadas, y a veces polémicas. Este trabajo se llevó a cabo con el fin de investigar una percibida intensificación de lucha, y un cambio simultáneo hacia el uso de tácticas más directas, en la ciudad de Dublín (Irlanda) durante los tres últimos años. Se realizaron entrevistas con activistas del Irish Housing Network para descubrir como perciben y explican este cambio, y de esta manera echar luz sobre las macro-dinámicas de los movimientos sociales en la ciudad. Se encontró que los entrevistados habían sido testigos de dichos intensificación de lucha y tendencia hacia la acción directa. Atribuyeron estos fenómenos a un contexto más amplio de abandono de vías institucionalizadas de resolución de conflicto (como el pacto social), y de reducción del papel organizativo de las

viejas organizaciones de izquierda (como los partidos y sindicatos). También indicaron la importancia de otros factores, como la politización, el crecimiento de nuevas redes de contactos, y el surgimiento de conciencia crítica, para entender la proliferación de estas tácticas, consideradas mas eficaces que que habían sido predominantes en los años precedentes. En el análisis de los resultados se encontró una capacidad limitada de estudios anteriores de movimientos sociales irlandeses y de “repertoire theory” para explicar estos cambios, dado que han sucedido aparentemente en un contexto más amplio de cambio político, y que es un campo bastante poco desarrollado de estudio.

Keywords: direct action, tactics, community organising, institutionalisation, politicisation, networking, consciousness, housing, water protests

Introduction: the emergence of the “sinister fringe”

Some three years ago, in April 2014, communities in Dublin and other parts of Ireland began gathering to resist the installation of water meters in residential areas. The groups in question directly blocked works on behalf of a newly-established company, Irish Water, to install facilities which would measure usage for billing purposes for the first time. The blockades generally succeeded, and by November of that year, attempts to install meters in numerous areas across Dublin had been abandoned in the face of consistent opposition and direct action (Roche, 2014). Despite a legal injunction against interventions, actions were to continue into 2015, and to this date these areas remain without metering facilities. Meanwhile, two national “days of action” organised by the new Right2Water group in late 2014 drew what was estimated to be the largest crowds of any nationwide mobilisation in recent Irish history (Hearne, 2015, 313). A broader trend of non-registration with Irish Water emerged, and on the day of the deadline, only one third of liable households in the country had provided their details to the company. Around this time, the minister for health, alarmed by the confrontational nature of water charges protests, referred to an emerging “sinister fringe” of protesters (Irish Independent Online Editors, 2014).

The sinister fringe was not limited to protests around the topic of water charges. As contestation around the issue reduced in 2015, a number of direct actions around the right to housing appeared to take their place in the public eye. In July 2015, an abandoned hostel for the homeless was illegally occupied, renovated and put back into use by community activists from the Irish Housing Network (IHN) and local volunteers. The same would occur in December of 2016, on a much larger scale, when Apollo House, an abandoned office block, was put to the same use for the Christmas period before eviction. Beginning in late 2015, the Housing Network also began facilitating stand-off occupations by people facing eviction, particularly from public housing, mirroring groups such as the PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) in Spain. One such case came to a head on the day of the Irish general elections, when thirteen families

living in Dublin City Council (DCC) accommodation on Mountjoy Street occupied their homes in the face of intended eviction, until demands of alternative accommodation were met (McNamee, 2016). These large occupations constitute the tip of the proverbial iceberg reported in the media, compared to the vast number of smaller actions which have been taking place under the radar in the intervening time.

Evidence of these mobilisations forms a stark contrast with the dominant narrative up to 2013 of Ireland being a country that does not protest, preferring to “sit on sofas rather than take to the streets” (O'Connor, 2013), and obediently taking its neo-liberal fiscal medicine (Bootle, 2012). A quick search online reveals multiple articles between 2009 and 2013 questioning a lack of protest in the country, but seemingly not one since then. The tagline of one article in 2015 even joked that “Not long ago, TheJournal.ie was publishing articles with headlines like ‘Why don’t the Irish protest?’” (Brophy, 2015).

From the rivers to the sea communities all over Ireland are mobilising, organising and getting off their barstools and onto the streets thanks to the quango that is Irish Water. (Moore, 2015)

What we can take from this is that there has been at least a perceived shift in levels of protest in Ireland since the beginning of mobilisations related to water charges and the right to housing. Reported demonstrations and actions point to the presence of dissent once noted as absent. Furthermore, descriptions of these actions and the concern of politicians point to questions about the tactics used by groups. These cases are largely examples of what we term as direct action. Although by no means non-existent in the repertoires of some Irish protest groups in the past, the past three years have brought to light an apparently new “sinister fringe” of community activists that are unafraid of using direct and often illegal tactics to achieve their ends. The exaggerated reaction to this on the part of institutional political actors was best summarised in the sensationalist reference in parliament by one member of the ruling party to a developing “potential ISIS situation” in Irish activism. (Carroll & O'Halloran, 2014). The argument that there has been a change in the dominant tactics of protest during this time draws not only on media reports, which serve as an introduction but only go so far in their utility, but also on my own perception as an observing activist, and on academic analyses of the Irish protest scene which will be outlined later in the article.

The aforementioned apparent changes formed the basis of this research, with the aim to identify, describe and explain them. More specifically, it aims to assess whether activists themselves have witnessed a change in tactics, moving towards direct action; how and why that change has occurred in their experience; how precisely tactics have spread in the process; and how this fits in with the overall picture of the mobilisations in question – that is, what in the nature of these new mobilisations is conducive to direct action. Thus I aimed to

build a clearer picture of the emergence of heightened contention, new mobilisation, and the use of new tactics in confrontation in Ireland. I have established this in contrast with the period preceding the outbreak of actions around the issue of water charges, which was characterised by smaller protests, focused around single issues and using moderate, institutionalised tactics (Naughton, 2015).

The intended value of this research is that it will add to knowledge about the dynamics of social movements and activism in Ireland – a topic which has been relatively undeveloped to date. The lack of collected information on this topic extends especially to the use of tactics in movements, which in the context of the above media reports is an ever more relevant issue. Thus it is hoped that this research will be interesting in that it will explore a relatively undeveloped area of sociological study in Ireland and shed light on very recent, and ongoing, changes affecting that field.

In the following section I will outline the basis of the research in sociological theory around social movements and direct action, and in the recent history of Irish community activism. Sections thereafter will describe the methodological approach of the study, its findings and how these findings might be applied to construct a coherent image of the changing dynamics at play in Irish protest.

Theoretical background

The research undertaken takes the tactics and actions of social movements – and more specifically those oriented around community activism – as the core object of study. To give the research a theoretical context, this section aims to establish the object of study through a review of some established theory on social movements, tactics, action repertoires and direct action.

We can establish that what has been seen emerging in Ireland in recent years is a mixture of isolated, uncoordinated, yet crucial moments of contention forming the basis of new, coordinated community organisations and broader social movements. The Irish Housing Network was set up in response to the presence of isolated instances of contention and the formation of smaller community protest groups, in order to create synergy through the sharing of resources and the linking of multiple dissenting voices in a larger organisation. It is important to emphasise that the network did not aim to co-opt these movements through the creation of a larger group, but instead operates separately and distinctively as, literally, a network of those pre-existing groups. The network, then, might be seen as the crossing point of community organisations and a social movement, where the former morphs into the dynamic of the latter.

Of haves and have-nots: social movement theory and tactics

Our core understandings of the way in which social movements operate tend to revolve around questions of power. Movements are said to be the product of the mobilisation of those who do not have access to institutional power to effectively

take that power through confrontation (Tarrow, 2011). A form of dichotomy emerges, best reflected in Saul Alinsky's so-called "science of revolution", in which social movement targets and contenders are labelled as "Haves" and "Have-Nots" respectively. Alinsky's model appears to be applicable to our object of study. For example, the basis for community organisation is centred around perceived injustice towards the community, and responded to with small-scale, community-based resistance (Naughton, 2015; Hearne, 2015). Whether our movements are *radical*, like Alinsky's, is something that can be alluded to but not explored thoroughly without entering a teleological analysis of the movements in question, which is not my intention. However, the presence of systemic critique and the use of direct action have been taken as sufficient to earn the radical label (Elbaum, 2006; Barbrook & Bolt, 1980). Furthermore, Alinsky's model professes a focus on practical gains in communities, discarding political ideas, as does the Irish Housing Network. My intention here is to draw a parallel with Alinsky's conceptualisation of community organisations, and use this to acknowledge the power relations at play, while avoiding the over-extension of his theories, and indeed the romanticising of the archetypical *Have-Not*.

Tactics are the means by which social movements attempt to achieve their aims, or in Alinsky's terms, how Have-Nots take power from the Haves (1972, 126). These tactical choices are limited by situations faced by the organising group, including time constraints and historical patterns of contention, such that no organiser or mobilised group operates in a vacuum wherein choices are made. As Alinsky put it, you "[do] what you can with what you have". Thus there are few identically repeatable forms of action (Alinsky, 1972; Carter, 2010), but patterns will tend to emerge around what forms of protest are deemed worthwhile, given their being tried and tested. What results, in theory, is a set of *modular* protest forms, forming a "limited set of routines", or a "repertoire of contention", which constrains the activist's choice of action through the limited experience from which those choices are drawn (Tilly, 1995).

The repertoire of contention that existed in 2014, as residents of various streets across Dublin gathered to resist the installation of water meters, is something we should consider. This repertoire will have consisted of a set of established protest forms which had been institutionalised as part of the "modern political repertoire" – where an institution is a "set of mutual expectations based on past experiences" (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). The most likely recourse to action judging from the very recent history of Irish protest might have been an organised march addressing either the specific issue at stake, or broader austerity policies (Naughton, 2015).

We should not consider ourselves to be in a position to specifically define the existing repertoire in this case, or to assume that direct action was alien to it. However, where DA *had* been recently used, as in, for example, contestation over the introduction of the bin tax in 2003, or the use of Shannon Airport by the US military during the Iraq war, it had proven to be a divisive tactical point, and had not been embraced by larger leftist organising groups in most cases

(Anarchist News, 2003; Flood, 2003a; 2003b). However, as is clearly illustrated in the forms of action used in and from 2014, the movements in question went outside this *seemingly* existing repertoire. To some extent this will have been in response to the specificity of the situations in question, limiting the range of modular choices available, as described above, and to some extent it might draw attention to an apparent change to the existing repertoire of contention, or even the crafting of a new one. Indeed, this is to some extent what the research aims to establish and explain.

The question here, then, is how a newly-mobilised group of people reacts to new experiences for which apparently existing repertoires do not equip them, if we are to work from the assumption that the existing repertoire of contention did not include DA tactics to a large extent. This question goes to the heart of how repertoires are created and expanded – namely, through experience of struggle. New forms of protest are said to emerge at the *perimeter* of existing repertoires, as contenders innovate in response to challenges, and where those new forms prove successful they are said to spread from the perimeter, becoming more widely used and eventually institutionalised (Tilly, 1995).

This appears to line up with our expectations with regard to the emerging tactics of contention being studied, as they did, visibly, emerge through new forms of struggle. More specifically, we aim to study how direct action tactics came to be adopted by communities in the case of water charge and housing protests, and this will require a review of what direct action specifically entails as a tactical form.

"A potential Isis situation": theorising direct action tactics

A brief definition of Direct Action (DA) as a category of tactic in contentious action must take into account a number of different perspectives, as various authors have described it in various ways, depending on the context in which they wrote. An anarchist history describes the “direct” element as meaning “non-parliamentary” action, outside of the constitutional tradition, or even “normal action” - simply direct in contrast with the representation that is associated with making demands through a third party (Walter, 2002). Work addressing DA specifically in the 1970s echoes this, placing DA as occupying the broad spectrum between, and excluding, on one side, parliamentary or “liberal” paths to change, with actions such as leafleting and speeches, and on the other side, guerilla warfare and rioting (Carter, 2010). A recent book on community activism describes DA as the opposite of “going along to get along”, wherein outsiders to the political system take power into their own hands when taking actions (Shepard, 2015).

The concept has been divided and categorised in numerous ways. An anarchist approach tells us that DA involves mainly disruptive action and civil disobedience (Walter, 2002, 87-89). From a legal approach, DA can be divided into that which is non-violent and communicative, or obstructive, disruptive and aiming to “intimidate” (Mead, 2010, 236-238). If there is anything we can

take from this, it is that the definition of DA depends on the context in which it understood, and this is precisely noted by April Carter (2010, 3). For the purpose of our research, direct action can be differentiated from lobbying, marches and speeches which aim to express opinion but do not effect change in themselves, but instead generally persuade a third party to make certain decisions. This definition is at risk of being overly simplistic, but to set a starting point we will take DA to be *confrontational* action, often involving disruption and civil disobedience, and disregarding institutional paths of political representation such as, in the Irish case, social partnership (addressed later).

Direct action is used because it *gets the goods* (Shepard, 2015; Walter, 2002), but it is also *communicative*. That is, it has the capacity to illustrate community values in practice, such as where the action in question involves building desired alternatives through action (Shepard, 2015; Carter, 2010). An example is the direct provision of services by and to the community, as in the case of the Bolt Hostel or Apollo House (later discussed). This brings us back to the question of power, or more specifically to the creation of situations of *dual power*, when communities act as if they were free (Graeber, 2009). In this way, communities are said to play a key role in liberal democracy (Carter, 2010; Shepard, 2015). This might be illustrated in actions around water charges succeeding in postponing the introduction of, and reducing, the charges in question. However, these “gestures of freedom” (Shepard, 2015) also set groups up as existing necessarily outside established political institutions by definition of their actions.

Unlike other forms of protest, direct action *challenges* power rather than persuading it. This makes groups that use direct action more difficult for the state to co-opt or accommodate (Carter, 2010). Direct action is to a great extent resistant to state tactics of accommodation and professionalisation. The radicalisation of a movement's tactics is the *antonym* of their institutionalisation, as they are thus incompatible with modern political repertoire (Tarrow, 2011). This does not only confirm that users of DA are in heightened conflict with the state, but the resistance to co-optation also draws attention to an important element in Irish protest – that of social partnership. As we will see in the section on protest in Ireland, the emerging groups being studied have to some extent filled a void left by previous clientelist government policies which created Community Development Projects in order to institutionalise local activism. The strategy of confrontation inherent in taking direct action is key to this dynamic in recent protest.

The Irish context: social movements since the 1960s

So far we have established a perceived contrast between the level of protest since the outbreak of contention over the introduction of water charges in Ireland and that in the foregoing years of economic crisis and austerity policies, when the *lack* of protest was a defining characteristic of narratives. The use of direct action has been identified as being *mainly* non-characteristic of the

organisational tactics of foregoing protests, in that it does not stand out as forming part of the repertoire of the large leftist organisations that dominated Irish protests in recent years, and where it was used by other movements it was in rare instances, and was a relatively divisive topic. To better understand this situation, this section aims to provide a recent historical context for the research at hand, through a summary of some key moments of struggle in which direct action *has* been used in Ireland, beginning in the 1960s, the earliest date of involvement by the oldest interviewee for this project.

Often referred to as the precursors of modern community organisations around housing rights in the city, the Dublin Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and National Association of Tenants' Organisations (NATO) were set up in the 1960s in Dublin, in response to a shortage of available housing, poor conditions in existing housing, and “anti-city” planning, which saw inner city communities relocated to the suburbs and the city centre being depopulated (Punch, 2009). The DHAC, particularly, used direct action tactics such as the squatting of unoccupied houses by homeless families and organising with communities to resist the depopulation of communities. This resistance around depopulation continued after the DHAC, into the 1980s, with communities such as that located in Sheriff Street mobilising against the mass demolition of residential areas to make way for commercial developments such as the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC).

Another key example of the use of direct action by a community organisation in Dublin is that of Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD). The early 1980s saw a major mobilisation of communities in Dublin city to take action in response to growing problems of drug dealing and addiction, with which CPAD groups were formed in a number of areas (Lyder, 2001). These groups were almost entirely based on the use of direct action, where local “pushers” were called before community assemblies, and in many cases forcibly evicted from their homes. Networks were established to gather information on those who were dealing and buying drugs in communities, and patrols were organised by residents to stop these activities in a number of Dublin housing schemes. The same tactics of marching on *pushers'* homes and patrolling to stop sales from taking place in communities were applied in these numerous cases, after their early perceived success in Hardwicke Street. Meanwhile, the movement was delegitimised in the media, accused of links with the Irish Republican Army, legal challenges were brought against the communities by dealers, and the state and gardaí attempted to suppress the movement. CPAD groups continued to operate for some five years, in the face of severe police violence in response to their actions (Lyder, 2001).

The majority of these and other community mobilisations eventually came to be co-opted by the Irish government's “Social Partnership” programme, which set up official, funded Community Development Projects (CDPs) from the late 1980s in order to incorporate activists in institutional paths to the resolution of the problems once contested through the aforementioned groups (O'Byrne, 2012). These CDPs came to embody community processes around both housing

and drug addiction through professional community workers (Punch, 2009; Lyder, 2012; O'Byrne, 2012). The period saw a de-politicisation of community activism, as CDPs gradually moved away from approaches which espoused the building of “critical consciousness”, radical discourses, community empowerment, and a Gramscian ideology, towards “managerialism”, direct service provision and top-down, professionalised approaches to the problems at hand, with an individualist, neo-liberal ideology (O'Byrne, 2012).

Some twenty years later, the era of social partnership reportedly ended with reduced funding through new austerity policies of economic rationalisation, beginning at the time of the economic crisis in 2008 (O'Byrne, 2012). This point also saw a renewal of community disaffection, as grassroots interventions around housing and urban environment in Dublin took on a “new importance and meaning”, in the void left by the decline of CDPs (Punch, 2009). This marks a notable shift into the context in which mobilisations against water charges would eventually emerge. In the 2000s, only a “radical minority” in leftist movements favoured the use of direct action over social partnership (Cox & Curry, 2010). This was a noted topic of debate and a very divisive point of tactical choice in movements opposing both the use of Shannon Airport by US military planes during the Iraq War and the imposition of bin taxes in Dublin city (Flood, 2003a; 2003b; Anarchist News, 2003). However, three years before the water charges protests would erupt, a turn towards favouring direct action over partnership programmes had already been sensed and predicted by observers (Ní Dhorchaigh & Cox, 2011). Here it was reported that the already mentioned “neoliberal turn” in government policies and police repression of protest saw movements disempowered to the point where confrontation was *inevitable*. As we will come to see in the findings, this would be a considerable element in the spread of DA tactics.

An analysis of the years preceding contestation around water charges shows that the period from 2010 to 2013 saw a considerable number of localised, single-issue protests, which to a large extent continued to follow the repertoires and patterns of protest established during the social partnership era (Naughton, 2015). These demonstrations were mainly framed as community mobilisations to address specific problems. Those that occurred around a leftist critique of the 'bailout' of the country by the *Troika* (The European Commission, ECB and IMF), and the severe austerity policies that resulted, were still organised by the main institutionalised trade unions and leftist organisations, and limited by their repertoires. As late as 2015, one paper still attempted to explain the lack of protest of a character seen in other peripheral European countries in the Irish context (Cannon & Murphy, 2015). On the other hand, it was noted that in contrast with these continued trends, there was an increase in both confrontation and systemic critique in movements, accompanied by a continued decrease in the efficacy of social partnership policies to contain protest (Naughton, 2015).

The run-up to mobilisations around the water charges was seemingly defined by a move away from protests being led by trade unions and leftist parties, towards

more grassroots organising, and an emerging dynamic of autonomous community activism (Hearne, 2015). The movement around water charges and meter installations is considered to have been “transformative”, in having drawn massive numbers of people, the vast majority of whom were found never to have participated in a movement before (Moore, 2015). These actions are said to have mobilised and empowered a previously “silent majority” of people, who then began confronting opponents, and in a large number of cases through the use of direct action tactics (Hearne, 2015).

The context in which the mobilisations to be studied by this work occurred, as gathered from the above literature, is taken to be one of ongoing change in the dynamics of social movements and community organisations. This first notable change is in the leadership of protests, with an emerging divide between foregoing left-wing organisers, political parties and trade unions on one side, and grassroots community groups on the other. The second is a perceived change in the repertoires of contention of emerging groups, which are espousing direct action tactics to a greater degree than was described in literature making reference to the previous two decades or more, particularly since the introduction of social partnership. As the movements being considered in this research are very recent, there is a lack of literature on their emergence and tactics. However, there is also a lack of analysis of action repertoires in Ireland, and thus this review has gathered what it could from limited sources, and aims to add to a relatively underdeveloped area of study.

Methodology

The methodology adopted during the carrying out of this research was by no means selected in a vacuum, wherein the perfect selection for each phase could be made without trial and error. The research methodology eventually used resulted from a thought process around how best to address the specific research questions addressed by the study, but was also defined by decisions made in the context of my situation as a researcher and an activist. One of these contextual considerations was how I came to select the group I would study due to my own interests. Another was my desire to make the research relevant and useful, in contrast with a pre-formed idea I had of the academic high castle, wherein research is conducted for its own sake or that of the researcher, and bears no interest for those concerned in its findings. Finally, there was that of the technical strategies used to carry out the research. These considerations are outlined in this chapter.

The iterative process of group choice

My interest in the topic at hand came to a peak as I returned to Dublin after over a year living in Barcelona, and following the actions of social movements there. I felt that the political landscape in Dublin had changed to an unexpected extent. With the opportunity to conduct research at hand, I set

about a search for new groups which encapsulated this change. Most appeared close at hand, in circles of autonomous activists I already knew to engage in direct action such as squatting. However, I found that while I was absent the majority of groups of activists involved in the explosive water meter protests of the previous year (see Hearne, 2015) had begun to move on to contesting issues mainly centred around housing provision. At this point, the Irish Housing Network was taking off somewhat, after the occupation of the Bolt Hostel, with regular reported occupations and resisted evictions. The group resembled the PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca), a massive group which I had seen achieve many feats during my time in Spain. As an umbrella group, the IHN had in its membership virtually all of the smaller groups taking actions around housing in the city at the time. What's more, the network professed a devotion to direct action and grassroots mobilisation. At this point I approached a group of IHN activists with my research proposition.

Movement-relevant theory

In making methodological choices for my research, I was conscious of following a desire to study the movement in a certain way. Perhaps this is best voiced by Barker and Cox (2002), who acknowledge a distance between much of social movement theory and actual social movement practice. This calls for a balance between what are termed activist and academic forms of movement theorising, which emerge in different contexts, and produce different forms of knowledge. Activist theory – the ways in which movement participants on the ground conceptualise the same questions that academic theorists aim to address from the outside, looking in – is formed through the process of struggle, and *doing* social movements. I hoped that my participation in the movement I was researching would assist in bridging this gap. The concept of “movement-relevant theory” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005), and the professed aims of this journal (which I used for much of my pre-research study), encouraged my attempt to create a methodology through which I could be an activist before an academic, and imagine my colleagues from the movement being as interested in my results as those from university.

Methodological structure

The overall research design of the project was qualitative, due to the interpretivist nature of the questions I aimed to address, and the inductive aims incorporated in the intended research. Data was collected principally through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with activists from the Irish Housing Network and smaller groups that participate in the network, and interviewees were chosen by purposive sampling and snowballing. The interviews were treated as the key source of data for the research, and my participation in the network enabled me to corroborate the findings with a secondary data set which was not analysed. Interviews were based on an approximate guide, and interviewees lead the conversations in the direction they saw fitting. In any case,

I generally found it unnecessary to pose predefined questions, as interviewees themselves would cover the topics I wished to raise in an interesting manner. In total, one pilot interview and six subsequent detailed interviews were carried out within a period of two months, ranging from fifteen minutes to more than an hour in duration. Each interview was recorded in audio format, before being transcribed.

The participant observation element of the research took advantage of my involvement in the Irish Housing Network's media task group. These activities did not involve me working alongside all of my interviewees, as some were drawn from other network sub-groups. My participation in the media group involved me conducting interviews for the network, through which I witnessed to some extent the processes that the research aimed to describe. For example, in one meeting with a family occupying their home in resistance to eviction, the present members engaged in a discussion of specifically *why* they decided to take what they termed “direct action” for the first time, and what considerations were involved. Through the chosen combination of methods, I intended to provide more honest and useful findings, in line with the aforementioned concept of movement-relevant theory. However, I will emphasise that this was an instinctive choice at the time, due to my desire to involve myself more with the network.

The interview findings were analysed thematically, after all interviews had been conducted. The data gathered was mostly analysed descriptively, but also in part on the latent level, with the hope of revealing themes running deeper than what was manifest. An example of this is the broad theme of politicisation. This emerged on most occasions explicitly, as a respondent would simply say overtly that people had been politicised through the mobilisations in question. Yet on other occasions it emerged at the point of analysis, through descriptions of a growing political consciousness, a realisation of the nature of the state, or a turn to Gramscian ideas of conflict by people who had never before engaged in political action.

Many of the ethical considerations made before and during the research process have been outlined above. I feel that the most pressing ethical concern in my research was the question of how to accurately represent what activists communicated to me interviews, and this was dealt with in so far as was possible through my participation giving me the context in which to understand their ideas and descriptions of events. My interviewees were consenting adults, who were open about their involvement in the activities described, expressed enthusiasm about participating in my research, and seemed interested in discussion in interviews. Furthermore, to protect respondents, I gave them pseudonyms at the point of writing up the findings.

Findings: Reflections on direct action

This first section of findings aims to describe to some extent the constitution, nature and purpose of direct action, according to the reflections of those interviewed as part of the project. It is organised in four sections, which summarise interviewees descriptions of direct action as a tactical consideration, as meaningful and effective action, and as *real* community organising, respectively.

1. Direct action as a tactical choice

The term *Direct Action* (DA) was recognised by all interviewees as applicable to some activities of movements in which they had been involved. Its use was widely regarded as a question of tactical choice, implicitly defined in contrast with other movements' limitation to non-DA tactics. The most consistently provided example of non-DA tactics was organised marches and rallies, or “waving a placard and asking somebody to listen to you”. Most interviewees did not rule out the utility of marches and rallies as tools of raising awareness. Instead, what was problematised in this regard was a total limitation to these tactics in action repertoires, overtly linked by interviewees to the tactics of the *established* left. The shift towards DA recognised by respondents was equated with groups' departing from this tactical limitation, and organising outside such limited structures of contention as those provided by institutionalised leftist groups.

I think it's great [...] the week before an election – fantastic, a great expression, a good tactic [...], but marching people up and down a road on a Saturday ain't gonna change anything. (Roisín)

The problematisation of the tactics of the “organised” left (“as they like to call themselves!” [John]) is only the beginning of a series of overt expressions of disillusionment with established leftist politics and mobilisation. This dominant distinction made between the groups with whom activists were involved (having emerged since 2014) and the established left is further discussed later.

Examples of DA tactics that had been used by participants mainly revolved around two broad forms – occupations and obstructions. Occupations took various forms, ranging from sit-ins at government and council offices to the sustained squatting of unused buildings or homes threatened with eviction. Obstructions were similarly varied, and included forcibly preventing evictions and the blocking of works such as the installation of water meters.

2. Direct action as meaningful action

While examples of direct actions tended to fall into the above categories,

differing impressions came to light with regard to what such tactics aim to achieve. A founding member of the IHN described direct actions as having two main effects: firstly, that of raising awareness by drawing attention to the problem at hand; and secondly the “substantive effect” – *getting the goods*, or stopping what the group is opposed to. A third purpose of DA then outlined was “collective service provision”, as in the case of the *Bolt Hostel*, or later *Apollo House*, which were squatted and run as homeless hostels by the IHN and other activists for two months in 2015, and one month around Christmas 2016, respectively. However, there is also an important element of meaning implied in these actions. In the former case specifically, the purpose was said to be not only “putting a roof over people's heads” (service provision), but also “taking [...] [council]-owned property and occupying it, which is a direct action” - raising awareness, confronting power and incorporating a “transformative vision” in the process. Another IHN organiser also described DA as transformative in nature, integral in drawing attention to the “root cause” of issues contested. This essential transformative vision provides a linking point between direct action as effective action and as meaningful action.

While respondents were agreed on direct action as having its main purpose in being an effective tactic (getting the goods and raising awareness), some argued that the creation of a critical consciousness in communities was a major – if not the main – purpose of engaging in confrontation. The respondent that placed the most emphasis on DA as a *process* rather than a tactic was Tony. He was the oldest of the interviewees, having been a community organiser since the 1960s, both on a grassroots level at first, and later with official Community Development Projects. For this interviewee, DA is “a learning process and a two-way agitation process”, married to the ideas of critical consciousness proposed by Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci (Tony made this theoretical framework explicit throughout, and linked it to the rationale of community development in his experience). The consciousness in question was said to emerge from an emphasised *reflection* with action. Its most tangible result, according to Tony, is sustained contention after one's ends are achieved, but it is also an end in itself, in challenging the hegemony of ideas in society and empowering communities through education and politicisation. Questions of critical consciousness and politicisation are further discussed as reasons for the spread of tactics and contention in the second section of findings.

3. Direct action as effective action

An old slogan says “direct action gets the goods”. In interviews, the strategic nature of DA was emphasised through the description of tactical choices leading to its use. One IHN activist said that it was first and foremost *practical* and *tactical*. Other respondents seemed to take DA for granted, implying its utility for quickly achieving small-scale aims (specifically the resolution of community problems).

You've only so much time and you want to [...] allocate [it] in an effective way, and direct action is [...] the most effective way of creating the sort of change [...] on a micro level that you want to achieve, at the moment

(Anton)

This was especially pointed out by other interviewees. One contrasted organising communities around direct actions with the slower, less effective tactics of putting up posters and calling people to demonstrations. Again, in this sense, the use of effective tactics was contrasted with the tactics of the so-called established left (centred around intendedly large-scale, pacific and coordinated demonstrations). As these established tactics were deemed less effective in the short term, they constituted another reason for distinguishing oneself from groups which limit themselves in their repertoires of action.

Another key theme which arose in interviews, which pointed to effectiveness as rationale for the use of DA tactics, was the element of perceived success described in response to questions about the spread of those tactics.

Respondents gave great importance to communities seeing DA tactics succeed either in other communities or in their own, and applying them more often in response. This was emphasised on the “lower level” of community activism by two particular interviewees, pointing to the blockage of water meter installations, and by two others around the example of communities resisting evictions – both spreading through their visible success in achieving short-term goals.

If one was to investigate specifically how these successes were witnessed by other groups, the internet would be likely to emerge as a major element. Anton's Facebook profile was mainly devoted to sharing videos of community resistance which he had recorded for others to see and learn from. Roisín also accredited social media with aiding these ends, as new activists were given the opportunity to watch videos of other community actions and “repeat that [action] without actually having to be there”. These observations led us to further discussion of how tactics spread through networking, which will be further discussed in second findings section.

4. Direct action as *real* community activism

A recurring theme in interviews was the commonsensical presence of direct action in communities as their natural recourse to action, and the idea that the use of these tactics therefore constitutes *real* community action. John, particularly, made reference to his youth in Ballyfermot, a Dublin housing scheme “abandoned by the state”, where anything that was achieved came through DA. He went on to clarify that DA was the “natural impulse of ordinary people”, who “know the state disregards them” and need to be confrontational in order to achieve anything. On a similar note, Tony and Kate stressed that direct action is imbued in community action, and an integral part of community

protest, respectively. The concept of *real* community activism was again interlinked with other key themes, such as the *efficacy* of action and distinction from the tactics of main left-wing organisations contesting the same issues, as here illustrated:

I was at the [Right2Change] protest on Saturday and there was 80,000 people there, but people were just – “ugh, God, we're only marching again, you know, what is the point of this on a Saturday?” – and they're absolutely right [...] You've got people who are spending weeks putting up posters, giving out thousands of leaflets, bla bla bla, where you could be organising your community where it's actually going to be needed [...] The only [way] you're going to get in-depth, proper organisation that will make change is by going door to door and doing what the water charges did, you know, bringing roads together, estates together, you know - that's organising. (Roisín)

Real community activism, as viewed by those interviewed, was found to revolve around a concept of *real* struggle, which in turn consists of conscious confrontation with the institutions of the state. It is through this necessity of confrontation that direct action becomes a key element in real organising. Furthermore, it is through established leftist organisations abandoning struggle, or the “two-way agitation process” referred to by Tony, that communities were said to have become alienated from them and moved to self-organise (John). Finally, struggle was reported to be the core element in the dynamics of spreading confrontation – the “snowball effect of struggle impacting more struggle” (Aidan). This leads us to further discussion of consciousness and politicisation which are discussed in the following findings section, on the spread of direct action.

Findings: the spread of direct action

Respondents confirmed having witnessed an exceptional rise in the use of direct action in Dublin in the past two years, and in *all* cases linked this rise to the emergence of new social movements around the issues of water and housing provision. Some stressed their surprise at the sheer quantity of people taking part in contentious action since the emergence of conflict over the installation of water meters in 2014. The key effect that this larger participation in actions has had on the use of DA lies in strength in numbers, said to have lead to people feeling less isolated and more confident in confrontation as a result (Aidan). Tony also indicated the “mass nature of the movements” as central to the spreading of their tactics. The intersection of questions of numbers of participants and of tactics lies in the element of networks and learning, further discussed later. However, the change in organising after the milestone of the water meter confrontations is a matter of dealing not only with bigger numbers, but also with a larger section of society (Aidan).

The following four topics summarise interviewees responses on the specific

explanations for, and the dynamics behind, the spread of the wave of contentious collective action witnessed in Dublin since 2014, and that of the use of direct action tactics within the movements forming part of that wave. The main four distinguishable reasons given are, in order: politicisation and the spread of perceived critical consciousness in communities; the severity of the issues being contested by movements; networking and learning processes; and organisation outside the established left.

1. Politicisation and consciousness

One of the main overarching themes discussed so far in relation to respondents' explanations for the rise of direct action tactics has been the politicisation of communities and individuals. The main basis for this explanation lies in the observation that the vast majority of participants in the mobilisations that occurred around the blockage of water meter installations and later protests around housing issues were newly-mobilised people, who had little or no previous engagement with social movements or community activism. This phenomenon has been observed in previous research (Hearne, 2015), but it was also indicated explicitly by interviewees as characterising recent protests, and specifically direct actions. This is the *new* section of society described as the “normal everyday folk”, the “next ring of people” that have been politicised (Roisín, Aidan). Anton referred directly to the participation of “people who were never involved in politics in their life, or community activism” as those *driving* a tactical shift towards direct action, through their providing a sufficient number of people for that purpose. On a similar note, it was pointed out by Kate that it's this “broader support network” in communities that has made the risk involved in confronting powerful opponents one that can be assumed.

However, this politicisation was not only described as a reason for which direct action has become possible. It was also linked to the motivation to engage in direct action, through politicisation creating a new critical consciousness in newly-mobilised communities. Where it was noted before that “success breeds success” (Aidan, Tony), the once-professional community developer (Tony) goes on to explain that this only occurs when participants learn from the experience of direct action *who their opponent is*, and what their position of opposition constitutes, and furthermore, as noted by John, how change happens in society only through confrontation. This is the process referred to as the growth of a critical consciousness, and it was argued to be the main reason for changing attitudes towards direct action that have occurred as communities became accustomed to confrontation. Kate pointed to this as an *alienation process* that resulted from violent reactions to protests on the part of the gardaí, noted by Roisín to have been “a great way of politicising people and also showing people the nature of the state [and] the nature of the [...] police”.

You can turn around and say, yeah, “all cops are bastards”, yeah, [...] but only [when] they encounter and they experience that themselves will they realise the

nature of the state and what it's willing to do. (Roisín)

The observable effect of this process was a change in perceptions around protest noted by Roisín as the demise of a previous “embarrassment” about protesting. This was further exemplified by Tony, who said that in his community a person jailed for involvement in direct action is now looked upon with admiration for defending their community, where before they would have been deemed “a bit of an eejit” (an *idiot* in Irish slang). This change in consciousness that was widely noted by interviewees will have had a significant impact on motivations to engage in direct action. The role of DA was said to be unique in its creation of critical consciousness through witnessed *reaction*, which in turn leads to a motivation to engage in more DA, thus creating a chain reaction largely credited with creating the shift in tactics that this research aimed to explain.

2. The issues at stake

A second major theme in interviewees' explanations for the “explosion” of direct actions across Dublin in recent years was the idea that economic and political arrangements have pushed communities into new situations where confrontation is inevitable. Economic austerity affecting disadvantaged communities, combined with the collapse of social partnership arrangements that before allowed conflict to be resolved in a clientelist manner, were credited with creating these new realities (Aidan, Roisín, Kate). As Roisín comments, “those crumbs from the cake ain't there anymore [...]; it's how far you're gonna push people, and then people will fight back”. This reality was also worsened symbolically by new topics of contestation centring around fundamental issues such as water and housing provision (Aidan, Tony).

The idea here is that new, highly contestable issues, combined with perceived injustices (eg: economic, or police violence) and abandonment by both the state (social partnership) and the established left (as discussed in other sections) constitute macro conditions which have provided alienated groups with new opportunities for contention. This would appear to fit Tarrow's (2011) description of *opportunity* as one of the central elements in the dynamics of cycles of contestation.

These opportunities were described in interviews with reference to specific cases of communities taking direct action. Kate notes that communities have found new means of “channelling anger”, and Anton and Aidan describe this as being specifically allowed by new situations. For Roisín, the case of the “spontaneous occupation” of houses on Moore Street in January 2016 could be traced to the actors in question realising “they *could*” occupy the buildings, and reaching consensus to take this action. Similarly, with regard to water meters, Roisín notes, “they gave us a gift”. This was in reference to water meter installations beginning in the “toughest” areas of Dublin, in the political context of the time, and that situation being conducive to confrontation.

This adds another piece to our macro-image of how DA contestation emerged in the cases considered. In the first findings section we established why direct action was a practical and preferred tactic in these cases. In the previous section, we discussed how politicisation and the creation of a reported critical consciousness created a mindset among potential participants which provided an appetite for contestation. Here, we have established the role of *situations* as opportunities for contention reported in interviews. What remains to be seen is how tactics were learned and spread simultaneously with these processes, and how organisation outside the established left and its associated action repertoires impacted this emergence of contestation.

3. Networking and learning: the snowball effect

Protests and direct actions around the two main broad issues of water meters and housing were by no means separate in their emergence, and the ties between the two topics were raised in *all* interviews conducted. One such tie is the direct relationship of the same actors being involved in both mobilisations to a large extent, either simultaneously or moving from one topic of contestation to the next (generally from water to housing issues, as opportunities for actions around water meters diminished). This “snowball effect” of people moving from “struggle to struggle” (Aidan) was said to be a result of networking processes that resulted from the “explosion” water meter confrontations.

The water charges has changed everything, you know, in the last three or four years, big time. [...] I think the difference is that people are networked. [...] People in given communities are getting to know one another, and also get to know, almost, the agitators in the area, who [...] now can ally with people who are newly mobilised [...] so if something like an eviction happens in an area, well that becomes a focal point for these newly mobilised people to politically engage.
(Anton)

This idea was echoed by other interviewees, clarifying that before the water meter mobilisations, other key elements were in place, and the potential activists were there, but that they simply “hadn't met up”. Mobilisations around the installation of water meters, then, created a “huge informal network [...] interested in direct action, [...] [and] civil resistance” (John). This would appear to constitute another main explanation for the spread of tactics and contestation. In the case of growing numbers of protests and confrontations with authorities, the element of networking links into phenomena such as the setting up of local text alert systems and discussion groups on social media, through which newly acquainted people could inform each other about developments. Real time communication, alerting people of attempted water meter installations, or later attempted evictions, are examples of applications of networking using these tools.

The second element of the networking process reported in interviews was the

spread of DA tactics through accompanying learning processes. This sharing of experience, within the broader dynamic of networking outlined above, allowed newly mobilised groups in communities to replicate the tactics proven successful by similar groups in other parts of Dublin and beyond, through both *direct* contact with activists, and witnessing actions and reactions through video recordings available on social media (Anton, Roisín). Tactics – particularly new direct action methods – were thus learned and repeated in separate instances with different actors. This sharing of tactics was applied to instances of resistance around water charges and housing alike. Sidney Tarrow's (2011) description of “modular forms of contention” might shine light on this process, as successful tactics become part of shared repertoires, repeated in varied instances and against various opponents. Occupations of government and council offices would appear to be an example of this, applied by multiple different organised groups, as well as by families directly affected by public housing evictions during the past year. Furthermore, the fact that interviewees themselves indicated the learning and repetition of tactics as key to the spread of DA appears to cement this.

4. Community empowerment: organising outside the established left

As pointed out earlier in both the literature and findings, mobilisations around water charges in Dublin involved a vast number of people who had not been involved in social movements or politics up to that point. One implication of this is that to a large extent the actions taken around these issues, whether blocking water meter installations or occupying buildings and government offices, were organised and took place *outside* of what is termed the established left – that is, pre-existing left-wing organisations such as main trade unions and leftist parties.

In interviews, this was largely described as communities taking power into their own hands, without recourse to the organising capacities of these formerly dominant organisations. Kate and Aidan emphasised particularly this process, by which communities became the organisers and participants in actions simultaneously. This was said to have constituted a process of *empowerment*, whereby communities came to be “directly asserting control” in their struggles, which also led to greater levels of involvement and confidence in protest (Kate). She added that the voices of unions and parties are still there, but that the organising power has been taken from them by grassroots groups.

Respondents linked this distancing from leftist organisations to the emergence of direct action tactics, through the fact that the actions of communities in the past two years took on a radical form that had not been espoused by the organisations in question. John remarked that “only direct action confronts power”, and that the refusal of trade unions to engage in these forms of protest meant that their undertaking involved a necessary distancing from those unions (this tactical point is further evidenced in the theory section with reference to direct action protests at Shannon Airport and around the Bin Tax in Dublin). It

was furthermore clarified that not only did the use of DA require a distancing from trade unions, but that abandonment by trade unions (for example, through the Irish Congress of Trade Union's decision to cease calling for protests in support of the Labour Party's presence in government) also led to communities taking DA, as they no longer faced limitation to the tactics espoused by these organising bodies.

A consistent critique of the established left has emerged throughout these findings, especially with regard to the ability of these organisations to mobilise people for *real* activism and confrontation of power, and their tactical limitation to marches and leafleting, among other moderate activities not deemed as effective as direct action (Roisín, John, Tony). As Tony remarked, the *organised* left is unable to see how it is “part of the problem”, through its lack of effective engagement. The perceived abandonment of communities by these bodies was seen as leading to the initial establishment of informal networks of local activists such as *Dublin Says No* to take on contestation outside of these organising bodies. This started with earlier issues around austerity policies, and exploded with the spark of the water charges, leading first to the undertaking of isolated direct actions, and eventually to the formation of local community groups that would coordinate action around the water charges and housing, from Blanchardstown to North Dublin Bay.

Reflections on findings

One key realisation on my part, while conducting interviews, was that activists did not respond in terms of how they *moved* from certain tactics to others. Instead, it emerged that admittedly new tactics were being used by *newly mobilised* groups of people defining their own rules of engagement, or repertoire of contention. Firstly, it became clear that they had specific reasons for choosing these tactics (because they were effective, meaningful, real, successful, empowering, etc.). Secondly it became clear that these reasons extended to constitute explanations for the spread of the tactics, because they achieved short term goals, and created a consciousness such that participants wished to be involved in continued contention after these short term goals were achieved. Thirdly, respondents provided explanations for why new people were being mobilised and pushed to confront power, centring around disadvantaged communities being pushed too far by government policies, and left to their own devices through the lack of institutional paths to resolution of conflict and decreased engagement on the part of the established left.

Interviewees had clearly considered their actions tactically, theoretically and in national and historical contexts. Yet, they generally did not state a point where they *chose* to start using direct action, as such. Instead, where a first experience of direct action was emphasised, it had occurred in the context of confrontational tactics becoming *feasible* and *necessary* in their views. The basic social movement axiom stands – *you do what you can with what you have* (Alinsky, 1972). As Alinsky pointed out furthermore, there can be no

excessive moralising of means and ends in community activism, as it leads the activist to endless inaction. This appears most in line with respondents' perceptions of the established left, who have seemingly been left behind while new groups took opportunities and expanded the Irish social movement repertoire through tactical innovation on what at least began as the periphery. Only one respondent acknowledged a very conscious choice of tactics. This was Tony, the community organiser of some fifty years' experience, for whom the conscious choice was a return to direct action with the decline of social partnership. Other respondents had been mobilised for the first time in approximately the past two to six years, and their tactical choice was seen to be a momentary one in light of new opportunities.

Conclusions

The findings outlined and summarised above indicate a notable shift towards the use and legitimisation of direct action tactics witnessed by interviewees. This shift was described in the experience of activists as having occurred mainly through the recognition of the efficacy and necessity of confrontational tactics. These tactics were said to have spread through networking in communities, witnessed success, the mobilisation and politicisation of new groups of people, and the growth of a critical consciousness through the initial use of these tactics which has led to the appetite for further contestation around other problems in newly-mobilised communities. Furthermore, the emergence of new opportunities for contestation and tactical innovation emerged as simultaneous conditions which allowed these dynamics to evolve. The use of mainly new tactics was described as being made possible by a growing divide from established leftist parties and unions, and declining social partnership initiatives, leaving communities to organise themselves, and effectively define their own rules of engagement.

To put this in terms of established social movement theory, it shows, to some extent, the limited capacity of repertoire theory alone to describe the changes taking place in these cases, as they are not limited to conditions internal to movements but largely occur in a broader context of socio-political change. The lack of visible lines of continuity in Irish repertoires of contention may point to changes being better described in terms of an emerging *cycle* of contention (Tarrow, 2011), with its own new actors, early risers (such as the water charges movement) and followers (such as the housing groups considered), redefining the Irish contentious political landscape and rendering previous studies into these topics less applicable to the current scenario. This study, due to its limited scale and scope, can only point to these questions raised around established theory, and they are worthy of further investigation.

Further limitations of this study include that it is confined to a small section of Irish protest groups, specifically those that have emerged in recent years to contest housing issues in Dublin, however dominant they have become in narratives around protest in Ireland. It also addresses perceived reasons behind

changes in tactics on a noticeably *macro* scale. Further research could explore in greater detail how tactics are adopted on a micro level – that of the individual participant – and furthermore what meaning these new mobilisations hold for those who partake in them. Given the concentration of the movements described mainly in North and Inner Dublin, it would be interesting to establish which influences on the emerging dynamics of protest are specific to these areas, and how they differ in other parts of the city and the country, as well as how they fit in with broader European trends in social movements.

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Writing a history of now: the Campbell House rent strike

Phil Hedges

Abstract

Against a backdrop of unaffordable housing, students from University College London (UCL) undertook rent strikes that won concessions from University landlords. This paper examines one of the first UCL strikes - the dispute at Campbell House Halls of Residence.

The UCL, Cut the Rent (UCL,CTR) group was arguably crucial in this struggle. One of the outward facing tools for organising was the Facebook page - and this paper begins by presenting an account of the strike assembled solely from material posted on this page.

The process of assembling this account is outlined, describing the criteria for inclusion as a source, before drawing on Walter Benjamin and Steven J. Jackson to present the epistemological position that underpins the paper. The historiographical concerns that arise from this process are explored, with Eric Hobsbawm's lecture 'The Present as History' referenced as a basis for these discussions

Feedback on the account by the minority of UCL,CTR activists who engaged with the researcher highlights a desire to construct an accurate narrative - albeit from differing motivations. Finally the narrative presented is closely examined and gaps in the account are highlighted. To demonstrate the limitations of the methodology, these gaps are addressed using material from oral history interviews.

Keywords: Benjamin, Facebook, historiography, Hobsbawm, Jackson, rent, rent strike, social media, strike, student

Introduction

It was against a backdrop of unaffordable housing that students from University College London (UCL) undertook a series of rent strikes that won concessions from University landlords. The UCL, Cut the Rent (UCL,CTR) group was arguably crucial in this struggle, bridging the gap between residents, the student union, radical groups and the wider university populous.

One of the outward facing tools for doing so was the UCL,CTR Facebook Page. Blogging in a previous wave of protest, Paul Mason identified the crucial role of a new social type - the graduate (or soon-to-graduate) with no future, who has “access to social media... so they can express themselves in a variety of situations...” and ensure that “...therefore truth moves faster than lies...” Social

media arguably remains a crucial tool for student activists to network and present counter-narratives that ensure "...propaganda becomes flammable" (Mason, 2011), with the UCL,CTR Facebook Page having over 2,750 Likes at the time of writing in October 2016.

It is in this context that this paper examines one of the first UCL strikes - the dispute at Campbell House Halls of Residence - and seeks to answer three interconnected questions.

1. *What would a history of the rent strikes at Campbell House Halls of Residence look like written solely using the UCL, CTR Facebook Page?*
2. *What opinion would participants from UCL,CTR have of this narrative?*
3. *What would be left unanswered in this account?*

This paper begins by addressing question 1, presenting an account of the strike assembled solely from public material made available via the UCL,CTR Page. It does not present a *definitive* account of the strike and contains minor inaccuracies. Rather it is presented to evidence the narrative assembled using social media and as a source to help contextualise the responses to question 2 and 3. The reader is presented with a redraft of material presented to participants from UCL,CTR for comment in the autumn of 2016.

The process of assembling this account is outlined in the Methodology section that follows, describing the criteria for inclusion as a source before drawing on Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and Jackson's *Rethinking Repair* to present the epistemological position that underpins the paper. It then addresses some of the historiographical concerns that arise in writing a "history of now", using Hobsbawm's text *A History of the Present* as a basis for these discussions.

Question 2 is addressed in the Opinion section. This collates feedback by key activists in UCL,CTR after being presented with the account of the rent strike. Anonomised for ethical reasons, these responses present a critique of the narrative from the position of actors in the events depicted, and highlights that the overwhelming response from the minority who engaged is a desire to construct a more accurate narrative - but with differing motivations for doing so.

Question 3 is addressed in the Analysis section, where the narrative of the rent strike is examined closely and gaps in the information highlighted. In doing so the researcher touches upon micro-level questions related to how UCL,CTR organised. Answers to these questions were largely unavailable from the Facebook Page - and to further underline the limitations of the methodology, interview transcripts are used to begin to fill in these gaps in the researcher's knowledge.

Rationale

The value of this study can be illustrated by two experiences. Greene's presentation of his paper *Thatcherism and Homelessness* at the Radical Histories/Histories of Radicalism conference (2016) presented a view of squatting in London during the 1980's seemingly based - primarily - on sources in the 56a Infoshop's archive of radical zines. The perceived over-reliance upon written material led attendees connected to the Advisory Service for Squatters to respond critically, questioning why Greene had not yet engaged in oral history research with those who were involved. This underlined the dangers of over-reliance on one type of source, with new media here analogous to the DIY small press publications that were arguably crucial to radical movements in previous decades. Greene had only told part of the story, as seen through the 'mouthpieces' of the movement. It also highlighted one of the strange experiences inherent to writing modern history – that research may focus on the actors who may become an audience for their work, and seek out active engagement with it.

Despite this there is a need to engage in original research without access to interviewees. During the researcher's Masters study on the International Labour and Trade Union Studies course at Ruskin College, access to interviewees was problematic for colleagues studying movements abroad or controversial topics, meaning that dissertations were occasionally difficult to complete. Actors may be rightly wary of engagement with academia, due to negative experiences, fear of criticism etc - leading to an impasse for the researcher. In this context, research based on publically available information is one way to complete projects, albeit a problematic one as this paper illustrates.

This paper also forms the beginnings of a case study into rent strikes at UCL. Whilst this paper focuses largely on methodology, the narrative of the Campbell House strike has value as a study from which conclusions may be drawn – although this analysis is beyond the scope of this project.

Cost of living

Although this paper focuses on a dispute that resulted primarily from the *standards* of accommodation offered by UCL, it is important to contextualise the general crisis of affordable housing in London.

In 2015, rising accommodation costs continued to outpace increases in earnings. House prices increased in England by 5.8% in the year to May 2015, with the average price in London reaching £503,000 (ONS, 2015). Rent on a two bed room flat was below £1,000 a month in only 4 boroughs, with the Valuation Office outlining that, between 2010-2015, rent on a one bedroom flat had increased by 22% (O'Carroll, 2015). This was paired with a decade of wage depression, estimated (pre-Brexit) to not return to a 2007 peak until at least 2018 (Tily, 2016).

For students in London, a NUS/UniPol reported 26% increase in rent in 2012-13, followed 13% each in 2014-2015 and 2015-16 with an average weekly rent of £225.83 (2016, p. 7). Taking the UK as a whole, the average price of purpose built student accommodation in August 2015 “now represent[ed] 95% of the maximum student loan (Asquith, 2015)”, with one potential student outlining that their accommodation costs left them with a weekly shortfall of £30 (Bachelor, 2015).

It was in this context of unaffordable housing that the Campbell House residents undertook strike action, with 87 strikers from Campbell House West winning a term’s rent in compensation from UCL of £1,386 each (Sherriff, 2015).

The Campbell House Rent Strike¹

Conditions in Halls

The rent strike at Campbell House was not an isolated dispute over poor living conditions. UCL, CTR itself was formed at a Halls Assembly for the Ifor Evans Halls of Residence in Camden in November 2014 and from the outset, campaigned for lower rents and better standards of accommodation. As well as increased hall fees:

...more tangible factors have also played a part within this student movement: broken fridges, toilets and showers, extortionate fines, inequality of conditions between floors and rooms only seem to scratch the surface.²

An Evening Standard expose of conditions at UCL’s Camden Halls showed photos of damaged accommodation, whilst interviewees commented on poorly maintained cookers, broken furniture, windows that let in the cold and the disparities between the quality of kitchen facilities.³ These poor conditions were not limited to UCL accommodation; the location of Imperial College’s Woodward Hall was described in less than flattering terms⁴ whilst SOAS students living in Kings Cross undertook a rent strike of their own in April with one student explaining:

¹ See Hedges, P (2017), *Rent Strike May Day*, <http://ruskin.academia.edu/PhilHedges> for a more accessible revised account of the strike, particularly sections 8-10.

² <http://anticuts.com/2014/11/04/ucl-student-tenants-organising-for-action-on-poor-conditions-and-high-rents/>

³ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/ucl-halls-appalling-conditions-rent-expensive-london-accommodation-9850286.html>

⁴ <http://www.getwestlondon.co.uk/news/west-london-news/north-acton-monstrosity-building-nominated-9765208>

I killed 38 cockroaches on the first day of university... There were dead and living cockroaches in every single room. There was also a massive infestation in the kitchen.⁵

Living in what NUS Welfare Officer Shelley Asquith described as “squalid conditions”,⁶ the students striking in Campbell House, along with their sister strikers in Hawkrigge Halls, were additionally forced to deal with disruptive construction work. This led Hawkrigge residents to withhold rent from April 2015,⁷ with Campbell following in May.⁸ Resident Shaniquah Hunter described noise from the demolition work on next-door’s Waites House as making conditions “unliveable”,⁹ whilst Campbell House rent striker Jamal Rizvi remembered:

Students who wanted to revise in their rooms couldn’t do so. In rooms nearest to the works, mirrors were bouncing off walls and desks were shaking. We took decibel readings in every room on our smartphones and in those closest it reached up to 95 decibels, and up to 75 in the rooms furthest away. The university responded with reluctant acceptance and tried to brush it under the rug. There were stairs leading from the street to the basement kitchens and the rats could just go down the steps.¹⁰

Despite assertions from UCL management, demolition began at 7am – an hour earlier than council regulations - and went on through exam periods.¹¹ Signatories to the Campbell House e-petition described conditions variously as:

It is virtually impossible to study efficiently in such an environment. For the amount of rent we pay, it is unacceptable”; “It’s impossible to be in my room for 9 hours a day, 6 days a week”; “...UCL are entirely responsible for the poor timing of these demolition and expect students to simply deal with it...”¹²

⁵ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/students-living-in-cockroach-and-rodent-infested-halls-launch-rent-strike-10201579.html>

⁶ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/dear-ucl-own-up-pay-up>

⁷ <http://uclu.org/articles/support-hawkrigge-house-students>

⁸ <http://uclu.org/articles/students-step-up-rent-action-across-ucl>

⁹ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/students-demand-compensation-from-ucl-over-building-works-wrecking-exam-revision-10247510.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/16/ucl-students-100000-compensation-strike-demolition-rat-accomodation>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/403289819855342>

¹² <https://www.change.org/p/ucl-management-university-college-london-i-support-the-rent-strike-ucl-pay-compensation-to-the-students-at-campbell-house-who-have-suffered-and-had-their-revision-ruined-because-of-ucl-s-demolition-work/>

December 2014 to May 2015

Despite the dual focus on improving standards and winning a rent cut, organising during the winter of 2014/15 largely focused reducing halls fees. After delivering a petition to the head of student accommodation calling for compensation for poor conditions in the Camden Halls,¹³ the actions undertaken in January to April focused on rent costs at UCL. This is perhaps unsurprising given that a status update in April outlined that links were so close between UCL, CTR and Defend Education that they were holding joint meetings.¹⁴

Certainly the mass petition¹⁵ made no mention of accommodation standards, only rising fees; accommodation costs and attacks on UCL dominated the placards and signs of the rent hike camp on 19th March¹⁶ and the provost balcony occupation on 27th March.¹⁷ Despite this, the statement accompanying the camp made clear the poor state of UCL accommodation and the need to invest in their upkeep¹⁸ whilst Angus O'Brien can be heard chanting in support of a rent strike during the occupation.¹⁹

The focus on standards became more acute in April, with UCL, CTR and UCLU targeting conditions at Hawkridge. Early advice to withhold rent²⁰ turned into a rent strike by an 8th April Evening Standard article.²¹ On 5th May, around 100 residents of Campbell House followed suit.²²

Rent strikers at Campbell outlined two key demands, most concretely in their e-petition – the end of demolition work until the end of the third term, and “Compensation... paid for each resident, in the monetary value of the whole of the rent for third term (as this is the time period the demolition work began, and will continue until)”.²³ In his UCL Union Halls Representative role, David Dahlborn had already reported that UCL were not willing to offer compensation,

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/338955342955457>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/389714697879521>

¹⁵ <http://uclu.org/articles/ucl-cut-rent-how-you-can-get-involved>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/380380442146280>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/383393015178356>

¹⁸ <https://uclfreededucation.wordpress.com/2015/03/19/statement-students-stage-mass-camp-out-in-the-ucl-quad-to-protest-the-rent-hike/>

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/videos/383403885177269/>

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/ucluhallsrep/photos/pcb.433346973506238/433346903506245/?type=3&theater>

²¹ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/students-demand-compensation-from-ucl-over-building-works-wrecking-exam-revision-10247510.html>

²² <http://uclu.org/articles/students-step-up-rent-action-across-ucl>

²³ <https://www.change.org/p/ucl-management-university-college-london-i-support-the-rent-strike-ucl-pay-compensation-to-the-students-at-campbell-house-who-have-suffered-and-had-their-revision-ruined-because-of-ucl-s-demolition-work/>

instead offering limited alternative accommodation, and did not believe themselves to be in the wrong over building work²⁴ despite it taking place during exams.

Indeed, UCL's response to strikers was to impose financial sanctions for late payment of rent.²⁵ This was met with a Crowdfunder entitled *Buy a UCL striker a pint! Solidarity support!* With UCL levying £25 fines, 14 backers pledged £129,²⁶ a figure that reached over £250 with face-to-face collections.²⁷

June and July 2015

Two key events took place in June and July that escalated the rent strike. UCL threatened academic sanctions against rent strikers.²⁸ This led to protests at the open days in early July, supported by the Radical Housing Network (RHN).²⁹

UCLU reported on 5th June that in addition to £25 late payment fines, UCL had threatened that if rent strikers did not pay by 12th June, they would be barred from reenrolment and would be unable to attend their graduation ceremony. This was despite academic sanctions being ruled illegal by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in 2014.³⁰ PI Media reprinted an email sent to a Campbell House striker, outlining that summer accommodation would also be withdrawn should a balance be outstanding.³¹ In typically forthright terms, Dahlburn described these threats as "...a cowardly, vile, aggressive and illegal action by UCL", whilst NUS Vice President Welfare Colum McGuire wrote to the UCL Provost Michael Arthur in protest.³²

By 11th June, UCL were claiming that the letters were sent in error;³³ this did little to placate things, since rather than drop sanctions completely, they were put on hold until compensation claims were resolved, with summer

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/396820620502262>

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/400771466773844>

²⁶ <http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/buytherentstrikeapint/>

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/402730126577978>

²⁸ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/dissent-is-not-tolerated-here-no-graduation-for-rent-strikers/>

²⁹ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/rent-strike-ben-beach-839

³⁰ <http://uclu.org/articles/ucl-makes-vile-threats-to-striking-students>

³¹ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/dissent-is-not-tolerated-here-no-graduation-for-rent-strikers/>.

³² <http://uclu.org/articles/ucl-makes-vile-threats-to-striking-students>

³³ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jun/11/university-college-london-students-withhold-rent-over-building-works?CMP=share_btn_fb

accommodation still being withdrawn.³⁴ Given that sanctions remained in breach of the OFT ruling and that the university were likely also in breach of the Student Accommodation Code (SAC) calling for maintenance to be undertaken outside of exam periods, this did little to placate strikers. Moreover, non-strikers in arrears were also threatened with illegal academic sanctions³⁵ that presumably were *not* on hold.

The support of RHN was announced in a Vice article published on 16th June,³⁶ linking housing struggles across the capital and calling for mass rent strikes. RHN's involvement may have stemmed from connections made with UCL,CTR at a demonstration in March in support of the PAH Movement in Spain.³⁷ Regardless, the sudden involvement of RHN saw an immediate call for demonstrations in "full solidarity" with rent strikers on 3rd July – the day of the UCL Open Day.³⁸

This was coupled with an open letter to the Provost linking the student strikes to wider housing struggles in London and expressly referencing the "implicitly violent" threats made by UCL. With graphics reading "Support the UCL rent strike. No Justice. No Peace" and the event suggesting attendees should "BRING NOISE - BRING FRIENDS - BRING SMOKE," the demonstration was a clear escalation of the dispute.

The demonstrations that disrupted the open days on 3rd and 4th July 2015 were in fact organised by a collation of 12 groups organising around issues of equalities, tuition fees, housing, austerity and the environment.³⁹ UCL,CTR debuted "shields" in the shape of tower blocks,⁴⁰ that - coupled with smoke from orange flares - resulted in iconic imagery that would be referenced throughout the campaign.⁴¹

³⁴ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jun/11/university-college-london-students-withhold-rent-over-building-works?CMP=share_btn_fb; <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/dissent-is-not-tolerated-here-no-graduation-for-rent-strikers/>

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/411309175720073>

³⁶ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/rent-strike-ben-beach-839

³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/events/1632699003609551/>

³⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/events/877892685619234/>

³⁹ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/ucl-left-plans-day-of-action-to-disrupt-open-days/>; <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/416845561833101>

⁴⁰ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/uk-universities-marketing-radicalism-webb-bethell-732?utm_source=vicefbuk

⁴¹ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/chaos-caused-on-ucls-open-days/>; <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.327689464082045.1073741828.325834490934209/417691398415184/?type=3&theater>

Reports focused on 3rd July, when 300 protesters gathered on Mallet Street before marching to cloisters, where each group took the opportunity to talk about their concerns.⁴² Vice memorably described the event:

On the open day, this allied anti-bastard squad marched around the campus, letting off smoke flares and handing out leaflets to crowds of wide-eyed, post-A Level 17-year-olds. People sitting on the different stalls looked awkwardly on.⁴³

Webb somewhat ironically went on to outline that the protests were more interesting to future students than the official Open Day, might benefit the university's radical reputation and suggested this was why UCL took a hands-off approach to policing the protest.

August to October 2015

Dahlborn might have been writing about rent strikes in July as if the Hawkridge and Campbell House disputes had already been successful⁴⁴ but it took until 15th October to win the Campbell House strike, when UCL,CTR posted a teaser status declaring victory,⁴⁵ with details made available the day after.⁴⁶

August saw Shelley Asquith - former president of University of Arts, London (UAL) – elected to NUS Welfare officer. UAL students had occupied the reception area of Central St Martins College of Art and Design following proposals to cut foundation courses,⁴⁷ an action supported by UCL,CTR.⁴⁸ Asquith raised the visibility of student housing issues in the Guardian in August,⁴⁹ and was forthright in her condemnation of UCL's treatment of

⁴² <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/chaos-caused-on-ucls-open-days/>

⁴³ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/uk-universities-marketing-radicalism-webb-bethell-732?utm_source=vicefbuk

⁴⁴ <http://www.thestudentassembly.org.uk/news/-the-rent-strike-at-ucl-soas-was-successful-well-do-it-again-with-better-planning-and-greater-numbers>

⁴⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.327689464082045.1073741828.325834490934209/447606792090311/?type=3&theater>

⁴⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.327689464082045.1073741828.325834490934209/447647735419550/?type=3>

⁴⁷ http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/24/students-occupy-central-st-martins-in-protest-against-cuts?CMP=share_btn_fb

⁴⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/382380965279561>.

⁴⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/aug/04/student-lives-put-at-risk-by-negligent-landlords>; <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/aug/15/soaring-student-rents-college-accommodation-crisis>

Campbell and Hawkrigde rent strikers⁵⁰ and in support of rent strikes as a tactic.⁵¹

For UCL,CTR , September and October saw an attempt to bridge the gap between the 2014-15 generation of activists and the 2015-16 via a number of blog posts that outlined what had been won in the previous year,⁵² how to organise in halls⁵³ and the levels of profit made by UCL via its halls of residence.⁵⁴ O'Brien took on the role of UCL Union Halls Representative and a series of open meetings were organised⁵⁵ to ensure the campaign moved forward in to the new academic year.

In September, through "admin error or arbitrary punishment", a Campbell House rent striker was prevented from reenrolment. UCL,CTR responded by vowing to "...never tolerate UCL's illegal and immoral sanctions against rent strikers at Campbell House!"⁵⁶ Although UCL's Director of Student Support and Well-being, Denise Long, confirmed that this was due to changes needing to be made to registry systems, this and other reenrolment issues were inflammatory given the threats made to rent strikers.⁵⁷

In this atmosphere of organising and escalation, UCL agreed to a hearing on the Campbell House dispute in early October. The hearing took place on 12th October, with PI Media outlining the panel, with representatives from the higher university echelons and UCLU present including, as chair, Professor Anthony Smith, Vice Provost of Education and Student Affairs. Dahlborn, acting on behalf of Campbell House rent strikers, was pessimistic that the hearing would resolve the issues without recourse to a review or an appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.⁵⁸ Two days later, UCL,CTR reposted a

⁵⁰ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/dear-ucl-own-up-pay-up>

⁵¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/aug/15/universities-students-rent-controls-strikes>

⁵² <https://uclfreeeducation.wordpress.com/2015/09/28/5-things-the-cut-the-rent-campaign-won-in-2014-15/>

⁵³ <https://uclfreeeducation.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/6-ways-you-can-fight-for-lower-rent-and-better-halls-at-ucl/>

⁵⁴ <https://uclfreeeducation.wordpress.com/2015/10/11/ucl-rent-myth-number-1/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/events/1371382112991350/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/events/964826676907267/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/events/859177480869532/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/439776126206711>

⁵⁷ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/ucl-student-participating-in-rent-strike-is-unable-to-re-enroll/>

⁵⁸ <http://pimediaonline.co.uk/news-investigations/complaints-panel-hearing-to-take-place-for-former-ucl-campbell-house-residents/>

somewhat atypically neutral 12th October status from the UCL Union Halls Representative account outlining that an outcome could take up to ten days.⁵⁹

As it happened, the Campbell House strikers didn't have to wait that long. The day after the repost, the hearing ruled that 87 former residents of Campbell House West⁶⁰ were due compensation equal to a terms rent – worth £1,368 per student and almost £100,000 overall.⁶¹ UCL management's response to students' issues was found to have “not only demonstrated a lack of empathy towards student's circumstances and an understanding or appreciation of what would be an acceptable student experience, but was disingenuous to the student's concerned.”⁶²

The Campbell House rent strike was over.

Methodology

Having presented a narrative of the strike at Campbell House Halls, this section examines the methodology used to construct this history.

“Focus” briefly outlines the parameters of using the UCL, CTR Facebook page to write a history of the strikes and details the deliberately restrictive filter imposed upon the literature available.

“Theory” begins with addressing the epistemological position of the researcher and the positionality inherent in the narrative presented. Likening the researcher to Steven J. Jackson's Repairer, repurposing the debris left behind by Benjamin's conception of progress, the researcher's role in creating an interpretivist version of history is highlighted. This theoretical exploration concludes with looking at historiography.

Zinn and Hobsbawm provide a foundation for understanding politically relevant research. A position of sympathy with housing activists is acknowledged - and again referencing Benjamin, celebrated. The section concludes by using Hobsbawm's text *The Present as History* as a tool to explore issues directly related to writing a history of the near-present.

⁵⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/447274645456859>

⁶⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/16/ucl-students-100000-compensation-strike-demolition-rat-accomodation>

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/pcb.447649945419329/447649872086003/?type=3&theater>

⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/pcb.447649945419329/447649888752668/?type=3&theater>

Focus

This study began with a single question: *what would a history of UCL,CTR look like only written using the UCL,CTR Facebook page?*

This intellectual experiment was inductive (Bryman, 2008, p.26) in that there was no pre-existing theory – the purpose was to see what this narrative would look like using a limited range of sources and analyse this further. This question narrowed from UCL,CTR as a whole to the strike at Campbell House Halls due to more information being available than initially anticipated.

The criteria for inclusion as a source was kept focused due to a concern that the amount of material uncovered would become unmanageable, and that the ability to examine information principally provided by Facebook would be diluted. An attempt to filter content in-line with viewing the Page as a Follower was abandoned for epistemological reasons outlined below.

The material included in constructing the narrative was limited to:

- Posts on the UCL,CTR Page between the first Post on the Page, 5th November 2014, and the day after the Campbell Halls dispute was resolved on 16th October 2015.
- External links Posted on the UCL,CTR Page between the first Post on the Page, 5th November 2014, and the day after the Campbell Halls dispute was resolved on 16th October 2015 - but only the *exact* webpage linked.
- Embedded PDF's in these external links.
- Events Posted on the UCL,CTR Page between the first Post on the Page, 5th November 2014, and the day after the Campbell Halls dispute was resolved on 16th October 2015. This was regardless of who Hosted the Event.

The examination of a particular time period and a single Page immediately limited the topics that could be addressed in the narrative. The “pre-history” of UCL,CTR – the formation of an awareness and culture that would enable an activist grouping – is difficult to construct, given that the Facebook Page presented a group part formed. What happened before this falls by definition outside of the scope of the narrative presented. Just as E.P. Thompson’s working class “...did not rise like the sun at an appointed time [but] was present at it’s own making.... (1963, p.8), the makings of a student activist culture oppositional to the university predated November 2014 (Cant, 2016). Likewise, discussion with participant’s revealed useful retrospective material about Campbell House was published after the somewhat arbitrary 16th October 2016 cut off.

Theory

Epistemology

Referencing thesis IX of Benjamin's *Theses On the Philosophy of History*, Jackson's image of the Repairer picking through the debris in the wake of the Angel of History (Jackson, 2014, pp.237-238) offers a starting point for understanding the process of writing a history based on Facebook. The Repairer is akin to Benjamin's rag picker in his *Arcades Project*, repurposing the waste of 19th century Paris and building something useful from the ruins as progress blows the helpless angel further into the future. This mirrors what the researcher is attempting to do with fragments of information gleaned from the Page, with content as electronic 'debris', forgotten as history moves on, being repurposed by the researcher into a coherent narrative.

This can be understood as an interpretivist epistemology (Bryman, 2008, p.30). The narrative constructed is not a reconstruction of an original form, but a repurposing; the researcher is not putting back together a narrative that existed as a coherent whole. In this way, it is a reading of information that runs counter to the original purpose of the material.

For Facebook users, information nearly always appears as a decontextualised fragment on the News Feed, juxtaposed in-between unrelated content and spread out temporally. Rather than a coherent narrative, fragmented content is presented in a format where Posts are isolated, divorced from other Page content through the sheer volume of information, meant to be read and discarded - and may not be available to be read by a Follower at all. Facebook, in the period studied, prioritised around 300 Posts on users News Feeds from an average of 1500 per day (Blackstrom, 2013). News Feed content is filtered for user preference as indicated through interaction with other Posts. In short, information has to compete for visibility.

This realisation led to the early abandonment of attempts to filter the content in-line with what a Follower would see. The researcher, scouring Benjamin's wreckage, collates content that was arguably never meant to be a coherent whole. From this debris, a narrative is constructed that is grounded in evidence and reflective of events - but a narrative that is likely incomplete and one of many. It is important to underline it is the researcher who decides which fragment fits with another in what order, how contradictions are resolved and to what end. In this way, the researcher writing history from Facebook has a distinct epistemological position outside of the Page Owner/Follower duality, just as the Repairer is outside of the Producer/Consumer duality (Jackson, 2014, p.234). This removed position renders the objective understanding of events impossible.

The quality of the content accessed is equally problematic. Over-simplifying for clarity, using a Facebook Page to write history can be compared to sorting through collections of correspondence where every letter is an open letter (Post) and the content written accordingly. In this hyperthetical archive, responses to open letters are present (Comments), but not the replies (Comments) of the

author to other open letters (Posts). Important discussions take place elsewhere in private correspondence (Messages) and the researcher is unsure who exactly the letters (Posts) address and if this audience witnessed the material. It can be understood as incomplete, self censored or biased and part of a larger dialogue. The desire to politically influence the actions of others is a clear consideration when examining content of campaigning groups such as UCL,CTR.

Fig. 3.1 partly presents this dynamic, focusing on status updates that report on off-line events:

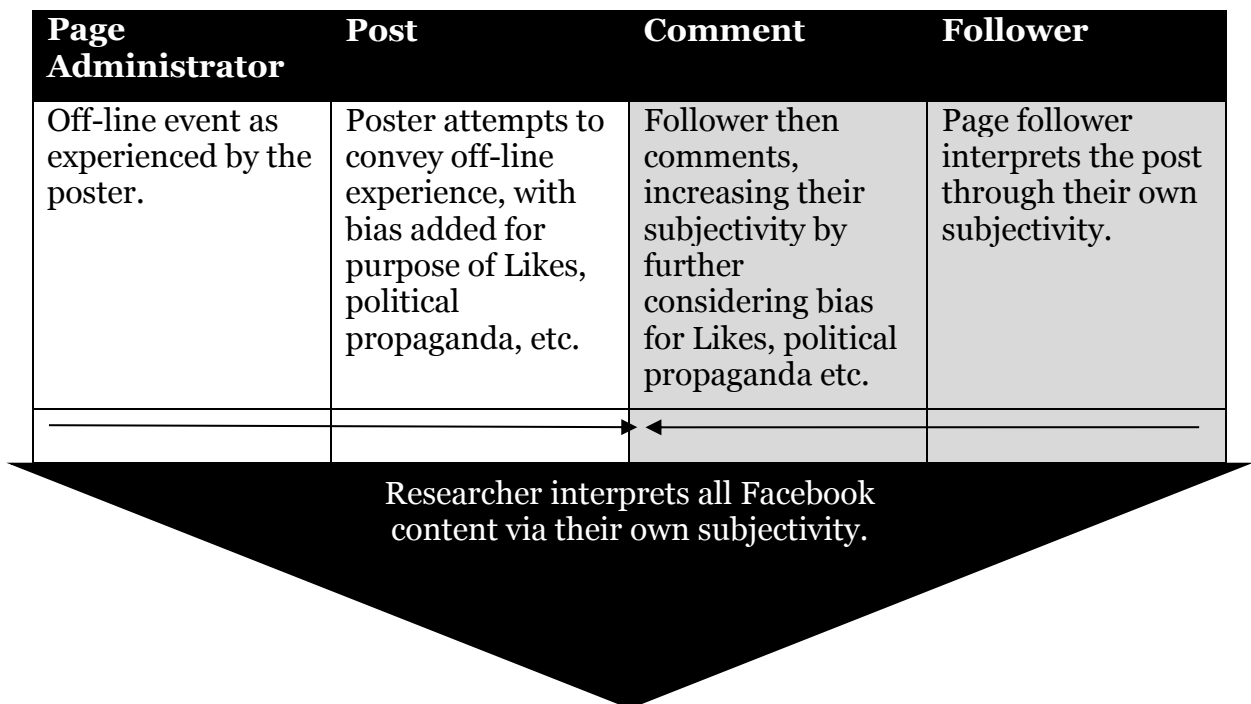


Fig 3.1: Interpretive epistemology

Historiography – Questions and values

The American historian Howard Zinn argued that “...too many scholars abjure a starting set of values, because they fail to make the proper distinction between an ultimate set of values and the instruments needed to obtain them (Zinn, 1997, p504).” Zinn’s point is echoed by Eric Hobsbawm, for whom “...historians must tell the truth about history...,” for whom the crucial distinction is remaining bound by “...historical statements based on evidence and subject to evidence...” (1999a, pviii). The point here is that the means by which radical histories are constructed must be evidence based and that their authors must “...subject their assumptions to critical scrutiny”, not that historians “...must stand outside their subject matter as objective observers” (Hughes-Warrington,

2000, p.168). The researcher's "...values should determine the questions we ask..." (Zinn, 1997, p504) and how evidence is combined and interpreted; in the terms outlined above, how the "debris" is put together.

The initial question asked in this paper is more nuanced than it appears and it is important to ask exactly what narrative has been written. Nominally a history of the rent strike in Campbell House Halls, the limit on available sources means that this is a more complex history - not of the strikes "as they happened" but how they were presented by UCL,CTR and assembled by the researcher. The narrative written from the perspective of UCL management, evidenced with posts from an official university blog, would look very different. Again, this is an interpretivist position, and one that reflects the oppositional set of values held by UCL,CTR by the nature of their activism and the researcher in his positionality. These have shaped both the evidence collated and the how these have been assembled.

The researcher's background as a victim of negative rental experiences and one of the few in the UK to benefit from co-operative housing (Walker and Jeraj, 2016, p.149) underpins a positionality that is antagonistic towards a landlord's perspective. Momentarily remaining theoretically grounded in Benjamin, this sympathy towards housing struggles can be read in the context of Thesis VII of *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, as "brushing history against the grain" (Lowry, 2005, p.46) – against history's winners, whose achievements were built on "barbarism." This means going against a history that can be "...seen as an enormous, single triumphal procession occasionally interrupted by uprisings on the part of the subordinate class (ibid, p.49)." Embracing a pessimistic view of progress, Benjamin advocates writing history in solidarity with the oppressed rather than the oppressors.

In a larger context, the struggle for affordable housing is arguably one that working people are losing. Whilst the wider context of housing in the UK is beyond the scope of this paper, the rent strike took place amongst a backdrop of general crisis. Walker and Jeraji (2016) collate bleak and familiar narratives from the rental sector; as one columnist disingenuously wondered – as if the rent strikers were ignorant of wider conditions –

"..what happens when [strikers] enter second year of university and leave the (dubious) comfort of halls, or graduate and leave university. How can they hold the corrupt and fundamentally unfair property market to account then, when everything becomes more complicated? (Baxter, 2016)

Meanwhile, at the time of writing, an apartment reached a record price tag of £150million in London (Tobin, 2016), an extreme example of a general trend of soaring property prices. This history is not invalidated by the view point it is written by; rather, echoing Benjamin, this particular history is written in solidarity with those struggling for decent, affordable housing, with the tenant

sick from mould, with the key worker unable to buy a home. Someone else can write the history of landlords and property speculators.

Historiography – writing the history of now

Hobsbawm's lecture *The Present as History* provided an overview of his concerns surrounding writing a history of recent events. He highlighted three main problems, which will be addressed in turn here to frame a general discussion of radical historiography. A probable 4th concern for Hobsbawm, the difficulties of writing a history critical of the researcher's own political affiliations (Kaye, 1995, pp.134-135), was presumably mentally resolved by this stage.

I shall consider mainly three of these problems: the problem of the historians own date of birth... [1].; the problems of how one's own perspective on the past can change as history proceeds [2]; and the problem of how to escape the assumptions of the time which most of us share [3] (1997b, p302).

(1) Hobsbawm referred to the work of John Charmley on Churchill, noting that it was easier for him to write a revisionist account of appeasement and Britain's resistance to Nazi Germany in 1940 given that he had no experience of living through the events (ibid, p305) – "...our generation knows without having to go to the archives, our appeasers were wrong and Churchill for once was right" (ibid, p306). Having direct experience, it was easier to understand the spirit of the age, given the dramatic changes that have taken place since (ibid, p308).

It seems possible to turn this argument on its head. Whilst the aging historian might be able to *read* of the crisis in higher education, the generational experience of a university education may make it harder to understand the precarious situation faced by students and graduates. It is one thing to know that almost 1 in 3 employed young graduates are unable to secure highly skilled work, and another to wonder if you will be one of the 30.8% who fail to do so (BIS, 2016, p.10). It is a reminder that the explicit positionality outlined above underpins the interpretation of the sources just as Hobsbawm's war experience influenced his reaction to Charmley.

(2) Hobsbawm's next argument was that "...even the recorded past changes in the light of subsequent history," as illustrated by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The events of 1989-91 put the history of the previous decades immediately into a different context – it "...inserted a punctuation mark into its flow (1997b, p311)", quickly turning the Twentieth Century into a "trptych", two periods of major crisis split by a period of stability (ibid, p313).

In terms of the narrative presented in this paper, the events described have immediate political relevance and resonance. The successful wave of rent strikes at UCL in 2015 led to further strikes in 2016 (Ali, 2016) and a national network of groups attempting a wave of strikes across the UK (Cant, 2016) - and the paper is written in this context. Would the narrative have looked different if the strikes in 2016 had been unsuccessful – would there be an implicit or explicit attempt to understand why Campbell House had been successful where other strikes had failed? Less counter-factually, what effect will the success or failure of the new campaign have upon future interpretations of the Campbell House dispute?

The researcher has argued that the Campbell Strike went “against the grain” of progress; however, this could also be argued as premature and disempowering because it is not yet clear how successful the current wave of strikes will be in reforming housing. E.P. Thompson’s famous declaration that he is “...seeking to rescue...” his subjects from “...the enormous condescension of posterity (1963, p12)” is one example of Benjamin’s influence on historiography (Lowy, 2005, pp115-16). But the strikes are not yet forgotten, they are not yet “casualties of history”... “condemned in their own lives, as casualties (Thompson, 1963, p12)”, and in need of redemption. To suggest that they are may be demobilising for current activism – as if rent strikers are as against the direction of history as Thompson’s Luddites – and is incompatible with Thompson’s own commitment to celebrating human agency (Hughes-Warrington, 2000, p314).

Benjamin’s friend Bertolt Brecht provides a more appropriate conceptual foundation in his poem *A Worker Reads History*. A likely influence on Thesis VII (Lowy, 2005, p.54), for Raphael Samuel, Brecht’s poem also brings together the disparate political stands of People’s History (1981, p.xxxiii), of which the Marxist “history from below” is one (1981, p.xv). Brecht essentially asked how historical events could have been delivered by great individuals without the nameless, forgotten people who actually made them happen. In his speech *Swan Honk May Day*, Peter Linebaugh used the final couplet as a tool to frame his observations. Here “...our ‘particular’ is University Hall and our ‘question’ is who hauled it’s craggy blocks of stone?”

For this paper, a more appropriate stanza might be “Each page a victory / At whose expense the victory ball? / Every ten years a great man / Who paid the piper? (2016, p.163)” Students living in the conditions described paid for the victory ball, whilst “great man” Provost Michael Arthur took home a package worth £359,195 (Grove, 2016) – and this paper is an examination of their resistance to exploitation.

(3) Hobsbawm concluded by examining the Cold War from the perspective of “...the famous imaginary Martian observer...,” (1993, p.315) asking if, with the benefit of distance, the binary assumptions (such as the division between capitalist and communist countries) made *within* a historical period about how the world is structured will endure, or if viewed from the future, other patterns

of understanding will be more relevant. As Hobsbawm noted regarding his work on the short Twentieth Century, “we shall have to leave it to the twenty-first century...” – or at least, what is left of it – “...to make its own decisions” (ibid, p.316).

It is equally impossible to predict how future historians may view the Campbell House strike. For example, students are not the only exploited actors within the university. With on-going pay disputes for academics at the time of writing - following a real terms pay cut of 14.5% since 2009 (UCU, 2016) – it may be that from a distance the binary distinction between student and academic exploitation becomes less distinct. But it is for our descendents to make these observations.

Opinion

This section seeks to uncover the views held by activists from UCL,CTR concerning the narrative presented. It begins by outlining the methodology employed in answering question 2, before presenting and analysing findings. In doing so, it is clear that minority of participants who engaged with the research process were concerned with providing information identified as missing to present a fuller narrative. The section concludes with a typology outlining the various reactions to the study.

Methodology

A draft of the account presented in section 2 was circulated to participants who were identified via Facebook as having a sustained involvement in the rent strike. As Tagging of individuals on the Page was haphazard, involvement was determined by a Tag reoccurring across a spread of months rather than examining the total number of Tags for each individual. These participants were contacted using Facebook.

Of the ten, one no longer had an active Profile, and only a single reply was received from the other nine. Two participants had published email addresses during the period studied, but neither replied to email. One was approached in person, but ignored follow up contact. The participant (PART1) who made contact agreed to a semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2012, p.471) via Skype.

Because of the methodological focus on employing Facebook as a filter, a snow-ball technique (ibid, p.424) was not employed pro-actively in order to secure contacts and only utilised when offered. Despite prompting from the PART1, no reply was received from the other eight participants. However, two further participants were identified, one of whom agreed to a semi-structured interview via Skype (PART2) and another (PART3) signposted material published after the period examined. These contacts were strikers based in Hawkridge and Campbell House Halls respectively. These sources attempted to address an issue that PART1 had identified - “...what became sort of invisible are the people who were on rent strike themselves.”

Facebook allows accounts to send Messages directly to Profiles that are not linked as Friends. This Message however goes into the Message Request folder – a “spam inbox” that is separate from the main message inbox and often goes unnoticed. This may help explain the low response rate. The session on dealing with the media (Elle & Anabel, 2016) at the Rent Strike Weekender highlighted an awareness amongst activists of the need to be wary of providing information that may later harm their careers. This wariness may extend to academics, and highlights the difficulties for outsiders in gaining access to participants. Without feedback from these activists, it is conjecture why they declined to respond to requests for involvement.

Reflecting on the account of the strike

All participants were keen to help complete the narrative presented in the literature review. For PART2, this meant “...I can just give you a story, like... description of what happened...” whilst PART1 outlined that “...I know which bits, where to fill in basically...” PART1 also outlined that the account served as a reminder both in terms of the events covered that had been forgotten and as a prompt to revisit parallel organising activity missing from the narrative. PART3 declined an interview due to time commitments but signposted published material that provided information missing from the account (Rizvi, 2015).

PART2, perhaps reflecting pragmatic reasons for engaging in the rent strike, expressed less complex feelings about the account. It was “...very surprising...” that the researcher had chosen the strike as a topic to study. Approaching the paper from an unrelated discipline, it was “...very different from whatever I had read before...” The thought that someone might study the strikes was inconceivable, having adopted an approach in 2015 that “...your facing a problem, you’re just going to solve it...” Having done so, PART2 spoke positively of Hawkrigde - and although surprised to be approached by a stranger who had contacted her because of her activism, was happy to recommend residency in 2015/16. This was in contrast to PART1, who had contributed content to the Page with an awareness of how the messaging might be interpreted and for whom “... it was kind of exciting to see that... published message that I was expecting it to convey.”

PART1’s continuing involvement in housing activism coupled with an overtly political stance also meant that the account dovetailed with a personal desire to re-examine the strikes, going as far as to note that “...I wanted to write something about it looking back...” The purpose for doing so, beyond an interest in history, was that “....next time people do a rent strike they won’t have to invent the where, how, whys themselves again...” – the recording of events was closely tied to the development of a praxis, and it was clear that many topics discussed were “...something I’ve put quite a lot of thought into myself...” Related to this was an awareness that the strikes at SOAS and UCL revived a tactic forgotten on the British left; PART1 outlined an event where the theory of rent strikes are discussed, to which his reply was “There’s one going on literally

right now! Look at it...” That Glasgow 1915 remained the model for rent strikes remained a subject of concern.

PART1 engaged in direct reflection on the narrative, feeding back that “...as an account of events... I think its towards the right... it’s accurate... in terms of like, historic business.” Conversely, PART2 showed less commitment to engaging with the narrative directly, being keen to tell her story whilst admitting “...I have to be honest, I did read it, but I have kind of forgotten [it]”.

Typology

The UCL,CTR activists can therefore be split into two broad categories. Of the 10 activists identified via Facebook as being key, plus two participants suggested by PART1, a maximum of 11 could have contributed to this study (with one striker no longer contactable via Facebook). Of these, 3 in some way were keen to **Complete** the narrative whilst 8 (PART4 - PART11) for whatever reason **Declined** to reply to requests for feedback. Of the 3, they can be loosely split into the categories of the **Politically Motivated**, expressly looking to appraise the strike in order to develop praxis to help with rent activism going forward, and the larger category of the **Apolitically motivated**, sign-posting corrections to the narrative with varying degrees of engagement but no overt commitment to developing praxis.

This sample is too small to be conclusive but it does highlight the different relationships that activists had to the writing of history. Mirroring to Greene’s experience at the Radical Histories/Histories of Radicalism conference, it does reinforce the idea that participants in historical research, when engaged, are keen to ensure an accurate account is presented and suggests that there may be multiple motives for this.

PART1	PART2	PART3	PART4 - PART11
Complete – 27.2%			Declined – 72.8%
Politically Motivated	Apolitically Motivated		Unknown

Fig. 4.1: Typology of motivation for participation

Analysis

Whether for brevity, positionality or lack of evidence, any study of historical events will be incomplete. The researcher can-not know or evidence everything about a subject. Whilst some details are lost to history, others sign post areas for future research. This section raises several questions highlighted by the researcher as areas missing from the presented account.

These are chosen subjectively and do not represent an exhaustive list. Questions were developed inductively, and drafted as part of the writing of the narrative rather than pre-existing concerns at the point the project commenced. Care has been taken to select a mix of issues that are both methodological - in that they result directly from the strict filter imposed on sources - and those likely to be difficult to answer conclusively with further field research. Although assembled from publically available material, care has also been taken not to present theories that are harmful to participants in UCL,CTR or the rent strikers.

Finally, in order to demonstrate that another mythology may offer more useful insight, interview transcripts have been used (somewhat uncritically given the small sample size) to begin to answer the questions posed. It is worth noting that these answers were received after the questions were originally conceived and examined, meaning at that stage, the researcher genuinely did not know the answers.

Question: What is the difference between Campbell House and Campbell House West?

One of the initial problems identified was confusion about the nature of the Campbell House site - and which residents had won the rent strike. Early in the dispute, the site is referred to as Campbell House.⁶³ By the end of the dispute, victory is announced for Campbell House West – although UCL,CTR sometimes use both terms simultaneously, as in the status update on 16th October 2015⁶⁴ and the press release.⁶⁵

A closer examination of the sources identified that 200 students lived at Campbell House,⁶⁶ with over 100 taking strike action⁶⁷ in May 2015. But the

⁶³ <http://uclu.org/articles/students-step-up-rent-action-across-ucl>

⁶⁴

<https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.327689464082045.1073741828.325834490934209/447647735419550/?type=3>

⁶⁵

<https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/pcb.447649945419329/447649872086003/?type=3&theater>

⁶⁶ <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/students-demand-compensation-from-ucl-over-building-works-wrecking-exam-revision-10247510.html>

⁶⁷ <http://uclu.org/articles/students-step-up-rent-action-across-ucl>

dispute was *won* for 87 residents, around 60 of whom were on strike⁶⁸ in Campbell House West. This suggested that there was more than one site or that Campbell House was multiple buildings.

One reading of this could be that the narrative presented on the Page is incomplete, and the remaining 113 students had had their dispute collapse over the summer. Although not Posted on the Page, this information could be common knowledge for participants, who would read the press release and news updates in this context. Another reading, equally likely, could be that the narrative of the dispute constructed by the researcher finishes early, and that compensation was awarded to these strikers later than their counterparts in Campbell House West.

In any case, this issue demonstrates the difficulties of assembling a narrative from the 'debris'. Temporally disjointed and posted as fragments, arguably no one reading the Page in the intended manner would have seen material from October 2015 and noticed the shift from one term to another - particularly when used interchangeably to some degree. Decontextualised material could be understood at face value. This underlines the unique epistemological position of the researcher, distinct from the Follower of the Page.

Answer:

Campbell House was split into two blocks on opposing sides of the road. It was the west side that was adjacent to a demolition site and had the majority of the issues with noise. Whilst Campbell House and Campbell House West were used interchangeably by UCL,CTR, the strike only took place in the west section.

The discrepancy in the number of strikers can be explained by inaccurate statistics; organisers never knew how many residents of Campbell House withheld rent. In the interview, PART1 estimated that of around 70 residents, at least 30-40 took action, again, contradicting figures presented in written accounts.

Question: How did rent strikers organise themselves within Campbell House Halls?

The day to day strategy of organising and maintaining a rent strike within Campbell House Hall itself is largely missing from the narrative, although day-to-day activism is occasionally hinted at. The strike bulletin contained a photo of a petition pinned to a door, pledging that signatories would withhold rent,⁶⁹

⁶⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/16/ucl-students-100000-compensation-strike-demolition-rat-accomodation>

⁶⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/397400973777560>

whilst students recorded noise levels on their smart phones to present as evidence.⁷⁰

The UCL Free Education blog *6 Ways You Can Fight For Lower Rent and Better Halls at UCL* from early in 2015/16 academic year⁷¹ outlined a series of steps for organising in halls. These may have changed from the previous year, when the Campbell House strike began, but potentially still offer some insight into how halls were organised. Students were encouraged to take part in their local Halls Assembly, which were described as:

...Where residents get together to decide for themselves how they would like their halls to be run... This is real democracy in practice.... Many of the rules and conditions that UCL enforces are unfair – Halls Assemblies are where you and everybody else in your halls decide what to do about them.

The Post went on to outline that each hall should have a union rep and residents committee, where they are allocated a budget and meet with management to resolve resident's problems. It concluded with a call to get organised, make individual disputes collective and demand improvements from UCL.

Beyond this, there is little information. For example, how often were halls assemblies in Campbell House during the strike? How did strikers interact with university staff? How did they support each other practically? What was life like for those who refused to go on strike? Was there conflict between strikers and non-strikers? Did all the residents committee support the strike?

In their seminal paper on rent strikes, Moorhouse, Wilson and Chamberlain (1972) outlined the difficulties of obtaining evidence of rent strikes, partly because they are not considered news worthy, or covered in a way that key details are obscured. In terms of the day to day activities of rent strikers, the methodology employed in this paper appears to offer little improvement.

Answer:

Campbell House strike would not have taken place without the Hawkrigde strike, from which strikers drew inspiration; Hawkrigde "...really broke the ice on it... (PART1)". In this way, the two strikes are closely linked. The conditions of organising were different however; Hawkrigde required extended door step conversations (PART1), given the lack of close social ties between the international post-graduates without "...many... chances where we could

⁷⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/16/ucl-students-100000-compensation-strike-demolition-rat-accomodation>

⁷¹ <https://uclfreeeducation.wordpress.com/2015/10/01/6-ways-you-can-fight-for-lower-rent-and-better-halls-at-ucl/>

fraternise with each other (PART2)". This demographic proved to be vulnerable to threats from the university. When in June UCL threatened to prevent strikers graduating, the strike in Hawkridge collapsed (PART2). Conversely, for the UK undergraduates in Campbell, threatened with being prevented from reenrolment, this threat was "...comical due to its illegality" and resulted in a formal apology (Ravi, 2015).

At Campbell House, a petition with over 60 signatures, alongside decibel readings taken from the hall, was presented to the unsympathetic Head of Student Accommodation at UCL, William Wilson. Following this, there was a meeting close to deadline for withholding the final rent payment that fewer than a third of residents attended. However, information was passed on in conversations between residents who lived in "...flats, 5 rooms... with a shared kitchen..." either face-to-face or via private Whatsapp or Facebook groups. There was a close network already in place that was able to facilitate two way conversations during the strike between student union officers and a large number of residents within the hall (PART1), who were independently committed to taking action.

Question: What was the political ideology of UCL,CTR during this period?

The political ideology of UCL,CTR is not explicitly defined in the material shared on the Facebook Page during the period studied. This section outlines some of the evidence that demonstrates that solidarity was offered to and received from myriad radical struggles. It then compares the aims of the founding petition with some of the more radical calls made on behalf of the group and suggests that a mix of radical and pragmatic messaging may have meant that activists coalesced around mutual goals for diverse reasons.

Solidarity was offered to a variety of groups during the period studied. Support was demonstrated for wider housing struggles from an early stage, evidencing an understanding that housing issues were not limited just to students. Activists supported the March for Homes demonstration in January 2015, calling for an end to the broader housing crisis.⁷² Notably, a meme was posted to the Page shortly after, linking student rent exploitation with that of ordinary Londoners.⁷³ UCL,CTR were attending meetings connected to wider housing

⁷² <https://www.facebook.com/events/576375515827729/>

⁷³

<https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.327689464082045.1073741828.325834490934209/359898004194524/?type=3&permPage=1>

struggles⁷⁴ and information critical of the starter home housing policy was shared in October.⁷⁵

This solidarity extended to supporting eviction resistance in Barcelona⁷⁶ and closer to home, the Sweets Way estate.⁷⁷

Unsurprisingly UCL,CTR were also supportive of student struggles. In addition to attending the National Student Demo in November 2014,⁷⁸ the LSE occupation,⁷⁹ housing struggles in Durham⁸⁰ and Derby,⁸¹ and the rent strike at SOAS in late April were all supported.⁸² But it was the UAL dispute that led to the most teasing of photos - a meeting of activists from across London universities in the occupied university.⁸³ There are no details of what was discussed.

In terms of sharing platforms with other, broader, activist groups, in addition to those taking part in the Open Day demonstration, arguably most interesting was involvement in the Anti-Freshers Fair at the Free University of London⁸⁴ in October 2015 - at which Corporate Watch, Fuel Poverty Action, Reclaim the Power, English Collective of Prostitutes and the London Anarchist Federation also appeared. Many of the struggles identified had a common commitment to direct action tactics, which UCL,CTR were evidently happy to employ themselves.

A broad socialism was occasionally hinted at in other material on the Page. In the message of support to SOAS strikers, there is an early call to abolish landlords;⁸⁵ addressing the Brick Lane debates in June, Dalhborn labelled rent

⁷⁴ http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/pissed-off-london-renters-are-talking-about-having-a-rent-strike?utm_source=vicefbuk

⁷⁵ <http://indy100.independent.co.uk/article/if-youre-a-family-on-the-national-living-wage-heres-where-you-can-afford-david-camerons-new-starter-homes--b1VsYqUHDe>;
http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/10/07/david-cameron-starter-homes-policy-blasted_n_8255858.html

⁷⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/375342429316748>

⁷⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/428304170687240>

⁷⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/events/1438512509748733/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/379183358932655>

⁸⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/367188673465457>

⁸¹ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/434901000027557>

⁸² <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/393224910861833>

⁸³ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/photos/a.360387217478936.1073741829.325834490.934209/381575262026798/?type=3&theater>

⁸⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/445404662310524>

⁸⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/393224910861833>

theft,⁸⁶ whilst on 16th August a status update suggested that abolition of rent was preferable to rent control.⁸⁷

This is a long way from the petition demands laid down in November 2014 to “reverse the rent hike; equal standards across the site; accountability and direct student influence; transparency in spending; sustainable investment for students, not profit”, as well as the goals of the rent strike at Campbell House. In terms of concrete activism, this radical position on private property may have given way to a more pragmatic approach, with the UCL Free Education blog in October 2015 making a clear case for the university spending its finances differently in order to facilitate a rent cut (UCL Free Education, 2015d).⁸⁸

What is not clear is the political make up of UCL,CTR and the politics underpinning the rent strikers at Campbell House, given the lack of an explicit ideology and a messaging that combined radical and pragmatic elements around private property. It is worth underlining that UCL,CTR was a broader organisation than the two halls that undertook rent strikes; whilst it is unlikely that every rent striker was involved in UCL,CTR, it is clear that, with its roots in the Camden Halls, not every member of UCL,CTR was a rent striker. The two were not the same. How far did concern for housing issues extend for the average striker beyond conditions in UCL Halls? How many of the rent strikers were active in UCL,CTR? Were elements of one or both groups approaching the same issues from different positions? These questions begin to mirror the debate between Melling and Damer over the radicalism of the 1915 Glasgow rent strikes (Damer, 2000, pp.72-73).

Answer:

In PART1’s account, UCL,CTR grew out of Defend Education (DE), a group that had formed from connections made within the student movement in 2010 and was “...somewhere between... a student activist network... and like a faction within the student union.” DE had become “...inward... more interested in, like, theoretical debate than kind of organising,” with UCL,CTR a crossover group of activists keen to be more outward looking.

UCL,CTR drew on students who were not previously politicised; PART1 estimates that 95% of strikers and 70% of organisers were involved in activism for the first time. This coalition came together around the conditions and costs of UCL halls, adopting a grass roots community organising approach, with a conscious discussion to function as a network, an open group united around the issue rather than have a political line or membership.

⁸⁶ <http://www.citymetric.com/politics/britains-left-theres-growing-talk-national-rent-strike-1152>

⁸⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/uclcuttherent/posts/430609140456743>

⁸⁸ <https://uclfreededucation.wordpress.com/2015/10/11/ucl-rent-myth-number-1/>

PART1 highlighted that the issue of the rent was chosen strategically as well as pragmatically from a range of campaigns and that activist ideology can be expressed “...what they do [more] than what they say”. In targeting housing issues, there was theoretical awareness amongst organisers of where the issue fitted into larger problems within wider society and that these “deeper issues” were related to more profound “structural problems”.

This coalition therefore paired core organisers who in some cases had a strong leftist stance with strikers who in some cases were entirely pragmatic and would have not been involved in a more ideologically explicit campaign. PART2 articulates the later position, outlining “...I’m sure there were politics involved, there was... but I couldn’t bothered with it... I didn’t care”. This mix resulted in messaging that occasionally reflected both elements.

Conclusion

This paper has answered three interrelated questions. It has outlined a narrative of the strike developed from the UCL,CTR Facebook Page, alongside a detailed exploration of the methodology used to construct it; it has explored how UCL,CTR participants responded to the narrative; and it has concluded by addressing areas that are missing from the narrative in order to highlight the limitations of using a single resource to construct history. Paradoxically, in doing so, the study presents the beginnings of answers to other, perhaps more fundamental questions. This exploration concludes therefore with future beginnings, highlighting areas for further research.

The narrative presented in response to question 1 is partial and forms the foundation for further study; the areas highlighted as being missing in question 3 begin to sign post further study, but answering these robustly requires access to wider sources and remains beyond the scope of the paper.

Therefore the researcher has only begun to answer ‘*what is the narrative of Campbell House rent strike?*’ - a fuller answer lies teasingly on the horizon, alongside robust answers to both the questions presented *and* answers to questions that the researcher cannot conceive with the information available from the Facebook Page. It is probable that many of these questions may never be answered, but it is equally clear from interview transcripts that there is key information readily available that is missing from the account.

The methodology used to answer question 1 is likely transferable to other historical events; but attempting to do so is beyond the scope of this paper. And whilst Zinn is correct to highlighting that radical scholarship should transcend disciplinary boundaries (1997, p.504), the researcher’s academic limitations curtail this; it is only possible to stray so far from a discipline as a well intentioned amateur before one is out of one’s depth. So whilst the historiographical exploration is illuminating, what insight could be gained (for example) using an identical filter but grounded instead in discourse analysis? Closer to home, it seems likely that other theoretical frameworks may frame discussions in revealing ways - for example, what would it mean to conceive

social media as part of James C. Scott's Public Transcript (Scott, 1990, p.2)? It is for more qualified academics to answer this; the questions '*is the methodology presented transferable to X historical event?*' and '*what insights can be gained from X field of study?*' remain to be addressed.

What would it mean to apply a similar methodology to other forms of social media? What would it mean to apply the methodology across more than one account or Page or to use a hash tag (for example) as a filter to an historical event? In doing so, what would be revealed and what would be hidden?

Finally the typology presented in response to question 2 has begun to illustrate both the difficulties of obtaining oral history interviews and that those who do participate may do so from multiple motivations. The small sample size means that this requires further investigation. Are there other motivations than those presented and are these different depending on the subject being researched? One example might be the desire to "right a wrong", to "set the record straight" by highlighting how events were wrongly represented at the time. Is it possible to identify motivations – beyond the speculative – as to why interview subjects were reluctant to participate? Adapting question 2 – '*What opinion would participants from UCL,CTR have of this narrative?*'- for other histories, with other struggles, locations, demographics and periods, may prove illuminating.

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Implementing the principles of kotahitanga/unity and manaakitanga/hospitality in community peace activism: an experiment in peace building.

Janine M Joyce and Joseph Llewellyn

Abstract

The group 'Peacing Together' formed in 2015 to encourage and promote the values and actions of peaceful community, through a series of events culminating in a festival celebration, held on World Peace day, in Otepoti/Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand. 'Peacing Together' had a diverse conception of peace rooted in locally interpreted cultural concepts of kotahitanga/unity, manaakitanga/hospitality, alongside spiritual values (Buddhist, Yogic, Indigenous, Muslim) and a commitment to honouring the 'unity within our diversity'. This led us to use bicultural and anarchistic methods of organization to create the event called Kotahitanga Manaaki te kawa and in turn directed us to focus on community building as our key method of peace-building within this project. This paper is a case study of the event we created and facilitated.

First, we will explain the theoretical base for our activism based in the concepts of kotahitanga, manaakitanga and 'unity in diversity' and the kaupapa (agreed principles) we stood by in our organising to ensure that we stayed close to our theoretical and values base. Second, we discuss what was achieved in the actual event. Third, we discuss successes and failures of our organising process, which was based on an organically formed decision making process that honoured a peaceful kaupapa. Finally, we summarise our learning and discuss areas for continued reflection, as well as the future of 'Peacing Together'. This case study highlights the importance of agreeing core values as a practical base for peace activism through community building.

Keywords: kotahitanga, manaakitanga, peace, activism, self-reflection, community building, unity-diversity, Aotearoa New Zealand

Introduction

The group 'Peacing Together' came together to promote Peace in Otepoti / Dunedin, Aotearoa / New Zealand, through a series of events culminating in a multicultural festival, held expediently on the United Nations endorsed International Day of Peace 2015. The event was named Kotahitanga

Manaakitanga Te Kawa. This name described our peace kaupapa¹ as including an overriding hospitality towards our multiple identities and a shared commitment to unity. This event followed World Peace Day celebrations held in Dunedin and globally for many years, predating the 2001 United Nations endorsement. The day itself was very successful, with ninety cultures representing themselves through music, food and cultural sharing.

Activists engaged in several months of planning and organisation. This involved being hospitable to differences of vision and motivation that members represented. It involved human processes of socialising, laughter, respect, encouragement and visioning. We represented those interested in community wide peace-building processes, and those with with political and spiritual goals. We also represented those interested in creating an enjoyable, inclusive multicultural arts expression. Over time the group became more homogenous in its goals, which was aided by clear base principles that honoured our differences in identity, motivation and belief systems.

This paper as an opportunity for autobiographical self-reflection will share a critique of our own processes and feelings as peace-builders during one experiment in peace building, in particular the process of community building and partnership with local Māori tangata whenua,² using anarchistic principles. The organising group developed these principles organically, rather than borrowing them directly elsewhere.

We will critically examine this experiment in peace and its outcomes in four sections. First, we will provide some context for the event, elaborating on the concept of unity in diversity and kotahitanga. Second, we will describe what was achieved during the Kotahitanga Manaakitanga Te Kawa event and the experience for attendees. Third, we will provide an autobiographical critical self-reflection of our own peace community building-process and the issues that arose from this. Finally, we will conclude by summarising our own learning and discuss areas for continued reflection. In so doing we seek to balance our external action with careful awareness of our motivations, seeking new learning to carry forward. While the day certainly had many successes, no event is perfect. We hope that sharing our own reflections on successes and challenges of our experiment in peace may be helpful for others engaging in similar projects in the future.

¹ Kaupapa: 1. Level surface, floor, stage, platform, layer; 2. (noun) topic, policy, matter for discussion, plan, purpose, scheme, proposal, agenda, subject, programme, theme, issue, initiative; 3. (noun) raft.

² Tangata Whenua: Local people, hosts, indigenous people - people born of the whenua, i.e. of the placenta and of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried. Māori: Meaning ordinary or ordinary people. The term is used to represent the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand who are made up of a diverse set of nations and sub-nations.

Context

World Peace Day: A time to commemorate and vision towards a non-violent humanity? Perhaps, yet for many in our local city this seemed irrelevant and impractical. One of our challenges was to bring ideas of practical peace-building alongside the joy of a multicultural arts event. When we conceptualised a way of drawing together the diversity in our community, we utilised Māori cultural ideas of Kotahitanga and Manaakitanga. These formed the basis of our vision. Kotahitanga refers to an underlying spiritual unity between all beings but more often, it refers to Māori political and ideological unity. It is often simply translated as unity. Manaakitanga refers to human rights, hospitality and generosity, which are seen as very important values.

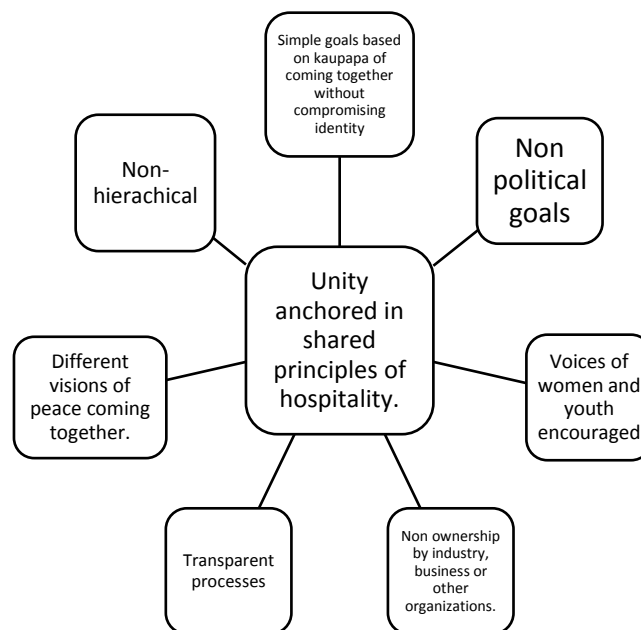
Historically the kotahitanga movement represented a Māori political movement focused upon unity of purpose regarding issues of justice around land, following Te Tiriti o Waitangi³ settlement with the British Crown in 1840. It was effective as Te Tiriti o Waitangi negotiation process has been, at 100 years, the longest legal case against the colonising British Crown. It has taken the energy and focus of Māori for generations. As the Treaty settlements legal process comes into its latter stages, we were aware that there remained much post-conflict tension, pain, bitterness, prejudice and inequality within our community. We recognised that we needed to show hospitality towards the idea of coming together as human beings, laying our political identities aside for one kind moment. This was a huge ask of all participants. We were curious about what kotahitanga might look like if it was expressed through the spiritual lens of unity within diversity. We wondered what would happen if we offered hospitality or manaakitanga to such a possibility. We explained our process simply as the counterintuitive ideal of celebrating the unity within our diversity. In so doing we were hoping to create a space of internal dissonance that might allow conflicting ideas and groups to be able to come together in a spirit of collaboration.

The phrase ‘unity in diversity’ may sound a little oxymoronic, however when viewed through the lens of kotahitanga (as we envisioned it), or from an anarchistic point of view, the opposite can be true. ‘Unity in diversity’ implies that we, as individuals or groups, can come together on an equal footing with a specific purpose. The purpose here was community building through peace. The groups and people involved in our project had different worldviews, skills, and dedicated their lives to a variety of different occupations. Through the kotahitanga lens, peace was not about homogenising these groups into one identity or unit that thought or acted the same. Nor was it about creating one group that led from a position as expert. It was about all groups coming together with unique identity, for a purpose, working together while recognising and celebrating our differences. A process of respecting and celebrating others difference and right to self-determination of expression and involvement. This

³ Treaty between indigenous Māori leaders and the British Crown

view of Kotahitanga was the root of our motivation, aim, methods of organisation, and set up of the actual event on world peace day (see figure 1). Kotahitanga was our vision of peace – the means to peace and the end of peace. As a result, our organisation was non-hierarchical. We had public meetings with all interested parties and community leaders. We encouraged community groups to put forward women and youth representatives alongside the men. In this way we recognised potential leaders, and other voices. In our public meetings we ensured that all Peacing Together spoke and shared their similarities and differences. Tau iwi⁴ worked with tangata whenua, tangata whenua worked with each other, and tau iwi worked with other tau iwi. Beyond this, peace was not defined – people held different views on exactly what peace was beyond recognising others rights to self-determination. We agreed that peace was a process of relationship. We agreed that relationship was about processes of being together, hospitality and shared principles.

Figure 1



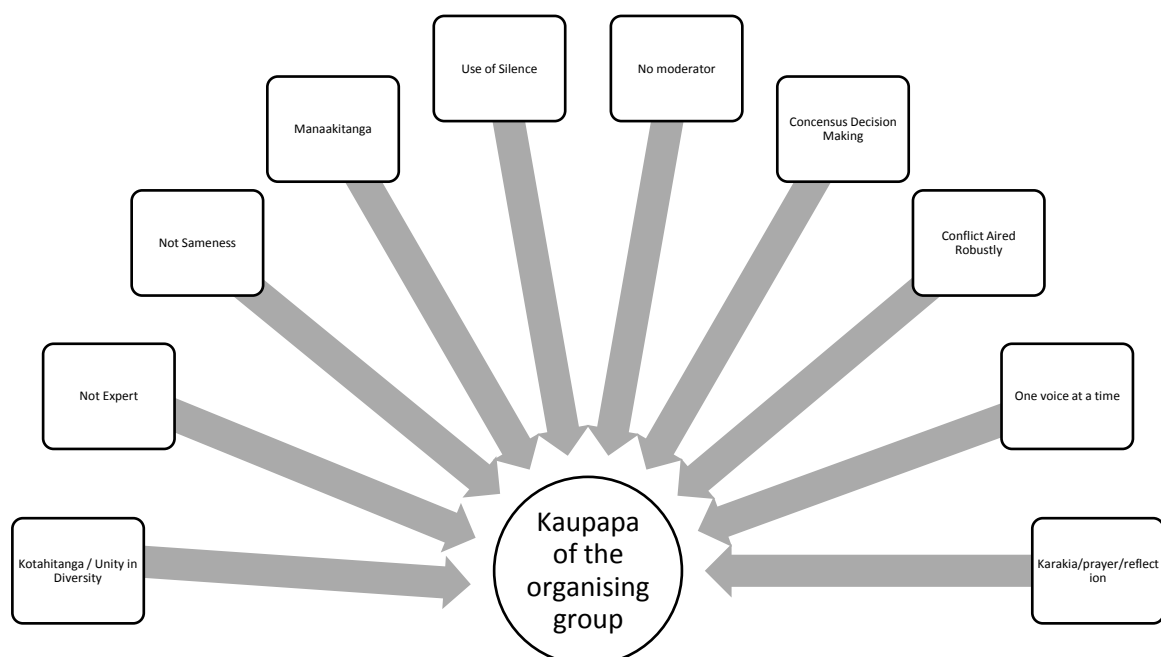
In order to keep this anarchistic kotahitanga vision at the forefront of our minds, the organising group developed a kaupapa to guide us in our organising (see figure 2). Kaupapa can be understood as agreed principles. The kaupapa in our group became an anchor point in times of crisis and conflict, and became a tool for retuning ourselves to nonviolent communication and remembrance of our unified purpose when we were exhausted. Nobody was put above anybody

⁴ Tau iwi: Other bones. A word that can be used for all non-Māori.

else; there were no experts. We embraced manaakitanga through the sharing of ideas and food, through respecting each other, though only having one voice speak at a given time, and through laughing. And sometimes through arguing and staying around the table until we could reach a shared way forward that was practical and felt good.

Feeling good was also the feeling of not having been transgressed at a human and spiritual level. We used our own model of decision-making which ensured that nobody held authority over another. There was no permanent leader or moderator, instead leadership arose and diminished momentarily. We aired, discussed and worked through conflict robustly. At the end of a meeting, people would share a karakia/prayer or reflection from their own background as a way to bring the group together and ground us. Mindful silence was also used at various points in the meeting to ground us and bring us back to the kaupapa if we started to stray. The need to ground was important when we became excited and overwhelmed with ideas or overwhelmed with stress and a sense of self-importance.

Figure 2



From the beginning of the process we recognised that agreeing and manifesting these concepts was a challenge, as we could not create events that were hospitable in the wider community, without first modelling this in our processes with each other. We were aiming to start enacting our vision of kotahitanga as peace within our community, and hoped that this would have knock-on effects into the future.

By doing this we were in some way representing what Amit (2002, 18) describes as an ‘imagination of solidarity’:

Community arises out of an interaction between the imagination of solidarity and its realization through social relations and is invested both with powerful affect as well as contingency, and therefore with both consciousness and choice.

The day: Kotahitanga Manaakitangi Te Kawa – the 21st of September 2015

The United Nations International Day of Peace is celebrated on the 21st September each year. Otherwise known as World Peace Day, this is an event that outdates its United Nations endorsement (complete recognition in 2001) by a number of decades, and has been celebrated in a diverse range of events around the world since. While there are official United Nations International Day of Peace celebrations, ours was not one of them. We, along with organisers of previous World Peace Day event organisers in Dunedin, felt that this limited the scope of the day and who would want to be involved. Many do not see the United Nations or its member states as instruments of peace, and the aim of the event was not to promote the United Nations. However, we see World Peace Day as appropriate for our celebrations, as peace was the focus of the event. We acknowledge productive peace work that is being done by people working for the United Nations, so we did not seek to exclude these people either. Other peace days, such as ‘Gandhi Jayanti’, may have produced other barriers to participation and understanding. In reality our event could have been on any day, but we saw World Peace Day as a day that made our motivations clear to the public.

The ‘Peacing Together’ organising group was comprised of seven people representing a range of cultures; Māori, Pākehā, Bosnian and Solomon Island. Each person embodied deep religious-spiritual identities including Buddhist, Muslim and Yoga alongside a range of political beliefs. In addition, the group was guided by a local Māori Kaumatua and Upoko. Ages ranged from 25 to 79 years, with four men and three women. All volunteered their time and had full family, community and work commitments.

As with any large scale event, months of planning and organising took place. Prior to the day there was a sustained level of community building. This involved the group approaching local Māori tangata whenua for guidance. In this process a local Kaumatua⁵ and Upoko⁶ agreed to join the group. ‘Peacing Together’ was welcomed by the Kaumatua at his home and formal introductions, personal perspectives, motivations for the day and food were

⁵ Kaumatua: Elder within Māoridom; one with knowledge and wisdom.

⁶ Upoko: Spiritual leader/head.

shared. Outside of roles in 'Peacing Together' many of the individual group members had had long, multiple and sustained relationships with representatives of local Māori Iwi from multiple hapu⁷ who were involved in many informal and formal ways.

As well as our own planning and consultation, we included the following lead-in events: i) community concerts in local cafes and bars, ii) a public community meeting to share the planning and invite community group involvement, iii) a formal public conversation at the local university entitled 'Peace and Te Tiriti o Waitangi', iv) linking with the local Hiroshima Day public commemorations, v) a radio show and radio interviews on other shows, vi) a public community talk with prominent anti-nuclear activists and academics, vii) facilitated art students joining together to print prayer flags with messages of peace, viii) facilitated high school students exploring the meaning of Kotahitanga as unity within diversity and assisting in speech making on the day, ix) an after the event community fruit tree planting at local rest home. During this time the 'Peacing Together' group was gathering volunteers for the day, sharing ideas with the community, diffusing conflicts between groups so they could support the day and writing grant applications. In addition, 'Peacing Together' was working hard to understand the kaupapa of peace through the lens of Kotahitanga and Manaakitanga. This involved working through ego manifestations, political and cultural identities and personal experiences of injustice, loss and trauma.

At the beginning there was no finance for the festival day. The initial successful procurement of a grant to hold the event at the large Forsyth Barr Stadium (the local rugby stadium) meant that it became a much larger event than was originally envisaged. Support trickled in overtime via small grants from: Community Trust Otago, Otago University Student Association (OUSA), Quakers Peace Award, Student's for Free Tibet Aotearoa, Dunedin Multi-Ethnic Council, Peace And Disarmament Education Trust (PADET) and individual members of 'Peacing Together'. However, it required considerable faith as the funding was never assured and the group relied a great deal on volunteers, personal relationships, alongside business community goodwill and support.

After acquiring funding and completing the series of run in events we send out our press release. It went like this:

Kotahitanga Manaaki Te Kawa- World Peace Day 2015 – Forsyth Barr Stadium, 20th September. The group 'Peacing Together' will present Kotahitanga Manaaki Te Kawa - World Peace Day 2015. 'Peacing Together' is a not for profit group that formed in March 2015, consisting of Artists, Event Creators, Community Facilitators and students from the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. This event will be the first of its kind and a wonderful opportunity for everyone to

⁷ Iwi: Nation. Hapu: Sub-nation. Many translate the words Iwi and Hapu to mean 'tribe' and 'sub-tribe'. A hapu is made up of a number of family groups and is traditionally where decision making takes place in Māori society.

come together celebrating our unity within diversity in Dunedin. Our kaupapa for this event is Celebrating Peace through Multicultural Diversity. Throughout the day there will be food stalls, a WOMAD inspired program of live music, dance, children's activities, great coffee, visual art, poetry, speakers, workshops, and stalls for all. There is plenty of opportunity for everyone to come and make this a memorable community experience. The United Nations' (UN) International Day of Peace is celebrated on September 21st each year to recognize the efforts of those who have worked hard to end conflict and promote peace around the world. The International Day of Peace is a day of ceasefire and we will acknowledge this day by inviting David Ellison, the Chief (Upoko) of Karitane, Puketeraki and Kaumatua of 'Peacing Together' to welcome the people on the day. A Dunedin City Councillor will join in opening World Peace Day 2015 for Dunedin City. For many of us peace can seem an unrealistic possibility. Coming together to celebrate music and arts for a community event with a common harmonious mind can help us appreciate the diversity within our community. It is another step towards remembering our common humanity and learning to respect and enjoy our natural diversity. 'Peacing Together' would like to thank all the community groups and organizations who have supported us thus far and invite any others who would like to support this kaupapa to contact us about their participation. We invite you to "come and join us and participate and create a place to share music, dance, laughter, culture, knowledge, inspiration, and passion.

The day itself began with a shared welcome from local Māori leaders and a locally elected City Councillor. This welcome was untraditional for the area as women Māori leaders spoke alongside the men. A local Kapa Haka group performed the waiata. The following link shows the way in which this event was opened: <https://vimeo.com/140144023>. The opening was an explicit demonstration of hospitality, tolerance and openness towards the human diversity that we each represent. It also represented an easing of tension between local iwi members and demonstrated a coming together in a culture post-colonisation with painful and tragic histories of loss and complicated modern legal battles of redress.

Over forty different community groups set up stalls and these included groups such as; i) Students for Free Tibet, ii) Dunedin multi-faith group, iii) Dunedin multi-ethnic council, iv) Red Cross, v) Oil free Otago, vi) Suicide prevention trust, vii) the Quaker Centre, viii) Pacific island communities and ix) local Buddhist Centre. Alongside these were commercial food vendors and groups demonstrating Yoga, Tai chi and Meditation. Throughout the day over twenty acts from all around the world shared traditional and modern dance, music, speakers and song. Vegetarian food was provided by the local Hare Krishna group and the logistics of the day, such as car parking attendants, stage set up etc., was done by a small group of volunteers, including many high school students. Hourly teach-ins also took place providing a space for discussion and learning around various peace and international conflict related topics.

A qualitative survey was undertaken during the day of 100 attendees. This

represented approximately 10% of those who attended the day. The feedback was that many local residents were surprised at the cultural diversity in their town. Many of the new cultures described themselves in the survey as ‘kiwis’ - perhaps representing a collaborative identity but this was not clear and is subject to conjecture. The following statement is illustrative of this view:

This day created a sometimes rare opportunity for cultures, genders, orientations and races to interact. This opportunity is sometimes not as available as it should be and this event provided this opportunity in a happy, safe, and joyful way.

In general comments from attendees were that the event was a fantastic idea and it was amazing to see such a wide range of cultures in Dunedin. Most were surprised that there was in fact a plethora of races, creeds, and colours within the Dunedin community and thus they strongly invited a repeat of the event annually. Everyone surveyed agreed that the venue was too cold and noisy. Many suggested having the event in November when the local weather was traditionally warmer.

Critical self-reflection of our model of peace community building

‘Peacing Together’ was the name given to the 2015 organisational group. World Peace Day events have been enjoying increased regularity since the 1980s, and now many events are happening globally with increasing frequency. The local community of Dunedin, New Zealand has also been joining this global trend by celebrating this day and encouraging a visioning of peaceful humanity. Past events have included; i) a central peace pole being built on the museum lawn which became the base for peace commemoration events, ii) multiple Yogamala events, iii) Centre of the city open event with a Yogamala, speakers, community peace stalls and sharing of food, iv) a continuation of the centre of the city event with different people stepping in to participate, and now v) the Kotahitanga Manaakitanga Te Kawa World Peace day event.

