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Interface volume 4 issue 1
The season of revolution:
the Arab Spring

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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.

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The season of revolution:
the Arab Spring and European mobilizations

Magid Shihade, Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Laurence Cox

The Arab Spring: Eurocentrism, modernity and Orientalism

Whatever name we assign to the events in the Arab world, we end up trapping ourselves in one limiting or problematic framework or another. The concept of seasons is embedded in a long history of Orientalizing the region, as if what happened in the history of Arab people before 2011 did not qualify for an acknowledgment of the energies, struggles, and fighting for a better life they have been waging against western colonialism, intrusions, and unjust local governments for over 100 years. From Algeria, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq to Palestine, Arab people have been putting up a hard fight for over a century against a western, colonial and neo-colonial, capitalist and racist modernity. But this hardly registers in a western-centric mindset and discourse, nor among many in the Arab world.

Despite the obsession of the West with the Arab world, and despite its claims of superior knowledge, Arab people continue to be "misunderstood," and / or maligned, and established academic theories continue to fail to explain, and or predict developments in the region. With every failure, a more arrogant wave of theories are generated by the same failing western-centric expertise, replacing or continuing the old paradigms of "knowledge" as if nothing had happened. Failures are evaded, and expertise, analyses, and prescriptions are repeated with the same arrogance.

This pattern is due to at least three interrelated issues: modernity, Orientalism, and Eurocentrism, which have been at work in combination since the ascendance of western modernity to global hegemony, with its assumption that humans are rational and thus can achieve accurate knowledge and be accurately studied.

This was accompanied by a denial of the contribution of knowledge of different cultures from around the world, and with a western-centric approach to knowledge that not only universalized theories and explanations of questions related to human societies, but was also embedded in a project of global domination that aimed at maintaining western supremacy and the dependence of the rest of the world. This approach to knowledge was and continues to be shaped, as it is related to the Arab world, with a racist and Orientalist attitudes that color the views of even those who claim and even might be very much against western hegemony, and are supportive or are in solidarity with Arab people and other people in the South.

Too many experts who claim sympathy with Arab people's struggles, and claim to be in opposition to Western hegemony and exploitation of the globe have

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rushed quickly to assert expertise on the Arab revolution, and to make early judgments on it mere weeks or months after it started, as if it is something that has ended, rather than seeing it as something that is in the making.

The French Revolution, the most celebrated example of people's power to change history in Euro-centric historiography, took years to achieve some of its goals, only to be hijacked later by the dictatorship of Napoleon who led the same French state to colonize large parts of the world. The slogans of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" were soon forgotten and domination and genocides against people in the Third World became the norm of the French "Republic," its legacy, and continues to be part and parcel of French involvement in different parts of the world in pursuit of resources and hegemony. Nothing less is expected from the U.S. or Britain as old colonial rule was replaced with imperialist and neo-colonial structures of domination and exploitation.

In the many reports, talks, conferences, and or papers about the Arab revolution, old Orientalist and neo-Orientalist narratives continue to present the Arab world as either dangerous, chaotic and violent or stagnant, passive, and always of need for help from the outside (from the West).

When revolutions erupted, instant claims of western influence shaped much of the discourse (as though Arab people were incapable of having their own revolutions). The ideas of the "non-violence theorist" Gene Sharp (whose main work and analysis of violence, oppression, and dictatorship has only focused on East European, and Third World countries, and for some reason never discussed Israeli or American wars and oppressions), were argued to be the guiding ideology of Egyptian youth. Israeli and Western media constantly showed reservations and fear of the unknown, of possible chaos, or the danger of "radicals" taking over governments in the Arab world.

Of course such arguments and representations managed and continue to manage to ignore the history of activism and revolution in the Arab world against economic, political, social and imperial repression, and the local dictatorship that were and some continue to be supported by the West. They also ignore Arab youth in Europe, their history of resistance and revolts against racism and their struggle along with other marginalized groups for economic, social and political justice in Europe.

Thus the struggles of people in the South seem to continue to be ignored, manipulated to fit western interests, or when impossible they are maligned as the result of "fanaticism." When they manage to overcome local, regional, and global restraints and succeeds, these struggles are celebrated and coopted as the result of Western influence.

The history of western interventions in the South, not only militarily, politically, and economically, but also intellectually have not only created disfigured "Oriental" minds, but also Western ones. Those who were made to believe that their history of knowledge production was not valid or irrelevant have often ended up only mimicking and reproducing western paradigms and distanced

themselves from their local knowledge as they also came to see it as "backward," or irrelevant. Those in the west who came to believe that western knowledge is the only "real", accurate and useful knowledge, were led not only to feelings of supremacy, but also to avoid taking seriously alternative knowledge which might have helped better explain human societies and its changes. The end result wasthe marginalization of diverse and more democratic knowledge, coupled with an insistence on paradigms and frameworks that continue to demonstrate their inadequacy.

This pattern continues today to shape discourse about issues including the developments in the Arab world, where constant writing, conferences, talks, and workshops are shaped by this same western-centric approach, which failed to predict or explain what happened in the Arab world, yet continues to insist on shaping the understanding and the outcome of events there to fit western interests of the west, and continue to lecture about how things should be as if people there will act and behave as instruments rather than agents. It is not only intervention in military, political, and economic forms in Libya, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, but also an "intellectual" campaign which is continuing unabated.

All this, in addition to the selective interventions of the West in many countries, the selective support for some "revolutions" by contrast with western support for brutal regimes such Saudi Arabia, the Israeli military settler colonial project, and war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq (part of a longer history of crimes against Southern populations, of exploitation of Southern resources and of maintaining underdevelopment and dependency there), makes the situation in the Arab world poorly understood.

But to have a better future for everyone, and to be able to start understanding the world around us in an effort to transform it, the old paradigms of western supremacist, capitalist, racist, colonialist practices and approaches to knowledge must end, if popular movements and the academy are to produce knowledge that can help create a better world, that is more just and democratic, not for the few, but for the largest majority if not for all.

In the meantime, as in the past, the human energy of people on the ground will prove the limits of such western interventions again and again, in a continuous struggle for decolonization and real liberation from this nightmare. This resistance has been also taking place in the form of writing and counter intellectual resistance. This journal issue is one of such attempts at counter intervention that aims at challenging how events in the Arab world have been explained and represented.

In this issue

The articles in this special issue are diverse and cover several issues.

Austin Mackell's interview with Egyptian labour activist Kamal Elfayoumi is particularly significant for *Interface* because of the arrests of Mackell, his translator Ailya Alwi and postgrad student Derek Ludovici when they arrived in Mahalla al-Kubra for the interview (see Mackell 2012). As with other recent attacks on foreign media, the Egyptian state are seeking to discredit local activists by associating them with fictitious external agendas and thus cutting them off from international media. In this particular case, the claim is that the three researchers promised children money to throw rocks at a police station: a claim which would be ridiculous if the charge did not carry a sentence of 5 − 7 years. We ask *Interface* readers to sign the petition on http://www.change.org/petitions/australian-prime-minister-act-on-austin-mackell-s-matter-now-freeaustin.

Samir Amin's article provides a context for the Arab revolution and the rise of what he defines as the tri-partite cluster of forces (comprador elites, political Islam, and imperialism) that aim at maintaining the dependence of the region, its subordinate position, and the absence of development that allows U.S. led global imperialism and Israeli hegemony in the region.

Vijay Prashad's article contextualizes the revolution in a long history of resistance in the South and attempts for people there to shape their own history through different projects such as the Non-Allied Movement, and the counter imperialist projects to suppress any independent path for the peoples of the South. Jeremy Salt discusses the different dynamics in the region since the start of the revolution, the rise of different regional powers, and the continuous western interventions in the region.

The article on Tunisia by Corinna Mullin and Azadeh Shashahani discusses how western intervention historically and at the moment is going to affect the development of the revolution in Tunisia (and elsewhere). Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio provide an inside look at the political context and the challenges and possibilities for social movements in Egypt one year after the taking of Tahrir Square.

Bassam Haddad tries to find room for opposing western interventions and imperialism while being critical of despotism, and supporting popular aspirations in Syria and elsewhere for freedom, justice, and liberty. Steven Salaita discusses media coverage in the U.S. and its rootedness in modern Orientalism and assumptions about Arabs and Muslims, and insists on calling contemporary events a revolution.

Ahmed Kanna discusses the unreported revolution and protests of South Asian workers in the Gulf, while Aditya Nigam argues for rethinking the traditional frameworks of what defines political organizing and allowing more space for seeing new forms of protest and politics also outside of western paradigms of social movements and protests.

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Finally, Cassie Findlay discusses the struggle to archive the graffiti and other forms of public art from the Egyptian revolution.

A "European Spring"?

As the phrase suggests, the "Arab Spring" has been an inspiration to activists in Europe, where a recent wave of mobilizations has swept across the continent. Perhaps the most significant influence was the occupation of Tahrir Square, which prompted European activists to take the practice of occupation (most often reserved for squatted social centres) into the public squares and into direct contact with other citizens, drawing in large numbers of people who had not mobilized before (Calvo, forthcoming; Romanos, forthcoming, Vogiatzoglou and Sergi, forthcoming). At the same time as face-to-face contact was increasing, the increasing use and importance of ICTs also played a key role in developing forums of discussion and transmission of news and calls for mobilization (Fuster Morell, forthcoming).

The European protest wave has taken both participants and observers by surprise with the intensity, scope and longevity of the mobilisations. These continue the double critique levelled by the global justice movement against neoliberal capitalist globalization and ineffective, illegitimate representative democracy - but now set against the backdrop of global financial crisis, austerity cuts, soaring unemployment and the deterioration of social welfare safety nets for the most vulnerable.

Although the protests in Spain and Greece have drawn the most media attention, European mobilizations in response to the financial global crisis in fact started much earlier, in Iceland's 2008 Saucepan Revolution, prompted by the economic collapse resulting from the banking crisis (Júlíusson and Helgason, forthcoming). Icelanders occupied Reykjavik's Austurvöllur square every Saturday from 11 October 2008 to 14 March 2009, banging on pots and pans (in echo of Argentina's 2001 uprising) and occasionally throwing eggs at members of parliament.

They demanded the resignation of the government, parliamentary elections, electoral reform (from one of differently-weighted constituencies to one person, one vote), the prosecution of bankers and politicians responsible for the mishandling of the nation's finances, a new constitution, and a referendum to decide whether or not Iceland should assume the debt generated by the collapse of its three main banks. The mobilizations were successful: the President resigned, a new constitution was drafted using participatory methods and Icelanders voted "No" on two referenda (6 March 2010, and 10 April, 2011).

Also in 2008, between 6 and 23 December, Greece erupted in protests after the shooting of a 15 year old boy by Athens police. The outrage over the shooting sparked mobilizations which channelled discontent with deteriorating economic conditions and dissatisfaction with the political class and were characterized by

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violent confrontations in the streets. It wasn't until 5 May 2010, after a general strike in the context of the Greek debt crisis, however, that the "Greek Revolution" got underway.

Strongly backed by the unions, who called six general strikes in 2011 alone, the movement met in Syntagma Square in front of parliament to demand the abandonment of neoliberal politics and cuts in social spending; that the EU, IMF and WB stop pressuring Greece to adopt austerity measures; and an increase in citizen power with an attendant decrease in the power of financial and economic elites. In May, 2011 the Greek *Indignados* movement was formed, inspired by the Spanish *Indignados*, and with the slogan "Direct Democracy Now!" on May 31 2011, *Indignado* protesters surrounded and blockaded politicians in parliament.

The Spanish 15-M or *Indignados* movement occupied the central plazas of Madrid, Barcelona and other cities and was the product of a diverse configuration of assemblies and groups with a marked autonomous character. "Real Democracy Now!", the civic platform that called the 15-M protest, was the prime impulse behind the original protests and was itself made up of numerous groups and campaigns, including the "Nolesvotes" (Don't vote for them) campaign which called for abstention against all political parties that had supported the Sinde Law regulating web pages and intellectual property rights; the "Platform of those Affected by Mortgages" (PAH), the student group "Youth without Future" who had been key mobilizers against the Bologna university reforms, long standing environmental action group "Ecologistas en Acción", diverse social centres, Attac Spain, and other groups active in the global justice movement and in other recent protests.

In Madrid, where the movement began, the form of assemblies - which were autonomous and decentralized and spread throughout the cities - represented an extension and amplification of the forms developed by autonomous actors in the global justice movement (horizontal assemblies based on consensus decision making designed to make visible and protest against political issues, and coordinated between local assemblies via a general assembly) but the striking feature, fostered no doubt by the direct effect of the financial crisis on many citizens, was that many of the participants were new to protest.

Unlike the Icelandic movement whose goals were clear and specific, the Spanish *Indignados* generated a comprehensive and radical list of demands that encompassed many long-term social movement demands (from anti-nuclear claims and reductions in military spending to the recovery of historical memory and the separation of church and state, to the reform of labor laws, and a radical reform in tax law to benefit the most vulnerable), reflecting the multiplicity of social movement groups involved in the protests.

The two first points of the manifesto produced by the general assembly in the Puerta del Sol on 20 May 2011 were a change in the Electoral Law to open lists and a one person one vote system (as against the current one where minimum thresholds make it harder for radical parties to gain seats), and that the

fundamental rights stipulated in the Spanish Constitution be upheld: the right to a decent home, to universal and free healthcare, to free circulation of people, and to a public and non-religious education.

Internationalisation?

The European mobilizations were strongly inspired by not only by the Arab Spring but also by each other, and references to mobilizations across national borders were frequent. Protests in Portugal began prior to the more visible protests in Spain when the movement of the "desperate generation"(Geração o rasca) - inspired by the events in Egypt - took to the streets on 12 March 2011 in the biggest public demonstration since the 1974 revolution. The protests lasted only one day, but activists later mobilized again in solidarity with the Spanish 15-M *Indignados* and went on to more sustained protests in October. While Egypt was a clear inspiration in the Spanish case, activists there also looked north, carrying signs saying "We too can be Iceland", referring to Iceland's refusal to pay the debt and its new constitution.

The Spanish mobilizations in turn inspired mobilizations in Italy (*indignati*, calling for *democrazia reale ora* on 20 May 2011) and France, and influenced the framing and demands of the Greek and Portuguese movements who adopted the 15-M/Indigado/Real Democracy Now slogans and names. Common to all of the protests is a rejection of austerity measures imposed by International Financial Institutions, a defense of the welfare state, a critique of neo-liberal global capitalism and a deep critique of representative democracy and the political class.

These mobilizations came together with the developing Occupy movement and struggles in other countries 15 October 2011, at the initiative of the Spanish *Indignados*. Protests in more than 80 countries and 900 cities called for global change, recalling the global anti-war protest of 15 February 2003.

Other European countries saw far more limited mobilisation (at least so far). Ireland, for example, is one of the countries hardest hit by the crisis in both financial and social terms, with soaring unemployment, cuts and emigration, and the crisis saw the collapse of support for the traditionally governing Fianna Fáil and its overt clientelism. Yet this failed to translate into substantial social movements, and conventional trade union marches accompanied the entry of their Labour Party ally into a new government committed to neoliberal austerity and demonstrations of loyalty to Berlin. The government's attempt to impose a poll tax and a threatened water tax are generating significant civil disobedience, and Occupy camps were highly visible in six different towns, but as yet an Irish uprising comparable to events in Iceland, Greece or Spain has been absent. Understanding these counter-examples is crucial both for activists in these more passive countries seeking to change the situation as well as for researchers — as are, of course, the *differences* between mobilisations in countries like Iceland, Greece and Spain.

Spanish developments

As we go to press, two noteworthy updates on the Spanish case: the first and the most troubling is the move from the Popular Party government to draft legislation that will criminalize peaceful public protest on and offline[1]. The importance of this attack on fundamental civil liberties and its implications for social movements cannot be overstated. The legislation would make any protest organized by internet or social media that results in "violence" a criminal offense. The implications of this are clear: any act of "violence" at a street protest could result in criminal penalties for the organizers. The legislation would also elevate passive resistance to a criminal offense, including blocking the entrance to public buildings and sit-ins. It would classify as criminal "threatening behaviour toward the forces of order /security, throwing dangerous objects, and rushing or charging", carrying a penalty of two years imprisonment.

This is a clear strategy to deter peaceful protest under the guise of dealing with the "radical element". Making the organizers of a public demonstration which anyone can join criminally liable for the actions of any one of the participants is draconian to say the least, but it becomes even more troubling when one considers the frequently-used tactic of undercover police infiltrators acting as agents provocateurs. If successful this strategy would be very effective in denying citizens the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. The Minister of the Interior, Fernández Díaz, justified the need for the change in legislation to deal with "radical violent anti-systemic protesters that use these types of protest events to act like real urban guerrillas" (RTVE 2012). He argued that far from making Spain an anomaly, the legislation would bring Spain into line with the legislation currently on the books in France and the UK.

This latest initiative comes against the backdrop of a general strike in Spain (29 March 2012) which saw hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets, accompanied by heavy handed policing, but also against the backdrop of recent student protests in Valencia, sparked when students protesting against cuts in education at the LLuis Vives High School decided to block traffic and were beaten and arrested by the police (Martínez 2012 and Público 2012)[2]. The circulation of images of police beating minors circulated via internet, triggering protests of high school and university students, professors and others across Valencia and other cities. The protesters dubbed the protests the "Valencian Spring" in a clear reference to the Arab Spring and the criticisms of the cuts in

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[1] See EDRI 2012 and RTV 2012

[2] For an extensive listing of news coverage see: http://www.acampadavalencia.net/prensa-primaveravalenciana/

education funding were linked also to critiques of political corruption[3] and the lack of real democratic participation and institutions.

The second development is less dramatic, but still illuminating: the news that a small minority of the Real Democracy Now movement, which was behind the 15-M *Indignados* mobilizations, has decided to incorporate the name "Real Democacy Now" (DRY) as a legal association, against the wishes of the majority of the people involved in the assemblies. Reported in the mainstream press with the headline "The Real Democracy Now movement splits in two" (Elola 2012), the version from the movement web portal tells a different story. In an article titled "Real Democracy Now is no longer Real Democracy Now", members of DRY state that the move to create the association was minoritarian, unilateral and illegitimate[4] since the State assembly in Málaga in the summer of 2011 clearly agreed that Real Democracy Now would never adopt a legal form because that went against the principles of the movement:

"We want to make clear that we continue to believe in a coordinated network of individuals without leaders... and continue to be a horizontal network without representatives...DRY is an idea, values, principles and political and social objectives based on radical democracy: a participatory, horizontal and direct democracy, for real democracy now!"

If key goals of the 15-M movement have been a rejection of representative politics, a strong commitment to alternative forms of deliberative decision making (to the point of taking on the challenge of trying to achieve consensus in popular assemblies of 5000 people), and a desire to engage in prefigurative transformative politics that not only critique the ravages of rampant global capitalism but attempt to meet them head on via the establishment of mutual aid societies and cooperatives, these attempts have been met, as always, by the voices of those who demand leaders, efficiency, and some form of hierarchical decision making structure.

This is in keeping with the cleavages that divide not only the Spanish 15-M movement, but also Occupy movements in the US and other contemporary movements in the West/Global North. It was also a common tension in the Global Justice Movement (Flesher Fominaya 2007) where some institutional Left actors dismissed autonomous protesters as "swarms of mosquitoes" and were anxious to get down to what they saw as the business of real politics. These differences of approach go back generations in various permutations throughout the history of European social movements (from the First International's

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[3]There is a long running political corruption scandal revolving around the former President of Valencia, Partido Popular member Francisco Camps and other members of his party. See Hernández 2010.

[4] http://www.democraciarealya.es/blog/2012/04/22/la-asociacion-democracia-real-ya-no-es-democracia-real-ya/

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conflicts between anarchists and Marxists via the 1960s rupture between institutional and extra-parliamentary Lefts and debates between radical democrats and representative politicians in Green parties). The "where do we go from here?" question is as inevitable as it is predictable. The challenge of working across these fundamentally different approaches to political action is a central task for contemporary movements in Europe, and the tension between radical participatory democracy and efficiency and institutionalization will be with us for the foreseeable future.

The Spanish Minister of the Interior is probably right about one thing: Spain is not an anomaly. The levels of mobilization and the levels of repression may be more visible, but it would be optimistic to think that increases in attacks on the right to protest and, in particular, attempts to control the use of the Internet and to censor the free circulation of information are not on the horizon across Europe. Some comfort perhaps can be taken from Castells' (2011) assessment of Mubarak's attempt to pull the plug on the Internet during his five day blackout (27 January-1 February 2011) during the January Revolution. The attempt was met with the solidarity, creativity, ingenuity and technological savvy of hundreds of people and hackers around the world and in Egypt who worked together to re-route information, find alternative routes of communication and keep people connected.

If the importance of social media and Internet can be overstated and oversimplified, with insufficient attention given to real geographical disparities in use and connectivity, it is clear that ICTs are opening up new possibilities for new forms of mobilization and new forms of surveillance and repression. The effects of the global financial crisis are far from subsiding, and the 15-M movement is gearing up as we write for a new round of global protests from 12 – 15 May. As noted above with regard to the "Arab Spring" the rush to quick judgements in the face of a lack of empirical evidence needs to be tempered with analysis and insightful reflection, and the recognition that this wave of protests is not over.

In this issue

In this issue, our special section on European Spring opens with Eduardo Romanos Fraile's interview with the activist blogger @fanetin on his perspective on the "15-M" movement. Marianne Maeckelbergh's article "Horizontal democracy now" looks at how the decision-making processes of 15-M in Barcelona both draw on and develop those of the alterglobalization movement.

Fabià Díaz-Cortés i Gemma Ubasart-Gonzàlez, in "15M: Indignació, Trajectòries mobilitzadores i especificitats territorials. El cas català", explore the significance of the pre-existing local context to events in Barcelona, while Puneet Dhaliwal's "Public squares and resistance: the politics of space in the Indignados movement" discusses the strategic value of the occupation of physical space.

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In "Mobilizing against the crisis, mobilizing for 'another democracy'" Donatella della Porta discusses the continuity between both waves of protests globally, in the goal of democratic change – and the disparity in the modes of transnational organising. Finally, Joan Subirats' "Algunas ideas sobre política y políticas en el cambio de época" explores the emergence of new network forms, the role of IT and how both fit into wider processes of social change.

A global wave?

The "Occupy" movement, so present in Anglophone media, has marked, above all, a return of US social movements to the wide-ranging alliance-building and mobilisation that was supposed to have been defeated by the rise of post-9/11 nationalism and security panics. Both inspired by events in Spain and the Arab world and inspiring events in countries in Europe and elsewhere, its international connections are equally evident.

In the nature of things, the deeper relationships underlying these three very different crises of hegemony – that represented by the Arab Spring, that manifested in European protests against austerity and that of the Occupy movement – are the subject of a debate that is only beginning, among activists as among movement researchers.

Waves of social movements, in one or more areas of the world-system, are a normal feature of life in capitalism. They include the "Atlantic Revolutions" of the late 18th century (America, France, 1798 in Ireland and the Haitian revolution which ended slavery); the revolutions of 1848 across Europe; the wave of 1916-23 which left new states of very different kinds in Ireland and Russia but saw revolutionary situations in many if not most European countries; the anti-fascist resistance from (say) the Spanish Civil War to 1945; Asian and African anti-colonial movements which led to independence from empire for most of the world's population; the global wave of 1968, from Mexico to Japan; the revolutions of 1989-90 which brought down state socialism in most places (but were defeated in China); and the Latin American "pink tide" which has seen a string of revolutionary situations and movement-linked states in South America and shaken US hegemony there.

The causes of such waves are widely debated. One reading links them to the long Kondratieff waves of capitalist development and tries to see a structural link to the ebbs and flows of political economy. Another highlights weakened states (for example, at the end of wars). Katsiaficas (1987)has talked about an "eros effect" of contagion from one revolution to the next. Others have celebrated "networking" processes. They may also be seen as linked to the rise and fall of regimes of accumulation – that they represent both a crisis in such regimes and a moment in which popular forces have an opportunity to push events in a different direction: enforcing democracy against monarchy or dictatorship, independence against empire, welfare against capitalism, and so on.

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Certainly such waves have been among the major social forces in the history of recent centuries. Decolonisation – whether the US in the 18th century, Latin America in the 19th, Ireland in the 1920s or Asia after WWII – is one major outcome. Democracy – in the French Revolution, the European resistance to fascism or the events of 1989-90 – is another. Social justice has been a common theme, from the Haitian revolution via the European uprisings at the end of WWI to the Latin American pink tide. A democratisation of everyday life – in particular after 1968 – is another.

The current wave is happening in a very particular global context. The wave of 1989-90 saw the Soviet Union lose its satellites and then disintegrate, and Putin has not been able to restore its reach. The pink tide demonstrated the US' inability, for the first time in a century or more, to impose its will (in military, foreign policy or economic terms) on its Latin American "backyard", while events in Egypt in particular have underlined its limited purchase on the strategically crucial Arab world.

More generally there is a rumbling challenge to neoliberalism: started by the "IMF riots" of the 1980s and early 1990s, articulated by the Zapatistas, the World Social Forum, summit protests and the 2001 *Argentinazo*, institutionalised by radical governments in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, and now manifested across three key global regions.

This challenge is particularly significant as the tentative criticisms of neoliberalism made at the start of the current crisis by figures like Gordon Brown have had no real implication beyond the narrowly technical ("quantitative easing" etc.) It is clear that there is no significant dissent within elites – political and financial, or their hired mouths in academia and journalism – about the proposal that the only way forward is yet more of the recipes that created the crisis. Of course the fact that elites are so resistant to alternatives is one of the major factors forcing ordinary people into radical resistance.

To summarise the situation at present would be foolish. If conferences and special issues on the Arab Spring (and, less frequently, European anti-austerity movements) are now commonplace, the Occupy! movement has developed so recently that it is only now beginning to be represented significantly in academic work. Activists too are struggling to keep up with the sheer flow of information; to build effective links with groups that are developing at such a rate; and to imagine ways of organising that might resolve some of the problems and barriers they are facing. The next few years promise to be not only interesting ones for scholars of social movements – they also promise to be decisive ones for the struggles of ordinary people to shape their own futures.

Also in this issue

As always, this issue of *Interface* contains a range of other articles alongside those related to the theme and special section. Marina Adler's article looks at

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the Oaxacan APPO and how a strong movement alliance and collective identity was generated out of the 2006 uprising. Nancy Baez and Andreas Hernandez' practice note (including a video by participants) looks at the grassroots-led participatory budgeting initiative in four New York districts and how it challenges the model of that city as the financial centre of global capitalism.

The article by Magdalena Prusinowska, Piotr Kowzan and Małgorzata Zielińska looks at the rise and fall of the OKUPÉ student movement in Gdansk and why imported models of movement decision-making have not worked so well in the university context. Finally, Jim Gladwin and Rose Hollins' action note looks at Auckland's Water Pressure Group and sets this in the context of privatisation of municipal assets in New Zealand.

Lastly, we welcome Mandisi Majavu as our new reviews editor. This issue we have reviews of 8 books: Chenoweth and Stephan's *Why civil resistance works: the strategic logic of nonviolent action*; Manji and Ekine's *Africa awakening: the emerging revolutions*; Starr, Fernandez and Scholl's *Shutting down the streets: political violence and social control in the global era*; Givan, Roberts and Soule's *The diffusion of social movements: actors, mechanisms and political effects*; Hessdörter, Pabst and Ullrich's *Prevent and tame: protest under (self-) control*; Observatorio Metropolitano's *Crisis y revolución en Europa: People of Europe rise up!* Lemonik and Mikaila's *Student activism and curricular change in higher education* and MacKinnon's *Consent of the networked: the worldwide struggle for internet freedom.*

Finally

We were delighted to have Mayo Fuster Morell as a guest editor for the special section on the European Spring. Sincere thanks are also due to Elizabeth Humphrys for her help with many things, including cover images and contacts in Egypt. Cristina wishes to thank Antonio Montañés Jiménez for help with background information on the European Spring section of this editorial.

Along with our new reviews editor Mandisi Majavu we also welcome Aziz Choudry as US / Canada editor (with Lesley Wood). Lastly, as always, we would like to thank the contributors to this issue and the anonymous peer reviewers.

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Weaving Revolution:
Harassment by the Egyptian Regime

Austin Mackell

Beginning with a postscript

On 11 Feb 2012, a year to the day after Mubarak's downfall, my friend Derek Ludovici - a post graduate student working on the Egyptian labour movement – and I – accompanied by my long term translator Aliya Alwi and our taxi driver Zakaria Ahmed - travelled back to Mahalla. I had long been hoping to again speak with Mr Kamal el-Fayoumi about the labour and revolutionary movements' successes and failures over the year. In part, that interview was going to be used to update the article that appears below as I was in the process of finalising this note for *Interface* journal. What's more, a small national network of leftist students and workers had called for a general strike. Mahalla seemed an obvious place to spend the day.

We arrived in the town around noon, and went to meet Mr el-Fayoumi in the town's main square — the site of Mahalla's most famous uprising. Upon emerging from the car and beginning to exchange "allekoums" and "sallams" with Mr el-Fayoumi and a young man from an Egyptian TV crew who had had the same idea as us, we were set upon by a group of men.

The angry group came out of nowhere shouting at us, calling us spies, and Aliya a traitor and worse. We made an attempt to escape but the car ended up surrounded by an ever-growing, and ever more aggressive mob. It is very likely these people were mostly there of their own volition, as many Egyptians have accepted the story that further strikes and protests are part of a foreign plot to destroy Egypt. It would be surprising however, if at least some of the henchmen of the local strongmen weren't present in the square that day.

Our taxi driver unfortunately got out of the car, attempting to reason with the crowd — one of whom he told us later, was threatening to smash the car's windows with a brick. When he got back in he told us he had handed over his licence and it was now in the hands of a policeman who had emerged. He and other officers cleared a path and took us to a police station. We were then held for a total of 56 hours in a variety of facilities operated by the Gharabiya Governorate Police, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and Military Intelligence. During this time Aliya, Derek and I were charged with inciting people to vandalism. Specifically it is alleged we promised to give money to children if they threw rocks at a police station. The charges remain with the prosecutor's office at the time of writing. It seems the Ministry of the Interior documents centre is holding up progress, which, my lawyer is told, is comprehensively copying everything I own as part of the case against me. This has made me concerned for the safety of my sources. Already I have heard that one man, a dissident police officer who had declared his loyalty to Tahrir Square

(despite being rejected by the revolutionaries) was questioned about his connection to me when harassed by the authorities.

(From left to right) Derek Ludovici, Aliya Alwi, Austin Mackell, Zakaria Ahmed. Police, following our arrest in Mahalla, took this photograph inside a police station. It was then passed to state media, which ran stories about foreign saboteurs and spies having been arrested.

However, my colleagues and I are not the real targets of these charges. They have been concocted as part of a continuing effort to discredit the revolution and further protest actions, in particular strikes, as part of foreign plots against the country's sovereignty and stability. This narrative already has more than a little traction. When, on the day of the planned strikes, the 'honourable citizens' of Mahalla placed two foreign agents and their Egyptian lackeys under citizens' arrest, it was too good a headline to give up. The story continued in the Egyptian press for about a week or so. After the police raided my apartment it was reported that I possessed union pamphlets, books about Hezbollah, and even a collection of Nasrallah's speeches (a present from my father). We even heard reports that our case was raised by one of the defendants in the Mubarak trial as part of the elaborate foreign plot to overthrow him; the same plot that was responsible for the deaths of protesters, rather than the snipers working on his orders! Apart from adding to their propaganda effort, our case also served to further discourage the press, particularly the foreign press, from travelling outside Cairo, Alexandria and other relatively safe zones. This will help push the story of the labour movement of Egypt even further under the radar.

The Feb 11 strike was a dismal failure unfortunately. When I did get a chance to interview Mr el-Fayoumi (handcuffed to him in the back of a police truck, about 24 hours into our captivity) he had little good news. Having been in telephone contact most of the previous day, he said that the strike action in Mahalla had garnered little support, no more than five or ten per cent of the workers had participated. It is possible the number was even less. What's more, it is also

possible that the mob that had set upon us was in fact in the square as a counter protest to the strike march that was also planned.

This lack of enthusiasm was echoed around the country. It is not that the workers are anti-strike — strikes continue in overlapping waves. However they are largely organised by profession, industry - or even more commonly - around a specific workplace. The workers are not interested in uniting to use their labour power as a force in national politics, in places where those that voted, voted for the Muslim Brotherhood, the salafis, or other non-leftist parties. Indeed other Mahalla workers — including those involved in and even leading strike action previously — have criticised people like el-Fayoumi, calling for them to return to the official unions, citing leadership changes within.

Such voices seem, for this moment, to have the upper hand in the Egyptian workplace. Given the financial and other advantages the old unions have over the new unions, the balance seems unlikely to shift quickly, if it does at all. That does not mean the independent unions have been completely unsuccessful. By their very existence they have incentivised change within the old union structures, and they will continue to remain an important voice in Egyptian politics.

It's also worth noting that if any substantial neo-liberal structural readjustment programs are attempted — as currently being contemplated in talks with the International Monetary Fund - things may change quickly. The thrust of the labour movement, however, seems less revolutionary now than it did a year ago, when the hated figures of Mubarak and his circle were there to unify them with students, unemployed youth and other slum dwellers, peasants, Islamists and every other substantial current in Egyptian politics in collective disgust.

Editor's note: The interview that follows first appeared in an Italian eBook, and is reprinted here as part of our Arab Spring issue. While we do not usually reprint previously published material, the unusual circumstances in this situation warrant it. We are grateful Mr Mackell has written this postscript at what is a very difficult time.

Weaving Revolution:
Speaking with Kamal el-Fayoumi

Kamal El-Fayoumi, worker and union organiser at Misr Spinning and Weaving Works, in Mahalla El-Kubra.

The mainstream media, when covering the story of the Arab Spring in general, and Egypt in particular, has looked mainly at the role played by the internet, and internet activists. In particular, they singled out social networking sites and the new media distributed through them, as the key factor in propelling Egyptians to rise up.

They are not wrong to highlight this, as without doubt such technologies, and their courageous application, did help ferment the massive protests that have rocked Cairo since the 25th of January last year. What's more, this form of online, horizontal organisation, on this massive scale, is something new and momentous, which should be inspiring for people the world over, and terrifying for the elites who rule us.

However, as of course they couldn't discuss any serious revolutionary theory (almost all of which is Marxist and therefore taboo), they have told only half of the story. The whole story of this revolution, like that of all revolutions, is one of class coalitions. In the decade leading up to 2011, the baton of rebellion was passed back and forth repeatedly between two distinct categories of political actors.

One category is that of the bourgeois groups, led by intellectuals and activists, focussed in Cairo and Alexandria, and focussing on political rights and broad systematic changes. Perhaps the most seminal of these is the Egyptian Movement for Change, better known by its slogan *Kifaya* (meaning "enough").

Kifaya's agitation, particularly around the time of the 2005 elections, were perhaps the first signs that despite the massive security apparatus of the Mubarak regime, Egyptians were still able to organise protests on issues including the extension of Mubarak's term, speculation of a transfer of power to his son Gamal, and the generally corrupt and stagnant state of the Egyptian nation.

As Kifaya faltered and fell by the way side, the second category - working class groups - organised around economic demands, often quite local, and strongest in the industrial cities of the Nile Delta and along the Suez Canal, began to rise. These in turn inspired more bourgeois activists, and an increasingly intense feedback loop was created.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than by the story of the April 6th Facebook group.

April 6th was one of the main groups – along with We Are All Khalid Said – who called for protests on January 25, which had been until then, known as police day. As a result, after Mubarak's fall, the group's leadership, in particular Ahmed Maher, became among the most sought after celebrities in Egypt, with foreign and local press – not to mention world leaders including David Cameron, eagerly seeking interviews and meetings. Amazingly – despite the group's massive press exposure – almost no one bothered to talk about the origins of the group, or even where its name came from.

That would mean talking about the strike, on April 6th, 2008, of the textile workers of Mahalla, which the online network was founded to support. To do that would lead into a serious discussion of the Mahalla workers' struggle against the Mubarak regime and its IMF and World Bank sponsored neo-liberal programs of "reform". The importance of opposition to neoliberalism in propelling the massive uprising is still largely ignored by the mainstream media – despite the three day general strike which immediately preceded Mubarak's forced resignation, and which must have hastened the decision of the generals (who control nearly 40% of Egypt's economy through unsupervised private public partnerships, under the veil of secrecy which currently shrouds Egypt's military budget) and other Egyptian elites - to turn on the embattled president.

In part this imbalance is a result of ease of access afforded by the concentration of the bourgeois elements of the revolutionary coalition in the large cities, but more important were overlapping ideological and aesthetic factors. The young, photogenic, net-savvy, middle class, English speaking urban activists are attractive and relatively unchallenging agents of change. Their story fits with the narrative of an uprising motivated by individual liberal freedoms and highly compatible with the vision of corporate-led globalization as an agent for positive change. The workers, on the other hand, are a coarser lot. They generally speak only Arabic, and their narrative of revolution revolves around calls for a strong state sector, social solidarity, and collective rights – in particular the right for collective bargaining, which has been stripped from them by yellow, state

controlled unions. Their fight, against privatization, economic injustice, and the corrupt and weak union leadership, is deemed too gritty, too 20th century.

It is beyond the scope and resources of this article to comprehensively address this imbalance, or to give a full account of this struggle (those seeking such an account should look to the scholarly work done on the issue, most notably by Stanford professor Joel Beinin). What shall be attempted is to transmit and contextualize the testimony of Kamal Mohammed el-Fayoumi, an independent union organizer from Mahalla who has worked in Masr Spinning and Weaving Company for over 28 years, and whose father worked there before him. The testimony was taken during an extensive interview carried out in April of 2011 by Egyptian filmmaker Montasser Bayoud and myself. Wherever possible Mr el-Fayoumi's own words have been included. In some cases their original sequence has been altered to maintain thematic flow.

Workers of Mahalla

We met Mr el-Fayoumi on the streets of his hometown. He took us past the factory in which he works, along with more than twenty thousand others. He told us that before the January uprising, there had been more than 500 secret police also employed inside the factory, placed there to keep an eye on the workers. After a failed attempt to gain access we travelled with him through Mahalla's unpaved, narrow, obviously poor, but strikingly clean streets, to a room with dimensions of no more than eight by ten feet from which he told us much of the union activity the town was famous for had been organised. Between seemingly endless phone calls and the arrival of various visitors, mostly his fellow workers, he told us the story of their struggle.

For el-Fayoumi the story of the revolution begins with the Bread Riots of January 18 and 19 in 1977. These were largely spontaneous uprisings that occurred following moves by Sadat, in accordance with IMF and World Bank dictates, to terminate subsidies on basic foodstuffs. Over two days at least 79 protesters were killed, and more than 800 injured. Such violent repression was not enough to quell the unrest, and Sadat was forced to re-introduce the subsidies. The broader policy of *Intifah* (meaning literally, "open door") – an economic re-alignment which was perhaps as key to Egypt's shift in Cold War allegiances as the Camp David agreement or Sadat's salute to the Israeli flag in Jerusalem – continued, though in a slower, more piecemeal fashion.

This generated friction with the working class, but state run unions managed to largely contain the discontent. That started to change, el-Fayoumi told us, in the face of increased anger and labour agitation following "the privatization policies followed by Atef Obeid, Minister of the business sector throughout the late 1990s and until 2003". It was during this period that workers in Mahalla first began to whisper to one another about possible resistance. It wasn't until after "the famous strike on the 12th of the 7th 2006" that they began to really challenge the market's creeping advance into their workplaces and lives.

One of the issues triggering this strike, says el-Fayoumi, was the lack of union freedoms and "the forging of the votes during the union elections that took place in 2006". Mr el-Fayoumi says these elections were rigged to serve the interest of the board director at that time, engineer Mahmoud El Gebaly.

> He was getting prepared to run for the parliamentary elections, so he chose some of the followers of the ruling party, the National Party and he helped them win the elections so that they would help him become a member of the parliament, so that he would also have a piece of the cake and the wealth of Egypt, just as was the norm in the reign of the ex-president, or the tyrant or the gang leader, Mohammed Hosni Mubarak.

With official union leadership clearly not fighting for their interests, the workers themselves took the initiative without waiting for permission, starting their strike on the 7th of December to protest low wages, and demanded two months worth of profit sharing.

He describes the three-day stoppage as "the first fuse of this phenomenon in Egypt". He says that, by taking place at "a time when strikes and sit-ins were criminalized by the emergency law" and having management acquiesce to their demands for the two months' profit share (89 pounds/11.06 euros per worker) the weaving works workers set a precedent that would be empowering for other workers around the country, and dangerous for the bosses.

The experience, he says, also led the workers to realise just how co-opted was their government run yellow union. It had warned its members against demanding exactly this kind of profit sharing.

> ... we withdrew the trust from the union committee and gathered over 15 thousand signatures, around 60% of the number of workers, to say that this union does not represent us. We took this petition to the president of the general union for the weaving works workers, Said El Gohary, and we also took it to the president of the federation of workers' unions of Egypt, Hussein Mugawer, to tell them that we do not want this union to represent us anymore, but they refused and said that bringing down this union would lead to the disintegration of the whole union system, because the Weaving Works and Textile Company is the largest in terms of numbers of workers.

Spurred on by their victory, and eager for more substantial and permanent improvements – in particular the right to organise independently of state supervision:

> They organized a second strike on 23rd of September 2007 to demand the raising of the bonuses and food allowance and work conditions allowance and they demanded a rise of minimum wages to 1200 pounds.

They organized a strike that lasted a week, and at the end of that week the whole world was talking about that strike that was organized by Mahalla weaving works workers, and how it was a peaceful strike, and how the workers did not vandalize the factory and how Mahalla weaving works workers have awareness enough to keep them from acts of vandalism. And this was the point for Mahalla weaving works workers that drove the government - despite the corruption and tyranny that existed at the time - to accept that Mahalla weaving works workers were able to break the long duration of oppression practiced by the government. We were able to get this admission through negotiations with the president of the federation of the workers unions of Egypt, Hussein Mugawer, and the president of the general union for workers of weaving works and textile, Said El Gohary, and President of the holding company, Mohsen Al Gilany, who came to negotiate with 30 of the representatives of the workers. There were no members of the forged and false workers unions present with us, which was counted as the most significant victory of the strike...

...The Mahalla weaving works workers had succeeded in destroying the wall of fear and were able to forcefully practice their right to strike, which gave courage to the rest of the workers to strike. In the protest of 17/2/2008, we as the Mahalla weaving works workers organized a strike and a protest and the people of El Mahalla joined us after the day shift that ended at 3:30 pm and we demanded minimum wages at 1200 and we demanded better living conditions and we demanded to get fair pay for the work we do.

... it was the proof for all the workers of Egypt that Mahalla weaving works workers do not only move for their personal demands but also for all the workers of Egypt, and this was one of the most important moments of the working class history in Egypt and especially Mahalla weaving works workers' history.

After this protest of 17/2/2008, and the collaboration of the people of Mahalla to demand minimum wages of 1200 pounds and bettering the living conditions and economic situation in Egypt, the Mahalla weaving works workers started a famous strike on 6/4/2008 and called on all the Egyptian people to support it so that it would become a day of civil disobedience, and so that it would become a day to revolt in all parts of Egypt. The government took this lightly at first, thinking it was only talk on the part of Mahalla weaving works workers and that it would not happen. But all the classes of the Egyptian people and especially the youth, the young people on Facebook organized a campaign... spreading the word that Mahalla weaving works workers were organizing a day of civil disobedience on the 6th of April. The word started spreading which concerned the government.

The people of El Mahalla El Kubra responded to the call because the demands of the workers were also the demands of the people... bettering living conditions and raising wages, and not only for the Mahalla weaving works workers but for all the workers. Also, at this time, prices were soaring and did not match the wages that the Egyptian people received.

So the people of Mahalla responded. Due to the security situation and the oppressive control of the State Security against all who speak of the rights of the Egyptian people, against those who protest the forging of votes in elections and those who call for better living conditions and freedom for the people, State Security used to summon them and intimidate them into dropping the cause.

All these factors did not scare the Mahalla weaving works workers, and when the government sensed the gravity of the call that we put out, it started sending all the State Security personnel and National Democratic Party to lure Mahalla Weaving Works workers through responding to some of the demands like raising the food allowance... (the food allowance was 38 pounds [4.72 Euro] and they raised it to 90 pounds [11.19 euro]) ... to create discord among the strikers, because they were afraid that a popular revolution was about to break out in the city of Mahalla.

... The demands of the workers on the 6th of April were: minimum wages to be 1200 pounds (149.11 Euros), raising the food allowance 100%, raising monthly bonuses to 50% of the basic salary and raising work conditions allowance to 50 % of the basic salary...

The demands of the Egyptian people were minimum wages at 1200 pounds, lifting the emergency law, ceasing trying civilians in military courts, free elections, bringing down the high prices from which the people suffered, ceasing the privatization that destroyed most the Egyptian public companies...

On the 30th of March, some of the workers were summoned and were warned that if they went through with the strike planned for the 6th of April they would be arrested. This meeting was held with Hussein Mugawer, president of the federation of union workers who is supposed to be advocating the rights of the workers, but who we call the head of the mafia - because Hussein Mugawer is a businessman not a worker. He is a member in the board of a cement company and specialized in robbing the right of the workers.

I attended this meeting and he clearly stated that the demands of the workers would not be met and that whoever participated in the strike of the 6th of April 2008 would be arrested... he warned that all the political movements like "Kifaya" were only only looking out for their own interest, and they were all talk and no action...

... He produced a document [which stated that there will be no strikes on the 6th of April and that the workers have to double to rate of production] and ordered us to sign it. He threatened the workers during the meeting and said there were 13 arrest orders issued and ready to be used... I refused to sign the document and I told him that Mahalla weaving works workers had not had their demands met yet so they would stage a strike and that they wanted their pay raised.

So he threatened me that this will be my ruin and that no one will hear of me again, so I told him that I was aware of that. Also my mate Wa'el Habib refused to sign... He threatened me directly in that meeting.

Three days before the events of the 6th of April I was summoned by the State Security in Mahalla and they warned me against going through with the strike. I told him I was a worker and I would join the strike because I have demands. On the 6th of April 2008 at 2:30, I was walking with my mate Tarek Amin and suddenly we were approached my ten people from the State Security dressed in civilian clothing and were arrested. We stayed in custody from the 6th of April until the 31st of May after everyone else has been released. We the Mahalla weaving works workers were released last on the 31st of May.

Despite the incarceration of el-Fayoumi and other leaders, and the partial breaking of the strike when some workers were intimidated into returning to their posts, the day was still a momentous one, with the people of Mahalla rising up, and playing out a preview of the scenes that would later rock Cairo, Alexandria and other cities around Egypt:

> The people of Al Mahalla reacted to this protest… and revolted against Mubarak's regime demanding that he be brought down in one of the famous squares of Mahalla city. In this protest, on the 6th of April, Mubarak's picture was trampled on the ground and the people chanted for him to leave.

> We as the workers say that if the Egyptian people had heeded the call of the weaving works workers on the 6th of April 2008 we would have gotten rid of Mubarak's regime then…

> The 25th of January was a natural result to all that has been happening to the Egyptian people since 2006, and was the next step due to the political and social unrest and the oppression of the gang of businessman we call the government through oppression of freedom and the arrest of civilians and trying them in military courts, and this was very evident in the forging of the elections of 2010, and was one of the strong motives that led to the revolution of the 25th of January.

> As for the youth of the revolution, I was in contact with them after the first workers strike in Mahalla on 7/12/2006 and we were always meeting, in more than one place, like the Socialist Studies Centre, and the Mubarak Youth Centre and we objected to Mubarak's policies everywhere.

> We were in continuous contact with the people of the revolution of the 25th of January since 2006 and our protests and our strikes in which we took part all over Egypt, one of which was the most important was the strike of the workers of Tanta on the pavement of the House of Parliament and that lasted more than 180 days after the company was sold to a Saudi investor (with the consent of Mahmoud Mohye El Din, Minister of Investment and Aisha Abled Hady, Minister of Labour and the president of the federation of the union workers, Hussein Mugawer).

> This investor tried to destroy the company so that he could sell the land. The workers of Tanta Linen Company protested. Along with them were all the activists and all the workers of Egypt, most importantly the Mahalla weaving works workers who were in support of their strike. This is one example of the cooperation of the Egyptian people and workers to raise the minimum wage to 1200 pounds.

> This took place in March 2010. We staged a protest in front of the Ministry Council to demand the execution of the court order on raising minimum wage. This was a workers protest in front of the council and we announced this to Ahmed Nazeef, the prime minister at the time, to execute the court order and we said that we will return on Labour Day for the same cause until the court order is carried out.

We returned on Labour Day, and our numbers were over ten thousand protestors in front of the council and it showed how the government does not respect the judiciary entity.

This protest included the youth of the 6th of April especially, and the youth of the Socialist Studies Centre and lawyers and activists and others loyal to the cause from the tax sector and Tanta Linen Company. It was a truly epic show of support on Labour Day 2010.

After that the workers and the political activists and all the people of Egypt started interacting and we all went to Abdeen Palace and objected to the inheritance of power and extending the reign of Mubarak. This protest was a true battle with all the people with different classes of workers, employees, politicians and intellectuals against the thuggery of the ruling regime because the security forces tried to break apart the protestors by force but did not succeed due to the large numbers of people. We said that day that we would not allow Hosni Mubarak to give the power to his son because we are not a piece of land or cattle.

These were some examples that showed the solidarity of the workers with the youth of the 25th of January, specifically because we said no after the elections of 2010 and the scandalous forgery that took place. We said that the Egyptian people must rise against this oppressive system... It was the festive day for the police forces and a black day for the Egyptians because of what oppression the police represented to the people. If you look at the budget of the interior ministry it is over 13 billion pounds (1.6 billion Euro) whereas the budget for education does not surpass 2 billion pounds (248 million Euro). The interior ministry was considered Mubarak's right hand, which he used to oppress all those who opposed him, so it was decided that this protest would be a pay back for all this, to the police and the thugs of the National Democratic Party.

After that we decided as workers, and also the youth of the revolution from 2006 that we would stage a protest in Tahrir Square on the 25th of January. As usual the security forces were there in vast numbers and tried to break up the protest, but failed due to the insistence of the youth that they would not leave until Mubarak's regime was brought down.

My mate Wa'el and I from the Weaving Works in Mahalla were in direct contact with the youth. The sit in continued from the 25th till the 28th, the Friday of Wrath, when all the people went out in a protest, and I was with them, in Mahalla city, at the same time when millions were in Tahrir Square.

On this day, the regime tried in all ways to deny the people their rights... live fire and tear gas and did not succeed... the police retreated due to the determination of millions of the Egyptian people, especially in Tahrir Square, to live in freedom with dignity and to bring to an end the corrupt system under which they live.

My mate Wa'el Habib insisted on traveling to Cairo after these events and I tried to point out to him that there was a curfew and that the military was in control of the whole country, but he said he will go and stay there and he did, and he was there on the day the camels stormed the square and saw all that happened.

On Wednesday I called them and they told me that they were being beaten and killed by people on horses and camels carrying swords and daggers, and many

people had been wounded, and that's when I decided to travel to be there too - midnight right after, they told me that they regained control of the square.

I travelled the next day at daybreak. Reaching the square was very difficult, as there were thugs everywhere. I tried to enter Tahrir Square and could not so I returned and tried from another small street, so a man told me to keep going and I will find an entrance where they will ask for my ID and let me in, which they did. Once I entered the square, I met this young lady, her name was Nermin, and she greeted me very warmly. I asked her why she was there even though she was injured, and she said something that I will never forget as long as I am alive. She said, "I'd rather be stabbed by daggers than be ruled by Mubarak". What she said really moved me, this girl of maybe 26 years, and the whole square was full of people who were also aware of their rights and political life and reality.

I stayed in the square all through Thursday and Friday. On Thursday, one young man we have known since 2006, when they saw me they insisted that I give a speech on one of the stages inside the square. I told them I will take a few moments to relax and I started walking through the square to think of what I wanted to say in my speech. As I was walking a man approached me from the state security and addressed me by my name, and told me not to get too animated with the speech because the whole square is full of state security personnel. This really aggravated me, and when I took the stage for the speech I said that this killer Hosni Mubarak is the one who ordered the shooting of the protestors and that he shouldn't only be brought down, but he should also be held accountable for ordering the shooting of the protestors. And I said that the destruction of Egypt can only be blamed on him.

I said that the people owe the youth of the revolution and Mahalla weaving works workers for being the first people that called for bringing down the regime. I stayed with them for 3 days then I travelled home. I went back again on the day he stepped down - Karim and I, we were able to reach the square. The day he stepped down, we watched the glorious cooperation of the people of Egypt on the 11th of February... All kinds of people were there, the workers and employees and farmers and students...

We stayed in the square until sundown then we were planning on moving towards the presidential palace, so we went to pray and by the time we were done, it was being said the president had stepped down. I watched the joy of the people on the 11th of February. That day I said the revolution just started and this is not the end. We as the workers of Egypt have the right to speak, and no one will rob us of this right.

The General Strike

*A 34 year old sociology graduate and teacher named Ammar holds up his
contract. It states his pay is 110 Egyptian pounds ($18.60 US) a month with
an annual Labour Day bonus of ten pounds ($1.69)*

One important part of the story that el-Fayoumi left out was the three-day
general strike, which began on February 8th and continued till the dictator had
fallen. This – after years of strike actions involving over a million workers, even
by conservative estimates – is credited by many as tipping the balance and
forcing the generals to move against Mubarak.

The army's higher echelons, it is important to note, are deeply embedded in the
Egyptian economic elite. The secrecy around the military budget has allowed the
army to amass a loss-free sector of parasitic capitalism, with retiring generals
being handed positions managing everything from the manufacture of cooking
utensils to the management of luxury hotels. Worker organisation was a direct
threat to this closed loop of privilege. It is not surprising that within a week of
assuming power the military had issued a decree banning strikes that could
harm "the wheel of production". This decree, despite repeated attempts at its
enforcement, the harassment of union organisers, and the continued backing of
the military for the state run unions, has been far from successful.

In the months immediately following the fall of Mubarak, an unprecedented
wave of union activity rolled across the country, in both the public and private
sectors of the economy, involving at the very least hundreds of thousands of
workers. Outside government buildings in downtown Cairo, the scene of a group
of angry workers with placards became the norm. Small, workplace specific
actions also occurred. During this period I met the owner of a pharmacy at a

posh cafe in the uptown suburb of Zamalek (where the price of a coffee is substantially more than most Egyptians make in a day). He spoke of facing down one such action. 15 employees were threatening strike action if an overbearing manager was not removed. The owner in this case, was able to dismiss and replace the five ringleaders, and intimidate the rest of his staff to drop their complaints. The wave of strikes continued until late September and early October, when they culminated in large scale, nationwide strikes involving teachers, doctors and bus drivers, before settling into a pre-election lull.

Common demands include accountability for bosses, a minimum wage of 1200 Egyptian pounds (148 Euros) per months, and a maximum wage of 15000 Egyptian pounds (1,854 Euros). Many of those in casual labour demanded full time contracts with fixed pay. Often, specific figures in management are the focus of worker rage, with the central demands of some strikes being the removal of the authority figures who have loomed large over them until now.

An independent trade union began to form, built around the independent Real Estate Tax Collectors union, which had been successfully established following major demonstrations in 2010, including a thousands-strong sit in outside the cabinet building.

I met with the president of this trade union federation, Kamal Abo Aitta, (who is also the president of the Real Estate Tax Collectors Union), in the days immediately following the first round of voting for Egypt's new parliament. Our interview took place outside a tent that the independent trade union has maintained as part of the latest Tahrir sit-in, which is this time directed at the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) – the self appointed generals who have assumed executive power since the ousting of Mubarak.

The SCAF, said Mr Abo Aitta, is currently the only thing stopping the removal of the 1976 law that controls union organization, with the ministry of manpower and by the legislative authorities having already given their consent. As well as this obstruction to changing laws, the SCAF and the business elite have acted directly to suppress union activity, with many striking workers beaten, arrested and put before military courts, sacked, or having their wages docked.

Despite this he says that independent union membership has reached 2 million. This number is seen as unrealistically high by some, but is impossible to independently verify, in part because of the loose association that fledgling unions, many of them formed in single workplaces, have with the central body. As Mr Abo Aitta points out, there are cases where employers have refused to recognise the wishes of their employees to associate with the new federation, and continue to deduct union fees from wages and pay them to the government run unions. In some cases this is occurring at the same time as the new union leadership politically aligns itself with the independent movement.

According to Mr Abo Aitta, other problems facing the new union movement include the fact that in many cases, workers have been paying dues to the old state run unions for years, and have amassed pension plans, which they fear losing should they change memberships. Female workers have also been told

they cannot use union run childcare facilities that would allow them to work, and in some cases the bosses and officials from the state run unions have asked their husbands to sign letters forbidding their wives from joining the independent unions. (The role of women in defying the state run unions and spurring this fresh workers movement into being is worthy of much independent investigation, as there is a whole universe of extra difficulties they have faced.)

In an important aside, he mentioned that one independent union had even been founded inside a factory run by the military. While so far this is the only such uprising in the military owned sector, that even one workplace has managed to defy the generals' "iron fist", at a time when the military still enjoys seeming impunity, is enough to inspire many of the possibilities of future union actions.

In any case, says Mr Abo Aitta, the strikes will continue regardless of the formal status of workers and their unions. Minimum and maximum wages (though promised) have not yet been paid. Administrators from the Mubarak era are still in place in ministries and in the workplaces and working against union freedoms. The revolution, he points out, has not yet done the work of the workers in terms of social justice.

One factor that seems to be slowing the revolution on all fronts is the growing diffusion of political emphasis. The bourgeois political groups have been focussed on ending the SCAF's rule, and on the establishment of solid political rights, while the union movement has been focussed on the specific demands of the workers in the hundreds or possibly thousands of workplaces across the country where actions are taking place. Meanwhile, political parties competing in the formal political system seem caught up in identity debates about the secular or Islamic nature of the Egyptian nation, with most voters settling for the apparent compromise presented by the Muslim Brotherhood's party, Freedom and Justice.

However, in working to topple the "mini-Mubaraks" in factories and offices around the country, they are still doing the work of the revolution – focussing on their immediate reality, rather than the national political leadership, which has been the focus of the twitter crowd.

However, given the undeniable links between the army's power over parliament, its unsupervised military budget, its sprawling commercial interests, its tendency toward repression, and its general political obstructionism, it is not hard to imagine how these forces could once more align and push forward for change.

About the author

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The Arab revolutions: a year after

Samir Amin

Abstract

The article discusses the Arab revolution's development after a year of its inception, the causes for the success of political Islam in the elections, their alliance with the reactionary ruling comprador class and the American led capitalist system and the different possibilities for the future of different Arab countries, especially Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Syria.

Why the so-called "Arab spring"?

The uprising of Arab peoples as of early 2011 (Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrein and Yemen, later Syria) was not unexpected, at least by many Arab left activists, if not by the Western powers.

During the Bandung and Non-alignment period (1955-1970) the Arab countries were in the forefront of the struggles of the peoples, the nations and the States of the South for a better future and a less unequal global system. Algeria's FLN and Boumedienne, Nasser's Egypt, the Ba'ath regimes in Iraq and Syria, the South Yemen Republic, shared common characteristics. These were not "democratic" regimes according to the Western criteria (they were "one party" systems), nor even according to our criteria which implies positive empowerment of the peoples. But they were nevertheless legitimate in the eyes of their peoples, for their actual achievements: mass education, health and other public services, industrialization and guarantees for employment and upward social mobility, associated with independent initiatives and anti-imperialist postures. Therefore they were continuously fiercely fought by the western powers, in particular through repeated Israeli aggressions.

These regimes achieved whatever they could in that frame within a short period, say 20 years, and then after that went out of steam, as a result of their internal limits and contradictions. This, coinciding with the breakdown of the Soviet power, facilitated the imperialist "neoliberal" offensive. The ruling circles, in order to remain in office, have chosen to retreat and submit to the demands of neoliberal globalization. The result was a rapid degradation of the social conditions; all that had been achieved in the era of the National Popular State to the benefit of the popular and middle classes were lost in a few years, poverty and mass unemployment being the normal result of the neoliberal policies pursued. This created the objective conditions for the revolts. It is curious to note that some of the most vocal supporters of the "democratic revolutions" calling the West to their rescue are some of the former leaders who enthusiastically supported the neoliberal alignment!

The revolts were therefore not unexpected and many indicators suggested them, such as the Egyptian mass strikes of 2007/8, the growing resistance of small

peasants to the accelerated process of their expropriation by the rich peasants, the protest of new middle class organizations (such as "Kefaya") etc.

I have attempted to give a picture of the components of both "the movement" and of the reactionary "anti-revolutionary" bloc (the leadership of the Army and the Muslim Brotherhood) supported by Western powers operating in Egypt, in particular in Amin (2011a, b, forthcoming).

I also refer here to other similar processes in Bahrain, which was savagely crushed by the army of Saudi Arabia (without the least protest of the West), and in Yemen (where al Qaida was "introduced" in order to neutralize the "menace" coming from the progressive forces, particularly strong in the South).

This chapter was concluded by the elections in Tunisia and Egypt.

The triumph of political Islam in the Tunisian and Egyptian elections

The elections in Tunisia (October 2011) opened the way to the crystallization of the right-wing block which includes Al-Nahda-Renaissance Party (Brotherhood) and personalities who claim to be now "bourguibists" (followers of Bourguiba the first Tunisian president), after their support for the Ben Ali regime. This coalition relies on the majority of the council charged with producing the new constitution.

This new regime is likely to achieve some democratic improvements (respect for pluralism and freedom of opinion and a halt to the worst types of police repression) along with regression in key social issues (women's rights, secular education, and the state), in the context of ensuring the maintenance of the status quo in the area of economic development.

It is worth keeping in mind that the revolutionary movement in Tunisia has not challenged the dependent pattern of development of the era of Ben Ali, but considered it as "sound" in itself, and accepted the narrative of the World Bank! It was satisfied to direct its criticism at the repressive police state alone, and by the imposition of "royalties" on all economic activities which had been grabbed by members of the President's family. The general public (with the exception of an isolated left-wing) did not comprehend that this style of dependent development is the cause of the deterioration of social conditions which prepared the conditions for the uprising of the masses. The new ruling coalition will not modify the pattern of development created by the first Tunisian president, Bourguiba, but rather will infuse it with increased religious doses that will solidify the alleged Islamic particularism.

The President of the new regime in Tunisia, Marzouki, happens to be a former left activist who suffered real repression by Ben Ali, but who seems not to have understood the real meaning and consequences of economic "liberalism". Curiously this man has organized in Tunis in February 2012 a "conference" on Syria, which indirectly supported an eventual Western intervention in this country.

In Egypt, the results were followed by Islamist victory on a larger scale. What can be expected from the achievements of political Islam and its deep rootedness in the public and the rise of the echo of the slogan "Islamisation of society", hence its electoral victories? The answer requires a return to uncover the reasons for this success.

Anyway the success of the Islamist parties, in Egypt at least, is certainly not the end of the story. The "legitimacy" of the elected parliament, which the Western powers consider exclusive, is questioned and counter balanced by the no weaker legitimacy of the continuing struggles for social progress and authentic democratization of politics and social life.

Yet the obstacles for the radicalization of these struggles remain great, as long as the major components of the movement have not reached the required level of awareness with respect to the destructive effects of continuing along a liberal political economy, and the alignment with a US guided globalization. But progresses are to be noticed in the growing of that consciousness.

Success of political Islamic parties

I argued previously that the de-politicization of the society was due to the modus operandi of the Nasserist regime, which is behind these achievements. Note that Nasserism was not the only system that took this approach. Rather, most populist nationalist regimes of the first wave of awakening in the South had a similar approach to the management of politics. Note also that the actually existing socialist regimes also took this approach, at least after the revolutionary phase, which was democratic in nature, when they consolidated their rule.

So the common denominator is the abolition of democratic praxis. I do not mean here to equalize between democracy and multiparty elections management, but rather I mean the practice of democracy in the proper sense of the word, i.e. respect for the plurality of political views and political schemes and to respect its organizing. Because politicization assumes democracy and democracy does not exist merely because those who differ in opinion with the authority enjoy freedom of expression. The obliteration of the right to organize around different political views and projects eliminates politicization, which ultimately caused the subsequent rise of political Islam and disaster.

This disaster has manifested itself in the return to archaic views (religious or otherwise), and this was also reflected in the acceptance of the project of the "consumer society" based on solidification of the so-called trend of "individualism," a trend which spread not only among the middle class that benefits from such pattern of development, but also among the poor masses who call for participation in what appears a minimal welfare—even though with its maximum simplicity—in the absence of credible real alternatives. Therefore one must consider this as a legitimate demand from the popular classes.

De-politicization in Islamic societies took a prevailing form that was manifested in an apparent or superficial "return" to "Islam". Consequently, the discourse of the mosque along with the discourse of authority became the only permitted ones in Nasser's period, and more so during the periods of Sadat and Mubarak. This discourse was then used to prevent the emergence of an alternative based on the entrenching of a socialist aspiration. This "religious" discourse was then encouraged by Sadat and Mubarak to accompany and cope with the deteriorating living conditions resulting from Egypt's subjugation to the requirements of imperialist globalization prevailing style. This is why I argued that political Islam did not belong to the opposition block, as claimed by the Muslim Brotherhood, but was an organic part of the power structure.

The success of political Islam requires further clarification regarding the relationship between the success of imperialist globalization on the one hand, and the dominance of Muslim Brotherhood slogans/discourse on the other hand.

The deterioration that accompanied this globalization produced proliferation of the activities of the informal sector in economic and social life, which represents the most important sources of income for the majority of people in Egypt (statistics say 60%). The Brotherhood's organizations have real ability to work in these circumstances, so that the success of the Brotherhood in these areas in turn has produced an inflation of these activities and thus ensures its reproduction on a larger scale. The political culture offered by the Brotherhood is known for its great simplicity, as this culture is content with only conferring Islamic "legitimacy" to the principle of private property and the "free" market relations, without considering the nature of the activities concerned, which are rudimentary ("bazaar") activities that are unable to push forward the national economy and lead to its development.

Furthermore, the widespread provision of funds by the Gulf States has allowed for the boom of such activities as these states have been pumping in the required funds in the form of small loans or grants. This is in addition to charity work (clinics, etc.) that have accompanied this inflated sector, thanks to the support of the Gulf States. These states do not intend to contribute to the development of productive capacity in the Egyptian economy (building factories etc.), but only the development of this form of "lumpen development", since reviving Egypt as a developing state would end the domination of the Gulf States (that are based on the acceptance of the slogan of Islamization of the society), the dominance of the United States (which assumes Egypt as a comprador state infected with worsening poverty), and the domination of Israel (which assumes the impotence of Egypt in the face of Zionist expansion).

This combination of an authority that hides behind the "Islamic" slogans/discourse and at the same time succumbs to the prevailing imperialist capitalism and the consequent impoverishment of the people is not specific only to Egypt. It is a common feature of most Arabic and Islamic societies. This axis is at work in Iran, where Khomeinism insured the dominance of the "bazaar economy" from the beginning. It is also the cause of the catastrophe in Somalia,

which has been removed from the list of states of the modern contemporary world.

What then can we expect from the likelihood of political Islam's rule in Egypt (and other countries)?

There is a prevailing and extremely naïve media discourse that contends that "the victory of political Islam became inevitable because Islamic self-identity dominates the reality of our societies, and it is a reality that some had rejected or denied its social validity, and thus this reality imposed itself on them."

However, this argument completely ignores another reality, namely that the de-politicization process was deliberate, and without it no political Islam would have been able to impose itself on these societies. A second streak in this discourse argues further that "there is no risk from this victory of political Islam, because it is temporary, for the authority emerging from it is doomed to failure and thus public opinion will withdraw from it". This is as if the Brotherhoods would accept the implementation of the principles of democracy if they worked against their interests!

However, the regime in Washington apparently adopts this discourse, as well as public opinion there, which is manufactured by the media. And there is an ensemble of Egyptian and Arab intellectuals who also became apparently convinced by this discourse, perhaps opportunistically, or because of lack of clarity of thought.

But this is a mistake. Let it be known that political Islam, if it takes over government / rule, will continue to impose itself, if not "forever" then at least for a long time (50 years? let us look at the case of Iran for example). During this phase of "transition" other nations will continue their march of development, and so we will find ourselves eventually in the bottom of the list. So I don't see the Brotherhood as an "Islamic party" primarily, but it is firstly a reactionary party If it manages to take power, this will represent the best security for the imperialist system.

A word about Salafism (salafiyya)

Salafism came to complement the obscurantist advocacy of Rashid Rida and the Brotherhood. It openly rejects the idea of "liberty" (and therefore democracy) as it contradicts, in their view, the nature of the human being, as he/she is created as a slave (note the word) to serve his Creator-Master, like a slave required to serve his/her master. Of course, this doctrine does not explain how we come to know the concrete demands of this Master-Creator in the modern world. Does he accept or reject an increase in wages for example? This opens the way for a "religious Iranian-style rule *(wilayat al-faqih),*" and for a dictatorship of the clerics who declared themselves "scientists/ulemah," who have a monopoly over this knowledge!

The Salafis are the enemies of modernity, as modernity is grounded on the right to human creativity in dealing with earthly matters, and questions concerning human society. And creativity requires freedom and free critical thought, which is rejected by the Salafis. What then about Salafi leaders who say that they "belong to the modern world" because they teach their students how to use the computer and "business management"(this by resorting to the sort of mediocre American pamphlets distributed by USAID)? These statements are not only a real farce, but the real Master here is the prevailing capitalist imperialism which is in need of "servants" who practice this "art" (obeying God and obeying religious authority) and nothing more. The famous Mr. Dunlop, "the expert" on education during the days of British occupation of Egypt, had realized this perfectly and made it a blueprint implemented in schools!

Modernity begins by overcoming these limitations and accepting the principle of freedom, which is a condition for developing the capacity of the nation to be able to belong to the modern world in an actual and active sense.

The Muslim Brotherhood and imperialism operate in conjunction, and with a division of tasks. The Muslim Brotherhood needed a "certificate" of democracy, which Obama gave them, and to that end they had to distance themselves from the "extremists", the Salafis.

Are there conditions that allow for a democratic reform in Algeria?

Egypt and Algeria are the two Arab countries which have occupied a prominent and leading position during the first wave of "awakening of the South" in the era of Bandung and the Non-aligned Movement. They achieved a successful progress in their building of a state/nation, an entity that deserves to be considered "post-colonial" accompanied by noticeable progressive economic and social achievements, despite its limitations, and which planted hopes for its continuation on the road to liberation. But this process was halted in the two countries, and both moved back to the status of countries and societies ruled by the current imperialism.

The Algerian pattern seems to have enjoyed a superior consistency to that of Egypt which was reflected in its ability to limit subsequent erosion, so that the Algerian ruling class is still divided between a patriotic wing and a comprador one. In some cases, these two contradictory characters are shared in the same one person that belongs to the ruling class. This is unlike the situation in Egypt where the ruling class, during Sadat and Mubarak rule, completely abandoned any nationalist inclination altogether.

There are two reasons that explain this difference.

The war of liberation in Algeria naturally bred a radical trend ideologically and socially, unlike Egypt, where Nasserism came after the liberation wave of the revolution that started in 1919, which went through periods of expansion and retreat, before the seeds of its radicalisation were rooted after World War II.

Then came the 1952 coup and its ambiguous character, which halted the development of the radicalisation of the liberation movement. This was followed by the Nasserist coup of 1954 which amended this right wing trend, but that amendment adopted an elitist approach that excluded the popular classes from actively being involved in contributing to it.

On the other hand, we must take into account the devastating effects that independent Algeria inherited from the pattern of French settler colonialism, where "traditional" Algerian society had disintegrated so that the new society of independent Algeria has become endowed with a pervasive plebeian nature. Thus the demand "for equality" became a distinguishing feature of the behavior and aptitudes of citizens, to a degree unparalleled in all other Arabic countries. This is also in contrast to the history of Egypt as the ruling classes, since the time of Muhammad Ali Pasha, had supported the evolution of society and the Egyptian project of revival. And the Egyptian project remained under aristocratic leadership calling for modernization, so that it gradually became a project of an "aristocratic bourgeoisie."

These two differences have created different conditions for the challenge posed by the rise of political Islam. As Hocine Bellaloufi explained (forthcoming), political Islam in Algeria revealed its ugly face early on, and came to failure and defeat. But this did not signify that political Islam has become something of the past and unable to recover. However there is a huge difference between Algeria and Egypt from this perspective so that political Islam in Egypt still enjoys "legitimacy" among the general public. And the alliance between the comprador bourgeoisie and political Islam remains representative of the main axis that will ensure a long-term rule of the dependent capitalist economic pattern in Egypt.

From this, we can imagine different developments in the face of contemporary challenges in both countries, at least in the short term, because we should not rule out the possibility of controlled reforms in Algeria. At least this possibility has a portion of realism, unlike the situation in Egypt, where it is impossible to imagine a development that avoids violent collision between the popular movement and the cluster of reactionary "Islamic/comprador" alliance.

Furthermore, while Egypt and Algeria are the two Arab countries who can be conceived as candidates for accession to the group of "emerging" states, they also can come to represent a sad model for failure to climb to that level. Although the responsibility of the ruling classes in this failure is crucial, it is not correct to ignore the responsibility of rest of the society and its intellectuals and activists in the political movements.

With regard to the Arab states in the Maghreb generally, it is claimed that the Kingdom of Morocco is another positive example of a change based on the achievement of gradual democratic reforms by peaceful means. Let the reader allows me to make my reservations on the likelihood of achieving such goal, as such evolution is conditioned by a Royal Decree that excludes from the start any questioning about the dependent capitalist pattern that frames it.

Furthermore, in addition to that, as long as the Moroccan people remain content with the principle of the rule of religious-monarchial regime (as the king is "Amir Al-Mu'minin"), these restricted and limited reforms won't open the way for the real democracy required.

Perhaps this is why it is impossible for Moroccans to understand the significance of the problem of Western Sahara - as the free people of Western Sahara are proud of another interpretation of Islam that does not allow them to kneel except before God, and not before any human being, even a king.

The Syrian disaster

The Syrian Ba'athist regime once belonged to the cluster of national popular experiences (though not democratic) in the style of Nasserism and other experiences in the era of Bandung. When the limits of possible real achievements in this framework became apparent, Hafez el-Assad turned to a project that sought to combine the preservation of nationalist patriotism opposed to colonialism on the one hand, and on the other hand, to benefit from the right-conservative concessions reflected in the "openness" (liberalization) similar to the route taken by Nasser following the defeat of 1967.

The subsequent history of this project became apparent. In Egypt, it led immediately after the death of Nasser in 1970 to surrender without reservation to the demands of the reactionary axis consisting of the United States, the Gulf and Israel.

In Syria, this "opening" (liberalization) led to the same results as happened in other countries, that is to serious rapid deterioration of social conditions for poorer classes, and which eroded the legitimacy of the regime.

In the current developments, the Syrian regime has faced protests with repression, and nothing else. The Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of the opportunity to appear as the "opposition". Thus a coherent plan crystallized under the leadership of imperialism and its allies that sought not to "rid the Syrian people of a dictator," but to destroy the Syrian state, modeled on the United States' work in Iraq and Libya.

Here also the profound relationship of the tripartite interests is apparent, as the goal

1) for the U.S. is the breaking of the Iran/Syria/Hezbollah alliance, which is an obstacle to the U.S. entrenching its control over the region,

2) for Israel to have Syria fragmented into sectarian mini-states, and

3) for the Gulf Arab states, it is the entrenching of a "Sunni" dictatorship in the Wahhabi style, although this dictatorship will be established on the massacres and criminal elimination of Alawis, Druze and Christians. In the face of th this possible fate, the Assad regime remains unable to respond with the only needed and effective method, which is to exclude the use of violence and to engage in genuine reforms. The only acceptable

solution assumes the opening of the way to genuine negotiations, which is the precondition for the strengthening of a democratic front whose components are present on the ground, despite the effort to mute its voice. Simply opposing state terrorism to so-called "Islamic/Salafi" terrorism leads nowhere.

Some conclusions

1. Contemporary imperialism's strategy for the region (the "greater Middle East") does not aim at all at establishing some form of "democracy". It aims at destroying the countries and societies through the support of so -called Islamic regimes which guarantee the continuation of a "lumpen development" (to use the words of my late friend A G Frank), i.e. a process of continuous pauperization. Eventual "high rates of growth", praised by the World Bank, are meaningless, being based on the plunder of natural resources, associated with fast growing inequality in the distribution of income and pauperization for the majorities.

Iraq provides the "model" for the region. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein has been replaced by no less than three terror regimes, in the name of "religion" (Sunni and Shi'a) and of ethnicity (the Kurds), associated with the systematic destruction of infrastructures and industries, and the planned assassination of tens of thousands of elite citizens, in particular engineers and scientists, as well as the destruction of the education system (which was not bad in the time of Saddam) to reduce it to the teaching of religion and business!

These are also the targets/goals for Syria.

Isn't it a curiosity that we see now the Emir of Qatar and the King of Saudi Arabia among the most vocal advocates of "democracy"? What a farce!

2. Turkey is playing an active role, along with the US (never forget that Turkey is a NATO member) in the implementation of this plan. It has established in the Hatay province camps for the recruitment and training of killers (so called "Muslims") who are infiltrating Syria. Refer here to the book of Bahar Kimyongur (2011).

3. The U.S. was "surprised" by the Tunisian and Egyptian popular revolts. They now plan to "preempt" possible similar movements by initiating armed revolts of small groups supported by them. This strategy was tested with success in Libya (now a disintegrated country), and now in Syria. The reader can refer here to my papers on Libya[1] and Somalia[2].

The next target is Iran, under the pretext of its nuclear development, using ofr this purpose Israel, who is unable to do the job without the active implication of US forces. Iran, whatever one may think of its regime (in fact associating

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[1] "Libya could break up like Somalia", *Pambazuka*, 07/09/2011

[2] "Is there a solution to the problems of Somalia?" *Pambazuka*, 17/02/2011

"Islam's rule" and market economy!) does constitute an obstacle to the deployment of the U.S. military control over the region. This country must therefore be destroyed.

4. The final real target of contemporary imperialism is "containment and then after that the rolling back" by preemptive war of the most dangerous emerging countries (China first). Add here Russia which, if it succeeds in modernizing its army, can put an end to the exclusive military power of the U.S., if Russia chooses to, as canChina.

Yet, if no bold opposition from China and more importantly Russia develops and the U.S. manages to achieve its goals, that implies the total subordination of all other countries of the South with a view to ensure the exclusive access to the natural resources of the whole planet to the benefit of the societies of the triad (US, Europe and Japan), their plunder and waste. It implies therefore more lumpen development, more pauperization and more terrorist regimes. Contemporary capitalism has nothing else to offer.

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Dream history of the global South[1]

Vijay Prashad

Abstract

This article provides a brief history of the Third World project, the project of the Non-Allied Movement, and the project of the South, and serves to give a larger context of the befell the Arab world, and the revolution that started in 2011. It shows on one hand the attempts to decolonize the Third World and freeing it from Western imperialism and domination, and on the other hand the continuing project of imperialism and its effects on the Third World, including the Arab world. It also discusses the changing global political economy and the possibilities of the future global system.

Part I: The Third World project[2]

> "The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose project should be to try to resolve the problem to which Europe has not been able to find the answers."
> *Franz Fanon, 1961*

The massive wave of anti-colonial movements that opened with the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), and came into its own by the last quarter of the 19th century, broke the legitimacy of colonial domination. No longer could it be said that a European power had the manifest destiny to govern other peoples. When such colonial adventures were tried out, they were chastised for being immoral.

In 1928, the anti-colonial leaders gathered in Brussels for a meeting of the League Against Imperialism. This was the first attempt to create a global platform to unite the visions of the anti-colonial movements from Africa, Asia and Latin America. Considerations of expediency and the convulsions of World War 2 blocked any progress on such a platform. It would have to wait till 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia, when a smattering of newly independent or almost independent African and Asian countries sent their leaders to confer on a planetary agenda. The Bandung dynamic inaugurated the *Third World Project*, a seemingly incoherent set of demands that were actually very carefully worked

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[1] This presentation was delivered at a Special Session of the United Nations in Geneva to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Non-Aligned Movement (December 2011) and at the American University of Beirut as a keynote address at a conference at the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud Center for American Studies and Research (January 2012).

[2] This section relies on Prashad 2007.

out through the institutions of the United Nations and what would become, in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement.

The central concept for the new nations was the Third World. The Third World was not a place. It was a project. Galvanized by the mass movements and by the failures of capitalist mal-development, the leadership in the darker nations looked to each other for another agenda. Politically they wanted more planetary democracy. No more the serfs of their colonial masters, they wanted to have a voice and power on the world stage. What did that voice say? It spoke of three main elements:

a. *Peace.* It had become apparent by the mid-1950s and early 1960s that the Cold War between the two superpower blocs was catastrophic for the planet. Not only might the nuclear-fueled confrontation result in Armageddon, but the sheer wastage of social resources on the arms race would distort the possibility of human development. By the early 1950s, the United States spent ten percent of its Gross Domestic Product on its defense sector, a development that raised the ire of President Eisenhower, who at the end of the decade bemoaned the growth of the "military-industrial complex." This complex did not end at the borders of the United States. It had ambitions for the planet, wanting to sell arms to every country and to insinuate a security complex over the social agenda of the Third World Project. No wonder that the first concrete task after the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in Belgrade was to send India's Nehru and Ghana's Nkrumah to Moscow and Indonesia's Sukarno and Mali's Keita to Washington, carrying the NAM's Appeal for Peace. Kennedy and Khrushchev offered the typical bromides, but did not reverse the tensions that intensified with the building of the Berlin Wall and with the tank standoff at Checkpoint Charlie. The Third World Project kept faith with the Bandung communiqué, which called for "the regulation, limitation, control and reduction of all armed forces and armaments, including the prohibition of the production, experimentation and use of all weapons of mass destruction, and to establish effective international controls to this end." The International Atomic Energy Agency of 1957 was a child of Bandung, and a cornerstone of the Third World Project.

b. *Bread.* The new nations of Africa and Asia and the renewed national agendas of Latin America explicitly recognized that the countries they had seized were impoverished. Any direction forward would have to confront the legacy of colonial economy, with the advantages seized by the Atlantic powers and the trade rules drawn up to benefit those historical, not comparative, advantages. Economists like Raul Prebisch of Argentina (Dosman 2008), who would become the first Director General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development, challenged the Atlantic institutions such as the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, and the IMF, which Prebisch called "a conspiracy against the laws of the market." When Prebisch took the helm at UNCTAD, the economic arm of the Third

World Project, he announced the need for a "new order in the international economy… so that the market functions properly not only for the big countries but the developing countries in their relations with the developed." It was out of this general framework that the Third World fought for a revision of the "free trade" agenda, for better commodity prices, for primary goods cartels (out of which comes OPEC), and for a more generous policy for the transfer of investment and technology from North to South. Fought at each turn by the Atlantic powers, the Third World took refuge in the UN General Assembly with the 1973 New International Economic Order resolution. It was the highest point of the Third World Project.

c. *Justice*. NAM, created in 1961, was designed as a secretariat of the Third World Project, with the Group of 77 (1964) to act on its behalf in the United Nations. The founders of NAM (Nehru of India, Nasser of Egypt, Sukarno of Indonesia and Tito of Yugoslavia) recognized that little of their agenda would be able to move forward without a more democratic international structure. The UN had been hijacked by the five permanent members of the Security Council. The IMF and the World Bank had been captured by the Atlantic powers, and the GATT was designed to undermine any attempt by the new nations to revise the international economic order. It was hoped that NAM, and the G77, would put pressure on the West and the East to afford political space to the new nations. It was not to be. Nigeria's minister to the UN in the early 1960s, Jaja Wachuku chided his fellows for their acceptance of the inequality within the UN, "Are we going to remain veranda boys," he asked, watching from the balcony as the five permanent members controlled the debate within the UN?

That was the Third World Project: for peace, for bread and for justice. It came to the world stage on shaky terrain. The houses of the new nations were not in order. Lack of democracy in their own political worlds combined with mismanagement of economic resources and a very shallow reconstruction of the social landscape constrained the new nations. The old social classes hesitated before the anti-colonial mass movements, but as these were demobilized the old elites called on the Generals or on right-wing populist politicians to sweep up the mess. The Project was hampered by these failings, but it was not these limitations that did it in.

What did it in was the Atlantic project.

Part II: The Atlantic project[3]

> "Nothing important can come from the South."
>
> *- Henry Kissinger, 1964*

In 1975, the seven leaders of the major advanced industrial countries met in the Château de Rambouillet to decide the fate of the planet. They were the Group of 7: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Canada. The Rambouillet gathering was their first formal meeting. The G7 leaders were detained by four facts. Three of them were encumbrances that they wished to do away with:

(1) The *social democratic agenda*, that many of them emerged from, had now become expensive (not only the social wages that had to be paid, but also the wage packets to entitled and restive workers).

(2) The *communist agenda*, which had become more accommodating, but was yet able to offer an alternative to those entitled workers.

(3) The *Third World Project*, whose most recent instantiation, the Oil Weapon of 1973 and the demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) had come as a genuine shock.

These three horizons needed to be disbanded. The fourth problem was a more general one, and it ended up being the solution to their other three irritants: the new *geography of production*.

Gerald Ford opened the conversation at Rambouillet with a plea that the main thrust had to be for the leaders "to ensure that the current world economic situation is not seen as a crisis in the democratic or capitalist system." The G7 had to prevent the capitalist crisis from becoming a political one; it had to be handled as a technical economic problem. This was all very well as rhetoric, but it was not a salve to the more realistic people in the room.

Helmut Schmidt, who was a Socialist and Chancellor of West Germany, took the floor,

> "Harold [Wilson] of the UK, you talked of viable industries, and indicated that this excluded lame ducks. You referred to textiles as an example. I am a close friend of the chairman of the textile workers union in Germany. It is a union of a shrinking industry. *I would hope that this would not be repeated outside this room.* Given the high level of wages in Europe, I cannot help but believe that in the long run textile industries here will have to vanish. We cannot ward off cheaper competition from outside. *It is a pity because it is viable;* capital invested in a job in the textile industry in Germany is as high as it is in

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[3] This and the next part rely on Prashad 2012b.

the German steel mills. But wages in East Asia are very low compared with ours. The German textile industry is viable, but will vanish in ten or twelve years."

Foresight, collusion: it does not matter. What matters is the emergence of the new geography of production, *viz.* the disarticulation of Northern Fordism, the emergence of satellite and undersea cable technology, the containerization of ships, and other technological shifts that enabled firms to take advantage of differential wage rates. In Schmidt's case, the wages of East Asia were his concern that might drive the destruction of industry in Europe.

This is familiar stuff. It is often taken as the ground for the emergence of neo-liberalism. From David Harvey's useful (2007) primer, we get the impression that neo-liberalism was experimented with during the New York municipal crisis, and then, via the IMF and its *élèves*, exported to the rest of the planet. This is not the full story. What Harvey does not have is the necessary demise of the Third World Project, and so the opening up of the countries of the South to the new geography of production. Resistance to transnational corporations had been quite strong till the late 1970s, when the Third World Project went into a tailspin, assassinated by the enforced debt crisis. You might recall that the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations spent its energy for three decades to define a code of conduct for transnational firms. It was substantially dissolved in 1992, and became a fixer for corporations rather than a regulator of their business practices.

Neo-liberalism had a polycentric revival at the G7, but so too in the capitals of the Pacific Rim and in the emergent "locomotives of the South" (in Brazil, India, South Africa, and China). The ruling classes in these societies had, like their European and American cousins, long wanted to abandon the cultural strictures of old Nationalism: the requirements of the social democratic Welfare State, in the Atlantic sector, and the requirements of the anti-colonial Third World State, in the continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Small pockets of elite opinion harbored resentment at the anti-colonial heritage. Out of these pockets came new intellectual agendas, including the revival of the Hayek school of liberalism, namely that the state must be excluded from economic activity as much as possible. Cultural ideas of individualism and enterprise were celebrated in emergent media, at the expense of the national liberation ideas of socialism and the collective good. The impatient elites wanted to set themselves apart from the obligations of the post-colonial. They wanted to live, as the Indian poet Nissim Ezekiel put it,

> At jazzy picnics,
>
> Cooking on a smoky stove,
>
> Shooing beggars from the backdoor wall.

It was fitting for them that the new post-colonial states had failed in so many ways; the failures were used as a measure to push for their own agendas. These elites produced their own neo-liberalism in response to the same debt crisis that opened their countries up to the factories of the North.

By the 1980s, the reinvigorated Atlantic bloc aggressively fought back against the NAM, and all talk of a New International Economic Order. At the Cancun meeting in 1981 to discuss the ill-starred Brandt Report, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher came to throw down the gauntlet. Reagan mocked the proceedings, particularly those "who mistake compassion for development, and claim massive transfers of wealth somehow, miraculously, will produce new well-being." The North-South dialogue effectively ended.

The corridors of the IMF and the World Bank were scrubbed clean of old Keynesians and developmentalists. Only managerialist and neo-liberal thinkers were welcome into the leadership. Questions of history and of sociology were of no consequence. GDP was the only variable that mattered. At the IMF, Johannes Witteveen gave way to Jacques de Larosiere, and at the World Bank, Tom Clausen and Anna Krueger washed the stains left by Robert McNamara. Liberalism was shown the door.

The UN too had to be cleansed. When he briefed Daniel Moynihan for his new UN post, Henry Kissinger told him, "We need a strategy. In principle, I think we should move things from the General Assembly to the Security Council. It is important to see that we have our confidence and nerve." He wanted the US to "get hold of the Specialized Agencies," such as UNCTAD and UNESCO, and turn them to the "business civilization" of the North.

Having excised the institutional threats to the Atlantic project, the G7 moved to use the debt crisis of the 1980s to its advantage, and to push through a new intellectual property and trade regime to consolidate the gains of the North against the South. By the time the NAM met in New Delhi in 1983, the exhaustion of the Third World Project before the fierce thrust from the North was evident. There was to be no effective political strategy to deal with the debt crisis, with the Southern countries willing out of political necessity to see the Club of Paris and the Club of London one by one, to get their structural adjustment orders so as to extend their credit lines. More radical voices called for a debtor's strike, but this fell on deaf ears. The problem was not the debt itself (after all, today the total external debt of the developing countries stands at $1.38 trillion, whereas the total external debt of France alone is $1.2 trillion). The problem lies with the power asymmetry, with France able to refinance its debt via favorable rates from the bank cartels, plus lower risk premiums relative to other countries. The North could command the banks.

Rather than a South-led New International Economic Order, the world had to live with a North-led New International Property Order. The Uruguay Round of the GATT changed the intellectual property regime so that reverse engineering or transfer of technology became illegal. The North and its businesses would be able to outsource the production of commodities to the South, but the bulk of

the profits for their sale would be preserved as rent for intellectual property (this was the process that produced "jobless growth" in the North and led to its debt-fueled consumerism for its vast mass — a social imbalance that has now exploded first through the housing market, and soon through the personal credit market).

In 1981, the new Secretary General of the UN, Javier Perez de Cuellar called the gap between North and South "a breach of the most fundamental human right," and pledged that the UN would work to bridge the gap. The UN, now under Atlantic tutelage, did no such thing.

Part III: The South project

In Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina's film *Chronique des Années de Braise* (1975), a crazy prophet emerges from the city to greet a horde of bedraggled peasants. He extends his arms and says, "You were poor and free. Now you are only poor!"

In 1989, the poor from the hillside settlements around Caracas, Venezuela, rose in revolt against the rise in bus fares, spurred on by an increase in petrol prices. This was the most spectacular of the IMF or Bread Riots. More such protests and rebellions shaped the social world on all the continents, now increasingly even in the Atlantic world (as we see with the social convulsions in Club Med, the southern European countries and with the Tea Party and the Occupy protests in the United States). What united these protests were at least five processes:

1. Enforced austerity regimes pushed first in Africa, Asia and Latin America under the name of structural adjustment and then more recently in the Atlantic world under the name of balanced budgets and fiscal responsibility.

2. Catastrophic unemployment in pockets of these societies, particularly in rural areas where factory farming has deskilled work through the use of expensive and unsustainable technological inputs. The International Labour Organisation's 2011 report suggests a vulnerable unemployment rate of 50.1%. The ILO has called for a Global Jobs Pact, with greater public investment in infrastructure and a "stronger, more globally consistent supervisory and regulatory framework for the financial sector, so that it serves the real economy, promotes sustainable enterprises and decent work and better protects the savings and pensions of people." As with much that happens at the ILO, it carried no weight with the G-7, where labor issues are considered *infra dig*.

3. The dominance of the FIRE (Finance, Real Estate and Insurance) sector, whose fire-sale of assets in the name of privatization produced higher unemployment and very great levels of social inequality.

4. Increased hunger amongst billions of people. From Rome, the Food and Agriculture Agency reported in 2009 that the world's hungry would top

1.02 billion that year. FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf has spent his entire career on food issues. Whether working on groundnut or rice or agriculture or hunger, Diouf has been a thoughtful champion of the problems of food and starvation. While releasing the 2009 report, Diouf could not contain himself, "A dangerous mix of the global economic slowdown combined with stubbornly high food prices in many countries has pushed some 100 million more people than last year into chronic hunger and poverty. The silent hunger crisis -- affecting one sixth of all of humanity -- poses a serious risk for world peace and security." In 2008, food riots struck Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Haiti, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Vietnam, India and Pakistan have banned the export of grain, worrying about food security, while food importers like Indonesia, Korea and Mongolia have slashed import tariffs. The IMF recognized that one of the spurs for the Arab Revolt of this year was the rising bread prices as a result of the end to the "democracy of bread" (*dimuqratiyyat al-khubz*).

5. It is bad enough if one is reduced to the level of bare life, but even worse if this condition is not general across the population. Rates of social inequality are at record levels for the modern era. A recent UN report shows us that the richest 1% of adults across the planet owned forty percent of global assets, and the richest 10% owned eighty-five percent of the world total. "Some have predicted convergence," the report notes, "but the past decade has shown increasing concentration of income among people, corporations and countries."

How has the NAM reacted to these developments? Has it been able to break out of the defensive posture that marked it since the 1980s? At the 2006 Havana NAM summit, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez called for the creation of a new Commission to study the current situation and propose an agenda that "will not be thrown to the wind." He nodded to the South Commission, whose work in the 1980s set in motion the theory of the "locomotives of the South," although its own report, published on the day Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, is little read.

The South Commission toiled in the unfavorable climate of the 1980s. Shunned by the North, the Commission made a virtue of necessity: it called for South-South Cooperation, with its General Secretary Manmohan Singh offering the view that "the new locomotive forces have to be found within the South itself." It was this thinking that provided the calculations for the creation of the Group of 15 (at the 1989 NAM summit), then the IBSA Group (India-Brazil-South Africa) in 2003 and eventually the BRICS formation (Brazil-Russia-India-China and South Africa) in 2009. These were seen as the locomotives of the South.

The IMF's 2011 report suggests that by 2016 the United States will no longer be the largest economy in the world. This is, as the historian Ferdinand Braudel put it, the "sign of autumn" for Atlantic hegemony. Signals of decline are visible in the fragile economic fundamentals in the Atlantic states, with the red light of

caution burning bright over the dominance of finance in the economy and the increase in military spending. Since 2001, the United States alone has spent $7.6 trillion on its wars and its national security apparatus. This comes alongside massive cuts in social spending, and in tax breaks to the rich (this year, the top 1% in the United States earned an average tax cut that is greater than the average income to the 99%). When it became clear that the United Kingdom's autumn was at hand by 1925, Winston Churchill proclaimed, "I would rather see finance less proud and industry more content." These words would apply to the domination of the Wall Street, the City of London and other stock exchanges over the lifeblood of social economy.

By IMF projections, China will be the largest economy in 2016, but it does not appear to wish to assert it alone. China appears content to share the stage with the BRICS states, and to push for multi-polarity and economic diversity.

But the BRICS platform is limited in several ways:

1. The domestic policies of the BRICS states follows the general tenor of what one might consider Neoliberalism with Southern Characteristics — with sales of commodities and low wages to workers alongside the recycled surplus turned over as credit to the North as the livelihood of its own citizens remains flat. For example, the Indian people experience high levels of poverty and hunger, and yet its growth rate is steadily increasing. Rather than turn over the social wealth in transfer payments or in the creation of a more robust social wage, the country seems to follow World Bank president Robert Zoellick's advice to turn over its surplus to "help the global economy recover from the crisis." There is something obscene about making the "locomotives from the South" pull the wagons of the North (particularly given the North's own reticence to allow for a new surplus recycling mechanism during the debt crisis of the 1980s).

2. The BRICS alliance has not been able to create a new *institutional* foundation for its emergent authority. It continues to plead for a more democratic United Nations, and for more democracy at the IMF and the World Bank. These pleas have made little head-way. During the height of the financial crisis, the G8 promised to disband and to use the G20 for their purpose, which is now forgotten. Anemic increases in the voting shares at the IMF did not enable the South to put forward a joint candidate to become its Executive earlier this summer.

3. The BRICS formation has not endorsed an *ideological* alternative to neoliberalism. There are many proposals for the creation of a more sustainable economic order, but these are left to the margins. The Rio formula for "separate and differential treatment" allows the South to make demands for concessions from universal polices that the North refuses to endorse (not the least of which is on climate change). This is a defensive stand. There is no positive alternative that has been taken

forward as yet. It might emerge out of the convulsions from below, where there is no appetite for tinkering with a system that most people see as fundamentally broken.

4. Finally, the BRICS project has no ability to sequester the *military* dominance of the United States and NATO. When the UN votes to allow "members states to use all necessary measures," as it did in Resolution 1973 on Libya, it essentially gives carte blanche to the Atlantic world to act with military force. There are no regional alternatives that have the capacity to operate. The force projection of the United States remains planetary – with bases on every continent and with the ability of the US to strike almost anywhere. Regional mechanisms for peace and conflict-resolution are weakened by this global presence of NATO and the US. Overwhelming military power translates into political power.

Conclusion

If we look into the entrails of the system, we will find that its solutions do not lie within it. Its problems are not technical, nor are they cultural. They are social problems that require political solutions. The social order of property, propriety and power has to be radically revised. That is without question. The issue is what must be the strategy, the tactics, the way forward to a place that is not what we have now. The Global South is a place of great struggle, of various tactics and strategies experimented with on the streets and in the halls of government. It is an unfinished story, one that has to have a good ending.

One word unites the variegated protests across the planet: No! From Occupy Wall Street to Tahrir Square, from the Kennedy Road shack settlement in Durban to the rural hamlets of Haryana – the policies of neo-liberalism have been resoundingly rejected. What emerged since the 1990s has been *resistance*, the defusing of the energy of neo-liberal policies that emerge out of international and national institutions. The "Global South" comes to refer to this concatenation of protests against the theft of the commons, against the theft of human dignity and rights, against the undermining of the democratic institutions, and the promises of modernity. The Global South is this world of protest, a whirlwind of creative activity. These protests have produced an opening that has no easily definable political direction. Some of it turns backwards, taking refuge in imagined unities of the past or in the divine realm. Others, merely defensive, seek to survive in the present. And yet others find the present intolerable and nudge us to the future.