Previous events did not focus directly on challenging elites. And neither did the ‘Peacing Together’ process. Instead we focused upon building collaboration between groups, consciousness raising and education, whilst providing a prominent space for many groups in the community, with similar concerns and interests, to meet. They came together under the kaupapa and hospitality towards unity within diversity, as one practical expression of peace, and in a spirit of multicultural celebration. The event was not about *directly* confronting and disrupting. This position does not indicate a rejection by organisers of nonviolent tactics that confront and disrupt – many people involved in the day have been involved in nonviolent direct action in the past - but these tactics were deemed inappropriate for the aim of the event which was community building, as explained below. The aim was to bring people together, to demonstrate hospitality, to make connections and to energise each other. We

saw this as a necessary. However 'Peacing Together' recognizes the vital importance of an on-going co-creation of a democratic just peace, which involves challenging violent systems of power in multiple ways. 'Peacing Together' contributes one aspect of this challenge which is the importance of bringing the ordinary people affected by violent global systems of power and control together in a hospitable way. Building a vision of community that can lead and inspire action. Facilitating a stronger collective shared expression of hospitable community. Showing what our values are.

At a pragmatic level our approach allowed us to be successful in receiving funding from central and local government. We successfully negotiated with corporates to meet alongside groups critical of their actions. We included local government leaders in our thinking and ideas. By doing so we hoped to encourage less prejudice and more interaction between groups. We also hoped to create an environment of welcome to refugees and other cultures new to our city. Did it stop us from taking a stronger voice on inequality and issues underlying conflict? It was perhaps an opportunity lost. Yet one that seemed justified for the kaupapa.

All members involved in 'Peacing Together' have a strong commitment to social justice and since Kotahitanga Manaaki Te awa have continued to be involved with multiple issues including but not limited to; mental health awareness, Te Heke (highlighting the issues with local river use and outstanding local Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues), refugee welcome, Muslim awareness, National peace hikoi, suicide prevention awareness, anti-militarisation activism, and the proposed TPPA trade agreement.

By organising the 2015 Kotahitanga Manaakitanga Te Kawa we saw ourselves as contributing in a small way to a global peace movement, while focusing specifically on the local level. Events in Dunedin have been organised differently each year by people sharing a similar vision. It has never been the aim to formalise the process by making an organisation. Rather than creating an event that could be owned; people and groups have come together and then left again, bringing their experience, time and resources at different times in order to contribute to the event. This 'organisation in flux' has led to events with quite unique contributions each year. The organisation of events has always been bottom-up. While there have been leaders, these positions have never been permanent, allowing different people with different ideas and skill sets to take the reins each year. Dunedin's World Peace Day events have focused mostly on community organising, bringing together many groups in the community who focus on, or have an interest in, peace related issues.

As stated above, we have seen ourselves as part of a larger global peace movement, and also as our own unique local peace movement. Van Seeters and James (2012, xi) write that:

Defining a social movement entails a few minimal conditions of 'coming together': (1.) the formation of some kind of collective identity; (2.) the

development of a shared normative orientation; (3.) the sharing of a concern for change of the status quo and (4.) the occurrence of moments of practical action that are at least subjectively connected together across time addressing this concern for change. Thus we define a social movement as a form of political association between persons who have at least a minimal sense of themselves as connected to others in common purpose and who come together across an extended period of time to effect social change in the name of that purpose.

We believe that we fit within this definition of a social movement. However, what brings us together – the term peace – is difficult to define. On the plus-side, this has allowed for lots of involvement from a wide range of people in both organising and orchestrating the event. The potential negative consequence of this is that conflict can naturally arise due to these differing conceptions. On the organisational level, where we were heavily involved, all of the activists clearly saw the need to promote ‘peace’. At no point in the organisation process did the group try to define this, which is probably one of the factors that allowed such a diverse group of people, with different voices, to come together.

As mentioned above, we took a community building approach toward peace. We will now explain our understanding of this. Community building at its most simple may be defined as: “forming collaborative partnerships among neighbourhood’s stakeholders to strengthen their internal capacity to solve their problems” (Eicher, 2007, 6). Our work towards peace was about bringing community groups together and working for peace from within, as opposed to appealing to or directly challenging an external group. We hoped that by bringing diverse, peace-focused, community groups together it would build connections, and reduce isolation. We agree with Eicher (2007, 6) who writes that groups without power suffer a particular kind of isolation; “...because people with these communities have been systematically isolated, they need to learn to trust one another, establish roles, and improve from within”. We hoped to contribute to this, strengthening our ability to achieve our shared aim of creating peaceful society. Within this we were mindful of our privileged status as academics and we were committed to creating an organisational group that was a mixture of community members and academics. We remained careful by not utilising our knowledge in a way that would create any imbalance in power. Again Eicher (2007, 7) reminds us:

Organisers may have to overvalue those with degrees and expertise and existing positions of power and, by default, leave out others. There is also some concern that the community building approach requires multiple trade offs and compromises to get everyone on the same page. Many problems are not challenged or addressed.

This was certainly the case in this experiment of community building. Multiple trade-offs occurred in order to focus on the event. ‘Peacing Together’ at times consciously devalued the academic voice in order to create a space for others to

step into. An example of this was the speakers on the day. They represented youth, an equal gender mix and people that had the capability to speak from within many multi-cultural communities. ‘Peacing Together’ encouraged cultures that would normally give a male voice to propose a female speaker. The group paid particular attention to our relationships with tangata whenua nurtured over many years and in many forms and also the relationships within the tangata whenua groups:

Attending to existing community relationships, revitalising or creating community identity and meaning, and encouraging participation and partnerships are integral, cohesive components of community building” (Hyland, 2005, 13).

We do not suggest that we are qualified to comment on the complex or historical and modern areas of conflict within tangata whenua relationships, however we can say that this event was successful in bringing together leaders from multiple local hapu onto the welcoming stage. In doing so the tangata whenua involved demonstrated and offered an example of manaakitanga/ hospitality towards all the cultural groups and peoples in the Dunedin community.

We had a common view within ‘Peacing Together’ that tangata whenua status was to be honoured. We were mindful of not offending anyone and relied upon our Kaumatua to guide us in areas of cultural import. Whilst we welcomed the best channels that came forward to organise this event, we also acknowledged that we were all flawed by non-peaceful principles at times. ‘Peacing Together’ members explicitly came back to the kaupapa of a non-defined peace or the concept of the unity within our diversity to reset our commitment to the event:

One cannot talk about community and community building without, first, acknowledging the existing relationships within the community and examining the myriad other relationships that develop, either consequently or intentionally, and, second, considering the various political, economic, and cultural factors that are divisive in all the processes involved in building and sustaining communities (Hyland, 2005, 11).

It was these dynamics that were the most confronting. Individuals and groups required discussion and time to agree to put differences aside. Some cultural groups harboured resentment for the way they had been treated by the Dunedin community. At times our simple wish to celebrate together seemed beyond the willingness of others.

Finally our experience of community building was flexible, fluid and not repeatable or formulaic:

The essential contingency of community, its participants' sense that it is fragile, changing, partial and only one of a number of competing attachments or alternative possibilities for affiliation means that it can never be all-enveloping or entirely blinkering. Community is never the world entire, it is only ever one of a number of recognized possibilities (Amit, 2002, 18).

Forming a unified vision of peace was not possible, yet creating and experiencing a peaceful celebration of multicultural diversity was. Ultimately a healthy community is one in which there is an acceptance of diversity, a degree of equity, competence (i.e.: collaboration, working consensus to achieve goals, agreeing ways and means), strong networks and sense of community exists between people (Wass, 2000).

A vision of peace

While 'Peacing Together' never defined 'peace', it was clear from the beginning that a key part of our conceptions of peace was the ideas of Kotahitanga and manaakitanga. This meant involving many different cultural groups – artistic, activist, and academic – in one space to celebrate, discuss, learn and be. In many ways the make-up of our organising group was reflective of this. It also came at a time where we are seeing a rise in xenophobia, especially through Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments globally. Our assertion of unity in the event was to offer an alternative vision of the world to these increasing right-wing sentiments. While focusing on unity we had an equal focus on diversity. Explicit in the 'Peacing Together' kaupapa, was the celebration of peace through multicultural diversity. For us it was clear that peace did not mean all being the same, but rather accepting and celebrating difference. This was inclusive of political difference.

We aimed to promote peace in the positive sense. By this we mean that we clearly envisioned peace as the absence of direct and hidden violence in its structural and cultural forms (Galtung, 1964, 1990). This is opposed to negative peace that is merely that absence of direct physical violence. It was a proactive peace (Benford & Taylor, 2008) aimed at promoting peaceful society rather than directly challenging violence. Kobi and Fishman (2012, 7) summarise this nicely:

The condition of positive peace can be created when social justice mitigates structural and cultural violence. Cultural violence occurs when the political leadership of a movement or state incorporates continuous incitement to hatred and violence into a society's public discourse. In contrast to negative peace, positive peace is not limited to the idea of getting rid of something but includes the idea of establishing something that is missing and changing the societal and political structure.

‘Peacing Together’ members shared the perspective that there was the need to work alongside tangata whenua. This was acknowledged as a key part of working for positive peace in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We recognised the un-peaceful founding of Aotearoa/New Zealand through colonialism, which still has effects today, and we were clear that for a peaceful society to be achieved, this must be a key focus from the beginning of the process.

However, there were differences in the ‘Peacing Together’ vision of the day. This was significant as it led to subtle misunderstandings about what Aldous Huxley (1939, 9) called ‘means and ends’ within our community development. He wrote, “The end cannot justify the means, for the simple and obvious reason that the means employed determine the nature of the ends produced”. Whilst ‘Peacing Together’ members shared the same language about the event, the underlying expectations and assumptions were never fully articulated. The day was shared with the public as a ‘WOMAD’ inspired event. ‘WOMAD’ is a world music festival with the stated aim being to “celebrate the world's many forms of music, arts and dance.” ‘WOMAD’ (2015) “aims to excite, to inform, and to create awareness of the worth and potential of a multicultural society.” Yet for us we were less interested in a WOMAD inspired event and more committed to an expression of peaceful community building. Accordingly, we held the view that peace is made through peaceful inner and outer practices, which in turn may have peaceful long-term effects.

Organising Kotahitanga Manaakitanga Te Kawa, openly, without hierarchy or ownership, was itself an experiment in peace. This is true as much for the organisation process, as the event itself. ‘Peacing Together’ struggled with this concept, as titles were more easily understood by funding agencies and the responsibilities of having such titles, better understood by individuals. On reflection it seemed to us that as we got closer to the event, we at times surrendered an equal organisational style for a top-down and centralised leadership style. ‘Peacing Together’ met on a number of occasions to explicitly discuss and attempt to rectify this mind-set but members never reached consensus. The main concern was that the workload would not be covered, mistakes would be made and reputations potentially affected. It was felt that relationships within the community were held by individual members and would suffer if they became shared. We experienced this dynamic as a lack of transparency and a lack of commitment or knowledge of peaceful process. This tension was present throughout, and continued for some time after the event.

We wonder whether this division in the group can be understood also as a tension between anarchistic visions of peaceful society, and less radical or critical visions of peaceful society. Anarchist visions of peaceful society favour non-hierarchical organisation based on mutual aid that aim to create equitable, transparent, open structures. Anarchist visions of a peaceful society are (commonly) non-utopian. They aim to create ways of being and organising that do not impinge on others, and where we support each other. In other words, they see peaceful societies as ones where people are free to pursue what they want to in their lives; providing they are not harming others; without being

restricted by others who hold more power; while at the same time acknowledging that freedom can only be achieved when we come together as communities. In many ways the kaupapa of 'Peacing Together' reflected the logic of an anarchist affinity group. These groups are:

a (usually small) group of anarchists who work together to spread their ideas to the wider public, using propaganda, initiating or working with campaigns and spreading their ideas within popular organisations (such as unions) and communities. It aims not to be a 'leadership' but to give a lead, to act as a *catalyst within popular movements* (AnarchistFAQ Collective, 2016).

However, Anarchistic groups would usually share an explicit common goal and underling motivations. To have peace from an anarchistic point of view, centralised, permanent, restrictive authority must not hinder people. Anarchistic organisation recognises the connection between means and ends, and therefore aims to find ways to organise without any one member of a group holding power-over another. Colin Ward (1966) wrote this of anarchy and organisation:

You may think in describing anarchism as a theory of organisation I am propounding a deliberate paradox: "anarchy" you may consider to be, by definition, the opposite of organisation. In fact, however, "anarchy" means the absence of government, the absence of authority. Can there be social organisation without authority, without government? The anarchists claim that there can be, and they also claim that it is desirable that there should be. They claim that, at the basis of our social problems is the principle of government. It is, after all, governments which prepare for war and wage war, even though you are obliged to fight in them and pay for them; the bombs you are worried about are not the bombs which cartoonists attribute to the anarchists, but the bombs which governments have perfected, at your expense. It is, after all, governments which make and enforce the laws which enable the 'haves' to retain control over social assets rather than share them with the 'have-nots'. It is, after all, the principle of authority which ensures that people will work for someone else for the greater part of their lives, not because they enjoy it or have any control over their work, but because they see it as *their only means of livelihood*."

We were concerned with holding an anarchistic perspective and needed to debate many questions. For example; was running a peaceful voluntary community organisation all about consensus and agreement in decision making? Was there space for a peaceful group to use confrontational means in group communication and organisation? Is it even possible to prevent hierarchical knowledge and informal power structures forming within organisational groups? It would be fair to say that we did not successfully answer these questions. However, it was agreed that we would use certain techniques to try and organise without hierarchy and power-over.

Our learning

‘Peacing Together’ group formed over eight weeks and the early meetings were characterised by excitement, vision and over-talking. The strength at this stage (and throughout the next ten months) being the groups’ capacity to speak frankly to each other with a commitment to staying together as a group. Early in the process ‘Peacing Together’ agreed that we would commit to running our discussions in a collaborative and respectful way, as laid out in our kaupapa. This resulted in an organic form of consensus organising which arose from the members of the group. We did not take a method or theory of consensus decision making from elsewhere.

As mentioned briefly above, consensus decision-making was implemented in order to work together non-hierarchically, without giving any one person authority, while at the same time ensuring that everyone’s voices were heard. We are aware that there are negative critiques of consensus decision-making made by some activists, and it is not within the confines of this article to fully engage with them. However, we acknowledge that we did not have immediate time constraints that demanded fast action, and as a result never worked through how this kind of situation should be dealt with. For example, we were not occupying a building and were about to be evicted by the police as has happened in other peace movements. We were also aware that changes may have had to be made in a larger organising group, as meetings may have gone on for too long for some of us to attend. Also, as it has not been tested, we do not know how this organising structure would have worked with larger groups or with groups of people that have different needs, for example, different time and work commitments. Having said this we must also note that we were not hindered in creating a large event by our consensus decision making process, rather it was what kept us together and committed to the organising process.

The following process evolved within the first few weeks. The meetings began with a blessing and traditional karakia/prayer. This was followed by a simple tuning together exercise. Attendees would shut their eyes, quieten their nervous systems and move into a shared space of silence. In this space attendees would access a sense of connection with each other, and to the shared purpose. Sensitivity and awareness of this varied according to individual’s prior training/guidance in meditative traditions. Back et al. (2009, 1114) describe the type of communication that Peacing together endeavoured to create as a group:

Compassion in contemplative traditions is transmitted through a quality of mind and requires active intentional mental processes - it is the opposite of passive, receptive activity. These compassionate silences arise spontaneously from the clinician who has developed the mental capacities of stable attention, emotional balance, along with pro-social mental qualities, such as naturally arising empathy and compassion.

We had previous experience with large diverse multicultural groups where this style of communication had led to efficient and light hearted community building (Joyce, 2015). It seemed reasonable to aim for congruence between the inner embodied peace of organisers and the outer expression of peace through the day itself. Everyone within 'Peacing Together' agreed to this.

From a calmer atmosphere we would take turns to speak, often utilising a taonga/treasure (a traditional process which was suggested by our Kaumatua, modified for our meetings, whereby whoever has this on the Wharenui/meeting-house is afforded uninterrupted talking time, alongside respectful listening). 'Peacing Together' members would often need to remind each other to come back to this simple communication process. This became increasingly necessary as the event became larger, more complicated and people more exhausted and stressed. In the later stages, especially as members of the public were invited to join in the meetings, 'Peacing Together' would use a traditional agenda and minute taking process. Throughout the entire process we needed to utilise collaborative intelligence and a range of conflict transformation skills:

In other words, conflict management, conflict resolution and problem-solving are never-ending processes which have to be continually rediscovered and reapplied to new problems and new sets of relationships (Clements & Ward, 1994, 6).

Despite the above, members often transgressed each other in terms of gender and cultural expectations. Bruhn (2005, 156-157) reminds us that the on-going dynamics of cultural inclusion and exclusion experienced in our small group, may be a tension found within modern societies:

In today's society there is no longer a stable environment that shapes an individual's identity or develops a sense of belonging to society, but rather individuals participate in various independent social systems... Therefore, it is possible for individuals to be included in and excluded from various social systems at the same time.

We consider that it was to be expected that philosophical differences remained unbridged, as a result of the different platforms that the event represented for individual members of 'Peacing Together'. In our opinion, pragmatically and in hindsight we developed 'just enough tolerance', 'just enough respect' and 'just enough unity' to create an event of peaceful diversity. Perhaps 'just enough love and kindness towards each other'.

Yet one of the strengths of 'Peacing Together' was also the source of its greatest tension and conflict. Internal group processes were designed to allow for peaceful organising, the non-hierarchical nature of the group was at times challenged. It may be beneficial for future events to dedicate time at the

beginning of the process to have discussions around what a peaceful process looks like and how we could enact it. While we implemented various techniques, which were accepted by the group, it is unclear whether this has much of an effect on the organisation process outside of the formal meetings. It may also be beneficial to return to these philosophical discussions throughout the process to remind ourselves of them. This would allow for a self-critique where we could examine if the steps we were taking are really peaceful. At times (admittedly partly because of time and energy constraints) people ploughed on, organising specific parts of the event, without consultation with the rest of the group or without considering how it would contribute to peace or community building. This led to identities based upon self-important i-ness rather than a collaborative we-ness. People began to count the hours of volunteer service, rather than delegating and up skilling others. There were moments of irrationality and burn-out. We believe that reflection periods could have been built in to the process in order to allow each person to think about whether or not they were acting to create peace, or from our own sense of ego. As we live in a world that does not, in large, operate on anarchical principles, this may be unsurprising. It is likely to take many more experiments in peace before we can expect to free ourselves of hierarchical and i-centred thinking that is accepted and encouraged in so many of the social relationships in our society.

Following the events success, Peacing Together is left with a responsibility for future celebrations of World Peace Day. Or is it? There are different ways an event like this could be continued. On the one hand 'Peacing Together' is situated to easily replicate a similar event and perhaps even grow it. Seed funding exists for future events so it has the potential to become a part of the cities festival timetable. The alternate view is that 'Peacing Together' does not need to be perpetuated. For future events new organisers can adopt 'Peacing Together', use it and redefine it, or reject it completely. From a community building perspective the goal is that members of the public continue to come forward to value, promote and enact peace. From an anarchistic peace building perspective, different people can do this in different ways and at different times.

If 'Peacing Together' continues as the vehicle for peace day event management, then there are some potential issues. Any solidification of the group; by defining what it is, what it can do, and what its events should entail – as generally happens with formal yearly events - has the potential to threaten the flexible influx organisation of Dunedin World Peace Day events that have been organised by the wider community up until now. Ownership of the event of World Peace Day potentially shuts out others who may hold different visions of peace. However, it does not need to and this will depend upon the theoretical understanding of community building and peace that the group gives preferential awareness to.

We consider that Dunedin's peace events have been, over the last few years, representative of a particular dynamism. In this process many expressions of peaceful vision have occurred, according to the membership and heart of community members. The lack of a rigid leadership group has enabled a shared,

organic celebration, promotion and experience of peace. No community group has dominated the other, nor have particular personalities. In the future, we would be concerned if community groups were subsumed under one leadership group, with any sets of expectations including; what can and cannot be done; what peace is and is not; or even what is an acceptable World Peace Day event. We hope that this natural movement towards the values of peace will continue.

Conclusion

We recognise that our critique is only one perspective on the experience of creating Kotahitanga Manaaki Te Kawa World Peace Day and perhaps takes a less political lens than others would like. Yet we value the opportunity to describe the processes involved as these were the base for the festival itself. We focused our energy on creating a multicultural festival.

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The local food movement in Belgium: from prefigurative activism to social innovations

Geoffrey Pleyers

Abstract

This article provides an analysis of the action logics and challenges that underline the evolution of the local food sector in Belgium and the challenges that these actors face in a new stage of the movement for local, organic and fair food.

Since 2000, disparate local movements have spread all over Belgium, in the wave of the alter-globalization movements, critical consumerism and prefigurative and concrete actions against neoliberalism.

Regional networks of those groups have progressively emerged, and have become socio-political actors. While prefigurative activism and the original critical stances towards markets and mainstream economics remain present in many groups, a rising part of the local food activists now draw on a confluence of critical consumption, ecological transition, the social economy and solidarity and local development.

Local food in Belgium: from activists' micro-local initiatives to institutional alliances

Since the early 2000s, alternative food networks have become increasingly popular in Belgium. Under different modalities, they put “consumers-citizens” directly in touch with local producers from which they purchase vegetables, fruits and other food.

The network of “neighbourhoods for local food”, “Voedselteams”, counts 171 purchasing groups in Flanders, totalling over 4,000 households who buy their vegetables and fruits from a hundred small and medium farmers, a third of which are certified organic, and all from the Flemish Region. 94 “groups for solidarity purchase and for peasant agriculture” (mostly known by the French acronym GASAP) are active in Brussels. In French-speaking Wallonia, over 150 “collective purchasing groups” (in French “Groupe d’Achat Commun” or GAC) are active¹. Some of them, like that of the “Beau-Mur” neighbourhood in Liège (a town of 250,000 inhabitants) provide over 80 households with local foods.

The revival of local food initiatives in the early 2000s in Belgium was closely connected with the alter-globalization movement, and in particular with a culture of activism that focuses on prefigurative actions, where activists consider that changing the world starts with concrete actions in everyday life. By then, the local food movement was composed of dozens of small local groups

¹ <http://www.asblrcr.be/carto>

that wanted to preserve their autonomy, inter-personal relationships and local roots and were thus very reluctant to associate with institutional, political and economic actors. The first part of the article will focus on this culture of activism and its dilemma.

While this local and prefigurative approach remains present in most local food networks, the sector has considerably evolved in the last 10 years, as the second part of the text shows.

A set of factors and actors such as the creation of regional coordination networks, NGOs' campaigns and support by public administrations have contributed to a fast expansion of the local food sector. This expansion and the new actors inevitably change the stances and dynamic of the sector, notably through a rather classic institutionalization process, as the second part of the text will show. Original stances, concepts of social and the criticism of the consumerist society remain present in some initiatives, but are now combined with less contentious and more entrepreneurial approaches. Such combinations inevitably revive some structural dilemmas of the local food movement. At the same time, they may also open new opportunities for social innovations.

Local food movements in French-speaking Belgium (Brussels and the Walloon Region, approximately 5.5 million inhabitants) constitute an interesting case study to understand two cultures of activism that are at the core of many local food movements, and their encounter. The first one is grounded in prefigurative activism and claims to change the world by maintaining strong local roots. Promoters of the second logic of action insist on the need to cooperate with institutions and upscale the movements to enlarge its social and political impact. The article shows that the two logics are constitutive of the movement. While the early steps of the movement were grounded in the more activist logic and the second one becomes dominant as the movement institutionalize, both are articulated at each step of the evolution of the movement.

The analysis draws on two kinds of data. Interviews and observations in local food networks and initiatives have been conducted during three periods: 2003-2004, 2008 and 2014-2015. After classic semi-directed interviews, the dialogue with the actors of food movements or networks gave space to particularly insightful "reflexive dialogues" on the result hypothesis and analyses. The article also draws on a wide range of articles by French-speaking Belgian researchers and an abundant grey literature and actors' "self-analyses". A wide range of local researchers have produced a scholarly literature in various disciplines, including sociology (e.g. de Bouver, 2009; Verhaegen, 2011), agronomy (Stassart, Baret et al, 2012), philosophy (Luyckx, 2014), social economy (e.g. Mertens, 2014) and transdisciplinary research (Dedeuwaerdere, 2013; Popa, Guillermin & Dedeuwaerdere T. 2015; CATL, 2015), as well as a wide set of reports and analyses by local civil society organizations (e.g. Barricade, 2012-2015; Oxfam reports 2015; Capocci, 2014; Baguette, 2015).

A new impetus for the Local Food Movement

A new wave of local food networks

Local food networks are far from new. Such networks were actually widespread in Belgium and in some parts of France in the 19th century (Zimmer, 2011). Some kept working or re-appeared throughout the 20th century, such as the “Collective purchase group” (GAC in the French acronym) of the Seraing, an industrial suburb of Liège, which has been active since 1973.

The current renewal of local food networks in Western Europe, and notably in France (Zimmer, 2011), Italy (Toscano, 2011) and French-speaking Belgium finds its roots in the alter-globalization movement in the early 2000. In France, the new local food network setting, AMAP², was launched in 2001 by small peasants and a local section of the alter-globalization network ATTAC and was directly inspired by the US groups for “Community Supported Agriculture”.

In Liège, two social and cultural centres particularly active in the local alter-globalization movement were also among the first ones to start direct purchase groups for local food. The “Beau Mur” hosts both the local section of ATTAC and one of the larger group of local food consumers in town. It gathers over 80 families every Tuesday. A frontrunner of the local alter-globalization movement and the heart of the “Social Forum in Liège” in mid-2000s, the autonomous social and cultural centre “Barricade³” launched its “GAC” as early as 1999. It organizes a dozen talks a year about food, denouncing the hold of transnational corporation over food and pointing to concrete alternatives. In 2013, Barricade was again the main initiator of a new model of local food network: the “Liège Food-Earth Belt” (“Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise”, see below). It involves dozens of actors from different sectors and promotes the production and local food consumption.

As I have showed elsewhere (Pleyers, 2010: 35-105) Barricade and most of the local food initiatives emerged in a specific part of the alter-globalization movement, bathed in a culture of activism⁴ that focuses on prefigurative activism, personal subjectivity and a concept of change rooted in everyday life.

Critical consumption

As Claire Lamine (2008:40-52) has shown, individuals and families join collective purchasing groups for diverse motivations: an easy and trustful access

² “Association for the support of Peasant Agriculture”, in French “Association pour le Maintien de l’Agriculture Paysanne” (AMAP).

³ For a short descriptive and analytical overview of the cultural centre Barricade in English, see Pleyers, 2010, in particular pages 68-73. On Barricade’s local food network, see Louviaux, 2011 (in French). www.barricade.be/

⁴ I understand “culture of activism” as a consistent set of normative orientations, concepts of the world, of social change and of the movement’s role and internal organization that produces a specific logic of action.

to organic products, friendly relations with neighbours and fellow local participants, the will to support small farmers and the local economy.

Most activists I interviewed in the early 2000s insisted on another argument: it provides a possibility of “implementing a concrete action” against the excesses of industrial agriculture and its environmental consequences and to support a concrete alternative, to show that “another world is possible” and that it starts here and now, by acts in daily life. When setting up or joining a local food networks, they claim to “regain control” of their choices as consumers, to feel themselves as “consum’actors” rather than passive consumers, and to directly engage with a range of concerns that are both personal, collective and global, from health to climate change.

In the literature, “responsible consumption” has been defined as “the deliberate and conscious attention to consumer decisions to translate political positions related to legal concepts and global responsibilities” (Sassatelli, 2006: 220). To this “responsible” dimension of alternative consumption practices, part of the interviewees and most of those who initiated a local food network add a resolute criticism to the consumption society, over-consumption and global markets.

I would rather refer to their practices as “*critical consumption*” (Pleyers, 2011), as these actors inscribe “responsible consumption” acts in a critical stance towards the consumerist society and the “domination of markets” and consider it as part of a broad movement towards a deep transformation of society and its cultural orientations. Their aim is not only to consume better, but to consume less and to promote a different society, based on “voluntary simplicity” (de Bouver, 2009), de-growth and a different idea of happiness.

Critical consumption thus refers to a social and cultural movement (in the sense of A. Touraine (1978) and Melucci (1989)): a historical actor that challenges some of the core normative orientations of our society. As with any social movement, it should not be directly identified with a concrete social actor but rather refers to a particular meaning, a dimension of action that is embodied in a series of practices and at different level by a range of groups and individuals. Critical consumption is not confined to the food sector. It is embodied in a range of practices that have widespread all over Belgium. In Wallonia and in Brussels, over 120 local exchange systems⁵ (exchange of products, services, knowledge and assets) are active in Wallonia and Brussels and “gift fairs” (“donneries”) are established or regularly held in 52 towns.

Prefigurative activism and the resistance of subjectivities

This “critical consumption movement” is anchored in a culture of activism that conceives social change as rooted in prefigurative actions, daily life, local social relations, lived experience and the local level. Rather than political rhetoric and arguments over macro-economics, they withstand the global markets by their

⁵ <http://sel-lets.be>

everyday life, local “conviviality” and a sense of personal responsibility. The consistency between one’s actions and values is at the core of their commitment, which is thus both prefigurative and performative. The “other world” starts here and now, in concrete alternatives that includes consuming less and opting for local and seasonal food. The local consumers’ groups are antechambers that allow citizens to prefigure practices of a different, fairer and more sustainable world. They provide a space to experiment alternative practices and become “spaces of experience”, understood *“as places sufficiently autonomous and distanced from capitalist society and power relations which permit actors to live according to their own principles, to knit different social relations and to express their subjectivity”* (Pleyers, 2010).

Resistance is transcribed and lived in the acts of everyday life and life itself is at the heart of alternatives, to the point that some “critical consumers” are reluctant to consider themselves as militant: “For me, it’s not activism. It’s just a change in our way of life” (a student, Louvain-la-Neuve, interview, 2012).

Activists and “ordinary citizens” who follow this path protest against the manipulation of needs and information by the consumerist society. They oppose the rules of “society of consumerism, competition and comparison” (Christophe, interview, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2013):

“It is a struggle to de-alienate oneself. Once you become more aware of your needs, you simply become happier” (David, Brussels, 2012).

They present themselves as “objectors to growth and speed” and refuse “the monopoly of economists in the determination of what well-being means only on the basis of economic growth and GDP”. This logic of experience and prefigurative practices and this aspiration to recuperate autonomy are also embodied by a growing number of activists to become “prosumers” by growing vegetables or producing their own jams or honey.

The meanings and aims of their practices don’t find their roots in the utopia of a rapid global change but in a sense of personal responsibility and the personal requirement of a greater consistency between ones practices and values. Self-transformation, reflexivity and the relationship to oneself is at the core of their commitment:

“I think that changing oneself is central. For me, it is clear that in my way of being committed, the most important thing is to maintain my integrity and that my practices are consistent with the values I advocate” (Sofie, Brussels, 2012).

“It is first and foremost a way of refusing to play a game I do not agree with. At least with the vegetables, I do not play the game, I do not provide more grist to the mill.” (Jerome, participant in an AMAP in Paris, Focus Group, 2012).

The relation to the other is another core dimension of these “convivial” movements. To the anonymity of relations of the (super-)markets, they oppose the authenticity and usability of local ties. Faced with a society “that individualizes” and “subjects all our relationships to money”, they place the quality of social relationships at the heart of their lifestyle and alternative practices, being the use of bicycles as transportation, carpooling or the weekly meetings of the local food groups (Hubaux, 2011). Behind this wide range of local and micro initiatives there is actually a project of societal transformation that aims at “moving from productivity to conviviality, to replace technical values by ethical values” (Illich, 1973: 28). These movements aim at “recreating social ties”. The gift is honoured in the initiatives of “incredible edibles” in which those who grow a vegetable share a part of their harvest with neighbours dropping it on the squares of villages or neighbourhoods. As stated in their slogan “Less goods, more links”, “voluntary simplifiers” maintain that the reduction of material consumption is valuable because it limits one’s environmental impact but also because it gives time to develop friendly social relations (de Bouver 2009). Collective gardens have also spread in Belgian cities and towns. They provide places of conviviality and encounters beyond the usual social and cultural barriers. Some of these gardens combine with social reinsertion projects. Some aim to participate in the integration of vulnerable layers of the population (Winne, 2009).

From local groups to global change

A distinct approach of the movement’s organization flows from this concept of social change. For these groups, conviviality and friendly relationship among the local group members as well as horizontality and active participation are not only bysides of an alternative food supply. They are a full part of the process and the performative movement as they prefigure a different world.

Many collective purchase groups thus do not want to grow beyond a certain number:

“After twenty [families taking part in the local food group], it is better to create a second group, because once this limit is overtaken, different problems arise and it becomes difficult to maintain the same relations among members.” (an activist from Barricade in Louviaux, 2003 : 48).

These activists believe a global change will arise from the multiplication of diverse, autonomous spaces of experience. Thus, when someone becomes interested in Barricade’s Collective Purchasing Group, activists respond:

“Rather than join us, better go and see what is happening in your neighbourhood. If there is no collective purchasing group in your neighbourhood, build it.” (an activist of Barricade, interview, 2003).

Rather than enlarging its various groups, many groups thus opt for “emulation” (Tarde, 2001) and “swarming” rather than a growing organization (Pleyers, 2010: 93):

“We don’t seek to build a big organization but many, many small organizations, each maintaining its specificities.”

By doing so, they hope to maintain convivial and participatory group dynamics and to counter the trend towards institutionalization that usually characterizes civil society organizations and solidarity economy projects. When a group grows, the interpersonal dimension progressively gets lost and the separation between the project entrepreneurs and the more passive “consumers” widens.

These actors lead us to reconsider the importance of local level in a globalized world. Local movements usually receive little consideration from social movement scholars, who consider that their focus on the local level results from either a limitation to the selfish defence of local and particular interests of NIMBY movements, or the inability to successfully bring their demands at the national scale (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001). A comprehensive understanding of their culture of activism shows instead that these movements remain local because the “local” scale and territories have provided spaces where actors and alternative projects arise, other forms of democracy are experimented and concrete practices of emancipation in the 21st century are implemented. Any confusion between the territorial scale of a movement and the level of its societal meaning must thus be avoided.

By focusing their activities on the local level, some movements seek to improve the living conditions of their members but also, for many of them, to lay up the foundations for societal transformation. For these activists, social change is not limited to the local scale, but they resolutely conceive it in a bottom-up approach. Often condemned for being tiny, those experiences assert the idea that the fulfilment of democracy requires its values to enter the economic arena and practices (Laville, 2010:26; Hart, Laville, Catani, 2010). The core of critical consumerism lies precisely in this will to combine the implementation of concrete practices at the local scale with a critical challenge of the place of consumption and the economy in our society.

While critical consumers and (ecological) transition activists (Hopkins, 2009) proudly claim that they go beyond political rhetoric and implement concrete alternative practices, this concept of social change however also faces some challenges and limitations. The sustainability of the project requires to ensure economic viability for consumers and producers and to tackle institutional and political dimensions of local food issues. The spread from self-transformation or change in a limited local group to larger scale transformations often remains a blind-spot in the overarching quest for society change. Is it possible to change the world “bite after bite” as proposed by food movement activist Ellix Katz (2009)? Will prefigurative movements at local level translate in systemic

change? Or is it just about multiplying islands of alternative practices in an ocean of consumerism? One may recall that the rise of critical and responsible consumption and of the public awareness of global warming are concomitant with an historic expansion of consumption society and one of the fastest increases in car sales in history⁶.

A new stage: New actors and institutionalization

Expansion and transformations

After a first stage marked by the multiplication of small size local groups ("Groupes d'Achat Commun", GACs), local food networks are now settled in the social, political and urban landscape of Belgium. They mobilize thousands of citizens and dozens of producers every week. The movement has also gained visibility and access to some resources, including public paid jobs for its coordination.

In Flanders, the "neighbours' food network" "Voedselteams" has strengthened their regional coordination which now counts six subsidized jobs. Its efficient coordination allowed the "Voedselteams" to gain visibility and initiate collaborations with the regional state institutions and government. Regional coordination bodies have also emerged in Wallonia and Brussels: the "Responsible Consumer Network" and the "Brussels Actors Network for Sustainable Food" (RABAD). The latter was established in 2008 at the initiative of the a local institution (IBGE) and with the support of the Research Centre of Consumers (CRIOC) to foster collaborations and exchange of information among the 42 member organizations and to raise awareness on local food among the population. These two coordination bodies quickly gained access to public funding, which is far more accessible in Belgium than in most other countries (Faniel, Gobin & Paternotte, 2017). Their professional staffs are now able to provide support to the creation of new local food groups and have contributed to the visibility of local food in the media and institutional arenas.

The access to professional jobs and resources has definitively empowered the local food sector. It has also led local associations to amend some of their original stances and practices:

"Inside, there has been some change in our organization mode. It is still collective, but is much more structured than before "(an employee of "Barricade", interview, 2014).

Activists and organizations of the local food movement are confronted with the classic "dilemma of institutionalization" (Jasper 2014; Pleyers 2012): it enables

⁶ In spite of the growing awareness of global warming, car sales are increasing at a historic pace. 69,464,432 were sold in 2016 following the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers, setting a new sales record. <http://www.oica.net/wp-content/uploads//pc-sales-2016.pdf>

access to resources and allow the movement structure to be more efficient and to reach more consumers and producers but also changes the operating mode and away some initiatives of the radical critique of consumerism that was the origin of the movement for local food.

The local food sector in French speaking Belgium has undergone a partial institutionalization process. Such a process entails internal and external dimensions. Internally, most movement organizations evolve from loose structures to professionalized, hierarchical organizations (Tilly 1986, Kriesi 1993). Externally, some movements are progressively integrated into institutional politics (Tarrow 1998) or become *self-help networks*, whose main purpose is to provide services to their members (Kriesi 1996).

While institutionalization is a classic path of evolution for most social movement, the dilemmas it raises are particularly challenging for a movement that was rooted in the culture of activism in which the renewal of local food in Belgium was rooted. While most leading actors of the local food movements in the 2000s shared strong autonomous, anti-institutional and de-commodification stances, today's most visible and dynamic "entrepreneurs" (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) of the local food movement in Belgium collaborate with public institutions and some even promote regional development projects and policies.

After a period dominated by the networks of "local food consumers groups", a new model of confluence has spread in the local food movement in French speaking Belgium.

While the local food sector mostly relied on local purchase groups formed by a limited number of families and small local producers, the new dynamic pole are the "City Food-Earth Belt" (in French: Ceinture Aliment-Terre) that gather a wide range of social, economic and institutional actors concerned with local food issues.

The first "City Food-Earth Belt" was launched in Liège in 2013. Once more, the small activist cultural center "Barricade" has played a major role in the preparation, the launch and the development of this "Liège Food-Earth Belt" (Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liégeoise, "CATL"). The project is inspired by both the Transition Initiatives and the solidarity economy sector (Capocci, 2014). It gathers local food consumers' groups, other forms of "citizens-consumers" groups and initiatives, local producers, local branches of NGOs, representatives of local governments and administrations, and actors from the solidarity economy sector.

Some dimensions of critical consumption and prefigurative activism remain salient in the new project. However, in the CATL as in other "Local Transition Initiatives" (Hopkins, 2009), the most conflictual and contentious stances of critical consumption have been downsized in favour of a more collaborative approach with actors of civil society, the economic world and local institutions. Discourses on "economic de-growth" have thus been combined with (and sometimes transformed into) projects of "regional economic development

projects”.

As Mary Kaldor (2003:83) recalls, the institutionalization process entails a “taming process” and “taming is not just about access [to resources and to institutional politics arena]. It is about adaptation of both sides. When authorities accept part of the agenda of protest, the movements modify their goals and become respectable”. In the terms of Alain Touraine (1973: 354), “The more movements become interest groups, the more they risk losing their historicity⁷”.

Extension to other civil society actors

The diffusion of the local food issues to social, political and economic actors beyond the original activist circles constitutes both a success and a challenge for the local food movement⁸ as it is obliged to transform itself.

In recent years, Belgian NGOs have shown a rising interest in food related topics. The campaigns conducted by environmental organizations and development NGOs — including Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, WWF, Oxfam, the coalition of development NGOs CNCD — have contributed to increase public awareness beyond activists’ circles and to frame food as a social, political and citizens’ issue. Most NGOs presented local food as a major and easily accessible alternative and responsible practice that contribute to tackle climate and environmental issues. These campaigns have been successful in extending the visibility of local food initiatives in progressive and even mainstream media, bringing more people to implement more responsible choices as consumers, and so reduce the particularly high of the Belgians (WWF, 2014: 37). Such campaigns however reduce the local food movement to its environmental and health impact, while they undermine other dimensions of the original project, including the horizontal and active participation of engaged consumers in local groups and criticism of the hyper-consumption society.

Local authorities

The development of the local food movements in Belgium also illustrates the need to go beyond the strict separation between civil society and political actors. Local authorities are often considered as targets of local movements activists, for example in their campaigns to promote school food. In some cases, local authorities and institutions should also be considered as full actors of the local food movement. Various cities and local governments have become efficient

⁷Touraine defines historicity as the actor’s capacity to challenge society’s major normative orientations.

⁸ Trans-sectoral connections have been eased by the small size of French-speaking Belgium and dense interconnections among its activists. Some actors who aimed at connecting different strands of the population and sectors of civil society were among the first ones to launch local food consumers’ groups, as was the case for “Barricade” in Liège.

brokers between food activists and the population. They are able to reach out to a much broader population and to raise awareness of food issues beyond the progressive middle class that forms the main share of local food activists and consumers.

The Belgian branch of the “Max Havelaar” NGO has launched the “Fair Trade Towns” campaign⁹ to encourage municipalities to change consumption practices in their local administration and schools, and to set up “consum’actors workshops” and campaigns to raise awareness on food issues (both targeting local food and fair trade) among their citizens and local restaurants. The involvement of the city of Ghent in the promotion and implementation of “veggie Thursday” shows the interest of such collaboration. For example, every Thursday, all of the restaurants in the city don’t offer meat. The initial concerns about losing customers were quickly proven false and “veggie Thursday” is now used as a tourism argument on the city website. The local public institution “Brussels Environment” has funded various programs to promote more sustainable consumption, from “sustainable school food” to new collective gardens. It also provides training in schools and financial aid to schools that develop projects focusing on sustainable food.

In 2016, the regional government of Brussels has launched its “Good Food strategy”: a five-year policy program with ambitious objectives, including a 30% local production for fruits and vegetables consumed in the Brussels Region by 2035. The program strongly draws on existing citizens’ initiatives, including the local consumption groups, and actively seeks to federate these initiatives and to increase their visibility. This strategy is representative of the growing role of local authorities in the local food movement, not only as institutional ally but as proper actor of the movement, with a protagonist role to promote it in the public space and public policies but also to structure it and contribute to its internal evolution.

Olivier De Schutter (2014), former UN rapporteur on the Right to Food and leading scholar and activists of the food movement in Belgium, and Rob Hopkins (2009), the founder of the “Transition Movement” that has inspired various food movement activists in Wallonia, strongly promote collaborations between local transition initiatives and cities, municipalities and regions. Analyses of local initiatives for ecological transition in France (Frémeaux, Kalinowsky, Lalucq, 2014) and case studies in countries of the North and South of the planet recounted by activist M.M. Robin (2014) show that support of local institutions or the state play a major role in supporting local food initiatives (whether on consumers or producers side) at the critical stage when they need to ensure their sustainability on medium and long terms.

Cities, municipalities and regions play a major role in developing local food supply chains by ensuring sustainable outlets. In England, many municipalities

⁹ This campaign is partly funded by the Belgian Development Cooperation and the Walloon Region, which illustrates the close connection between public institutions and civil society in the Belgian regions.

provide food from local producers for school canteens, local government or penitentiary centers (Seyfang, 2008). In France (Jaud & Mulberry, 2011) and the USA (Poppendieck, 2010), local food movement organizations have campaigned for school food programs based on local produce and quality. While still rare, similar initiatives have started to spread in Belgium too, mostly thanks to direct connections between producers and local authorities or the head of institutions. For instance, on the initiative of Thierry Wimmer, the young mayor of a rural municipality and president of the hospital committee, the main hospital in East Belgium now purchases its milk directly to the local small farmers cooperative “Fair-Bel”.

Local food as a contribution to a regional development project?

In Flanders, the neighbours’ local food network “Voedselteams” has developed a dialogue with the regional government and has largely inspired its strategic development plan for short food supply chains (Verhaegen, 2012; Van Gameraen, Ruwet et al., 2012).

Just a few years ago, most of the groups and initiatives around local food in Wallonia were reluctant to any collaboration with public institutions and large scale projects. Today, a growing number of activists within the local food movement in the region bet on convergences between critical consumption, ecological transition, the social economy and local development projects.

So far, regional authorities’ interest in the local food initiatives has not been raised by ecological concerns, but by local economy and jobs. A 2014 report (Verdonck et al., 2014) suggests that the local food sector accounted for 2,500 jobs in Brussels, and that this number could be doubled thanks to public incentives and the development of local food sector, including new distributions channels and in urban agriculture. The regional authorities immediately launched initiatives on that basis and included “sustainable food” as one of the four axes of the “Job-Environment Alliance” that gathers civil society actors, research centres, local public administrations and schools.

Likewise, leading actors of the Liège City Food Belt initiative insist on “the potential creation of hundreds of jobs that cannot be delocalized” thanks to a “food chain that is entirely local, from production to consumption”. They now define the CATL as “an open community to develop and support new initiatives both on the consumers and the production side”. It intends to become “an incubator of social entrepreneurs” and to “boost the local economy through the multiplication of projects related to local or fair trade food”. The idea of social entrepreneurship, very present in the social economy sector (Gendron, 2006; Nyssens, 2006), is at the heart of many initiatives bringing them closer to more classic (social) business projects.

The initiators of the Liège City Food Belt share the conviction that the promotion of local development entrepreneurs is a part of a project that seeks a deep transformation of society notably through a de-globalization process. The contribution to local and regional economic development assigned to the City

Food Belt projects seems however to not be entirely compatible with the de-growth perspective that was at the core of most local food movement initiatives a decade ago.

Local economy and more conventional food system

The renewed interest in local food initiated by activists has also expanded the demand for local food, providing a space for local economic initiatives and “short distribution circuits” set up by small and medium farmers. The network “Farm point” (“Point Ferme”) was founded in 2011 in a semi-rural area near Liège. It now distributes 400 vegetable baskets and a hundred “meat boxes” from 15 local farmers a week in 100 delivery points. The visibility of food issues and of organic and local food in the public space has also fostered a rising interest in agroecology among Belgian farmers (Stassart et al., 2012; Dumont, Vanloqueren, Stassart & Barret, 2016)

To grasp the importance, impacts, and challenges to this sector and small and medium size farms requires overpassing cleavages between “alternative” and “conventional” food systems (Verhaegen, 2011). As researchers, it also requires us to foster synergies between research on “consum'actors”, local economy, food producers and agronomy (Baret, 2014) that are usually split in different disciplines (sociology, economy, rural studies, agricultural engineers...) and subfields (social movement studies, solidarity economy, rural and urban studies...)

To serve as a spur for market players, including supermarket retailers, is an indirect but significant impact of the local food movement. Collective actors are key actors in fostering individual consumers' choices, giving them visibility and providing them with a specific meaning (Pleyers, 2017). Alternative practices outside of conventional circuits have made visible some consumers' selection criteria (such as the food production place) that were hitherto neglected by the market. As the movement growth and gain media attention, the demand for local food becomes visible to retailers, who try to respond to it. As Rao (2009) has shown, civil society mobilization, concrete local initiatives and the construction of a collective identity as a movement are critical factors for these “rebels markets”. Once incorporated to the main retailers concerns, the sales of local food reach a much bigger scale as in alternative food network.

Capitalist markets are particularly swift when it comes to partially integrating criticisms made by social and cultural movements (Boltanski, Chiappello, 1999). Local and organic food is no exception. Such products are now found on the shelves of major Belgian supermarket chains. The original criticism to the consumption society has largely been lost in the process. Does the extension of responsible food consumption inevitably lead to muzzling radical criticisms to consumption society?

On the other side, local or organic food may be considered as a “Trojan horse” for criticism of the excesses of the consumption society that reaches the lives of millions of citizens. Many activists of the critical consumption movement thus consider local food as a particularly effective tool to open a path to critical

stances towards the excesses of the mass-consumption society. The young initiator of the “Altérez-Vous” cooperative and local food restaurant testifies:

"At first our project was not working. And then, we realized that starting with the food, we manage to get people interested in our project and our cooperative. Food affects everyone directly and people are interested in what they eat. From there on, we got people interested in cooperatives, solidarity economics and other social projects." (Louvain-la-Neuve, focus group, 2013).

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No Expo Network: multiple subjectivities, online communication strategies, and the world outside

Niccolò Bertuzzi

Abstract

Technological devices are supporting the convergence of individuals and groups, sharing and implementing common repertoires of contention: these opportunities redefine possibilities for arranging at distance, defining a common minimum frame, and allowing multiple adhesion paths and ways of participation. Moreover, the ability to attract political and media attention and the maintenance of the internal solidarity play a strategic role both for successful protests and resistant movements.

According with the theoretical framework deepened in the first part, this paper analyses the mobilization against the Universal Exposition 2015 held in Milan. After a brief overview of the context and the mapping of the main organizations belonging to No Expo Network, an assessment of their involvement in the coalition is presented. Thereafter, the online communication strategy is explored through a systematic analysis of the No Expo website and its visibility in websites, blogs and social network sites of the various groups belonging to the Network. In a mixed perspective, both as scholars and as activists, in this article our purpose is, on the one hand, to describe and also to critically analyse the coalition and its dynamics; on the other hand, to underline the main criticalities of Universal Expositions, by supporting the No Expo arguments.

Keywords: contentious politics, strategic action fields, Expo, No Expo, mega events, online communication, social movements.

Introduction

Year 2015 in Milan meant Universal Exposition. Everything in the city seemed to speak this language and be somehow related to the mega event. Concerts, exhibitions, conferences, university courses: through the construction of a specific 'strategic narrative' (Freedman 2006; Ringsmose and Børgesen 2011; De Graaf, Dimitriu and Ringsmose 2015), the rhetoric in support of Expo2015 became hegemonic (Gramsci 2001). Beside this propaganda, some voices were raised to express doubts and opposition from different points of view: our purpose in this article is to analyse their communication strategies (especially, but not only, online), reflecting on how they tried to contrast the Expo2015 dominant discourse. We are conscious that these few pages are not enough for such an extended topic, firstly because No Expo Network was composed of a large number of individual and collective actors, and only some of them will find

space in the following pages; secondly because, along with the online communication (which is the main focus of our analysis), practices and protest actions were developed before, during and after the event.

The article is divided in four main sections: the first one briefly reminds the context in which Expo2015 emerged and the circumstances surrounding the protest, the second one is dedicated to the theoretical references, the third one presents the fieldwork, and in the last one some conclusions and reflections are proposed. We present here a mapping of the organizations, an evaluation of their centrality level, and the main results related to the No Expo online communication strategies. These findings are part of a wider research and are mainly based on a systematic analysis of online communication (No Expo website and different communication channels of single groups of the Network) and 8 semi-structured interviews with different kinds of activists (Bertuzzi forthcoming).

To conclude this brief introduction, and before the contextualization of the No Expo mobilization, we need to clarify as our perspective is engaged and also partially ‘militant’ (Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle 2007; Halvorsen 2015; Russell 2015), as we were somehow involved in No Expo Network and we shared its critical positions.

Contextualization

On 31 March 2008, the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions) commissioned to Milan the 2015 edition of Universal Exposition, with the theme ‘Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life’: the organization was assigned to Expo 2015 S.p.a., a company created in October 2008 by Italian Government, Lombardy Region, Province of Milan, City of Milan and Chamber of Commerce of Milan. The Universal Exposition is a mega event (Roche 2000; Muller 2015; Gruneau and Horne 2015) which, according to latest dispositions of the BIE, is planned every five years, lasting for a maximum of six months: the first one (of modern era) dates back to 1851 and was held in London. This was the second time that Milan hosted the Expo, after more than a century. In Expo2015 142 countries participated, along with international organizations (e.g. United Nations, European Union, Caribbean Community), big corporations (e.g. Coca Cola, Joomoo, New Holland) and a number of NGOs (non governmental organizations) gathered in the pavilion named Cascina Triulza.

In parallel to the evolution of the event, protests against it have been raised since 2007 when No Expo Committee was created (for a detailed reconstruction, see also Casaglia 2016). There were several important steps, like critics against the PGT (Piano di Governo del Territorio: Territory Government Plan) of Milan, or observations to the variant of the PRG (Piano Regolatore Generale: General Regulation Plan) in implementing the Program Agreement for Expo2015. However, especially some events characterized the mobilization: it should be reported at least No Expo Festival in May 2010, No Expo Climate Camp in June 2012 and the big demonstrations in October 2014 and May 2015.

Then, various mobilizations to which No Expo Network participated over the years must be added, from No TAV (Treno Alta Velocità: High Speed Railways) to No TEM (Tangenziale Esterna Milano: Eastern Milan Orbital Road) and No Pedemontana, to name only few. These mobilizations were strongly related to No Expo and were an occasion to unveil the connections between the mega event and the transformation of the territory: they were also partially successful struggles, in that they were able to connect locally base protests with a more general reasoning over neoliberal governance (Mossberger and Stoker 2001).

As well known, in order to understand how social movements build counter-narratives or how they use existing discourses to propose alternative scenarios (Ringsmose and Børgesen 2011; De Graaf and Dimitriu 2012) is important to consider the background where contentious discourses emerge (Bröer and Duyvendak 2009). In our case, at least two elements must be remembered: the security-warning built around No Expo Network during the months preceding the event, in a stigmatizing climate of security paranoia; and the various scandals that accompanied the works of preparation (see: Barbacetto and Maroni 2015; Moccia 2015; Casaglia 2016). Starting with this last aspect, it's correct to point out that, despite dominant public discourse has been particularly favourable to the event, some voices, even including institutional ones, contested the mainstream propaganda: such critics were mainly focused on the costs of the event, and especially on bribes paid with numerous arrests and judgments. In addition to these criticalities, relatively perceptible even by public opinion, other anomalies, highlighted by No Expo Network, found a certain amount of visibility: firstly, those aspects related to the repercussions of the 'over-construction' that the event would have had on Milan; secondly, the inconsistency of the main sponsors with the declared philosophy of the event.

Given this situation, different groups gathered around No Expo Network, contesting both the specific realization of the 2015 edition and the general philosophy of such events (Bertuzzi forthcoming). In fact, an important goal of No Expo Network was to bridge some of its arguments with previous editions of the Universal Exposition and with the opposition against other recent mega events conducted in Italy (see: Bobbio and Guala 2022; Casaglia 2016).

All that said, in the next paragraph we will remind some theoretical contributions useful to frame our research, starting from general considerations about contemporary protests and collective identity, and then focusing on the use of the Internet by social movements. Then, the following section will be specifically devoted to the description of the remarkable internal variety and the online communication strategies of No Expo Network, in order to answer our research questions:

RQ1: What kind of collective actors were part of No Expo Network?

RQ2: What was the importance of the online communication in the context of the No Expo message? How did No Expo Network, and the groups composing it, use the Web in order to propose their arguments and promote their actions?

RQ3: What form of internal organization No Expo Network developed and how do the different groups interact among them?

Theoretical framework

As previously anticipated, our focus in this article will be especially on the online dimension of No Expo Network; this is the reason why in this brief theoretical framework we will remind some references regarding the role assumed by the Internet for contemporary social movements.

It's quiet shared the assumption that new possibilities of participation supported by technological devices are favouring the convergence of individuals and groups, which, in the past, probably would never have shared common actions and protests (Bennet and Segerberg 2011; Pleyers 2011). These conditions redefine the forms of confrontation based on organization, dialogue and agreement at distance (Kamel 2014), the definition of a common minimum frame (Tremayne 2014), and the dynamics of adhesion to protest, allowing multiple paths and ways of participation (McDonald 2002; Pleyers 2011). In such general framework, several scholars have stressed for a long time the phenomenon of the personalization of protest (Inglehart 1977; McDonald 2002; Micheletti 2003), namely a growing 'tendency to engage with multiple causes by filtering those causes through individual lifestyles' (Bennett and Segerberg 2011, 771): this kind of personalization sometimes jeopardizes the 'collective identity' of social movements, giving space to forms of 'individualized collective actions' (Micheletti and McFarland 2010).

Also for such reasons, studying the political dimension of the Internet nowadays becomes mandatory: however, as della Porta and Mosca (2009, 772) stressed, 'for many years the debate on the political effects of the Internet has been mainly focused on an abstract level, with scarce references to empirical data', leading to underestimated (Bennett 2003) or contradictory (Di Maggio, Hargittai, Russel Neuman and Robinson 2001) results. One of the solutions applied to contrast this situation has been to analyse ties and relations between groups and individuals: 'networks', in fact, are acquiring centrality not only as analytical devices, but also in their empirical nature of 'organization as ideology' (Bennett 2005), privileged places for reflexivity (della Porta and Mosca 2005) and opportunity of new 'digital repertoires of contention' (Earl and Kimport 2011). If the Internet has been treated as an object of study, in other cases it has also been used as a tool of analysis (Mosca 2014), in particular, to study links between different organizations (Caiani, della Porta and Wageman 2012), their ability to mobilize resources (Caiani and Parenti 2013) and to build movement imaginaries (Bennet and Segerberg 2011).

Given this panorama, several authors have highlighted the potential of the Internet, from its ability to create transnational networks (della Porta 2005) to its usefulness in terms of protest instrument (Jordan 2002; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010), from organizational advantages (Gerbaudo 2012) to its democratic value (Mosca 2007). On the other hand, there is who emphasizes the limited

effectiveness of the Internet itself, which at best could only strengthen existing offline relationships and identities (della Porta and Mosca 2009; Diani 2000), and whose democratic power is not so often developed (Rucht 2004). What it seems irrefutable is that the Internet gave to social movements the possibility to develop new repertoires of collective action (Tilly 1984), offering a great help to the uprising of a new paradigm of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001), that Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 2013) labelled as ‘the logic of connective action’. At the same time, it has to be admitted that this great potential of the Internet represents also its main limit: its very nature of ‘weak-tie instrument’ (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson 2005) entails a difficulty to maintain long mobilizations (Diani 2000) and leads to faster decline (Earl and Schussman 2003). In the end, we do not think correct to opt for partisan positions, neither techno-optimistic (Shirky 2008) nor techno-pessimistic (Morozov 2011) to online protest, the first one stressing the creation of a ‘virtual public sphere’ (Langman 2005), the other fearing an augmentation of classical dynamics of exclusion (Cammaerts 2008); we prefer to embrace a more prudent and halfway position (Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010; Gerbaudo 2012) recognizing the importance of the Internet but without assuming a devaluation of human beings.

To conclude with a general remark, we can observe that certainly the emerging and the spreading of the Internet (along with other older and broader processes) implied a growing complexity of society at large and also of social movements more specifically: this does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to the development of collective identities, but instead makes them plural and therefore not superimposed in a single political identity (Monterde, Calleja-López, Aguilera, Barandiaran and Postill 2015). So, already in the past, various attempts to define the growing extension of social movements were proposed, from ‘action sets’ (Aldrich and Whetten 1981), to ‘rainbow coalitions’ (Peterson 1997), from the idea of an ‘archipelago of islands’ (Diani 1988) intended as a wide network of different subjects gathered around a very general issue, to the classic concept of ‘contentious politics’ (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). In our perception the best framework to understand contemporary movement coalitions is the one proposed by Jasper (2014) that insists on the strategic dimension and the agency of both single individuals and SMOs (social movement organizations), in the more general paradigm that Fligstein and McAdam (2012, 3) defined as that of ‘strategic action fields’, namely ‘a meso-level social order where actors (who can be individual or collective) interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field (including who has power and why), and the field's rules’.

Fieldwork analysis

As remembered in the introduction, in this article the analysis is limited to the communication strategies (especially online) of No Expo Network: we mainly did it through an observation of digital media (websites, blogs, social networks

sites) and 8 semi-structured interviews with different kinds of activists. The findings presented in the next pages will be also discussed (especially in the conclusion) referring to other parts of our research, namely a framework analysis on the main files produced by No Expo Network, and the direct participation in public assemblies and demonstrations (Bertuzzi forthcoming).

Mapping the network

As a first aspect, it's correct to specify the nature of No Expo Network (an heterogeneous aggregation of groups) and that of its antagonists (the management trust of Expo2015 and all the investors, private and public, involved in it). In this sense we can primarily recognize a multidimensional asymmetry. On the one hand No Expo Network, composed by a huge number of grass-rooted organizations, most of them without a juridical status and with different purposes: the existence of each organization was strictly connected to the activism of their members; moreover, their goals and strategies were constantly shared and discussed. On the other hand, an aggregation of public institutions (transnational, national and local), corporations, enterprises and only a residual group of NGOs. The asymmetry emerged firstly in relation to the different forms of organization (informal and grass-rooted vs. bureaucratized), secondly to economic resources invested in promoting/contesting the Exposition, thirdly to opportunities for media access. Finally, and in a more general frame, asymmetry could be detected in the contrast between the constructive power of Expo message and the deconstructive purpose of No Expo Network: the first perspective was managed by a massive recourse to marketing communication addressed to an international distracted public, the second one required an articulated set of arguments and a potential mass willing to evaluate them.

Considering this, our first purpose was a descriptive one: to outline a map of the Network and to answer our first research question, namely:

RQ1: What kind of collective actors were part of No Expo Network?

Till first months of 2015 some of them were linked in the homepage of <http://www.noexpo.org>, but in that period the website was renewed and the list disappeared: we asked the reasons to some activists involved in the communication management, and it didn't seem to be the result of a strategic choice but only a consequence of website restyling. Anyway, we reconstructed the list through our notes, journal articles and information collected among activists, focusing on an incremental approach in order to include as much organizations as possible involved in coordination, organization and participation. From the 18 organizations previously listed in the website, we increased the number till 55, most of them without a juridical status; moreover, some of them were specific coalitions (mainly focused on a single No Expo campaign) composed by pre-existing organizations and/or new organizations created to contrast some specific Expo projects (e.g. civic committees against construction of new water channels which converged in No Canal coalition).

So, the first important aspect to be considered is related to the variety of these grass-rooted organizations: we reconstructed this variety from the self-definition of the groups themselves traced on their social network sites (from now on: SNSs), blogs and websites. The real protagonists of No Expo Network were, at least in its more visible phase (year 2015), the most important metropolitan and regional ‘Self-Managed Occupied Social Centres’ (Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti, in Italian; from now on: CSOAs); other important actors were the collectives of students (mainly composed by students from the university but also from the high school) and the movements against big infrastructure projects. Different groups and individuals supporting specific No Expo campaigns, other pre-existing campaigns on common goods, and initiatives on housing and the right to the city represented the variety of the Network also. Moreover, some unions were included in the Network as co-organizers of some events, such as the Euro MayDay. All these actors listed in Table 1 were Italian, but a little number of groups and activists from other countries joined the mobilization, participating in some events and collaborating in the critical work of imaginaries’ (de)construction.

Table 1: Internal composition of No Expo Network

Category	Groups
Occupied Social Centres	Piano Terra, Zam, Lambretta, Sos Fornace, Il Cantiere, Torchiera, Casc Lambrate, Macao, Boccaccio, Leoncavallo, Conchetta, Baraonda, Transiti
Students' SMOs	Studenti contro Expo, Unione degli studenti, Collettivo Bicocca, Studenti per l'altra Europa, Movimento Studenti Rho, Collettivo Universitario The Take-CUT, Dillinger, Rete Studenti Milano, Link, CCS Coordinamento Collettivi Studenteschi, Giovani Comunisti, Studenti bergamaschi
Movements against infrastructures	No Canal, No Tav, No Muos, No Mose, No Grandi Navi
No Expo related campaigns	Io non lavoro gratis per Expo, Liberati da Expo, NoExpoPride, We-Women Fuor d'EXPO, Io non studio gratis per Expo
Pre existing campaigns or SMOs	Off Topic, San Precario, Ri-make, La terra trema, Antispefa, Genuino Clandestino, Paci Paciana, Autonomia diffusa, Eat the Rich, Acqua ben commune, Ira-C, Abitare nella crisi, Spazio Mutuo Soccorso, EuroMayDay
Unions	CUB, USB, Slai-Cobas

By means of our semi-structured interviews and our participation in assemblies and events, we then tried to define a centrality level of the various collective subjects involved in the Network. In this very case we use the term 'centrality' in a broader meaning, as an indication of the different levels of coordination, organization and participation to the No Expo events.

We identified 15 groups as 'coordinators', meaning that they were the main actors of the Network, defining the general strategies and framing the 'official' discourses and rhetoric. Then, 13 groups can be labelled as 'organizers of events', being involved especially in specific situations and when singular initiatives were developed. Finally, 18 were simple 'participants', because they were only involved in the physical participation in collective appointments.

If we consider the single groups belonging to those three different levels, we can summarize saying that the ‘coordinators’ were especially represented by the main local CSOAs, that not only had a greater visibility in the city of Milan and a better ability to mobilize activists but also ‘imposed’ the specific issue of the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1968) as the central one during the years of mobilization (Casaglia 2016; Bertuzzi forthcoming). In the ‘organizers of events’ (and partly in the ‘participants’), on the contrary, there were numerous collectives of students, namely subjects that, at least in theory, have much time to spend but less networks to rely on; in addition to them we detected various other anti-capitalist Italian movements, especially those based in other parts of the country, and some specific campaigns and various national unions.

Apart this very broad and generic typology, there’s an important point to remark: heterogeneity of organizations and participation’s dynamics during last years implied a discontinuity degree, namely a different weight assumed across time by the collective actors involved in the general mobilization: in particular, the growing central role of CSOAs must be an other time remembered (Casaglia 2016; Bertuzzi forthcoming). For this reason it’s not useful to consider this ‘centrality classification’ as an absolute homogeneous measure along the time; it can rather be considered as a trend indicator of organizations’ leadership attitude in the specific context of No Expo Network.

This last point leads us to consider the various ways of using online protest in the general frame of the No Expo coalition.

Online communication strategy

In this paragraph, we will try to add some interpretative remarks to the report of our findings, starting from our second research question, namely:

RQ2: What was the importance of the online communication in the context of the No Expo message? How did No Expo Network, and the groups composing it, use the Web in order to propose their arguments and promote their actions?

For this purpose we considered some structural aspects of its online communication, in particular those expressed through <http://www.noexpo.org>, and their communicative impact on websites, blogs and SNSs of the main groups belonging to No Expo Network.

The first important aspect is related to the mimetic strategy that characterized the No Expo website: for example, its logo has been designed altering the original Expo logo (see figure 1). Same colours, same lettering, but subverted through the explicit explanation, in the payoff, of the three main effects which, according to opponents’ viewpoint, have been produced by the event: debt, concrete, precariousness (‘debito, cemento, precarietà’, in Italian). In such subvertising practice (Chesters and Welsh 2011) it’s possible to read a sort of brand strategy (Banet-Weiser 2012) in the No Expo Network communication; this aspect has been already noted (della Porta and Piazza 2008) in some of the so called No-coalitions (No Tav, No Mose, but also No Global), in which No

Expo Network could certainly be comprised, and in other recent mobilizations or, broadly speaking, social movements such as Occupy or Anonymous (Beraldo 2017).

Figure 1: No Expo logos and banners



Considering this important premise, we explored if and how it existed a sort of coordination, or at least a coherent connection, between the No Expo website and the websites or blogs of groups and organizations belonging to No Expo Network. The heterogeneity of groups and organizations was reflected also in their web-based communication channels: as reported in Table 2, the most diffused web tools were SNSs, used by almost all of the organizations mapped (42 of 55); then followed websites (19 of 55) and blogs (19 of 55). Of the 55 organizations mapped, 39 had a website and/or a blog and only two had a website, a blog and at least one SNS profile.

Table 2: Online communication channel of No Expo Network

	Level 1 (tot. 15)	Level 2 (tot. 13)	Level 3 (tot. 18)	Campaigns, MayDay (tot. 7)	TOT. (53*)
Web site (WS)	6	4	6	3	19
Blog	5	3	3	3	14
Social networks sites (SNS)	15	11	13	4	42
Only WS+blog	0	0	0	0	0
Only WS+SNS	0	2	4	2	8
Only Blog+SNS	3	3	3	2	11
WS+blog+SNS	2	0	0	0	2
Nothing	0	0	0	1	1

After this first overview, we checked the existence of a permanent link to the No Expo website in the homepage of the 39 organizations which used the website and/or the blog as communication tool: only eight of them had a permanent link to the No Expo website. Among them, only four organizations with a permanent link were strongly involved in the Network, participating to what we identified as the ‘coordination table’: this evidence is relevant if we consider that, according to the classification presented in the previous paragraph, 15 were the organizations participating actively to the coordination table of the Network. We, in fact, assumed that a permanent link is a multiplier of visibility in a comprehensive communication web strategy, an instrument ‘for reciprocal help in attaining public recognition, and for potential means of coordination’ (Burris, Smith and Strahm 2000, 215). We also considered the visibility of the No Expo initiatives in the same websites and blogs: only 20 of the organizations considered gave visibility to some of the initiatives promoted by No Expo Network.

These evidences allow us to introduce some considerations, which can better pinpoint the significance and role of the No Expo Network online communication. A first finding concerns the non-exploitation of the opportunities related to web-based communication: the website (but also the common pages on SNSs) was not the first strategic communication channel if we simply consider its diffusion in relation to SNSs of single groups. The second

evaluation brings us back to the asymmetry previously quoted: although the mimetic strategy of the No Expo website, we can't consider it completely as a tile of a Corporate Communication Strategy. It was, despite all, the result of an agreement and a very different, if not opposite, decision-making process to those identifiable in the organizational structure of Expo enterprise: assembly based vs. pyramidal structure, horizontality in decision making process instead of top-down approach, self-reflexivity as method instead of corporate pragmatism, plurality of subjectivities instead of a unique and coordinated image for marketing purposes, voluntary work of activists instead of a professional full-time contracted team with specific professional skills.

This assumption is also shared by the activists we have interviewed, who appeared on the one hand very conscious of the high level of (technical and political) expertise that characterized the coalition, and on the other hand convinced of the marginal (or at least secondary and ancillary) role that the online communication should have had with respect to the offline actions.

When we created the website, in the group more involved in the organizational team, we were discussing what slogans we could use. Someone proposed “debt, concrete, precariousness”. From that idea we recovered the old No Expo logo with the man of Leonardo and we attached it to the graphics and colours of Expo. In some ways this choice was very instinctive, very little strategically planned if we think to strategy as a result of a rational and “in cold blood” choice...Some other more fine tuned communication tools, such as Expomapp for Android and iOS, are not in the No Expo website but they're more complex examples of mimetic strategy...Communication, especially web communication, at the moment, is extremely amateur; at the beginning we tried to propose and share a policy related to communication strategy, but extreme fluidity of collective self-organized aggregations, and more and more among civic committees, prevents to implement a real common communication policy.

The website, in fact, despite its communicative potentiality, has been perceived as a bidimensional tool, a document container, an information instrument, but it couldn't return the heterogeneity and the social complexity of communicative actions promoted by No Expo Network, whose viral potentiality went well beyond the Web.

I think the best way to understand No Expo Network is not through the website, but focusing attention on main initiatives which impressed rhythm and effective public visibility: the critical mass in Monza (7 July 2013) which arrived just in front of Villa Reale, one of the official representative headquarter of Expo and officially within the perimeter of the red line; moreover we produced the game Expopolis, based on Monopoly game, and we performed it in many squares...each one can download, reproduce and personalize it, according to local struggles against land-grabbing and the context where you want to play. In addition we can consider also some important campaigns like No Canal campaign and student's campaign against voluntary work. All these events were the best communication

actions of the Network and the website can give you only a partial and reductive feedback of communicative activities.

It seems that communication richness outside the No Expo website (in other web-based channels of communication, and especially outside the Web) couldn't be recollected and presented in it, for many different reasons: the first one is strictly related to the long-time decision-making process behind the publication of contents on the website; secondly, the autonomy of each organization was respected and, in some ways, encouraged, because it was a guarantee of the potential viral effect of spontaneous and grass-rooted activities promoted by a multiplicity of subjects which couldn't be constricted in a coordinated communication strategy, such as a corporate one.

Movement networks: variety of issues and the management of media propaganda

Also considering other parts of the research not included in this paper (Bertuzzi 2017; Bertuzzi forthcoming), we finally refer to our third research question (RQ3: What form of internal organization No Expo Network developed and how do the different groups interact among them?) with a special attention to the management of the media (negative) propaganda.

All the research (web based analysis, in depth interviews and participant observation) and militant activities we conducted, gave us the opportunity to evaluate from different perspectives a so complex aggregation of collective actors: the mapping was necessary to understand the shaded boundaries of the Network and some participation dynamics. In the middle of our research we felt useful to reconsider what a social movement is. According to the classical definition of Mario Diani, a social movement is 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict' (Diani 1992: 13). Starting from this perspective, we should then speak of No Expo Movement and not of No Expo Network, but there are some important reasons which allow us to introduce a distinction between Network and Movement: the Network is necessary to build up a Movement, but it's not sufficient. Crossing the main findings about the online communication of No Expo Network with the interviews and the participant observation in some important No Expo events, we can say that the most lacking elements preventing us to speak about a No Expo Movement were the absence of a coordination process (in the communication dimension, and in the events' organization and participation) and the consequent impossibility to build a long-term mobilization; moreover, it seemed to lack a real 'collective identity' able to give a sort of continuity along the years of mobilization. The distinction here proposed also found the agreement of some activists interviewed: they distinguished, for example, No Expo Network by No Tav Movement – the second one with a long history and a strong capacity to support

its goals even if built up by different organizations with quite divergent points of view (della Porta and Piazza 2008).

Then, regarding our specific analysis, we also must consider the huge number of issues faced by the organizations belonging to No Expo Network (land grabbing and right to the city, labour exploitation, cultural policies, animal rights, environment protection, education, pinkwashing, greenwashing, and so on). In this sense, and trying to connect the organizational dimension with the communicative aspects, the website was only the lower common denominator: as already specified, much more than on websites, blogs and SNSs, communication was rooted in the actions promoted by groups of (or single) organizations. Therefore, social creativity and viral effect implied only a limited coordination degree (in communication and, more in general, in the action strategies) but, in some circumstances, namely in the collective appointments, this gave back a fragmented image of the Network and 'legitimated' the cannibalism of mainstream media (traditional and new ones), allowing them to spread a negative storytelling of the whole coalition (Bertuzzi 2017). In this regard, No Expo Network showed fluctuating trends both among the media sphere and the 'world outside': occasionally it was able to emerge getting positive attention from the citizens and the media (or at least from a part of them) like in the No Canal mobilization or with the Expopolis Game, in other moments it seemed to undergo the events that itself organized and which were manipulated and trivialized by the media, as it happened during No Expo MayDay when a small number of quite limited destructive actions (against cars, windows of banks, and shops) were able to catalyse the public discourse on the event, totally obscuring and delegitimizing the No Expo discourses and the participation of thousands of people.

Conclusions

In the previous pages we analysed different aspects regarding internal composition, discursive opportunities and (online) communication strategies of No Expo Network. In what follows we will try to briefly re-consider the results at the light of some more general questions: what are the dangers/problematics of this kind of coalitions? Are there any positive/constructive elements of the use of SNSs and online communication that we can learn from this example and that can become a collective toll-kit?

Starting from the end, we remembered the distinction between movements and networks (Diani 1992), stressing how the definition of a 'collective identity' is necessary to build a movement coalition. At the same time, an apparent weak point, being a Network and not a Movement, could be also interpreted and strategically played as an opportunity: in fact, creativity and viral potential of the actions proposed by different subjects could be diffused only through weak ties and weak coordination environments. However, this wasn't actually the case of No Expo Network, which was substantially defeated in its scopes and resulted in a 'failed mobilization' (Zamponi 2012): with this definition we mean

here that the No Expo mobilization couldn't resist in its initial efficacy and potential strength. At the same time it's important, as pointed out by Zamponi (2012), to critically analyse also these kinds of mobilization in order to 'break the academic habit of studying only successful protests'.

With specific reference to our case study, the partial failure we are talking about could be symbolically highlighted, for example, by the election of the CEO of Expo2015 S.p.a., Mr. Giuseppe Sala, as new Mayor of Milan in 2016 (Bertuzzi 2017). We are aware that the very purpose of the mobilization was not to stop the Expo or to prevent the election of Sala, but rather to develop awareness on the way in which this kind of events have a flywheel effect with regard to the neoliberal transformation of urban governance. In this regard, along with the partial failure, we must also recognize a parallel partial success in the ability to connect local mobilizations (No Canal and others) under the umbrella of No Expo, in order to underline the more general processes underneath the localized consequences of the event.

Going back to the strategic dimension and to the agency of individuals and SMOs, we saw as the logic of connective action in No Expo Network took a central position. As already said, in absence of a real shared 'collective identity' and facing the difficulty to maintain a strong mobilization along the years, the multivocality, the networked dimension of the coalitions and the 'atomization' of some collective processes, also represented one of the main potentialities of the Network itself: potentialities not always developed and often neutralized by the public dominant discourse that was in favour of the *kermesse* and tried to stigmatize any form of dissent. In this sense, we can propose a generalization saying that those coalitions embracing a logic of connective action needs a very strong collective identity, maybe even more than those still characterized by a logic of collective action. This is visible for example in the apparent weakness of the use of SNSs when not sustained by a common minimum frame: in fact, the only moments that could attract a generalized interest among the public opinion (even if an interest then declined in a negative, stigmatizing way) corresponded to those events that maybe began on the Internet but then had an offline resonance.

It's true that different kinds of mobilization with other characteristics (greater extension, more visibility, some forms of support from international and political allies, and so on) could also mobilize resources and gain visibility only remaining at an online dimension, at least for some period; but it's also true that the great appeal of the online dimension of social movements typical of the Nighties/Noughties is nowadays decreasing, and also those recent mobilizations 'born' on the Web needed to go on the streets to conquer (or try to conquer) their real goals (Gerbaudo 2012; Tufekci 2017). Even more, it's always more evident as it's impossible to abandon the logic of collective action and how the online and the offline dimension should be taken as a whole: the lack of communication strategy we registered in our empirical analysis (visible also in other recent episodes: see for example the Global Debout in France and then in other countries) and the way this lack can affect patterns of integration across

different collective actors, are phenomena that should be at the top agenda of social movement studies (and also of the activists' reflections) in the years to come.

To conclude with a provocation, we would like to emphasize how online protests, and more in general media struggles, require big energies and investments, but this didn't coincide with the medium-long term cultural change pursued by many of the organizations belonging to No Expo Network. So, the struggle between the mega event and the surrounding protest was not the warfare but only a transition point, where new coalitions were experimented, distances and closeness among organizations were tested, and asymmetries in power relations were challenged or reproduced. In such situation, surrender to a media battle can maybe be considered as part of a wider strategy aimed at getting out of the colonized media circle in order to look for other languages, strategies and codes.

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The Irish water charges movement: theorising “the social movement in general”

Laurence Cox

“The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general [*die soziale Bewegung überhaupt*].” (Marx to Engels, December 11 1869)

Abstract

This paper uses participant narratives and Marxist social movement theory to analyse resistance to water charges as the driving force of Irish anti-austerity struggles – or “the social movement in general”. It locates this movement within the history of working-class community-based self-organisation in Ireland. Contemporary resistance to metering and refusal to pay are not “spontaneous”, but articulate long-standing local rationalities.

The current situation has seen the crisis of other forms of working-class articulation: union dependence on a Labour Party which enthusiastically embraced austerity in government; the co-optation of community service provision within “social partnership”, under attack from the state since the mid-2000s; and the collapse of far left initiatives for shared parliamentary representation and resistance to household charges. New forms of popular agency are thus developing; community-based direct action has enabled a historic alliance between multiple forms of working-class voice and unleashed a vast process of popular mobilisation and self-education.

Finally, the paper relates the Irish movement to the wider loss of consent for austerity on the European periphery, and asks after the political prospects for effective alliances “within the belly of the beast”.

Keywords: Social movements, Marxism, Ireland, water, class, community activism, austerity, neoliberalism, resistance

Introduction: the poverty of Irish academic theory¹

Something extraordinary has happened in the Irish movement against water charges, part of a longer struggle against austerity and centred in working-class housing estates in the major cities. Self-organised groups of friends, neighbours, family and activists have prevented, disrupted and in some cases reversed the installation of water meters across substantial parts of working-class Dublin, Cork and elsewhere. A massive proportion of the population has never registered for billing, refused to pay or cancelled their payments. Some of the largest demonstrations in decades have taken place. Ireland has joined those peripheral European countries where a political majority for austerity politics can no longer be found except by fraud or force. A greatly revitalised working-class community activism has joined together with a substantial proportion of the trade union movement that has abandoned its traditional loyalty to the Labour Party, and with various left and independent parties and parliamentary deputies.

The movement provoked a substantial crisis in the 2016 election and government formation process: at time of writing (May 2017), the issue – kicked into the long grass of a commission, with charges suspended in the interim – has returned to haunt the corridors of power. In the parliamentary committee set up to consider the commission's report, Fianna Fáil, currently supporting the minority Fine Gael – Independent Alliance government, voted with Fine Gael and against all other parties for a report which will presumably now be implemented in legislation. This rolls back charges (and refunds those who had paid) but retains a levy for "excess use" (and hence a back door for reintroducing charges in future) as well as meters in all newly built housing – the latter good news for billionaire Denis O'Brien, the owner of much of Ireland's private media and one of whose companies was awarded contracts for meter installation.

The intention is no doubt to demobilise the movement, which had visibly stalled other austerity-related plans, such as the proposal to impose a broadcasting licence payment on those who did not own a television.² However it seems clear that the levels of popular participation generated within the movement have spilled over into the many other austerity-related issues destroying lives across the country. People who have once become mobilised on this scale and with

¹ Earlier versions of this argument were presented to the UCC Dept of Government research seminar, the Manchester "Alternative Futures and Popular Protest" conference, a plenary session at the Sociological Association of Ireland conference, and an academia.edu discussion. My thanks are due to the organisers and participants.

² "Government backed off TV licence plan over fears of water charges-style protests, claims TD". *Irish Times* 9 May 2017. It is significant in this context that the state broadcaster RTÉ had consistently massively underestimated the numbers of those involved in water charges protests, making the new licence fee a particular target of criticism.

such an impact rarely consent to go back home quietly and forget about the experience³.

And yet the movement is barely studied *as a movement*. Its most avid chroniclers have been right-wing journalists who seek either to demonise or trivialise it⁴. Most academic writing has consisted of drive-by punditry: a handful of partly-informed comments on the fringe of discussion of something “important”, usually economics, policy or government formation⁵.

To say this, however, is apparently an extreme breach of in-group solidarity. An earlier version of this paper received such sustained criticism for its temerity in challenging other academics that it may be worth pausing to reflect on the reasons for this. According to one commentator, all forms of research are valid in their own terms; more diffuse criticisms simply reaffirmed a sense of professional loyalty in which what is most important is to avoid being “harsh” to one’s fellow academics and to show due deference to “the literature”, however poor. This paper takes a rather different view, which is that academics should be held to serious intellectual and professional standards rather than in effect given a free pass for having a university job.

In this context, much of what has been published (as discussed below) is weak by the most basic standards of familiarity with empirical fact, logical argument, research methods and international research. The provincialism which lets this kind of writing stand as “the literature” undermines the credibility of social research as a whole. There is then a wider weakness of the Irish variants of particular disciplines in their (classed) inability to notice working-class movements in particular, by comparison with states, formal organisations such as parties or middle-class movements. Lastly, we might note the slippage where writing about policy or parties is felt to encompass popular mobilisation, thus avoiding any requirement to study the latter seriously. In this respect, the

³ For readers unfamiliar with the movement, the significant features of the “issue” are the Irish state’s decision to charge individuals (not the businesses and farms which use 78% of water) for water usage, a move widely seen as enabling future privatisation; and the official claim that charges are required by the EU. Water charges affect the vast majority of private households, owner-occupied and rented; only those on some rural group water schemes are exempt, while people in flats or where two houses share a pipe face estimated bills. Thus the charges impacted almost all social groups, regressively.

⁴ One honourable exception is Brendan Ogle’s (2016) book on the movement came out. It is no criticism to say that it is fundamentally a history of the Right2Water / Right2Change alliances which he was instrumental in helping to bring together, and not of the wider movement beyond the Right2Water demonstrations and the 2016 election. The book gives an excellent insight into the often-underlooked role of trade unions in the movement.

⁵ Early feedback from colleagues sought greater engagement with “the literature” and “existing debates”, marking the reasonable assumption that there should *be* a literature and academic debates on such a substantial movement. This paper is partly written to remedy its near-total absence at present.

criticisms which follow are intended as a call for greater intellectual standards – as well as an observation that some emperors really have no clothes⁶.

Talking about “important” things

Around the time the movement took off, two political scientists (Cannon and Murphy 2015) co-authored a paper which explained what they identified as a *lack* of protest in Ireland by factors including the Irish not being poor *enough* to protest en masse. Reality has of course already delivered a harsh critique of the article’s basic premise. However brief reflection should have suggested that if absolute levels of wealth really determined readiness to protest, we would find a neat curve mapped across human history, with its highpoint at some “optimum” level of deprivation generating maximum protest. Needless to say, no such curve graces the introductory chapters of social movements textbooks⁷.

From the politically reductionist end, activist Rory Hearne and his geography class carried out a Facebook survey focussing on the rather leading question “What kind of political party do you think the movement needs?” (Hearne 2015a, 2015b). While participants reliably reproduced the general left rhetoric that parties are good, the subsequent history suggests that this opinion does not have great effect on their actual practice: no new party actually materialised⁸. Nonetheless Hearn’s study has the great merit of existing and its empirical material is valuable⁹. A *New Left Review* piece, meanwhile, focusses roughly evenly on economics, parties and unions, and media commentary, with actual popular participation relegated to occasional asides (Finn 2015a).

⁶ Since writing this paper I was delighted to listen to David Landy’s (2017) conference paper, which is everything that research in this area should be – but, in Ireland, is not: familiar with the social movements literature, empirically familiar with the details of the water charges struggle and able to situate it in a wider context both of Irish movement history and of social movements internationally.

⁷ We should also note psychological reductionisms, such as Power and Nussbaum (2016), who explain the supposed absence of protest with the mysteries of Irish Catholicism – despite both its well-documented decline in recent decades and the contrast they see with (Protestant?) countries such as Spain and Portugal. What they actually document, it might be suggested, is people’s willingness to explain supposed Irish peculiarities in terms of national character.

⁸ Respondents themselves saw voting in elections as substantially less effective at bringing change on issues like water charges than protesting (52.3% vs 77.6%; 2015a: 24). As noted below, this is a reasonably accurate reading of the history of the Republic, which offers little indication that parties are an effective means of bringing about social justice – but repeated examples of large-scale social movements bringing about substantial change in the teeth of official Ireland.

⁹ There are obvious methodological problems which are not overcome by simple sample size (Hearne 2015a: 2). However we can note that Ireland has internationally high levels of Internet usage and Facebook in particular; that social media use is very important for the movement; and that this survey was strongly supported by movement groups. The survey’s data thus probably gives a fair indication of at least a significant part of the movement.

The notion that collective popular agency might have its own logic, or be of interest in itself, is evidently at odds with Ireland's self-identified critical academia, which is critical in the sense of acting as an alternative elite, critical of the current shape of the economy, polity and media, but not primarily interested in what working-class people are actually doing – or in a different kind of politics that would not rely on their own expertise¹⁰.

This self-referential tendency comes out strongly in the debate between Peadar Kirby and "Oireachtas Report" (2015a, b). Kirby, a soft left academic, attacked the movement for failing to provide an alternative institutional proposal to the government's newly established Irish Water, and hence (to his mind) "*actually undermining the right to water*" (italics Kirby). Tellingly, he blames "the so-called left leaders and parties which have mobilised this campaign" (2015a). From this alternative elite point of view, the only real interest in a movement is its *policy contribution*, and a movement is mobilised by "leaders and parties". As "Oireachtas Retort" puts it on the narrowness of this "radical policy" perspective,

Since 2008, there have many earnest proposals. But here is the question.

Where are the We The Citizens, the Claiming Our Future and Constitutional Conventions. Where are the hundreds of authors who have churned out books of reform and new republics. Is this not politics too? Or are you policing someone else's limits....

On Wednesday I watched people from Edenmore, Africa, Ballyhea, Detroit - walk on stage in absolute awe at the support they have received and will just as sincerely give in return....

So who is telling who about so-called politics? (2015a)¹¹

Disciplinary fragmentation and social partnership certainly play a role in generating this blindness to popular struggle (Cox 2015). This is also true in much international commentary, where an electoral focus predominates: a search not for Gramsci's modern prince but for a modern Prince Charming (Cox and Nilsen 2014: 203), a party or leader whose existence abroad could underwrite a certain kind of left intellectual activity at home. Syriza, Podemos and Sinn Féin – three radically different organisations – are often cited together here. With Syriza now defeated by the EU, Podemos having failed to sweep the

¹⁰ It is also worth noting in this context that a surprising number of writers on austerity, equality and the politics of change are members or allies of the Labour Party in particular. "Beware of Greeks bringing gifts": or more exactly, movements should be far more cautious about taking advice on how to organise against austerity from people whose primary allegiances are to parties who have been busily *imposing* austerity against massive popular resistance.

¹¹ Kirby's response (2015b) shows a failure to grasp the realities of power (including within academia), indicated by his plaintive objection that his critics use pseudonyms: how *dare* they inhabit situations where they might suffer repercussions for their views?

board electorally and Sinn Féin somewhat less than all-conquering, it should now be possible to question this fetishisation of parties in a neoliberal era which allows them remarkably little scope.

In fact the constant insistence by “realists”, academic or party-political, on the centrality of the party-political arena misses the most obvious historical fact about Irish popular struggles: they have repeatedly won major victories *without* having any kind of political majority. The victories of the Land War, ultimately producing a massive land redistribution and the end of the landed aristocracy, and the wholesale defeat of nuclear power in 1979, are extraordinary achievements in global terms – but were achieved *despite* the parties in power. The same is true for the less unique victories of the feminist and GLTBQI movements: it is these social majorities which have forced governments to call referenda, often against their long-standing reluctance to touch these issues. If the 8th amendment is repealed, it will be small thanks to political parties. Finally, of course, nothing the Irish left has won has been due to having a parliamentary majority, because we have never had a government with anything more than a centre-left party as junior coalition partner. In other words, a “hard-nosed, realist” analysis of Irish politics has to conclude that social movements are a much *better* tool for social change in the Republic than the party route has ever been in terms of actual victories.

In contrast with a literature which appears determined to focus on formal politics as a point of principle, the present article uses the tools of social movement research to focus not on elite behaviour but on “the social movement in general”, the popular participation which has propelled this issue into the limelight – and which has repeatedly put the official system very firmly in its place, spluttering at the effrontery of the tracksuit-clad plebs but even more at their effectiveness in refusing the decisions made for them by those who know better and play by the rules of the official game.

In discussing “the social movement in general”, then, I want to emphasise that the significance of the Irish water protests is as the sharp end of a massive popular movement against austerity: as in the nineteenth-century usage of “social movement”, society beyond the enclaves of the privileged is in movement (Cox 2013a). As we shall see below, the multiplicity of fields in this struggle is crucial, resisting attempts to reduce it to a single kind of action or to contain it within the analysis of official institutions¹².

Methodology

Starting from a methodological commitment to participatory action research (PAR), my initial feeling about the movement was that it should be researched by those more closely involved; and that the scale of the movement, in particular

¹² Within this kind of analysis, social movement is not *opposed* to parties, unions, radical media etc. but rather the latter are all possible forms of manifestation of social movements, however difficult their interrelationships are at times.

its reach across different social groups, its geographical spread and the massive involvement of newcomers to movements, called for extensive ethnographic research that would be capable of grasping the multiple and at times contradictory experiences involved. However, as noted the bulk of published research related to the movement has treated it as a walk-on actor in some apparently more important discussion, and the only ethnographic research to date has been carried out by movement participants who happened to be in university at the time¹³. At present the Irish Research Council is not offering the kind of general research funding which could enable substantial ethnographic research into the movement.

Having been asked to speak on the subject in several locations, most notably a plenary session of the Sociological Association of Ireland's annual conference, on which this article is based, I felt that it was important both to challenge the representation of the movement in existing academic writing and to highlight and support the development of what research is being done. I have been contacted by several researchers carrying out activist student projects, and have been making links between them and encouraging the sharing of their outcomes. Hopefully some of these will become available more widely in the not-too-distant future, and some of their participants will go on to carry out further research¹⁴. With most participants by now already mobilised, the chance to capture this experience ethnographically has largely passed. However, life history interviews – both of previously-experienced activists and newcomers – could grasp these long-term shifts once integrated personally, and I have been working on this with students at Maynooth.

The methodology underpinning this article is perhaps best described as a form of attenuated PAR within working-class community activism, in that it arises from and articulates some discussions within that movement and slow conversations with activists over some years¹⁵. On a shorter timescale and in relation to the water struggle, my analysis draws on co-organising the 15th Grassroots Gathering in Drimnagh (where meters have been successfully resisted) with a number of local water charges groups and a series of public

¹³ Ireland does have relatively high levels both of third-level participation and of non-traditional students, however.

¹⁴ One obvious gap is an examination of the geography of direct action and non-payment (insofar as sources permit), which could usefully be mapped against older geographies of community activism, left voting etc. as well as the distribution of “days of action” protests, the location of Hearn's respondents, etc. This might show how far participation can be said to have extended existing modes of everyday action into the political sphere.

¹⁵ On movement theory, see Barker and Cox (2011); on PAR and related approaches in social movement research see e.g. Croteau et al. (2005), Shukaitis et al. (2007), or Cox and Fominaya (2009). It should be noted that the question of movement boundaries (whether “the water charges movement”, “the community movement”, “the anti-austerity movement” or whatever should be imagined as separate but interrelated, as subsets of one another or in some other way) is one which mainstream social movement theory does not handle well. Marxist arguments (Cox 2013a, Cox and Nilsen 2014) propose that we should place the emphasis rather on the social agents as they organise and reorganise in different ways across time.

events involving movement activists; and individual discussions with community activists active around water. This position enables in particular taking the pulse of the (internally leading) community-based end of the movement, particularly in Dublin, and is weaker on trade union, rural and political party perspectives.

The paper also re-analyses several published accounts by activists. Andrew Flood, probably Ireland's single best observer of social movements, gave a very thought-provoking talk on the movement drawing on his three decades of close involvement with Irish movements (Flood 2015). Two community-based activists, Criostóir MacCionnaith and Catherine Lynch, wrote excellent MA theses (MacCionnaith 2015, Lynch 2015). Both have kindly given me permission to cite some of the interview material published in their theses; these reflective discussions between peers represent some of the most insightful published accounts of the movement in terms of exploring the personal experience and transformation of its participants. There are shorter pieces by Ferdia O'Brien (2015), "Stephen" (2015), Áine Mannion (2015), Dara McHugh (2014) and others, and undergraduate theses by Brian Mallon (2016, 2017) and Owen Brennan (2016).

I have also benefitted from many discussions with and observations by movement participants and well-placed observers. Thanks are due to "Alibaba", John Bissett, Jean Bridgeman, "CMK", Laurence Davis, Terry Fagan, Fergal Finnegan, Niamh Gaynor, Margaret Gillan, "GW", Mariya Ivancheva, Jimmy Keenan, David Landy, Tomás MacSheoin, Pádraig Madden, Tara O'Donoghue, Brendan Ogle and James Quigley, as well as those whose names I don't know. I also wish to thank those activist students who have engaged with, critiqued and developed arguments made in classroom contexts, in particular Brid Comerford, Ken Connolly, Kevin O'Hara and Kathleen Ryan. Thanks as well to Carole Cusack, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Daniel von Freyberg, Anne Kane, Galvão Debelle dos Santos and Corey Wrenn. A movement this massive and diverse can only be understood through a diversity of experiences and reflections: anything valuable here has been learnt from these activists, and I hope it is useful to them in turn. Needless to say, none of them are responsible for the paper's errors and weaknesses¹⁶.

¹⁶ Anyone involved with the movement – or with the Irish left – will also know that the movement also has its own internal tensions, with mutual accusations and hostile commentary. In this paper I have tried not to get into the details of such accusations. This is partly because it can be hard to know the truth of particular controversies (and in the Irish context they can easily derail any wider discussion). More importantly, though, what is striking about the water charges movement is that *for once* this kind of conflict is not the most important feature of attempts at collaboration on the Irish left, and it has not succeeded in destroying the movement. In other words, the remarkable thing about the water charges struggle is that these various groups have been able to come together, and largely stay together, at all.

Of course organisations (community groups, unions and parties alike) have a tendency to "organisational patriotism" – self-righteousness and defensiveness, often coupled with a cynical eye to organisational self-interest – which gets in the way of wider projects with depressing regularity. This makes it all the more important (intellectually, but also politically) to pay close

Purpose of the article

This article seeks, firstly, to establish an empirical overview of the movement in its various aspects, using the tools of social movement analysis: in other words, to study it as a social movement, and not as a footnote to policy, economics, media or institutional politics. In this respect it seeks to remedy both the absence of such an overview and the weaknesses of such academic research as does exist. It is thus somewhat longer than usual where one can rely on previously-published literature to provide an empirical background; it also explains points which may be obvious to participants but not to younger people or those outside the country.

Secondly, it argues that the water charges movement has to be understood within the longer history of Irish anti-capitalist movements and working-class community activism. In this sense the article may gain in historical depth what it lacks in the immediate ability to grasp a vast, disparate, internally contested movement. The Marxist theory that Alf Nilsen and I have articulated, partly on the basis of this history, seems to have some purchase: in May 2014, just after the first direct actions against meters, we wrote of Ireland that

the way out [of the crisis of resistance] must lie not in a further reassertion of the narrow interests of organisational elites, be they community, NGO, or Trotskyist, but in strategies aimed at supporting the development of active *movement* participation and alliance-building on our own terrain. This is obviously easier said than done: in all likelihood, the next moves in action from below will not come from increasingly isolated movement organisations but from new mobilisations below the radar.... (2014: 191-2)

Thirdly, the article seeks to draw attention to the emphasis placed by participants themselves on an often-transformative experience of mobilisation and learning. The water charges movement is characterised by a high level of mobilisation of people new to activism, for whom the process involves throwing off the “muck of ages” (Barker 1995), articulating “good sense” against “common sense” (Gramsci 1971). In such processes, people allow themselves to become more conscious of the tensions between their own “local rationalities” and hegemonic relationships, enabling a public reframing of their situation as unjust and subject to change through collective action, producing new kinds of social relationships and knowledge (Wainwright 1994, Cox and Nilsen 2014). Elite-focussed academic research, taking participation in the public sphere for granted, routinely fails to recognise this experience, which is not only significant at the personal level but – when repeated in very large numbers among groups

attention to those moments when wider perspectives are capable of overriding these tendencies. It is perhaps a tautology to say that such moments are characterised by the ascendancy of the wider social movement over its individual parts, the mobilisation of large numbers of people outside existing organisational frameworks and a consequent re-emphasising of the prospect of wider social change.

who are often politically passive – can represent a changing of political relationships across society.

Insofar as this paper starts from a strong critique of what little academic literature exists, it is perhaps important to state some criteria for better research in the area. To avoid repeating the weaknesses of existing analyses, a serious social movement analysis of the struggle should be (a) centred in an understanding of the ebb and flow of popular agency, specifically how it breaks out from institutional “business as usual”; (b) historical – locating the movement within changes in working-class community activism; and (c) comparative – relating Irish struggles against neo-liberalism to struggles elsewhere in Europe.

This article is organised as a first attempt to sketch out such an analysis. The first section covers the historical background for the movement in the development of working-class community activism in Ireland, while the second covers the more immediate run-up to the movement in prior anti-austerity activism. The third section attempts a bird’s-eye overview of the movement, both empirically and in terms of its relationships with the state, specifically in terms of repression and hegemony. The fourth explores how participants have experienced the movement, with particular reference to processes of learning and development. Finally, the conclusion draws some tentative connections with anti-austerity movements elsewhere in Europe.

The making of Irish working-class community activism

A Marxist analysis of social movements

A Marxist perspective is not, of course, a mechanical materialism or a vulgar economism of the kind discussed in the introduction. As Lebowitz (2003) puts it, to the political economy of *capital* we need to counterpose a political economy of *labour*: how people meet their needs, act to defend their existing gains and to meet new needs. More relevant than comparing absolute living standards is Coulter and Nagle’s observation that the combination of tax increases and welfare state cuts in this period – about 1/5 of GDP – represented the single largest reduction in living standards in any developed country outside wartime (2015: 9). Popular agency is far more likely to respond to the *disruption* of local rationalities (“the straw that broke the camel’s back”) than to any absolute situation.

“Real human beings”, however, are not simple abstractions: they have not just pre-existing understandings of their needs and ways they attempting to meet these, but cultural judgements about how they should be met, learned ways of acting collectively when these expectations are attacked or unfulfilled, even aspirations for a better world, for themselves or for their children. We need some way of grasping this beyond identifying the exact figure at which *homo economicus* might leap into movement participation.

Conversely, a Marxist approach also rejects the assumption that the routine workings of capitalist democracy exhaust “politics”¹⁷. As MacCionnaith puts it, Hearne fails “to differentiate between a movement and a party in posing the question ... and then read[s] the respondents’ answers largely as a vote for a new party” (2015: 48). Marx and Engels’ writings are full of discussions of social movements, class struggle, popular traditions of political thought, the effect of past struggles on present-day strategies, the relationships between movements and the scope for change, and the like: in contrast with some present-day left traditions, they did not treat parties as the be-all and end-all of politics.

Recent attempts at developing a Marxist theory of social movements have argued for a developmental notion of social movement, shaped by historical context and social situation, in conflict and alliance with other movements from above and from below, capable of both advancing to unprecedented levels of political significance and of falling or being knocked back (e.g. Barker et al. 2013; Cox and Nilsen 2014).

One implication of such an analysis is that such processes of development, alliance and conflict will produce substantially different overall contexts in different places. This can be described in terms of a “movement landscape”, a concept intended to grasp the enduring relationships between movements that characterise a particular period of “business as usual” in a given location (Cox 2016a). Capable of being remade in periods of mass mobilisation and organic crisis, in routine periods such landscapes tend to reshape movements to fit within what participants understand as possible, likely, workable or legitimate. This notion underpins Fominaya and Cox (2013).

This implies close attention to the peculiarities of Irish social movements (Cox 2016b) – something which cannot be grasped without a comparatively-informed appreciation of movements in other contexts. Analyses which lack reflection on the local movement landscape are almost bound to fail, whether they start from a simple ignorance of movements elsewhere (naturalising local conditions) or from naïvely transposing US or UK models to Ireland. So too do approaches which miss the centrality of historical struggles over class and land, state and ethnicity, gender and sexuality to Irish politics, the extent to which both states are shaped by movement struggles and their ebb and flow. In particular, it is important to understand the massive presence of working-class community activism in Ireland, and its alternation between disruption and apparent subsumption within the state (Cox 2010).

Subjects and objects

One of the most challenging, and still-unresolved, aspects of a developmental approach is what could be phrased as the question of how people in movements

¹⁷ They also imply more than the reformist call for a “second republic” through refined debate and the holding of forums (a strategy which recalls Ursula Le Guin’s observation: a liberal is someone for whom the means justifies the end).

shift from being objects to becoming political subjects (Cox 2001); in more concrete terms, as how people can move from agency restricted within a framework accepted as given (hence focussing on micro-level resistance, cultural identities, reformist politics etc) to challenging it; and move from a purely defensive position, reacting to assaults by movements from above, to an offensive one articulating what Alf Nilsen and I (2014) call a “social movement project”¹⁸.

The transformative experiences discussed in the fourth section of this paper are a crucial part of this: people remake themselves, in solidarity and dialogue with their peers and in conflict with movements from above. In the process they extend the boundaries of their subjectivity from a narrowly-circumscribed (often highly-commodified) realm of action to asking about the big structures which construct such realms; and they articulate a vision of another world beyond the routine activities of professional intellectuals, however haltingly:

Working-class revolutions ... constantly criticise themselves, they continually interrupt their own course, return to what has apparently already been achieved to start it from scratch again... (Marx n.d. 272-3).

This comment does not, of course, fully resolve the shift from object to subject, any more than does Touraine’s seminal (1981) analysis. However I want to insist, with Barker (1999), that it is a crucial aspect of large-scale, radical movements which cannot simply be reduced to what a bird’s-eye analysis might reveal at a single point in time in terms of explicit power relations. As we know from earlier movement waves, this experience reverberates throughout society in unpredictable ways long after its opening scene has closed. In some ways, the history of community activism in Ireland – and its sudden, unexpected rebirth in the water charges movement – illustrates this perfectly.

The making and remaking of working-class community activism in Ireland

The Republic has historically boasted a massive degree of grassroots working-class self-organisation, in the form of a movement of community-based activism, arts and education, on a scale unknown elsewhere in the developed world outside of minority ethnicities (probably indirectly explicable by Ireland’s colonial history, specifically the impact of imperialism and ethnic/racial

¹⁸ Such projects are not alternative policy or political programmes, or the “forums”, “national conversations” or “constitutional conventions” projected by professional intellectuals as the extension of their own activity. They may *result* in some of these, but as the outcomes of far broader popular struggles articulating a radically different view of the social world defined by a *restructuring* of oppressive political structures, and hence a shift of energy away from such elite spaces and towards more organic expressions of struggles from below.

domination on working-class community identities): Geoghegan and Cox 2001, Mullan and Cox 2001, Gillan 2010, Cox 2013a, Zagato 2012¹⁹.

From the 1960s, as slum clearance led to the resettlement of inner-city populations in newly built peripheral suburbs, working-class activism in Dublin and elsewhere developed on a new basis, formalising earlier neighbourhood traditions of solidarity, consensus formation and direct action. First the Dublin Housing Action Committee and then in the 1980s and 1990s Concerned Parents against Drugs and the Coalition of Communities Against Drugs (Lyder 2005), but also many local struggles over basic services such as schools, public transport, creche facilities, housing, policing and so on, saw a practice of grassroots consensus building, tied to a critical analysis of power and willing to use disruptive tactics, generalised across much of working-class Ireland and often led by women.

While theoretical inputs came from Alinskyite theory and liberation theology, the leading protagonists were often activists leaving the – mostly centralised and statist – republican, socialist and feminist organisations of the period, who saw the benefits of organising locally, bringing the whole community with them in a process of collective self-education and mobilisation around concrete issues, and making real gains on the ground. As the strongest activism was found in the most deprived working-class areas, union membership (increasingly public-sector) and left parties drew further apart from this process, and cooperation became rarer and harder.

From the late 1980s, this movement – drawing on left nationalist discourses – succeeded in forcing the state into localised forms of “partnership”, and was subsequently included in the “community and voluntary sector” from the early 1990s under Ireland’s national neocorporatism, which embraced most movements²⁰ in a process of sectoral fragmentation, professionalisation and demobilisation offering limited funding for service delivery and some policy influence. Marston (n.d.: 27) notes the salience of partnership in activist accounts of anti-austerity protest at the start of the crisis. There were nonetheless conflicts outside the partnership framework, notably 1990s resistance to water tax²¹ using similar tactics to the current movement, and 2000s resistance to bin charges.

¹⁹ It is important to note that in the UK “community” has often been a top-down language used by the state for conservative purposes (on Northern Ireland see Robson 2000). However in the Republic working-class organising on a community basis and on a massive scale, phrased in oppositional terms (Curtin and Varley 1995), *preceded* the state’s adoption of this language and has shaped it strongly (Cox 2010). In this respect the experience of community-based organising in the Republic is closer to that of ethnic minorities in the US, discussed e.g. by Naples 1998. It should go without saying that recognising the existence of a movement which organises in characteristic ways and using this language does *not* imply assuming a pre-existent essential “community”; see Mullan and Cox 2001 for some notes on the genesis of this kind of activism.

²⁰ The women’s and GLTBQ movements had a massive and disruptive effect on state policy, while the environmental movement had prevented nuclear power in Ireland.

²¹ <http://www.wsm.ie/c/anti-water-tax-campaign-dublin>

From the early 2000s, *before* the crisis, having demobilised movements, and rendered them largely dependent on the state for funding and policy impact, the state attacked their participation in partnership. Harvey (2014: 50) shows this for the community movement, although processes of exclusion and incorporation were felt in all movements (Cox 2010). The community sector was certainly badly hit, with average cuts around 35% (Bissett 2015: 173), and many organisations closing entirely.

In this context, the failure of the Campaign Against the Household and Water Tax enabled a return to grassroots protest based on the older traditions of community activism; or, put another way, a return of *social movement* as against *organisations* or *policy* (Cox 2013b).

Resistance to austerity before water charges

Levels of resistance

The 2008 financial crash was felt particularly heavily in Ireland. With the bailout, under EU pressure, of private banks, the Republic's 5 million inhabitants took on approximately 42% of the entire EU debt crisis, meaning massive job losses and pay cuts, new (mostly regressive) taxes and levies and cuts to state services. While previous distributive politics had remained trapped within the logic of interest mediation, from 2008 onwards disruptive struggles began to manifest themselves powerfully. This change in the social fabric sets the scene within which water charges would become the strategic issue around which popular resistance could unite.

Firstly, a series of large-scale trade union protests were organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) which, along with the largest union SIPTU, has a revolving door relationship with the neoliberal Labour Party and a fundamental commitment to "social partnership". The leadership's main concerns were to keep popular agency within bounds and negotiate "acceptable" concessions with government – on occasion, to propose them. The main events include:

- February 2009: 120,000? in Dublin
- November 2009: c.250,000 public sector workers in one-day strike
- June 2010: Croke Park Agreement bars industrial action
- November 2010: 100,000? in Dublin (official shock that union leaders were heckled)
- February 2013: 110,000? in 6 cities

These (contested) figures are best read as relative indications of scale. 100,000 is a conventional figure meaning "as big as any demonstration ever gets in Dublin in recent decades"; it is the figure routinely quoted in relation to the anti-war protest of February 15th, 2003. Thus what is being said by informed observers is that these are among the largest protests in living memory.

The turning point would be October 2014, when five unions, some of them substantial – Unite, the Communication Workers Union CWU, the retail union Mandate, the civil service union CPSU and the plasterers' union OPATSI – broke ranks with other unions to help found the Right2Water coalition. The defection of the most radical wing of the union movement to explicit opposition to Labour policy on an issue of principle is a politically remarkable moment – a moment marked more cynically when SIPTU's conservative leader Jack O'Connor flirted briefly with Sinn Féin.

Other sectoral protests during the crisis included:

- 2001 – present: opposition to Shell pipeline in NW Ireland (“Rossport”), within an environmental justice / redistributive framework
- 2008 – present: rising tide of political squats, resistance to evictions, etc.
- 2011 – present: opposition to fracking
- June 2008: c. 15,000 pensioners in defence of medical cards
- September 2009: c. 12,000 people from community projects
- November 2010: c. 40,000 students
- December 2010: first “Spectacle of Defiance and Hope”
- February 2011: first weekly Ballyhea “Bondholders” protest
- October 2011: 6 Occupy camps established; some last until May 2012
- October 2012: c. 20,000 farmers
- November 2012: c. 15,000 in protest organised by left parties, trade unions and the Spectacle
- November 2012: widespread protests over death of Savita Halappanavar after being refused an abortion
- October 2013: c. 12,000 pensioners

While – following Irish particularism and unlike e.g. Spanish demonstrations – many of these were sector-specific, the Spectacle, Ballyhea, Occupy, the November 2012 protest and some housing activism were explicitly conceived as general resistance to austerity, while student protests included radical fringes seeking to raise wider issues. As Naughton (2015) shows, over half of reported protest events between 2010 - 13 focussed on austerity or the bank bailout, a substantial shift from traditional Irish particularism.

The difficult process of overcoming sectoral fragmentation, sectarianism and clientelism had been experimented in other sectors: particularly in relation to resistance to Shell, which brought together an alliance similar to the eventual water charges alliance (local community activists, anarchist and ecological direct action, republicans, socialists, trade unionists and radical democrats). Similar networking processes are a staple of the Grassroots Gatherings (Cox 2014a), which bring together bottom-up, direct action and community-based forms of social movement outside social partnership and the electoral arena –

and (more instrumentally) of Trotskyist front-building. Bissett writes similarly of the community arts-based Spectacle of Defiance and Hope:

Those involved have come to see in the Spectacle not an end in itself or a silo, but as one of the spokes in the wheel of a larger movement that is gradually building against austerity. The idea of “joining the dots” with other entities of a similar nature has been strongly endorsed by those involved. The Spectacle has worked closely with *Occupy Dame Street*, sections of the Trade Union Movement, *Anglo Not Our Debt*, and with organised political campaigns against austerity and debt (2015: 181-2).

The scale and success of the water charges alliance, however, went beyond this, reflecting a general shift in popular mood. We can trace this shift in public-sector ballots around government offensives on pay, hours and conditions:

- 2010 Croke Park agreement: SIPTU 35% against, IMPACT 23% but UNITE 65% against, INMO 84% against, etc. (all later forced to sign). The agreement passed²².
- 2013 Croke Park II: SIPTU 53.7% against, IMPACT 44% against, UNITE 84% against, INMO 95.5% against, etc. (10 unions against, 5 for). The agreement was defeated²³.
- 2013 Haddington Road agreement (all unions signed up to a minimally reworded Croke Park II under threat of legislation imposing the same terms without any prospect of eventual reversal).

In this same period, the household charge (now local property tax) faced huge difficulties in implementation. 44% of households failed to pay by the April 2012 deadline, 37% by October. The state eventually introduced legislation to collect the tax from wages or welfare.

Overall, then, reports of the death of Irish activism were greatly exaggerated and served political purposes in dismissing the feasibility of resistance. Anti-austerity protests included some of Ireland’s largest demonstrations in decades and substantial mobilisation in other forms, in the context of the EU’s largest net emigration by far, with perhaps 28% of 20-30-year-olds born in the country living elsewhere.

While not as sustained or radical as anti-austerity activism in Iceland, Greece or Spain, then, Irish anti-austerity movements have been consistently comparable to those in Portugal and Italy. Ireland also shares the latter’s domination by forces oriented towards a “business as usual” framework, in particular Labour, ICTU and SIPTU. Labour’s shift to *overt* austerity politics in government from

²² <http://www.rte.ie/news/2010/0611/132070-pay/>;
<http://www.rte.ie/news/2010/0528/131575-pay/>

²³ <http://www.thejournal.ie/croke-park-pay-deal-871574-Apr2013/>

2011 (having run on an anti-austerity platform) disrupted this but led to its Pasokification.

Electoral realignments

After a lone brick was thrown at a protest (to howls of liberal outrage), an anarchist site proclaimed “I bet this brick can get more likes than the Labour Party”. No sooner said than done:

Page		Total Page Likes	New Page Likes	Posts This Week	Engagement This Week
1	 I bet this brick can get ...	11.8K 	0% from last week	38	12.7K 
2	 Enda Kenny	11.3K 	▲1.6% from last week	1	1.6K 
3	 Labour Party	10.5K 	▲0.1% from last week	2	193 
4	 Fine Gael	9.1K 	▲0.9% from last week	3	2.1K 
5	 Joan Burton	2.5K 	▲0.9% from last week	2	36 

Enda Kenny is the Fine Gael prime minister; Joan Burton was the Labour leader²⁴. Electoral outcomes show a somewhat more scientific version of the same result:

²⁴

<https://www.facebook.com/brickorlabour/photos/a.413481455470367.1073741828.413425165475996/415430118608834/?type=3&theater>

Year	Right (FF, FG, PDs etc.)	Labour	Sinn Fein	Far left, independents and others, Greens
Nov 1992 vote	68.3%	19.3%	1.6%	10.9%
June 1997 vote	71.9%	10.4%	2.5%	14.6%
May 2002 vote	68%	10.8%	6.5%	14.7%
May 2007 vote (FF + Green govt)	71.6%	10.1%	6.9%	10.1%
Feb 2011 vote (FG + Lab govt)	53.5%	19.4%	9.9%	17.2%
Feb 2013 poll ²⁵	51%	10%	18%	21%
Mar 2015 poll ²⁶	41%	7%	24%	28%
Feb 2016 vote (FG minority govt)	52%	6.6%	13.8%	27.6%
Feb 2017 poll ²⁷	53%	6%	19%	22%
May 2017 poll ²⁸	50%	6%	15%	29%

(My calculations)

The items in red here mark the salient points. For most of the state's history, the right-wing parties which emerged out of the nationalist movement shared 70 – 85% of the vote, with the rest divided between radical nationalists (today

²⁵ *Irish Times* 8 February 2013

²⁶ *Irish Times* 26 March 2015

²⁷ *Sunday Times* 12 February 2017

²⁸ *Sunday Business Post* 28 May 2017

primarily represented by Sinn Féin), Labour, and other independents and small parties. The May 2007 election, and the subsequent Fianna Fáil / Green government which presided over the crash and introduced austerity, is typical of this (despite increasing difficulty for right-wing parties in Dublin). In the February 2011 election, nearly 20 percentage points moved leftwards, roughly 10 to Labour and 10 to Sinn Féin, the far left and independents (the Greens taking a well-deserved bashing). Briefly, polls around 2015 showed a further 10% abandoning this position, but overall the right-wing bloc seems to have settled at just over 50% for now.

As Labour, in power with Fine Gael, became the primary spokespeople for austerity, their popularity was slashed to a third of its 2011 high. Sinn Féin initially benefitted, as seen in the 2013 and 2015 polls. In the 2016 election, perhaps partly due to right-wing media attacks, some of this new support returned to Fianna Fáil; however, the far left along with other independents and small parties consolidated its support.

Overall, about 20% of the electorate has abandoned automatic support for Fianna Fáil's "Peronism", a tradition of clientelist redistribution popular among much of the respectable working class (Allen 1996). Half of this group has genuinely learned something and has moved to parties or candidates with sincerely left-wing positions. The other half is nostalgically national-developmental, prepared to vote for Fianna Fáil, Labour or Sinn Féin despite the clear limitations of their actual will to oppose austerity²⁹. This is a search for a party to represent Gramsci's corporate class consciousness – seeking a return to the subaltern incorporation that Peillon (1982) identified for labour within Ireland's older national-developmental project.

The water charges struggle

The development of the movement

After legislation was introduced to take the household tax from wages and welfare, the coalition of AAA/Socialist Party, PBP/SWP, Workers and Unemployed Action group and Workers Solidarity Movement (anarchists) underpinning the Campaign Against Household and Water Tax (CAHWT) fell apart in 2013. By this time the United Left Alliance, which brought together the first three with other left deputies, was well on the way to its eventual demise. Thus when water charges were initially introduced, my search for information only found fossilised websites and no up-to-date material.

However, this lack of central control enabled local action and self-organisation far beyond what the CAHWT could have agreed on. From April 2014, spontaneous direct action (starting in Ballyphehane / Togher in south Cork city and Edenmore in NE Dublin) prevented meter installation in many working-

²⁹ Sinn Féin's practice in government in Northern Ireland is at odds with its stated positions in the South; see Finn 2016.

class estates, producing an effective loss of control of territory by the state. (Elsewhere, meters were removed after installation.) While the timing and geography was shaped by the installation timetable, resistance to registration and payment – with increasing poverty after six years of austerity – developed before any central organisation³⁰.

From late 2014, the five trade unions already named brought together community activist groups with left parties including those listed above, Sinn Féin, the Communist Party, the Workers Party and left independents to coordinate national demonstrations and “days of action” under the “Right2Water” (R2W) logo. This alliance between community groups, unions and left parties is unprecedented in recent memory, and in scale and significance. However it restricts itself to areas of agreement – some member unions and parties are unable to call for direct action or non-payment. When the “Right2Change” electoral pact was unveiled one union broke ranks, and there were significant internal conflicts over attempts to convert movement support into votes³¹.

Alongside direct action, non-payment and marches, activists have contested state and commercial media representations and police accounts, both around numbers (consistently underestimated) and violence (largely from the police). The moral and technical legitimacy of the charges has also been challenged, alongside electoral involvement in multiple forms (not only Right2Change).

It can be seen that this is a movement in Diani’s (1992) sense of a network of individuals, informal groups and formal organisations, and that it is mistaken to represent R2W as “the movement”, let alone to see Sinn Féin (which has difficulties with both direct action and non-payment) or any other single party as its electoral voice. These multiple fields of struggle and organisational forms represent the movement’s diversity – but also its proto-hegemonic capacity to bring together many different sections of society opposing both water charges and austerity in general³².

³⁰ David Landy suggests (in comments on academia.edu) that some CAHWT local groups or individual members remained active after its collapse and fed into the water charges movement. This seems entirely plausible, if one bears in mind that many of these individuals and groups would also have been active *before* the formation of the CAHWT. In other words, we should expect to find local activism moving in and out of formal organisations as well as less formal groups and networks. This is of course also true for members and ex-members of left parties.

³¹ <http://buncranatogether.com/home/2015/11/19/a-donegal-critique-a-microcosm-of-malaise-in-right2change-ireland>

³² It should also be noted that individual activists often move in and out of these different organisational forms, joining or leaving nationally-organised bodies as those become more or less relevant to their own primary concerns, while their own political learning and activist biographies may also lead in different directions (recruitment, disillusionment, biographical availability, keeping one’s distance, “fellow-travelling” etc.) An organisation-centric imaginary assumes that the fundamental reality is (for example) a national campaign or left party, whereas the *organising* reality may be rather that a branch is founded or becomes defunct based on

We should also note a huge growth in the practice of active democracy, with countless meetings taking place at the level of one or a few streets, on the available green spaces, in supermarket parking lots, in pubs and GAA halls, working out what to do in relation to all the different dimensions of the conflict discussed below.

Direct action

In areas like Crumlin, Irish Water had to abandon attempts to install meters after 6 weeks (MacCionnaith 2015). Protestors developed effective early-warning systems using texts and Facebook, as well as “flying column” support for other areas. Sometimes both police and installers adopted a hands-off approach and protestors could negotiate; elsewhere police were more aggressive, with people thrown around, beaten and pepper-sprayed. One highpoint was the “Battle of Rialto St” in early 2015, where the Garda (Irish police) used force of numbers to prevent disruption; however protestors could prevent machines being moved, and the tactic was not repeated (“Stephen” 2015). It is hard to estimate just how effective direct action has been, but clearly substantial areas of working-class Dublin and Cork in particular have become de facto off limits to Irish Water, a substantial victory given the high-profile nature of the conflict³³.

The state’s inability to escalate the conflict beyond a certain point is notable, and does not reflect any discomfort with police violence. Private security, used for intimidation and surveillance, was also less vicious than at Rosspoint. Nonetheless personal experience of police aggression, together with social media sharing of videos from recognisably similar areas and social groups, contributed to undermining state legitimacy considerably. Social media also proved fertile ground where anonymous “meter fairies” could share information on how to remove installed meters – repeating the 1990s water struggle, where working-class activists simply reopened taps which had been closed to a trickle³⁴.

Non-registration and non-payment

Official figures for registration and payment have varied wildly, whether because of incompetence or the massive scale of resistance. Socialist Party deputy Paul Murphy produced hilarious results through repeated parliamentary

whether the relevant people locally find that organisation useful for their own purposes, which may well change over time.

³³ David Landy commented on an earlier version of this paper that the more working-class an area was, the more likely it was to resist the installation of water meters effectively.

³⁴ Direct action is, incidentally, an area which most academic commentators shy away from or in many cases fail to mention, in favour of the more “civil” means of official demonstrations (Sen 2005). Here participant accounts show a much clearer sense of the realities of ground-level conflict.

questions and FOI requests. *Official* registration figures (of c.1,650k households liable) for the early period included the following³⁵:

Nov 14	Dec 14	Jan 15	Feb 15	Mar 15
800000	950000	800000	880750	990000
	900000	1031009	1220000	1200000
	920000	837000	906953	1230000
		760500		988000
		821600		990000

A December 2014 poll showed that 37% intended to pay, 30% did not intend to, 14% “it depends”, 1% don’t know³⁶; by May 2015 only 30% (229k householders) had *officially* paid³⁷. It is clear that the whole project was financially and politically holed below the water line well before the new government suspended charges. An October 2015 poll showed strong party and class correlation around intent to pay, something borne out also in social media / comments “below the line” etc. As with numbers at protests and police violence, there was a sharp contrast between official claims (“most are paying / you have to pay”) and on-the-ground experience.

Demonstrations

The main demonstrations have been as follows:

- October 2014: 100,000? in Dublin
- November 2014: 100,000+ in 106 different locations (Ogle 2016: 78 gives 200,000) At least 27 Dublin neighbourhoods.
- December 2014: 100,000? in Dublin
- January 2015: 50,000? in Dublin (non-R2W; see Burtenshaw 2015)
- March 2015: 80,000? in Dublin
- April 2015: 30,000? in Dublin (non-R2W)
- August 2015: 80,000? in Dublin

³⁵ <https://medium.com/@beyourownreason/irish-water-registration-woes-df8e62737270#.elcygvnzn>

³⁶ <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/water/irish-water-crisis/only-two-in-five-say-they-will-pay-new-water-charge-30853232.html>. The remaining ~9% is around the proportion not liable for the charge.

³⁷ <http://www.lookleftonline.org/2015/10/less-than-one-in-three-pay-their-water-bills/>

- January 2016: in 30+ different locations, lower numbers?³⁸
- September 2016: 80,000? in Dublin
- April 2017: 30,000? in Dublin

If we add these to union protests, we see that anti-austerity protests have probably mobilised between 80 and 120,000 (ie “as big as it gets”) ten to twelve times in six years.

The initial importance of the November 2014 “day of action” has to be underlined (Cox 2014a; see Ogle 2016: 73-76 on the innovative decision to hold a localised national protest). Irish people are often wary of movement participation lest they “stand out” and become targets of mockery or suspicion in communities where surface consensus has huge social value; typically, large-scale participation develops only when all concerned have satisfied themselves that they will not be alone. November 2014 resolved this, underlined the scale of non-payment (hence the unlikelihood of court action) and made it possible to estimate the likelihood of effective resistance to meter installation. Local demonstrations, of course, also took place outside the national days of action, while the Dublin-based demonstrations saw groups marching under their own local and usually home-made banners rather than merging into a homogenous mass.

We should also note the extraordinary variety of groups involved: undermining the narrative which highlights Right2Water alone, Burtenshaw’s (2015) valuable account of Dublin Says No, Communities Against Water Charges, the 1 Year Initiative and the National Citizens Movement shows a much more complex picture.

Repression

The state’s response has been one of limited, show-piece events rather than effective repression. For example, between November 2014 and October 2015, 188 arrests of protestors were officially recorded³⁹. Ethnographic data suggest that the figure is considerably higher: however, most are not charged but simply released far from home.

Of these *recorded* arrests, 75 were under the Water Services Act (criminalising non-violent direct action on water), and 91 under the Public Order Act (mainly “refusal to obey the instructions of a Garda”). A deputy and ten others were charged under the Public Order Act for failing to obey police orders to leave the area; charges against the deputy have already been struck out. Three people have been charged with “insulting language”, one for calling the President a “midget traitor”; the defendant has since retracted the word midget.

³⁸ <http://www.wsm.ie/c/dublin-marches-against-water-charges-jan2016>

³⁹ “188 water protestors arrested in 12 months”. *Irish Examiner* 9 October 2015.

More dramatically, a deputy, two councillors and 10 others were charged with “false imprisonment” (carrying a sentence up to life imprisonment), along with 14 charged with “violent disorder” or “criminal damage” (the “Jobstown 27”). The charges have served eminently political purposes, with dawn raids arresting the elected representatives and an 18-year-old; one 14-year-old was arrested by 8 guards. On the basis of these charges, the AAA political party was subsequently banned from collecting money.

In an earlier version of this piece I wrote

Since the “imprisonment” was blocking the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister’s) car, the chances of jury conviction are low⁴⁰ and it is little surprise that the main trial date was moved at least 6 times, with 97 garda statements in some cases.

In the most high-profile trial a jury unanimously found the deputy, two councillors and three others not guilty (a seventh was discharged during the trial), unleashing a remarkable, and nearly unanimous, volume of vitriol from the mainstream media. This may have had something to do with the fact that their coverage of the trial itself had largely dried up once it became clear that garda statements were repeatedly contradicted by video evidence – indeed in her summing up the judge directed the jury to ignore the statements of three gardaí whose testimony was not only contradicted by video evidence but was given in identical language. The number of police statements contradicted by video evidence, and the apparent coordination of many of these statements, were of course not covered in the mainstream media.

The overall picture suggests individual elements within the state trying to make an example, where they lack the ability to use force effectively. With show trials rather than effective repression, the movement response was predictably one of outrage rather than retreat.

A crisis of hegemony

Discourses from establishment politicians, mainstream media and academics show a failure to grasp that popular objections to water charges are deep-rooted, founded both in material realities (widespread inability to pay) and moral outrage (opposition to privatisation of basic needs). The lack of a serious strategy to ensure payment speaks volumes about the assumption of automatic popular consent – as does the resort to conspiracy theories (the “sinister fringe” of dissident republicans supposedly guiding the movement) to explain ordinary people’s refusal to continue being governed as they have been⁴¹.

⁴⁰ A 17-year-old has been convicted in the jury-free Children’s Court and is appealing this to the High Court at time of writing.

⁴¹ Power, Haynes and Devereux’ report on media framing of dissent *assumes* that “such discourses contribute to and reproduce hegemony” (2015: 1). It does not consider whether this

Moral panics also speak to this: the throwing of a water balloon was greeted as incipient fascism (unlike the actual appearance of Pegida in Ireland), blocking a car as violence (unlike the actual use of the riot squad against children), and insulting the president as unthinkable. The token criminalisation of elements of the movement is at best an attempt to restore consent by appeal to respectability, hoping that others will dissociate themselves.

Irish Water has faced massive and continuing difficulties in securing compliance. At least 5 separate deadlines were set, a €100 bribe for registration was introduced, and attempts were made to use landlords to ensure tenants paid. Following the 2016 election, Irish Water phonelines were clogged with people cancelling direct debits; bills for charges in arrears are still being sent out despite the suspension of further charges, with threats of court orders to secure payment (from hundreds of thousands of households?)

Two different kinds of politics are in conflict here:

This protest, small as it was symbolized the coming together of a greater community good, where neighbours in our communities stood shoulder to shoulder sharing the knowledge that the greater good didn't just end at their front gates to their houses across the city, side by side they walked the roads and streets of Crumlin calling out to all who would listen to them and follow the vision of the few political minds within our community that have the wherewithal to stand up to our political masters who had taken our votes and betrayed us with broken promises and stand proud, powerful and untouchable behind the bureaucracy and the law that protects them. (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 223)

The hegemonic crisis is marked by the co-existence of two separate, significantly non-communicating spheres of politics: substantive (popular) democracy and formal (elite) democracy. Protestors assert a moral economy of “the right to water” against the neoliberal moral economy of “the user must pay”, within broader, classed discourses (human needs, poverty, collectivity and privatisation against governance, consumption, individualism and environment) expressing different local rationalities (economic and social situations, forms of action and lifeworlds; Cox and Nilsen 2014).

In many working-class areas, the interface between these two forms of politics is mediated through coercion rather than consent; liberties such as the right to protest are being *taken*, not given, in the face of state attempts to shut them down. There is a crisis in policing these areas. After all, recent Irish governments have repeatedly shown their willingness to use baton-charges, water cannon, behind-the-scenes violence and intimidation and private security to break social movements – if they expect to get away with it. The proposal to

intention is always successful: given the massive scale of the water charges movement, a more interesting research question might be why the media onslaught they document has *failed* to have more of an effect on popular mobilisation.

send in the riot squad to clear strategic areas of west Dublin, for example, must surely have been considered and rejected at cabinet level.

There are material reasons for this: early crisis budgets cut staffing and closed stations, leading to an effective “retreat to barracks” undermining real local knowledge and legitimacy. However my own experience and research on Irish policing suggests that the real constraints are (a) the question of whether police would in fact obey such an order en masse; (b) whether the slightly over 13,000 police are capable of holding down working-class Ireland by force; and (c) what forms of resistance might be unleashed in such circumstances. As with Ireland’s mortgage crisis, where 12% of owner-occupied households are in arrears, mass coercion is not a realistic option and limited attrition is the only available strategy.

Elsewhere, establishment and “dissident” media and academic representations exist in substantially separate spaces, weakening the credibility of traditional intellectuals. This, and the significance of social media for delegitimising police and politicians has led to repeated Labour Party calls to censor social media. Movement participants are thus correct to feel that they are asserting democracy from below.

Lastly, the coming-together of Ireland’s three main forms of working-class self-organisation and political representation (community activism, unions and left parties) is unprecedented in recent decades. Its potential in terms of class realignment and recomposition has not yet been fully appreciated. It is important to think these relationships as part of a wider dialectic within working-class Ireland; after all, a single household may have members involved in more than one of these, and there are often complex family histories. There is also a substantial biographical dimension, in that for several decades community activists have often been drawn from the ranks of disaffected members of state-oriented parties and organisations, while political parties also seek actively to recruit effective local activists. If from an organisational point of view we isolate these different types of organisation as fundamentally different, it may make more sense to see them as different aspects of a wider movement within which their individual ups and downs and their interrelationships help to shape the wider story of how working-class Ireland organises (Cox 2013a).

Understanding the movement

A moment of emancipation

One feature familiar to scholars of revolutions and large-scale social movements is the extent to which they represent a moment of “collective effervescence” (Barker 1999) or, as Lenin (1905) put it, a festival of the oppressed. If top-down research and elite-focussed disciplines regularly fail to capture this, it is primarily because such approaches start from the perspective of the institutional routines of official politics. When large numbers of people who have *not* previously experienced themselves as political subjects in their own right come to do so, however, this is precisely not a routine experience. In

creating new collective relationships, in breaking with old habits of deference and passivity, and in contesting their exclusion from or subordination within the public sphere, such new actors' experience is significant in terms of personal transformation, the formation of new collective actors and challenging broader power structures.

Genuinely large-scale movements, almost by definition, involve a substantial proportion of such mobilisation, particularly when they are grounded in social groups which do not regularly and routinely engage in active politics and when the movements are not initiated by existing actors such as parties and unions⁴². Ethnographic data collected by movement participants shows how important this experience has been in the water charges movement, and what it means for those newly mobilised, particularly in terms of the process of mobilisation, the articulation of local rationalities and "good sense", and social movement learning more broadly (Cox 2014b).

Two long-time working-class community activists carried out in-depth research with participants. MacCionnaith (2015) carried out PAR with activists from Crumlin, one of the strongest areas of direct resistance, including focus groups, individual interviews and online ethnography. Lynch (2015) carried out feminist research with women from four different regions (including Dublin suburbs, rural villages and small towns), using group interviews, focussing particularly on their experience as women – negatively in terms of internal power dynamics and positively, in emancipating themselves from socialisation into passive, unobtrusive and apolitical gender roles; as yet ethnicity has been little explored in relation to the protests.

With the authors' permission, I reuse some of their interview material here to explore participants' experience. Firstly, given the decades-long specialisation and professionalisation of "politics", union activism and community organising in working-class areas, the movement means above all the mass participation as political subjects of vast numbers of ordinary people for their first time – whether blocking meter installation, facing the fear of not paying bills, taking part in local or national demonstrations, challenging pro-austerity views online, informing themselves about the issue, sharing videos of police brutality or mocking official media claims of low turnouts.

Participants experienced this as emancipatory, particularly women but probably also older, "respectable" men and young people:

⁴² Hearne (2015a: 2) found that 54.5% of respondents had not protested prior to the water charges issue. *If* this can be generalised to the very large numbers who took part in this movement, most of the remaining 45.5% must have been involved in community or trade union action, as other than the February 2003 protest against the war on Iraq no other movements in recent years have mobilised anything like so many participants (the greatest number of his participants had taken part in demonstrations). More probably, however, this figure understates the overall picture, suggesting a more politicised group of survey participants.

When politics becomes personal you have no other choice but to get out and protest (quoted in Lynch 2015: 50).

For most this has been their first confrontational protest experience:

We did a Jobsbridge, hmm, protest outside in Wexford town. And hmm it basically freed me. That's how I felt. You know, empowered me and I felt free and that I had a say and an opinion, you know? (quoted in Lynch 2015: 37).

This emancipation has been personally transformative:

I have a lot to thank Irish Water for. My life has changed so much, and so much for the better (quoted in Lynch 2015: 46).

This is in large part the result of a widespread feeling of “cognitive liberation” (McAdam 2013):

I woke up, first off (quoted in Lynch 2015: 38).

- both in relation to the external world:

[I] sat with the laptop in front of me and I educated myself (quoted in Lynch 2015: 37)

and in self-reflection and overcoming the “muck of ages”:

I find that self-education in myself, I think I'm learning more within myself, about myself doing it this way than I think I would have learnt in school (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 82).

There are of course also costs associated with this:

There are times when sometimes I say, ‘Is there any way you could have blocked knowing about it and not have got involved in it? (quoted in Lynch 2015: 38)⁴³

⁴³ Newer activists routinely make comments like this, implying either that politicisation is a painful emotional experience in itself or that it implies heightened levels of conflict, effort, etc.

Anarchist writers have rightly highlighted the significance of police behaviour and social media in this process of articulating good sense against common sense:

The Irish Water story has provided ample opportunity for various parts of the system to expose their true nature. This is especially true in the case of the Gardaí, who have enjoyed a reputation of being 'peacekeepers' among much of the population. But people who have blocked water meters from being installed have discovered another reality. To many, the Gardaí are like an occupying army. There is no lesson quite like being arrested, and thanks to social media this lesson has been shared the length and breadth of the country...

Within the anti-water charges movement the mainstream media have come to be seen as couriers for government propaganda. Attendance at protests is persistently under-reported and the movement has been hounded by the 'has protest gone too far?' narrative (sometimes using outright fabrication). We have been able to subvert this by forming our own counter-media which has played an important role. A sprawling network of Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and a host of blogs and other websites provide a means to communicate quickly among ourselves. With this we keep up to date on activity around the country, digest and react to establishment spin, discuss tactics, and more. This grassroots media network has given staying power to the movement, allowing protesters who would be otherwise isolated and forgotten to link with and inspire others. (O'Brien 2015)

This is the sharp end of a wider process of confrontation with official rules (bills, limitations on protest etc.) and official voices (in the media, one's own family etc.) Such confrontation has hugely boosted individual confidence:

Just because they [elites] went to university or they went to wherever it doesn't actually make them capable of doing anything ... they don't know anything about us, they don't know how we live, who we are ... they have no connect with us as ordinary people (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 152)

The traditional pieties of top-down party (union, community activism etc.) hierarchies are increasingly challenged:

I am seeing left parties that are ... to me ... appear to be more for the party than for the people (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 87)

The net effect is a much broader experience of popular agency:

One of the things I've noticed that's brought about a massive change all over the place is people are now much more politically aware; people used to just plod along and stayed at home in and a lot of people didn't bother vote (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 90)

This is understood as stretching across time:

You wonder what kind of generation we're bringing up. You know, are they going to be rebels or activists or what? (quoted in Lynch 2015: 44)

and across space:

what's happening in the rest of Europe as well, there's this new thing called direct democracy and it's coming in (quoted in MacCionnaith 2015: 146)

MacCionnaith's participants understood the struggle as "a battle", "a war" and "a revolution" (2015: 82), underlining their understanding of the hegemonic challenges involved. Lastly, we can quote Quigley's experience of the first national protest (October 2014):

[Elites] played it well, with just one problem, it isn't true and it wasn't scum who rose up, it was the Demos, that part of democracy they had hoped we had all forgotten about. We rose up with confidence and humour with one message: we are here, we exist and that mob you are so afraid of turned out to be a politically literate, democratically aware population, laughing at attempts to brand us leeches....

That day was not just a show of force but of culture. Communities with shared experience, dialect, fashion, music even life expectancy, finally coming together after years of deliberate geographic isolation from each other and the shared experience of both social and geographic isolation from wider society changed the rules of the game forever once we felt the power unleashed that day. The real revolution is one of workin' class legitimacy, that day it was all possible, no more pandering to middle class ego, pull em out by the ears and let us fix this. And now that day is a memory but a shared memory, a shared experience and one which contains a huge amount of power because that was the day we were proven right. (Quigley 2015)

The old left and the new

Elsewhere (Cox 2015) I have suggested that the state-centric left used the Irish crisis to revalorise its own cultural capital in economics and policy discussion against the anti-authoritarian and movement-focussed politics of the earlier "movement of movements", but also against the diversity of issues the latter

identified with neoliberalism. However MacCionnaith argues that community-based struggles are now “comfortably enveloped” within the worldwide movement of movements, instancing links to water struggles in Greece, Bolivia and Detroit and horizontal forms of democracy (albeit with tensions around this: 2015, 85). Certainly awareness of both TTIP and environmental issues around water is widespread within the movement.

Mallon (pers. comm.) notes the presence of a significant number of activists who have *left* top-down left parties for the more grassroots practices of community struggle, repeating the 1970s and 1980s experiences at the origins of working-class community activism⁴⁴. Whether or not the parties of the left are willing and / or able to readjust, a change is happening from a leader-centric, delegating form of politics as a minority interest to one where the wider sphere of community action extends into the political in some of its most dramatic meanings. Hence a far wider range of people participate, changing their lives and social relationships in the process, and expect to be involved in decision-making internally as well as publicly. In some Cork groups, community activists now find themselves reading Chomsky and Bookchin. More generally, the movement has been marked at a local level by a flourishing of discussion and democracy: street meetings, packed events in pubs and community halls, Facebook encounters and conversations on protests. This newfound space of thinking things out collectively represents an extraordinary *collective* learning process.

The movement is prefigurative, not in the sense of small groups starting from existing theory, but rather articulates theory out of practice in a process of political learning. It is also busy shaking off the “muck of ages”, both the conservative national-developmentalism of Fianna Fáil and Labour and the top-down practice of Sinn Féin and Trotskyist activism, while recovering the bottom-up culture of working-class community organising.

Social class in the movement

An interesting question here is the proto-hegemony exercised internally by the strongest working-class communities, where direct action has become an effective and regular practice, and which can articulate their own politics most clearly. In a Gramscian perspective, the leading role played by urban working-class groups is visible in many different dimensions⁴⁵: the chronological origins of the movement in well-organised working-class housing estates; the movement’s drawing on traditions of bottom-up community organising (as

⁴⁴ It can also be noted that left parties which were opposed to direct action on ideological grounds in the early 2000s, when anti-authoritarian movements introduced them, have gradually adopted them as their own (Brian Mallon, pers. comm.) Similar processes are probably happening in some areas with defectors from partnership-era community organisations moving to more radical action strategies.

⁴⁵ Respondents to Hearne’s survey were based 45% in Dublin and a further 28% in Leinster, with highest responses within Dublin from working-class and mixed areas (2015a: 2, 17).

against the consensual forms of community action noted by Curtin and Varley 1995 as characteristic of rural Ireland, mobilising behind local notables in defence of geographically-defined interests); the involvement of left parties and trade unions; the development of complex organising networks; and the marginalisation of attempts to give the movement a right-wing inflection (Hearne 2015a: 36).

Outside Lynch's (2015) work, we know relatively little of the movement in traditionally more passive sectors – in particular, the rural poor and lower middle-class groups which have historically followed conservative political leads. However, the failure of repeated attempts to divide the movement suggests substantial support for this working-class leadership. Nonetheless, given how unusual this pattern is in Irish movement history, it seems plausible that we should look for mediating organisations which enabled this unusual transmission from urban working-class areas to rural and middle-class groups. These might include organisations such as the Right2Water campaign and political parties as well as family / friendship ties and social media; as yet there is no clear evidence as to how the process occurred⁴⁶.

However one clear finding from the oral history work I am currently doing with students at Maynooth is the *variety* of ways in which people in different areas engaged with or participated in the movement: in each context explored, students found different emphases and approaches. We should of course expect of a genuinely mass movement that it would reflect the diversity in society, but this does underline the difficulty of top-down generalisations which dismiss this reality.

Organisations and movements

MacCionnaith notes how the Right2Water coalition “is stymying their growth and inhibiting their potential” (2015: 84) and criticises Hearne for misidentifying the coalition with the perspectives of often much more radical grassroots activists, notably around direct resistance and non-payment (2015: 48). This critique can be extended to Finn, who presents matters thus:

Local protests against the installation of water meters had already begun in a number of towns when a broad campaigning front, Right 2 Water, was launched in September, with support from Sinn Féin, the socialist left and a number of trade unions. Right 2 Water built on the foundations laid by an earlier campaign against a flat tax on home-owners... (2015a: 56)

⁴⁶ Many thanks to Niamh Gaynor, Mariya Ivancheva and David Landy for discussions around this point.

Yet the “local protests” developed in the context of the *collapse* of the CAHWT – and would almost certainly not have been supported by its leadership⁴⁷. Further, by the time of R2W’s foundation local protest was both highly visible and highly effective: the Crumlin group, for example, was already in the middle of its successful struggle to prevent meter installation in the area. O’Brien writes

But people didn't throng Dublin's city centre out of nowhere. After the collapse of the CAHWT (Campaign Against Home and Water Taxes) around January 2014, crucially, a small number of people decided to stay active and stop the installation of water meters, for instance in Ballyphehane and Togher in Cork and then a few areas of north east Dublin. On this, Gregor Kerr, who was the secretary of the Federation of Dublin Anti-Water Charge Campaigns (FDAWCC) in the 1990s, opined 'I don't think it's any exaggeration to say that the huge protest on 11th October wouldn't have been anything like the size it was without the slow burn for the previous months of blockades and protests against meter installations spreading from community to community. And it was no coincidence either that many of the people involved in water meter blockades had also participated earlier in the summer in blockades of scab-operated bin trucks in their communities in support of the locked out Greyhound workers.' The initiative and hard work of these early campaigners was the germ of the huge movement which has burgeoned since. (2015)

Familiarity with the difficulties of the Dublin left, then, suggests a less top-down perspective on the relationship between community-based struggles and R2W. Not only had CAHWT’s demise seen deep divisions between the AAA (Socialist Party front), PBP (SWP / ISO front) and Workers Solidarity (anarchist) over tactics, but it followed the public implosion of the “United Left Alliance”, containing the SP, PBP and the Tipperary-based Workers and Unemployed Action Group. WUAG withdrew in 2012, the SP in early 2013 and the ULA effectively ceased to exist by late 2013. Thus, at a minimum, it was the success of the water charges movement on the ground that made a new rapprochement between these and other political forces possible.

As the earlier anti-Shell campaign shows, the competitive and sectarian traditions of the capital’s left can be overcome when its organisations take a secondary role. In Rossport this was achieved by the imprisonment of the “Rossa 5”, and the campaign’s decision that all decisions should be taken by their families – a relationship subsequently extended to “the local community”. In the early days of R2W, the rhetoric was that it was simply organising the national demonstrations (hence dodging the impossible question of how to

⁴⁷ Kerr notes: [CAHWT] “involved huge numbers of working class people but never developed a grassroots structure, and the steering committee meetings eventually became turgid affairs mired in wanna be leaders lecturing everybody else. In contrast the anti-water charges campaign has emerged from communities and the political parties and organisations have been running after it trying to ‘lead’ it. Indeed there isn’t *an* anti-water charge campaign, there are a plethora of groups organising in an ad hoc manner, some co-ordinated, some not. That’s a huge strength.” (cited in O’Brien 2015)

relate to illegal direct action, which would have broken its internal coalition). Until the formation of “Right2Change” in late 2015, then, the existence of community-based direct action and non-payment *enabled* an alliance, not only between far-left parties and with Sinn Féin but also between those parties and the unions, which could otherwise not have survived its first serious test.

For Finn, however, “The coalition of forces behind the water charges movement had real potential, but even the most optimistic left-wing activists were caught unawares when the campaign of protest suddenly took flight in the autumn of 2014.” (2015a: 56) In other words, real politics consists of national demonstrations and political parties. I hope the preceding analysis has showed that the reverse is true: we are witnessing a return of the wider *movement* as against formal *organisations*, and we should not misidentify the movement’s future with party and union leaderships which have a poor track record of overcoming their internal divisions, let alone working together with community movements. This commentary by visiting RS21 activists is closer to the reality:

For months on end working-class communities had been organizing themselves, peacefully blocking the installation of water meters in their areas, calling countless street and estate meetings across the country every night as well as local protests⁴⁸.

The failures of the CAHWT and ULA parallel the way in which community groups and unions had previously placed all their eggs in the “social partnership” basket. Community projects have suffered massive cuts (Cox 2010; Bissett 2015). This was particularly crippling since for community groups, as for unions, engagement in partnership meant a combination of professionalisation and demobilisation⁴⁹. When the state attacked partnership, the core legitimisation of this strategy was undermined, but those organisations had no alternative strategy than hoping for a return to the previous unhappy marriage.

Thankfully, there is more to movements than their organisations; and the historical organisational failures of the far left, unions and community groups alike enabled a revitalisation from below of working-class *organising*. It is to the credit of those organisational leaderships who have managed to reorient themselves to support this, though a critical analysis also has to ask about the limits of this and how far they are willing to countenance a substantive *internal* democratisation of their own organisations⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ <http://rs21.org.uk/2015/02/03/the-rocky-road-ahead-the-movement-against-irish-water/>

⁴⁹ This rendered them entirely dependent on the state for advocacy and funding, with few professional *organisers* but many research officers, policy officers, media officers, funding officers, legal officers etc. The movement was thus dependent on elite goodwill both to fund these positions and for these roles to be effective.

⁵⁰ At the time of writing, the experience of Right2Change and the 2016 general election – coupled with the downturn in movement activity as activists wait to see what will happen with

Within large-scale movements, there is often a creative tension between (informal) organising, networks, skills and practices and (formal) organisations. When people started to get leaflets saying that Irish Water was going to install meters in their estate, and decided to resist that directly, the question "how are we going to stop this?" and "who will join me on the pavement tomorrow morning?" will rarely have been answered from scratch; individuals' previous involvement in partnership-period community organisations, CAHWT, left parties, unions etc. may all have been important in different contexts. At the same time, the flourishing of new, informal groups and the huge numbers of local meetings is a sign that existing organisational forms were not seen as either available or able to deal with this issue. The intellectual challenge, perhaps, is to find a language that represents this on-the-ground reality rather than presenting the movement as the *product* of formal organisations.

The naïve rhetoric of spontaneity and surprise reflects a top-down viewpoint familiar in the history of movements. EP Thompson's famous "Moral economy" article (1971) showed the weaknesses in this approach nearly 50 years ago; more recently, Dale (2005) and Flesher Fominaya (2015) have showed what is missing in using "spontaneity" to explain the East German uprising of 1953 or the M-15 movement in Spain. "Spontaneity" often means simply that from a top-down viewpoint we lack access to what the grassroots agents who launch a new movement outside existing organisations are thinking or doing. When we do the research, we consistently find that large-scale, "spontaneous" popular movements draw on networks, political cultures, repertoires of contention etc. which are the sediments of previous struggles. Zibechi's (2010) analysis of the Bolivian water war in terms of indigenous community organisation in El Alto makes the same point in a neat parallel to Ireland⁵¹. This is the thawing (or reheating?) of frozen movement knowledge, the reactivation of learning from earlier working-class struggles (Cox and Nilsen 2014). The party, it seems, is not the memory of the class after all – or only a very selective part of that memory⁵².

Predictions?

The big story, then, is the movement: the rebirth on a massive scale of self-organised activity across and beyond working-class Ireland. This can be expected to feed back into the wider history whatever the outcome: people have been mobilised in exceptional numbers and across all generations and many social divides.

the issue – seem to have led to something of a revival of sectarian tensions (and mutual accusations between parties, unions and community groups).

⁵¹ It is important to note that comparative analysis repeatedly shows that one cannot read off the nature of a movement from the "issue" it is organised around. For a good overview of the diversity of responses to water privatisation in Africa, see Gaynor 2016.

⁵² A point underlined by some comments on this paper from party members who doubted the existence of any movement or grassroots outside of their own organisation, or presented these as simply stooges for forces trying to marginalise parties within R2W / R2C...

Whatever happens, hundreds of small groups around Ireland are engaged in networked, daily resistance to austerity. They communicate through channels on social media that are almost completely missed by the mainstream press. Increasingly, they manage impressive feats of organisation. (Burtenshaw 2015)

Six weeks before its formation, I predicted that

the new government will avoid officially abandoning water charges and Irish Water, but will kick the can down the road and put charges on the long finger, resolving its embarrassment vis-à-vis the EU with reference to *force majeure*. Indeed both FF and FG – the likely government partners-to-be – could potentially gain from a situation where FG is extricated from enforcing the charges and FF can claim the credit for deferring them. (Cox 2016c)

Thus far, experience has borne out this prediction, with the issue nearly forcing a new election and the eventual government suspending charges and referring the issue to a commission. The (presumptively) final committee outcome is clearly a fudge, in which most households will not be charged but a levy for “excessive use” has been retained (the level for which will no doubt be reduced when the political climate is held to be more auspicious).

Movement entrepreneurs are already attempting to present action over housing as the “next big issue”: while it is clear that it is a significant political issue, attempts over the eight years of crisis to turn it into a mass *movement* comparable to the water charges struggle have consistently failed, for relatively obvious reasons to do with the huge diversity of situations people find themselves in around housing⁵³.

More generally, however, movements rarely obey this kind of strategic logic. Historical experience, as with the US Civil Rights Movement and New Left, or the west European movements of “1968”, indicates that popular mobilisation on this sort of scale normally has substantial and positive effects. When people are engaged in action around something that is already a core part of their lives or that involves lots of people close to them (hence when they mobilise on a “community” basis with friends, family and neighbours); when this involves a visible and sustained confrontation with “legitimate authorities” (police, media, government etc.); when they commit themselves to more risky actions

⁵³ The stellar performance by the “Home Sweet Home” campaign, which occupied the NAMA-owned Apollo House in Central Dublin over Christmas and New Year 2016-17, was successful both in showing the degree of popular support for action around homelessness and in forcing the State to take action. However like other housing campaigns in Ireland during the crisis, numbers of active participants remained several orders of magnitude smaller than those involved in action around water. This does not in any sense make housing an unimportant political issue; it is simply to observe that attempts to talk up its potential for *large-scale* mobilisation have consistently failed to bear fruit in practice.

(confronting police, not paying etc. as opposed to simply signing a petition or going on a march); and when there is an intense democratic process of movement-making (as opposed to an astroturfing or NGO model) - that experience tends to stay with them well after the immediate "issue" is over, and they regularly go on to develop new kinds of movement which express their own local rationalities.

However, these new movement developments can hardly be foreseen in advance, any more than (say) the rise of the women's movement or movements against nuclear power could have been foreseen from a study of the American SDS or May 1968. Most importantly, the future political activities of newly mobilised groups cannot be read off from top-down considerations of what constitute the most important political issues in a bird's-eye perspective, or for that matter from ideology criticism which assumes that the "meaning" of particular issues is the same for all participants.

Conclusion: resistance on the periphery needs allies in the belly of the beast

Together with Ireland's failed referenda (Finn 2015b: 249) and union ballots, the 2016 election results bring Ireland broadly into line with Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Iceland. The scale of emigration and non-voting mean that electoral results significantly *underestimate* the loss of consent for austerity.

Across the European periphery, it is now difficult, verging on impossible, for elites to secure legitimate consent for austerity politics. Instead we have seen parties such as Pasok or Irish Labour elected on anti-austerity mandates and then induced to change their minds, technical governments in Italy and Greece (Kennedy 2015: 96-7), the Portuguese "soft coup", the EU's defeat of Syriza, the long difficulty in forming a government in Spain and so on.

The EU can evidently keep going even with this massive loss of legitimacy on the periphery; while there is an equally substantial loss of legitimacy in the core (and EC Europe) it is largely expressed on the far right. The question is where anti-austerity movements in the periphery can find comparable allies in the core for alliances capable of dislodging austerity and, beyond that, neoliberalism. Hyman's perspective (2015), which calls for an anti-austerity alliance between unions, new social movements and parties, fits within this problematic, as do the various AlterSummit, Blockupy, DiEM25, Plan B etc. initiatives and conversations between these (Björk 2016, Baier 2016)⁵⁴.

However, as in Ireland it is more likely that if the kind of large-scale movements needed do develop, they will come from the grassroots rather than as top-down initiatives. This does not, of course, mean that we should not attempt to support organisation-driven initiatives and infuse them with real grassroots content. It

⁵⁴ See e.g. Blockupy's call to use protests against the G20 in July 2017 as a "stage and step of our struggles for a Europe from below": <https://blockupy.org/en/6832/lets-use-the-anti-g20-mobilization-as-stage-and-step-of-our-struggles-for-a-europe-from-below/>

means that we should avoid confusing this necessary organising with an actual pan-European movement. Wider success depends on effective international alliances between *movements*, and a mutual recognition of ourselves in each other's struggles; and we are far from this point at present⁵⁵.

In Ireland, the real-world meaning of popular decision-making exists in the practical *attempt* to make or shape decisions collectively (Szolucha 2016) and in asserting an alternative logic of the purpose of politics (moral economy) and its standpoint ("people" vs elites). Individually, the movement represents a sharp learning curve in terms of *substantive* political understanding as this logic meets the reality of inflexible policy, police repression and media attacks.

Participants' experience of mobilisation, participation and radicalisation is a powerful one and increases the likelihood of involvement elsewhere. The experience of winning, or even substantially challenging *formal* politics is also hugely significant here. What is important for this is not so much the election itself or policy decisions as whether participants interpret the outcome as a victory or defeat. For now what is being glimpsed, in many local meetings and housing estates across Ireland, is the possibility of a different kind of democracy from below, grounded in living practice and tackling the many hidden and not-so-hidden injuries of class as experienced in the Republic.

⁵⁵ Past learning from earlier waves of the anti-neoliberal "movement of movements" can be important here, in that such alliances were more effectively made (in Europe) in the early 2000s; however, it is clear that we need to go beyond even that level of cross-national mass mobilisation if we are to defeat neoliberalism.

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Protest, emotion and change: an analysis of two women's collectives fighting against machismo in Oaxaca, Mexico

Alice Poma and Tommaso Gravante

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present our proposal of analysis that highlights how protest changes people and the role of emotion in this change. Aware of the emotional intensity of experiences of protest, our objective will be to show how emotion gives a new meaning to these experiences. In order to do this, we will analyse the role of emotions in the transformation of consciousness and behaviour, showing how collective emotions can strengthen people and how the protest experience changes emotions towards state and authority. To conclude, we will present the emotion work that women are doing in their process of emancipation. Based on previous empirical research where we have studied the experience of women from Oaxaca (Mexico) who participated in the 2006 insurgency to then create two self-organised women's collectives, we propose an analysis that proves that the emotional dimension is vital to understanding and analysing protest as a path to emancipation. The methodology that we have used throughout our research is based on depth interviews and focus groups.

Keywords: Mexico, emotions, protest, social-cultural change, emotion work, and women

Introduction

“It was pain and rage that made us challenge everything and everyone 20 years ago. And it is pain and rage that now again makes us lace up our boots, put on our uniforms, strap on our guns, and cover our faces.”¹

The emotional dimension of protest is evident nowadays to those who observe protest. For instance, in Mexico, from where we are writing, thousands of people are still marching to express their grief, anger and indignation against the killing of six people and the disappearance of forty-three students in the state of Guerrero in September 2014. While the parents of the young people and their schoolmates marched, saying “May our grief not be indifferent to you”, people all over Mexico answered with “Your pain is ours, your anger is ours”.

¹ Press release of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (Mexico). May 8, 2014.

Empathising with people who are struggling, that is, feeling deep in one's heart what others are feeling, is the first step to solidarity and collective action, which "is both generated by and generates emotions" (Bayard de Volo, 2006).

But how can we analyse emotion, and for what purpose? Starting from the idea that emotions, as social, cultural and political constructs, are key factors to understanding every aspect of protest and social movements (i.e. emergence, maintenance, splitting, undermining, dissolution), in this paper we want to highlight the role of emotions in the process of change that people experience by participating in protest.

As claimed by Piven and Cloward (1977), during a protest experience, people experience a transformation of consciousness and behaviour. Although this process of change does not include emotions, since these authors "were writing in a period when scholars denied the emotions" (Jasper, 2014b, p. 210), we defend the idea that this process, like many others, is stimulated by and provokes emotions and emotion work (Hochschild, 1979 and 1983).

Based on literature on emotions and protest, the aim of the paper is to show the role of emotions in the transformation that members of two self-organised Mexican women's collectives are experiencing. The analysis focuses on collective emotions, emotions toward authorities and emotion work because we have observed that these three elements are central to the process of transformation. Regarding emotion work, we have identified two emotions, fear and anger, that have been expressly managed as a political activity of these collectives. In this case, the link between emotion work and social change lies in the capacity to overcome gendered feeling rules and transform cementing, status quo-supporting emotions into subversive mobilising emotions (Flam, 2015).

The inclusion of the emotional dimension to understand collective action also means that we have to consider the collective dimension of emotions. Based on social constructivist approaches that view emotions as social and cultural constructs (Hochschild, 1979, 1983), we focus our attention on how people think about and reprocess their own emotions, individual and collectively. As Zibechi (2014) answered in a radio interview, "First, we should not negate fear, we need to collectivise it, to socialise it (...) [fear] can be overcome collectively. And if we overcome fear we can do things".

What Zibechi proposes is collective emotion work² (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) in order to respond to political violence. Emotion work is "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (Hochschild, 1979, p. 561). It is not about controlling or suppressing emotions, but about shaping, creating or trying to shed certain feelings. This process, which has been already put into practice, for instance, by feminist collectives (Taylor, 1996; Taylor and Rupp, 2002), highlights the importance of emotions in personal and political empowerment and social change (Flam, 2005). Moreover, considering that

² The term "emotion management" is used by Hochschild synonymously with "emotion work" and "deep acting" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 551). Like Hochschild, we use emotion work and emotion management as synonyms.

emotion work could be the result of a long-term process and extreme events (Gould, 2009), we will show in this article that the deeply emotional protest experience can become a transformative experience in which people start reframing their reality and the emotions and emotional rules that structure this reality.

Starting from these premises, in this paper we want to show the process of change that women, who self-organised in two collectives, experienced as a consequence of participating in the insurgency of Oaxaca (Mexico, 2006) and the role of emotion in that change. The core of our analysis resides in the idea that participating in protest allows people to start a process of transformation in which emotion plays an important role, and in fact is the fuel for action and thought.

This paper will be divided in five sections: to start with, we will describe the Oaxaca context, the collectives analysed, and the method used for the research. We will then present a brief review in which we will show the role of emotions in motivation, introducing the transformation of consciousness and behaviour. The following sections will be dedicated to emotional processes relevant in the transformation of consciousness and behaviour, such as collective emotions, which contribute to building ties among protesters; and emotions towards the state and authorities, which feed the antagonist identity of “us” vs. “them”. Finally, we will present two emotional processes that women work on in their activities, highlighting the role of emotion in people’s changes, and in particular the role of emotion work in strengthening and empowering people.

Context, case study and methodology

Even though Oaxaca is a territory rich in natural and cultural resources, it is one of the poorest states in Mexico in economic terms (CONEVAL 2012), with marginalisation and social inequality percentages among the highest in the country (CONAPO 2010). The most severely affected segments of the population are indigenous people and/or rural communities or peripheral neighbourhoods of urban areas. Within this array of poverty and marginalisation, women suffer a multiple stigma because they are poor and/or indigenous and because they are women. In this context of inequality (INEGI 2008), women in neoliberal Mexico suffer from discrimination and violence every day since, as Motta, Flesher Fominaya, Eschle and Cox highlight, “poverty has been feminised and violence, both structural and individual, has intensified” (2011, p.1).

Moreover, in Mexico, violence is extended and accepted, and Mexican women undergo daily social discrimination and institutional or structural sexism (González Arias, 2011).

In this contextual frame, to which we can also add the fact that it has one of the highest rates of women’s human rights violations in Mexico, in recent years Oaxaca has seen an increase in violence-related crimes and assassinations

targeting women³ as a result of the intensification of conflicts and repression as part of the low intensity war strategy implemented by the state.

Bearing all this in mind, when, on 1 August 2006, thousands of women decided to take the streets and protest against governor Ulises Ruiz, an emerging process by part of the citizenry took place. This represents a huge milestone in Oaxacan society in terms of questioning and challenging the repressive dynamics of the dominant powers and the hegemonic patriarchal discourse.

The subjects of this research are women who, after participating in the insurgency of Oaxaca (2006), decided to self-organise in two collectives in order to resist and fight machismo: *Mujer Nueva* [New Woman] and a self-defence workshop, *Lucha Chula* [Pretty Fight]. What these women have in common is that they decided to self-organise, after having experienced a similar, highly emotional life event that changed them profoundly.

This case study shows that the transformation process is not linear, but helical. The women's participation in the occupation of radio station 96.9 FM and TV channel Canal 9 of the state radio and television facilities (CORTV) for almost a month in August 2006 (Gravante, 2016; Sierra, Poma and Gravante, 2016a); their participation in barricades that neighbours were building in many Oaxaca neighbourhoods in order to defend themselves from police and organised crime repression during the insurgency; and their participation in the many demonstrations and plantones that were organised during that period produced a transformation of consciousness and behaviour that, in the case of the women's groups analysed, was the first step towards self-organisation when the insurgency ended.

Literature on social movements helps us understand the emotional toll that the end of a struggle brings with it. Gould (2009), for example, shows how the disbanding of ACT UP caused its activists to feel emotions like: depression, bitterness, sadness, and a feeling of loss, emptiness and uncertainty about ending a struggle experience that had filled their lives. This is joined by a feeling of futility and lack of meaning because the movement made people feel socially useful and provides goals that had to be rebuilt when the experience ended.

Adams (2003) who, unlike Gould (2009), analyses a movement that ended up achieving its aim, shows how initial enthusiasm about the end of the Pinochet dictatorship ended in bitterness and disappointment. In this case, the disappointment was due to the expectations of those involved about the new regime, which were not met. As in Gould's (2009) study, Adams (2003) shows that, despite their victory, losing a common enemy and goal created disengagement, a feeling of futility and emptiness. Furthermore, the women who went back to being housewives felt abandoned because they lost the intimacy and fellowship that had been formed during the movement's experience.

³ See the reports of the Observatorio Nacional Ciudadano del Femicidio (2010 and 2012) and those of the Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca (2011 and 2013).

The women who we are working with decided that they did not want to lose the friendship, sisterhood, freedom, empowerment, etc. that they built during the insurgency. This is why the two groups were created, with the aim to keep fighting machismo in their everyday lives. The process that we are analysing is how these activists evolved and the role of emotions in that evolution.

The research (2010-2017)⁴ was set out methodologically starting with in-depth interviews, drawing upon the technique of episodic interviews (Flick, 2000, 2004). This method, which consists of exploring the processes to be analysed by subjects narrating episodes of their experiences, makes it possible to recognise and analyse “the narrative-episodic knowledge with the use of narrations, while the semantic knowledge becomes accessible by means of concrete deliberate questions” (Flick, 2004, p. 118). In our research, it has proven a helpful tool since it “facilitates the presentation of experiences in a general and comparative manner, and at the same time it ensures those situations and episodes are told in their specificity” (Flick, 2004, p. 119).

This technique allowed us to explore both the change that women experienced by participating the insurgency (past experience), and the changes related to specific present events. Moreover, in-depth interviews makes it possible to explore the emotional dimension of protest experiences because the subject has time to remember and reflect individually on her own experiences and feelings. In our experience, activists do not spend much time reflecting on their own feelings, since they are busy facing everyday problems and activities. The time spent with these women was very pleasant and useful for both of us because it created empathy, which is both a political and methodological tool (Poma and Gravante, 2016a), and also because this time was dedicated to self-reflection. We have also obtained this methodological finding in other research (Poma and Gravante, 2016b), and in the case of these two collectives, we can see that this time was useful because we are still in touch and working with these subjects. As Motta shows for storytelling, our method of research “involves transgressing a practice of knowing as mastery through creating practices of self- (other) knowledge” (Motta, 2014, p. 37).

Moreover, the people’s experiences in protests is not limited to a personal and individual dimension; instead, it comprises a broader, collective one. For this reason, in addition to sixteen in-depth interviews, we found it necessary to address reflections on the emancipation process undergone by each person in discussions and collective development by carrying out two focus groups which, as evidenced by della Porta, “allow us to recreate —almost as in an experiment— conditions similar to those considered as belonging to paths of opinion formation, particularly in social movements” (2014, p. 15). The first focus group (ten participants) was carried out with Mujer Nueva [FG_MN], while the second

⁴ The cases presented in this article are part of wider research that has encompassed the study of all the alternative media that arose during the insurrection of Oaxaca (Gravante, 2016). In addition, part of the research has been funded by the Bilateral Programme of Mexico’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE) and by the Mobility Programme of the Ibero-American Association of Postgraduate Universities (AUIP).

(six participants) was carried out with the young women involved in the self-defence workshop Lucha Chula [FG_SD]. In the focus groups we discussed: 1) the change the women who participated in the insurgency of Oaxaca experienced; 2) the emotion work they were doing, focusing on the overcoming of learned helplessness and fear and the expression of anger.

Finally, the analysis presented in this paper is characterised by a focus “from below” (Poma and Gravante, 2015), which involved studying the protest not only at the micro level, but also focused on “non-subjects” (Motta, 2014), such as women, who are made invisible in the analysis of protests in the shadow of activists and leaders of formal organisations, the majority of whom are male.

Indeed, in the Oaxaca insurgency, the majority of the studies are focused on APPO (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) or the CNTE’s Section 22 (the Oaxacan section of the Mexican teachers’ union), where the role of women in the process of social change is practically absent.

This is not a unique case in women’s activism, considering that, as Motta and Seppälä show, “what is elided and denied in many analyses is the ways in which racialized subaltern women who simultaneously face multiple oppressions can also create and experiment with new political subjectivities, re-imagine emancipatory politics, and produce and embody multiple grounds of epistemological difference and becoming” (2016, p. 7).

The approach from below suggests paying attention to the people fighting, and in particular to their experiences and feelings, which, as written by Jorge Regalado, “had always been there but we did not have the eyes to see them nor ears to hear them” (2012, p. 170). From this perspective, the focus of the analysis is not on the movement itself as a social actor any longer, but the experience of self-organised women “and their everyday forms of resistance and transformation” (Motta, 2014, p. 23).

Focusing on the subject means recognising the capacity for action-reflection and production of knowledge on the part of the people involved in the struggles and resistances (Freire, 1970, 1976), and the process of reinventing an “other” politics, from below (Motta, 2014). In other words, the protagonists are the authors of their own experience and the interpreters of their own political practice, and the entire social reality is the result of these social subjects producing and acting. As the Zapatistas said, “We cover our faces so you can see our hearts”, and this is the aim of the focus from below, to “see beyond visible struggles” (Holloway, 2009, p. 22). The aim is to analyse the emancipatory role of emotions in protest by analysing the role of emotions in the transformation of consciousness and behaviour of the women who participated in the insurgency of Oaxaca and the emotion work that they do in order to empower themselves.

To conclude, focusing our analysis on the micro level of the protest and from below allows us to show protest as an emancipating experience because, while at macro level every event becomes unemotional, at micro level we can feel and observe the emotions that people have felt and we can empathise with them. This is why analysis at the micro level of the protest is so significant: because it

is one important way to comprehend what really happens when people protest, as well as the effects of the protest on people, as we can see in the next two paragraphs dedicated to the role of emotions in the participation.

Emotions and protest: from motivation to change

That emotions are important in protest, as in every moment of human beings' lives, is an idea that has been demonstrated in the literature on social movements in the past twenty years (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000, 2001 and 2004; Jasper 1997, 1998, 2006, 2011, 2014a, 2014b; Flam and King 2005, della Porta 2008, Gould 2004 and 2009, Bayard de Volo 2006, among others). Thanks to the work of authors who include emotions in the study of protest, it has been proven that emotions, among other things, "help explain not simply the origin and spread of social movements but also their continuation or decline" (Jasper, 1998, pp. 416-417); they have significant effects on movements (Gould, 2004), and, besides the relational, cognitive and emotional consequences of protest, they affect the movements themselves (della Porta, 2008; Jasper, 1997) and are related to the transforming capacity of protest. In other words, emotions are "a key feature of society" (Flam and King, 2005, p. 3).

This literature has also widely demonstrated that emotions motivate people to participate in collective action. In fact, what is easily observable is that when people protest they often have experienced a moral shock (Jasper, 1998, 2006 and 2011), which is the emotional response to information or an event that people do not expect. During the insurgency of Oaxaca, for instance, one of the events that produced moral shock was the eviction and brutal repression of the teachers in the main square in Oaxaca which triggered the protests against the then-governor Ulises Ruiz in May 2006 (Poma and Gravante, 2016a).

Although it sometimes seems that ordinary people react to some events apparently unexpectedly, what analysts do not often recall is that, despite outwardly living their lives quietly, people develop and nurture a "hidden transcript" (Scott, 1990), and when something that emotionally touches them occurs, they react. The "hidden transcript" (Scott, 1990), fed by emotions that people feel in their everyday lives, is a mix of emotions and cognition that interact together with a sense of injustice related to an event, legitimising resistance against the government, as this extract shows:

I come from a very poor and modest family, so I'm sick of the injustices that people experience. Like me, there are thousands of Oaxacan women living the same situation. At that time I spoke on behalf of all Oaxacan women who are marginalised, battered, neglected... Now I feel no fear. (I.Oa.9a)

What moves people to protest is a mix of feelings, such as grief, injustice, fear or anger, which result from these individuals' life experiences. In order to organise all the feelings that have an effect in protest, Jasper (1998, 2006, 2011)

identifies four types of emotions: reactive or reflex, moods, affective and moral emotions. We will focus on the last two categories, considering that event anger and fear can be moral emotions when they are processed cognitively, and they are not only a direct reaction to some events.

Affective and reciprocal emotions, such as, love, respect, admiration, affection, confidence, trust, gratitude and loyalty, can mobilise (della Porta, 1998), reinforce solidarity (Taylor and Rupp, 2002) and sustain activism and commitment (della Porta, 1995; Goodwin and Pfaff, 2001; Romanos, 2011; Poma and Gravante, 2016b) when felt toward the members of the group. In the same way, cementing emotions, such as, gratitude and loyalty (Flam, 2005), can be felt toward other actors, such as authorities. When citizens do not trust in politicians or other authorities it is because they have experienced some sort of outrage or disappointment so many times. In this case, subversive counter-emotions can emerge, such as hate, contempt, and anger directed toward the opponents (Flam, 2005).

Together with affective bonds, moral emotions (Jasper, 1998, 2006, 2011; Goodwin et al., 2004), such as indignation and outrage, are the fuel of the protest (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2001). As we have already shown in this case study (Poma and Gravante, 2016a), these emotions can mobilise but they can also feed collective identity when they are shared (Poma and Gravante, 2016b).

While emotions are important in order to mobilise, support or weaken collective action in its different stages – recruitment, solidification, and dismantling – they also influence the change that people experience as a consequence of their participation, which Piven and Cloward (1977) called the transformation of consciousness and behaviour. This process includes delegitimation of the system, assertion of rights that involve demand for change and, finally, a sense of efficacy (Piven and Cloward, 1977, pp. 3-4).

The interviewees identified this transformation in relation to the insurgency of Oaxaca as the process that “opens your eyes” and “wakes you up”. One outcome of the insurgency was, for instance, that people who had never protested before reconsidered their ideas about protest. Our hypothesis is that protest changes people’s minds because of its emotional intensity and the process of reprocessing that emotions trigger, considering that “once a person begins to participate, she is subject to new social processes that help shape her emotions, morals and cognitions” (Jasper, 1997, p. 185).

Moreover, for the women interviewed, the process of transformation only started with the insurgency. In fact, in our case study we were able to observe that participation in the insurgency of Oaxaca (2006) was only the first step of a long journey that is still (2017) ongoing. Participation in the insurgency allowed these women to get to know each other and bond together, to empower themselves individually and collectively and to build affective bonds and spaces that they now do not want to give up. Sharing experiences, emotions and a new collective identity as women capable of fighting against chauvinist violence and

for a better society was what led them, for instance, to react and overcome fear of authority or violence and start a process of emotion work. This process includes, for example, the re-appropriation of anger, that is, another important process that empowers and helps them to fight against their own shame, resentment or sense of guilt (Holmes, 2004).

To conclude, what makes the protest experience a unique experience is that it is highly emotional and cannot be delegated. When people fight against something that is upsetting their life, they are personally experiencing something new. By feeling the emotions in their belly they are experiencing the protest first-hand. In these contexts, as well as indignation, outrage and anger, which are present from the beginning and have motivated people to fight, the emotional dimension of the transformation of consciousness and behaviour comprises both the shared and reciprocal emotions among the people who are fighting and emotions towards the state or the authorities, which, as we will see in the next two paragraphs, sustain the development of new subjectivities.

“This struggle bonded us”: the role of collective emotions

During one focus group we did with the *Mujer Nueva* collective, two women broke down and cried remembering the barricades in Oaxaca, when they distributed food to young people from slums who fought in the barricades and were defending the radio and TV channels occupied by women. At this moment, the women were showing empathy, crying, and thinking about where these young people who had become like their children could be and what they could be doing. Also, as these women told us, “we have become very important to them” (FG.MN).

This event shows that collective emotions (Jasper, 1997 and 2013), that is, emotions towards people who are fighting together and shared among them, are a central element in the protest experience. Bonds and feelings felt during a protest are as intense as the struggle is, and they are emotional baggage⁵ that no one can lose, as this Mexican woman states:

These are the words of a companion who is now dead: “This struggle bonded us”. And it is true. We, the women of the collective group, didn’t know each other before and that struggle has bonded us and now we want to deepen this relationship. (I.Oa.9a)

In addition, we could observe in our research that the new relationships that

⁵ We use this concept as a positive one, although it sometimes acquires a pejorative meaning, considering that the feelings that people experience in their lives can have a negative effect on their behaviour and attitudes (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com>). In general, emotional baggage is neither positive nor negative, but something that everyone has, and it is up to each person to decide if and how to take advantage of it.

arise from the protest experience allow people, for instance, to know each other, overcome prejudices, rely and discover affinities.

Sometimes you have these dumb ideas, I don't know what we could call them, about some movements... but when you live through it, you are marked by it. (FG.MN).

Like protest, domestic violence also bonded women together. As a member of Lucha Chula told us, they built a sisterhood by “sharing our violent experiences and creating a circle of friendship” (FG.LC). These ties, which are created during the conflict, are one of the legacies of these experiences, in which these women rediscovered the pleasure and necessity of working and bonding together among women.

The first change these women had experienced as a consequence of their participation in the insurgency was rediscovering connections with other women and the importance of working together, beyond the protest experience. As a member of Mujer Nueva highlights, “after 2006 I realised that I was not the same woman as before, that you can't think about social struggle without women's struggle” (FG.MN). An activist of Lucha Chula, who had previous experience (since before 2006) in anarchist groups, explains that she realised that she was experiencing “schizophrenia” generated by the division between the intimacy sphere among women, at home and with her female friends, and the political sphere that she shared with men. As she said during the focus groups, it was in the self-defence workshop (it means, since 2011) where she “could bring together intimacy and the political sphere without any problem” (FG_LC). In this case the young woman explained that the lack of intimacy is due to a lack of empathy and harmony with her male comrades. As she told us “I can't talk about the same things with a man (...) Here [in the group that organises the self-defence workshop] we understand each other, it's easier” (FG.LC).

The role of collective reciprocal and shared emotions (Jasper, 1997) in this change lies in empathy and sisterhood. What strengthens these women and ties them to each other is sharing emotions and empathising. As a woman in Oaxaca told us, regarding the occupation of the public TV channel Canal 9 during the protest in 2006: “we did not want to leave that space and nobody understood why. We did not want to leave it because it had become our space” (FG.MN). And another woman, when talking about the barricades, said: “this was what hurt us the most, that they [the authorities] had taken from us the spaces that we had built around the fire” (FG.MN).

Sharing protest experiences with other women, and feeling at ease with women more than men, changed the group's agenda and practice. Moreover, as literature on social movements has already demonstrated, affective bonds between members can develop and strengthen the sense of collective identity (Taylor, 1989; Bayard de Volo, 2006) and help people to overcome loneliness

and helplessness, two feelings common in women who have suffered violence. As this extract shows:

I hadn't known my neighbours well and in the barricades I got to know them better (...). That's how we created a community and other sorts of relationships, and I think that's the best thing ever, the ways of relating to each other and being together. (I.Oa.7)

The new sisterhood that arose from the protest allowed women to overcome emotions such as powerlessness and shame, and to keep self-organising when the protest finished, as one member of *Mujer Nueva* explains:

When we went back to our old lives we realised that we were able to conquer our space, but not a gender stance within the social movement (...) After 2006 I realised that I could not be the same woman as before, that there is no social fight without women's fight. This change was very important for me. (FG.MN)

Similarly, one member of *Lucha Chula* explained that her change was discovering that there was a chance to keep fighting in a more comfortable space where: "you are no longer the only crazy one shouting out against the patriarchy, and you can see many people supporting you" (FG.LC).

Women activists who had participated in social movements since before 2006, and women who experienced protest for the first time in 2006, discovered that all of them shared loneliness. This mood, among other things, limited these women's potential for emancipation from their previous lives and fed into learned helplessness, that is, the feeling that leads people to think it is useless to fight against something that cannot be changed. Overcoming social loneliness and shame is important because the mere fact that people feel supported and part of a new "us" influences moods and provides energy to the protagonists of these experiences. As a member of *Mujer Nueva* told us: "I feel happy in the group because we succeeded in breaking that [learned helplessness]". (FC.MN).

Receiving support, comfort and solidarity, as well as knowing that there are other people with whom to share ideas, concerns and purpose, avoids one of the main objectives of every domination systems: isolating and dividing people. Protests bond people and feed their identity, as a woman in Oaxaca said: "the best reward the movement gave me was meeting my compañeras" (FG.MN).

Sharing spaces such as barricades or the TV channel bonded these women together, and when these experiences ended they started building new spaces, which in this case are the two experiences analysed, *Mujer Nueva* and the self-defence collective. All the women interviewed felt that they did not have a place in institutional politics, broader social movements and the social context, and for this reason they decided to build new spaces where they could keep sharing experiences and emotions and from where they could keep empowering

themselves. For the first time, and thanks to their participation in the insurgency, these women, who had felt that they had no space in their society before, felt that they were able to build their own spaces, and this was a crucial moment in their lives because it was at that moment – when such spaces became real – that they started making their own paths toward emancipation, as this extract shows:

[during the insurgency] We built a new space together, in order to go and talk about family and personal problems, without any interests. These experiences leave a mark. [Thanks to this space] We all succeeded in overcoming our fears, we could show ourselves as we actually were, and what we wanted to do. (FG.MN).

Free or self-organised spaces are important because, as Chatterton (2008) highlights, social change is linked to the need to create spaces for emotional connections; similarly, Brown and Pickerill (2009) showed the importance for activists to build “fear-free” and “shame-free” spaces for sharing experiences, supporting themselves and developing new projects based on empathy, happiness and solidarity, which is, quoting a Lucha Chula activist, their “best weapon” (FG.LC).

This explains why the spaces that these women built on their own, both during the protest and after it, are so important. “Free spaces”, as Reger affirms, “are cognitively and emotionally important contexts within social movements” (2004, p. 206). What we were able to observe in the two experiences analysed is that it is in these spaces where emotional reflexivity (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; King, 2005) takes place, creating the conditions for a process of transformation of consciousness and behaviour (Piven and Cloward, 1977) and emotion management, as we will see in the third paragraph.

To conclude, what we want to highlight is that the insurgency of Oaxaca provided the opportunity to build an environment consisting of women who enjoyed their sisterhood as well as working together, which not only makes it possible to achieve the objective of the struggle but also ensures that the experience is more bearable. The experience changed these women lives, as this extract shows:

After all this we will never be the same women as before, because we got closer to each other, we are more aware. We are now aware [of the importance] of supporting women, and even as a society we [the women] are more connected. It was a very hard experience, very painful, but also beautiful. (FG.MN)

All these new bonds strengthen, on the one hand, solidarity between women who have lived through the same experience or have recognised themselves as having the same values and ideas (Taylor and Rupp, 2002) and, on the other hand, they feed the polarisation of society and disappointment and discredit

against “others”, which furthers the antagonist identity (us vs. them). The “them” here are those against whom these women have fought during the insurgency, such as the state, the government and the police. This leads us to the next section, in which we will present the role of emotions directed towards authorities.

The role of emotions directed towards authorities

Another change that these women experienced as a consequence of their participation in the insurgency of Oaxaca was a redefinition of their relationship with the authorities, that is, politicians and police forces.

During an interview with one of the women in *Mujer Nueva*, she told us that Governor Ulises Ruíz, against whom Oaxaca’s people fought unsuccessfully in 2006, was not only considered guilty for repressing the people⁶, but also represented for her and her companions the father or authoritarian husband who had beaten them or the man who had raped them, their daughters, or other women. During the protest, the public and private spheres merge together, and the feelings that people have felt in their ordinary lives become part of their political action, as the personal postpartum experience is turned into the postpartum self-help movement (Taylor, 1996). As Krauss wrote, “experience is not merely a personal, individualistic concept. It is social. People’s experiences reflect where they fit in the social hierarchy” (1993, p. 249). The everyday experience of people, full of emotions, develops their “hidden transcript” (Scott, 1990) and their worldviews, and this link between the private and public spheres can explain the lack of trust and confidence that millions of people feel towards governments and authorities, and how deep this gap is.

The violent repression during the insurgency in Oaxaca in 2006 led many people not to trust in their government anymore and to distance themselves from the state as a consequence of their own experiences. Sometimes people keep voting in order to exercise their right, even though “it will not take us anywhere” (I.Oa.9b), and at other times anger and grief are so extreme that people refuse to vote. As happened in Italy and Germany, where radical militants developed a “counterculture of an image of a ‘violent’ and ‘unfair’ state” (della Porta, 1995) as a consequence of police brutality and a routine employment of violence, the emotional intensity of the protest experience changes the view of the state that people had.

The distrust against the authorities and disaffection with the system that resulted from the Oaxaca insurgency explain the self-organised projects that these women started during and after the conflicts. In addition to the pleasure of staying together to do something useful for the community or group that

⁶ Ulises Ruíz’s government has often been accused of being authoritarian and disrespectful of human rights, and peasant and indigenous movements have been violently repressed. During the insurgency of Oaxaca, 27 protestors were killed, and more than 500 detainees disappeared or were tortured or persecuted.

people feel as a consequence of participating in the protest, subversive counter-emotions toward authorities (Flam, 2005), such as the contempt these women hold against politicians and their distrust in institutions, lead them to self-organise in order to build something new.

After 2006 *Mujer Nueva* and *Lucha Chula* started working in the slums and indigenous communities in order to help other women to empower themselves, avoiding gender institutions, with which they share neither discourse nor practice. Their activities aim to collectivise domestic, structural and political violence experiences among women in order to give support, hope and strength by generating solidarity, empathy and sisterhood. They also support women who leave their violent partners, and in one case a woman killed her husband in self-defence.

In their activities, these women fight against the cultural sexism that generates learned helplessness, shame and passiveness in women who suffer from domestic violence, and the institutional sexism that causes that the vast majority of the rapes to be unpunished but allows a woman who has an abortion to be sent to jail (González Arias, 2011), as this extract shows:

Together, united, organised, we can do many things for other women. Especially for those who are suffering from violence. All kinds of violence, both domestic and by the state. I always say that violence is everywhere, there is violence in the union [CNTE], there is violence at work, there is violence at home, there is violence in the very same family. So, it is as if we had dared to raise our voices, to leave that life that we had because we were subjugated. (I.Oa.9)

The experiences and emotions that these women shared during the insurgency, when they experienced political violence, together with emotions they felt about how the state unfairly treated women who suffered from male violence, such as injustice, indignation, anger, sadness, powerlessness, despair, frustration etc., led them not to trust the authorities, and instead to find other ways to build new projects in which they could stay together and continue the process of emancipation that began during the protest. In these cases, the politicians, institutions and social movement organisations' leaders no longer speak for them but become part of the problem. For these women, fighting against machismo is a daily resistance that they face together, creating and spreading new ideas, values, emotions and practices through self-education and emotion work, beyond institutions and organisations, whether governmental or otherwise.

Their projects are based on the idea of autonomy from the state that in Mexico is being put into practice by the Zapatistas and other indigenous communities who have overcome the "state paradigm", that is, the idea that radical change is only possible by taking state power (Holloway, 2002). In these experiences, where ordinary people self-organise and which Zibechi (2007) called "societies in movement", the state is not the spokesperson anymore, but a subject, often

threatening and dangerous, despite which people continue to empower themselves and build their own projects and society.

As we have observed in other self-organised groups in Mexico (Poma and Gravante, 2016b), the subversive counter-emotions felt toward opponents have not only led them to identify with the Zapatistas, but they have also had an influence on the strategic decisions about their self-organised and self-managed struggles, about working at local level and, even at this scale, about choosing who to work with. These women's groups are inserted into the Mexican autonomy and community tradition (Regalado, 2013b) which is growing in both urban and indigenous settings and is characterised by favouring their own local agendas and projects that aim to shape autonomous subjectivities and communities (Regalado and Gravante, 2016).

To conclude, despite the fact that fear of repression and violence (both domestic and political), a sense of powerlessness and learned helplessness often discourage people from reacting to injustice, shared and reciprocal emotions ensure that these women have found the courage to go forward and keep resisting and developing their projects. The protest experience deeply changes people, insomuch as women who fought in the Oaxaca insurgency agree that they will never be the same as before, not only because it changes people's ideas and their way of seeing the world but also because it bonds people who share the same experiences and emotions and restores hope.

Women's change is not something that ended in 2006, but something that started with participation in collective action to create new political subjects, who face the situation with different spirits and values, as the existence of *Mujer Nueva* and *Lucha Chula* demonstrates. As the name of the collective *Mujer Nueva* indicates, they are New Women whose main purpose is to keep empowering themselves and other women. In order to do this, both groups periodically organise workshops and activities with professional women such as psychologists and other social scientists, MDs, artists, boxers and martial arts experts. One of the outcomes of their activities that we want to highlight in this paper is the emotion management that they keep doing, which includes, among other things, personal and collective work on anger and fear. In the next section we intend to highlight two instances of emotion works related to women's change that we were able to observe in the cases studied: overcoming fear and the re-appropriation of anger.

"Let's get rid of fear and bring out anger": emotion work as a path to emancipation

In the first two paragraphs we have shown the change women experienced as a consequence of their participation in the insurgency of Oaxaca, an experience that led them to create new spaces from where they are now fighting machismo and the effects of domestic and political violence. In these spaces, one of the goals is to challenge some feeling rules that society imposes (Hochschild, 1979, 1983), which at the same time generates new changes in women who participate

in the groups' activities.

"Emotion work" involves the subjects' ability to reflect on feelings and try to handle them by channelling, suppressing or evoking emotions. Emotion work is needed in everyday life "when our feeling does not fit the situation, and when we sense this is a problem" (Hochschild, 1983, p.43). In social movements, it becomes a strategy for challenging hegemonic and engendered feeling rules.

The main applications of this concept to the study of social movements include research that has dealt with the handling of fear (Goodwin and Pfaff, 2001; Flam, 1998; Johnston, 2014), the transformation of fear into anger (Jasper, 1997), of shame into pride (Gould, 2009; Groves, 1997), of pain into anger and of anger into pain (Summers Effler, 2010). Focusing on the emotion work done by social movement organisations, Reger (2004) has analysed the channelling of anger into empowerment and collective action, while Flam (2005) has analysed the processes of sowing mistrust, re-appropriating anger, working against fear, and overcoming shame.

In the case of *Mujer Nueva* and *Lucha Chula*, we want to discuss the emotion work they do by facing fear and trying to bring out anger, as a strategy to face violence and machismo in their everyday lives. We have chosen these two emotions as an example because the slogan of the self-defence workshop that the younger women organise is "Let's get rid of fear and bring out anger". Moreover, what we are observing in Mexico is that, since solidarity and collective action has begun, what it is needed to resist and respond to state violence is "to spread the anger" (Gaitán, 2014) and overcome fear collectively (Zibechi, 2014).

Re-appropriating anger and facing the fear they feel every day, both of which limit their freedom, are crucial steps for liberation and emancipation, since "the personal side of social change requires an emotional reflexivity" which is "the ability to identify and understand the impact of particular emotions on thinking" (King, 2005, pp. 160-161).

In order to understand the emotional dimension of violence against Mexican women, it is also important to understand that these Mexican women's fight against machismo is not only a question of dignity but also a question of life, because what is at stake is their very life and freedom, since domestic and sexual violence in Oaxaca kills more than 150 women a year⁷. Our analysis shows that the breakdown of daily life routines due to the intolerable level of violence faced by Mexican women in Oaxaca generates many emotions that need to be managed collectively in order not to remain passive when someone experiences violence, as this extract shows:

It is that suddenly the fear paralyses you. You suffer all kinds of violence and you

⁷ 173 women were killed between December 2011 and November 2012 in the state of Oaxaca; more than a half of all women are victims of violence. Source: www.consorciooaxaca.org.mx/violencia-feminicida/

keep feeling helpless, and you want to do something but you cannot and at this point you feel frustrated. Suddenly you feel that you are useless, your self-esteem falls and everything. It seems like nothing, but after 2006 all the abilities that were hidden within me came out (...). Now I really can defend myself with words, I will not keep my arms crossed anymore. (FG.MN)

Moreover, as emerged in the interviews and focus groups, the fear that women in Oaxaca face every day is not only about the possibility of disappearing and being raped, beaten and assassinated, with impunity for their attackers, but is also about the men's violent response when women react against and publicly denounce when a man touches them in public and private places or when they make personal comments. In addition to this, there is fear related to domestic violence related to the fear to being beaten or even assassinated and the fear of the economic consequences or outcome for their family if they refuse to accept such violence. In fact, many women who do not have a job cannot live without the income of their husbands, and their reaction against violence can lead them to lose their children or not to have a place to live. To sum up, in this context, fear concerns both life opportunities and physical freedom and life itself, and that means that many women decide not to oppose to their condition, which generates powerless and frustration among the women who participated in the groups analysed:

I remember the work we did with a lady who was being beaten by her husband. When I see these cases, I say "Why didn't they react? Why are they accustomed to it? (...). (FG.MN)

As the member of the two collectives told us, in order to create the conditions for women to be able to confront their situation and react to violence, the first step to "get rid of fear" consists of facing the fear of fear, since: "A woman coexists with fear from when she was born. (...) we [women] are very passive and we need to lose the fear of fear. And this fear has been imposed with violence". (FG.LC).

One way to face the fear of fear is by sharing experiences, not feeling alone, and doing collective activities such as theatre or self-defence workshops, which are ways to start accepting that the fear that everyone feels can be confronted. Collective emotions and affective bonds created during the insurgency helped women to face and overcome their fears. As Johnston (2014) shows in his study about authoritarian regimes, fear can be managed collectively. The mechanism called "fear abatement" is a subprocess that is highly relevant to initial mobilisation and seems to be common to different kinds of mobilisations.

Collective activities make women feel more self-confident and help them to reframe their experiences and change feeling rules, which are "the guidelines for the assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situations" (Hochschild, 1979, p. 566). As a member of the self-defence workshop asserts: "I was scared

to go out at night, but now I know that if someone attacks me I can defend myself and I am not defenceless anymore” (FG.LC). Moreover, members of *Mujer Nueva* highlight that “many people who participated in 2006 [in the insurgency] are not helpless anymore, but the majority still are, and it makes me feel powerless and I ask myself why?” (FG.MN).

The participation in collective action generates affective bonds and a new collective identity that make people more confident, a process that women who experience violence alone do not have. As members of *Lucha Chula* explained to us, when a woman participates at the self-defence workshop for the first time, they try to instil confidence in herself “we do it by speaking, sharing experiences, and after that there is the physical technique, which helps strengthen confidence” (FG.LC).

Our point is that collective action, thanks to its emotional intensity, creates the conditions for a process of reflexive self-construction from which participants become new political subjects who – by collectively reframing their reality and feelings – are emancipating themselves. As studies on Participatory Approaches Research (PAR) have demonstrated, “empowerment and transformation happen when the body and embodied emotional knowledge are involved” (Van Wijnendaele, 2014, p. 278), which highlights “the power of emotions to shape social life” (2014, p. 278).

The emotion work aimed at counteracting fear also consists of accepting that fear is natural, and that “ideally it is necessary to feel some fear in order to be on alert” (FG.MN), without feeling paranoia. Finally, counteracting fear means feel safe and accepting that “sometimes we can be more vulnerable, but we can bring out our strength, which comes from fear turned into rage” (FG.LC).

To sum up, the emotion work aimed to counteract fear is linked to the strategy of bringing out anger, because anger is a reaction to not be scared:

Society has culturally instilled fear in women forever. Primarily fear of [suffering from violence in] the street and [instilling the idea] that women have to be in a private space. Bringing out anger means that we are able to react, because society teaches us that we do not have to react if we are attacked, [that we have] to be quiet and not do anything. Bringing out anger is reacting. (FG.LC)

The re-appropriation of anger is important because, as Flam affirms, anger “is a key antidote to the fear of repression” (2005, p. 27). As we have shown before, emotions are the result of life experience, and the anger these women feel is related to the injustices and violence they face every day in their houses, workplaces, neighbourhoods and cities.

Although, as Hochschild stated, the feminist movement in the US brought with it “a new set of rules for framing the life of men and women... [and] a woman can now as legitimately (as a man) become angry (rather than simply upset or disappointed) over abuses” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 567), in many cultures, anger

is still a male privilege and women who display anger easily become the target of negative sanctions (Flam, 2005, p. 22). In fact, the young women of the self-defence collective are disparagingly labelled as “feminazis”.

Most women in Mexico are still brought up to remain silent and not express their opinions in public or private spaces. That is why the spaces that the women we interviewed built during and after the protest are so important to them: because in those places they can be themselves, they can learn to bring out their emotions and ideas with the purpose of no longer being submissive, and afterwards they are able to do so outside their spaces, in society.

Sharing anger is the first step of the emotion work. Anger mobilises, but it can also be emancipatory because it helps fight against guilt, resentment and shame. People who live in rural areas, indigenous people, women who have been victims of violence and people who belong to slums often share a feeling of shame. The protest experience and the new spaces that *Mujer Nueva* and *Lucha Chula* created after the protest help women to lose their shame and rebuild a sense of pride. Sharing anger and considering it something that is a part of them, something which is related to their experience that it is important to express, is a process that strengthens people. As Holmes states:

if anger is taken up as a necessary part of conflicts, not as a chance for personalised slighting, then it can help emotionally and politically move people towards respectful relations with others that are key to establishing social justice. This involves seeing anger as productive of relations with others rather than as a reaction to an enemy ‘other’. (2004, p. 130)

To conclude, overcoming fear and the re-appropriation of anger are two emotional processes that strengthen these women. Without going into the psychological dynamics of emotion work, what we want to highlight is that the experiences that we have analysed confirm that: “it is through our management of feeling that feeling is social” (Hochschild, 2008, p. 80).

Conclusions

We have presented an analysis of two Oaxaca women’s collectives in order to show the role of emotions in the transformation that collective action generates. In this case study, the first breaking point was the insurgency of Oaxaca, which provided an opportunity for women to get to know each other and build a sisterhood. The end of the social movement was the beginning for these women’s new collective experience, created so as not to lose the affective bonds and sisterhood built in the struggle, and to fight against political and domestic violence and machismo. Moreover, this process has led these women to create their own political practice, characterised by solidarity, sisterhood and being women-centred rather than state or male centred. This politics of the “other” not only includes different ways and strategies for resisting and fighting

machismo in everyday life, but also practices of self- (other) knowledge and a different way to feel, express and share their feelings with other women.

Our analysis reveals that emotions are important in collective action because they are so intimate and personal that they cannot be delegated. It also confirms that, as Krauss wrote

shifting the analysis (...) to the subjective experience of ordinary women makes visible a complex relationship between everyday life and the larger structures of public power. It reveals the potential for human agency, which is often hidden in a more traditional sociological approach. (Krauss, 1993, p. 250).

Emotions, in addition to motivating and mobilising people, strengthen and empower them, bringing these women who share ideas, experience and emotions together and accentuating the antagonist identity between “us” and “them”. In fact, empathy, a sense of sameness, and sharing experiences and emotions are what bonded these women. On the other hand, a lack of empathy is also what divides people, feeding their hidden discourses and the antagonist identity of an “us” and a “them”. Together with other emotions such as hate, anger, contempt and distrust, the lack of empathy shows who is in and who is out, putting “everyone in their place” (I.Oa.9a).

Our research shows that the change that women experienced as a consequence of their participation in the insurgency in 2006 did not end with the protest, but is a process of transformation that these women continue by promoting local political projects and emotion work. In this process of transformation, shared and reciprocal emotions can help people to overcome powerlessness, loneliness and helplessness, that is, a sense of inevitability. Moreover, overcoming fear and expressing anger without shame is an emotion strategy that the two groups are adopting to empower themselves and other women.

The women interviewed, who are setting up new self-organised collectives to fight machismo, are creating a new world in the shell of the old one, because they are working both individually and collectively, confirming that “individual transformation is only the vital first stage: empowerment must develop into a collective form of struggle” (Kesby, 2005, p. 2051). As the research highlights, emotion work is a path to emancipation since it represents a way to break with the male chauvinist culture, which includes gendered framing and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979), in which the women interviewed live.

Although many framing and feeling rules have already changed thanks to the feminist movement in the last four decades, even in Mexico and other countries where violence against women is a serious social problem, such as Italy or Spain, there is still much to do, and that is exactly what *Mujer Nueva* and the self-defence collective in Oaxaca are doing, in a self-organised way. The analysis of these collectives shows how relevant it is to focus the analysis of collective action from below and on “unsubjects”, such as women, often made invisible by male comrades or leaders. These experiences show that women carry on

organising themselves and creating alternatives in a way that does not neglect their worldview, needs and sensitivities, aspects that are often scorned and repressed in social movements and political contexts.

In conclusion, emotions are important in protest because they mobilise and strengthen people, and also because they play an important role in emancipation, since through emotion work it is possible to challenge and change existing power relations and rules (Hochschild, 1979 and 1983). Finally, this analysis confirms that emotions are “fundamental to developing a more holistic approach to personal empowerment and social transformation” (Van Wijnendaele 2014, p. 269) not only in PAR, as the author shows, but also in the study of collective action.

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Table 1. List of quoted interviews

Label	Experience	Date of interview/Focus Group
FG.MN	Mujer Nueva Collective	April 2013
FG.SD	Lucha Chula Self-Defence Collective	April 2013
I.Oa.7	Mujer Nueva Collective	December 2010
I.Oa.9a	Mujer Nueva Collective	December 2010
I.Oa.9b	Mujer Nueva Collective	April 2013

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Greek society in crisis and in motion: building the material bases for an alternative society from the bottom up

Georgia Bekridaki and Antonios Broumas

Abstract

In the last six years, Greece has been hit by a vicious circle of relentless neoliberal restructuring programs. During the years of the crisis, throughout the country urban and rural communities of struggle have been formed, which tend to employ instituent practices and to acquire constitutive characteristics, in order to collectively address unmet social needs / desires and ensure their collective survival. In this context, socially reproductive commons in germ form have emerged with social and solidarity economy initiatives in their peripheries, alternative forms of life in common have been shaped and societies have been set in motion with the potential to establish the material foundations of their collective autonomy. Within this huge gap of social (re)production, the constituent power of social movements emerges in germ form as a resurgent force with the potential to address these needs and desires and, correspondingly, shape life in common. In the neoliberal era, it is this potential of a constituent counter - power that has the capacity to constitute the contending power to the dominant force of the capital - state complex.

Keywords: Greece, social movements, mutual aid, commons, social and solidarity economy, constituent power.

Introduction

Greece is at the forefront of a social war raging throughout the south and, gradually spreading towards the north of Europe. On the one side, capital loots wealth and accumulates social power from vulnerable populations directly by dispossession of small property, public wealth and the commons and less by the traditional means of extracting value through exploitation (Harvey 2014: 65). On the other side, societies, experience the impact of the crisis of capital as a general social crisis, penetrating all facets of social reproduction. Yet, in times of crisis the power of the capitalist market and the bourgeois state over the social body in certain ways subside. The high rates of structural unemployment push a large part of society at the margins of the wage system and the world of commodities. The disintegration of the welfare state leaves behind a desert of unmet social needs and desires. The growing incapacitation of nation states to regulate the economic power of global capital and address its social repercussions adds to the democratic deficit of representative regimes. Within this huge gap of social [re]production, the constituent power of social

movements emerges as a resurgent force with the potential to address these needs and desires and, correspondingly, shape life in common. Having no other alternative, populations displaced by the capitalist crisis self-organise in movements in order to (re)produce their own commons and establish new forms of life that guarantee conditions of dignity (Harvey 2013: 168). In this process, multitudes in motion challenge the state monopoly of law and politics and the power of the capitalist market to provide the conditions of their subsistence by choosing radically democratic ways of self-institution and fair, cooperative and sustainable practices to produce and manage common resources¹.

Accordingly, during these six hellish years, Greek society has responded in similar ways to address the crisis and preserve social reproduction from utterly falling apart. In the beginning, social forces were set in motion as a response to the neoliberal assault, with the aim to provide the material bases for social reproduction by means of solidarity. Yet later on, social movements acquired deeper political characteristics, striving for the formation of institutions that would be both long - lasting and semi-autonomous from the capital / state complex. This paper constitutes an attempt to reconstruct the narrative of the Greek crisis from the perspective of the social movements, i.e. a narrative of collective struggle and emancipation. Its aim is to identify the constituent characteristics of the Greek movements within a society in crisis and reveal the ways through which such movements have confronted the capital-state complex. The paper starts with a short summary of the authors' methodological choices in the course of this research. The second part of the paper narrates the most important events of social mobilisation, which determined the social context of the struggle. Its third part describes and categorises the mutual aid institutions of the movements. The fourth part offers an analysis of commons' movements. The fifth part is dedicated to social and solidarity economy structures, which emerged from the movements. The paper ends with the authors' critical thoughts on the current condition of the Greek social movements and their potential for the way forward.

Methodological choices

In terms of methodology, this paper offers an analysis of Greek social movements from the perspective of critical political economy. The context of analysis is considered to be the reproduction of society broadly defined, i.e. the process through which society reproduces itself through time (Narotsky 1997). Social reproduction is assumed to be a twofold process. It relates on the one hand to the circulation and accumulation of social values and, on the other hand, to the production, distribution and consumption of resources (De Angelis 2007: 176). Society is reproduced by contending modes of social reproduction,

¹ Indicatively see Sitrin (2006), Zibechi (2012), Graeber (2013), Douzinas (2013), Azzellini & Sitrin (2014).

the capitalist being the dominant and the commons-based being an alternative mode. Capital and the state are mutually dependent and interrelated in complex ways, forming a unity in diversity of social power separated from society (Karatani 2014).

Notwithstanding the dominance of capital, the commons are held to be the great other of our collective social being (Caffentzis 2013: 253). The commons are social practices of both pooling resources in common and, in addition, reproducing the communal relations around these productive practices. They constitute alternative spheres of social reproduction and form a contradictory relation to commodity markets, lingering between contention and co-optation (Broumas 2017). Due to the structural power of capital, the dominance of the commodity market value system and the dominance of money as the universal equivalence of social values, practices of commoning are incapacitated from expanding, whenever tense productive activity is involved, which is incapable of decentralised allocation to multiple commoners. The social and solidarity economy may thus ideally be compounded with the commons in a conjoint organisation of non-capitalist production, whereby the commons will constitute the core and the social and solidarity economy structures will expand its periphery to the detriment of the capitalist mode of social reproduction.

Antagonistic social movements are considered to acquire constitutive characteristics, whenever they expand to socially reproductive practices by forming commons and social and solidarity economy structures, i.e. practices which have the capacity to meet individual and/or collective needs and desires. These characteristics take the form of commons and social and solidarity economy structures. The more collective needs and desires are met through such practices and the less social groups are dependent to the capitalist mode of social reproduction and the dominant value system of commodity markets, grass-roots movements acquire constitutive characteristics, which may lead to the building up from below of dual power, a constituent power capable of directly contending the power of capital (Zibechi 2010: 7; Ciccariello – Mahier 2013: 239-40).

The core claim of this paper is that the social movements of the past six years in Greece have spasmodically exhibited such elements in germ form and yet have by far failed to consolidate into wider networks of power circulation, let alone accumulate into such a constituent power. The particular forms of constituent movements are manifested, on the one hand, in peer-to-peer networks of mutual aid coping with a specific basic social need and, on the other hand, commons-based social structures and social and solidarity economy initiatives.

Years in turmoil: the rise of constituent power in Greece

The narrative of the Greek crisis is a narrative of both overwhelming defeat and massive social upheaval, a story of both despair and rebellion. Six years have passed, since that morning of April 2010, when George Papandreou, the former

prime minister of Greece, announced from Kastelorizo that the country would request the financial aid of the Eurozone member – states as a measure of last resort to guide the Greek economy and society back to safe waters². During these six years of relentless neoliberal restructuring unemployment has risen by 273,7%³, precarious jobs now constitute 27% of the labour market, wages have declined by 38%, pensions by 45%, and overdue mortgages have increased by 400% (Solidarity For All 2015). In addition, average monthly expenses of Greek households have been reduced by 31.2% (Elidromitis 2014), leading to electricity cuts of more than 237.806 households due to unpaid bills and 8 out of 10 blocks of flats in the country without heating⁴. Finally, overtaxation has crashed 2.45 million taxpayers into indebtedness towards tax authorities and resulted in a steep rise of bank account confiscations by the state, from 18.000 in 2013 to 50.000 in the first two months of 2014⁵. As a result, poverty in the country has risen up to 35,7%, material deprivation of basic goods has almost doubled since 2008⁶ and child poverty rate has reached up to 28.8% (Caritas 2016: 74). In overall, the bail-out programme has effectively promoted: (i) the removal of any obstacles to the exploitation of labour by capital, (ii) the disintegration of the already feeble welfare structures of the Greek state, and finally, (iii) the privatisation of public institutions, the enclosure of the country's commons and the population's use value resources through expropriation.

The effects of the policies imposed on Greek society deeply changed everyday lives and penetrated most social strata. After the initial shock citizens were able to regroup, stand on their feet and constitute a multitudinous collective subject antagonistic to the political forces that backed – up the neoliberal agenda. Yet, the rise of social counter – power within the crisis did not appear in a socio – historic vacuum, rather it has its roots in the social struggles of the recent past. In the 2000s the widespread corruption in the dominant system of power along with the implementation of neoliberal policies led to a gradual disaffection mainly between young people regarding systemic parties and institutionalized trade unions. This period gave birth to an undercurrent of relatively

² The Prime Minister's announcement is available at: <http://archive.papandreou.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017]. Kastellorizo is a small Greek island far east at the borders with Turkey. It was selected as the place of the announcement for propagandist reasons to symbolize the supposed unity of the nation in the difficult times ahead and raise nationalist sentiments among the population. In the recent national elections of 25.01.2015 George Papandreou was not even elected as member of parliament.

³ In November 2014, the total number of unemployed was 1.242.219 people compared with 3.551.148 in employment, with the worst rates of unemployment among young people [50% in late 2014]. According to the statistics of the General Workers Confederation, the unemployment in the country has acquired structural characteristics, since seven out of ten unemployed already stay jobless for more than one year (<http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231353662>).

⁴ <http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231278488>

⁵ <http://news.in.gr/economy/article/?aid=1231309435>

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6035076/3-04112014-BP-EN.pdf/>.

autonomous, informal organisations in the civil society and to a multitude of autonomous social movements, which scratched the surface of artificial social stability and challenged the grand narrative of neoliberal hegemony.

Just a spark was missing to set fire at the already compromised social contract. On Saturday, the 6th of December, a few minutes after 21:00, at the traditionally leftist neighborhood of Exarchia in Athens, a police officer on patrol shot and killed Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a teenager at the age of 15. In the more than thirty days of the revolt that followed protesters hit the streets in unprecedented numbers with mottos such as “Fuck May '68, Fight Now” and constituted a powerful and polymorphous social movement, characterized by its creative negation of the existing social relations and structures and its inclination towards aims for absolute social liberation (Astrinaki 2009; Douzinas 2010; Stavrides 2010; Vradis & Dalakoglou 2011). After the first month of the revolt militants left the city centers and decentralized / re-territorialized the processes of autonomous movements at the neighborhood level, a sphere more directly related to the lives of their participants and the communities they aimed to transform (Azzellini & Sitrin 2014: 12). As it was then said, the spirit of leftist Exarcheia spread throughout the country. The next months after December 2008 autonomous social centers were established in many neighborhoods of Athens and Salonica, Greece's major cities, and even in smaller cities. In the years to come, these centers became the organizational cells of the movements on the urban terrain. Featuring political and cultural events, collective kitchens, bars and cafes, grocery stores, child care structures, seminars, lessons for immigrants, political assemblies and communities of struggle within them, autonomous social centers opened the movements to society and, in dialectical exchange, enriched and socialized the processes of the movements. It was militants from within such communities who established the very first solidarity economy initiatives.

After the country fell prey to the hands of the troika in April 2010 the major popular act of resistance against the bailout program was the Greek squares movement that spawned during the summer of 2011 out of the Arab uprisings and, especially, the Spanish indignados (Giovanopoulos & Mitropoulos 2011, Leontidou 2012, Kallianos 2013, Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos 2013). The movement was initiated in mid-May by a calling under the motto “we woke up”, which circulated through the internet and became viral. On May the 25th, 2011, the squares of most Greek cities were flooded by citizens and the Athens Syntagma square, which is strategically situated in front of the Parliament, was occupied by tents. Until May the 31st, the occupations spread and became permanent. As specific rules and norms of direct democratic deliberation were crafted by participants, the Syntagma square popular assembly became the coordinatory heart of the movement and its direct democratic assembly emerged at the political forefront. Between the 1st and the 15th of June the Syntagma assembly started acquiring constituent characteristics. The assembly issued its main resolution under the motto “Direct Democracy Now” in juxtaposition to the less concrete and ambitious “Democracia Real Ya” of the Spanish

“indignados”. The resolution called for people to “take their lives in their own hands” and formulate from the bottom up a polity of direct democracy for Greek society. Between the 15th and the 30th of June the squares movement spread in the rural areas and direct democratic assemblies were formed even in small villages of the country. Following the Syntagma assembly's call to the citizens of Athens to organise a blockade of the parliament, in order to avert the approval of a major neoliberal restructuring bill, the police executed a plan to clean out the protesters from the square, in which massive confrontations between tens of thousands of protesters and special police forces took place. Whilst the vote a vote for government change was lost in the Parliament and the bill was passed, Syntagma square was temporarily cleaned in a bloody orgy of police violence⁷. In the next weeks, assemblies for the re-orientation and political character of the movement were held, but failed to regroup and solidify in consistent structures. The squares movement miraculously succeeded in constituting a multitudinous post – political subject of genuine social power, which directly confronted the neoliberal establishment (Douzinas 2013)⁸, yet it was these inherent contradictions of multiplicity that caused its collapse. Hence, after July it gradually declined and subsided.

The squares movement left behind an important legacy of structures operating through direct democracy (workers' cooperatives, local assemblies, social centers, solidarity networks, movements in defense of the commons, endeavors in solidarity economy). Yet, its failure to produce tangible alternatives to the crisis led the oppressed strata of Greek society again bestowed their hopes in representative politics. SYRIZA, a coalition of the left coming out of a fifteen - year collaboration between divergent political groups within the fragmented Greek left, which started at the times of the alter-globalization movement, managed to represent these social dynamics. In the 2012 elections it climbed from 4% to 27% and in the January 2015 elections took the majority vote and formed a coalition government. In conclusion, the rise of SYRIZA in power took place in parallel to a significant decline of social mobilization.

Years of resistance, mutual aid and networks of inspiration

Walter Benjamin has written that “[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule [...] it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency” (Benjamin 2003: 392). Although it begun as an emergency response of communities and social movements to address the repercussions of extreme poverty caused from the

⁷ Police violence was so excessive that even Amnesty International issued an urge to the Government to abstain from such practices (www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/greece-urged-not-use-excessive-force-during-protests-2011-06-16).

⁸ By using the term “post-political”, we pinpoint the ambiguous character of the squares movement, which lingers between the rejection of representative institutions and its failure to provide substantive alternatives, hence remaining within the post – political context.

neoliberal restructuring policies, the grassroots social solidarity movement is today one of the most important developments and forms of resistance and popular self-organisation that has emerged within the six years of the crisis. The more distant roots of this movement can be traced back to the anti-globalisation movement, the defense of public spaces by local communities, the growing culture of self-organised social centres and the ‘no pay’ popular campaigns against road tolls, public transport costs and extremely high prices in basic goods.

The rise of the mutual aid movement was triggered by the manifold struggles of Greek society against the Troika and the bailout programs, especially the occupation of the squares in the summer of 2011. This genuinely grassroots movement played a pivotal role in popularising a culture of self-organisation, people’s assemblies and direct democracy as a tool for decision making processes. After the 2011 Greek occupy movement subsided, many groups of local activists kick-started mutual aid structures all over the country, organising resistance around the basic needs of local communities. As a result, in the beginning of 2012 many mutual aid groups had already been formed. Their practice included reconnecting electricity provision to poor households, the “without middlemen” distribution of agricultural produce, the establishment of solidarity healthcare clinics and solidarity tutoring programs and other activities of mutual aid adherent to local needs. Gradually, the mutual aid movement became a vehicle, not merely for survival and human dignity, but also for the organization of political struggles against neoliberal policies. Moreover, through the establishment of alternative social relations of mutual aid and cooperation between individuals, by fostering participation and face-to-face democracy and by practicing self-management in various areas of social and economic life, the mutual aid movement has managed to become one of the most important, innovative, and hopeful outcomes of popular mobilisation and resistance.

The structures of the mutual aid movement are organised in the form open assemblies with horizontal decision-making processes. They function as spaces for democratic participation and communal self-organisation, with the purpose to break the barriers between the organisers and those that receive solidarity. Due to its characteristics, the mutual aid movement has emerged as a powerful social experiment in the ruins of the crisis. It outlines a political culture, which creates the conditions to address social needs through the establishment of socially reproductive commons. The movement is widely perceived by its participants as a means for collective survival, which goes hand in hand with the wider fight for political change. Without the latter, i.e. the changes needed for the eradication of social inequalities and exclusion, the paradigm of grassroots social organisation runs the danger of merely becoming an alternative within a framework of generalised poverty.

Since January 2015, with the leftist Syriza party in the coalition government, the challenges faced by the movement have been enormous and the mutual aid networks and structures are in the process of redefining their role in the new

conditions. An essential point is that many mutual aid structures never had the intention to replace the welfare system but exactly the opposite. Through their activities they succeeded in putting pressure to the state to take action and this principle is still pursued with Syriza in government. A second point, which has recently been drawn to attention, is the general consensus within the mutual aid movement not to stop but persevere and deepen its activities. The pressure from unmet basic needs of the impoverished strata not only perseveres, but is also on the rise. In addition, alternative mentalities and political practices cultivated within the movement are seen by wider social groups as an exodus from the social and political deadlock, lately reinforced by the retreat of Syriza to austerity policies.

So, within the first year in the new political scene the mutual aid movement expressed an assertive attitude towards decision-makers, in order to exert control over elected officials. At the same time, the movement endeavored to formulate general proposals for its institutional recognition, since the current legal framework has been proven very hostile for mutual aid networks. On the other hand, the Syriza coalition government has not expressed any serious intentions to exploit the knowledge and experience stemming from the movement, so as to implement it in solid public policies. In this respect, the mutual aid movement has played a very active role during the week that the referendum took place. Hundreds of initiatives from all over Greece created their own “NO” campaign against a compromise of the country with its external sovereign debtors, which would strengthen, as is now the case, the grip of neoliberal policies over Greek society⁹.

Social clinics and pharmacies

Cuts in public expenditure have strongly affected the quality of, and access to, health services in Greece. According to the OECD, the ‘per capita expenditure’ for healthcare between 2009 and 2011 has been reduced by 11.1 %. Furthermore, according to the ILO World Social Protection Report 2014/15, public spending in health between 2007–2011 has dropped by 3.7%. Accordingly, expenditures for medicine reimbursement dropped by 56%, from 5.1 billion euros in 2009 to 2.2 billion in 2012, a development that led to an increase of up to 70% in patients’ economic burdening for medicines. Yet, the most acute problem at present is the exclusion of more than 3.3 million people¹⁰ from the public health care system. According to the president of EOPPY (National Organisation of Health Care Services), 3.068.000 people have dropped off the social security register, due to their inability to keep up with their monthly contributions to the system or because they lost their jobs, closed down their companies, or became

⁹ <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/ena-vrontero-ohi-apo-domes-allileggyis>

¹⁰ <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/koinonia/ygeia/anasfalistoi-panw-apo-tria-ekatommuria-ellhnes.2420059.html>; <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=387049>

unemployed for more than a year (Solidarity For All 2015: 11; see also ILO 2015, Eliodromitis 2014).

The first social solidarity clinic was created with the aim to provide health services to undocumented immigrants and refugees. Starting from only three (3) clinics in September 2012 (in Athens, Thessaloniki and Rethimnon, Crete), there are today 45 clinics functioning all over Greece. There is not any single model for the governance of solidarity clinics, since each project is unique in itself, and the same goes for all the solidarity structures. Nevertheless, all clinics subscribe to the “Charter of Common Principles of the Solidarity Clinics”¹¹, which was adopted in their nationwide meeting in November 2013 and led to a nationwide Cooperation of Solidarity Clinics and Pharmacies. In the wider area of Athens, a Coordination of Solidarity Clinics and Pharmacies of Attica has also been established since June 2013, which operates on the basis of face-to-face biweekly assemblies.

In their Charter the solidarity health centres clearly claim that they are open to everyone living in Greece, they do not aim to substitute the public health services that the state has decided to ditch, and they fight for the reversal of the people’s exclusion from public health services and for an end to the neoliberal health policies. In practice, they support their objectives both by providing medication to the official public health care system and by organising protests and actions in collaboration with health workers’ unions, in hospitals, neighborhoods and state institutions, demanding health care for all. At the same time, the solidarity clinics have created face to face assemblies open to wider communities, through which they constantly make great effort to mobilise patients, to make information campaigns about medication and health services as commons. The clinics are hosting cultural and social-political events and establish synergies and mutual aid bonds with other local/peripheral social movements.

The solidarity clinics have elaborated proposals for unhindered access to public health services to all people from the very first steps of their establishment. Therefore, they are expected to take action in this direction during the tenure of the new coalition government. Furthermore, they participate to the public debate with their own statements¹², attend meetings with the Ministry and freely express their points of agreement while keep on raising issues that have not been dealt with by the state. As a result, solidarity health clinics have definitely become pillars of the wider social movements with distinct and autonomous political functions and aims vis a vis the state and the incumbent political parties.

¹¹ See Charter of Common Principles of the Solidarity Clinics, available at: <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹² See proposal of Solidarity Clinics and pharmacies on the consultation for the citizens without health insurance, available at: <http://www.opengov.gr/yyka/?p=1201#comments> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Solidarity education initiatives / solidarity tutorials

Growing economic inequality has also affected the ability of many families to provide adequate schooling to their children¹³. Based on the initiative of unionized and unemployed teachers, associations of pupils' parents and volunteering university students, the solidarity movement has been capable of offering free solidarity tutorials in many schools and mutual aid centres. Most of these initiatives, which have reached the number of 30 educational programs throughout the country, are managed by general assemblies of mixed membership by teachers, parents and pupils¹⁴. Their stated aim is not to act as substitute to the ailing public education system, but to confront the inequalities that such a system reproduces because of its rapid dissolution under the pressure of the memoranda policies¹⁵.

Food solidarity structures

Just a few years ago, nobody could have imagined that a fifth of the country's population would be unable to meet its needs for nutrition. Food solidarity is the most prominent activity within the mutual aid movement and the one which features the most diverse actions and forms of organisation. Examples include food solidarity structures, "without middlemen" networks, solidarity kitchens, cooperative social groceries and communal farms.

Mutual aid structures that support families with food started in the middle of 2012, as the problem of poverty became more visible. Their main field of activity has been the collection of food and its distribution to those in need. The key aim of this practice is the involvement not only of those able to donate, but mainly of those unable to meet their basic needs of subsistence. The participatory aspect of the food solidarity structures is equally important in the collective struggle for dignity. By mobilising those who approach the movement for assistance, such structures struggle to transform the latter into agents of mutual aid and moral support, thereby addressing the issue of isolation and individualization, as well as the depression and despair, which is linked to them. The weekly collection of donations in food, either from the people outside supermarkets, or from local shoppers (groceries, bakery, butchers etc.) and local farmers' markets, is the

¹³ It is very common in Greece for pupils to follow evening private lessons supplementary to the school program. This pathology comes as a consequence of the emphasis of the Greek public education system on constant examination and evaluation.

¹⁴ See for instance Assembly of teachers, parents, pupils and activists/volunteers of the Solidarity tutorials, Citizens Movement Mesopotamia, available at: <http://www.mesopotamia.gr/δικοτυο-εκπαιδευτικησ-αλληλεγγυησ-λο/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹⁵ See Mesopotamia, available at: <http://www.mesopotamia.gr/el/bank-school/to-allhleghguo-sxoleio/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

main source of supply for the food solidarity structures and, additionally, the main way of spreading the practice of mutual aid into local communities. Alongside food solidarity distributed in bi-weekly parcels, 20 solidarity kitchens are also operating on a daily or weekly basis. Half of the 20 solidarity kitchens cook and provide 9000 portions of food on a weekly basis, with the help of 130 volunteers, by obtaining their food supplies through donations and self-funding.

The food solidarity structures constitute the backbone of many other activities of mutual aid, such as clothes' collection, solidarity tutorials, public political events, cultural activities, legal support etc. In March 2014, 103 of these groups held their first nationwide meeting in Athens in an effort to enhance their cooperation and share their experiences and know-how¹⁶.

“Without middlemen” distribution networks

In February 2012, mutual aid groups in the cities collaborated with farmers in order to distribute their produce outside the official market circuits (Psaropoulos 2012). Collecting pre-orders of products from urban residents and connecting them directly with producers, the “without middlemen” initiatives have organised alternative distribution networks, enabling both the farmers in their endeavours to achieve a fairer income than the price given by merchants and large supermarket chains and the consumers to pay lower prices than those found in commercial stores. The initial aim of the movement was to provide basic and quality food at lower cost in a period of recession and to provide alternative outlets for local products.

As the “without middlemen” paradigm spread, with many groups and also certain local authorities adopting the practice¹⁷, the movement has raised important issues related to localisation of food production, food sovereignty, social management of food distribution and quality control. Moreover, through their participation in the “without middlemen” movement, the idea of collaboration and establishment of cooperatives among farmers has also been re-introduced in a new light.

The success of the movement has also been confirmed by the repression against the “without middlemen” actions, which have in many instances been conducted by municipal authorities connected with the pro-Troika parties on behalf of powerful business interests. One third of the local structures has faced troubles with the authorities. Most important, in April 2014 an act was passed in Parliament¹⁸, aiming to restrict the official open markets in favour of the big food distribution chains and the supermarkets, which in effect outlaws the

¹⁶ See the first meeting of food solidarity initiatives, available at: <http://tvxs.gr/news/kalane/%C2%ABmazi-tha-toys-fame%C2%BB-i-proti-synantisi-trofis-stin-athina> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

¹⁷ <http://www.localit.gr/archives/88253>

¹⁸ <https://www.thepressproject.gr/article/61161/Ekteloun-to-kinima-Xoris-Mesazontes>

“without middlemen” actions. Despite these assaults, the movement still carries on and tries to coordinate and organise its resistance.

Since their sustainability is strongly connected to their legitimacy under the law, the rise of Syriza in power came at a tipping point for the “without middlemen” initiatives. Alike to other parts of the grass-roots movement, such initiatives also struggle for coordination and networking among themselves in order to face common issues in a collective manner. The movement has thus accumulated forces in certain focal points of its activities, such as the delineation of common criteria for socially controlled quality check of produce, sharing information among producers and consumers via common web platforms, informative campaigns towards consumers, the establishment of consumer cooperatives, the need of a new agricultural cooperative movement and a proposal for a new law that will include “without middlemen” activities. All these characteristics show that the “without middlemen” movement is here to stay.

Workers’ mutual aid campaigns

One of the prominent vulnerabilities of the trade union movement in Greece has been the lack of mutual aid structures for its members, especially when they are dismissed from work. In this context, the joining of forces during the year 2014 between the mutual aid movement and unions, which have been engaged in long struggles and strikes, is very promising for the future. The establishment of mutual aid structures within workspaces became a necessary means so as to build social support during workers’ struggles and confront the hardships of wage reductions, austerity and forced redundancies. Such cases include “Artemis”¹⁹, the mutual aid structure of the Athens University staff – established after a three months long strike against layoffs and work-suspension -, the solidarity of ERT (Greece’s public broadcaster shut down by the government) workers - who occupied and self-managed the majority of ERT’s local radio and TV studios for almost two years, the solidarity structures of the photojournalists’ union etc. Yet, the most important mutual aid movement has been built around the symbolically important and brave struggle of the 595 female cleaners sacked by the Ministry of Finance²⁰. Mutual aid structures have become integral part of their support basis. Through the “Solidarity for All” team, the cleaners were connected with solidarity clinics for their needs, developed fundraising and media campaigns, whereas more than 40 food solidarity structures cooked for their (and for the teachers in job-suspension) camp outside the entrance of the Ministry of Finance in central Athens.

¹⁹ <http://artemis-da.blogspot.gr/>

²⁰ More information on the cleaners’ struggle can be found at the relevant blog of the collective: <https://595katharistries.wordpress.com/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Housing, debt, legal support initiatives

High unemployment and severe austerity programs have rendered impossible for an increasing number of the Greek households to keep up with debt liabilities. According to Central Bank of Greece statistics, the number of people with overdue debt payments soared in May 2013 up to 320.000. Despite the fact that only one third of such bad debt is related to mortgages, the recent lift of the suspension of public auctions may lead to the foreclosure of up to 180.000 houses, with 80% of those being the primary residence of their owners. Furthermore, the issue of private debt has been significantly exacerbated by the fact that freelancers, small shop-keepers and family-businesses cannot afford their tax and social security fees, with thousands of them having their bank savings, incomes, private belongings and houses confiscated and/or foreclosed by the state.

To counter such dire conditions of looting people's belongings, the mutual aid movement struggled to build a network of resistance named "foreclosures-STOP", in order to protect the right to housing from tax plundering and private banks. Many dozens of public meetings have been held, and more than 40 mutual aid structures have participated in the movement against foreclosure and debt, by providing information and legal support for debt settlements or by organising direct action against house foreclosures. Due to the aforementioned changes in the legal framework in 2014²¹, house foreclosures has climbed in recent months and the practice of actively stopping them by mutual aid groups is increasing. In this respect, the mutual aid movement has managed to stop foreclosures in many neighborhoods of Athens as well as in half a dozen of other cities throughout Greece.

For the mutual aid movement, protecting the peoples' houses is fundamental in the efforts of restricting the "accumulation by dispossession" process of the banks, as well as the tax-plundering policies aiming only for the repayment of the bailouts. More importantly, the protection of houses and livelihoods is fundamental in resisting the tearing apart of the social fabric, especially in a close-knit society like the Greek one, where the home lies at the centre of the organisation of social life. One of the most important demands is the full protection of the main housing of all without any house-value criteria as the minimum first step that a progressive government should do and for sure to examine the protection of the possession of the people who are no income the last years or their living conditions have dramatically changed their ability to pay back loans and taxes.

²¹ The protection of the main residence house has been abolished since January 2014 (<http://www.kathimerini.gr/796056/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/apeley8erwnontai-oi-pleisthriasmoi--ths-prwths-katoikias-apo-1hs-ianoyariou>).

Since January 2015 Syriza's government has proceeded to 9 months suspension of foreclosures for the main housing possession²², in order to gain some time to enact a more permanent regulatory framework for the issue. Simultaneously, the main banks of Greece promised a “moratorium” on foreclosures, in order for a mutually agreed solution to be formulated. Yet, the suspension on foreclosures has been lifted, since it has been among the prerequisites imposed by the third restructuring program. Hence, the imposition of foreclosures has been facilitated by recent legislation²³. In this context, it is more than obvious that the movements against evictions will continue their social and political intervention until family housing is fully protected in the country.

Commons' movements

Greece is at the front line of a global social war on the one hand to commodify and on the other hand to protect and multiply the commons. In opposition to the neoliberal restructuring policies, Greek social movements have devised strategies for the commonification of crucial public services, both in order to preserve social reproduction from falling apart and as a means to avert their violent privatization and promote social change. In many cases where social struggles reached high levels of radicalization and consciousness, these practices of commonification have been articulated as an alternative not only to privatisation but also to state management, engaging user – citizens both in the self - production and the self – governance of ex state public services (Fattori 2013: 265).

Movements for the commonification of public services

Waste management is indisputably crucial for the sustainable metabolization of human societies with nature. In Greece the management of waste by state / market joint ventures has been widely ineffective, extremely expensive and ecologically disastrous, leading to million Euros of fines imposed by the European Union. In the beginning of 2011 individuals and collectives within the movements joined forces to elaborate specific proposals for waste management with socialised characteristics. Through horizontal grass-roots processes the PROSYNAT initiative was established with the aim to struggle for change in dominant policies and to commonify waste management²⁴. In the years to come

²² <http://www.kathimerini.gr/802092/article/oikonomia/ellhnikh-oikonomia/trimhnh-anastolh-twn-pleisthriasmwn-1hs-katoikias-xwris-eisodhmatika-krithria>

²³ <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/news/οχι-στους-πλειστηριασμούς>

²⁴ As mentioned in its website, the Initiative for Public Discourse on Waste Management (PROSYNAT) is a citizens' collective which functions with direct democratic and anti-hierarchical processes and aims for the coordination and joint action of citizens and collectives on waste management. For more information visit the PROSYNAT website available at: <http://prosynat.blogspot.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

PROSYNAT organised hundreds of open events throughout the country on alternative ecological policies for waste management and constructed an affiliated network of localized initiatives. In April 2012 PROSYNAT issued an elaborated proposal for a decentralized, resource - effective and ecological waste management at the local / municipal level and with the engagement of citizens as an immediately applicable way to transcend the dead – end created by the privatization of waste management in the country (PROSYNAT 2012). Social mobilization on the basis of this proposal initially led to wide citizens' discontent against dominant policies on waste management and then to their delay and gradual overturn. Local citizens' cooperatives and networks managing waste from the grass-roots started activities in at least four areas of the country with 21 more under way²⁵. The logic of giving emphasis to household waste management and neighborhood composting, which was proposed by PROSYNAT as the first phase of waste management, gained ground. Finally, after the May 2014 municipal elections, when the radical left SYRIZA candidate won the Athens and wider Attica Prefecture, and, of course, after the January 2015 national elections, when SYRIZA gained power, PROSYNAT proposals have emerged at the core of the new state policies for waste management.

Water is allegedly the most important common good for human societies, since it is necessary for the existence of life itself. Neoliberal restructuring policies during the Greek crisis always had as their major component the rapid privatization of state – run services for ridiculously low prices in order to open new markets to capital and the logic of profit. Along these lines, in 2011 the Greek Government announced its intention to privatize the Public Water Corporation of Salonica [PWCS], the second largest city of Greece, part and parcel with public water corporations of other cities and, of course, Athens. Immediately after the announcement the most vibrant elements of the city's movements formed an anti-privatization alliance to fight back, called the “136 Movement”, which also formed liaisons with the PWCS workers' union. As the fight matured and gained in popularity, participants realized that an agenda restricted to resistance would not avert the neoliberal assault and decided to formulate a grassroots proposal for the commonification of the water services of Salonica. According to the proposal, each municipal district would establish a non – profit water cooperative of end users of the service and all the cooperatives would form a second – level non – profit cooperative, which would then participate in the privatization process, purchase the offered 51% of the shares of the PWCS and then govern the institution through direct citizen / worker participation and on a non – profit basis²⁶. In 2013 and while the

²⁵ These are: (i) the “ANAKLYKONO STIN PIGI” social cooperative in the city of Patras (<https://anakyklwnw.wordpress.com/>), (ii) the MOIKONOS social cooperative in the island of Mykonos (<https://moikonos.wordpress.com/>), (iii) the Kalloni – Kelia social cooperative in the island of Tinos (<http://kalloni-tinos.gr/>), and (iv) the Re-Think neighborhood compost network in the city of Kalamata (<http://www.rethink-project.gr/>) [all accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁶ For more information on the commonification proposal of the 136 Movement check the relevant article under the title “The Citizens' Bid to Control Thessaloniki's Water”, available at:

privatization process was pushed forward, the first six water cooperatives to be established formed the second – level “Citizens’ Union for Water” cooperative, attracted financial aid from social responsibility investors and registered a formal public offer for purchasing the 51% of the PWCS. When the public offer was rejected on vague procedural grounds by TAIPED, the Greek agency for the privatization of the assets of the country, the water movement of Salonica organized a massive informal referendum, which took place on May 16th, 2014, in 181 electoral centres throughout the city and with a turnout of 218.002 citizens, 98% of which voted down the privatization of the PWCS. As a result and due to such widespread social dissent, the ND-PASOK pro-austerity government was forced to freeze the privatization process before stepping down after the January 2015 elections.

Despite growing citizens’ repulsion, television is still the most popular mass medium in Greece and the main tool for the manipulation of public opinion by the establishment. In this context, during the years of neoliberal austerity the public radio and television broadcaster preserved a marginal independence compared to private television broadcasters in terms of the imposed narrative of the Greek crisis and part of its personnel was able to justify this stance before governmental pressure on grounds of journalist freedom and deontology. On the night of June 11th, 2013, the Government disrupted the broadcasting of ERT without prior consultation or even notice and issued within the next days an emergency decree for its abolishment²⁷. Notwithstanding one whole month of massive social mobilizations against the closure, ERT employees along with activists and citizens started immediately again broadcasting from most radio and tv channels of the public broadcaster, engaging into direct action acts to occupy the latter’s premises and infrastructure and taking decisions through direct democratic assemblies. The self – managed ERT became a pole of the country’s anti-austerity struggle, at its best reaching millions of citizens with its radio/tv broadcasting program, which became more and more radicalized with the introduction of reports and opinions directly from social struggles. Up until the re-establishment of ERT by the anti-austerity SYRIZA - ANEL coalition government on April 29th, 2015, that is for almost two years, the main radio/tv channels of country’s public broadcaster never stopped producing and transmitting their programs to the wider public under conditions of worker self – management and with the participation of society.

<http://www.136.gr/article/citizens-bid-control-thessalonikis-water> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁷ The main aims of the Government were to (a) achieve a monolithic representation of reality by all tv channels in the country and (b) ensure that the private broadcasters’ conglomerate would be the sole bidder and achieve a ridiculously low price in the tv spectrum frequencies auction in January 2014, as finally was the case.

Socially reproductive commons movements

Historically, capitalism has expanded through the enclosure of the commons and the destruction of socially embedded relationships that rendered their collective management and (re)production possible (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000). Today, neoliberal policies promote the restructuring of existing social settings through processes of accumulation by dispossession and through acceleration, primarily by privatizing common goods, commodifying new spheres of life and imposing unsustainable natural degradation. Nevertheless, throughout the globe these processes are countered from bottom – up social processes of commoning, re-appropriation and sharing of social resources beyond the state / market dichotomy. Emergent commons movements re-invent the public in the sense of the common, of what we all share. Instituent forces of commoning avoid the classic dichotomy between the public and the private by instituting communal duties of stewardship and by allocating individual or collective usufructuary rights. Hence, even in eras of neoliberal domination, social movements defend common goods by (re)constructing communities for the governance of the commons, often in relative autonomy to the state.

Such communities have gradually been emerging in Greece, even before the crisis, but their development has been fragile and dependent on the ebbs and flows of state repression. Social processes of commoning can be found much more in affective relations, public space, alternative media and technology than in agricultural or artisanal communities. In the context of agriculture, alternatives are experimented throughout the country by eco-communities, which started to multiply, when groups of young people fled from the cities in response to the crisis and struggled to reconstruct their lives in the countryside²⁸. Much more important in terms of social impact are the eco-festivals organized by the bio-farming communities throughout the country with a central annual eco-festival to gather all communities at the national level²⁹. Yet, at the moment the most crucial agricultural initiatives of commoning take place through the horizontal networks for the exchange of traditional Greek seeds, which hold the rich bio-diversity of the country's edible plants alive

²⁸ Eco – communities are especially difficult to monitor and their exact number cannot be estimated, but they can be found in many natural areas of Greece, where land occupation is tolerated. Indicative websites of Greek eco-communities are available at: <http://en.freeandreal.org/>, <https://paliomylos.wordpress.com/>, <https://www.facebook.com/agnandi.vegoritida>, <https://www.facebook.com/pirametavouna>, <http://www.stagones.org/>, <http://skalaecovillage.com/>, <http://www.organizationearth.org/>, <http://aipeia-gi2.webnode.gr/>. See also Enallaktikos.gr, 72 eco-communities blossom throughout Greece, available at : http://www.enallaktikos.gr/ar811el_72-oikokoinotites-anthizoy-n-se-oli-tin-ellada-tis-vivis-syrgkani.html [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

²⁹ Eco-festivals are self-organized communal feasts, where bio-farming communities establish direct communal relations with consumers of their products on the basis of ecology and political engagement. The most important local festival is the pan-thessalic eco-festival, which takes place in Volos. The last national eco-festival of 2014 took place at Megali Panagia, a village in Halkidiki which is the centre of the struggle against the vast gold mining activity in the area.

against the ever – expanding usage of proprietary seeds. With the largest being Peliti, a horizontal network with local assemblies featuring thousands of participants, both citizens and farmers, and the second largest being Aegilops, a synergy between bio-farmers, which also runs a seed bank, these networks have built communal and ecological consciousness around agriculture at the grassroots level and are behind all struggles against GMOs in the country³⁰. Although Greece had a strong tradition of agricultural cooperatives³¹, the embrace of the cooperativist movement during the 80's by the “socialist” government of PASOK introduced strong elements of partitocracy, clientelism and state dependence, which ruined the cooperativist tradition deep in social consciousness (Kioupkiolis & Karyotis 2015). Initiatives such as the aforementioned slowly reconstruct the ruins of agricultural cooperativism in the country on healthier foundations, producing new generations of farmers and rejuvenating the 5000 to 7000 agricultural cooperatives in the country (PASEGES 2013) with the introduction of new social values and practices.

Affective relations, counter – cultures and public spaces have been the terrains, where Greek social movements have been accumulating their counter – power for years now. The waves of squats, social centers and public space occupations ignited by the December 2008 revolt and the squares movement have left a legacy of alternative social reproduction in the urban terrain that materializes and territorializes the social struggles and sets societies in motion, when confrontation with the establishment arises on all fronts. Autonomous movements are organized around more than 200 social centers in neighborhoods of all the big and medium cities of the country³². These extensive modes of commoning are the main nodes through which social counter – power is horizontally circulated and co-ordinated / accumulated. Furthermore, inside most of these networked nodes intensive ecosystems of social and cultural commoning take place, since these nodes have become the focal point for various communities, such as community grocery stores, communal kindergartens, collective kitchens, cultural cafes, housing projects, artistic collectives, educational structures, community radios, alternative media, technology collectives, and, of course, political discourse and deliberation³³. In addition, these hub-bubs constantly spill over their values and practices to the

³⁰ More information about these networks is available at: <http://www.peliti.gr/> and <http://www.aegilops.gr/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

³¹ From the times of the Ottoman occupation to the 1950's agricultural production in many parts of the country was organized according to “syntrophies”, a custom of mutual aid between farmers, whereas commons associations in stock-raising (“tselingata”, “koinata”) had existed for centuries. One of the world's first agricultural cooperatives was founded in 1780 at Ampelakia of Larissa, Greece, on the production of cotton.

³² http://www.enallaktikos.gr/kg15el_antallaktika-diktya_t65.html.

³³ The categorization of commons movements as intensive and extensive has been described by Massimo De Angelis in his talk at the 3rd Commonsfest in Athens on May 15th, 2015 [in file with author].

neighborhoods where they are located, reclaiming public space through the reproduction of alternative social relations based on equality, mutual aid, collaboration and political mobilization.

Even before the commonification of the public broadcaster ERT an ecosystem of alternative and community media struggled to inflict ruptures on the dominant narrative of mainstream media on the Greek crisis. In 2012, after the bankruptcy of “Eleftherotypia”, a historic and widely circulated center – left newspaper, a group of fired journalists and media workers established the cooperative newspaper “Efimerida ton Syntakton”, in order to provide independent and antagonistic information to the public. The newspaper of the journalists, as its title actually means, has gradually earned its position among the ten most popular printed newspapers in the country but is by far the newspaper within the “big 10” with the strongest liaisons with the social struggles. In the market of printed magazines, the most successful alternative media is the bi-weekly pro – movements “UnFollow” magazine, which is widely known for its investigative journalism against Greek oligarchs and, accordingly, for the mafia – style threats against it due to its investigative and radical content. In the field of electronic media, the alternative news portal “The Press Project” has accumulated the attention of wider audiences to its far left critical analyses. In addition, the radio station “Sto Kokkino”, owned by SYRIZA, yet having an all – embracing leftist and pro-movement attitude, has managed to transmit its program almost at a national level and has climbed among the five most popular news radio stations in the country. These alternative media, accompanied by a constellation of community media tools of the grassroots, such as community radio stations³⁴, web-tv portals (e.g. www.omnia-tv.com), cooperative e-portals (e.g. <http://www.alterthess.gr/>), micro-blogging sites (e.g. www.dromografos.org), e-radios (e.g. www.radiobubble.gr) and independent electronic networks (e.g. www.athens.indymedia.org), and critically reproduced by wider social media spheres of internet users, have been capable of formulating an insurgent public sphere, which has popularized critical opinions and has openly challenged mainstream media perspectives on the crisis. Finally, media activists from these collectives have been able to crowd - source financial support by the general public for at least five different documentaries, which became widely popular critical chronicles of the Greek crisis and were also publicly displayed in several other countries³⁵.

Even before the crisis Greece's highly educated and technology – savvy youth had been organized in communities, which [re]produced various intellectual commons. The Athens Wireless Metropolitan Network (AWMN), one of the

³⁴ Autonomous movements have a long tradition of experimenting with community radios, having established some of the first independent radio stations in the countries back in the 80s, when the radio spectrum was liberalized. Today more than seven autonomous community radios operate in different parts of the country under conditions of state repression.

³⁵ For instance, the crowd-sourced documentary “Debtocracy” was viewed by half a million people in the first five days of its release.

largest community wireless networks in the world, which dates back from these days, today comprises 1.235 backbone nodes and counts more than 12.222 client computers and 830 free software online applications, spreading even outside the borders of the city of Athens with the most southern point being Epidaurus and the most northern point being the town of Nea Artaki on the island of Evoia (100 km and 85 km correspondingly from the city centre). Twenty one other community wireless networks operate in various parts of the country with the most promising being Sarantaporo.gr, a community network in the rural area of mount Olympus, which connects fifteen small villages together, providing fast internet access for free to their residents, to local businesses, schools and health clinics. In addition, the hacking communities along with civil society have formed five hackerspaces and one fab-lab in major Greek cities. The hackerspaces are the "Hackerspace" in Athens, the "Tech Ministry" in Thessaloniki, the "P-space" in Patras, the "To Labaki" in Herakleion, and the "p2p lab" in Ioannina. These techno-social centers act as local common pools of knowledge sharing and collaborative innovation, produce specific projects under copyleft licenses to cover social needs and raise technological literacy and awareness especially of young people. Yet, after the crisis intellectual commons communities have converged with each other and with the wider social movements and have acquired evident political characteristics. Hence, participants from within these collectivities have raised wider social awareness on issues related to digital rights, surveillance, bilateral free trade agreements, such as ACTA, and commons – based peer production and have supported social movements with the necessary infrastructure³⁶. Furthermore, this merging process has produced interesting meeting points between agricultural, artisanal, social and intellectual commons communities and movements, such as CommonsFest, an annual grass-roots festival for the protection and expansion of common goods³⁷. Finally, activists from the communities have independently produced a documentary with the story of intellectual commons in Greece³⁸.

³⁶ Indicatively, these include the interventions of Digital Liberation Network on digital rights, the activities of the Greek team of the P2P Foundation on commons – based peer production (<http://p2pfoundation.net/Greece>), the work of the Underground Free University on the provision of PCs and peripherals to many social centers (www.ufu.gr), the seminars of Skytales on use of cryptography by activists (www.skytal.es), the sessions of Hackademy for investigative and technology – savvy journalists (www.hackademy.gr) and the provision of autonomous web hosting, blogging and email server infrastructure and services for political activity by the Espiv collective (<https://espiv.net/>).

³⁷ The 2015 CommonsFest, held in Athens on May 15-17, gathered the most vibrant activists, communities and cooperatives of the country and featured international speakers, such as Richard Stallman, Massimo De Angelis and Pat Conaty..

³⁸ The documentary is entitled as "Knowledge as a Common Good, communities of Production and Sharing in Greece". It is available under a creative commons license at: <http://common-knowledge.eu/2014/11/15/knowledge-as-a-common-good-communities-of-production-and-sharing-in-greece-full-documentary/> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

Social and solidarity economy

Alongside solidarity structures, a constellation of other relevant initiatives makes up the whole picture of the social and solidarity economy. Free-share bazaars, local alternative currencies and time-banks have been established as forms of direct moneyless exchange of goods and services. Approximately 190 of these initiatives throughout the country dedicate their activities on the aim to meet the needs of the people through collective processes of sharing and bartering³⁹.

The debate on the social and solidarity economy has been open in Greece for some years now, but its form and social effect have been significantly influenced by the crisis and the neoliberal restructuring policies. Rising levels of unemployment and the inability of a large portion of the highly qualified workforce to find its place in the deregulated labour market, as well as the questioning of the dominant mode of production, have created the social conditions for the development of cooperative enterprises. Until September 2015, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor, 600 new workers' or consumers' cooperatives have been established.

The number of the new cooperative enterprises is increasing in all sectors of economic life, in such volumes that allow us to talk about a tendency that puts forward new forms of organisation of work and production. The majority of these projects is located at the sectors of catering, culture and arts, environmental services, healthcare, media and food processing. It is worth noting that the debate for alternative and fair trade, along with the "without middlemen" movement, have significantly contributed to the development of consumer cooperatives, which, beyond connecting producers with consumers, highlight important issues about food production and distribution policies, about genetically modified products, food price policies, the quality and origin of food products and its social and economic footprint.

These cooperatives have employed practices which contest the dominant modes of organisation of everyday life. They follow democratic and collective decision making processes through assemblies, they implement an equal-wage policy and they are autonomous and self-managed by their members, while they include in their scope of activities services for the benefit of their membership and society at large⁴⁰. The workers' cooperatives aim to connect with the solidarity structures and the movements in their proximity. They strive to become not only part of a protective net for a society in hardship but also a way out for the young people facing unemployment. In addition, workers' collectives, as shown by the struggle in the recuperated factory of Vio.Me

³⁹ Solidarity For All, Social and Solidarity Economy Structures in Operation, available at: [http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/structures?term_node_tid_depth=All&term_node_tid_depth_1\[\]=158](http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/structures?term_node_tid_depth=All&term_node_tid_depth_1[]=158) [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

⁴⁰ See Networking of Workers' Coops / Main Principles, available at: <http://kolektives.org> [accessed on April 1st, 2017].