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Containing the "Arab Spring"

Jeremy Salt

Abstract

The article discusses the developments in the Arab world since the beginning of the Arab revolutions in 2011, and the way regional and global forces have been trying to deal with, contain, and obstruct their development, in line with long standing Western interventions in the region, based on Western interests and ideologies.

Introduction

Striking with the force of an avalanche, the so-called "Arab spring" (who was it who thought of this phrase?) caught everyone off guard, off balance and unprepared, none more so than the governments who, through their intelligence services, were supposed to know what was happening in every crevice of their country. Tunisia's Zine el Abidine ben Ali was swept away quickly, but in Cairo Husni Mubarak held on grimly until his fingers lost their grip as well. The US clung to these men, their proteges, as long as it could, as it had done with the Shah in the late 1970s until it was clear even in Washington that he was finished, as it had done in the past with authoritarian governments and "pro-western" dictators around the world until they, too, were finished.

Hillary Clinton arrived in Cairo, declaring that she, and her government, were on the side of the people, on the side of democracy, freedom and human rights. She was not believed, of course; the January 25 Revolution Youth Coalition refused to meet her because of her "negative position from the beginning of the revolution and the position of the US administration in the Middle East".[1] While *irhal* (go!) dominated Arab world rhetoric, as the uprisings spread, transition and dialogue were the key words for the US and its allies as they sought to regain their footing in a volatile situation. Transition for the people demonstrating in Tahrir Square and elsewhere meant transition to a fully democratic system. Transition for the US meant transition to a system that might be different from the old regime, might turn out to be better or worse for the local people, but would not disrupt "western" interests across the region. Dialogue meant negotiations with the parties likely to dominate the restructured Middle East.

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[1] Kristen Chick, "Clinton, Rebuffed in Egypt, faces tough task on Arab upheaval", *Christian Science Monitor,* March 15, 2011.

Early developments and election results

The overthrow of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt was merely the first stage of an unfolding process. By November 2011, Tunisians had elected a coalition government formed between Rashid al Ghannushi's Islamist Al Nahda party and the liberal Al Takattul.

In Egypt, by this time, the confrontation between the people and Mubarak had been replaced by an increasingly bitter confrontation between the people and the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), in particular its commander-in-chief, Hussein Tantawi, who had been inside Mubarak's inner circle for decades. By late November Egyptians had also shown their electoral preferences, in the first of a three stage process. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won about 45 per cent of the vote and 49 per cent of parliamentary seats in the first round. Polls had predicted a sweeping triumph for the brotherhood (the *ikhwan al muslimin*), so the real surprise was the extent of the success of the salafist parties, especially Al Nour, which came home with 20 percent of the seats. These results were confirmed in December and early January, when the second and third round of elections were held.

Leftist and even liberal centrist parties, including the oldest in the country, the Wafd, were left trailing in the rear. Good news for the *ikhwan* and the salafists was bad news for Christians, secular liberal women's groups, gays and liberals, irrespective of gender and religion but, as the Islamists will lose no opportunity to point out, and this is democracy. Egyptians will now be ruled by an *ikhwan*-military duumvirate instead of the Mubarak-military duumvirate.   It will take some time for the real differences to become apparent but the *ikhwan* and the salafists want to build an Islamic state. All the tools of surveillance and repression are now falling into their hands and it would be unrealistic to think they will not use them. The military hesitated before finally coming in behind the demonstrators in Tahrir Square but soon reverted to its role as a tool of the system. Its brutality in crushing dissent reached some sort of horrible climax in December with the stripping, kicking and beating of the girl with the blue bra as she lay defenseless on the ground. Did this signify that men think the election results have given them some kind of license to beat rebellious women?

Western responses to the revolutions

Throughout spring the turbulence spread across the region. The declaration by the UN Security Council of a no-fly zone set the stage for armed intervention in Libya, culminating seven months later in the overthrow of the government and the open murder of Muammar Gaddafi. The destruction of the *jamahiriyya* left Libya in a fragmented turbulent state, with militias showing no inclination either to disarm or acknowledge the authority of a central government so nominal that it had no real authority. This was not a revolution but the destruction of an Arab-African government by Britain, France and the United States.

In Yemen mass protests were met by state violence continuing over months and unfulfilled promises by President Saleh that he would step down. In Bahrain protests continued ahead of the release of a government-sponsored report in late November, denying, unexpectedly, that the February demonstrations had been stirred up by Iran and accusing security forces of using excessive force and torture. This did not deter the government from deploying the security forces against demonstrators as before. In Syria peaceful protests were soon overwhelmed by continuing violence, with the army on one side, armed gangs and "defectors" on the other and innocent civilians caught in between.

The response of western governments to all of these situations varied: support for Ben Ali and Mubarak until support was no longer feasible; support for Bahrain's ruling family behind the patina of mild criticism; tacit support for Saudi intervention in Bahrain; criticism of President Saleh but no suggestion that a no-fly zone should be imposed over Yemen.

Unsurprisingly, the dominant element in these variations of response was self-interest. Saudi Arabia is an "ally" of the US; Bahrain is the gulf home port of the US Fifth Fleet; President Saleh has opened Yemeni air space to US drone missile attacks which have killed some militants (including US citizens) along with many innocent citizens.

Only Libya was deemed worthy of armed intervention. Whatever the damage being done to human rights, western governments had long-standing grievances against Gaddafi. He had been a thorn in their side for decades, and had recently been putting together a program which would have given Africans their own central bank, investment agency, monetary fund and currency (based on the gold dinar). This, more than oil, to which western companies already had generous access, was the most probable reason for the decision of France, Britain and the US to take advantage of the moment and attack in the name of protecting human rights.

Themes of the Arab revolutions

Within the countries caught up in the "Arab spring", there were common themes as well as dissimilarities. Unemployment and rising prices added to an awareness of the gulf between the world of the rulers and the world of the ruled. After Zine el Abidine ben Ali fled, his villa at Sidi Bou Said was searched and bundles of 500 euro notes found stacked on shelves, as if they were small change the president and his wife couldn't be bothered taking with them. Along with the wealth was the miasma of corruption around Ben Ali's inner circle and the general detestation of his wife, Leila Trabelsi and her relatives.

The catalyst for revolution was the death on January 4 of Muhammad Bouazizi, the street vendor who set fire to himself outside the municipal offices in the town of Sidi Bouzid. Demonstrations spread across the country and spilled across the border into Egypt as hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to shake off the parasites who had fed off them for decades. Twitter, facebook, mobile phones and digital cameras took the place of the wall posters

of the 1960s, mobilizing people and showing the world in graphic detail how far governments were prepared to go in crushing them with their security forces — soldiers and police — and their thugs, running amuck in the lanes around Tahrir Square.

Young activists had the technological skills to pull the various strands of the opposition into one swelling and ultimately irresistible movement. In Egypt, there were many catalysts along the way: the campaign for a nationwide general strike on April 6, 2008, and the attempts of police to force textile workers at Mahalla al Kubra to stay on the job; the death of Khalid Saaed, beaten to death by police in Alexandria in June, 2010; the arrest of bloggers and activists; finally, the video posted by Asma'a al Mahfouz on January 18, 2011, an impassioned declaration to the people: "do not lose hope — hope only disappears only when you say there is no hope". A week later hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Tahrir Square.

It was the beginning of the end for Mubarak, even with the army, the police, the swarms of armed thugs and the camels and horses being ridden into the middle of demonstrators. There were numerous parallels with Tunisia. A dictator who had ruled the country for longer even than Ben Ali (from the assassination of Anwar al Sadat in 1981); the suppression of dissent using the most brutal means; an enriched upper echelon; and, against their own rhetoric of freedom and democracy, the support of outside governments for a dictator in return for protecting "western interests" across the region.

Rising prices, poverty, unemployment and the youth demographic all have their place in the story of the uprisings. During the Mubarak years the Egyptian economy experienced dynamic growth; population growth slowed; official unemployment fluctuated between eight to 12 per cent before dropping below 10 per cent in 2010, lower than in many western developed countries (including the US and the EU), while "extreme poverty" (purchasing power of less than $1.25 a day) was almost eradicated.

However, the number of people living beneath the poverty line (less than $2 purchasing power a day) jumped sharply between 2005 and 2010. The correlation with a steep rise in food prices between 2005-11 can scarcely be missed (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011: 155). Of particular importance to a country such as Egypt, where fluctuations in basic foodstuffs can completely disrupt a family budget (as the reductions of subsidies on IMF advice did in 1977 before riots forced the government to withdraw them), the world price both of cooking oil and wheat soared in 2010-11. It was price rises which generated support for the general strike called in 2008. The government followed up by holding the price of *baladi* bread at affordable levels and significantly increasing the number of Egyptians (from 39.5 million to 63 million) entitled to buy food (bread, cooking oil, butter, sugar etc.) at subsidized prices. Other items had to be bought at market prices.

Government attempts to hold prices down and stave off social explosion were matched by measures to control population growth, but while both birth rates

and death rates began to decline from the mid-1980s, the birth rate remained much higher (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011: 162). The outcome, by 2010, was the rapid growth in the number of young people in the 20-24 age group. Egypt's official unemployment rate at the onset of the revolution was nine per cent, but of this number half — a total of about one million young people - came from the 20-24 age group. As more than 43 per cent of the unemployed had university degrees, "the impact force of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution was not only young but also very highly educated" (Korotayev and Zinkina 2011: 168). The young also had the networking skills needed to mobilize, and they were able to draw into protests millions of people who were feeling the effects of low wages and continually increasing prices. Educated and aware, the young activists sought to end an oppressive system of government which they had known all their lives.

Revolutions and counter-revolutions

The first successful stages of a people's revolution in Egypt were followed by counter revolution.   The army took control of the electoral process and even sought to impose its will over the constitutional process (through "supra constitutional" principles that would have put the military above parliamentary scrutiny had they not been withdrawn). It used the emergency laws in place since the assassination of Sadat as ruthlessly as Mubarak had done. In September these laws were expanded to include "the obstruction of roads, disruption of transportation, possession of weapons and dissemination of false information".[2] On October 4, SCAF announced that the state of emergency would be maintained until the end of May, 2012, and would not in fact be lifted until "stability" was restored.

Five days later, an orchestrated attack on demonstrators outside or near the Maspero building (headquarters of state radio and television) by the army, police and thugs wielding an assortment of weapons left 27 people dead, some crushed to death when military vehicles were driven into the crowd.   The demonstrators — mostly Copts but supported by Muslims — had marched to Maspero in protest at the failure of the state to investigate arson attacks on Coptic churches and the biased reporting of these attacks by state television.   By November, some 12,000 people had been tried before military tribunals, more in ten months, as one commentator observed, than had faced the tribunals during the three decades of Mubarak's rule.[3] The decline in the standing of SCAF, and especially of Hussein Tantawi, was striking when compared to the popular support the military had enjoyed closer to the overthrow of Mubarak.

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[2] "Egypt. State of the Transformation Process', Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law,
www.mpil.de/ww/en/pub/research/details/know_transfer/.../_gypten.cfm

[3] Jack Shenker, "Tahrir Square crowds vow 'fight to death' for end of military rule", *Guardian*, November 21.

A poll taken early in November predicted electoral success for the Muslim Brotherhood, while underestimating support for Al Nour and overestimating it for the Wafd, which ended up with seven per cent of the vote in the first round as opposed to the predicted 26 per cent. A further pointer to the future was the response to questions dealing with foreign relations: 51 per cent of those polled had "very positive" feelings towards Saudi Arabia and 30 per cent "somewhat positive" feelings. Of those who felt positive, 74 per cent said the reason was because Saudi was "a model for the Islamic community" (Al Ahram 2011).

Both the *ikhwan* and the salafists were slow in joining the revolution. Indeed some salafi scholars denounced the January demonstrations as "un-Islamic" but by late July both the *ikhwan* and the salafists were holding their own demonstration in Tahrir Square. In a radical change after the overthrow of Mubarak, because until then they had shunned political engagement, salafis formed their own political parties, among them Al Nour, Al Nahda, al Asala and Al Fadila. The core of salafi activism is "satellite salafism". In the past eight years salafi television channels have proliferated. Of the ten or so now broadcasting, Al Nas (The People), part of a network of salafi satellite channels owned by Saudi investors, is the most popular. Al Rahma (The Mercy) is owned by the salafi imam Muhammad Hasan, whose tapes and books are widely available. The absence of women from salafi air waves and the presence of salafi men and women on the streets of Cairo and Alexandria, the men wearing long untrimmed beards and gallabiyas foreshortened halfway down the calf and the women covering their faces with the *niqab* (full veil), was seen as further evidence that "a new and distinctly conservative or puritanical strain of Islam is gaining ground in Egypt" (Field and Hamam 2009). This assessment has now been confirmed by the election results.

The Muslim Brotherhood has always been effective when it comes to delivering social justice at the grass roots level and salafi organizations are equally committed to this same goal. Both want to convince Copts and their liberal Muslim or secular critics that they have nothing to fear: this is difficult for Christians to accept when salafists have taken the lead in attacks on their churches. When the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visited Cairo, his advice that Egyptians build a secular state was immediately rejected by the brotherhood. As its adherents chanted in Tahrir Square, "Islamic, Islamic, we don't want secular".[4]

Ahead of the elections, the poll previously quoted shows the depth of support for this view. Of those polled, 62 per cent thought the laws of the state should follow the Quran and 31 per cent were sympathetic to "fundamentalism". Only 39 per cent gave a high priority to women having the same rights as men and only 36 per cent thought it important that Copts and other minorities should be able to freely practice their religions. One final figure bears on the revolution and the cohesive force of the "social media": 65 per cent of those polled had no

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[4] Lauren Bohn, 'Inside Egypt's Salafis', *Foreign Policy*, the Middle East Channel, August 2,2011 www.mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/201108/02/inside_egypts_salafis

access to the internet or email. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in Tahrir Square but in a population of 83 million this is a relatively small number. How many Egyptians across the country, relying on the television and newspapers for what they knew of what was happening in Cairo, felt strongly enough about Mubarak to want him brought down? What the election results showed was that the vision of the post-Mubarak Egypt – a secularized liberal state - animating the demonstrators in Tahrir Square was not shared by the majority.

Libya

Reading the signs in Egypt, as best as it could, the US entered into "dialogue" with the Muslim Brotherhood. While eventually supporting the right of the Egyptian people to freedom and democracy, the US was rather more reserved when it came to Bahrain, the Gulf home of the US Fifth Fleet. In March the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) authorized intervention by a Saudi force, nominally to protect strategic sites but in fact to prevent the ruling family from being toppled. The Saudis streamed across the causeway on March 14 and the next day Bahrain's king, Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, declared martial law and set his security forces on the demonstrators massing at Pearl Roundabout. They were routed over a period of days and the monument at the center of the roundabout finally destroyed. Shia villages were attacked by regime thugs as part of the cleaning-up process. The violence extended into hospitals where the wounded were being treated.

At the height of the demonstrations in February, Ms. Clinton spoke of encouraging reform in Bahrain and speaking out "where we see them violating human rights and using violence inappropriately". President Obama condemned the violence of governments in Bahrain, Yemen and Libya, but where the first two of these countries were reprimanded, and encouraged to proceed on the path of reform, the opportunity was seized to pounce on Libya and bring down the government of Muammar Gaddafi.

As soon as the citizens of Benghazi began protesting, France, Britain and the US moved without delay. A protest to the UN Human Rights Council was the trigger for a no-fly zone resolution passed by the UN Security Council and approved by the Arab League. Gaddafi's offers of negotiations (supplemented by offers from the African Union) were all rejected by the "rebels" and the NATO allies. Under the aegis of a "responsibility to protect", Britain, France and the US launched a devastating aerial assault on Libya that lasted for seven months before ending in the downfall of the regime, the death of tens of thousands of people and Gaddafi's shocking murder, clearly set up by France and the US. The US had stationed a Predator drone overhead and a French fighter aircraft was called in as soon as Gaddafi's convoy left Sirte.[5] The missile attack on the convoy was

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[5] Claude Angeli, "Kadhafi condamné à mort par Washington et Paris", *Le Canard Enchaîné,* October 26, 2011, p.3.

apparently ordered in the knowledge that even if Gaddafi was not killed outright, bands of armed men who hated him was not far away.

Gaddafi was the same Gaddafi he had been a year before or ten years before, the very same Gaddafi who had shaken hands with Obama, Sarkozy, Blair and Berlusconi and had awarded the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Gaddafi International Award for Human Rights (worth $250,000) as recently as November, 2010. Now they all turned on him. In the spring of 2011, Dr. Jekyll was transformed into Mr. Hyde. The Middle East madman returned to the printed page and electronic screen of the mass media.

The lurid accusations that he was killing thousands of his own people, that he was bombing them from the air and that he was pursuing a "scorched earth" policy against the "rebels" were incrementally augmented: he was using black mercenaries and he was organizing the distribution of Viagra to his troops so they could rape the womenfolk of the opposition. None of this proved to be true. Hillary Clinton, paraphrasing Julius Caesar, even turned Gaddafi's murder into the occasion for a joke - "we came, we saw, he died". The most developed country in Africa, according to the UN's Human Development Programme index, was rendered dysfunctional and plunged into an uncertain future. The destruction of the *jamahiriyya* was followed by torture, murder and the disappearance of thousands of people regarded as "pro Gaddafi" loyalists. The government formed in the capital had little control over bands of armed young men refusing to go home and militias holding on to their patches of turf. Any quotidian gain from this transformation of the state was obviously not going to be apparent in the short term. The secrets that Gaddafi may have exposed had he been put on trial – notably the disappearance of the Imam Musa Sadr, Lockerbie and his dealings with western leaders - were buried with him.

Syria

The 'success' of the Libya operation created the template for action against Syria. The catalyst for the protest movement was the arrest in Dar'aa of children for writing graffiti on a wall, yet it soon became clear that Syria was being targeted by governments and groups whose interests were not reform but the destruction of a government which had stood in the way of Israel and the US for decades and was loathed by the *ikhwan* and salafists everywhere. The peaceful campaign for reform was soon swamped in violence, by the state against armed gangs and "defectors" and by the latter against soldiers and civilians.

As it had done in Libya, the western media developed a false narrative, until it could no longer be maintained, that all the violence was one-way. The claims of "activists" or "human rights" organizations were reported with little or no attempt at verification. The Syrian government broadcast the tapes of interrogation of hundreds of armed men who had been arrested and confessed to a range of crimes, including the shooting of demonstrators, in such a way that the blame could be laid on the government. As the evidence piled up it became

clear that not all of it could be put down to information squeezed out of suspects by means for which the Syrian *mukhabarat* is renowned, if not more so than any other state security organization. Weapons and money were being smuggled into the country in large quantities: the weapons went up the scale from pump action shotguns to machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers.

As the central arch in the strategic relationship with Iran and Hizbullah, the downfall of the Baathist government would be a triumph of great strategic magnitude for the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, which has sat behind the scenes and allowed Qatar to take the Arab lead in the campaign against Bashar al Assad.

As the struggle with these countries has unfolded in the past decades, Syria has shown itself to be a wily and resourceful opponent. In Lebanon the US and Israel were ultimately outmaneuvered by both Hafez al Assad and Hizbullah. Israel was to suffer the death of a thousand cuts at the hands of Hizbullah during its long occupation of southern Lebanon, which it was forced to evacuate in 2000. The game continued in 2003 when the US Congress passed the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act (SALSA), opening the way to a broad range of sanctions. The assassination of Rafiq Hariri in 2005 was another man-made opportunity to corner Syria. The shock was used successfully as leverage to get remaining Syrian troops out of Lebanon, but the attempt to pin the murder on Syria failed when the UN special tribunal ruled four years later that the four "pro-Syrian" generals who had been arrested and imprisoned should be released for lack of evidence. In 2006 Israel launched an attack designed to destroy Hizbullah. This again ended in humiliation for Israel, which proved incapable of capturing and holding Lebanese villages a few kilometers from the armistice line.

In January this year the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia suffered another setback when the Hariri government collapsed in Beirut. Hariri is a US and Saudi protégé, who had acted for their interests in trying to outflank Hizbullah. This latest triumph for Hizbullah – and through Hizbullah for Syria and Iran – was followed on February 14 (three days before the uprising in Benghazi) by the uprising in Bahrain. Revolution was spreading across the region, but these two developments in particular fully awakened the near paranoia of the Saudi ruling family at the extent of Shi'a power and influence, from Iran and the gulf through to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The Shia were demonstrating as Bahrainis but as far as the Saudis were concerned this was a Shia uprising fomented by Iran.

Insofar as Syria is concerned, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi Arabia's former ambassador to the US, and Jeffrey Feltman, a former US ambassador to Lebanon and presently the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, were reported to be working on a multilayered plan of destabilization as far back as 2008.[6] They were said to have $2 billion in hand for the purpose.

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[6] "Media sources reveal details of a conspiracy by Bandar bin Sultan and Feltman to 'destroy' Syria", www.champress.net/indexphp?q=en/article/view/86507. Feltman also served as special assistant to US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, during the Oslo "peace process".

There is no "smoking gun": government conspiracies are usually not exposed until the archives are opened 20 or 30 years later,   but some things can be proven. One is the attempt to weaken Syria through SALSA and another is the funneling of millions of dollars to Syrian exiles and exiled groups through the State Department program called the Middle East Partnership Initiative.   The money is channeled through the Los Angeles-based Democracy Council. The London-based Movement for Change and its Barada satellite television station are among the beneficiaries, according to information leaked by Wikileaks from US diplomatic correspondence. Proxy organizations have been used to send money to the opposition inside Syria as well. The deadly intent of the US government was made clear by Feltman when, speaking at a congressional hearing, he said that the US would "relentlessly pursue our two-track strategy of supporting the opposition and diplomatically and financially strangling the [Syrian] regime until that outcome is achieved".[7]

In its confrontation with the Syrian government the US and its European allies were joined by Turkey, which gave support to the so-called "Free Syrian Army and hinted at the possible establishment of a "buffer zone" across the Syrian border. The French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, talked of establishing a 'humanitarian corridor' inside Syria.   These euphemisms have to be reduced to what they actually mean, which is the invasion of Syrian territory, with all the dangers attendant on such a move. In both Libya and Syria — but not elsewhere — the US and its allies used the rhetoric of human rights to advance long-standing strategic aims, which, if successfully carried through, will change the shape of the Middle East for decades to come. An unprecedented opportunity has arisen to reshape the region behind the screen of the "Arab spring" and the "west" is reaching for it. One would have to be entirely oblivious to the last two centuries of European and American intervention to think that what is now happening is altruistic in nature.

Qatar and Turkey

A striking feature of the "Arab spring" was the emergence of Turkey and Qatar as key players. In the aftermath of the uprising in Egypt, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, abruptly reversed the "zero problem" foreign policy they had developed since coming into government in 2002. In the wake of the uprising in Benghazi they decided to ride the crest of the wave of reform. This was bound to work with Libya, given that Gaddafi could not resist the aerial might of the US, Britain and France forever, but proved to be more problematic with Syria. Turkey appeared to dive in head-first without weighing all the consequences of the various strands of its policy.

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[7] Aisling Byrne, "A mistaken case for Syrian regime change", *Conflicts Forum*, conflictsforum.org/2012/a-mistaken-case-for-syrian-regime-change/

Not only was there strong domestic opposition to the government's confrontational line, but the sanctions imposed by Turkey were hurting small businessmen in the southeast who trade across the Syrian border and often have relatives on the other side. As part of its new stance, Turkey allowed the "Free Syrian Army" to operate from bases in southeastern Turkey, with other NATO members reportedly providing weaponry and training. It supported the establishment of the Syrian National Council in Istanbul, only to discover that the council and the internal Syrian opposition could not work together.

A particular point of discord was the call for external intervention by leading members of the council (notably Burhan Ghaliun) and the rejection of western armed intervention by the internal opposition and even some exiles. Russian and Chinese opposition make it unlikely that the UN Security Council will be able to pass another 'no fly zone' resolution but intervention still remained possible. According to Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, speaking in early January, NATO members and the Gulf States were planning to intervene: "The main strike force will be supplied not by France, Britain and Italy but possibly Turkey".[8] If Turkey does go so far as to intervene in Syria, an historical precedent will have been set.

The slogan by which Turkey lives is "peace at home and peace abroad" and possibly not since the republic was established in 1923 has a Turkish government ordered military intervention across its borders without direct infringements on or threats to its territorial integrity. Turkey has intervened repeatedly in northern Iraq in pursuit of PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) fighters who have launched attacks inside Turkey and intervention in Cyprus in 1974 followed the intention of the military junta then ruling Greece to declare *enosis* with Cyprus. Overt armed intervention in Syria would be fraught with the most serious regional and global consequences yet it seems that Turkey's government has been swayed by the flattery it has received from the outside on its success as a "moderate" Muslim government and its standing as a regional power.

Given its miniscule size and population Qatar would seem to be punching above its weight, but its involvement in the attack on Libya and its influence in setting the agenda for Syria have been critical. It collaborated with the US, Britain and France in attacking Libya, committing special forces for the purpose, and went on to take an even more aggressive stance against Syria. It has orchestrated anti-Syrian sentiment at the Arab League and has consistently demanded armed intervention against the Syrian government. When General Dabi, the Sudanese head of the Arab League monitors sent to Syria, remarked during a visit to Homs that the situation seemed "quiet", Qatar campaigned (unsuccessfully) for the entire team to be withdrawn. With the monitors coming under continuing

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[8] "Discord Among Arab Monitors as Russia Warns of Syria Intervention", *Al Akhbar English*, January 12, 2012. Online at www.english.al-akhbar.com/content/discord-among-arab-monitors-russia-warns-syria-intervention.

criticism from "activists", Qatar's emir, Shaikh Hamid bin Khalifa al Thani, again called for intervention, this time specifically by an Arab military force.

In its coverage of the situation in Libya and Syria, Al Jazeera clearly followed the government line. As a main source of news and comment, it significantly shaped the mainstream western media position on Syria. Other sources included human rights groups and exiles feeding the accusations of activists inside the country to the global media. Reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Council were largely based on unverified accusations and took almost no account of the counter-charges by the Syrian government, despite the mounting evidence that armed gangs and "defectors" supported with arms and training from beyond Syria's borders were killing thousands of soldiers and civilians.

Conclusion

How the "Arab spring" is turning out obviously depends on perspective. For the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and salafists everywhere it has certainly gone very well in North Africa. A new and unprecedented phase of history has been opened up. Moroccans, Tunisians, and Egyptians have elected governments which describe themselves as "moderate" but are bound by their own doctrines to push conventional law further in the direction of sharia law. The mainstream Muslim parties will be pushed to go ever further by the salafists. In theory the Muslim parties are committed to the struggle against Israel, but in fact their policies are likely to be pragmatic.

As long as Egypt maintains the treaty with Israel it will continue to receive US military and economic aid, with further financial support flowing in from Saudi Arabia. Money will be a powerful incentive not to rock the boat. Breaches of human rights as they affect women in particular but all liberals irrespective of gender or religion will be left for reprimands in the State Department's country reports. As the first year of the "Arab spring" drew to an end the results were mixed. The outcome in Syria remained uncertain, demonstrations continued in Yemen and Bahrain but elsewhere there had been no change or change that could only dismay the young activists who got the revolution off the ground.

This is particularly the case in Egypt, where the hundreds of thousands of people massing in Tahrir Square were calling for a liberal Egypt and not a religious reformulation of the old regime. The fruits of the revolution have been voted out of their hands into the hands of movements that played almost no part in it, but as the Muslim Brotherhood and the salafists will say, this is democracy. Now that the Islamists have taken the reins of government, the liberal tradition which has prevailed in Egypt through all vicissitudes faces its greatest challenge.

U.S. and Saudi interests converge almost seamlessly and in the "Arab spring" both have grasped the opportunity to remake the Middle East so as to isolate and if possible destroy their common enemies. The election results in North Africa have given significant impetus to their drive to block Iran and contain

Shiism whether in the gulf, Iraq, Syria or Lebanon. There are echoes here of western "defense" plans of the 1950s, centering on the building of an alliance of conservative states against "radical" Arab nationalism and the Soviet Union. These doctrinally committed Sunni Muslim governments could be expected to be antipathetic if not actively hostile to Iran and Shia Islam.

The US has suffered losses (Mubarak and Ben Ali) and has to live with numerous uncertainties, but for now the situation in the gulf has been stabilized, the Syrian government has been gravely weakened and governments have come into power in North Africa which has signaled their willingness to work with Washington even at the expense of Palestine. For Israel the "Arab spring" has allowed the Netanyahu government to move ahead with its settlement projects for the West Bank and East Jerusalem with less media attention than ever.   The lasting, tragic legacy of the "Arab spring" may be the benefits it delivered to those movements which did not fight for the revolution but benefitted from it, along with those governments, notably the US and its western and regional allies, whom it caught off guard before they recovered their footing and set about turning it to their advantage.

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US intervention and the Tunisian revolution

The legacy of US intervention and the Tunisian revolution: promises and challenges one year on

Azadeh Shahshahani and Corinna Mullin

Abstract

Tunisia is distinguished not only as the spark that ignited the "Arab spring" uprisings, but also as the first of these to successfully institutionalise the "revolution" through what have been hailed as the country's first "free and fair" elections in October 2011. This comes after several decades in which Tunisians endured, though also resisted, an often brutal, dictatorial regime. The elections, along with the recently commemorated January anniversary of the Tunisian revolution provide an opportunity to reflect on the incredible achievements made over the past year as well as the obstacles that remain to realising and consolidating the goals of the revolution.

This article will assess these achievements and obstacles, in light of the legacy of domestic despotism and western interventionism, focusing on the "war on terror" decade. In particular, it will consider the possibility that the rush towards a western backed process of democratic consolidation may lead to a clash of imperatives in post-revolution Tunisia. This could entail increasing tensions between some elements of the state, business elite and their western backers, on the one hand, preoccupied with restoring "order" and "stability", and several sectors of society, including various labour, youth and religious activists, on the other, demanding more radical structural change, which could entail a measure of "disorder", at least initially.

The article will end by considering the state of the revolution one year on, focusing on some of the key challenges, political, economic and social, to the realisation of the revolution's ideals, and examining those areas in particular that may be hindered or blocked as a result of the international geopolitical context and continued US intervention.

Introduction

Tunisia is distinguished not only as the spark that ignited the "Arab spring" uprisings, but also as the first of these to successfully institutionalise the "revolution" through what have been hailed as Tunisia's first "free and fair" elections in October 2011. This comes after several decades in which Tunisians endured, though also resisted, an often brutal, dictatorial regime. Even more extraordinary, has been the electoral success of the Islamist An Nahda party, which, after decades of having been at the receiving end of some of the most repressive of the regime's policies, managed to gain legal status, return their leadership from exile and rebuild party structures, and mount an impressive electoral campaign all within months of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's deposal from

office. Having won more than 42% of the vote, securing 90 seats in the 217-member constituent assembly, Nahda entered into a coalition government with the liberal, secular Congress for the Republic and the left-of-centre Ettakatol Party to form a ruling coalition, dividing up ministerial posts between them (Guardian, 2011). The elections, along with the recently commemorated January anniversary of the Tunisian revolution provide an opportunity to reflect on the impressive achievements made over the past year by as well as on the obstacles that remain to realising and consolidating the goals of the revolution.

The dramatic events of the last year, in which Tunisian society succeeded in gaining the upper-hand in the seemingly unchangeable balance of power that was tipped for so long on the side of the repressive state, have provided much cause for optimism amongst Tunisians as well as those elsewhere in the region and further abroad committed to the principles of justice, freedom and democracy. New practices and understandings of citizenship that developed in the course of the uprisings have continued to influence state-society relations until today.

The *ancien regime* was marked by all of the societal pathologies associated with authoritarianism, including excessive state violence and domination of the public sphere, pervasive fear, atomisation, and rampant corruption. Today, it feels as if the lid of a pressure cooker has been lifted. The sense of relief is palpable. People are talking politics and debating the day's contentious issues in a way that was impossible under the old order. There has been a pluralisation of the political and public spheres in which a space has been opened for a greater number of Tunisians to not only take part in the practices and processes associated with democratic governance, but also to challenge the state's monopoly on cultural production, political discourses and control over public space. This can be seen in the ubiquitous display of public art in the form of political graffiti that has spread across Tunisia's urban structures (Mejri, Kim and Ryan, 2011), through the numerous protests that one can witnesses on any given day and on any number of issues ranging from labour disputes to identity issues.

Other protests have taken issue with the government's foreign policy, and include demands for Tunisia to take a more independent stance vis-a-vis those western states that many feel betrayed the Tunisian people for so long by propping up an unaccountable and repressive regime, in the name of promoting social "progress", economic "liberalisation", or, in the context of the "war on terror", "security". This sentiment was on display in a recent protest held in front of the "Friends of Syria Conference" in Tunis where placards were raised that read *"Hillary Clinton dégage!"* [Hillary Clinton, go away!] alongside Syrian, Palestinian and Tunisian flags (Baeder, 2012). It could also be seen in the numerous protests in which the issue of Palestine has been raised, including at an October conference on Arab Bloggers in which 11 Palestinian participants were denied visas (Hilleary, 2011), as well as the 15 May protest in Tunis to mark the 63rd anniversary of the *Nakba*, organised by the National Committee for Support of Arab Resistance and Struggle against Normalisation and Zionism

(Mhirsi, 2011). There were also the tens of thousands who welcomed Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh during his January trip to Tunisia, a visit and welcome that would have been unthinkable during the Ben Ali years. Supporters greeted his comments on the Arab spring, which he described as "a glorious revolution that will bring back the *ummah* [Islamic nation] and its glory in place of the chaos that the American administration had so desired," with chants in support of "Palestinian liberation" (Jerusalem Post, 2012).

However, it is also clear that many obstacles remain along the path to constructing a new polity capable of addressing not only Tunisians' political and individual grievances, but their socio-economic and collective grievances as well. Crucially, there is the fear that the rush towards a western backed process of democratic consolidation may lead to a clash of imperatives. This could entail some elements of the state, business elite and their western backers, on the one hand, preoccupied with restoring "order" and "stability", and many sectors of society, on the other, demanding more radical structural change, which could entail a measure of *disorder*, at least temporarily.

This is made clear in the ongoing debate over what the government should do about "*protestations anarchiques*", or unauthorised protests/strikes, which it claims have cost the national economy more than $2.5 billion and had an especially dire effect on certain export industries, such as phosphate (Hamadi, 2012). According to Samir Dilou, Human Rights and Transitional Justice Minister, the government's struggle at the moment is to find a balance between policies that would honour the "spirit of the revolution" by protecting the protesters' human rights, and at the same time fulfil the state's duty to ensure "social order", deemed a necessary prerequisite for economic growth. Timothy Mitchell (2011) has discussed the nature of these tensions in his book *Carbon Democracy* in which he argues that though democracy is often associated in the minds of activists with its potentially emancipatory function, it can also "refer to a mode of governing populations that employs popular consent as a means of limiting claims for greater equality and justice..."

This article will assess these achievements and obstacles, in light of the legacy of domestic despotism and western interventionism, focusing on the "war on terror" decade. It will end by considering the state of the revolution one year on, focusing on some of the key challenges, political, economic and social, to the realisation of the revolution's ideals, and examining those areas in particular that may be hindered or blocked as a result of the international geopolitical context and continued US intervention.

The Tunisian Revolution's Collective Grievances: National Sovereignty and an end to Western Intervention

The brave and desperate actions of Mohammed Bouazizi on 17 December 2010 sparked a wave of nationwide protests not only against the rising food prices that resulted from the latest round of IMF-mandated food subsidy eliminations but also against the longstanding structural issues that underpinned the Ben Ali

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dictatorship, including high levels of unemployment and corruption as well as the near-complete absence of civil liberties and political freedoms. The protests continued until 14 January 2011, when Ben Ali was finally forced to resign and Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi announced an interim national unity government, only partly satisfying protesters' demands. On 27 February, Prime Minister Ghannouchi stepped down, responding to demonstrators' demands calling for a clean break with the past. According to a UN human rights investigation, at least 219 Tunisians were killed during the uprisings and another 510 were injured (Toronto Star, 2011).

Much of the attention on the causes of the revolution have focused on longstanding structural issues, including the government's distorted budget priorities, with a lack of balance between the funds invested in its repressive security apparatuses and those delineated for infrastructure and social goods such as healthcare, education, training, or job creation. Add to this, the restrictive labour policies, suffocated public sphere, distorting wealth concentration, and the developmental gap between coastal areas and the interior. The increasingly exploitative and unbalanced nature of Tunisian state-society relations had the effect of rupturing an earlier "social contract" implicitly agreed between the rulers of the distributive, post-independence Tunisian state, characteristic of the region at the time, and Tunisian society, in which the latter gave up rights to meaningful political participation in return for generous social provisions and the promise of national development. As such, the Tunisian government achieved and maintained hegemony through what Gramsci (1998) has referred to as a mixture of "coercion" and "consent".

As a dynamic and responsive form of power, hegemony, according to Gramsci (2000), operates according to "a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria," which "presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised." However, with the adoption of neoliberal "reforms", mostly at the behest of the IMF/World Bank as well as bilateral trading partners, including the US, the state became immune to the "interests" and "tendencies" of the hegemonised.

With structural adjustment policies that required a further opening of the Tunisian economy to foreign goods, investment and finance, further privatisation, reduction in food and gas subsidies, and increased focus on development strategies geared around the tourism industry and the creation of "free trade zones" (Prince, 2011) that produce goods targeted for the European market, Tunisian society received increasingly less from the social bargain. They were left instead with greater levels of economic stratification, increased numbers living in poverty and a proliferation of low skilled jobs unable to meet either the economic needs or life aspirations of a majority of university graduates. Upon breaking its end of the bargain, the Tunisian government was aware that a price would have to be paid, either through political reform or increased repression. Tunisia, like many other post-colonial states opted for the latter, making the transition from what Nazih Ayubi (1995) refers to as the

"populist" to the "bureaucratic" authoritarian state. This transition, and the sense of societal alienation and frustration it engendered, paved the way for the Tunisian revolution.

Analysis of the Tunisian revolution has understandably focused on these structural issues and the impact they have had on state-society relations. In addition, there have been numerous reports documenting the manifold ways in which the Ben Ali regime violated the human rights of Tunisian citizens. Many Tunisians, especially those on the receiving end of the country's "justice" system, including trade unionists, leftists, and, in particular over the last ten years, and in the context of an already hyper-secularised public sphere that many felt was imposed by the West rather than organically developed, those with Islamist leanings, experienced the travesties of the denial of due process, absence of the rule of law, and widespread use of torture.

However, often overlooked in both academic and journalistic accounts of the Tunisian revolution have been the grievances expressed by the Tunisian people that touch on what Rashid Khalidi (2011) has referred to as their "collective dignity". As he explains, these relate to the "subordination of the Arab countries to the dictates of US policy, and to the demands of Israel." Therefore, the "demand for collective dignity is a call to end this unnatural situation". In the Tunisian context, this has been expressed as frustration at the country's lack of real sovereignty in a global economic order enforced by international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank as well as powerful states and, perhaps most damaging, a global "security" order that has privileged the security and prosperity of the west at the expense of the region's own states and peoples. It is in this context of limited sovereignty that many Tunisians feel the most egregious of the regime's violations of their human rights, broadly conceived to entail social, political and economic rights, took place.

In light of Western governments' tendency to turn a blind eye to, or even to support and encourage, repressive Tunisian regimes so long as their economic and geo-strategic interests were safeguarded, it is not surprising that the West's initial response to the Tunisian revolution was mild and muted, with French Minister for Foreign Affairs Michèle Alliot-Marie even offering support to Ben Ali's repressive security apparatuses to crush the unrest (Amnesty International, 2011). In the US, it took a full month of sustained protests menaced by state repression and violence for the Obama Administration finally to acknowledge publicly what State Department officials had been quietly stating in their Annual Human Rights Report for years and which recently had been confirmed by Wikileaks' release of statements from the Obama-appointed US ambassador to Tunisia: That Ben Ali's regime was patently corrupt and brutally repressive (Mullin, 2011). President Obama's condemnation of the Tunisian government's violence on the day that Ben Ali was finally forced to flee the country and his subsequent praise for "the courage and dignity of the Tunisian people" was seen by many Tunisians as too little and too late.

In light of the above, this article will assess the legacy of western and particular US interventionism in Tunisia. As one of the most powerful actors in this global

economic and political order, US support for the Ben Ali regime, despite knowledge of its numerous and persistent human rights violations that blatantly contradicted the US stated normative commitment to the values of democracy and human rights, is seen as particularly toxic. The methodology employed here includes the examination and analysis of primary and secondary sources related to the history of authoritarian rule in Tunisia to produce a genealogy of societal repression and resistance, focusing in particular on the "war on terror" period, from 2001 until 2010 revolution. It also includes interviews with various organizations and individuals, including those who had been on the receiving end of Ben Ali's most brutal policies and practices as well as those who had been involved in contesting and resisting the gross human rights violations of the *ancien regime*, focusing in particular on former political prisoners and torture victims of the deposed regime.

One grievance that was expressed repeatedly by these various actors with whom we met was the perception that western governments had been complicit in the crimes committed by the Ben Ali regime, through their provision over the years of copious amounts of diplomatic, military, and economic support, in particular in the past ten years, in the context of the "war on terror". Not only did many feel that western governments had too often turned a blind eye to the depravities of their Tunisian allies in order to secure their own economic and geo-strategic interests in the region, but, even worse, many suspected that some of Ben Ali's most heinous crimes were committed at the behest of these governments.

Repression and Resistance in Tunisia: from National Independence to Revolution

Numerous and diverse monuments and historical sites dispersed throughout Tunisia bear silent witness to its history of foreign invasions, occupations, and resistance. Home to the ancient Phoenician city of Carthage, Tunisia's location at the center of North Africa made it attractive to the rulers of the Roman, Arab, and Ottoman empires, who all recognized the geo-strategic importance of the country. In 1883, using the excuse of Tunisian debt owed to its European creditors, French forces (as the British had done one year earlier in Egypt) occupied Tunisia; the French made Tunisia a "protectorate." As with all forms of colonial rule, under the French, Tunisia's land and native population were exploited for the benefit of the colonisers. Resistance to French colonial rule existed from the beginning and increased over time.

During World War II the Germans briefly occupied Tunisia, but toward the end of the war the French regained control. Following the war the Tunisian struggle for national independence intensified, headed by the nationalist leader Habib Bourguiba and his Neo-Destour (Constitution) party. In a sign of the growing appeal of the independence movement, in 1945, Ferhat Hached led Tunisian members out of the communist-dominated French General Confederation of

Workers (Confederation Génrale des Travailleurs - CGT) to form the Tunisian nationalist UGTT, the Union Generale Tunisienne du Travail.

Following several years of brutal repression of the nationalist movement, in 1954, French Premier Pierre Mendès-France promised the pro-independence "Bey" - provincial governor under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire - internal autonomy. After long negotiations, a French-Tunisian convention was signed in Paris and on 20 March 1956 France recognized Tunisian independence. In April 1956, the French-educated Habib Bourguiba formed the first independent Tunisian government. His doctrine was defined by a French and Turkish inspired hyper-secularism, nationalist development, and a pro-West foreign policy orientation. As Larbi Sadiki has noted (2002), Bourguiba's strict ideology and "patrimonial" governing style left little room for competing visions and alternative socio-economic, political or identity projects. According to Sadiki (2002), "colonial hegemony was substituted with an indigenous hegemony," which entailed the state "banning rival centres of power".

In March 1957, Tunisia signed a bilateral agreement with the US in return for economic and technical assistance, though the country would remain firmly within France's sphere of influence for several decades to come. In July 1957, the National Assembly deposed the popular Bey and elected Bourguiba chief of state, thus establishing a republic. Bourguiba, who came to be seen by many Tunisian nationalists as "France's man," won the first presidential election in 1959 and was re-elected in 1964, 1969, and 1974, when the Assembly amended the constitution to make him president for life.

The Rise of Labour Activism and State Repression: Cooption and Coercion

Though Bourguiba was initially supported by many Tunisians for his charisma, ability to connect with the "man on the street" and nationalist development programme, economic malaise and increased political repression led to student and labour unrest during the late 1970s (Salem, 1984). During this period clashes with the government increased (White, 2001). In January 1978, violence broke out when the UGTT called a general strike in protest over the arrest of a union leader, alleging that attacks against union offices in several towns had been officially inspired. Over 50 demonstrators were killed and 200 trade union officials, including UGTT Secretary-General Habib Achour, were arrested.

In April 1980, Mohamed Mzali became prime minister, leading many Tunisians to believe that political liberalization was on the horizon. Trade union leaders were released from jails and UGTT Secretary-General Achour received a full presidential pardon. New laws were passed allowing for the creation of opposition political parties and paving the way for the first multiparty elections in November 1981. Several opposition parties were legalised, including the Tunisian Communist Party which had been banned since 1963. The UGTT's highly contentious decision to enter into an electoral pact with President

Bourguiba's Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD, formerly Neo Destour) resulted in their "national front" winning all seats in the national assembly.

Anxious to preserve its power and fearful of the increasing popularity of Islamist movements in Tunisia and elsewhere in the region, Bourguiba's government adopted a policy of intolerance and suppression of Islamists. In 1980, at least 50 members of the Islamic Tendency Movement, predecessor to the moderate Islamist Hizb Nahda (Nahda, or Renaissance Party), were arrested, including the movement's founder, Rachid al-Ghannouchi.

Hizb An-Nahda (Nahda) and Islamists' Repression and Resistance

An Nahda (Renaissance) Party is the largest Islamist party in Tunisia. Its origins can be traced to 1970 with the establishment of Qur'anic Preservation Society (QPS), originally an apolitical organization dedicated to encouraging piety within Tunisian society through a bottom-up strategy of (re)Islamisation. The Society's approach to politics began to change in the late 1970s when growing social unrest, particularly among organized labour, politicized the movement's discourse and activities. Though many Islamists initially condemned the trade union UGTT's social action, they nonetheless learned from it the importance of mass mobilisation and street politics. In 1981, the Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique (MTI) was founded by Sheikh Ghannouchi, as he is known to his supporters, and other former members of the QPS as a loose coalition of Islamist groups seeking political and economic change. The MTI's political platform included calls for equitable economic reform, an end to one-party rule, and a return to the "fundamental principles of Islam" (Waltz, 1986).

During the course of the 1980s, the MTI gained a large following among the Tunisian youth and adopted a more populist platform. It eventually developed into a well-organized social and political movement and was one of the first Islamist groups in the Arab world to explicitly adopt democratic principles, with Sheikh al-Ghannouchi's writings on the theological and political basis for Islamist participation in pluralist politics positioning the movement's leader among a handful of well-known Islamist reformists (Noyon 2003, p.99). During this period, Islamists moved to enlarge their social base through activism in the UGTT and other civil society organizations (Shahin 1997, p.95 and Sfeir 1987, p.30).

In November 1987, after his bloodless coup, Ben Ali announced his plans for reform and democratization, and Sheikh al-Ghannouchi, who by then sought open participation in Tunisian political life, signed on to the president's "National Pact," which allowed him to run a list of candidates in the 1989 legislative elections. Hopes that these steps would lead to pluralisation of the political and public spheres were soon dispersed, as it become clear that Ben Ali would be following the path of "Bourguiba's brand of nationalism [leaving] no room for any free space for non-governmental or non-party actors" (Sadiki, 2002). Though Ben Ali appeared at first to present a more amenable stance

towards religious institutions and practices, for example by re-opening the al-Zaytunah university and mosque, in "Bourguiba's Atatürkist fashion, he also strictly banned veiling and the sporting of beards" (Sadiki, 2002).

Soon after the signing of the pact, Ben Ali changed course and began what would become a long and drawn out period of repression of Islamist movements, beginning with legislation prohibiting the use by any political party of the words "Islam" or "Islamic" in their names. In response, the MTI renamed itself *Hizb al-Nahda*, the Renaissance Party. However, Ben Ali still refused to allow Nahda to enter the elections as a recognized political party, although he did permit it to field "independent" candidates. By 1992, virtually all of Nahda"s leadership was imprisoned or in exile and its organizational capabilities within the country destroyed (Noyon 2003, p.103).

The IMF: Economic Repression and Resistance

In 1984, implementation of a structural adjustment plan signed with the IMF forced the elimination of food subsidies and resulted in a rise in bread and semolina prices. This action, in turn, sparked unrest and Tunisia"s first wave of 'bread riots' over the following year. As a consequence, public sector workers, supported by the UGTT, organized strikes demanding pay increases. This stage of resistance was followed by a period of harsh repression marked by deteriorating relations between the UGTT and the government, the closure of the union's newspaper, and the arrest of many union members, including Mr. Achour. Over the next few years, the government would consolidate its control over the UGTT (Murphy, 1999).

In 1985, Israel raided the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters in Tunis, which had been the PLO base since 1982 when it was driven out of Lebanon during Israel's invasion and occupation. The raid, in which 60 people were killed, could be seen as marking a turning point in Tunisia's relations with the US, which came to see the North African state as a reliable regional ally.

In January 1986, the Tunisian Communist Workers' Party (POCT) was founded, but it was soon banned, a status that was unchanged with Ben Ali's assumption of power, despite promises of greater democratic openness and respect for human rights. Three years later, the first presidential elections since 1974 were held. President Ben Ali was the only candidate and thus his electoral triumph was no surprise. Although the Nahda party was banned from participating in the general elections held at the same time, its members ran as independents. The party did well, but because of massive fraud and manipulation of the election, no one knows exactly how well. In response, Ben Ali initiated a new campaign of repression against the party, which led to the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of its followers (Alexander, 1997). In the Chamber of Deputies election, Ben Ali's Constitutional Democratic Rally won all 141 seats. Ben-Ali went on to be "re-elected" four more times, the last time in 2009 with 89 percent of the vote.

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Despite the clearly undemocratic and repressive actions of the newly installed Ben Ali regime, strategic relations between the US and Tunisia were enhanced . Those relations were cemented by increased US security assistance, including an active schedule of joint military exercises involving the two states. During this period the US-Tunisian Joint Military Commission began meeting annually to discuss military cooperation, Tunisia's defence modernisation program and other "security" matters, and a new bilateral investment treaty was signed between the two countries (US Department of State, n.d.).