(<http://www.viome.org/>). in Thessaloniki, can be a feasible way to re-initiate production in workplaces under workers' control, which have been abandoned, closed or gone bankrupt by their bosses. Vio.Me in Thessaloniki, the first factory that is self-managed by its workers' assembly, is at the frontline of the struggle to build an alternative model of production in Greece. Moreover, it is a tangible example for a way out of the crisis, economic downsizing and unemployment, which also develops forms of collective, democratic management of economic structures.

During the years of the crisis several focal points have been formed where initiatives of the social and solidarity economy join. Worth mentioning is the Festival for the Solidarity and Cooperative Economy (<http://www.festival4sce.org/>), set up just after the “squares movement” on 2011, which is a meeting point for members of cooperatives, grass-roots solidarity structures and various other citizen initiatives. Another initiative is the “Solidarity for All” organisation (<http://www.solidarity4all.gr/>), formed in early Autumn, 2012. The latter has been the result of the growing grassroots social solidarity movement and of SYRIZA’s decision to support this movement by creating a solidarity fund. Yet, Solidarity for All does not coincide with the solidarity fund. It aims to facilitate the development of grassroots solidarity, to enhance the culture of self-organization in the various fields of social mobilization, to create collective tools and spaces for coordination, to share know-how between solidarity structures, to increase the visibility of the solidarity movement and to develop international solidarity campaigns for the Greek people. In a decentralized and collective manner, it provides logistical and administrative support to the local solidarity structures, while it participates in coordinating attempts on an equal basis simply as one more solidarity structure. Finally, it is worth mentioning that in May 9-10, 2015, a nationwide meeting of solidarity structures took place⁴¹. In the meeting participants decided to pursue regional or sectorial meetings and actions, as the next steps for networking, organising and spreading the solidarity movement.

The way forward

The Greek society is currently undergoing a period of rapid change and re-orientation, in which already existing social structures enter into a stage of reform and re-adjustment to the new environment and new structures emerge. The severe economic crisis has brought about a corresponding crisis of social reproduction, during which large social groups have been forced to find new ways of meeting their collective needs and desires through sharing, mutual aid and collaboration. This social tendency has resulted in the emergence of various commons in the fields of sustenance, housing, health, education, art, technology, mass media, communications and social innovation. In this context,

⁴¹ <http://www.solidarity4all.gr/el/news/1st-nationwide-solidarity-structure%E2%80%99s-meeting>.

socially reproductive commons with social and solidarity economy initiatives in their peripheries have shown their potential of establishing the material foundations of collective and wider social autonomy. In the neoliberal era, it is this potential of a constituent counter - power that has the capacity to constitute the contending power to the capital - state complex. In this light, the Greek crisis is not only a story of pain, poverty and misery. It can also be reconstructed into a narrative of courage, hope, social struggle and progressive change; a narrative of the commons.

Yet, it remains to be seen whether these initiatives are ready to push for further economic and social transformations, or whether their dynamism is going to subside because of the rise of SYRIZA in power or under the unbearable conditions of the economic crisis. The consequences of austerity policies on the majority of the population have, on the one hand, triggered the rise of alternatives but have, on the other hand, weakened the productive powers of the country to such an extent that it will take more than a decade to reconstruct. This negative impact is on its own an important factor that may limit the potentials of emerging movements to grow and expand in several aspects of every-day life. “Progressive” dialectics between the SYRIZA coalition government and the movements have been limited. During the first period of SYRIZA in power, the new coalition government focused its attention on the tough negotiations with the EU institutions and the IMF and, therefore, had little space to put its political priorities into practice. Yet, after its capitulation, the re-elected SYRIZA-ANEL coalition has moved towards the opposite direction of implement austerity measures, in order to avoid a Grexit. At present, as Syriza's plan to establish policies on the opposite direction of austerity have failed, the expectations and the hopes of large parts of society from the Left are being seriously tried.

For grass-roots militants in Greece it is today more than ever obvious that time / space is needed to be gained from the disciplinary power of capital and the iron fist of the neoliberal state in order to amass sufficient social power for radical and society - wide transformations. Equally transparent is the fact that the leftist government of SYRIZA with its declared intentions to facilitate social change has to do a lot more than win the elections and survive the onslaught of the European neoliberal elite, at least to the extent that it aims to build hegemonies invulnerable to neoliberal co-optation and viable in the mid and long - term. We do not live in revolutionary times of dual power formations⁴², or do we? The acceleration of capital circulation / accumulation and the ecological dead - end do not leave us with any alternatives but to fight back and to fight now. In this sense, it is imperative for progressive governments to relate to autonomous social movements in specific ways, so as to give time / space and unleash the potential of the latter for social emancipation. Is a contemporary

⁴² Dual power describes the revolutionary moment in history when an insurgent popular power transforms social relations from below, gains socially reproductive characteristics and rises to contend the bourgeois state apparatus.

dual power between autonomous movements and leftist governments possible in the heart of Europe as a socio-historic formation amidst the crisis and a contemporary revolutionary strategy to move beyond the world of capital? As a well-respected revolutionary has rightly stated, “if we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable” (Bookchin 2005: 107).

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Re-membering practices of popular education in the struggle for an alternative South Africa¹

Thembi Luckett, Shirley Walters, Astrid von Kotze

Abstract

Throughout history there have been dreams, visions and hopes for a utopian world. The history and presence of politics in South Africa abounds with moments and movements of pushing beyond and resisting ‘a dog’s life’. Integral to pushing beyond for a better world, are education and learning processes and practices, albeit in different shapes and forms, with varying intensities and power. This paper seeks to trace certain popular education practices that have and continue to deepen the struggle for an alternative South African society. The paper highlights the shifts and changes in popular education in response to the ebbs and flows of political struggle and movements. It is based on research entitled ‘Re-membering traditions of popular education’ – a recovery of popular education practices from the past that may have been forgotten and reconnection with present forms of education, organising and action. As a renewed working class movement is regrouping and growing in response to the ongoing structural violence of neo-liberal economic policies and state violence, this paper argues that popular education can play a role in contributing towards building this and other movements. Popular education can foster critical analysis in order to understand the context more deeply, name the enemy and foster openness and hope in searching for and imagining a collective alternative.

Keywords: Popular education, political struggle, vision, hope, history, South Africa

This paper is part of a 3 year research project entitled ‘Re-membering Traditions of Popular Education’, which aims to un-cover and re-cover forgotten traditions of popular learning and education in South Africa. ‘Re-membering’ suggests two things: firstly, a process of casting one’s mind to call up something that may have been forgotten, a finding and retrieving in order to reveal, a recollection, uncovering of something that was neglected or no longer recognised as being there. Secondly, re-membering suggests an act of connecting what has been severed, a re-attaching, a putting together what has been kept apart and re-establishing of relations between parts that belong together. The project aims to shed light on processes of activist education that

¹ We wish to acknowledge the financial assistance of the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) which has supported the Re-membering Traditions of Popular Education Research Project.

generated knowledge in often imaginative and innovative ways in South Africa particularly in its hey days of the 1970s and 1980s.

The history of South African politics abounds with moments and movements of pushing against oppression and exploitation, and “pushing beyond”, resisting “a dog’s life”. According to Freire (1998), through dialogue and mutual relations, we are able to collectively understand our reality and to imagine different possibilities. Processes of imagining and envisioning enable acts of collective resistance, action and agency, and vice versa. Education and learning are integral to imagining and struggling for a better world. This paper seeks to highlight popular education practices that have and continue to deepen the struggle for an alternative South African society. We look back and tell an incomplete story of the history of popular education in South Africa in order to move forward in the current context.

Through shining light on moments from the past that bear on the present, this paper illustrates how firstly, popular education is part of a rich history in the struggle for an alternative society in South Africa. Secondly, popular education is embedded in its socio-political context. It is constrained and enabled by the ebbs and flows of history it “is always contextual and contingent, reflecting and responding to changing circumstances and, in particular, the changing relationship between the formal politics of state and the informal politics of social movements in civil society” (Martin, 1999, p. 1). Whilst popular education is rooted in its context, at its best, it responds to the context with a view to pushing beyond what is, at any particular moment in time. Popular education initiatives are part of building a vision for tomorrow, today. Thirdly, whilst many argue that there has been a demise in popular education, this paper seeks to demonstrate that popular education continues to exist in the cracks and crevices, in the search for the ‘not yet’.

Tenets of popular education

Popular education is a contested term and practice, with multiple definitions and practices. Definitions of popular education range from employing participatory methods for personal development, to acting as part of overtly political anti-capitalist projects (von Kotze, Walters & Luckett, 2016). Martin (1999, p. 4) argues that popular education is “rooted in the interests, aspirations and struggles of ordinary people”, “is overtly political and critical of the status quo” and committed to “progressive social and political change”.

This research understands popular education to be both a theory and a practice of social action, underpinned by the following key principles:

- Social justice, both in process and in proposed outcomes;
- Grounded in the daily social, economic, political and cultural reality of people whose experiences throw up the questions and contradictions they wish to examine and reflect on in order to change

them;

- Dialogue: all participants engage in dialogue and analysis and in the process develop their ‘voice’ to ‘speak up and out’;
- Action and reflection – what Freire called ‘praxis’: the purpose of learning to ‘read the world’ is to change it (von Kotze, 2014).

Here, popular education is not about identifying skills deficits in order to better prepare individuals for the marketplace, as is the hegemonic model of education. Rather, it seeks to draw on the collective knowledge and experiences of life struggles and activism, on historical understandings, in order to develop coherent theory and practice to challenge the individualized, commodified, social world. It is part of deliberate undertakings to further social movement learning.

Eyerman and Jamison state that “Social movements are not merely social dramas; they are the social action from where new knowledge including worldviews, ideologies, religions, and scientific theories originate” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 14). As Walters (2005) explains, popular education is integral to social processes, and therefore it is not surprising that it gains in prominence at heightened political or economic moments in response to actions within the State, civil society or the private sector. As she elaborates, social movement learning includes both learning by people who are participants in social movements and learning by people outside of social movements through the impact they make. (Hall & Clover, 2005) Learning through a movement can occur informally through participation, or through intentional educational interventions. The educational and organisational practices are intertwined. The cultural, gender, class, and ethnic locations of the individuals or groups involved shape the educational and organisational practices, just as they are shaped by the particular historical conjuncture. Social movements are exceedingly rich learning environments. As Mohanty (2012) states, popular education within social movements is the “sustained and hard work of excavating experiential knowledge, and of teaching/learning to change the world”.

Methodology

Research design

The research project seeks, as far as possible, to achieve congruence between its means and ends, adopting a Participatory Research Approach (PRA). Drawing on adult education literature (for example, Kassam 1982, Walters 1989), this approach demands that knowledge is constructed collectively, through dialogue, and that the research integrates ‘investigation, education and action’. PRA is committed to the educational value of the research process for all participants, consistent with the notion of risking disturbance, that is, a willingness to change as result of the research process in the pursuit of social justice. In this way, the

project employed an inductive, empirical method of research, allowing for the emergence of trends, patterns, themes and unexpected findings and outcomes.

Data collection and production

The project employed a number of data collection methods. For the purposes of this paper: we firstly unearthed and collected documents – printed text, auditory records and visuals from the past. We consulted history books, historical sources, and other published timelines of adult education and political events in the 20th and 21st Centuries. We searched for information on education laws/policies, progressive non-formal education activities, the establishment of organizations/ institutions/ publications involved in popular education with an eye towards identifying different historical strands of popular education, for example, relating to the labour movement, Black Consciousness Movement and cultural activism, as well as the political events that affected the terrain of struggle for liberation. We do not claim to have captured all historical facts, or even attempted to. Rather it was a search for a story and stories of popular education through a “collection of concrete remembered objects and impressions” (Benjamin, 1968).

Secondly, we conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and groups about past and present organizations in South Africa that undertake educational work. The primary purpose was to develop insights into organisations’ educational practices, philosophies and conceptions of popular education. Over 30 organisational profiles were drawn up from sectors ranging from community development, democracy and human rights, labour, land and rural struggles to education rights, such as Community Monitors, Equal Education, Gender at Work and Surplus People’s Project. In addition, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 21 local and international practitioners. Each of the interviewees had been involved in popular education/activism for over 30 years in sectors ranging from labour, cultural activism, feminist popular education, literacy, community activism, peace work and children’s rights.

Thirdly, we observed and participated in two national workshops of popular educators in 2013 and 2014, which brought together practitioners working in a broad range of popular education. These provided opportunities to observe, journal and interview popular educators as well as conduct dialogues on popular education.

Conceptual framing

Popular education is underpinned by various theories of the state and theories of transition – as we have elaborated elsewhere (Von Kotze, Walters & Luckett 2016), there is not one understanding of popular education. While Paulo Freire is often referred to as a core reference point, interpretations of his work vary. During the 1970s and 1980s in South African popular education, Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci were oft cited. For purposes here we elaborate briefly on

key ideas within Gramsci's work, which influenced activists at the time.

As Walters (1989, p. 100) describes, Gramsci saw education as central to politics. He saw the struggle for a new working class culture as taking the form of a struggle for a mass philosophy able to make each party member an 'organic intellectual', which involved a range of democratic activities including modes of thinking, living and feeling. In order to transform society Gramsci believed that people needed to know what the new world could be like. The first task was therefore to 'make revolution in the mind'. Thus, the development of coherent theory was central to Gramsci's theory of social transition and his educational practice.

The role of the educator, in the form of the organic intellectual or the party was clear. The educator needed to be 'connecting people's historical experience dialectically with laws of history...' (as cited in Walters 1989, p. 100). For Gramsci, Marxism provided theory which helped transform 'common sense' to 'good sense'. However, Marxism was not used as a dogma which was outside of history. The pursuit of intellectual activity, he argued, should occur in close linkage with political practice and so be continually challenged and transformed by practice. The importance of knowledge being generated through praxis (Gramsci and Freire appear to have similar views on this) worked against the notion of an authoritarian teacher-learner relationship. Action and reflection, while deepening praxis, were crucial components of the educational process.

Gramsci saw participatory democratic practices such as the development of working class organisations in the Factory Council movement as integral to the educational process. Gramsci saw as the practical and political task of hegemony: to organise and unify the working class so that it would acquire from its own experience 'a responsible consciousness of the obligations that fall to classes achieving State power' (Gramsci, 1977, p. 65). At the core of Gramsci's practice was the connection between destruction and construction. The councils were seen as the embryonic form of the new society in the womb of the old. Therefore the basis of his strategy was to organise the workers and peasants in order both to wage a frontal attack against the state and to establish working class organisations as the foundations of a new culture. Through democratic participation in the management of the organisations, theoretical and technical skills would be acquired. Gramsci, like participatory democratic theorists, argued that learning occurred through participation itself.

Gramsci's ideas were partially a critique of the prevailing economism amongst the orthodox Marxists of the day. He expanded the concept of 'politics' to include economic, social, ideological and political factors. His concept of hegemony has created alternative possibilities for Marxists in their development of a theory and practice of transition from a capitalist state to a socialist one. These include widespread democratization of many aspects of social, political and economic life; the acceptance of community organization as an important aspect of the working class struggle; and the creation of democratic institutions where workers can obtain a 'ruling class consciousness' through praxis.

Gramsci's ideas continue to be reflected in contemporary theorising of the South African state and its transition. Hart (2013, p. 10) argues that Gramsci's notion of 'passive revolution' is useful but, to be adequate to contemporary challenges, requires moving beyond 'with help from Fanon, Lefebvre and strands of feminist theory'. She notes that both Gramsci and Fanon have figured prominently at different moments in South African struggles – Fanon was an inspiration for Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1970s (and again to the student movements of 2015 onwards). Gramsci's ideas helped fuel fierce struggles against the apartheid regime and racial capitalism in the 1980s. Hart (2013, p. 18) in fact argues that 'they share remarkable similarities and complementarities'. One of these is Fanon's emphasis on the imperative for working through and beyond taken-for-granted understandings of nationalism, which resonates closely with what Gramsci meant by the philosophy of praxis – 'namely the practices and processes of rendering fragmentary 'common sense' ... more coherent, enabling new forms of critical practice and collective action'.

Hart (2013) draws on nearly 20 years of ethnographic research to describe what is happening in South Africa today, which she says exemplifies "an extreme but not exceptional embodiment of forces at play, in many other regions of the world: intensifying inequality alongside 'wageless life'; proliferating forms of protest and populist politics that move in different directions; and official efforts at containment ranging from liberal interventions targeting specific populations to increasingly common police brutality" (Backcover).

Hart (2013) describes in great detail community struggles over, for example, adequate water supply for daily living. She argues that local government has become *the* key site of systemic contradictions, which play out in everyday life – water, like many other resources is being 'outsourced' and privatised; it has become commodified so even politicians at the local level do not have direct control – it is difficult for local citizens to know to whom they should turn, or to whom they should make demands. This has the effect of limiting democratic participation of citizens. She quotes Sitas (Hart, p. 148) who argues how in KwaZulu Natal, popular democratic politics that accompanied the growth of the democratic trade union movements in the 1980s has given way to grassroots populism 'with serious authoritarian undertones'. She also refers (Hart, p. 173) to Neocosmos' argument that 'state politics has systematically de-politicised the people with emphasis being exclusively placed on managerialism (to deliver human rights), juridical expertise (to protect human rights) and education.....'. In other words 'technicism has replaced active politics'. Hart (p. 225) suggests that 'passive revolution' is a useful lens through which to bring aspects of Fanon's work to grasp the complementarities between Gramsci's philosophy of praxis and Fanon's efforts to point towards a new humanism. As she states, "Both Fanon and Gramsci were relentlessly focused on the processes through which subaltern classes might become active participants in the production of new forms of critical understanding and collective action; and both assigned a crucial role to intellectuals who are neither vanguards nor celebrants of subaltern wisdom, but engaged in mutual processes of transformation". Of

particular relevance to popular education, Hart (p. 228) argues that “both Fanon and Gramsci envisaged an ongoing process of democratic and dialectical pedagogy, in which the educator must herself be educated”.

With this conceptual backdrop, we turn now to the story of ‘moments’ of popular education in South Africa particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.

A story of popular education in South Africa

There is a long history of people’s resistance to oppression and exploitation. Popular education initiatives cannot be separated from political conditions where local/global ideas and practices rise and fall. The history of systematic education initiatives in the search of an alternative has been an ongoing process albeit with interruptions, pauses, varying pulses and intensities, and different strands from liberation theology to Black Consciousness, from radical adult education to feminist education and workers’ education. The first instance of trying to make accessible educational material, documented in this project, is the *Voice of Labour*. It was a publication to support the General Workers Union and a series of socialist groups, started in 1908. Worker education classes began with the formation of night schools by the International Socialist League (later the Communist Party of South Africa) in 1919. Later on, the struggle against apartheid was punctuated by moments such as the launch of the Defiance Campaign and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) in 1952. In 1956, the first national SACTU school was convened, where young workers and organizers learnt from the experiences of veteran trade unionists such as Ray Alexander, John Nkadimeng and Eli Weinberg. Trade union education was linked to campaigns, such as the SACTU 1-Pound Campaign (SAHO, 2016). In the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle intensified and in 1985, the United Democratic Front launched the ‘Forward People’s Power’ campaign. The struggle for an alternative education was an integral part of the struggle for a democratic future. In the early 1990s organisations and coalitions prepared themselves for negotiations and a democratic government. Coalitions such as the Women’s National Coalition (WNC) were formally launched. The WNC brought together over 60 national organisations to draw up a Women’s Charter to build a democratic society based on the principles of non-sexism and non-racism. It undertook education and organizing with thousands of women as part of its campaigning work. Popular education during the anti-apartheid struggle, was situated in an extra-ordinary movement of resistance, despite and because of political constraints, which enabled radical visions and radical education practices (see for example, Fester 2015).

As indicated above, there are many stories, moments and explosions of popular education in South Africa’s history. This paper does not offer a full overview of the many popular education-inspired initiatives. Such an undertaking would go beyond the limits of one paper. Instead, we will focus on illustrative moments and initiatives, contrasting the ‘heyday’ of popular education from the late 1960s with its decline post-1994 and its re-emergence more recently in order to

elucidate contextual dynamics over time.

1970s and 1980s: Building tomorrow today

Because of the sharpening of contradictions, the objective reality, it boiled over completely, it gave popular education a spark or the fires of popular education grew much further, they'd been there all the time because of the way in which the country lurched forward. There was some sense that there's a possibility of breaking the apartheid chains and creating a new society, and there was an alternative. And since popular education had been preaching this alternative for quite a while, it emerged much more strongly and much more visibly than in the past. (Community Activist, 28/05/2014)

In 1967 the radical University Christian Movement (UCM) was formed, with its founding conference held in Grahamstown. It was influenced by black theology and liberation theology. Within 2 years, the UCM established 30 branches at universities, training colleges and seminaries all over the country. At the same time, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) began on campuses of black universities under the South African Students Organization (SASO). SASO was established in 1968 after some members of the University of Natal's Black Student Representative Council decided to break away from the liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). In 1969 SASO had its inaugural conference at which Steve Biko was elected the first President. SASO organized community learning groups and study circles dedicated to political education. According to SASO's policy manifesto, black consciousness is "an attitude, a way of life" (cited in Naidoo, 2015, p.117). The emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in 1969 marked a challenge to colonialist and apartheid conceptions of knowledge and education. Questions arose about the nature of formal education and its value for students and adult learners involved in the struggle against apartheid oppression. As Neville Alexander (1990, p. 106) writes, "Until 1969, approximately, most people in the liberation movement, most political activists, wanted, and said so in so many words, an education that was equal to the education of Whites ... And it didn't strike them until the Black Consciousness Movement came into being that that education was an education for domination, that it was a racist education that prepared people for an oppressive and exploitative position in society". According to Hadfield (2016), at the core of the BCM was a focus on liberation – enabling black people to fulfill their potential through self-reliance and a sense of dignity. Similarly, Gibson (1988) argues that it is about the creative subjectivity of black people against the force and brutality of the state.

The BCM's critique of education for domination grew in the 1970s and 1980s and converged with growing workers and student movements. In 1970, the UCM began receiving and circulating the works of Paulo Freire, notably *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Students were trained in Freire's methodology and

used it in community education and literacy classes. Two years later, Anne Hope facilitated a series of workshops with Steve Biko and 15 members of SASO, who were planning to run a national literacy programme based on Freire's approach of conscientisation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRTMJMcAhCQ>). The literacy programme was part of the Black Community Programmes (BCP), in which Black Consciousness activists reached out to build black self-reliance. Mosibudi Mangena, a member of SASO's branch on the Reef, recalled his experience of the BCP, "No doubt [teaching literacy with Paulo Freire's methods] conscientized the Winterveld people, but they also conscientized us ... There is a difference between knowing about oppression of our people on a theoretical level and actually getting involved with the community" (Hadfield, 2016, p. 39).

The national literacy programme did not take place as planned because leaders were arrested and banned – but the curriculum designed was later to become the basis of what is now both a local and an international programme, Training for Transformation. In 1972 and 1973 Christian students, black students and workers built new organisations, undertook new actions, tried out new teaching practices (some drawing on Freire), and wrote new publications e.g. Ravan Press, in the face of political repression and bannings (Hadfield, 2010).

One cultural activist/sociologist (04/04/2014) interviewed, was asked to identify key moments or events in the history of popular education in South Africa, and listed 1973, 1976, 1980, 1983, 1986 and 1990. He explained, further:

1973, with the explosion of strike activity that created the new trade union movements; symbolically very important and created the conditions for popular and class education in the country. 1976: the rebellion of the black youth when the ideas of emancipation started hitting the streets, the violence, new forms of organisation, new challenges. 1980: the formation the first time of a catalytic movement; the Community Action Support Group in Johannesburg ... the coordinating of a lot of the emerging movements, whether they were Congress type or Black Consciousness type – everybody started getting together supporting worker strikes, anti-republic demonstrations, and a sense of organising the alternative. 1983: for me personally, the Dunlop play and strike, but also at the same time the formation of the UDF, approximately the same time. 1985-1986: civil war in KwaZulu-Natal, its beginning. In 1990: the unbanning of the organisations. I am saying these because these were significantly the moments where a new environment was being created.

The birth of a militant workers and student movement in the 1970s, saw mass student boycotts and workers undertaking mass strike action, with the proliferation of worker organizations and advice offices in solidarity, such as the Urban Training Project. Advice offices, often driven by white students and academics, played a solidarity role during and after the strike wave of 1973 (Vally, Mphutlane & Treat, 2013). The peak of strike activity saw an estimated 100 000 workers participate in a series of short but widespread industrial

strikes. Workers mobilised around the slogan “Ufilumuneti, Ufe Usadikiza!” (“The person is dead, but his spirit is alive!”) (Lacom, 1989, p. 163). Ordinary workers were intervening, making history in the spontaneous strike waves of 1973. It was arguably the first time that masses of ‘ordinary people’ believed that an alternative was possible; and more so, that they would make that alternative possible through their own struggles (Grossman, 2000). A cultural activist (04/04/2014) involved in the trade union movement stated, with a Gramscian sensibility, “1973 it’s this idea of democracy, grassroots democracy and it’s both a practical necessity and vision that one needed to build a new type of trade union movement that was democratic, that was accountable, that was building tomorrow today type of slogan. So that was a very key idea in 1973.”

Friedman (1987), amongst others, has written extensively about the rise of the workers’ movement and independent trade unions in the 1970s. The rising workers’ movement was influenced by Black Consciousness, ideas from the New Left (that rejected Stalinism) and the grassroots organizing of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. In a syndicalist tradition, unions were seen as experiments in pre-figuring a future, socialist society. Students and radical intellectuals such as Rick Turner (1980), who put forward an argument for utopian thinking and practices of humaneness in the present as part of a rejection of capitalist values, aligned themselves with workers (Nash, 1999).

Vally (1994) suggests that trade unions were understood as “schools of labour” and “laboratories for democracy” in which workers could experiment with new ideas, arrive at understandings, and generate and develop collective practices. The labour movement was rooted in collective struggle and collective goals – the overarching goal of democracy, and within that, varying visions of socialism and freedom. Collective experience rather than information from books was the foundation for the generation of knowledge to be used in struggles and processes of grassroots organising. Events such as meetings, rallies, shop-steward councils and ‘siyalalas’ (all-night seminars/meetings) were sites for creating and disseminating education (Vally, Mphutlane & Treat, 2013). Boundaries between educator and learner were blurred as ordinary people possessed experiences of everyday life, which could be built on and shared as knowledge. A worker was both learner and teacher – thus the slogan “each one teach one” (Vally, 1994). The initiation of Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) national workshops saw the integration of workers’ self-education and workers’ cultural expressions. Importantly, education, culture and action were closely linked, illustrating both Gramsci and Freire’s notion of praxis.

Ordinary trade union members gave expression to their experiences of exploitation and oppression in cultural productions (Sitas, 1986; von Kotze, 1988). Culture became understood as a ‘weapon’ of struggle, with organisers and facilitators of writing, drama, poetry, art and music labelled as ‘cultural workers’, who saw their work as contributing to political struggle. According to a cultural activist (04/04/2014), in the 1980s, “you saw the best of creativity, the best of what was possible in the working class in terms of culture and education

coming together” – an assertion and reclaiming of the creative capacities and experiences of the working class.

The South African Committee for Higher Education Trust (SACHED), SACHED, founded in 1958, became the largest and arguably most influential education NGO in South Africa by the 1980s. SACHED was able to respond to the ongoing education crisis and political movement by constantly adjusting curricula to current and local dynamics. One systematic response was the formation of its more radical wing, the Labour and Community Committee (LACOM), which undertook educational work with community organisations and trade unions (Trimbur, 2009). It emerged out of a need to link labour and community struggles and to build democratic working class organizations. According to a community activist (28/05/2014) interviewed, “LACOM was in a sense following what was already happening”.

According to former LACOM educators interviewed (08/10/2014), LACOM undertook educational work introducing systematic study of political economy concepts, organising skills, basic technical skills, African history, workers’ history and campaign-linked education. Education was embedded in organisations and campaigns, such as the workers’ May Day campaign, and seen as part of movement/organisation building. The collective process of education and knowledge production was emphasized as more important than individual self-advancement as workers and community members jointly planned workshops, building on people’s experiences and existing knowledge. One illustration of this is that educational materials rarely carried a particular author’s name: materials were collectively authored and owned. As a LACOM literacy educator interviewed (08/10/2014) said: “We didn’t publish as individuals. We’re a group. We’re a collective. It was really strong. It was really important”.

LACOM’s internal culture aspired, in the Gramscian sense, to reflect the society it was part of creating. LACOM built and struggled for a culture of democracy, openness, debate, critique, transparency, non-sectarianism and collective ownership, which fed into the ways in which education was facilitated.

LACOM’s educational work was part of attempts to push beyond the present. For example, LACOM with the South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) pushed against deep-seated patriarchy within the trade union movement and society more broadly by undertaking educational work on gender relations and maternity leave. This was one of the first attempts to transform gender relations within workers’ organisations.

LACOM/SACCAWU (1991) published ‘Sharing the Load: The struggle for gender equality, parental rights, and childcare.’ In this way, LACOM tried to pre-figure the future by concretely imagining a society in which knowledge is not individually owned, in which patriarchy is overcome and solidarity is a cornerstone.

All interviewees agreed that LACOM was part of a longer and bigger radical tradition and vision for socialism and freedom: “people connected [to LACOM] had a vision of social society, an alternative society to the capitalized society ... a

vision of something very different” (community activist, 28/05/2014). Part of this vision was to overcome mental/manual divides and enable the expression of people’s whole beings: their productive, creative, mental, emotional capacities. Expressions of this radical tradition, in organisational form and educational practices, are enabled in the context of a radical movement. The radical pulse of popular education that pushes beyond what is, is enabled when grounded in the struggles/movements that beat outside the workshop/meeting walls. As a community activist (28/05/2014) said, popular education and socialism, visions of an alternative, have a long history but catch fire in particular contexts: “Popular Education tradition comes much earlier, socialism earlier and so on. So it continues. And for me that tradition still continues in different ways, in different forms. But the intensity and heights are continually in dynamic with a whole lot of other forces.” SACHED, and with it LACOM, closed its doors by the late 1990s, as part of what has been referred to as the “decimation of the NGO sector” (Aitchison, as cited in Trimbur, 2009, p. 158).

‘People’s Education for People’s Power’

In 1985 the United Democratic Front (UDF), a broad alliance of African National Congress (ANC) oriented community and worker organisations, launched the ‘Forward People’s Power’ campaign. This was a period of mass stay-aways of hundreds of thousands of workers and students and grew in the late 1980s to stay-aways involving millions of workers, youth and communities. The struggle for an alternative education was part of the struggle for a democratic future. ‘People’s Education for People’s Power’ emerged as a concept, vision and programme of action out of the education crisis. People’s Education can be described as “a deliberate attempt to move away from reactive protests around education to develop a counter-hegemonic education strategy, to contribute to laying a basis for a future, post-apartheid South Africa” (Kruss, 1988, p. 8). People’s Education was based on a rejection of Apartheid education epitomized in the ongoing school boycotts of 1984/5, but it moved further to envision education for the majority of the people – students, parents, teachers and workers – and attempted to build that vision in the present. According to Kruss (1988, p. 9) “Students, teachers, and parents began to question what a different, alternative education system would be like. What would be its underlying principles? What would be its method and content?” People’s Education aimed to prepare people for full participation in a democratic society, build democratic organisations to struggle for People’s Power and deepen and develop ‘revolutionary organization’. It aimed to instill particular values necessary for building an alternative society, such as co-operation, solidarity, creativity, critical thinking, active participation and democracy. The movement of People’s Education tried to inculcate these values in the present and undertook projects to rewrite curricula based on these values and in the interests of the majority of the people.

The tide of political movements and resistance enabled the mushrooming and explosion of ideas, organizations, actions – taking risks and searching and

pushing beyond the present. In this ferment, new creative, courageous ideas emerged: “We are learning. We are finding that there are many things that we can do. We are sharing our strength”, (ILRIG/Workers of the Vineyard, Townhouse and Spurs, 1989, p. 15). As the anti-apartheid movement grew stronger, ideas and practices of accountability, participation, report back, recall and democratic control became part of building an alternative, democratic and socialist society within the present. Voices spoke loudly (through multiple means) of alternatives; asserting and valorizing their own knowledge and experiences as the basis for an alternative future. These processes were understood as deeply educational (Baskin, 1991). It was a period in which people grew and explored: “workers searched memory, each other, history, the world, political texts, for ideas and knowledge, bringing everything into their intellectual embrace” (Cooper, Andrews, Grossman & Vally, 2002, p. 119-120).

Nonetheless, the politics, processes and practices of collectivism, within popular education and the anti-apartheid movement, were not universal and ever-present – they were constantly struggled and fought for. Reflecting on mass meetings, a feminist educator (28/04/2014) stated that education practices were sometimes undemocratic:

If you really wanted people to, firstly, learn something and to participate and have their voices heard, you would do it completely differently. You would use different sorts of processes, different sorts of methodologies. But to stand there preaching at people for two, three, four hours at a time – ... the messages you were sending is that, usually it’s men, but not only men, stand up and tell you what to think and what to do ... So whenever I could influence things I would try to say, so what are we trying to do here? And try to design things in a way which would firstly be more playful, and allow people to bring their whole selves into this space as opposed to only their heads.

Whilst the political conditions enabled the innovative, bold, courageous, democratic political acts and popular education activities, the conditions also undermined them. The intensity of repression bred divisions, mistrust and secrecy. As much as forging solidarity and unity, the necessity for secrecy also encouraged authoritarianism in organisations. Political/ideological differences entailed divergent visions for the future. While the identification of a common overarching enemy united people and organizations on the ground, in struggle, there was also mistrust and divisions. The moments zoomed in on, threw up flashes – sometimes prolonged and sustained – of an alternative that interrupted the present: “hope is active – we exercise agency, piercing through time by seeing the alternatives, the possibilities available to us in moving beyond a particular limit situation” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 793). Popular education is constrained or enabled by the political situation of its time, responding to and at times pushing beyond. The ideas of Freire, Gramsci, Fanon, circulated and influenced understandings of organizing, politics and pedagogy – means and ends were at times seen as co-terminous.

1994: Tensions, contradictions and diminishing collective hope

It's clear that popular education in the 1980s rode on the back of the popular movement, and as that movement declined so did the popular education.
(Worker educator, 14/04/2014)

The 1994 political transition process saw shifts in popular education, as popular education continued in the absence of a strong popular movement on the ground. The main liberation movement became the government. The radical purpose, rooted in collectivism, became increasingly diluted and polluted. All activists interviewed stated that there was a decline in popular education programmes and initiatives from 1994 as most efforts went to build the new democratic society. This movement as described by Neocosmos (2011, p.385) was “from an emancipatory (non-identitarian) conception founded on popular agency in the 1980s to a chauvinistic one based on victimhood in the 2000s”. Neocosmos (2011) argues that ‘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 from an earlier period’. Education came to reinforce the neoliberal state agenda through a limited, reductive approach to education. Education, understood through human capital theory, reduces learning to plugging in ‘skills-deficits’ for the market economy, as opposed to “a broader purpose for education that is linked to a tradition based on social justice and democratic citizenship” (Vally & Motala, 2014 p. X).

Participants at a national popular education workshop in 2014 asserted that 1994 was a turning point, when popular education waned. Activist/educators contested that the rise of neo-liberalism ‘dirtied the river of popular education’, and that in the absence of a unifying struggle, ‘popular education branched off into a small tributary, with neoliberalism itself as the main driving force’. Workshop participants were sympathetic to the view that in 2014, we ‘stand at the delta of deceit: this is marked by individualism and individual interests, it is also manifest in acts of violence such as Marikana. The river is so polluted that it is dangerous to fish in it!’ (National Popular Education Development Workshop report, 2014).

For many struggle activists, there was a tension. It became a dilemma reflected in debates on how to position oneself in relation to the new ANC government and how to relate to the system. A cultural activist/sociologist (04/04/2014) interviewed, explained:

When you start to create a society of the ‘new’ and then immediately there’s a polarisation of people who want to work in the system, to create the system, to create new ways the system operates, and people who are left with the people outside that – and because of this exclusion, inclusion, inequalities, and so on,

there are people inside and outside.

Thus the mid-1990s were described as a confused and contradictory period when many activists and educators were unclear as to how to support a democratically elected government and yet simultaneously be critical of it. A community activist (28/05/2014) said there was resistance to people wanting to continue popular education; people were told “look, liberation has been achieved” and “the more subversive or counter-hegemonic work disappeared” (feminist educator, 28/04/2014).

Those interviewed identified the dissonance between the notion of ‘the people shall govern’, for which they had struggled, and the reality which is well described by Neocosmos, as one where, unsurprisingly, popular education practices were not encouraged: “If I think of all the work in the literacy organisations and the language and the stuff; fantastic work was never taken up by the state into the adult night schools. All the SACHED work was not built on,” (feminist educator, 28/04/2014). Working outside of the state, interviewees pointed to the difficulties of undertaking education/activist work in the context of neo-liberalism and considerable funding cuts for progressive projects, which led to the demise of many community-based organisations and NGOs involved in educational activities, and thus to a decline in popular education in the 1990s. Further, a feminist educator claimed that funding was sometimes denied to organisations that did not tow the ruling party’s line.

The democratic South Africa was born at a time, which is described by Hart (2013, p. 156) as simultaneous processes of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation. ‘De-nationalisation’ she argues, encompasses the terms on which heavily concentrated corporate capital re-engaged with the increasingly financialised global economy starting in the early 1990s, and the ways these forces drive increasing inequality and the generation of surplus populations. ‘Re-nationalisation’ relate to the ways the post-apartheid nation came to be produced. Hart and Neocosmos describe these processes differently, but both point to the uneven ways in which citizenship is manifest. The middle classes have ‘rights’ and the subaltern classes have ‘entitlements’ – ‘rights’ suggests a core commitment to legal processes, the latter does not. Neocosmos (2014, p. 152) summarises state politics as ‘a politics concerned with maintaining divisions, hierarchies and boundaries’. It is not one that embraces ‘people’s power’ in the full sense of the term – nor popular education.

It is therefore to be expected, given the predominance of neo-liberal economics, that a key tension emerged post-1994 between collectivism and individualism. Education came to be framed within a human capital paradigm, which sees education as an individual or private good. So for example, the accreditation of skills and knowledge, as part of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), introduced in the mid-1990s, was seen to potentially undermine the principle and politics of collectivism as it had been practised, by a process that individually categorises, certifies and divides workers. At a 2013 Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (Ditsela) Conference

on popular education, a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) official stated that “workers have the right to have their skills validated ... accreditation makes their skills real” (Ditsela conference, 2013). This begs the questions, validation by whom and for what purpose? In the context of the erosion of strong workers and popular movements, and of internal radical education, recognition by and for a worker’s collective (such as a general meeting) is not valued as previously.

According to Cooper et al. (2002, p. 123), worker education shifted from “a tradition in which the dominant self-conception of workers’ engagement with their own learning involved images of worker-led choirs, plays and poetry — aimed at entrenching the self-consciousness of the working class as a force capable of demanding progressive change in the interests of the oppressed — new images came to dominate, of individual employees earning certificates and filling out paperwork in pursuit of their own advancement”. Similarly, a literacy activist (08/10/2014) reflected, “If you look just at the field of adult education there was a strong movement around adult education. And there was a strong tradition wanting to link adult literacy work to political mobilization and to development. And I think that tradition died for a number of years ... it became a whole battle around certification and formalization, and standards. The whole emphasis on a link between education and organization died and then it became an individual credentialing thing.” Popular education for social mobilization was increasingly displaced by education for individual social mobility.

Tensions arose and arise between collective learning, solutions and visions, and individual certification, development and advancement for private ends, in the absence of a movement. This is not an argument against personal development and growth, nor that they are mutually exclusive, — but that hope/utopian thinking reduced to private ends, when it is stuck in the dominant logic of the market, is stripped of its radical possibility. As Marcel (1951, 10) writes, “Hope is only possible on the level of the us ... it does not exist on the level of the solitary ego, self-hypnotised and concentrating on exclusively individual aims. Thus it implies that we must not confuse hope and ambition.” Further key tensions are elaborated in the paper ‘Navigating our way: A compass for popular educators’ (Von Kotze, Walters & Luckett, 2016).

If popular education is contingent upon its context, what are the implications for popular educators inside and outside of social and political movements? A worker educator (15/04/2014) reflected on the balance of forces: “I think on the macro level of what kind of radical education is appropriate for this time, given all the balance of forces and states of organisation and what people are ready and right for, I don’t have answers for that; it is very contingent ... so much of it is about a political context — I’m not taking responsibility away from us”. This does not necessarily mean that popular educators can only do radical education work under certain contexts. One can continuously cultivate the possibility of pushing beyond the present; hope reaches out from its context, but is not bound by it. Popular education thrives on the tensions in any particular moment as tensions and contradictions make visible the status quo and what appears to be

normal, opening up possibilities to experiment and move beyond the present context.

The heart of popular education beating in the cracks and crevices

Despite the decline in popular education, as described above, popular education continues to exist in the cracks and crevices in the search for an alternative society. Von Kotze, Walters and Luckett (2016) capture some of the shifts and expressions of popular education in South Africa by proposing a compass which outlines four ‘types’ of popular education, without being discrete categories: popular education for empowerment, popular education for systems change, issue-based popular education, and popular education for emancipation. These types can be seen manifested in the shifts and changes in popular education since 1994, with emancipatory practices existing in the cracks and crevices.

From 1998 onwards, we saw the rise (and fall some years later) of social movements as well as a range of new NGOs which continued old traditions of popular education; there were also new ones that reflect the shift towards neo-liberal politics. The range of organizational profiles featured on the Popular Education website (www.populareducation.co.za) illustrates these divergent emerging practices.

Reflecting the trend of a shift towards individualization, much popular education now targets primarily the individual, believing, that ‘development begins with self’. The underlying assumption is that change in the individual will translate into action directed at collectives and connect individual healing and development to collective struggles. As one feminist educator (28/04/2014) describes:

If people are going to be able to be agents in their own world, they need a sense of self, and that might come in different forms. Some of it might be able to be responded to in popular education and some will need deep therapy and whatever else they need. Because without it you just get buffeted ... by which ever wind is blowing. And if you don't recognise your own hurt and your own pain and your own stuff that you've been through and give yourself a break, allow yourself to acknowledge what I need to work on in order to, in a way, feel more confident.

Another educator explains that personal change may precede or coincide with collective action but that the first real hurdle is “to get people to recognize that your individual lived experiences, whatever issues, are not individual problems but common collective problems” (Labour rights activist, 27/09/2013).

In a different space, some popular education practitioners continue to put pressure on institutions from within, attempting to change policies, or keeping radical agendas and foci alive within what might otherwise be conservative institutions, such as universities.

Social movements and campaigns formed another key development post-1994. In 1998, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a social movement, was launched. TAC and other social movements and campaigns mostly undertook issue-based education, pushing against the erosion of living and working conditions. Other more recent examples include Equal Education and the Right to Know Campaign. Abahlali baseMjondolo took a more comprehensive approach to education, asserting the idea of struggle as a school and the combination of theory and practice in the 'University of Abahali': "The learning we talk about is always a learning that is put into practice. At the same moment of learning, we apply it. To share it and apply it is what makes it a living learning. This is not an education to make individuals better in their individual jobs and careers – it is with the people." (Figlan, Mavuso, Ngema, Nsibande, Sibisi & Zikode, 2009, p. 48). In Neocosmos' view (2011), it is not surprising that Abahlali has experienced the full force of a repressive state within 'uncivil society', as it refuses to kowtow to 'the victimhood of human rights discourse'. It has stressed its self-organisation, internal democracy and an axiom of equality. Its alternative politics has resulted in ongoing police brutality, a campaign of vilification and attack by the local state.

Currently, many social action groups engage in 'direct action' and run education sessions as part of campaigns: this is education for social mobilization and usually issue-based education. Their purpose is usually to address an immediate short-term issue that has arisen within specific communities or constituencies, for example, 'The Right2Know'. The message is generally straight-forward, unambiguous. The education is an integral component of mobilization and often does not involve a deeper study of the underlying causes of current issues being addressed. The image that popular education for mobilisation conjures is that of a loud-hailer: calling people to join the struggle. The hope that sustains action is firstly, winning, and secondly, broader changes that may flow from victory and collective confidence.

Other NGOs, such as the Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) and Workers' World Media Productions (WWMP) mobilise popular education to keep a radical vision alive. In 1999, the Khanya Annual Winter School was launched, to assist social movements, communities and labour in responding to globalization, including equipping activists with theoretical and organisational skills. Similarly, the International Labour Resource and Information Group (ILRIG) started an annual Globalisation School in 2002, which aims to build strong working class organisation to develop alternatives to the neo-liberal agenda. COPAC aspires to build 'a cooperative movement in South Africa and promoting alternatives to capitalism that meet the needs of workers and the poor'. COPAC's (2015) vision is "Building human solidarity to sustain life", based on values and principles counter to the logic of the market, such as solidarity, sharing, mutual care, democratic control, collective agency, creativity, and environmental conservation (interview, 02/10/2013). Similarly, in its counter-hegemonic practices, the Community Monitors School links education and research to building community organisation/organizing and to community action in order to achieve socio-economic and environmental justice

for communities affected by profit-making corporations. The intention of building organisation and organising is partly a response to the lack of strong working class organisation post-1994, especially in rural areas, and to the dominance of hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of organization. Community Monitors attempts to build an alternative idea of organisation/organising, which focuses on activity (not structure), continuous learning and develops the confidence, creativities and potentialities of all involved (interview, 01/10/2013). An organisation such as Gender at Work (<http://www.genderatwork.org/OurWork/OurApproach/GWFramework>) utilizes a holistic body, mind, spirit focus. Purpose and process (the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the work) are closely inter-related. This includes investigating and challenging the patriarchal binaries of mind vs. body, private vs. public, nature vs. man. Underlying the work is an analysis of common assumptions – particularly with regard to the quality of daily interactions / relationships, building egalitarian relations in the present. It is important to note that whilst some NGOs are cultivating popular education pedagogy, and connecting their work to struggles on the ground, the NGO form of organisation is very different to organisations of mass struggle in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the current context, are not accountable to mass democratic movements. Thus there are limitations to democratic possibilities, and at times, NGOs can shift into vanguardist, authoritarian approaches.

Within different political orientations or trends, popular education continues to be part of building alternatives. Critical to these practices is building ethical relations and a particular sensibility towards the world which guides practices in varying contexts and conditions of struggle. Popular educators carry an aspiration to build ethical relations in the present, regardless of the context. As a children’s rights activist/educator (16/05/2014) said, “It is not enough to speak about the values that underpin an alternative society. A popular educator must be a living example of the new socialist person through even the smallest everyday interactions.” It is work that deals with our whole beings and our different life journeys. A feminist educator (28/04/2014) said, “It’s not a small matter to work with people’s sense of well-being and their sense of dignity and respecting themselves. And different people will be at different stages along the trail.” She describes popular education as allowing and encouraging people to bring their whole selves into spaces – encouraging people to participate as fully as they can, with their heads, hearts and their hands, in whatever contexts and situations people find themselves. Often it is about disrupting spaces to make them more heartfelt, more equal and interactive, more playful and creative: “It’s encouragement of the dignity and respect that comes with the challenging of the different hierarchies of power within a given context. And it might look very different and you might have very different opportunities at different times.”

Popular educators push for this in a variety of spaces – the taxi, train, community meeting, trade union, social movement, university meeting etc. People and organisations are currently struggling for these spaces in the multiple forums and fields they occupy from the worker, feminist educator/activist calling out patriarchy in her organization, to the community

activist building solidarity against gender-based violence in her community, to the popular educator who keeps asking why and so what, encouraging critical consciousness. An educator activist interacts with the others by encouraging, probing, pushing and expanding people's horizons:

A sensibility; it's a way of being in the world ... we are all living in extreme – well, some people in much more constrained circumstances than others, so how do I analyse? If I'm in a relationship with someone who's beating me up, what do I do about that? – as micro as that might be or in an organisation like a university. People may be becoming authoritarian so what am I going to do about it? How do we analyse processes? It's about a sensibility, which encourages the striving for social justice together with others. My liberation is tied into the liberation of others – I am invested personally and politically. (Feminist educator, 28/04/2014)

Public protest is at a high level in South Africa. During the 2004/5 financial year about 6000 protests were officially recorded and in 2009 the number was reported to be 10 times higher than in 2004 (Duncan 2016). As Neocosmos (2011) reports, the politics of these protests are often about community interests (rights and 'service delivery') and many are led by ANC members, so they rarely adhere to an axiom of political equality. They have been described as being like 'fireworks displays' – they make a lot of noise and catch attention, but do not necessarily focus on building organisation and using dialectical pedagogy to understand the underlying causes of the problems and to create visions for alternative futures.

Student activism reignited across the country in 2015 and morphed into the #FeesMustFall movement and the related #OutsourcingMustFall/#EndOutsourcing of workers on university campuses. There has been a great deal written in the popular and academic press (see for example Booysen, 2016) about these movements as they continue. The sources of the movements are similar to those described by Hart (2013) at local government level; they arise from systemic contradictions whereby students and workers are increasingly forced to carry the burden of reduced funding from the state, as higher education is seen as 'a private good'. The South African tertiary education system has followed international processes of commodification of knowledge and privatization of the public sector, instituting the "market university". In an extremely polarized society, access to, and more especially, graduation rates in tertiary education are very low for the majority of the black population. Inequality is further entrenched in university employment relations through the exploitation of outsourced workers (Luckett & Pontarelli, 2016).

The social movement learning and popular education strategies that fuel the student and worker protests are still to be studied, but it is clear that the social movements have influenced discussions in the broader society about funding and purposes of education in general, including higher education. Within the movements, amongst participants, there are a number of approaches used,

some more democratic and inclusive than others. Against authoritarian and patriarchal practices, attempts were made, particularly in situations of university occupations, to deepen democratic and pedagogical processes. Fanon's writings, with varied interpretations, have been widely referenced and pedagogical spaces have at times been nurtured where the theory and practice of 'decolonized education' has been a key focus. Solidarity across divisions was built, the most significant being between students and workers (which has existed previously but to a more limited extent).

One worker leader at the Witswatersrand University reflected on the process of coming together and combination of theory and action, "We learned that we have to join forces. When we are united we are strong. And we also have to have lots of meetings so we can have proper discussions about our struggles and how to come together to find common goals and solutions. We also took action." When asked to reflect on how she envisages an ideal university, she responded, "It is a place where we are free. Where all the workers and the students are free. I like what is happening now with all the struggles that have brought us together. It is not like before, when we just used to walk past each other ... It is whereby we know each other as the university community. We communicate. We get together, not only when we are protesting. We should be able to get together ... We also want to be able to get an education, not just be staff or workers. We want to be able to do all things." (Luckett & Mzobe, 2016, p. 97-98). This searching for community and the full expression of one's potentialities and humanity extends beyond the perimetres of the university, building hope for a different future. In the coming months it will be important to see if solidarity is built beyond the borders of the university, drawing on lessons from the Black Community Programmes of the BCM, whereby students learnt the necessity of participatory practices and "working with, not for people" in black communities (Hadfield, 2016).

Conclusion

By bringing to the fore histories of struggle and practices of radical education we are able to reconnect past practices with the present, strengthening the hope in the present for the future. This paper has highlighted the rich history of popular education in South Africa, as well as its rootedness in the socio-political context. It has noted that popular education is shaped by the ebbs and flows of history and political struggle. However, popular education cannot be reduced to its context. This paper has tried to show moments and practices in which popular education initiatives push against and beyond the present. As such, whilst many argue that there has been a demise in popular education since 1994, this paper demonstrates that popular education continues to exist in the cracks and crevices, in the search for the 'not yet'. A focus on imagination, imagining beyond and the hope in the cracks, serves as an 'antidote to alienation and cynicism'; it offers 'an affirmation of life, a reawakening of the human spirit and of collective goodwill' (Mackinnon, 2004, p. viii). We cannot simply forget and escape what is, we can only consciously and willfully go beyond.

As a renewed workers' and student movement is regrouping and growing in response to the ANC's neo-liberal economic policies, the Marikana massacre, continued structural racism and destruction of the planet, popular education in South Africa can and must play a role, in contributing to building this movement, imagining and naming an-other world. (Von Kotze & Walters, 2017) This is a long-term commitment. As a worker educator (15/04/2014) stated, the solution lies "in a collective solution ... allowing people to see things differently, to imagine a different future". This requires boldness in naming the enemy and openness in searching for a collective, common vision. On-going processes of democratic and dialectical pedagogy and organising are integral to these processes. Looking to the past and the flashes of hope that pierce through homogenous capitalist time, we do not have to start from scratch: "There is a legacy which has not yet become, tied to struggle for a future which has not yet become. Millions of ordinary workers collectively laid the basis for that legacy, made that hope possible by doing what yesterday had seemed impossible. In that fact is surely the core of the hope of the future." (Grossman, 2000)

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Teaching Across Borders

Jeffrey W. Rubin and Emma Sokoloff-Rubin

Introduction (Jeff)

In 2004, my daughter Emma and I traveled to Ibiraiaras, Brazil, with an unconventional goal: Design a curriculum about a rural women's movement that would teach high school students in the US about citizenship and democracy. Over the past twelve years, we have crossed international borders and borders between different kinds of pedagogical practice. As we used our ethnographic research to challenge the direction knowledge usually takes in communities in Brazil and the United States, we found our scholarship transformed as well. We no longer see a clear border between being a father-daughter team and scholarly researchers, writing for middle school students and for peers, or grappling with curricular development and academic theorizing.

This project began when our family lived in the southern Brazilian city of Porto Alegre for a year so I could research social movements that had been transforming the country. When we returned to the U.S., Emma, then thirteen, began lobbying to go back to Brazil for another extended stay. We came up with an idea for a project: Emma and I would videotape interviews with women in the movement (originally the Movement of Rural Women Workers, now called the Movement of Peasant Women), and then she would teach a class about the movement in her school. We went ahead with this plan and spent a month of the summer of 2004 in the small rural town of Ibiraiaras, attending movement meetings and interviewing women in their homes. The next academic year, Emma taught a course about Brazilian social movements, incorporating our videotaped interviews into lessons on citizenship and social change. Over the next two years, we turned Emma's course into a curriculum and presented it to teachers in workshops at universities across the US.

Then we brought the curriculum back to the women in the women's movement. In church basements, union halls, and the kitchens of small rural houses, we presented the curriculum through photos and videos from Emma's class and from our workshops with teachers. We filmed each step of the project so we could continue to bring our research and teaching experiences back and forth between Brazil and the United States. These border-crossings informed our understanding of the movement and of ourselves.

One: the women's movement (Emma)

In 1986, a group of young women in the southern Brazilian countryside defied their fathers and started the Movement of Rural Women Workers (MMTR). Brazil's military dictatorship had just ended, and for the first time in two decades, citizens could protest without the ever-present risk of violent

repression and torture. Young women with fourth and fifth grade educations learned to lead in the MMTR, inspiring their neighbors to join protests and fending off policemen at critical moments. They mobilized tens of thousands of women to march on the national capital, Brasilia, to demand economic and political rights. And closer to home, they took over the state legislature, streaming onto the Senate floor and camping out there until their elected representatives passed laws guaranteeing maternity leave and pension rights.

Sixteen years later, these same women gathered in a church basement on the outskirts of Ibiraiaras. By now some of them had become union presidents, teachers, and leaders in municipal government, while others balanced work on small farms with participation in the women's movement. As they carried their commitment to their early visions of a different reality for women into new spaces, these leaders found that much of the hardest work of activism occurs after the major days of protest, in battles that take place in public spaces and in women's homes.

The women had achieved spectacular success since they started the movement as teenagers in the mid-1980s. In the church basement in 2002, as my Dad and I listened, they grappled with what to do next. How do you stay an activist and keep coming to meetings, when the person whose mind you need to change isn't the governor, whom you see only at demonstrations in the capital city, but your husband, who sleeps beside you every night? When new legal rights don't translate into changes at home, do you stage demonstrations at the end of your driveway?

We brought these questions to students in U.S. classrooms through portraits of the leaders whose tenacity and openness – and uncertainties – had first captured my attention as a teenager. Here are two examples:

Gessi

In 2001, after leading the women's movement for fifteen years, Gessi Bonês accepted a position as head of the health department in Ibiraiaras, where she lived with her husband and two young children. Gessi left the women's movement meetings and mobilizations, with their long black plastic tents and communal meals, their protest songs and pageants of rural dreams, for a small empty office in the health clinic. The bureaucrats in city hall were openly hostile, telling her that she had no education and knew only how to protest and make trouble, so what was she doing there?

The question of where to do politics—in the streets or in the institutions or in some mixture of the two—confronts citizens and activists all over Brazil and Latin America today. People who fought to bring down a military dictatorship thirty years ago find themselves able to run for local office and win, or to work in a government department and make actual changes in policy and practice. And since the mid-1990s, the Workers Party, a leftist party committed to combating poverty, has been winning elections, culminating in the victories of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, or Lula, in the 2002 and 2006 Brazilian presidential

racess, and of Dilma Rousseff in 2010 and 2014.

But what can come of such within-the-system maneuvering, when the odds are still against significant reform? Gessi's administration lost the elections in 2004, and she discovered that the hard work of incremental change in the health department can be undone with by the next municipal government. Something about working in government had grabbed Gessi, however, and she went on to win an elected position as an advocate for children in Ibiraiaras. In contrast, many leaders of the women's movement, who opposed Gessi's decision to join the health department, argue that investing in incremental reform means limiting yourself from the beginning, and that when Gessi joined the government, she took on the task of governing at the expense of truly reforming the world.

Mônica

When we asked Mônica Marchesini what she thinks about while she milks the cows on her farm, she answered that she thinks about the contribution it makes to the family economy—it provides milk for the children to drink and, after her morning work, cream and cheese to sell. Mônica doesn't lead a union or a health department; she makes all her own food and travels ten miles from her farm into town three times a week to work with the women's movement. The ideas and hopes that come out of her activism often stand in stark contrast to the realities of her everyday life.

Showing us around her kitchen, Mônica explained that both men and women eat meals and track dirt into the house, so they should clean up together. She said that boys and girls should both do household chores, then added that she can't wait for her daughter Milena to grow up, because then she'll have someone to help her around the house. Mônica told us that she can work until late into the night, doing dishes and washing clothes, because women have more stamina than men. Her husband Joacir, she explained, likes to watch TV, and to corroborate, he winked at us and kicked his feet up onto the coffee table.

Mônica's statements don't line up, I remember thinking. She's contradicting herself. She just said that both men and women eat meals and track dirt into the house, so they should clean up together, but Joacir's place is on the couch. She said she works through the evening, but that her husband is tired, so he needs to watch TV. She said that she can't wait for her daughter to get older so there's someone to help, even though she has three sons and believes that boys should help too.

Watching Mônica wash dishes and talk about her family, it struck me that the contradictory things she was saying were deeply true. She was saying one thing and doing another, but she wasn't being hypocritical. Mônica lives in this space of contradiction. This is perhaps what the women's movement in Ibiraiaras asks women most persistently to do: believe in a vision of a different world while living immersed in the reality of this one. We've come to call what Mônica does "holding paradox:" holding the paradox of what her life is against what she

hopes it might become.

Two: creating the curriculum (Emma)

When Dad and I first decided to make a curriculum about the women's movement, we didn't know if it would work. To suggest that American students have something in common with, and something to learn from, the efforts of women in Brazil is to go against the direction knowledge usually takes. It's more common to teach about developing countries through the lens of U.S. foreign policy, or to teach about the civil rights movement or early women's suffrage movement as part of a narrative of improvement that locates injustice solidly in the past. We wanted to use examples of Brazilian social movements to teach students about citizenship and democracy.

The summer before my sophomore year of high school, Dad and I spent a month in Ibiraiaras interviewing leaders of the women's movement. The curriculum began to take shape the following year, when I taught an elective course to middle school students at my school. Week-by-week, watching my students' reactions and bouncing ideas off my dad, I put together a series of lesson plans. Each lesson connected examples of Brazilian social movements to social issues and political activism in the US. For example, my students read letters Brazilian activists wrote to President Lula, then wrote letters of their own. Some wrote to President Bush, others to their mayors or to the principal of the school. They debated whether landless workers should be allowed to take over idle land, and, in a parallel, fictional debate that brought the issue closer to home, whether Americans with third homes should be obligated to allow victims of Hurricane Katrina to move in. The names of MMTR activists became common terms in our classroom, as students watched video clips of the women speaking and read early drafts of the profiles I later brought back to Ibiraiaras with me.

"I don't know if I would be that brave," a sixth-grader said after hearing Gessi's story of facing dogs and guns. Dad and I were teaching an afternoon workshop on the women's movement at the elementary school I had attended. In the video, Gessi remembers how "...we started moving and the dogs and policemen started to walk backwards, walk backwards, and we kept walking forwards."

The lessons of our curriculum are open-ended. We present compelling but incomplete representations of political activism—video, music, a written excerpt from an interview—and invite students to make sense of what they are seeing and to relate that back to their own communities. We took a similar approach to workshops we ran for teachers the following year, in which we asked teachers to take on the role of students and participate in lessons they could later teach. Teach for America Teachers in Miami related the violence and deprivation in Brazilian favelas to the poor African-American neighborhoods in which they taught, where fifth graders had trouble reading and new highways destroyed local economies. Teachers in North Carolina told us that materials on countries in the Global South always look at huge problems like hunger, ethnic killing, or

environmental destruction, with local people presented only as suffering victims. In contrast, our curriculum shows ordinary Brazilians actively solving problems in their communities.

Teachers in San Diego saw their own stories and those of their female students in the interviews with women's movement activists like Mônica. After reading an interview with Elenice, a former movement leader whose father forced her to quit school after eighth grade, a Latina teacher in San Diego said that she had won a full scholarship to UCSD, but her mother refused to let her go to college. "If you do that," her mother said, "no man will ever marry you." The young woman turned down the scholarship, then, years later, paid her own way through college.

Three: bringing our curriculum back (Jeff)

In the summer of 2007, we brought our curriculum back to the women in Ibiraiaras to show them what we had done with their stories. We presented our work in the same kitchens and union halls where we had first learned about their organizing and ideas. At home, we had gathered together everything we could find related to the curriculum, so we arrived with a binder overflowing with lesson plans, letters to the women from students who had taken the course, photos of workshops we'd run for teachers, and videos of classes.

Many of the women thought the curriculum was subversive, in its aim of exposing students to activism. They also saw how much work had gone into it: the interconnected tasks of coming up with ideas, translating them into lessons, learning from everyone you can get to talk to you, and transforming all of that into a physical product, with tabs and a binder, unit outlines and lesson plans, so that you can place it in someone's hands, and they can use it to teach.

Because the women in the women's movement were organizers, and this is what they do—gather and present information effectively, using stories and ideas and song to move people—they recognized this aspect of their work in our own. "It's a concrete thing you've done," Rosane Dalsoglio said in the union hall in Sananduva, "showing something that really happened. You're taking to the United States concrete and practical experiences that we created here."

The women we'd met over the years gathered around our laptop, watching videos of themselves that we used in our lessons. Their responses reminded us that we were also bringing back representations of a history that had been forged in struggle, with little time for documentation. After Emma and I walked the women through the materials we had brought, the youngest in the group leaned forward, opening her hands. "My God, I also lived this," she told the group. "But we didn't save anything . . . a photo here, a photo there, like souvenirs."

In one of the videos we brought to Ibiraiaras with us, we use segments of our interviews with the women to get sixth graders in Massachusetts talking about what it means to form a movement. At the end of the lesson, a student who had

barely spoken in class all year summed up the lively discussion. The student spoke softly and slowly, much as the women in Ibiraiaras might speak at a meeting, and her teacher leaned in from the back of the room to hear. “Each woman,” the student said, bringing her hands from beneath her desk and folding them neatly on its surface, “is motivated by one thing, but they all connect to women’s rights. Gessi’s is being a leader and getting women’s rights. Gessi wants rights, but she also wants to help her family. Elenice, she wants an education, and she wants rights. And it all combines together, and if all women do that, they’re probably going to get rights, if they keep working at it. They can’t give up.”

We taught the same lesson we had taught in Northampton, twenty minutes from our house, to students in Ibiraiaras. To our surprise, the lessons worked, eliciting many of the same responses, even though this was a lesson about women who lived around the corner, whose history had taken place in this very location—but whose lives and activism were never spoken about in the schools.

Four: new methodologies and new insights (Jeff’s voice)

In the process of analyzing and teaching about the women’s movement, Emma and I came to approach the task of scholarly research in new ways. This led us to write a book in two voices about the women’s movement, bringing into our scholarship concepts developed in workshops with high school teachers and discussions with rural women as they commented on our curriculum.

Early on in our collaboration, the idea had been that Emma would “translate” me and make my ideas accessible to a wider audience. At the first meeting we attended in Ibiraiaras, the kick-off for the municipal election campaign, Emma and I noticed very different things. Emma saw who sat where in the room and how Gessi crossed and re-crossed the boundaries between men and women with ease. She noticed who spoke with authority and with what gestures, while I was attentive to speeches and to the political implications of what each person said. I knew how to analyze the words, while Emma could sense the relationships playing out in the room.

When we spoke about this moment in my Latin American History class at Boston University a couple of years later, one young woman shouted from the back of the room, “That’s because you’re a guy and she’s a girl.” The class laughed, surprised by her audacity and apparent accuracy. The truth was more complicated. We were father and daughter, professor and student, seasoned ethnographer and young traveler. Eight years later, however, when we were completing our book, the collaboration between Emma and me was no longer about high school teaching or academic scholarship as separate activities, and we have ceased noticing different kinds of detail in predictable ways. Often we observe the same things, holding up words or fleeting images to sharp analysis or uncertain insight. We argue stubbornly and finish each other’s sentences, improvise and communicate on shifting planes.

Ideas that Emma and I developed to make ethnographic material accessible for secondary school students have become the theoretical underpinnings of our scholarly analysis. For example, we first used the idea of paradox to capture a central characteristic of each woman about whom we wrote, so she could represent one aspect of the women's movement to students. This worked for teaching, but then paradox went further for us, pressed in new directions by new interlocutors. We realized that the paradoxes we identified were lived as tensions, bringing personal and collective history into the present, and these acute discomforts pressed women to act. Paradoxes, a graduate student colleague observed to me, gave movement to movements, pressed them to bring the future into being as they moved through time. And the idea of paradox presented the notion of "holding" as well, the holding of paradox that gives depth to musical performance, an idea suggested to us by Emma's clarinet teacher, but also makes it hard for an individual to stay in a movement, balancing irresolvable tensions, and hard for a movement itself to hold many different kinds of people.

In the course of presenting our curriculum to secondary school teachers, we learned about graduate level instruction as well. When we taught a workshop for sixth grade social studies teachers at Duke, we invited Wendy Wolford, then a professor in the Department of Geography at UNC and an expert on the MST, to join us and say a bit about the history of the struggle for land in Brazil. When Wendy saw the way we used interview clips of Brazilian women speaking to us about their activism to teach about the women's movement in our lessons, it set off a light bulb in her head. "I do interviews all the time," she told us, "but I've never thought of using them in my classes." The following semester, Wendy designed a methodology course for graduate students, "Ethnographies of Globalization," for which she asked scholars of different parts of the world to submit an interview transcript, a description of the context in which the interview took place, and a published article that resulted from the interview.

Emma and I gained the insights we did into the politics of women's activism because she accompanied me as a co-researcher and because we focused our ethnographic work on creating curricular materials for secondary school students. In Ibiraiaras, we were performing an alternative family relationship in front of women who defined their adulthood and their political activism by having defied their fathers. In turn, women responded to our relationship and to Emma in explaining their political and personal actions.

One evening, Emma asked Ivone (Gessi's sister) and her partner Vania what they thought when I first arrived, a male researcher from the States wanting to study a women's movement. Emma joked that maybe I should leave the room so they could tell the truth. I laughed and walked out the door. Research isn't usually done in teams, and being there together let us ask questions about each other that we couldn't have asked about ourselves. This time, with Ivone and Vania, it was late and cold and I stayed outside for only a moment. But once she started thinking, Vania finished her story with me in the room. She spoke about not knowing at first whether to trust me, if I would indeed come back more than

once and if she would want to have me around.

In the course of twelve years, Emma and I have taken our work back and forth to the women in the MMTR, to secondary school and university classrooms in Brazil and the United States, and to family members and friends, engaging in dialogue that extends outward from the university both transnationally and locally. What Emma and I learned grew out of the observations of women and men, teachers and students in all of these locations, talking to us and each other.

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¡Poder Popular de verdad! Etnografía del movimiento contra la construcción de una cárcel en Cariaco (Municipio Ribero, Estado Sucre, Venezuela)

Stefano Boni

Resumen

El artículo ilustra como una acción colectiva directa, llevada a cabo entre marzo y octubre de 2013, fue construida y consolidada para bloquear la construcción de una cárcel en Cariaco, Municipio Ribero, Estado Sucre, Venezuela. En la introducción se presenta el concepto de “Poder Popular”, observando que existen varias interpretaciones del mismo, con distintas interfaces, una instituida (formal, oficial) y la otra instituyente (informal, espontánea), cuyas lógicas muy frecuentemente entran en conflicto. En la primera parte se describen el comienzo, la consolidación y el éxito de un movimiento que logró acortar identidades partidistas contenciosas y activar múltiples sectores sociales en un proceso de toma de decisiones horizontal, participativo y transparente. Seguidamente se identifican los elementos determinantes para el éxito del movimiento, entre los cuales resaltan: la participación de base colectiva, el recurso a Internet, la unidad de intención, las formas diversas de protesta y, finalmente, el bloqueo decisivo y prolongado de la carretera nacional. En la conclusión se reflexiona sobre algunas lecciones que pueden ser aprendidas de la acción colectiva directa realizada por los habitantes de Cariaco.

Palabras clave: Acción colectiva directa, Venezuela, etnografía, Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, poder popular

Introducción

“Poder Popular” es un concepto clave en las políticas del gobierno de Hugo Chávez Frías (1998-2012) para la construcción del “Socialismo del siglo XXI”. Marcello Colussi (2007) lo define de la siguiente manera:

El poder popular es el ejercicio efectivo, a través de la organización y la participación real, de la amplia mayoría de un pueblo en la decisión de los asuntos básicos que le conciernen. El poder popular es más, infinitamente más que la atención de los problemas puntuales de una comunidad acotada, el alumbrado público o el adoquinado de un barrio, la resolución de un problema específico del transporte colectivo de un sector urbano, o la instalación del agua potable o la edificación de una escuela en una comunidad rural. El poder popular es la democracia real, directa, efectiva, participativa del pueblo soberano, no sólo

para atender problemas prácticos puntuales sino para definir y controlar la implementación de políticas macro a nivel nacional, e incluso internacional.¹

La definición, contenida en el Artículo 2 de la Ley Orgánica del Poder Popular (2010), es la siguiente:

El Poder Popular es el ejercicio pleno de la soberanía por parte del pueblo en lo político, económico, social, cultural, ambiental, internacional, y en todo ámbito del desenvolvimiento y desarrollo de la sociedad, a través de sus diversas y disímiles formas de organización, que edifican el estado comunal.²

La misma ley decreta “[...] *la participación de las comunidades organizadas, a través de sus voceros o voceras, en las distintas actividades del proceso de ordenación y gestión del territorio* [...]” (Artículo 20). El marco legal para el desarrollo de un poder “autogestionario” es fuerte. Los Artículos 25 y 26 de la ley ponen igual dignidad en las instituciones estatales y en las organizaciones sociales desde abajo.

El Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, conforme a las iniciativas de desarrollo y consolidación originadas desde el Poder Popular, planificará, articulará y coordinará acciones conjuntas con las organizaciones sociales, las comunidades organizadas [...] Las relaciones del Estado y el Poder Popular se rigen por los principios de igualdad, integridad territorial, cooperación, solidaridad, concurrencia y corresponsabilidad, en el marco del sistema federal descentralizado consagrados en la Constitución de la República.

La ley reconoce la importancia de la autogestión, pero canaliza el poder popular en formas legales e institucionales. La implementación del poder popular en la Venezuela chavista ha tomado la forma de los Consejos Comunales (2009)³ y procesos democráticos en la planificación pública (2010).⁴ Los movimientos sociales tienen un rol bastante marginal en la ley. Otro punto crítico del marco legal es la caracterización del “Poder Popular” como “socialista” cuando buena parte de la sociedad venezolana (la que vota para la oposición y la que no vota) no se identifica en esta colocación política (Smilde 2009; García-Guadilla y

¹ www.aporrea.org/poderpopular/a41978.

² Ley Orgánica del Poder Popular, Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social

³ Ley Orgánica de los Consejos Comunales, Ley Orgánica de las Comunas, Ministerio del Poder Popular para las Comunas y Protección Social.

⁴ Ley Orgánica de Planificación Pública y Popular, Ley Orgánica de Contraloría Social; Ley Orgánica del Consejo Federal los Consejos Comunales.

Mallen 2013; Briceño 2014; López Maya 2014: 286-288).

Uno de los logros más importante del chavismo fue fomentar la participación popular en los distintos sectores sociales para que conozcan y defiendan sus derechos. Más aún, no siempre las instituciones oficialistas cumplen con los fundamentos ideológicos y legales del chavismo. Existen, entonces, dos concepciones del “Poder Popular”: la primera formal, promovida por el gobierno bolivariano, aunque controlada y canalizada en formas instituidas; y una segunda, que se evoca en el título llamándola “Poder Popular de Verdad”, que en Venezuela tiene profundas raíces no vinculadas necesariamente al chavismo. Esta última toma la forma de luchas inclusivas, populares, libres de las limitaciones de los partidos políticos, alimentadas por la participación comunitaria transversal, que se activa espontáneamente en instancias decididas no por las instituciones, si no por los ciudadanos como expresión de una “soberanía popular subordinada” (Nugent 1998: 28; cfr. López Maya y Lander 2011).

¿Qué pasa, cuando no hay una coordinación armónica entre un barrio y las instituciones? ¿Qué pasa, cuando la voluntad de los entes gubernamentales no coincide con el “Poder Popular”? Normalmente las instituciones pasan por encima de la voluntad de los ciudadanos residentes, cuando proyectos importantes son aprobados desde arriba. Una tensión de este tipo ocurrió en Cariaco para determinar el sitio para la construcción de un “Centro para procesados”.⁵

La organización de la lucha: unir la comunidad

Cariaco, capital del Municipio Ribero, es un pueblo de 65.000 personas en el Estado Sucre, Oriente de Venezuela. Tiene una larga trayectoria de organización y lucha popular aumentada por la reacción a un tremendo terremoto que devastó la ciudad en 1997. Algunos Cariaqueños, en Marzo de 2013, oyeron que el municipio seleccionado para poner el “Centro para procesados” en Sucre, habría sido Ribero, siendo Cariaco su capital. La previsión de gasto es de 47 mil millones de Bolívares. La noticia comenzó a ser bosquejada por programas locales de radio, pero el alcalde – al principio – negó el asunto.

A final de agosto y en los primeros días de septiembre 2013, una encargada del INTI (Instituto Nacional de Tierras), asesora de seguridad del gobernador del Estado Sucre, llamó a una reunión con los consejos comunales para promover el centro, prometiendo empleo y pidiendo lealtad al Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV).⁶ Según testigos, en una reunión preguntó: “¿Quién votó el 7

⁵ <http://www.mppsp.gob.ve/>, Fortaleciendo el sistema penitenciario MPPSP – FONEP construyen los nuevos centros para procesados y procesadas en el país.

⁶ Los consejos comunales son una forma de organización de la comunidad, desarrollada en el marco de la revolución bolivariana donde el mismo pueblo es quien formula, maneja fondos, ejecuta, controla y evalúa las políticas públicas poniendo en práctica las decisiones adoptadas por la comunidad.

de Octubre para el presidente Chávez?”. Luego afirmó, “pues, también votaron para la obra del presidente, y esta es una obra del presidente”; en otra ocasión dijo: "Ahora vuestras amas de casa pueden vivir mejor, porque pueden vender diez, quince cajas de cerveza". Los militantes chavistas que se opusieron a la construcción de la cárcel fueron acusados de apoyar a la oposición y su misma afiliación al PSUV fue cuestionada. El PSUV controla todos los niveles gubernamentales (ministerio, gobernación, alcaldía) involucrados en el asunto. En los primeros días de septiembre comenzaron los movimientos de maquinarias y los Cariaqueños descubrieron el sitio seleccionado por el Ministerio del Poder Popular para el Servicio Penitenciario (MPPSP) para la construcción. Se trataba de un área de 12 hectáreas a 2 Km. del centro de la población, en una zona muy conocida porque forma parte del sistema de riego de Cariaco, uno de los más grandes de Venezuela.

La principal dificultad para el movimiento que se estaba formando fue vencer las dudas de la gente: hasta el momento, nadie le había ganado una pelea al gobierno y además había miedo por la previsible represión. Pero la reacción de muchos militantes del PSUV, que todavía formaban la mayoría de los habitantes de Cariaco, fue de rechazo contra el proyecto. La cámara de comercio y un ex-alcalde que milita en la oposición, llamaron a una asamblea general, para el 9 de septiembre de 2013, en los hogares parroquiales, sin darle alguna connotación partidista. Asistieron representantes de la iglesia católica – un sacerdote introdujo la asamblea con una intervención –, también estuvieron representantes de la iglesia evangélica, la defensora del pueblo y setecientos cincuenta ciudadanos. Entre ellos, estuvieron los cuatro aspirantes a la alcaldía en las elecciones municipales programadas para el 8 de diciembre 2013: todos hablaron en contra de la construcción de la cárcel. Se quiso recoger las opiniones de todos, organizando el derecho de palabra, con intervenciones de 3 minutos cada uno: la asamblea duró cuatro horas, con más de 60 intervenciones, en mayoría de mujeres. Se votaron las propuestas, una a una, al final de la asamblea. El rechazo a la obra fue evidente. Se decidió formar el "Comité para la no construcción de la cárcel en Cariaco".

Los argumentos contra la ubicación de la cárcel convencieron a la gran mayoría:

- a) El sitio seleccionado está muy cerca del pueblo: los motines y los desórdenes previsibles afectarán directamente a la población. Una cárcel, además, genera inseguridad y tráfico de armas y droga.
- b) La zona seleccionada tiene vocación agrícola, ubicada en el corazón del sistema de riego de Cariaco.
- c) Queda en una vía de acceso turístico, hacia las playas del golfo de la península de Araya y de la isla de Margarita.
- d) Está cerca de la Universidad Politécnica Territorial Clodosbaldo Russián, con una matrícula mayor a 2500 estudiantes.
- e) El municipio no cuenta con las instituciones necesarias para alojar una

cárcel (fiscalías y tribunales penales, policía, guardia nacional, hospitales).

Además, la ocultación del proyecto y la falta de consultación crearon irritación difusa y fortalecerán la movilización. Nombrar la obra como "centro de procesados" es considerado un sutil engaño: el movimiento social siempre hablará de cárcel. El Comité contra la cárcel no rechazaba la construcción sino los terrenos escogidos por el Gobierno, debido al impacto ecológico, social y económico que generaría: pedía una consultación popular para determinar el sitio más apropiado lejos de los centros urbanos, pero cerca de un hospital, de circuitos judiciales y de instancias policiales. El Comité ayudó a escoger un sitio alternativo que tenía estas características en el Edo Sucre.

Se decidió empezar la lucha siguiendo el camino legal. El 13 de septiembre, el Comité realizó un encuentro sin éxito con el gobernador quién acusó al Comité de incoherencia por aceptar la construcción de la cárcel excepto en su propio municipio y de asumir una posición electoral y política contra el gobierno. Para su sorpresa, los voceros de las más importantes organizaciones de base del PSUV (el presidente PSUV en el municipio, el jefe del sindicato transportista del PSUV, presidente de estudiantes del PSUV, el secretario juvenil del PSUV, concejales del PSUV) estuvieron presentes y apoyaron al Comité. El 27 de septiembre de 2013 el Comité pidió un derecho de palabra ante al Concejo Legislativo Estatal. Se presentó una denuncia a la fiscalía y al Ministerio del Poder Popular para el ambiente acerca de la deforestación sin permiso y se pidió un estudio de impacto ambiental. Se pidió ver el proyecto y el permiso de la ingeniería municipal para la construcción. Se solicitó al Consejo Municipal y al alcalde una declaración para paralizar la obra. El Consejo Municipal, con mayoría del PSUV, el 11 de septiembre exhortó, por decisión unánime, a las autoridades competentes a buscar un sitio más adecuado para la construcción.

Considerando que el alcalde no cumplió, se organizó una vigilia, animada con música, poesía, oraciones, cantos y teatro, para seguir solicitando al Alcalde la paralización de la obra. También se solicitó un referéndum consultivo al Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE) – ente que en Venezuela rige todos los procesos electorales – sin éxito. Se empezó una masiva recolección de firmas para enviar al MPPSP. Los Cariaqueños, que residen en Caracas – capital del País – se movilizaron y organizaron una primera protesta, el 12 de septiembre de 2013, frente al MPPSP: una delegación fue recibida para una audiencia con el equipo de la ministra mientras ciento cincuenta personas con pancartas bloqueaban la calle. En una segunda audiencia, a la presencia de la ministro, llevaron cartas de consejos comunales, estudiantes, comerciantes, cañicultores, la resolución del Concejo Municipal y las firmas de los ciudadanos todo, lamentablemente, sin éxito. La protesta llegó a la Asamblea Nacional.

Estas acciones fueron promovidas por un liderazgo compartido entre muchas cabezas, aunque dos ex-alcaldes (uno militante del PSUV y otro de la oposición) y el presidente de la cámara de comercio fueron los voceros principales. Muchos sectores del PSUV no quisieron poner la cara por el miedo a las consecuencias

políticas, pero participaron activamente, en otros aspectos de la protesta. Por ejemplo, la comunidad universitaria, que en su mayoría milita en el PSUV, recogió más de trescientas firmas para enviar al MPPSP.

Comenzó un trabajo meticuloso para informar sobre la obra y explicar los argumentos contrarios a los varios sectores sociales, económicos – productores, promotores turísticos y comerciantes – gremiales, estudiantiles y religiosos. Se contactó con los distintos sectores de Cariaco, y de los pueblos cercanos, a través de voceros que presentaron los argumentos contra la ubicación de la cárcel en las asambleas de ciudadanos: donde participaron miembros de los consejos comunales y de redes de vecinos. Mensajearon los números telefónicos anotados durante las asambleas con el fin de promover la autogestión popular, por ejemplo: *"usted es jefe de este movimiento"*.

El Comité se organizó creando comisiones de trabajo e involucrando cada quien según su actitud, competencias y contactos: la realización de una asamblea semanal, abierta a todos, permitió a quienes estuvieron involucrados coordinar las actividades. En Venezuela las actividades sociales y políticas, frecuentemente, son alimentadas con dinero del Estado; el Comité trabajaba con sus propios recursos, organizando el autofinanciamiento entre los mismos participantes, con trabajo voluntario, equipos, dinero, comida.

Se utilizó el internet para recoger informaciones y para consultar asesores, como el observatorio de prisiones y los defensores de derechos humanos. Los medios de comunicación fueron fundamentales para el respaldo a nivel nacional y para poner presión sobre los entes gubernamentales. Las convocatorias de actividades locales se anunciaron de boca en boca; sin embargo, se utilizó un sitio internet existente, pensado inicialmente para la promoción turística y con dos miles seguidores, volteándolo para sensibilizar e informar sobre la lucha contra la construcción de la cárcel. Las informaciones (fotos, informes, éxitos de reuniones y protestas) se difundieron viralmente a través de las redes sociales con muchas reacciones positivas: felicitaciones al movimiento, preguntas organizativas, ofertas de apoyo. La cárcel de Cariaco fue una de las noticias centrales en periódicos, televisiones, programas radiofónicos al final de septiembre hasta en los primeros días de octubre. En el día más caliente de la lucha, llegó a ser el segundo *"trending topic"* en la red social *"twitter"*.

La confrontación: pacífica y estratégica

Las respuestas de los voceros del PSUV, al creciente consenso logrado por la lucha contra la cárcel, fueron múltiples. Inicialmente – buscando el libre consenso de la gente – se empleó, a través de las empresas contratistas y con remuneración más alta de lo normal, setenta personas del pueblo: una medida efectista, en cuanto ese número de trabajadores sobrepasaba las exigencias del trabajo a realizar. Se ofreció mayores beneficios en materia de servicios – mejorías en las vías agrícolas – y se prometió nuevas inversiones. Además, se presentó a la cárcel como una nueva fuente de trabajo para Ribero (400 trabajos

indirectos y 200 fijos y se habló de la necesidad de contratar: obreros, cocineras, docentes, barberos, enfermeras, chóferes, proveedores). En un segundo momento – tratando de obtener el consenso con métodos menos transparentes – se contrató grupos de jóvenes – definidos “*mala-conducta*” o “*antisociales*” por algunos Cariaqueños – para pintar eslóganes en favor del centro para detenidos. Por otra parte, se detectó la infiltración de miembros de los cuerpos de inteligencia del gobierno, en ropa civil, en la segunda asamblea. Finalmente, se ejerció presión sobre los empleados públicos, docentes y estudiantes para que retiraran su apoyo al Comité.

Sin embargo, la lucha siguió creciendo, gracias a una gran cantidad de pequeños logros. Se organizaron marchas estudiantiles y de moto-taxistas. Se realizó una proyección, utilizando un “*video beam*” en la plaza principal para mostrar experiencias de poblaciones, de otras naciones, que habían tenido éxito en una lucha parecida. Además, la gente más comprometida se negó a colaborar con la obra; por ejemplo, el ferretero y los camioneros rechazaron las ofertas de compra y de trabajo.

Aunque el pueblo se mantuvo unido sobre el objetivo final, aparecieron diferencias sobre el camino para lograrlo. En la asamblea del 9 de septiembre se comenzó a manifestar una tensión entre la directiva del comité, que quería mantener la protesta pacífica, sin prisa y enfrentamientos violentos, esperando el momento más oportuno para una eventual confrontación, y sectores juveniles que querían invadir los terrenos destinados a la construcción de la cárcel y acelerar la lucha. Se buscó la mediación. El 13 de septiembre, se optó para una protesta innovadora, para no perder aliados futuros: no se cerró la vía nacional – como de costumbre en Venezuela en estos casos – ni se quemaron cauchos como querían los sectores más impulsivos. Se realizó una cadena humana, a lo largo de la vía nacional sin interrumpir el tránsito vehicular, con pancartas y anuncios desde las 6 de la mañana, entregando folletos alusivos al rechazo de la obra. En la segunda asamblea se discutió la posibilidad de un paro cívico, para la mañana del 30 de septiembre. A pesar de que los líderes del movimiento estimaban ese llamado apresurado, porque la fecha considerada era demasiado cercana para organizar en manera óptima la movilización y de las diferencias que existían acerca de la duración de la actividad, se logró una mediación y se convocó el paro para la fecha propuesta, con una duración de seis horas: desde las 6 hasta las 12 de la mañana. En la invitación al paro se hizo hincapié en presentar una movilización que:

No tiene ningún tinte partidista ni electoral, es un clamor popular, es una respuesta de todas las fuerzas vivas, sin distingo de ningún tipo, que a una sola voz de pueblo unido, le pide al Gobernador... y al Alcalde... ejercitar su autoridad y escuchar la voz del “soberano” decretando la inmediata paralización de la obra. De no ser así nos reservamos el derecho, como comunidad a realizar próximas acciones, más contundentes...

El paro fue todo un éxito. No hubo clases. El sector transporte, así como las empresas públicas y privadas colaboraron. Las tiendas bajaron las santamarías, hasta el mercado municipal no abrió las puertas. Las calles de Cariaco estuvieron desiertas. Además, los líderes ya habían afinado una estrategia para bloquear la obra. Conocían las canteras donde se podía tomar el relleno necesario para la construcción y sabían dónde tenían que pasar los camiones. Por ello, finalizado el paro cívico, convocaron la población a concentrarse exactamente en ese lugar y no ir hasta el sitio de la cárcel, evitando una confrontación directa, que podía generar violencia. Desde allí salió una marcha participada y jocosa, de cinco mil personas, que terminó en la plaza principal del pueblo con una concentración cultural animada por poesía, música y oraciones. El mismo día, a las once de la noche, los militares convocaron a los líderes de la protesta: los integrantes del Comité pidieron sin éxito que la reunión se realizara en la plaza principal para que todo el mundo pudiera asistir libremente. La mañana del primero de octubre, Cariaco amaneció militarizada: llegaron 700 soldados que ocuparon las entradas y las vías principales.

La victoria

Cuando la comunidad se moviliza los efectos son contundentes. El 6 de octubre, en la madrugada, las empresas contratistas empezaron a cargar material de relleno para el terreno. Un campesino advirtió al Comité. Lograron pasar sólo dos camiones de los primeros veinte previstos. Se alertó por la radio y, también, se corrió la voz entre los vecinos: el pueblo se aprestó para tomar la calle. En diez minutos la vía fue cerrada: los camiones tuvieron que volver atrás. En este punto se decidió arriesgar la lucha: se tomó la carretera nacional. El puente sobre el río Carinicuao es estratégico, porque cierra varias vías y es simbólico, porque es un lugar asociado con los pueblos indígenas originarios. Miles de personas trancaron la vía nacional, desde la mañana hasta las seis de la tarde. Los militares se apostaron realizando una presencia intimidatoria, pero la población los ignoró. El Comité anunció que volverían a bloquear el tránsito cada día, hasta que alguien firmara la orden de paralización de la obra. El día siguiente en Caracas, en alto niveles del gobierno, se decidió la suspensión de la obra. Al mediodía del 7 de octubre la directiva del Comité conoció el éxito de *“La Batalla del Río Carinicuao”*.

Sin embargo, los miembros del PSUV estatal no aceptaron la derrota. El Presidente del Consejo Legislativo llegó al puente a las cinco de la tarde y trajo el decreto emitido por el gobierno con la aprobación de la suspensión de la obra. Quiso hacer un acto político para presentar la paralización como un mérito propio del candidato del PSUV para la alcaldía. Por otra parte, el decreto de paralización no estaba bien redactado y no tenía firmas. La gente se enardeció y lo empujó hasta la plaza principal y allí lo acorraló y estuvo a punto de lincharlo. Según testigos, bajo presiones y golpes llamó al gobernador, diciéndole: "Yo estoy pagando lo que usted hizo. Quítate de tu cabeza que este centro va a ser en este pueblo. Estos negros están muy calientes". El 9 de octubre, Cariaco celebró

con una vigilia, actos culturales y oraciones que no tendrá cárcel.

Desde aquel momento, la gente planteó mantener viva la organización del Comité para conseguir otros logros: pidieron, por ejemplo, que el terreno, ya limpio, fuera utilizado para un hospital o para ampliar la universidad. Como nota marginal amarga, de esta crónica, el hombre que el PSUV encargó de organizar el apoyo a la construcción de la cárcel tuvo que mudarse de Cariaco y se disgustó hasta con sus familiares. Sin embargo, el municipio siguió votando para la revolución bolivariana. El PSUV ganó las elecciones municipales (con una participación del 53%) con más del 50% de los votos, mientras que en el segundo lugar llegó el otro candidato chavista. Testigos dicen que el gobernador llamó por teléfono al nuevo alcalde y le preguntó si ahora la cárcel se iba a construir; él contestó: "Sí, pero no en este sitio".

Cuando el pueblo, en lugar de los gobiernos, dicta la agenda política, toma decisiones que chocan con la voluntad de organizaciones poderosas – regionales y/o nacionales – se pone en crisis la pretensión del Estado para ejecutar el monopolio de la soberanía. Se abren así grietas en la autoridad del Estado, que son peligrosas porque – de hecho – muestran que las formas alternativas de organización del poder, originadas desde abajo, no sólo son posibles, sino más cercanas a los intereses de la comunidad. La movilización contra la construcción de la cárcel fue, indiscutiblemente, una victoria de la comunidad. Sin embargo, fue un éxito intrínsecamente frágil que puede ser reconsiderado y dar lugar tanto a retomar un proyecto sobre el cual el gobierno invirtió recursos cuantiosos, como también a reafirmar la suprema soberanía del Estado.

Conclusión

Es interesante examinar la trayectoria de los movimientos sociales en el ámbito de la “revolución bolivariana” en Venezuela. Muchos autores sostienen que en ese país los movimientos sociales han tenido un fuerte impulso en las dos últimas décadas, porque sus requerimientos han sido asumidos directamente por el gobierno. Según esta posición teórica, los movimientos sociales han desarrollado un rol predominante en la escalada al poder de Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías y, por lo tanto, han logrado negociar con el gobierno una serie de concesiones: reconocimientos constitucionales, participación directa en las reformas de sus marcos legales, aumento de financiamiento y atribución de prestigio a identidades – en otros tiempos – estigmatizadas. Esta es, por ejemplo, la posición de muchos sectores y movimientos indigenistas y/o afrodescendientes (Fernandes 2010, Ciccariello-Maher 2013, Azzellini 2012).

Pero, como acota Zibechi (2007, cfr. Edelman 1999, Holloway 2002), los “gobiernos amigos” desarrollan un rol ambiguo porque los movimientos sociales que aceptan acercarse al poder instituido, frecuentemente asumen la lógica de este último, aceptando mecanismos de cooptación de los dirigentes principales. Entonces, si por una parte los movimientos sociales han tenido un aparente crecimiento en América Latina durante la temporada de los

“gobiernos progresistas”, por la otra, los mismos “gobiernos amigos” de los movimientos sociales eclipsaron la extraordinaria novedad y el legado disruptivo de las revueltas que constituyeron su premisa: la institucionalización de muchas luchas las reduce en formas compatibles con los objetivos y la lógica del partido y del gobierno en el poder (Smile 2009, Uzcátegui 2010, Boni 2016). La lucha contra la construcción de la cárcel en Cariaco ejemplifica como la larga tradición de activismo desde abajo, acción directa y democracia protagónica venezolanos no han sido borrados, sino solo parcialmente suspendido bajo el gobierno chavista (López Maya y Lander 2011).

Hoy en día, remecido por una grave crisis económica y política, hay movilizaciones masivas en contra del gobierno que se autodenomina socialista. La lucha contra la cárcel de Cariaco sugiere que, en vista de mantener un cierto protagonismo político, las comunidades siguen teniendo una fuerza de movilización autónoma. Cuando se manifiestan imposiciones desagradables, el pueblo conserva el conocimiento y la fuerza para que prevalezca su propia voluntad. La acción directa de los movimientos sociales es un recurso precioso que los ciudadanos venezolanos tendrán que utilizar con frecuencia en el futuro próximo, independientemente del color del futuro presidente y del próximo gobierno.

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Fighting for public water: the first successful European Citizens' Initiative, "Water and Sanitation are a Human Right".¹

Andreas Bieler

Abstract

Between May 2012 and September 2013 the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) 'Water and Sanitation are a Human Right' successfully collected close to 1.9 million signatures across the European Union (EU), forcing the Commission into an official position on the role of water in the EU and wider world. Based on a historical materialist approach to social movement struggles, the purpose of this article is threefold. First it will analyse the reasons for why the ECI, initiated and co-ordinated by the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), was so successful. Second, the article will assess the impact of the ECI on EU policy-making. Finally, the article will reflect on the wider lessons to be learned for the struggle against neo-liberal restructuring. It will be argued that a combined focus on the commons as well as new forms of participatory democracy may provide the basis for a broader transformative project.

Keywords: EPSU, European Citizens' Initiative, neo-liberal restructuring, resistance, trade union – social movement alliance, water as a human right

Introduction

Against the background of the ongoing global economic crisis, the privatisation of public assets has created a global infrastructure market, considered to be 'a profitable source of private investment with a range of competing investment funds providing good returns relative to other types of investment' (Whitfield 2010: 91). Water services are no exception in this respect. 'A disturbing trend in the water sector is accelerating worldwide. The new "water barons" – the Wall Street banks and billionaire oligarchs – are buying up water all over the world at unprecedented pace' (Yang 2012, see also Abrams 2014).² And yet, from the Cochabamba water wars in 2000 to the United Nations declaration of water as a

¹ Many thanks for the comments by participants of the *ETUI Monthly Forum* in Brussels/Belgium, where a previous version of this paper was presented on 22 January 2015 (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOYEpiRbGis>). I also gratefully acknowledge the constructive feedback by two anonymous reviewers and Laurence Cox, as well as the support by EPSU and its General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan.

² The politics of water privatisation are extensively covered in the documentary *Blue Gold – World Water Wars*; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q8a2cbO2Ozc>; accessed 20/02/2017.

human right in 2010, from the re-municipalisation of water in Grenoble in 2000 to the re-municipalisation of water in Berlin in 2013, the struggle against water privatisation has picked up pace. Drawing on this experience of struggles around the world the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) submitted its request to organise a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on 'Water and Sanitation are a Human Right' to the European Commission on 2 April 2012. Once the ECI had been approved by the Commission on 10 May 2012, the collection of signatures started. Between May 2012 and September 2013, close to 1.9 million signatures were collected across the European Union (EU) and formally submitted to the Commission. The purpose of this article is to analyse the reasons for this success, the related impact on EU policy-making, as well as its wider implications for resistance against neo-liberal restructuring.

In the next section, through a critical engagement with liberal conceptualisations of social movements a historical materialist perspective on social movement struggles will be developed, which allows us to understand the ECI within the wider dynamics of global capitalism. The subsequent section will analyse the key reasons for the unprecedented success of signature collection. Then, the impact on EU policy-making will be evaluated, before the article reflects on the wider lessons for the struggle against neo-liberal restructuring. Methodologically, the empirical argument is partly based on a set of 24 semi-structured elite interviews with representatives of organisations, which participated in the ECI. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and that no direct quotes would be attributed to them. Interviews have the advantage of providing an insight into the internal decision-making process of an organisation in contrast to policy documents, which only state the outcome of a debate. The validity of information was cross-checked through the information from other interviews as well as the consultation of further primary and secondary printed sources.

Restructuring and resistance: a historical materialist analysis of social movements

Social movements and civil society more generally have been widely studied by liberal approaches in view of increasing levels of inequality against the background of globalisation. In line with Karl Polanyi's (1957) ideas about a double movement, in which a period of laissez-faire is followed by a period of regulation, liberal scholars discuss the possibility of establishing global governance institutions, which can ensure a more just distribution of increasing wealth, resulting from neo-liberal restructuring at the global level (e.g. Held and McGrew 2002: 135-6; Held et al. 1999: 449-52). There are, however, a number of problems associated with this. First, these scholars understand civil society as some kind of progressive force. 'The private sphere (i.e., civil society as distinct from and opposed to the state in the liberal scheme of things) ... is regarded as the terrain where freedom is exercised and experienced' (Buttigieg 1995: 5). It is, however, overlooked that civil society also includes pro-globalisation forces such as business associations, which are often a driving force behind global

restructuring (Sklair 1997). Of course, ‘the oppressed, the marginalized, and the voiceless are indeed important elements of civil society, and they merit special attention precisely because they are generally overlooked, even though they are in the majority; but to regard them as tantamount to civil society can only result in a false understanding of the complex dynamics of power relations within, among, and across States’ (Buttigieg 2005: 35).

Second, liberal analyses overlook the crucial importance of the capitalist social relations of production around the private ownership of the means of production and wage labour. As a result, different organisations have different levels of structural power available, with business organisations in times of transnational production networks being more powerful than national trade unions, for example (Bieler 2011: 165-70). ‘Civil society is not some kind of benign or neutral zone where different elements of society operate and compete freely and on equal terms, regardless of who holds a predominance of power in government’ (Buttigieg 1995: 27). Unlike in the liberal understanding, ‘civil society is not a level playing field’ (Buttigieg 2005: 45).

Furthermore, by neglecting the social relations of production, liberal approaches overlook in their emphasis on re-distribution of wealth that it is the hidden abode of production, where exploitation takes place (Barker 2013: 44). Emanuele Lobina et al in their focus on outcomes of water struggles utilise a policy networks approach in order to go beyond the dichotomy of agency and structure. ‘In fact, networks do not exist in a vacuum and both their origin and evolution are a result of the interdependence between agency and structure’ (Lobina et al. 2011: 20). Elsewhere, he develops a sophisticated approach around agency and institutional governance structures for the analysis of water struggles, which ‘promises to be more exhaustive than one based on agency as its sole interpretive key’ (Lobina 2012: 170).

In turn, Donatella della Porta and Luisa Parks focus on changing opportunity structures within the EU, when analysing whether social movements focus on the European or the national level in their campaigns on issues of social justice (della Porta and Parks 2016). Elsewhere, in order to account for the complex, multilevel institutional structure of the EU Parks develops a variable political opportunity approach, which ‘accounts not only for interaction between actors on multiple levels, but also for the interaction between opportunity structures on multiple levels, as well as admitting the continued importance, but not the exclusivity, of national governments on the international state’ (Parks 2015: 22). Nevertheless, these analyses locating agency within the wider (changing) institutional structures still overlook the crucial importance of the sphere of production for the outcome of struggles. Of course, institutional structures are important for understanding agency, but understanding why certain structures have been established in the first place and why they might be in the process of changing still requires analysing the underlying social relations of production and how they have conditioned institutional formations. Moreover, overlooking the structuring conditions of the capitalist social relations of production makes it impossible to reflect on whether the success of the ECI may contribute to a

broad transformation of the current system and the way production is organised. This will be discussed in the penultimate section of this article.

Donatella della Porta has gone furthest from a liberal perspective towards bringing capitalism and a focus on class back into social movement analysis. Drawing on the concept of political cleavage, she argues that this concept ‘can indeed be useful to discuss the extent to which capitalist transformations, in particular neoliberalism and its crisis, have contributed to the emergence of a new class (of losers of globalization, or precariat) or the re-emergence of old, formerly pacified conflicts’ (della Porta 2015: 16-17). Ultimately, however, the concept of cleavage is a liberal, pluralist theoretical approach, in which different social positions are determined through a number of equally valid, parallel characteristics.

Unsurprisingly, drawing on this approach, della Porta then focuses on the identification of the mobilizing bases for social movements along a number of categories including class, generations and educational levels (della Porta 2015: 42). She outlines the dynamics of capitalism and here especially the implications of neo-liberal restructuring, but who the agents are behind neo-liberal restructuring and why they pursue this strategy is left unexplored (della Porta 2015: 29-35). We end up with a very interesting picture of who participated in the global justice movement in contrast to current anti-austerity protests. ‘Bringing capitalism back into the analysis is an important move if we want to understand changes in the social bases of protest and movement’ (della Porta 2015: 60-2). She adopts a relational approach between the wider social structures and the agency of social movements in this identification of the social bases of movements (della Porta 2015: 224). Nevertheless, the dynamics of struggles, the strategies pursued and the outcomes secured remain outside the scope of investigation.

Hence, in order to analyse the dynamics underpinning the ECI this article is based on a historical materialist approach to social movements (Barker et al. 2013) with an emphasis on social class forces as main collective actors and a focus on class struggle as key to understanding economic-political developments (Bieler 2014). Emphasising the centrality of the social relations of production, it is understood that the way exploitation is organised within capitalism is crucial for the wider institutional formations of different political economies. By organising exploitation around the private ownership of the means of production and ‘free’ wage labour, those who do not own the means of production, i.e. workers, are indirectly compelled to sell their labour power (Wood 1995: 29, 34). Thus the political and the economic, state and market appear to be separate, and within the separate political sphere, at least within liberal representative democracies, all individuals appear to have the same rights and power. Of course, this masks the enormous differences in power resulting from the unequal distribution of the means of production. While liberal approaches conduct their analyses based on this assumed separation of the political and the economic, historical materialism goes beyond this and starts its analysis through a focus on the social relations of production. As a

result, different levels of structural power in class struggle within the state can be comprehended. It is understood that the underlying power structures and different levels of resources within the capitalist social relations of production engender asymmetries across business, trade union and social movement groups. Moreover, this focus on the social relations of production allows a historical materialist approach to analyse how institutional changes are conditioned by changes in these underlying structures.

Drawing on historical materialism, in this article civil society is understood in a Gramscian sense. Importantly, for Gramsci the form of state consists of ‘political society’, i.e. the coercive apparatus of the state more narrowly understood including ministries, the police and other state institutions, and ‘civil society’, made up of political parties, unions, employers’ associations, churches, etc. (Gramsci 1971: 257–63, 271). For Gramsci, civil society is the sphere of hegemonic struggle over the purpose of a particular state form. ‘Civil society is simultaneously the terrain of hegemony and of opposition to hegemony’ (Buttigieg 2005: 38). And while hegemony is initially constructed and established within civil society, it has to reach into political society to ensure a stable order. As Peter Thomas asserts,

Gramsci leaves no doubt that the exercise of hegemony, initially elaborated within civil society, also impacts upon that other superstructural ‘level’ of the integral state, ‘political society or State’. It must necessarily, because political society itself and the power concentrated in it are integrally related to civil society and its social forces, as their mediated, ‘higher’ forms (Thomas 2009: 194).

As a Marxist, Gramsci was, of course, aware of the internal relations between the political and the economic and how the underlying production structures resulted in different levels of structural power for agents in civil society. Equally, he understood that class struggle was more than simply the strategies by trade unions and employers’ associations. Class agency, by Gramsci was understood in a broad sense.

Such an understanding is also reflected in the work of Harry Cleaver. When reflecting on the increasing number of struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s, Cleaver asserts that ‘the reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes’ (Cleaver 2000: 70). Hence, the analysis of class struggle has to cover the whole ‘social factory’, not just the workplace, and includes struggles against exploitation in the sphere of social reproduction (van der Pijl 1998: 46-8). The notion of ‘social factory’ is useful, first because it indicates the importance of the social relations of production reflected in ‘factory’. By adding ‘social’, however, it makes clear that production and reproduction of capital and labour is not only assured within production narrowly understood, but extends into the social and natural substratum.

Access to water is precisely such an issue. Privatising water, transforming water into a commodity to make profit, clearly affects the workplace and generally results in lower wages and deteriorating working conditions for workers employed in the sector. At the same time, however, it also goes beyond concerns related directly to the workplace and affects every worker as well as the wider community in their lives outside work, considering how crucial access to safe drinking water and sanitation is in daily life. In short, the struggle against the commodification of water as a tradable, economic good by an alliance of trade unions, social movements and NGOs is clearly an instance of class struggle within the ‘social factory’ against the commodification of the sphere of social reproduction. In the next section, the main reasons for the success of the ECI in collecting the required number of signatures will be analysed.

The European Citizens’ Initiative “Water and Sanitation are a Human Right”

Three key objectives were stated at the launch of the ECI in May 2012: ‘(1) The EU institutions and Member States be obliged to ensure that all inhabitants enjoy the right to water and sanitation; (2) water supply and management of water resources not be subject to ‘internal market rules’ and that water services are excluded from liberalisation; and (3) the EU increases its efforts to achieve universal access to water and sanitation.’³ The start of the campaign had been slow and the targets proved challenging. Eventually, however, the campaign went well beyond the required 1 million signatures and also reached the quotas for the minimum of seven required EU member states in that 13 countries including Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain collected the required amount of signatures. Germany stood out as the country with the most signatures. 1,341,061 signatures were collected, of which 1,236,455 were considered valid.⁴ In this section, three key reasons for the success of the campaign are discussed: (1) the long history of water struggles preceding the ECI; (2) the special quality of water and how this was reflected in the three objectives of the ECI; and (3) the broad alliance of trade unions, social movements and NGOs present at both the European as well as various national levels.

Long history of water struggles

The ECI did not emerge out of the blue. Since the increasing push for the privatisation of water services from the early 1990s onwards, struggles over water had erupted around the world. Most well-known is the so-called water

³ See <http://www.right2water.eu/>; accessed 12/12/2014.

⁴ See http://www.right2water.eu/sites/water/files/table%20number%20valid%20signatures_21.pdf; accessed 12/12/2014.

war of Cochabamba. When water services were privatised in the Bolivian city, 'one clause of the contract guaranteed a profit of 15 percent to the consortium; another indexed the profit rate to foreign currency exchange rates, as a protection against devaluation of the Bolivian currency' (Bakker 2010: 166). Price hikes of 200 per cent or more were the result. Local resistance erupted and when peaceful protesters were met by police and soldiers, violent clashes ensued with one 17-year-old protester being killed. Eventually, in April 2000 the Bolivian government revoked the concession to Aguas del Tunari, a consortium led by the US construction giant Bechtel (Lobina 2000). The very fact that this struggle was directed against the super-profits of a transnational corporation (TNC) and for access to a vital source of life in the sphere of social reproduction indicates the importance of focusing on exploitation and class struggle across the whole 'social factory'.

The second World Water Forum at The Hague in 2000 gave progressive groups an opportunity to make themselves heard publicly (Interview 1; see also Bakker 2010: 1). As a next step, also inspired by the success of the first European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002, the water movement organised the first Alternative World Water Forum in Florence in 2003 (Interviews 3, 5 and 9). It was intended to provide opposition to the official World Water Forum and its emphasis on public-private partnerships for the organisation of water distribution. The World Water Forum is organised by the World Water Council, which is accused of being 'a mouthpiece for transnational companies and the World Bank.'⁵ The objective of the Alternative Forum is ultimately to de-marketise water and to democratize the government of water as a resource (Interview 9). A first major success was the adoption of a resolution by the UN in 2010 recognising water as a human right (Interview 14), sponsored by several governments from the Global South and here in particular Bolivia (Interview 9; Fattori 2013a).

Parallel to these international efforts, there were ongoing struggles at the national and sub-national level. Battles over re-municipalisation had been raging for some time in Europe. Water was first re-municipalised in the French city of Grenoble in 2000 (Avrillier 2005). The same occurred in Paris in 2010, followed by the re-municipalisation of water in Berlin in 2013 (Lobina, Kishimoto and Petitjean 2014: 7-8). Equally, resistance against water privatisation had started in the Italian cities of Arezzo, Florence and Aprilia in the late 1990s, early 2000s in response to drastic price increases after public companies had been turned into public-private partnerships (Interviews 8 and 11). Together with international developments around the first Alternative World Water Forum in Florence in 2003, these local struggles paved the way towards the establishment of the Italian Water Movement's Forum in 2006 and the eventual successful country-wide referendum against water privatisation in June 2011 (Bieler 2015). In Germany, co-operation in struggles against water liberalisation at the national level goes back to 2000. The establishment of the network *Unser Wasser* already included trade unions and environmental NGOs

⁵ See <http://www.fame2012.org/en/>; accessed 17/06/2014.

at that time (Interviews 18 and 22). In turn, EPSU itself had been involved in struggles against water privatisation in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, establishing the Reclaiming Public Water Network together with the Public Services International and key Canadian trade unions at the end of the 1990s, but also successfully fighting privatisation of water as part of the EU Services Directive in 2002 as well as Public Procurement Directives in 2003/2004 (Interview 15). In short, the ECI has ultimately been the coming together of different struggles from local, national and global level, concretised in a European-level effort by EPSU.

The unique quality of water

The theme of water has significant symbolic power, with water being understood as a fundamental source of life and, therefore, as a human right, reflected in the very title of the ECI. This discourse, for example, resonated with the Catholic Social Doctrine, ensuring strong support from Catholic groups in the Italian referendum against water privatisation in June 2011. It helped to consolidate ‘a broad popular consensus over the principles of social justice and universality that should inspire water management’ (Fantini 2014: 37). The three broad objectives of the ECI incorporated well these various dimensions of the symbolic power of water, with different concerns being of more importance in different countries and for different types of movement partners.

For example, in Germany the opposition to the liberalisation of water services, Point 2 of the ECI, was crucial and directly linked to discussions around the Concessions Directive. While the ECI was ongoing, the Commission had also published the draft Concessions Directive, liberalising water services and forcing public entities to tender contracts openly across the EU. Liberalisation does not automatically imply privatisation (Interview 15). Considering the complex procedures and capital and technology intensiveness of such public tendering, it would, however, have been inevitable that these contracts would have been snapped up by large, private TNCs such as Veolia and Suez. In other words, liberalisation of water as part of the Concessions Directive would, for example, have implied privatisation of the many public water providers across Germany (Interview 17). The perceived danger was that the quality of water would deteriorate as a result, access to water made more difficult, the working conditions for employees worsened and the prices for consumers increased (Falk 2013). Especially the AöW, organising public, often small-scale water providers in Germany, made this link between the ECI and the draft Concessions Directive (Interview 21).

Nevertheless, while the Concessions Directive was of equal concern for Austria, the issue of water as a human right was more prominent in the Dutch campaign (Interview 17). For Catholic groups, universal access to water and sanitation, demanded in Point 1 of the ECI, proved important as an issue of social justice in the Italian context (Fantini 2014: 37), while Point 3 about the EU pushing for water as a human right globally was relevant for development NGOs such as the

Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua (CICMA) in Italy, which is part of the *World Water Contract movement* (Interview 14), or German groups such as the *Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung* or the church related organisation *Brot für die Welt*, arguing that Europe had a responsibility for the whole world (Interviews 21 and 22). Environmental groups including, for example, the Italian *Legambiente* (Interview 10) or the German *Grüne Liga* equally participated, because when water becomes privatised and the sector is dominated by the profit motive, the protection of the environment generally comes second, it was argued (Interview 22).

Trade unions in general were concerned about the potential privatisation of water and the potential implications for salaries and working conditions. 'Public sector workers tend to have higher protection through collective bargaining coverage and are less affected by precarious work' (Jakob and Sanchez 2015: 76). In turn, social movements organising consumers worried about the potentially higher prices and some people being cut off in case they are unable to pay. Thus, the struggle for water as a human right and against privatisation is precisely a struggle taking place in the wider 'social factory' against exploitation in the sphere of production and the organisation of the workplace, as well as the wider sphere of social reproduction and the importance of ensuring affordable access to water for everyone as well as the protection of the environment.

It would have been surprising, if there had been no tensions inside the movement. This is quite common considering the different constitution of trade unions and their internal representative democratic structure as well as high levels of bureaucratisation on the one hand, and the more flexible, but often also ad hoc social movements on the other (Bieler and Morton 2004: 312-16). Social movements have sometimes had exaggerated expectations about what unions can deliver in terms of finance, but also their flexibility of taking decisions quickly, trade unionists argue (Interview 18). There is a feeling at times that social movements just want trade unions' resources and credibility for their own campaign (Interview 15). In turn, some social movements feel that trade unions have imposed the ECI on the wider movement without enough possibilities of others to participate in the formulation of the ECI as well as the devising of the strategy.

For example, a representative of the Berliner Wassertisch stated that the wording of the ECI was drafted by EPSU together with the German service sector union ver.di and that it had been made clear that this was not negotiable. Some regret was expressed that in contrast to an initiative by the *World Water Contract movement*, the EPSU text did not include a concrete legislative proposal (Interview 20). From within the Italian water movement, some felt that the ECI had been imposed on them from the outside by EPSU and its local affiliate Funzione Pubblica-CGIL (Interview 14). Nevertheless, the unique quality of water, captured in its various ways in the three points of the ECI, ensured that this broad alliance of different types of actor could be brought together (Interviews 2, 3 and 5).

Importantly, the campaign on purpose excluded close connections to political parties. In Italy, the water movement had consciously decided not to portray the 2011 referendum as a left-wing campaign, but to provide it with a broad appeal. Hence, political parties were relegated to a secondary, supportive, committee (Interviews 2 and 5). In the referendum itself, many supporters of centre-right parties had also opposed water privatisation. In Germany too, as well as at the European level, political parties were not officially part of the movement in order to ensure the broadest possible support (Interview 18). There were, of course, contacts with MPs from the Left Party and the Greens in Germany, but the alliance overall did not want any of the political parties to dominate the campaign and make it into an electoral tool (Interview 19). Water is clearly an issue beyond political party divisions.

Broad alliance of actors at European as well as national level

The fact that the ECI had been based on and supported by a broad alliance of trade unions, social movements and NGOs across the whole ‘social factory’ was also crucial. At the European level, it was EPSU, which initiated the campaign and also sustained it with its administrative and financial resources. It formed a European level alliance together with other organisations such as the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) and the Social Platform (Fattori 2013a).⁶ However, these EU-based groups ‘did little more than place banners on websites and publicise the ECI through their networks’ (Parks 2015: 71). It was EPSU, which had been the leading organisation co-ordinating and holding the campaign together (Interview 22). Its organisational structure, bringing together representatives of its national federations in the organising committee, provided the crucial backbone and leadership of the campaign (Interview 15). For example, when the unions organising workers in the water sector in Lithuania and Slovenia struggled to collect signatures, the energy federations in both countries, also EPSU members, stepped in and led the national campaigns (Interview 23; Interview 24). EPSU’s broad coverage of public services and utilities facilitated this strategic move. In short, EPSU

has a strong presence, expertise, and resources in Brussels, but can also rely on developed networks of national and local trade union chapters for the collection of signatures. During their campaign, the EPSU also drew on the support of other national and local movement groups formed in long-term collaborations with water movement groups, particularly in those member states hardest hit by the effects of the financial crisis (della Porta and Parks 2016: 13).

Even more important, however, than the European-level alliance were the various alliances of unions and social movements at the national level. National

⁶ See also <http://www.right2water.eu/who-we-are-organizations>; accessed 12/12/2014.

quotas had to be reached in at least seven countries and the collection of signatures, therefore, had to be organised at the national level. When EPSU had organised a successful European level alliance of trade unions and green and social movements and NGOs in opposition to new Public Procurement Directives and the related attack on public sectors across the EU in 2000 to 2003, this alliance had been unable to establish similar alliances at the various national levels (Bieler 2011: 175). This time round, it was different. All the successful campaigns were based on strong national alliances.

Unsurprisingly, the success of the ECI was not the same across all EU countries. It was in Germany that the most signatures were collected. This was related to the perceived impact of the Concessions Directive on the German water industry (see above). Making the link between the ECI and the Concessions Directive proved to be crucial for the high number of signatures (Interviews 17 and 21). Moreover, there was a tightly organised campaign around the services trade union ver.di, supported by the German trade union confederation DGB, together with a whole range of local water movements such as the *Berliner Wassertisch*, the *Wasser Allianz Augsburg*, the *Working Group Water and Privatisation* of Attac München and the NGO *WasserInBürgerhand*, environmental movements such as the BUND, the *Grüne Liga* and the feminist group *EcoMujer*, as well as development NGOs including the *Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung* (Interviews 20, 21 and 22). Especially the organisational structure of ver.di in the various districts across the whole country was vital for the local presence of the campaign. Finally, the possibility to sign on the internet was significant. Around 80 per cent of all German signatures were online signatures. This possibility obtained additional importance through media presence, be it a discussion of water privatisation in the investigative programme *Monitor* in December 2012,⁷ be it the picking up of the campaign and portraying of the internet address in the comedy show ‘*Neues aus der Anstalt*’ in January 2013,⁸ or the coverage in the *ZDF heute* show in February 2013.⁹

Nevertheless, the fact that a large part of signatures was collected in Germany should not make one overlook the success of the campaign across the EU. In both Lithuania and Slovenia most of the signatures were also collected online. The Lithuanian campaign, led by the Lithuanian Industry Trade Unions’ Federation, had very good links with the media, providing space on a number of occasions for campaign leaders to state their case. Parallel to the ECI, the law on water management was amended and with effect on 1 November 2014, this law prohibits both water privatisation and the transfer of concessions for drinking water supply. The law also specifies that people should pay no more than four per cent of family income for water as a maximum (Interview 23). In turn, Facebook proved crucial in Slovenia. Led by the Trade Union of Energy Sector

⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wYqYTtkE4Ds>; accessed 12/12/2014.

⁸ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBg5AY5rfvQ>; accessed 12/12/2014.

⁹ See (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EtyYKXDvYQ>); accessed 12/12/2014.

Workers, the campaign succeeded at convincing politicians, artists, theatre stars and a famous Slovenian rock group, whose song 'Water' was used for the campaign, to accept that they post supporting material on their Facebook sites (Interview 24).

In Italy the water movement had already successfully collected signatures on a number of occasions. For the referendum against water privatisation in 2011, for example, 1.4 million signatures had been collected (Bieler 2015). When it came to collecting signatures yet again in relation to the theme of water, the Italian alliance of trade unions and social movements indicated a degree of fatigue with this particular way of organising opposition as well as disillusion with the lack of positive impact by the successful Italian referendum in June 2011 (Interviews 5, 9 and 10). They still managed to reach the national quota, with 65,223 validated signatures, but this was a relatively small number in comparison with past collections. Similar to other countries in the European periphery such as Portugal, Spain and Greece, linking the ECI to austerity policy and its negative consequences had been decisive in the final push. 'As various groups including national members of the EPSU, municipalities and movement groups worked to link the ECI to austerity issues signatures did pick up in these countries, with all but Portugal passing the threshold to pass the ECI' (Parks 2015: 76).

Other countries did not meet the national quota. In France, for example, trade unions were lukewarm towards the initiative, as the company trade unions of Suez and Veolia did not want to campaign against 'their' companies. From a narrower trade union perspective, they argued that it was their task to focus on salaries and working conditions of their members. Whether the company itself was private or public would be a secondary issue (Interview 1). And even the fact that water services had been re-municipalised in Paris in 2010 did not encourage a broader signature collection campaign (Interview 17). In the UK too, the ECI did not pick up much support. No trade union had been willing to make water one of their key campaigns, which may at least partly have been due to the fact that there were ongoing struggles against so many other attacks on the public sector (Interview No.15). Nevertheless, the fact that the quota was achieved in 13 countries is a sign of success. This was also due to the fact that the pan-European alliance managed to connect with local and national campaigns across the whole 'social factory', bringing together trade unions organising workers in the production process with social movements and NGOs mobilising people within the sphere of social reproduction.

Evaluating the ECI: what impact on EU policy-making?

As outlined above, for Gramsci any gains in civil society, and the successful collection of signatures is such an initiative in civil society, have to impact on political society within the integral state in order to result in concrete policy changes. In relation to the EU, it can be argued that over the years a distinctive European form of state, closely interrelated with national forms of state, has

emerged. To what extent then has the success of the ECI been translated into policy changes within the European form of state? On 17 February 2014, hearings of the ECI took place with the Commission and the European Parliament (EP). While the Commission representatives mainly asked questions during their hearing, the meeting with the EP was deemed more successful by the campaigners (Interview 17). It was four hours long and 60 MEPs, mainly from the environmental but also from some other committees, were present, with most of them talking at some stage.

The response by the Commission, delivered on 19 March 2014, however, was a disappointment. It argued that it would not introduce water as a human right into EU legislation, as the Commission was not responsible for this. This was a matter of national level legislation. Similarly, while the Commission confirmed that it would not further pursue the liberalisation of water, this too was not backed up by EU legislation. Instead, it declared that it had to remain neutral vis-à-vis national decision-making in the water industry. As a response by the AöW makes clear, however, the Commission had not observed this neutrality in relation to EU crisis countries (AöW 2014: 2), having pushed for further liberalisation and privatisation in Greece, Portugal and Italy. The Commission, moreover, announced that it intended to hold a consultation on drinking water, something they could have done even without the ECI and which does not really address the main objectives of the ECI, as some activists allege (Conrad 2014b). The Commission did not promise a general change in foreign policy in relation to pushing water as a human right in its dealings with other countries around the world either (Interview No.17). Observers also note that there is still an emphasis on market conformity in Commission statements (Interview 19). Finally, the AöW raised some concerns about a potential attack by the Commission on small public water companies under the pretext of poor water quality (AöW 2014: 1-2).

And yet, some success of the ECI can be noted. Especially in Germany and Austria, the Concessions Directive was a crucial point for the mobilisation of opposition. When the ECI had reached one million signatures in February 2013 and it became clear that it might actually be successful, Commissioner Barnier, responsible for the Concessions Directive, went to Berlin and discussed, with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, an exception for the German water economy. When it then became clear that this would create even more difficulties for the Directive, water was excluded from the Concessions Directive (Conrad 2014a: 35). 'In short, the ECI on water [had] already achieved a significant political result and an extraordinary victory even before it formally arrive[d] on the Commission's desk' (Fattori 2013a; see also EPSU 2013). Of course, focusing on class struggle in the analysis, as argued above, it is no surprise that capital and here especially large TNCs had not been inactive. There was heavy lobbying by the private water industry on the Commission. Private water companies rejected the link made between the ECI and the Concessions Directive and expressed their disappointment about the exclusion of water, considered to make up half of the concessions within the EU (AquaFed 2013).

The fact that this pressure by capital was unsuccessful further indicates the success of the ECI.

Moreover, as one interviewee pointed out, the ECI had changed the public discourse on water in Europe. Arguments about the importance of keeping water in public hands would no longer be laughed at or belittled. Prior to the 2013 national elections, all German parties committed themselves to retain water in public hands and this issue also featured in the coalition negotiations between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats (Interview 21). At the European level, the ECI campaign energetically lobbied the candidates for the new President of the Commission in 2014, and four out of five committed themselves to implementing the human right to water if elected (EPSU 2014c). The public consultation on the Drinking Water Directive, even if not demanded by the ECI, is also a reflection of the fact 'that water has taken its place on the European agenda' (Parks 2015: 95). Equally, the new rules established by the EU to improve the monitoring of drinking water across Europe in October 2015 indicate the high profile of water in EU policy-making. In its press release, the Commission explicitly stated that the public consultation and new monitoring rules are 'part of the wider response to the European Citizens' Initiative Right2Water' (European Commission 2015).

Finally, the ECI successfully established links of transnational solidarity. Of course, the individual campaigns of collecting signatures had to be organised at the national level. Nevertheless, working on the same campaign simultaneously, co-ordinated in regular meetings in Brussels, established links across borders, which in turn facilitated international support for local campaigns. While witnessing the hearing of the ECI in the EP through a video link, activists from the Thessaloniki citizens' movement against water privatisation decided to hold their own independent referendum about the privatisation of water services in their city on 18 May 2014. EPSU, the Italian water movement as well as others from the European water movement sent monitors in support (Interviews 2, 7 and 15). After a large turn-out and significant rejection of privatisation in this unofficial referendum, with 98 per cent of those who voted opposed to privatisation, the pressure on the Greek government not to privatise mounted. In the end, it decided to put a stop to the privatisation of water services in both Thessaloniki and Athens (MacroPolis 2014).

While the ECI has been successfully completed, struggles against water privatisation continue. Thus, there is a clear, ongoing legacy of the ECI. In the Spanish town of Alcazar de San Juan, mass mobilization of citizens resulted in the collection of 11,000 signatures and an occupation of the city council, opposing and eventually stopping the privatisation of the city's water services in February 2014 (EPSU 2014a). In Ireland too, resistance has been mobilised against the imposition of new water charges by the Irish government together with the Troika (Fallon, 2014). 'More than 150,000 people mobilized the 1st of November all over Ireland against water charges, following months of protests and resistance' (European Water Movement 2014). More recently, Slovenia has amended its constitution to establish access to drinkable water as a fundamental

right (Guardian 2016). In general, people are no longer simply accepting the imposition of water privatisation and there is a continuing push for re-municipalisation. ‘In the last 15 years there have been at least 180 cases of water remunicipalisation in 35 countries’ (Lobina, Kishimoto and Petitjean 2014: 3; see also Kishimoto, Lobina and Petitjean 2015).

At the European level, the alliance behind the ECI and here in particular EPSU and some of its affiliates have pursued the issue of water further within the EU institutional set-up. In October 2014, the European Economic and Social Committee (EcoSoc) adopted by a large majority a supportive statement, in which the Commission was asked to implement the ECI’s demands urging the Commission ‘to propose legislation establishing access to water and sanitation as a human right as set out by the United Nations’ (EcoSoc 2014: 3). Additionally, it was demanded that access to water and sanitation are excluded ‘permanently from the commercial rules of the internal market by proposing that they be reclassified as a service of non-economic general interest’ (EcoSoc 2014: 6-7). Moreover, due to the Commission’s weak response to the ECI there has been a significant uptake of the initiative by members of the EP. The co-ordinators of the EP’s environmental committee decided in September 2014 to work on an initiative report as a follow-up to the ECI. In September 2015, a resolution passed in the EP states that the Commission’s response ‘lacks ambition, does not meet the specific demands made in the ECI, and limits itself to reiterating existing commitments’ (European Parliament News 2015). The lead MEP of this resolution Lynn Boylan (GUE/NG, IE), whose report was approved by 363 vote to 96 (with 261 abstentions), stated that ‘[o]wnership and management of water services are clearly key concerns for citizens and cannot be ignored’ (European Parliament News 2015). Water should neither be part of a revised Concessions Directive in the future, nor of any trade deals negotiated by the EU, the resolution demanded.

A predominant focus on EU institutions is, however, dangerous. It overlooks that the strategic selectivity of the EU form of state is heavily skewed towards the interests of transnational capital and the way they enjoy privileged access to the key Commission Directorates responsible for Competition, Internal Market, and Economics and Finances, while trade unions, social movements and NGOs are generally side-lined (Bieler 2006: 179-82). In the wake of the global financial crisis, as della Porta and Parks demonstrate, it has become even more difficult to impact on EU policy-making. ‘Power at the EU level has moved to the most unaccountable and opaque of the EU institutions, with opportunities closing down particularly (but not only) for groups active on issues of social justice’ (della Porta and Parks 2016: 6). An exclusive emphasis on EU institutions is in danger of forgetting that the liberal constitutional model facilitates the continuous enclosure of popular sovereignty. ‘There can be no constituent effort, nor liberation from corporate greed, outside of a radical critique of property rights, which is capable of going beyond the public-private dichotomy and of elaborating a genuine institutional structure for collective agency outside of parliamentary democracy’ (Mattei 2013: 375). Moreover, while the national campaigns around the ECI were often successfully used as a

tool of wider mobilisation, focusing on policy-making within the EU institutional set-up is likely to develop into an elite affair, risking to become delinked from the broader campaign. It could result in a demobilisation of forces, which are no longer needed for that process. In other words, a focus on EU institutions of representative democracy will neither help mobilising people nor result in a transformation of the current economic model.

Moreover, while a European opening of water services for more competition and leading to privatisation has been successfully halted, a new attempt is being made via trade agreements. A series of trade agreements are currently under discussion such as the Comprehensive Trade and Economic Agreement (CETA) (with Canada) or negotiations like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) (with the US) and Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) (over 20 countries), which risk creating a web of interlinked trade agreements, the sole purpose of which is to open service sectors and possibly health, elderly care, education and water for more competition and private capital. Interestingly, even the limited implications of an ECI as a tool to further democratic participation in EU policy-making have been undermined by the Commission's decision not to permit an initiative in relation to the negotiations of TTIP. While TTIP has stalled at least for now, the EP signed CETA on 15 February 2017 despite widespread protests. In sum, struggling within the constraints of (EU) representative democracy is unlikely to result in a transformative agenda.

Will this success of the ECI be enough to ensure that water remains permanently outside the market? As observers point out, a review clause has been included in the Concessions Directive, which could imply that the decision to exclude water might be revoked in five years' time (AöW 2014: 2). Moreover, the 'Commission's Communication makes no commitment to explicitly exclude these services from trade negotiations such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)' (EPSU 2014b). Equally, does the success of the ECI represent a first step towards reversing neo-liberalism in the EU more generally? The next section will reflect on these issues.

Towards a transformative agenda?

There is some disagreement over the extent to which a human rights approach can help to counter neo-liberalism. Bakker, while accepting that a focus on human rights may be a good strategy, considers it to be rather individualistic and thus not conducive to a more collective response to privatisation (Bakker 2010: 13 and 158-9). 'Pursuing a human rights framework as an antiprivatization campaign thus makes three strategic errors: conflating human rights and property rights, failing to concretely connect human rights with different service-delivery models, and thereby failing to foreclose the possibility of increasing private-sector involvement in water supply' (Bakker 2010: 152). Linton, by contrast, does regard it as part of a hydrosocial cycle, directly opposed to neo-liberalism and, thus, part of a collective response towards a community based alternative. 'Rather than an "empty signifier", the right to water can thus be regarded as internally related to the political struggle against

neoliberalism' (Linton 2013: 117) and, thus, as a potential part of broader transformative politics, as a novel discursive terrain with the potential to resist TNCs. Thus, 'human rights have been considered a "master frame" that can appeal across borders and contexts' (Parks 2015: 79). The fact that the ECI was successful precisely at a time of increasing austerity pressures is not only testimony to its enormous success, but also indicates its fundamental, counter – neo-liberal dynamic. It also needs to be remembered that an ECI has to be formulated in a way that it is within the competency of the Commission to act. The campaign organisers would have preferred to rally around a slogan such as 'Keep Water Public' or even 'Return Water into Public Hands', but the result would simply have been that the request for an ECI would have been denied (Interview 15). Finally, the second objective of the ECI clearly goes against neo-liberal restructuring of water and, thus, includes a transformative dimension.

Importantly, just to return water into public hands does not automatically imply that the service is run better. 'We acknowledge', write David A. McDonald and Greg Ruiters (2012: 6) in the introduction to their book on alternatives to privatisation, 'that many existing public services are poorly run – or non-existent – and do not meet any of our "criteria for success". Defending these services is not an acceptable route to developing alternatives.' The very fact that water privatisation was presented as the best way forward during the 1990s came against the background that the traditional public model had failed in developing countries (Bakker 2010: 76-7). In developed countries too, public does not automatically imply efficiency. In fact, Italian state companies were often accused of being rather inefficient as a result of nepotism and corruption (Interview 7). Equally the traditional public, anthropocentric way of managing water had been highly exploitative of the environment (Bakker 2010: 87). In short, returning water into public hands can only be a first step. 'Remunicipalisation is not merely about returning to the pre-privatisation situation, but should be about reinventing public water management altogether' (Hoedeman, Kishimoto and Pigeon 2012: 107). The way water services are run has to be re-thought more fundamentally.

It is one of the key contributions of the Italian water movement that it has raised the issue of water as a commons beyond the dichotomy of private versus public (Carrozza and Fantini 2016: 110-14). The commons are understood as 'elements that we maintain or reproduce together, according to rules established by the community: an area to be rescued from the decision-making of the post-democratic elite and which needs to be self-governed through forms of participatory democracy' (Fattori 2011). Assessing the failures of public sector water provision during the 1980s, David Hall concludes that 'the problem of the 1980s public sector failures can ... be seen as a lack of democratic process in the public sector, rather than a problem with the public sector itself' (Hall 2005: 20). As Sergio Marotta observes, 'the case of water management is significant because the defence of public water has encouraged movements to intensify democratic participation' (Marotta 2014: 46). Thus, the focus on the commons in Italy is combined with an emphasis on a different, more participatory form of democracy, which had already been practised within the European Social

Forum process (della Porta 2009). A form of democracy which ‘guarantees citizens’ direct participation in local government and the administration of the commons, which goes beyond the mere participation in local public institutions’ [translation by the author] (Carrozza and Fantini 2013: 77). The mobilisation for public water around the Italian referendum in June 2011 ‘acquired the role of a paradigmatic battle in defence of democracy and against the commodification of life, powerfully synthesized in the movement’s motto: “It is written water, it is read democracy”’ (Fantini 2014: 42). In other words, it is the combination of a new understanding of democracy and a new understanding of how to run the economy and, importantly, of how these two dimensions are closely and internally related, which brings with it a transformative dimension. ‘Strengthening the democratic, public character of water services is fundamentally at odds with the currently dominant neoliberal model of globalisation, which subordinates ever more areas of life to the harsh logic of global markets’, concluded Bélen Balanyá and his colleagues already in 2005 (Balanyá et al. 2005: 248).

Discussing solutions around the notion of the commons has also been part of struggles against water privatisation in Greece and Portugal (Bieler and Jordan 2016). The citizens of the group K136 against water privatisation in Thessaloniki understood this dimension and viewed the crisis ‘as an opportunity to intensify the search for democratic alternatives’ (Steinfors 2014). Working on an alternative model of how to run the city’s water services, it emphasised the importance of a new form of democracy. ‘The model is based on direct democracy, meaning that decisions are taken at open assemblies and are based on the principles of self-management and one person, one vote’ (Steinfors 2014). Similar experiments are carried out elsewhere. In Paris and Grenoble, ‘civil society representatives sit on the Board of Directors together with local government representatives, and have equal voting rights ...; [moreover,] citizen observatories have been established to open spaces for citizens to engage in strategic decisions on investment, technology options and tariff setting’ (Lobina, Kishimoto and Petitjean 2014: 5).

In the Italian city of Naples, the lawyer Alberto Lucarelli was not only given the task by the mayor to organise the re-municipalisation of water services, but also to include forms of direct citizen/consumer and worker participation in the public company (Carrozza and Fantini 2013: 95; Interview No.13). In Berlin, the Berliner Wassertisch, which had been the driving force behind the re-municipalisation of water, demands further democratisation of the local water company and has developed a water charter to this effect, including demands for the participation of citizens in the running of the company (Interview 20, Berliner Wassertisch 2014). In the Spanish city of Zaragoza, trade unions signed an agreement with other civil society organisations, political parties and the municipality for public water management in order to secure the human right to water (EPSU 2014d).¹⁰ While there is no blueprint of how a new form of democracy should be designed, experiments of the type in Naples, Grenoble,

¹⁰ See also see also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxCNIvvDm6g>; accessed 20/02/2017.

Paris and Zaragoza, in which trade unions, municipalities, public water managers, and citizen groups from across the ‘social factory’ are working together, can help to explore new democratic ways of managing water and sanitation successfully for all. As Fattori reminds us, ‘commons and communing are not an ideology but a set of practices, a fragmentary manner – and at the same time they are generating ideas, projects, and theories’ (Fattori 2013b: 386).

Conclusion

While impressive in itself, it is not only the large number of signatures, which is a sign of success. The ECI, based on a broad alliance of trade unions, social movements and NGOs, was successful at a time, when austerity policies were enforced across the EU member states, including pressures towards further privatisation especially on the countries in the EU’s periphery such as Greece and Portugal. It, therefore, went completely against the trend and in opposition to dominant forces pushing for further neo-liberal restructuring. When analysing the reasons for the success of this campaign, it was argued that we need to focus on class struggle across the whole ‘social factory’, including resistance at the workplace against privatisation and the inevitable worsening of working conditions resulting from it as well as resistance in the wider sphere of social reproduction for universal, affordable access to water as a key source of sustenance for human lives as well as the protection of the environment generally. This wider struggle is reflected in the broad alliances of trade unions, representing workers in the workplace, and social movements and NGOs, representing struggles against exploitation in the sphere of social reproduction.

Nevertheless, struggles against water privatisation have not only been defensive. They are also signs of struggles for a transformation beyond neo-liberal economics. A focus on the commons combined with a new understanding of democracy may provide the basis for a broader transformative agenda. From their establishment in water services, these new models can then be extended to other public services/commons such as health, education, energy and transport. Especially left-wing individuals and groups have been ‘willing to adopt water as an “entry point” to pursue a broader political strategy: exploring new forms of political engagement alternative to traditional left-wing parties and trade unions’ (Carrozza and Fantini 2016: 111-2). In the Italian region of Puglia, for example, the Rete dei Comitati per i Beni Comuni¹¹ was established in June 2012,¹² including also issues such as the cycle of refuse collection and recycling, as well as public transport, as part of the commons (Interview 16). The local water committee in Torino, a city in the North of Italy, also intends to expand the water movement into a Movement of Public Goods, including issues such as

¹¹ See <http://www.benicomuni.org/>; accessed 20/02/2017.

¹² See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p2AbScJYRkU&feature=youtu.be>; accessed 09/01/2015.

public transport, refuse collection, and the No-TAV campaign against the construction of a high-speed railway line in the region (Interview 12). At the same time, however, while progressive forces attempt to extend further the sphere of the commons, forces of capital push back against the gains made. The third bailout agreement between Greece and the Troika of European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF in July 2015 included provisions for further privatisation of the Thessaloniki and Athens water companies (euobserver 2015). As always, class struggle is open-ended and successful transformation, therefore, a possibility but never assured.

Interviews¹³

Interview No.1: Deputy General Secretary, EPSU; Brussels, 23 January 2012.

Interview No.2: Two representatives of the Secretariat, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; Rome/Italy, 25 March 2014.

Interview No.3: Co-ordinator for Welfare State policies, FP-CGIL; Rome/Italy, 26 March 2014.

Interview No.4: Co-ordinator for wider networks, Cobas; Rome/Italy, 26 March 2014.

Interview No.5: Member of National Council, ATTAC Italia; Rome/Italy, 27 March, 2014.

Interview No.6: Member of the National Co-ordination Group; Unione Sindacale di Base (USB); Rome, 27 March 2014.

Interview No.7: Researcher on water movement, Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso; Rome, 31 March 2014.

Interview No.8: President of the Acqua Pubblico committee in Arezzo; Florence, 2 April 2014.

Interview No.9: Co-ordinator of International Section, Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua; Florence, 2 April, 2014.

Interview No.10: Co-ordinator in Tuscany for questions related to water, Legambiente Toscana; Florence, 3 April, 2014.

Interview No.11: Members of the Arezzo Water Committee; Arezzo, 4 April, 2014.

Interview No.12: Co-ordinator of the Water Committee in Torino; Torino, 7 April 2014.

Interview No.13: Researcher on water movement, University of Torino; Torino, 7 April 2014.

¹³ While the names of interviewees have been excluded, the particular position of individuals within organisations has been retained where relevant with the permission of the interviewees.

Interview No.14: President, Comitato Italiano Contratto Mondiale sull'Acqua Onlus; Milano, 8 April 2014.

Interview No.15: Deputy General Secretary, European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU); Brussels, 6 May 2014.

Interview No.16: Referent, Water Committee of the region of Puglia/Italy, interview via skype; 6 June 2014.

Interview No.17: Officer responsible for water economy since June 2013, ver.di; Berlin, 17 November 2014.

Interview No.18: Officer responsible for water economy until June 2013, ver.di; Berlin 17 November 2014.

Interview No.19: Director, Section of macroeconomic co-ordination, DGB; Berlin, 18 November 2014.

Interview No.20: Representative of Gemeingut in Bürgerhand (Common Goods in Citizens' Hands; GIB) and Representative of Berliner Wassertisch (Berlin Watertable); Berlin, 19 November 2014.

Interview No.21: Director, Allianz der öffentlichen Wasserwirtschaft (Alliance of Public Water Economy, AöW); Berlin, 20 November 2014.

Interview No.22: Officer responsible for water questions, Grüne Liga; telephone interview, 27 November 2014.

Interview No.23: President, Lithuanian Industry Trade Unions' Federation, interview via skype; 12 January 2015.

Interview No.24: President, Trade Union of Energy Sector Workers of Slovenia (SDE), interview via skype; 15 January 2015.

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Beyond growth, capitalism, and industrialism? Consensus, divisions and currents within the emerging movement for sustainable degrowth

Matthias Schmelzer and Dennis Eversberg

Abstract

Under the banner of “Degrowth”, recent years have seen the emergence of a new strand of emancipatory critique of economic growth and the search for social-ecological alternatives beyond capitalism and industrialism. Some even speak of a newly emerging social movement for Degrowth. While much has recently been written on Degrowth ideas, we know very little about the social base of this spectrum. The article presents results from an empirical survey among 814 of the 3000 participants of the 2014 international Degrowth conference in Leipzig, Germany – the largest Degrowth-related event so far. After introducing the reader to the history and some of the core ideas of Degrowth debates, it draws on the empirical results to argue that Degrowth can indeed be seen as an emerging social movement in Europe. It is shown that the Degrowth spectrum is united by a basic consensus for a ‘reductive’ turnaround in the societies of the Global North, as well as by consensual support for universalist, feminist, grassroots-democratic, and anti-capitalist ideas. Results of a factor analysis indicate a series of internal tensions and points of contention, the interplay of which is illustrated with reference to a cluster analysis. We conclude that, despite inevitable tensions and fissures within, Degrowth does provide the degree of consistency and shared identity needed to become a rallying point for a broader social movement addressing some of the most important challenges faced by European societies today.

Keywords: Degrowth; ecology; global justice; anti-capitalism; social movements

1) Introduction

As many older activists will recall from their own memory, the 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of broad-based debates about the *Limits to Growth* and the negative social and environmental consequences of economic growth (Muraca/Schmelzer 2017). Influential as they were for the formation of environmental movements and the thinking of activists in those years, this discourse mostly fell into oblivion only a few years later, making way for the concept of “sustainable development” (World Commission 1987), which was to dominate ecologically-minded debates for the following decades. In recent years, however, following the realization among many environmentalists that sustainability and development never were reconcilable in the first place, the more fundamental strand of opposition to growth has resurfaced in critical

academic debates and social movement discourses (see Latouche 2006; Martinez-Alier et al. 2010; D'Alisa et al. 2014). Despite the political and economic elites' insistence that Europe's crisis could only be overcome through strong and continuous growth, more and more Europeans now doubt that more growth will actually further global justice, preserve the planet, or even improve their own living conditions. Even Pope Francis has recently addressed the problem in his ecological encyclical "Laudato Si", calling for an end of growth in rich countries:

"We know how unsustainable is the behavior of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth" (Francis 2015, 141).

What was translated as "decreased growth" here reads "decrescita" in the original Italian. Francis thus consciously used a political neologism that has been at the forefront of both a broadening academic and societal debate and an emerging social movement. Over the course of the last 10 years, it has spread from its origins in France ("décroissance") and other Southern European countries ("decrecimiento", "decrescita") to the rest of Europe and the English-speaking world ("Degrowth").

It is the spectrum of people currently rallying around this idea of sustainable and globally just economic Degrowth that we turn to empirically in this article. Our starting point is the surprising success of the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in September 2014 in Leipzig. This event attracted more than 3,000 participants from academia, social movements, political organizations and alternative economy projects, making it the biggest Degrowth-related public event so far. This colorful, even festive gathering assembled an exceptionally broad, organizationally and ideologically diverse spectrum, ranging from environmental NGOs through Transition Town initiatives to urban gardening projects and anarchist groups. Around and beyond the Leipzig conference, its three predecessors and its follow-up event in Budapest in 2016, academic work on Degrowth has multiplied. Simultaneously, practitioners and activists have linked the guiding idea of Degrowth to a multitude of practical projects and experiments, from urban gardening to eco-communities, as well as coordinated actions and struggles such as the 'Ende Gelände' anti-coal protests in Germany.¹

Empirical research on Degrowth as a spectrum of practitioners and activists or as an emerging social movement in Europe is only starting. While Degrowth as a concept and the various intellectual currents within it are well studied (see for

¹ On these multiple links see the final publication of the two-year networking project *Degrowth in Movement(s)* at <https://www.degrowth.de/en/dim/degrowth-in-movements>.

example D'Alisa et al. 2014; Schmelzer 2015), little is known about the attitudes and practices of the people that identify or practically associate themselves with Degrowth by participating in projects or actions, engaging with Degrowth literature, or attending Degrowth events. Much of the existing work focuses on the academic strand of Degrowth and its function as an “interpretative frame” for various social movements and their practices (Demaria et al. 2013; see also Martínez-Alier 2012; D'Alisa 2013; Muraca/Schmelzer 2017). In addition, a handful of qualitative case studies on local Degrowth projects (Cattaneo/Gavaldà 2010; Kunze/Becker 2015; Burkhart 2015; Pailloux 2015) and on activist's perception of the Degrowth spectrum and its future (Holz 2016) have recently emerged. In Germany, in particular, there has recently been some debate about whether it is justified to speak of a German Degrowth movement – with no clear consensus emerging so far (Brand 2014; Adler 2015; Muraca 2014; Schmelzer 2015; Eversberg/Schmelzer forthcoming).

In this article, we aim to empirically substantiate the debate over whether the interpretative frame provided by Degrowth can actually be seen as providing the rallying point for a new social movement, or a new coalition of hitherto separate strands of movements. We analyze the common concerns, framings and narratives that hold this heterogeneous spectrum together, as well as the (potential) fault lines, strategic and ideological differences and underlying conflicts that run through it. And we draw out some implications for what activists and activist-scholars can learn for their struggles for alternative economies, global social and ecological justice, and for overcoming the capitalist system.

To do this, we draw on the results of a survey we conducted at the Leipzig conference, using a four-page standardized questionnaire handed out to all participants with the program booklet on arrival.² It was filled out by more than a quarter of those in attendance.³ The questionnaire contained a series of 29 statements concerning growth, Degrowth and related issues that respondents were asked to rate by ticking one of five boxes on a scale from “completely disagree” to “completely agree”. Most of the findings presented in this article are based on the responses given in this part, which we analyze both for individual statements and using multivariate methods, namely Factor Analysis and Cluster Analysis. The results, we hope, can provide important insights for Degrowth activists and practitioners, as well as their potential allies, since they enable a better understanding of the internal logics, dynamics and fractionings within this dynamic and heterogeneous spectrum of social and political activism.

² The paper questionnaire was provided in both a German and an English-language version, an online version that was offered as an alternative was also available in Spanish. The latter was only used a single time, while the German version was, at 669 (82%) by far the most widely used. The remaining 144 respondents answered the English version.

³ The questionnaire was returned by 814 participants, of whom 685 grew up in Germany, 127 in other (predominantly European) countries, and 2 made no statement. For details on sample demography, see Eversberg 2015.

A few words on our theoretical concept: We argue that what we call “the Degrowth spectrum” can adequately be analysed using Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *field*. Using this term does not presuppose anything about how internally heterogeneous, how highly organized, or how strictly or loosely bounded our object of study is, nor actually whether it is justified to speak of something as coherent as the term “Degrowth movement” would suggest. Conceiving of Degrowth as a field implies taking stock of the actors present in this ‘structured space of forces and struggles’, reconstructing the relations of proximity and distance, cooperation and conflict among them, and trying to identify the underlying ‘forces and struggles’ that shape these relations. The key ‘force’ to look out for is what Bourdieu termed the ‘field effect’: As in a magnetic field, this effect creates invisible ‘lines’ introducing discernible regularities into the heterogeneity of the social agents. The field effect cannot be directly observed – it must be read off indirectly from the orientations or ‘position-takings’ of those affected by it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 243, 86; Bourdieu, 1996).

In this context, ‘Degrowth’ is, on the one hand, a code word for the common ground created by the field effect: The common belief or *illusio* (‘sense of the game’) that everyone in the field shares and that makes them consider growth critique and Degrowth-related activism worthwhile in the first place. On the other hand, it also establishes relative regularities within the relations among the actors affected by it: Seen as a field, a movement is always a space of struggles and disagreements about the *meaning* of the common goals and the appropriate *strategies* for achieving them. These ongoing arguments end up in lines of division or splits between different camps that individual actors then tend to more or less align with.

After a brief introduction to the core ideas and intellectual traditions of the Degrowth debate (Section 2), we will proceed to focus on the *unifying* aspect of the field effect. This is outlined by presenting what we decided to call the *basic consensus* among Degrowth activists (statements an overwhelming majority agrees on) (3.1.), as well as some issues on which clear majority positions are countered by relevant dissident minorities (3.2.). We then go on to investigate the divergences, splits and fractionings that the field effect creates on the basis of that common ground. The results of our Factor Analysis (4.1.) reveal several clearly identifiable tensions in the respondents’ thinking, among which the most notable is between a romanticizing *critique of civilization* and a *rationalist progressive* position. Finally, we briefly introduce the five subcurrents identified in our Cluster Analysis, highlighting their positionings in relation to each of the tensions elaborated on beforehand (4.2.). In Section 5 we conclude by summarizing our main findings and drawing out some conclusions for future activism as well as for further research.

2) The Degrowth debate: origins and intellectual traditions

The critique of economic growth is almost as old as the growth paradigm and its precursors reach back at least to the 19th century, when social movements in

Europe and beyond – both progressive and conservative – fought industrialization, acceleration and alienation. The critique of economic growth and GDP as the cherished indicator of capitalist accounting became more explicit and highly prominent during the 1960s and 1970s, not only in the context of the global revolution of “1968”, but also in established institutions and government circles. However, it receded to the background with the triumph of the concept of “sustainable development”, which from the 1980s onwards dominated societal debates about ecology and development for decades (Fioramonti 2013; Dale 2012; Schmelzer 2016).

The Degrowth debate is the most radical strand of the new wave of debates on the need for a social-ecological transformation of high-income societies that resurfaced after the capitalist crisis of 2007/8. The term derives from the French “décroissance”, which, although having risen to prominence only recently, was already coined in the early 1970s, amid heated debates about the Club of Rome’s *Limits to Growth* and about what was then perceived as a crisis of the growth paradigm. In 1972, French political theorist André Gorz first used the term in a positive and normative sense, posing right away the question that remains fundamental until today: “Is the earth’s balance, for which no-growth – or even degrowth – of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?” (cited in Kallis, Demaria, and D’Alisa 2014, 1; Asara 2015, 25). In the following years, the term “décroissance” sporadically appeared in French debates (Duverger 2011). However, it was only in 1979, when the French translation of a collection of papers by Romanian-American ecological economist Nicolas Georgescu-Roegen – another important founding figure – appeared under the title *Demain la Décroissance: Entropie – Écologie – Économie*, that the term was established in its more specific meaning: as an alternative to the ideas of “steady state” and “zero growth” (on the history of Degrowth, see Muraca/Schmelzer 2017).

These French origins reveal the twofold conceptual tradition that the term has carried from the outset: It merged a scientifically based ecological critique of growth and of mainstream economic thought with a strand of socio-cultural criticisms of the paradigmatic escalatory logic of late capitalism. Among its foundational elements were the influence of the *Situationists*, a specific variant of heterodox socialist thought marked by a strong awareness of ecological issues (Cornelius Castoriadis, André Gorz, Ivan Illich, Herbert Marcuse), a strand of French personalism (Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau), and, finally, neo-rural movements inspired by the French tradition of left catholicism (D’Alisa et al. 2014; Martinez-Alier et al. 2010). These elements continue to provide the groundwork for the revival the term has seen since about the turn of the millennium – combined with one novel element that has its own roots in the antagonistic discourses of the 1970s: the critique of the Western model of development that found its medium of mass expression in the no-global, or – as it was called in France – the *altermondialiste* movement (Latouche 2006).

After its revival in France, the term and the ideas associated with it soon gained a foothold in other Southern European countries, facilitated by close cultural

proximities and some common inspirational sources. In the past decade and a half, *décroissance*, *decrescita*, or *decrecimiento* has developed not only into a core concept of vibrant intellectual and scholarly debates, but also into an interpretative frame that provides an intellectual link between the activities of grassroots initiatives for car-free cities or food cooperatives, anti-globalization mobilizations, protests against advertising or large-scale infrastructural projects, and environmental campaigns (Demaria et al. 2013; Martínez-Alier et al. 2010). The academic collective *Research & Degrowth*, founded in 2007, has initiated a series of international conferences that have since helped further internationalize and institutionalize Degrowth both as an academic concept and as an activist slogan. These gatherings started out with an initial two hundred participants in Paris in 2008, grew continually in the course of the follow-up conferences in Barcelona (2010), Montreal (2011) and Venice (2012), and culminated in the 2014 Leipzig meeting, attended by 3000 participants. The 2016 conference in Budapest, the first to be held in Eastern Europe and much more academic in style than the enormous Leipzig event, was intentionally limited to 500 participants. The international Degrowth community that has emerged around these conferences constitutes a heterogeneous platform summoning different academic disciplines, social movements, practical experiments and more or less antagonistic initiatives. What unites them is a common critical view of late capitalist societies' fixation on economic growth in both its structural (economic and institutional) and socio-cultural (modes of subjectivation, social imaginary, colonization of the lifeworld) dimensions.

While the critique of the escalatory fixation of capitalist modernity has a long tradition in Southern European countries, it has only recently gained traction in those Northern European countries that still exhibit noteworthy rates of economic growth – especially Germany, with its export-led growth regime based on stagnating wages, flexibilization, precarious jobs and high productivity. What unites 'Degrowthers' (as adherents of Degrowth have come to be called) across their national or regional varieties and internal divergences is, firstly, their rejection of the technological optimism of the 'sustainability' discourse dominant in the 1990s with its promises of 'decoupling' growth from environmental destruction. One key argument drawn from the critique of 'green growth' ideas is that ecological justice can only be achieved by ending the "imperial mode of living" of the Global North with its unsustainable levels of affluence at the expense of the South and the environment (Brand/Wissen 2013). This, the argument goes on, implies an end of economic growth in the global North and a reduction of the biophysical 'size' of the economy (D'Alisa et al. 2014).

The rejection of a policy focus on economic growth does not imply the dogma that nothing in the economy must expand. Rather, it opposes a specific narrow-minded understanding of economic growth that equates increases in Gross Domestic Product with greater social well-being, along with the corresponding societal institutions and imaginaries, ranging from capitalist accumulation to consumerism and acceleration. In the Degrowth vision, certain fields of economic activity may very well expand (such as the care economy, renewable

energies, sustainable agriculture etc.), while others that are socially or environmentally objectionable (such as the fossilistic sectors, individualized traffic, luxuries) should be phased out. The point is that these are to be conscious democratic decisions based on a thorough assessment of the social and ecological consequences.

The second commonality lies in the specific relation between theory and practice that Degrowthers aspire to, namely the attempt to develop “concrete utopias” (Muraca 2014) as alternatives to the growth diktat and to connect these to disobedient practices and alternative modes of living (Burkhart et al. 2017). Degrowth activists argue that new, less resource-intensive modes of living that are sustainable in the long term and allow for a convergence toward equal possibilities for everyone on a global scale will not be invented by political elites or enlightened theorists. Rather, they must be found practically and in a grassroots democratic way. This, at least, is what proponents of Degrowth mostly argue when, drawing on such different sources as ecological and feminist economics, the critique of development policies, and debates about the “good life”, they seek to conceptualize a social-ecological transformation for highly industrialized countries. But is this more than just the self-portrayal of a few intellectuals? And is there a similar understanding of the goals and aims of Degrowth among activists at the grassroots level of this collective search for paths toward transformation?

3) The ‘common sense’ of Degrowth: consensus and majority positions among activists

3.1. Some notes on the survey

The following sections are based on analyses of our survey participants’ responses to the 29 statements on growth, Degrowth and related themes, which we asked them to rate on a scale from 1 (“completely disagree”) to 5 (“completely agree”) (or “don’t know/can’t say”).⁴ We designed these items to capture respondents’ political beliefs, values, and moral convictions concerning a number of key questions that we regarded as particularly important for identifying relevant divisions as well as points of agreement within the Degrowth spectrum.

To reduce selection bias, we took a number of measures to make participation in the survey as easy as possible.⁵ We remain cautious concerning the

⁴ For the full questionnaire, see Eversberg 2015.

⁵ The questionnaire was handed out to all participants equally together with other conference materials, extra copies to replace lost ones were available at the registration desk, and we provided an on-line version that could be filled out after the conference. To increase the return rate, we reminded participants on several occasions (in plenary sessions, at lunchtime) to fill out and hand in their questionnaire. The comparison of our sample with available data on all those registered for the conference for some key attributes (gender, nationality, country they arrived from) does not suggest any strong distortions (see Eversberg 2015).

representativeness of the sample for the totality of conference participants (for example, we suspect that people with a background of academic education may have been more inclined to fill out the rather lengthy questionnaire), let alone for the Degrowth spectrum as a whole. Nevertheless, we are confident that the results provide an adequate picture both of some core beliefs that most of the participants share and of the tensions, divisions and disagreements that exist among them. We assume that the *range* of views present within the Degrowth spectrum is by and large fully and accurately captured by the results, while some uncertainty remains especially about the relative *strength* of the ‘subcurrents’ we will introduce in Section 4.2.

In a first, descriptive step, the remainder of this section focuses on those issues most respondents broadly agree on. We distinguish between two levels of agreement: First, we will present what we call the *basic consensus*⁶ among Degrowth activists, consisting of the statements that only small minorities opposed (3.2.). After that, we discuss several statements on which clear majority positions exist, but are countered by relevant dissident minorities (3.3.).

3.2. The basic consensus: without economic contraction and the renunciation of amenities, capitalism and domination cannot be overcome

Taking stock of the responses given on the individual statements, we find that, despite a lot of controversy about many issues, there is a set of core ideas that were affirmed by an overwhelming majority. This consensus results from those seven statements that less than 100 respondents (12%) had rated contrary to the majority position (Figure 1). In essence, it is based on two central pillars:

The first is the belief that the promise of “green” or “sustainable growth” is dismissed as an illusion, that further growth is not an option for early industrialized countries, and that a reduction in material affluence will be inevitable. This results from overwhelming agreement to the statements

- “Growth without environmental destruction is an illusion”,
- “Let’s be honest: In the industrialized countries, shrinkage will be inevitable”, and

6 The way we use the notion of ‘consensus’ here must not be confused with its common use in activist circles, where it refers to a mode of decision making intent on finding solutions everyone can ‘live with’. Since a survey is not about decisions, and there was indeed no debate about the statements, there will never be a 100% agreement on anything. Instead, using the somewhat arbitrary criterion of less than 100 diverging answers, we singled out those positions that would likely have ended up ‘actually consensual’ in this or some similar form if they had been subject of debate and decision among the social core of the spectrum assembled here.

- “In the future, we will have to abstain from amenities that we have become used to”.⁷

The second pillar concerns the contours of the transformative vision put forward against the fixation on growth: It is to be pro-feminist, pacifist, grassroots-democratic, and rooted in a critique of capitalism. An overwhelming majority

- *rejected* the statement that “*It’s pointless to oppose capitalism as long as there is no realizable alternative societal concept*”,
- supported the view that “*Female emancipation needs to be an important issue for the Degrowth movement*”,
- took a strong stance *against violence* as a means for reaching a Degrowth society,
- and claimed that “*The change must come from below.*”

The high degree of agreement reveals two things, even though the motives for refusing or agreeing to these statements might have been quite diverse: First, it testifies to the degree of unity in the perception of shared concerns and attitudes, which is central to the formation of a social movement (della Porta and Diani 2005). Second, it demonstrates that a large majority in the Degrowth spectrum shares a vision that is anti-capitalist (or at least skeptical of capitalism), pro-feminist, peaceful and grassroots-democratic in nature.

⁷ We were particularly surprised that this last item – although deliberately strongly worded – was affirmed by such a large majority.

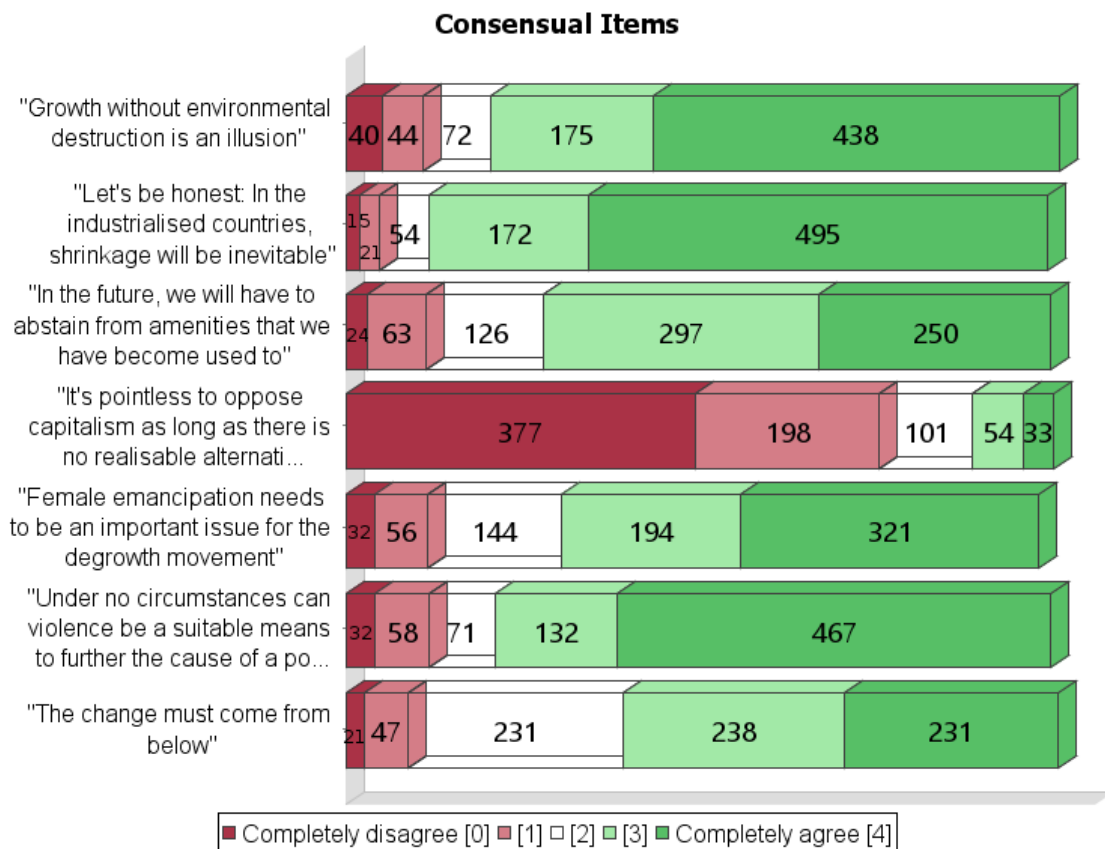


Fig. 1: Response patterns on the consensual items. Difference between the total for each item and the 814 respondents overall yields the respective nonresponse rate.

3.3. Contested majority positions

Next, there is a series of propositions that clear majorities support, but with sizable minorities disagreeing. We present three groups of such statements, relating to three broad aspects of Degrowth, and try to provide some interpretation concerning the implications of these results for the Degrowth spectrum. These interpretations should, however, be taken as more of a heuristic exercise that provides the background for the more detailed factor and cluster analyses in Section 4.

3.3.1. Lifestyle changes and self-transformation as starting points of transformative practice

Clear majorities favor several statements referring to the importance of personal lifestyles and everyday practices as points of departure for societal transformation. The motivations for supporting this transformation are not merely ecological, but rooted in an eco-social global justice perspective.

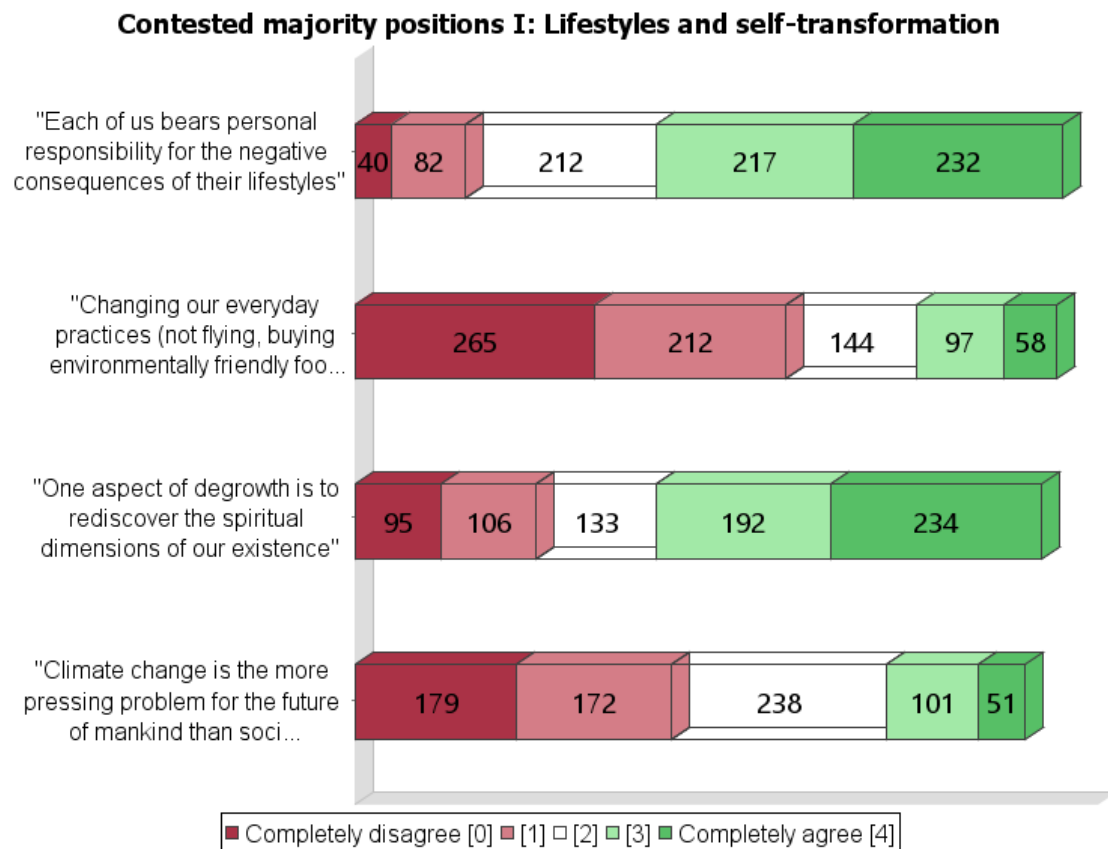


Fig. 2: Response patterns on items concerning lifestyles and self-transformation

More than half (55%) support the view that everyone is responsible for the consequences of their lifestyles, while an even larger majority (59%) objects to the statement that “Changing our everyday practices (not flying, buying environmentally friendly food) will not make the world a better place, since it does not question capitalism.” This testifies to a refusal to simply blame “the system” or deflect questions of responsibility away from oneself by negating any capacity of the individual to contribute to change. However, this should not be taken to imply a belief that personal practices are the *sole* source of change, since, as we have seen, a critical view of capitalism and other structural factors of domination is part of the basic consensus. It may as well amount to a recognition of everyone’s involvement in global structures of domination and injustice, of a degree of personal accountability and of the need to adopt the resulting responsibility. Instead of waiting for some future revolution to bring redemption, the large variety of small-scale and local transformative practices so characteristic of the Degrowth spectrum demonstrate that many want to start experimenting with change here and now and within their own lives. However, almost 20% of respondents reject the idea that everyday practice can be a starting point for real societal change. This points to a demarcation that is

highly typical of Degrowth debates, especially in Germany (Adler 2015; Schmelzer 2015) and that we will encounter again further on.

Interestingly, a majority of 52% also agree that Degrowth should be about rediscovering “the spiritual dimensions of our existence.” 25% reject this. Yet it seems doubtful that many of those agreeing to this statement gave it a narrow religious or esoteric meaning. Mostly, their understanding of “spirituality” seems to be accompanied by a critique of power and alienation, expressing a desire for a change in one’s relations to nature and to one’s own self. It provides an outlet for a fundamental critique of a disenchanted techno-capitalist society indifferent to one’s emotional needs. Still, more in-depth qualitative research, such as focus group interviews, would be necessary to further clarify the meaning of this broad support for spirituality.

Furthermore, the majority’s focus on practical self- and world-transformation is not merely ecologically motivated. Indeed, the fact that only a minority of 18% agree that “climate change is the more pressing problem for the future of mankind than social inequality” testifies to a broad, socially inclusive vision of what needs to change. For many, it seems to be a concern with fundamental global justice that requires economic contraction in the Global North, which is more in line with “just transition” conceptions (e.g. Brand/Wissen 2013; D’Alisa et al. 2014). Still, almost 19% do consider climate change more important than social justice – a tension we will return to later.

3.3.2. The necessity and difficulty of a social-ecological transformation

Some majority positions concern the characteristics of the envisioned transformation. Half of all respondents agreed that “If things don’t change, western societies will collapse within a few decades”, while 22% rejected this idea. And a relative majority sees the necessary transformation as very fundamental: 46% support the statement that “anything short of revolutionary change will not suffice to overcome our society’s fixation on growth”, with only 22% disagreeing.

Both claims demonstrate that participants conceive of Degrowth less as a purely ethical critique and more as an attempt to contribute to a far-reaching transformation that is seen as a necessary condition for future human well-being. The general tendency among Degrowth activists is to envision this transformation by starting from one’s own social position and subjectivity as a site for experimenting with emancipatory ways of overcoming the fixation on growth. The alternative seems to be: ‘Degrowth by design – or by disaster’. And to a relative majority, averting disaster amounts to nothing short of “revolutionary change”...

Contested majority positions II: The necessity and difficulty of change

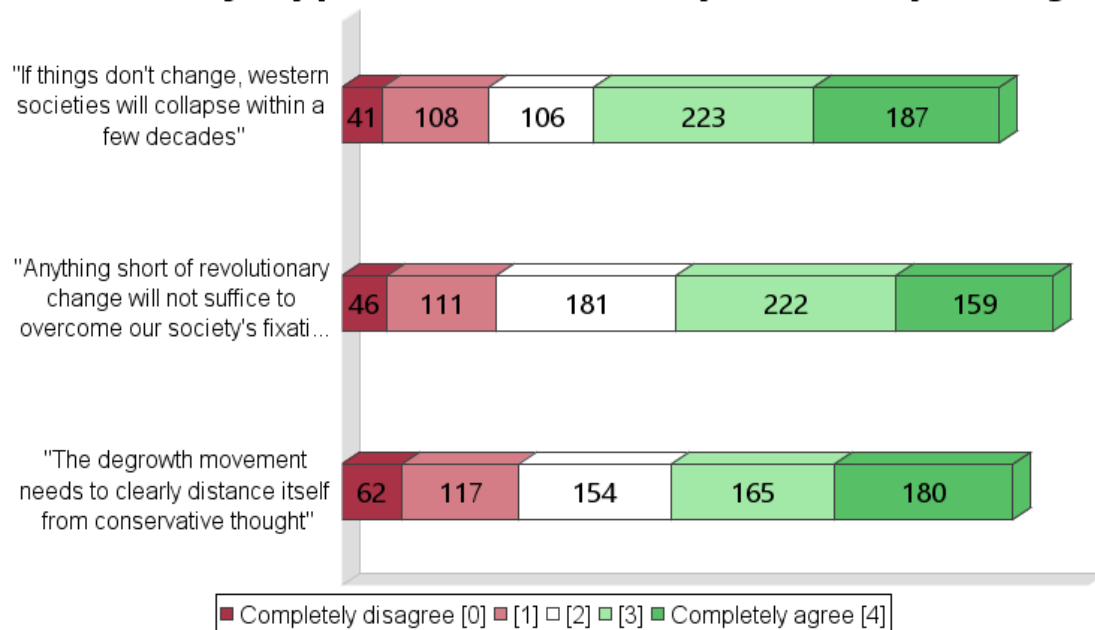


Fig. 3: Positions on the necessity and difficulties of the transformation

The ambition to prevent catastrophe through revolutionary change has implications for the self-positioning and the willingness for coalitions within the political sphere: A relative majority (46% of all respondents) champions a clear distancing of Degrowth from conservative ideas, while 22% object to such a clear demarcation. This is evidence that the larger part of the Degrowth spectrum tends to situate itself within the political left, although there is a sizeable current that, while not necessarily sympathizing with conservatism, objects to drawing such clear boundaries.

3.3.3. Type and direction of the transformation

Other contested majority tendencies concern the visions of the type and direction of the transformation toward a society without growth. While a narrow overall majority (just over 50%) reject the notion that the automobile industry will still be around 20 years from now, almost as many respondents (48%) contest the proposition that cities will have to be “largely dismantled”. Both views – seeing car traffic and large industrial infrastructures as expendable and wanting to preserve urban settlement structures – may be related to the fact that 60% of respondents live in cities above 100.000 inhabitants and only very few work in the manufacturing sector.

While a relative majority (47%) supported the proposal to “abolish the interest based monetary system”, the number of non-responses on this particular statement was strikingly high (200 or 25%). Obviously, many felt unsure about the meaning of this question or found it hard to judge, implying also that those

that did answer may have understood it in many different ways. We thus hesitate to derive anything from this result other than that many respondents seem to have felt that “something is wrong with the way money works”.

Contested majority positions III: Type and direction of necessary transformation

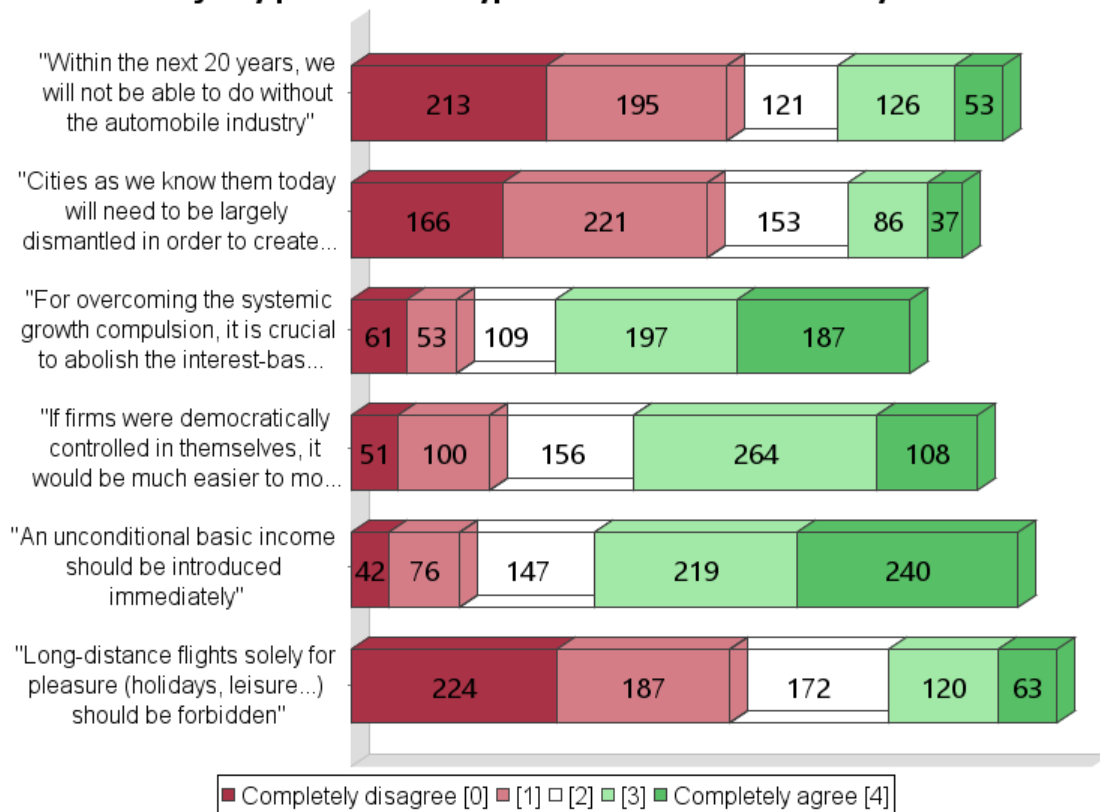


Fig. 4: Positions on the type and direction of the transformation

Furthermore, a relative majority (46%) advocated the democratization of firms as a means to “move away from growth”. The basic democratic and practical approach and the distrustfulness of central coordination expressed by all these results is also reflected by the fact that restrictive measures to enforce the necessary changes find little support. Rather, most seem to hope that change will come about through responsible personal decisions, the autonomy of which should further be strengthened and protected by society. In this vein, the demand for an immediate adoption of a basic income finds very strong support (56%), while banning long-distance flights solely for pleasure is rejected by a narrow absolute majority.

These responses show that, while everyday social practices serve as the starting point for societal transformation, there is also support for broader societal reforms aimed at enabling a less resource-intensive lifestyle. At the same time, these majority positions do encounter significant dissent, indicating the limits of the approach of starting from one’s own modes of living.

4. Tensions and Divisions in the thinking of Degrowth supporters

So far, we have only considered the patterns of responses on individual items. In this section, we turn to the typical patterns or combinations of responses to different statements in order to reveal underlying tensions and disagreements that extend beyond the reach of any single-issue question. To do this, we draw on two multivariate statistical methods: Factor Analysis (4.1.) and Cluster Analysis (4.2.).

4.1. Tensions: Factor Analysis

To identify systematic differences and divisions within the typical response patterns, we conducted a Factor Analysis to examine the regularities in participants' responses on all 29 statements.⁸ Factor analysis looks at 'typical' combinations of answers on different questions that often go together in the data. These are used to 'compress' as much of the overall variance (degree of heterogeneity) as possible into a smaller number of new variables, called 'factors.' Each factor can be considered a synthetic 'fake statement' made up of portions of several of the original statements. The nine factors we identified (Table 1) summarize the most common patterns in which the positive or negative evaluations of individual statements were found to go together in the dataset. The factors reveal underlying dimensions of respondents' expressed attitudes that can be interpreted as "core beliefs" or "character traits." Based on the results, each respondent is assigned factor scores that indicate how they would have responded to the combined 'fake questions'. Since each statement could be agreed to or rejected, a negative factor score indicates opposition to said synthetic statement, or agreement to its opposite. In other words, every factor spans a continuum between two extreme positions. These positions, and thus the meaning of the factor, can be read off from the statements that make up the factor and the strength of their (positive or negative) contributions, while the factor scores allow each individual (or group) to be located somewhere along this continuum.

8 Some technical details: We ran a Principal Component Analysis (PCA, a variant of Factor Analysis), using Varimax rotation for optimising the results. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, which allows an assessment of the sample's suitability for a factor analysis, is at .765, a reasonably good value for an analysis using this many variables. Bartlett's test for sphericity indicates that the null hypothesis of total non-correlation among all variables can be dismissed with certainty ($p=.000$). The procedure produces nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (i.e. explaining more variance than any single variable/item), which, after rotation, account for 3.9% (Factor 9) to 8.4% (Factor 1) of the overall variance within the data. The communalities – the shares of the variance in each individual variable explained by the factors – exceed the commonly cited minimum of .3 for all statements. The average commonality is .504, meaning that the nine factors extracted explain 50.4% of the variance among the 29 statements.

In our following interpretation we focus on the first four factors,⁹ which, taken together, explain 26% of the differences in respondents' answers to all 29 questions. We will also briefly address Factors 5 to 7, as they reveal some further interesting fault lines and tensions helpful in interpreting the five currents of the Degrowth spectrum presented in the following section.¹⁰

⁹ Based on their absolute eigenvalues and inspection of the screeplot.

¹⁰ Following established methodological standards, our interpretation of the factors takes those statements into account that charge (positively or negatively) by more than 0.5 on the respective factor. In addition, statements charging between 0.3 and 0.5 are considered if the respective item does not contribute more strongly to any other factor.

Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No growth without environmental destruction	-.120	.171	-.305	.405	.214	.339	.135	-.122	
Responsibility for own lifestyle	.329	.144			.113	.542	.101		
Dismantle cities	.513			.379			.255	.107	
Previous generations	.667	-.106			.174				
Opposing capitalism is pointless		-.263	.548		-.159	.225	.239		
Democratic firms	.145	.158						.765	
Distance from conservatism	-.110	.166		.656			.132	.113	
Harsher distributional conflicts	.161	-.285	.356	.279	.417	-.190		-.335	-.108
Collapse within coming decades	.450	.129			.189		.204	.115	
Back to 'natural place'	.570	.191		-.145		.123	.220		
Auto industry remains important	-.152	.102	.576					-.114	-.181
Female emancipation			-.117	.537	.110		-.368		.144
Violence is no means						.667			
Everyday behavior brings no change				.564	-.131	-.283		-.246	
Revolutionary change	.129	.434		.207		-.490	.218		
Ban long-distance flights	.166		-.269	.213	.130	-.118	.558	.128	
Climate change more pressing than inequality			.170				.643		
Problem is the negative consequences		-.205	.492				.145	.410	
Basic income		.521		.173	.122	-.120	-.230	.152	
Shrinkage in North necessary		.181	-.303		.595				
Rediscover spirituality	.659	.146		-.129			-.217		
Abolish interest-based monetary system	.374	.472				.111		.170	-.319
Degrowth Party	.149	.268				.108	.189	.197	-.517
Belief in growth	.148	.549				.369	.187		.122
Technology as a precondition for Degrowth	-.202	.206	.569					.136	.236
Change from below	.147	.181		.153					.761
Growth kills creativity	.426	.458		.213					
Refrain from amenities	.143				.768				
Directly feel negative consequences	.209	.288	.241	-.220	.427		.276		

Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalisation.

Relevant positive contributions marked in green, negative ones in red.

Reading example: The statement that "To live more sustainably, we should remember and revive the lifestyles of previous generations" contributed two thirds of the weight of a single statement to the construction of the first factor, with a positive response contributing to a positive factor score.

a. Rotation converged after 16 iterations.

Table 1: Rotated component matrix of the Principal Component Analysis

Factor 1: Critique of Civilization vs. Modernist Progressivism

The first factor captures what seems indeed to be a central dividing line within the internal dynamics of the Degrowth spectrum. The statements that contribute to it all refer to issues of civilization and progress. The strongest contributing item (.667) is the call to revive “the lifestyles of earlier generations”, followed by the claim that Degrowth includes rediscovering spirituality (.659) and the very controversial statement that “Man should return to his (and her) natural place in the world” (.570).¹¹ Also contributing slightly above 0.5 is the claim that cities will need to be “largely dismantled”. Finally, the expectation that western societies will collapse if no fundamental change occurs has its strongest contribution (.45) on this factor.

In sum, a positive score on this factor expresses a fundamental skepticism of industrial civilization, a rejection of technological notions of progress, and a desire for a “return” to a more “natural” lifestyle. Conversely, respondents with a negative score tend to reject such ideas in favor of a rationalist, ‘disenchanted’ world view and an affirmation of civilizational progress: Cities and the associated cosmopolitan lifestyles are regarded as cultural achievements worthy of preservation, romanticizing views of nature or traditional ways of life are rejected as regressive and at odds with emancipatory ideals, as are esoteric or religious views as well as expectations of civilizational collapse.

Read both ways, the core disagreement described by this factor is only secondarily about respondents’ evaluations of technology. Primarily, it is between positive and negative stances on modern Western civilization as a set of material, cultural and mental infrastructures. It separates those that *dismiss* any positive notion of progress along with the fixation on growth from those struggling to separate the two and *redefine* progress in ways allowing for a non-escalative or “reductive modernity” (Sommer/Welzer 2014).

Factor 2: Voluntarist Idealism vs. Sober Materialism

The second factor concerns the question of what it is that drives growth and change. Its positive variant is most strongly characterized by agreement to the statement “Except our own belief, there is nothing that forces us to go on with the madness of growth” (.549) and to the demand for a basic income (.521). Weaker, but still relevant are the contributions of the call for abolishing the interest-based monetary system (.472) and the claim that growth has “killed off people’s creativity” (.458). Furthermore, the statement that only “revolutionary change” can end growth has its strongest positive contribution here (.434).

A positive factor score thus indicates that someone locates the key driver of growth, but also the crucial starting point for change, in people’s subjective

11 This item received a singularly high number of nonresponses (300/37%), as well as numerous handwritten comments on the paper questionnaire such as “what’s that supposed to be?” Obviously, many felt they could not answer because they rejected the implicit premise that such a ‘natural place’ even exists. This effect was indeed intended by us in opting for this wording.

attitudes and everyday practices. It expresses the ‘individualist’ assumption that ‘growth’ is merely the sum of everyone’s individual practices and that everyone could just as well start ‘undoing growth’ if only they became conscious of this. This entails a very positive assessment of the chances for far-reaching change, since it would follow that such change could come about quickly by way of political reforms (basic income, monetary reform) once those holding power and responsibility woke up to realize the need for it. The “revolutionary change” advocated thus mainly invokes a revolution of thought in the sense of Latouche’s (2006) ‘decolonization of the imaginary’, which would more or less automatically pave the way for far-reaching societal transformation.

We call this attitude *voluntarist* because it assumes that everything could change immediately if only people wanted it (having realized it is in their ‘true interest’), and an *idealist* one because it expects changed ideas to directly entail changes of societal structures. In addition, the stances on the items about creativity and basic income suggest a close connection with a critique of *alienation*: growth is negatively identified with the heteronomy and pressure exerted to enforce it, while liberation is sought in regaining sovereignty and space for creativity through instruments such as the universal basic income.

The counter-position, marked by a negative factor score, advances a *materialist* (in the philosophical sense) perspective against this view. From this ‘holistic’ vantage point, ‘growth’ is not the mere sum of individual practices, but the product of entrenched societal structures functioning largely beyond the individual’s will, which cannot be easily left or abandoned and are defended by powerful interests. It is these interests, and the relations of power and domination constituting them, that respondents with a negative factor score aim at with their critique and that they identify as inherent or practical constraints to overcoming growth (quick revolutionary change is unrealistic, immediate far-reaching demands are pointless). In sum, thus, the negative version of this factor indicates mainly a disillusioned or *sober* vision of the prospects for social change, centering on the power of entrenched social structures.

Factor 3: System-Immanent Techno-Optimism vs. Critique of Industrialism

A positive score on factor 3 indicates a comparatively techno-optimistic attitude, coupled with a relatively positive view of capitalism. Most strongly positively contributing are the statements that “we will not be able to do without the automobile industry” within the next 20 years (.576), that a high stage of technological development is an important precondition for the transition to a post-growth society (.569), and that “it is pointless to oppose capitalism” without any coherent alternatives at hand (.548). While the latter does not necessarily imply explicit approval of capitalism, it does suggest an acceptance of the capitalist social order as the frame within which any realistic change will have to take place for the time being. This moderate or ‘pragmatic’ stance is also expressed by affirmation (just below .5) of the statement that “the critique of growth is less about growth as such as about its destructive effects”. Although

not significant technically, the negative contributions (just above .3) of the consensual items that “growth without environmental destruction is an illusion” and that shrinkage will be inevitable in the North neatly fit in with this. Obviously, the trait referenced by this factor involves a desire to distance oneself from what is perceived as an overly radical, fundamentalist opposition to growth and capitalism. The last statement with a relevant contribution is the expectation that a shrinking economy will bring harsher distributional conflicts, indicating a concern that social justice will be much harder to achieve without growth. In sum, a high positive factor score places a respondent at the fringes of the Degrowth spectrum, indicating that they are more inclined to ideals of ecomodernism or ‘green growth’.

In contrast, negative scores point to a harsh critique of capitalism, which highlights neither alienation nor inequality, but decidedly focuses on technology: Rejecting capitalism is seen as sensible, the automobile industry as obsolete, and a high level of technological development is interpreted as more of a hindrance for a post-growth society. Growth is rejected head-on as a matter of principle, while economic contraction is seen as unavoidable or even desirable and not necessarily associated with escalating distributional conflicts. herein essence, this is a radical critique of capitalist industrialism as a mode of living dominated by technological systems that are not merely in the wrong hands, unjustly distributed or inappropriately used, but inherently problematic and harmful for social cohesion.¹²

Factor 4: Structural Critique of Domination vs. Reformist Conservatism

Factor 4 captures the tension between a radical, revolutionary stance against all forms of social domination and a ‘pragmatic’ concern with ‘small steps’ within existing institutions. Its positive variant is most strongly characterized by support for a clear distancing of Degrowth from conservative thought (.656), followed by the claim that “female emancipation needs to be an important issue for the Degrowth movement” (.534). Another element is the belief that “changing our everyday practices will not make the world a better place, since it does not question capitalism” (.564). This indicates a structure-oriented thinking that locates the starting point of change in struggles against societal structures of power as such rather than in individual social practice. Furthermore, the fact that the statement “growth without environmental destruction is an illusion” also contributes to this factor (.405) suggests that society’s relations with nature are also subject to this critique of structures of domination.

Scoring negatively, Factor 4 stands for an openness to conservative ideas, or at least to debate with conservatives, for a focus on individual daily practice, and

12 Such fundamental critique of industrialism and large-scale technology is also central in the writings of some of the key intellectual forerunners of the Southern European décroissance movement, such as Ivan Illich (1998) and André Gorz (2009).

generally for a shying away from the more radical elements of Degrowth thought. We call this stance *reformist* because of its intention to seek change mostly on a small scale, in little increments and without antagonism, and *conservative* because it aims to preserve the existing overall structure of social relations.

Factors 5 to 7

The explanatory power of Factors 5, 6, and 7 is notably lower than that of the first four, and they receive contributions from only a few closely related items each. We still want to briefly mention them because they do provide hints at relevant divisions in the field of Degrowth thought and activism that can enhance our understanding of the relations between the five currents we will introduce in the following section.

Factor 5: Denouncing Amenities vs. Modernist Progressivism. It captures the tension between insistence on the necessity of renouncing the amenities of a resource-intensive and destructive ‘Northern’ lifestyle and a contrary position that is more focused on questions of wealth distribution. The statements contributing to it are “In the future, we will have to refrain from amenities that we have become used to” (.768) and “Let’s be honest: In the industrialized countries, shrinkage will be necessary” (.595) as well as, to a weaker degree, the expectation of harsher distributional conflicts in case of economic shrinkage (.417).

Factor 6: Individualist Pacifism vs. Revolutionary Conflictualism. Its positive version includes a rejection both of violence as a means of political struggle (.667) and of revolutionary change in general (-.490), as well as an ethics of individual accountability for the consequences of one’s personal lifestyle (.542). Thus, respondents with high positive factor scores assigns a high degree of responsibility to the individual for contributing to a transformation that must, by any means, be nonviolent and occur without a revolutionary rupture. A negative score indicates a revolutionary orientation favoring a sharp rupture with the structural imperatives of growth that may not be possible without violent conflict.

Factor 7: Eco-Authoritarianism vs. Libertarian Egalitarianism. Positive scores on this factor are constituted by prioritizing the challenge of climate change over the problem of social equality (.643), coupled with support for the idea of banning long-distance flights for leisure purposes (.558). Pointedly, this amounts to an eco-radicalism escalated to the point of supporting the authoritarian enforcement of what one considers binding ecological imperatives. In contrast, negative scores testify to a refusal to play out ecological demands against concerns with social justice and personal autonomy.

4.2. Divisions: Five currents within the Degrowth spectrum

As the results of the factor analysis have shown, the Degrowth spectrum is not only united by a broadly shared consensus, but also internally heterogeneous and crisscrossed by multiple tensions concerning its goals and strategies. To help us gain a better understanding of how these tensions and disagreements play out within the political “landscape” of the spectrum, we now turn to the last step in our investigation. Using the method of Cluster Analysis¹³, we have identified five currents that not only differ in terms of their ideas and beliefs, but are also distinct in terms of social composition and political and day-to-day practices. While these five currents can be characterized in detail with reference to their responses on each of the 29 statements in the survey (see Eversberg/Schmelzer 2016), it is also possible to describe each of them, as well as the proximities and distances between them, in terms of their respective scores on the factors examined above. Fig. 5 graphically summarizes this, portraying each Cluster by its specific combination of the ‘character traits’ captured by the factors.

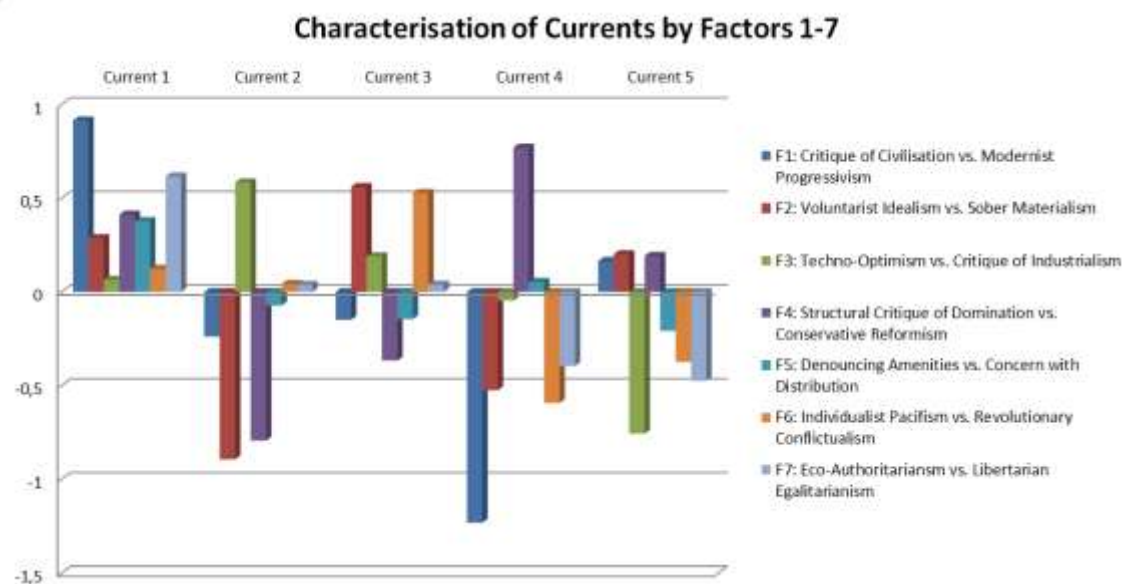


Fig. 5: Characterization of Currents by Factors 1-7

1. *Sufficiency-Oriented Critics of Civilization*: 22% of survey participants belong to this current, which is characterized by positive scores on *all* factors, but most

¹³ Cluster Analysis is a method that is suitable for identifying *groups* that share similar basic orientations or worldviews among the respondents that answered to a specific set of questions. We conducted this second multivariate analysis (specifically, a *k*-means Cluster Analysis) using, again, the responses on all 29 statements as a basis. The results are documented in detail elsewhere (Eversberg/Schmelzer, forthcoming). Here, for reasons of space, we restrict ourselves to a very short, condensed presentation.

strongly by its biting *critique of civilization* and, to a lesser degree, its inclination to support *eco-authoritarian* policies. Many of these respondents are older activists, often with long-standing experience in social, and particularly environmental, movements. Based on a vigorous ecological motivation, they strongly affirm the statements stressing closeness to nature, spirituality, or a revival of earlier generations' lifestyles. Their activism is directed towards building sufficiency-oriented "parallel societies" (Adler 2015) as nuclei of an alternative way of life. After the collapse of industrial societies that many of them expect, they envision that these communities could become a model for a societal 'reset'.

2. Immanent Reformers: The second current combines a stark *sober materialism* with an almost equally strong *conservative reformism*, combined with the highest *system-immanent techno-optimism* among all currents. Respondents in this group (19%) actively use the newest technologies, travel frequently, often belong to political parties and student initiatives, and feel comparatively little connection with social movements. This group stands at the techno- and progress-optimistic pole of the Degrowth spectrum, and is the most 'reformist' (in terms of operating within the existing institutions). They reject anti-civilizational skepticism, spirituality and regressive orientations, but also express little support for revolutionary upheaval and anti-capitalism. They seek thorough societal change between the poles of "green growth", ecomodernist visions, and reforms that would transcend growth from within existing institutions. As they diverge most strongly from the Degrowth consensus sketched above, we do not consider this current a part of the Degrowth spectrum in its entirety. Yet, precisely for that reason, its members could potentially be crucial actors in mediating between the Degrowth movement and institutionalized politics, or could act as moderate disseminators for its ideas.

3. Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists: People in this current (23%) typically score high on *voluntarist idealism* and *individualist pacifism*, and they also tend toward a *conservative reformist* attitude. They are on average relatively young, two thirds of them are female, and many have little experience with social movements and political activism. Most of their views don't differ much from the average of the survey participants – their most striking single position is the above-average endorsement of a Degrowth party, presumably signaling a desire for an established public mouthpiece of their beliefs. They locate the problem with growth mainly in people's day-to-day habits, which they think everyone could change right away if only they understood. This is coupled with a particularly strong pacifism and a general avoidance of conflict. Their ideal of a transformation is one in which Degrowth prevails simply by way of an evolutionary expansion of day-to-day behavioral change from below. We assume that this cluster is in part a transitory state that many young sympathizers pass through before forming strong opinions and ending up in a different cluster later in life.

4. Modernist-Rationalist Left: This group has some very clear-cut views, especially its *very strong modernist progressivism* and its staunch *structural*

critique of domination. It also scores high on *sober materialism*, *revolutionary conflictualism* and *libertarian egalitarianism*. Its members are primarily male, strongly concentrate in large cities, and account for only 13 percent of respondents. They often have a long history of activism, which mostly involves relatively “traditional” forms of left politics: a comparatively large share are party members, and a particularly large majority often participates in demonstrations. Their identification with social movements is weaker than average, while their core stances are almost the mirror image of the first current: They believe in progress, sharply refuse spirituality, romanticization of the past and conservatism, and advance a critique of capitalism based on structure-oriented arguments and issues of social justice rather than ecology. They consider a thorough critical analysis a central precondition for any political practice, and taking action without such theoretical groundwork easily appears to them as naïve, futile, or even dangerous. This is another current that can probably not in its entirety count as part of the Degrowth spectrum. The part that does articulate its positions “from within”, however, is immensely important in shaping the Degrowth discourse.

5. Alternative Practical Left: The fifth current is in some ways an antagonist of the second, expressing a particularly vocal *critique of industrialism* and leaning toward both *revolutionary conflictualism* and *libertarian egalitarianism*. It comprises 22% of respondents, with an above-average percentage of people living outside Germany and a strong rootedness in an activist alternative milieu. Among this group, participating in direct actions or living in alternative housing projects are far more common than on average. They strongly identify with social movements and are highly networked within the Degrowth environment. They typically express a pattern of mostly radical views which, however, cannot clearly be located on either side of the divide between the critique of civilization (Current 1) and modernist-rational leftism (Current 4), but rather crisscross it. To them, openness to spirituality and rejecting the romanticization of nature, structural thinking and a critique of industrial society are no contradictions, but go hand in hand. This current stands for an *anarchist*-inspired critique of growth and capitalism that agrees with the fourth current in stressing aspects of social justice, while being more in line with current 1 in focusing on experiences of *alienation* caused by the perpetual pressure to expand. Respondents from this current do consider personal everyday practice a leverage point for transformative action, while avoiding a moralist stance based on an individualist ethics of responsibility. Their practical dissent and experimentation with counter-conduct aims less at the formation of parallel structures than at transforming one’s own growth-determined subjectivity and, as a long-term consequence, society as a whole. The bottom line is the vision of bringing about *revolution by way of practical self-transformation*.

5) Conclusions

The findings presented in this article are based on the first large-scale empirical survey among activists of the Degrowth spectrum. What insights can

researchers and activists within and beyond this spectrum gain from this investigation? What lessons does it hold for those struggling for a global social and ecological transformation?

Most importantly, we do see reasons to believe that Degrowth can be described as a social movement in the making – a movement that opposes economic growth, capitalism, industrialism, and other forms of domination, that proposes and works on alternatives, and that takes self-transformation and collective practices in the here and now as starting points for broader societal transformations. We have demonstrated in this article that participants of the Degrowth conference, and this probably equally applies to Degrowth activists more broadly, are a) engaged in conflictual relations with growth-based capitalism;¹⁴ b) form dense informal networks; and c) – a point we believe to have made particularly clear – they also share a rather distinct collective identity (on these three defining criteria for social movements see della Porta/Diani 2006, 21). The main cornerstone of this identity is certainly what we have described as the movement's basic consensus, including the belief that a reduction of the biophysical size of the market economy will be necessary in the Global North, requiring that people here abstain from certain amenities, and a desire for this transformation to transcend capitalism in a feminist, pacifist and emphatically democratic way. Another important piece of evidence is that 41% chose "the Degrowth movement" when asked what social movements they identified with. Indeed, many also identified with other social movements (in particular environmental, alter-mondialist and anti-nuclear movements), partly to an even larger extent, but there was also a segment of 16% who *only* identified with the Degrowth movement. Degrowth should thus not be seen as competing with other movements. Rather it might be the hallmark of Degrowth that it is a complement or an interpretative frame that can create meaningful connections between otherwise separate ecological, social, and political concerns (Demaria et al. 2013).

Degrowth is certainly still a movement *in the making*, insofar as it has scarcely been the subject of classical oppositional social movement practices such as demonstrations, civil disobedience, or direct actions so far. Even if many activists have participated in such actions, they were seldom perceived as activities of the Degrowth movement. Currently, however, this may be changing – actually, the conference in Leipzig ended in a demonstration and an open action training at a local coal power plant. The 2015-2017 "Degrowth in Action" summer schools, designed as a follow-up to the conference, were deliberately held at the same site and in close cooperation with the more openly activist climate camp in the Rhineland region. As part of this strategy of forging links with the climate movement, the end of the 2015 Summer School was timed to

¹⁴ We accept that this may indeed be the one point at which this conclusion might legitimately be challenged: Does such an abstract entity as "growth-based capitalism" pass as a "clearly identified opponent"? In fact, the issue does seem more complicated, since the concern with self-reflection and self-transformation implies a recognition of one's own entangledness in the machinery of growth, i.e. a (partial) inclusion of one's own self in the identified "opponent" (Eversberg 2016).

coincide with *Ende Gelände*, a large-scale civil disobedience action against lignite mining that participants were invited to take part in.

The effectiveness of Degrowth in providing an interpretative frame, or rallying point, for a conflictual diversity of critical intentions and transformational approaches is demonstrated by our Cluster Analysis. It shows that five broad currents coexist: The eco-radical *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization*, the moderate *Immanent Reformers*, a transitory group of *Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists*, the *Modernist Rationalist Left* and the *Alternative Practical Left*. Our findings suggest that within this internal heterogeneity, there is indeed one group that most closely represents the core ideas of the academic debate around Degrowth, and plays an integrating role that makes it a sort of “embodiment” of the interpretative frame Degrowth provides, namely the *Alternative Practical Left*. Their views are firmly rooted in a radically critical view of capitalism, industrial society, and social domination, while avoiding both the anti-civilizational retreat into alternative communities common among the *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization* and the theory-centered concept of political action typical of the *Modernist-Rationalist Left*. The *Alternative Practical Left* most clearly advocates a transformational practice that starts out from the everyday, opening up experimental spaces for acting differently (in squats, urban gardens, repair cafés, or climate camps), and aspiring to ‘become something different’ in the process, to experimentally turn oneself into a different subject emancipated from the imperatives of growth. Thus understood, ‘revolutionary change’ is not a yearned-for future event, but the successive broadening and proliferation of this process of transforming oneself and society (cf. Graeber 2009: 211; 526-534).

It is these ‘contagious’ effects of transformational practice that may play a role in fostering practical convergence between the ideologically differing currents within the Degrowth spectrum. Based on the shared consensus, such practically self-reflexive practice, if self-consciously political, could bridge the gap between the antagonistic clusters 1 and 4, appealing both to some in the *Modernist-Rationalist Left* tired of the rightly structural, but often strategically stumped critical posture and to parts of the *Sufficiency-oriented Critics of Civilization* wary of the social ineffectiveness of retreating from the political sphere. For many of the *Voluntarist-Pacifist Idealists*, the attractiveness of the practical-transformative approach was probably crucial for attending the conference in the first place. What seems doubtful is whether many *Immanent Reformers* can be convinced of this kind of strategic orientation, seeing that this current is the most skeptical about the basic consensus. Still, openness to their intentions on the part of others in the movement is important: If parts of this group do get affected by the ‘field effect’ of Degrowth, they may become important advocates of Degrowth ideas within the more institutionalized realms of politics.

Finally, Degrowth also stands for the re-emergence of a form of emancipatory critique that – at least in Germany – had lost currency in recent decades: the critique of alienation. While the organized left, coming from the Marxian intellectual trajectory, has traditionally held that critiques of exploitation and

injustice are the more ‘mature’ version of anti-capitalism, the re-actualized critique of alienation is capable of mobilizing strands of anti-capitalism that were regarded as ineffective or thoroughly integrated since the upheavals of the 1970s and the formation of a “flexible capitalism” (Boltanski/Chiapello 2003, van Dyk 2010). As some Degrowthers put it: The cake is not only distributed wrongly, it is also poisoned (Rosa 2009). Degrowth, then, is not about getting a greater piece of the pie, nor even about appropriating the bakery and baking it yourself, but also, on top of that, about collectively finding something entirely different to bake that is both smaller and tastier. This requires a different way of baking, which itself presupposes bakers capable of doing that because they have practically tried it. This is what the demand to practically start with the transformation of everyone’s relations to themselves and the world aims at. This importance of the critique of alienation for the Degrowth movement is evidenced by several of our results, not least in the factor analysis. It is present both in the deep rift between a fundamental critique of civilization and a modernist rationalism evidenced by factor 1, and in factor 3, which separates the radical critique of industrialism as an *alienating capitalist* formation from a wholesale anti-civilizational stance.

To us, this seems to mirror the intellectual origins of Degrowth in the critical traditions of Southern Europe. While in Italy or Spain, critiques of alienation had always been an integral part of left thought in the form of anarchist and libertarian-socialist currents, in Germany – with the exception of a short surge in 1968 (Eversberg 2016) – it has practically always been marginalized in the discourse of the left (not to mention the GDR, with its Marxist-Leninist state ideology). Beyond the (politically marginal) anarchist circles that had always held onto it, this type of critique has gained new traction with the rise of the anti-globalization movement in the last 15 years – again going particularly strong in Southern Europe (Graeber 2011). These lineages may help explain why Degrowth originates in France, Spain and Italy, and also why key differences persist between Southern European variants of Degrowth, in which the critique of alienation and post-development always played a key role, and ‘post-growth’ debates in Germany, Austria and the Anglo-Saxon countries, in which a more strongly “marxianized” left has always been more focused on economic inequality and exploitation, and more strongly separated from debates about ecology and sustainability (see also Muraca 2014; Muraca/Schmelzer 2017).

In any case, a new movement coalition does seem to be emerging around the notion of Degrowth. While disagreements and rifts within the field of Degrowth activism persist, both the intellectual stimuli of Southern European debates and the active efforts to create a transformative practice in line with them have been effective in creating the sense of relative unity and common purpose that is characteristic of emerging social movements.

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An oral history of Peoples' Global Action

Laurence Cox, Lesley Wood

When the Zapatistas rose up in 1994, social movements around the world took notice. Many activists travelled to Mexico to see what was happening or asked 'what can we do?'. In response the Zapatistas organised two "Intergalactic Encounters for Humanity and against Neoliberalism", the first one in Chiapas (1995) and the second in the Spanish state (1996). At the second of these, movements from the global South insisted on the need not just to reform neoliberalism but to defeat capitalism completely, and to produce a resistance as transnational as capital. Peoples' Global Action, founded at a conference in Geneva in 1998, evolved the following hallmarks:

1. A very clear rejection of capitalism, imperialism and feudalism; all trade agreements, institutions and governments that promote destructive globalisation;
2. We reject all forms and systems of domination and discrimination including, but not limited to, patriarchy, racism and religious fundamentalism of all creeds. We embrace the full dignity of all human beings.
3. A confrontational attitude, since we do not think that lobbying can have a major impact in such biased and undemocratic organisations, in which transnational capital is the only real policy-maker;
4. A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism;
5. An organisational philosophy based on decentralisation and autonomy.

These principles underlaid the subsequent "global days of action" against capital, combining protests aiming to disrupt the summit meetings that mark the visible organisation of neoliberal capitalism with simultaneous actions around the world, bringing hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets in 60 countries. The best-known of these is probably the 1999 protest that derailed the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

The PGA also organized a number of global conferences, regional conferences, and caravans, where activists from different grassroots movements built trust, relationships and shared strategy and knowledge.

This decentralized, networked model of organising reflected wider trends in the new wave of movements and fed back into it, to differing degrees. In some Andean countries the scale of popular unrest was such that PGA was just a small

part of a much wider process of mobilising and networking; in some European countries it was for a time the only game in town. As other processes (e.g. Indymedia, social forums), other political traditions (notably on the statist left) and other issues (most obviously the US’ “war on terror”) developed, PGA as an formation faded into the background. Its goal had always been to network between existing movements and communities in struggle; this, and radical opposition rather than polite lobbying, became very much the order of the day.

In 2014 a group of activists, most ex-PGA, started discussing the idea of doing an oral history together with a few academics with similar backgrounds. The idea was to collect people’s stories and find out what they thought of the PGA experience. We wanted to do this not just for the history books or people’s own autobiographies, but in a way that would be useful for today’s movements, perhaps particularly those which are consciously or unconsciously drawing on some of the approaches developed in PGA and other parts of the movement of movements, but also those which are struggling with some of the same challenges. Heading towards the G20 summit protests in Hamburg this July, that history is clearly anything other than exhausted – but equally clearly we didn’t win in the ways we’d hoped, and so the question of what movements can do better today is an important one.

The project is intended as primarily an activist one, and the goal is not a “professional” oral history but one done by activists, with and for activists. We are creating the infrastructure to enable activists to plan, carry out and archive interviews with one another and to use the process to reflect on movement struggles today. A Scholar-Activist Project Award from the Antipode Foundation and a SSHRC small grant are currently paying for small pilot projects activist researchers recording an initial batch of interviews in some selected countries, and we are already starting to see activists take on this project on their own behalf. Meanwhile we are setting up secure data storage to archive interviews and constructing a website as a front end for the project. In the end, our goal is to make these stories available for our own movements.

We are very much open to offers of interviews and can supply interview guidelines, consent forms and secure data storage. Activists wanting to run events using the project to reflect on today’s movements and lessons from the past are very welcome. For further information please see <http://pgaoralhistory.net/> or contact us at pgaoralhistory@tao.ca

The right to housing in theory and in practice: going beyond the West

Katia Valenzuela-Fuentes, Dominika V. Polanska & Anne Kaun

The struggle for housing beyond the West

During the last three decades processes of urban development have spread speedily across the globe, transforming hundreds of cities into primary sites for the implementation of a neoliberal agenda. As expected, this global phenomenon brings with it a number of negative consequences for the lives of disadvantaged urban residents. Privatization and commercialization of public space and housing stocks, increasing gentrification of neighbourhoods and deregulation of the housing sector are only a few examples of the adverse scenario that people from less well-off backgrounds have to face. These processes constitute capital-driven strategies that have been enforced by displacing, evicting, marginalizing and criminalizing communities who are, at the same time excluded from any participation in the decision-making process of the urban restructuring. These actions, carried out by corporations, investors and developers and closely backed up by entrepreneurial governments (Mayer, 2009) or “centaur-states” (Wacquant, 2012) are embedded in an accelerated process of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2008) that has exacerbated inequality and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The effects of this growing polarization in the distribution of power and wealth can be easily observed in the spatial forms of the cities, in which gated communities, glittering city centre developments and privatized areas under non-stop surveillance coexist in sharp separation with favelas, precarious and informal settlements and impoverished working class neighbourhoods (Harvey, 2012; Lipman, 2011).

If the aforementioned strategies are essential for the neoliberalization of the city, it is important to clarify that this process does not only rely on the implementation of economic and urban policies. Understood as a “network of policies, ideologies, values and rationalities that work together to achieve capital’s hegemonic power” (Miraftab, 2009, p.34), neoliberalism usually combines coercion and state violence with softer tactics aimed at engaging the citizens in its ideological agenda. Therefore, cities become a fertile ground for the emergence of neoliberal subjects who embrace individualistic ethics, define themselves as consumer citizens and firmly rely on their individual responsibility for attaining well-being (Leitner et al., 2007) and meeting their basic social needs (such as education, food, healthcare, housing, transportation, utilities and so forth). However, despite the attempts of hegemonic control coming on both the material and ideological fronts, the strategies of capitalist

accumulation in the cities have been disputed and challenged by communities which no longer accept the commodification of their urban spaces by reclaiming their power over the ways in which the cities are made and remade (Harvey, 2012; Künkel and Mayer, 2012). By embracing slogans such as ‘the right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2012; Marcuse, 2009) or ‘the struggle for a dignified life’ (Pérez, 2017, Reynoso, 2009), different collectives, social movements and communities, both within Western and non-Western contexts, have rejected the individualistic neoliberal ethos and mobilised for the “exercise of collective power over the process of urbanization” (Harvey, 2012, p.4) in the fields of housing, public spaces, services, transparency, information and access to the city, amongst others.

Although several similarities can be found between the struggles in the global North and global South, it is also essential to acknowledge the diversity of geographical, physical, economic and social realities in the analysis of urban neoliberalism and its contestations. The challenge, then, is to reinterpret critical thinking in light of the specific realities and historical experiences shaping these expressions of resistance (Zibechi, 2016). In line with this purpose, this special section tries to go beyond the understanding of non-Western territories as merely sources of data, reclaiming them as “sites of theorization in their own right” (Parnell and Robinson, 2012, p.596).

Drawing on the need for contextual and situated knowledge in the field of housing, this special section brings together examples from Latin America (Uruguay and Mexico), Middle East (Ankara in Turkey), Southern, Central and Southeast Europe. Altogether, the pieces presented here seek to contribute to the ongoing theoretical and political debates about the struggle for housing in under-researched geographical regions and/or in countries displaced to the periphery of Europe (as the case of Italy, for instance). Six original papers documenting housing struggles in Uruguay, Poland, Italy, Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary are part of this section. These articles are followed by the transcription of an activist panel with four housing organizations from non-Western contexts (Mexico, Turkey, Poland and Hungary), where activists debated the contextual, political and organizational challenges encountered in their collective praxis.

In spite of the rich diversity of cases presented in this section, a similar trend is common to all of them: those who are squatting, resisting evictions and displacement, mobilizing against rent increases and housing shortages, organizing around homelessness or planning and building housing co-operatives; in different ways they are all embodying experiences of exclusion, marginalization and oppression. However, these positions do not stop them from resisting neoliberalism and fighting for a more dignified life in the city. Interestingly, they all seem to agree on the way in which they challenge neoliberalism. Rather than relying and waiting for top-down solutions coming

from governments, political parties or other traditional institutions, they embrace a political approach ‘from below’ (Motta, 2013) that emphasizes the power of the communities to provide solutions to their own problems, either by creating autonomous projects or by mobilizing and pushing the governments to negotiate the housing policies through force. According to Cox and Nilsen (2014), movements from below can be understood as:

...the organization of multiple forms of locally generated skilled activity around a rationality expressed and organized by subaltern social groups, which aims either to challenge the constraints that a dominant structure of needs and capacities impose upon the development of new needs and capacities or to defend aspects of an existing dominant structure which accommodate some of their specific needs and capacities (p.72)

Following Cox and Nilsen’s definition of movements from below, it can be argued that the experiences of housing activism discussed in this section represent clear attempts to challenge the constraints imposed by the hegemonic neoliberal project. By developing their own local rationalities, the communities mobilizing for the right to housing engage with novel repertoires of action in order to fulfil their needs and enhance their capacities. For example, many contributions in this section highlight the importance of democratic organizational structures and political strategies developed by collectives and movements in resistance. Consensus decision-making, direct democracy, self-management, horizontality, grassroots networking, non-violent direct action and the use of assemblies for fostering participation, among others, are some of the key features defining the political practice of squats, social centres, tenants’ and homeless’ associations, cooperatives and urban platforms analysed throughout this section.

Paradoxically, these inspiring experiences coexist with equally subaltern sectors of the population which choose to accept the individual responsibility for housing and to avoid engaging with oppositional politics, possibly because of the internalization of the neoliberal ideology or the disenchantment with the current economic and political system. In the specific context of post-socialist countries, a third element is also explanatory of people’s disengagement with collective struggles: the discredited memory of the former state socialist regimes and their elites, and the attempts to eradicate this political legacy has led to the consolidation of a culture of de-politicization that distrusts collective projects linked to socialist beliefs. Drawing on this tendency, and as some of the cases in this section illustrate, emerging groups are reacting to the past and present functioning of civil societies in their countries by embracing non-conventional and non-institutionalized ways of political organizing (Jacobsson, 2015;

Polanska and Chimiak, 2016). These contextual elements, essential for understanding the expressions of resistance in post-socialist regimes, remind us the importance of engaging with the historical and cultural specificities of each region, so our analyses do not get trapped in categories coined and informed by the West.

In the case of Latin America, for instance, housing struggles from the Southern Cone cannot be analysed without acknowledging the long history of repression and resistance experienced by movements of the urban poor during the dictatorships of the mid-twentieth century. The crucial role and political experience gained by urban movements in their fight for democracy is clearly a legacy that has transcended to the new generations of South American housing activists and urban poor dwellers. A good example is found in Chile, where in practically every emergency camp established by families that lost their houses after the earthquake in 2010, people set up community kitchens. Here, the communities recuperated the tradition of ‘collective cooking’, popular in disadvantaged settlements during the dictatorship period, reclaiming their capacity to deal efficiently with shared problems in a collective way (Simon and Valenzuela-Fuentes, 2017). Another particular feature of housing struggles in Latin America has been the occupation of land and construction of large squatter settlements. In her analysis of the cooperative housing movement in Uruguay, Marta Solanas (in this section) emphasises the occupation of land as a strategy carried out by this movement in the late eighties. Similar is the experience of the *Frente Francisco Villa de Izquierda Independiente*¹ from Mexico City. As an activist from this organisation (also in this section) explains, in the context of a state that has proven incapable of providing housing solutions, this movement created in the eighties has been occupying for decades disused land in order to build autonomous neighbourhoods.

The authors and activists gathered in this special section take on the challenge of developing analytical frameworks more attuned to the specific territories where the housing struggles are taking place. They provide a rich account of the dynamics, political practices and contextual background of local struggles for housing in different “non-Western” territories, and in so doing they offer a significant contribution to the fields of critical urban theory and social movements studies in general, and housing activism in contexts outside of the Anglo-American world, in particular. Furthermore, their inductive and, in many cases, insider approach to inquiry, opens a debate about the importance of changing not only the content but the “terms of the conversation” (Mignolo, 2009, p.4), through the development of more collaborative forms of knowledge production and the commitment to research that is ethically and politically

¹ Best known as *Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente* (former name).

oriented, and useful to current processes of resistance.

The transcription of the panel with housing activists and urban critical scholars, available in this section, is a small attempt to move towards that direction. Here, the organisations do not need ‘experts’ to speak on their behalf. They are able to posit their own cartographies, vocabularies and concepts of the world, articulating their own categories of analysis (Casas-Cortés et al., 2008) and engaging in a politics of dialogue with critical researchers.

Altogether, the pieces presented in this section fill in empirical and theoretical gaps in the field of housing activism. They also show how different cases of housing struggles across the globe concur in their resistance against global dynamics of capital accumulation, in spite of the particular forms taken by global capitalism in their local contexts (Harvey, 2016). Finally, we hope that the debates, political strategies and challenges discussed in this section can offer inspiration to both critical scholars and housing activists and can contribute to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

In this section

For this special section we asked for contributions seeking to shed light on the development of housing activism in under-studied geographical areas. We looked for pieces responding to questions such as:

- How neoliberalization is contested at grassroots levels in the field of housing?
- What are the historical backgrounds of these contestations and how do they emerge?
- What are the main strategies of action and challenges encountered in housing activists’ praxis?
- How do housing activists cooperate and deal with coalition-making?
- Which radical, informal, non-institutionalized and marginalized forms of activism are emerging in the field of housing?
- What are the methodological challenges for the study of housing activism?

Drawing on these themes, we accepted the following pieces that enable us to move the conversation forward:

Our section on housing activism opens with the article of Joanna Kostka and Katarzyna Czarnota, who explore the potential of activist research for bridging

academia and urban activism in Poland. By presenting a co-owned collaborative research design developed in the city of Poznan, the authors criticize the model of knowledge production employed by academics studying urban resistance practices in Poland, arguing instead for the development of “engaged scholarship” able to build on and learn from experiences of resistance and community knowledge.

In the study of the Hungarian grassroots homeless group ‘The City is for All’, Bálint Missetics analyses the social context in which the group operates and the main features of its internal organization, offering some theoretical interpretations of the role of non-homeless members and the group’s internal and external politics. The paper provides an insider, self-reflective, and theoretically inspired view on the group with the aim of contributing to the work of other social scientists interested in the role of the ‘ally’ within homeless activism.

In her contribution to the special issue Ana Vilenica develops a contextual analysis of experiences of housing activism in Serbia, focusing on the challenges, failures and achievements of the movement. Moreover, she discusses the potential of bringing forth a prototype model of affordable housing in the post-transitional and peripheral circumstances of Serbia by developing a hybrid self-organized cooperative model based on experiences from both Eastern and Western Europe.

By looking at the example of cooperative housing in Uruguay, Marta Solanas outlines the historical, political and social background that has shaped the creation and consolidation of FUCVAM (Uruguayan Federation of Mutual Aid Housing Cooperatives). In her paper, Solanas explores the ways in which processes of self-management, mutual-aid and cooperation between social organizations of different countries can build a counter-hegemonic alternative to defend the right to housing.

In his paper, Klemen Ploštajner explores the housing issue and the neoliberal ideology of homeownership in Slovenia. Who is to be organized? Who is to be challenged or attacked? What kind of new and better institutions do we need? By addressing these three important theoretical and practical questions, the author attempts to unravel the main challenges in the field of housing activism in Slovenia, positing cooperativism as a practical answer to the socialization of the housing issue.

Focusing on the Italian case, Andrea Aureli and Pierpaolo Mudu examine the implications of squatting for housing in current neoliberal trends, arguing that squats in general and residential squats in particular, are good sites for prefiguring new modes of political agency, which not only seek to resist neoliberal governmentality but may also open up the possibility of a polity beyond the state.

Finally, this special section closes with the original transcription of the activist panel held as part of the international conference “Housing Activism: Beyond the West” held at Södertörn University, Sweden, in May 2016.² The transcription includes the presentations of four housing organizations from non-Western contexts: The Committee for the Defence of Tenants’ Rights, Poland; The City is for All, Hungary; The Office of Housing Rights in Dikmen Vadisi, Turkey; and The Popular Organization of Independent Left “Francisco Villa”, Mexico. In this panel, the activists summarise the history, organizational strategies and challenges of their organisations, identifying differences and similarities in their processes of struggle and drawing lessons from their political praxis.

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Modes of knowledge production in the study of radical urban movements

Joanna Kostka and Katarzyna Czarnota

Abstract

Research on radical social movements in the context of recent Central and Eastern European political realities has brought attention to different forms of resistance: in terms of their strategies, repertoires of action, and opportunity structures. However, the advancement of social movement research corresponded with a growing isolation of intellectual endeavors from social movement practices. Especially in its abstract development of theory the field began to produce work that was distant from, and often irrelevant to, the very struggle it purported to examine. In this article, we analyze the research methods employed by mainstream academics studying urban resistance in Poland. We show that the detachment and distance from the phenomenon under study contributes to the widening gap between theory and practice. We then argue for the development of engaged, activist research able to build on and learn from resistance movement's experience and knowledge. We maintain that a collaborative approach conscious of cognitive justice can not only bridge the gap between theory and praxis, but multiply the practices of resistance and push forward alternative visions of a just society. We present a case study of activist research, undertaken by a collective of independent sociologists and activists associated with the Greater Poland Tenants Association and the Anarchist Federation of the city of Poznań, to demonstrate how knowledge generation can serve as a tool for challenging systemic inequalities.

Keywords: activist research, cognitive justice, urban resistance, Poznan, movement-relevant research

Introduction

In the last 40 years research on social movements has brought substantial attention to the role of historical, cultural, and political factors that facilitate or hinder social mobilization. The scholarship of the 1960s has been instrumental in moving the analytical focus from collective behavior to the ways in which the emergence and evolution of movements relate to the opportunities, threats, and resources available for achieving rational goals. Rather than seeing movements as irrational or destructive forces, the new line of social research began to acknowledge their constitutive potency in shaping modern society. This seismic change in scholarship resulted in large measure from a close interaction between scholars and movement activists (Croteau 2005). As university campuses became a site of contestation, scholarship benefited directly from its

close association with activism, and presumably social movement efforts benefited from the participation of social movement students and scholars. Moreover, there was a newfound conviction that social inquiry should be driven not mainly by the need to test and refine theories, but by the human need to know and to act (Mills 1959).

Ironically, the advancement of social movement research and its firm establishment within the academy corresponded with a growing isolation of studious endeavors from social movement activity. A growing cadre of social movement scholars seemed to be driven more by an ambition to revise and synthesize existing paradigms than to engage in inductive, empirically grounded investigation of social realities. In its abstract development of theory, the field produced work that was not only distant from but often irrelevant to the very struggle it purported to examine (Flacks 2005). This is not to say that activists disregarded theory per se, rather they grew impatient with the obvious, general, remote, and vague statements that often paraded as social science theory (Bevington and Dixon 2005). Many engaged scholars, including Paulo Freire, critiqued the abstractness and sterility of intellectual work arguing that it failed to create unison between theory and praxis. Already in 1968, the radical caucus at the American Sociology Association questioned the usefulness of social movement analysis: in what way does the validation, elaboration, and refinement of concepts provide usable knowledge for those seeking social change? This question continues to be raised by activists and communities actively pursuing transformative social change.

Academic knowledge production, be it mainstream, critical, or interpretive is valued for the specific ways it is created – for instance, that it is *transparent* about the steps it has taken (to be “verifiable” and “duplicable”) and that it preserves *a critical distance* to its subjects (even if it incorporates the meaning-making practices or categories that its subjects use, i.e. it is “objective”). These values remain important for a rigorous analysis. However critical commentators argue that the domination of a positivist paradigm in social sciences creates “artificial” boundaries between the researcher and the researched (Juris 2007). According to Loïc Wacquant, the positioning of a researcher as an outside observer entices him/her “to construct the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically” (1992, 39). The inability (or reluctance) of a researcher to enter into the flow and rhythm of ongoing social interaction, hinders his/her ability to understand social practice and move beyond purely “hermeneutic representations” (Bourdieu 1977, 1). Moreover, reliance on deductive methodology tends to dismiss the knowledge produced by those seeking social change. This is particularly distressing given that contemporary social movements articulate, produce, and disseminate critical knowledge in a way that does not need intervention of external observers, experts, or intellectuals willing to represent, code, or organize their practices. In short, it appears that the practice of “normal science” conflicts with the moral dimension of social movements’ goals.

This article explores the possibility to break out of academic and activist *ghettos* in order to produce practically engaged and collaborative research that could serve as a tool for generating social change. In the context of Polish radical urban movements¹ united under the slogan ‘right to the city’, we examine mainstream research approaches and juxtapose them to methodologies promoted by people involved in political struggle. The aim is to problematize the purposes and uses of academic knowledge in this context and to explore ways in which it can build on and learn from a movement’s experiences. We argue that movement-relevant research (i.e. activist research, participatory action research) conscious of cognitive justice could not only bridge the gap between theory and praxis, but could also multiply the practices of resistance and push forward alternative visions of a just society. We conclude that the collaborative and relevant research is not simply about navigating between the fields of ‘activism’ and ‘academy’, but it is about transforming the relationship altogether and reimagining academy as a machine for ‘translating’ between different visions, languages, and concerns, and for building alternatives to the status quo.

The arguments presented in this article are a product of numerous self-reflective discussions we conducted over the past year. By comparing and challenging our different knowledge and experiences (that of a critical academic exploring theories and practices of injustice and inequality and of an activist involved in radical urban activism), we deconstructed prevailing methods of sociological inquiry and conceptualized ways in which activism and scholarship could reinforce one another. To illustrate our argument we outline activist research, undertaken by an informal collective of independent sociologists (graduates and students of sociology, pedagogy and art studies) and activists associated with the Greater Poland Tenants Association [Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Lokatorów] and the Anarchist Federation of Poznań, aimed at producing knowledge which could be used to reshape the processes of urbanization. While we are not attempting to provide fixed answers or solutions, we do feel that there is an urgent need to open a discussion about current academic practices and their potential contribution to struggles for social change.

Mainstream approaches to the study of Polish radical urban movements

Collaborative approaches to knowledge production continue to be largely absent in mainstream scholarship on social movements in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). For the last 20 years, researchers have been constructing typologies of post-communist social movements and explaining why the levels of mobilization in CEE tend to be much lower than in other parts of the continent (Ekiert and Kubik 1999). The use of tools and metrics developed in the Western

¹ In our understanding ‘radical movement’ refers to grassroots collective initiatives aimed at generating systemic change, rather than pursuing reformist claims.

context results in somewhat misleading and outdated interpretations when applied to a post-socialist society (Polanska and Martinez 2016, 31). In fact, the concept of a “weak civil society” continues to dominate the analysis of mobilization and contestation in CEE (Howard 2003; Petrova and Tarrow 2007; Ekiert and Foa 2011), even as mass protests unravel across the region. Spaces of mutual meaning-making are absent and there is little motivation to generate plural and democratic knowledge on issues that concern and mobilize communities.

While a burgeoning scholarship on radical urban movements pays more attention to the plurality of knowledge embedded in these movements, it still fails to identify grassroots ethical-political convictions and allow them to drive (even partially) the formulation of research objectives. The prevailing focus on standardized theoretical frameworks such as, alliance formation, resource mobilization, or political opportunity structures (see Polanska and Piotrowski 2015; Piotrowski 2011; Piotrowski 2014; Polanska 2015; Staniewicz 2011; Żuk 2001; Audycka-Zanberg 2014; Gajewska 2015) produces movement representations that plays into external framing and coding. It appears that scholars position themselves as theorists whose roles are limited to using movements as objects of observation, or as a case to test hypotheses. Thus, the researcher acts as external observant who accesses the movement, grabs its knowledge and leaves the scene without any substantial contribution (Graeber 2009).

The extraction of a movement’s knowledge for cloistered academic debates is facilitated by data collection methods and dissemination strategies. Most scholars interested in social movements (whether politically involved or not) come from fields of sociology and anthropology². Hitherto, the underuse of participatory action methods that warrant a researcher’s participation in political struggle is rather striking. The inquiries into radical social movements are predominately based on semi-structured interviews and short-term participatory observations (often conducted during formal conferences). According to politically involved collectives (i.e. Rozbrat) the researchers are rarely open to communal discussions about the purpose of their research, and often impose pre-formulated and even ‘ill-designed’ questions³. The subsequent use/sharing of data collected from the sites is rarely disseminated beyond the

² It is rather surprising that other fields including political science and economy, at least in the Polish context, provide limited analytical input to the research on mass mobilization and contestation.

³ Qualitative method is part of a rigorous scientific inquiry, and in itself is not necessarily contested by radical collectives. The issue stems more from its inadequate use, which relates to a broader concern with the quality of the Polish academia, i.e. access to experienced academic supervision, meticulous ethics review processes, peer-group learning, independent study and reflexivity.

scientific journal articles and/or conference presentations⁴. It appears that the main goal of such research is career advancement and scholarly validation. Sometimes scientific jargon (and dominance of the English language) makes the research inaccessible even to those who contributed their knowledge, time, and experience to its creation. Not surprisingly, activists consider these modes of knowledge production invasive and voyeuristic, prone to misrepresentation of resistance perspectives, and unconcerned about the aims of political struggle. In line with Certeau's (1984) arguments, they regard the research on social struggle as a means for professional progression and academic prestige that (even if unintentionally) cements societal inequalities and threatens the very aims of radical struggle.

Another problematic aspect of research on radical urban movements is that it places excessive emphasis on the identity building process. The effect is often a distortion of radical urban sites (i.e. squats) and those associated with them. Squatters tend to be presented as a fervent "urban tribe" (with the specific dress code, discourse and original customs) or a subcultural and "hard to reach group". The inquiry is one-sided and undialectical; it makes identities and their equality with other groups (movements) the basis of political activity. As such, identity becomes the main (and often the only) explanatory variable used to expound mobilization, contestation, and alliance formation. Once set, identity becomes a trap from which no one escapes. Thus the movement's activities are mapped solely against predesigned and rigid identity templates rather than wider political processes. In effect differences among various groups are exaggerated while solidarity among oppressed, disenfranchised and contesting individuals is under conceptualized.

The domination of an identity perspective in literature on Polish radical movements is further reflected in the residual attention to wider economic inequalities and practices of capitalism. This trend goes beyond the Polish context and could be attributed to the "cultural turn" in academia. Goodwin and Hetland (2013) in their work "The Strange Disappearance of Capitalism from Social Movement Studies", demonstrate that recent scholarship on social movements tends to focus on short-term shifts in cultural framing, social networks, and especially political opportunities; rarely examining such shifts against macroeconomic conditions. As a result, focus on redistributive justice, class struggle, and politicization of public goods is substantially if not wholly detached from the dynamic structures and practices of (neo)capitalism. This detachment however seems even more exaggerated in Polish sociological scholarship, which seems strongly embedded in the neoliberalist paradigm. Political collectives maintain that academics have an individualistic understanding of social problems facing the impoverished, dispossessed, and disenfranchised citizens. Their reluctance to engage in systemic analysis of socio-economic forces affects the very formulation of research questions. As a

⁴ The expectation to 'publish or perish' creates significant challenges for activist-academic collaboration, particularly as universities increasingly value refereed publications in prestigious international journals.

result, there are few comprehensive studies that problematize accepted political and economic models, and their long-term effect on those who 'do not fit the accepted norms'⁵. Rarely do scholars venture beyond the sanctity of property rights and/or challenge monetarist doctrines and governance practices.

By dismissing the lived-experience perspectives, the existing research does not only fail to grasp the concrete logic and essence of urban resistance but also neglects to address the scale and scope of ongoing contestations. This is particularly visible in the conceptualization of squatting as an ideologically charged activity as opposed to the need for shelter, which is the primary (and often the only) motivation to squat. More importantly, the analyses of urban social movements gloss over the ongoing curtailment of social and political rights, not just for traditionally disadvantaged and marginalized groups, but also as Mayer (2012) observes:

for comparatively privileged urban residents, whose notion of the good urban life is not realized by increasing privatization of public space, in the 'upgrading' of their neighbourhoods or the subjection of their everyday lives to the intensifying interurban competition (pg. 63).

By silencing these issues social movement scholars once again run the risk of presenting urban contestation as a disruptive (irrational) force that *unnecessarily* defies the status quo, which they assert functions according to democratic principles.

Overall, the methodological and moral principles underlying Polish scholarship on radical urban movements preclude an in-depth understanding of the mentalities, objectives, and techniques of urban resistance and, perhaps more importantly, fail to analyse political norms and hidden power asymmetries. This brings us back to the initial question – who is the beneficiary of research on social movements?

Alternative research methodologies and their 'transformative potential'

In this light, the current analysis of radical mobilization in Poland seems abstract, diffused, and weak in highlighting systemic inequalities. As the authors gain scholarly recognition in international journals, their work remains either unknown in the circles of Polish radical activists or considered of little value (both in practical and analytical terms). While a gap between academia and

⁵ The absence is also driven by a shrinking number of independent grants that breeds conflicts of interests and pushes scientists to engage in commissioned work. Short-term, overly-bureaucratized grant schemes are not conducive to ethnographic participatory research schemes, which build on perspectives of 'disenfranchised' groups. More importantly research funds provided by the state come with carefully outlined research goals that are of interest to policy-makers rather than communities.

activism at times seems irreconcilable, due to conflicting interests, epistemological orthodoxy and privileging of certain types of data, we argue that rigorous, collaborative and movement-relevant research is indeed possible and should be applied. Several authors, including Bevington and Dixon (2005), Croteau, Haynes and Ryan (2005), Flacks (2005), Dadusc (2014), and Choudry and Kapoor (2010) have highlighted the importance of engaging with knowledge produced by, and internal debates within, social movements and activist networks in order to more fully understand the collective dynamics. Others, including Juris (2007), Colectivo Situaciones (2003), Russell (2015), insist that research must problematize hierarchical relationship between academia and activism and connect with the deepest dilemmas that movement organizers have to deal with. Thus, it is plausible that *activist research* is indeed able to build on movements knowledge, problematize structural power, and serve as an emancipatory tool. However, to bolster the quality and relevance of produced work such research must challenge the very function of the university and strive to reimagine it as a machine for the production of *other* worlds.

Various faces of activist research

Critically engaged sociologists remind us that activists actively analyse and theorise, and do not shy away from exploiting the existing body of work towards their own aims. As noted by Juris (2007) the movements currently gathering under the claim for the ‘right to the city’ have been uniquely self-reflective, as activists produce and distribute their own analyses and reflections through global communication networks. The activist research breaks down the divide between participant and observer and aims to carry out theoretical and practical work in collaboration with and full engagement of *subaltern* knowledges. It is committed to the significant knowledge people have about their lives and experiences and a belief that those most intimately impacted by research should take the lead in shaping research questions, framing interpretations, and designing meaningful actions (Pain 2004). Such engagement could lead to emancipation and empowerment of communities whose interests, ideas, and narratives have been silenced or pushed out of mainstream political, social, and economic spheres.

The move away from didactic approaches to knowledge production is attributed to critical adult educators from Latin America, Asia, and Africa (see Kindon et al., 2007) who developed and popularized Participatory Action Research (PAR). They focused their attention on how social science research could be used to “move people and their daily lived experiences of struggle and survival from the margins of epistemology to the centre” (Hall 1992, 15-16). There are multiple paradigms and tools subsumed under the term PAR (see Jordan 2003), but the common particularity lies in the shifting role and definition of the researcher, who becomes a facilitator, rather than an expert, and the research process that strives towards the emancipation of silenced voices. The task of PAR practitioners is to let the researched participate in the definition of the research

focus, by asking research questions and deciding on research objectives. As noted by Dadusc (2014, 52) the entire process prompts “a bottom-up discovery of local, situated knowledges with methods based on inclusion rather than extraction, on participation rather than appropriation”. This has primarily been achieved through the inclusion of disenfranchised groups within the key decision-making procedures of the research process and their ownership of its outcomes (see Boston *et al.*, 1997). Prefiguring post-positivist critiques, PAR acknowledged that research is an inherently political process that is embedded in the “relations of ruling” (Smith 1990). Consequently, the notion that social research can be value-free, objective, or scientific is viewed as an ideological position that expresses prevailing power relations within capitalism (Jordan 2003).

While PAR has become an influential methodology of the marginal, promoting the interests of the poor and disenfranchised, with time it lost its militant edge (Jordan 2003; Fals-Borda 2006). Institutional mainstreaming of bottom-up approaches in the 1990s made PAR attractive to organizations such as the World Bank, eager to undertake development projects that were more locally appropriate. Yet rather than emancipating the marginalized so they could change their structural conditioning, research was done mostly ‘on’ (rather than with) the marginalised “to provide policy-makers with information about poor people’s perspectives on poverty” (Brock 2002, 1). Vincent (2012) has shown how this idea of participation is often used by those external to the communities, to construct collectives that undermine histories of struggle. Similar tactics are used by scholars engaged in research on Polish social movements⁶, resulting in picture of ‘weak’ and excessively fragmented mobilization.

Not surprisingly, radical urban movements have become skeptical about the emancipatory potency of PAR and its capacity to advance movement-relevant knowledge. The critics have argued that it is not enough to merely amend methodological approaches. Rather, for research to become meaningful to and reflective of the struggle, it should push the boundaries of academy from within. In other words, social movement researchers should use the academy as a site of struggle to challenge academic prescriptions that make the academy inaccessible to those on the outside. A growing number of activist researchers including those involved in militant ethnography prioritize research that values embodied experience and reflexive accounts (see Colectivo Situaciones 2003). They are concerned with the capacity for struggles to read themselves and consequently, to recapture and disseminate the advances and productions of other social practices. As such, they embrace research in which the academic component is often irrelevant precisely because it does not take the university as a referent (Russell 2015).

⁶ As stated in the first section of this paper, the analysis of social movements is fully disconnected from the lived experiences of people – both under neoliberal policies and under state-run socialism.

Movement relevant research and cognitive justice

Activist research speaks directly to whose knowledge counts and how this knowledge is used, bringing forward the concept of “cognitive justice” coined by Indian intellectual Shiv Visvanathan. Cognitive justice asserts the diversity of knowledges and the equality of knowers. While attempts to do justice to other ways of knowing has been strongly criticised for promoting “anything goes” relativism and the inclusion of pseudo-science in the canon of “Science”, Visvanathan (1998) maintained that cognitive justice is not a justification for abandoning critical inquiry but a call for a democratic, pluralist understanding of science. According to his conceptualization:

- All forms of knowledge are valid and should co-exist in a dialogic relationship to each other.
- Cognitive justice implies the strengthening of the “voice” of the defeated and marginalised.
- Traditional knowledges and technologies should not be “museumized”.
- Every citizen is a scientist. Each layperson is an expert.
- Science should help the common man/woman.
- All competing sciences should be brought together into a positive heuristic for dialogue.⁷

Cognitive justice resonates with scholars who recognize that all knowledge is positioned. Haraway (1988) has argued that *all* researchers always speak from a particular location in the power structures and do not escape the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical and racial hierarchies of the ‘modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal world system’. In this understanding, the role and the standpoint of the researcher shape and affect the knowledge that is produced. Consequently, the notion that social research can be value-free, objective, or scientific is viewed as an ideological position that expresses prevailing power relations within the status quo. To understand the relations of power, it is important to use the gaze of practices of resistance that question and subvert the very relations of power one is analysing.

The negation of objectivity and adherence to cognitive justice attracted critique from various academic fields, including those championing critical outlooks on knowledge and development. Activist research has often been dismissed as ‘political’ or even as mere propaganda that opens up science to all form of abuses. These arguments have been effectively challenged by post-colonial, feminist, and critical race scholars, however, the tensions remain. Speed (2004)

⁷ He recognises the risks of this project, for example in terms of its appeal to fundamentalisms, but argues that Science contains its own grammar of violence that needs to be addressed.

acknowledges that tensions do exist between political-ethical commitment and critical analysis of universalism, relativism, or particularism. Yet, she also points out that these tensions are present in all kinds of research. Hale (2001, 14) in turn writes that these tensions can be resolved by activist research that makes politics explicit and up-front, and reflects honestly and systematically on how they have shaped researchers understanding of the problem at hand. He also reassures that activist research contains a built-in inoculation against the excesses of radical relativism and nihilistic deconstruction (where all knowledge claims are reducible to underlying power moves). It comes with well-developed methodological cannon that can guide production of the best possible understanding of the problem at hand, can distinguish between better and less good explanations and communicate the result in a clear, transparent and useful manner.

What we can infer from these debates is the assertion that the voices of those involved in the struggles are distinct from the social science literature that seeks to study and explain such struggles (Routledge 1996). Yet, we agree with militant researchers (Russell 2015, 227) that the problem lies not in maintaining and negotiating this distinction, but in ensuring one is conducting research as a subject orientated through struggle, rather than as an 'academic' producing disembodied – 'dead' – information about movements. This requires academics to self-reflect and as argued by (Holloway 2010) exploit the few remaining 'cracks' in the institutionalized academia in order to contribute to antagonistic social change. While this might be a difficult task given the ongoing neoliberal assault on independent research institutions (see Harvie and De Angelis 2009), universities must support the non-experts in knowledge production and continuously address the power effects of different modes of knowing.

The next section of this paper reflects on the activist research project undertaken by an independent collective in the city of Poznań. We present the efforts undertaken to unveil the housing crisis in the city and use the collected knowledge as a tool for progressing the movement's demands. We outline the entire research process, focusing on its collaborative dimension and political aims. We critically analyse its contribution to social change (as perceived by those involved) and the challenges encountered along the way.

Filling the gap: unveiling the housing crisis in Poznan

The 2011 marked the formation of a new alliance between the Anarchist Federation associated with the squat Rozbrat and tenants mobilized under the Greater Poland Tenants' Association. The alliance emerged as a response to the neoliberal urban development characterized by massive privatization of social housing, housing foreclosures, growing numbers of illegal resettlements financed by the banks, and de facto erosion of social/housing rights. The leading aim was to publicize the scale and scope of these infringements, which remained absent from public discourse. While the alliance possessed necessary skills in terms of campaign organization, media contacts, and demonstration, its

members felt that stronger resistance tools were needed to progress the demands. An agreement emerged that in order to effectively contest urban development policies, one must define, map, and analyse the scale of social conflict from a bottom-up perspective. It was recognized that the existing data on housing has been compiled by economic elites who extoll economic growth and private gain at the expense of equity and broader social development. In effect, the analysis of escalating inequalities and disenfranchisement in Polish urban spaces was largely absent.

Census data and research undertaken by international organizations have shown that approximately 15% of the population lives in poverty housing, defined in terms of substandard and unsafe living conditions (e.g. no bathrooms and toilets, no central heating, exposure to asbestos and mould), and 44.8% of Poles are living in overcrowded conditions with the EU average standing at 17% (Habitat for Humanity 2015). Compared to the EU average (5.2%) the severe housing deprivation rate stands at 10.1% (Housing Europe 2015). Poland also ranks in the bottom third of the OECD countries in terms of housing conditions for children (average rooms per child and children in homes that lack basic facilities). In 2012 there was a shortage of 1.5 million dwellings (NIK 2012), a direct effect of aggressive privatization of public housing stock and limited construction of affordable housing. According to the Central Statistical Office, no social housing was provided in Poznań in 2010-2013, and the completed municipal dwellings amounted to 0.7-7.6% of the total housing production in the same years (CSO 2014). As evidenced in Poznań's public housing registry, close to 2000 persons await social housing, while the waiting period can reach up to 10 years. At the same time, the number of evictions and foreclosures has been on the rise. The Greater Poland Tenants Association estimated that in 2011 close to 140 families have been evicted from publicly owned housing and in 2013 the number reached 183 (in previous years the number rarely exceeded 50).

While the housing shortage appears to be well documented, its deeper causes and effects continue to be obscured as few (if any) universities conduct comprehensive analysis of the legal provisions, costs of development strategies, and, most importantly, the experiences of those affected (tenants, urban squatters, evicted or homeless persons⁸). There are also no reliable situational reports or policy documents critically evaluating housing policies in Poznań, one of the largest cities in Poland with a population of 0.7 million. This lack has allowed politicians and administrators to belittle or even deny the precarious living conditions of a growing number of Poznań's citizens. Instead, inability to secure quality housing has been strongly linked to embedded benefit dependency and pathology. Individualization of housing problems has legitimized further budgetary cuts, evictions, and forced re-location of "lazy

⁸ It is important to mention that one of the most prestigious Polish sociological journals, the *Review of Qualitative Sociology* [*Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*] has not published a single research article concerning tenant issues or decreasing social housing stock, since its initiation in 2005.

tenants who abuse alcohol, devastate their living spaces, and deliberately do not pay rent” (Kopiński 2016).

What also remains unproblematic in the context of Poznań (but also in other Polish cities and towns) is a growing number of ‘vacant abodes’⁹. While the Public Housing Management Agency accounts for approximately 800 empty publicly owned flats, there is no record of unoccupied buildings with an ‘unclear’ ownership status, or privately owned flats (often entire buildings) acquired for speculative purposes. There is also no register of publicly owned, non-functional buildings, i.e. old hospitals, military barracks, or police stations, which many believe could be converted into residential spaces. This dearth of data is especially distressing given that a growing number of families have found themselves residing in hazardous conditions - summer cabins located on allotment gardens, abandoned barracks on the city’s outskirts, or flats in tenant housing earmarked for demolition¹⁰. While the authorities insist that these ‘wild tenants’ are an exception, mounting anecdotal accounts prove otherwise. Over the last decade, numerous self-help informal networks have sprung across Polish cities keeping people well-informed about the location of vacant/abandoned living spaces and passing on information to those in dire situations. However, these new forms of resistance to dispossession were not identified or addressed by academics working on urban development. The daily struggle for housing was also absent from research on the so-called New Urban Movements, which focused predominately on NGOs and charities involved in human rights issues and neighbourhood development programs¹¹.

Given this immense knowledge gap the members of the alliance decided to design and implement research that would generate compelling analyses of the empty abodes in the boroughs of Poznań. Compiling data and exposing it to rigorous analysis was seen as an imperative tool for raising awareness about the scale of the problems and politicizing ongoing gentrification processes. The alliance also wanted to acquire reliable material which could be used to pressure the authorities into meeting the real housing needs of the dispossessed tenants.

⁹ Vacant abodes [pustostany] are potentially liveable spaces (flats, houses, lofts, factories, etc.) which stand empty as a result of bureaucratic mismanagement and intensification of speculative strategies.

¹⁰ In Poznań close to 4000 people illegally reside in allotment gardens due to poverty and lack of means to access proper accommodation. See

<http://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/1,36037,19549822,ogrodki-dzialkowe-koniec-z-mieszkaniem-na-dzialkach.html>

¹¹ In general, the New Urban Movements and affiliated NGOs are not concerned with problems that affect the most disenfranchised residents. Issues promoted by these activists adhere to urban esthetics (i.e. garbage collection, gardening), security issues, and access to citizen friendly services (i.e. bike trails, organic food shops, artistic happenings). In the view of evicted tenants all these issues are aimed at well-off citizens and in fact lead to accelerated dispossession of the poor.