The "War on Terror":
Civil Society's Repression and Resistance

The phrase "war on terror" was first employed by US President George W. Bush five days after the 11 September attacks on US soil, when he pronounced: "This crusade - this war on terrorism - is going to take a while" (Suskind, 2004). Bush's speech, including his deliberate use of "war" terminology along with his not-so-veiled reference to the medieval crusades launched to conquer lands under Muslim rule, was criticised by legal and international relations experts for its incendiary nature. Unlike traditionally conceived wars fought between sovereign states, the "war on terror" lacked a defined and identifiable enemy, thus increasing the likelihood of perpetual military action as well as the chance that it would be used as a pretext to pursue non-terror-related interests.

The "war on terror" soon developed into an international military campaign led by the US and the UK with the support of other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as non-NATO countries, including many US allies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Though the campaign was initially waged against al-Qaeda, it came to include as its targets a whole range of purported "terrorist" movements, the large majority of which could be broadly described as Islamist in nature.

From its inception, the Bush Administration's presentation of the enemy in the "war on terror" as somehow exceptional both in their actions and motivations provided the US Government with the necessary justification to employ equally unconventional, and in many cases illegal, methods in its attempts to capture and punish them, even if this meant violating international agreements, including the Geneva Conventions and US domestic law. The "counter-terrorism" policies associated with the "war on terror" resulted in numerous illegal and unethical practices, including torture, extraordinary rendition, detention without trial, indefinite detention and targeted assassination.

Though Afghanistan and Iraq were to become the principal battlefields in this war, President Bush made clear from its inception that the entire world would become susceptible to US intervention in its seemingly existential struggle against terror. In a speech made on 20 September 2001, Bush said: "Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the US as a hostile regime"

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2001). The majority of MENA regimes decided that it was not worth the risk of incurring the US' wrath by placing themselves on the wrong side of the "us versus them" divide. Many also saw in this Manichean construction the possibility of promoting their own narrow interests: a way to gain a new lease on life for their repressive regimes as well as a path to increased economic and military assistance.

Tunisia was among several MENA countries that declared its support for the US "war on terror" and offered substantial intelligence and strategic cooperation on this front. As a 2009 Congressional Research Service report explained, "The Bush Administration considered Tunisia to be an important ally, a moderate Arab, Muslim state, and a partner in the global 'war on terror'" (Migdalovitz, 2009). In return for its cooperation in the "war on terror", the US was willing to overlook the well-documented human rights violations of the Ben Ali regime; indeed, political repression actually increased during this period.

According to the shared US and Tunisian narrative, the Tunisian government faced a grave threat from radical Islamists seeking to overthrow the regime and build in its place a theocratic state. Though the government's repression initially focused on the moderate Islamist Nahda party, after the 11 September attacks, and in line with the increasing demands of the US for operational intelligence and evidence of thwarted Islamist conspiracies that could justify increased spending on its ever-expanding "war," the Ben Ali regime began to focus less on the threat posed by the Islamo-nationalist movement and more on "salafi-jihadi" movements (International Crisis Group, 2005).

The first Tunisian organization to be targeted in the context of the "war on terror" was the Tunisian Combatant Group (TCG), which in 2002 was added to the US State Department's Terrorist Exclusion List and was subsequently subject to an assets freeze. Though largely unheard of in Tunisia prior to its terrorist classification, the TCG was accused of being a radical offshoot of Nahda that sought to establish an Islamic state in Tunisia through violent means. The TCG was suspected of plotting, but not carrying out, attacks on US, Algerian, and Tunisian embassies in Rome in December 2001. The US Government also accused the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), now known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), of actively recruiting Tunisians and maintaining ties with the TCG (International Crisis Group, 2005).

Between 2001 and 2003, US-Tunisian relations were further enhanced under the US-North African Economic Partnership (USNAEP), which was designed to promote US investment in, and economic integration of, the Maghreb region. In 2002, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) was established by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell "to create educational opportunity at a grassroots level, promote economic opportunity and help foster private sector development, and to strengthen civil society and the rule of law throughout the region" (MEPI, 2002). MEPI was part of an overall strategy by the Bush Administration to promote "democracy" and "free markets" in the region as an antidote to terrorism.

Tunisia's 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law

One of the many ways the US influenced partner countries in the "war on terror" was through support for the promulgation of "anti-terror" legislation. In 2003, Tunisia enacted the "Anti-Terrorism Law on Support of International Efforts against Terrorism and Money Laundering" (2003 Anti-Terrorism Law). Although Tunisia is party to many international conventions and acknowledges in Article 1 of the 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law the country's respect for international, regional, and bilateral conventions, several provisions of this same law are in fact at odds with Tunisia's international obligations. The 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law's passage and its implementation prompted expressions of serious concern by national and international human rights organizations, including the United Nations (United Nations, 2010; Amnesty International, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2008).

In the course of our interviews, we heard numerous accounts and analyses of the implications of this shift in rhetoric on the relationship between the Ben Ali regime and the West. During this crucial time, and by virtue of the extensive securitisation of Islamist activism and even criminalisation of Muslim religious practices, Ben Ali aligned himself firmly with the West as an ally in the "war on terror". The perceived targeting of radical Islamists enabled Ben Ali to curry favour with the West, with many former political prisoners believing that this led to direct and/or indirect financial and political benefits to the Ben Ali regime (National Lawyers Guild, 2011).

The arbitrary and unlawful nature of many of the arrests and prosecutions of political prisoners under this law has been detailed in reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (2005, 2009, 2010), and will not be repeated here. It is however worth noting that the evidence gathered during the course of our interviews with former political prisoners who were more prepared to speak freely after the fall of Ben Ali's regime, supports the findings of extensive procedural irregularity and impropriety resulting in grave and far-reaching human rights abuses documented in those reports.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the "war on terror" has been a complete lack of accountability for officials who committed gross violations of human rights. As Bassam Trifi, a lawyer and member of the Organization against Torture, said, "Torture has touched everyone including political prisoners. Torture has impacted trade unionists, leftists, Islamists, and even those accused of ordinary crimes" (2011). In addition, Mr. Trifi noted that:

> With regard to the West's attitude to "terrorists," we have seen many victims tortured on the basis of the unconstitutional 2003 law, which was enacted in reaction to what happened on 9/11. The name of the act itself references the international attempt to counter terrorism. Many people have been taken to court. They were persecuted for their ideas alone.

Despite its long-lasting rhetoric of favouring democracy throughout the world, the US government has consistently chosen to support and provide aid to oppressive regimes in the Middle East so long as those regimes cooperated in the so-called "war on terror". Although it is unclear what precise role the US played in the wording or timing of the 2003 legislation, it is clear the Bush Administration was happy with its passage. The US State Department called it "a comprehensive law" to "support the international effort to combat terrorism and money laundering" (Migdalovitz, 2009).

Yet critics, both domestic and international, claimed that the law made the exercise of fundamental freedoms an expression of terrorism (Amnesty International, 2008). According to former Tunisian Judge Mokhtar Yahyaoui, a founding member of the Association for Support of Political Prisoners who was fired for challenging the government for its judicial interference, the 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law was a direct result of US pressure for greater Tunisian cooperation in the "war on terror". Furthermore, Judge Yahyaoui claimed that US military assistance to the Tunisian government was conditioned upon Tunisia's counter-terror cooperation and accused the Ben Ali regime of "selling our sons to the Americans" as part of this effort (National Lawyers Guild, 2011).

Despite evidence of increased state violence and political repression, in 2004, the same year that President Ben Ali "won" a fourth term with 94 percent of the vote, the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) opened its Regional Office in the US Embassy in Tunis. The US State Department Annual Human Rights Report (2005) on Tunisia that year declared:

> [Tunisia's] human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit serious abuses . . . . [T]here were significant limitations on citizens' right to change their government. Members of the security forces tortured and physically abused prisoners and detainees. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals.

In October 2006, Ben Ali's government launched a campaign to enforce more rigorously a 1981 ban on headscarves in public places such as schools and government offices; this move angered those on the receiving end of this campaign as well as human rights activists. The persecution of individuals for their political and/or religious beliefs and practices continued unabated in 2007. In January of that year, a shoot-out occurred between the police and alleged members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat, or GSPC), a group allegedly linked to al-Qaeda, that left dozens dead and many others injured, including police officers. Over 60 of the alleged participants were arrested and, following unfair trials, were sentenced under the anti-terror laws.They were tortured while in prison. Many of the individuals arrested in this incident were released in the post-revolution amnesty.

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Also in 2007, two former Guantanamo detainees, Abdallah Hajji and Lotfi Lagha, were returned to Tunisia and, despite diplomatic assurances given by the Ben Ali regime, were subsequently imprisoned and mistreated after show trials. They have both been released as a result of the post-revolution amnesty. An additional five Tunisian citizens today remain in Guantanamo (Worthington, 2011).

In October 2009, President Ben Ali "won" a fifth term in office. According to the 2009 US State Department Human Rights Report on Tunisia (2010):

> There were significant limitations on citizens' right to change their government…widespread reports that it [the government] used intimidation, criminal investigations, the judicial system, arbitrary arrests, residential restrictions, and travel controls to discourage criticism. Corruption was a problem.

Despite this, Western governments continued to maintain close relations with the Ben Ali regime, which was praised for its continued security cooperation in the "war on terror" and for its so-called "economic miracle" (Applebaum, 2007). This position was reinforced when, in August 2010, the Tunisian government passed a law opening the Tunisian economy to foreign franchises in the sectors of retail/distribution, tourism, automotives, and training. Another sign of encouragement for Western supporters of neo-liberal "reforms" in Tunisia came in September 2010, when an understanding was reached between Tunis and the IMF that recommended the removal of all remaining subsidies as a means to achieving "fiscal balance" (IMF, 2010).

In a sign that Washington was also content with the application of Ben Ali's anti-terror legislation, Tunisia was praised in the State department's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2010*, in particular in the areas of "Legislation and Law Enforcement", citing the "at least 40 separate terrorism-related cases in 2010" that the government prosecuted, "many including multiple defendants". Tunisia's leading role on the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) was also mentioned, as the head of Tunisia's Financial Intelligence Unit served as MENAFATF President in 2010 (US Department of State, 2011).

The common thread in our conversations with former political prisoners, lawyers, and human rights advocates was the frustration and anger directed not only towards the Ben Ali regime but also at the US Government for its perceived complicity in the abuses. As Larbi Abid of the National Council of Liberty points out, "the question of whether the US was aware of human rights abuses taking place in Tunisia should not be asked because it simply is not possible for a superpower like the US to not be aware of them" (National Lawyers Guild, 2011). This conclusion is buttressed by the annual State Department Human Rights reports discussed above as well as Wikileaks releases of cables from the

US Embassy in Tunis to the US State Department (The Guardian, 2010; Nasr, 2011).

While the State Department reports included details of the corruption and abuses of the Ben Ali regime, they conclude by stressing that none of that would affect the strategic relationship between the US and Tunisia. This point was emphasized by Hamma Hammami, the head of the Tunisian Communist Party (National Lawyers Guild, 2011). From the opposite end of the spectrum, a member of Nahda, the main Islamist party, also noted that prior to 11 September, there was a campaign in France against Ben Ali and the human rights violations committed by his regime. However, after the 11 September attacks, since Ben Ali responded positively to all US Government demands to take part in the "war on terror", he received assurances from Western governments that human rights violations would be kept quiet.

US "Democracy Promotion"

Often overlooked in analyses of the "hard" power policies associated with the "war on terror", including the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, are the corresponding "soft" power components of the Bush Administration's strategy, including, most important from the perspective of the MENA region, "democracy promotion" programs. Far from aiming to radically transform the Middle East, it seems the US democratization agenda often functioned as means to maintain, rather than challenge, the status quo. For example, as Beatrice Hibou has noted in her book *The Force of Obedience: The Political Economy of Repression in Tunisia*, "democracy promotion" initiatives generally geared their funds towards NGOs that were recognised by the Ben Ali regime, referred to by Tunisians as OVGs (*organisations vraiment gouvernmentales* [really governmental organisations]), and hence "really not authentic counter-powers" (2011).

Another problematic area of foreign funding, as Hibou points out, is that it was often focused on projects defined as priority areas for western governmental and/or non-governmental agencies that financed them, including women and youth groups, "which [did] not necessarily correspond with those which the organisers of the main movements would [have] liked to see subsidised, for example the struggle against torture or the denunciation of the situation in prisons" (Hibou, 2011). This position seemed to be confirmed by several of the key revolutionary actors we met, most of whom never came into contact with any of these democracy-promotion projects (National Lawyers Guild, 2011).

There are several reasons to be wary of US democracy-promotion efforts in the region in general and Tunisia in particular. To begin with, the notion that democracy can be achieved through outside intervention, as opposed to developing organically along with the requisite institutions and consciousness on the part of a state's citizens and rulers, is problematic. It was invalidated by the experience of Western foreign policy in the region over the past century, with the 2003 Iraqi invasion the case *par excellence*. Almost none of the dozens

of successful transitions to democracy in recent decades (including in the MENA region) have come from foreign intervention; rather, they have come from democratic civil society organizations and grassroots movements engaging in "strategic, largely nonviolent, action from within, and employing tactics outside the mainstream political processes of electioneering and lobbying," placing them outside the remit of the "democratization" agenda. As Middle East expert Stephen Zunes has pointed out (2011), in the one area where democracy promotion efforts could have had a real impact, in "training in strategic nonviolent action or other kinds of grassroots mobilization that proved decisive in the struggle," US democracy-promotion efforts through organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) or MEPI were absent.

The irrelevance of the US democracy-promotion projects to the movement behind the democratic revolution in Tunisia is not surprising considering the historical relationship that has existed between rhetorical support for democratization and the promotion of alternative foreign policy interests, especially in the context of the Cold War. For example, NED, the first of these democracy promotion organizations, was established in the early 1980s under President Reagan in the wake of several high-profile CIA, Cold War-related scandals and subsequent Congressional investigations. The context of its origins has led many analysts to conclude that the NED was established as a means of outsourcing the CIA's clandestine political activities to a seemingly more benign and, crucially, independent organization (Blum, 2000).

Democracy Promotion's Neo-Liberal Agenda

Although ostensibly a not-for-profit organization promoting human rights and democracy, the work of the NED has often been indistinguishable from covert government activities. As Allen Weinstein, its first President, confessed in a 1991 *Washington Post* interview: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA" (Blum, 2000). The NED's stated rationale - to spread human rights and liberal (Western) democracy across the world by establishing free market principles - was readily adapted from the Cold War to the "war on terror" paradigm. As President Bush stated in January 2004, the NED budget needed to be doubled so it could "focus its new work on the development of free elections, and free markets, free press, and free labor unions in the Middle East" (Blum, 2000). Though the organization claims to support the development of independent trade unions, it is clear that its focus is on promoting civil society organizations that privilege "class cooperation and collective bargaining, minimal government intervention in the economy, and opposition to socialism in any shape or form," that these programmes are based upon a very narrow, neo-liberal understanding of growth and the function and types of rights that should be accorded to labour within society (Blum, 2000).

The US democracy promotion agenda has emphasized "economic freedom" - a neo-liberal capitalist economic model which emphasizes open markets and free trade - rather than economic and social justice for the working class. One of the

largest single recipients of NED funding for Democracy in recent years has been the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), which has received three times as much NED funding as all human rights, development, legal, and civil society organizations in the region combined (Zunes, 2011).

MEPI, established in 2002 as an additional foreign policy tool in the US State Department's democracy-promotion arsenal, shared a similarly neo-liberal agenda, including amongst its principal aims: "to foster private-sector development" and encourage the "entrepreneurial spirit" by "work[ing] with government officials, judicial authorities, regulators, legislators and bankers in the region on removing barriers to business" and "promot[ing] a major change in the attitude of local workers -- from relying for jobs on the public sector and state-owned companies" to relying on the private sector. In its website mission statement, MEPI announces its goal to "advance US foreign policy goals by supporting citizens' efforts at economic, social, and political empowerment . . . ." (US Department of State, 2007). However, far from demonstrating the much-touted link between economic and political liberalisation, implementation of the "Washington Consensus" in MENA states has resulted in a concentration of economic and political power in the hands of elites.

Distorted Budgetary Priorities and Bias in Funding

Numerous attempts were made to obtain detailed information from MEPI and NED regarding the types of projects funded during the pre-revolution period but to no avail. The information we have gleaned from their websites shows that most spending has been dedicated to training and capacity building workshops for civil society actors. Regardless of the effectiveness of these types of programs in attaining their respective objectives, or of the role (or lack thereof) played by those groups in receipt of MEPI/NED funding in the revolution, one thing is clear: The amount of US dollars spent on military support for the Tunisian government has been grossly disproportionate to that spent on democracy promotion, raising questions about the sincerity of the program's aims.

For example, out of a total of $69.28 million of US assistance given to Tunisia from 2006-2010, only $15.69 million, or roughly one quarter, went to democracy and human rights promotion programs, with the rest, $53.59 million going to "military and security" assistance (McInerney, 2010). Yet even these figures do not show the whole picture. In order to understand how US military interests undermine democracy-promotion objectives despite the prominence the latter receives in US rhetorical diplomacy, one must look at the amount of military sales approved by the US Government during a similar period. For example, between 1987 and 2009, the US military signed $349 million in military sales agreements with Ben Ali's government (Pein, 2011). Furthermore, in 2010, the Obama Administration asked Congress to approve a $282 million sale of 12 "excess" Sirkorsky military helicopters to Tunisia (Pein, 2011).

One must question the seriousness with which the US Government took the democratization agenda considering the government was aware, as

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demonstrated by the US State Department annual human rights reports, that Tunisia's "human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit serious abuses" (US Department of State, 2005). Absent any external threats to the country, it was clear that this high-tech military equipment would be used for internal repression of political dissent and actions that would clearly undermine any democratization projects undertaken by MEPI and NED.

President Obama's "war on terror" and Democracy Promotion

The election of Barack Obama as US President in November 2008 on a platform of "change" was welcomed by many in the MENA region and seen to herald a dramatic sea change in US relations with the Muslim world. In particular, his June 2009 speech in Cairo was taken by many to signify a conscious effort on President Obama's part to transform US-Middle East relations.

 "The language we use matters," President Obama declared, and it is evident that he has made an effort to avoid the most offensive of the Bush era"s discursive constructions, including the "war on terror" label (President Obama claims to view terror as a tactic, "not an enemy"), as well as polemical and poorly defined terms such as "Islamofascism" and "evildoers" (Mullin, 2011). Beyond the shift in language, President Obama has also promised to amend some of his predecessors' more odious foreign and domestic policies vis-à-vis the "war on terror", vowing "to close Guantánamo, and adhere to the Geneva Conventions" (Baker, 2010). In his Cairo speech, President Obama indicated that while adopting his predecessor's rhetorical adherence to a policy of "democracy promotion" in the region, he would distance himself from the aggressive manner in which his predecessor pursued this alleged agenda. Not only did he hold the view that democracy is a common aspiration of "all people" in the world, but Americans would promote and protect such mechanisms and institutions associated with this form of governance, as human rights, "everywhere" (Mullin, 2011).

Some, however, have questioned the actual policy significance of President Obama's rhetorical shift. Not only has President Obama been unable to carry out his firm commitment to close Guantánamo, he has also failed to address adequately the detrimental "war on terror" legacy, refusing to establish any punitive or deterrence mechanisms, and has proved incapable of investigating and holding accountable those top-level Bush administration officials responsible for implementing illegal policies (Cohn, 2011). Moreover, from the perspective of Tunisia's "war on terror", many of the civil society actors we met with shared the perception that the human rights abuses committed in the name of "counter-terrorism" actually increased, with tacit US support, in the period after President Obama came to power (National Lawyers Guild, 2011).

As with the various other areas of President Obama's Middle East agenda, where policy and practice have fallen well short of rhetoric, so too have his actions spoken louder than words when it comes to the issue of democracy in the region. Like administrations before it, President Obama refrained from

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criticising the devastating effects of the neo-liberal "reforms" pushed on the country by the IMF/World Bank and other "structural adjustment" gurus, many of which have served as obstacles to meaningful and bottom-up democratisation efforts in the region. Their calls to lower tariffs, privatize, reduce food and gas subsidies, focus development strategies on the tourism industry and the creation of free trade zones that produce goods targeted for the European market - all resulted in even greater levels of economic stratification, increased numbers living in poverty and a proliferation of low-skilled jobs unable to meet either the economic needs or life aspirations of a majority of university graduates. About the only area of state funding that was not reduced as a result of these neo-liberal reforms, and which the Obama Administration did not criticise in the context of its "democracy promotion" agenda, was that of security - despite the knowledge that there was a good chance this funding could be used in the repression of the various groups deemed by the Tunisian regime as constituting national security threats.

Achievements and Challenges of the Tunisian Revolution: Assessing change and continuity in Tunisian-US relations

Despite the incredible achievements of the Tunisian revolution, many obstacles still remain to the realisation of the aims of those involved for a more tolerant, equitable, just and sovereign Tunisia. This section will provide an overview of some of these key challenges, including the in the crucial areas of the national identity, economic and social justice, "security" and foreign policy, and with a focus on the role of the US in recent developments.

The Tunisian Revolution and Identity: "Culture wars" or "Rebalancing of the public sphere"?

After a long and arduous decade in which, as this essay has demonstrated, the US often colluded with the state violence and political repression of the Ben Ali regime in the name of a supposedly shared concern in "fighting terrorism", and after a slow start to recognising how dramatically the societal tides had shifted, on the surface it seems the US stance vis-a-vis Tunisia has changed dramatically. Former foes are now allies, and former friends now enemies. The abrasive discourse and blunt policy instruments of the "war on terror" seem nothing but a faint memory. Conflation and a failure to distinguish between the ideologies, political agendas, strategies and tactics of a wide-range of Islamist activists in Tunisia, only a very small minority of whom ever advocated violence, were the norm during those years. Today, US politicians that once loudly beat the "war on terror" drums speak of the ruling An Nahda party as promisingly "moderate" in its "rejection of extremism and it respect for the democratic process, individual liberties, women's rights and the rule of law" (Lieberman, 2011). Watching the rapidity with which this political conversion seems to have taken place is enough to give observers cognitive whiplash. Whether out of a true reckoning with the mistakes of the past (of which there has yet to be a

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public recognition), or less principled, realpolitik reasons, the US seems to be staying out of the very sensitive identity struggles that Tunisian society is currently undergoing.

It is not surprising that the issue of identity is coming to the fore considering the post-colonial state's attempt to suppress any challenge to Borguiba's narrowly conceived Tunisian identity, which viewed religion as largely anathema to modernity and therefore banished it from the public as well as, to a certain extent, private, spheres. These policies were continued under the Ben Ali regime in which public piety came to be seen not only as a threat to the secular identity of the state, but also to state security. In this context, the electoral victory and actual assumption of political power by An Nahda, a party that for so long was at the receiving end of some of the most repressive of the government's policies and practices, is nothing short of incredible. Not only does it represent a tangible victory for all those individuals that were tortured, killed, wrongfully imprisoned or exiled on the basis of their political and/or religious beliefs, a victory physically embodied in the person and position of the former political prisoner and Nahda member, Samir Dilou, as Human Rights and Transitional Justice minister (Lachheb, 2011). But it also represents a symbolic victory, for those who have struggled not only for a pluralisation of the political sphere, but of the public sphere as well. They have patiently waited for the day that Tunisia's Arab, Maghrebian and Islamic identity would have the space to develop and compete for the hearts and minds of the Tunisian public on equal footing.

Yet as many of these issues are being discussed for the first time in the open it should come as no surprise that they may cause discomfort amongst some, especially those who feel their interests are best protected by maintaining Tunisia's secular and pro-western identity. As Larbi Sadiki contends, "the lack of a shared political space [in Tunisia] has meant that there are rival hegemonic political discourses to the dominant one," making polarisation and conflict more likely (Sadiki, 2002). One can see this in some of the passionate, and sometimes heated, debates that have taken place in recent months in which Tunisian identity has become a site of contestation for rival political projects. Some of the most sensitive faultlines today seem to be between the conservative and relatively small, though vocal, Salafi movement that was unable to function in the open during the Ben Ali days, and hardline secular elements which are entrenched in the media, and an elite which many on both the right and left believe are a leftover from the *ancien regime* (*Al Arabiya* News, 2012).

For example, recent conflicts have arisen over the broadcasting of the film "Persepolis," by the privately owned Nessma TV that offended the beliefs of many Tunisians, not only Salafis, because of the depiction of God in human form (Brooks, 2012), the publication of scantily dressed models in newspapers (Al Arabiya News, 2012), as well as questions pertaining to the limits of "freedom of religion" in a newly democratic Tunisia, with Salafis leading protests and sit-ins at Manouba University near the capital against a policy banning female students from wearing the niqab (a conservative face veil)

during classes or exams (Bouazza, 2012). There are also ongoing debates regarding Tunisia's Arab-Muslim identity in the constituent assembly, in particular regarding the first article of Tunisia's current constitution, which names the language of the country as Arabic and its religion as Islam. Nahda, on the one hand, has questioned whether this reference to Islam in the constitution's preamble is sufficient in terms of delineating the religious orientation of Tunisia's legislative framework, whereas the centrist Congress for the Republic (CPR) party and Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) suggested that it may already go too far (Lamboley, 2012).

It seems likely that debates over identity issues will continue in the foreseeable future. So long as they are conducted in a context free of violence and intimidation, these debates can continue to positively affect the pluralisation of the public sphere by prying away from the secular elite its monopoly over the ability to define what it means to be Tunisian. As the Tunisian human rights and democracy activist and London-based lawyer Intissar Kherigi has put it, this should lead to a "rebalancing of the public sphere" (Kherigi, 2011).

The Tunisian Revolution and Economic Justice: US Help or Hindrance?

Though the Tunisian revolution was never solely about economic issues, of course they formed a key component of the grievances expressed by protesters. Unemployment, underemployment, low wages, restrictive labour policies, unequal distribution of wealth, unequal public expenditure (with the coastal regions receiving 65% of public investment), conspicuous consumption of the elite and flagrant corruption were prominently expressed concerns. Today, many of these issues remain unaddressed. Some of this may be attributable to the economic impact of the uprisings, combined the economic crisis in Europe, which has affected growth levels and the ability of the Tunisian government to address longstanding structural issues (African Economic Outlook, 2011).

More worrying than the declining growth rates, however, are the increasing unemployment figures, with over 700,000 Tunisians, or 19 percent of the working-age population, unemployed in 2011 (Loftus, 2011). More worrying still, are the figures of unemployment for college graduates, one of the key sectors of society to participate in the 2010-11 uprisings, especially in those regions of the country that were notoriously neglected under Ben Ali, e.g. Gafsa and Tozeur, where rates are as high as 37.5 % and in Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine, where 28% of college graduates are unemployed (Lamboley, 2012). Many feel that this is due to a continued lack of focus by government authorities on the regions that are in greatest need of state investment. As an ex-miner from the Gafsa Phosphate Company (CPG) put it: "the problem is not the region, but the distribution of the federal budget" (Lamboley, 2012).

Yet there are signs that the newly elected government is seeking to confront some of these longstanding social and economic problems that are a legacy of years of corruption and unequal growth. The 23 billion dinar 2012 budget saw a

7.5% increase over last year's spending, with a large portion said to be set aside for social development. Regional Development Minister Jameleddine Gharbi has stressed the need to focus government energy on regional disparity between areas, along with unemployment (Ghanmi, 2012). Moreover, Tunisian Minister of Health Khalil Ezzaouia has recently called for the establishment of universal healthcare for all Tunisians as a means of addressing some of these structural inequalities. Though Tunisia's healthcare system has been praised by the World Health Organization (WHO), as opposed to its North African neighbours, with nearly 90% of Tunisians having access to some form of health insurance, the healthcare system is plagued by similar issues of regional disparity. According to a recent report published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIC), "In the rich coastal areas, the services are comparable to those in Europe, whereas in the interior of Tunisia the number of specialists and doctors, the quality of equipment, and the coverage of services are all much lower" (Lamboley, 2012).

Perhaps it is unsurprising that it is in Gafsa where some of the most vocal labour unrest can be witnessed, as the strikes of 2008 which many attribute to laying the groundwork for 2010/11 uprisings took place here. Recent work stoppages and protests led by in the UGTT in this southwestern city known for its phosphate mines include participation by parents of wounded demonstrators in the 2008 strikes as well as unemployed college graduates demanding jobs (Lamboley, 2012). There have also been signs that tension may be mounting between the unions and the state, with claims from the UGTT, as well POCT and PDP that recent incidents of vandalism at UGTT headquarters across the country may have been the work of individuals and/or institutions associated with the state (Hassine, 2012).

This state of affairs has left many looking back to the oppressive labour policies of the Ben Ali regime for comparison. As Mouldi el Fahem, a member of PDP's executive bureau put it: "It is not the first time unionists are subjected to this type of exploitation" (Hassine, 2012). Many are worried that calls to restore "order" and "stability" in the name of national development could be at the expense of political rights, in particular freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. As one UGTT official explained, although the union also desires stability and prosperity for the country it should not be done "at the expense of subjugating people and denying them their basic rights."

The economic policies of the newly elected government, with its overreliance on the market, seem inadequate to address the main structural issues affecting the economy. The government seems likely to follow down the path laid by Ben Ali and to continue to open Tunisian markets and economy to foreign investment, apparently without placing the aspirations of a highly educated workforce and equitable national development at the heart of considerations. The task at hand for the Tunisian government is not made easier by foreign governments, such as the US, and international financial institutions, which seem intent on pushing the same weathered policies that are now not only responsible for the economic travesties that formed a key grievance of uprisings in Tunisia and elsewhere in the region, but also for the "economic crisis" in the very heart of the metropole

itself. Attractive loans, especially for a country with real balance of deficit concerns, are yet again on offer, with the same conditions that led to unbalanced development and increased dependency on western states under Ben Ali, including "*massive cuts to the public sector and privatizations" (Russia Today, 2011).* From recent statements made by Obama, and proposals discussed by G8 leaders as well as the IMF and World Bank regarding the provision of funds to promote "economic reform" and "private sector" investment in Tunisia and Egypt, it is unclear whether any lessons have been learned about the causes of the revolutions (Vinocur and Maitre, 2011).

Revolutionaries expressed a vision of a democratic Tunisia, marked by balanced development, equality, and social justice. However, economic growth driven by foreign investment under IMF dictates is generally associated with precisely the type of unbalanced development and income disparity that generated the socio-economic collective grievances leading to the Tunisian revolution. The PCOT, whose recent name change to *Al Badil* (Revolutionary Alternative) they associate with a weak performance in the 2011elections, feels that the government is not taking the necessary steps to reverse the damage done to the economy and society as a result of Ben Ali's neoliberal policies (Walker, 2011). In particular, they are campaigning to cancel Tunisia's debt as well as adopt a policy on foreign investment that is focused on equitable national development. As Samir Taamallah, a former political prisoner and member of the central committee of PCOT, explained, foreign investment should serve the "needs of our country...we are not against investment, but we want it to be done in a reasonable way that benefits the people" (Walker, 2011).

Those hoping that the new government will initiate a break from the past IMF/World Bank sanctioned fiscal policies will find little hope with the Ministry of Finance's "pilot project" for tax and customs regulations, which includes plans to streamline administrative, regulatory and governance structures and policies for them to become more business friendly and in line with the "organic structure" promoted by "the World Bank and adopted by a number of countries throughout the world" (Tlili, 2012).

It also seems likely that any US intervention in this regard will be to support the status quo. Recent legislation passed by US Congress demonstrates that the conflation of democracy with free market capitalism remains the underpinning logic of US policy towards Tunisia. In a telling statement, U.S. Senator Adam Schiff (D-Burbank representative) explained recently introduced legislation that would allow the federal government to provide "financial assistance, technical support and strategic advice to companies destabilized by political unrest." He explained that this "a once in a generation... opportunity to help people in the Arab world to complete their democratic transition," assuming the common sense nature of the relationship between support for private business and democratic development, not requiring further elaboration (Ayari, 2011). Recent talks between US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Marzouki and Prime Minister Jebali in which the enhancement of free trade agreements between the two countries was discussed also demonstrate the US desire to

ensure an outcome to the revolution in which strong political and economic alliances between the two countries are maintained (Ayari, 2011). It is interesting to note that though US exports to various parts of the MENA region fell in 2011, e.g. Lebanon by 10%, 11.5% in Qatar and 9.5% in Egypt, 50.3% in Syria, and 51.5% in Palestine, exports to Tunisia remained unaffected by the revolution, rising by 2.7% last year (Maakaroun, 2012).

The Tunisian Revolution and the End of the "War on Terror"? Human Rights Implications

Many Tunisians would agree with the assessment of Anwar Kousri of the Tunisian League for Human Rights (*Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme*, LTDH), that since the removal of Ben Ali, there has been a marked shift in the governmental attitude towards human rights organizations in Tunisia (National Lawyers Guild, 2011). Perhaps most important, the political police - the secret section of the police that functioned as a domestic spy agency and had wide ranging power to monitor and act against anyone deemed disloyal to the regime and which was accused of torturing detainees as well as manipulating political trials - has been dissolved. However, Mr. Kousri cautioned that disbanding the political police brigade is not enough as there are other police units that have engaged in repressing dissent. In addition, many human rights advocates feel that in addition to the amnesty, it should be a priority for the government to re-open all complaints of torture that were lodged prior to 14 January 2011 as part of any transitional justice efforts.

After the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the Interim Government was quick to pass a general amnesty (19 January 2011). The amnesty purportedly resulted in the release of all prisoners detained, thought to number in the thousands, as a result of their membership in and activism for the broad range of political groups banned under the former regime. However, discussions with members of the International Association of Solidarity with Political Prisoners (AISPP) gave the impression that many individuals are still unaccounted for (National Lawyers Guild, 2011).

In addition, though political prisoners and human rights activists voiced specific demands for the Tunisian Government to rewrite or repeal the 2003 Anti-Terrorism Law, it seems the law is still in place. Martin Scheinin, the UN's expert on protecting human rights in the fight against terrorism, confirmed this in a recent report. In it, he explains how, despite being told by Tunisian officials that the law was no longer in use, he received conflicting evidence on a visit to a prison near Tunis. According to Scheinin, it was clear that judges were still citing the 2003 law in alleged terrorism cases, allowing for detention on the basis of flimsy evidence (News24, 2011).

Furthermore, according to news reports, there is evidence that the presumably unchanged law has been used to arrest accused terrorists as recently as 12 February 2012 (Shirayanagi, 2012). According the Tunisian Minister of the Interior, Ali Larayedh, 12 Tunisian suspects from an alleged Islamic extremist

group with ties to Al Qaeda were detained. Larayedh claimed that "after our interrogations we have learned that the suspects were stockpiling arms to be used when the time was ripe to impose an Islamic Emirate on Tunisia" (Shirayanagi, 2012). Coincidentally, these arrests were made only a few days before the convening of the 26th session of the Tunisian-American joint military committee. At this meeting Defense Minister Abdul Karim Zbidi, an Independent member of the cabinet who served in various government posts under Ben Ali, reiterated Tunisia's request for increased military assistance from the US, in particular "logistical support for the modernization of military equipment" (World Tribune, 2012).

It is unclear whether the new government, and the Justice and Interior Ministries in particular, are serious about addressing the human rights concerns associated with the 2003 anti-terror legislation. There is also the question of judicial reform and transitional justice, including the introduction of new policies that ensure judicial independence and freedom from interference by other branches of the government, as well accountability, namely bringing to trial those who committed abuses in the context of Tunisia's own "war on terror" and exposing the role of outside forces in aiding and abetting these crimes.

Statements made in Obama's May 24 speech to the British parliament suggest that the US will not be a helpful partner in this regard and demonstrate either a failure to comprehend, or to ignore, the collective political grievances articulated in the Tunisian revolution. Despite expressing US support for democratic change in the region, Obama claimed that Americans "must squarely acknowledge that we have enduring interests in the region: to fight terror with partners who may not always be perfect," thus overlooking the perception of many Tunisians that the repression they experienced for years at the hands of a brutal tyrant was facilitated, if not enabled, by US/western support (White House, 2011).

The Tunisian Revolution and the end of "Democracy Promotion"? Democracy from Below

It also seems likely that the US government will continue, through the newly launched Middle East Funding Initiative, which has awarded the US State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) $770 million to spend with "flexibility" in responding to developments associated with the "Arab Awakening", to use "democracy promotion" funding as a means to maintain the support of various sectors of the political elite, and even, perhaps more insidiously, as a means of imposing parameters on the ideas, agendas, policies, and discourses of as many elements of civil society that they can penetrate. The nearly $190 million granted to Tunisia, will be geared towards the State Department's "new assistance programs aimed to shore up the country's media, civil society, political environment, and electoral process..." (Yaros, 2012). The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) will be overseeing

more than $23 million in "transitional support" from this budget for the non-military components of the US aid budget Tunisia (Yaros, 2012).

According to their website, MEPI has been involved in four key initiatives in Tunisia. MEPI's Local Grant "Vision 2040 for Tunisia" program, supports various "civil society" initiatives, including in the areas of education, "women's empowerment", "controlling demographic growth", encouraging "civic engagement" for Tunisia's youth and "spreading the culture of citizenship", focusing in particular on areas of "the rule of law, constitutions, free and fair elections, and pluralism" (US Department of State, 2011). Other programs encourage Tunisia's youth to "have a voice in the political decision-making process by" participating in electoral politics (US Department of State, 2011). Additional projects include, work on a public opinion research and outreach initiative called The Arab Democracy Barometer (ADB), "to promote good governance and a successful democratic transition"; as well as supporting the launch of the "Tunisian General Labor Confederation" (CGTT), meant to be a rival to the UGTT, and claiming to work toward "modern trade unionism" (Ajmi, 2011).

Another likely recipient for the earmarked State Department democracy funding is the National Democratic Institute (NDI) that has run "democracy promotion" programs in Tunisia since 2000. As with MEPI, NDI's post-revolution work also seems focused on directing revolutionary sentiment towards electoral politics, with its stated aims: "to foster a more competitive and representative multi-party environment where political parties compete effectively on behalf of citizens' interests, and where civil society plays an active role in overseeing the political process." Though its Political Party Development project states that it works with all political persuasions to "strengthen parties as proponents of a more open political system", claiming that "more than 110 political parties are benefitting from newfound freedoms and competing to represent citizens in elected government," after a search of their website, it seems only three parties are mentioned by name (and this from a 2009 statement).

All three are parties that had acquired legal status during the Ben Ali years including the centre-left, fiercely secularist political party *Ettajdid* (Renewal) Movement, and *Ettakatol* , the centre-left party, which is now part of the power-sharing governement with An Nahda, and the secular liberal party, Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), which won 3.9% of the popular vote and 16 of 217 seats in the National Constituent Assembly. NDI worked with these parties to engage in election monitoring for the 2009 Tunisian elections, in which the deposed leader was "elected" to a fifth five-year term (National Democratic Institute, 2009).

It is clear from interviews with some of the recipients and subcontractors of US State Department aid that one lesson has been learned: the work of "democracy promotion" organisations in the past was too heavily dependent upon a top-down approach that overlooked the needs and aspirations of the non- "loyal", non-elite members of civil society. Whether this realisation will truly inform future activities remains to be seen. It also is unclear if the incorporation of such

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individuals and groups into the programs of these organisations will facilitate or limit the radical aspirations of many that participated in the revolution. As Mitchell has argued, though there can certainly be emancipatory elements to the democratisation agenda, it must also be seen as "an engineering project, concerned with the manufacture of new political subjects and with subjecting people to new ways of being governed," in which the protection of entrenched interests, both domestic and international, generally take precedence over those of the majority (Mitchell 2011, p.3).

Whether it is perception or reality, there are still many who feel that US "democracy promotion" policies are little more than a fig leaf to mask more nefarious interests. According to PCOT leader Hamma Hammami, the US and Europeans are "are aiming to limit the Tunisian revolution to minor reforms and modifications and want to sustain the former system, and maintain former pro-capitalist economic, political and social policies" (Walker, 2011).

Conclusion

Though this article has provided plenty of evidence for skepticism in light of the various entrenched interests hovering over and seeking to contain Tunisia's revolutionary potential, it has also, by presenting the many achievements on both the state and societal levels, provided cause for optimism. Inarguably, the most impressive achievement of last year's uprisings was to tear down the proverbial "wall of fear" so carefully constructed over the years by Tunisia's authoritarian regimes. This achievement will have reverberations in state-society relations for years to come. The Tunisian people remain mobilized and continue to demand that the new government live up to the ideals of the revolution, on the levels of both individual and collective dignity. As Foucault (1980) has argued, "there are no relations of power without resistances".

As for the role of the US and other powerful states and international institutions, though it is clear that some lessons have been learned, in particular regarding the unsustainability of past policies that demonstrated a patent disregard for the rights, dignity and will of the Tunisian people, it is equally clear that efforts have been undertaken to mould the new reality in such a way that would guarantee the protection of US interests for years to come. However, the reality of power and politics is that there are never any absolutes. It is impossible, even for hegemonic powers, to prepare for and adequately respond to all contingencies and/or control the outcomes of various processes once they are set in train. We have seen this in Iraq and Afghanistan, and are seeing it now in relation to the Arab spring uprisings.

Despite their best efforts, US hegemonic control over the region is weakening. The revolutions in the region are both a symptom and cause of this fact. Various international, domestic and regional factors, including the economic crisis and several strategic and ethical failures in the various battlefields of the "war on terror", can account for the decline in US structural and material power

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vis-a-vis the region. This decline can only be a good thing from the perspective of pursuing and safeguarding the aims of the Tunisian revolution.

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After Mubarak, Before Transition: The Challenges for Egypt's Democratic Opposition

Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio

Context: The Military and the "Deep State"

Unlike Tunisia's more orderly and quicker transition, over a year after the removal of ex-President Hosni Mubarak, the situation in Egypt remains confused. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the military junta which took over from the former President, has undertaken certain steps towards transition, but opinion on their intentions remains deeply divided. Increasingly, it is clear that they constitute the hard core of Mubarak's regime, that they are fighting for their survival, and that in this struggle, they are more than prepared to sacrifice the demands for freedom and social justice which were at the core of the uprising which began on January 25th, 2011.

Appreciating the complexities of the wider political situation in Egypt is crucial to understand the magnitude of the obstacles which independent civil society groups face in Egypt today.

The basic demand of the uprising, in Egypt as in Tunisia, is encapsulated by one of its best-known slogans: *ash-sha'b yurid isqaat an-nizaam*, the people want the downfall of the regime. It was not simply a question of removing Mubarak, but of ending the entire clientelistic, authoritarian system which made life intolerable for ordinary Egyptians: decades of systematic abuse of power by the police and security services, corruption from the highest political levels to the most lowly bureaucrats, rising living costs and low wages, and unemployment are only a few of the more high-profile difficulties. This system worked to the advantage of corrupt business leaders led by the President's son Gamal, of the mafia-like intelligence and police services, of the President's National Democratic Party, which channelled patronage, and of the armed forces, the reputation of which emerged relatively unscathed from Mubarak's corrupt regime not least because they were relatively sidelined within it, but who nonetheless hold vast economic and political power.

It is only in the context of this oppressive *nizaam*, or regime, that it is possible to understand the unprecedented turnout of protests on January 25th, and their determination not to back down in the face of intense repression throughout the protests. On February 11th, 2011, crowds across Egypt rejoiced at the President's downfall – to be sure, a momentous, unprecedented event in Egyptian history – but a year since Mubarak's removal by the military, the core of that *nizaam* remains in place, and the empire has been striking back. The military effectively removed Mubarak and purged core elements of the former regime – the businessmen linked to Mubarak's son Gamal, such as steel magnate Ahmad Ezz. Since then, SCAF has been attempting to consolidate their grip on power. The way they have done this relies on a combination of several tactics: first, stoking populist – and often highly xenophobic – rhetoric through state-controlled

media in order to bolster their legitimacy and stigmatise pro-democracy opposition; second, postponing the handover of power and making occasional concessions when they received strong pushback from civil society; third, by attempting (often with considerable success) to divide the opposition, especially by tempting the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) with the prospect of power-sharing.[1]

Movements and the Challenge of the Revolution

In a way, the project of the Uprising should not have led one to expect anything less than this kind of entrenched counter-revolutionary effort. The Uprising, after all, set itself ambitious targets. These are best summed up by its two best-known slogans. The first, *ash-sha'b yurid isqaat al-nizaam* (the people want the downfall of the regime) signalled the deep rejection of the parasitic corruption and abuse of power which permeated every aspect of ordinary life. The second, *aish, horreya, adala igtema'eya* (bread, freedom, social justice) maps out the kind of society protesters wished to see the old/new regime replaced by: a more inclusive social, economic and political system to replace the oligarchic, authoritarian kleptocracy which has ruled Egypt to date.

These two slogans by and large capture the goals and values of the broad range of groups which took part in the January uprising from its inception, and which constitute the historical core of the pro-democracy movement in Egypt.

This rubric includes several different kinds of groups, with different priorities and methods of action. Broadly, they can be divided between the historical core of the movement which comprises "extra-parliamentary" activist or independent NGOs, independent trade unions, and the parliamentary groups — largely discredited, before the uprising — including leftist parties such as *Tagammu* liberal groups such as Ayman Nour's *Al-Ghad* (Tomorrow), or smaller Islamist groups like the *Wasat* (Centre) party.

The first post-Mubarak parliamentary elections, held between November 2011 and February 2012, saw the virtual disappearance of Mubarak's vehicle for clientelism, the National Democratic Party, and brought different groups to parliament, from the Social-Democratic Party to the liberal Egypt Bloc to the Revolution Continues group, the effectiveness of which remains to be seen: their test will be not so much in terms of impact on legislation, since the parliament is dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood Freedom and Justice Party (which received about 47% of seats) and the hardline Salafist Al-Nour (Light) Party, which received 29%, but rather in faithfulness to the objectives of the uprising

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[1] For a review of the general Egyptian context and the role of the military and the Brotherhood, see Andrea Teti (2012), "Egypt's Uprising One Year On," *ECIA Briefing*, 10/2; http://www.european-centre.org/ecia-briefings/egypt-one-year-on/; Andrea Teti, "Egypt's Uprising: Still Talking About A Revolution," *Berfrois*, February 17th, 2012, http://www.berfrois.com/2012/02/andrea-teti-egypt-one-year-on/; on SCAF-Brotherhood relations, see Robert Springborg, "Egypt's Cobra and Mongoose," *Egypt Independent*, February 27th, 2012; http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/683311 last accessed March 2nd, 2012.

and resisting cooptation by the regime, which proved the downfall of the old Leftist and Liberal parties.

Among the NGOs, the most prominent are organisations such as the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) headed by Khaled Ali, also now officially running in the 2012 presidential elections, the New Woman Foundation (NWF), the Hisham Mubarak Law Centre (HMLC) and the Centre for Trade Union Workers' Services (CTUWS). Among the independent trade unions, Real Estate Tax Collectors' (RETA) union was the first (established in December 2008) but has been followed by literally hundreds of new unions since the January uprising. Kamal Abu Eita, who heads RETA, is also chairman of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), formed on January 31st, 2011.

The independent trade unions and "activist NGOs" are certainly the most important component of the movement, both in terms of independence from the regime, and in terms of the efficacy of their action. Over the past decade, they have used a range of methods in their struggle against the regime and for the mobilisation of the population.[2] Groups like HMLC or CTUWS, for example, are trying to provide legal services to workers in order to help them fight for their rights. Some NGOs focus on monitoring and advocacy in human rights. Independent trade unions attempt to organise formally, although labour legislation still has not been changed to allow for freedom of association, retaining the top-down, regime-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation as the sole legal representative for workers. In these activities, groups use a variety of instruments, from strikes to single-issue campaigns, new communications technologies to print media and word of mouth.

Objectives

Broadly, the objectives these groups give themselves — the *matalib al-thawra*, goals of the revolution — are several, but primarily fall under the rubrics of social justice and political inclusion.

With respect to economic policy, the object of protest is an economic system which disenfranchises vast swathes of society. Beyond the frequently cited figure of 40% of the population living beneath the $2/day poverty line, which

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[2] For a review of the specific tactics used during the January uprising, see "Egyptian Activists' Plan: Translated," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 27th, 2011; last accessed March 3rd, 2012; http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/egyptian-activists-action-plan-translated/70388/. For a view of the mobilisation on the day from the South-West of Cairo, see Lorenzo Trombetta, "Anti-regime protesters and loyalist forces in Cairo. A dialectical confrontation," last accessed March 3rd, 2012; http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/12/city-state-resistance-spaces-of-protest-in-the-middle-east-and-mediterranean/; as well as Al-Jazeera English's documentary on the April 6th movement: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrNz0dZgqN8;

actually underestimates poverty levels[3], the "liberalising" reforms of the past decade and a half, and especially since Ahmad Nazif's government from 2004 to the 2011 uprising, have had a dire impact on ordinary people's lives. Before the uprising, local riots broke out after nation-wide shortages in subsidised bread (*aish*). There has also been a recent gas crisis despite the government exporting considerable quantities of gas. And while Cairo's elites are relocating to gated communities, dragging state investment in infrastructure with them, slums and informal settlements (*ashwa'iyyat*) are the norm for millions of the city's poor, and remain largely without – or with very expensive – basic services. The City of the Dead, a cemetery just outside of historical Cairo, is estimated to house 2 million of the capital's living.

Recently, the effects of those policies have certainly been made worse by the recent world-wide spike in food prices, but the long-term trends have long been in place. In one of its few populist measures, the military junta took the step of increasing public sector salaries by 7% and inviting the private sector to match it, although this one-off hike is quickly nullified by the combination of pre-existing income gaps and inflation. This context makes clear why the continuous calls from business and from the IMF and other international financial organisations (IFIs) to cut subsidies on basic foodstuffs like bread, cooking oil, and petrol are highly controversial among the poor and – increasingly – the middle classes, and helps explain the presence of the country's poor in the January-February 2011 uprising. Unsurprisingly, many groups involved in the uprisings are staunchly opposed to continuing Mubarak's privatization programme – for example, the privatization of water, electricity, petrol, and natural gas – and many wish to see it at least partially reversed.

Another familiar policy amongst oppositions groups is the institution of a national minimum *and* maximum wage. In the private sector alone, pay can range from LE240 ($4) to LE50,000-500,000 ($8,300-83,000) for the higher echelons of public administration (e.g. ministers, deputies, etc.) in take-home pay and benefits alone, i.e. without counting the income from corruption. Other measures called for by pro-democracy groups include land redistribution (Mubarak and Nazif reversed the few safeguards Nasser had put in place against latifundia and smallholder/labourer exploitation), safeguards in "special economic zones" (SEZs) where workers are even less protected, and the renegotiation of "odious debt" incurred under the Mubarak regime.[4]

One of the more interesting campaigns conducted by opposition groups has been the boycott of products and services provided by military-owned companies: the military's vast economic empire – the so-called "pasta

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[3] For critical reviews of this literature and its implications for Cairo, see Bush 2004 and Sabry 2010.

[4] "Drop 'dictator debt,' activists and economists say," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, October 28th, 2011; http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/509601; last accessed March 1st, 2012. The issue of SEZs is not viewed as entirely separate from the WB/IMF debate, but not debated as extensively, not least because business elites – secular or Islamist – are heavily involved in SEZs.

economy", of which there is increasing general awareness — relies on a combination of exploitation of conscripts, often forced to make and then buy products, and state subsidies, which put the military in a position to loan the government $1bn last December.[5]

On a political level, there are several demands common to the full range of the opposition. In relation to elections and the "mainstream" political arena, different groups have emphasized different demands, for example in relation to the timing and sequencing of parliamentary and presidential elections and of writing the new constitution. All, however, have been concerned with the enormous advantage in terms of organisation and funding which established groups — the Muslim Brotherhood and lower-profile but well-funded Salafi movements — would inevitably have in elections. A few chose for this reason not to concentrate on elections at all, but rather on building nation-wide grassroots organisations, not unlike the Brotherhood itself.

In other respects, the voices coming from independent pro-democracy groups have been fairly consistent. Some of these demands focus on requests for firm guarantees for freedom of speech and association, which Western governmental donors have for the most part focused on (albeit imperfectly). Importantly, freedom of association is demanded not just for NGOs and other civil society actors, but also for trade unions. This requires liberalising both the NGO law and the unions law, both of which currently provide a raft of instruments for the regime's control of independent associations.

A second raft of demands also requires legislative change. First among these is the reform of the security services in general, and specifically of the Ministry of Interior. Here, pro-democracy groups are pushing for accountability of the security services, particularly with respect to the widespread abuse of power both before and after the uprising, and for effective civilian oversight of these bodies. First and foremost, all groups demand the lifting of the emergency law.

Finally, it is important to note that while economic demands have often been represented in Western and local media as separate and higher priorities than political demands by demonstrators, from speaking to activists and from documents produced by groups across the left-liberal political spectrum, it is clear that these two dimensions are inseparable.

Obstacles

The obstacles pro-democracy opposition groups face are many, from the systematic harassment of members and supporters by the police and security services, to the bureaucratic obstacles placed in their way. Legislation itself

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[5] "Army loans $1 billion to central bank," *The Daily News Egypt*, December 2nd, 2011; http://thedailynewsegypt.com/economy/army-loans-1-billion-to-central-bank.html; last accessed March 1st, 2012. Other campaigns include the *Kazeboon* (Liars), No Military Trials for Civilians, and *Emsek Felool* (Catch the Remnants) against former ruling party members running in post-Mubarak elections.

poses major difficulties. For example, NGOs have to be registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, and while the registration regime is in theory permissive – NGOs have to apply for recognition, and are (illegally) vetted by the security services, but if a ruling is not issued by MoSA within 60 days, approval is implicit – in practice neither the letter nor the spirit of the law are respected by authorities. For unions, there is the obligation of being part of the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), a top-down organisation in which strike actions, for example, have to be approved by the regime-appointed leadership. This kind of legislative architecture is often so restrictive that some groups – the Center for Trade Union Workers' Services (CTUWS) is a prime example – find it easier to establish themselves as law firms rather than NGOs or unions.

The issue that has certainly received most coverage recently has been the so-called "foreign funding" debate and the aggressive moves made by the regime against a wide range of NGOs. The background to this "debate" is the increasingly strident nationalism the regime has stoked, not least thanks to state-controlled media, which despite the growing role of "new media" is still pivotal in Egypt. The function of this choice seems to be to simultaneously provide the regime with some kind of "revolutionary" fig leaf and to stigmatise and politically marginalise the "revolutionary youth".

The accusation levelled at opposition NGOs by Minister for Social Solidarity Faiza Aboulnaga has been that NGOs have received unauthorised foreign funding and/or operated without a licence. The accusation is disingenuous: firstly, because Aboulnaga was herself responsible for NGO oversight under Mubarak; secondly, because while the legislation is permissive with regard to NGO registration, the state ignored this and kept promising particularly Western NGOs that authorisation would be forthcoming; thirdly, because the crackdown focused virtually exclusively on pro-democracy NGOs while ignoring the very sizeable funding accruing to, say, the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafi groups from the Gulf; and finally, of course, because the largest recipient of "foreign funding" is the Egyptian state itself, which receives funds from the US government alone to the tune of nearly $3bn per year, with $1.5bn going to the military.

This, however, is not to say that the "foreign funding" debate does not touch upon genuine issues. The debate itself, as opposed to the xenophobic populism touted by state-controlled media, has actually been going on in Egyptian civil society for a long time before the 2011 Egyptian uprising, and in much more sophisticated terms.[6] In essence, it revolves around the question of whether it is at all justifiable to draw on funds from foreign states, particularly Western governments or organisations close to them.

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[6] For an excellent introduction to the pre-uprising debate within Egyptian civil society, see Pratt 2006. The authors' own fieldwork, conducted between December 2008 and November 2010 in Cairo, and in London, Amsterdam, and Brussels on European donors, confirms and updates some of Pratt's findings.

Some groups have indeed received funding from Western governmental and quasi-governmental organisations, including groups such as Al-Gil and the Suzanne Mubarak Foundation – in fact, Egyptian Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organisations (GONGOs) have been particularly adept at absorbing US and EU funding. Amongst independent NGOs, many distinguish between governmental and non-governmental funding, and while rejecting the former, are prepared to apply for the latter. Indeed, often the debate distinguishes between specific organisations, based on their (perceived) proximity to governments of certain countries – primarily the US, the UK and France. Several prominent Egyptian human rights organisations fall into this category, distinguishing between different donors. On the other hand, some argue that receiving funding from Western organisations makes local rights groups dependent on Western agendas, and in any case dependent on foreign sources of funding for their activities, which means a certain vulnerability to funding being cut off or leveraged at any point.

Although the vulnerability – whether politically motivated or not – is a genuine difficulty, the "dependency argument" risks underplaying the degree to which local organisations – and indeed, international NGOs that fund them – consciously adapt to the procedural demands made by their patrons, while remaining true to their original remits. It also has to be emphasised that in several cases the debate over whether to even apply for such funding has been hammered out in internal discussions, often with the result that an organisation would apply, but consciously *not* adapting their goals or language to suit donors' (perceived) preferences.[7] Ultimately, the difficulty NGOs face particularly when dealing with politically thorny issues such as workers' rights or human rights generally, is that while the regime obviously has no incentive to provide (or allow) funding unless they can reasonably expect to co-opt rights leaders through patronage, the targets of these NGOs' activities are often the poorest and most defenceless in society, and it is hardly realistic to expect such organisations to support themselves on funding from such constituencies.

The "debate", particularly when manipulated by the military junta and its civilian backers, is of course disingenuous in another crucial but unspoken assumption, namely that the Egyptian regime would provide these organisations with funds to conduct the kind of work to understand, deal with, and mobilise against the political and economic marginalisation which is the principal effect – if not instrument – of the elites which control that regime itself.

One of the problems in the current context overall is that serious, in-depth discussion concerning key issues, from the role of IFIs to "foreign funding", from the military's economic influence to addressing poverty, is hijacked by the kind of often xenophobic populist nationalism stoked by the military and drawn

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[7] Activists in different Egyptian NGOs expressed this opinion in interviews with the authors conducted in January 2009 and November 2010.

upon by the Brotherhood and Salafi groups to deflect attention from these issues and their inability to provide long-term solutions to them.

Divisions within the Movement

Aside from the differences over the issue of external funding, there are several divisions within the "pro-democracy" camp broadly writ.

Firstly, there is a debate about whether parliamentary or extra-parliamentary forms of action are preferable. The parliamentary route has certain advantages in the eyes of some, for example the ability to bring issues of social justice to the agenda of parliamentary debate and wider public opinion. For others, parliament both before and after the January uprising is tainted by the levers of co-option the regime has used in the past, neutering parties like the Wafd, Ghad and Tagammu' at least partially, and the objective ought rather to be building a mass base which would give movements and trade unions strength whether or not they are present in parliament.

Secondly, there is the question of relations with the SCAF military junta and with the Muslim Brotherhood. While the reputation of the junta in the eyes of most activists — particularly liberals and leftists — is now irretrievably tainted, and very few see compromise with the military as a viable option, the debate on Islamists is ongoing. This debate is one of the elements of continuity with the pre-uprising context. Feminist organisations such as the New Woman Foundation, for example, faced the problem of working with pro-regime GONGOs like the Suzanne Mubarak Foundation and Islamist groups like the Muslim Sisterhood (the women's section of the Brotherhood). The debate within these organisations revolved around the possibility that collaborations on specific issues could yield short-term gains, against the likelihood that these gains would be reversed or paid for with larger losses in other areas.

Thirdly, specifically with regard to the independent labour movement, there is the problem of achieving a degree of coordination for unitary action. EFITU, the new independent federation, has grown very rapidly since its establishment on January 31st, 2011, and now comprises over two hundred unions of varying size. Achieving a degree of "internal democracy" for EFITU will be crucial in retaining the level of legitimacy and mobilisation which workers have achieved in the run-up to the January Uprising and since then. There have also been the first signs of fissures within EFITU: its two principal founding organisations, Kamal Abu Eita's RETA and Kamal Abbas' CTUWS fell out last autumn, and CTUWS has withdrawn from EFITU. The differences were on the surface related to "foreign funding", but also to basic strategic objectives for the labour movement, with RETA favouring focusing unionisation drives on the still large public sector, while CTUWS aims to extend unionisation into the private sector and into Special Economic Zones, where workers have even fewer rights.

The Muslim Brotherhood:
Decorative Opposition by another Name?

The MB has come to be seen by many activists – not least several amongst its own youth movement – as primarily interested in riding the wave of the January uprising in order to achieve a compromise with SCAF, rather than displaying any allegiance to the Uprising's principles. The Brotherhood has therefore backed the military on issues such as elections, and has condemned pro-democracy demonstrators nearly as eagerly as the junta. Having dominated the lower house elections gaining nearly half of its seats, and far and away outperformed any other party gaining 68% of seats in the (largely powerless) upper house, the Brotherhood's "red lines" seem to be linked to parliament's powers and presidential elections. More importantly, the Brotherhood's leadership has consistently appeared ready to compromise with the junta – and even with the then-embattled Mubarak – in return for some kind of informal power-sharing arrangement with SCAF.

But the Brotherhood's tactics are potentially risky. Over the past ten months, its leadership has often underestimated popular desire for change. At crucial points such as the run-up to the January Uprising and the November protests, it publicly criticised protests, and by encouraging its supporters to stay at home, was badly wrong-footed by the massive popular support such protests had. The MB leadership spectacularly misjudged the reception calls to demonstrate on January 25th would have, and while it later declared itself part of revolutionary forces, it explicitly refused to join the November *millioneyya* (million-person) marches, preferring instead to echo the junta's own old, authoritarian rhetoric of "foreign hands" and plots to destabilize Egypt. Such was the disaffection between protesters and the MB that on some occasions when high-ranking Brotherhood representatives tried to go to Tahrir to show their participation in anti-SCAF protests and "bathe" in revolutionary legitimacy, were booed off the square, and some have pointed to disaffection amongst its youth possibly turning into a haemorrhage towards other parties.

With regard to the Brotherhood's youth, the picture is fairly confused: many were an integral part of the uprising from the very beginning – against the express indications of their leadership – but while some have left the MB and some have been expelled, many have chosen to remain within it. This has sapped the potential drift of support away from the MB and its FJP party, and towards other parties such as the Wasat or the splinter party El-Tayyar, which fared badly in recent elections. It also does not augur well for the chances of former MB "youth leader" Abd el-Moneim Aboul Futouh in upcoming presidential elections.

Within the MB, leaders like Aboul Futouh and Essam El-Erian, who are the more "politicised" among the leadership and also the more pragmatic – if not liberal – in their number, had already been marginalised within the governing structures of the Brotherhood well before the January Uprising. Octogenarian leaders like Muhammad Badie preferred the Brotherhood's historically moderate, pragmatic and apolitical stance, attempting to cut deals with the

regime rather than use the Brotherhood's mass support to put pressure on it for radical change.

Some view this choice of tactics as a calculated one, believing that disaffected members will soon return. Either way, this approach is entirely in line with the MB's tried and tested tactics of attempting on the one hand to pragmatically compromise with power, and on the other hand continue to increase its influence in a range of "non-political" organisations such as lawyers, teacher and pharmacist syndicates, in several of which it has recently won internal elections.[8]

There is, ultimately, a possibly even more basic problem that divides the Brotherhood — certainly its leadership — from other opposition groups. This is not so much the much-debated issue of the "role of Islam" in Egyptian public life, which receives many headlines, particularly outside Egypt, but rather its economic policies. Some have already been pointing out the degree to which the current leadership is "business-friendly"— there is nothing in the group's ideology which opposes private property or the profit motive *per se* — and its policies are essentially continuous with the liberalisations of Mubarak's government, not least because key Brotherhood leaders are themselves businessmen.

There is in this sense a tension between the Brotherhood's acceptance of those privatization policies which so badly hurt the weaker sections of society, and the charitable activities intended to support them. Nor has corruption been far removed from the Brotherhood's businessmen, as the controversy surrounding the trial of tycoon Khayrat El-Shater shows.[9] In the short run, the Brotherhood can deflect attention form this tension by focusing on corruption, but in the long run, particularly if the Brotherhood is allowed to govern, this tension will become more evident — for example in relation to the group's approval of SEZs — and the fissures within the movement may deepen.

Conclusion

The factors which lead to the January uprising, the forces which took part in it, and the post-Mubarak retrenchments all take place in a complex economic and political landscape. Within it, the liberal and particularly leftist groups which took part in the uprising are finding themselves increasingly under attack by the military junta, former elements of the regime attempting to retain a measure of influence, and the Brotherhood, attempting to secure power for the first time. The vast organisational and financial resources these different groups can draw upon — individually and collectively — far outshine any resources pro-democracy

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[8] SCAF's "supra-constitutional principles" documents indicates it will select members of the Constitutional Council from among the professions.

[9] For an introduction, see "The Brotherhood's businessmen," *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, February 13th, 2012, http://www.egyptindependent.com/node/654581; last accessed March 2nd, 2012

groups can muster, as recent controversies over "foreign funding" and the military's effective use of state-controlled media show, and from this point of view prospects are far from optimistic. The basic, long-term issues which lead to the uprising, however, are not being addressed by the dominant forces of the post-Mubarak landscape, and in this respect there remains a space to build an effective opposition movement, much like independent trade unions have managed to do over the past decade.

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Syria, the Arab uprisings, and
the political economy of authoritarian resilience

Bassam Haddad

Abstract

The article argues that while generalizing is useful, it often times obscures the particular dynamics in each case of the Arab revolutions, and discusses how the Syrian case is not only about minority rule, but more so an entrenched system of local economic and regional dynamics that makes the Syrian case different and requires thus a different approach.

Introduction

This paper examines the causes of the Arab uprisings that have been given short shrift or that have been caricaturized in the deluge of literature on the topic. The emphasis will be on the Syrian case, particularly in terms of the weighted political-economic considerations that have been neglected in some analyses. The stalemate in Syria at the time of writing is indicative of a need for a more nuanced and multifaceted analysis of the causes of the revolt. The paper concludes by foreshadowing the shape of things to come in terms of the continuity of similar political-economic formulas, irrespective of who remains standing.

Since the Arab uprisings started in Tunisia in December 2010, there have been early attempts to frame them with generic economic arguments about poverty (Breisinger et al. 2011) and destitution, with regional comparisons to the case of Syria (SRCC 2011). Equally, narrow arguments about the uprisings being a reaction to decades of authoritarian rule do not help us to understand why they are occurring now. Finally, the prevalent "social media revolution" narratives[1] merely obscure the important issues at play.

Little attention has been given to the interaction between political and economic variables, and even less to the particularities of every case and their political-economic legacies and trajectories. The urge to see commonality has often clouded both the differences and the analysis of single cases.

A case in point is some of the analysis on Syria. An examination of events in Syria through 2011 can, intentionally or otherwise, elevate "sectarianism" arguments (Van Dam 1996 / 2011; Seale 2011) or the "sectarian rule" argument (where the Alawite minority is pitted against the Sunni majority). More nuanced analyses that recognize the inadequacy of the "sectarianism" narrative still fail

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[1] See report authored by University of Washington academics: Howard et al., 2011.

to highlight that nearly half of Syrian society is itself comprised of minorities,[2] a fact that dilutes the misplaced claim that a small sect rules the majority.

Finally, some leftist intellectuals and policy analysts have raised Syria's credentials as a powerful regional player, as well as its record of "resistance to imperialism," to define the struggle at hand.[3] The fears of some leftist watchdogs and so-called security concerns over the possible alignment with imperial aims often take precedence over, and indeed may inadvertently undermine, the very raison d'être of the uprisings.[4] While regional and international interference clouds the domestic setting and often alters the "conflict," such factors should nonetheless be integrated into the analysis to reveal the complexity of the Syrian case. They should not simply *replace* or hijack the essential narrative of the causes of the uprising.

The abovementioned political, economic, revolutionary, and communal arguments often form an amorphous explanatory lens through which the battle on the ground has been interpreted, at least in the mainstream media (Agha and Malley, 2011). Most narratives focus on symptoms rather than on the tangible causes that have driven the confrontation. Most egregiously, much weight is placed on the here and now as opposed to the political and economic context of the last few decades. Thus, analysis has proceeded from the basic binary that pits dictators against democrats, collapsing decades of institutional and strategic relations and contexts into a simplified normative battle. What compounds the analytical fog is the deluge of "knowledge production" in the form of articles, opinion editorials, and books that are responding to a public thirst on all matters related to the uprisings. The uprisings thus became a fad of sorts that will eventually be shattered by counter-revolutionary efforts in the region and beyond—if onlookers continue to pay attention.

Fortunately or not, the Syrian case invites analytical pause as it disrupts the normative binary opposition. It is not that the Syrian regime is not authoritarian or that the sentiment behind the protest is not about freedom. Rather, class, sect, region, institutions, ideology, domestic strategic relations, and foreign relations all come to the fore in creating the ten-month old stalemate there, with no foreseeable exit in sight. However, without identifying the structural causes for the Syrian uprising as well as the strategic relations that continue to hold the regime together, we will be lured and misled by the glitter of the normative aspects of the uprising, even as we conduct our analysis.

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[2] Again, van Dam's work has been indicative of the focus on the Alawi and Sunni positions, often neglecting other minorities in Syria.

[3] Critiqued by Khalil Issa, Brian Whitaker, and the author as arguments against the anti-authoritarianism protests: Issa, 2011; Haddad, 2011a; and Whitaker, 2012a.

[4] For one perspective on the regional machinations see Hicham Safieddine, 2011.

Definitions and Caveats

I shall start by positing some remarks and caveats about the recent events in the region. I use the word "events" deliberately to underscore the multitude of problematic and misleading ways in which observers have characterized, interpreted, connected, and/or written off the protests. Are these revolutions, or are they what Asef Bayat (2011) termed "Refo-lutions?" Or are they uprisings and revolts? Could they simply be just recurring demonstrations with no long-term tangible consequences? How do we discern exactly what they are? I shall discuss the caveats first, and then examine the particularities of the Syrian case in its international, regional, and local context. The two discussions are connected by virtue of the fact that we are not actually experiencing real "revolutions" in the Marxist or classic conceptions.[5]

Most of us casually refer to these events by using one or another of these words. And though the boundary between some of them is not always clear, some of these designations, namely "revolution" and "demonstration," are hardly reconcilable. We are not sure *exactly* what is transpiring across the region. What we do know is that what we are witnessing, even in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, is not a revolution, neither is it complete regime change. What we have in cases where the head or symbol of the regime resigned or departed, is a *project* for regime change that may or may not produce the results desired by the protesters, a category that itself may shatter, as we witness today in Egypt.[6] But that should not be a cause for pessimism.

A review of the history of revolutions[7] and political change might actually advise optimism, despite all seen and unforeseen hurdles. In most cases that have experienced upheaval we could be witnessing what has been termed the "second Arab revolt" or the "1968 current" (Wallerstein 2011). These consist of more genuine levels of participation and contestation, but often with major counterrevolutionary currents in places like Egypt. Another more apt characterization of the current uprisings is that they represent the struggle to end the post-colonial period of successive liberal and autocratic regimes.[8] These

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[5] See Juan Cole's introduction to *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East* (1999: 3-18) for a primer on revolutions.

[6] See SCAF positions on *Ahram online* at

 http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/30286/Egypt/Politics-/In-turnaround,-Abbasiya-hosts-antiSCAF-rally.aspx, and calls for unity at

http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/30392/Egypt/Politics-/Calls-issued-for-Unity-Friday-btwn-pro-and-antiSCA.aspx; and analysis by Ez Eldin, 2012 in relation to women and Egypt.

[7] As well as Cole, 1999, mentioned in n10, see Skocpol, 1979 and Arendt, 1963/2006 on social revolution and the changing face of revolution respectively.

[8] See Khalidi, 2011: Preliminary Historical Observations on the Arab Revolutions of 2011,in *Jadaliyya,* http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/970/preliminary-historical-observations-on-the-arab-re

broad characterizations are important gateways and frameworks for much needed focused analysis on single cases. The lure of the word "revolution" is strong, but must begin to give way to sober and empirically based analysis over and beyond terminology.

Furthermore, after a year of uprisings, we must note that we are no longer witnessing spontaneous protests by a discontented and oppressed public, with jittery responses by established regimes. We have entered the realm of strategic and medium-to long-term decision-making on both sides, one that includes actors from the Gulf countries (Hokayem 2011) as well as strategic neighbors like Turkey (Philips 2011), all of whom have sought to play a more active role in the region. We are also witnessing international inputs that have complicated the situation and given leverage to incumbent regimes that then cite such inputs as evidence that their local uprisings have foreign influences or starting points. The veracity of such claims in every case is less important than its actual effects in a region deeply injured or affected by foreign intervention. What might have started as protests and revolts are slowly becoming protracted struggles and—where incumbent regimes have some public support (e.g., Syria)—conflicts.

Thus, I shall treat this apparent fog of definitions not by trying to find the right or correct characterization, but by bypassing or suspending this task to emphasize the basic heterogeneity of the cases involved. Egypt is not Tunisia, and both are not Libya. All three are removed from Yemen (International Crisis Group 2011a), Bahrain (Shehabi 2011), and Syria. We also witnessed tremors in Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria[9] that have emanated from yet another set of circumstances which, clearly, have not yet sufficed to maintain a strong protest momentum.

The Limits of Commonality

The recurring theme across these Arab countries is that they are experiencing high levels of mass mobilization on a scale hitherto unseen in the Arab part of the Middle East, at least not in unison and certainly not since the struggles for independence from colonial and imperial rule. We have also witnessed a strong affinity among these publics for learning from each other's experience, creating a domino-like effect across the Arab countries. This signals the persistent, even if amorphous, historical, cultural, and political dimensions that continue to bind many Arabs in a systemic way—though we should not overstate this affinity as it remains at the level of triggers and signaling, not cooperation and collaboration.

Beyond that, the commonality dwindles, and in some cases, stops. It is more productive to focus instead on the significant differences among these polities, in terms of social structure, ethnic, regional, social, and sectarian diversity. Most importantly, more attention must be paid to the different political economies—as will be discussed below—that obtain as well as the cumulative

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[9] See Abu-Rish, 2011 on Jordan; Dalmasso and Cavatorta, 2011 on Morocco; and Davis, 2011 on Algeria.

effects of economic development and change, even across similarly structured political economies.

Thus, we should avoid addressing the regional protests as a singular unit of analysis. It is also important to recognize the similarities between what we are witnessing in the region and what many other countries, beyond the developing world, are experiencing. Barring an exaggerated connection between the local (here) and the local (elsewhere), it is important to consider the effect of particular alliances and interests at the global level that determined the nature and extent of intervention or pressure. The US-supported Saudi military deployment (Bahaa 2011) in Bahrain to effectively quell the protests is a case in point, and one that is related to common political and economic interests between Bahrain's neighbors and an array of non-Arab countries. Similar concerns, though more political than economic in this case, play a role in moderating the push for regime change in Syria, even by its enemies. But in nearly all local and global cases of uprisings during the past year, including in the United States, there has been a growing populist/popular rejection of corrupt leadership.[10] In most Arab cases that experienced turmoil, the authoritarian alliance between the political and economic elite is invariably the target of protests. The details differ from case to case, though, signaling the end of the commonality and the need to delve into the particularities of each single case.

Effects of the Nexus of Political and Economic Power

Instead of surveying the gamut of factors and claims about the causes of the uprisings, I shall examine a factor that has been given scant attention despite its centrality in each of the countries that have experienced revolts and turbulence. Namely, the growing relationship in the past few decades between the political and economic elites[11] in the countries undergoing mass uprisings. This nexus of power pervades most global political economies but produces deleterious effects to the extent that the context allows. In many Arab countries, it is associated with the protracted process related to the unraveling of state-centered economies there. One must caution in the same breath against the emphasis on such factors as singular causes for the uprisings.

Assessing the impact of this alliance/nexus is difficult because it requires one to disentangle the gamut of existing political, social, and economic ills in the region and neatly attribute some of them to the uprisings. To be sure, there are many sources of polarization, poverty, repression, and, ultimately revolt, that some analysts are finding it convenient to go back to the residual category of the cultural black box to explain the region's shortcomings[12] (some have never left it

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[10] See Walt, 2011 for a critique of American dominance.

[11] On Syria see Perthes, 1995, 2004; Haddad, 2011b; and Heydemann, 2004.

[12] See Khouri's problematizing of the use of the term "Arab Spring", 2011; and a thought-provoking critique by Mandhai on Ikhwanweb, 2011.

in the first place). It is possible, however, to highlight some problematic areas that have been exacerbated by the new elitism, and the modes of coping, resistance, governance, and living that it has engendered. Systematic research is required to conduct rigorous process-tracing, but some of the direct and not-so-direct effects are inescapably evident, especially when one considers the new forms of collaboration between repressive political elites and (often) happily unaccountable business actors.

On the face of it, we can preliminarily divide the impact of this nexus of power into at least two categories, both of which have directly or indirectly affected the outcomes we have witnessed last spring. Politically, the new nexus of power between the political and economic elite seems to have buttressed authoritarian rule over the past decades (depending on the case), whether or not other factors contributed to this outcome. This is not simply a function of "support" for the status quo by these elites, for this is the norm nearly everywhere. It is also a form of legitimation of the status quo because the corollary of this nexus involves various forms of "liberalization" or state retreat.

This includes a:

1. "budding," "growing," or seemingly "vibrant" civil society[13] that may be considered a sign of political "opening," a "freer" economic environment in which the state gives up its monopoly over some sectors of the economy; and

2. a large "private" sector that purportedly grows at the expense of the state-run "public" sector,[14] giving way to a broader dispersion of resources with economically democratizing effects.

These outcomes are pleasing to some external actors, including the amorphously labeled "the international community"— a view that is reflected in the USAID economic growth plan for Egypt (USAID 2004-2010). However, the overwhelming majority of the population, who has to fend for itself, does not view this in positive terms, as public provisions, jobs, and welfare dwindle.

The social effects of this new nexus of power have been all too clear in the years before the 2011 revolts. Economic reforms have led to the destruction of social safety nets (e.g., welfare, subsidies, and job provisions) that have usually compensated for the failure of the market to keep people out of poverty and hardship. Basic health and education provision has been affected during years of neoliberal led economic policies. Poor and low-income people in the Middle East rely on state subsidies on wheat, flower, and sugar as well as oil, so that they can afford the basic necessities such as bread.[15] Such drastic changes are contributing to two dangerously related phenomena. Increasing poverty[16]

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[13] Pratt, 2007 examines how civil society can actually undermine democracy in the Middle East.

[14] See Samer Abboud (2010: 9-12) for a summary of economic reformist positions in Syria.

[15] For insight into downward trends for subsidies in Syria, see Haddad, 2011b Chapter 6.

[16] See UNICEF report, 2010, on child poverty in Egypt.

(including absolute poverty) and thus social polarization, whereby societies are increasingly losing their middle classes. Secondly, economic exclusion from the "market," a phenomenon that has contributed to a dramatic increase of the informal sector[17] and of those who are functioning, and living, almost completely outside the market. The populations affected by these policies have been documented in various publications, from Diane Singerman's (2009) work on the informal sector in Egypt to Asef Bayat's (2009) work on "quiet encroachment" in the same country. More recently, we saw such groups protest side-by-side with lower-middle and middle class Egyptians throughout Egypt— not just in Cairo.

In Egypt Nadine Marroushi (2011) has noted that there continues to be support in the direction of the free market and privatization from both the liberal and Islamist parties. This has remained the case even after the Egyptian revolution, with its attendant neoliberal assumptions such as the trickle down effect, tight state budgets, private sector growth, the importance of self-reliance, and ending the "dependence" on the state. All these rationales must be carefully examined, for most of them emanate less from a demonstrable conviction and intent to guarantee alternatives and more from the sheer desire and ability to deprioritize long-term collective interests and mass provisions. There are alternative approaches and models (Gamal 2011) that are simply not being given the space they deserve, largely because they involve redistribution.

The incremental—and not so incremental—goring of workers' and labor interests in the private *and* public sectors is another outcome that can be easily traceable to policies and political decisions associated with the new elitism. The shifting of effective alliances from labor to business in various Arab regimes was part and parcel of the unraveling of state-centered economies.[18] Rights, rules, and regulations increasingly favored business at the expense of labor as time went by, starting in the 1970s (officially or unofficially). Through the 1980s and 1990s trade unions, peasant federations, and labor organizations in countries like Egypt (Beinin 2001) and Syria (Hinnebusch, 2009: 20-21; Haddad, 2011b: 80) were increasingly co-opted by corporatist authoritarian systems of representation, but continued to enjoy some privileges. Therefore, it is true that the political elite started this process of shifting alliances and privileging capital long before business actors became prominent, but the sort of change that took place in recent years has had a different character.

Earlier, such stripping of labor rights was considered a function of problematic authoritarian arbitrariness, something that is frowned upon socially and viewed as a departure from what Marsha Pripstein Posusney (1997: 4 − 6), in her work on Egypt, called the "moral contract" between labor and the state. More recently, and before the wave of protests and revolts began, the incremental stripping away of labor rights was carried out in the name of "investment" and "growth."

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[17] See Schneider and Enste 2002 on informal economies.

[18] On the role of the state see Ayubi, 1995.

In Syria the ideological context was one of a socialist-nationalist[19] coloring that provided a basis for judgment and norms, an ideological, or rhetorical, underpinning that was influential from Egypt to Iraq. Hence, social polarization, poverty, and developmental exclusion were considered "wrong" and unacceptable. Today, such disturbing effects became the new norm, a means to a "better" future, a legitimate station along the way to prosperity and efficiency. All such designations were short-circuited by the uprisings, but it is too early to sound the death-knell for growth formulas that are zero-sum in character.

Perhaps most significantly were the socioeconomic implications of a new elitism that vehemently emphasized urban development (at the expense of the neglected countryside and its modes of production) and non-productive economic activity, characterized primarily by consumption (Mitchell 1999). The increase in shares of the tourism and service sectors at the expense of manufacturing and agricultural production (associated with land re-reform laws and other regulations) produced different kinds of needs in society.[20] For instance, there is significantly less need for skilled labor, along with the educational systems and institutions that would be required to train skilled labor. Whatever is arising in terms of the "new economy" and the field of Information Technology lags far behind other countries. It is too small and too underdeveloped to substitute for losses in other sectors and is certainly not competitive internationally. Employment (Achy 2011) of hundreds of thousands of yearly new entrants into the job market will continue to suffer accordingly if public policy continues to be colonized as it has been by the new elitism in the context of authoritarian governance or post-revolution reform.

 The much heralded private sector is nearly everywhere in the region only picking up "shares" of fixed capital formation from the embattled and bloated public sector, but is nowhere near compensating for job losses, let alone accommodating new job-seekers. The revolts of spring 2011 are not unrelated to the failure of the "private-sector-led" alternative to state-centered economies. Neither model served people or sustainable growth. Hence the need for a more imaginative approach that involves an optimal division of labor between the private and public sector as well as the proper distribution of emphasis across sectors (i.e., industry, trade, tourism, service, information technology, agriculture) and regions (i.e., rural, urban).

The often-neglected elements in some circles are the combination of measures that fall under the rubric of trickle down economics (private sector investment, foreign direct investment, new market institutions, new rules and regulations, the rule of law, etc.). It is erroneous to place the causes of the revolutions and protests squarely on these economic variables—which is not the point of this intervention. However, one cannot understand the depth, breadth, and

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[19] For insight into the language and rhetoric, read Syria's 10th Five Year Plan 2006-2010.

[20] See Haddad, 2011b Chapter 4, for a discussion on a new state-business collusion in Syria.

magnitude, of the revolts without reference to the effects of these policies, and their agents.

The problem of development is not simply about rules and markets and will not be resolved as such. Whatever else is at work, the most egregious problems stem from various and continuing forms of political *and* economic disempowerment and denial of self-determination at the individual and collective levels.[21] Most of these problems were/are being exacerbated by a new nexus of power that is as unrelenting as it is/was unchallenged (depending on the case). This new elitism was not the only source of these problems, but a guarantee that they will fester if alternative agencies and institutions do not develop.

Compounding Effects of the New Nexus of Power

The new nexus of power in and of itself is not sufficient to bring about sustained protests. It was only the constellation of various factors that brought an end to the seemingly impenetrable wall of fear. These factors are by no means restricted to structure: politics and strategy, as well as subjective calculations, ultimately played a significant role to tip the balance in favor of the unthinkable: public protest in Syria.

Namely, in addition to the economic deterioration brought about by the nexus of power in Syria, we can identify two major factors: the independent effect of authoritarian rule and demonstration effect. Deep economic deterioration (Perthes, 1995; Hinnebusch, 2009, 15-17; and Perthes, 2004, 28-29), elite capture of public policy, and authoritarian rule proceeded without the existence of meaningful avenues for redress. This created a pressure cooker effect for many years (more or less, depending on the case at hand), leading to a sense of despair across broad sectors of the population, affecting more than just people's livelihood and desire for political "freedom" (these societies always wanted more political freedom). What took the situation to a deeper level is that this combination also struck deeply at people's dignity. I will argue that even that outcome (when one's dignity is affected) was not sufficient to spur mass mobilization in some countries, notably Syria. What tilted the calculus of individuals and groups in Syria in terms of going to the streets is the feeling that, NOW, after Tunisia and Egypt, they can actually do something about it.

Thus, the structural political/economic factors obtained, the injury to one's dignity obtained, but such factors required some strategic principle or agency for them to spur mass uprisings. Many onlookers ask why people were willing to risk their lives and continue to risk their lives, especially in Syria? It is precisely because of the deep injuries that were incurred for long periods of time, coupled with the presence of hope for a way out. In that sense, we can observe that this explanation comports with a rational actor model if we adjust preferences.

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[21] See the latest AHDR Report, 2009.

Ultimately, this somewhat crude narrative manifested itself in various ways across the countries that experienced upheaval (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain), and certainly in Syria. However, some countries were less ripe for such uprisings in the sense that the discontent as well as the tools/factors available did not allow for critical mass and/or immediately effective/terminal challenge to the status quo. Syria, and Yemen to a lesser extent, is a case in point. Ripe here means that the injuries discussed and the possibility of a better alternative had not yet reached deep into the core of all major segments or regions of the country. Hence the relative quiet one witnesses in Damascus and Aleppo.

Conclusion: The Shape of Things To Come After the Uprisings

The concern about the growing nexus of power is at heart a structural, not an empirical, one. When authoritarian elites began to build relations with capitalists or the business class in the 1970s and 1980s they were doing more than simply pursuing their own interests. They were trying to respond to growing economic troubles or crisis. However, with time, these political elites and their offspring were increasingly becoming the economic elite.[22] Their interests were reflected in their policy preferences, their lifestyles, and their changing social alliances (if not tastes). Most importantly, the incentive structure in the 1980s changed.

While it was more profitable for an ascendant counter leadership in the 1940s and 1950s to champion the cause of the oppressed and exploited on account of their prevalence, in the 1980s the incumbent regimes became increasingly threatened by this growing and powerful force, i.e., the masses. High birth rates, low infant mortality, and increasingly urbanized and political engaged (if muted in practice) societies have become a liability, not a ticket for establishing legitimacy vis-à-vis an ancient regime/order still connected to former colonizers. Decrepit state institutions could not keep up with massive urbanization and the rate of new entrants into the job market every year. Failing public sectors were already over-bloated and began seriously to strain state budgets[23]—largely because of mismanagement whereby economic decisions were guided by a political logic that emphasized control.

Recognizing that a new social contract with labor and populist forces would require a modicum of power-sharing, and noting their own growing interest in the "market" and a malleable "private" sector, the political elite opted for the easy way out that comported with their changing preferences and the changing incentive structure: i.e., they began to deepen their connections with select parts of the business community, mostly at the expense of gains made by labor since the late 1950s under the United Arab Republic, and then in the mid-1960s under the new radical and rural-minoritarian Ba`thist leadership.

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[22] For a detailed study of this process in the case of Syria, see Haddad (2012b), chapter 4.

[23] See Haddad (2012b), chapter 5.

The increasing structural power of capital (i.e., the increasing opportunities for transforming economic wealth into political power) drew more and more state officials and, later in the 1990s, their offspring, into a crony-dominated market in which networks that bind bureaucrats/politicians and capitalists were able to skew economic policy formulation and implementation to their favor. And when this was not possible, they were able to transgress the law to the extent that they were well-connected or to the extent that they themselves were the "connection," i.e., the strongmen that can transgress laws with impunity. A growing group of "entrepreneurs" and capitalists began to develop an interest not only in the so-called "private" sector, but also in beginning to organize themselves in order to protect their interests either through increasing accountability in the economic environment or by strengthening their ties and lobbying efforts.

This process, which started after 2005, when Bashar heralded the Social Market Economy principle, was severely and prematurely interrupted by the advent of the uprisings in March 2011. It remains to be seen what kind of alignments were beginning to take place as researchers go back and revisit the critical years between 2005 and 2011. In any case, it is safe to assume that this social stratum has developed a keen interest in preserving its position at the helm of the socioeconomic pyramid. This explains to a large extent its ambivalence vis-à-vis the Syrian uprisings and its quiet and non-explicit support of the protesters, when they did so.[24] Notably, the upper layer of the business community—which is comprised mainly of individuals connected to the regime in an organic manner—is firmly supportive of the regime because of their intertwined interests in maintaining the physical assets that it continues to guarantee.

In any future formula, it would be erroneous to assume that these business interests and their social carriers are going to revert to a preference for a state-centered economic formula, even if a populist-leaning leadership emerges out of the uprising—notwithstanding the analytical fog that surrounds the changing nature of the Syrian uprising beginning in late 2011 and continuing to the time of writing.[25] We are likely to see the creeping back through various avenues of the very same capital and interests that gave rise to the social polarization in the first place, except with better packaging. This is not necessarily deterministic, but it is not likely that the rebuilding of these polities will eschew these business interests unless the structural power of capital is balanced by a robust democratic process with stable institutions. Based on any cursory observation of the Syrian scene, this is not likely to be on the horizon.

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[24] See Bassam Haddad, "Syria's Business Backbone," in *MERIP*, Winter 2012.

[25] See Bassam Haddad, "The End of Taking the Syrian Revolution at Face Value," in *Jadaliyya* (http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4519/the-end-of-taking-the-syrian-revolution-at-face-va).

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Corporate American media coverage of Arab revolutions: the contradictory message of modernity

Steven Salaita

Abstract

The article examines the discourses and images of U.S. corporate media coverage of the Arab revolutions, and the way the revolutions contravened longstanding Orientalist assumptions about the incompatibility of Arab culture or Islam with democracy, as defined by a Eurocentric conception of modernity.

Introduction

This essay will examine the discourses and images of corporate American media coverage of the Arab revolutions from their beginnings in Tunisia in December, 2010, until November, 2011, a year that saw dramatic political changes in the Arab World and ambiguous responses to those changes from American news agencies. I am particularly interested in the way the revolutions contravened longstanding Orientalist assumptions about the incompatibility of Arab culture or Islam with democracy (as democracy has been envisioned and defined by a Eurocentric conception of modernity). I have studied numerous English-language print and visual media. While there has been no homogenous form of representation by those media of events in the Arab World, I have found consistent tropes and narratives throughout the reportage of corporate sources.

Before I enter into an analysis of those tropes and narratives, I want to clarify my use of terminology and my methodology. I refer to the recent politics of the Arab World not as "the Arab Spring" or as an "uprising" because the term "revolution" connotes more accurately to the general spirit of the popular protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and other countries. In Tunisia and Egypt, popular protests led to the usurpation of standing dictators, a feat that is revolutionary in both intent and outcome. While an uprising can certainly lead to a coup-d'état, the term "uprising" doesn't adequately describe a systematic desire for widespread socio-economic reform by a significant portion (perhaps even a majority) of the citizens of any nation-state. The word "revolution" as used here, then, identifies a coalescence of rampant protest with concrete demands for political change and social justice. While the nature and performance of the Arab revolutions differ according to location, leadership, scale, and economy, they have all been revolutionary in two senses: 1) they seek to undermine an established social, political, and plutocratic order; and 2) they are willing to subject and be subject to violence in order for wide-scale transition to occur.

I exclude from this description of revolution organized political parties funded by state actors. While such parties and outside influences have been evident and present serious complications to any analysis of upheaval in the Arab World, I am more interested in the organic elements of revolutionary fervor among the citizens of the affected nations and the spontaneous communities they erected for strength and solidarity. There are always complex and counterrevolutionary geopolitical contingencies embedded in protest, but rather than tracing them out I prefer to explore representation and discourse. I focus on the spirit of the protests as genuine democratic movements (no matter their shortcomings and failures) that shocked the American public and its mainstream commentators. In corporate American media, Arab protestors have been lionized as heroic, bastardized as malicious, or simply ignored, depending on where an uprising took place. Even when lionized, however, the protestors have been envisaged through problematic tropes by most corporate media. We therefore cannot speak of homogeneous or even consistent representation.[1]

My identification of a "corporate American media" is comprehensive but narrow. I examine those media primarily in the United States, for such media remain influential despite the recent decentralization of traditional news and opinion sources. The United States also has vested geopolitical interests in the outcome of any social change in the Arab World (as elsewhere), which influences the tenor and content of media coverage. In this usage, "corporate" overlaps with what people generally consider to be mainstream media: network and cable news channels, major-circulation newspapers, and high-traffic websites (usually owned by conglomerates, such as *Slate* by Microsoft, or the websites of the television channels themselves). I prefer the term "corporate media" because it emphasizes the coalescence of so-called mainstream thought with elite corporate interests. There is a hegemonic symbiosis between what news sources consider mainstream—i.e., widely acceptable, inoffensive—and the control exerted by corporations (who own nearly all mainstream media) on social thought contingent on maximizing their ability to consolidate power and exploit that power for profit. Corporate media are therefore a direct participant in American state policies, as well as informational emissaries of the state policies that most benefit them.

General Observations

There are no consistent representations of the Arab revolutions. The political machinations of those revolutions preclude accurate or comprehensive reportage. The vast differences of organization, tactics, goals, and discourses of the Arab (and ethnic minority) protestors make it impossible to subsume the recent politics of the Arab World to a singular narrative. In the realm of

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1. The ezine *Jadaliyya* has had consistently strong coverage of the Arab revolutions. <www.jadaliyya.com>.

representation, though, one can detect distinctive patterns in the discursive and imagistic choices of corporate American media. First of all, those media represent events in the Arab World from the point of view of American state interests (which is to say, the point of view of Western corporate interests). If no specific benefit to American state interests is apparent in the possible outcomes of a given uprising, corporate media simply invent an advantageous potential result and report from that standpoint.

As the Arab revolutions spread and in some cases developed into violent quagmires, the tone and tenor of American media changed. In the beginning, when events in Tunisia led to the revolt against Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, a tenor of international optimism influenced corporate media coverage in the United States, as the courage of the protestors overwhelmed strict geopolitical interests. Later, as Western nations contemplated military intervention and as revolutionary populations formed discrete parties and international alliances, corporate media assumed a more traditional perspective highlighting state actors, economic possibilities, and American market considerations. By autumn of 2011, the cautious goodwill corporate American media exhibited for Arab protesters declined and was replaced by recapitulation of United States government talking points.

Corporate American media have consistently offered particular narratives about the Arab World during the period under review in this essay, most of those narratives long in use but some of them new (or altered to reflect changed dynamics). The following are of note:

- The dynamics of media coverage do not merely illuminate American perceptions of and political interests in the Arab World, but also reinforce a preponderance of enduring American self-images (as disseminated from the point of view of the nation's economic and political elite). The self-images of import here conceptualize the United States as a timeless and natural space of opportunity and freedom, intuitive phenomena that are not alien to American people as they are to Arabs. American political righteousness has been a dominant theme in corporate media from the start of the Arab revolutions. This righteousness has been manifested through a particular discourse of Western modernity having been imported to, and finally accepted by, Arab societies.

- Corporate American media allotted coverage to certain uprisings at much different rates. Protests in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, for instance, were underreported or ignored, while those in Syria were highlighted. These disparities have been determined by whether a particular tyrant was a United States client or enemy.

- A consistent point of view has been the effect of Arab revolutions on Israel. More specifically, corporate media commentators have expressed little interest in the well-being of Arab societies, instead focusing on how events would affect the well-being of Israel. Such expressions of Zionism

overwhelmed the understanding of Arab political issues in their indigenous contexts.

- The beginning of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt represent the first time since 9/11 (and largely extending to before 9/11) that Arabs weren't systematically portrayed as barbarians, terrorists, or imbeciles.[2] While it cannot be said that the portrayal of Arabs has been uniformly negative in corporate American media, such portrayal has been negative as a systematic phenomenon. We must now take into account how the altered representations following the protests in Tunisia have complicated what had until then been a remarkably predictable representational formula.[3]

- Even when corporate media evinced sympathy and admiration for Arab revolutions, there was no notable acknowledgment or retraction of the basic Orientalist formula of Arab culture and Islam being incompatible with democracy. (In the Orientalist formula, it is worth noting, "democracy" is a highly coercive word that coheres to Eurocentric notions of modernity as well as to longstanding imperialist practices.) In turn, those formulas remained intact despite the changed tone (from general hostility to grudging respect) of media conceptions of the Arab people.

There have been other forms of representation in American media, but the ones I highlight above account for distinctive patterns, which I examine in detail below. Let us now take a look at each pattern in detail.

The Influence of Western Modernity

About the recent Arab revolutions, Joseph Massad points out:

> As for the larger Arab context, those who call what has unfolded in the last year in the Arab World as an Arab "awakening" are not only ignorant of the history of the last century, but also deploy Orientalist arguments in their depiction of Arabs as a quiescent people who put up with dictatorship for decades and are finally waking up from their torpor. Across the Arab world, Arabs have revolted against colonial and local tyranny every decade since World War I. It has been the European colonial powers and their American heir who have stood in their way every step of the way and allied themselves with local dictators and their families (and in many cases handpicking such dictators and putting them on the throne).[4]

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2. Edward Said (1981) examined these phenomena decades ago.

3. The presence of Zionist imperatives is crucial in this context. For a comprehensive example, see further Petras (2006).

4. Joseph Massad, "Arab Revolts—Past and Present," *Al-Jazeera English*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011111810259215940.html>. 18 Nov. 2011.

Massad's point is crucial to any analysis of corporate media coverage, for it identifies the basic assumptions on which much of that coverage is modeled and identifies the fallacious perceptions of a stagnant Arab culture. Even in the moments that commentators expressed admiration for Arabs, they did so in a framework conceptualizing revolutionary activity as an accident of history.

Samir Amin offers another germane observation:

> The apparent 'stability of the regime,' boasted of by successive US officials like Hillary Clinton, was based on a monstrous police apparatus counting 1,200,000 men (the army numbering a mere 500,000) free to carry out daily acts of criminal abuse. The imperialist powers claimed that this regime was "protecting" Egypt from the threat of Islamism. This was nothing but a clumsy lie. In reality the regime had perfectly integrated reactionary political Islam (on the Wahhabite model of the Gulf) into its power structure by giving it control of education, of the courts, and of the major media (especially television). The sole permitted public speech was that of the Salafist mosques, allowing the Islamists, to boot, to pretend to make up "the opposition." The cynical duplicity of the US establishment's speeches (Obama no less than Bush) was perfectly adapted to its aims.[5]

Amin points to the inveterate meddling of the United States (and to a lesser degree Western Europe) that went virtually unreported in the past and has been largely ignored in the present. This meddling, replete with physical in addition to economic violence, has played a crucial role in the repressiveness of Arab societies against which the uprisings directed their anger.