Turning towards activist research

From the very beginning, there was a consensus that the research should be driven by political aims and guided by knowledge accumulated among those involved in the struggle. Driven by a critical approach the research strived to problematize the neoliberal paradigm and theorize possible alternatives to individualization, marketization, and economic development. At that stage, the cooperation with critically minded scholars willing to reach out and join the local struggle was welcomed since the force of numbers was considered a prerequisite for systemic change. The emancipatory power of resistance lies also in its diversity - academics can raise awareness about social issues among the middle class, while activists and local communities can expose hidden struggles which affect those silenced by the system.

However, cooperation with academia proved difficult from the very start. Researchers who visited Rozbrat and sites of evictions were predominately interested in causal enquiry embedded in a positivist research design. They arrived with pre-formulated questions and hypotheses, at best hoping to interest squatters with their assumptions and “hinges”. They opposed any redefinition of their questions and tended to abandon their endeavour as soon as their modes were challenged by the squatters¹². It seemed that those affiliated with local universities were reluctant to cede control over research design and engage in collective decision making about the aims, principles, and practices used to conduct social research. Those scholars who did show interest in a participatory endeavour were constrained by rigid grant rules, the epistemological regimes of their departments, and a lack of collegial support. It became clear that in the Polish context most of the academic endowers constitute an extension of the capitalist system. As such, partnership between those arguing against capitalist modes and those immersed in them proved antagonistic. Activists feared that opening up to academia could result in the co-optation of research goals and subjugation of the struggle. On their end the academics lacked reflection on the power exercised by their modes of knowledge production and theoretical perspectives on social movements.

The reluctance to engage in institutionalized research prompted the alliance to form an independent collective of sociologists (no longer affiliated with academic institutions but with post-graduate training in sociology, pedagogy and art studies) and activists associated with the Anarchist Federation and the Greater Poland Tenants Association. Independent of grant schemes and departmental orthodoxies, the collective proceeded to design research that drew on the practices of resistance and valued the embodied experience and reflexive accounts. The concept of cognitive justice was built into the project in an effort to fully incorporate not only the voice but also the knowledge of those most

¹² It was very common for researchers to contend that squatting sites are ‘difficult to reach’, ‘closed off’, ‘hostile’, however very few researchers have treated squatters as equal partners, or reflected on the ethical dimension of their inquiry. While Rozbrat opened its door to various individuals, it resisted those who ‘poke around’ and were determined to extract knowledge for the sake of research that contributed little to Rozbrat’s activities and aims.

affected by neoliberal housing policies (i.e. evicted tenants, those living in precarious conditions). Engaging with activist research methodology, the investigation was based on collective, inductive processes of knowledge generation, open to re-direction and reformulation of research questions. Like the research conducted by Routledge (2008, 2009) and Juris (2007, 2008), this resulted in attendance and participation in local organisational gatherings, coordinating workshops, facilitating information sessions, discussions on e-lists, coordinating publicity, distributing literature, participating and speaking at protests, and so on. In other words, the participation was wholly contingent on the nature of the specific political milieu within which the collective was a constitutive participant.

Investigation and findings

The collaboration and process of data collection was inspired by methodology developed by Right to the City-NYC Alliance¹³. Over a period of six months the collective canvassed census tracts in six strategically selected boroughs to identify vacant sites. The vacant spaces were categorized by location, date of construction, ownership status, size, technical conditions, and capacity to house tenants. All forms of ownership (i.e. private, public, unsettled) and types (i.e. barracks, hospitals, military garrison etc.) were taken into consideration. The researchers covered the areas in search of empty units, at times conducting informal interviews with the residents for verification and identification of other sites through a snow-balling technique. The identified spaces were catalogued and photographed, adhering to a strict policy of confidentiality¹⁴. The vacancies belonging to the city were the easiest to identify, since each vacant space is monitored by a private security firm, and the windows are marked with their logo. Once the canvassing was completed the researchers triangulated the findings with data from the National Statistical Office and available policy documents. Following this process, the findings were collectively analysed and discussed.

¹³ In 2009, the Alliance (of grassroots activists, critical academics and low income residence) launched a citywide participatory research project to locate and record information about vacant residential buildings in the communities where the members lived. By walking the streets in targeted low-income neighbourhoods, RTTC-NYC has been able to identify thousands of units of vacant housing that have not been accounted for by the city, the media, or any other means. The findings were incorporated into Policy Platform and used to outline the principles and policy recommendations most important to the low-income residents. From a list of 33 demands included in the platform, RTTC-NYC prioritized a campaign to convert vacant residential buildings into low-income housing.

See http://righttothecity.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/02/People_Without_Homes_and_Homes_Without_People-1.pdf

¹⁴ Collected data was secured, addresses kept confidential, and all efforts were made to prevent collected data and information from reaching the wrong hands.

The research confirmed that there were in fact numerous vacant units suitable for occupancy held empty either for speculative purposes or as a result of ineffective public management. The collective estimated that in Poznań alone there are between 15 and 30 thousand vacant abodes. These estimates clashed dramatically with data provided by the authorities. The discrepancy confirmed that the issue concerning the availability of housing has been severely distorted by public officials who insist that the city has “no money and no space” to meet the housing needs of low-income citizens. The research thus became a strong argument for challenging these claims and delegitimizing urban development strategies based on evictions, rigorous entitlement criteria, and privatization of social housing. Perhaps more importantly the movement was now in possession of tools for opening up the public debate about the negative impacts of economic development policies, such as the proliferation of luxury housing development in low-income neighbourhoods.

Dissemination and exploitation

Throughout the research process there were many collective discussions concerning the final usage of accumulated data - when and where the data should be publicized, who should become its main audience and through what channels. In the end, the findings were incorporated in the campaign “Recovering 30 Thousand Vacant Living Spaces” to facilitate wider dissemination. The results became an integrated part of the campaign’s material, which aimed to raise awareness about urban policies that measure success not by the quality of life or social protection they provide for citizens, but by accumulated profit. Information on vacant abodes and housing policies appeared on billboards erected in the city centre, and on fliers distributed across the most impoverished districts of Poznań¹⁵. The findings were also distributed during demonstrations in support of the squat Odzysk¹⁶ where activists demanded decriminalization of squatting and called for the opening of vacant housing to those in need. Subsequently, the findings were regularly featured and discussed during local protests, eviction blockades, community meetings and citizen debates. They were written up in an easily accessible manner supported by audio-visual material, and made available in social centres and community halls across Poland.

Although the impact of the research is difficult to measure and one cannot talk about definite success, certain positive developments can be identified. Firstly, as envisioned the research became an imperative tool during negotiation with the authorities. For the first time the Poznań’s authorities have found it difficult

¹⁵ See <http://www.rozbrat.org/dokumenty/lokalizm/4101-odzyskujemy-30000-pustostanow>

¹⁶ Odzysk, refers to a squat functioning in Poznań between 2013 and 2015. In 2013, the Anarchist Federation occupied an abandoned tenement building located in the city center. The building stood empty for several years reflecting a lack of housing policy in Poznań. The Anarchists converted the building into a socio-political center. In 2015, the building was taken over by a new owner. However, the building remains empty.

to rationalize and legitimize ongoing harassment of tenants and curtailment of housing rights.¹⁷ Secondly, the research prompted timely and needed public debate about the dwindling quality of public housing, dubious legality of forced eviction, and mismanagement of public housing stocks by the authorities. The reframing of the housing issue in terms of rights not privilege has been picked up by the media resulting in a surge of critical stories and editorials concerning evictions, housing budgets, and housing rights. As a result, there seems to be a turn in public opinion which is now more supportive of evicted tenants and families and more critical of the state's action. Finally, the discourse on squatting is slowly becoming more sensitive to its structural dimension, recognizing precarious living conditions as an effect of neoliberal policies rather than personal choice or subcultural trend.

Concluding remarks

The lack of balanced cooperation between academia and activism, and the ongoing depreciation of activist knowledge and modes of learning, constitute a major barrier in closing the gap between theory and practice. The differences in empirical approaches, interests, and aims often prove too difficult to overcome, eventually leading to a falling out with the academic cadre. Yet it does not have to remain so. Those involved in the urban struggle are aware that wide coalitions among academics, activists, artists etc. have the potential to unify a multiplicity of urban demands under one common banner. The strength in numbers and solidarity among diverse groups and opinions can effectively challenge the neoliberal paradigm so strongly embedded in the Polish politics. We showed that various scholars and activists alike successfully demonstrated that rigorously designed, collaborative activist research can not only challenge or undermine the prevailing neoliberal thesis but can also serve as a mobilization tool and awareness raising mechanism. Rather than dismissing activist research as an ideologically biased exercise, it could serve as a means to expand our understanding of on-the-ground complexities, and give a real voice to those who have been silenced by the prevailing norms.

Despite the present inability to consolidate collaboration between academia and political activism in Poland, we are not contending that such a relationship is impossible. As activists become more proficient in using sophisticated research methods for gathering data and analysing ongoing struggle, academic circles are becoming more open to inventiveness and impact-driven research. Although in the Polish context researchers continue to be constrained by departmental orthodoxies and ongoing commercialization of universities, the spaces for

¹⁷ Although the authorities are reluctant to admit that current housing policies reinforce social injustice and have disenfranchised a large part of the population, they are no longer able to rely on an old argument: lack of housing stock. By now the findings are always brought to the discussion table during city council meetings and urban planning sessions.

<http://www.radiomerkury.pl/informacje/pozostale/rozmawiali-o-pustych-mieszkaniach.html>

critical inquiry are now more accessible¹⁸. Critical and self-reflexive engagement in research of a growing number of scholars can indeed prompt experimentation with alternative modes of knowledge and can challenge the power relations embedded in academic institutions. Activist research (or other methods based on cognitive justice) neither attempts to represent a social world nor empower social movements. Instead, it learns from and embodies movements' experience and modes of knowledge. In this way, the movement becomes an active force in the production of knowledge, and strives to use this knowledge for generating social change.

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¹⁸ If nothing else the new academic cadre has a greater access to English publications, is able to travel abroad, and participate in various international grant schemes and projects.

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Homelessness, citizenship and need interpretation: reflections on organizing with homeless people in Hungary

Bálint Misetics

Abstract

Hungarian grassroots activist group The City is for All is the joint effort of members directly affected by homelessness or housing poverty and their allies (activists with secure housing), who work together for the right to housing. The following paper provides reflections on the group's work and politics by one of its founding members. It is introduced with a summary of the social context in which the group operates (the emergence of mass homelessness after the transition and its management by the state), which is followed by a detailed account of the group's internal organization and main activities. The next section examines the dynamics of inter-class cooperation within the group. The final section offers tentative theoretical interpretations on the politics of the group. The paper does not seek to address a specific research question, its goal instead is to provide an insider—but at the same-time self-reflective, and to a certain extent, theoretically inspired—view on the group in a way that can be useful for other organizers and politically engaged social scientists who are interested in building inter-class alliances in social justice activism.

Keywords: homelessness, housing poverty, evictions, activism, Hungary, inter-class cooperation, organic public sociology, linguistic domination, politics of need interpretation

1. The social context: homelessness in Hungary

1.1. The emergence and reproduction of mass homelessness

Homelessness was not officially addressed by social policy before the regime change of 1989/1990, though the term “homeless” was used regularly in lower level administrative documents, and the hidden practices of social care (coupled with criminalization) did provide shelter for homeless people in state-run workers' hostels and social care homes (Horváth 2008). Mass homelessness emerged in Hungary in the years of the transition from “socialism” to free market capitalism, with deindustrialization and the corresponding sharp rise in joblessness, the quick decline in the number of beds in workers' hostels and in the prevalence of subletting of rooms and beds (both of which provided minimal housing options for those in dire need), the decriminalization of unemployment

and alcoholism (and a partial amnesty), and the loss of thousands of beds in mental health institutions.¹

The main structural reason behind the emergence as well as the permanence of mass homelessness was the gap that arose between incomes and the cost of housing. Housing, to a significant degree, was a state controlled good before 1990; and while the allocation of housing subsidies was an important example of how the regime's social policy *reproduced*—and even *increased*—social inequalities (Szelényi 1983; Manchin and Szelényi 1987), housing affordability was managed through a system in which the bureaucratically set wages did not cover the costs of housing, but the prices of rent and utilities were kept low through extensive consumer subsidies (Hegedüs and Tosics 1996).

The transition brought along the re-commodification of labor as well as of housing; however, while in the case of housing, this meant the disintegration of the previous housing model, including a sharp decline of subsidies and a sharp increase in household energy prices (a fourfold increase in the early 1990s and an altogether twelvefold increase in the decade); the re-commodification of labour meant a massive increase in joblessness and decreasing real wages and incomes. State withdrawal from the field of housing took place at the very time when—because of the “social costs of the transition”—the need for it would had been even more than before.

Furthermore, the rapid mass privatization of the municipal housing stock in a generous “right to buy” fashion not only redistributed an immense wealth to those already privileged by the earlier system of housing policy, and increased inequalities in its own right by distributing higher than average “privatization gifts” to those with higher education, income and wealth (Dániel 1995). It also severely limited the subsequent possibilities of public housing provision. The share of municipal public housing shrank from 22 percent to 3 percent of the total housing stock: what remained is usually housing in the worst condition with the poorest residents (who, without savings, could not afford to buy their home even at the offered low prices). As it has long been argued by Titmuss (1968), services offered solely to the poor will soon become *poor services*: the renewal of the municipal housing stock is minimal, the housing units are often in unacceptable condition, and local authorities often try to reduce their maintenance costs by getting rid of their poorer tenants (often within the framework of urban renewal programs) or by further privatization (Ladányi 2000; Czirfusz and Pósfai 2015). Furthermore, the remaining 113 thousand public housing units are only partially allocated on the basis of social criteria, and even those are sometimes defined in a way to exclude those most in need. While evictions from public housing (the number of which has been sharply increasing) is a significant source of homelessness, homeless people—with

¹ On the emergence of mass homelessness, see (in Hungarian): Győri 1990; Iványi 1994; Oross 1996; Mezei 1999; Győri 2008; Misetics 2016.

sporadic exceptions through “Housing first” projects specifically targeted to them—have virtually no chance to access public housing (Fehér, Somogyi and Teller 2012).

While the lack of a considerable public housing stock could have been substituted for by an adequate system of demand-side rental subsidies or housing allowances, nothing in this vein has evolved in Hungary (Hegedüs and Teller 2004). Regulation on private renting and rent setting can be characterized as markedly liberal (Lux and Puzanov 2012), and even that regulation is commonly disregarded, with the consequent insecurity of private renting (Hegedüs, Horváth and Teller 2014). Since 1990, low-income households who could not own a property have been mostly left alone to struggle with increasingly adverse market conditions, and the state failed to adequately address the systemic causes of indebtedness and homelessness as well.

This was not only a failure to act, but also a flawed design of housing policies which have been operating: indeed, a predominant cause of prevailing housing poverty as well as of the reproduction of homelessness has been the extremely unjust distribution of state support for housing. In the 1990s as well as in the early 2000s and currently, housing-related state expenditures have been showing an extreme bias in favor of the middle- and upper-classes, and against the lower classes and the poor (see Dániel 1997; Hegedüs 2013; Misetics 2017).

1.2. State response to homelessness

Two and a half decades ago, in the winter of 1989-1990, protests, sit-ins and the well-publicized occupation of major train-stations by homeless people all made it obvious to the Hungarian public that there is a crisis. Homelessness emerged as a public issue in the peculiar historical moment in which the “socialist” regime was already in the business of undoing itself, but the perception of social problems and of the corresponding state responsibilities was still much under the influence of the social sensibilities and political understandings cultivated by the previous “welfare dictatorship” (Bartha 2012). As one of the intellectual allies of the homeless protesters put it in his recollections: “The final goal could not have been anything else than the state treating the homeless so that you are a citizen of this country, and your status of citizenship makes you entitled to live and to be housed” (quoted in Iványi 1997, 17). The homeless protesters, with banners such as “We are human too”, indeed demanded jobs and *housing*.

While homeless protesters did not succeed on the housing front, an elaborate system of state-sponsored shelters, drop-in centers and outreach social work programs did evolve, partially because of the disruption and publicity they achieved for the cause. Large, dormitory-style shelters opened in abandoned buildings, unused basements, recently closed worker's hostels, military barracks, in the wooden shacks of the campsite of the disbanded Communist Youth League and even inside a huge vessel originally built for war reparation to

the Soviet Union. These responses, which laid down the basis of the contemporary homeless assistance system, resembled, and often still resemble emergency relief in case of unexpected (natural) disasters, rather than social policy. Still, in comparison to 1989, when even in Budapest there was only 16 male and 8 female shelter beds available specifically for homeless people, and one single temporary home for families, today just in the capital there are around 5 thousand people living in overnight shelters and temporary hostels, and the capacity of the homeless-assistance system is more than twice as much country-wide. The provision of shelters, temporary hostels and day-time centers for homeless people became a legal obligation of larger local authorities, and there is also an extensive system of state-funded network of street social work services.

Besides the emergence of this homeless assistance system, the 1990s were characterized by informal police harassment of fluctuating intensity without any attempt to legalize the practice (Udvarhelyi 2014). Things changed fundamentally after the new government took office in 2010, however.

The new right-wing parliamentary supermajority implemented a comprehensive punitive, inegalitarian turn in social policies (Szikra 2014; Scharle and Szikra 2015). A detailed account of the post-1990 retrenchment of the Hungarian welfare state is beyond the scope of this article, but since it is a predominant part of the context the activist group under consideration has to operate in, it's worth noting that Hungary and Greece were the only OECD countries in which real public social spending has *decreased* in the years of the most recent crisis (OECD 2014), and that the level of increase in income inequalities in Hungary since 2010 is unmatched by any other EU countries.² Beside welfare retrenchment, the other predominant aspect of the Hungarian context with respect to grassroots organizing is the government's attack on pluralism and the rule of law, and its colonization of state institutions, including the Constitutional Court (see Bánkuti, Halmai and Scheppele 2012) – which is clearly demonstrated by the criminalization of homelessness.

Beside the government's bluntly inegalitarian social policies, the criminalization of homelessness became codified after 2010. In November 2010, new legislation defined the purposes of public spaces, and authorized local authorities to pass ordinances prohibiting their use for any other activity. Notably, the official rationale for the legislation provided by the Ministry of the Interior gave only one example of such other activity: the "habitual residing of homeless people" in public spaces. In 2011, several local authorities took the opportunity and passed ordinances that made it illegal to "use public spaces for habitually residing there", and the Law on Misdemeanours subsequently criminalized street homelessness in the whole country in the end of that year.

² Own calculation of the change of gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income between 2010 and 2015 (EU-SILC data).

In 2012, when judges unilaterally appointed by the ruling party were still in the minority, the Constitutional Court ruled that the criminalization of homelessness lacks any constitutional justification, and declared that “homelessness is a social problem which the state must handle within the framework of the social administration and social care instead of through punishment”.³ This victory did not last long, however. Within days, the prime minister announced that the government would not comply with the decision because it was “impractical”. And with the Fourth Amendment to the Fundamental Law (in 2013), the governing party’s supermajority vengefully introduced into the constitution several pieces of legislation which had previously been ruled unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, including the (possibility of the) criminalization of homelessness.⁴

Since the October of 2013 there have been over 500 occasions in which homeless people were charged with a misdemeanor for the sole reason of sleeping rough. Of such charges, even one would be too many, of course, and these numbers underestimate the prevalence of police harassment, as the legislation is mostly used for what the police would be and was doing anyway without any legislative authorization: to force homeless citizens to move away from particular public spaces. Still, it seems that the legislation that criminalizes homelessness has not been aggressively enforced, leaving not criminalization, but “shelterization” as the dominant state response to homelessness.

We should return to the question of why the criminalization of homelessness is of such importance nonetheless, after introducing *The City is for All*, one of the main ongoing campaigns of which has been against the criminalization of homelessness.

2. Introducing *The City is for All*

2.1. The foundation of AVM

The City is for All (or as it will be referred to subsequently, after its original Hungarian name *A Város Mindenkié*, AVM) is the joint effort of members directly affected by homelessness or housing poverty and their allies (activists with secure housing), who work together for the right to housing, against the discrimination of homeless people, and against the criminalization of homelessness. AVM has been organizing campaigns, protests and non-violent but disruptive direct actions since 2009 around all sorts of social injustices related to homelessness and housing. While for years the group’s activities were mostly confined to Budapest (the capital of Hungary), since 2015, there is also a partially independent subgroup operating in Pécs (a major town in the South of

³ 38/2012. (XI. 14.) Constitutional Court decision.

⁴ For a more information on the criminalization of homelessness in Hungary, see Bence and Udvarhelyi 2013; Misetics 2014; Udvarhelyi 2014a.

the country). The group usually has around 30 active members, who regularly participate in weekly meetings.

AVM's approach to homelessness is structural and political. It cultivates and promotes an articulate diagnostic and prognostic framing (see Snow and Benford 1998; Cress and Snow 2000) on homelessness and housing deprivation, which locate their causes in the structure of power and distributive inequalities and demands radical egalitarian housing policy reforms from the state to address these. This framing of homelessness is centered around the notion of right to housing: homelessness, housing deprivation and evictions are understood to constitute the violation of rights, and the recognition of the right to housing is AVM's main demand and goal. While AVM also steps up for incremental reforms, its main policy demands, beside the codification and institutionalization of an enforceable right to housing, includes the prohibition of evictions without the provision of an adequate alternative; an extensive social housing sector; a country-wide housing allowance and debt-assistance program; and the utilization of vacant housing units. It follows from this political approach to homelessness that while AVM does provide some forms of direct assistance to homeless people or to families threatened by eviction, its main focus is political work, which emphasizes protest and includes the use of disruptive tactics.



Figure 1: The annual housing march of AVM (2017)

Source: AVM. Photo by Gábor Bankó.

AVM was initiated in 2009, partially inspired by a Bronx-based advocacy group, Picture the Homeless (PTH)⁵ which was founded by homeless people on the principle that “the voices and leadership of homeless people is critical to educate the public and mobilize the political will to target resources in the struggle to end homelessness”.⁶ The initiators of AVM have known each other from having been involved in an earlier grassroots housing advocacy group which worked towards the right to housing and against the criminalization of homelessness since 2005. This activist group, however, did not include as members people who are themselves homeless or living in housing poverty.⁷

The founding of the group was decided upon after a three-day-long workshop held in the august of 2009 in Budapest by activists of Picture the Homeless and to which fifteen homeless people and fifteen non-homeless supporters (mainly social workers and activists) were invited.⁸ After the workshops, the participants decided with consensus that instead of following the model of PTH, where only homeless people can be members (though that rule does not apply to paid organizers and other staff members who make many of the day-to-day operative decisions), AVM would be founded and operated together by homeless and non-homeless activists.⁹

Since then, AVM developed an inner organizational system in which homeless and non-homeless people (subsequently referred to as “ally” members or activists, in accordance with the group’s own terminology) work together. This initial organizational decision raised several questions on how the inner reproduction of power inequalities (between extremely poor and middle-class or highly educated and poorly educated activists) can be avoided or at least mitigated (which will be discussed later).

Still, most of AVM’s members have been homeless or directly affected by housing poverty: living in deprived, unsecure, overcrowded or unhealthy housing, including informally built shacks, usually on squatted public land, threatened by eviction, etc. The involvement of homeless people in organizing

⁵ On Picture the Homeless, see “A Conversation on Organizing Models for Social Justice Struggles in the City” (Hughes, Peace and Meter 2010, 79-84).

⁶ <http://picturethehomeless.org/home/about/early-history-and-founders/>

⁷ About the group, *Az Utca Embere* [The Man on the Street] in English see Udvarhelyi and Nagy 2008.

⁸ Initially, the idea that people “from America” were coming to teach homeless people might have played an important role in mobilizing homeless participants. It is also worth noting that several of the homeless participants had already had experience in some sort of community work through their involvement in *Fedél Nélkül* [Roofless], a street newspaper initiated, written and distributed by homeless people.

⁹ The group was initiated by Éva Tessza Udvarhelyi, Anna Bende, Bálint Vojtonovszki and the author, and was founded by the participants of the aforementioned workshops.

and operating AVM not only provides its essential ethos, but it is also one of the features which distinguishes it from the variety of NGO-s and religious organizations in Hungary which work with homeless people, as well as from the increasing number of grassroots volunteer initiatives which provide food and blankets to those sleeping rough. While these organizations play a predominant role in *providing services* for homeless people,¹⁰ homeless people are usually not in any way involved in their organization or operation.¹¹

2.2. AVM's internal organization

AVM is entirely based on volunteer work: it does not have any paid staff, not even an office space. It does not have formal leadership, and it is also not a legally registered organization. While it occasionally applies for small grants (which do not require having a formal institution and have few strings attached), most of its activities are not financially supported by any outside donor. It receives smaller donations from its supporters and it also makes use of meeting places provided for free or for below-market price. The decision not to seek a legally recognized framework for the group's activities was made early in 2009 to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic tasks, and possible control by outside influences through administrative burdens, regulations and donors' preferences.¹² Still, referring to AVM as an "*informal* activist group" would be misleading, as all of its activities are structured along an elaborate system of rules and procedures. The main elements of AVM's internal organization are the following.

AVM is organized into working groups. As of 2017, there are three main working groups. The working group on "advocacy" deals with issues related to shelters, lack of legal address, public space and criminalization. The working group on "housing" addresses broader issues of housing policy, tries to prevent and obstruct evictions, engages in local community organizing, and organizes the Annual March on the Right to Housing. The "Homeless Women for Each Other" is a group exclusively for women, and most of its activities concern problems specific to homeless women and the struggle against the human rights abuses committed by the child protection authorities whereby children are separated from their parents because of the poverty or homelessness of the

¹⁰ In 2013, NGOs and churches operated 50-70 percent of the capacities of temporary hostels, overnight shelters and daytime centres (Győri 2014).

¹¹ The aforementioned street newspaper, *Fedél Nélkül* is a partial exception: while the newspaper is edited, and its distribution is coordinated by social workers, it publishes the articles, short novels, poems and visual art pieces of homeless people, who are also involved in the supervision of its distribution.

¹² On the dilemmas of nonprofit incorporation among movements of homeless people in the US, see Cress 1997.

family.¹³ Beside these three main working groups, there is also a group for internal matters (which is also in charge of organizing public cultural programs), and one on the group's legal aid program (which grew into a separate association, as it will be discussed below).

Every working group holds their weekly meetings at a particular, fixed time of the week,¹⁴ where they make operative decisions and plan activities. Important issues are decided by the "large group", the weekly joint organizing meeting for all members, where working groups also report back about their activities. Each working group (as well as the joint organizing meeting) has a coordinator, who is nominated and decided upon by the members, usually for half a year.

AVM holds semi-annual (three- or four-day long) strategic retreats, in order to have time to reflect on, and evaluate the group's work, refine and revise its strategy and to discuss in detail everything which concern not the everyday tasks, but the overall goals and orientations of the group. Retreats are also important because they usually provide the best opportunities for members to spend time together, and to play games, watch movies or have lengthy conversations with each other (for homeless members, it is also often the only time they can get away from the city as some sort of a vacation). Positions which are filled on the basis of nominations (but without voting) are also filled or renewed in these retreats: the two coordinators of membership (who are expected to pay most attention to the involvement and retainment of members), coordinators for financial matters, for the press, for international relations, and members of the working group on internal matters.

Every group meeting is facilitated, and trainings on facilitation are regularly held to allow each member to acquire the necessary skills to facilitate a discussion. Participants can speak only after raising their hand and being asked to speak by the facilitator. The use of activist hand-signs (for expressing agreement and disagreement while someone speaks and which were publicized recently e.g. by the "Occupy" protesters) were discussed in the group and decided against, as it might intimidate shy speakers, discourage the formulation of alternative opinions against a perceived majoritarian standpoint, and facilitate impatience. Meetings are run on the basis of a pre-prepared detailed agenda which is also shared on the group's listserv prior to the meeting. In order to keep track of decisions and responsibilities, minutes are also prepared for every meeting, which are then distributed in hard copies among the participants of the subsequent meeting.

¹³ On this issue, see the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (2014) most recent report of Hungary.

¹⁴ For example, the date of the main organizing meeting (the "large group") essentially did not change since 2009: it is always on Monday evening (with the exception of Christmas or New Years Eve, but regardless of any other holiday).

In AVM, every decision is made by a consensus. Voting is prohibited, and indeed considered to be a taboo, though the decision making process still utilizes a majoritarian logic in a soft way and within constraints. In the group's practice, consensus decision making does not mean that every single member needs to agree that the decision in question is the best from the available options. What it means however is that each member has a "veto-power" over every decision. So if after a discussion there seems to be an option behind which most of the voiced opinions converge (the length of the discussion being determined by the extent to which the issue in question is contested), the disagreeing members are at one point asked, whether the discernible majoritarian decision would be *acceptable* for them. If not, the group proceeds with the debate; if yes, the decision has been made. In order to ensure the participation of homeless members in the decision making process, every important question needs to be decided *in person*, and not on the group's listserv (which homeless members usually have less frequent and less regular access to).

While some of these rules might seem to be self-explanatory in the provided form, a challenging aspect of integrating new members into the group is the process of facilitating their "socialization" into the day-to-day application of these rules: e.g. not to speak without being asked by the facilitator, not to speak about topics other than those on the agenda, etc. Indeed, one of the most delicate tasks of the facilitator is to strike a right balance between applying these rules strictly enough to ensure the orderly and timely course of the meeting but without applying them too rigidly and thereby discouraging members from voicing their opinions.

The aforementioned rules also serve to encourage a certain self-reflective approach to the group's work. An interesting example of this is how the problem of homeless members' asking for money from "ally" members was handled. Initially, this led to a lot of tensions (to a significant degree because those homeless members who were in equally bad financial condition but did not ask for help felt resentment over those who did, and because asking for "loans" and not being able to pay it back might have contributed to some members' absence from meetings). When the problem was perceived, a group of members was assembled into a committee to think of solutions for the problem in order to prevent the prevalence of informal, individual donations (which are likely to lead to such inegalitarian dynamics that are corrosive to the inner life of the group) while at the same time providing for some channels for the financial support for those in dire need. The initial suggestion which the committee had prepared was not accepted, so they were asked to revise it. A refined suggestion was then delivered, which was implemented. According to these rules, each member can ask for donations in the large organizing meeting (requests can be anonymous or with a name, they can specify the purpose, such as "medication", "shelter fee", but this is not required); then everyone is invited to contribute, but those who receive do not know the identity of the givers. Members who received a donation are encouraged (at least in theory) to give the donation back – in

which case it is not returned to each member who contributed, but to the group as a whole.

2.3. AVM's main activities

AVM engages in a broader variety of activities than what is usual for most organizations or activist groups, including organizing marches and protests; negotiating with various state authorities and services (e.g. the local authorities' property management companies, the police, the emergency medical service, shelters); defending tenants and shack-dwellers against evictions with non-violent resistance, holding teach-ins in homeless shelters on various legal issues (such as voting rights or discriminatory law enforcement); formulating detailed policy proposals; squatting empty buildings;¹⁵ organizing cultural and educational programs for homeless people; renovating vacant public housing units and lobbying the local authority to rent them out to people living in homelessness; organizing ophthalmological exams and providing donated glasses for homeless people for free; conducting participatory action research projects (see Udvarhelyi 2013a); promoting legal change through strategic litigation and providing free legal aid in individual cases, etc.



Figure 2: Activists of AVM defend a family from eviction (2014)
Source: AVM. Photo by Anna Vörös. The banner on the left reads: "Housing is a human right".

¹⁵ For a recent comparative study on AVM's approach to squatting, see Gagyí 2016.

An indicative list of AVM's main activities is presented in the following table:

The "Housing" working group	
The mobilization of people living in housing poverty	Monthly mutual aid meetings
	Local community organizing
Housing policy	Formulating housing policy demands
	Annual March for the Right to Housing
Evictions	Weekly duty on evictions
	Individual-level advocacy ("case-work")
	Civil disobedience actions (human blockades) against evictions
	Detailed information booklet on the process of evictions
Public housing	Collection and publication of data on the public housing stock
Vacant (public) housing units	Participatory vacant unit counts
	Symbolic squats/takeovers of vacant buildings
The "Advocacy" working group	
Legal address	Provision of information and advice about related legal problems
	Monthly mutual aid meetings
	Data collection on the prevalence of lack of (regular) legal address
	Formulation of policy proposals
Homeless-assistance system	Individual-level advocacy ("case-work")
	Policy advocacy
	Campaigns and protests
Public restrooms	Policy advocacy
	Awareness raising
Self-built shacks	Organizing people living in self-built shacks
	Protecting self-built shacks from demolition
Criminalization of homelessness	Campaigning for the abolition of the criminalization of homelessness
	Data collection on misdemeanor charges against homeless people
Police harassment and discriminatory law enforcement	Campaigning to end discriminatory law enforcement
	Participatory action research
	Awareness raising
The "Homeless Women for Each Other" working group	
Oppression of women	Organizing workshops for the empowerment of homeless women
	Providing a space exclusively for women and thereby facilitating the sharing of experiences of discrimination and domestic abuse
Problems specific to homeless women	Collection and distribution of information

Temporary homes for families	Collection of grievances from families residing in temporary homes
	Individual-level advocacy ("case-work")
Abusive practices by the child protection authorities	Individual-level advocacy ("case-work")
	Campaigning against the breaking up of homeless families

Table 1: Activities of AVM's three main working groups

The grey colouring signals that the group is not currently (as of 2017) engaged in the activity.

Certain important activities that grew out of AVM's work in the past years have been "out-sourced" to formal organizations which function as close affiliates of the group. The legal project of the group—which consists of a weekly legal clinic at one of the busy public spaces of Budapest and the provision of free legal aid to people living in housing poverty—has grown into a separate, formal organization in 2016 (the *Street Lawyer Association*), which opened up the future possibility of professionalization and the employment of full-time staff in order to reach and serve more people.

An other affiliate formal organization of AVM is the *From Street to Housing Association*, which grew out of a local struggle of AVM against the demolition of self-built shacks in 2012. AVM managed to stop the forced evictions and to convince the local authority to provide vacant, dilapidated public housing units which the group can renovate (through donations and volunteer work) and can house some of the shack-dwellers. Beside adapting this model at other localities, the association implements further innovative local projects as well, in order to provide affordable housing for formerly homeless people.

Finally, *The School of Public Life Foundation*, a community-based training, research and development center in Budapest is also a close affiliate of AVM, which grew out of the group's educational and training projects. Founded in 2014 by two "ally" members of AVM, its goal is to "make accessible the trainings and resources necessary for efficient advocacy and movement-building for a much broader audience of oppressed and excluded citizens and for the organizations representing them".¹⁶

3. An experiment in inter-class cooperation

The mobilization and empowerment of those most directly affected by homelessness and housing poverty is the prime goal of AVM and is valued for both its instrumental and inherent value. According to the understanding of politics cultivated within the group, the involvement of people living in housing

¹⁶ <http://www.kozeletiskolaja.hu/page/rolunk>

poverty is crucial for genuine social change to occur with respect to housing, while the involvement and politicization of homeless people is also a powerful negation of the dominant prejudices against homeless people and their social and political exclusion.

Prior literature on organizations and movements of homeless people often emphasized the difficulties of organizing by homeless people due to their extreme deprivation. It has been argued, for example, that the marginalization of the homeless “translates to a precarious and sometimes limited form of grassroots activism” (Williams 2005, 497) or that the “image of organized, enduring associations of leaders and followers pursuing deliberately chosen strategies in opposition to others [...] does not apply to the organisations of homeless people” (Anker 2009, 281). A study of a Danish user organization for homeless people (SAND) explicitly argued that “interest organisations of marginalized groups need support from external actors (state or others) to survive because of their structural weaknesses, limited resources and transience” (Ibid, 275), and researchers on homeless social movement organizations in the US also emphasized “the importance of external support for homeless activism” (Cress and Snow 1998: 1102).

The transitional nature of homelessness has been also pointed out as a barrier to organizing homeless people (Allen 2009; Anker 2009). While AVM has also lost members due to the amelioration of their situation (especially if they could secure a job or housing only in the countryside or by emigrating to Western Europe), for many of its members (and for many of the homeless people in general), homelessness has not been transitional, but an unacceptably long-term condition. Moreover, because AVM understands homelessness and its corresponding constituency in a broad sense to include those without adequate housing (and the transition from homelessness to inadequate housing is most often the only realistic possibility for most), and explicitly values the experience of *formerly* homeless people as well, a member’s escape from homelessness does not necessarily need to pose a problem for his or her continuing participation in the group’s work.

Furthermore, the group’s experiences suggest that among those living in housing poverty, it is not the most deprived who are the hardest to organize. At least in the case of AVM—where participation usually requires a fair amount of presence—it has been easier to recruit and keep members who are strictly speaking homeless, because they have been more likely to be single, in comparison to those who live in inadequate or precarious housing, who have been more likely to live with their families. While for the former, the collectivity (which members of AVM sometimes refer to as their family), and the sense of belonging and the human relations which accompany it are often otherwise scarce resources, the latter are more likely to find that every time they attend an organizing meeting is a time they could have spent with their families.

The problematic of homeless people’s resource poverty and their corresponding need for external support also plays out differently in the case of AVM, in which

activists with direct experience of homelessness and housing poverty work together with “ally” members, i.e. with activists without such experiences (and more resources). This decreases the group’s need for *external* support: AVM can be said to be not dependent on that (though it does rely on meeting spaces that are provided for it for free or for below-market prices). It is worth noting that since homeless people, in the narrow sense of the term, are often deprived of personal relationships with non-homeless people (Albert and Dávid, 2001), especially as far as egalitarian relationships are concerned (thus excluding contacts with bosses, welfare administrators or shelter staff), the very interactions that the diverse class composition of AVM make possible and facilitate can be considered as “resource” for many of the group’s members.¹⁷ On the other hand, the presence of non-homeless activists in the group is likely to bring many of the problematic dynamics inherent in external support (of control or domination) inside the group.

However, it would be misleading to simplify the internal dynamics of the group into the cooperation of members who are, and who are not, directly affected by homelessness or housing poverty – even if this is how the group usually presents itself to the public. Essentially all of the long term “ally” members joined the group after having had more or less experience with advocacy or activism, and most of the “ally” members also come from a broadly understood social science (cultural anthropology, sociology, social policy, gender studies, social work) background. It is also telling (even if it is partially explained most probably by sociometric factors) that around half of all the “ally” members had studied (and lived) at some point at the *College for Advanced Studies in Social Theory*, a small university organization, dedicated to the study of critical social theory. It would be therefore more accurate to describe the group not as the joint effort of homeless and non-homeless activists, but as an alliance of homeless people and radical intellectuals (or students).

The prevalence of activists with some sort of social scientific background should not be seen as an accident, but is perhaps best understood in relation to the inherently political nature of sociological knowledge (which will be explored in more detail in the following section). The social science background of “ally” members probably also contributes to a self-reflective approach that allows for the recognition and questioning of their (our) own privileges, and can also add to the sense of support on part of homeless members (who can feel that they get the best possible allies, who are educated and “on par” with the kind of opponents the group needs to face).

¹⁷ These relationships can also function as springboards for other non-homeless communities (e.g. activist communities not otherwise related to housing issues or homelessness), and relationships with non-homeless people (including those who are not AVM’s activists but follow the group’s work) can also facilitate access to resources in a more material sense (e.g. one-off or more long-term employment possibilities).

The dialectic and mutual advantages of the cooperation, and complementary knowledge of “ally” members (with their social scientific background) and members with direct experience with homelessness can be best illustrated by AVM’s social policy demands. An earlier attempt at organizing homeless people led to the 1997 foundation of *Homeless for the Homeless Cultural and Advocacy Association*, which drafted a petition in 2002. The petition almost exclusively addressed grievances about the regulations of, and conditions in shelters.¹⁸ Reminiscent of Lenin’s classical characterization of the type of political struggle of the dominated which strives to “secure from the government measures for alleviating distress to which their condition gives rise, but which do not abolish that condition” (Lenin [1901] 1969, 43), they demanded better treatment *as homeless*, without going very far at problematizing or politicizing their homelessness. Back in 2009, the notion of asking for “abandoned Soviet barracks” to shelter homeless people was also just as popular among the homeless members of AVM as it was among the general public.

The fact that the group has been nonetheless arguing for social and housing policy measures that address the root causes of homelessness instead, is certainly contributable to a significant extent to the “ally” members. On the other hand, that AVM’s demands do not remain at a high level of abstraction either, and that the group has remained also very attentive to, and active in such questions as whether homeless people can use the services of more than one daytime centers (which is often necessary if they want to eat, as well as wash and handle administrative issues, etc.), whether homeless people can access their belongings they left at the storage run by a homeless-assistance organization on the weekends, or the availability of public rest rooms, is thanks to the group’s articulation of the homeless members’ most immediate daily grievances.

¹⁸ Quoted in Udvarhelyi 2014b, 187. For the English doctoral dissertation in which the book is based, see Udvarhelyi 2013.



Figure 3: Homeless members of AVM at a protest (2013)

Source: AVM. Photo by Dina Balogh. The placard reads "We don't want to live in mass shelters!"

Contrary to Lenin's influential assertion that class political consciousness can be brought to movements of the dominated "only from without", AVM's method for inter-class cooperation is not that of external inculcation of critical ideologies, but that of mutual learning. The ethos of AVM's inner organization could be described through the Gramscian premise that all humans are intellectuals. The role of "ally" members—who, because of their class position and education, have had privileged access to knowledge—is to facilitate their less privileged fellow activists' taking on "directive and organizational, i.e. educative, i.e. intellectual" functions (Gramsci 2000, 310), and also to learn from their experience and insights in a "passage from knowing to understanding and to feeling and vice versa from feeling to understanding and to knowing" (Ibid. 349).

However, the fact that activists who are living in homelessness or dire housing poverty are working together with a subset of the non-homeless population who are much beyond the average in terms of various types of cultural capital (degrees, organizational skills and experience, social theory and social policy knowledge, etc.) also bears the danger of becoming disempowering by intensifying the problems—power inequalities and symbolic domination—the possibilities of which are inherent in any political collectivity in which activists from different class position work together.

For example, an unintended consequence of how AVM's members customarily refer to each other as being either an "affected" (a shorthand for "member affected by homelessness or housing poverty) or an "ally" member (understood as members who are not homeless) is that it might give the false impression that the former do not possess certain skills (e.g. organizational skills or the ability to find, read, and comprehend data or literature on various social policy issues) the latter do because of their homelessness, while those skills would neither be possessed by the vast majority of non-homeless (and even middle class, university educated) Hungarians.

The organization culture of AVM facilitates an understanding of educational (and class) differences in which questions of merit is entirely absent—to paraphrase Bourdieu, an understanding that "culture is not what one is but what one has" (Bourdieu 1993a, 234)—and cultural capital is understood as a collective resource to be used for the shared goals of the collectivity. AVM's organizational culture also facilitates an intense reflection on the egalitarianism of the internal organization and operation a work. The kind of meticulously detailed procedural rules described above should not be seen only as a functional necessity given the quantity and complexity of the group's work, but as also being driven by the awareness of what Jo Freeman (1972) called *the tyranny of structurelessness*. As she argued in her influential essay, an informal structure of power is likely to coexist with a formal dedication to "structurelessness", which can therefore be a "way of masking power" and can hinder truly democratic decision making, egalitarian and inclusive participation, and accountability.

There are also several organizational rules which meant specifically to ensure that "ally" members do not dominate homeless members, and in general to counteract the spontaneous reproduction of power inequalities. First, in principle no "ally" member is allowed to represent the group by herself or himself; public appearances are decided on by a system of nominations, and at least 50 percent of the representatives need to be women (which is however handled with some flexibility to accommodate constraints of availability). As this rule applies for most media representations as well, AVM attempts to provide intensive preparation for media appearances to its members.

Second, there is also a "special facilitating" system to enhance equality of participation in the discussions: in this case, the consecutive order of the signals is modified by the facilitator in order to compensate for the usual biases of participation (homeless members are given priority over "ally" members, women over men, new members over old members etc.). This was initially used only on rare occasions, but the group is currently experimenting with its universal application.

Third, while the group is essentially open to prospective homeless members and people living in housing poverty (after attending three meetings, they are asked whether they would like to become members, without any membership fee), it cannot be automatically joined by "allies", only by invitation. Given that it is

usually easier to mobilize middle-class activists, this is intended to serve that a right balance is kept in the ratio of “ally” members and members directly affected by homelessness or housing poverty: i.e. to ensure that enough additional organizational skills and resources are present without overburdening the “ally” members, but also without non-homeless activists dominating the group. If it is perceived that the group would require further work force, members collectively decide on the invitation of specific “ally” activists who have been nominated by someone.

Fourth, homeless members are provided with financial support from the group for travelling (public transportation is expensive, and to get into the centre of the city and back to the shelters or to the self-built shacks of members can take several tickets), and if they coordinate a campaign, a task or a working group, they also receive support for mobile phone and internet use expenses.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the group regularly organizes a variety of trainings, workshops and teach-ins (ranging from facilitation and note-taking, through public speaking skills, to feminism, social policy and social theory) in order to make every member of the group increasingly capable of, and confident to take on an increasing variety of tasks.

All these organizational rules notwithstanding, the participation of “ally” members cannot cease to risk being dominating. Perhaps the most invincible aspect of the inherently problematic nature of “ally” members’ involvement concerns linguistic and symbolic domination. After Bourdieu, I refer to linguistic domination whereby a particular use of language, associated to certain class positions, is imposed as legitimate on all speakers, which make speaking a classifying act. Therefore, speaking becomes the appropriation of “one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position in a hierarchy of styles which expresses the hierarchy of corresponding social groups” (Bourdieu 1991, 55). Consequently, every linguistic exchange “contains the *potentiality* of an act of power, and all the more so when it involves agents who occupy asymmetric positions in the distribution of the relevant capital” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 145).

The heightened attentiveness to fellow activists and the self-restraint to not dominate discussions, which are expected of “ally” members, are not in themselves able to neutralize this aspect of domination. This is a form of symbolic domination, the occurrence of which is not conditional on the speaker’s intentions, but presupposes “on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity”, the recognition of the objective order of uses of language, based on “dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint” (Bourdieu 1991, 50-51).

Beside the aforementioned system of “special facilitation”, in AVM there is also a strict policy prohibiting the unnecessary use of foreign expressions. However, such egalitarian rules can obviously address only the most superficial aspects of linguistic domination. There is no organizational rule which can neutralize how

the internalized normative standard against which speaking is perceived as “nice”, “clever”, “convincing” or “well-argued” is biased in favor of intellectuals and against less educated members.¹⁹ Therefore, while efforts are made to limit the symbolic violence inherent in intra-group linguistic exchanges (the most paradoxical manifestation of which was perhaps the occasion when the author of the current text was holding a teach-in on Bourdieu’s theory of linguistic domination to convince the homeless participants why his way of speaking should not be perceived as “convincing”), and the increase in self-confidence homeless members usually gain through participating in the group’s work might be able to counteract partially this dominating aspect of the inter-class alliance AVM is based on – still, this problematic aspect of the internal dynamic of the group might be impossible to fully eliminate.

4. The politics of citizenship and needs interpretation

4.1. The politics of homelessness

In order to spell out the politics of AVM, we need to turn first to the dominant social understanding of homelessness and the dominant image of “the homeless”. In Hungary, the dominant state response to homelessness, the homeless-assistance system, is best explained “as an attempt to neutralize the outrage homelessness produces in those who see it, and not as a reasoned desire to cope with it as a particular social problem” (Marcuse 1988, 83). It leaves the structural causes of homelessness unaddressed, and even though it recognizes homeless people’s need for “help” – but not their need for justice.

The homeless-assistance system that has emerged since 1990 did alleviate the suffering—and even saved the lives—of countless homeless citizens, but at a significant cost concerning the social construction of homelessness. For shelters not only deliver services, they also perpetuate an understanding of homelessness. As Hoch and Slayton notes about the case of the US, efforts to provide at least emergency shelters for the homeless were “not only rapidly expanding the number of these dormitories for the poor”, they have been also “legitimizing their institutional value as a solution to the problem of homelessness” (Hoch and Slayton 1989, 5). In the early 1990s, the victories of the homeless protesters and their social professional allies were won at the cost of the perpetuation of a misrepresentation of the problem of homelessness and the misrecognition of its causes and its possible solutions. With the separation that emerged between the question of homelessness and housing policy, homeless citizens became reduced to the status of *bare life*, who “in their naked humanity, are at best to be kept alive” (Feldman 2004, 25) through shelters and street social work – an understanding which was even enshrined in a 2000 decision by the Constitutional Court which ruled that the state is only obliged to

¹⁹ Cf. Wright’s account on the cooperation of homeless activists and students in California, and their different experiences with respect to being listened to (Wright 1997, 277-278).

provide shelter “to offer protection from a danger directly threatening human life”.²⁰

The very idea that shelters are the obvious alternatives to rough sleeping implies that “homeless people are not fit for regular housing” and thus reinforces “prevailing popular ideas that homeless people are of a different, inferior kind – ‘not like us’” (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin 2007, 79). This contributes to the emotional (and spatial) distancing of homeless people, while the discourse emphasizing the individual responsibilities and deficiencies of homeless people—a kind of “sick-talk” (Gowan, 2010) which shelters often impose on their residents (Lyon-Callos 2004; Ámon, 2013)—is silent about the systematic causes of homelessness.

The symbolic cost of the emergence of an extensive homeless-assistance system has been the reification of the couple notions of *homeless* and *shelter*, similar to the self-explanatory relationship we understand to be between such notions as *soldier* and *barrack*, *sick* and *hospital*, or *criminal* and *prison*. The cost to be paid is that now upon seeing a homeless person we do not ask the question “Why does not (s)he have a place to live?” but rather another one: “Why does not (s)he go in the shelters?” And this question is not only about curiosity, but also about blame.

Social provision, instead of enriching citizenship as envisioned by T. H. Marshall (1964), might end up eroding it (cf. Fraser and Gordon 1992) through the reproduction of a reified notion of “the homeless” and an asociological and apolitical understanding of homelessness as a social problem. Nancy Fraser wrote that “public assistance programs ‘target’ the poor, not only for aid but for hostility” (Fraser 1997, 25), and the same could be discerned about the homeless assistance system, the *par excellence* example of social policies that address only—at the surface—the consequences of social injustices while leaving its underlying structural causes intact. It is not able to solve homelessness but it is able to provide an apparent solution and therefore to relocate the blame about homelessness from the state (and the political ruling class) to the homeless themselves.

This is why the apparent availability of shelters has played such an important role in the attempted justification of punitive measures against homeless people. The right-wing mayor of Budapest explained this quite clearly in a television interview: “as a first and second step, we lend a helping hand, with the appropriate provisions. But if someone nonetheless still tries to continue his [homeless] lifestyle, almost in a truculent way, fundamentally threatening the interests of the vast majority, he turns himself an outlaw, and thereby needs to

²⁰ 42/2000 (XI. 8.) Constitutional Court decision. For a conservative critique of the post-1990 constitutional case law in Hungary which nonetheless emphasizes the Constitutional Court’s unwillingness to protect the poorest segments of the citizenry, see Sajó 2006.

be treated as such, and be taken away”.²¹ Just as Foucault wrote about the moral split in poverty which accompanied the emergence of poorhouses in the classical age:

On the one side was the realm of Good, where poverty submitted and conformed to the order that was imposed upon it, and on the other the realm of Evil, where poverty rebelled and tried to escape that order. *The former accepted internment, and found its repose there; the latter resisted it, and thereby merited its condition.* (Foucault 2006, 59; emphasis added)

This leads us to the other—and increasingly—dominant approach on homelessness: “sin-talk” (Gowan 2010), which manifests itself mostly in the attempts to legitimize its criminalization. As it was argued in the first section of the article, criminalization has been recently codified in Hungary, but it is not aggressively enforced: still the discourse that aims to legitimize the criminalization of homelessness has done at least as much long-term harm by blaming, stigmatizing and dehumanizing homeless people and by redefining homelessness as an issue of aesthetics and order as criminalizing itself through the harassment and fining (and possible incarceration) of the homeless.

²¹ Interview with Budapest Mayor István Tarlós on TV2, 5th of November, 2010. Source (in Hungarian): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uotpv1BbaQ8>



Figure 4: Civil disobedience at the Budapest City Council against the criminalization of homelessness (2013)

Source: AVM. Photo by Gabriella Csoszó. The banner reads: “Housing, not jails!”

The criminalization of homelessness and the exclusion of homeless people from public spaces would hide one of the direst and most obvious consequences of flawed government policies and an unjust social system. This could be seen as a veil of ignorance, but one that is the reverse of the concept developed by political philosopher John Rawls (1971). “Rather than imagining that we do not know our individual characteristics and life situation in order to develop principles of justice, this veil of ignorance ensures that we make political decisions without ever having to think about how they might affect differently situated persons” (Kohn 2004, 140). But what is more important here is not how the criminalization of homelessness aims to make the visible signs of homelessness *disappear*, but how the related discourse makes homeless people *appear*.

As Hungarian cultural anthropologists Török and Udvarhelyi (2005) argue with regard to the (anti-homeless) “underpass-cleaning rites” of the Hungarian authorities: in the rhetoric that attempts to legitimize the spatial exclusion of homeless people, the notions of “public” and “society” become restricted along with the scope of legitimate users of public spaces, and homeless people become

also excluded from these—ideally universal—categories. Rough sleeping is often framed as an issue which inconveniences the “citizens” of a city (as if homeless people were not also citizens), or simply “the city” (as if homeless people were not also “residents” of the city).

This is the semantics of asymmetrical counter-concepts as elaborated by Reinhart Koselleck (1985): the collective self-definition of the speaker is such that it excludes the other from the possibility of recognition. Thereby, homelessness becomes a problem that occurs not within the public but a “threat that appears from elsewhere” (Kawash 1998, 330–1). This is revealingly exemplified by a headline of one of the most read Hungarian news portals after the Constitutional Court decision that overturned the criminalization of homelessness, “The mayor fears a homeless *invasion*”, or by an introductory note of a newsreader in a television program: “Will rough sleepers *invade* underpasses for good?”.²²

In contrast, a systemic approach to homelessness, or “system-talk” (Gowan, 2010), would locate the sources of homelessness in the social structure and in the dominant system of distribution and redistribution. While this approach does absolve homeless people from the blame for their homelessness, it is often accompanied with a lack of agency concerning the homeless themselves (cf. Wagner 1997). After all, if it is all about the social structure, it is easy to see homeless people as helpless victims of injustices.

4.2. The politics of citizenship

The politics of AVM can be understood as being inspired by a systemic approach to homelessness, with the important qualification that homeless people are entrusted with agency, and not only as *prospective residents*, but as *actual citizens*, i.e. as agents of social change. The group articulates—and its activists who are homeless or live in housing poverty embodies—an image of homelessness which is opposed to both the blaming of homeless people and the individualizing and depoliticizing of homelessness (characteristic of “sin-talk” and “sick-talk”, respectively), while at the same time avoids (re)presenting those without housing as hopeless victims – which is not only of strategic value.

For the aforementioned reasons, homeless people suffer not only from exclusion from the housing (and labor) market, but also from a specific type of disempowering *symbolic exclusion*, something that is felt deeply in a process through which social structures and the power relations inherent in them become internalized. One of the most disturbing and most specific contribution

²² (Emphasis added.) Right wing politicians as well as journalists argued after the decriminalization of homelessness that there would be a great increase in rough sleeping in busy underpasses, and more homeless people would die of hypothermia because of the Constitutional Court decision.

of Bourdieu's later work to our understanding of domination is how it becomes embodied in the form of enduring dispositions: through the “somatization” of social hierarchies which is “tantamount to a durable construction of the unconscious” (Bourdieu 1996, 198). Liberation—he argued—would thus require the radical transformation not only of “the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant” (Bourdieu 2001, 43), and not only of “consciousness”, but also of the already existing dispositions by means of a “thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises” (Bourdieu 2000, 172) that would only be capable of durably transform habitus.

It is worth returning to aforementioned inherent politics of sociological knowledge which “ally” members play an important role in bringing into the work of AVM. First, sociological imagination is capable of suspending the suspension of doubt “as to the possibility that the social world could be other than it is” (Bourdieu 2000, 1972), and therefore of limiting the legitimacy of any arbitrary social order that stems from its ability to make itself appear as natural. Sociology can “de-naturalize” and “defatalize” (Bourdieu 1993, 26) the social order – for example the state’s abandonment of its responsibilities for those living in severe housing poverty which emerged as an almost self-evident feature of the post-transition policy regime. By allowing agents “to think about society as opposed to being thought by it” (Wacquant 2004, 101), social science can be capable of making the social world accessible to speech, and thus to politics. When the sight of people living in the street is widely perceived as being as natural as the change of seasons, this is an important skill.

Second, the dominant understanding of poverty and homelessness is full of ideas that have the function of blaming those at the bottom of the class structure for their fate, and surrounding “the class hierarchy with a moral atmosphere” (Gans 1995, 95). In contrast, class consciousness, the “recognition that our hardship and servitude is mostly independent from our own personal traits” but is “a result of our random position in the social division of labour and in regard to property”—whose emancipatory effect Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás compared to the ecstasy of the acquittal from the false accusation known from Franz Kafka’s works—“provides salve for the irrational shame and guilt coming with poverty and subordination, gives a valid knowledge of society and represents moral impetus to liberating collective action” (Tamás 2002, 85-86). But class consciousness understood in this way, is really nothing else than what C. Wright Mills famously called the “sociological imagination” (Mills 2000), or what in turn is the very understanding of homelessness and poverty AVM is cultivating.

What is a matter of recognition and dignity for the dominated is the essence of the sociological imagination: the transformation of private troubles into public issues. From this perspective, the role of “ally” members in the group can be understood as an organic public sociological practice (Burawoy 2004), and the internal politics of AVM as a joint of effort of homeless activists and their “allies” to bring about the “transfer of cultural capital which enables the

dominated to achieve a collective mobilization and subversive action against the established order” (Bourdieu 2000, 188).

Organizing for structural changes also seems to be the most direct means to alleviate the effects of symbolic domination, “this supreme form of dispossession that is the shame of self” (Bourdieu 2004, 619). For as Frances Fox Piven argues, this transformation—dominating domination—is “personal but its also collective. The transformation is personal but it occurs through a change in the collective understanding to which you are exposed” (Shepard 2008, 13). A homeless organizer of an activist group in California defined empowerment “as educating homeless people that they did not ‘cause this situation’ of homelessness” (Williams 2005: 501), just as a sympathetic researcher grasped the value of organizing by Danish homeless people by arguing that it “enables participants to create new understandings of themselves, and to see the problems related to homelessness in a broader social and political perspective” (Anker 2008: 35). Wright, in his study of the Student Homeless Alliance, also emphasized “a greater emotional uplift, a sense of hope” epitomized by such statements of the organization’s homeless participants as “I don’t have to feel ashamed of being a failure because I know the situation was set up so that I fail” (Wright 1997, 291).

Not everyone who finds AVM with a pressing housing problem become an activist and remain with the group. In fact, the most important and most difficult part of group’s recruitment process is the effort to transform the relationship between AVM’s activists and people with housing problems from its initial form, which resembles in many respects the relationship between a “client” and a charitable organization, to that of fellow activists. The mutual aid groups referenced in Table 1 (and which are more recent developments in the work of AVM) grew out of this very attempt, to transform individual-level “case work” into a more collective and more political approach.

In any case, those who are homeless or without secure housing and choose to remain with AVM, are not only exposed to a world view which locates the blame for their poverty and homelessness in the power and distributive inequalities in society, and asserts their moral equality, as citizens, regardless of their material destitution – it also *offers* a channel through which they can step up, “as a full member of society capable of participating on a par with the rest” (Fraser 2000, 103), against those inequalities. It is this reclaiming of citizenship, through being able to take on a role—as homeless, but in opposition to almost everything society is thought her to think of herself as “a homeless”—that is the most immediate gain that homeless people can obtain by participating in such a collective political project for structural change.²³

²³ Naturally, AVM also provides “ally” members with an opportunity to find or enrich *their* citizenship. As Wright reflected on his own advocate researcher role: “When you talk back to social workers, police, and ‘experts’ on behalf of those who have no voice you also discover your own voice” (Wright 2012, 12). For one of AVM’s founders, Tessza Udvarhelyi’s own personal



Figure 5: Lakatosné Jutka, a homeless member of AVM speaks at a parliamentary committee (2015)

Source: AVM. Photo by Zsolt Csízi.

The results of an activity from the 2009 workshops from which AVM emerged provide a telling example of this. Participants were first asked to tell the first expression they associate with the word “homeless”. Most of the expressions they picked were like the following: “hopelessness”, “invisibility”, “a vilified person”, “abandoned”, “fallen”, “nihil”, “hopeless”, “unfortunate”, “bottle of wine”, “exclusion”, “pity”, “dependency”, “vulnerability”, “stinking”, “loneliness” or “bum”. Then they watched together a short video clip in which Joan Harrison, a homeless member of PTH gave a powerful speech at the steps of City Hall in New York City against the announced closure of a drop-in center. In her speech, Harrison emphasized that the institution in question was a place in which the privacy, liberties and dignity of homeless people were violated, but it was nonetheless unacceptable that decision-makers would deprive homeless people even of this meager service. After watching the video clip, participants were asked again to tell the group about the first expression that came to their mind. These were the following: “struggle”, “hope”, “inner firmness”, “union”, “human dignity”, “perseverance”, “anger”, “strength”, “class struggle”, “human rights” and “inspiration”.

account on how applied cultural anthropology politicized her and how “learning to use that research as part of a social movement, radicalized [her], see Udvarhelyi 2010.

This transformation is very personal, while at the same time is also of broader political significance – for nothing else is as effective in countervailing both the dehumanizing tendencies of public discourse and the patronizing image of the homeless poor cultivated by charity and the homeless assistance system as homeless people reclaiming their status as citizens of equal standing by publicly speaking up against injustice.

4.3. The politics of need interpretation

The parallel to this politics of citizenship reclaiming, and the other main aspect of the politics of AVM is the repoliticization of homelessness, which could be understood along the analysis of Nancy Fraser (1989a) as a “politics of need interpretation”. As we have seen, shelters, the main state response to homelessness, not only provide a roof above one’s head, they also *manufacture meanings* about the appropriate response to homelessness – and also about the *needs* of “the homeless”. In this respect, AVM’s campaigns can be understood as an attempt to “cast off the apparently natural and prepolitical interpretations that enveloped” the needs of those without a home of their own. Of course, what is at stake here—as always in case of the discourse over needs—is a *political* conflict “through which inequalities are symbolically elaborated and challenged” (Fraser 1989b, 162).

As Fraser writes, it can be uncontroversially said that homeless people need shelter in order to live and that the state, as the final guarantor of life has a responsibility to provide for that need. “However, as soon as we descend to a lesser level of generality, needs claims become far more controversial. [...] Do homeless people need forbearance, so that they may sleep undisturbed next to a hot-air vent on a street corner? [...] A bed in a temporary shelter? A permanent home?” (Ibid, 63). AVM demands the latter, and by doing so, it argues not so much for the incremental amelioration of the existing homeless assistance system but—through reinterpreting the status of homeless people (as citizens of equal moral worth) and their needs (housing, instead of shelter from exposure to the natural elements)—puts forward much more ambitious goals.

Goals, which were possible to be formulated in the winter of 1989-1990 (still under the hegemonic influence of the paternalistic welfare dictatorship) but which have been almost completely absent from the public discourse about homelessness after the following two decades. The local experiments of “housing first” (or as the name of AVM’s subsidiary organization dedicated to such programs puts it “From the street to housing”) projects could be also understood not only as a type of direct action to provide homes for a small number of specific homeless individuals, but also as a properly political statement which demonstrates that *it can be done*: that homeless people are not a particular species that somehow can live only in subway stations or shelters, but citizens who have the same *needs* as anyone else, and whose only *differentia specifica* is their—not only material, but also symbolic—exclusion from housing forms considered to be normal.

It would be most probably an overstatement of the influence of AVM to say that it wages a struggle over the (re)distribution of resources, though the egalitarian housing policies it demands would entail just that. (Not that any other advocacy group, besides organized business interest, could have much effect on distributive policies in the post-2010 political system.) But it has been certainly waging a struggle, quite successfully, on the aforementioned two fronts.

For example, while earlier it often took some importuning to make editors and journalists accept that the spokespersons of the group are not those “ally” members who they happen to already know, but the homeless members specifically nominated for that interview, this practice has become largely normalized by now. The power of the group over the public discussion about homelessness and housing is in turn nicely exemplified by the fact that at the 2014 television debate of Budapest mayoral candidates, most of them spoke about the issue of vacant housing (an issue that AVM has been intensively raising awareness of with annual marches as well as symbolic takeovers of vacant buildings).

And while the prospects of any egalitarian reform is indeed very bleak currently in Hungary, it could be argued that none of those struggles that seem lost (in the sense of being ineffective for the material processes of distribution) have been in vain, because—beside providing maybe the only opportunity for those homeless people who join AVM to reclaim their dignity as citizens—they nonetheless contribute to the remaking of the political understanding of homelessness (and “the homeless”) and housing deprivation, and thereby provide for more fruitful conditions for egalitarian social and housing policy reforms, should there be a political opening, than it was the case this past two and a half decades.

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Contemporary housing activism in Serbia: provisional mapping

Ana Vilenica
(in collaboration with Ana Džokić and
Marc Neelan / Who Builds the City)

Abstract

This paper aims to provide a provisional map of contemporary housing activism in Serbia. It is part of a broader effort to politicise the housing issue in Serbia, bringing it back to the political arena, and to facilitate connections between existing, atomised struggles in the field of housing. The paper is based on action research, informed by collective discussions with housing activists. The current housing situation in Serbia will be conceptualised in terms of the neoliberal post-socialist condition on the European periphery. The defining characteristics of housing regimes in Serbia and the conflicts around them will be identified by focusing on concrete situations. These include: elite housing mega-developments, spiralling mortgage debts, evictions, a dysfunctional social housing system and energy poverty, along with emerging housing alternatives. In the concluding remarks, we will reflect on the current state of housing activism in Serbia, setting out a framework for debate around the potential of housing activism and challenges it faces in the future.

Keywords: housing regimes, housing activism, neoliberal, post-socialist, peripheral, Serbia

Building a research approach from within the struggles

Our writing about housing activism in Serbia stems from an urge to contribute to the emerging struggles for universal and unconditional housing. Writing this text could be seen as a step towards mapping, describing, analysing and discussing the positions of participants in the “So-called Housing Issue” (Tzv. Stambeno Pitanje) event in October 2015 in Belgrade. This event, set up by “Who Builds the City” (Ko Gradi Grad) and realised in collaboration with the “Ignorant Schoolmaster and his Committees” (Učitelj Neznalica i Njegovi Komiteti) association, was the first attempt to bring together various housing activist initiatives, groups and movements in Serbia. The present research is part of a learning process that can potentially bring us closer to imagining and building structural alternatives.

In working on this article, we consulted current writings on housing struggles beyond the West, which confirmed that the situation in Serbia has not yet been explored. Researchers have focused on urban struggles like the Belgrade versions of Critical Mass or the Pride Parade, or on the movement against the

Belgrade Waterfront development, but without taking the housing perspective into account. Although researchers declare their interest in “low key activism”, case studies still tend to concentrate on the more impressive but less socially focused forms of action. Through its approach grounded in actual social struggles for a home, this paper intends to go beyond the dominant fascination with mass street protests, contributing instead to ongoing efforts to open a debate about urban struggles beyond the West.

This contribution can be aligned with various attempts to bring the housing issue onto the political agenda by framing it as a political field of antagonism in a class-based society. The aim is to show that there are energetic housing struggles in Serbia and to situate them in the broader context of Serbia’s contemporary housing regimes on the periphery of Europe. Based on this approach, this paper intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature of the current complex of “housing crises” in Serbia, partially responding to a general failure to understand the function of housing in Serbian society today. By identifying the discourses, practices and political outcomes of recent and ongoing housing activism, with particular emphasis on the potential for strategic or tactical collaboration between various groups and initiatives, this research sets out to open the debate around the potential of grassroots housing activism on the European periphery and the challenges it faces, in a context of urgent need for radical systemic social change, both at local and global level.

Housing regimes in Serbia

The current housing regimes in Serbia were established on the ruins of the incomplete egalitarian practices of “socialist” Yugoslavia. The latter were based on the initial revolutionary wave that strove to create an egalitarian society. The current regimes, by contrast, are grounded in the war and the period of the so-called blocked transition in 1990 (Bolcic 2003), which was followed by primitive accumulation, social cuts, the destruction of welfare and growing poverty and inequality. This “shock therapy” imposed by the “transition” towards (neo)liberal democracy didn’t bring the expected wellbeing, instead the whole state, and therefore also its housing provisions, ended up in a “periphery trap” (Balunović 2013), unable to develop under the given circumstances. This process was followed by external pressure for internal reforms (EU integration process), debt servitude (borrowing huge amounts of money from the IMF) and the false belief that foreign investment would contribute to growth. Housing regimes in Serbia today are based on the paradigm of private ownership, an absence of coherent social policy and a state apparatus serving the private interest of the economic and political oligarchy. The regimes reflect specific social and housing legislation, a longer-term privatization agenda, debt proliferation at all levels, urban regeneration schemes and the resulting social displacement, conflicts between particular social groups, and not least, the energetic promotion of social values centred on “success” (eg. home ownership) and “failure” (social housing tenancy). These housing regimes are class-based, sexist and racist, as befits their neo-colonial nature.

During the Yugoslav socialist experiment, housing was conceived as a fundamental right within a society based on concepts of social ownership and self-management (introduced in the beginning of 1950s). Apartments were granted for permanent use to workers (regarded as the owners of the means of production in a rapidly industrializing country) on the basis of their work engagement. Housing construction was financed by the Solidarity Housing Fund, to which all the employed contributed a small percentage of their income. At the beginning of the 1990s, socially owned apartments financed by this fund constituted 53% of Belgrade's housing stock. However, this system designed to assure everyone of housing did not function perfectly. Housing provision was delegated to self-managed enterprises in 1965, shortly after which new inequalities began to appear, resulting from a combination of private misuse of the system and simply inadequate provision. Certain groups of workers were often given privileged access to socially owned apartments: usually those with higher education and/or higher job status, employees of the more successful companies and Communist Party functionaries (Archer, 2016). After 1959, those who failed to get a high-ranking position on housing lists were often able to solve their housing problems by means of subsidized loans for materials and credits for the purchase of an apartment (Le Normand 2012:356). Yugoslavia also tolerated the spontaneous development of the “wild” suburban settlements built to house the growing influx of workers into the cities (Milikić et. all 2012). There was also significant unemployment rate (which kept growing after the reform in 1965). Excluded from the work-centered system of socialist housing provision, the unemployed were left to find their own way, whether in a grey private rental sector or by living with extended families in usually overcrowded flats. Neither homelessness nor the unsolved remainder of the housing problem was officially supposed to exist. (Sekulić 2013:28; Rus 1991).

During the same period, a general reform of the territorial powers of government transferred management functions from central to local political bodies in the name of direct self-management. In practice, however, the mechanisms of self-management were implemented only in part. Workers and citizens did not decide directly on crucial matters such as the channelling of major investments or general development policy (Rakita 2015).

The situation changed dramatically in 1990 with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the war. The dismantling of social ownership by way of privatisation and the new primitive accumulation created by capital turned “self-managers” into wage-labour, while political managers, in collaboration with entrepreneurs, became the new elites. A new Law on Housing Relations opened the door to the privatisation (expropriation from public ownership) of apartments and their “transition” into commodities within a real-estate market. The entire socially owned housing stock was initially nationalised and brought to state ownership, then in 1992, with the Law on Housing, the flats were offered to the tenants living in them for purchase at bargain prices. These changes crystallised inherited inequalities from the socialist experiment and opened the door for the new ones. As a result, 98.3% of apartments in Serbia today are privately owned, while 10% of the Serbian population can be classified

as homeless under a broad definition and only 0,9 % of housing is in public ownership (RZS 2013). The theoretical benefits of this privatisation were lost to inflation and the decentralised form of the privatisation: the property to be privatized was owned not by the central states but by public enterprises and institutions. The biggest “losers” of this process were those workers who had paid the required percentage into the housing fund but were unable to claim their right to housing before privatisation.

Illegal construction increased throughout the 1990s. Initially this was a self-help strategy among low-income groups, but the practice was later expanded by the nouveau riche. Some built roof extensions on existing buildings (both for personal use and for profit), while others even put up luxurious villas. The state’s withdrawal from housing provision, combined with generally clientelist economic relations, the re-orientation towards profit-making and the absolute rule of the market, made housing in Serbia a fertile ground for all sorts of (tolerated) fraud. This resulted in insecurity for prospective housing buyers, including middle-income purchasers. During this period, speculative housing construction boomed: in the constant search for maximum profit, investors circumvented legislation (mainly at local level), entering the grey economy and relying on informal channels and corruption. Some built without company registration. New developers avoided taking loans from banks, instead operating illegally and transferring their risk onto the life savings of their customers. Until a few years ago there were even situations where single apartments were sold multiple times to different owners while the building itself was still under construction.

Aside from the issue of privatisation, housing was not on the political agenda until the beginning of 2000. Following the so-called democratic changes in 2000, housing was turned into a purely for-profit domain, under an ideology that set up home ownership as the social ideal. The response to the challenge of defining new social housing politics under new conditions was a move from an approach based on solidarity to an approach based on efficiency in providing housing solutions to those who cannot find them on the market on their own (Petrović 2014). With the Law on Public Property of 2011, responsibility for social housing provision became part of the jurisdiction of municipalities, which became the owners of the public land and social housing.

The trouble with the social housing challenge in Serbia is precisely the failure to define in clear terms whom the beneficiaries of housing provision should be. There is no official estimate of the need for social housing and no documentation that would give a clear idea of who is on the lowest income and how much money their income leaves them to pay for rent and utilities. This circumstance made it possible for the focus of social housing provision to shift from those who need it the most, namely the poor, to those on middle and lower middle incomes who cannot compete on the market. Solidarity housing funds existing between 1991 and 2004 provided highly subsidised owner-occupied housing for middle income groups and did not contribute at all to the social housing fund. This tendency continued with the Social Housing Law of 2009,

which defines those in need as everyone who cannot find a solution to their housing needs on the market. Besides providing housing to the middle-income groups, the state also subsidised housing loans for this group, thus decreasing banks' risks and interest income. By 2010, 40 000 loans had been given out. Other indirect subsidies were a tax exemption for first time buyers and tolerance towards illegal housing construction (Petrović 2013). This situation came to a head in 2016 with the new Law on Housing and Maintenance of Building when the very term "social housing" was replaced with the term "housing support".

Those at the bottom of the social ladder were addressed only rarely, and even then mostly through international donations. Special housing programmes were created for certain vulnerable groups such as refugees or the Roma minority. Refugees from the wars of 1990 and internally displaced persons became the focus of some of these projects, but this provision was not enough to close the collective centres in which some of them continue to live. Among those who were hit the hardest by the so-called transition were Roma households. The post-socialist period accelerated their downward mobility, while the increasing pauperisation of the majority population led to a widespread perception of any provision to Roma as a privilege at the expense of the Serbian majority (Petrović 2013). In 2009, this situation – in combination with the lack of social housing provision and welfare policy and bad labour market condition – led to the introduction of a new type of social housing provision in Serbia: container settlements on the outskirts of Belgrade. This solution was facilitated by infrastructural development sponsored by EIB and EBRD. It led to the displacement of a Roma settlement under Gazela Bridge. Donors accepted this solution, thus contributing to the reproduction of poverty among this minority group. The new Law on Housing and Building Maintenance tends to legalise the existing practice of withdrawal of the state from providing housing for those who have the greatest need. The law did not oblige the Republic of Serbia to house homeless people, to protect people without papers (only those with registered permanent residence in RS) or to provide emergency housing for those evicted for any reason other than "public interest": unpaid mortgages, ownership disputes, etc. did not qualify. Nor did the law require postponement of eviction where a legal appeal was pending (Law on Housing and Building Maintenance 2016). It would seem that the social dimension of housing was abandoned altogether when the term "housing support" replaced "social housing" in the text of this law (Ćurčić, 2016).

Furthermore, the new law is shifting almost the entire burden of the maintenance of apartment buildings onto residents, thereby perpetuating rather than solving the problems. Most of those who benefited from the purchase of a socially owned apartment in the 1990s now face a range of problems as a result of being unable to pay for the maintenance of the buildings. Instead of finding a way to help tenants, legislators decided to focus on "improving" the management of the buildings. The Law introduced professional building management (for buildings where a tenant manager could not be elected) and "forced management" (in cases where tenants cannot manage to organise

themselves), shifting the focus away from the main reason for the lack of maintenance of the housing stock: the general impoverishment of the population rather than an individual irresponsibility.

For the vast majority of the citizens of Serbia, utility costs are becoming unmanageable, not only because of widespread impoverishment but also as a result of the inadequate and clientelistic operation of energy and other utility providers, and the practice whereby “privileged borrowers”, i.e. large public companies, pay their bills with huge delays or not at all. In Yugoslavia, urban services such as municipal heating were delivered through a universal system of social welfare provision, and heating was to a large extent made affordable for the majority. As a result of austerity measures, clientelism and the neoliberal privatisation of energy spending, inhabitants have been pushed into a defensive struggle against their public utility companies.

The proof that not even those on middle incomes can feel safe on Serbia’s new housing market can be found in the autocratic behaviour of banks. Unilateral changes to interest rates and bank margins have become life-threatening to many housing loan recipients. Hit hardest are those borrowers who took out housing loans in Swiss francs at much lower interest rates than were available denominated in euros or Serbian dinars at the time of borrowing. When the value of the Swiss franc began rising sharply against the euro in 2011, the real amount owed on franc-denominated mortgages increased enormously. This left 21,000 families in Serbia with loan annuities two and a half times higher than at the period of signing the loan contract, which meant some of the affected families depleted their financial resources. The banks foreclosed on the homes of those unable to pay, leaving the affected families without anywhere to live yet still liable for their outstanding debts.

The financialisation of housing that started with the bank loans continues to take over the housing market through new mega-development projects. The government of Serbia further exacerbates new inequalities by supporting and co-financing the construction of private luxury apartments such as the Belgrade Waterfront (a public-private partnership with a newly founded UAE company, designated a project of national interest) and pushing for social cleansing in central Belgrade. The cost of a square metre in this new exclusive development vastly exceeds the payment capacity of local Belgrade residents. The project also led to several legislative changes, one of the most notorious being the introduction of the so-called Lex Specialise, a special law on the expropriation of private property in the case of construction not intended for public use. It can be concluded that recent changes to housing legislation and other aspects of public policy were usually fuelled by the demands of European integration processes or by investor’s needs.

Over the last few years, the most conspicuous manifestations of new housing regimes in Serbia have provoked an intensification of activist responses, shedding light on major conflicts in Serbia’s housing situation. The activist resistance attempts to articulate alternatives around which a local housing movement could form. This would make it possible to exert concerted pressure

in a situation of housing emergency by means of radical analyses, cumulative grassroots expertise in housing and an open space for potential housing alternatives.

Major housing conflicts and the political and activist responses

Privatisation as a new slavery

During the “transition”, many of those who couldn’t benefit from the big sell-off of socially owned apartments became like “furniture” to be sold along with formerly socially owned companies. The privatisation schemes of many “self-managed” companies included accommodation that the workers had a right to through their work for the company and their investing into the Solidary Housing Fund of Yugoslavia. Erasing the category of the worker became a major obsession of new post-socialist privatisation and housing regimes (Ignorant Schoolmaster 2015).

The best-known example of this is the case of former workers of the construction company “Trudbenik Gradnja” from Belgrade. Following privatisation, the new owner – the offshore company “Montera” – sold all of Trudbenik’s assets, fired its workers, and started pressuring residents in three locations in Belgrade to move out. As the workers and their families had nowhere to go, they refused to leave. In order to evict them and sell the buildings, the new owner obstructed payments for water, electricity and heating services. Although the workers were paying regularly through “Trudbenik”, “Montera” held onto the money itself, deliberately compounding the tenants’ “debts” to the utilities. Eventually “Montera” went bankrupt and the tenants were brought under the jurisdiction of the Bankruptcy Trustee, but their situation did not change. This time, the state started using private debt collectors, confiscating wages and pensions from the residents in order to settle debts, leaving the “ex”-workers without the basic means of survival. Today the tenants continue to live under the constant threat of eviction, their lives in many ways a series of ordeals.

The struggle of the ex-workers to stay put was supported by the “Association of Workers and Friends of Trudbenik” (mobilising against the eviction through direct action)¹ as well as through the long-time involvement of the “Ignorant Schoolmaster” Association. Through a series of public debates, a bulletin for self-education and social issues (sold as a supplement to the daily newspaper *Danas*) and projects to provide much needed legal support to the workers, the

¹ One of the most effective actions took place in February 2010, following an order to cut the electricity supply to a workers’ apartment building in the neighbourhood of Konjarnik (while outdoor temperatures reached minus 14 degrees Celsius). The “Association of Workers and Friends of Trudbenik” redirected their syndicate demonstrations to the Konjarnik location and threatened to block one of the main city roads. This pressure resulted in re-connection of the electricity supply to the workers’ accommodation. Court bailiffs continue to regularly intimidate residents and accuse them of giving a bad name to the state, implying that they would have to become homeless in order to show their devotion to it.

“Ignorant Schoolmaster” Association made a breakthrough in naming and conceptualising the problem that workers faced after privatisation. In 2014 they filed a criminal charge against all parties involved in the privatisation of the “Trudbenik gradnja” and “Rekord” companies, including members of the government of 2004-2006, the head of the privatization agency and various private consultancies, alleging *human trafficking*. “Ignorant Schoolmaster” argued that the privatisation and restructuring process that resulted in workers’ comprehensive loss of present management rights and future hopes constitutes a form of *slavery*.² With this new practice of naming, the association exposed an essentially faith-based entrepreneurial ideology raised to the level of cultural hegemony: a promise of freedom that in practice merely individualized responsibility and undermined the prospect of coming together to formulate a common interest.

The “Ignorant Schoolmaster” Association developed a clear anti-capitalist perspective, setting out to rethink the past and present experience of workers in Yugoslavia and Serbia and to consider possible alternatives. The group worked within the “productive misunderstanding” between the different political orientations and experiences of participants in the discussions, in such a way that its politics and engagement transcended the traditional activity of an NGO. Besides an intensive programme of debates organised in Belgrade the members were also actively taking part in the debates organised by housing groups in other cities, including public media debates, and so actively contributed to the public politisation of housing issue.

New developments as sites of new urban conflicts

In the last decade, new developments became a means of “improving the image” of “(post-)transitional” Serbia. This urban optimism has been promising a new European Serbia and a renewed Belgrade as a competitive European capital ready to join the family of progressive European cities. Perusing this appearance of progress was regularly followed by new exclusions, displacement and oppressions.³

² The legal base for this charge was a list of workers that was an integral part in purchase contract.

³ It could be said that the massive international student sporting event 25th Summer Universiade, held in Belgrade in 2009, became the first symbolic instrument of a new regeneration practice in Belgrade. Preparations for the event included the construction of the new commercial-residential complex Belville in New Belgrade, which was given the temporary function of housing visiting athletes, accompanied by new traffic infrastructure. The conflict arose when city authorities started to clean up the plot next to the Belville athlete’s center, inhabited mostly by Roma (from Belgrade, but also including refugees from Kosovo) and some of the most vulnerable communities in the country. Demolition of their improvised houses began following a decision by the Belgrade Secretariat for Inspections, without giving proper prior notice and without providing alternative accommodation for the families. The bulldozing of around forty houses started while residents were still inside. Despite significant rebellion, during 2012 the settlement was gradually erased and inhabitants were moved to container

One of the most striking indicators of new urban governance in Serbia is the Belgrade Waterfront project, the mega urban redevelopment of the de-industrialised waterfront of the Sava River. The project emerged as the result of a public private partnership with the freshly founded company Eagle Hills from the United Arab Emirates. Besides the elite housing that is being built at the moment, the plan includes new business spaces, luxury hotels, shops, the largest shopping mall in the Balkans. Belgrade Waterfront was announced by Aleksandar Vucic, the current prime minister and elected president of Serbia, during his candidacy for Mayor of Belgrade in 2012. In 2015, the project was declared to be of national significance, claiming to resolve the unemployment problems with unsecured jobs in construction and in the service sector and announcing the creation of a new clean, safe and beautiful European capital. What the people of Serbia actually got is the socialisation of the expenses of the project preparations, including social cleansing. Millions of Euros of public money are being invested in preparing planning documentation, clearing the terrain and infrastructural works. Preparation for this project also meant the expropriation of a number of privately owned houses and small businesses.

During the first phase 224 families had to be displaced. Most of the people living in the displacement areas Savamala and Bara Venecija were ex-workers of the Railways Company. The city has divided the population into “legal” (those who own property, including people with user status for homes that are not purchasable) and “illegal” (those who, for various reasons, do not have proper legal documents). It divides those who will be granted an unequal compensation in the expropriation process, from those who will end up in emergency accommodation –leaving them under threat of future homelessness.

Since mid 2014, the “Don’t Let Belgrade D(r)own” (Ne da(vi)mo Beograd) Initiative, a diverse coalition of middle-class urbanities, NGOs, activists, architects, journalists and creatives has been concentrating on revealing the irregularities of this project by action research, analysis, attempting to use the existing mechanisms of participation, publishing the initiative’s bulletin, organising street actions and street protests. Their mobilisation framework resides in the Right to the City reference, which attempts to mobilise citizens to participate in pressuring the state to respect existing regulations and laws. The initiative did an important job in addressing issues of deregulation, problematizing the investor’s driven urbanism, and state corruption – the state suspended its own laws to meet the demands of the foreign investor. From 2016 after the overnight illegal demolition of private barracks in Savamala, which featured restraining guards and the absence of a police response, the Initiative started an anti-corruption campaign targeting the city and state establishment and ruling party’s crony policies. The initiative managed to mobilise around 20 000 people on protests, people who were dissatisfied with the government but until now the establishment did nothing to bring those responsible to justice.

settlements on the outskirts of the city, where they still live as of 2017. Here eight members of a family share a single container of 14 square meters.

In terms of the housing issue, the Initiative focused mainly on the unaffordability of the newly built apartments for Belgrade's mid-income citizens. And even though it has attempted to make contact with inhabitants of the area who face expropriation and eviction, it did not recognise that their struggles could be related. In their attempt to halt the project, the Initiative saw the struggle of these people as one of "individual interest" (looking for a better deal with the city), while the goals of the Initiative were seen as "general". "Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own" neither had the appetite nor capacity to address the complex issues of housing, beyond housing as a mere real-estate issue. It claimed to work in the interests of all but failed to articulate the interest of those most affected by the financialisation of housing, by privatisation and the new anti-social aspirations in society.

The struggle for the truth about social housing regimes in Serbia

Insufficient social housing in Serbia leads to a permanent housing crisis. Today just 0.8 % of housing units in Serbia are in public ownership (1% in Belgrade). The lower strata inhabitants became "losers" in the housing privatisation of the 1990s, and many of them are today living under inadequate conditions or in collective emergency housing, waiting for proper accommodation. On the other side the inadequate amount of existing and planned social housing indicates the incapability of this social housing system to offer stability and security to its tenants. To provide social housing, the Serbian state mainly relies on foreign donations and human rights based fundraising. The projects are usually mediated through multiple governmental (established in 2011) or non-governmental agencies which are altogether failing to provide adequate solutions. Ghettoization, blaming victims for their misery and divide-and-rule methods became the triggers for existing race and class-based conflicts to escalate in violent riots. In a system based on the paradigm of profits, market logic, and land grabs, a dysfunctional social system is the logical outcome.

The Kamendin neighbourhood in Zemun Polje, one of the City of Belgrade's sporadic social housing projects, laid-out as a satellite settlement, stands for a signifier of the general problems of the social housing system in Serbia, and not a local specificity, as the media wanted us to believe. The Kamendin was intended to house socially vulnerable individuals (with household incomes of less than 60% of the national average), those displaced from slum settlements, severely disabled persons, and persons in need of care and assistance. The situation in Kamendin escalated in a reactionary racist protest in Zemun Polje against its underclass of Roma tenants. Representatives of the citizens' groups that initiated the protest sought to stop further settlement of socially vulnerable Roma residents in Kamendin and in the container settlements between Zemun Polje and nearby Batajnica. This example illustrates an important phenomenon when right-wing rhetoric and politics get the spontaneous support of a larger number of people; in this case, impoverished "white" inhabitants attacking the socially weakest, which they consider to be the source of a threat. The event provoked a wave of humanitarian/philanthropic responses from different state

and civil society actors but the real problems of Kamendin stayed unclear and hidden underneath shocking media representations that were feeding racism.

As a result of the inability to produce an understanding of the very logic of this situation, the project Kamendynamics (Cultural Centre Rex: Nebojsa Milikić, Tadej Kurepa) started a year's long discussion with tenants and the general public (a year and a half after the events mentioned above). Soon after it became clear that such protests were working in mutual support with government attempts to remove "undeserving beneficiaries" from social housing in Kamendin. Activist research conducted both through individual consultations with tenants, city officials, and NGO representatives and public talks revealed that a significant number of tenants accumulated debt because their income didn't allow them to keep up with expensive rent and utility bills payable to the municipal utilities company. To the present day these people live under a permanent threat of eviction, and they have no means of sustaining themselves because their income is nullified by their debts. During the course of the research phase it became evident that the authorities do not want to discuss the inability of these people to pay their housing costs: they declared those living in worsening conditions (mainly Roma) to be irresponsible, calling them bad beneficiaries who accumulated debt and damaged apartments through uncivilized use.

This project Kamendynamics became a small campaign, fighting against the politics that proclaims poverty to be rooted in cultural differences and individual preferences. This campaign works in parallel with tenants' individual and collective self-organised attempt by means of legal charges, public protests and petitions to defend their rights, acting as individual amateur legal experts or in collaboration with human rights organisations offering legal support to the tenants (Praxis, YUCOM). Mutual discussions consequently resulted in a sketch for a future mural representing a class pyramid of Serbian social housing including Roma tenants that carry on their backs media, NGOs, government institutions, politicians and on the very top the EU institutions and EU politicians overseeing the efficacy of social housing in Serbia conceptualised as a "pull factor" meant to control migrations. This analysis was presented at the Cultural Centre Rex and within the frame work of the international art project Actopolis.

This research revealed the utter violence of the social housing system and of the systemic individualization of responsibility which prevents tenants to organize around mutual problems. Under the mantle of care, the state was taking part in the ghettoization and marginalisation of social tenants, and burdened them with unexpected debts. Kamendynamics became an attempt to radicalise the story that is the reality of Kamendin and to generate an understanding of the current situation as the concerted destruction of social housing and its replacement with neocolonial-peripheral projects.

Organising against energy-related impoverishment: calling institutions to accountability

Energy poverty has become a general phenomenon in post-socialist countries (Bouzarovski, 2010). In the last decades, the concept of energy poverty has gained prominence in Serbia, as a result of the inherited situation, austerity measures, clientelism, energy insufficient housing stock, the neoliberal privatisation of energy expenses and the abolishment of subsidies for district heating. Energy related services represent the biggest share of household costs. It is estimated that between 60 and 70% of households in Serbia are affected by energy poverty (Petovar 2016). The problem is aggravated in privatized multi-unit buildings, housing 25% of Serbia's population, by the fact that utility companies made the situation impossible for those who cannot pay the bills and want to get off the grid.

This conflict escalated in the city of Niš, due to an almost 100% increase in district heating prices within a few months, as a result of the change from billing per square meter to a billing based on actual consumption and to the non-transparent management of the public heating company. Facing inevitable heating debts, affected tenants in Niš self-organised and shortly after registered the "Movement of free tenants and owners of private buildings" (Udruženi pokret slobodnih stanara i vlasnika privatnih zgrada) to demand the possibility to collectively disconnect from the municipal heating network. Since officials did – in contradiction to the law - not allow this option, claiming that the purchase of an apartment with municipal heating automatically included the obligation to pay the heating expenses, an open conflict with the city authorities has arisen. Niš tenants mobilised against the management of the city by party factions and public companies, emphasising that the relevant legal framework is routinely flouted, including their disrespect of the legal framework in this area. These practices, the tenants argue, are "what prevents the law and the state from doing their jobs". The initiative encourages critical responses to an authority alienated from the interests of the citizens, and speaks out against omnipresent servility. The Association organised massive street protests in front of the City Heating Plant and City Hall followed by individual and collective legal charges against the public utility company and later, in 2017, against city authorities for breaking the new Law on Energy, the Law on protection of competition and the Consumer protection law.

As a result of this public pressure, tenants won several victories. In 2015, the city authorities made it possible for tenants to temporarily disconnect from the grid and heating prices have been lowered to a more affordable level. Furthermore, the Association has been granted a seat on the supervisory board of the City Heating Plant – a potential transparency mechanism in citizens' control. The greatest success of this initiative, and a milestone in local housing struggles, has been the overcoming of the apathy of the atomised local population through this mass mobilisation. Also significant was its successful politicisation of the housing issue, partly through the organisation of existing tenant assemblies, as the previously atomised building representatives

(presidents) came together in a civil organisation. The Association managed to establish an organisation funded entirely through membership fees, contrary to the dominant model of NGO-subsidised work.

Mortgage fraud: a “side effect” of housing regimes

The entry of foreign banks into the Serbian market and the introduction of housing loans in the early 2000s changed the entire housing landscape significantly. The autocratic behaviour of banks through unilateral changes to interest rates and bank margins has become life-threatening to many housing loan recipients. Banking fraud has emerged as yet another source of problems in Serbia. Hit hardest are those borrowers who took out housing loans in Swiss francs at much lower interest rates than were available denominated in euros or Serbian dinars at the time of borrowing. When the value of the Swiss franc began rising sharply against the euro in 2011, the real amount owed on franc-denominated mortgages increased enormously. This left 21,000 families in Serbia with loan annuities two and a half times higher than at the period of signing the loan contract, which meant some of the affected families depleted their financial resources. The banks foreclosed on the homes of those unable to pay, leaving the affected families without anywhere to live yet still liable for their outstanding debts.

In 2011 the Association of Banking Clients “Efektiva” was formed, bringing together those burdened with toxic housing loans. Their approach was based on numerous individual court cases against banks, trying to prove that the banks used an unconstitutional currency clause, which transferred all of the risk to the bank clients. After unsuccessful negotiations with the state, the Association started staging protests: apart from a long-term camp in front of the Serbian government building, the Association also organised protests inside banks to get the attention of the public and of officials.

Their messages, however, neither gained recognition nor generated solidarity among the wider public. One reason may be that the majority of impoverished residents in Serbia have very low credit scores and no eligibility for loans, and those indebted to banks are therefore considered to be part of the privileged middle class. Furthermore, “Efektiva” is in essence a consumer protection association, with its objective being a fair treatment for all its indebted members and fair business conditions. This focus stops them from being able to criticise banking and housing fraud on a systemic level, leaving their struggle opportunistic and isolated. On the other hand, Efektiva’s motto “better to rent than take out a loan” suggests an awakening, leading to the recognition of enslavement through loans as the only paradigm in a neoliberal society.

Politicising tenants: attempts in urban self-governance

Tenants’ self-governance in Serbia has been systematically weakened, neglected and endangered as part of the new housing regimes in Serbia. This includes

both the inherited non-functional top-down model implemented in “socialism” (Rakita 2015) and the effects of the post-socialist conversion of collective buildings into private units, the new partisan nature of Local Community (Mesna zajednica) and the growing alienation and absence of communication among residents (Stanar 1-4, 2015/16).

In conceptual terms, one of the most interesting current attempts at self-organization has been pushed through by the “Local Politics and Urban Self-Governance” (Lokalne Politike i Urbana Samouprava) project in the Detelinara neighbourhood in the city of Novi Sad. This has been an exceptional case of self-organisation not driven by a direct existential threat. The project was initiated by the Center for New Media_kuda.org and the Group for Conceptual Politics (Grupa za Konceptualne Politike), both motivated by the wish to foster critique and debate and to reaffirm civil society as the basis of democratic politics. The fundamental conviction of the project is that housing policies should be created by tenants. Their vision is grounded in a critique of state domination over all domains of life. This is seen as the very reason for the weakening of civil society and the placing of politics exclusively in the realms of party and state. The focus of this project is placed on creating the conditions for a politics away from the state.

The “Local Politics and Urban Self-Governance” project has been using the potential and forms of an NGO to restore the will of residents to act collectively. The problems that this project has faced are to do with the established conviction, that an NGO should provide services to citizens and not serve as a place where politics emerge. In order to create the basis for real impact by residents, the project proposed the foundation of the “Initiative for the Association of Assemblies of Residential Buildings” (Inicijativa za Udruživanje Skupština Stanara) with a long-term goal to prevent members of political parties from running for the Council of Local Community (Skupština mesne zajednice). After two years, the project announced the failure of this initiative due to the inertia of tenants and their inability to take over this platform as a basis for the production of politics (Stanar 4 2017). The newly chosen focus of the project is situated within the existing civil society milieu in Serbia in pursuit for a space to think beyond state and party.

Imagining alternatives: cooperative housing

High prices and the inability to access bank loans mean that many people reach their forties still living with their parents, and cannot start an independent life. According to Eurostat data published in 2016 69,5 % of young people from age 18 to age 34 in Serbia still live with their parents. Keeping in mind that over 10% of the Serbian population is structurally homeless (RZZS 2011) it is more than clear that there is a huge need for housing alternatives.

As a response to the lack of affordable options, the “Smarter Building” (Pametnija Zgrada) initiative, of the platform “Who Builds the City” in Belgrade, started to research possible alternatives in 2012. Through a number of public

sessions, the group dissected house pricing, explored forms of direct democratic decision-making, outlined the legal aspects of a collectively run organisational model, and imagined possibilities to introduce the notion of equality (to a society based on inequality). As a result, a main undisputable framework was set. “Smarter Building” is to showcase collective self-development and use of housing, for substantially lower price than on the market, and including different income groups (together with people without income). It is to be non-speculative and possible to replicate.

Although “Smarter Building” did not start from a prescribed idea of what the organisational model for housing should be, the cooperative form soon emerged as a viable legal and organisational entity for undertaking a collective endeavour. The initiative is looking at both Serbian and Yugoslav experiences of cooperative housing⁴ and at West European experiences and practices⁵. This attempt could be located within the broader global renewed interest in cooperative housing. The politically sensitive aspect of this and similar approaches comes from the possibility of (re-)claiming the production of housing by citizens themselves, thus taking it out of the realm of profit making, and effectively cutting out the middlemen – developers, investors, real estate agents, contractors and ultimately, commercial banks.

After 5 years, the project is still at the discussion table without any concretely planned steps to be taken. The basic concern is how to make this project possible in financial terms. In the current situation, it would be necessary that municipalities, cities and state bodies recognise the importance of such a model of housing and offer land for use under favourable terms, or possibly without compensation altogether – conditions that the state has already been willing to offer to foreign investors. Another route would be to avoid public authorities all together, and instead raise funds or save a significant amount of money, which would take considerably more time and resources and would jeopardise the replicability of initial model houses. The group is committed to general openness and political “neutrality”, which makes it even harder to make decisions. In 2017, faced with the general absence of housing issues from public discourse in Serbia, Who builds the City decided to turn to more general housing campaigning, believing it would prepare the terrain for this kind of model in the future. Nevertheless, while it may provide a possibility for a part of the urban population, at the moment cooperative housing could only offer one

⁴ On the one hand housing cooperatives are a known organisational form that has been present in Serbia from 1870. It was practised in socialist Yugoslavia as well, parallel to the much more common model of socially owned apartments. The downfall of housing cooperatives started at the end of 1980's and the start of 1990's, when they received the exclusive right to extend existing collective residential buildings. From here on, and following the paradigm shift in terms of housing ownership, housing cooperatives slipped into corrupt, market driven practices and consequently became mistrusted. Today there are only a few functional housing cooperatives in Serbia, none of which actually practise cooperative principles. This can be traced back through 20 years of institutional neglect, privatisation and the intentional obstruction of cooperatives in all areas of society.

⁵ Such as e.g. the Mietshäuser Syndicate in Germany.

possible strategy for action and survival, and is far from being a comprehensive solution to the wider housing issue.

The old is dying and the new cannot be born

Housing activism in Serbia is shaped by the country's post-socialist peripheral conditions. Keeping in mind that inequalities and social injustices were partly inherited from "socialism", the so-called "democratic-transition" has terminally let down most of the citizens, trapped in a social framework with limited possibilities. Generally speaking, housing activism can be described as dwellers trying to cope with neoliberal capitalist paradigms and thinking beyond the aspirations of the previous system and the scarce possibilities of the present one.

Today's housing activist landscape in Serbia is characterised by varieties of conflicts around many issues. Identities, politics and goals, including ways of organising, remain diversified and stuck in the subsequent fragmentation of the housing struggle. Years of atomisation, individualisation and privatisation have created a situation in which tenants have become distrustful, both towards state and state institutions as well as towards civil society organisations. Therefore it is clear that an organisation's capacity is limited in regard to resources and people power at their disposal (many active members belong to multiple groups and initiatives), but there have been significant changes at the level of networking between different initiatives as well as significant successes at the level of more massive grassroots mobilisations and in-depth reflection and attempts of new political articulations of problems and alternatives.

Self-help organising around singular issues today appears as most prevalent in the housing field. It is based on perusing practical solutions in given circumstances that will protect individual interests of organised individuals through legal and public pressure. These individuals have a potential to develop grassroots expertise around a given issue and sometimes they manage to succeed in lifting some of the previously existing limitations, thus preparing the terrain for future struggles. In general, however, most of these struggles are fought in their own isolated spheres due to the absence of an overarching understanding of housing within the framework of social relations shaped by contemporary housing regimes. An important cause of fragmentation can also be found in the individualisation of responsibility for affected groups, which leaves them vulnerable and atomised.

In the last few years there have been some attempts to partially break this framework by channelling mass mobilisation of those who have lost out, and by mobilising support from other initiatives. These mobilisations marked the new strength of civil society that manages to articulate their struggle in broader terms. The problem of these groups on the other hand lies in the absence of a clear political concept. Their mobilisation horizon is based on cautiously avoiding "any compromised ideology" and refusing any political theory. They thus end up relying on existing prejudices, experiences and interests with

demands that do not go beyond the demand for efficient public administration. In their brightest moments, they can go as far as formulating demands against corrupt party-factional elites and state and capitalist oligarchy and for “true democratic participation”.

At the same time, there is an identifiable tendency to try to think of alternatives in practical, legal and ideo-political terms against mainstream ruling mechanisms. This tendency exists in a productive misunderstanding with other approaches and carries with it an important potential to imagine and push the existing limited framework towards meaningful alternatives. At the moment, the process includes the rethinking of some of the still potent concepts that were conceptualised but never materialised in the socialist experiment including social property as property without an owner and self-management instead of participation. These attempts in thinking alternatively inevitably create new potentialities in collision with reality.

Regarding organising models, we are witnessing the end of the “classical” period of NGO-isation. After the 1990s, housing activism emerged as part of the tendency to impose a Western model of civil society, with Western assistance, in so-called transitional countries. This saw the emergence of non-profit professionals focused on organisational capacity, providing services and professional advocacy, rather than communal mobilisation for self-help. In contrast to this situation, today we have new organisations emerging from the existential needs of the oppressed groups of individuals. These organisations’ finance mechanisms tend to be based on membership or individual donations, and they build their approach on a distance to Western foundations and their agendas.

Nevertheless, NGOs constrained by money flows continue to be a significant manifestation of the neoliberal post-socialist peripheral housing regimes in Serbia and continue to be significant actors in housing struggles. The problem with this form of organising is that it is not intended to change the world, but rather to adapt and improve in the context of the existing regime. At the same time, it currently seems that the only progressive and emancipatory ideas and actions related to housing stem from this activist-opportunist space and public function. The state is outsourcing very important questions to NGOs, thus creating the illusion that attention and focus is imparted on important social, political, and cultural issues. Therefore, it is very crucial to understand and consider whether or not NGOs are just contributing to the ruling mechanisms, or whether are they embryos of another political philosophy and practice. The NGO sector usually has access to funds only for the articulation of and reflection on very acute social problems. That’s why it is important to scrutinize the impact of these funds on the activities and the ideologies of organizations or groups that directly rely on them. The other challenge of this situation is how to connect emerging radical political philosophy with political and activist actions that tend to avoid radical analyses and behave within the mainstream framework.

Housing antagonisms are too often blurred and continue to reproduce as such in housing activism. Some groups refuse to acknowledge that housing issues stem from class society, blaming the corruption of ill-functioning institutions as main culprit or focusing on repairing the ill-functioning parts of the housing system for the exceptional groups. On the other side, there is a lack of understanding in the attempts to generalise housing problems that housing oppression is not experienced uniformly. None of the mentioned groups has acknowledged the specific experiences of women in housing and racism does not appear in most of the analyses as a structural problem.

The distance between privileged and marginalised groups often seems unbridgeable. This is partly a result of authorities deliberately setting them up against each other, and partly because of the praxis, developed among (professional) middle class activists, of cultivating homogeneity among the residents, by representing them all as victims of a destructive autocracy, thus intentionally obscuring the deep class divisions among residents, as well as the distribution of power within society. What seems to be outside the scope of the “citizenism” based approach in Serbia is those who cannot afford to respect the law.

On the housing activism side, there is currently an ongoing tendency towards tactical alliances between different groups with different strategic positions around singular events or issues, mutual or mutually inclusive projects, as well as on a more long-term base in new broader housing initiatives (as Citizens front). A recent example of a rare housing profiled coalition came into being as a result of the “So-called Housing Issue” event, in October 2015 when 14 organizations decided to jointly take part in the process of amending the new Law on Housing and Building Maintenance. This ad-hoc coalition for the right to housing called for the withdrawal of the proposed Law and for opening a broad public dialogue on a range of topics: affordable housing, the role of the state and citizens in providing adequate and affordable housing, and creating mechanisms towards its actual implementation. This first of its kind housing “rainbow alliance”, temporarily united against an unfavourable Housing Law, had considerable visibility but it just managed to prove once more that the existing mechanisms of participation are nothing more than imitation of democratic procedure.

After the new version of the law entered the parliamentary procedure, the same group withdrew from criticizing individual articles of the law and decided to focus on the particular economic problem behind this law. This could be seen as an important step towards overcoming the idea of a failure of the law as a result of incompetent and uninformed bureaucrats and party cadre, to exposing the law as a concrete political and ideological project that in the bourgeois state is always a tool for maintaining the status quo, or letting it deteriorate, but always against the majority. Until this exposure has been achieved, however, this kind of weak reaction continues to stay in the domain of missed opportunities for clearly articulated political work.

As long as there are people who have been excluded from the right to housing or the city, be it through silencing, a lack of solidarity or the exclusion from decision making, and as long as there is a lack of clear political demands towards a society conceived on principles of equality for all, including the articulation of alternatives, activist practices will hardly be able to accomplish their transformative potential. Until we confront the problem as a whole – including the current regime of urban redistribution that has turned our homes into currency – the system and the related housing problem will not be touched “where it hurts the most.” The challenge of today’s housing activism is to open up a space for imagining alternatives that will allow for the residents to create just housing politics and confront existing power and housing oppression. Instead of a current tendency to exclude and devalue the attempts of revolutionary or radical thinking and stay in a comfortable zone of what’s “possible”, new trust should be put in the radical analyses and new brave alternatives coming from political philosophy beyond the betrayed promises of democracy in capitalism. These alternative politics have to include as their minimum: decommodification of housing, definancialisation of housing, communing of the empty dwellings, housing self-management, and new intersectional mechanisms that will prevent oppression and exclusion.

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FUCVAM: cooperativismo de vivienda, de los barrios en Montevideo a una alternativa contrahegemónica en otros Sures

Marta Solanas Domínguez

Resumen

El cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo es uno de los referentes más reconocidos en el campo de la vivienda popular. Aglutinadas en FUCVAM, más de 400 cooperativas han construido, desde 1966, alrededor de 17000 viviendas, con espacios comunitarios y equipamientos colectivos.

El texto propone caracterizar la cooperación Sur-Sur que el cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo realiza con otros países del continente –como propuesta contra-hegemónica–, situando esta experiencia actual en la historia recorrida, desde su creación, por FUCVAM, la Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua.

Así, observamos cómo el cooperativismo de vivienda en Uruguay sigue siendo una alternativa válida para el acceso a la vivienda: FUCVAM experimentó un primer momento de creación (1966/1979), un tiempo de resistencia (1980/1989), una época de elaboración de alternativas (1990/2004) y recientemente una etapa de consolidación (desde 2005). Por otra parte, se muestra cómo se ha cooperado con otros países, a partir de una asociación estratégica de FUCVAM con la organización sueca We Effect: se han conformado y construido cooperativas de vivienda en Paraguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras y Nicaragua. Más allá de eso, se ha conformado una red que apuesta por una alternativa contra-hegemónica para la producción de vivienda y ciudad.

Palabras clave: cooperativismo de vivienda; cooperación Sur-Sur; política de vivienda; producción social del hábitat; autogestión; Uruguay

Introducción

El cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo es uno de los referentes más reconocidos entre las organizaciones populares, así como entre personas investigadoras, profesionales y responsables de políticas; en los campos de la vivienda popular y entre quienes defienden el derecho a la vivienda y la ciudad. Las cooperativas de vivienda, en Uruguay, conforman conjuntos habitacionales con viviendas y espacios de uso colectivo; se realizan sumando los esfuerzos y

recursos de sus futuros habitantes (*ayuda mutua*¹ y autogestión), el estado (préstamos y terrenos) y equipos técnicos interdisciplinarios (asesoramiento). Las cooperativas y barrios cooperativos son de propiedad colectiva, autogestionadas por la asamblea de socios y se agrupan en Federaciones; existe un marco legal que define su funcionamiento, como uno de los programas de la política de vivienda del país. Este movimiento social urbano celebraba a lo largo de 2016 cincuenta años de vida, conmemorando los tres proyectos pioneros que se esbozaban en 1966 en el seno del Centro Cooperativista Uruguayo y se concretaron en los años que siguieron, tras la aprobación en 1968 de la Ley Nacional de Vivienda (Nahoum, 2008; González, 2013; Solanas, 2016).

El texto que presentamos es el resultado de distintos acercamientos a las cooperativas uruguayas y su transferencias a otras latitudes, realizados entre 2010 y 2016. Nuestro objetivo es caracterizar la cooperación Sur-Sur que el cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo realiza con otros países de la región – como propuesta contra-hegemónica –, situando esta experiencia actual en la historia recorrida desde su creación por la Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua, FUCVAM.



Figura 1. En 2016 se celebraban 50 años de los primeros proyectos cooperativos. Cartelería. Fuente: FUCVAM, 2016.

Para comenzar, expondremos el marco teórico desde el que miramos la experiencia uruguaya y la metodología con la que nos acercamos al trabajo y, en

1 Se llama «ayuda mutua» a la mano de obra que todas las personas socias aportan para la construcción del conjunto habitacional. En la otra modalidad, las llamadas *cooperativas de ahorro previo*, los cooperativistas aportan un ahorro previo, en lugar de la mano de obra.

segundo lugar, mostramos el camino transitado por el movimiento cooperativo en las cuatro fases identificadas en su historia.

En un primer momento, se construyó el propio movimiento –la federación– mientras se edificaban los barrios cooperativos pioneros en Montevideo y la organización resistía los tiempos más duros de la dictadura (1966-1979).² A continuación, FUCVAM siguió viviendo una época de resistencia durante la salida de la dictadura y el primer gobierno democrático, a la vez que se realizaban equipamientos comunitarios y servicios autogestionados en los barrios (1980/1989). En una tercera época, el cooperativismo de vivienda elaboró alternativas al neoliberalismo, ocupando tierras y realizando reciclajes de edificios en las áreas centrales, en una etapa en que los barrios cooperativos amortiguaban los efectos de los procesos acelerados de exclusión social y segregación territorial que ocurrían en la ciudad (1990/2004). Finalmente, observamos la consolidación de la propuesta cooperativa, con un mayor número de conjuntos habitacionales y barrios cooperativos en construcción, a la vez que se enfrentan los nuevos desafíos (2005/actualidad).

Por último, presentaremos la experiencia del cooperativismo de vivienda más allá de las fronteras de Uruguay. Desde los inicios de la propuesta cooperativa, se sucedieron contactos e intercambios con otros países, hasta iniciarse en el año 2000 un programa de *cooperación Sur-Sur* (Solanas, 2010) con otras organizaciones latinoamericanas, contando con el apoyo económico de la organización sueca *We Effect*.³ Desde entonces, se han creado y construido cooperativas de vivienda en Paraguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras y Nicaragua. Después de más de quince años del inicio de ese recorrido, la experiencia muestra las dificultades para cambiar marcos legales, obtener financiación y que se normalicen las políticas de hábitat basadas en la autogestión de los habitantes. A través del intercambio, formación y con asesoramiento de equipos técnicos multidisciplinares, no solo se han construido conjuntos cooperativos, sino que también se han consolidado movimientos sociales y federaciones en cada uno de los países. En 2012, FUCVAM fue reconocida por esta práctica de transferencia con el Premio Mundial del Hábitat, lo que supuso un antes y un después para la actividad internacional de la federación.

La participación en una de las actividades de transferencia realizadas en Montevideo en setiembre de 2013, nos permitió vislumbrar las características del momento actual, así como los desafíos que se abrían con este horizonte, tanto en Uruguay como en el resto de países implicados.

La metodología utilizada a lo largo del trabajo de investigación fue principalmente cualitativa. Para la comprensión de la historia del

² La dictadura uruguaya se inició con un golpe de estado en junio de 1973 y terminó en 1985, cuando se constituyó el gobierno resultante de las elecciones, ya en democracia.

³ Cuando se inició el proyecto de cooperación internacional, se trataba del Centro Cooperativo Sueco (SCC), actual *We Effect*.

cooperativismo de vivienda y el recorrido realizado por FUCVAM, contamos con fuentes primarias, secundarias, entrevistas a informantes clave, visitas a distintos barrios cooperativos y observación participante de actividades de la federación y los barrios. En el caso de la experiencia de cooperación Sur-Sur, nos hemos documentado con fuentes secundarias y entrevistas, observación participante (en la pasantía de 2013) y con una visita a las cooperativas construidas en Bolivia (en 2016).

1. Contexto: Uruguay. Acercamiento histórico-social

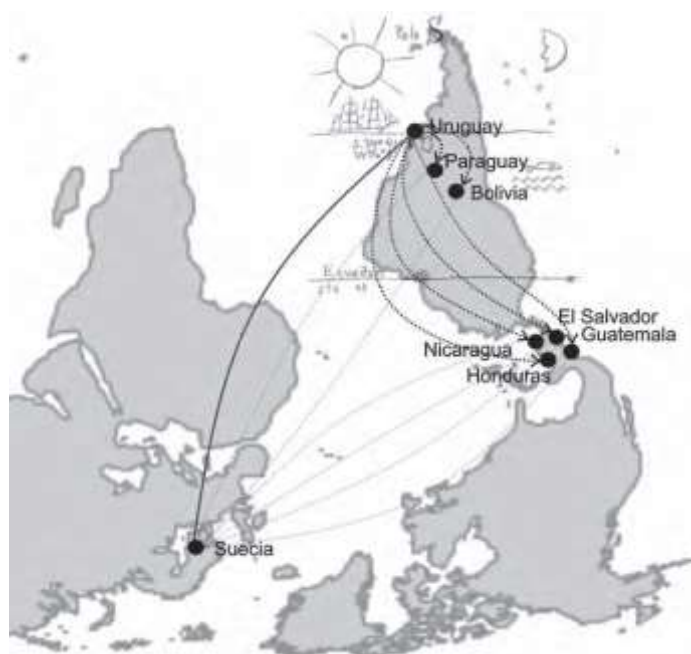


Figura 2. La cooperación Sur-Sur de FUCVAM y SCC, compuesta con *Nuestro Norte es el Sur* (Torres-García, 1943). Fuente: la autora, 2010.

La República Oriental del Uruguay es un país singular, si lo observamos en relación con el contexto geográfico en que se ubica. El *paisito*, situado entre Argentina y Brasil, recorrió un camino en la historia que le ha dado un carácter diferente al de las naciones vecinas, así como bastante distinto del resto de estados del continente americano. Uruguay cuenta con una población de 3.286.314 habitantes (censo 2011), de los que aproximadamente la mitad se ubican en Montevideo.

Uruguay es uno de los primeros países que tuvo un modelo de *estado de bienestar*, forjado en las primeras décadas del siglo XX. Esos años marcaron su

posterior *desarrollo*, con una época de esplendor económico y social, de democracia consolidada (al iniciarse la década de 1950), que le valió la consideración de «Suiza de América». Pocos años más tarde comenzaba una crisis económica, social y política, que llevó rápidamente a las clases populares al desempleo y a enfrentar grandes dificultades para cubrir las necesidades básicas, entre ellas el acceso a la vivienda.

A finales de 1967, Uruguay tenía un gobierno represor, las condiciones económicas empeoraban rápidamente y el sistema bancario había quebrado en 1965. El sector de la construcción estaba paralizado después de más de una década de *boom* y el Banco Hipotecario del Uruguay (BHU) se había quedado sin fondos para financiar ni la construcción ni la compra de vivienda. Tras una década de precarización progresiva, las clases trabajadoras acababan de lograr la unidad sindical en 1966 y estaban impulsando la unidad de las izquierdas en un partido –el Frente Amplio, creado en 1971–. En este contexto se elaboró la Ley Nacional de Vivienda, aprobada a finales de 1968. Esta ley contenía el *Capítulo X*, en el que se describía y cimentaba el sistema cooperativo para la producción de vivienda y barrios.

Las primeras cooperativas de vivienda se construyeron al iniciarse la década de 1970. Posteriormente, el país sufrió un golpe de estado en 1973 y una dictadura que permaneció hasta 1985. Los gobiernos democráticos que siguieron se enmarcaron en los lineamientos neoliberales, destacando una nueva crisis económica que golpeó al país en 2002. Desde 2005 el Frente Amplio gobierna el país, después de acceder al gobierno de la capital en 1990.

2. Marco teórico y metodológico

Marco teórico

Partimos de la consideración de la vivienda y la ciudad como derechos humanos: tener acceso a una vivienda adecuada facilita la satisfacción de otros derechos, ligados a las características del hábitat en que las personas se ubican (salud, intimidad, educación, descanso, esparcimiento, trabajo). Distintos instrumentos internacionales han introducido el derecho a la vivienda: la Declaración Universal de Derechos Humanos (ONU, 1948); el PIDESC (ONU, 1966), entre otros. Así, una vivienda adecuada se define a partir de la serie de características que debe reunir: habitabilidad, seguridad de tenencia, disponibilidad de servicios e infraestructuras urbanas, asequibilidad y gastos soportables, adecuación cultural (Dede y Larrosa, 2006; Rodríguez, Relli y Appella, 2008).

El concepto de *derecho a la ciudad* fue formulado en Francia durante la década de 1960, en defensa de los chabolistas de las periferias y teniendo en cuenta el impacto negativo sufrido en las ciudades, al ser convertidas en mercancía por la economía capitalista (Mathivet, 2009; Sugranyes, 2010). Henry Lefebvre (1968) consideró que el *derecho a la ciudad* es una exigencia:

Puede formularse solamente como derecho a la vida urbana, transformada, renovada (...) donde «lo urbano» –lugar de encuentro, prioridad del valor de uso, inscripción en el espacio de un tiempo promovido al rango de bien supremo entre los bienes– encuentre su base morfológica, su realización práctico-sensible.

En la *Carta de la Ciudad de México por el Derecho a la Ciudad* (2010) se establecen los seis fundamentos estratégicos del derecho a la ciudad (Zárate, 2011): el ejercicio pleno de la ciudadanía; la función social de la ciudad, de la tierra y de la propiedad; la gestión democrática de la ciudad; la producción democrática de la ciudad y en la ciudad; el manejo sustentable y responsable de los recursos naturales, patrimoniales y energéticos; el disfrute democrático y equitativo de la ciudad. Por su parte, David Harvey (2013: 20) afirma que

El derecho a la ciudad es por tanto mucho más que un derecho de acceso individual o colectivo a los recursos que esta almacena o protege; es un derecho a cambiar y reinventar la ciudad de acuerdo con nuestros deseos. Es, además, un derecho más colectivo que individual, ya que la reinvención de a ciudad depende inevitablemente del ejercicio de un poder colectivo sobre el proceso de urbanización. La libertad para hacer y rehacernos a nosotros mismos y a nuestras ciudades es, como argumentaré, uno de los más preciosos pero más descuidados de nuestros derechos humanos.

La interacción entre las propuestas de las organizaciones sociales, los habitantes, y las propuestas teóricas realizadas sobre todo en las universidades actualiza progresivamente el contenido del derecho a la ciudad. Observamos cómo los pactos internacionales, las Constituciones nacionales y su concreción en leyes y reglamentaciones son marcos necesarios, pero nunca suficientes. Por un lado, porque la existencia de las normas y la legalidad y reconocimiento de derechos no implica que existan la financiación y recursos estatales que concreten de manera óptima la realización de los derechos de las personas. Por otra parte, porque la propia acción de la población organizada es la que puede y va dotando de contenido lo que consideramos derechos.

El término *producción social del hábitat* (PSH) se hizo frecuente en América Latina durante la década de 1970: se definió a partir de distintas experiencias de intervención y mejoras urbanas, en las que diversos actores se vincularon de manera directa y cercana a los sectores populares. Lo que diferenciaba ese tipo de actuaciones era la importancia otorgada a la organización y participación de los habitantes. Entendemos como PSH a los procesos de construcción de vivienda y ciudad basados en el liderazgo de los habitantes –actuales o futuros– de un determinado territorio, que actúan agrupados, se organizan y autogestionan el proyecto acordado por el colectivo, para lograr mejoras en su entorno (acceso a la vivienda o adecuación de las existentes, infraestructuras urbanas, espacios públicos, equipamientos y servicios colectivos). Estas personas pueden contar con el asesoramiento de equipos interdisciplinarios, así como tener acceso a recursos estatales (financiación, terrenos o inmuebles, etc.)

o realizarse exclusivamente con recursos de los usuarios. Por otra parte, estos procesos pueden ocurrir con un marco legal que permita la actuación de los colectivos implicados o bien se realizan *por fuera* de la *legalidad vigente*.⁴

Dentro de la PSH, hablamos de autoproducción cuando las iniciativas son promovidas por los habitantes: «proceso de gestión del suelo, construcción y distribución de vivienda bajo el control directo de sus usuarios de forma individual o colectiva» (HIC, 2006). En esos casos también hablamos de autogestión: los habitantes toman las decisiones, utilizan los recursos que tienen y se movilizan para conseguir otros recursos necesarios. Poniendo en práctica la autogestión, el grupo adquiere competencias en la administración directa de procesos productivos. Genera ahorros, gana flexibilidad a la hora de afrontar dificultades económicas, puede generar algunos puestos de trabajo. Si se da en el marco de una cooperativa, puede convertirse en herramienta para abordar otros emprendimientos económicos. Cuando además se conectan a otras organizaciones sociales o experiencias autogestionarias, se generan mejores oportunidades laborales al circular más información. (HIC, 2004: 48)

Las prácticas autogestionarias se vinculan con procesos de emancipación, ya que las personas que participan en ellas ganan autonomía. Raúl Zibechi (2010) plantea la interdependencia de ambos conceptos. La emancipación está relacionada con la capacidad de los sujetos sociales de liberarse de todo tipo de dependencia; para ello ponen en juego su autonomía de acción. Es eso lo que les permite determinarse por sí mismos y elaborar sus propias normas de relación y funcionamiento.

Los movimientos autogestionarios combinan un proceso de mejora de las condiciones de vida de los pobladores –una «vida digna» mediante la práctica de la autogestión del hábitat popular– con una estrategia de transformación política para hacer frente a la marginación social y económica –la construcción de «poder popular» mediante la creación de instrumentos políticos–: el objetivo no es sólo la vivienda, sino el poder y la capacidad de difundirlo en cada calle y pasaje de las poblaciones del país (MPL5, 2012).

Con respecto a los movimientos sociales, Zibechi (2003) sostiene que los cambios introducidos en la esfera laboral y el mundo del trabajo han transformado las formas de organización y lucha de las clases populares. De la importancia del movimiento obrero en los años 1960 y 1970, durante las décadas que siguieron los movimientos se han conformado a partir de otros

4 Por ejemplo: la ocupación de terrenos o inmuebles (para ser habitados como viviendas, centros sociales, huertos urbanos, etc.); la realización de cooperativas de vivienda antes de que existan leyes que permitan un desarrollo adecuado de este modelo; o el despliegue de medidas de presión en caso de negociación de las condiciones de acceso y permanencia en las viviendas (impagos de cuotas, entre otros).

5 MPL: Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha: organización popular chilena que lucha por vivienda y derecho a la ciudad.

sectores: indígenas, campesinos, pobladores. El autor destaca entre los rasgos comunes de los movimientos más destacados del continente americano la territorialización. Mariana Menéndez (2015: 20) define los movimientos territoriales urbanos como «aquellos movimientos que tienen como característica la territorialización, y la disputa de lo urbano».

Por último, introducimos la mirada de Boaventura de Sousa Santos, quien defiende la necesidad de conceptualizar desde las *Epistemologías del Sur* (2011), contando con una serie de herramientas metodológicas. Con la sociología de las ausencias y la sociología de las emergencias podemos visibilizar aquellas experiencias que el pensamiento hegemónico, eurocéntrico, ha ocultado, mostrando que las alternativas ya existen y lo necesario es cambiar las maneras de mirar y analizar la realidad, también desde las universidades: “nos hace falta un pensamiento alternativo de alternativas”. El autor plantea, asimismo, que existe otra globalización, contrahegemónica, llevada a cabo por sujetos y organizaciones populares (como el encuentro e intercambio que resultaba de los Foros Sociales Mundiales).

Metodología

La metodología utilizada a lo largo del trabajo de investigación fue principalmente cualitativa. Para la comprensión de la historia del cooperativismo de vivienda y, específicamente, de FUCVAM, hemos contado con fuentes primarias (publicaciones de la federación, de institutos asesores como el CCU, así como textos relativos a las discusiones parlamentarias y leyes aprobadas); fuentes secundarias y entrevistas a informantes clave (cooperativistas de distintas épocas, asesores de institutos, técnicos de instituciones, entre otros).

Las cuatro etapas identificadas en la historia del cooperativismo corresponden también al conocimiento de una serie de barrios cooperativos de la ciudad, que fueron seleccionados en cuatro ámbitos después de mapear⁶ todas las cooperativas de la ciudad de Montevideo. Se ubicaron 311 en total,⁷ entre cooperativas habitadas, en construcción o en trámite. Entre los casos elegidos, tres de las cooperativas fueron seleccionadas en el barrio de Punta Gorda (dos de ayuda mutua y una de ahorro previo); otras tres cooperativas (resultantes de las ocupaciones de tierras) están situadas junto al Parque Rivera. Los casos de mayor tamaño, y más antigüedad, son los barrios cooperativos Zona 1 y Zona 3 entre las Avenidas Alberto Zum Felde y Bolivia; el barrio cooperativo Mesa 1, sobre la Avenida Camino Carrasco. Las más recientes son tres de las cooperativas del barrio cooperativo Alfredo Zitarrosa, en el Sur del barrio

⁶ La primera versión del plano se realizó entre febrero y junio de 2011, sistematizando la información básica en un SIG (tamaño, año de creación de la cooperativa, años de obra, tipo de cooperativa, IAT asesor). En noviembre de 2015, se actualizó la información: algunas de las cooperativas ya estaban habitadas; otras que en 2011 estaban en trámite ya se habían terminado de construir en 2015.

⁷ Todas ellas de propiedad colectiva.

Maroñas. Posteriormente, se seleccionó una cooperativa más en otra zona de la ciudad, la Tacuabé, para sumarlo a los ejemplos de las ocupaciones de tierra realizadas en 1989.

El estudio en profundidad de todas esas cooperativas elegidas se realizó fundamentalmente de una manera cualitativa: a partir de visitas a los barrios, observación en los espacios libres, observación participante en distintas actividades, elaboración de un cuestionario, fichas guía y entrevistas a habitantes de las cooperativas. La mayoría de las visitas, participación en actividades y entrevistas, se realizaron entre agosto y diciembre de 2011. En todos los casos, se visitó la cooperativa en más de una ocasión, en distintos días de la semana y horarios. Se entrevistó en cada cooperativa a más de una persona, en todos los casos pertenecientes al consejo directivo o a la comisión de fomento cooperativo. Asimismo, se mantuvieron conversaciones con habitantes en la calle, usando una pequeña encuesta de percepción del barrio y la ciudad como disparador. Asimismo, se realizaron entrevistas abiertas a miembros de los IAT que habían trabajado con cada una de las cooperativas seleccionadas (6 equipos técnicos). Otra parte del estudio de campo se llevó a cabo entre septiembre y diciembre de 2013: se visitaron todas las cooperativas una vez y se incluyó la cooperativa Tacuabé (con dos visitas y una entrevista a uno de los cooperativistas).

Por último, para la caracterización de la experiencia de cooperación Sur-Sur contamos con fuentes secundarias, entrevistas a tres informantes clave en Uruguay (asesores técnicos de FUCVAM y del CCU, y el cooperativista responsable del ámbito internacional en FUCVAM) y realización de encuestas a informantes clave en distintos países (Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador, Andalucía, Cataluña, Francia), en un primer momento (2010); en segunda instancia, pudimos participar de la pasantía organizada por FUCVAM y BSHF⁸ en 2013, lo que implicó una observación participante de la metodología que FUCVAM utiliza en cada intercambio, así como nuevas entrevistas a tres informantes clave (cooperativistas de FUCVAM). Por último, realizamos una visita y entrevistas a tres informantes clave (dos habitantes de dos cooperativas ya construidas y una persona del equipo técnico que asesora a la Central, CACVAM, en la actualidad) en el caso de Bolivia, en agosto de 2016.

3. Cooperativas de vivienda en Uruguay: características generales y claves

Una cooperativa de vivienda es una asociación autónoma de personas que se agrupan para proveerse de alojamiento, espacios colectivos y servicios complementarios. En el caso de Uruguay, las cooperativas de vivienda quedaron definidas legalmente en la Ley Nacional de Vivienda de 1968 (ley 13.728).

⁸ Building Social Housing Foundation, es la encargada de la convocatoria anual del Premio Mundial del Hábitat.

Estas cooperativas se realizan por la conjunción de los esfuerzos de los cooperativistas (aportan ahorros, mano de obra por ayuda mutua y autogestión) y el estado (aporta financiamiento, terrenos y otros recursos), con el asesoramiento técnico de equipos interdisciplinarios (Institutos de Asistencia Técnica, IAT). Benjamín Nahoum (2013) plantea como esenciales las siguientes claves: organización cooperativa, ayuda mutua, autogestión, asesoramiento técnico, financiamiento público, propiedad colectiva y la presencia de la federación (FUCVAM). Añadimos como otra de las claves fundamentales la existencia de *Carteras de Tierra e Inmuebles*.

Las cooperativas de vivienda se clasifican en función de dos criterios: según el modo de tenencia y los recursos que aportan los habitantes. En las «cooperativas de usuarios», se mantiene a lo largo del tiempo la propiedad colectiva (la cooperativa es propietaria del conjunto habitacional); en las «cooperativas de propietarios» cada vivienda pasa a ser propiedad de sus habitantes cuando se termina la construcción. En ambos casos, pueden realizarse «por ahorro previo» o «por ayuda mutua», según cómo aportan sus habitantes, al inicio, el 15% del coste total del conjunto. En las cooperativas de ahorro previo, los habitantes realizan una aportación económica inicial. En las cooperativas de ayuda mutua, los habitantes aportan 21 horas semanales de mano de obra durante todo el periodo de construcción.

El financiamiento de las cooperativas de vivienda combina tres elementos: préstamos, subsidios y aportes propios. El préstamo lo realiza el estado por un 85% del coste total, las cooperativas los devuelven en cuotas, con intereses bajos y en un plazo de entre 25 y 30 años. El subsidio lo aporta el estado, puntualmente, para quienes no pueden pagar la cuota de manera circunstancial. El aporte propio, como ya señalamos, lo realizan inicialmente y durante la obra los habitantes, es el 15%. Para acceder al suelo urbano, existen instrumentos como la Cartera de Tierras e Inmuebles, a nivel estatal y municipal (en el caso de Montevideo y algunos otros departamentos del país). La intendencia otorga cada año una serie de terrenos o inmuebles a las federaciones: posteriormente, cada cooperativa paga el terreno cuando consigue el préstamo estatal.

Las cooperativas cuentan con una serie de órganos para su funcionamiento. La asamblea general es el espacio en el que participan directamente todas las personas socias de la cooperativa. Es el órgano máximo de toma de decisiones. El Consejo Directivo lo conforman un mínimo de tres personas (presidencia, secretaría, tesorería) y es responsable de la gestión cotidiana de la cooperativa. La Comisión Fiscal tiene la tarea de controlar las cuentas de la cooperativa. La Comisión de Fomento Cooperativo se encarga de la educación, integración y fomento cooperativo, tanto de los habitantes de la cooperativa, como de vecinos del entorno y ciudadanía en general.

Por otra parte, las cooperativas cuentan con el asesoramiento técnico de los IAT: son equipos interdisciplinarios que realizan el proyecto arquitectónico, así como el proyecto social de la cooperativa; durante la obra, realizan el seguimiento de la construcción y de «la ayuda mutua».

Por último, es importante la existencia de las federaciones, FUCVAM y FECOVI, que aglutinan a las cooperativas (la primera, a las realizadas por ayuda mutua; la segunda, aquellas hechas por ahorro previo). Estas Federaciones aúnan sus demandas y propuestas, apoyando a las nuevas cooperativas en su conformación, e identifican los retos y oportunidades de cada momento.

4. Una historia de FUCVAM: creación, resistencia, construcción de alternativas y consolidación

Creación: cuando se aprobó la Ley de Vivienda, FUCVAM ya estaba allí (1966/1979)

La Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Viviendas por Ayuda Mutua (FUCVAM) nace de un proceso saneado y respondiendo al impulso de una necesidad real. Se forjó a la intemperie, cuando todavía no estaban claras las posibilidades de desarrollo del Movimiento Cooperativo y precisamente para forzar la concreción de esas posibilidades.

El camino que se emprende tiene no pocas dificultades, pero las metas a alcanzar son muy importantes: asegurar los préstamos para las nuevas cooperativas; conseguir tierras para los proyectos; lograr de una vez por todas un Plan de Viviendas y dentro de él, un cupo para el cooperativismo, que esté en consonancia con sus posibilidades de ejecución; desarrollar sus organismos de modo de poder abordar las necesidades de las cooperativas, tanto desde el punto de vista de la defensa de sus derechos comunes, como de la ejecución de sus planes.

El Solidario, (FUCVAM, 2007a; documentación de 1970)

En 1966, un equipo de profesionales en el seno del Centro Cooperativo Uruguayo (CCU) lanzaba una propuesta innovadora para dar respuesta a las dificultades crecientes de alojamiento de las clases populares: se formaron tres grupos de personas interesadas, en tres localidades del país, que construirían cooperativas de vivienda. Al mismo tiempo, impulsaron la formación de otros grupos en Montevideo y asesoraron al conjunto de diputados encargados de proponer una Ley Nacional de Vivienda. Mientras esta se elaboraba, los grupos precooperativos ya se estaban articulando y coordinando; la Ley quedó aprobada en 1968, FUCVAM se creaba oficialmente el 24 de mayo de 1970, coincidiendo con la inauguración del primer conjunto habitacional cooperativo, en Isla Mala.⁹

Durante los primeros años, hasta 1975 aproximadamente, se construyó la propia federación, su manera de funcionar, sus organismos internos, sus estrategias y prioridades. Se volcaron las energías en las cooperativas, que estaban en plena obra. Durante esos años funcionó la Central de Suministros, un mecanismo de

⁹ Actualmente el municipio se llama 25 de Mayo, en el departamento de Florida.

compra conjunta de materiales para todas las cooperativas, que permitía ahorrar y a la vez suponía un rodaje para la coordinación y el trabajo colectivo.

Ya estaban presentes muchos de sus ejes actuales de trabajo: la formación cooperativa; la comunicación y difusión de la experiencia (con un boletín interno, actualmente la revista *El Solidario*); el fomento cooperativo; la participación en exposiciones colectivas y la realización de seminarios; la «internacionalización» de la experiencia, tanto participando en actividades en otros países como recibiendo visitantes; y por supuesto la elaboración de posicionamientos y propuestas con respecto a la política de vivienda vigente o en elaboración.

En junio de 1973, Uruguay sufrió un golpe de estado; la política de vivienda cambiaría profundamente a partir de 1976 (dejaron de financiarse cooperativas y se priorizaron los conjuntos habitacionales realizados por promotores privados). Los sindicatos y las organizaciones estudiantiles fueron prohibidas y sus miembros perseguidos, encarcelados, exiliados, desaparecidos. FUCVAM no fue ilegalizada porque era una organización de fundación muy reciente, si bien las asambleas de las cooperativas eran vigiladas y las personas que habían realizado anteriormente alguna actividad política, estudiantil o sindical no podían ser parte de los consejos directivos ni las comisiones. La dictadura se mantuvo hasta 1985.

Por todo ello, entre 1975 y 1980 se iniciaba el tiempo de resistencia. La federación mantuvo un convenio con la Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes de Canadá, lo que les permitía realizar actividades de «desarrollo social» –en gran medida dirigidas a los niños y jóvenes de las cooperativas–, que resultaron de gran importancia: implicaban la necesidad de reunirse –y la posibilidad de reunirse– en un contexto totalmente hostil.

En Montevideo, se estaban terminando de construir los grandes barrios cooperativos: la convivencia en las cooperativas comenzaba en plena dictadura. Es el tiempo en que se forjaron como “islas de libertad”:

Las cooperativas de vivienda por ayuda mutua fueron “islas de libertad” durante la dictadura y en su seno se amasó una cultura comunitaria y territorializada de resistencia al régimen. (...) fueron refugio de perseguidos, primero, para convertirse en espacios de contracultura en los que nacieron murgas, se mantuvo vivo el canto popular y el teatro independiente. En suma, el pensamiento crítico y la crítica social encontraron suelo fértil en las cooperativas-comunidades gracias a las relaciones de confianza y proximidad entre sus miembros, y desde allí se proyectaron al resto de la sociedad conformando una de las columnas vertebrales de la resistencia al régimen. (González, 2013)



Figura 3. Asamblea de FUCVAM, 1971.
Fuente: *El Solidario*, 2007 (imagen de 1971).



Figura 4. Zona 3, casa comunal. Fuente: la autora, 2011.

Resistencia: FUCVAM se activa por la salida de la dictadura y lucha para mantener la propiedad colectiva (1980/1989)

Entre 1980 y 1989, el proceso de salida de la dictadura y la recomposición democrática hicieron que FUCVAM se insertara como otro colectivo más en coordinaciones como la «Intersocial» –junto con la Central sindical, la organización estudiantil y la de derechos humanos–, comenzando con la participación de las cooperativas en los comités por el «NO» a la dictadura, en 1980. En 1983 se enfrentaron al gobierno dictatorial mediante una huelga de pagos, después de una subida excesiva de las cuotas. Tras la elaboración de una ley que implicaba la conversión a propiedad individual de todas las cooperativas, la respuesta de FUCVAM fue una jornada de recogida de firmas,¹⁰

¹⁰ En Uruguay es posible convocar un plebiscito si se reúnen un total de firmas equivalente o superior al 25% de la población inscrita en el padrón electoral. En un día recogieron más de

en febrero de 1984, para evitar convertirse en «cooperativas de propietarios». Así, FUCVAM fue afianzando su posición como «nuevo movimiento social» en el país;¹¹ asimismo, la propiedad colectiva quedó definitivamente instalada como uno de los rasgos identitarios más fuertes del cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo.

A continuación, la federación creció rápidamente, con muchos nuevos grupos esperanzados por la vuelta a la democracia en 1985, pero tuvo que resistir el bloqueo del gobierno: sin personerías jurídicas, sin tierras, sin préstamos. La política de vivienda no priorizó la vivienda popular tampoco entre 1985 y 1990. Frente a esta situación, se produjeron en 1989 las ocupaciones de tierras, que durante el año siguiente dieron lugar a nuevas condiciones.

Los barrios cooperativos existentes se consolidaron durante estos años, construyendo nuevos espacios para uso comunitario: desplegando un abanico de usos sociales, educativos y culturales.



Figura 5. Actividad de FUCVAM para mantener la propiedad colectiva. Fuente: FUCVAM, 1984.

300.000 firmas (en un país con tres millones de habitantes). FUCVAM utilizó por primera vez esta opción de solicitar la convocatoria de plebiscito, que años más tarde utilizarían otros movimientos populares para impedir, por ejemplo, la privatización de servicios públicos.

¹¹ Rodolfo Porrini (2014) sitúa el cooperativismo de vivienda como uno de los movimientos sociales activos en el país desde los 1980, junto con «Movimientos de mujeres», «Movimientos en defensa de los Derechos Humanos», «Jóvenes alternativos y contraculturales», movimientos «por las diversidades sexuales», «descendientes de africanos e indígenas americanos», «ambientalistas» e «internacionalistas en el nuevo milenio».

Construcción de alternativas: FUCVAM ocupa tierras, resiste al neoliberalismo y propone nuevas soluciones (1990/2004)

La economía y la política uruguaya cambiaron rápidamente durante la década de 1960,¹² con rasgos que permitirían hablar de un anticipo del neoliberalismo, que se apoyó más tarde en el gobierno de la dictadura para consolidarse. En la década de 1990 sus efectos aumentaron y se instalaron en la sociedad y el territorio. En el caso de las políticas de vivienda, esto implicó un descenso del financiamiento, la eliminación de cualquier apoyo estatal a la autoproducción, escaso apoyo a la producción cooperativa (financiación muy limitada y dificultad de acceso a la tierra). La vivienda se consideraba una mercancía, lo que se refleja en el uso de la expresión «soluciones habitacionales».¹³ El territorio montevideano quedó marcado por la expansión en las periferias de los «Núcleos Básicos Evolutivos» (NBE), soluciones habitacionales de 30 m², realizadas por empresas.¹⁴

Frente a esta realidad, durante los 90 el cooperativismo de vivienda construyó a partir de nuevas estrategias. En primer lugar, realizaron ocupaciones de tierra en 1989, en las que reivindicaron la creación de una Cartera de Tierras. La llegada del Frente Amplio al gobierno departamental de Montevideo en 1990 significó una oportunidad para la experimentación con nuevas propuestas. La primera de ellas fue la propia Cartera de Tierras, que se inició con la asignación de terrenos a las cooperativas ocupantes y sigue vigente a día de hoy (se creó la cartera estatal, la CIVIS, en 2008).¹⁵ Otra de las nuevas líneas de actuación fue el reciclaje de edificios existentes, en áreas centrales de la ciudad; fue una política exitosa, que se incorporó rápidamente a las líneas de financiación del Ministerio.

Por otra parte, entre 2001 y 2003 Uruguay sufrió los efectos de una intensa crisis económica. FUCVAM tuvo que reagruparse y volver a resistir: el Fondo Nacional de Vivienda se recortaba, los préstamos se reducían y eran

¹² Las políticas desarrolladas durante el batllismo y neobatllismo consideraban al Estado como árbitro entre las personas trabajadoras y la patronal (defendiendo los derechos de los trabajadores cuando fuera necesario y legislando para ello); por otra parte, el país mantuvo una política económica que regulaba las importaciones y exportaciones. La reforma cambiaria de 1959 fue abriendo la puerta a una serie de cambios que se fueron profundizando durante la década de 1960, alineando al país con las doctrinas económicas del FMI.

¹³ Concepto que fue acuñado para poder contabilizar no solamente las viviendas nuevas (completas) realizadas, sino también cualquier intervención realizada en una vivienda, desde un mejoramiento puntual, una ampliación, la regularización de deudas o la conexión al sistema de saneamiento, entre otras.

En todo caso, el cambio en el uso de “vivienda” por “soluciones habitacionales” da cuenta en un cambio en el fondo de la cuestión, tratando con ligereza un derecho fundamental.

¹⁴ En teoría, sus usuarios debían poder ampliar y mejorar esas “viviendas”, pero sin poder contar con asesoramiento técnico ni apoyo estatal.

¹⁵ Entró en funcionamiento en 2011, cuando se reglamentó.

insuficientes para completar las obras. La federación denunció insistentemente los casos de corrupción relacionados con el manejo del Fondo, llegando a realizar una Marcha a Punta del Este¹⁶ en el verano del año 2003.

Estos años de experimentación fueron, en general, un periodo de crecimiento de FUCVAM, en nuevos modos de hacer y en número de cooperativas, aunque el acceso a la financiación seguía siendo escaso y lento. Por otra parte, a finales de 1999, FUCVAM elaboró y aprobó su *Declaración de Principios* (FUCVAM, 1999). Otro foco del accionar de la federación durante los 90 fue la vinculación con otras organizaciones. En Uruguay se unió a la coordinación de distintos plebiscitos, que tuvieron el objetivo de frenar el avance las políticas neoliberales, como la privatización de empresas públicas. Asimismo, se profundizaron los vínculos con organizaciones que luchan, a nivel internacional, por el derecho a la vivienda, en distintos países.

Los barrios cooperativos existentes seguían contando con una oferta de equipamientos, espacios de uso comunitario, servicios autogestionados y usos sociales, educativos y culturales que las clases trabajadoras expulsadas de la ciudad no siempre tenían a mano en sus ubicaciones forzadas (cantegriles, asentamientos, bordes de distintos municipios del área metropolitana). Las cooperativas, que habían resistido los años más duros de la dictadura como «islas de libertad», ahora se convertían en «islas de dignidad» en la ciudad segregada.

Consolidación: la federación coordina la construcción de 70 cooperativas en todo el país y enfrenta nuevos desafíos

En 2005, con la llegada al gobierno nacional del Frente Amplio (FA), se renovaron las expectativas de los cooperativistas, suponiendo que habría un nuevo impulso al cooperativismo de vivienda. En principio, la vivienda no fue una de las prioridades de aquella legislatura. Esto dio lugar a ciertas acciones de confrontación: otra marcha a Punta del Este y la ocupación de unos terrenos de la empresa pública de ferrocarriles, en 2006.

En 2008 se concretó la reglamentación de la nueva política para el cooperativismo de vivienda: cambió el sistema de acceso a los préstamos, estableciéndose dos «llamados» anuales con sendos sorteos a los que concurren los grupos. La Cartera de Tierras en Montevideo continúa funcionando, así como la Cartera CIVIS a nivel nacional desde 2011. Asimismo, se reglamentó el subsidio a la cuota, que posibilita la permanencia en la vivienda para quienes no pueden afrontar las cuotas.

Aunque el siguiente gobierno del FA (2010/2014) sí priorizó la vivienda (considerándola «emergencia nacional»), el presupuesto quinquenal no aumentó, en valor real. FUCVAM se movilizó en distintas ocasiones en este

¹⁶ Punta del Este es un reconocido balneario, lugar de vacaciones de las clases altas de los países vecinos.

periodo, la primera de ellas en septiembre de 2011, en el marco de las negociaciones de las deudas pendientes de algunas cooperativas (para la que a finales de ese año se lograba un acuerdo). Durante 2013, FUCVAM propuso un «Debate Nacional por Vivienda», con la intención de asentar los logros realizados, por un lado, y que se elaborase una «Política de Estado» –que no dependiera de vaivenes electorales–, una planificación a un plazo largo (15-20 años).

Por otra parte, el Premio Mundial del Hábitat de 2012 aumentó las conexiones con colectivos, instituciones, estudiantes, profesionales e investigadores de otros países; así como las peticiones de pasantías (visitas a las cooperativas, en Uruguay) y de asesoramiento y apoyo a proyectos y luchas concretas (visitas de cooperativistas uruguayos a otros países).

FUCVAM se encontraba en 2016 en un momento de gran ebullición, con muchas cooperativas en construcción (ochenta cooperativas, alrededor de 2500 viviendas). La celebración de los cincuenta años de los primeros proyectos se acompañó de distintas actividades: entre ellas, dos jornadas de debate en torno al presente y futuro. En la primera de ellas se debatió acerca de las tecnologías, las normativas y los proyectos de vivienda cooperativa. En el segundo seminario las temáticas abordadas giraban en torno al derecho a la ciudad: acceso a la tierra, servicios y construcción en altura. Por otra parte, la internacionalización de la experiencia de FUCVAM continúa siendo muy relevante: tanto por su participación en foros y actividades en otros países (recientemente, Hábitat III en Quito o la Feria de Economía Solidaria de Catalunya, en Barcelona), como por su tarea de apoyo y asesoramiento a la creación y coordinación de cooperativas de vivienda en otros países de la región.



Figura 6. FUCVAM en la actualidad: cartelera. Fuente: web FUCVAM, 2016.



Figura 7. Movilización noviembre 2016. Fuente: Gustavo Castagnello, web FUCVAM, 2016.

5. De los barrios montevideanos a otros sures: el cooperativismo de vivienda uruguayo camina, es premiado, sigue caminando.

En el año 2000 FUCVAM y el Centro Cooperativo Sueco (actualmente *We Effect*) iniciaban el programa de «cooperación Sur-Sur» a partir del cual se han conformado y construido cooperativas en Paraguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras y Nicaragua. En 2012, FUCVAM fue reconocida con el Premio Mundial del Hábitat por esta práctica de transferencia. En octubre de 2016, con ocasión de la conferencia Hábitat III celebrada en Quito, el Premio Producción Social del Hábitat fue otorgado, junto a otras dos iniciativas, a la cooperativa COVICOFU de Montevideo y a la federación que aglutina a las cooperativas bolivianas: el CACVAM.

La vocación internacionalista de FUCVAM tiene su raíz en el origen del sindicalismo y de las distintas modalidades asociativas del país, que surgieron a finales del siglo XIX. Así, la federación tuvo prontamente contactos con organizaciones más allá del contexto nacional, inicialmente obteniendo financiación necesaria para afianzarse, durante la dictadura (Dambrauskas y González, 2008). Por otra parte, un ejemplo de las primeras transferencias que ocurrieron desde Uruguay hacia otros países es la «Cooperativa de Vivienda Unión Palo Alto», en Ciudad de México. Esta experiencia contó con la inspiración de Enrique Ortiz, tras una visita que este arquitecto realizó a la cooperativa de Isla Mala allá por 1968 (Solanas, 2016).

Durante la década de 1960 y los primeros años de los 1970, tanto los técnicos del CCU como cooperativistas de FUCVAM participaron en actividades en otros países (Chile, Bélgica, entre otros). De la misma forma, ya desde la década de 1980 encontramos en *El Solidario* (la revista de la federación) artículos dedicados a las visitas que recibían las cooperativas, de personas procedentes de otros países; así como información de premios internacionales que recibieron (Hábitat Forum y BSHF, en 1987).

Más adelante, en 1990, se creó la red latinoamericana SELVIP (Secretaría Latinoamericana de Vivienda Popular), conformada por organizaciones populares de Argentina, Brasil, Paraguay y la propia FUCVAM; todas ellas son parte desde entonces de la red HIC-AL (Coalición Internacional del Hábitat – América Latina). Asimismo, la federación mantuvo un trabajo directo en coordinación con distintos países, en cada uno de ellos con características propias. En el caso de Argentina, se realizó en cooperación con el MOI (Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos), organización que a la larga impulsó la aprobación de la Ley 341 para instrumentar políticas de vivienda para hogares de escasos recursos en situación crítica habitacional en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires y que en la actualidad cuenta con varias cooperativas habitadas y en construcción en áreas consolidadas de la ciudad. En Brasil, estuvo vigente un

convenio con el gobierno de la región de Rio Grande do Sul¹⁷ y se dio también una instancia de intercambio con Venezuela.

En este contexto, a finales de la década de 1990, FUCVAM se vinculaba con la organización *We Effect*¹⁸ para una nueva aventura. La alianza estratégica entre ambas organizaciones hizo y hace posible aumentar la difusión de la experiencia uruguaya a otros países del continente. El primer convenio se hizo en 1998 y pronto se amplió a seis países: Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua y Paraguay.

La estrategia general tiene como primer objetivo concretar proyectos piloto, que muestren a la población y a las instituciones que el sistema de producción cooperativa de vivienda funciona. Para ello, se cuenta con el apoyo de equipos interdisciplinarios, que realizan el asesoramiento técnico (se trata de organizaciones con las que FUCVAM y *We Effect* ya tienen una trayectoria conjunta).

En la primera de las experiencias, en Paraguay, se sentaron las bases de la metodología que se utilizaría en los siguientes proyectos. A partir de entonces, el caminar por cada uno de los países supuso aprendizajes y adaptaciones. En Bolivia la «cultura indígena» impregnó los proyectos. El concepto de «propiedad colectiva» no se vio como una innovación, sino una idea propia, tradicional, de las poblaciones implicadas. La realidad económica y laboral, informal en la mayoría de las familias, provocaba una gran imprevisibilidad y el proceso devenía inestable. Las mujeres se convierten en las protagonistas principales de los grupos cooperativos, al igual que en el resto de países que mencionamos. En Guatemala se subrayaron las grandes diferencias entre las clases sociales más ricas y los sectores más empobrecidos. El proyecto cooperativo se resentía en lo que refiere al diálogo entre los actores que debían relacionarse. El intercambio de pareceres, de demandas y las tomas de decisión colectivas se hacían más difíciles. En El Salvador, se dio una «ruralización» de un modelo que había nacido en el medio urbano uruguayo. El sistema cooperativo se flexibilizó y adaptó a la forma de una cooperativa de implantación dispersa. En Honduras la experiencia estuvo marcada por dos problemáticas propias del país: la cooptación de los líderes y la corrupción. Esto no impidió que se creasen los espacios para poder intervenir de la forma deseada, destacándose que en alguno de los programas el gobierno local correspondiente dio apoyo material y político. En Nicaragua, país marcado por relaciones sociales especiales –los vínculos de solidaridad son fuertes– la afinidad con un modelo cooperativo autogestionario de viviendas fue de rápida emergencia. Los grupos mostraron fuertes liderazgos y capacidad de

17 Por otra parte, en la ciudad de Sao Paulo y su área metropolitana, es interesante la experiencia cooperativa (*mutirões* como COPROMO), que reconoce el “modelo FUCVAM” como inspiración y que a día de hoy sigue siendo impulsado y asesorado por el colectivo USINA-CTAH, fundado en 1990. <http://www.usina-ctah.org.br/>

18 Organización sueca que impulsa proyectos de cooperación internacional en distintas regiones del mundo.

organización, lo que redujo los tiempos. Se dieron buenos acuerdos y articulaciones con los municipios, que cedieron los terrenos (Dambrauskas y González, 2008).

La estrategia puesta en marcha trata de responsabilizar a los propios grupos de toda la tarea que habrá que realizar, puesto que se basa en una transferencia de «pobladores a pobladores», de «cooperativistas a pobladores que quieren ser cooperativistas». A partir de ahí, se busca también aglutinar a las distintas experiencias cooperativas que van naciendo en torno a una organización de segundo grado (federación, central o similar). Desde estas agrupaciones de cooperativas de vivienda¹⁹ es desde donde comienza la lucha por la creación de marcos jurídicos, de políticas de vivienda y hábitat, por la financiación estatal – a través de la movilización, de la incidencia política–. Y todo esto dirige las acciones iniciadas hacia un cambio global en términos de hábitat y en consecuencia, un cambio social.

Pudimos participar en la pasantía organizada por FUCVAM y la BSHF en septiembre de 2013, lo que nos permitió saber más de «la vida cotidiana» en FUCVAM y visitar otras cooperativas; por otra parte, comprendimos cómo es trabajo realizado para dar a conocer y compartir sus saberes en otras latitudes. Las pasantías parten de una serie de premisas: son los propios cooperativistas quienes explican el funcionamiento del *modelo*; esta explicación se realiza mediante charlas y a través de la conversación en visitas a cooperativas; el grupo de *visitantes* está invitado a todas aquellas actividades que realiza la federación durante los días en que transcurre la *pasantía*; por último, se da visibilidad institucional y pública a la actividad, pues se realizan reuniones tanto en la Intendencia de Montevideo como en el Ministerio de Vivienda.

Durante los últimos años, el cooperativismo de vivienda ha continuado avanzando en los países de Centroamérica, aumentando el número de cooperativas (tanto edificadas, como en cantidad de grupos conformados) y consolidando las organizaciones de segundo grado. El Salvador destaca por las experiencias realizadas en el Centro Histórico de su capital: de la realización de dos proyectos pilotos iniciales, en la actualidad ya cuentan con doce cooperativas. En este país, el asesoramiento lo realiza la organización FUNDASAL; por otra parte, la organización de segundo grado se inició con una Mesa de Coordinación y pronto se estableció la FESCOVAM.²⁰ Ambas han priorizado la acción de incidencia política, que ha significado varios resultados: la consecución de un préstamo de doce millones de euros proveniente de la cooperación internacional desde Italia y la elaboración de una Ley de Vivienda que cuenta con un capítulo en que se definen las cooperativas de vivienda. En Honduras, la organización que nuclea a las cooperativas y a otros colectivos que

¹⁹ Con asesoramiento y apoyo de las organizaciones locales de profesionales con experiencia en programas de vivienda y hábitat.

²⁰ Federación Salvadoreña de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua.

luchan por la vivienda es el COHVISOL.²¹ Su existencia fue fundamental tras el golpe de estado a José Manuel Zelaya, cuando los gobiernos que se han sucedido han tratado de eliminar la financiación a la vivienda popular que se había conseguido con el programa PROVICCOSOL. En este país, la peculiaridad es la Mesa del Sur, una organización de segundo grado regional, que es la que está desarrollando las experiencias más interesantes (por las dificultades que existen a nivel nacional para que las cooperativas se realicen con propiedad colectiva). Asimismo, este caso da cuenta de la importancia de la financiación estatal, para poder pasar de los casos piloto a la generalización de las propuestas cooperativas. Por su parte, Guatemala muestra las dificultades profundas de actuar en contextos en los que la corrupción de los gobiernos es corriente y la represión que ejerce el estado sobre los movimientos populares es cotidiana. En cualquier caso, ya existen dos cooperativas construidas y la Mesa de Cooperativas de Guatemala trata de irse consolidando. Entre esta Mesa y el equipo asesor, IDESAC,²² siguen realizando incidencia política y han conseguido que se estudie un programa de financiación y se apruebe una Ley de vivienda, que tiene carencias significativas pero es un paso adelante. En Nicaragua, la central que funciona como organización de segundo grado es la CENCOVICOD y la ciudad en la que más destaca el cooperativismo es León, debido a que la municipalidad conformó una cartera de tierras. La relación con el estado, sin embargo, es conflictiva: precisamente cuando el cooperativismo crecía con fuerza en lugares como León, el gobierno retira la financiación ya aprobada por Ley, e incluso decide que los subsidios los concederán solo de manera individual. Se han buscado alternativas, tanto para el acceso al financiamiento (con la Fundación Juan XXIII) como para el acceso a los terrenos (a través del programa de *We Effect* y la participación de la salvadoreña FUNDASAL). Asimismo, las organizaciones siguen actuando para que sea el estado quien se responsabilice de que se cumpla el derecho a la vivienda: se lleva a cabo una recolección de firmas para que el gobierno contemple a las cooperativas en su nuevo plan (González, 2016).

Un caso cercano: Bolivia

En Bolivia, las experiencias de cooperativismo de vivienda se concentran por el momento en la ciudad de Cochabamba. El intercambio con FUCVAM comenzaba en 1999, inicialmente en actividades organizadas por la Universidad de San Simón y la ONG PROCASHA. Después de los aprendizajes realizados en Paraguay, la cooperación entre FUCVAM, *We Effect* y las organizaciones bolivianas se formaliza en 2001.

En la actualidad, existen cinco cooperativas de vivienda, de las cuales COVISEP (30 viviendas) y COVIVIR (12 viviendas) ya edificaron sus conjuntos habitacionales. Por su parte, COVICOM está próxima a iniciar la construcción

²¹ Consejo Hondureño de la Vivienda Solidaria.

²² Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social de América Central.

de sus viviendas, en el terreno que linda con COVIVIR. COSVAMS y COVIJO son cooperativas conformadas que a día de hoy continúan buscando terrenos y financiación para continuar sus proyectos. Las cooperativas construidas tuvieron que acceder al financiamiento mediante la búsqueda de distintos apoyos, sumando las aportaciones de We Effect y de la ONG Hábitat para la Humanidad, al no existir en el país un marco legal y de financiamiento público. El acceso al suelo es una de las mayores dificultades: el precio en las áreas centrales e incluso en la periferia del municipio de Cochabamba es muy elevado; las dos cooperativas construidas se encuentran en otros municipios del área metropolitana, distanciadas en torno a una hora y media del centro de la ciudad, en transporte público.

Desde 2004 todos los grupos están articulados en el CACVAM: Comité Articulador de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua. Asimismo, se creó un equipo técnico, el EAT Macovam, para asesorar a las nuevas cooperativas y realizar los proyectos y seguimiento de las obras.

Uno de los logros que nos indicaban los cooperativistas es la incorporación del sistema cooperativo de producción de viviendas, como posibilidad, en el informe presentado por el gobierno del país para la conferencia Hábitat III. En general, continúan movilizándose y presentando a las distintas instituciones públicas sus propuestas, sustentadas en el funcionamiento de las cooperativas ya construidas.



**Figura 10. Cooperativa COVIVIR, salón comunal.
Cochabamba, Bolivia. Fuente: la autora, 2016.**



Figura 11. Cooperativa COVIVIR, espacio comunitario y viviendas. Cochabamba, Bolivia. Fuente: la autora, 2016.

6. Conclusiones

En Uruguay, el cooperativismo de vivienda se ha mantenido como alternativa contra-hegemónica para el acceso a la vivienda, conformándose como una experiencia que va más allá de la búsqueda de alojamiento. Los barrios cooperativos se plantean como territorios en los que se desarrolla una forma de vida distinta: la vivienda se valora por la posibilidad de usarla y por toda una serie de características que están relacionadas con la identidad de sus habitantes y del colectivo que han construido a lo largo del proceso de conformación, construcción y autogestión. Los cooperativistas generan conocimiento propio, desde sus experiencias, y lo acumulan, mejorando con el tiempo sus capacidades. Según sea necesario, cuentan con el apoyo externo de la Universidad para sumar las herramientas de la academia a sus propios modos de reflexión, investigación y acción.

Por un lado, sostenemos que el sistema cooperativo de producción de hábitat fue posible por un diagnóstico adecuado de la realidad que vivía el país a mediados de la década de 1960, así como de las capacidades, recursos y necesidades de las clases populares a las que se destinaba la propuesta. Por otra parte, consideramos también que las sucesivas innovaciones realizadas (en ocasiones por los propios cooperativistas, en otros casos a propuesta de las instituciones) han permitido que el cooperativismo siga siendo válido cincuenta años después. Asimismo, la propia resistencia que tuvo que afrontar el cooperativismo de vivienda, implicó la conformación de muchos de los rasgos de su identidad actual (como la propiedad colectiva).

La internacionalización del cooperativismo, las relaciones de la federación con organizaciones populares de la región y de otros lugares del mundo, es la ampliación de sus modos de hacer a una escala mayor. El resultado es múltiple: más allá del apoyo que supone la presencia de cooperativistas de FUCVAM en otros países, para la creación de cooperativas de viviendas o de un movimiento para su concreción; se genera una red de organizaciones sociales con capacidad de incidencia en las políticas, o al menos con la posibilidad de ampliar los

términos de los debates sobre el derecho a la vivienda y la ciudad. Asimismo, el sistema cooperativo, en este caso “modelo FUCVAM” muestra la validez de sus claves fundamentales, en aquellos países en los que se despliega. Entre ellos, destaca la propiedad colectiva, que en algunos casos se integra de una forma muy natural (por vincularse con facilidad a modos de hacer recientes) y en otros suscita desconfianzas y escepticismos (al igual que los suscitó en el Uruguay de los 1960s). De la misma forma, se subraya la importancia de contar con un marco legal específico (políticas de vivienda y normativas municipales que posibiliten el acceso a tierras) y financiación estatal: en los países donde se logró, comienza a darse el paso de los proyectos piloto a la generalización de los conjuntos cooperativos; allí donde todavía no se consigue, las organizaciones deben elaborar estrategias propias (acudiendo a financiación de organizaciones con fines sociales, de la cooperación internacional, etc.), que se acompañan siempre del reclamo a los estados para que finalmente se hagan cargo.

Por su parte, FUCVAM sale reforzada de su interacción con pobladores de otras latitudes: por los conocimientos que adquiere al conocer otras realidades y por la legitimidad que supone ser premiada y ser considerada un referente a nivel mundial.

El carácter contra-hegemónico se subraya también en el intercambio Sur-Sur, que genera una red del tipo “globalización desde abajo”. Por un lado, por la importancia de que son los propios pobladores quienes se organizan y proponen los contenidos y las metodologías de la “cooperación”, continuando con la ayuda y apoyo mutuo que son propias de la construcción de las viviendas y los barrios, pero en una escala muy ampliada. Además, esta construcción contra-hegemónica implica una alternativa a la dicotomía mercado/estado, que supone la construcción de alternativas por la vía de la creación de “commons” (bienes comunes o comunales), que estarían en línea con propuestas como las sugeridas por Elinor Ostrom (1990) con respecto a la gestión de bienes comunes; o aquellas de Walter Mignolo (2011), con su epistemología de la frontera y la posibilidad (y necesidad) de *desprenderse*, saliendo de esa dicotomía público/privado.

Por último, la ampliación a la escala internacional de la lucha por la vivienda en términos que no son los hegemónicos, va construyendo una red amplia que se basa en la defensa del valor de uso de los territorios, en la defensa de la propiedad colectiva y la autogestión como bases para un modelo de vida con criterios alternativos. Se conecta, por un lado, por la globalización contra-hegemónica anticipada por Boaventura de Sousa Santos y, por otro, con las alternativas vislumbradas por Raúl Zibechi, aquellas que ya están en marcha, que anticipan mundos posibles porque ya están siendo.

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Society of homeowners and possible cooperative future: case of Slovenia

Klemen Ploštajner

Abstract

Neoliberal offensive has manifested itself in the rise of homeownership across the Western Europe and USA. Similar patterns, but with different particularities, can be observed in postsocialist countries of Eastern Europe. Slovenia's history of socialist housing provision and its privatization after the fall of Yugoslavia has led to extreme levels of homeownership that is pulling the society towards individualization and pacification. These structural conditions led to marginalization of housing activism (and research) mainly because movements are lacking concrete answers to three critical questions of movement building: who is to be organized? who is to be addressed or attacked? what kind of new and better institutions do we need? The paper tackles these questions by looking at housing cooperatives as a possible solutions to perils of homeownership. It thinks of cooperatives not only as a solution to housing problems in Slovenia, but also as a tool of reproduction of other social movements. Cooperatives give them space to organize, offer means of subsistence, tool to connect with broader audiences, but most importantly they build relations and institutional arrangements that change the everyday life of neoliberal consensus.

Keywords: Slovenia, transition, homeownership, cooperative housing, neoliberalism, activism

Introduction

Housing is no longer, if it ever was, “one of the numerous *smaller*, secondary evils...” (Engels 1872), but it is at the centre of the reproduction of capital accumulation and capitalist relations. With the neoliberal offensive that is based on the reconstruction of international division of labour, the built environment has gained new importance in the circulation of capital. The switch from primary to secondary circuit of capital (Harvey 2006), which is occurring in the era of neoliberalisation, means that the built environment is no longer only supporting industrial relations, but is, together with the financial sector, becoming the main field of the production of profit. Because housing is linking everyday life of borrowing and saving with the global circulation of capital (Langley 2009), it has become the most important sector that connects build environment, finances and daily life of people.

Housing is thus at the centre of the new regime of accumulation that is based on the expansion of financial industry through deepening of debt. It is also the sector that enables the capitalism to build its way out of the constantly returning crisis. Capitalism in the 21st century is surviving by producing and occupying

space, as was stressed by Lefebvre (1981). This accumulation regime is pushing for huge changes in the field of housing. It is leading to commodification of housing and different relations that are part of it. The right to profit is dominating over the right to housing and exchange value of housing is being promoted over its use value. Commodification is most visible in the ways individuals are relating to different housing tenures. More and more individuals are seeing their homes as investments and are relating to them as investors or entrepreneurs (Langley 2009). The main mechanism that is pushing them into entrepreneurial logic is financialisation, which is linking housing to financial sector by connecting housing prices to the capital markets and is at the same time pushing families into debt to cover housing expenses.

It would be extremely limiting and, from activist perspective, outright wrong to consider neoliberalism and its “housing policies” as merely a method for reactivating capital accumulation. As was analysed by Foucault (2008) it is crucial to recognize neoliberalism as a mode of regulation. It is a regime of discipline that individualizes subjects and enforces the rule of self-responsibility upon them. Thus, the neoliberal offensive in the field of housing must be also understood as a way of disciplining subjects. Better yet, it is a *regime*, which is constantly producing particular subjectivities that see neoliberal relations as natural. The main role is played by the state and the core of neoliberalism thus: “consists of an articulation of state, market, and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third” (Wacquant 2012, 71). State policies are reorganizing the social fabric and at the same time reorganizing state functions. The state is thus more and more becoming, and acting as a tool for the creation of profitable environment for capital investments. It is also more and more focused on re-educating its citizens to understand themselves as entrepreneurs of their own destiny. This means that neoliberalism does not lead to the retreat of the state, but to its reconstruction (Jessop 2002).

By offering the material foundations for the neoliberal ideological formations, housing has become one of the main fields of this new regime of governing. This is not evident only historically¹, but also structurally. Housing represents the biggest part of households assets and is also the biggest household expense. Because of its relative expensiveness, it is also the main asset to accumulate and invest in. This is also nurtured by the new state housing policies that promote homeownership as an investment for safe retirement or a way to climb on the housing/class ladder. Housing policies must thus be understood as a tool of governmentability that promotes individualized solutions to complex, structural and collective problems. By promoting homeownership as natural and ideal tenure, housing policies are depoliticizing the housing question and privatizing

¹ The first step into neoliberal era was huge privatization of council housing in UK and radical defunding of public housing in USA. Both are important materially as well as symbolically. The first was seen as an introduction and »giant leap« into the society of owners, while the second was connected with the retreat of the state and with the expansion of the ideology of homeownership.

collective issues. From this follows that housing is at the centre of the ideological and economic formation of neoliberal society.

The main goal of this article is to offer an analysis of this trend within the context of Slovenia and to try to find commonalities and differences between description of neoliberalism in introduction and its existence in post-socialist Slovenia. Secondly, it aims to further the understanding of housing situation in Slovenia with the goal to address it and find the strategies to challenge it. For these reasons the ideas of commoning will be put forward and latter applied to the situation of extremely high homeownership rates that are persistent in Slovenia. In the final part of the article theoretical analysis of commoning as a strategy for addressing the housing question will be applied to the concrete case of a housing cooperative known as Zadrugator that is being developed in Slovenia.

Strange case of neoliberalism in Slovenia

The word of the day in Slovenian politics is the word neoliberalism. As if neoliberal tendencies had become part of Slovenia no earlier than with the recent crisis and responses to it: with policies of social benefits cuts, privatization of state companies and banks, deregulation and flexibilization of labour markets. It is true that neoliberal policies have expanded with the economic crisis, but their tendencies have been present since the collapse of socialism. One of the fields that is at the centre of neoliberal social reconstruction in Slovenia is housing². However, neoliberal reconstruction in Slovenia is peculiar and its peculiarities are connected to the position of Slovenia in capitalist world-system and specific historical developments. We will not go deep into this general statements, but will only focus on their role on the housing field.

Nowadays, Slovenia officially has one of the highest rates of homeownership in the developed world. Around 90% of the population is living in the home they own or is owned by their relatives (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2013). Other 10% is renting, of whom majority lives in non-profit accommodation that is provided by municipalities or publicly owned housing funds, while only 2% of the population rent on the market. Even if we take into consideration that most of housing researchers question the credibility of these

² Second one being automobility. »Mass motoring effects an absolute triumph of bourgeois ideology on the level of daily life. It gives and supports in everyone the illusion that each individual can seek his or her own benefit at the expense of everyone else. Take the cruel and aggressive selfishness of the driver who at any moment is figuratively killing the "others," who appear merely as physical obstacles to his or her own speed. This aggressive and competitive selfishness marks the arrival of universally bourgeois behaviour, and has come into being since driving has become commonplace.« (Gorz 1973) Both fields are neglected by intellectual and activist public.

data³, homeownership is still much more prevalent than in other countries. Can we, following Kemeny's (1980) analysis, which claims that homeowners tend to be more inclined to support the cuts in welfare state, or many different articles that connect homeownership with neoliberal offensive (Doling, Ford 2007; Roland 2009), thus conclude that homeowners of Slovenia are the popular base of neoliberal paradigm?

We can make some conclusions from these connections, while we must also stress that tenure is social institution that varies across different localities. There are certainly links between homeownership and neoliberalism in Slovenia, but they are different then what western theory suggests. While in the countries with liberal financial regimes, that means lax credit regulation and developed financial institutions (US, UK, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands), homeownership is connected to mortgage debt, entrepreneurial subjectivities and financialization, this is not the case in Slovenia. Schwartz and Seabrooke (2009) stress that to determine the level of commodification of housing we should not only look at how high the level of homeownership is, but should also focus on how this tenure is achieved. In countries with liberal financial regimes it is achieved mostly by mortgage debt and this debt is also securitized, which means that people are more inclined to understand homeownership as an investment. In these countries housing is at the centre of neoliberal construction of entrepreneurial and investor subjectivities (Schwartz and Seabrooke 2009). These trends are obvious in the centres of global financial markets, but they are not as evident at the peripheries of world-system.

High levels of homeownership⁴ in Slovenia have been achieved with very low level of indebtedness. Household debt stands at around 34% of GDP (Gorišek and Pahor 2013), which is much lower then EU average and is the consequence of underdeveloped financial markets, lack of financial instruments and institutions. Homeowners are thus not disciplined into neoliberal subjectivities with the bonds of debt (Lazzarato 2012) or lured with the prospects of society of owners (Langley 2009). Most of them have become homeowners by self-building that was encouraged in socialism and is still the predominant way to achieve this tenure. We could say that this means that the base of housing system in Slovenia consists of some sort of "primitive" family socialism with the hint of solidarity economy. However, these practices of communal help, solidarity and self-organized informality do not lead into strengthening of communities, but into radical affirmation of private property. Practices based on communities are tearing communities apart. Historically we must connect this practices with the transition from socialism and what kind of role it played on the housing market.

³ This is connected with the fact that most of the rental activity is done illegally (Sendi and Mali 2015). This means that the majority of renters are not registered and are often officially counted as living with friends or relatives.

⁴ 91% of the population is living in the home they own or is owned by their relatives (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2013)

Socialist housing system has left huge mark on Slovenia. Not only materially (most of apartment buildings were built in socialism), but also symbolically and ideologically. However, the biggest mark could be attributed not to the period itself, but to the break and never ending flight from it⁵. In socialist Slovenia around 30% of the population was living in state constructed and state owned rental housing. This form of tenure was the preferred tenure not only in the official ideology, but also for most of the population. During the transition majority of socially owned housing stock was privatized and bought by individual households that were living in it. Housing law from 1991, that enabled privatization of rental stock, was one of the first pieces of legislation in postsocialist Slovenia. The process of privatization was also more radical than in most other transition countries. Following Aalberts and Christophers (2014), who claim that privatization of housing represent the most radical and vital promotion of ideology of capital, we could say that privatization of housing stock in Slovenia was the entry point into new social system. It “represented a 'grand opening' to the process of transition, as the privatization of social housing was one of the earliest and most tangible 'transition' acts, directly affecting a massive population” (Cirman and Mandič 2013, 278). The consequences can be compared with the selling of council housing during the rein of Margaret Thatcher (Harvey 2007).

Privatization has not only reaffirmed the dominance of private property in housing, but it also ideologically and materially discredited all other forms of tenure. Because socially owned rental accommodation was the most promoted tenure in the times of socialism (Mandič 1996), it was discredited by the collapse of the system. Policies of transition not only sold off material foundation of non-profit rental housing, but also erased the memory of state led housing provision. Renting, especially state led, has become understood as a remainder of socialist past, while homeownership is part of the new capitalist future. During socialism state and state run companies were obliged to provide for housing needs of all citizens, so politicians (a viewpoint that is to a large degree shared by the general public and the media) now conceive these practices as unreasonable, expensive and ineffective. State should only provide for the weakest members of the society, which it does by managing shrinking and ever more residualised non-profit housing stock (Sendi 2007). The dominance of homeownership is thus affirmed by the lack of other options of living.

By affirming the dominance of private property over collective ownership, housing system is thus at the centre of neoliberalisation in Slovenia. On the level of production of subjectivities the system of housing provision is producing atomized and individualized subjects that should provide for themselves. Housing is to a large extent seen as a private problem. State obligation has shifted from direct provision towards the principle of enabling that should

⁵ The only trait of the housing system that is left is self-building and the dependence on relatives to achieve homeownership status (Mandič 1987).

create conditions for individuals to tend for their own needs⁶. Housing is thus one of the main vehicles in the production of neoliberal subjectivities that see private property as natural, normal and the best way of relating to property. The main agent of production of these kind of subjectivities is the state, which is promoting homeownership by destroying other tenures and offering financial support to homeowners and prospect buyers (Cirman et al. 2009). These concrete developments are in line with the analyses of neoliberalism that see it not as a retreat of the state, but as its reconstruction (Dardot and Laval 2011). »Political dominance is a means of reinforcing and entrenching a dominant ideology in a social structure by using the state to form basic laws and to encourage forms of institution that are consonant with the dominant ideology and to disadvantage those which are not.« (Kemeny 1992, 96)

In short, Slovenian neoliberalism on the housing field is peculiar only if it is thought through western theory. However, it is not peculiar if we understand neoliberalism not as a coherent economic theory and political project, but as tendency that operates differently at different localities. We must analyse “actually existing neoliberalism” (Peck, Theodor and Brenner 2009) that is path-dependent and its development depends on the context it works in. Slovenian neoliberal condition is thus the consequence of the transition from socialism that enabled high levels of homeownership without indebtedness and financial expansion. At the same time it also discredited all other tenures and affirmed the dominance of private property. Neoliberalisation is evident in housing preferences: it is normal to own, to have the plot you can call your own and control it fully without considering the needs of the others. It is seen as a civilizational norm and personal achievement. All other tenures are perceived as inferior or in the best case as a step on a ladder towards ownership status (Hočevar and Uršič 2007). This ideal structures the whole housing field and organizes practices and expectations. The ideal of homeownership is ultimately the ideal of self-sufficiency and individual freedom. This freedom must be understood as a negative freedom, as the right to be left alone, not to be harassed or bothered. Individual house with a plot of land in the suburbs comes together with a fence, warning signs and neighbourhood watch. Being a homeowner means taking care for oneself and not bother for the others. Housing system and spatial development that is connected to it is thus fully privatized. Not only because most of the housing stock is individually owned, but because it is managed without the consideration for the common good.

This material conditions produce certain relationships and subjectivities. Small digression to the Marx’s description of the class position of French peasantry of late 19th century could help us explain the relationship between housing and

⁶ We can observe some interesting trends concerning self-provision of housing. Most homeowners have self-built their homes with the help of social networks. After the crisis state is trying to curtail this “black market” and tries to monetize communal help. While these reforms clearly try to expand the GDP by starting to count what was not included in it before, it will also have big consequence on informal housing provision. Self-building will become harder, more expensive and complex, which could force younger people to buy or rent.

living. “The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse... A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department” (Marx 1852). While Marx claimed to be talking about production, what he actually was talking about were peasants’ living conditions and patterns. He was talking about tenure and housing. Peasants were separated not only because the way they produce, but also because the way they lived. This was not only the consequence of spatial arrangements that under the condition of scattered houses produce isolation, but it was also the consequence of tenure. Homeowners are tending for themselves because their well-being is, at least ideologically, less determined by the well-being of the other members of the society.

In the societies with developed liberal financial regimes correlation between homeownership and the welfare state is explained through the logic of temporal distribution of housing costs (Kemeny 1980). While renters spread their housing expenses through whole life, buyers compress the bulk of housing costs into household’s first years. They need to save money for down payments and after that they need to repay mortgage debt in first decades of household’s live. Because of that they are more inclined to agree with cuts in welfare state, because of trade-off between housing costs and taxes (Kemeny 2004)⁷. When they become homeowners, they are inclined to see themselves as self-sufficient, which again makes them a natural constituency for supporting cuts. Similar conclusions can be drawn from Slovenia. Not only is high level of homeownership one of the factors that produce individualized subjectivities, but it is also producing certain kind of expectations for people who are renting or are still living with their parents. Homeownership is thus reproducing itself by producing material conditions that discredit all other tenure and by creating ideological environment that see homeownership as the ideal form of living. So the main way to address this state of affairs is to create new forms of tenure that will strengthen communities and would not encourage individualization through private property.

Strategical considerations about housing movements

Housing and especially homeownership is thus at the centre of reproduction of the neoliberal social condition. It offers material base for the reproduction of neoliberal ideologies that promote individualization and especially individual solutions to collective problems. Social field is thus deconstructed and starts to

⁷ Other connection is made by Schwartz and Seabrooke (2009), who describe monetary conservatism of homeowners. Because they are indebted and depend on the rise of housing assets for consumption, they are inclined to support low interest rates, low taxes and lax financial regulation.

appear as individual project and not as a collective endeavour. In this sense: “the residential is political – which is to say that the shape of the housing system is always the outcome of struggles between different groups and classes” (Marcuse and Maddon 2016, 4). However, it is not only the effect, but is also one of the movers of the societal changes. The way we satisfy our individual housing needs has ideological⁸ consequences. That is why movements must address residential patterns. To paraphrase Lefebvre: if they want to resist capitalist relations in any kind of meaningful way, they have to change everyday life. »The crucial ingredient for success is a movement which is able to establish a hegemonic ideology in which residential organization figures as a major element« (Kemeny 1980, 118).

Living patterns in Slovenia thus materially and ideologically determine collective conscience (Hočevár in Uršič 2007). Scattered living patterns, that lead to longer commuting hours and more time being spent on taking care for individual property, produce individualization and socially destructive self-interest. Homeowners also experience less problems with paying for housing expenses and are thus less inclined to relate to people with housing problems. This lack of empathy is amplified by ideological dominance of homeownership that produces all other forms of tenure as failed statuses. Homeowners tend to take care for their property and focus their political engagement to improve their immediate surrounding. When different authors claim that homeowners are more politically active, they forget to mention that they are mostly active in their local environment and to a large extent to protect the value of their property or living standard, not to build communities or address injustices.

Housing movements that want to work in these conditions must address three critical questions of movement building: who is to be organized? who is to be addressed or attacked? what kind of new and better institutions do we need? Because high levels of homeownership, which is a known tool of pacification, it is extremely hard to organize any constituency. Because the government is not involved in housing issues and housing is considered as an individual problem it is hard to have a concrete target to focus on. Because housing policies under state socialism were organized around state rental sector, this sector is now ideologically delegitimized and can not be conceived as viable alternative to socially destructive homeownership. Material conditions thus produce a lot of

⁸ And obviously also material. Kemeny (1992) nicely describes how certain type of housing typology produces certain type of mobility, ways of relating to the space and others. He compares one city in Germany with one from USA. First one is mostly made of apartment blocks with rental accommodation, while the second consisted mostly of homeowners and individual detached houses. Most of the inhabitants of the first live close to the city centre and commute with public transportation, while in the second case most drive cars because they live far from the centre. As was stressed by Dorling: “One person choosing to build a home with a large garden does not just affect that one person. Everyone who then has to live further out of town has to drive past that garden.” (2015, 102)

barriers for movements to organize. If they want to be successful, they need to address these three questions⁹.

First is the question of *agency*, which is not only the question of who has the most pressing needs, but also who has the ability and will to organize. One group that is most inclined to experiment with new housing forms are young adults, who are also one of the hardest hit groups by current condition. Because of the flexibilization of work they are not only more exploited on the labour market, but these same conditions force them into precarious housing tenures¹⁰. They are not able to become homeowners, because they are not able to get a loan. Lack of non-profit rental housing forces young people to return home after they finish studying or to rent on the profit market, which, as was stated before, is mostly illegal and thus very precarious. They thus have immediate needs that are not only not addressed by current system, but are also produced by it.

However, as we stated before, young adults are not only interesting because of their needs, but because they are able to organize. This is connected to their housing preferences, that are still dominated by the dream of homeownership, but to the lesser degree than for other social groups. forms of tenure are gaining legitimacy. Owning a home is slowly starting to loose its veneer of freedom and democracy and other forms of tenure are gaining traction. The privatization of public housing stock and the retreat of the state from housing that followed is now critiqued as one of the biggest mistakes of transition¹¹. These developments open a lot of paths to address housing problems in different ways than with the advancement of homeownership. Communal or collective ownership, non-profit rent, public housing and many other forms of housing provision are no longer perceived solely as something strange or from socialist past (Mandič and Filipovič Hrast 2015).

Second question is the question of *targets*: who or what to attack or address? In the context of Slovenia this is particularly hard question, because there seems to be no obvious targets. The state is not active¹², there are no big private actors that could be the focus of organizing and most of the renting, even though it is

⁹ I do not want to only focus on intellectual processes, but also on practical solutions. It is too often forgotten that the main point of politics is the organization of everyday life, which is ultimately the question of practice. Left-wing movements often put too much energy into debate and too little into building concrete institutions that would produce material conditions for the transformation of everyday life.

¹⁰ According to Eurostat 60% of young adults were living with their parents in 2015, which is high above the average number in EU (47,9%).

¹¹ Privatization was already criticized when it was happening (Mandič 1994, Stanovnik 1994). Today the critique is part of the general media discourse and it is even hinted at in the official state documents like National Housing Plan 2015-2025.

¹² Inaction is a form of action. As is claimed by Žižek (2008), it is even a form of violence. However, it is a type of action that is hard to comprehend, that is more or less invisible and it is thus harder to address. To organize around inaction is much more challenging than to organize around visible wrongdoings.

exploitative, is done by small owners, who are perceived as common people and not as potential agents of oppression. What could be addressed is general housing conditions, but these types of targets are too abstract to enable actors to organize around. What needs to be done is to turn around our understanding of power and start to think about it with the help of Foucault (2004). We must understand power as a constitutive force that is producing certain types of relationships and subjects. Power must be understood as a network of forces. Obviously there are knots of concentration and stronger influence, but we must not lose sight of capillary relations of power that are present in the way everyday life is structured. It is not enough to talk about “housing oppression” as is done by Maddon and Marcuse (2016), but it is necessary to talk about what kind of relationships are produced by the current housing system. This is also consistent with our analysis of state of housing in Slovenia, where homeownership is producing individualized living patterns, relations and expectations.

This change of focus brings us to different conceptualization of dissent, which must no longer be understood as a form of resistance or a form of demanding, but should rather be conceptualized as a form of constructing and organizing. It is not enough to declare housing as a human right that governments should protect or respect. Even worse: “on its own, the mere idea of universal access to good housing is not a challenge to the existing political-economic order but a perpetually deferred promise that the system uses to legitimize itself. Merely declaring a universal right to housing is not the same as actually providing housing for all” (Maddon and Marcuse 2016, 193). Rights talk that is not supported by concrete actions, organizations and institutional support is in the best case scenario a tool of mobilization, but by itself cannot offer a solution to current condition. “As with all rights, everything depends on how it is interpreted, institutionalized, and enforced” (ibid., 193-194). The question is thus not only what to demand, but how to organize. Not only what to prevent, but also what kind of new institutions to build. When John Holloway (2002) is talking about “changing the world without taking power”, he is speaking about building institutions that are taking power away from the hegemonic points and decentralizing it. This should also be the focus of housing movements: building workable alternatives to homeownership, which brings us to the third question of organization: what kind of new institutions do we need?

For the housing commons: possible cooperative future

Could we conceptualize housing cooperatives as an organizational tool that offers a viable solution to housing problems and at the same time builds collective power? If homeownership is the most commodified form of tenure and renting is the usage of housing as capital, then living in the cooperative could be understood as the tenure that resist forces of primitive accumulation. It is helpful to conceptualize cooperatives with the help of literature that analyses new Latin American social movements from early 2000s and the occupations of city squares after 2008 (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014). Ethnographic research of

these movements has used the list of concepts to distinguish new movements from the old ones. Some of the terms that new movements use to describe themselves are: popular power, assembly, horizontalism, autogestion, autonomy and protagonism (Sitrin 2012). These concepts form new vocabulary that is recreating the way people see the world. The same can be said about cooperatives. Cooperatives also recreate language and they do that through the way they are organized.

As we already stated, it is not only important that we satisfy our needs, but also how we do it. At the centre of new movements are concepts like horizontalism, assembly, protagonism and affect-based construction. Movements tend to be organized around assemblies: “moments of gathering, of intentional coming together in such a way that all can speak and be heard, and so that decision can be made” (ibid., 22). The leading body of a cooperative is general assembly that consists of all members. Democratic participation and control are guaranteed with these institutional arrangements. This opens up the space for protagonism, which is connected to social agency and participation. People are involved in the process, are making decisions and performing tasks which gives them back the power and capacity that were taken away by representation. Cooperatives do not only empower people through assemblies, but also with the never ending process of education. One of the main cooperative principles is education and training, which enables members to develop their personal skills and participate more effectively. Developing individual capacities is also one of the main reasons for people to be part of the movement or the cooperative. Sense of belonging is fostered and new relationships are formed. If tenure is the question of how people relate to each other, then housing cooperative produces relations that are based on collective participation, solidarity and 'living-in-common'.

Another word that defines new movements is 'autogestion', which: “literally means 'self-administration', but more broadly refers to collective democratic self-management...” (ibid., 30) It is connected to the question of collectivization and autonomy. While autonomy represents the capacity to make decisions about one's own life, collectivization implies that freedom: “does not simply imply the absence of limits, but rather the capacity to act according to one's own needs within a space that is necessarily shared with others” (Khasnabish 2010, 89). Collective actions encourage the feelings of strength and capacity, but at the same time also fosters empathy and feeling of interconnectedness. Cooperative is collectively owned and individual members are not able to sell their shares. Profit is shared equally among all members and it is obligatory to form reserve funds for development and insurance. Individual member is thus better off if the whole cooperative is thriving. While movements in Argentina are talking about 'todos somos' to emphasize their connection with other movements, cooperatives are practising this motto by helping to establish and develop other cooperatives. The principle of “cooperation among cooperatives” is thus at the heart of the cooperative movement.

Cooperatives are based on prefiguration, which is: “the capacity of the marginalized and oppressed to organize and coordinate structures to govern

their own lives, parallel to capitalist or state-run institutions and services” (Sitrin and Azzellini 2014, 19). In his article *The Return of the Housing Question* Stuart Hodkinson is describing prefigurative housing practices as a possible solution to the constant process of primitive accumulation under capitalism. “To pursue ‘living-in-common’ means to act prefiguratively, to try to meet our housing needs and desires through the creation of non-hierarchical, small-scale, directly democratic, egalitarian and collective forms of housing in our everyday lives” (Hodkinson 2012, 438). Prefigurative politics is connected to the idea that means determine goals or, to put it even more radically, that means are equal to goals. How we organize ourselves, will determine where are we going. Institutions that we construct should promote the way we want to live and should have an educational function. This point is also emphasized by Bookchin: “In forming and functioning in such assemblies, citizens are also forming themselves, for politics is nothing if it is not educational and if its innovative openness does not promote character formation” (Bookchin 1986, 170). Institutional arrangements that are now tearing people apart and are producing isolation, should be replaced with institutions that educate and practically stimulate ‘living-in-common’.

Hodkinson is speaking of commoning as a practice.

Commoning does not end with the enclosure of land but in fact constitutes our daily acts of producing alternative forms of sociality that protect against enclosure and accumulation. In this way, commons are not just things, spaces or networks that protect people from the market or enable us to survive independently of wage-labour; nor are they just forms of resistance to capital and its value practices and modes of doing; they are also, simultaneously, composed of alternative social relations based on commoning where individual interests and differences are articulated into common interests and people produce to share and share what they produce (Hodkinson 2012, 437)

This practices of commoning are produced on the local level through social relations that not only resist commodification and profit motive, but also produce viable living alternatives to capitalism. They are braking the link between social reproduction and accumulation of capital.

From the activist point of view we can derive couple of important guidelines from Hodkinson’s analysis. First, must not only be based on the critique of the capitalist system, but they must also be building viable alternatives to the conditions produced by capitalist accumulation. Second, it is extremely important how we satisfy our need, because different solutions produce different relations. Third, alternatives must develop the capacities of individuals and communities to survive independently from the accumulation of capital, which means that they must build power and their own means of reproduction. Last but the least, concrete alternatives must be linked to the emancipatory ideals that are strong enough for people to engage. As was written by Erik Olin Wright: “A real utopian holds on to emancipatory ideals without embarrassment

or cynicism, but remains fully cognizant of the deep complexities and contradictions of realizing those ideals” (2012, 3).

These theoretical considerations have been more or less intuitively applied in the development of housing cooperative Zadrugator in Slovenia and this is one of the main reasons why our cooperative is gaining public and also political attention. The process is still relatively young and underdeveloped, but it already shows important signs of success. Before analysing the relative success story of Zadrugator some introductory remarks are at place. Zadrugator is officially registered as a cooperative, however we have still not been able to materialize a concrete project and move into a concrete cooperative. This is mostly the product of the environment in which housing cooperatives do not exist and the history of cooperative practices and ideas was all but erased¹³. Most of the population is not aware of what housing cooperatives are, how do they function and how they can concretely resolve their housing problems. Politicians are aware of them, but connect cooperatives with real socialism¹⁴ and thus do not think of them. Secondly, housing is not and has never been an important political topic in independent Slovenia, because it has been relegated to the private sphere. We could say that the relations towards housing cooperatives are more indifferent than hostile.

However, Zadrugator did not start its work in the state of total indifference towards housing cooperatives. The idea has been appearing since 2011, when couple of initiatives started to publicly talk about cooperatives. These were the first seeds, but idea did not gain much political nor media attention. Another important development that helped kick start Zadrugator was the growth of cooperatives in general that started to occur after economic crises in 2008. Since the independence cooperatives were mostly limited to agricultural sector, but after the crises they also started to appear in other sectors. What is even more important, they have started to connect and develop their own support institutions that not only offer organizational support, but also try to politicize the question by addressing the media and the state. These general trends helped to open the way for Zadrugator.

After a year of informal meetings, learning and discussing housing cooperative Zadrugator was officially registered in the middle of 2016. Cooperative is operating on two interconnected levels. First one is the realization of concrete rental housing cooperative that would show that cooperatives offer concrete and viable alternative to homeownership. This part of work consists of building the cooperative membership, finding funding and accessible plots of land, working on architectural solutions and developing the legal foundations of the

¹³ The same also holds true for the cooperative sector in general, which is underdeveloped. There are less than 400 very small and scattered cooperatives operating in Slovenia.

¹⁴ The connection of cooperatives with socialism is based on the false idea about the Slovenian history. Cooperatives were not very developed during socialism and were even discouraged by state ideology. The high point of cooperatives were 1920s and 30s when they were strongly connected with all political camps (Catholic, Socialist, Liberal).

cooperative. However, because developing the concrete project in isolation from general housing issues was not possible we also started to engage with broader political issues. Political engagement is connected to the second level, which consists of developing the state sponsored system of financial and organizational support for cooperative initiatives. By connecting housing cooperatives with state finances, we are opening public discussion about housing issues and also try to force the state to act. Connecting these two levels of work is extremely important, because without political work we will not be able to materialize the concrete cooperative.

These connections are also the main reason why our initiative is gaining a lot of political, public and media attention. Zadrugator entered public sphere with the proposal of concrete alternative and was not only offering the critique of the current state of affairs. It has thus offered a new way of looking at the housing situation in Slovenia by not only building on the existing critiques, but also by developing new ones. Offering a viable alternative enabled Zadrugator to critique the state policies, but also to offer new ideas on how state should function. By elaborating on new alternatives and producing concrete plan for transformation, it opened the way to address the question of homeownership in the new way. It broadened the public debate that was before that limited on two tenures: homeownership (preferred) and state owned rental housing. Zadrugator tries to show that homeownership is not only unreachable, but also socially destructive. This public campaign was conducted through series of media appearances, public events and work on social media¹⁵.

The most important part of the public campaign has been to show that another world is possible, if we borrow the well known slogan of World Social Forum. It has been extremely important to portray the message that we can live differently and that this alternatives are viable or even necessary. However, our work has taught us that is not enough to offer general guidelines, but that you need to have concrete answers to concrete questions. General claims can only establish the field of discussion and open the way, but by themselves they will not bring forward concrete alternatives. The initiative must enter this opening with concrete plans for transformation and organizational capacity that is able to bring forth this transformation. It is not enough to only demand funds for housing cooperatives, but you need to provide a concrete plan that answers the questions like what kind of funds, who will provide them, how will they be provided, what kind of cooperatives will eligible to access them... Only concrete proposals enable the initiative to gain support, realize projects and address needs.

Zadrugator's concrete proposal consists of building organizational capacities of collectives and connecting them to state funding. State funds should be used to

¹⁵ Another important factor has been the usage of different ways of speaking about the housing issues. We try to simultaneously use the language that is generally understandable and at the same time show that we have the expertise to address housing problems. These two ways of addressing the problem enable us to reach general public and at the same time talk in the language that the politicians, public officials and experts can relate to.

support the establishment of communal projects, their realization and to build their organizational capacities. These projects must be relatively autonomous from the state and after they gain initial support have to be able to survive without state funds. This level of autonomy is essential from the standpoint of the movement, which needs to be able to resist the state if it is necessary. Again, quick glance to situation in Latin America can help us understand this point. In 2012 in his last address to the public as a president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez claimed that Bolivarian revolution will be based on communes or it will end. He understood that communes, that are: “self-managed and sustainable communities that are oriented toward their own collective internal needs.” (Ciccariello-Maher 2016, 21), can not flourish without state support and protection, but at the same time are threatened by capitalist state that functions according to the logic of capital. State power must thus be used to slowly decentralize power and build different institutional arrangements that will eventually be able to abolish the capitalist state. Applying this logic to the case of housing cooperatives, we realized that we must use state funds to build relatively autonomous projects that will be able to sustain itself and address the housing needs that are now provided by the state or the market.

However, the level of autonomy must not be absolute and needs to be limited at least by the needs of local environment. By tending only to the needs of one particular group (in our case the members of the cooperative), the project can quickly in the best-case scenario become an island of solidarity inside the general condition of exploitation. In the worst case, housing cooperatives can even contribute to gentrification by heightening the symbolic value of a certain area of the city. These considerations are already inscribed into the philosophy of the cooperative movement. Individual cooperatives are encouraged to connect to other cooperatives and build multiple networks between them. They are encouraged not only to trade with other cooperatives, but also to help establish new ones. From this follows one of the main cooperative principles, which states that cooperatives are obliged to tend to the needs of the local community. Individual cooperative must not only tend for its members, but must also address wider social issues and offer solutions for them. It should connect to the local environment and work with the local communities. However, it is not enough to just try to address isolationist tendencies by connecting the initiative with other struggles, but the initiative also needs to build institutional arrangements that force it to function in this manner.

To prevent the isolation of the cooperative from the local environment and its needs Zadrugator is focusing on three levels¹⁶. First one is to develop the system of ownership that prevents speculation on housing prices. Housing units are always owned collectively and individual households are not able to buy or sell individual flats. This arrangement disables the treatment of housing as investment and prevents the rise of prices inside cooperative. Housing

¹⁶ Similar considerations and tactics are employed by the La Borda cooperative from Barcelona. For more information about the project look their webpage <http://www.laborda.coop/en/>

cooperative will thus be able offer accessible accommodation and will not contribute to the rise in housing prices in local environment.

Second, cooperative must be organized to force members to tend to the needs of the local environment and not be isolated from it. There needs to be a certain level of control over the cooperative housing that is exercised by the general public and especially local population. The mechanism that our cooperative is working on is the system of leaseholds that leaves the land in public hands while the housing built on it is owned by the cooperative. Cooperative will lease the land from municipality, which will give the public a certain kind of control over the way cooperative works. This system is well developed in Zurich, where city is leasing land to cooperatives for affordable price and is thus able to demand that cooperatives are providing some public services (parks, space for local activities, certain number of flats for disabled...).

Third, Zadrugator aims not only to provide housing, but also offer space and activities that would address the needs of local population. Beside state regulation of housing markets and the production of space, the only way to resist gentrification is to strengthen the local community. New projects need to connect with the community and offer them the space to organize, address their needs and build relationships. To be able to build appropriate space for local community, Zadrugator will first research the local environment to determine objective and subjective needs of local residents. By analysing the location, we will try to find out what is lacking in the neighbourhood (green spaces, shops, kindergartens, playgrounds...) and through survey determine what local population needs and desires. Through the research Zadrugator will also try to establish relations with the locals. The goal is thus to open the cooperative for local inhabitants by offering them activities and spaces that address their needs.

The aim of Zadrugator is to develop a viable housing alternative to homeownership that will foster “living-in-common” by preventing speculation and developing common ownership. It aims to develop the system of state support for these kinds of projects and thus force the state to finance collective solutions to housing problems. The cooperative seeks to build on the idea of the social function of property and address the atomizing effect of private property. It aims to become a practical realization of commoning.

Conclusion: from tactic to hegemony

Theoretical considerations and practical conclusions are teaching us about the strengths of cooperatives. They are useful tools to collectivize otherwise individualized housing issues and thus simultaneously politicize them. Because we need not only to focus on tending to the immediate needs, but also on how the needs are met, housing provision must not only provide quality housing, but it needs to offer a space for solidarity and empowerment. It needs to build institutions that will produce a territory of autogestion, democratic deliberation and decision making, of resilient communities and autonomous collectives. Cooperatives offer a useful tool that is already inscribed in law, but it is at the

same time reaching beyond it and can thus be conceptualised as “revolutionary reform”. “Such reforms seek not only to produce immediate and genuine improvements in people’s lives, but also to build popular political capacity and thereby lay the foundation for further advances at subsequent stages of political struggle. In other words, popular political power is not only deployed to bring about short-term changes; the changes themselves are selected with the specific strategic goal of augmenting that power” (Rodriguez-Garavito et al, 24)

As we have shown in the article, this is the aim of Zadrugator and is consistent with the spirit of cooperatives. Housing cooperatives tend to immediate needs and at the same time produce relations and organizational capacities that are able to build popular power. They offer the institutional arrangement to not only resist the forces of commodification and individualization, but also build alternative ways of relating to property, local environment and, most importantly, to each other. Cooperatives can thus be understood as a tactic, which has the possibility to turn into hegemony. Individual projects address immediate housing needs, but at the same time they enable people to organize and build collectives, thus producing the opportunity to address other needs or issues. Cooperatives not only solve the problem, but they also open the way forward. They are at the same time ends and means.

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Squatting: reappropriating democracy from the state

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Abstract

By highlighting the Italian “anomaly” vis-à-vis the Euroatlantic West, our paper argues that Italian squats in general and residential squats in particular, are “good to prefigure” new modes of political agency. We understand housing struggles as practices whose material dynamics imply a reinterpretation of the home as a crucial site of sociability and subjective empowerment through cooperation. This in turn blurs the traditional clear-cut separation between the private and the public spheres, and hence may herald the possibility of a polity beyond the state.

Keywords: squatting, Italy, wasteful construction, rights, public/private, democracy

Introduction

By analyzing some basic features of the Italian squatter movements, with specific reference to Rome as the most relevant case, we try to develop a more theoretical discussion of the implications of squatting for housing in current neoliberal trends. The theoretical discussion is developed through the argument that squatters challenge both neoliberalism and the law of the state. Italy, and more specifically the case of Rome, provide the actual substance of the study due to the policies implemented and the practices of movements that mobilize thousands of people.

Theoretical in scope, this article is part of an ongoing research project that attempts to weave together different disciplinary threads and approaches (from geography to cultural anthropology, from sociology to cultural studies, from literature to philosophy). Resisting the notion that human existence should be objectified into data sets and tables to be detachedly perused by the (more or less) engaged academic expert, we have attempted to take advantage of different methodological tools. Hence, we have combined statistical information on housing and eviction with ethnographic field work and interviews, activism with a mis/reading of the literature on squatters and urban social movements. Last but not least we have tried to put to good use our embodied knowledge acquired as participants to social movements politics in Rome.

Whatever its long term effects, the ongoing financial crisis has further revealed the irreversible nature of the ever-growing divide between states and the imagined communities of their citizens engendered by the present wave of capitalist globalization.

Furthermore, the active role played by the state in implementing and enforcing

neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2015; Harvey 2005) has resulted in its surrendering its function to fulfill the social needs of its citizens into the “invisible” hands of the market. Social rights, such as affordable housing, education and healthcare are increasingly transformed into commodities and inequality in all social domains has soared to an extent that even the enjoyment of basic political rights is put into question. In other words the neoliberalization of the state (Brown 2003) has resulted in the social and political exclusion of an ever increasing portion of its citizens (Finchett-Maddock 2016). While this is most commonly viewed as a crisis of democratic legitimization of the state vis-à-vis its citizens it may also herald the irrelevance of democratic legitimization as such.

In other words, to the extent that the state though retaining its sovereign power, is increasingly unable or unwilling to uphold the social and political rights of its citizens, the legitimacy of its existence may very well be put into question. This essay consists of seven sections: 1) justification of the relevance of the Italian case to develop more general perspectives; 2) and 3) discussion of the “wasteful construction process in Italy and the commodification of urban space; 4) imagining democracy through squatting; 5) considering squatters as law-breaking legislators 6) analyzing the Metropolis case study in Rome with some interpretative hypotheses and 7) conclusions.

Why Italy? Awry Modernity

Focusing on the Italian case and drawing from recent discussion on housing struggles as expression of new modes of post-national citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1996, Appadurai 2002) our paper will argue that squats in general and residential squats in particular, to the extent that are a specific mode of collectively inscribing the right to decent housing in space, it also reveals the tension and contradictions between the notion of universal right and its *spatial* realization through the law of the state, they are also “good to prefigure” the possibility of a polity beyond the state (Vasudevan 2015). In his discussion on totemism, Lévi-Strauss famously quipped that animals are chosen as totems “not because they are ‘good to eat’ but because they are ‘good to think’”; their observed behavior, appearance and relations with other species become the prop of “savage” thought¹ as a result, empirical facts become “figures of thought”.² This reference to Lévi-Strauss is both a disclaimer and a qualification of the speculative scope of this article. A disclaimer; in discussing squatting practices in Rome, neither do we claim that squatters and activists are currently pursuing the project of a state-less society, nor that squats (residential or otherwise) are a model of such a society. What we do claim though – and this is the speculative intent of this article – is that squats can be thought of as

¹ Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, p. 89.

² Garber, 2008, p. 14.

emblematic of an *emergent* (Williams 1977) mode of appropriation of rights that implicitly challenges the legitimacy of the state.

With the term emergent Raymond Williams sought to highlight that in any given society new cultural meanings and practices are constantly created. To qualify a social practice as emergent does not imply that its novelty may in any way herald a new social order different from the dominant one, indeed it may turn out to be just a new phase whereby “the present state of things” manages to reproduce itself. In other words, to qualify social practices as emergent implies to focus on *their possible trajectory not on their probable one*.

Our focus on Italy in general and Rome in particular is first of all motivated by our own biographies, hence inevitably “subjective”. Though we believe the Italian context to be a political and social “laboratory” of alternative futures, worth investigating, our claim is based on tropological³ motives rather than on inherent geographical, historical, social or cultural traits. Geographically located at the margins of western Europe, *yet geopolitically* very much integrated into the (Euroatlantic) West. One of two mythical birth places of western “civilization” (ancient Rome) it also hosts the seat of a global religious power (Roman Catholicism) whose authority has survived practically unscathed for almost two thousand years and in part as a result of this, Italy was a latecomer to the modern political system as a nation state, whose international ambitions were often frustrated by the lack of support of its own citizens. Furthermore, its borders have been repeatedly modified as a result of international conflicts.⁴ From the second half of the 1960s till the early 1980s, its democratic institutions have been challenged by state-abetted neo-fascist terrorism, authoritarian conspiracies and left-radical social movements (Aureli 1999, Balestrini e Moroni 1997, Bermani 1997, De Felice 1989, Ginsborg 1990).

In other words, whatever import such historical traits may have, Italy as the object of scholarly concerns has been *narrated* as an inherently conflictive, contested and uncertain space, where modernity is ever elusive and located elsewhere; across the Alps or to the other side of the Atlantic (Agnew 1996, Mason 1988); at once and at the same time blessed with civic virtues (Putnam 1993, Sciolla 1997) or plagued by amoral familism (Banfield 1958). Last but not least, since its unification Italian ruling elites of all stripes have repeatedly failed to address the age long divide between the north and the “underdeveloped” south which has been racialized, exploited and subjected to a form of internal colonization which problematizes the all-to-neat distinction between the West and the “rest” (Dickie 1997, Forgacs 2014, Gramsci 1994, Gribaudi 1996). In short, we would argue that the all too often debated “anomaly” of Italy - vis-à-vis a normative notion of western modernity (Barański and West 2001, Forgacs and Lumley 1996, Mammone, Giap Parini, and Veltri 2015) - can be very well understood as the ironic recognition of its emergent, and potentially counter-

³ Cf. Hayden White, 1985.

⁴ The present territory only dates back to the end of WW2, and the treaty which officially established its eastern border, the treaty of Osimo with Yugoslavia, was signed in 1975.

hegemonic modernity (Cassano 2001 and 2011, Esposito 2012, Lombardi-Diop and Romeo 2012, Righi 2011, Virno and Hardt 1996). Let's "enter" Italian modernity through the most recent struggles for housing.

In Italy, movements for the right to housing have for a long time addressed, resisted and opposed trends of capital accumulation: speculation on land rent, production of abandoned spaces, privatization of public assets, protection of property rights. In Rome for example, approximately more than six thousand people have successfully participated to collective squatting actions in the last decade (Mudu 2014). Cooperative practices among housing activists have increased and reached the point where they have been able to squat several buildings at the same time with thousands of coordinated people.⁵ Italian social movements have experienced various sequences of mobilization; in the 1970s and in the 2000s for example, their focus has been on housing, while in the mid of 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s it was on Social Centers (Mudu, 2004; 2014). Regional and urban disparities compose an heterogeneous national situation and there are obvious limits in selecting Rome as a case study representative of the Italian situation as a whole. Yet Rome, due to its central position and large mobilizations, has been able to host emergent trends and relevant actors that have promoted experience, connections and developments relevant for our analysis. Currently, the squatting movement is loosely articulated into a large network that not only includes the traditional anarchists and post-autonomist tendencies but also various local collectives of heterogeneous left-wing origins all over Italy, an expression of this is "Abitare nella crisi" a network, which, in addition to Rome covers cities such as Asti, Bergamo, Bologna, Brescia, Cosenza, Firenze, Genova, Macerata, Milan, Monza, and Turin.⁶ Furthermore, over the the last ten years the movements for the right to housing, have come to redefine the organized squatting of hundreds of apartments in the largest Italian cities as being about the more general right to *inhabit* the city (diritto all'abitare).

"Wasteful" construction in Italy

Housing aptly illustrates the current situation whereby the state (including all its local articulations) though retaining its sovereign power, is increasingly unable or unwilling to uphold the social and political rights of its citizens. In

⁵ Eight collective squattings were carried out on 6 December 2012 involving more than 2000 people coordinated by the Roman "Right to Inhabit Movement". Nine collective squatting followed on 6 April 2013, and six were carried out on 6 April 2014, both involving thousands of people. Cf. "6 dicembre 2012 Roma alza la testa: 10 nuove occupazioni! Riprendiamoci la città!", <http://www.abitarenellacrisi.org/wordpress/2012/12/06/6-dicembre-2012-roma-alza-la-testa-10-nuove-occupazioni-riprendiamoci-la-citta>, accessed May 9 2017; Roberto Ciccarelli, "Lo «Tsunami tour» nella capitale degli sfratti e della povertà" in *il manifesto*, March 7, 2013; Viola Giannoli "Lo "tsunami tour" dei movimenti Occupata una decina di palazzi" in *la repubblica*, April 6, 2013; "Tsunami in Roma", <http://www.dinamopress.it/news/the-tsunami-is-here-en-gr?showall>, accessed May 9 2017.

⁶ <http://www.abitarenellacrisi.org>

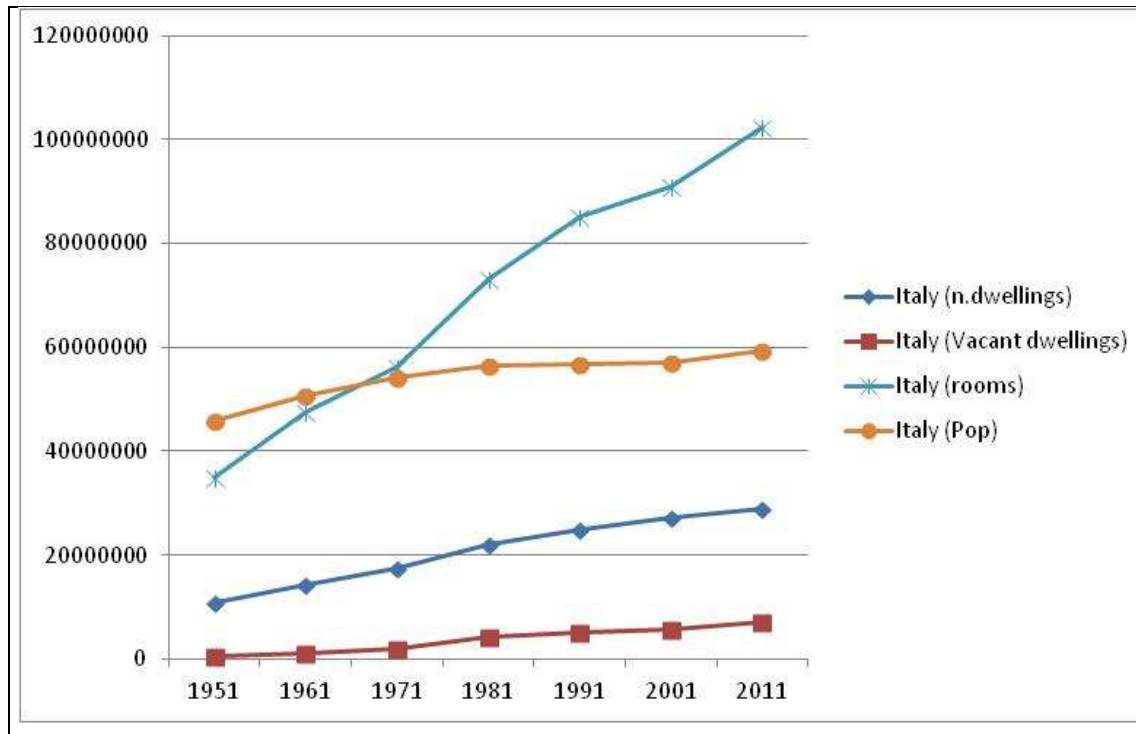
particular, since the beginning of the 1990s, with the law no. 359 of August 8, 1992, that strongly limited rent control (*equo canone*), the Italian state expressed its unwillingness to provide affordable housing at for relevant sectors of the population. As for business groups in the building and real estate sectors, their behavior has not changed substantially from the period of fascist dictatorship through the post-war period (Bortolotti 1978), hence the Italian post-war housing history is full of examples of mobilizations of carried out by residents and migrants.⁷

From the 1950s till roughly the 1980s, all the housing policies were met by a strong opposition of the working class (Daolio, 1974; Ginatempo, 1975). If we briefly consider the trend of the last sixty years, the Italian situation is emblematic for various aspects: demographic and urban changes, policies encouraging home ownership, dismissal of the public assets, thousands of yearly evictions, and various trends of organized resistance. Indeed, data related to the major Italian cities and Italy as a whole can offer some interesting hints (*Figure 1*). First, over the last four decades we record an increasing trend of available dwellings and rooms for housing and a decreasing trend of the whole population. The demographic structural changes of the population (new family structures, aging of the population, increase of singles, and the lowest birthrate in the EU) can partially explain this trend. In the 65 years since the end of the second world war, the population of major Italian cities increased by 130%, while the number of dwellings by 270%.

⁷ In the 1950s most of the mobilizations were carried out by Italian southern migrants in Rome or in the big industrial cities, that were non-citizens in the city where they have migrated. In fact a fascist law enforced in 1939 (law 1602/ 6 July 1939) and valid until 1961, prohibited migrations from the countryside to the cities. In the last twenty years foreign migrants became the new non-citizens.

Figure 1 - 1951: 2011: Number of dwellings, vacant dwellings, number of room and population in Italy

Source: authors' elaboration based on census data



Demographic transformations went together with an anthropological transformation of the country in a nation of home owners. The trend to ownership has been national, and in 2011 the percentage of families owning their apartment ranges between 69% in the south and 74% in the North-East. According to census data, housing in Rome reflects this national trend; in 1971 34.2% of apartments was owned and 61.5% rented, in 2001 owners are 64.6% and renters 28.3%, in 2011 the figures are respectively 71.4% and 18.6%. But it would be naive to consider such broad figures as an indicator of available housing. The housing market is heavily segmented and, at least since the 1980s (Brazzoduro 1997).

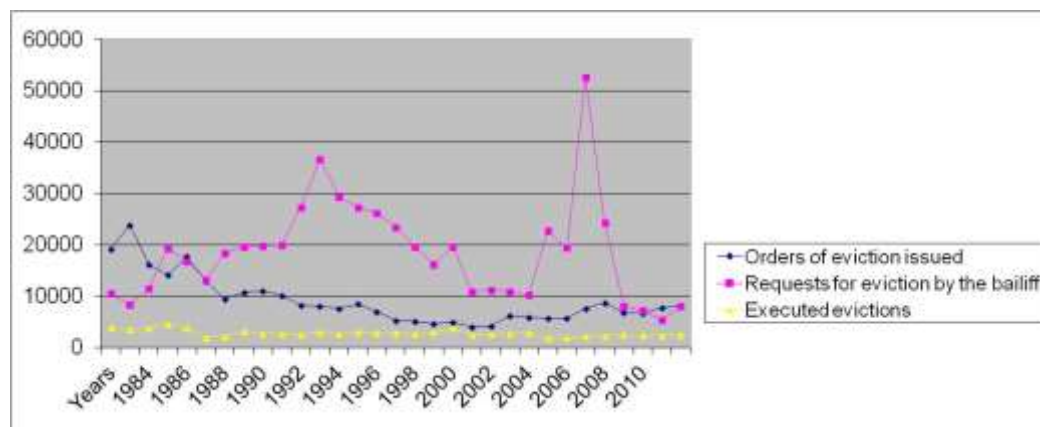
Between the mid-1970s and mid 1980s rent in Italy absorbed on average less than 15% of the salaries of employees and workers. The incidence of rent expenditure has risen slightly in the second half of the 1980s and in the first half of the 1990s had risen to about 18%. Since the mid-1990s rents have been rapidly and constantly on the rise, absorbing about 30% of the salaries of employees at the beginning of the new century. The cost of an apartment has remained relatively stable during the 1970s and the 1980s, requiring on average an investment of approximately seven years of an individual income. During the 1990s, the cost of an apartment began to increase steadily reaching 14 years of an individual income (Poggio, 2009). Since the full “liberalization” of the house market in 2001 and the introduction of the Euro, renting and selling prices have

more than doubled (Ares2000 2003). This means that average pensions are below the threshold of the average renting values.

The increased figures also forced the media to report on the housing emergency (see among others: De Vito, Fama 2016, Guccione and Reggio 2015). To complete the statistical picture it is worth considering the data on evictions. In Italy, in 2014, more than 36,000 families were evicted from their apartments, almost one hundred evictions per day. Between 1983 and 2013, along thirty years, 87,644 evictions were carried out in Rome, an average of 2,827 each year (see Figure 3). The vast majority of evictions was carried out for rent arrears. Rome is a city where thousands of evicted and people without possibility to have access to the rent market or social housing have self-organized themselves.

Figure 2 - 1983-2013 - Rome: Average monthly rent (Euros) in apartments 80-90 mq in semicentral areas

Source: authors' elaboration based on official statistics



At the beginning of the century, three major squatter movements emerged in Italy: *Coordinamento di Lotta per la Casa*, *Action* and *Blocchi Precari Metropolitani*⁸. All these groups operate through squatting and have shown to be able to renovate housing faster and more effectively than the official authorities can. In addressing basic needs and political objectives they play a role that often configures that of unofficial trade unions of homeless or of organized groups lobbying institutions. Whatever is the role played, there has been for long time no convergence in joint action (Mayer 2009). Though squatting tactics in Rome have been diverse, resulting in the production of idiosyncratic spaces such as Metropolis, Porto Fluviale, Spin Time Labs and Sans Papier, they all revolve around the definition of squatting. Within distinct political organizations, more or less top-down, and strategies, in favor or not of

⁸ Additionally, students housing activism has emerged since 2009 and other movements such as Comitato Popolare di Lotta per la Casa have been able of significant squatting practices (Parisi and Castellano 2014).

negotiations with authorities, the action of squatting abandoned spaces has been actively pursued. It is time to clarify more in detail the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of squatting.

Squatting an “abandoned” space

“A squatter is a person who occupies land or empty buildings without legal title and without paying rent” (Wates and Wolmar, 1980: 230). Quite often “[...] with the demise of the private landlord and with the social priorities and assumptions of local authorities as landlords, there exist whole sections of the community for whom any housing provision remains” (Ward 1976: 33).

Squatter settlements, once concentrated in Africa, Asia or Latin America or in the post-war big European capitals such as London or Paris are now a global phenomenon. Private property and housing policies, migrations and homelessness, frame the practice of squatting. “But when landowners and other adversaries refuse to act upon petitions, letters, demonstrations, and other mild measures; when they insist on exploitation to the point of starvation or exposure; when they repress the fair and just requests of individuals; then direct action in the form of land occupation, squatting, and rent strikes is often the only viable choice to further social development” (Corr 1999:9). Since the 1960s, squatting in Europe has been a tactic reflecting the drive on the part of social movements to develop and experiment alternative cultural practices (van der Steen, Katzeff, van Hoogenhuijze 2014). Though squatting an empty tenement building to live in, and squatting an empty factory to host cultural events, political meanings or experiment an alternative form of sociability may reflect different concerns, it is also true that the constituencies involved often overlap. Be that as it may, squatting is not possible if a series of actions are not set in motion: defining what is an abandoned property, find it and take it.

The conditions of possibility for the occurrence and development of squatting has been analyzed at a general level (Martínez 2013). Based on the Italian case we can rearticulate these conditions to frame collective squatting practices. In fact, to squat a site it is necessary to consider various elements:

1. The existence of abandoned buildings (a wasteful construction process in our case) that can be “recycled”.
2. The presence of deprived individuals that have no access to either material or immaterial capital, or both.
3. The action of squatting; that is, taking over an abandoned property.
4. The self-management of the squatted space.
5. The general framework of squatting necessity and rights in the society that create the conditions to re-imagine democracy.

Briefly, we have to consider the fact that squatting cannot happen without people that take the decision to enter a property or land illegally. The existence of population “interested” in squatting derives from a “state of necessity” that gives a justification for breaking the law (Fichett-Maddock 2016). The justification can be either political or based on a material need (van der Steen, Katzeff, van Hoogenhuijze 2014). The action of squatting implies taking over an abandoned property through several “micro-actions”, for example finding and identifying an abandoned house, entering it, establish water and electricity and so on (Common Place 2008). This means making a space suitable for people to live in it, also through maintenance works (Martínez 2013). Tackling the implementation of a squatting implies a decision-making process that is usually through self-management. The way squatted spaces are run has been analyzed also in detail (Piazza 2011). We will focus our analysis on the definition of abandoned spaces, usually not investigated carefully and the framework to conceptualize squatting that is usually addressed focusing on legalization, institutionalization, opportunities or policing (Martínez 2013, Pruijt 2003).

The question “what is an abandoned space” is interesting not only because it clarifies some terms that are fundamental to understand squatting practices, but also because it leads us to a more difficult question: through which mechanisms a space can be defined abandoned? The abandonment has a multi-scalar nature: it can refer to a single apartment, a building (that is the most common situation), an entire neighborhood, a piece of land or even a city. The word “abandon” in itself leads the discussion toward not an objective status of an object, but to the idea of giving up one's rights for a time, due to particular social relations (Mudu and Aureli 2016). The literature on current abandoned land has classified “temporarily obsolete abandoned or derelict sites” (TOADS) in various ways (Greenberg, Popper and West 1990). Typologies of vacant land has been proposed (Northam 1971). Nevertheless, the case of a direct production of abandonment not for the usual market, but produced directly as waste (something hardly applicable for previous periods) highlights the extent to which neoliberalism is totally indifferent to equity or social justice, and uniquely geared to profitability, for its own sake (Bowman and Pagano 2010). Capitalism has introduced a new set of abandoned lands associated to downturns between different cycles of investment such as underused parking lots, landfills, former industrial sites, infrastructural corridors, toxic landscape, derelict urban sites (Berger 2006).

Abandoned buildings are an interesting case of waste production. On the one hand, houses are sold at accelerated rates to secure the most profit. On the other hand, the exigencies of capitalist profit-making may lead to this factor of production being excreted (as a form of waste) into nearly completed buildings, barely finished apartment blocks, creating surplus housing that are partially excluded from capitalist exchange and social life. This waste production deserves some more analysis.

“Wasteful construction” and the commodification of urban space

In its pursuit of endless accumulation, capitalism is lead to annihilate space through time in order to stave off its recurrent over-accumulation problems. According to David Harvey (2003) the movement of capital can be viewed as sequence of “spatial-temporal fixes”. This concept seeks to evoke the contradictory nature of the process whereby it is only by embedding itself into the land that capital can move over it in search of maximum profit. Yet, as the rate of profit decreases that same built environment, from a solution to the problem of over-accumulation becomes a liability, the more so since the invested capital is “fixed” into the land and hence cannot be moved. Harvey stresses the crucial role of the state throughout the whole process of space production; first, it ensures the enlarged reproduction of capital by developing different forms of public assets such as affordable housing, public health care, public utilities and so forth; then, by actively participating in their privatization and commodification in order to open up new fields of accumulation to the “bogged down” capitalist. David Harvey defines “accumulation by dispossession”, which mainly occurs through privatization, as the predatory mechanism that supports capitalist development. According to Harvey accumulation by dispossession represents a way for capital to overcome the cyclical processes of over-accumulation by finding new opportunities to regain profitability.

This way out of capital must be taken with a pinch of salt and situated practices can maybe offer other way out solutions (Ong 2006). As Whiteside points out, “since dispossession as privatization is about opening up spaces, this theory is not positioned to account for why the state may instead close off spaces in reaction to crises” (Whiteside 2012). If we examine in detail the mechanisms whereby capital dominates the housing market, we can define the dispossession process as a contradictory one. It is *dispossession by abandonment*, by producing and accumulating abandoned places. The process of dispossession occurs not as a second stage of depredation after something has been produced and then has to be privatized or taken away from the poorest. It is a process that immediately starts from the beginning of the production process that already possesses the seeds of future depredation. Social and spatial assets heretofore conceived as being off-limits to profit-making initiatives are transformed into opportunities for capitalist exploitation. The consequence of this process has been the transformation of urban space into a commodity like any other thus triggering the senseless consumption of land through “wasteful construction” (*spreco edilizio*). “Wasteful construction” aptly illustrates the present paradoxical predicament generated by speculation whereby offer and demand are totally mismatched (Indovina 1973). “*Wasteful construction*” happens because of the economic centrality of construction. In a time of capital financial expansion the building sector has traditionally experienced disinvestments. Within the last decade the financial market crisis was fatally linked to the financial bubble and the promotion of socially useless, not requested new houses to adapt to a period of crisis. If we explore more in details this issue we find several cases of ‘wasteful constructions’ built but unavailable when 1)

having been built by private companies, they lack the relative infrastructures, electricity, water and sewage systems, etc.; 2) when owned by public institutions there is no clear procedures to give them to individuals or families or 3) when they provide the concrete base for virtual financial constructions, speculative investment funds. Rome shows many examples of the three cases. The first point has been a major issue for years because many buildings are not on the market because owners (usually private companies) do not want them to be. The second component is used irregularly to mismanage public assets whereas the third one has been one of the new features of the recent global financial crisis.

Abandoned buildings and areas are socially "communicated" as an abstract commodity, no longer identifiable with particular decisions and political patterns, they are depoliticized. The common sense discussion of the "housing crisis" of the "homeless emergency" as the result of a lack of housing, seldom takes into account the functioning logic and the evolution of the housing market. But, it is arguable to isolate the "abandoned buildings" from their production and reproduction (Indovina 1973). Various actors, that can be easily identified, actively conceal the responsibilities inherent to a particular market structure for housing and take decisions on behalf (habitually in collaboration) of a restricted elite of well-known speculators and *rentiers* often for a share of the ensuing profits. Once welfare provisions are eliminated, the housing "crisis" is transformed in a police problem. Laws on housing contribute to interpret the lack of offer of housing for the lower classes within a repressive framework against the homeless "criminals" (Dadusc, Dee E.T.C. 2014). The production of "wasteful construction" is a dynamic relationship between the forces which control the housing stock and the construction sector and the urban features in which they operate. The urban features in many southern European cities is related to corrupt system based on controlling the outsourcing of public functions.⁹ When the whole structure of housing for the lower classes is managed in openly corrupt, clientelist, nepotistic ways, it is obvious that a conflict against organized squatters has to be implemented through evictions, repression and arrests. This conflict is carried out not to enforce justice, or the rule of law, but to repress the organized resistance of the disenfranchised and to intimidate their potential supporters. We have argued here that wasteful construction originates in the conscious production decisions of capital and this in turn accounts for the failure of the existing system of to address housing needs of the lower classes. But a social response exists and involves thousands of people as autonomous producers of rights that renders the process the unequal distribution of basic resources visible. Furthermore, in analogy with wasteful production they are humans-as-waste (the case of the Romani is an

⁹ A case in point is the so-called "Roma mafia capitale" scandal in 2015. The Roman municipal government has been involved with crime syndicates to misappropriate and mismanage money earmarked for city services, in particular housing. See, among others, 659852394 *The Guardian*, "659852394 Rome mafia trial begins with 46 accused of systematic corruption", 5 November 2015 or Elisabetta Povoledo, "659852393 Italy Gasps as Inquiry Reveals Mob's Long Reach" *The New York Times*, 12 December 2014.

exceptionally vivid example, Maestri 2016), expelled from the status of workers and consumers (Yates 2011, Sassen 2014).

Squatting, on the contrary, advocates a “construction thrift” (*parsimonia edilizia*), whereby abandoned or otherwise underutilized buildings are reused and taken care of (see the discussion on Metropoliz below). The evolution of social resistance to the lack of low-income housing, the privatization of housing assets, which also benefited the middle classes, the lack of any intervention for the homeless population, and the search for alternative political and cultural forms, has taken the form of collective squatting in various European countries (SqEK 2013; SqEK, Cattaneo, Martinez 2014).

It thus can be argued that squats put into question four aspects of contemporary western societies: 1) the neoliberal project of accumulation by dispossession; 2) the efficiency of privatization and “free” market as optimum service providers; 3) the idea of private property as the cornerstone of capitalist sovereignty and 4) the “bourgeois” rule of law characterized by the contradiction between universal rights and their actual implementation through national and international legislation. If this is the case, the failure on the part of the state to recognize rights to an increasingly elusive and denationalized citizenry, could be an opportunity to imagine the possibility of a polity outside the state. This in turn would imply that state law need not to be the structuring element of rights and that approaching the vast phenomenon of squatting in purely juridical terms may actually efface its emergent character. Indeed, we would argue that the “grass-root” conflictive manipulation of the rule of law may open up the possibility of the emergence of a “non-state law”. Hence a fifth point that should be added to the previous aspects challenged by squats. This aspect is the idea of squatted home, as prefigurative of a different articulation between the private and the public spheres.

Imagining democracy through squatting

Today it would seem as if nation states do not really require the consensus of their citizens in order to function and thus the latter are facing the prospect of having to fare for themselves. And housing is a case in point. Hence, when discussing the current de-democratization process engendered by neoliberalism, we can consider two reference positions simplified by the work by Wendy Brown and Saskia Sassen. Brown notes that there are two fundamental consequences to the fact that states, within their eroding sovereignty in democracies, detach from being popular and supervenient. “On the one hand, democracy loses a necessary political form and container, and on the other, states abandon all pretenses of embodying popular sovereignty and hence carrying out the will of the people [...]” (Brown: 2010). But can citizens exist without a state to turn to? Indeed, is democratic self-government conceivable let alone possible?

Brown's gloomy prospects can somehow be counterbalanced by Saskia Sassen's argument that the current “unbundling” of state territorial sovereignty does not

necessarily imply the demise of the institution of citizenship, which she argues is inherently “incomplete” hence its articulation to the nation state is a *historically contingent development*, hence the modern notion of citizenship as inherited and formalized condition is apparently giving way to a “denationalized”, informal variant: “This reinvention takes the institution away from questions of nationality narrowly defined, and towards the enactment of a large array of particular interests [...]. In global cities, these practices also contain the possibility of directly engaging strategic forms of power.” (Sassen:2003:43).

Somewhat simplistically, we have described Brown’s approach as “gloomy” as opposed to the more “optimistic” Sassen. Maybe their differences might be better framed by taking into account the preferred spacial focus of their work. Brown’s critique of neoliberalism takes at its reference point the self-contained state-national level. At this level, Sassen’s “unbundling” of the relationship between state, citizenship, and territory generated by neoliberalism, is depicted as the “unraveling” of the demos; the democratic public sphere, and hence its inhabitant, the democratic citizen, vanishes and is substituted by the market-place that can only be inhabited by competing economic actors, who have few non-negotiable rights, dwindling entitlements and guarantees. Everything and, most importantly, anybody is expendable. In other words there is literally no place for democratic deliberation (Brown 2015). But, more important from our perspective, is her focus on the active role of the heretofore democratic state in bringing about the demise of the polity. The state retains its sovereign power but its legitimacy is based on a logic of economic performance, not on its upholding of the rights of its citizens. Hence, while individual and collective rights are increasingly rendered conditional, dependent as they are upon the individual’s performance in the pervasive market, the relative obligations towards the state are still enforced. In other words the state is not accountable to those who are subject to its authority. Democracy as we know it is thus hollowed out. Brown’s gloomy diagnosis of western liberal democracy is claustrophobic, because the notion of citizenship in positive legal terms, (state) laws constitute citizens, who are empowered as result, which implies that such empowerment is conditioned by the “goodwill” of the state. In other words one only has those rights that are already regulated by the laws of the land. And since the state has granted them, the state can very well take them away, by protecting the process of wasteful construction and dispossession, for example.

From Sassen’s perspective the disappearance of the democratic polity is really the unbundling, the coming apart, of the three transhistorical components, territory, authority and rights, whose institutional isomorphism, which is now unraveling as a result of neoliberal globalization, is interpreted as one possible version of their articulation. Hence, in terms of the relationship between the state and citizenship, it is their mutual national embeddedness that is unraveling. This in turn reveals the inherently incomplete nature of citizenship, which when it was institutionally anchored to the national state allowed the latter to accommodate new right-bearing subjects into its fold while today, with the erosion of its territorial sovereignty, leads to the emergence of forms of

denationalized citizenship practices (Sassen 2008). What distinguishes such practices is that while they are still located in what has been historically constructed as the national level their claims are not expressed in terms of allegiance to the national state, since the latter is unable or unwilling to recognize their legitimacy.

It should be obvious why we would be drawn to residential squatting and use it as an emblem of what it may mean to live in a state-less society *today, in our neoliberal present*. To occupy an abandoned building, or a plot of land nobody uses, in order to make a home for oneself and for (and with) others, tells the lie to one of the ideological foundations of the modern state, which in securing its legitimacy by protecting property as a universal right, conflates the home one owns to live in, with a building whose owners let (or not) for a profit. In the process one's home becomes a commodity just like the building owned by developers, which like any commodity can be sold, used as collateral or abandon. Yet the difference between the home one lives in and the building someone owns is quite substantial; the former provides the shelter of one's basic autonomy as a human being, the latter makes this basic prerequisite of human life conditional. The former is one fundamental resource for the nurturing of one's subjectivity; the latter is a way to exploit, hence wage power over, the material means of re/production of the subjectivity of someone else. Hence, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf (2004 [1928]), having a place of one's own enables one's ability to actively and meaningfully engage with one's peers socially and *politically*.

Such being our assumptions, we would further argue that residential squatting as prefigurative politics is particularly stimulating *today, in our present neoliberal predicament*.

This said, it seems to us that juxtaposing Brown's vanishing demos, with Sassen's denationalized citizens practices could generate some interesting implications well beyond housing or squatting; one being that once the public domain of politics vanishes, where does the private go? Or to put it in another way, once the separation between public and private spheres becomes ever so elusive as in the vanishing demos or in the denationalized conflictive spaces of the global city, how can one decide whether a claim is a right or a privilege? Who is to decide whether a struggle is partial, partisan, or self-serving (or conservative) or is a potentially empowering attempt to practice a politics of equality and dignity for all?

Squatters as law-breaking legislators?

The current trend of neoliberal policies on housing is to converge toward defending speculators and subsequently to enforce laws against squatters. This situation, where occupants are tolerated for a time but not given rights of tenure, represents a rather unusual pattern of routinization without regularization (Smart 2001). Yet, squatting as such questions the law *of the state* as the structuring element of rights. A right in this context can only be

interpreted as “the capacity to call upon the collective” to stand behind one’s claim to benefit from one’s possession, without a property title (Bromley 1991: 94).

Hence, at the “grass-root” level the conflictive manipulation of the rule of law opens up the possibility of the emergence of a “non-state law”, based for example on “common law”, something that lies between the liberal juridical forms and the feudal consuetudinary norms. Some authors have qualified these anti-authoritarian forms of resistance as operating in a law-making fashion, creating ‘*hidden law*’ that evades the spotlight of the system, is non-hierarchical, non-representative and non-coercive (Finchett-Maddock 2016).

On our part we would argue that by turning a property someone has abandoned into an object owned by nobody, squatting potentially produces an a-legal other, which is alien to the law of the state (Mudu and Aureli 2016).

Squatters in this sense would be an-archic legislators, where the act of squatting represents a political gesture: reclaiming democracy from the state and freedom from capital and thus the right of not being governed or at least the right of not being governed in this way.

There is an interview where Arjun Appadurai makes an interesting remark about the politics of visibility of squatters in Mumbai/Bombay:

One of the troubles of being poor, and certainly with being homeless, in Bombay is that you are in permanent view. A very large part of the production of locality, of the work of the imagination, of the labor and vision of social reproduction for the disenfranchised, for the homeless, for the poor in places like Bombay is how to cope with being permanently and inescapably on view. (Appadurai 2003b: 50)

The relevant political contrast here is visibility versus publicity. The homeless condition, as the marker of the lack of autonomy, is here epitomized by the condition of being subject to uncontrolled exposure, to be seen without being recognized. To be seen is to be controlled, disciplined, exploited, made redundant and expelled. If visibility is to be seen as a redundant presence deprived of subjectivity, the first step towards regaining autonomy is to become invisible, to establish the material conditions that allow you to control when and where to be seen as a human subject, and hence to redraw the boundaries between the private and the public domain in your own terms.¹⁰ It would seem that this is what can be gleaned when entering Metropolis.

¹⁰ “If you cannot be sure about the walls that separate your intimate sphere from the wider world and about the roof that protects you from the elements, then the physical basis for citizenship — understood as a series of spatial activities — is highly circumscribed.” (Appadurai 2013). Accessed 18 Apr 2016. <<https://placesjournal.org/article/housingand-hope/>>

Metropoliz: Challenging the Partition of the Sensible

A former salami factory in the outskirts of Rome, Metropoliz was squatted by B.P.M. (Blocchi Precari Metropolitani) activists in 2009. The site originally squatted by activists, together with over one hundred people of different nationalities, included the grounds of an abandoned car dealership nearby. Later that year, in accordance with the activists, a group of Romani from Eastern Europe having been evicted from a previously squatted factory, moved into the car dealership grounds. In the summer of 2012, they were again evicted by the police and decided to move into Metropoliz where they now live.

Back in 2009, Romani's participation to the squatter movement attracted the attention and solidarity of researchers and activists.¹¹ Workshops and action research projects were soon developed by artists architects and researchers to help the inhabitants in renovating and decontaminating the grounds and the buildings. These series of projects led to a sci-fi docu-fiction (Space Metropoliz), directed by Fabrizio Boni and Giorgio De Finis, developed and shot in cooperation with the residents, the whole production process took more than a year and the film was finally released in 2013. In the meantime in 2012, having completed the shooting of the film Giorgio De Finis proposed to the residents and to the B.P.M activists to use the artwork built for the set as the first nucleus of an art museum to be hosted on the premises. The project was accepted and the Maam (*Museo dell'altro e dell'altrove metropolitano*) was born. So far, the project has been rather successful and has become one of the most important artistic venues in Rome attracting avant-garde artists from Italy and abroad who develop and donate their site-specific art work to the museum and in the process contribute to the ongoing renovation of the squatted factory. Metropoliz shows an hybrid nature, which apparently allowed activists, residents and artists to frame their respective trajectories as articulations of a shared project.

Hence, according to the activists:

Metropoliz_mestizo autonomous zone is a liberated space, an experience of grass-root reclamation of a former factory [...] where Peruvians, Africans, Ukrainians, Roma and Italians live together and struggle for their right to live with dignity.¹²

A statement that somehow reverberates in the self-description of the “museum”, which contrary to its institutional counterparts:

[...] transforms its spatial marginality, its utter lack of funding, its lack of purity (Maam is an inhabited museum, a “real” museum) into a resource. By putting in

¹¹ Romani in Italy have rarely actively participated in social movement struggles; cf. Mudu and Chattopadhyay 2017.

¹² <http://metropoliz.noblogs.org> retrieved, 06/20/2015.

motion a virtuous relationship between art and the city and between art and life, Metropoliz will have at its disposal [...] a precious collection of art works that will contribute to protect it from the always looming threat of forced eviction. Maam seeks to transform the whole factory into a super-object and into subject of collective art. Artists are invited to lend their free contribution by interacting with the space, its residents, and fellow artists.¹³

Though different in tone, both statements articulate a “will to hybridity”, a desire to collapse or at least to blur social and cultural differences, indeed that crossing social and cultural boundaries can open up a whole realm of possibilities for collective empowerment and cultural innovation. To be sure, the activists stress that the nature of their project is a collective and oppositional pursuit whose goal is the reclaiming their right to the city, while the “curator” of the museum highlights that the museum's site-specific artwork, in and of itself contributes to the residents' struggle.

The ethnographically intriguing aspect lies precisely in this apparently negligible difference, more specifically it lies in how the project of blurring social and cultural differences is practiced.

Let us take a second look at how art at Metropoliz can contribute to the political objectives of its inhabitants. In other words how can art forestall their forced eviction?

First, because of its cultural and market value; second, because Maam is, in the words of the curator, “a counter-museum” that seeks to transform the whole factory into a work of art, and as a result attracts patrons who normally would never dream of entering an illegally occupied building and yet, each Saturday (when the Maam is open) they do come, and while looking at the art work they come in direct contact with the residents and discover that they are indeed fellow human beings and might be sensitized to their plight.¹⁴ Hence, at the most immediate level, art is used as a sort of “trap”; the public, intrigued by the art discovers that law-breakers cannot be that bad if they live surrounded by valuable works of art.

At another level though, the aesthetic of the Maam is very much dependent on its location, and that it is “inhabited”. The curator is very keen stressing that the “relational” nature of the “museum” is also what makes it unique. Here the adjective “relational” can refer both to the juxtaposition of works of different artists, that sometimes results in their collaborating with one another, and to how art is experienced by the patrons; as a way to enter, however fleetingly, in contact with the “other” which in this case is both the location, the actual factory, but also those who live in it.

¹³ <http://www.museomaam.it/cose-il-maam/>, retrieved, 06/20/2015.

¹⁴ Interview with Giorgio De Finis, June 9, 2015.

Visibility is then very much what Metropoliz is about. Indeed, what to show to whom and to what purpose is an ongoing concern for all those involved in the squat; the residents, the activists and the “curator” of the “museum”. And what can or should be shown very much varies depending on who does the showing. If you talk to the activists, for example, you might have the feeling that for them being visible implies something quite different from how the Maam understands it.

Back in 2009 the B.P.M. chose to squat the former factory not just because it was empty, but because they knew that a subsidiary of Salini-Impregilo, a major Italian general contractor, was planning to develop the site. Hence, their initiative was not just a grass-root solution to the housing crisis, it was also a statement regarding the origins of that same crisis, those who profited from it and the complicit role of local government in the whole process,¹⁵ in other words they made the connection between wasteful construction, abandoned spaces, commodification of urban spaces and dispossession public. Moreover, by squatting the former factory they not only sought to make that connection visible, they also pointed to its inherent conflictive nature; and in so doing, they did not only identify the enemy, they also prefigured the kind of community best suited to confront it. Namely, a socially and culturally diverse one.

What should we make of all this?

Well, if the homeless condition can be understood as being subject to uncontrolled exposure, to be visible without being seen, the “inhabited museum” generates a space that constrains all those who enter it to *physically* take into account the existence of the other and to “find their feet” vis-à-vis one another.

Probably the French philosopher Jacques Rancière would not be entirely at ease with our reading of his work, but we would say that finding one's feet is very much at the center of what he argues art and politics are about.¹⁶ They both challenge what he calls the *partition of the sensible* that structures the social order by allocating bodies, objects, roles, discourses, feelings and perceptions to their proper place and functions. Art and politics are acts that may disrupt such partitions. They both prompt us all to find our feet once we realize that normative reality involves an excess which it not so much excludes as does not acknowledge; it is there but is not seen, heard but not understood. The virtual at the center of reality. While art is the act that reveals the virtual within the partition of the sensible, making the virtual real, thus redrawing the borders of this same partition, is the always unfinished business of politics.

Thus, squatting becomes a possible stepping stone for the re/appropriation of the right to have rights in common, independently from the state. The capacity to self-produce not only proper residential spaces, but also public spaces

¹⁵ Interview with Irene Di Noto, June 15, 2015.

¹⁶ For example, Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, London: Continuum, 2010.

external to the law of the market, is at odds with the neoliberal model of urban governance.

To the extent that our neoliberalized present is characterized by the fading away of the imagined national polity of formally equal citizens, by the blurring of public space where they can exercise their rights, and by the emergence of an ever-expanding redundant humanity, the hybridity of Metropolis/Maam could help us imagine the kind of a political gesture that may generate a non-state public space in *constant flux* through the subversion and re-articulation, of the “private” (Appadurai 2003a). For the privacy of the squatters is not the same as the privacy of the homeowner and, least of all, of the developer. For the simple reason that it is the result of a collective project, and the individual “home” thus acquired is most typically the result of the joint efforts of fellow squatters in the most concrete terms; whether it’s a plot of land, an empty factory or an office building, the allocation of space where families and individuals can set up, or build, their living quarters, requires lengthy negotiations, implies the agreement on some shared norms based on the ethical commitment to a minimum of reciprocity.¹⁷ In other words, the squatter’s home is not the proverbial “castle” that isolates the household from the outside world but an example of that “production of locality” that empowers the disenfranchised to meaningfully engage, indeed to imagine, an autonomous sociability (Appadurai 1996). Which is what having a room of one’s own is really all about, a place where Woolf’s Mary Benton, while looking out from her window onto the streets of the imperial city, can piece together the genealogy of her subjection. And she can do so precisely because that “private” space is part and parcel with a *collective* project of empowerment always in the making. And so if we like to argue that squatters may have a little of Mary Benton in them, it is because through their collective action they invent spaces that substantiate the unfixed, contested and multiple identities in places considered abandoned, wasted or not eligible for an urban political presence (Massey 2005). But in so doing, they also challenge the neat partition of the sensible that locks the private sphere in a zero-sum relationship with the public domain, with the former conceived as the sphere of the mere human who has no rights, and the latter that of the citizen whose empowerment is conditioned to being the lawful subject of the state (Rancière 2004). More than a claim to the right to housing, or to the city, squats would thus embody the right to have rights, or better still the “right” to a life in common not predicated on the sovereignty of the state and its social order.

Conclusions

Arguing that squatters are an-archic legislators is a metaphor and, like all metaphors its heuristic value rests on its ability to question the taken for granted partition between the world “as is” and how it could be. Hence dubbing squatters as an-archic legislators is to a certain extent an ironic provocation. As

¹⁷ For the relevance of self-build infrastructures in empowering squatter communities, see Amin, 2014; for the relevance of autonomous norms within squats cf. Finchett-Maddock, 2016.

a general rule, actually existing squatters do not draft laws (some do, when they get elected to local or national office, but this need not concern us here). Yet laws are also a way to conjure an imagined community into a permanent and transcendental entity vis-à-vis its living members. Yet, as we have tried to argue, our present neoliberal predicament is putting into question the permanence of the state “democratic” polity, and from this perspective Brown’s “vanishing demos” or Sassen’s “umbudling” of territory, authority and rights, are two different ways of describing this process, whose consequence seems to be the creation of a constantly expanding “surplus” population. If this is the general trend, “wasteful construction” and the related production of abandoned urban space is one way in which this surplus is materially produced in Italy (and elsewhere). Furthermore, to the extent that wasteful construction and abandoned spaces coexist with homelessness, leads us to interpret this paradox as structural and would vindicate our belief that the state-market dicotomy is a fictive one, that masks the Janus-faced reality of power. Hence, to our mind, collective squatting not only clearly exposes the limits of the property’s “social function” under “free market” dynamics but it challenges state democracy by disrupting the partition of the sensible enforced by the “rule of law”.

In what sense squatters may represent a practical form of citizenship engaging strategic forms of power? At the most immediate level they are an attempt to resist neoliberalism’s privatization and commodification of public assets such as housing and cultural venues; at the institutional level, by claiming that “rights are to be conquered and practiced”, squatters implicitly challenge one of the cornerstones of state sovereignty, namely private property; and finally, at deeper political level squatters implicitly put into question the law of the state as the structuring element of universal rights, i.e, the liberal democratic arrangement.

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Activist panel “Housing activism: beyond the West”

**Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów, A Város Mindenkié,
Dikmen Vadisi Barınma Hakkı Bürosu,
Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente**

This final piece provides the transcription of the Activist Panel¹ held at the conference “Housing Activism: Beyond the West” on the 27th of May, 2016 at Södertörn University, Sweden. It includes the presentations of the four guest organisations attending the panel:

- * Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów / The Committee of Defence of Tenants’ Rights (Poland)
- * A Város Mindenkié / The City is for All (Hungary)
- * Dikmen Vadisi Barınma Hakkı Bürosu/ Office of Housing Rights in Dikmen Vadisi (Turkey)
- * Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente/ Popular Organization of Independent Left “Francisco Villa” (Mexico)

Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów /The Committee of Defence of Tenants’ Rights (Poland)

I am in this *Committee of the Defence of Tenants’ Rights*. And I am going to speak a little bit about the housing situation in Poland and our background. And then my comrade is going to talk about tenants’ activism and what people do, about our history of our tragic situation. I am mainly concerned with the city of Warsaw.