The issue of political Islam becomes especially important in this paradigm, for it is usually Islam that provides both the pretext for and opposition to American interference in the Arab World. Islam is the most explicit cultural failure of Arabs according to an entire class of politicians and political elite. Arabs are unworthy of democracy even if they were programmed culturally for it because Islam, the enemy of modernity, is the only possible outcome of unmonitored Arab agency, a proposition untenable to US political interests in the region. Yet, as Amin points out, it is the American support of various Islamist movements and dictatorial regimes that has enabled the peoples of the Arab World to identify a distinctive opponent in the very discourses of freedom uttered by American officials and repeated by corporate media.[6] Such ironies have been central to the tenor and language of those media ever since the Arab peoples destroyed the narratives into which they had been tidily arranged.

When corporate media were forced to confront these venerable narratives of Arab stagnation, they often compressed Arab protestors into a Western paradigm of nonviolent resistance (a paradigm derived, ironically, from non-Western figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi, wherein such figures

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5. Samir Amin, "2011: An Arab Springtime?" *Pambazuka News*. <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/73902>. 6 June 2011.

6. See further McAlister 2005 and Little 2002.

are reduced to caricatures of their actual philosophies of resistance).[7] The Arabs, it seems, were coming to their senses, rejecting the violence and barbarity of their culture in favor of the enlightened modernity so laboriously exported to them by Western benefactors. This tendency to conceptualize an Arab awakening inspired by erstwhile American values coalesced around the peculiar figure of Gene Sharp, a retired American professor whose little-known book, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, became a *cause celebre* among corporate media. Sharp, proclaimed the BBC, is "the man now credited with the strategy behind the toppling of the Egyptian government."[8] The BBC's passive voice precludes accurate identification of exactly who is providing Sharp credit for toppling Hosni Mubarak. The BBC actually references other corporate media.

Under the headline, "Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in Revolution," the *New York Times* proclaimed of Sharp that "for decades, his practical writings on nonviolent revolution — most notably 'From Dictatorship to Democracy,' a 93-page guide to toppling autocrats, available for download in 24 languages — have inspired dissidents around the world, including in Burma, Bosnia, Estonia and Zimbabwe, and now Tunisia and Egypt."[9] Sasha Abramsky, writing in *The Nation*, offers a similar observation: "The force of Sharp's emancipatory thinking was on full view in Egypt last month, as a population long thought to be too passive to throw off the yoke of tyranny finally found its voice."[10]

Abrasmky's passage illuminates the troublesome assumptions about Arab societies underlying corporate media coverage. The term "passive" recalls the venerable notion that Arabs lack agency and, based on the stagnation of their culture, are destined to acquiesce to the rule of tyrants (a notion that handsomely serves US interests in the region). Abramsky's formulation of an Arab population "finally" finding its voice validates Joseph Massad's argument that corporate media recycle the belief that Arab populations have suddenly arose from an ahistorical slumber, a radical cultural shift that can be attributed to the influence of Western scholars of nonviolence.[11] Western modernity remains the standard of revolution and supposedly provides revolutionaries their inspiration. Plenty of evidence suggests, however, that it is the very

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7. Gandhi's writings are more complex than liberal Western activists often suggest. A useful collection is Dalton 1996.

8. Ruaridh Arrow, "Gene Sharp: Author of the Nonviolent Revolution Rulebook," *BBC*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12522848>. 21 Feb. 2011.

9. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?pagewanted=all>. 16 Feb. 2011.

10. Sasha Abramsky, "Gene Sharp: Nonviolent Warrior." *The Nation*. <http://www.thenation.com/article/159265/gene-sharp-nonviolent-warrior>. 16 Mar. 2011.

11. The seminal text these commentators overlook is Antonius 1939.

construct of Western modernity and its reliance on dictatorship for economic supremacy, against which the Arab peoples have revolted, with a keen awareness of the interplay of Western democracy with Eastern autocracy.

Inconsistent Coverage

While it would appear obvious to anybody who follows patterns of corporate American media that those media highlight events and regions that prove instrumental to the practice of American imperialism, it is important to assess the discourses that rationalize such inconsistent coverage. In the case of Arab revolutions, those discourses reveal the extent to which corporate media convey the interests of the American government. They do so not only by uncritically repeating official government statements, but also by presenting limited information based on the proclivities of the economic elite, a tacit form of politicking passing itself off as objectivity.

The New York Times, for instance, devoted intense coverage to unrest in Syria, an enemy of the United States (though such alliances are never as clear-cut as government officials would have it). If we compare the coverage of unrest in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, strong American allies, during the same period, we see that the two countries, which brutalized protest, were virtually ignored beyond their diplomatic roles in the Arab World.[12] Repression in Bahrain was comparable in brutality to that of Syria, yet Syrian violence against civilians received disproportionate coverage.

The same is true of Saudi Arabia. A search of *The New York Times* online archive between September 20, 2011, and December 20, 2011, returned 67 articles on "Saudi Arabia unrest," many of them relaying Saudi officials' responses to events in Syria and elsewhere in the Arab World. A search of the same period with the terms "Syria unrest" turned up 169 results, nearly all of them implicating president Bashar al-Assad's repression. When I changed the search terms, the results were similar. "Syria repression" netted 32 results, while "Saudi Arabia repression" netted 11, nine of them actually about al-Assad's heavy hand in Syria. At *The Washington Post*, a 90-day search of "Syria unrest" from mid-September to mid-December, 2011, resulted in 14 articles, while a search of "Saudi Arabia unrest" from the same period returned 6 articles, none of them about protest in Saudi Arabia. "Syria repression" turned up 10 articles; "Saudi Arabia repression" came up empty.

At both publications, searches of "Bahrain unrest" and "Bahrain repression" produced scant material. *The New York Times* ran 39 articles under the search "Bahrain unrest" (as opposed to the 169 for Syria), around half having little to do with citizen protest in Bahrain. For the search "Bahrain repression," 10

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12. For more information on the Bahrani and Saudi repression of protestors, see further the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, <www.bahrainrights.org/en/>; and the Amnesty International report, *Saudi Arabia: Repression in the Name of Security*, available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE23/016/2011/en>.

results came up (as opposed to 32 for Syria), two of them op-ed pieces and another letter to the editor. *The Washington Post* returned 11 results for "Bahrain unrest" (as opposed to 14 for Syria, an improvement over *The New York Times*). For "Bahrain repression," the paper ran 8 articles (as opposed to 10 for Syria). *The Washington Post*, then, devoted more attention to Bahrain than did *The New York Times*, but practically ignored Saudi suppression. The multitudinous roles of Saudi Arabia in the affairs of all Arab nations—as overt and covert funding source, military ally, religious influence, and so forth—was largely unmentioned and unanalyzed by corporate American media in general.

To guard against the possibility of compromised results based on disparate vocabulary, in both searches I changed the terminology from "unrest" to "protest," "oppression," "suppression," and "uprising," and found comparable percentages. I also searched "Saudi" instead of "Saudi Arabia" and provided alternate transliterations of "Bahrain" (Bahrayn, Bahrein) without discovering any changes. Other major newspapers and broadcast websites covered the Arab revolutions with disparities nearly identical to those of *The New York Times*. A survey of corporate media during the first year of the Arab revolutions will reveal a consistent pattern of such tendentious points of view wherein self-assuredness ostensibly indicates an objective standard.

The New York Times and *Washington Post* betray tendentiousness in other ways. Both publications heavily supported the uprising against Muamar Ghadhafi in Libya and editorialized in favor of NATO intervention, repeating those calls for intervention in Syria. Yet the papers rarely interrogated their own ethical and editorial inconsistencies. Israeli brutality against civilians, for instance, has never warranted calls for foreign intervention in either publication, nor has either publication called for intervention in Saudi Arabia despite vicious repression of most forms of activism. Indeed, corporate media had long supported the same Arab dictators they were later forced to disclaim, a pattern in strict keeping with the public sentiments of the American government. It is worth noting that corporate media almost universally supported the Saudi military intervention in Bahrain.

Israel as Sacred Icon

Corporate media's lack of interest in Israeli state repression is counterbalanced by their intense anxiety about the safety and security of Israeli society. In turn, their coverage of the Arab revolutions was influenced by concern for Israel, which quickly reestablished Israel's status as a sacred icon of American modernity. The inclusion of Israel in discussion of Arab revolutions isn't apocryphal, for in corporate American media Israel is the primary subject of importance in the Middle East. The outset of the Arab revolutions would do nothing to change that reality.

Expressions of concern for the well-being of Israel (state and society) reinforce the elemental binary of Western modernity and Arab barbarity. Certain assumptions, sometimes stated but often implicit, become evident when that

binary is deployed: an Arab World not under the careful control of handpicked leaders is not to be trusted; the Arabs are too irrational and threatening to be left to their own devices; the Arabs, of less strategic import to the West than Israelis, are therefore inherently less valuable as human subjects; the need of Western capital to supplement the interests of the economic elite is more important than the well-being of the Arab societies that must suffer under the rule of dictators who facilitate financial injustice (a form of reasoning that corporate American media also use in relation to the United States populace); and the expansionist imperatives of Israel supersede anti-imperialist sentiment central to movements for Arab self-determination.

Although anxiety about the revolutions' effects on Israel arose mainly in opinion pieces, it was evident in news coverage, as well. Ethan Bronner of the *New York Times*, for example, complained in an article titled "Beyond Cairo Embassy Attack, Israel Senses Wider Siege" that "as the months of Arab Spring have turned autumnal, Israel has increasingly become a target of public outrage. Some here say Israel is again being made a scapegoat, this time for unfulfilled revolutionary promises."[13] Jeffrey Goldberg evinces the same anxiety through disgusted answers to his own rhetorical question: "Why, after decades of quiet, has the Egypt-Israel border become so tumultuous? Two reasons: The interim Egyptian government has lost control over the Sinai since the revolution, and Gaza, which borders the Sinai, has been transformed by Hamas into a weapons-importing and terror-exporting mini-state."[14]

In a piece of news analysis, "Arab Spring Spells Uncertainty for Israel," Jeremy Bowen of the BBC allowed his concern for Israel to overwhelm his objectivity. In assessing the developments in the Arab World vis-à-vis Israel, he confessed, "In fact—and I am shuddering a little as I write these words, as I have written them so often before—the signs are not good."[15] At CNN, the "regional tsunami" instigated by the revolutions has produced frightening consequences:

Israel's closest partner in the Arab world, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, is now on trial. The military council that replaced him has distanced itself from Israel and allowed space to popular opposition to the peace treaty between the two countries. While Israel sheds no tears about Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's problems, it is apprehensive about what might follow should

13. Ethan Bronner, "Beyond Cairo Embassy Attack, Israel Senses Wider Siege," *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/world/middleeast/11israel.html?pagewanted=all>. 10 Sept. 2011.

14. Jeffrey Goldberg, "Israel Surrounded as Arab Spring Turns Darker," *Bloomberg*. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-09-13/israel-surrounded-as-arab-spring-darkens-commentary-by-jeffrey-goldberg.html>. 12 Sept. 2011.

15. Jeremy Bowen, "Arab Spring Spells Uncertainty for Israel," *BBC*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/9573523.stm>. 27 Aug. 2011.

unrest eventually unseat him. Instability in Syria would inevitably spill into Lebanon, where Hezbollah has tens of thousands of missiles aimed at Israel.[16]

Similar sentiments pervade corporate American (and British) media, along with many independent liberal sources such as *The Nation* and *Huffington Post*.

As the revolutions began in Tunisia and Egypt, corporate media avoid articulating such anxieties, though Israel was nevertheless a topic of conversation. Rather than speculate about how Israel might cope with hostile, unrestrained Arab hordes, those media expressed tacit anxiety by reassuring audiences that the burgeoning revolutions lacked a foreign policy component (code for: not hostile to Israel). In February, 2011, Thomas Friedman declared, "For anyone who spent time in Tahrir Square these last three weeks, one thing was very obvious: Israel was not part of this story at all."[17] Ten months later he would write, "Israel is facing the biggest erosion of its strategic environment since its founding. It is alienated from its longtime ally Turkey. Its archenemy Iran is suspected of developing a nuclear bomb. The two strongest states on its border—Syria and Egypt—are being convulsed by revolutions. The two weakest states on its border—Gaza and Lebanon—are controlled by Hamas and Hezbollah."[18]

Friedman's change of perspective essentially mirrors the evolution of the corporate commentariat. The excitement and magnitude of the ostensibly spontaneous protests in Tunisia led to guarded support and proclamations that Arab democracy would not necessarily lead to anti-Israeli sentiment. As the revolution in Tunisia progressed, however, and spread to fellow Arab nations, commentators realized that democratic Arab sentiment is largely opposed to Zionism—a sentiment effectively suppressed by dictatorial leaders—and emended their viewpoints to reflect that realization. The articles proclaiming the supposedly "non-political" nature of the Tunisian revolt gave way to concerned speculation about the true intentions of Arab protestors, a concern often expressed in a coded fashion as fear of the threat of "Islamism." In fact, the most common story vis-à-vis Israel after the Tunisian revolutionaries overthrew dictator Zine El Abidin Ben Ali was about ten—or twenty, depending on the source—Tunisian Jews being rescued to Israel.[19] Not long after, a

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16. Tim Lister and Kevin Flower, "Israel Faces 'Regional Tsunami' Set off by Arab Spring," *CNN*. <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-09-22/middleeast/world_meast_israel-arab-spring_1_defense-minister-ehud-barak-mavi-marmara-israeli-government?_s=PM:MIDDLEEAST>. 22 Sept. 2011.

17. Thomas Friedman, "Postcard from Cairo, Part 2," *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/opinion/13-friedman-Web-cairo.html?pagewanted=all>. 13 Feb. 2011.

18. Thomas Friedman, "The Arab Awakening and Israel," *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/30/opinion/israel-and-the-arab-awakening.html>. 29 Nov. 2011.

19. This rescue operation was inherently suspicious, not least because Tunisian Jews later spoke strongly against an appeal by Israeli Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom to emigrate to Israel. Avraham Chiche, a Tunisian Jewish leader, responded to Shalom's appeal by proclaiming,

proposed anti-normalization and boycott amendment to the new Tunisian constitution raised the anxiety level of the commentators. The concern about Israel's well-being would pervade corporate media coverage as the Arab revolutions unfolded.

The New Arab Image and Unrevised Orientalism

The improved image of Arabs in corporate American media is perhaps the most interesting dimension of their coverage. A host of venerable Orientalist tropes, discussed above, have dominated corporate media coverage of the Arab World for many decades. While there have been favorable pop culture and news images of Arabs, such favorable images were never systematic; they were either isolated or discussed with a particular subtext (to reinforce ideals of liberal tolerance, for example, or to implicitly agitate for imperialist ventures; in both cases, Arabs end up as idealized subjects lacking agency and requiring some form of Western patrimony).

The revolutions would become sources of inspiration to Americans, however. Eager to capitalize on the popular reception of Arab protests among the American populace, politicians both liberal and conservative expressed verbal support for Arab democracy (though their actions in office had long indicated much different commitments). The influence of the Egyptian revolution was especially strong in the American polity. When mass political action began in Madison, Wisconsin, in February 2011, protestors and commentators connected that action to Egypt.

For the first time in decades, perhaps ever, the Arabs were help up by Americans as sources of inspiration, as people to be emulated. Article titles and protest slogans illuminated how deeply the example of Egypt became to Americans displeased with their own government. The Madison action, for instance, produced "We Are Tahrir Square"; "The Midwestern Tahrir"; "A Child of Tahrir Square"; "Wisconsin: America's Tahrir Square"; and "Where's Our Tahrir Square?" This sort of internationalizing of domestic protest would be repeated, though to a lesser degree, during the many occupy protests throughout the latter half of 2011.

The depiction of Arabs as inspirational rather than as existential threats to modernity was unprecedented at a level more profound than mere mimicry. Evoking Arabs as positive examples constituted a serious reversal of the tenets of liberal modernity, in which white civility is to be exported to those less developed (intellectually and economically). Such evocation was also a comeuppance for liberal activists in the United States who, even in ostensible

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"Silvan Shalom needs to mind his own business and let us choose to live where we want to live, instead of making publicity statements for Israel." See further, "Tunisian Jews to Israel: We're Staying Here, Thanks!" *New Jewish Resistance.*
<http://newjewishresistance.org/article/tunisian-jews-israel-were-staying-here-thanks>. 10 Dec. 2011.

support of Arabs, had long refused to acknowledge legitimate humanity in them.[20] We have never seen a moment in the United States in which Arab protest (against any institution) has been humanized to the point of emulation. This is not to say that activists in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the United States employed the same physical, political, organizational, ethical and communicative strategies as the protestors in the Arab World. In fact, there were serious strategic differences, too many to recount. I speak instead of a form of discursive and symbolic emulation.

The metaphorical uses of Tahrir Square in the United States illuminate numerous discourses of note. In particular they enable us to identify and examine fundamentally ambiguous self-images among the guardians of American modernity and the contradictory narratives of sustaining democracy within an imperialist economy of free-market capitalism. The very notion of a freedom protected by modernity relies on assumptions that apportion humans into disparate moral and intellectual categories. Thus the metaphor of Tahrir Square deconstructs the ideal of freedom without acknowledging its failure to historicize its own meanings and connotations. Once it was held up as an ideal in the United States, Tahrir Square was no longer a physical space hosting an actual revolution but an artifact of American imperialism, appropriated into a geography whose codification of modernity required Egypt to sacrifice itself to America's domination of liberty.

Arabs, of course, could not remain idiots or terrorists if their behavior was suddenly to inspire rather than disgust. Corporate American media rarely undertake systematic depiction based on organic or decontextualized methodologies. While their coverage of Arab revolutions was calibrated toward the interests of the plutocracy they help comprise, it is probably unfair to completely attribute the favorable images of Arabs to cynicism. Much of it, certainly at least some of it, was inevitable—that is to say, the bravery of Arab protestors and the righteousness of their desire to achieve freedom and self-determination would have been difficult to ignore or to dismiss as misplaced cultural angst. The Arabs, in this case, were in charge of their own destiny in terms of how they would be represented, though they could not totally move beyond the weight of a profoundly complex representational history in the United States.

The Tahrir Square metaphor ensured that Arabs were heroes for a moment in corporate American media. No matter how incomplete the media viewpoints of the Arab World, the altered tone in coverage represented a dramatic departure from the usual patrimonial tenor to which audiences had grown accustomed. In the United States, in which individuals and institutions across economic strata offer consent to corporate authority, a metaphor like Tahrir Square—even in its watered-down and bowdlerized incarnations—can only evince limited effectiveness before it is diffused by the established mores of corporate media. In turn, the Tahrir Square metaphor functioned only as long as it signified the

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20. I examine these matters in detail in Salaita 2009.

images of freedom as defined by corporate authority and not actual liberation from the strictures of corporate rule. The limitations of the Tahrir Square metaphor in the American polity illuminate the limitations of conceptualizing Arabs favorably in a political system in which imperialism in the Arab World is fundamental to the national interest.

The imperialism fundamental to the American national interest—a devious phrase highlighting the impulses of the ruling class—has helped create a complicated position for Arabs in post-revolution corporate media. Their revolutions have at least ensured that overconfident claims about the incompatibility of Arabs and democracy will need to be reconsidered and that American military strength cannot overpower the disorganized fact of popular sentiment. Even though analysis of corporate American media between the period of December, 2010, and November, 2011, illustrates a systematic form of positive representation of Arabs, classic Orientalist discourses remain entrenched in the United States. This lingering Orientalism is due in part to the demands of American foreign policy and the dialectic between historical racism and the current public mood. Corporate media omitted historical context for popular Arab displeasure or for the series of racist narratives about Arabs those media had codified over the course of decades.

As a result, the modes of Orientalism corporate media had exhibited remain intact and were often present even in moments in which Arabs were portrayed favorably. The construction of meaning through media is complex and contested, for media constantly undertake discursive and ethical revision even as they adhere to basic strategies and principles. (For example, corporate media continuously reexamine their policies on racial representation, but rarely challenge the structures on which racism has been created and sustained.) Neither commentators nor broadcasters reexamined the longstanding Orientalism of corporate media, which, despite the discursive changes attending coverage of the revolutions, remains unrevised. It would take more than uprisings, even ones the United States was forced by popular sentiment to support, to extricate the peoples of the Arab World from the construction of the media Arab. These narratives are entrenched in corporate media as a result of the imperialist practices underlying notions of American modernity. As Hamid Dabashi (2011: 9) puts it, "Something about being American demands saving the world even if that means destroying it."

Mahmood Mamdani offers a more elaborate version of this observation. He writes, "The modern political sensibility sees most political violence as necessary to historical progress." Mamdani uses this observation to raise his notion of Culture Talk, a way of translating foreign populations in the United States based on cultural determinism: "Culture Talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence" (2004: 17). Even though corporate media largely portrayed Arabs favorably upon the advent of the revolutions, the tradition of Culture Talk remained intact. I will not rehash the commonplaces of Culture Talk vis-à-vis Arabs here, as numerous scholars have examined them to great

effect. Instead, I offer an update of the major assumptions of Culture Talk upon the onset of the Arab revolutions:

- That Arabs are finally awakening to democracy

- That Arabs appreciate (and often seek) the guidance of a fundamentally benevolent United States

- That Arabs constantly have to guard against their inherent barbarity (i.e., their natural impulse toward political Islam)

- That Arabs in control of their own destiny are necessarily threatening

- That Arabs have been dormant throughout their history

- That Arabs attempt to enter into a modernity decontextualized from its invention and exportation by the West in general and the United States in particular

These assumptions permeate corporate media coverage of the Arab World. It would be nearly impossible to speculate about how such assumptions might be challenged or ameliorated, for the political and economic structures in which those media operate give the assumptions their mass appeal as natural and inevitable.

Conclusion

The Arab revolutions of 2010-11 produced a new set of media images for scholars to explore. The findings I present here are incomplete, as any one study will be. It is impossible to account fully for the range of images corporate American media present vis-à-vis Arabs (along with Central Asians, South Asians, and Muslims in general, groups with whom corporate media often conflate Arabs). The most noteworthy development has been the favorable portrayal of Arabs and how those portrayals have altered our understanding of the traditional demonization of Arabs. The complex relationship of corporate American media with the Arab World is ongoing, of course, and it is probably not a good idea to attempt prognostication; it is better to analyze the materials we actually have on hand.

What we now have on hand is an enrichment of American discourses on the Arab World. This is not to say that a sea-change in representations of Arabs in the United States has occurred, or even that Arabs find themselves in a more favorable position in corporate media. Instead, I suggest that socio-political circumstances in the Arab World forced a revision of typical corporate media paradigms. One element of corporate media coverage that has not changed is their promotion of rightwing Israeli policy. The main changed element is a partial acquiescence to the infectious energy of the revolutions. As the revolutions progress and stabilize, and as the counterrevolutions (many

supported by the United States) intensify, the tone and tenor of corporate media coverage will evolve, but based on that coverage to this point, it is prudent to assume that those media will retain a basic framework of interpretation and analysis.

This framework, as I illustrate above, is attached to the imperatives of American foreign and domestic policies. As a result, corporate media coverage of the Arab revolutions has been inconsistent and fraught with assumptions about the eminence of Western modernity. We learn more, in other words, about American sensibilities than we do about the Arab World in monitoring corporate media coverage of the Arab revolutions. The main thing to be taken from this learning process is the desire for continued American management of the Arab World. Corporate American media do not report news so much as articulate the anxieties of imperialist regulation. The Arab revolutions show that in moments of chaos, those anxieties seek comfort in the sureties of an overconfident conventional wisdom.

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A politics of non-recognition? Biopolitics of
Arab Gulf worker protests in the year of uprisings

Ahmed Kanna

Introduction

The Arab region is undergoing a potentially world-historical transformation. The Tunisian street vendor Muhammad Bouazizi's self-immolation, following mistreatment by a state functionary in late 2010, sparked a deluge of populist anger and activism that has toppled the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, soon to be followed by street demonstrations and battles across the region.[1] The analogy has been made between these events and the Prague Spring of 1968, both with its hopes for popular challenges of illegitimate state power, and its warnings about the cunning and brutality of such power arranged against popular movements.[2] Yet along with these mass acts of resistance there have been others, arguably more modest in their aims and undeniably less noticed by the world media. For years, workers, predominantly South Asians, have been taking to the streets in the United Arab Emirates and other countries of the Arab Gulf. What have these protests been about and why have they been ignored? How might they inform future scholarship on the Gulf, on urban and cultural geography, and on activism?

In this essay, I offer some explanations of why these uprisings have been marginalized in the discussions of the "year of uprisings," 2011, in which some

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[1] This essay is an expansion of Kanna 2011b. I have benefited immensely from the engagement with another version of the essay by panelists and discussants at the plenary session on the 2011 Arab uprisings, American Anthropological Association, Montreal, which was organized by Julia Elyachar, Farha Ghannam, and Jessica Winegar. The comments of Steve Caton were also tremendously helpful. My thanks also to Beena Ahmad, Fahad Bishara, and Nelida Fuccaro for their engagement of prior versions of the essay. Magid Shihade's editorial guidance on this version of the essay has also been invaluable. My thanks to him as well.

[2] This sentence, which I wrote in May of 2011, seems to resonate especially with the unfolding of events in Egypt, where the very hopeful events culminating in the toppling of Mubarak in early 2011 have transitioned into a much more unclear if not ominous period in which the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) has sought, with some vicious success, to divert and undermine the democratic energies of the uprisings by continuing and even intensifying Mubarak-era police state practices. Elections held in December 2011, the time of this writing, yielded a striking, if predictable, victory for the Muslim Brotherhood, who in coalition with a Salafist bloc, received a majority of the vote. The timing of the elections was, however, contested by secular and other opponents of the Brotherhood (and of Mubarak's former NDP) on the grounds that this timing disproportionately advantaged the already very well-organized Brotherhood and NDP. At the time this article was submitted to *Interface,* the Egyptian military under the command of Tantawi had just brutally put down another round of protests centered on Tahrir Square in Cairo, killing several people and injuring many others. State responses to the uprisings in Bahrain and Syria have been perhaps even more brutal, the future trajectory there still very uncertain. In Libya, the Gaddafi regime responded similarly, but his opponents, aided by a NATO bombing campaign, toppled him. Only in Tunisia is there some semblance of stability, with elections returning a victory for the Islamist Ennahda Party.

observers have noted the transformation of the global arena into a "protest planet" (Cole 2011, Engelhardt 2011). While such observers point out resonances between protests, and underlying political-economic contexts of an emerging political consciousness, from Tunis, Cairo, and Manama to Madrid, London, New York, and Oakland, there is at least one assumption that needs to be recognized and reflected upon in this discourse, important as the discourse is in providing intelligibility to the justified waves of discontent spreading across the globe and in expressing excitement about and solidarity with them. There is a problematic way in which this discourse claims for the category of "uprising" a specific kind of uprising, the state-reformist uprising which aims at a rights-based political recognition by a state. Important though this is, and though it is arguably the dominant form that the uprisings of 2011 have taken, I argue in this essay that we should expand our definition of uprising to include activism that does not seek recognition of equal citizenship rights by a state. This in turn will commit us to think about linkages between citizen uprisings and uprisings by non-citizens, the latter often agitating for rights, such as economic remuneration, decent working conditions, and dignity, that are not necessarily tied to citizenship status or recognition. It will also commit us to look at the less palatable aspects of at least some citizen-rights uprisings, which have had the effect of further excluding the claims of non-citizens (Chen 2011).

Moreover, the novelty of the activism of 2011 (implicit, after all, in the word "uprising") tends to be overemphasized in this genre. This can have pernicious consequences, as in the United States, where the alleged novelty of the Occupy Movements ends up marginalizing the long, continuous, and arduous path of reform and radicalism blazed by minority and working-class activists, in turn privileging the voices and positions of middle-class, white actors. In fact, activism is usually an ongoing process, whether in Cairo or New York or elsewhere.

Long histories and traditions of activist practice have in some cases – Cairo being an excellent example – helped to prepare the ground for the 2011 uprisings (Elghobashy 2011). In some cases, as in ethnic-minority activism in the United States, this work has often had both broader, more radical, and more concrete agendas than merely expressing the meliorative reformist voices of the "99 percent" (a rather homogenizing term, after all). In contexts such as the Arab Gulf, uprisings and activism have been both, as in the case of Bahrain and Oman and as the protest planet discourse acknowledges, about equal citizenship rights, but also often not about this at all, as the case I will discuss here will show. We should not assume, in other words, that the uprisings of 2011, or uprisings anytime, are only about what some have called a "recognitive" politics, in which the aim of protesters is to secure abstract equal citizenship rights, thus recognition as full citizens, by a state.[3] The types of protests I discuss here are

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[3] I borrow the terms "recognitive" and "non-recognitive" from the comments made by anthropologist Suad Joseph on the panel on the anthropology of subjectivity in the MENA region, organized by Sherine Hafez for the 2011 meetings of the Middle East Studies Association. But the concept of "non-recognitive" politics has been pioneered by scholars such

largely "non-recognitive." They seek not citizenship rights, but rather, economic rights. Indeed, these uprisings seem to want, at most, a *limited* recognition by the state, the recognition that that they are *not* citizens. In seeking such limited recognition, workers communicate a desire for narrowly defined non-citizen rights carrying specific non-citizen obligations in a country and to a state and society of which they are not citizens.

Biopolitics, Space/Spatialization

In this essay I try to articulate in a general and preliminary way the thinking and rethinking I have been doing in relation to issues of space, urbanism, and citizenship in the Arab Gulf since my earlier forays into the region in the period 2002 – 2007. In particular, I see the case of urban space in the Arab Gulf as a productive site from which to develop ethnographic anthropological and cultural-geographic projects on kinds of subjectivity and subjectivation not entirely or even significantly attached to citizenship rights-based, recognitive politics.

Rather, as I suggest in my concluding thoughts, the case of the Arab Gulf brings to light in a striking way Agambenian notions of biopolitics as a crucial process of modern spatial subjectivity/subjectivation.[4] As both Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (Agamben 1998) and Foucault's recently published (in English) lectures on biopolitics and security (Foucault 2007, Foucault 2008) show, politics in (Western) modernity is dominated by an increasing emphasis on the governance both of individual bodies and of populations. As is well-known, Foucault has argued for a shift from an agentive, state-centered, and repressive framing of power, to a notion of power that is concerned with the productive capacities of individual bodies and populations, a type of power that is, thus, emergent from the social arena of discourses and practices.

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as Aihwa Ong and Monisha Das Gupta. See, for example, Das Gupta 2006. As an example of the "recognitive" assumptions of writing on the 2011 uprisings, see the recent essay by the blogger Tom Engelhardt. He writes, for example, that "on the streets of Moscow in the tens of thousands, the protesters chanted: 'We exist!' ... Think of it as a simple statement of fact, an implicit demand to be taken seriously (or else), and undoubtedly an expression of wonder, verging on a question: '*We* exist?'" (Engelhardt 2011, emphasis in the original). Both recognition and the evocation of the awakening of a people, their consciousness of being a people, are explicit in this construction.

[4] There is a distinction that should be made, as anthropologist Omar al-Dewachi points out, between the concepts of subjectivity, rooted in a phenomenological tradition concerned with imagination, intuition, and perception, and notions of subjectivation, which emerge from the Butlerian and Foucauldian understanding of power as a matrix of subject-constitutive processes embedded in social contexts (personal communication, April 9, 2011). To my knowledge, the two traditions have not been synthesized in any sustained studies. While a promising theme of research, this is beyond the scope of this essay. It will suffice to claim, here, that processes of subjectivity and subjectivation are both at play in migrants' experiences of life in the Gulf. This will, I hope, at least be implicit in the examples to follow.

The role of space in both Foucault's oeuvre and that of Agamben is highly suggestive. It is, for example, implicitly at the center of and interwoven with Agamben's argument in *Homo Sacer.* Indeed, in critiquing Foucault's distinction between "political techniques" and "technologies of the self" and integrating them under the more general concept of the "structure of the exception," Agamben brings space more precisely into the analysis of power (Agamben 1998:5, 15). At the beginning of the book, for example, Agamben notes in a classic formulation that the establishment of sovereignty, of a juridical order, consists of imposing a "sovereign exception" (Agamben 1998:15 – 16). Quoting Carl Schmitt, Agamben points out that

> The exception appears in its absolute form when it is a question of creating a situation in which juridical rules can be valid ... There is no rule that is applicable to chaos. Order must be established for juridical order to make sense. A regular situation must be created, and sovereign is he who definitely decides if this situation is actually effective. All law is "situational law." The sovereign creates and guarantees the situation as a whole in its totality. (Agamben 1998:16)

This in turn implies an "ordering of space" (Agamben 1998:18 – 19): "What is at issue in the sovereign exception is not so much the control or neutralization of an excess as the creation and definition of the very space in which the juridico-political order can have validity" (Agamben 1998:19). Space can be understood in three senses in these passages. First, space plays a figurative role: it refers to the arena of life – juridical, territorial, institutional, etc. – delimited by the authority of sovereign. Second, space can be read in the imagined geography of order, an imagined geography that hinges upon distinctions between chaos and order, a "fundamental localization (*Ortung*), which ... traces a threshold (the state of exception) ... on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, enter into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible" (Agamben 1998:19). Third, space is meant more concretely, as place-making, as can be seen in Agamben's excursus on the camp as the signature place of modern sovereignty.

These three senses of the term "space" may be subsumed under a more general notion of spatialization, an active, imaginative constitution – *Ortung*, or "localization," in Agamben's terminology – of a space of the inside that is, in turn, fundamental to the mobilization of sentiments of national identity and belonging. The case of foreign workers in the Arab Gulf is, I am suggesting, an example of the "bare life" through which Gulf sovereignty, both in relation to state and to citizen, is constituted. For in the foreign worker can be seen the three senses of space through which sovereignty is constituted: the constitution of an arena of order, the imagined geography of the inside and of belonging, and of place-making.

It is often suggested that Arab Gulf countries are merely "tribes with flags," that they are somehow inauthentic nation-states. The national populations of these countries is much smaller than that of foreigners, a fact that puzzles not a few observers, who wonder how we can properly talk about a nation-state in the virtual absence (demographically, economically) of a national population. The urbanscapes of the cities of the region seem to supply further evidence. They

are fragmented, it is often said. Citizens live in their own exclusive enclaves and seldom interact with foreigners, domestic laborers in households excepted. Indeed, in the years I spent in Dubai, the overwhelming majority of the time I, as an American of Iraqi extraction and thus a foreigner, spent was with other foreigners. Only at the end of my longest field trip in 2003 – 2004, a period of ten months, was I invited to the home of my closest Emirati interlocutor, a visit that was fraught with awkwardness for the interlocutor's family and thus very brief. How can we speak of a nation-state the majority of whose economically productive population is foreign and in which foreigners are the most visible part of public space and the public sphere?

This is compounded by the fact that the "state" in the nation-state is actually a dual structure. The formal state with all its trappings – territorial claims, maps, flags, bureaucracies, etc. – is shadowed by a ruling- and notable-family patronage structure in which the more important business of the "state," primarily the arrangement of practical rights and duties of governors and governed, takes place. Not a few interlocutors told me that when they need specific things done, such as getting funding for a specific project, assistance with a health problem, navigating the bureaucracy of the formal state, etc., they attend the ruler's or urban notable's *majlis*, reception, for an audience with a potential patron (the ruler, a notable, etc.)

We therefore cannot speak of the political scientists' or juridical theorists' "state" in this context. Bureaucracy and centralization, the monopoly of violence and the state as an agentive headquarters of power, to adapt Foucault's terminology, are both too superficial and too static as framings of power. This is neither new nor insightful. After Foucault, this way of thinking has been evident in much important work on the state. What I am adding here is a small nuance to this tradition, specifically, that we should think of sovereignty not in terms of the static imagery and nomothetic sociology of national territories, maps, flags, coercive institutions and bureaucracies, but as a constitutive relation. The basic dimensions of sovereignty such as state power and the agency conferred by citizenship rights should be seen as situated and practical rather abstract and transcendent. Sovereignty *emerges,* it is a process. Moreover, it emerges, in this Agambenian reading, in constitutive acts in specific sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts.

Let me now turn to my empirical case before returning to a more speculative terrain. It is, to reiterate and expand upon my earlier point, the relationship between citizen and foreign worker, and in particular, the spatializing practice that helps to constitute this relationship – and not the institutions of governance or the space of governance in itself – that produces sovereignty in Gulf societies. From this spatializing process emerges the space of juridical order, the imagined geography of belonging, and place-making in Gulf urban contexts.

Worker Uprisings in the Arab Gulf

The states of the Arab Gulf region have been remarkably enveloped in the mists of myth and ideology, even in relation to other states in the region. To casual observers, they are the "popular" or, at least, "stable" states of the Arab region. Their ruling families, it is believed by many, have had a relatively easy time winning over their peoples with welfare gifts funded by petrodollars and successful, hegemony-building campaigns of cultural persuasion, as can be seen, for example, in staged displays of their authentic Arabness such as camel races, poetry competitions, and so-called folk dance and sports. This view is underpinned by an assumption that Gulf ruling families have been the only actors capable of bringing modernity to their "tribal" and "backward" peoples (Vitalis 2007).

In fact, as many examples from across the region show, the rise of the family-state in the Gulf was never uncontested. The story of Britain's great power game, with the Hashemites of the Hejaz and the Al Saud of the Najd as pawns, is well-known. The broad outlines of the alliance between U.S. oil corporations and the Al Saud soon after the founding of Saudi Arabia is as well. But stories about nationalist and worker resistance against the Al Saud, and comparable ones against dynasties such as the Al Sabah of Kuwait, the Al Maktoum of Dubai, and the Al Bu Said of Oman are hardly known at all.

It is important to point out that these uprisings, while often led by merchants, technocrats, or students, also often involved, instrumentally, the participation of workers. Saudi workers, for example, rebelled against the U.S.-based ARAMCO oil company's Jim Crow style policies in the 1940s and 1950s (Vitalis 2007). More recently, during the 2011 Arab uprisings, Omani workers in Salalah, Sohar, and Sur agitated en masse against stagnant wages, runaway inflation, and exclusion from jobs, which they accused the Qabus bin Sultan regime of handing out to favored Muscatis and foreigners (Escobar 2011). The regime met these protests with live ammunition and tear gas, killing a fifteen year-old boy. Meanwhile, in Bahrain we saw the Gulf's most serious threat to family-state power. The ruling Al Khalifa was saved by the Saudi Arabian army, which allowed the Bahraini royals enough space to pursue a sinister campaign of persecution of their opponents, real and perceived.

The recent Omani and Bahraini demonstrations, however, also shed light on how rare agitation by indigenous Gulf people has become in recent decades. The years 1930 to 1970 were ones of frequent and active opposition movements in the Gulf: from the merchant-led, reformist *majlis* (quasi parliamentary) movements in Kuwait and Dubai in the 1930s, to the anti-oil corporation movements in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the Dubai National Front, in the 1940s and 1950s, to the Arab Nationalist and Marxist liberation fronts of Bahrain and Oman in the 1960s and 1970s (Abdulla 1980, Al Rasheed 2002, Casey 2007, Davidson 2008, Halliday 2002, Kanna 2011a, Vitalis 2007).

Since the occupation of Mecca's Great Mosque in 1979, however, the countries of the Gulf, especially Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE as well as to some extent Saudi

Arabia, have been able to avoid mass uprisings and to utterly crush populist formations, largely because of demographics and oil (the exception here is relatively and oil-poor and ethno-religiously diverse Bahrain, where uprisings, especially by the politically and economically marginalized Shiʻa majority, have been frequent during this time period). Once oil was discovered, the Gulf states could create new dependent classes of citizens who were bought off with relatively generous handouts. In some parts of the Gulf, the hegemony of the oil-fueled family/security state was not entirely complete, such as in Bahrain with its institutionalized sectarianism and aforementioned marginalized Shiʻa majority, and Oman, with its particularly fraught history of Arab Nationalist and Marxist resistance movements. In general, however, with oil, the more unappealing kinds of labor on which any society depends—from construction to police work to the maintenance of urban infrastructures—was increasingly done by foreigners.

Foreign workers in the Gulf, while certainly marginalized and exploited, are far from the silent, passive wage slaves of popular imagination. During my own research on Dubai, at least nine worker protests broke out in just one month, September to October 2005. These protests ranged in size from about ten workers to about 1,000 workers. The Dubai protest by 1,500 "low-paid Asian workers," reported in March 2008 by Agence France Presse, was far from atypical in scale (Agence France Presse 2008). In the same year, the online *Epoch Times* reported a 3,000 worker strike in the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, east of Dubai (Jones 2011). Occasionally, however, strikes are much larger. For example, in late 2007 (according to the UAE daily, *The National*), approximately 30,000 workers struck for 10 days against the large Dubai construction firm Arabtec (Issa 2011).

The UAE, the country where I did most of my anthropological and urban field research, is in fact a revealing case study, because of all the Gulf states, it is seen as the most stable, a stereotype that only seems to have been buttressed by the relative lack of recent drama within its borders. In reality, however, worker unrest in the UAE is routine, and it paints a more complicated picture of so-called UAE stability. Let us look at only one month (again, not atypical for the UAE): this December 2010 to January 2011, the same time period of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. In December, writes journalist Stephen Jones, reporting for the *Epoch Times*, almost a thousand workers blocked a busy roundabout in an industrial area of Dubai (Jones 2011).[5]

The Risk and Forecast website (a far from politically-radical consultancy firm which analyzes political risks for global investment) reported another strike against Arabtec in the middle of January[6]: approximately 5,000 mostly South Asian workers, struck for nearly two weeks to demand a pay raise from about

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[5] Jones does not report against whom the strike was organized or in which specific neighborhood of Dubai it occurred.

[6] http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/united-arab-emirates/labour-demonstrations-as-dubai-deports-striking-asian-workers_649.html

$200 to about $250 per month. The website describes the UAE government's response—the deportation of 50 workers—as "alarming" and adds that "it undermines efforts that the country was moving towards modernizing its labour laws. Those have been described by international human rights groups as forms of modern slavery" (Risk and Forecast 2011). These strikes were no mere fleeting occurrence either. They were a common response by workers fed up with systematic, tacitly authorized expropriations of material welfare and dignity. As detailed by Human Rights Watch in a 2006 report on the UAE construction sector, foreign worker grievances do not only relate to wages, but result from the intersection of workers' structural vulnerability in the global political economy and local, on-the-ground practices by actors both in the UAE and in the workers' home countries (Human Rights Watch 2006, see also Human Rights Watch 2009). This is a situation which adds to non-payment of wages such practices as deceptive recruitment by labor agents, contract switching by employers, uninhabitable, isolated labor camps, and passport confiscation.[7]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the media, whether in the UAE or outside it, has tended to ignore workers, both South Asian and Arab (the latter also constituting a major part of the labor force in the UAE). While UAE English-language journalism tends to give migrant workers more coverage than does Arabic-language journalism, in both cases, the perspectives of workers are at most provided general and very brief outlet. Most of the copious newspaper and online journalism that I read from 2003 to 2007, when I was researching Dubai most intensively, in fact never bothered to talk to the workers involved in strikes. These journalists inevitably chose, instead, state or municipality officials—for example, the head of the police department's "human rights" division, an academic "expert," or a labor ministry official—who were somehow appointed to speak for the workers. Aside from the work of Human Rights Watch and a few scattered bloggers, workers are always represented as a homogeneous mass, and nearly always as a threat or a public nuisance. It should be added here that these journalists, "experts," et al., tended to represent themselves as pro-worker. While they saw themselves in this way, however, they seemed to share with the political opponents of labor a set of discursive assumptions in which the workers themselves are incapable of giving voice to their experiences.

Why this consensus, this doxa, of worker marginalization? Why the blithe assumption that workers cannot or should not speak for themselves? Why the

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[7] A more recent Human Rights Watch report, entitled "The Island of Happiness," details nearly identical structures and practices in the construction labor regime in Abu Dhabi. The report does note some improvements since the time of the 2006 report, especially in housing and access to healthcare. In spite of these, and assertions by the UAE labor ministry that reform is occurring, the report notes that "abuses continue, as the reforms have failed to address the fundamental sources of worker exploitation – employee-paid recruiting fees; visas controlled by employers; very low wages often far below what was promised workers in their home countries; and restrictions on organizing and no real access to legal remedies. As a result, the abuse of workers remains commonplace (Human Rights Watch 2009:1)

seemingly inevitable recourse to homogenizing them in both by self-described "pro-worker" journalism and anti-worker state and local actors?

Admittedly, while the mass actions in Egypt, Tunisia, and the other countries of the 2011 Arab uprisings have been political protests, the actions in the UAE are labor strikes. We should not conflate the two: the stakes in each kind of demonstration are different. The foreign workers of the UAE are citizens of another country and they will eventually return to their own countries. Yet while foreigners in the UAE do not envision being part of the imagined community, their protests nevertheless resonate in some important ways with those of the Arab uprisings (not least, those of the indigenous Gulf Arabs whose own voices and protests have been suppressed by the GCC family-states in response to the uprisings). Both the "Arab Spring" and Gulf worker actions are, broadly, about dignity and justice; both challenge the status quo of unaccountable family/security-states; and both are met with ferocious responses by those states. Yet, the Gulf worker actions are ignored or displaced from the center of discussions of contemporary activism. This is partly because, as mentioned above, these uprisings do not conform to the recognitive – political structure of their more well-known siblings from Madrid to Cairo to New York, etc. In the following, I delve more specifically into why the Gulf uprisings have been ignored, and conclude both with a reflection on the implications of this displacement and some thoughts on how to theorize the differences between the uprisings.

Migrants in the Gulf: A Double Bind

In the world in which we live—one where nation-states are the "natural" carriers and guarantors of individual rights—the relationship between citizen and nation-state is normalized. Claims by non-citizens on nation-states are not. While people obviously do make claims on nation-states of which they are not citizens, such a process is usually a complicated, uncertain, fraught proposition. It is, at least, indubitable that the juridical rights of non-citizens are almost always more limited than those of citizens in any given state. As Kuwait scholar Anh Nga Longva has put it, "from the perspective of capitalist and national logic, the political exclusion of expatriates rests on a double rationale which is widely and unquestioningly accepted [...] some criteria for exclusion are seen internationally as more acceptable than others." Exclusion upon the basis of citizenship "strikes most observers as a 'normal' state of affairs." It appears "rational and justifiable in our world of nation-states" (Longva 2005:118 – 119, see also Kanna 2011a:176). While taking nothing away from the democratic surge in the Arab countries, one has to admit that this nation-state logic does go a long way to explaining why Arab protests in Arab countries are celebrated while South Asian protests in Arab countries are ignored.

Second, in liberal Western media discourse, as alluded to earlier, only those protests aiming at reforming or toppling a state tend to be viewed as "political." While this has salutary effects, such as highlighting the fraught and contested

process of political legitimacy in the Arab states, a more problematic effect becomes evident in the marginalization or erasure of issues of class. While it would be unfair to critique the protest planet discourse as unaware of or unallied with class-based or status-based protests, and analytically inadmissible to clearly distinguish class and citizenship in the 2011 uprisings, it is fair to say that the protest planet discourse paints with too broad a brush, extrapolating a bundled notion class and citizenship as the normative spirit of the uprisings. Sometimes, class, status (e.g., subordinate foreigner or migrant worker) and citizenship can and should be clearly distinguished, and they often inform activism in complexly different ways. In the UAE, for example, reformist activism, anemic as it is, tends to come either from a nationalist or a pro-ruling dynasty perspective operating within a patronage-based, ethnocratic-citizenship doxa.[8] In this discursive formation, the ruling Arab ethne is territorialized as the normative subject of the nation and the national territory is ethnically constructed as Arab (Kanna 2011a, Longva 2005). Seldom, if at all, do struggles of citizens for reforms in prevailing autocratic political – economic arrangements make common cause with the struggles of working class foreigners.

The discourse of political rights as a function of national citizenship (Longva 2005:118) is made even more problematic when we consider how Gulf migrant workers, the majority of whom are South Asian, are entangled in complex webs of material and social structures, such as class and kinship, and cultural expectations such as familial obligations. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are major labor source nations for the Arab Gulf countries.

Sri Lanka, though perhaps an extreme case, is in not atypical. Ravaged by a 30-year-plus civil war, its rural economy in tatters, the island nation depends heavily on remittances from migrant workers. So do the other South Asian countries. This is both for economic reasons – a significant percentage of Sri Lanka's GDP is comprised of remittances – but also for social, cultural, and political reasons. Migrant work is a lifeline for enormous numbers of workers who would otherwise be unable to provide for families at home. In South Asia, where kinship structures tend to be far more elaborate than those based on Western norms of the nuclear family, it is not only the spouse and the children of the migrant worker who are dependent on remittances. Mass popular welfare and political stability are also partly dependent on the remittance economy, hence South Asian governments are hesitant to, or lack the capacity to, intervene forcefully on behalf their citizens when these citizens encounter abuse or exploitation in the country of migration. In a new book on Indian migration to Bahrain, anthropologist Andrew Gardner summarizes the situation in the following way:

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[8] Longva 2005 has defined ethnocracy as a construction of citizenship in which belonging to the nation-state is based upon shared origin or ethne, rather than language, national territory, or shared abstract values such as rights.

> Households may decide, for strategic financial reasons, to end one child's education so that he or she can enter the workforce and help with the burden of debt incurred by another's trip to the Gulf. Farmland and other productive resources are put up as collateral [for loans] ... the individual laborer is deeply enmeshed in a complex web of household relations and dependencies. (Gardner 2010:61)

Failure to meet economic goals in the Gulf, writes Gardner, is a "potentially cataclysmic financial event." Migrants who do so return home to families "stripped of key productive resources and burdened by the additional debt incurred in sending them to the Gulf ... These forces compel the foreign worker to stay in place, to endure the suffering at the hands of exploitative and abusive sponsors, or to flee those scenarios in search of work as an illegal laborer" (Gardner 2010:62)

The situation becomes even more complex when we consider that working class migrants in the Gulf context are further excluded from discourses of citizenship rights, when their case is situated in relation to their own countries of citizenship. In the case of Dubai, for example, middle class Indians are torn between a vague sympathy for and a neoliberal classism towards working class compatriots. As anthropologist Neha Vorahas described the situation, middle class Indians often say that because unskilled workers comprise the majority of Indians in the Gulf, non-Indians and non-South Asians come to view all Indians as unskilled and uneducated.

These middle class Indians, writes Vora, took pains to assert their middle class status, distancing themselves from their compatriots and in turn expressing the expectation of less racism directed towards them by Arabs and white expatriates. Middle class Indians "suggested that if only [working class Indians] practiced self-management and greater self-respect, the system might not be so discriminatory" (Vora 2008:390-391). The research by Gardner and Vora, among others, suggests that working class South Asians face a double bind. One the one side, they are excluded by the Gulf nation-state logic from rights discourse; on the other, as subordinate class actors in relation to other South Asians, their struggles are less prioritized, and their mobility (both in terms of class and space) more restricted, than that of middle and upper-middle class South Asians.

South Asian domestic and construction worker interlocutors in Dubai who helped me learn about the realities they were negotiating told me about children, parents, and cousins whose education, domestic survival, and welfare depended upon income earned in the Gulf. They also told me about the material, physical, and psychological challenges of migration to the region, from exorbitant (and under UAE law, officially illegal but tolerated) labor recruitment fees to the vagaries of living with and working for more or less sympathetic "host" families to the emotional toll of living for years, sometimes decades, far from home.

One particular interaction, moreover, conveyed to me the more nuanced aspirations of migrant workers. The interaction, which resulted from my own

obtuseness, made me appreciate more specifically the skein of material deprivation, middle-class aspiration, economic strategizing, and knowledge of the local social and urban maps that is woven out of the experience of people of limited means and limited access to the discourse of citizenship rights in Gulf.

As my wife and I were preparing to leave the field in the summer of 2004, we had to figure out what to do with the few items of furniture – a couch, a wicker armchair, shelves, kitchen stools – that we had purchased form IKEA Dubai to furnish our small studio apartment. I asked around and found a few furniture resellers in Deira neighborhood of the city. After calling a few of these resellers, one agreed to come out to our apartment in the Bur Dubai neighborhood to appraise the furniture. The man turned up with a partner, quickly glanced at the stuff, and offered me the equivalent of about US $50 for it. I was very disappointed with the offer, but being desperate, I shuddered at the thought of a deeper excursion into the labyrinthine world of Dubai wholesalers and re-exporters, a proper anthropological topic of research in itself. So I agreed to this particular buyer's princely offer.

A few days later, I visited my family in another part of Dubai (though Iraqi, my family lived and worked for a few years in Dubai, a period with which my field trips coincided). At the home of friends, I reconnected with the friends' housekeeper, an Indian woman, who I call Rachel, with whom my wife and I had a warm relationship. Rachel spoke Arabic very well, and during the year of my field work in 2003 – 2004, over many cups of tea, I translating between my German wife and Rachel, she told us many stories of her life back home and in Dubai, stories that often revolved around her children and her aspirations for them to have life chances greater than were available to her. At the family visit a few days after I had sold the furniture, Rachel and I spoke about my imminent departure from the field. With laser-like precision, she asked what my plans were with the furniture. When I told her I sold the stuff, her response was a mixture of head-slapping disappointment and irritation. "Why would you do that, Ahmed?" she exclaimed. "Don't you know those people will always cheat you? I would have given you 200 dollars!"

That Rachel was so precise in her readiness to volunteer what would have amounted to nearly a month's salary (and more, if shipping is accounted for) to stylish furniture with which to furnish her own home back in India with a sense of distinction (Bourdieu 1984) is significant. Here is a hint at what the worker uprisings are partly about. We are now familiar with images and other representations of Gulf migrant workers as "victims," "wage slaves" and such. Images in the media, both Western and local-Arab, usually show workers as a homogeneous mass. Phrases like "modern slavery" or "workers incited to violent rampage" are often used to describe, and thus limit, migrant working conditions and lived experiences.[9] It is, however, supremely important that we

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[9] See my more detailed discussion in Kanna 2011a, in which I compare these discourses to British Empire period colonial discourses which delimited local nationalist and reformist activism within similar discursive confines: either these reformist movements were

move away from such essentializing, perhaps even orientalizing, victim narratives and their like, while at the same time acknowledging the often horrendous working conditions under which many if not most migrant workers toil in the Gulf. What the examples of Rachel and numerous other workers with whom I had more casual encounters suggest is that migrant worker aspirations are, for lack of a better term, in significant part about a desire for a solid middle class life, a mixture of hopes for material stability, increased life chances, and a chance to participate in an ideal of the good life shaped in part by global commodities and images supplied by firms such as IKEA.

Worker desires for mobility – class mobility and spatial mobility – and enactments of agency (even very modest ones) thus encounter local structures of governance organized by a discourse of immobility and essentialized images of the worker either as lacking in agency or, as discussed in the essay's last section, as vaguely threatening, a troublesome target of governmentality. This discursive structure in turn helps to generate imagined geographies of the city and the nation as spheres of potential insecurity whose source is the allegedly dangerous body of the foreigner. Let me clarify with further examples from my research.

In late 2006, the project manager of a Dubai development firm invited me on a tour of a large new gated community which was being built on the city's rapidly expanding exurban frontier. The project was a typical large mixed-use (retail and residential) development aimed at the expatriate professional middle-class which constitutes a main pillar of the Dubai consumer market. As we drove from the residential part of the development to the enormous shopping mall the firm was simultaneously constructing nearby, I noticed a fairly imposing fence that had gone up around the grounds of the residential part of the project, and asked the manager why this fence was necessary. The manager responded that, well, obviously, it was a security fence. I said that this was puzzling to me. This project was so remote from the rest of the city that it could only be accessed by a major highway. Well, he answered, there are camels that sometimes roam around the area, after which, he paused and admitted that the fence was a bit overkill.

This was at a time when one could read, almost daily in the press, "wanted" notices alerting the public of absconding workers and supplying their passport information. For example: "Notice: This is to inform all concerned that the persons, whose photographs appear above, are under our sponsorship and are absconding. Any person/firm dealing with them will do so at his/their own risk. Kindly inform us or the concerned authorities of their whereabouts if known." Moreover, a constant stream of stories about national security, in which the protagonists were invariably state border agents battling against so-called illegals, infiltrators, and smugglers, invariably from Iran or South Asian countries, helped to reinforce images of a nearly ungovernable border,

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manifestations of local irrationality, or they were the result of external provocation (see also Davidson 2008).

threatening outsiders, and a vulnerable inside of "home" and "authentic local culture." The border between the two, interestingly, was not significantly a national border, but a regional and ethno-linguistic one: on the one side, the Arabic-speaking, Sunni Muslim western side of the Arab Persian Gulf, on the other, the frontier beyond which lay a homogeneously foreign and dangerous, Shi'a – Iranian and Hindu – South Asian world.

A revealing and far from atypical expression of this cultural – geographic sensibility can be seen in the letter to the editor of a major Arabic-language daily. A UAE citizen writes that he was shocked to discover the pitiful state of hygiene at a local vegetable market. "Vegetables are being stepped on by people's feet. No one cares about this." Indeed, he continues, this is normal "from the perspective of the [South] Asians and their nonchalance with respect to cleanliness." "Cleanliness," he continues, "is a necessary and basic element in the life of peoples *(hayāt al-shu'ūb)*, so it is not right that you have a people *(sha'b)* that does not care about cleanliness. The Department of Health must punish the careless Asians and introduce them to the concept that health is the most precious thing in existence, and that the Emirates are not India" (Humaid 2004). At this time, it was also not uncommon to hear or read about foreigners bringing "communicable diseases … like AIDs, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, and Leprosy" into the UAE.[10] Moreover, as both I and Longva found for our respective cases of Dubai and Kuwait, there is a sexualization and gendering of these conceptualizations of external threat. For example, foreign domestic workers are especially vulnerable to charges of sexual immorality and prostitution (see Kanna 2011a:127 – 128). A connection is made in such a view between the foreigner's allegedly loose sexual morality and the infiltration of culturally corrosive influences by way of the domestic space of the family.

Spatialization, Biopolitics, and the Structure of the Exception

Particularly striking is the way in which discourses of foreign threat are linked to what Agamben would call biopolitics. In Hal Foster's recent adaptation of Agamben (Foster 2011), this entails "the administration of human life as so much vital matter," or "the total management of biological life." For example, descriptions of illegal immigration in the UAE media during my research period, as mentioned, evoked and imaginatively constructed a nearly ungovernable mobility, a chaotic frontier against which the state struggled to impose order, in which the bodies of working class foreigners were connected to disease. Successful governance, as one official put it in an interview with the local media when I was in Dubai, is about "keeping the country clean of illegal immigrants."

Thus, the relationship between foreign workers and local Emirati actors is about more than rights. It exceeds or spills over our usual framing in which problems arise simply because non-citizens demand rights which citizens see as belonging

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[10] See, for example, Gulf News 2003.

only to members of the nation-state. The foreign worker is situated in a *biopolitical* relationship to the state and to citizens.

According to Agamben, biopolitical sovereignty is established upon a fundamental exclusion, that of the so-called *homo sacer* or "sacred man." The attribute of being "sacred" is here meant not in its contemporary modern sense, but in a sense more familiar to the ancient Roman world (the source of Agamben's genealogy of the homo sacer concept): that of being "accursed." According Foster, homo sacer was "the lowest of the low ... [he] may be killed and yet not sacrificed" (Foster 2011, see also Agamben 1998:8).

The Roman social order was defined at its limits by both the sovereign and homo sacer, complementary figures which constituted the structure of exception through which a juridical order (*Ordnung*) and thus sovereignty could be established (Agamben 1998:15, 18 – 20). The sovereign claimed an exceptional right to make at will any of his subjects a homo sacer, while all subjects of the sovereign could themselves behave as sovereigns in relation to the homines sacri at the lowest rungs of the social order. Agamben further argues that the condition of homo sacer and his "bare life"—his being qua his "animality"—are becoming the norm in a world of detention camps and states suspending their laws "in the name of preserving the law" (Foster 2011). Agamben takes the experience of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust as emblematic of bare life, but Foster calls to mind more prosaic examples, such as the "terroristic Muslim" or the hooded prisoner from Abu Ghraib. One might add another, perhaps even more prosaic example, the accursed foreign worker in the contemporary Gulf states.

In some ways, Agamben's theory applies literally to foreign workers in the UAE. In Dubai, for example, they live either in a vast system of labor camps on the peripheries of the city or within the domestic sphere of the household, perpetually in informal and temporary status and subject to any of the aforementioned privations of national-citizenship or economic rights, arbitrary acts that deprive them of full humanity and reconstitute them, for the duration of their stay in the Gulf, as bare life. It is significant that domestic workers are the only category of foreigner to be allowed access to the private spaces of the Gulf home (bedrooms, bathrooms, domestic—rather than public-living quarters): as bare life, they are seen as lacking the moral subjectivity that might threaten the privacy of the domestic sphere. Whether in the intimate spaces of the household or on the remote edges of the city, such workers become effectively invisible.

Both cognitively and spatially, it seems, the foreign worker in the contemporary Gulf societies constitutes the limit of sovereignty, the figure in relation to whom both citizens and, in some instances, more privileged foreigners take on the role of the sovereign. It is thus also interesting that there are two ways that foreign workers do become visible: debates about threats to national culture (already mentioned) and incidents which call upon the authorities to reassert state sovereignty. An example of the latter are the periodic so-called scandals revealed in the local press in which a company is discovered to be abusing

workers. State authorities intervene and promise to punish the offending companies. Seldom, if at all, are workers allowed to speak about their experiences. The incident quickly recedes from public discussion. These incidents enable the state authorities to periodically display their legitimacy and fairness, and also, in turn, to quickly reassert the state's right to constitute anyone it pleases as homo sacer.

In my Agambenian reading, we move away from seeing sovereignty as a static socioculturally disembodied phenomenon, and instead move towards viewing it as situated and relational. In particular, sovereignty consists in an active constitution of spatial and social relations through spatializing acts. A tripartite sense of the spatial is implicit in the constitution of the sovereign order: the sovereign order is a spatial figure of order, an imagined geography of inclusion versus exclusion, and underpins a place-making process in which, as in the Gulf, protected urban enclaves and camps predominate. *Ortung*, "localization," argues Agamben, is presupposed in *Ordnung,* in the process of "ordering", and vice versa. I have tried to complement this view in this essay by arguing that this localization/ordering is a necessary part of the mobilization of sentiments of national identity and belonging, that is, of the creation of an imagined community. The practical making of the category of foreign worker becomes the occasion for the localization of order and the construction of imagined geographies of inside and outside.

It is important to keep in mind that the biopolitics I am sketching here are not entirely unique to the contemporary Gulf. Indeed, Gulf societies seem very similar to other ethnocracies, such as Israel, and share much as well with the states of the global north in their biopolitical constructions of citizen and non-citizen.[11] Biopolitics, after all, is crucially keyed to uncertainty: the sovereign uses uncertainty—the threat of terrorist attacks or the cultural threats allegedly posed by noncomformist or categorically excluded people—as a pretext to make more sweeping claims to exemption from the law, in turn subjectivating an acquiescent population. This seems to be the common situation in the global north and south.

What seems to be significant about the Gulf, however, is the amplified, central place of spatializing biopolitics to the maintenance of sovereignty. In the absence of strong institutions of centralization and endowed with scarcely persuasive founding national mythologies (Clifford Geertz might call them interpretively "thin" stories), the process of exception takes on a visceral, daily, spatially palpable character in the Gulf countries. Given how entrenched the structure of the exception is in this context, it is predictable that worker uprisings are largely "non-recognitive." They do not assert that "we exist" (Engelhardt 2011). Rather, they seek a clear(er) demarcation between the

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[11] Similar to, but not identical to, Israel, which is, unlike the Gulf states, a settler colonial state in which the logic of ethnocracy has significantly different territorial and racializing functions alongside the general processes of the constitution of sovereignty by construction of an Other as "bare life."

sphere of citizen and that of non-citizen, mutually agreed upon between host or "sponsor" (the Gulf national or employer) and the foreign worker, a binding contractual relationship in which the responsibilities and obligations of each side are clear. Thus, Arab Gulf worker uprisings seek to shape and limit the recognition by the state, to get it to agree with the implicit acknowledgement that those rising up are not citizens and do not want citizen rights or obligations.

Ultimately, as politically active scholars, however, we should not content ourselves with pointing out the specificities of and differences between the citizen uprisings and foreign worker uprisings of the Arab region. The similarities are also important, and should be the occasion for thinking of the resonances and perhaps even potential linkages between the different kinds of movements. While the Arab Spring rebellions and the Gulf labor strikes are so different in so many ways, they ultimately both reject the self-exemption of sovereign power from the obligations of the law. In both the Arab uprisings and the South Asian strikes the assertion that the individual is not the mere subject of the sovereign power, not mere bare life, has been prominent. Both kinds of mass action should be situated in the development of the family/security state in the modern, postcolonial Arab world, as distinct phenomena that nevertheless each aim, in their own ways, to expand the rights and of the region's citizens and workers.

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The Arab upsurge and the
"viral" revolutions of our times
Aditya Nigam

Abstract

The article discusses the Arab revolution in the context of long history of activism and struggles in the region, and calls for a questioning of the already available paradigms in social science regarding "movements," and "activism," as well the spread of movements all around the world, and the way they pose a challenge to traditional political organizing.

Introduction

Two decades ago mass movements had rocked the former socialist world, bringing down some of the most oppressive regimes of the last century, heralding the end of a long winter that had kept thought too imprisoned in the polarities of the Cold War. Amidst the jubilation that followed, was declared the final victory of liberal democracies. American neoconservative thinker Francis Fukuyama triumphantly declared that these movements did not merely signal the end of the cold war or a phase of human history but of history itself. This was a contemporary rendering of Hegel's well known formulation about history as the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit that must reach its final destination, its *telos* in the Spirit's self-realization. In Fukuyama's rendering, the end of the socialist regimes was the final realization of History's Meaning; it had arrived at its final destination – at the endpoint of humanity's ideological evolution with the triumph of liberal democracy worldwide. Fukuyama and many others saw those mass movements for democracy as signaling the universalization of western liberal democracy and its establishment as the "final form of human government".

The movements of 2011 are a sharp refutation of this celebration although initially appearing to be merely further manifestations of the spirit of 1989. After all, the "Arab spring" comprised a series of mass movements in what were essentially anti-democratic and tyrannical regimes. Wasn't the explosion of the desire for democracy on what Asef Bayat called the "Arab street", simply the desire of a deprived mass of Muslim citizens aspiring to western values? Wasn't it yet another confirmation of the Fukuyama thesis that it is the desire for liberal democracy that is moving the world? And what greater confirmation can we possibly require but the fact that it was in the "Islamic" world, battered out of shape by the US led "war on terror", that the desire for democracy was the greatest? The US and its allies with their relentless push to export democracy to this part of the world, at last seemed to have found a vindication in these mass upsurges.

This was the reading offered by many analysts and commentators in the Western media. In India, strangely, there was a confused silence for a long time. Events in Tunisia and Egypt were not reported for quite some time in the "free press" of the "world's largest democracy". And when the Indian media did wake up to those earthshaking events, it could only see in them an affirmation of the western values of democracy and liberalism, conducted through nothing more than the "facebook activism" of the new generation.

Even in the western media though, not all reports were blind to the range of energies emanating from a number of different developments that had come together to produce the "Arab Spring". Thus an important report in *The Guardian* (London), offered a more complex account of the movement in Egypt that overthrew the regime of Hosni Mubarak (Dreyfuss 2011). In its words, it was "a movement led by tech-savvy students and twentysomethings – labour activists, intellectuals, lawyers, accountants, engineers – that had its origins in a three-year-old textile strike in the Nile Delta and the killing of a 28-year-old university graduate, Khaled Said". At its centre was "an alliance of Egyptian opposition groups, old and new."

The April 6 Youth Movement had come into existence in 2008 in support of the ongoing workers' struggle in the industrial town of El-Mahalla El-Kubra, primarily on issues related to wages. The struggle in the past few years also moved towards a restructuring of unions that had hitherto functioned with government appointed leaders. The list of demands for the April 6 strike also included a demand for raising the national minimum wages that had remained stagnant for over two and a half decades. Increasing workers' militancy over the past few years, we learnt from another report, was a direct response to the World Bank imposed "reforms" that had pushed lives of industrial labour to the brink (*Democracy Now!* 2011). It was this sharpening conflict, arising from the serious impact of structural adjustment policies, that provides the backdrop in which the middle class youth decided to rally in support of the April 6 2008 strike. It was they who converted the call for an industrial strike into a general strike.[1]

In the Indian media there was absolutely no sense of this complex picture. Going by reports here, the Arab Spring would seem to have been the exclusive production of the "networking babalog". "Babalog" is a term often used to refer, sometimes derisively, to privileged upwardly mobile youth. Some of these reports and comments constituted a peculiar mixture of derision and awe, of non-seriousness and celebration at the same time. (See for instance Dasgupta 2011).

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[1] The strike of course, did not eventually take place as factories were occupied by the armed forces from three days before it was supposed to begin, as Stanford University professor Joel Beinin, also former director of Middle East Studies at the American University of Cairo, informed viewers in a *Democracy Now!* interview (*Democracy Now!* 2011). The mass demonstration that did take place faced a brutal crackdown, one that has perhaps become a memory that has fuelled the gathering anger over subsequent years.

If sharpening class conflict provided one window into the great upsurge that overthrew the despotic regime of Hosni Mubarak, it was certainly not the only one. *The New York Times* recognized the *pan-Arab* nature of the new movement facilitated by the Internet. What it did not recognize – and nor did most other commentators who saw some sort of victory of Western values in these protests and struggles – is that the pan-Arab sentiment was at one level, decidedly *against* the US and its war in the Arab world. And in the Egyptian case, at least, this was inescapably so, given that Mubarak was the protector of US-Israeli interests in the region.

This sentiment, as Asef Bayat has pointed out, is deeply interwoven with the sentiments of the second Palestinian intifada. "Arab street politics", he says, "assumed a distinctively pan-Arab expanse in response to Israel's incursions into the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, and the Anglo-US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq." In fact, Bayat suggests, it is the Palestinian intifada that "remains a role model and inspiration to today's protesters". Right from the first intifada (1987 to 1993), that involved almost the entire Palestinian population including women and children, nonviolent resistance to occupation was the primary mode of struggle: civil disobedience, strikes, demonstrations, withholding taxes and product boycotts (Bayat 2011a). It is also worth underlining that Kefaya [Enough], the other major coalition behind the Egypt uprising, owes its origins directly to the second intifada (See also Shorbagy 2007). Bayat suggests a wider connection between the struggles in what he calls "this incipient post-Islamist middle east." Here, prevailing popular movements "assume a post-nationalist, post-ideological, civil and democratic character" where Iran's 'green movement', the Tunisian revolution and the Egyptian revolution become all of a piece (Bayat 2011b).

Whether or not one agrees with the analysis presented by Bayat, it seems undeniable that both in terms of the forms through which the movements express themselves and their "content" there is something fundamentally new and different that has come into view.

Thinking about the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions is no easy task. Standard tools of political analysis seem to be of little help. The discipline of political science has, of course, very little to say that is relevant about anything "political" in today's world. Its preoccupation with parties, "party-systems", "mobilization", elections, and governance, or with even with "civil society", rights and "social justice", or "cosmopolitanism" has little to contribute in making sense of some of these "new revolutions of our times".[2]

Even "democracy" makes very little sense once political scientists are through with it. What for instance, does "democracy" mean when masses of people decide to stake their lives to come out on the Asian streets of Yangon (Rangoon), Lahore, Bangkok (Kathmandu is a more complicated, if also more conventional scenario) and now in the cities of Tunisia, Egypt and other parts of the Arab

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[2] The phrase 'new revolution of our time/s' is paraphrased from the title of Ernesto Laclau's well-known book (see Laclau 1997).

world? Democracy here is not the name of some insipid liberal procedural arrangement where sterile debate always inevitably drowns all real concerns of inequality, poverty and domination. It is, rather, an empty signifier of sorts, invested with desires of all kinds, ranging from the desire to be free to the desire to consume. The eruption of "democracy" in mass movements in the early years of the twenty-first century, I shall suggest below, also points to a certain impatience with formal arrangements and institutional forms of politics even in the heart of what are seen as flourishing democracies. In that sense, the revolutions and rebellions in the Arab world, directed against oppressive and corrupt dictatorial regimes that preside over these countries, seem to be more than just that. Yes, the people want a say in the way things happen, in the way their future is determined, but perhaps there is something more here that needs decoding. It seems to me that these revolutions point to new forms of mobilization and new political practices and new subjectivities in ways that call for thinking afresh *the nature of "the political" itself.*

It is also important, it seems to me, to underline here that these developments are extremely complex and do not give us the luxury of either unproblematically celebrating them or simply condemning them. They no longer provide us with the luxury of choosing between Good and Evil as though they are always clearly pitted on opposite sides. This particular circumstance becomes most clearly visible in what I want to call the *postnational moment.*

The Postnational Moment

I use the term "postnational" in a very different sense from that which is usually attached to it – namely that of the supersession of the nation-state by global forces, institutions and processes. This is the sense in which most Western theorists like Habermas and scholars based there use the term. My use of the term involves the recognition that nations, nation-states and nationalisms can no longer provide the ethical horizon of critique, besieged as they are by a whole array of challenges from within – from cultures that were once sought to be erased for the nation to come to its own. The postnational moment is thus not simply about the supplanting of the national by the global but a much more complex process.[3]

Consider this: The Egyptian revolution was inspired by the Tunisian that just preceded it. And both together inspire the rebellions and revolutions across the rest of the Arab world that followed thereafter. All these revolutions, despite their ineluctably domestic roots, draw inspiration in some form or the other, from other movements in other places, in other contexts, just as they, in turn, inspire other movements in other parts of the globe.

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[3] This idea has been explored by a group of South Asian scholars based in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India, over a period of time and the papers that deal with different aspects of the idea have been published in a special number of *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay, India), Volume 44, No. 10, March 7 – March 13, 2009.

Thus, at one level, the April 6 Youth Movement – one of the key networks in Egypt – was in turn indirectly "inspired" by Otpor! [Resist!], the Serbian group that was instrumental in the anti-Milosevic mobilizations and which is credited with having played a key role in bringing down that regime in 2000.[4] Otpor! also has had a more direct relationship with groups like PORA [It's Time!] that played a crucial role in the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004-2005 that reversed the run-off vote of 2004 by forcing a re-election. Otpor! and PORA are said to have been directly or indirectly inspired by the writings of Gene Sharp, whose book *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, became a veritable bible for PORA!, according to one of its leaders Oleh Kyriyenko, and made its way into other groups struggling against dictatorships. Sharp's books and ideas emphasize non-violent mass action as the most effective way of challenging the power of dictatorships, and not surprisingly, draw on the ideas and work of Gandhi and Thoreau.[5]

It is interesting to think of the way different points in this tale connect; how different struggles draw sustenance from each earlier struggle – in some other place, some other time. And not always do these struggles obey the normative logic of old left-wing nationalisms; they may indeed seem a bit unpalatable to our thoroughly trained taste-buds. Thus, when it is revealed that Otpor! at some point, had received funds from US government agencies like USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, we can easily understand the motives of these institutions in providing such funds ("to promote US friendly democracy", says the website of one of these organization). It is far more difficult for us to imagine the motivation of these movements in accepting huge amounts of US funding.

And before we get into some simplistic regurgitation of the familiar story of "CIA-inspired movements", let us remind ourselves that Otpor! started out as a student outfit in the University of Belgrade in 1998, as a reaction to repressive laws promulgated by the government. It was probably around the time of the Kosovo war and the NATO bombing that it gained much greater popular support and US agencies also stepped in. The reasons why organizations like these might accept US support are not as simple as they might seem to be, for they range from amassing international support for the internal struggle to more simplistic and naive celebrations of a thing called "democracy" that apparently the US (and the West) has and which can deliver societies living under dictatorships to freedom. These struggles are postnational not only in that they establish connections with movements and struggles beyond their borders; they are also postnational because they are not averse to using the support of 'external powers' or states to aid their internal struggles – anathema

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[4] See Al Jazeera report, February 9, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrNz0dZgqN8 last accessed on 23 February 2012

[5] The point of this reference to Gene Sharp is, of course, not to suggest that movements in the Arab world could not or would not have arisen without it but rather to emphasize the ways in which different impulses come together and how, in the midst of struggle, movements draw resources from wherever they can.

to all nationalisms. However troubling this may be to us, the fact is that often struggles against oppressive "third world" dictatorships do not have the luxury of choosing the "anti-imperialist" side, where many such despots stand.

This is where the Arab revolutions made a significant break from outfits like Otpor! The one clear non-negotiable in the pan-Arab struggles is the question of Palestine and role of the Israeli-US axis there. And with the so-called "war on terror" becoming the justification for the worst kind of war crimes and bombing of cities and civilian populations, the anti-US and anti-Israeli sentiment is at an all time high. Not surprisingly then, the movements combine their anger against their own despotic rulers with the gathering revolt against the global despotism of the US-Israeli forces. However, even in the Arab case, Libya is a case in point where the messy postnational logic played itself out to the fullest. There we had a "radical", "anti-imperialist" despot Gaddafi, ranged against a mass movement that had to be eventually supported by Western powers militarily. This was a case that truly split the Left everywhere. In India, the Left, by and large, confined itself to making statements about imperialist aggression in Libya while maintaining silence on the mass opposition to Gaddafi and sons.

The Viral Spread

As we know, the eruptions in the Arab world did not remain confined to that region, their effects soon reverberating in the very heart of the Western world. The militant mass protests of students against fee hikes in Europe and Britain towards the end of 2010 had seemed to be an aberration but suddenly things changed rapidly. With mass sit-ins and demonstrations in Madrid, Barcelona and other Spanish cities, primarily against the multi-million Euro bailout plans for banks, militant street demonstrations in Greece and finally the Occupy Wall Street movement that started in New York and spread to other cities in the United States and to other parts of the world, another related but different story started emerging.

From the *indignados* in Spain and Greece to the Occupy Wall Street movement, the one thing that bound these movements was the demand for democracy — "real democracy" and "direct democracy", as opposed to the sham that went by that name in these "advanced democracies". Not surprisingly, the western media fell silent. Wasn't this going against the script of politics as liberals had written it? Hadn't we already arrived at the final destination of human society's political development? After all, the Arab story was only about a "democracy deficit" in societies ruled by despots. What was happening now in the very heart of the "democratic world" was upsetting the happy belief that the West had conned itself into believing. All the more so because all the new upsurges identified themselves very clearly and unequivocally with the new wind that had started blowing from the Arab desert lands. "Tahrir Square" became an addition to the lexicon of these twenty-first century struggles. As one report in *Der Spiegel* (2011) put it:

> The protesters have occupied the square for days now, with some comparing the gatherings to those that took place on Cairo's Tahrir Square earlier this year, and demonstrations also continued for the fifth day in a row on Thursday in Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao and Santiago de Compostela. Spaniards living abroad have also set up protest camps outside the country's embassies in Berlin, Paris, London and Amsterdam. Most of the events have been organized online. After organizing demonstrations in around 50 cities last Sunday, the Real Democracy Now movement became a household name virtually overnight.

Two features stood out in all these movements – both of which we in India had already witnessed in the course of a massive anti-corruption movement that had swept India in the period between the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movement. The first was the strident rhetoric, not simply against the ruling party but *against politics as such.* It wasn't one particular party but the entire domain of politics that was seen as suspect. Politics, that is, politics conducted through the political party, was increasingly seen as having hijacked "popular will" and transformed ordinary lives into pawns in the corporate game of profit-seeking. Thus for instance, a report in the French Left-wing paper, *l'Humanité* (2011) observed:

> No trade union, let alone a political party. The workings of traditional dispute are outmoded, and even deliberately excluded. Internet, through the exchange in real time via social networks and chats, has allowed the emergence of a spontaneous free and radical protest movement by a generation that's had enough...

> ...What is expressed is anger, a desire for radical change and a rejection of all traditional forms of politics. Which explains the refusal to be co-opted by any political party or trade union and calls to spoil ballot cards or vote blank. Confidence in the Spanish democratic system is broken; the indignants have the impression that their voices are never heard. The descent into the street came naturally, as an extension. The street is also where they want to be heard.

The second outstanding feature was the focus on *corruption.* "Robbery", "thievery" and "corruption" were recurrent motifs in the movements across Europe and the United States.

And so it was with the anti-corruption movement in India – also known as the Anna Hazare movement after its figure-head leader – in India.[6] Following on the heels of a series of exposures of corruption in high places where corporate loot and crony capitalism had been having a field day, the movement gave voice to people who do not otherwise participate in politics. Once again, the feeling that the hard earned money of the tax payer was being squandered was palpable. Once again, our leftist and radical thinkers of all hues, found

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[6] Anna Hazare is a 74 year old rustic Gandhian with an extremely idiosyncratic style. Before this movement his name has been associated with the ecological and economic regeneration of a village in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, which was long celebrated as a model by environmentalists. His paternalistic style has of course, come in for a lot of criticism from some quarters – not without justification.

themselves as always, in a quandary, completely missing the significance of what was going on.

Indeed, that was the strength of the movement: that it focused on one single issue on which everyone from left to right, from workers cheated of wages to sections of the corporate world, could all join in. The "Anna Hazare" movement was important precisely because it steered clear of what radicals wanted it to do, that is, take a stand on everything in the world. For that would have left, in the end, a motley crowd of radicals with their slogans and little else. Parenthetically, an additional point needs to be made here: Unlike many of the other movements that I have discussed here, the Anna Hazare movement also shared in some ways the old hierarchical pattern insofar as the charismatic figure of Anna Hazare was quite critical to the movement and unlike many of the other movements, after a certain point it received a very powerful backing from sections of the mainstream media.

There is a complicated dynamic to this process, the details of which we cannot possibly go into here. Suffice it to say that in the initial phases, from November 2010 to April 2011 (when Hazare sat on indefinite fast), the media had largely ignored it. Even on the first two days of the fast, scholars tracking the media response claim, it was not of much concern to the media. It was basically in this period that, with the number of Facebook supporters of the movement suddenly hitting 400,000 and with many media personalities sensing that something big might be in the offing, that its stance underwent a significant change. This shift was particularly visible in the electronic media whose advertising revenues depend crucially in what are called TRPs (Television Rating Point) and this is skewed in favour of the urban, consuming middle classes. Concerned media groups calculated that TRPs would shoot up drastically if they were to throw their weight behind the movement.

Also important was the movement's steadfast refusal to enter the political domain; its demand that their voice – and of citizens in general – be heard in and of itself, refusing the legitimation offered by channels of party representation.

In the Indian instance, this movement became the occasion for a vigorous debate on democracy itself. While the champions of the movement spoke in the name of some form of "direct democracy", establishment intellectuals saw in it a dangerous swerve towards mob-rule. The call to enact laws on the streets, as the movement in their perception seemed to be doing, was a call to anarchy. After all, law-making was the prerogative of the parliament.[7] It is a different matter,

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[7] The reference to law-making here is because the movement explicitly demanded the enactment of a legislation that would provide for an Ombudsman-type of institution that would deal with complaints of corruption. This demand actually merely picked up a proposal made by the Government of India's own Administrative Reforms Committee, way back in 1968. It had thus remained on paper for well over four decades. It is a different matter, of course, whether the law alone can deal with a matter like corruption in general. However, to be fair, here the emphasis was on political corruption and the ways in which it lent itself to large-scale corporate control over and swindling of people's resources.

of course, that the parliament whose prerogative it was to draft the legislation, preferred to sleep over it for well over four decades. Clearly, two different conceptions of democracy were at issue here. One that insisted on its formal aspects – elections and representation, and the other articulated in the speeches of Anna Hazare and his colleagues that invoked the Constitution to say that the people and not the representatives are the real sovereign. At some level, it is this second notion of democracy that seems to be animating movements across the world. Representation, especially as mediated through the party, is seen as thoroughly suspect.

In India's history there has been a robust tradition of critique of this notion of party representation, especially in the writings of thinkers like MN Roy and Jaya Prakash Narayan and the argument has been often made that representatives elected on party tickets are answerable only to the party that gives them the ticket to contest elections, rather than to the people who elect them. In such a situation, to repose faith in the fact that members of parliament are "elected representatives of the people" is disingenuous to say the least.

Looking at the entire range of movements that erupted across the globe this year, it seems difficult to escape the conclusion that, at the very least, they seek to redefine democracy itself, taking it away from the powers-that-be and the way they have defined it so far. At a very profound level, it seems that this round of global mass movements will initiate – indeed, it *must* initiate – a fresh thinking about *politics itself*. Older notions of politics may not seem workable now, especially as a new generation brought up in the post-Cold-War era takes centre stage. Twentieth century shibboleths mean little to them and they are in continuous conversation across the globe and across "ideologies", through the Internet.

The Party-Form and the Implosion of the Political

There is something very strikingly similar between these movements and the revolutions that brought down the state socialist regimes of Eastern Europe. Those too were inspired by "democracy" – and once again, the term there stood in for a range of concerns from freedom to market and consumption.

But more importantly, both, it seems to me, signal the last days of the particular form – the party form – that structured all of modern politics in the last two centuries or so. There is at the very least an exhaustion and weariness with the form of politics mediated by parties. As Shorbagy put it: "Right from the very beginning, Kefaya has identified the established political parties as part of the problem not the solution" (Shorbagy 2007). Other analysts and scholars too have underlined this aspect of the more pervasive movements across the Arab world, namely their weariness of traditional party politics (Bayat 2011a) or its virtual absence (Dabashi 2011).

To the party-form belongs the hijacking of popular initiative and will (or may we say, desire?), such as is expressed either in mass revolts or in elections. To this form belongs the history of 20th century totalitarianisms. For it is this form that

has revealed itself, especially since the last decades of the previous century, as the instrument for *the destruction of politics within the formal domain of politics* – a phenomenon I have referred to elsewhere as the "implosion of the political" (Nigam 2008). This seems as true of societies where parties have become instruments of naked dictatorial power as it is of those where they function in a formal democracy but increasingly begin to look like one another. If in Egypt they had all reduced themselves to the position of Mubarak's "loyal opposition", in the more "advanced democracies" they have all come to mirror each other. There is little difference today between parties and their programmes in almost all so-called democracies across the western world.

Politics has thus ceased to take place in this formal domain, inhabited by parties and structured by the logic of representation. The enunciation of anything that even remotely seems to challenge the "normal" order of things has been carefully excised from this domain and it is precisely the party-form that has been the key instrument in this operation. As a consequence, mass politics and opposition on the streets too has been completely erased, except when marauding proto-fascist groups and parties choose to unleash their bloody politics on the streets. In the Indian context, in the place of "politics" we now have sterile parliamentary non-debates, farcical boycotts of parliament sessions over trivial matters and the installation of the television studio as the arena of phantom political conflicts.

Between the parliament and the television studio we have the complete disjunction of "party-politics" from popular mass struggles and everyday life. Had it not been for the on-going struggles over land and mass dispossession of the peasantry, we might perhaps have forgotten that there is anything like social conflict in Indian society any more.

It is this form that is now increasingly becoming suspect for mass movements all over the world. It is not that new modes of rule have been found – and so, inevitably, every revolution ends up overthrowing the power of dictatorial regimes, only to be replaced by new parties, all wanting to head in the same direction. That was particularly the case with the erstwhile socialist states, but it is also true of many other revolts of recent times including Otpor! which subsequently split into a party wing and a movement wing. The difference now is that today we are no longer innocent about parties and their professed claims of ideology.

Even in India, where people routinely vote in elections and often in large numbers, they now seldom do so because they believe in the ideological platform of the party they vote for; most often they vote tactically, because they must keep certain channels of access to power open for themselves, which they have carefully built over time. Recent struggles and movements here have widely exhibited this pervasive distrust of the party-form. It is the biggest fiction manufactured by the discipline of political science and political theory over the past centuries that it is popular will that constitutes political power and that parties and leaders merely "represent" the "people". Marxism too reproduced this fiction; all it had to say by way of innovation was that the real party that

expressed the will of the people was the party that expressed the telos of History, viz. their own party. The new movements and struggles are no longer innocently prepared to buy this. Probably, that is why they do not attempt to take power.

While the struggles in the erstwhile state-socialist world belonged to the pre-Internet era, a crucial difference today is the mediation of the Internet and other new media forms. In this context, the suggestion about the viral nature of contemporary struggles made around the turn of the century by Hardt and Negri in *Empire*, seem apposite here. Movements and struggles at the beginning of the 21st century, they suggest, increasingly take the form of a virus that travels across frontiers and attaches itself to any "hospitable" body. Clearly, a hospitable body is one that is already vulnerable by virtue of its having lost the support of the large majority of its population. This viral struggle is facilitated and in fact, made possible by the Internet. New networks of horizontal communication have done something more: they have eliminated the need for a centralized organization with a centralized command structure by opening out avenues of horizontal communication. This much is clear and, by now, not particularly new. After all, it is ten years since *Empire* hit the scene. What remains to be addressed is the problem of new forms of power and new formations of the political.

The Conundrum

Clearly, we are living in an interregnum when the old forms of politics have become moribund and obsolete but new ones have not yet emerged. And so, as the tide of mass struggles recedes older animosities and sectarian conflicts, unthinkable outside the form of party-politics, make their appearance again. In this interregnum, once the moment of struggle is over, once the old regimes have been dismantled, we are left with the same old framework of elections. Once again parties step into the breach. Once again things seem to flow irreversibly back into familiar, recognizable patterns.

But it would be a mistake to imagine that this is yet another manifestation of the old pattern in which parties and vanguards have their final moment of glory, riding in on the back of popular unrest. Something, clearly, is waiting to be articulated in this relentless refusal of the political. And yet, it is not that politics as such has come to an end. Rather, the more "the political" gets evacuated of politics, the more politics appears everywhere else.

Rethinking the idea of the political and of politics as such, I suggest, entails a re-examination of the entire conceptual paraphernalia of political science and political theory premised as it is on what can only be called the dramaturgy of the will. It is as though "people" by definition are creatures of "the will to power", and that it is they who constitute the foundation of all politics. Thus when they participate in elections and cast their vote, they are seen to be exercising their will in electing their representatives. The reality that all the contemporary movements point towards, on the other hand, is precisely the

opposite: the domain of politics and the arena of democracy are the field of vanguards – creatures of the will *par excellence*, who usurp the sole right to speak and decide *in the name of the people*. What happens if we deprive these vanguards of the right to speak in the name of any such fictional collectivity? What if we see the act of participation in elections as a complex game that ordinary folk are forced to enter into and play with the political class in order to open channels to power that would otherwise be outside their reach?

The point I am making here is not that ordinary people are unconcerned with politics; rather their engagement with politics is mediated by a number of other quotidian concerns. It is when things become unbearable in some sense that mass movements of the type that we have been witnessing lately, take place. That is when concerns are perhaps articulated in their sharpest form. But in no case do we have "the masses" themselves making a claim for power, only vanguards who speak in their name. It is a weariness with this experience through the twentieth century that has now made it imperative that all such creatures of the will be excluded: that they be considered as part of the problem and not the solution.

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Witness and trace: January 25 graffiti and public art as archive

Cassie Findlay

Graffiti writing is one of the easiest and most efficient ways for individuals and opposing groups to register political dissidence, express social alienation, propagate anti-system ideas, and establish an alternative collective memory. (Chaffee, 1990, 127)

The desire to witness and to leave a trace is an essential part of being human; to leave some evidence representing our part in events large or small. The public expression of an opinion, a value or solidarity with others can be conveyed in the creation of public art or graffiti, by raising a placard, by Tweeting, blogging or carrying out other forms of online activism. It is about having a voice and perspective that connects us to bigger societal movements and events; a voice that has often been marginalised in the re-telling of our stories by historians, journalists and others. However many of these forms of communication have traditionally been regarded by archivists, librarians and museum curators as 'ephemeral' and therefore of a lesser value to more formalised and structured methods of recordkeeping as is found in the official files and volumes of governments and corporations. Their ephemerality is, however, not just in the perception of the memory professionals - it is a reality in the sense that these traces are often fleeting and unavailable for future review; Twitter has no inbuilt back-up functionality; placards are collected up and destroyed; graffiti is washed away. And this leaves us with a tension and an unease, what Jacques Derrida has termed "archive fever" (Derrida, 1996, 12); our desire to carry on knowing that a trace of our experience will exist to allow us to remember, but at the same time the uncertainty that such a trace will be preserved or may in fact be actively removed in an act of politically driven memory vandalism.

The graffiti glowed brilliantly from the minds of Egyptians who joined in the revolution.

This is the voice of Egyptian artist and intellectual Ahmad al-Labbad, speaking to Al Akhbar English journalist Sayyid Mahmoud about Tahrir Square and the streets of Cairo during the January 25 revolution as "the largest open art exhibition the world has ever known" (Mahmoud, 2011). For Labbad, the graffiti, symbols and placards were the only accurate log of the revolution that truly reflected the people's experience. He marvelled at the explosion of free expression and creativity that came from "ordinary citizens". However Labbad's project became a case study of the conflicting urges for memorialisation and trace removal or "memory killing", which exists at the heart of Derrida's concept of archive fever. Labbad: "I imagined that the revolution would spur us to

reconsider the value of the idea of accumulati. It is unfortunate that Tahrir Square was subjected to a frightful operation that erased the artifacts of the revolution. The removal of all the paintings and writings that appeared in the seventeen days prior to Mubarak's stepping down were done under the pretense of cleaning up. Magically, all forms of graffiti were removed from the walls. Thus, under the charge of 'beautifying the city', the authorities launched an attack on history."

Fortunately before the "clean up", Labbad had not only photographed the works but also categorised them according to their subject and date. What he did was organise these traces so that that their content was preserved and so they were related to one another and to the broader societal events which they recorded; he was creating a recordkeeping system.

Recordkeeping is about the nexus between power, accountability and the record as evidence. When a *trace* becomes a *record* by virtue of being part of a *recordkeeping system*, it assumes a new identity - one which brings with it greater power and possibility for societal understanding, reform and reconciliation. Recordkeeping of graffiti and public art as an expression of the people's political claims has nothing to do with highly regulated administrative processes as seen with traditional government or corporate recordkeeping. The "warrant" or recordkeeping requirement is not so automatically understood, nor are there systems in place capable of adequately capturing and contextualising the records. As Sue McKemmish noted in 1996 in her reflections on personal recordkeeping, "there is a pressing need to explore the functional requirements for postcustodial archival regimes that can ensure that a personal archive of value to society becomes an accessible part of the collective memory." (McKemmish, 1996, 45) In the years since her call, however, the focus amongst recordkeeping professionals has remained largely fixed on organisational recordkeeping.

And yet these less formal and more personal forms of recordkeeping demand our serious attention. We stand at a point in time where the personal, community and political archive is easier than ever before to form and disseminate quickly using technology. Importantly, these archives reflect their context in ways that are acceptable to the actors in the events - the protestors and the victims of oppressive regimes - rather than simply adopting standard contextual frameworks from institutional archives. If we accept that the formation of an archive is a political act, then it is easy to see how important is this adjustment to the balance of recordkeeping in society in times of crisis. Official archives contain the viewpoint of the oppressor and then the overthrown. The view of the masses as expressed by their art and slogans is both their response to official force and expression of their own demands, and must also persist. Derrida again: "By ingesting people's stories we make the archive – already a place of memory and mourning – into a place of understanding, of forgiving, of reconciliation." (Hamilton, 2002, 54)

This notion of ways of making and keeping evidence from more than one perspective where there are significant power and cultural differences is

captured well in a story reproduced by noted recordkeeping thinker Chris Hurley in an article he wrote in 2005 on the concept of parallel provenance: "It happened at a meeting between an Indian community in northwest British Columbia and some government officials. The officials claimed the land for the government. The natives were astonished by the claim. They couldn't understand what these relative newcomers were talking about. Finally one of the elders put what was bothering them in the form of a question. 'If this is your land,' he asked, 'where are your stories?' " (Chamberlin, 2003, 1) The graffiti of Tahrir Square are a version of the Egyptian people's stories from those tumultuous days. It is only right that they are protected and shared.

However efforts such as Labbad's to organise and contextualise such records is not all that is required. The question of access to any such new form of archive where it has been formed in the midst of regime change is, of course, vitally important. As the historian in charge of the National Archives of Egypt's Committee to Document Jan 25 project, Dr Khaled Fahmy, has said: "The question of access to information and archives is political, because reading history is interpreting history, and interpreting history is one way of making it. Closing people off from the sources of their own history is an inherently political gesture, and equally opening that up is a political — even revolutionary — act." (Shenker, 2011). By placing community-formed archives like Labbad's online as quickly as possible we allow for use, participation in and contribution to the archive by the widest possible range of affected people and groups. This kind of accessibility is essential for reconstruction and healing, as well as for a realignment of the balance of power between people and the state.

 Online access to these archives is a gift but it is also important to remember how the use of technology to capture and share these traces of the revolution helps shape the very nature of not only the archive but the memory/reality of the events in our minds now and into the future. In *Archive Fever* Derrida observes how the use of technology can change the nature of the "archivable event": "What is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way" (Derrida, 1996, 18).

Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more different experience of an archive if you compare a visit to The (UK) National Archives in Kew or to the National Archives of Australia in Canberra to view World War I dossiers or shipping lists, as compared with visiting 25Leaks.com to view documents seized by protesters from state security headquarters in Cairo in the aftermath of Mubarak being ousted, or www.tahrirdocuments.org, which provides scans of dozens of printed leaflets that were circulated in the streets during the anti-Mubarak uprising, from religious tracts to lists of political demands. These are "special purpose" archives, created in response to very immediate needs, and which put up few to no barriers (administrative, physical or otherwise) between people and the information, aside from the need to access the internet.

 Labbad's work, 25Leaks, Tahrir Documents and many other examples of alternate archives from the Arab Spring and elsewhere show us how technology, free flow of information and generational change have created the impetus for

people to participate in the recordkeeping process to form archives that show and confirm their experience. As Andrew Flinn notes in his discussion of community and independent archives, the collection and preservation of such materials is about their use for "...political and educational purposes, either as tools in contemporary struggles, or to remember and commemorate past lives whose achievements were disfigured by trauma and discrimination, or to combat the alienation and disempowerment of those, particularly the young, denied access to their own history." (Hill, 2011, 151)

Such participatory archives serve as important counters to those formed by business or government recordkeeping, with the state or corporations controlling what evidence is made, kept, destroyed or revealed, through the filter of their political, economic and moral values – and often with governance around such processes that is closed, discouraging society's gaze. These new forms of archives are no longer relegated to the category of ephemera in institutional libraries and archives, or are dismissed as only "fragments", but rather are contextualised, shared, open and dynamic - and available in a time and (online) space that maximises their power to effect change.

The rise of such community and politically driven archives forces those of us working as recordkeeping professionals / archivists to reflect on our professional theory and practice, to see what it is in essence that we bring to the keeping of records that is useful in this new and broader world of memory keepers. How can we provide frameworks to assist in the connecting up of these many disparate archives, or how we can help interpret them? Importantly, how can we cast off some of our preconceived notions of ownership and control to facilitate participative archives allowing more of the people's experience to enter the collective memory of the Arab Spring? Perhaps it is by taking inspiration from people like Ahmad al-Labbad and the archive of public art that glowed so brilliantly from the minds of the Egyptian revolutionaries.