During World War II the city, especially the inner city was completely destroyed and there was no place for people to live. Thousands and thousands of people were killed, including owners of buildings. Thousands and hundreds of thousands people were homeless, and what does this mean? After the war, people had to rebuild houses; usually they had to do it themselves, with their bare hands. Two things happened simultaneously public housing programs started only later, but in the meantime people were rebuilding the city with their own hands. After World War II there was a regime change, let’s say, and the formally called People’s Republic of Poland was installed. Different solutions to

¹ The panel discussion has been transcribed and edited before publishing. We would like to thank the participants for providing us with visual material to accompany the text.

solve the housing problem caused mainly by the war including many homeless were implemented.

The first solution was that people moved into the many buildings that were abandoned and empty. Some of them were told that if they helped to rebuild the building that was damaged, they could live there legally and permanently, and it would ultimately be able to call it their flat. Other people were assigned to live in these abandoned buildings. In addition, some people were sent to live in specific apartments by the city and by the state. They had to pay rent to a private landlord. So firstly, there was public housing that remained public housing and secondly, there was private housing, but tenants were forced onto the owners, who had no choice. Thirdly, the city and the state started a public housing programme to build new dwellings.

During the so called Polish People's Republic we had very specific housing patterns. We had public housing in buildings that did not exist before the war, and we had public housing in buildings that were privately owned before the war. This is important and you will know in a little bit why.

In 1989, there was a change of the economic and social regime in Poland as the country transformed into so-called market capitalism. One of the main ideas was that everything that was publicly owned or owned by the state or remains of communism, should be privatized. In case of buildings that were built after the war a lot of tenants were able to buy them for a fraction of the market value in order to privatize the housing. But not everybody was able to buy their apartment or they were not put out on the market available for tenants to buy.



Picture 1. Demonstration organized by the Committee in January 2017. Photo: Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów

After 1989 some of the people that were tenants in public housing units became owners and the ones that were less well-off remained in the public housing, a lot of these buildings were of very poor quality. In my neighbourhood 70% of the public housing units do not have heating; a lot of them don't have bathrooms in the flats. So it is a very bad standard. To make things worse, they decided to re-privatize some buildings. Which means theoretically to give it back to old owners and there are very few still alive. So mostly it was a matter of finding the needle in the haystack. When they were returning back buildings to previous owners, and this is something that is still in the process, occasionally somebody who was a child of a former owner received it, but usually the family sold it to real estate developers and investors.

The other thing is that a very large portion the houses to be returned in Warsaw (so called return) ended up in wrong hands due to fraud schemes in which people falsified documents to make legal claims. Still today people are being displaced by the privatization process and there is a very large gentrification going on in the city, which means that people are being subject to high rent increases, they are losing their homes, they are being evicted, harassed.

Another person in the group:

Back in 2009 when we started, this whole problem of the tenants was ignored in public discourse. It was said it was the tenants' fault, "they can't find a job, they cannot adapt to the market economy", stuff like that. So the basic thing was to

bring the issue to the table and I think after so many years of protests and actions, I think, this also happened and is something that has changed the political landscape. Nowadays whenever politicians say that this problem doesn't exist or that it is the tenants' own fault, almost everyone knows that there is fraud going on and that the buildings are re-privatized in an unlawful way. For example there were owners who tried to evict people and our actions brought attention of the media and helped to stop these processes. And those tenants there have been fighting for three years or more and have already managed to challenge many of the claims of the owners. Other things we have been engaged in have been neighbourhood demonstrations and bringing the issues of tenants' rights to the local authorities and picketing or blockades or occupations of the local offices.



Picture 2. Demonstration organized by the Committee in February 2017. Photo: Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów

What we have been trying to do is to shift the frame, so to speak. The government wanted us to play a role that would be convenient to them, and to be able to talk to us as representatives. We did not want to play that role, we always push it a little bit further in our demands, and we are not keeping with what is legal. At the same time, we are also advising the tenants on their legal situation, but we are never limiting ourselves to what is legal. We always push for issues that are not currently covered by the law. And we try not to become this domesticated social partner that the city would like to have and some activism that is not dangerous for them. So one example is the thing that is going to happen on Monday, as a result of one of our protests in the City District's Office. The politicians invited one of the representatives of the tenants and they want to find a place for us to find a frame in the social partnership. And they say "You have to come alone" and I didn't tell them that we are coming as a group of tenants. So we refuse to be representatives, we will come with all the people.

So these are some of the activities we have been engaging with, gathering neighbours and informing them about their rights. We found out that the best way to mobilize people is to start talking about what is going to happen to them, in their buildings. There are some lists published of housing that is going to be re-privatized. First the government was not going to provide those lists and it was secret. But after many actions organized by the tenants' associations these were finally made public. So what we do is that we go to these addresses where people are going to be subjected to these sometimes very violent re-privatization processes, informing them on what is going to happen to them and how to prepare for their struggle.



Picture 3. A demonstration organized in 2011 to the memory of Jolanta Brzeska. Photo: Komitet Obrony Praw Lokatorów

This is one of the actions we did [referring to a picture of Jolanta Brzeska]. She was a tenant activist that later got murdered for her activity. We suspect that she was murdered because she was discovering some facts about the illegal re-privatization process. But this didn't prevent people from being active, quite the opposite. Her murder did not have the effect that the mafia expected. Among others because of our demonstrations, her case became very well-known throughout the city.

These are some of the things we managed to achieve as well as blocking some law initiatives. The city was continuously trying to implement some changes in the law that would make it more difficult for us to challenge rent rises and stuff like this. In some situations we managed to block these initiatives. And some of the practical things we have been doing are eviction blockades. We have had more than 150 successful eviction blockades, and they brought people together. Sometimes it's even possible to block with legal actions. And actions combined with legal actions bring activists together. And in many cases our activities were successful because there are young and old people and the cops didn't want to attack old people, they felt awkward doing that.

A Város Mindenkié/The City is for All (Hungary)

I am from the *City is for all* group in Hungary. I will start with introducing myself and how I got into the group and then I will continue with talking about the group. y story will allow you to see how politics work in Hungary and how easy it is to become homeless and how hard it is to get out of it.



Picture 4. The *City is for all* birthday party in 2011. Photo: Körmendy Tunde

Until 2008 I worked 200 km away from Budapest as a worker. And in 2008 that factory was destroyed by Hungarian politics. I was fired and almost everyone else was fired. Earlier 22.000 people were working in that factory and now only 500. The factory was demolished eventually. And then I got divorced in 2009 and I moved to Budapest, the capital. And that's where I tasted the life of homeless people. I was living in a self-build shed in the woods. In 2013 the owner of the territory next to my place decided to go to the police because he argued that I devalued his property. So they wanted to get rid of me and demolished my place. That was the time when someone told me about the *City is for all*. But at that time the politicians already hated the *City if for all* or

feared them. So initially without the group, we started to lobby for public housing and social housing units. But I also got lucky because at that time there was a local election. And because of local elections they wanted to get votes, and it was good publicity for them to provide me with housing so they gave me a social housing unit that was full with mould and the rent increased every month. I was actually allocated a public housing unit in a building which they had planned to demolish for 20 years. The local authority did not spend anything on the building but it did demand us to pay rent and increased the rent as well. And I have been living in that flat ever since. That's about it about myself and now I want to speak about what we do, what we want to achieve with the *City is for all*.

First, that everyone has housing, and we are against evictions which is of much importance because in some of the districts of Budapest, there has been an increasing number of evictions. And we also want the laws that criminalized homelessness to be abolished, because someone that lives on the streets should at least not be harassed by anyone for it. And in terms of how we operate: There has been an increasing number of homeless people in Budapest. In order to do more work we are distributing the work among various working groups. One of our groups is the housing working group that is working against the evictions of tenants. Then there is the advocacy working group that focuses on people living in the sheds. Then there are several other working groups. We have a working group for internal matters that also deals with personal conflicts. And then there is the street lawyer group which has been integrated in the group before but now has become a specific organization. And we also try to organise activist cells, other cells in cities outside of Budapest.

I would like to talk about the tactics and strategies now. For example, we negotiate with local authorities and some of them do engage in discussions with us while some others don't. We also provide free legal aid, free of charge lawyers come every Friday from 3 to 5 to a square in Budapest to help homeless people that need it. We also provide free training for homeless people that can help them to get a job or and be more effective. We also organize meetings and picnics in green areas. And for some of these shed brothers we help to get housing. We also organize annual marches about homelessness and evictions. We also organize other types of protests and utilize civil disobedience as well. And we also organized blockades against evictions. Sometimes they are successful.



Picture 5. Demonstration of the *City is for all* in 2015. Photo: B. Molnár Béla

And finally I will talk about corporations or coalitions we are engaging in. We work for example together with the Hungarian anti-poverty network, we also work with the movement of workfare workers, workfare problems. And then there is organizations that were essentially created by The City is for All, that started within the group but have now become separate organizations. The first is the street lawyers' organization, which I am very proud of because they are increasingly successful in defending people's rights. We have 12 voluntary lawyers. They are lobbying local authorities to get access to public housing units in very bad shape, units that the local authorities have already abandoned and offering to renovate it and make it available for homeless people to live there. And there is also an organization called the School of Public Life which is providing training and free workshops for members. And finally there is the photography and activism project which trains our members to make nice photographs. And rely on our own images. But I want to add that we are independent from parties even though we are not independent of politics and we are developing from the bottom up. And 80 % of our members are homeless and 20 % are allies. And if we want to get something done or if we negotiate with those in power, we want to make sure that not the allied members

represent the group, but those people we are fighting for. But allied members do help the members to be prepared for such meetings and negotiations.

Dikmen Vadisi Barınma Hakkı Bürosu/Office of Housing Rights in Dikmen Vadisi (Turkey)

The name of our organization is the *Office of Housing Rights* which was established in Dikmen Valley, Ankara. My friend and I will provide you with some insider information about how this office is organized and about the current situation of the activism. Before I start I should say that I am an architect and now doing my PhD in architecture. My first encounter with the Office of Housing Rights actually dates back to 2013 and an event called “Summer school for children” also organized by the Office. I volunteered as a teacher there and was conducting some workshops called “Children and architecture” with children living in Dikmen Valley. Since that time, I participated in actions with the Office.

Before I start I want to explain you where Dikmen valley is, in Ankara, the capital of Turkey. It is very close to the city center, approximately 20 minutes by bus. Dikmen Valley has a long history of squatters settling there. Actually in 1970’s there was a rural migrational movement within Turkey, and some rural people from different parts of Turkey just settled there and occupied the land. And the profiles of these migration families are really wide-ranging, politically and ethically, religiously. The point is that Dikmen is heterogeneous in many different aspects. Like all squatter settlements, Dikmen Valley has also suffered from urban transformation projects, conducted by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality. We are familiar with these kinds of processes, because of the general neoliberal politics of the government. The local government tries to transform many squatted spaces. In 1993, the first urban development project started for Dikmen Valley and the municipality divided this valley into five parts which they tried to implement this split stage by stage. The first three stages were executed, but the last two could not be realised. Partly because of our activism and the resistance in the remaining two sections. This is 10 years of resistance in the area. How the emergence of the resistance dates back to 2006. In this year, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality established some consensus offices in the periphery of the neighbourhood. Their aim was to offer people houses in the periphery of the city. They want to move these people away from the city but they want to give them a house.

Some people just accepted this offer, but others did not, and those who rejected the offer from the municipality, they organized with each other and they established The Office for Right to Shelter, against this approach of the municipality. They made two main decisions after they established the office.

Firstly they decided to demolish office of consensus set up by the municipality, which is what they did. One night they prepared and one night they destroyed the office. Secondly, they decided to resist for their right to shelter. And if the development project was successful, they would only settle for a house on their own land and they would not move to the periphery of the city, they would not move out. The office played an important role within this procedure. The second critical juncture in the history of Dikmen Valley was in 2007 when the municipality organized a really harsh attack against the squatters' settlement. They destroyed the whole the squats. Because of this action, the organization resisted, they really fought for their houses and won that battle in 2007. And this was really encouragement for the people. After 2007 the office began to flourish in terms of activities. The first thing that the office did was to select the representatives from the neighbourhood. And these representatives established a kind of neighbourhood assembly or people's assembly within Dikmen Valley. This could be seen as an example of self-governance because people directly decide for their future, what will happen for their neighbourhood, they got together and discussed all of the problems, all of the possible solutions, how we could resist, what could be done.



Picture 6. The Office demonstrating against the urban transformation project of the area of Dikmen Valley. Photo: Dikmen Vadisi Barınma Hakkı Bürosu

The self-governance is really important and especially the Sunday meetings. All of the tenants gather at the office and discuss their tactics and strategies against the urban development projects. The actions of the office are not limited to Sunday meetings or other house meetings. All activities are based on the principle of the right to shelter. For example the representatives of the assembly visited all of the houses and they informed people, like in the polish case, about their right to shelter and they try to organize people. Other activities are about creating a sense of community, giving the people the feeling that there is life here, yes, they are poor but it is life, and we don't want to get rid of our life, we are living here all together, we are different people with various backgrounds, but we all live together. The most important thing is to show the municipality and government that there is a vivid community here. One of the most important events that has been organised for that aim is the neighbourhood festival. The first one was organized in 2009 and it was mainly addressing the Ankara municipality. Other festivals are commercial events, but we were against those festivals and we said, there is an alternative and we will organize a free festival, where all people can come together and be entertained and enjoy themselves. The second important event we organized is the summer school for children. And this is also meant as a criticism of the government's politics of education. We advocate for free education, we want all of the people to have equal rights to equal education, some of children - rich people's children - can go summer courses and summer school, but here in our neighbourhood we also give children the opportunity. Therefore, we organized a summer school every year and including volunteer teachers. A third activity is the women's house in the resistance in Dikmen Valley. We see women as leaders of the resistance and we arrange some activities especially for women. For example on the 8th of March, the international women's day. Our activities are, however, not limited to our neighbourhood. We also participate in different public and social demonstrations and meetings in the city, because in the process of 10 years this right to shelter activism also evolves into the right to a good life. Hence, we participate in every mobilization for the right for education, for workers' rights, for women's rights. One example is when my university they tried to demolish the forest within the campus and the office was there to just support protesters against the demolition. So we see that in different parts of the city and also in different parts of Turkey, Dikmen valley - the office - was there to support the resistance. Now I am giving the word to my friend.

Another person from the same group:

I am a master degree student and I am an activist in Dikmen valley. I started with them five years ago. My friend already shared common experiences and general information, but I would also like to give you a little bit more detail

about our tactics and about our strategies, what do we do and how we could continue for 10 years.

Just to give you an idea about the area: there are around 1000 houses in our area. The people there are still living together, although they are very different. We don't have a homogeneous society, their religion, their language, their lifestyle, culture, everything! And it was a big problem for us in the beginning, because they don't want to sit together, they don't want to talk with each other. So we decided to just talk about housing rights and that's it. We do not need to talk about their culture, religion, their language, their lifestyle. Then we started to explain for them that the main problem for us is that the municipality wants to throw us out. But we all have a right to shelter, and if you want your right we cannot care about religion, lifestyle, culture etc. And housing is really the main problem for them, because they would not be able to move. Because they can't afford an apartment, and they can't buy an apartment. And even those who could said "no we don't want to go", because we don't want to change our life, we don't want to change our home, because we have memories here, and we built our home here, so we don't want to go. So the first step was to establish the right to housing and the next was to improve the living conditions. For example since the municipality dropped the attempt to evict us, we are without transportation and we tried to fix this problem. I mean to clean the valley, to find transportation for us, especially for old people. At the assembly we have one representative from each neighbourhood, who reports issues raised by the tenants and reports back to them.

We have 7 neighbourhoods in our area and everyone has a leader and its own assembly, and if they have a problem they decide together and solve it and also help each other in their daily routine. Our second tactic is the Sunday meeting. Every Sunday we meet in our office for 10 years and discuss our agenda, decide our actions and make a new plans for the new week. What we can do, what we will do if somebody got a problem in our area and our most important strategy is to not exclude anybody from the process. And I can say for me, we are successful with the Sunday meetings and in the assembly, because we still work and we can still meet after more than 10 years, and we still have a plan for the next week or the next month. But I can say we are less successful in control of people and control of leaders because sometimes it can become a problem in terms of sharing work. And yes, we have been organising, but the last three years we haven't had a formal organization, and for me to be honest: we don't need an organization, we have our leaders, we have our newspaper, we have our assembly, and it works like this. We have struggled in our area for 10 years now. We didn't have to change our area and we didn't have to go somewhere else, and now we have a cooperative. And we can say that the municipality has attacked our area for more than 10 years. They have burned our office three times, but we built it again and now we are writing a book about the story of Dikmen Valley.

**Frente Popular Francisco Villa de Izquierda Independiente/
Popular Organization of Independent Left "Francisco Villa"
(Mexico)**

In the mid-twentieth century, Mexico experienced both an intensification of industrialization and discouragement of farming. This led to displacement and concentration of the productive forces in the main cities, giving birth to urbanization, a new phenomenon that brought serious problems, unsolved by the Government, in which the population grew excessively, being forced to survive within the informal sectors of economy and to increase the belts of misery in the periphery of the big cities.

In the early eighties, the first neoliberal policies are implemented in Mexico and with its fever of privatization, more than one thousand companies were sold to private corporations, and the Mexican government, obeying the plans of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, allowed the economy to be commanded by the law of supply and demand. What in the past was considered a right became a commodity: education, healthcare, housing, justice, they are only available to those who can afford them.



Picture 7. "Acapatzingo" Settlement of the Popular Organisation of Independent Left "Francisco Villa" in Mexico City: Photo: Organisation of Independent Left "Francisco Villa"

This context frames the beginning of our organization in 1988, in our need for a place to live which was (and it is) an inaccessible right for the majorities. This is due to the negation of this basic right by the political and economic system that allows the speculation of suitable lands for housing, it directly benefits to the real estate agencies, it keeps high costs of construction, it implements inefficient programs of social housing and it allows government's corruption.

For many years we tried to solve our housing problems individually but we were not heard. That is why we decided to get together and used mobilization as a weapon that allowed us to exist, that made us visible for the bureaucracy. Against the high costs of land, we decided to occupy it, defending it and to organize so we could solve the immediate problems of services and the issues derived from living together. We built precarious houses while we started saving money for a more permanent solution. Additionally, we had to resist repression and the attempts of eviction. Years later we managed to build permanent houses by combining loans with community work. With these collective strategies we saved an important amount of money that went to housing extensions.

Currently, the Popular Organization of Independent Left "Francisco Villa" has several settlements in different peripheral districts of Mexico City. In the district of Iztapalapa there are three settlements: Front 9 with 450 families, and Fronts Acapatzingo and 9 1/12, both with 600 families each. In the district of Tlahuac there are two settlements: Buena Suerte with 100 families; and Totlalzin with 60 families. Cisnes is a project in process and it will receive soon 200 new families. Finally, in the district of Iztacalco there are three settlements: the community Doroteo Arango with 70 families; Felipe Angeles, with 100 families; and Centauro Norte with 100 families. The construction of a fourth settlement is about to start in this district, with the building of 70 new houses for members of the organization.

Along with housing, we decided to develop self-managed projects of education, healthcare and urban agriculture, among others; all projects that improve our life conditions. We strongly believe that when these practices become life projects, we counteract the indifference and selfishness imposed by the system we live in and we create economic alternatives to the precarious salaries and services offered in my country.

Our organizational structure considers the assembly as the maximum authority, that is to say, the decisions are made by all the members. Besides, there are teams integrated by a certain number of families, depending on the size of the community and specific commissions dealing with specific tasks. Every working team name a representative.



Picture 8. Demonstration organized in 2015 by the Organisation of Independent Left "Francisco Villa". Photo: Organisation of Independent Left "Francisco Villa"

We stay away from traditional political practices and we don't have relationships with political parties. Our political practice is independent and anti-capitalist. We don't believe or participate in the electoral politics. This has led us to be in constant confrontation with the Mexican government and to suffer several episodes of repression, some of them ending in jail and murder. Despite these consequences, we can assert that our strategies have allowed us to learn and prove that we can develop alternative social, political and economic relations, outside the system.

Regarding our participation in other political networks, we are constantly trying to connect with other political forces. At a national level, we coordinate with collectives, organizations and communities from the rest of the country with diverse problems, aims and projects. Some examples are workers' organizations, sex-workers organizations, community police projects, community radios, associations of drivers and so forth. Now we are part of the National Campaign in Defence of the Earth and the Territory, along with more than one hundred

organizations and communities from the country that are resisting massive corporative projects that have not taken us into account, seriously affecting the environment, contaminating the water and lands, modifying Biosystems and destroying nature in favour of profit.

Book reviews: *Interface* 9(1)

Review editors: Dawn Paley and Bjarke Skærlund Risager

Books reviewed in this issue:

Heather Ann Thompson, 2016, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy*. New York: Pantheon Books (752 pp., hardcover, \$35.00)

Review author: Elva Orozco

Andy Blunden, 2016, *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. Leiden: Brill (257 pp., hardback, \$142.00)

Review author: Bonnie Nardi

Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Eds), 2017, *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press (440 pp., paperback, \$44.95)

Review author: Raphael Schlembach

Nicholas Hildyard, 2016, *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial extraction and the Global South*. London: Manchester University Press (144 pp., paperback, £11.99)

Review author: Alexander Dunlap

Javier Sicilia, 2016, *El Deshabitado*. Mexico City: Grijalbo (525 pp., paperback, MXN\$299.00)

Review author: Andrew Smolski

William K. Carroll, 2016, *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice*. London: Zed Books; Halifax: Fernwood Publishing (236 pp., paperback, CAN\$25.00; £22.99)

Review author: Andrew Kettler

Gladys Tzul Tzul, 2016, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena: Mujeres Y Tramas de Parentesco En Chuimeq'ena'*. Guatemala: Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicos, Tzi' Kin Centro de Investigación y Pluralismo Jurídico, Maya'Wuj Editorial (220 pp., paperback, MXN\$150)

Review Author: Meztli Yoalli Rodríguez Aguilera

William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker (Eds), 2016, *A World to Win: Contemporary Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony*. Arbeiter Ring: Winnipeg (413 pp., paperback, CAN\$24.95)

Review author: Laurence Cox

Robert M. Press, 2015, *Ripples of Hope: How ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (327 pp., hardcover, €99.00).

Review author: Richa Biswas

Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar (Eds), 2015, *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press (289 pp., paperback, \$34.95)

Review author: Lika Rodin

Book review: Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water*

Review author: Elva Orozco

Heather Ann Thompson, 2016, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy*. New York: Pantheon Books (752 pp., hardcover, \$35.00)

Despite deliberate efforts to conceal the truth about the prisoners' uprising at Attica in 1971, Heather Ann Thompson's *Blood in the Water* (2016) provides a comprehensive account of the events that took place before and after the bloody retaking of this maximum-security facility on September 13, 1971. Thompson's Pulitzer Prize winning study of the Attica prison and its legacy unfold in nearly six hundred pages. To narrate this story, the author makes use of a vast number of sources, including papers from the Attica Task Force Hearings, records from the Erie County Courthouse, White House tapes, newspapers reports, documents from the New York Special Commission on Attica, the Meyer Commission, and firsthand accounts of the actors involved. The result is a coruscating account of the bloody retaking of the prison by state forces, the brutal torture that Attica inmates suffered after the assault, the state's vast cover-up, and the prisoners' efforts to tell the truth. This set of topics makes *Blood in the Water* painfully relevant for our context. At its core, the book presents Attica as a historical moment whereby state violence was used against unarmed men to preserve its ideology of law and order.

The length of Thompson's book is warranted by the long and painful story of Attica's uprising. *Blood in the Water* consists of fifty-eight chapters organized in ten parts. Each part contains an average of five chapters plus a short bibliography of the main protagonists in the story, including Frank "Big Black" Smith, hostage Michael Smith, New York Times journalist Tom Wicker, whistleblower Malcolm Bell, renown lawyer Elizabeth Fink, slew CO William Quinn's daughter, Dee Quinn Miller, and others.

The book's title, *Blood in the Water*, conveys the horror that prisoners lived during the retaking. The words come from former prisoner James Lee Asbury whose testimony described how "merely ten minutes after the assault on the prison began, no matter where he looked, all he could see was blood in the water" (p. 187). Whose blood? Who ordered the violent assault on the prison? Was this terrible massacre inevitable?

Thompson's book responds to these questions with remarkable clarity. In doing so, she powerfully stages the dilemmas faced by a democratic prison movement that is almost immediately depicted as a riot by its detractors. The opening chapters deal with the harsh conditions prevailing in US prisons during the sixties and early seventies, including overcrowding, excessive use of violence,

and racial discrimination. Attica was a clear testament to all these problems. The prison was built in New York the 1930's, during the great depression. Two-thirds of the population at Attica was African-American and Puerto Rican. Conditions inside this facility were bad for all prisoners, but particularly so for black and brown inmates. As Thompson explains, few prisoners earned more than six cents a day, and the very lucky were paid \$2.90, significantly less than what they needed to survive inside the prison. This situation contrasted sharply with the profits that Attica generated from prisoners' labor, especially the metal shop and the laundry which "netted the state of New York almost \$1.2 million in sales [...] between 1969 and 1970" (p. 32). Despite these profits, Attica's inmates received few items gratis: two pairs of pants, shirts, a pair of shoes, underwear, and socks. Prisoners would receive a bar of soap and a roll of toilet paper for a whole month. The food was meager and unhealthy, and medical services were extremely deficient as most prisoners recalled.

Labor exploitation and inhuman living conditions at Attica triggered the uprising. In this sense, Thompson's book demonstrates how Attica's prisoners connected their struggle to the larger context of civil rights activism in the US. This is why they began to organize to demand significant reforms to the prison system. Initially, prison organizing inside Attica took the form of a peaceful and democratic movement. Inmates drafted a list of demands that they delivered to Superintendent Oswald with the hope that he implemented the desired changes. Above all, Attica inmates wanted to be considered and respected as human beings rather than "domesticated animals selected to do their [police authorities] bidding and slave labor and furnished as a personal whipping dog for their sadistic, psychopathic hate" (p. 32). Yet, high-ranking prison officials, including New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, didn't take these grievances seriously and insisted that Attica's rebellion was aligned with revolutionary forces seeking to destroy the "American way of life" (p. 266). Thus, instead of improving the prisoners' living conditions, state officials tried to assert more authority. In the end, the prisoners' call for reform turned into a full-fledged uprising. During the rebellion, which lasted only four days, prisoners fatally beat CO William Quinn and captured thirty-eight hostages to force the state to sit at the negotiations table. But while Attica administrators first showed some willingness to address the prisoners' concerns, in the end, governor Nelson Rockefeller decided to terminate the uprising by force.

The retaking of Attica by New York state troopers, local police, and prison corrections officers was extremely violent, with 39 people killed. One of the key contributions of *Blood on the Water* is to clearly demonstrate that the agents of violence were not the prisoners, as state officials had maintained for more than four decades. Rather, the violence that took place the day of the retaking was indeed perpetrated by the state. As a former prisoner put it in the days that preceded the retaking, "if a massacre takes place [...] in the final analysis, the world will know that the animals were not in here, but outside running the system and the government" (p. 158).

Through the use of deadly force, the state regained control of Attica. In the process, New York state troopers, local police, and prison COs killed thirty-nine men, including ten hostages. Although police officers did the killing, they accused the prisoners of murdering the hostages. Another 128 men were shot, and countless more were subjected to torture for weeks and months after the rebellion. This was all known to top officials, including former President Richard Nixon, who congratulated Rockefeller for regaining control of Attica. Then, the state launched a lifelong campaign to cover up the crimes committed that day. In turn, Attica's survivors initiated a lifelong battle to tell the truth.

Blood in the Water has numerous strengths. The book is well organized and carefully written. People from all backgrounds and trajectories can find it accessible despite its considerable length. Importantly, Thompson lets the main protagonists of Attica narrate their own stories, casting them as political actors in their own right. Contrary to Governor Rockefeller who thought of Attica's inmates as murderers, rapists or terrorists in need of domestication (Foucault and Simon 1974; Marshall and Christopher 2012), Thompson's study shows their human face, with lots of virtues as well as mistakes.

In a 1972 interview, Michel Foucault described Attica as a "machine" whose purpose is not the rehabilitation of men, but their punishment and subsequent elimination (Foucault and Simon 1974, 27). *Blood in the Water* shows with sharp clarity the truthfulness of this statement, as former prisoners recalled their frustration with the prison administration for ignoring their demands of being treated with respect and compassion. While the uprising was not devoid of violence, Thompson makes clear that the prisoners sought dialogue and consensus first. Violence was always their last recourse. Furthermore, violence could have been prevented had the authorities acknowledged that Attica's inmates had legitimate grievances instead of dismissing their demands as part of a revolutionary conspiracy against the state.

There are a few shortcomings in the book. Perhaps the most significant is Thompson's scant emphasis on the democratic character of the uprising, which pales in comparison to her lengthy focus on the legal battles that took place after the retaking. This move might be deliberate as it serves the twofold purpose of casting the justice system as an institution that perpetuates structural violence while also showing the victims' determination to resist the state efforts to get away with murder. However, Thompson misses a unique opportunity to redefine the meaning of justice from the perspective of the victims. Throughout the book, the reader is presented with the idea that justice comes from the courts, *a priori* assumed as independent and autonomous institutions. And yet, this is rarely the case, as justice system has a symbiotic relationship to the state, in itself an instrument of domination. To be fair, Thompson is not indifferent to this problem, this is why in a recent statement she admitted that the concept of justice is both "vexing and vitally important" (Thompson 2017). But what if justice is not the currency of the courtroom but something that is determined by the injured party? In a documentary aired in 2012, Traycee Barkley Timian, the

sister of Elliot D. Barkley spoke to this issue after narrating the murder of her brother, a leader, and spokesperson for the Attica prison movement. For her, truth telling is a kind of justice insofar as it exposes the lies of those in power. As she noted:

No it is not going to bring him back [LD Barkley], but you know what, I am satisfied with the truth being told. My brother was not a bad person. Let that truth be told. My brother went to Attica State prison and he had no business being there. Let that truth be told. Let the truth be told that people in higher positions, you know, killed my brother. I mean and they're gone [the murdered inmates] and there is no bringing them back so now the truth can be told.
(Marshall and Christopher 2012)

Traycee Barkley's alternative conception of justice means letting the world know that the criminal acts committed at Attica on the morning of September 13, 1971, were carried out by the state. Her conception of the state as a criminal "machine" contrasts sharply with the view that the state promotes of itself as protector of the people through the legitimate monopoly of the means of violence. Yet, as Traycee Barkley's words suggest, the morning of the retaking the state chose to murder in cold blood rather than allowing black liberation and black self-determination to spread inside and outside the walls of the prison. For Dee Quinn Miller, the daughter of slain CO William Quinn, this shows how far state officials are willing to go for the sake of maintaining power. "Attica is a powerful lesson, a cautionary tale about the lengths that people are willing to go to keep and gain power. Political power. Not in some third world nation, right here," said Miller (Marshall and Christopher 2012).

To understand the relevance of Attica to our present, it is crucial to search for alternative conceptions of justice that incorporate the perspective of those who are injured in order to avoid reinforcing the power of existing institutions that maintain the status quo. In this context, Thompson's *Blood in the Water* is a welcomed contribution to the larger effort of documenting and exposing the truth.

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About the review author

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**Book review: Andy Blunden,
*The Origins of Collective Decision Making***

Review author: Bonnie Nardi

Andy Blunden, 2016, *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. Leiden: Brill (257 pp., hardback, \$142.00)

There are many ways to read *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. It is a detailed history of the development of three modes of collective decision making: Counsel, Majority, and Consensus. It is an autobiography of the author's long participation in radical politics, delivered with so light a hand that Andy Blunden's presence is felt as delicately but definitely as a butterfly moving in a garden. It is a reflection on the nitty-gritty practices by which social movements ply their craft of getting things done outside formal bureaucratic structures. It is a paean to rigorous empirical methods; Blunden took nothing for granted, doggedly pursuing informants and sources to track down how real decisions were made by real people.

For those of a certain age, the book is a meditation on the roots of contemporary historical events that touched us deeply. For younger readers, it is a beautiful illustration of the importance of history and a reminder that it didn't all happen yesterday on Twitter. I implore young scholars to spend time with "Realist Historical Investigation" (chapters are not numbered, a bit of an inconvenience in my view) for understanding the rewards of digging deeply into a topic in both theory and method. I found this book a page turner, and that's saying something for a book whose title probably does not shout, "Must Read!"

All reviewers have to pick at least one nit, so I will get that out of the way now. I would have preferred a more standard procedure of academic citation. I do understand that the author did not want to interrupt the flow, and there's a good set of references, but I would have liked more, on some of the more obscure, but still very interesting points.

Blunden motivates *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* by observing that collective decision making is an ethical activity at the heart of all governance, justice, and good conduct. That we have not had a book on the history of collective decision making until now is surprising, and makes this volume all the more important. The book begins with a frank admission that the author was piqued into his research strategy by the slack in David Graeber's (2013) approach to the same questions about decision making. Blunden says:

[Graeber based his answers to these questions on] hearsay reports that Consensus had originated either with the Indigenous nations of North America, who had passed the practice on to settlers before being exterminated by those

same settlers, or with pirates operating off the North Atlantic Coast of America, before they were exterminated by the Royal Navy and American pirate hunters. Based on these unlikely propositions, neither of which have been verified by historical investigation, Graeber proposed that a body of people all of whom were *armed* could not impose majority decisions on a minority but rather would make decisions by consensus[.] (p. 11, emphasis in original)

Unpersuaded by Graeber's romantic (pirates! Indians!), but faltering narrative, Blunden established a meticulous program of historical research to get to the bottom of things regarding the important questions surrounding collective decision making. He calls his methods "realist" and that's just what they are—accessing reality as closely as we can by asking hard questions and not settling for simple stories.

Blunden undertook this work to move beyond Graeber's historically vacant narrative which could not explain how collective decision making processes would have been "*transmitted down the centuries* from colonial America to the small American anarchist movement of the late 1960s or Wall Street protesters of 2011" (ibid., emphasis added). In order to transcend "Just So Stories," as Blunden calls them, he rolled up his sleeves and began to probe the origins of collective decision making, setting a high bar for himself in not taking the easy way out which would have been: "[If] a certain practice bears some resemblance to a practice which existed somewhere else at an earlier date [...] [then it] originated from the earlier [source] (p. 12.). No! We are instead going directly to 15th century guild meetings, and we are going to read the rules in their Minutes! We will examine how things were laid out in the documents of the East India company in 1621, and what John Wesley thought about fashioning decision making in the Methodist church, and the ways the Black Panthers did what they did. All of this so we can establish a "concrete *line of transmission* from there to here" (ibid., emphasis in original) in determining historical roots of collective decision making processes within their actual historical linkages. I marveled at how determinedly Blunden scrutinized the historical record to inform the whole book, and chased after still-living sources for the latter part of the book that discusses the women's movement, anarchism, the civil rights movement, and other contemporary social movements. We have a good deal of incredibly rich material straight from various horses' mouths, carefully cross-checked and contextualized.

Although *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* is not heavily inflected with cultural historical activity theory, the methods and approach are clearly rooted in this tradition to which Andy Blunden has made outstanding contributions throughout his career. The "germ cell" of collective decision making is "*a group of people in the same room, deciding what to do together*" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Grasping this germ cell, or irreducible unit of analysis, allows us to grasp the contradictions of collective decision making and the complexities and complications that arise from the contradictions inherent in the germ cell. This

tack is classic Marx carried forward into modern cultural historical activity theory. Blunden's reflections on political economy, woven into his accounts of specific instances of collective decision making, also bespeak this theoretical lineage.

Blunden ends the book with a rather sobering thought: it does not matter whether we choose Majority or Consensus (or even Counsel). All can produce ethical outcomes, but it does not matter because

all the decisions which really matter are excluded from collective decision by the application of the laws of private property in the public domain. The food industry poisons us, the media spreads lies and misinformation and so on, because these activities are deemed to be "private property". (p. 245)

Yet at the same time, the larger message of the book inspires. An appreciation of the staggering and courageous effort it took to pull humanity out of the position of powerlessness inherent in having "no place and no rights in a feudal system based on the land" (p. 243), which *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* amply documents, can perhaps be aspirational for today's social movements facing overwhelming issues (the environment, income inequality, political corruption, rampant corporatism, and so on). It is astonishing that the voluntary associations of landless merchants and artisans of feudal times produced sound structures of governance as well as the equality and solidarity Blunden details, laying the foundation for Parliament, universities, trade unions, and much beyond. While it is easy to get discouraged at what is happening today in many realms of life, we must take inspiration from the tenacity and intelligence with which people with far fewer resources than we have transformed governance. Blunden's book, despite a bit of an ominous shadow flitting across the landscape at the end, provides plentiful inspiration in affording a clear view of exactly how people of good will came together and managed to make some pretty good collective decisions! Our heritage has much to offer, and we must not allow ourselves to become alienated from its good parts (by forces on either the right or the left). I believe there is real wisdom in connecting to the forebears Blunden discusses, both emotionally and intellectually, as we face the strenuous tasks that lie ahead. Reading Andy Blunden's book is Step One for recharging.

I can honestly say that I am happy to have read *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. My review might seem a bit incomplete, focusing on the meta issues as it does, but I hope there is method in my madness. I have not told you how collective decisions are made and how the forms of such decision making came into being. You will find out within the pages of Andy Blunden's lucidly written, thoughtful, scrupulously researched, and fascinating book on the topic. God (that wonderful lady) is in the details here, and the details should be savored, and not crassly summarized by the reviewer.

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About the review author

Bonnie Nardi is a professor in the School of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. An anthropologist, she is interested in computing and political economy, as well as social life on the internet, especially video gaming. Her most recent book, *Heteromation and Other Stories of Computing and Capitalism* (co-authored with Hamid Ekbria), was published in May 2017 by MIT Press. She co-edits the MIT Press *Acting with Technology* Series (with Kirsten Foot and Victor Kaptelinin). She is interested in radical approaches to sustainability and is a founding member of the Computing within LIMITS Workshops. Contact: nardi AT uci.edu

**Book review: Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson and
Peter N. Funke (Eds), *The Great Refusal***

Review author: Raphael Schlembach

**Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Eds),
2017, *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary
Social Movements*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press (440
pp., paperback, \$44.95)**

The Great Refusal is a fascinating collection of essays on different aspects of Herbert Marcuse's thought and its usefulness in interpreting and informing the struggles of contemporary social movements. To be clear, this book is not so much an intervention into social movement theory or any other established academic sub-discipline. Rather, it straddles the line between activist writings, the politics of resistance and radical philosophy and should therefore be of specific interest to readers of this journal.

Edited by Andrew Lamas, Todd Wolfson and Peter Funke and coming out of the "Critical Refusals" conference in Philadelphia in 2011, the book's contributions all very much speak to a wave of protest around 2011, the year that *Time* magazine dubbed the Year of the Protester (Anderson 2011). There are twenty-one chapters covering topics such as the Arab Spring, the Wisconsin labour movement and of course Occupy Wall Street and its various offshoots. But there are also pieces that cast the net a little bit wider, such as considering the struggles of migrant workers in China and the uprisings of East Asia.

As always, any work that tries to find ways of understanding contemporary events risks a loss of relevance. And we can certainly say about a number of the essays here that they have been written at a time of optimism for the Left, an optimism that today appears strangely misplaced. As I write this review, Donald Trump is giving his presidential inauguration speech in Washington DC, in which he invokes a very different kind of social movement than the one that the authors in this collected volume have addressed. The fortunes of social movements can turn so quickly, even though their long-term impact may not manifest itself until years or decades from now.

With this in mind, the question poses itself: can Herbert Marcuse's studies into rebellion in an affluent society be a source of inspiration to those who are seeking to combat the visions of neoliberals and extreme nationalists in the era of Trump, Putin, Modi and Erdoğan?

In recent discussions on Marcuse's work in the United States, from his stay at Columbia University to his time in California, there has been some doubt cast over the level of influence he really had as a radical thinker on the protest movements of the 1960s and 70s (Wheatland 2014). But although few activists

may have engaged with the finer points of his writings on Hegel, Freud and Marx, for some his version of Frankfurt School theory and negative dialectics formed an essential part of the “Marx-Mao-Marcuse” revolutionary trinity.

To their credit, for the authors in this volume, what appears more important is what anyone could learn from reading Marcuse today. This includes those whose academic research considers contemporary protest, disobedience and resistance. In the field of social movement theory, however, Marcuse remains curiously absent. This is an unfortunate omission. As I have tried to show elsewhere, his work, and indeed that of the wider circle around Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, can open up new perspectives on social movements and has also underpinned many of the best-known accounts of protests represented in the literature (Schlembach 2015).

What holds the chapters of *The Great Refusal* together is that they loosely examine the notion of the great refusal – however ill-defined this concept remains – and its contemporary relevance. Marcuse is credited with developing a non-orthodox Marxism that embraced all kinds of anti-oppression struggles. The introductory piece by the editors makes this argument very clearly. As they put it: “Analysis of the wave of protest in the 1960s and 1970s reveals critical similarities to today’s movement politics” and a re-engagement with Marcuse’s frameworks to understand those could “help scholars and activists identify the strengths and shortcomings of contemporary theory and practice of resistance” (p. 4). This is then not simply an application of Marcuse’s theory to contemporary mobilisations. Rather the book is an intellectual rendezvous of activist insights into particular sites of struggle and Marcuse scholarship.

This sometimes makes for a rocky encounter. While Marcuse’s arguments in works such as *One-Dimensional Man* or *Counterrevolution and Revolt* are eclectic, for many on the traditional Left the brand of Marxism offered here is alien and hampered by its pessimistic outlook on the revolutionary agency of the working class. *The Great Refusal* cannot alleviate these concerns. But for those willing to engage, the book offers a wealth of resources, inspirations and tools with which to think about oppositional politics in the present age.

For example, the prospects for class struggle are rarely far away from the contributions presented in this volume. Michael Forman’s chapter sets the tone by rehearsing the argument that Marcuse’s critique of affluent society can help us understand the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Similar in parts to the better known analysis by Nancy Fraser (2013) and others, he argues that the co-optation of the cultural revolution of the 1960s “may have contributed to the victory of the neoliberal project” (pp. 36-7). Marcuse’s critiques of misplaced radicalism and repressive desublimation are ever present here.

Overall, then, the editors are quite clear that they hope that this book will address some shortcomings in much of the critical movement scholarship that has analysed the contemporary wave of protest; firstly, “an inattention to history” and secondly, “a celebratory embrace of current movement practice” (p.

5). While we could of course think of examples that defy these tendencies there is something perceptive about these criticisms; although not all the contributors to this volume have taken them on board. With hindsight, and with our current understanding of the nationalist and right-wing turn that the populist wave has taken most recently, it is possible to say that the book could have benefitted from more engagement with Marcuse's views on repression, recuperation and counter-revolution. This should alert us to the realities for many who are trying to organise in increasingly repressive societies from Egypt to Russia to Turkey.

And while *The Great Refusal* does not stand uncritical towards the politics of Occupy Wall Street and similar moments of rupture in the West, the perspectives offered by reading Marcuse would alert us to the limits of left-populist movement strategies that foreground issues such as big lobbies and wealthy interest groups in politics. Instead, we need to take seriously the strengthening of authoritarian and nationalist reactions to capitalist crises and guard against their appropriation of anti-establishment politics.

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About the review author

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Book review: Nicholas Hildyard, *Licensed Larceny*

Review author: Alexander Dunlap

Nicholas Hildyard, 2016, *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial extraction and the Global South*. London: Manchester University Press (144 pp., paperback, £11.99)

Industrial infrastructure surrounds us and is slowly engulfing the planet. Roads, power lines, pipelines, water mains, electrical grids, telecommunication systems and so on, are not only an emblem of modernity, but the foundation of urban and suburban life. People have come to depend on industrial infrastructure, while governments, corporations and international banks constantly strive to build and maintain these systems. Yet the general public knows little about infrastructural development, which is the central topic examined in *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the Global South* by Nicholas Hildyard of The Corner House, UK.

This book unravels the evolution of infrastructure systems and the institutions responsible for them, with a focus on the complicated financial dimensions emerging around infrastructural investment, construction and operation. Chapter 1 outlines the global inequality or “organised social misery” created by capital accumulation and the Bretton Woods Institutions’ economic policies—structural adjustment or austerity measures. These policies strip away labour rights, environmental regulations and make market-mechanisms the compass of the future. This economic path enforced gives the private sector greater involvement in infrastructure development, which is articulated through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), not only as a popular mode of infrastructural development, but also as a means for corporations to legally drain extraordinary profits from the public sector and population at large.

Hildyard discusses financial extraction from PPP infrastructural development using the example of Lesotho’s Queen “Mamohato Memorial Hospital” in South Africa. He contends that Lesotho, one of the materially poorest countries in the world, is being looted through PPP infrastructural development. The total cost of the hospital is estimated at US\$153.1 million, which was, in fact, 95 per cent publically funded, placing all the risk on the government, while creating an annual cash income stream of US\$1.1 million for eighteen years to the consortium Tespong. *Licensed Larceny* highlights how, PPP contracts legally prevent competitive public works projects—in this case other hospitals—from challenging contracted profit streams.

Hildyard then transitions to detail how infrastructure under various PPP contracts are akin to a backdoor privatization scheme that transforms infrastructure development into a continuous and legally mandated profit making machine. PPP contracts are equated with a scheme where investors

“ensure that for every penny they put into the public plate, several public pennies are taken out” (p. 32), which is a process that, Hildyard argues, helps to sanitize against guilt and displace the blame for further country-wide impoverishment. The outcome is that infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and so on, are transformed from a public good (paid for and belonging to taxpayers) to an infrastructure designed to externalize and extract increasing profit from public funds. In short, infrastructure becomes a legally mandated apparatus of financial extraction—a money generating machine with high externalized social and ecological costs.

The author continues further with his analysis, discussing “infrastructure-as-asset-class” (p. 41). This means infrastructure itself becomes a tradable financial asset that allows finance to access new income streams directly and indirectly through various types of PPP contracts. These contracts are in the utility sector (utilities, ports, airports, etc), the resource/commodity sector (mining, oil, gas, timber and their facilities), the information sector (cloud-based computing and big data centers) and various natural capital infrastructures (carbon and biodiversity credit schemes). Guaranteed profit margins (minimums from 8-26 per cent) are coded into these infrastructural development schemes. *Licensed Larceny* looks at continent wide infrastructural corridors and transportation logistics in Africa, Latin America and Asia. These are the coordinated plans of countries to create mega-scale logistic networks so as to transport goods and natural resources at increasing speeds. Hildyard outlines the special importance of logistical hubs and transport, noting that the efforts of extractive and commodity industries are rendered pointless if these industries cannot transport their raw materials and goods to processing facilities and store shelves.

Licensed Larceny ends with a discussion of how the book’s findings can be mobilized in relation to taking action to stop or create more socially just infrastructures. Straying away from giving prescriptive answers, there is a discussion of the problems associated with the limited and recuperative approaches of NGOs, policy and institutional acceptance in general. Hildyard stresses the necessity of strategic and tactical thinking with and against these actors, while advocating, after Ivan Illich, friendship as “the political tool of the moment” that is built on mutuality and collective survival that leads into a brief discussion about “working-class culture” (pp. 93, 97). *Licensed Larceny* provides an important and engaging glimpse into a complicated, convoluted and under acknowledged phenomenon: the evolving infrastructural usurpation of financial resources.

Despite the justified concern surrounding the destruction of the private sector and “working-class life”—even if the latter is a bit romanticized—Hildyard recognizes government as the propulsive force behind infrastructure development and its “injustice-generating trajectory” (p. 25). This trajectory is a reminder that industrial infrastructure is a part of colonization that attempts to dominate nature, create controlled environments and imbue these

environments with capitalist ideologies and prescribed forms of life. This is to say, following Foucault, infrastructure is “environmentality”—the manufacturing of environments to condition and shape peoples’ mentalities (see Gabrys 2014). Leslie Sklair (2010, 152) has used the term “mall,” where the mall, in all its loaded symbolism, becomes a verb, an action and an exportable weapon of population control, while creating a material apparatus designed to affirm and normalize capitalist values, consumerist lifestyles and private property regimes.

Licensed Larceny tackles the neglected financial aspects of infrastructure, but between the lines we something else that should be emphasized. Infrastructure, in all its variety and difference (and perhaps, less obvious than a mall), is a special type of weapon that absorbs and transforms the natural environment, while constructing spaces that inculcate people with capitalist values and relationships—the material and psycho-social “accumulation-through-infrastructure” (p. 49). Infrastructure creates environments that encourage particular behaviours, actions and thoughts, which directly or indirectly attempt to stifle and/or direct imaginations, alternatives and protect predatory financial operations. Infrastructure becomes a technology of conquest that constantly works to affirm the existence of governance, economic growth and particular mind-sets by socially engineering environments and desires as a means to systematically extract and process natural resources— both human and non-human. Undeniably infrastructure has benefits, important uses and luxuries that can be made “more just,” but the negative structural impact of these infrastructural systems remain sidelined as they continue to proliferate—a concern that is compounded by the immense financial costs detailed by Hildyard. Thinking of infrastructure as a technology of colonization is useful as it directs human activity, reinforces particular value systems and in a sense weaponizes space for the extraction of natural resources. Meanwhile, people are increasingly dependent on infrastructure that clouds critical faculties, while inculcating acceptance and apathy in the face of immense social, ecological and financial cost incur by infrastructural development.

The enchantment with and complications of resisting infrastructural development is outside the scope of this book, which remains a personal interest. However, Hildyard provides an impressive first step into the neglected area of infrastructural finance. *Licensed Larceny* is highly recommended for anyone, inside or outside universities, with an interest in mega-projects, infrastructure and industrial corridors.

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About the review author

Recently awarded a doctorate in social anthropology from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Alexander Dunlap's previous research examined the social impact and conflict generated by wind energy development in Oaxaca, Mexico. Other publications by Alexander appear in *Anarchist Studies*, *Geopolitics*, *Review of Social Economy*, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Human Geography* and *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. Contact: xdunlap AT gmail.com

Book review: Javier Sicilia, *El Deshabitado*

Review author: Andrew Smolski

Javier Sicilia, 2016, *El Deshabitado*. Mexico City: Grijalbo (525 pp., paperback, MXN\$299.00)

The Poet, an important figure in Mexico, begins *El Deshabitado*, the autobiography of his sorrow and struggle, not at the moment of shock, but with togetherness. “It is good to have y’all here,” words spoken by his daughter, Estefanía (p. 17). These words, which console Javier Sicilia, are directed at the reader who has chosen to join the poet in an intense journey. The tragedy of the human search for justice. In this, we are participating in Gandhi’s proverb, oft-cited by Sicilia, “It doesn’t matter that we arrive at the fruit. What matters is to have been walking towards it.” Or, as Sicilia says in a moment of despair, “even with my exhaustion, I keep trusting in that poor and miserable needle fixed on a river to be found beyond the future’s north” (p. 203).

On March 28, 2011, Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega, son of the Poet, together with six others, was murdered and thrown into the trunk of a car by brutal criminals. The savage massacre, like so many horrendous events that had preceded it, shook Cuernavaca, a major city in Morelos, México to its core. A nation wept alongside a father who let out a cry, “*Estamos hasta la madre*,” which translates as “we’ve had enough.” Sicilia takes us along with him, through smoking one too many cigarettes and angry bouts with the absurdity of a world of flesh. His autobiography is the byproduct of a cruel society and a lethal War on Drugs, one that should not have to be written. It only exists because we as a species have failed, because our elites so corrupted by Mammon and worship of power lead us to Armageddon.

Yet, just as it is tragedy, *El Deshabitado* is a narrative of resistance, a discourse on Christian anarchism, the roots of our political being, and the utopian possibilities persisting in the mystic unknown. It is a conversation between Sicilia and the many, wise people he knows, meets, and fights alongside. The reader operates as a voyeur-participant, thinking out how to make multiple better worlds. Those utopian worlds are for Sicilia places that follow Adorno’s categorical imperative, to never allow Auschwitz to happen again. We are constantly caught between hope and horror, constantly called to end the banal machinations of formal power.

The confrontation with formal power, its symbolic dethroning as citizen confronts the main representative of the State, the Mexican President. Sicilia meets Calderón as the flawed human he is, not as President, by stipulating that if they meet, Calderón must meet Sicilia as Felipe, not as President. As if in a warp, a moment at which Sicilia, like Sarah, yells at the Goblin King, “You have

no power over me.” But, this is not the movies, and the warp closes back in, Sicilia trapped once more with his candle, carrying the small flame against the oppressors who blow mercilessly.

That candle burned bright with the 2011 march from Cuernavaca to Mexico City’s historic *Zócalo*, arm-in-arm with the victims of state and cartel barbarity. Walking by his side, Nepomuceno Moreno, a valiant father whose clamoring for justice and his son’s return was met with his assassination at the hands of the narco-State. Sicilia shares these stories throughout *El Deshabitado*, an indictment of a series of egregious policies that has transformed the country into a mass grave. Sicilia himself, and his family, faced death threats, part of why Estefanía fled with her son, Diego, to Europe. Sicilia brings this reality of activism to the fore.

Sicilia manages to make us feel caught there with him in real life, floating above family fights, as theory itself becomes flesh. Struggle not as heroic myths, but as daily grinds. There is no folklore of invincibility, but vulnerabilities, emotions, and failings amongst success. Throughout *El Deshabitado*, Sicilia returns to memories of visiting Estefanía and Diego, at Saint-Antoine-l’Abbaye, in France. Estefanía repetitively chides him for participating in *El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad*, for putting their family in danger to the point that she and her son fled to France, creating familial insecurity while challenging national insecurity. These tensions are debated, laid bare, and we, the readers, come to understand how beyond the image of the social activist at a march is the practice of everyday life.

The exile of his family members also represents a crucial point about Sicilia’s social position in Mexican society, as does the power of the people who inhabit his life. This power elevates his victim status. For Sicilia does maintain important connections, such as to Ambassador Tomás Calvillo with whom Sicilia was staying in the Philippines when they found out that Juan was murdered. Sicilia is deeply embedded in Mexico’s literary community and a longstanding participant in non-violent movements against modern society’s propensity for violence. Sicilia is a cosmopolitan actor, utilizing privilege as a weapon against the system. Sicilia critically reflects on the privilege he is afforded for his class and status in society, although perhaps not enough.

The understanding of his social position and the goals that he does display comes from an anarchism that he says is based in the Gospels and traditional mysticism. Drawing inspiration from liberation theology, with particular emphasis on The Beatitudes and on the command to make the last first. From there, Sicilia arrives at a profound understanding of *agape*, of a love that extends brotherhood even to his son’s murderer. The Antonine commune, Saint-Antoine-l’Abbaye, where his family is exiled, is based on this attempt to create the kernel of the kingdom of God. Work together, eat together, share, build a community. It echoes Sicilia’s poem, entitled Lucas 1, 30-33:

[the gods and angels] went away from Earth and left us with a fine and delicate pearl / free at last / owners of our senses and the fall / beyond our history's way / closer to the sense of it all / inside, very inside, in the deepest part / there where the ministry was made flesh and lives with us. (Sicilia 2004, review author's translation)

It is this politico-theological register with which Sicilia relays current events, both as what really happened and as Sicilia's re-creation of what happened. It is the discourse he occupies when he talks about organizing, goals, and utopia. In this register, he maintains a fidelity to documentation, with an annex containing 84 pages of declarations, letters, correspondence, and end notes. In this sense, it is what it claims to be, a literary autobiography, one steeped in philosophy, theology, politics, journalism and ethics.

Reading *El Deshabitado* is a profound experience, and quite unnerving. For, what does it mean to read another's pain? What does it mean to read another's pain to learn? How do you describe a book predicated on silence, no words, on a suffocation of life? How do you describe said work to implore others to read it and to think out how a social movement comes and goes as struggle ebbs and flows?

In *El Deshabitado*, the confrontation with the eternal return of brutality and the counterattack of righteous indignation raises these powerful, unsettling questions for a reader, or for reviewer. My answer, to best represent Sicilia's maxim describing the little candle we each hold, that we each protect against the oppressor's wind. As Sicilia ends his book, so shall we think of life, "towards hell" on our way to do combat injustice with our tiny candles.

To demonstrate my gratitude to Javier Sicilia, whose writings have inspired me over the years, I would like to repeat his demands:

the San Andres Accords must be respected, stop the war, free José Manuel Mireles, his self-defense forces, and all political prisoners, bring justice for the victims of violence, judge the criminal politicians and functionaries, and open the mass graves of Jojutla. (Sicilia 2017, review author's translation)

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**Book Review: William K. Carroll,
*Expose, Oppose, Propose***

Review author: Andrew Kettler

William K. Carroll, 2016, *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice*. London: Zed Books; Halifax: Fernwood Publishing (236 pp., paperback, CAN\$25.00; £22.99)

William K. Carroll's *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice* (2016) offers network and qualitative analysis of the counter-hegemonic tactics applied by transnational alternative policy groups (TAPGs), as these organizations attempt to resist the fatalism of the leftist project after the reassertion of neoliberalism in the wake of the recent global economic crisis. Carroll's work places much narrative weight on a general understanding of the financial hegemony that supports alliances between international banking and Western governments, which perpetuates neoliberalism through both rhetoric within the superstructure and economic control at the base. Carroll's work is essentially a critique of marketization and privatization that focuses on how counter-hegemonic groups work to resist NGOization, or the embedding of their motives within hegemonic ideologies. The contemporary left, for Carroll, has failed to advance productive alternatives to the hegemonic narratives of finance capital, either through command economies or direct revolutionary action. TAPGs provide an alternative means of critique. Carroll's fully contoured analysis of these TAPGs critiques neoliberal finance capital as the dominant market force in world politics. However, with recent political changes throughout the West, time will define whether Carroll's work remains as biting as it would have before recent reactionary sweeps altered the political landscape.

Carroll, of the University of Victoria, advocates for a rejection of liberal pluralism because it is an ideology that is exceedingly well suited for the crisis capitalism of the contemporary age. In the vein of Fredric Jameson's work in *Postmodernism* (1991), Carroll understands postmodern liberal pluralism as offering an increasing fragmentation of cultures and identities. For Carroll, what is needed for leftist progress is not identity politics, but rather an understanding of the shared fate of the environment and humanity if finance capitalism is left to continue unabated. Consequently, what is provided in *Expose, Oppose, Propose* is a form of "people power" that unites significant numbers of subalterns of the left through bridging the distances created between disparate groups within liberal pluralist societies.

Carroll is joined by co-authors for many of his chapters, but his solo-authored analyses are the driving critical force in *Expose, Oppose, Propose*. He

specifically critiques neoliberalism through the goals of “justice globalism” that he deems proper for honest and aggressive evaluation of possible decision making that can avoid hegemonic ideologies. These forms of critique become more authentic to the global masses through increasing links between the West and the Global South by networking TAPG movements. To complete his analysis of the means that TAPGs are applying to create justice globalism through these networks, Carroll and his colleagues interviewed 91 leaders within some of the world’s most prominent TAPGs. Examples of these leading TAPGs include: Third World Institute/Social Watch, Participatory Research in Africa, International Forum on Globalization, People’s Plan Study Group, Centre de Recherche et d’Information pour le Développement, Centre for Civil Society, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Transnational Institute, Focus on the Global South, and Developing Alternatives with Women for a New Era. Most of these interviews were performed during 2012-2013, in the wake of the global economic crisis, which possibly dates many of Carroll’s conclusions to a critical era that may have already passed. This temporal concern has only been heightened with the failure of neoliberal hegemony to resist populist and proto-fascist border protection movements throughout the Western world.

In general, Carroll hopes to discover forms of praxis that link critical theories against the neoliberal state with practical forms of engagement that mobilize into political action. In the first chapter, Carroll summarizes resistance to neoliberalism that focuses on both aggressive critique and nuanced dialogue. Carroll searches subaltern counter-publics, to borrow Nancy Fraser’s terminology, as less spectacular than visible movements like Occupy and the Battle in Seattle, but still as important for creating change against neoliberalism. These forms of neoliberal dominance are exemplified, for Carroll, through organizations like the Atlas Economic Research Foundation Network and the many market-oriented organizations that emerged from the Mont Pèlerin Society, founded by market theorist F.A. Hayek in 1947. Carroll often ponders: how can TAPGs, which need capital’s funds and public engagement, avoid becoming embedded in elite networks of hegemony that distribute NGO funding and control media apparatuses? This constant questioning leads to many nuanced analysis, but often fails to define conclusive answers for how TAPGs should work to avoid such pitfalls.

Chapter two, written with Elaine Coburn, explores KPM, the knowledge production and mobilization that leading TAPGs use throughout the world. The authors analyze these patterns through interviews with TAPG leaders. Chapter three, written with J.P. Sapinski, explores how well these TAPGs are able to use KPM to embed new knowledge within the global civil sphere through linking the West and the Global South. Carroll specifically highlights the spatial dynamics at play in the structuring of links between numerous leading TAPGs. In Chapter four, Carroll defines ways in which TAPGs have altered neoliberal hegemony, even against what can appear to be a fully adaptable and successful global

capitalist class. Despite these gains, Carroll discovers an essentially uphill battle faced by TAPGs for funding, especially after the recent economic crisis.

Much of Carroll's analysis explores how TAPGs can enter alternative knowledge into the public sphere, thereby offering new forms of understanding as part of the mainstream, rather than as merely a critique of the mainstream. In attempting to enter alternative knowledge into conventional forms of thought an inherent conceptual problem often occurs, whereby alternative knowledge must frame itself through mainstream knowledge patterns, and the ideological purity of alternative knowledge may be partially altered and polluted to be understood by those who are under the false consciousness of hegemonic common sense. Carroll thus explores how TAPGs navigate these minefields where messages must be made attractive, but in becoming eye-catching are possibly embedded into hegemonic language and common sense.

Chapter five, also written with J.P. Sapinski, explores the many fears of NGOization amongst proponents and members of the TAPG movement. NGOization involves how TAPGs are often forced to de-radicalize their critiques to reach new funding opportunities. In this analysis, Carroll and Sapinski find TAPGs functioning much like NGOs through the inherent links to global state apparatuses and private finance capitalism, but also offer that resistance is not futile as ideological purity can remain for goals of justice globalism within TAPGs. Carroll follows with a chapter outlining different forms of cognitive praxis that he finds common and productive among the most successful of TAPGs within the civil sphere. These essentially focus on how TAPGs work to enter alternative knowledge forms into public discourse. Chapter seven explores how these forms of knowledge can become practice through four modes of the actual doing of work by TAPGs: networking, research and analysis, training and learning, and outreach. Chapter eight then summarizes how utopian transformation can start from the nuanced practices of TAPGs against neoliberal state apparatuses through the creation of alternative knowledge about the environment and global justice in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, a South African concept that focuses on solidarity, mutual care, and community. *Ubuntu* emerges from protecting the rights and powers of the individual to create community and retain the commons.

Carroll hopes for continuing critiques of neoliberalism to occupy a discursive space that now exists due to the crisis of economy and ecology that was constitutive of the recent economic crisis. However, much has changed within the last political years that offers concerns with whether Carroll's work continues to be applicable to the present state of the West, or is simply an interesting and productive theoretical enterprise that conceptualizes a moment rather than a structure. Specifically, what happens to the TAPG industry when the enemy is no longer neoliberal hegemony? Must the TAPG counter-hegemonic project shift tactics to resist the more pressing concerns of neo-fascism and border control in the United States and Western Europe? How should the Marxist models of TAPGs change their tactics in the face of a new

enemy when the political doctrines of TAPGs were reformed in the last three years against neoliberal free trade? Specifically, TAPGs must soon discover their opponent, whether that adversary remains neoliberalism and globalization or has taken on a new and darker appearance based upon national isolation, border control, ethnic pride, and economic sovereignty as hegemonic touchstones for the falsely conscious and consenting masses.

Of more direct concern with Carroll's specific work, rather than his publication dates, is how the author uses bureaucratic language to style his analyses. Often using the bureaucratic language of acronyms and excessive clarity as a means of critiquing the neoliberal bureaucracy, Carroll's analysis seems to lack the emotional force and libidinal abstraction necessary for changing the meanings of labor resistance within the public sphere. Should the language of resistance be so devoid of emotion? This reviewer often wondered whether a bureaucracy, especially the neoliberal bureaucracy that has grown carcinomatous through the capacities of finance capital, can create a language so hegemonic that any attempt to deconstruct that structure has only that language to use for critical analysis. This reviewer appeals, in the wake of David Graeber's recent *Utopia of Rules* (2015): whether it is possible to find a form of critical language that does not need to use bureaucratic semantics? Will revolutionary catharsis emerge more often from libidinal and poetic language, rather than model a boilerplate language off of the very bureaucracy that revolutionary liberation must critique? Can a direct assault on neoliberal hegemony and NGOs come from organizations that act, talk, and function like NGOs?

Expose, Oppose, Propose generally applies Marxist ideology to critique neoliberal hegemony. Analyzing the role of TAPGs, or private policy organizations that resist neoliberal hegemony through expanding alternative knowledge, the edition provides numerous small examples of how TAPGs avoid becoming neoliberal NGOs, even after the intense funding crises that followed the global economic meltdown. Carroll's work is essentially a direct assault on neoliberalism that portrays minor variations that can chip away at the cloudy world of finance capital through direct actions by TAPGs. Carroll thus continues work to bind the fragmentation of ideologies that are deemed essential for the perpetuation of the forms of liberal pluralism he critiques as obstructive to revolutionary change. Carroll displays this critique visually, through showing the continuing links between organizations of the left, qualitatively, through interviews with TAPG leaders about how they expand alternative knowledge, and quantitatively, through categorizing the numerous TAPGs and their neoliberal NGO foils. His work is to remain important if neoliberal hegemony remains the force that the left must challenge in the coming decades. However, TAPGs must quickly understand if recent right-wing movements throughout the world have shattered dreams of neoliberalism, or are simply enforcing a new neoliberal false consciousness upon the populist masses who preach the Prosperity Gospel, find in narratives of climate change the absurdist debaucheries of profiting journalists, and perceive most forms of rigorous academic knowledge as inherently dubious. Only time will tell if Carroll's

superior analysis of TAPGs can continue as productive as world forces shift to more regressive rhetorics of oppression.

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Book Review: Gladys Tzul Tzul, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena*

Review Author: Meztli Yoalli Rodríguez Aguilera

Gladys Tzul Tzul, 2016, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena: Mujeres Y Tramas de Parentesco En Chuimeq'ena'*. Guatemala: Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicos, Tzi' Kin Centro de Investigación y Pluralismo Jurídico, Maya' Wuj Editorial (220 pp., paperback, MXN\$150)

En el contexto actual, de extractivismo y violencia capitalista, *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena* el primero libro de Gladys Tzul, es una lectura necesaria. Tzul nos presenta las luchas comunitarias de mujeres y hombres en Guatemala por la reproducción de la vida y la defensa del territorio en su comunidad natal Chuimeq'ena' (también llamado Totonicapán), la cual, es una lucha no sólo anticolonial sino también anticapitalista.

A partir de una mirada crítica a los Acuerdos de Paz, Tzul explora cómo el Mayanismo así como proyectos integracionistas a la nación, son intentos fallidos en la búsqueda de una política distinta para la transformación de los pueblos en Guatemala. Para la autora, una de las estrategias centrales para la defensa del territorio así como de la vida comunal son las tramas de parentesco en las comunidades.

Tzul nos describe el dolor después masacre del 4 de octubre de 2012 tras la movilización de varias comunidades en Chuimeq'ena'. La respuesta de 48 cantones frente al dolor colectivo fue una movilización para frenar a un poder violento. Los levantamientos son parte de una genealogía histórica de otras revueltas de las comunidades. Tzul hace un recuento histórico sobre algunas de las insurgencias comunales en la historia de Guatemala para la reproducción de la vida y la producción de lo común.

Como punto central en *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena*, Tzul explora la complejidad así como las estrategias que tejen las mujeres indígenas en tramas comunitarias defendiendo la tierra y la vida. Frente a una noción liberal, es decir, de propiedad individual, las luchas comunales que Tzul describe proponen desestabilizar las jerarquías genéricas en el acceso a la tierra.

Gladys Tzul, contrario a posicionamientos que aspiran a la universalidad de la igualdad, propone entender la lucha de las mujeres indígenas dentro de sus comunidades, en lo que ella nombra como una “inclusión diferenciada” (p. 170). Tzul retoma el concepto de “la política del deseo” de la feminista italiana Lia Cigarini, para reinterpretarlo desde las mujeres indígenas como una forma emancipadora, aquella que, parafraseando a la autora, trasciende la política de los derechos. Gladys Tzul entiende el deseo comunal como “la capacidad de

plantearse un asunto a resolver y de producirse colectivamente los medios materiales y simbólicos para superarlo” (p. 177).

En el primer capítulo, la autora responde a la pregunta ¿Por qué pensar lo indígena en clave comunal? Para Tzul, la categoría “indígena” es una creación colonial y estatal para seguir controlando a las comunidades, enmarcándolas dentro de leyes, usos, costumbres y tradición. De igual forma, la autora hace una crítica al movimiento Maya, pues, de acuerdo a ella, no estaba construido por comunidades de base, sino más bien por organizaciones que tenían proyectos desarrollistas, además de que la decisión en asambleas no era parte de su mecánica. Por el contrario, Tzul propone pensar la lucha comunal en términos estratégicos; es decir, a partir de las alianzas de parentesco pero también a partir de Asambleas comunitarias, en las que se produce la decisión para la conservación de los medios concretos para la reproducción de la vida o el territorio: “el agua, los caminos, los bosques, los cementerios, las escuelas, los lugares sagrados, los rituales, las fiestas, en suma, la riqueza concreta y simbólica que las comunidades producen [...]” (p. 39).

No obstante, la autora en varias ocasiones recalca que no existe una esencia homogeneizante de lo comunal indígena, sino, por el contrario, está lleno de contradicciones y complejidades. Tzul enuncia que lo comunal no es exclusivo ni algo que existe inherentemente en las comunidades indígenas. Para la autora, lo comunal es entendido como “una relación social atravesada por una serie de complejidades constituidas a partir de la estructuración de tácticas políticas para resistir, responder y fracturar la dominación” (p. 54). Es decir, es lo comunal, a través de una estrategia política de alianzas de parentesco, una potencia emancipadora, para el uso común de la tierra y, con ello, para la vida. Tzul describe como parte de la contradicción en lo comunal la existencia de una estructura patriarcal. Dicho parentesco está dictado por la patrilinealidad, es decir, se hereda la tierra por la línea paterna y masculina, pero que no logra desaparecer la participación política de las mujeres para la reproducción de la vida y en la producción de decisión.

En el segundo capítulo, la autora hace una recapitulación histórica de algunos momentos importantes de resistencia por luchas comunales en Guatemala. Nos deja claro que el k’ax k’ol, o trabajo comunitario, es parte central de la producción de lo común desde sus orígenes y hasta el día de hoy. Tzul retoma las rebeliones indígenas anticoloniales desde el siglo XVI hasta el siglo XVII. Asimismo, Tzul describe un momento clave en la historia, a finales del siglo XIX (en 1870), cuando comunidades compraron colectivamente tierras para uso comunal, ampliando así su territorio. Tzul termina este recuento con el análisis en el siglo XX y los Acuerdos de Paz. En este capítulo, la autora introduce el concepto de soberanía. No obstante, no es una soberanía entendida desde el punto de vista estatal e institucional, sino, por el contrario, es definida como “la capacidad histórica de decidir y organizar colectivamente la vida en un determinado territorio” (p. 90). Es una recuperación del concepto para repensar

las formas de autogobierno y organización colectiva subversiva frente a un poder que busca imponer sus decisiones.

En los distintos momentos históricos, las luchas comunales se enfrentaron a la herida colonial de distintas formas y que permanece en la memoria colectiva de las comunidades; es decir, no son rebeliones que aparecen de la nada. Durante el siglo XX, de acuerdo a *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena*., hubieron principalmente tres fuerzas que peleaban la soberanía sobre territorios: la izquierda, principalmente materializada en la Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), los sistemas de gobierno indígena y, por último, las fuerzas armadas. La autora afirma que los Acuerdos de Paz para terminar la guerra en Guatemala fueron únicamente negociados entre la izquierda y las fuerzas armadas, lo que dejó fuera la voz de las comunidades indígenas. Una de las críticas que la autora hace a los Acuerdos de Paz es la creación de políticas desarrollistas para el campo basadas en proyectos crediticios, es decir, de mercantilización y privatización de las tierras. Es por esto que la potencia emancipadora de las luchas comunales por la tierra, son evidentemente luchas anticapitalistas y anticoloniales.

El capítulo 3 y 4, profundiza sobre la estrategia política para producir los medios concretos para la reproducción de la vida, por medio del parentesco, pero también sus contradicciones, sobretodo respecto al patrilinealidad. Tzul nos recuerda que la fiesta es una de los momentos más potentes donde se produce lo común, en donde las mujeres tienen un papel central en la organización. En el último capítulo, la autora se centra en la idea de inclusión diferenciada, refiriéndose a las mujeres y su existencia en la vida comunal. Tzul decide llamarle inclusión diferenciada, para evitar el dicotómico inclusión/exclusión que simplifica toda la complejidad de la vida comunal. Asimismo, Tzul recupera la noción de trans-formación de Gutiérrez y Salazar para abordar las formas en que se producen y reproducen “las formas colectivas de habitar el mundo desde otro lugar que no sea la dominación, la explotación y el despojo” (p. 172). Dicha trans-formación, se realiza simultáneamente con la conservación. Esta tensión entre transformación y conservación se producen dentro de la misma lucha comunal, sobre todo, respecto al equilibrio entre géneros. Tzul afirma que, por ejemplo, las mujeres indígenas “queremos simultáneamente seguir habitando y conservando nuestra tierra comunal, al tiempo que deseamos alterar parte de las estructuras políticas internas -el parentesco- que la han hecho posible” (p. 173).

Es en este capítulo donde Tzul despliega la idea de política del deseo, como una política que escapa de los derechos individualistas de las luchas feministas liberales. Una política del deseo que es profundamente anticapitalista puesto que para la autora, las mujeres indígenas desean que la tierra sea heredada no sólo por medio del parentesco y también desean que no sea usada como propiedad privada. El matrimonio, limita las posibilidades de las mujeres indígenas para, retomando a Raquel Gutiérrez, “poder disponer de sí mismas” (p. 177). Al mismo tiempo, como Tzul advierte, los deseos de las mujeres no

caben en el texto, pues son plurales y diversos. Lo importante aquí también es la lectura que se le da al rol de las mujeres en la vida comunal. No se trata, como bien señala la autora, en describir a las mujeres en opresión o exclusión, como se leería desde una narrativa feminista liberal. Se trata más bien, de complejizar el papel de las mujeres como protagonistas en su lucha por la reproducción de la vida, al mismo tiempo que desean transformar ciertos aspectos de la vida comunal.

En conclusión, *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena* nos da luz, frente a las diversas caras del neo-extractivismo voraz, sobre cómo pensar las luchas comunales para la trans-formación de nuestra vida cotidiana, al mismo tiempo que nos muestra un ejemplo de producción de lo común, más allá del capital y como una lucha anti-colonial.

Sobre la autora

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**Book review: William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker
(eds), *A World to Win***

Review author: Laurence Cox

William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker (Eds), 2016, *A World to Win: Contemporary Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony*. Arbeiter Ring: Winnipeg (413 pp., paperback, CAN\$24.95)

William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker's *A World to Win* is a collection of writing by Canadian activists and activist-scholars on contemporary social movements which they see as constituting "agencies of *counter-hegemony*." The book packs a lot into a small space: Part I's seven chapters broadly discuss the situation of contemporary movements at a fairly general theoretical level; Part II's seven chapters cover different specific movements in Canada; while Part III's four explore the challenges of solidarity and alliance-building. Together these 18 chapters are very diverse in scope and style, but the tone is much more consistent, a tribute to good editing.

Beyond this broad arrangement, the structure of the book is largely given in Carroll's opening chapter. This presents the book as a whole as seeking to develop a praxis-oriented approach to social movements, one which avoids either a purely theoretical analysis or a purely pragmatic "what is happening and what we should do". To this end Carroll also produces an overview and attempted synthesis of three different perspectives on social movements and to draw out lessons from each for activists. These are the pragmatic-reformist (essentially canonical US social movement studies), the epochal-interpretive (starting from the North American interpretation of European debates on new social movements, to which are added authors like Laclau and Mouffe, Foucault and Chris Dixon), and a neo-Gramscian form of historical materialism, which Carroll bases on Marx and Gramsci, Michael Lebowitz and David Harvey, and a lengthy discussion of Habermas. Carroll is kind enough to include my own work with Alf Nilsen in this latter perspective.

Carroll draws five lessons from each of these three approaches. From the pragmatic-reformist approach, he distills some practical organising advice around interest mobilisation: what movements need to do in order to win at the most basic level. The epochal-interpretive approach is presented in an optative mode: movements "are" prefigurative, opposed to state-centrism, reflexive etc. – but also, implicitly, they should be all these things if they are to respond effectively to the nature of contemporary society. Gramscian historical materialism, finally, appears to tell us what movements from below have to do if they are to transform social relations: challenge movements from above, construct counter-hegemonic projects, develop solidarity and alliances, resist alienation and decolonise lifeworlds.

The “lessons” Carroll draws in *A World to Win* are very useful for activist thinking, and this core section of the chapter could readily be used in more activist classroom settings or as a background paper for movement discussions. I was left wondering, though, about what has happened to movements’ own theorising since Gramsci. Except for Chris Dixon, almost every post-Gramsci author engaged with is primarily academic in their work. I did wonder whether more could not be done with more closely movement-linked authors like Hilary Wainwright and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, with the implicit theories contained in the organising practice of the Zapatistas and People’s Global Action – not to mention some of Latin America’s new governments and the Rojava revolution, all surely key test cases for the wider systemic transformations invoked in the introduction. There is, I think, something in the book’s reliance on university-based theories which is not ideal when movements are trying to develop their own counter-hegemonic capacity.

The various chapter authors, however, are as much activist as they are academic. Space prevents an in-depth account of all 17 chapters, but the overall standard is excellent, with robust political arguments, solid empirical analyses and good writing: only a handful fall below the standards implied by attempting to develop a counter-hegemonic perspective and sink into intra-movement or intra-academic polemic of a more sectarian kind.

Far more chapters deserve to be highlighted. Steve D’Arcy’s chapter, subtitled “how activists articulate their politics and why it matters” reads the shift from New Left to contemporary political vocabularies in a constructive key. Lesley Wood and Craig Fortier trace the shifting construction of political coercion in Canada in ways that combine recognition of the harsh realities with an attention to the scope for effective resistance and delegitimation. Elaine Coburn and Cliff Atleo’s chapter attempts to theorise Indigenous resistance from an Indigenous perspective, highlighting a wider and alternative sense of how the world could and should be. Matthew Corbeil and Jordan House explore both the practical limits and the wider possibilities indicated by labour solidarity networks using direct action. Finally, Jacinthe Michaud explores historical moments of synergy between feminist activism and other political movements to discuss what is needed for the real transformation of movement coalitions.

As a non-Canadian reader, I found the empirical range of the chapters gave a lively insight into the many dimensions of popular struggle in Canada. The level of the debate was also inspiring, and left me wondering about the context of Canadian ways of thinking social movements. Along with the three modes of theorising identified in the introduction, we also have Coburn and Atleo’s Nuu-chah-nulth perspective as well as others framed within more conventional Marxist approaches that are strong on the critique of issues and structure, and weak on movements and struggle (what we can actually do). Overall, there is no doubt from this collection about the quality of thinking within Canadian writing on movements; but I would have liked some more of a sense of a conversation between these different modes.

If it is unfair to hope for explicit reflection on the forces shaping theorising within Canadian movements and in Canadian academia, surely part of a Gramscian perspective is to attempt to construct more of a relationship between these different elements. As it is, the chapters are not “potatoes in a sack”; but the conversation is not, yet, counter-hegemonic in the sense used in the book. Or, perhaps, in the wider world? What we know from the outside about the strength of First Nations resistance to the petroleum industry in particular, the strength of movements at the level of individual provinces or the organisation of summit protests suggests that there is a wider, and more effective, way of working together and that the rest of the global North at least can learn something useful from Canadian experiences – but it was not obvious to me on closing the book how this capacity for solidarity is supported, developed and theorised.

One important question for activists lies in the book’s subtitle. To the best of my knowledge Gramsci never used the phrase counter-hegemony. It is certainly consistent with his thought, but in practice is used in two rather different ways. In one form, counter-hegemony would be the development of an incipient *new* hegemony: this was, after all, Gramsci’s own perspective. This form of counter-hegemony then involves different movements finding common perspectives and shared interests in the formation of a strategic alliance for a new kind of society; and Carroll’s introduction firmly situates the book within this perspective.

Conversely, there are usages of “counter-hegemony” which are (implicitly) Foucauldian and highlight simply any resistance, from a given location, to existing forms of hegemony. An optimistic reading treats this situation as itself radical, in a way which neither Gramsci nor Foucault gives us much warrant for: historically, most forms of localised resistance or resentment do not get beyond that, and we are left with the gap between their actors who remain “trapped in their own lives”, as EP Thompson puts it, and the might-have-beens glimpsed in their resistance. More sharply, Gary Kinsman’s chapter highlights how queer organising went from being a counter-hegemonic movement to part of a new, neoliberal hegemony: single-issue politics at the expense of other movements is no victory.

Reading *A World to Win*, I felt that its chapters veered from one to another perspective on counter-hegemony, along with a third kind, exemplified by the title of Coburn and Atleo’s chapter, “Not just another social movement”, highlighting the extent to which some First Nations populations remain in a position to resist not just neoliberalism but capitalism (if not always class society) from outside. Similarly, Michaud highlight the very real challenges involved in transforming movement alliances in ways that really take feminism (and, she notes, anti-racism, indigenous politics and LGBTQ activism) on board. The irreducibility, in this sense, of the different ways of life and subjectivities from which movements grow makes the challenge of constructing counter-hegemony a very substantial one indeed; or, from a Gramscian perspective, it is

one which grows out of wider and deeper levels of popular participation in the war of position to construct a different world.

If the introductory chapter does address some of these difficulties (and can usefully be reread after finishing the book), the chapter sequence leaves us *in media res*, with these problems still open and unresolved; and this is, I think, a more honest way of thinking the challenge of counter-hegemony. Fully-blown counter-hegemonic alliances and projects tend to develop at the height of global social movement waves, which tip over into revolutions: the current wave, within which this book has been produced, has had its revolutionary moments (in Latin America and MENA) but Canada, like most of western Europe, has suffered the curse of being sufficiently involved in the wider global wave, and sufficiently mobilised, to grasp the possibility of going further without actually reaching that point. This is, obviously enough, a point where radical theory can be a particularly useful intervention, in trying to develop a shared analysis both of the current situation and of what the next step might be; it is also frustrating, in that the limits of what actually-existing movements can do is continually contrasted with what their most articulate and conscious elements need them to become. Along with struggling for better (broader-based *and* more transformative) alliances in practice, movements also struggle at this point to express an understanding of their own action in terms of its own “zone of proximal development”, the highest potential for “what comes next” that can credibly be articulated to an activist audience. *A World to Win* is a valuable contribution to that process.

About the review author

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Book review: Robert M. Press, *Ripples of Hope*

Review author: Richa Biswas

Robert M. Press, 2015, *Ripples of Hope: How ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (327 pp., hardcover, €99.00).

The book *Ripples of Hope* by Robert M. Press enunciates a new version of *satyagraha* (a form of non-violent resistance coined and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi) in the contemporary world where ordinary individuals stepping out of the relative safe enclosure of anonymity to participate in the non-violent tradition of Gandhi or Martin Luther King to challenge the repressive regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book focuses on forms of dissidence practised by ordinary individuals or small group activists that do not replicate the familiar and traditional grammar of movement studies. This dynamics of ordinary public mobilization brings forth a new focus on “individual activism” in the genesis of social movement which again anticipates new formations that has led to the actualization of novel political uprisings or imaginaries. *Ripples of Hope* focuses on micro and macro level forms of social mobilizations in three African countries, namely Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya, from each study we get new theoretical perspectives that allow rich understanding of social movements, democratization, and mechanisms of how non-violent movements operate in repressive settings.

The book is based on extensive archival and empirical research (it contains 170 interviews). It includes case studies of the three African countries which experienced long repressive rules. In these countries, individuals and small groups of activists led non-violent resistance which resulted in the ouster of autocratic leaders. This has established a new trend in the domain of popular mobilization in these African contexts.

Ripples of Hope argues that non-violent social movements in repressive settings are sometimes likely to generate “individual activism”, a much understudied part of social movement studies. This kind of activism appears when repression is at a high level and resistance is likely to decline into abeyance and become fragmented because it has to wait for safer times to emerge more openly and formally. Hence there will have to be “organization without organization” of ordinary individuals in such coercive contexts, who can only resort to non-violent modes of mobilisation as they do not have the means to organize large scale and externally resourced tropes of militancy (p. 25). Non-violent resistance, the book shows, can take place even under severe repression without favourable conditions or “political opportunities” and non-violent social mobilization in repressive settings also involves a broader and more complex array of participants in more fluid modes of actions than is generally recognized.

Gradually, such forms of activism grow into a culture of resistance unless blocked by extreme repression.

After introducing the theoretical framework, *Ripples of Hope* subsequently deals empirically with various forms of non-violent activism as practiced in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya. The first section outlines the resistance history of Sierra Leone. In 1977, a group of students of Fourah Bay College staged a major protest against the repressive regime of President Siaka Stevens. Resistance continued in abeyance in the form of the regular publication of the dissident, independent newspaper, *The Tablet*. By the time the brutal rebel group AFRC seized power in the late 1990s, a culture of resistance had been developed but resistance efforts were forced to operate from the underground because it was too dangerous to mount any open resistance. During this period of high repression some independent journalists like Paul Kamara, owner of the *For di People* newspaper, continued publishing clandestinely, spreading the “ripples of hope” that it was possible to resist the military junta. Their goal was to support “humanity, freedom and justice” (p. 83) which would emancipate the people from violent incidents of rape, beating and bloody executions, things that used to happen frequently. The Women’s Forum that emerged in 1994 included political, religious and groups, among others. There was mass, informal noncooperation that closed schools and businesses. This made many flee the war-torn country and slowed government bureaucracy to a crawl. A clandestine radio station (Radio Democracy) encouraged noncooperation that continued until the junta was ousted by international military intervention enabling the elected government to return from exile on March 1998.

The second part of *Ripples of Hope* shows how social movements were nurtured and functioned in Liberia. The violent Samuel Doe regime (1980-90) repressed the anti-government social mobilization which had developed in the 1970s and forced it to function in a clandestine manner. The subsequent non-violent resistance ranged from legal challenges by individual lawyers (Tiawan Gongloe, Aloysius Toe, and others) reporting by independent journalists’ statements by outspoken clergy and coalition building with international human rights groups. These methods subsequently succeeded in forcing the brutal regime to succumb to public resistance and international pressure.

The next section portrays Kenya in the late 1980s when the ruling regime was torturing political dissidents. As a result, individual attorneys and other activists informally mounted a social movement. In 1982 Kenya was declared “a one party state” (p. 212). The growth of the culture of resistance in Kenya involved three overlapping elements—individual activism (1987-91), small-group organizational activism (1991-1992) and mass public support (1991-1993). Human Rights attorneys took up cases of political detainees to wage legal battles against the repressive regime of Daniel Arap Moi. Mbugua, the editor of *Beyond* magazine exposed governmental fraud in voting. Sometimes, ordinary citizens, such as taxi-drivers and sympathetic guards, helped rescuing political actors from detention and torture. These individual activists were an example of

social movement brewing in micro-domains, operating in a limited scale, waiting for safer conditions in which to emerge more openly and in a more organized fashion. From 1990-1997 mass uprisings with domestic initiatives and increased international awareness pushed multi-party elections and an improvement in human rights.

This model of micro-level and everyday forms of social mobilisations does not correspond to traditional studies of social movements which generally focus on massive and systematized formation of “sustained, organized” groups with organisational leadership (p. 23). *Ripples of Hope*, offers hopes of different forms of political and resisting imaginaries which are actualised by citizen-individuals, and their ordinary organizational activisms. The three different case studies demonstrate contingent trajectories of public mobilizations in the contexts of developing countries and from these contingencies normative frames of mobilization theories are substantiated and at the same time challenged. New vistas also open up. *Ripples of Hope* is replete with archival and empirical documentations of different movements in these three countries and provides fresh findings, making an important contribution in movement studies research.

About the review author

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Book review: Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar (eds), *Marxism in the 21st Century*

Review author: Lika Rodin

Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar (Eds), 2015, *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press (289 pp., paperback, \$34.95)

Marxism has apparently lost in its influence both within and outside the academy, but it still serves as a point of reference for contemporary theorizing and social practices. *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*, an anthology edited by Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar, represents an outstanding attempt to engage with innovative interpretations of Marxist tradition.

As the contemporary world becomes increasingly encapsulated within the logic of competitive accumulation and consumption, the book succeeds in challenging the dominant public agenda by turning attention to the underlying social contradictions and the related struggle, both theoretical and political. Furthermore, it expands public knowledge about experiences with socialism in African countries currently seeking new positioning in the global arena. The anthology can be recommended for a reflexive reading to students and scholars in sociology, political science and history, as well as to social activists all around the globe.

Marxist theory and revolutionary practice

In *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*, ten chapters are grouped into three interrelated parts, two of which address contemporary developments in Marxism-oriented theorizing and the related conceptualization of liberatory social movements. This discussion prepares the reader to the following analysis of empirical cases. The articles in the third part explore African experiences with Marxism and its variations, a topic that has frequently been marginalized in academic discussion (p. 9). The editors have written the introductory and summarizing chapters.

The first part of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle* highlights fundamental challenges to Marxism that have emerged from the processes of globalization and rethinking of the role of civil society. Michelle Williams discusses Marxist approaches and the issue of democratic development in the globalized world. The author explores both rightist and leftist appraisals of the Soviet model of political participation, highlighting an alternative—direct democracy—carefully separated from the Soviet-days mono-

party political rule. Direct democracy provides hope for non-exploitive mass-society globally and in the African context.

Michael Burawoy contributes a discussion on prospective challenges to Marxist tradition associated with globalization and the rise of ecological agendas. Employing Polanyi's view on historical dynamics of market-driven societies, Burawoy develops a specific periodization of capitalism, demonstrating that through what he calls three waves of marketization—"commodification of labor, money and nature" (p. 49)—the focus, scale and content of both social conflict and the related political struggle have gradually shifted. At the current stage characterized by subsumption of the natural environment under the logic of capitalist accumulation, the role of civil society in addressing market-generated contradictions becomes crucial. In this context, traditional Marxism should account for (and eventually give way to) grassroots experimenting—"real utopias" (p. 47)—and develop sensitivity to global and national-specific non-capitalist responses.

Civil society and globalization are at the epicenter of Vishwas Satgar's theoretical reflections as well. Grounding in Gramsci's insights taken in transnational perspective, the author argues for an enhanced understanding of social political trajectories observed at the national level. As an illustration, a case of post-apartheid South Africa is scrutinized to demonstrate ways in which, by means of "passive revolution," global neoliberalism had succeeded labor's emancipation project. As an outcome of the analysis, Satgar argues for updating the Gramscian theorizing to account for the transformations in contemporary political economy, ideology, social organization and collective resistance.

The second part of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle* is devoted to the issue of relationships between Marxism and anti-capitalist activism. It opens with an article by Ahmed Veriava seeking to establish parallels between Marx's ideas about social struggle and Foucault's propositions on the problem of resistance. The author claims that taken collectively, an emancipatory attitude borrowed from the classics of critical tradition and poststructuralist interest in relationality and performativity of power can equip social activists, including the African left, with efficient theoretical constructs.

Jacklyn Cock and Meg Luxton continue the discussion by uplifting the role and position of feminism in Marxism-informed academic debates. Based on an extensive literature review on socialist feminism and specifically debates around conceptualization of social reproduction, the scholars argue for the importance of intersectional analysis, uplifted and developed by feminist intellectuals, for more nuanced and inclusive understanding of various forms of oppression and subjugation. Devan Pillay closes the book section with an attempt to adapt Marxism to analysis of contemporary ecological problems. Challenging a wide perception of Marx's elaborations as "anti-ecological" (p. 150) due to his deep subscription to modernist imperatives, Pillay quotes from classical texts expressing Marx's concern with ecological issues.

The last part of the anthology considers practical applications of Marxism in African regions. Daryl Glaser analyses “Africa’s Marxist regimes” (p. 169) as being profoundly shaped by the legacy of a Soviet-style “authoritarian socialism” (p. 168). Seven propositions are suggested which, among other things, contrast the imported “militarized” model of non-market society with locally emerged peasant socialism, claimed to be “authentically democratic” (p. 173). The author concludes by decentering Marxism as a theoretical basis of social political practice at the arena of ideological struggle.

Next, John Saul takes up the causes of abandonment of a socialist track in Africa. He employs a case study design to demonstrate that in assessing the failure of pro-socialist African projects, apart from unfavorable conditions and the external pressures of global capitalism faced by self-liberated countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa, political motivation and will need to be taken into consideration. In this context, countries’ trajectories vary. Even if Tanzania and Mozambique did not manage to maintain long-term socialism, their efforts to build a social society and the related experiences are valuable for anti-capitalist theory and social mobilization. In contrast, South Africa’s political leadership had intentionally moved away from Marxism and adopted global-standard politics, a development that eventually resulted in neoliberal “recolonization” (p. 214).

Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane examine mass protests in neoliberal South Africa, pointing out their fragmented ideologies, narrow scope and leadership issues as conditions that collectively limited outcomes of the struggle. Moreover, the dominant political coalition, which popular protests unavoidably referred to—the Tripartite Alliance—turned to supporting the capitalist track. The scholars draw linkage between class-based and racial oppression and reflect upon theoretical constructs that might facilitate a vision of the future for social movements in South Africa. Bond adds, as an illustration, a detailed description of the Marikana massacre, the related political unrest and disillusion in the country’s political leadership. In the closing chapter, Mazibuko Jara extends the discussion of the South African case and perspectives on Marxist theorizing. Misused and weakened by nationalistic politics of the African National Congress, Marxism still appears to be viable in addressing the central problem of entanglement between class and race subjugation.

Discussion

Three observations have emerged from my reading of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*. First, theoretically oriented scholarship seems to be relatively optimistic about the possibility of adjusting Marxism to contemporary intellectual discussion by means of its alteration, combination with other theories, reinterpretation or simply selective reading. Ultimately, Marxism remains a *weapon* that can be employed, directly or indirectly, in theorizing Leftist politics (part 2). In contrast, analysts of the application of

Marxism in political practice express rather a deep frustration over the limitations of the theoretical constructs in addressing contradictions of mass struggle in Africa and globally (part 3). This discrepancy raises a question of relationships between “sociological Marxism” (chapter 2) and Marxism as a theoretical ideology.

Second, in several accounts in the book, the hope is expressed in the potential of (rural) civil society to develop a non-capitalist formation. Marxism, however, traditionally has been skeptical toward the capacity of civil society to bring about and sustain radical social change (Alexander 2006), a proposition empirically supported by recent examinations of grassroots activism in western countries (e.g., Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014).

Finally, at some point, the reader gets an impression that as previously with the apartheid regime, African activists and intellectuals had to struggle for liberation from a “cage” of Marxism-Leninism (p. 284). More productive, however, may be an effort to analyze the reasons for which African revolutionary parties had become influenced by Soviet theoretical ideology and not by western Marxism almost simultaneously imported to the region via the educational system (chapter 7). The engaged reader might further wonder if members of the leadership of African movements (or movement associated intellectuals) attempted to critically explore Russian experience with socialism, since starting conditions in the respective regions were quite similar (chapters 7, 8). Considering Soviet-style ideas and methods as outcomes of grappling with specific challenges might help prevent an installation of Marxism in Africa as a narrow and rigid doctrine. Such a critical reflection could further expand public knowledge in terms of lessons learned from previous communist projects, beyond their popular accusations of cruelty and oppressiveness. Alternatively, a curious reader could be left longing for a more detailed analysis of the adoption of Marxism-Leninism in distinctive contexts of the African region. This, in turn, would allow deeper understanding of perspectives for non-orthodox Marxist alternatives.

Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle brings together scholars and activists to explore the history of liberation struggle in the region, the related ideologies and theoretical innovations. The book is published by the University of Witwatersrand, one of the largest institutions of higher education in South Africa known for its important contributions to the promotion of educational and technological development of the country (University of the Witwatersrand n.d.), as well as for its involvement in the anti-apartheid movement (Shear 1996). Naturally, themes of racial and class contradictions interweave in the materials, giving the volume an overall ambition to create an understanding of a possibility for a democratic type of Marxism.

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Llamado a participar del VI Encuentro Internacional “La Economía de los/as Trabajadores/as”

Fecha: 30 de agosto al 2 de septiembre de 2017

Lugar: empresa recuperada Pigüé, (Pigüé, provincia de Buenos Aires), con la abertura en la empresa recuperada Hotel Bauen en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Convocamos a participar de este Encuentro a trabajadores y trabajadoras de empresas recuperadas y autogestionadas, cooperativas y organizaciones sociales y populares, así como a organizaciones sindicales y académicos interesados y comprometidos con las prácticas autogestionarias y el proyecto de una nueva economía de los trabajadores y trabajadoras.

Este encuentro se desarrolla al cumplirse diez años de su primera convocatoria por el Programa Facultad Abierta, de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, en julio de 2007. Posteriormente, se realizaron encuentros nuevamente en Buenos Aires (2009), México (2011), Brasil (Joao Pessoa, 2013) y Venezuela (Punto Fijo, 2015), y a partir del año 2014 se comenzaron a realizar encuentros regionales en Sudamérica, Europa y América del Norte y Central, los últimos se hicieron en los meses de octubre y noviembre de 2016, con gran participación de representantes de cerca de 30 países.

Este nuevo Encuentro se va a celebrar en una coyuntura particular en que la economía de los trabajadores y trabajadoras, basada en la autogestión, aparece cada vez más como una alternativa al capitalismo salvaje.

Encuentren más información en www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar

Correos electrónicos: centrodoc AT gmail.com

sextoencuentrointernacional AT gmail.com

Comité Organizador VI Encuentro Internacional “La Economía de los/as Trabajadores/as”

Call for participation in the VI international meeting “The Workers’ Economy”

Date: 30 August to 2 September 2017

Venue: workers’ cooperative Pigüé (Pigüé, Province of Buenos Aires), with the opening in Hotel Bauen, a workers’ cooperative in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

We invite all workers and, especially, workers from self-managed cooperatives, social and popular organisations, as well as trade union and academic activists committed with the principle of workers’ self-organisation and the development of a new workers’ economy to participate in this event.

This meeting celebrates its tenth anniversary since the first one was organised in July 2007 by the Open University Programme of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University of Buenos Aires. Thereafter, there were meetings in Buenos Aires (2009), Mexico (2011), Brasil (Joao Pessoa, 2013) y Venezuela (Punto Fijo, 2015). From 2014 onwards, we have started to organise regional meetings in South America, Europe, North and Central America. The latter two took place in October and November 2016 respectively, and benefitted from the contributions of attendants from 30 different countries.

This new meeting takes place in a particular conjecture in which the idea of the workers’ economy based on self-management increasingly appears to offer a viable alternative to savage capitalism.

For further information, visit: www.recuperadasdoc.com.ar, or
email us: [centrodoc AT gmail.com](mailto:centrodoc@gmail.com), [sextoencuentrointernacional AT gmail.com](mailto:sextoencuentrointernacional@gmail.com)

Organizing Committee VI International Meeting “The Workers’ Economy”.

Guidelines for event announcements

Interface journal is happy to publish announcements for events which share the journal's basic purpose. This is to develop dialogue between activists and researchers on social movements, between different social movements, between movements in different continents and world regions or between different traditions of movement thinking.

To reach the broadest audience, such submissions need to be received by the editors with considerable time before the event's date, taking into account our publication process. Please allow **at least two months** for an event after the publication date (the event announced in the May issue should not take place before August that year, and for the November issue it should not take place prior to January the following year).

The deadline for receiving such announcements are **one month before** our announced publication date (so April 1st or October 1st), giving **a minimum of three months** in total. There is no maximum time limit.

To submit an announcement:

- Please use "Interface event submission" as your subject heading.
- Please follow the following format, with a total maximum of 250 words:

Title of the event.

Date or dates.

Venue.

Description of event.

For further details, visit: (URLs)

and other contact details (Emails, twitter, telephone as appropriate).

Name of conveners (organisation, institution, and/or individuals).

You can send the announcement in any or several of the languages that are currently represented by the editorial team. An English-language version will also help.

Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements

Vivian Strotmann

Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements (MTS) is an international and peer-reviewed journal, based at the Institute for Social Movements (ISB) of Ruhr-Universität Bochum (<http://www.isb.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/isb/index.html.en>) and dedicated to the historical study of social movements. *Moving the Social* is published by Klartext, one of the foremost academic publishers in Germany (<http://www.klartext-verlag.de/>). The journal is the continuation of the *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* which has been successfully published at the Institute for Social Movements since 1977.

The Institute for Social Movements is a research institute of Ruhr-Universität Bochum (http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/index_en.htm) and it cooperates closely with the Foundation History of the Ruhr (<http://isb.rub.de/sbr/index.html.en>). The latter incorporates the Library of the Ruhr (<http://isb.rub.de/bdr/index.html.en>) and the Archive for Social Movements (<http://isb.rub.de/afsb/index.html.en>). All these institutions are located within the House for the History of the Ruhr (<http://isb.rub.de/index.html.en>) at the heart of the city of Bochum in Europe's former foremost region of heavy industry, the Ruhr valley.

The institute grew from the Institute for the History of the German Labour Movement, founded by Hans Mommsen in 1977. It is multidisciplinary, focusing on both the past and present of social movements. It has a strong tradition in the regional history of the Ruhr as well as research on mining and working-class history, which was fostered under its previous directors, Siegfried Bahne, Werner Abelshauser, Helga Grebing and Klaus Tenfelde. The ISB's current director, Stefan Berger, holds the Chair of Social History at Ruhr-Universität Bochum and has extended the institute's research focus to the history of historiography, heritage, memory and identities. In recent years, the institute has undergone a notable process of internationalization which is reflected by the thematic and geographic scope of the journal and in the institute's publications overall (<http://isb.rub.de/publikationen/index.html.en>): apart from the English-language book series, the Institute publishes book series in German on the social history and social movements of the 19th and 20th century (*Schriftenreihe A*), on source documentations in the same field (*Schriftenreihe C*) and on forced labour during the two world wars (*Schriftenreihe C*).

Besides these book series, there is *Moving the Social*. It is concerned with the history of social movements, in a broader sense of the term. This encompasses

- the ‘old’ movement of labour,
- the so-called ‘new’ movements that mobilized after ‘1968’, including the women’s, peace, environmental and LGBTQI movements
- ‘lifestyle’ movements
- religious as well as right-wing movements of the past and the present.

MTS welcomes essays addressing contemporary global issues and collective responses, among them campaigns centered around climate change, urbanization, deindustrialization, neoliberalism, racism, sexism, and human rights. In contrast to other publications in the field, *Moving the Social* is distinctive, however, in its concern with the long-term trajectory of social movements and social problems, and in its commitment to the value of historical approaches for a better understanding of contemporary campaigns and processes of change.

The field of ‘social movement studies’ is marked by persistent and bold historical claims: that ‘the social movement’ as a distinctive political form emerged at a certain point in the development of modern societies; that it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of social movements (‘new’ and ‘old’) associated with particular social and economic contexts and forms of action and identity; that mobilization takes on certain typical patterns (‘cycles of protest’); that the era of ‘globalization’ and the spread of new information technology initiates new possibilities for political campaigning. Yet, although these historical claims are ubiquitous, they are only rarely based on developed historical analysis or comparison. Disciplined historical study provides an important means to test these claims, and to better comprehend the form, characteristics and varieties of ‘the social movement’. More than a quarry of information, it also provides the basis for compelling accounts of political and social processes, thus rendering the unfolding of social movements, and their effects more transparent in their developments and richer in description.

Convinced of the distinctive value of historical approaches to social movements, the journal particularly invites:

- examinations of the history of ‘social movements’ as a political form. This includes studies of the emergence of social movements; attempts to periodize; examinations of the relationships between allegedly ‘new’ and ‘old’ campaigns; and meditations on the novelties and continuities in contemporary campaigning. We would welcome historiographical explorations of these matters in addition to historical studies.
- attempts to connect social history with the history of social movements. The field of ‘social history’ has been marked by a concern with the collective experiences of ordinary people, and an attempt to link changing patterns of life with broader transformations. This offers a

potential point of connection with ‘social movement studies’, until now not fully exploited. Conceivably, the insights and approaches of social historians could enrich our understanding of the development and trajectory of social movements. Conversely, social movements should be recognized as an important aspect of social life, since their contribution to the history of societies merits further investigation.

- work that links historical study with research from other disciplines. The field of ‘social movement studies’ has so far been dominated by the work of sociologists and political scientists. Not simply committed to the value of history, *Moving the Social* aims to encourage a broader intellectual conversation, in which the insights of other disciplines can raise new questions and offer new approaches. Attention to spatial dynamics (a concern of geography), to culture and performance (evident in ethnography) and emotions (psychology), among other disciplines, is especially welcome.
- movements of the Global South. Although the social movement is conventionally depicted as a product of the Global North, ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements have also been an important factor in the Global South. The histories of these movements have not always been fully documented. Their implications for existing theories and historical accounts have not been scrutinized to their full extent. *Moving the Social* particularly encourages investigation of past and the present social movements of the Global South. As one part of this effort, it welcomes comparative approaches to social movements, which seek to scrutinize differences and commonalities between the Global North and South.
- transnational and comparative perspectives on the history of social movements. The ‘transnational turn’ has been a major development in the last decade and a half of historical research. *Moving the Social* aims to encourage such scholarship, and especially aims to explore longer-term histories of transnational diffusion and exchange. At the same time, editors are conscious of the distinctiveness and the value of comparative history. The journal therefore welcomes comparative-historical research, as well as attempts at combining comparison with special attention to transnational ties.
- Historiographical and theoretical examinations of pertinent work in social history. Sociologists and political scientists have developed a ‘canon’ of work in ‘social movement studies’, evident in textbooks, survey courses, and in patterns of citation. However, despite many historians’ contribution to the examination of particular social movements, there is little sense of a developed historiography in the field. *Moving the Social* seeks to encourage the development of such a historiography. Editors also welcome submissions that draw upon recent social and political theory, and consider the relevance of such theory to the historical study of social movements.

Moving the Social has a diverse Editorial Team to fit its international and interdisciplinary outlook.

Its two Editors-in-Chief are

- **Stefan Berger** (Ruhr Universität Bochum, <http://www.isb.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/mitarbeiter/berger/index.html.en>) and
- **Sean Scalmer** (University of Melbourne, <http://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/display/person174776>).

From 2012 to mid-2016, MTS's Managing editor was **Christian Wicke**. As of December 2016, the position of Managing Editor is taken by **Vivian Strotmann** (see contact information below).

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Moving the Social is biannual, with one issue on a particular theme and one thematically mixed issue. Each issue includes a comprehensive review article, one of which each year is on recent publications in social movement studies. Back issues have been digitized and are freely available on MTS's website at: http://moving-the-social.ub.rub.de/index.php/Moving_the_social/issue/archive. Current issues are available only to subscribers. There are different subscription options to choose from:

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Visit our website at <http://moving-the-social.ub.rub.de> to find out more and feel free to contact the Managing Editor with any questions at mts@rub.de.

About the author:

MTS's Managing Editor **Vivian Strotmann** holds a Ph.D. in Oriental Studies, with research mainly focussing on the history of sciences, Arabic lexicography and on the migration of knowledge between countries and cultures. From June 2014 to November 2016, she worked as Managing Editor of *Entangled Religions* at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg "Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe". In December 2016, she joined the University Library of Ruhr-Universität Bochum as a meta-data expert for the DFG-funded project "Historiography of Ottoman Europe" and became Managing Editor of *Moving the Social*. Vivian Strotmann takes a special interest in open access publishing and digital humanities. Contact: mts AT rub.de

Interview with activist Miguel Ángel Jiménez Blanco

**Kara Andrade, Ernesto Castañeda and
Luis Rubén Díaz-Cepeda**

Biographical introduction

Miguel Ángel Jiménez Blanco was coordinator and community organizer for the Union of Towns and Organizations of the State of Guerrero (UPOEG 2016), a coalition of hundreds of self-defense groups, including a women's brigade of one hundred women armed with low-caliber weapons to patrol their hometown of Xaltianguis.

Miguel Ángel was a political activist and a community organizer in Guerrero, one of the most conflictive Mexican states known for its history of conflicts, lawlessness and most recently, organized drug cartels. Miguel Ángel –a father of seven– migrated and lived in the United States for a few years. After returning to Mexico, he became an activist, a community organizer, a community police leader, and an active link between activists, human rights advocates, journalists, and civil society organizations.

His preferred weapons for organizing were the Internet and especially Whatsapp on his mobile phone, which enabled him to chat, call, and form groups with other people using the same mobile phone application. The application helped Miguel Ángel to connect with other activist groups across Mexico. He based his decision to use Whatsapp mostly on practical and cost-effective grounds. He set up a Whatsapp group that included some 180 local and international reporters to where he published first-hand reports from Guerrero.

Miguel Ángel conducted all his activism in Guerrero, Mexico, beginning in his hometown of Xaltianguis, two hours south of Acapulco. In 2014, he organized an all-female community police, for which he received international media attention. He wanted women to learn to protect themselves and not let other people attack or intimidate them.

He had many reasons to get involved in his community. His interpretation of the Bible and his understandings of history shaped his work ethic and sense of duty to overcome “evil” in the world. His main goal was to stem the violence, the abuse of power and corruption in Guerrero.

The “war on drugs” has produced thousands of deaths in Mexico. Over 25,5000 people have been reported “disappeared” or missing since 2006 (Human Rights Watch 2015). Community organizers, human rights activists, journalists and others are among those missing and killed. When 43 Ayotzinapa students disappeared in September 2014, Miguel Ángel organized search parties. Miguel Ángel actively supported the parents of the missing 43 students of Ayotzinapa. While searching for the students, he found and helped excavate clandestine mass graves throughout the state of Guerrero. Even though the students’ bodies

were not found, he continued this work and helped to locate and identify bodies, many which turned out to be those of smuggled migrants (CNN 2014, Jenkins 2015).

For Miguel Ángel the violence exercised by the state and that by organized crime were not different in their consequences; he intuited Tilly's (1984, 1985) warning not to differentiate analytically between illegitimate and supposedly legitimate violence. Miguel Ángel was not formally trained in human rights or politics; he was an organic intellectual (Gramsci 1994). Miguel Ángel acted on the idea that there was a need for citizens to arm themselves and to use violence when necessary to stop organized crime and abuse even when committed by local and federal police and governments. The following interview documents his views on government, citizenship, social change, and his use of messaging technology to achieve his goals. Our aim is to understand the reasons behind such altruistic activism despite the real risks involved, and to connect large scale social change with personal narratives (Castañeda 2009).

His mission and vision

MAJB: I consider myself like a street sweeper who must deal with the ugly, [and] remove the dead dogs [from the streets]. I do not like my role [as a leader] (...). I identify with the street sweeper whose duty it is to sweep... I prefer to be with the people, even though I don't make any money, and neither eat well, nor [do I] have a secure position. I prefer it this way. I do not want to be the leader of anything, nor do I want to be beneath anybody.¹

Using WhatsApp to Spread Information

KA: When did you begin to use the WhatsApp application?²

MAJB: I began to use it about a year ago, for personal messaging with friends. [In our activist organization] we communicate constantly, so we were spending so much money on messages or calls, and, because I travel often, I have a lot of expenses. I had to find a way to lower my costs. I noticed everyone sending messages on WhatsApp, and I realized that it was more economical. I also saw other members using it too, and partly because of convenience; I just had to copy and paste instead of repeating to write [the message] over and over again.

I was a little slow at first because I am not very good at these things, but I had to learn quickly out of necessity. I used to text each reporter individually, or take a long time to answer when they texted, as I have a list of more than 180 reporters (...)

The [WhatsApp] group is designed to be able to upload relevant, first-hand information. Yes, first-hand information, news I can get out to them quickly. Why? Because international news reporters have to inform about what is happening. I called this *Fuente Informativa* (news source), because news

² All questions posed in Spanish by Kara Andrade; responses were translated by the authors.

reporters can get information from here and give it to their media organizations and say “this is what’s going on” and (...) analyze, if it is convenient or not for them to come to Mexico (...) or plan to come to Guerrero.

What media are we talking about?

Univision, Telemundo, Sky News, the media in Germany, France, England, Spain, I don’t know, Japan, there are so many (...) the New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera, Milenio (...)

What are the things that interest international media?

Relevant stories, issues that have to do with something new. For example, when I organized the all-female community police, I became a “success” because they were the first women-led community police force in the world; we created more consciousness and awareness among women. In Guerrero, this caused a news sensation; they came to film from Mexicali, from Mexico and the United States. I have noticed that whenever there is something new or something that benefits the people, it attracts international media’s attention. It is not the type of sensationalist journalism that exists in Mexico. The national media wants to see the deceased, the dismembered, and those types of things. In Mexico, it is all about sensationalist journalism. The national media is controlled by the government, so they cover only what is beneficial [to them] and what does not affect the government.

Have there been news stories that have had an international impact?

Internationally, I would say that if I uploaded something like, “we found some bodies in Iguala”, they would react quickly. For example, when we reported, as you may remember, the [43 Ayotzinapa] missing students, it received international attention.

Were you among the first to break this news, or were there others?

We were the first.

Because you are out there near the Ayotzinapa students, right?

That is why I call it *Fuente Informativa*, because I upload what I see, or whatever is within my reach, wherever I may be. With this situation, we have some community projects in the area, and have 19 teenagers involved in the Ayotzinapa case. The families and the assembly asked us to speak up for them. And I have an obligation to the assembly.

So, are you a part of the Ayotzinapa assembly?

No, they [the community projects] are from the area where I live, but I have nothing to do with Ayotzinapa. Even if I wanted to partake; they do not like us because they say we are on our way to becoming a pro-government group. For us, the assemblies are the ones that are in charge, the assembly rules. So, in the Ayotzinapa case, only the community can change it, it is only up to them. We believe in the authorities, we hand everything over to them, to the commissioners, to the delegates, to the district leaders. We obey the assembly, but the authorities are the ones that endorse [our actions] not the assembly itself. We cannot do it only with civilians, which is where the differences are. And for that reason, we work in that way, we work with the government, we coordinate

with them (...) But why? Because we give them [government officials] the option to fulfill their word. I have already done my part, but we know they have not.

Who are the groups on WhatsApp?

They are people like me, they just want what is best for their families. I am in this with my wife, she is the leader of the group. Those who are involved and committed to this, we know that our lives do not mean anything to the government. We know they can take us down, so we have to make the most out of this communication. Now that we are in contact with groups in every state, we are doing precisely that. So we are learning how to communicate faster, because we've realized that the government's source of power is communication, which they are good at using. For the government, to circumvent the official media channels is to declare war on them. We are living through a revolution in Mexico now, but we are not living it like we did before [not with arms but through communication].

But how has communication changed with the Internet and new technologies?

The Internet came along and changed everything, it makes us feel like we are part of something at any given moment. Look, UPOEG has sown its seeds among the people, they are arming themselves. We have over a thousand armed towns, but we are not looking for a civil war. We are arming the towns so people are not pillaged, robbed, killed, their women and daughters raped, and criminals doing as they please. We want to establish order. Hence, we try to provide the towns with arms, not to fight the government, we are not interested in that. For one simple reason: if we did that, we stand to lose everything. The country's most powerful political leaders are going to hop on their planes and leave Mexico. Once we killed each other, they will come back; there is no point (...) Now, we're busy with creating electoral registers, we are forming a party. The political parties have always used us; for the first time in history, we are using one.

What's the name of the party?

The Humanist Party.

Recording electoral fraud with cellphones

Members of Jiménez Blanco's organization UPOEG decided to run for local offices in the legislative and municipal elections held on June 7, 2015. But they did not win any seats. Miguel Ángel partly blamed the losses on vote-buying and lack of transparency. One week after the elections, he travelled around the region to collect voters' testimonies of alleged vote-buying and coercion, which he recorded with his mobile phone (as shown in the photo). Those elections proved to be one of the country's most violent ones, with 21 assassinations of campaign officials and coordinators, their relatives and bystanders.

It was in June, exactly one week after these contentious elections, that Jiménez traveled to San Marcos, Guerrero, to collect voters' testimonies of alleged vote-buying and electoral fraud. He sped along pot-holed roads through small towns, texting, and making sudden stops at speed bumps. He made phone calls while he used his elbow to steer the car. He had two mobile phones, a big crack on his

windshield, and a Walkie-Talkie crackling with chatter from the local community police.



Miguel Ángel filming a testimony. Photo by Kara Andrade

This is how he described his methods for collecting testimonies from voters about alleged vote-buying:

It is very simple. We record the complaints by phone and pass it on to a friend who is in charge of that, and then the lawyer starts working [on the case]. We have about ten complaints.

Later, they transcribe the audio, list the witnesses, and go over other evidence in order to make a general complaint. This is how Miguel Ángel explains to a meeting why this is important:

It is about showing a few people that if they have the courage to speak publicly, they will see that other people will show courage too. Look, our proposal is very simple: if one of you were offered money or anything in exchange for your vote, we just want to videotape you and get your full name. We will videotape your face, so, [in future], we can file a formal complaint only with facts. It is not a personal complaint, all that you need is to give your testimony i.e., “I am so-and-so, at X time Mr. X arrived and offered me or gave me 100 pesos, 200 pesos. He gave me 200 pesos to vote for their party.” See, it is not against any party (...) it’s against government corruption. But we also do not want you to lie (...)

When you narrate that part, your testimony needs to last only one minute, it has to be very synthesized, just give the facts (...) Testify how you remember it at the time, "they gave you all money in exchange for casting your vote for their candidate and that it was so and so." Say that you remember who it was and that he belongs to X party. Tell us how you all were asked to vote, and give the name of whoever it may be, René or whatever his name may be (...). You need to testify only about what you saw; we just gave you an example, it is about what you saw, not what we believe (...).

Like I said, our testimony has to be seen as "listen, people over there have the courage to confront these issues", and then other towns will begin to do the same. Suddenly, there will be a spark in every town that is protesting ... I remember, 6 years ago they gave 100 pesos per vote, that was the norm. Now they do not pay 100 Pesos, now they pay 200, 300, 500, up until 1,000. Now, imagine that in the upcoming election, they are going to pay 1,500, 2,000 Pesos; I mean, with every day corruption becomes more powerful, and, whose fault is it? Ours, it is our fault.

And what are you expecting from the people here?

The only thing I expect them to do is to keep on fighting. That is my only hope. I do not expect anything from the people. I want people to react, I would love it, if they organized themselves, if they came together. (...) I do not want them to back themselves into a corner, but instead that they defend their kids, fight for them and fight for a better future. It is hard but that is the idea (...) You know, out of sight, out of mind; if people do not speak up, the state will not pay attention (...). The number one problem is not the government, it is not organized crime, it is not the drug dealers. They are not the problem. The name of the problem is apathy. The problem's name is lack of participation, lack of citizen will. This is the number one problem. For me, the second problem is that those of us who participate, we (...) fight internally. We have not understood that unity is strength (...). This is problem number two: the leadership divisions we have to live with. Yes, we are fighting, but everyone does so on their own (...).

Community police forces

But are you arming the towns?

Of course, we are arming the people. We have many armed towns.

Who is giving them the weapons?

They [arm] themselves. Each person has their own guns, their own rifles (...) they all have arms. We do not give them the weapons. Either they have them or they get them, but they are old weapons, just some stupid shit, you know. Do you understand why we arm the towns? Do you know what I mean?

So that they can defend themselves?

No.

So, it's not for self-defense?

No. See, we are organizing community police in every town, so that they can defend themselves from kidnappers, thieves, murderers, rapists, and

extortionists. We do not want to battle the government, and we will not allow people to do it either. We would not win, Kara. If we were to have a coup, millions would die, it would be stupid. Those with power will take off on their planes with their families to New York, or to whatever country, to live a f... fabulous life; they will not even use all their money. And after the rise, they will come back here to see how we are here in Mexico, and they will again oppress the survivors. I do not see any sense in us fighting, you know? I'm not against the government, I'm against the misuse of power.

How does the work you do here help the country?

So that the people in the towns begin to understand their role as citizens, as a people. When they are able to achieve something that, and this becomes known on a national level and on a global level, people elsewhere see this and say: if [they] can do this, then so can we.

While we were talking, we passed a military checkpoint. Why is the army here?

The army is all over. They are afraid that we are going to rise up in arms.

And is that why there is a community police?

After many abuses in Ayutla, people got tired and began to organize themselves and for that reason they started the community police. See, the situation got so extreme that you have to realize, "I do not have any more money; they will take my dignity now." When they take away the only thing that people have left, their dignity, that is when [they say] enough is enough... Clearly, what I do threatens the government. Because organizing the people is much more dangerous than arming people for an uprising, don't you think?

Miguel Ángel explains how different community policing groups fight among themselves:

This group [we just visited] is fighting with another group, there is division. That is why we urgently need to arrange a meeting... so they can dialogue. People are tired. Economically speaking, everyone has suffered the consequences (...) And above all there are clashes, one group arguing against the other, we need to stabilize this. That was the government's bet: that people would get exhausted as time goes by and get divided. Now, there is internal division not because of power, but because of poverty, the fight is an internal one.

Risks and threats

Have you faced death threats?

Not anymore. They have tried to kill me a few times, they even put a price on my head (...). For example, in my own town, I am a wanted man. They tried to kill me many times (...). They get angry, because I interfere [with their business] and do what I want. So, they always want to kill me, but they can dream on. The problem is that I am not going to stop just because some morons want to kill me. Listen, Kara, everyone who fights for social change has a similar fate, and you cannot deny it, either you go to jail for life or they kill you.

And you, what do you prefer?

To die, they will never get to torture me (...), I would never enter a jail cell alive, because if they put me in jail, they are going to torture me (...) just to get information out of me. The government is always looking for truthful information, but it is not hidden. For example, we use WhatsApp, the government has access to see all of our information. What can we hide? Everything is there. Because the government is watching us. To them, we are simply some type of guerrillas, don't you think? We are not guerrillas, but they are definitely observing us. Look how funny this is, my phone is recording all that we are saying right now, my phone is being tracked by the government, my phone has been [tapped]. They watch us organizers day and night.

But aren't there other apps that are safer?

Well, I will learn how to use them and then I shall communicate that way, but, until then, we will not use them. Besides, we do not have time to learn new technology.

That is worrying, because they can attack you, they can follow you, there are many dangers, don't you think?

Yes. I am aware of that, but, I don't know why, it does not worry me. I try to make sure that one can speak clearly, as I am not a guerilla fighter because I just am not. I am not a drug dealer, nor a murderer, nor a thief. Since I am none of these, it does not trouble me. If I were a part of any of that, I would worry people learned that I was a disgrace (...).

There is some danger; the government has already obstructed me. I do not get involved with the attorney general, or Mexico's deputy attorney, or their agents. We need order, they need to understand that we need order. It can't be the case that they are killing us left, right and center, while the government assumes that we are fine, we are fine, we are fine.

Miguel Ángel, there had been many people that they have attacked, for example: the doctor who was on Twitter, she was doing something similar on Twitter in Tamaulipas and they killed her. There were also bloggers who had done nothing more than to report on their communities, it happened in Ciudad Juarez. It happened in other places in Mexico, where there are people using technology, for transparency, for, I don't know, activism, and they killed them.

Sure, I know.

So, it doesn't matter whether someone is a radical guerrilla fighter or a thief?

No, I gave my personal opinion of what would worry me. I know it is worrisome, because the government's biggest concern is that we have the ability to organize and coordinate ourselves, and they want to prevent this by any means necessary. So I know this, [but] personally, I am not worried. I have other ways of communicating that the government will never know about.

How so?

Well, we visit every town and we communicate face to face, which, regardless of what they say, is the most perfect way [to communicate].

I do not know if you, at any point, received some type of threat, something that directly impacted you or other journalists that are a part of the group?

Up until now, I have not received any new threats, other than the ones that I have already had. Besides the normal ones, that they want to kill me, that there are bounties for my life, but new threats, no.

But how do you know if these are just empty threats?

No, I have already been persecuted. They have chased me in my town. I play hide and seek, I get to one spot, then another and then another, and we go like this in circles. The advantage is that I have people who inform me. Before I go to a place, they warn me (...). This is something that I fully understand, I do not do it for me, nor for the adults that are alive now; I do it for the new generations, for my kids. If someone does not sacrifice now, I ask myself, who is going to do it?

And your family?

The mom of my daughter keeps saying, "I do not understand. You always say and claim that what you do is for your kids, but you are never with them." And I tell her, one day my kids will wake up and learn what their father did and how he tried to change this dammed situation in the country, so that they could have a better place. And if they do not understand that, it is not my problem. It is true, I have to pay the price, and they will also have to pay. I am terrified that something could happen to my kids but not to me (...). Listen carefully, I love my children and I am doing this out of love. If I had no sense of what I wanted to do, then why would I fight? There is something that keeps me fighting. We all need a dog chasing us, a reason to fight.

Assassination

Miguel Angel Jiménez Blanco's bullet-ridden body was found on August 8, 2015 outside of his hometown in Guerrero; he was 45 years old (Andrade 2015a, Andrade 2015b, Jenkins 2015). His murder, still pending investigation, with no clear suspects or answers is not unlike the case of Ayotzinapa's disappeared students. Miguel Angel's murder case may remain unsolved, which would not be unusual for Mexico.

About the authors

Kara Andrade did the interviews with Miguel Angel Jiménez Blanco. Ernesto Castañeda helped with the material selection, editing, and analysis. Luis Rubén Díaz-Cepeda helped with the translation and further editing. We thank Christopher Perl for helping with the first round of translation.

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