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- Tahrir Documents: http://www.tahrirdocuments.org/

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"Esta revolución es muy copyleft". Entrevista a Stéphane M. Grueso a propósito del 15M

Eduardo Romanos

Abstract

Entrevista con Stéphane M. Grueso (Sevilla, 1973), activista del movimiento 15M y cronista del mismo a través de su cuenta en Twitter (@fanetin, con más de 8.500 seguidores en diciembre de 2011) y su blog El Perroflauta Digital (http://stephanegrueso.blogspot.com/). Stéphane fue uno de los manifestantes que pusieron cara al personaje del año elegido por la revista TIME (http://lightbox.time.com/2011/12/14/person-of-the-year-2011-protesters-2/). La entrevista se realizó en Madrid el 17 de octubre, dos días después de una manifestación global que, convocada en su origen por los indignados españoles, congregó a cientos de miles de personas en más de ochenta países bajo el lema "unidos por un cambio global". En la entrevista, Stéphane aporta su visión sobre diversos temas, entre otros, las características novedosas del 15M, sus formas de acción, los contenidos de su crítica, la relación con los medios de comunicación y la policía, el empleo de las TIC y el humor en la comunicación, la conexión con la cultura libre, los vínculos internacionales de los indignados españoles, los resultados de su movilización y sus retos más importantes.
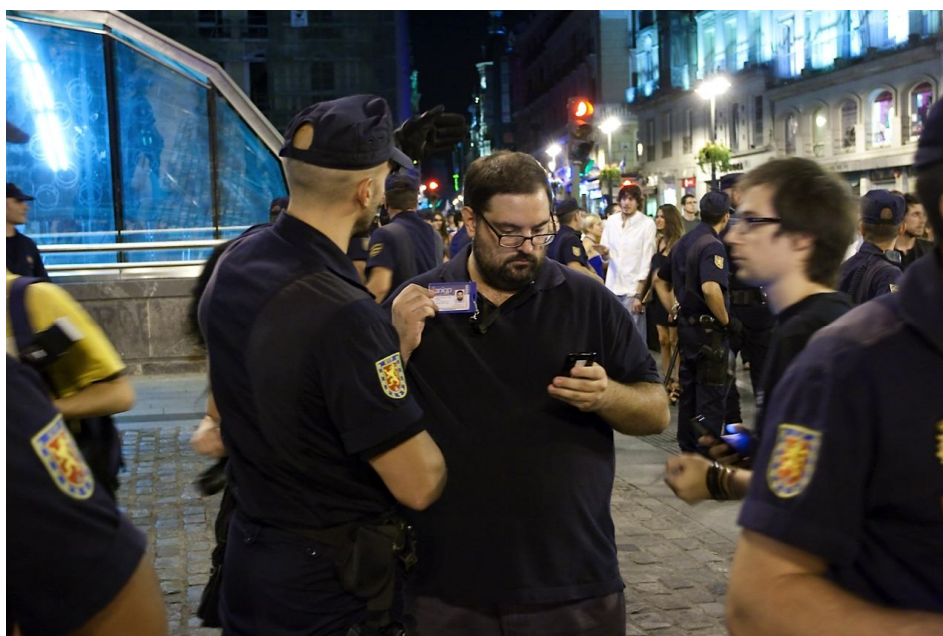
Ilustración 1: Stéphane, mostrando su acreditación de prensa a un policía mientras escribe un tweet, junto al periodista Héctor Juanatey, Madrid, 18.08.2011 (cc Daniel Nuevo)

[Pregunta] ¿De qué forma has participado y participas en el movimiento 15M?

[Respuesta] Como tanta otra gente, yo fui a la manifestación del 15 de mayo de 2011 convocada por Democracia Real Ya de una forma no casual. No soy una persona, o mejor dicho no era una persona de ir a manifestaciones, pero entre el estado de las cosas y dado que era un nuevo tipo de manifestación, en el sentido que no la convocaba ningún partido, sindicato o estructura tradicional, me pareció muy interesante. Además, decidí salir ese día a la calle porque es imposible no estar de acuerdo con los lemas o con lo que se iba viendo que eran las peticiones o las sensibilidades de Democracia Real Ya en tanto que entidad convocante y de todo el mundo que se sumó ese día a la manifestación.

Ese día fue precioso. Nos encontramos unos cuantos miles de personas en Madrid, muchas de las cuales eran gente como yo, para los cuales esto de salir a la calle era algo nuevo, pero que compartíamos ese hartazgo y esa necesidad. Fue una manifestación muy extraña, con muy pocos símbolos, sin las típicas pancartas organizadas. Todo era muy *homemade.* Fue una sensación preciosa, pasó todo sin ningún tipo de incidentes. Me encontré con mucha gente que conocía, curiosamente gente de mi barrio, lo que me hizo mucha ilusión. También estaba evidentemente toda la gente del activismo social de la zona centro [de Madrid], pero también otros vecinos. Llegamos a la Puerta del Sol y yo me fui a dormir. No me enteré de nada. Al día siguiente leí un tweet a las 9 de la mañana: "nos hemos quedado en Sol". [Aspaviento y gesto de ahogo.] Salté de mi cama y me fui corriendo para allá, y desde entonces allí me he quedado. Nunca he dormido en la plaza porque tengo la suerte de vivir muy cerca y no me ha hecho falta, pero digamos que desde el 15M hasta ayer he estado participando con toda la intensidad, el tiempo y la capacidad que he podido.

La tarea que he tomado ha sido hacer un poco como de cronista. El día 16 creo que estábamos todos ahí con la misma sensación, algo parecido a "aquí está pasando algo muy interesante, no sabemos muy bien qué es, pero yo quiero participar y quiero ayudar, ¿qué puedo hacer?" Yo empecé simplemente a contar lo que veía mediante Twitter, que me parece [una herramienta] muy útil porque llegas a [mucha] gente de una forma rápida, se multiplica la información y es cortito, con lo cual tampoco te enrollas. Empecé a hacerlo un poco [improvisadamente] y a las pocas horas o los pocos días ya empecé a hacerlo de forma consecuente. Y me convertí en una especie de mini-medio de comunicación autónomo, sin ningún interés, cliente, empresario o presión, sin nada. Tomé esa como mi tarea, y he sido bastante pesado: hay varios miles de tweets en el ciberespacio que me corresponden. A eso me dediqué. Me dije: "no me voy a meter en ninguna comisión o grupo de discusión, no voy a ayudar a traer maderas, yo voy a contar todo eso que está pasando". Y esa fue mi tarea. Alguien me dijo que yo funcionaba muy bien haciendo de puente entre la gente que estaba y la gente que no estaba.

¿Es algo nuevo para ti o has hecho algo parecido en movimientos anteriores?

No tengo ninguna tradición de activismo. Hacer, nunca he hecho nada. Y ahora todos hemos empezado a hacer cosas, y eso es muy positivo. Pase lo que pase con el movimiento 15M, a mí eso no me lo quitan.

Durante estos cinco meses, ¿ha cambiado tu forma de participación?

He estado tentado muchas veces de meterme en algún grupo. También he estado tentado de grabar vídeo. Me pasó una cosa que ahora creo que fue una suerte. El 16 de mayo tenía mi cámara de video en el servicio técnico y estaba muy irritado porque yo, que me dedico a hacer documentales, mi impulso es: [aspaviento] "voy a grabar todo lo que veo". Pero fui pasando de esa irritación a una especie de liberación y a una nueva situación de poder absorber las cosas y tener tiempo, no tener que grabar. Además, veía que ya había mucha gente grabando. El 16 de mayo yo también empecé a hacer un documental, de una forma un poco nueva para mí: particularizando las cosas y absorbiéndolas. Y desde entonces mi tarea no ha cambiado. De hecho, muchas veces he pensado en llevarme la cámara de fotos grande, la de video, pero no, prefiero irme con mi telefonito, que es una nueva herramienta. Mi relación con el teléfono también ha cambiado. Voy, observo, hablo con la gente y cuento cosas.

¿Cómo definirías al 15M?

No sé bien lo que es y no sé explicártelo, pero sí que te puedo dar algunas trazas o impresiones personales. Yo creo que el 15M es algo siempre positivo, en el sentido que la mayor parte del 15M, o lo más visible, o lo que yo más he experimentado son vecinos hablando entre ellos, intentando solucionar los problemas de todos. Y eso no puede ser malo. Y eso es lo que de alguna forma se ha hecho. Hemos acampado en mitad de unas ciudades, pero también hemos hecho un 15M que no se ve. Hay mucha gente trabajando sola en su casa, en grupos, en la red, y todo eso es 15M ¿Que es el 15M? Yo lo defino como un estado de ánimo. Es algo que te impregna, y entonces pasas de la típica indignación —esa palabra que ahora se usa tanto-, del típico situacionismo pasivo a una especie de estado activo y empiezas a hacer cosas. Todo el mundo hace cosas y hay muchísimas cosas que se hacen y también hay muchas cosas que se hacen y que no se ven. Y eso es alucinante. Tampoco sé de qué forma va a cristalizar esto o va a salir a la luz. No sé si dentro de 3 ó 4 años va a pasar algo, va a surgir algo, un partido, pero se está generando una gran cantidad de conocimiento y, sobre todo, se están movilizando y reactivando una gran

cantidad de ciudadanos. Me parece muy positivo y estoy seguro que va a traer algún cambio consigo.

¿Por qué el 15 de mayo, y no antes o después?

Hay dos cosas que estoy seguro han ayudado a que cristalice: primero, la situación de la llamada crisis, el hecho de que aquí el ciudadano está cada vez más y más presionado. Todo el mundo conoce a algún familiar o amigo que está parado y que está pasándolo mal, o que le van a quitar la casa. Creo que eso ha ayudado un poco a acelerar las cosas. Además, está la tecnología. Hubo 40 personas que se quedaron a dormir en la Puerta del Sol, pero la tecnología permitió que al día siguiente lo supieran millones. Las nuevas tecnologías permiten la circulación de las elites: ya no son las elites las que generan la información, ni las que acceden a la información y deciden qué, sino que ahora soy yo con mi teléfono y mucha gente como yo, los que contamos cosas que pasan y llegamos a miles de personas, intercambiamos opiniones [a través de las] redes sociales. Luego está la gestión del Twitter de @acampadasol y todas las páginas web que se han creado para el movimiento 15M. Han sido unas herramientas fantásticas. Ese acceso a la información, esa democratización de los medios de producción [de la información] y del acceso y la generación de la información ha tenido [mucho] que ver, incluso en el nacimiento, diría yo, porque buena parte de la gente que fue a la manifestación del 15 de mayo era gente que [maneja] otro tipo de información.

¿Hasta qué punto crees que el 15M supone una novedad dentro del contexto de la protesta en España?

No tengo mucho conocimiento de otros movimientos sociales. Protestas ha habido siempre. Es más, el 15M es algo que iba a pasar [de todas formas] porque es una suma de esos enfados y de ese hartazgo de la gente, pero también es una suma de muchas cosas que han ido pasando en muchos años: de la primavera árabe, por supuesto, pero también del 13 de marzo de 2004,[1] de las sentadas de V de Vivienda,[2] de la guerra de Irak, de los desahucios, de un montón de gente de movimientos que de repente se han reencontrado en esta amalgama y hemos juntado las sinergias y ha surgido esto. ¿Se parece a otra cosa? Yo creo que no.

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[1] Movilización de desobediencia civil durante la jornada de reflexión electoral de 2004, dos días después de los atentados del 11-M y un día antes de las elecciones generales que, contra pronóstico, dieron el triunfo al PSOE. La manifestación más visible fue la concentración de entre 3.000 y 5.000 personas en la sede general del PP en Madrid para exigir la verdad sobre los atentados, y que luego se extendió a otras ciudades. Véase, por ejemplo, Sampedro (2005).

[2] Plataforma de coordinación de las acciones del Movimiento por una Vivienda Digna surgido en 2006. Véase, entre otros, Aguilar y Fernández (2010).

Tiene también otras cosas que quizá lo hacen distinto, y esto no lo digo con conocimiento científico, es únicamente la impresión que tengo. Me refiero a lo inclusivo que es el 15M y al tema de la no-violencia. Ha habido en estos cinco meses múltiples ocasiones donde la cosa podría haber desvariado muy fácilmente, en el sentido que en cualquier tipo de reunión reivindicativa de más de 30 ó 40 personas, en cualquier sector, desde el futbol hasta los astilleros, es muy fácil que vuele una botella, que se le pegue una patada a la papelera, y aquí se ha tenido tal cuidado con todo eso que a mí me ha resultado algo emocionante. He asistido en la Puerta del Sol ha algunas intermediaciones de la comisión de respeto solucionando conflictos que me han parecido absolutamente brillantes.[3] ¡Qué gente! Son unos héroes. Se ha trabajado mucho en eso.

La no-violencia parece ser una de las señas de identidad del movimiento.

Tiene que ver con ese estado de ánimo. Es muy difícil que en una asamblea de 4.000 personas donde todo el mundo pone toda su buena voluntad para escucharte y ayudarte, tú, en un determinado momento, decidas tener una acción violenta. No va con ello. Acampadasol era igual que una comunidad de vecinos, un hospital, un aeropuerto, una ciudad o un país; era una sociedad que tenía sus problemas y sus roces, claro, y en este caso la comisión de respeto era la que se encargaba [de solucionarlos allí]. Pero yo creo que esto ha trascendido e inunda todo. Han pasado una serie de cosas que son realmente sorprendentes. Por ejemplo, las sentadas que hubo delante del Congreso.[4] Allí hubo un cuidado extremo y era muy curioso ver al típico chaval que, sin querer caricaturizar ni señalar, notas que se mueve en entornos anarquistas y que esa persona se vuelva y le indique a otra que hoy y aquí no se grita "la policía tortura y asesina" sino que hay que gritar "policía, sois como nosotros, y a vosotros también os engañan". Me pareció fantástico. Como te digo, [la no-violencia] ha trascendido y se ha hecho [algo visible] en todo momento.

Todos, en nuestra diferencia, en nuestra percepción de las cosas, en nuestras capacidades y nuestras orientaciones, estamos en lo mismo cuidando mucho eso, que por otra parte es lo normal: cuidar la convivencia. Antonio Lafuente, que es un investigador del CSIC que trabaja sobre líneas de procomún,[5] me

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[3] El campamento de la Puerta del Sol de Madrid (Acampadasol) se organizó, por un lado, en diversas comisiones dedicadas al mantenimiento del campamento y la logística del proceso asambleario, y por el otro, en grupos de trabajo dedicados a generar discurso vinculado con el movimiento 15M. Una relación de unas y otros, en http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net.

[4] Concentraciones convocadas delante del Congreso de los Diputados los días 21 y 22 de junio para protestar contra la reforma de la negociación colectiva. El Congreso está situado a escasos 500 metros de la Puerta del Sol.

[5] Véase http://medialab-prado.es/laboratorio_del_procomun/

mandó un tweet que me dio mucho que pensar y que decía algo así como que la convivencia es uno de los primeros procomunes que tenemos y que era muy bonito que se hubiera inventado una comisión de respeto para eso. Todos los días vemos en el Congreso cómo se chillan. Aquí no se chilla nadie, se respeta el disenso, puedes decir lo que quieras, y yo de verdad, con todo mi amor, voy a intentar ayudar. Todo eso ha sido muy bello y todo ha aportado, y estaba dentro del núcleo del 15M. Sea lo que sea el 15M, ha tenido eso y tiene que mantenerlo y todavía lo mantiene, yo creo. La manifestación del sábado [15O] también fue así.

¿Por qué tomando la plaza?

No lo sé, pero supongo que tiene que ver con lo que vimos en la Plaza Tahrir. De cómo decidieron hacerse ellos fuertes allí y dijeron: "hasta que no cambiéis, de aquí no nos vamos y podéis matarnos". Y allí los mataban. No tenemos que olvidar nunca que aquí no nos pasa nada. Puede venir un policía y que te pegue un poco, que es algo que ha pasado, pero no te juegas la vida como en otros sitios. Se decidió usar el símbolo de hacernos presentes y hacernos visibles. Te acabo de hablar de tecnología, de Twitter, de redes sociales, pero también en este país hay que pensar que una gran parte de la población no accede a ese tipo de información; hay mucha gente que sólo lee uno de los dos principales periódicos, ve uno de los tres principales canales de televisión, y escucha una de las cuatro principales radios, y esa es toda la información que recibe. Entonces, era interesante que la gente se enterara de lo que estaba pasando, y eso se hace a través de medios tradicionales y se consigue logrando visibilidad y qué mejor que ocupando un espacio público. Por otra parte, las plazas han sido tradicionalmente un espacio de intercambio, de diálogo. Y a mí me parece muy buen sitio para juntarnos y hablar. Otra cosa es montar una mini-ciudad. Pero, qué mejor sitio para hablar de las cosas; es lo que deberíamos hacer siempre, ¿no?

Ilustración 2: Movilización en la Plaza Tahrir, El Cairo, 8.2.2011 (cc Mona)

El tema de los toldos y de cómo se ha montado todo era, evidentemente, una referencia directa a la Plaza Tahrir. Y es algo que se ha conseguido porque antes de que saliera en los medios de comunicación españoles, que primero lo ignoraron –mejor dicho, una parte lo ignoró y otra parte desinformó adrede y tergiversó-, hubo un momento en el que el Washington Post sacó la foto [de la Puerta del Sol con los toldos] y entonces [los medios españoles] dijeron: "vamos a tener que empezar a hablar de ellos"[6]. Lo conseguimos y fue algo muy curioso: que tu periódico o tu radio, que tiene la redacción a 400 metros de Sol, pase por el Washington Post y vuelva. Pues se consiguió.

¿Qué problemas crees que denuncia el 15M?

A ver cómo me salgo del discurso tradicional activista, que por otra parte no controlo muy bien, pero... es que en el 15M, amigo, estamos en lo de siempre: se trata de vivir con dignidad y que no te mientan, que no te roben y que no te engañen. ¿Qué problemas son? Nos pasamos muchos días intentando lograr el famoso "consenso de mínimos" que no pudimos [sacar adelante], pero son los 3

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[6] Véase http://www.scribd.com/doc/55801317/The-Washington-Post-19-05-2011

ó 4 puntos donde te digo que nadie puede estar en desacuerdo. El 15M pide cosas como que hay que hablar de la ley electoral, ni siquiera te dice cómo debería ser, sino simplemente que así no funciona y que deberíamos hablar de ello. Y esa es la cosa más polémica. ¿Qué más pide? Que haya una separación efectiva de poderes, que la corrupción se expulse de la vida pública... Ese es el famoso acuerdo de mínimos que finalmente no pudimos alcanzar, pero bueno.[7]

¿Cómo ha sido la relación del 15M con los medios de comunicación de masas?

Ha habido una parte de desconcierto porque nadie sabía qué estaba pasando: esas asambleas, esas movidas, no es nada que hubiera pasado antes, no había referencias, era una cosa viva, orgánica, y había que tomarse el tiempo, y hay una serie de medios que se lo han tomado y yo siempre los cito, no tengo el más mínimo problema porque hay que reconocer su labor. El medio tradicional, grande, convencional que mejor lo ha hecho ha sido *20 Minutos*, uno de los periódicos gratuitos del metro y que tiene una web fantástica, y que son gente que se ha pasado miles de horas en la Puerta del Sol. También está *Periodismo Humano*, *Cuarto Poder*, *Diagonal*...[8] [Se trataba de] echarle un montón de horas y tener la voluntad de entender.

Yo he visto informaciones de prensa que hablaban de una asamblea del día anterior y eran informaciones que habían pasado por una agencia. Entiendo cómo está la prensa, que hay muchos problemas económicos y muchas noticias, y que esto tendrá la importancia que tenga, pero esto es Madrid, es la Puerta del Sol: manda a un tío que se escuche la asamblea y que te haga una pieza, no te vayas a las agencias. Lo de la prensa ha sido muy decepcionante porque incluso grandes medios más o menos progresistas no han tenido esa voluntad de comprender. También han debido recibir muchas presiones, me imagino, para criminalizar, para intentar buscar el líder... Rubalcaba diciendo "¿quién es el líder?" Y lo único que tenías que hacer era venir aquí, escuchar, intentar hablar con la gente y observar.

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[7] Las cuatro líneas de debate eran: 1) reforma electoral encaminada a una democracia más representativa y de proporcionalidad real y con el objetivo adicional de desarrollar mecanismos efectivos de participación ciudadana; 2) lucha contra la corrupción mediante normas orientadas a una total transparencia política; 3) separación efectiva de los poderes públicos; y 4) creación de mecanismos de control ciudadano para la exigencia efectiva de responsabilidad política (http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2011/05/26/).

[8] *Periodismo Humano* es un medio digital "con enfoque de derechos humanos y sin ánimo de lucro"; *Cuarto Poder* se define en Twitter como el "primer periódico de blogs en castellano, creado y editado por más de 20 periodistas"; *Diagonal* es un "periódico quincenal de actualidad crítica".

¿Crees que hay un perfil demográfico predominante en el 15M?

Aquí voy a intentar diferenciar 15M de Acampadasol, porque son dos cosas distintas. En el 15M hay evidentemente un tipo de gente más progresista, más de izquierdas; hay cierta [afinidad] en ese aspecto. También hay, quizá, cierta predominancia de la gente joven, pero no es cierto eso que se dijo que solo eran estudiantes y parados. Supongo que también son gente que accede a otro tipo de medios de comunicación, gente con otra información. Pero en la manifestación del 15O se veía perfectamente que era totalmente transversal; esa manifestación y la del 15 de mayo, y muchas de las que ha habido entre medio. Otras no, otras estaban más copadas por los sindicatos. Pero incluso la del mismo 19J fue interesante porque se vio que había otras estructuras que entraban [en el movimiento].[9] Volvíamos a ver esa izquierda tradicional de siempre, pero hasta ahora [el 15M] ha sido una cosa absolutamente transversal. No te puedo decir estadísticamente, pero hay un poco de todo y a mí me encantó porque yo tenía un poco miedo con eso, con ver qué pasaba el sábado [15O], y cuando volví a ver esas familias... Eso esta bien, esas familias que estaban con los niños, esto mola, esto es 15M.

En cuanto a Acampadasol, eso fue ya más microclima y, sin duda, había un núcleo de gente más activista, y menos mal que estaban ellos. Muy cerca de Acampadasol teníamos La Tabacalera, el Centro Social Okupado Casablanca, el Patio [Maravillas],[10] una serie de sitios con una serie de gente con un *know-how* de hacer cosas, que desde un principio han estado aportando y, además, han sabido mantenerse al margen o se ha sabido cómo mantenerlos al margen. Toda esta gente está ayudando, pero mantienen el rollo de "sin banderas" y de "estamos aquí en el 15M como ciudadanos". Eso funcionó muy bien. Evidentemente, en Acampadasol, y sobre todo las últimas semanas, se veía un tejido más activista, pero había mucha gente que venía y miraba. Muchas veces se iban al metro, a su casa, pero muchas veces pasaban por Acampadasol y yo las escuchaba y era muy interesante; la percepción del ciudadano que se encontraba con eso y tenía esa curiosidad de meterse en el toldo y pasarse un cuarto de hora e incluso hablar con uno [de los activistas].

Supongo que mucha de esa gente acabaría volviendo, [aunque] no creo que participaran porque para participar hay una cuestión por encima de todo y es que tienes que poder permitírtelo. Tienes que tener tiempo, y hay mucha gente que no puede. Por otra parte, me acuerdo de un día, debía ser la segunda semana, en el que de repente aparece un señor de cincuentaytantos años, en mono, con su maleta de cuero, el típico mecánico y dice: "chavales, tomad, os

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[9] Marchas contra la Crisis y el Capital convocadas en su origen por la Coordinadora de Barrios y Pueblos en Lucha de Madrid y a las que se sumó el movimiento 15M expresando su rechazo al Pacto al Euro lanzado por el Consejo Europeo en marzo de 2011.

[10] Centro Social Autogestionado La Tabacalera de Lavapies (http://latabacalera.net/); Centro Social Okupado Casablanca (www.csocasablanca.org); El Patio Maravillas (http://defiendelo.patiomaravillas.net/).

traemos esto del taller". Y saca un cuadro de interruptores. "Esto lo ponéis en los generadores y los protege. Es lo único que tenemos, es antiguo, pero creemos que funciona. Ahora me tengo que ir a trabajar, pero esta tarde vengo y os lo monto." Y se lo da a un tío que resulta ser el típico *rastas*. Yo estaba mirando aquello y se me saltaban las lágrimas. Ese señor hizo sus 8-10 horas de curro y volvería para montarlo. Hemos visto cosas así. La gente ayudaba, y eso era gente normal, gente que estaba muy contenta de ver que pasaba algo.

Quizá podemos hablar de dos niveles de activismo o compromiso gracias a los cuales se ha sostenido todo esto.

Hay gente que se ha pasado un mes viviendo allí y hay gente que un día, durante dos horas de su tiempo, ha ido y ha ayudado en la guardería. Todos hemos hecho todo lo que hemos podido. No sólo eso, también la gente que había fuera. Por ejemplo, el caso de una escritora que se llama Silvia Nanclares. A esta chica el 15M la pilló, creo, en una casa rural en Francia, donde estaba escribiendo un libro, o acabando de hacer algo. No podía venirse, pero qué hacía: cosas como acampar ella sola en su sofá. También hizo una página web, que se llama Bookcamping,[11] en la que desarrollaron un sistema para la recolección de los textos que nos habían traído hasta el 15M. Lo que quiero decir es que todo el mundo, en la posibilidad que ha tenido, ha hecho lo que ha podido, y eso es muy emocionante. En mi caso, todo el tiempo libre que he tenido, que es mucho porque estoy parado y era verano. Yo no me he ido de vacaciones por el 15M. Luego está toda la gente de los pueblos, pero ese es otro problema. En Madrid nos fijamos mucho en Acampadasol porque ha sido una experiencia muy intensa, pero tú piensa en los pueblos y en otros sitios, porque ha habido acampadas, asambleas e historias que son muy duras: 8 tíos con su saco de dormir en la Plaza Mayor de Cáceres y por la noche viene el guardia con la manguera y [gesto de regar].

¿Qué pros y contras ves con respecto al empleo de las TIC en esta movilización?

¿Pros? Hay muchos: la posibilidad de comunicar, de acceso a la información, el poder estar yo en la Puerta del Sol con mi telefonito y poder leer el último comunicado de la asamblea de aquí o el último comunicado de la asamblea de Buenos Aires. Ese intercambio, esa facilidad para llegar a la gente, e incluso esa herramienta logística. Me acuerdo de las primeras semanas en Acampadasol, cuando había una lista de necesidades en la que se leía: "hace falta papel higiénico pero no traigáis más pan, que ya tenemos". Eso empezó como algo

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[11] http://bookcamping.cc/

muy analógico, un cartón colgado a una farola, pero en una hora había miles de personas que ya lo habían [leído] y en tiempo real.

Ilustración 3: Nos hace falta / Por hoy no se necesita (cc Eduardo Romanos, 20.11.2011)

¿Contras? Hay uno típico: la cantidad de información y la intoxicación. Muchas veces ha sido muy difícil saber qué información era buena o veraz porque todo está inundado de información. Yo estoy lanzando 14 tweets al minuto, otra mucha gente también y luego están los medios, pero se ha gestionado bien. Ha sido una gestión y un modelo de organización que muchas empresas y estados deberían estudiar. El hecho de crear esas cuentas de Twitter, que son como oficiales... La gente del tweet de @acampadasol son otros que han hecho un trabajo absolutamente extraordinario. Yo no me canso de repetirlo. Tienen 70.000 seguidores y han sido un poco la voz oficial. Yo he estado con ellos, y muchas veces han estado tentados de respaldar algo, pero se han auto-moderado. El tweet de @acampadasol es perfecto porque sabes que todo lo que venga de ahí es información buena. No es la oficial, ni representan a nadie, simplemente es información buena. Luego están las páginas web: tomalaplaza.net y otras. Ahora mismo hay un blog de tomalosbarrios que me

dijeron que tenía 1.500 usuarios.[12] ¡Es tal movidón! Y creo que hay 104 ó 114 asambleas censadas en la Comunidad de Madrid, y cada una cuelga su acta. Esa organización y esa logística es algo que antes era imposible de hacer y ahora con las TIC es posible.

La información difundida desde @acampadasol no es la oficial, simplemente es buena información.

Su tarea es esa. En ese aspecto yo me comparo muy humildemente con ellos en el sentido que lo que hacen ellos y lo que hago yo es observar la realidad e informar. Yo lo hago desde fuera, en el perímetro, y ellos están dentro de la estructura, pero ven las cosas y las cuentan. Hace poco estuvimos en un congreso de periodismo digital en Huelva e hicimos una mesa [redonda] sobre el 15M. A gente como yo siempre nos intentan enmarcar en una cosa que se llama "periodismo ciudadano", que yo no sé muy bien qué es, pero no importa. Los periodistas nos decían que, sí, que [tenéis] "muy buena voluntad, chavales", pero que dábamos información sin contrastar... y que si teníamos o no teníamos credibilidad... Y yo les contestaba dos cosas, con toda la educación y la humildad posibles: primero, que no entiendo muy bien eso de contrastar porque lo que yo hago es ir a sitios y ver cosas y no sé qué coño tengo que contrastar porque... [hace como que apunta]: "hay 70 personas... el guardia lleva identificación o no... esta lloviendo pero han puesto un toldo..." Entonces, no existe eso [de contrastar], es algo directo. Y segundo, sobre la credibilidad. En las movilizaciones de agosto me pasó una cosa muy curiosa, y es que mucha gente me escribía al Twitter para ¡corroborar noticias! Por ejemplo: "en El País están contando que hay tanta gente, ¿es así?". Yo miraba y decía: "no", "sí", "50", "36 policías"... Las personas usaban a gente como yo o como @acampadasol para confirmar las noticias, con lo que eso de la credibilidad habría que discutirlo. Con esto en ningún caso minusvaloro la necesidad de prensa. Los periodistas son muy importantes. Yo no intento sustituirlos, no tengo ni formación ni conocimientos ni nada y yo voy a Acampadasol o a una manifestación y no sirvo para relacionarme, o buscar otras fuentes. No sé hacerlo, simplemente cuento lo que veo. Los periodistas nos hacen falta, nos hace falta que vengan, que analicen, que cuenten, que nos provoquen... queremos periodistas. Simplemente reivindico el papel de gente privada que [informa] mediante esta herramienta [muestra su teléfono], que yo defino como un "arma de comunicación masiva". Tengo la suerte de poder pagarme todavía la tarifa plana de datos y con esto llego a todo el mundo. Ellos lo comprenden, y que no se irriten y que sumen. Hay medios que lo están entendiendo y medios que no. También hubo ciertos roces con la prensa, y es comprensible. Venía la prensa, y había gente que no quería que se les grabara. Otros sí. De hecho, de las pocas intervenciones que he tenido en una asamblea, dos de ellas fueron precisamente para decir que habría que dejar a esta gente que grabe y que vengan cuando

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[12] http://madrid.tomalosbarrios.net/

quieran. Estamos pidiendo eso, aquí estamos defendiendo eso. Por otra parte, la Puerta del Sol se convirtió también en una especie de vivienda, y entonces es muy complicado que venga el cámara y entre en tu dormitorio. Hay se juntaban varias cosas.

¿Qué conexión dirías que tiene el 15M con la cultura libre?

Es una de las cosas que más me ha llamado la atención y también me ha hecho más feliz. Y además es una de las cosas que me han atraído al 15M. Cada uno tiene una vía, y la mía es claramente la cultura libre. Yo tenía cierto interés en la cultura libre. Hice *¡Copiad, malditos!*, un documental sobre la propiedad intelectual. Después, algo de mi activismo empezó con la Ley Sinde, que yo percibo como una ley que coarta derechos fundamentales de libertad de expresión.[13] Después vino [la plataforma] No Les Votes,[14] en fin... A mí, entre otras cosas, lo que me llevó a la manifestación del 15 de mayo fue la Ley Sinde y la cultura libre. Además, en la organización de Acampadasol, he visto reproducidos muchos mecanismos de la cultura libre. Todo era muy copyleft: ese compartir, ese crear en comunidad. En muchas de las programaciones de software libre se hacen grupos en los que se trabaja a partir de dos principios: el "rough consensus" y el "running code". Nosotros queremos que haya una cosa funcionante [sic] que se vaya desarrollando y... cada uno va trabajando y todos aportáis y yo en determinado momento decido qué se usa y qué no. Son procesos colaborativos y en Acampadasol se ha funcionado así en buena medida. Fue muy emocionante, se me cayó el lagrimón, en la primera semana, cuando montaron el punto de recogida de materiales, el archivo, en el que había una gente con unos ordenadores, y tú ibas con tu tarjetita y te lo descargabas, y vimos ahí un cartelito: "archivo de Sol, licencia creative commons". Se estaba comprendiendo eso. Toda la información que se estaba generando ahí, no se secuestra, no se usa. No, está aquí, entonces yo pongo el esfuerzo, la catalogo y todo eso, pero después te la devuelvo para que tú hagas lo que quieras, y te digo tú, ciudadano, te digo tú, diario *Público*, te digo tú, Intereconomía.[15]

La cultura libre se basa, como yo la entiendo, en una percepción de la cultura como algo no meramente comercial. Y vuelvo al tema del procomún. Yo hago *¡Copiad, Malditos!*, que es un documental comercial, que a mí me da de comer, pero luego resulta que, en lugar de querer venderlo en DVD, decido ponerlo en

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13 Polémica disposición de la Ley 2/2011 de 4 de marzo de Economía Sostenible relativa a la regulación de webs y la protección de la propiedad intelectual y conocida como Ley Sinde por Ángeles González-Sinde, en esos momentos Ministra de Cultura.

14 www.nolesvotes.com; http://wiki.nolesvotes.org/wiki/Portada

15 *Público* era un diario de tirada nacional y corte progresista (dejó de publicarse en papel en febrero de 2012) mientras que el Grupo Intereconomía es un grupo de comunicación con presencia en radio, televisión, internet y prensa escrita de corte conservador en lo moral y neoliberal en lo político y económico.

Internet con una licencia libre, que se pueda descargar, y así retornar un poco al procomún. Significa devolver un poco a la sociedad. Si tú quieres ver *¡Copiad, Malditos!*, que además lo has pagado porque es una coproducción de TVE, con lo cual [se ha hecho] con tus impuestos, te vas a Internet. Yo pierdo ese rédito pero aporto eso, y me hace feliz. Y en Acampadasol o en el 15M en general hay mucho de eso, hay mucho de hacer este tipo de cosas pero también con esa visión... humanista, de vamos a devolver a la sociedad, vamos a construir entre todos. Esas asambleas coñazo también son muy de cultura libre en ese aspecto: vamos a estar aquí hasta las 5 de la mañana escuchando hasta el último disenso porque es importante hacerlos así aunque sea poco efectivo y poco rentable. Ese compartir, ese trabajar juntos, ese... Llevo mucho tiempo pensando en esto y no sé formularlo mejor. Estoy un poco decepcionado conmigo mismo, pero... me gustaría tener ya una frase o aclararme, pero... te aseguro que era eso: esta revolución ha sido muy copyleft.

En varias ocasiones, en tu blog y tu cuenta de Twitter has hecho referencia a la utilización del humor dentro del 15M, ¿qué papel crees que está desempeñando en todo esto?

A mí me gusta mucho el humor sarcástico y crítico. Disfruto mucho analizando la actualidad con humor. Las viñeras de El Roto[16] durante el 15M han sido una herramienta de comprensión, de traducción, y también de felicidad porque te trae cierta felicidad experimentar el humor. A mí también me ha servido mucho para procesar emociones, e incluso frustraciones. Había una serie de momentos en los que asistía a una situación en la que me emocionaba mucho, o me enfadaba, y a la hora de twittear intentaba poner una chanza más o menos acertada pero que me ayudara a procesar esas emociones. Me pareció una cosa muy útil, incluso para reírnos de nosotros mismos. Por ejemplo, hay un video que se titula "Asamblea Interminable" en el que un grupo hizo una performance muy divertida en la que nos reíamos de nosotros mismos y de nuestra poca capacidad de sintetizar.[17] No sé cómo decirte, la felicidad que me ha dado a mí ver ese vídeo, relacionándolo con todas estas asambleas, que parecen tan absurdas y no lo son... Sí, son poco efectivas, estoy de acuerdo, pero esas horas que nos hemos pasado allí discutiendo con nuestra buena voluntad... Todo eso te ayudaba a procesar. Y ha habido momentos de humor que yo creo que han ayudado mucho. Otro caso que me parece interesante es el de @putohelicoptero: esa cuenta de Twitter absurda, que siempre te contestaba, y a veces te hacía sentir muy bien porque, de verdad, llevamos cinco meses en Madrid como en una novela de George Orwell.[18]

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[16] Viñetista del diario El País.

[17] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcvUXdOHkBw

[18] Tras el desalojo de la Puerta del Sol en la madrugada del 2 de agosto por la policía, usuarios de Twitter usaron la etiqueta #putohelicoptero para quejarse de las molestias que les causaban los

También ha podido servir para rebajar tensiones.

Efectivamente, es como una válvula de escape. A nivel emocional, es lo que tú dices, cuando nos encendemos mucho... Y reírnos de nosotros mismos, que es la cosa más sana del mundo y aquí lo hemos hecho bastante. Mucha gente tendría que aprender de eso.

¿Cómo ha sido la relación del 15M con la policía?

Con el tema de la policía, mi principal pensamiento es que tengo una gran decepción. Y vamos a decir policía porque al fin y al cabo es el funcionario que tienes enfrente con la porra, pero es una policía y una dirección de gobierno y unos políticos y toda una cadena. A mí, a nivel de usuario me ha pasado lo siguiente. Yo soy burgués, y nunca he tenido problemas legales. Además, nunca he sido activista, con lo cual yo era bastante escéptico con la típica historia [de represión que te cuenta] el "pelos". Pero eso ha cambiado. He visto cómo han agredido a personas sin ningún tipo de motivo. Por su estética y por estar ahí. Y por hartazgo. Hubo un día en el que los policías estaban hartos de estar ahí, y [decían:] "venga, esto hay que limpiarlo ya, y pum, pum, pum". Es un uso de la violencia que me ha parecido absolutamente inadmisible. Yo no sabía que estas cosas podían pasar. Y ha cambiado mi concepto totalmente. No sé si es el policía individual, el jefe del operativo, el delegado de gobierno, no sé quien, pero hay alguien que lo ha hecho muy mal. Y no sé analizar cómo es el trabajo policial, pero desde luego, la violencia, especialmente lo del 17 de agosto...[19] La misma carga del Ministerio del Interior, fue absolutamente innecesaria, yo me quedé temblando, pasé miedo...[20] Ese fue otro día de decepción con la prensa. Yo estaba allí y lo vi, y al día siguiente volví a leer unas cosas [en los medios de comunicación] que eran otra vez falsedades, absolutas falsedades. Por ejemplo, una que se repetía mucho era que se había avisado antes de la carga. Y eso es mentira porque llegaron las furgonetas, salieron los policías y a la que salían iban repartiendo. Hay videos, sí, pero lo que pasa es que en muchos sitios ven

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helicópteros de la policía que sobrevolaban el centro de Madrid. El 3 de agosto se creó en clave de humor la cuenta @putohelicoptero (3.000 seguidores), cuyos mensajes reproducían el molesto sonido (taca tacatacataca...). Stéphane M. Grueso le hace una entrevista en su blog: http://stephanegrueso.blogspot.com/2011/08/personajes-del-15m-putohelicoptero.html. Otros ejemplos de cuentas que utilizan la parodia son @acampadapolicia y @desdelamoncloa (No os representamos).

[19] Jornada de violencia policial en Madrid tras la Marcha Laica convocada por diversas organizaciones críticas con el gasto público en la visita del Papa Benedicto XVI a la ciudad con motivo de la XXVI Jornada Mundial de la Juventud (16-21 de agosto).

[20] Carga de la policía en la noche del 4 de agosto contra manifestantes congregados ante la sede del Ministerio del Interior, con la Puerta del Sol cerrada por la policía desde el 2 de agosto.

Antena 3 y no ven *Periodismo Humano* o mi cuenta de Twitter o los 70 vídeos que hay de la carga. Ese es el problema.

Yo no sé cómo se tendría que haber gestionado todo esto. Por otra parte, una cosa que sí sé es que yo tengo derecho a ir a la Puerta del Sol y sentarme. Yo entiendo que hay unas leyes que regulan estas cosas y que no pueden ser más de 19 [personas] y todo eso. También entiendo que no puedo impedir el comercio y toda una serie de cosas, vale. Todo eso lo entiendo pero somos una serie de gente que nos juntamos un tiempo delimitado en la Puerta del Sol a hablar asuntos públicos, qué mejor que eso, ¿no? Esa ocupación del espacio público... la Plaza Mayor es un sitio que la mitad del año está ocupada con unos stands de no sé qué mercadillo, de presentaciones comerciales, de una serie de cosas... ¿eso no es ocupar el espacio público? ¿Quién se lleva el rédito de eso? ¿Por qué ellos sí y...? Podemos hacer también la comparación fácil, pero bastante evidente, con la JMJ [Jornada Mundial de la Juventud]:[21] cómo han cerrado esta ciudad 15 días para una representación, un congreso privado, no sé, lo que fuera, no sé cómo definirlo.

Ha cambiado mi percepción personal totalmente. Yo respeto mucho la autoridad, son muy necesarios y es muy difícil, pero hacedlo bien porque tenéis una responsabilidad especial, porque estás jugando con cosas muy serias. Tengo dos compañeras de la asamblea de los Austrias,[22] que además tuve la suerte de grabar el vídeo y que espero que les ayude en su causa... las estaban sacando de la plaza y de repente [les empezaron a golpear].[23] Bueno, pues hay una que le quieren meter de 4 a 6 años y que tiene que ir cada 15 días a firmar a un juzgado. Descubriendo estas cosas, me da un poco de vergüenza decirlo, pero lo digo con toda seguridad: yo no sabía, desconocía que pasaban y es que de verdad pasan y nos tiene que dar mucho que pensar y tenemos que luchar contra ello porque... esto se parece mucho a [lo que pasaba] antes de la democracia.

Has comentado en tu blog que has vivido como observador las protestas del 1 de mayo en Berlín, ¿qué diferencia ves en las interacciones entre policía y manifestantes en España y Alemania?

La verdad es que no tengo elementos suficientes como para contestarte, pero sí, estando trabajando en TVE he asistido varios años a las protestas del 1 de mayo [en Berlín] y allí está todo como coreografiado. Acaba con una carga, y reparten, pero tú tienes muchas oportunidades de irte. Y, últimamente, [lo podemos ver] en Occupy Wall Street, cuando fueron al Puente de Brooklyn y lo cortaron y hubo 700 detenciones. Yo veía allí policías con megáfonos contando el rollo de

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[21] Véase nota 18.

[22] Barrio de los Austrias en la zona centro de Madrid.

[23] Video grabado en la noche del 17 de agosto y disponible en
http://stephanegrueso.blogspot.com/2011/08/la-manifestacion-laica-del-17-lo-bueno.html

la ley 14-no-sé-qué... Yo aquí no he visto a un solo guardia con un megáfono. No han avisado de nada.

También ha habido mucha discrecionalidad en el control policial de la protesta.

Es el desconcierto de la no-violencia y eso se ve muy bien en los vídeos de la carga de Plaza Cataluña en Barcelona: cómo están los policías pegando y la gente se protege y no vuela un puño de vuelta, no vuela una botella, y ese es el desconcierto. Pero vamos, es una decepción. Otra cosa que también he observado en la policía en este tipo de acciones violentas, y eso de verdad que lo juraría, es que muchas veces en una acción de este tipo, un policía se va para delante, hace una locura y los demás no pueden más que seguirle. Eso yo lo he visto.

En ocasiones pasa también con la protesta, que a partir de una determinada acción se produce una escalada de violencia.

Una veces sí y otras no porque en estas manifestaciones por Madrid, aparte de acallar gritos que no parecían adecuados, he visto en una de estas manifestaciones, el 18 o el 19 de agosto, después de la JMJ, después de la violencia [policial], que hubo un par de manifestaciones de protesta y hubo una como errante que acabó con una carga en Opera.[24] En esa manifestación vi cómo un joven se dirigía a unas peregrinas y empezaba a gritarles muy cerca y otra persona de estética anarco, ir para allá, cogerle del brazo y meterlo para adentro. Esas cosas las hemos visto. Entonces, sí, unas veces, efectivamente, se produce una escalada, y uno tira una piedra y van mil piedras y unas veces uno tira una piedra y se le da un coscorrón y se le mete para adentro [de la manifestación].

El 15M destaca también por el control de los posibles descontrolados.

Vosotros los académicos tenéis que echarle unas horas a eso y estudiarlo porque me parece algo absolutamente revelador y, además, una cosa que deberíamos intentar proteger y mantener, porque es algo más que legitima tu protesta.

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[24] Plaza situada a 600 metros de la Puerta del Sol, unida a ella por una calle peatonal (calle del Arenal).

A nivel personal, ¿qué es lo que más te ha impactado del 15M?

Para mí ha supuesto un cambio muy grande en el sentido que yo, de verdad, me reconozco en la famosa plaquita que teníamos allí: "Plaza Tomada. Dormíamos, Despertamos."[25] Es lo que me ha pasado a mí: yo he empezado a hacer cosas. Ahora estoy muy contento conmigo mismo, como dicen las modelos. No, de verdad, te da una tranquilidad personal, un placer el saber que haces lo que puedes, pero que de verdad haces. Otra cosa que el 15M me ha permitido es ampliar mi círculo social de una forma alucinante. Yo soy de amistades muy cortas, conozco muy poca gente, he vivido además muchos años fuera, hemos cambiado de residencia, con lo cual tenemos menos grupo y ahora, de repente, hay un grupo de conocidos y de amigos y de muy amigos que ha crecido mucho y que a mí me aporta muchísimo.

También me ha dejado con ganas. A mí, el 15M me ha dejado con ganas, me está dejando con ganas. Yo no sé muy bien de qué, y no me voy a meter en política o no voy a convertirme en un mártir, no sé lo que voy a hacer, pero... ojito, [porque] hay mucha gente que estamos impregnados de esto y seguimos aquí. Hay mucha gente trabajando en la línea de compartir y generar procomún. Ayer, por ejemplo, un compañero publicó una foto de las muchas que había hechas desde arriba de la concentración de Sol, una foto muy bonita. La posteamos y la retwitteamos y hoy ha llegado un tweet que dice: "gracias a esta foto me he inspirado y he abierto un blog." Eso es muy importante y a mí, con la pequeña resonancia que tengo a través del Twitter, me pasa mucho eso, ver gente que me contesta, interactuar con ellos, y son gente que se han abierto la cuenta del Twitter anteayer... hay un montón de blogs que tienen un post, dos posts...Toda esa gente, toda esa generación de conocimiento, toda esa reflexión... ¡es impagable! Eso tiene que continuar y es un poco lo que me ha pasado a mí también. ¿Cómo me ha cambiado el 15M? No sé cómo me ha cambiado, lo que sí sé es que me ha cambiado y estoy muy contento con que me haya cambiado. Yo me quedaría con esa idea.

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[25] Plaza colocada en la Puerta del Sol el 12 de junio de 2011, y que fue retirada tras el desalojo del 2 de agosto.

Ilustración 4: Dormíamos, Despertamos. Plaza Tomada

En cuanto a iniciativas específicas, ¿cuáles son las que más te han llamado la atención?

Hay una que me parece muy significativa, que es el tema de parar los desahucios. Con ello, para empezar, lo primero que ha pasado es que te has encontrado con una realidad que desconocías. Creo que hay entre 240 y 300 desahucios al día. Estamos en un pico, pero en los últimos 10 años, en este país, a docenas de personas se les echaba diariamente de su casa y tú eso no lo sabías. Bueno, pues ahora ya lo sabes. Sólo el hecho de saberlo ya me parece muy interesante. Y también el efecto de ir y ponerte delante de una casa, que es una cosa que he intentado hacer yo de vez en cuando y que me parece muy sano. Yo entiendo la propiedad privada y que hay casos y casos, pero tal como están las cosas hay que intentar hacer algo. Te preocupas por la gente, te vas para allá, e intentas ayudar y echas una mañana de tu tiempo. Vuelvo al tema de que te lo tienes que poder permitir. Y el conocimiento que se está generando, porque ahora estás empezando a enterarte de cómo eran las hipotecas y cómo se han comportado los bancos... Esto sí que es una cosa tangible: el 15M ha obligado al presidente del gobierno a subir el mínimo de las subastas de los pisos, del 50%

al 60%,[26] y a subir el mínimo embargable, de 600 a 900 Euros. Eso hemos sido nosotros los que lo hemos hecho. Así que creo que podemos estar orgullosos.

Al hilo de los resultados, ¿qué crees que ha conseguido el 15M hasta el momento?

Lo que ha conseguido el 15M es cambiar gente. Hay una serie de gente –yo espero que seamos muchos, y confieso que soy uno de ellos- que hemos cambiado y que estamos impregnados de esta ilusión, de este estado de ánimo, de querer hacer cosas, de esta alegría, y es muy importante, incluso en el tema anímico personal de cada uno. El haber recuperado esta ilusión es una cosa impagable. Yo afortunadamente no tengo problemas económicos graves directos, aparte de que se me acaba el paro, pero hay mucha gente que de repente han encontrado esta vía de alegría. De forma tangible, no tenemos partido, no tenemos programa electoral, y sí, hacemos asambleas muy raras, y somos muy perroflautas[27] y todo eso, pero de verdad que hay miles de personas que estamos con el run-run-run, cada uno como puede, desde casa, 10 minutos al año o 300 días al año, y estamos... suena muy pedorro, pero estamos creando un mundo mejor.

Ese es el problema del 15M, que es difícil ver cosas tangibles. Una cosa que siempre recomiendo son los textos del grupo de trabajo de economía [de Acampadasol]. Yo creo que es la mejor investigación en economía que hay en España, mejor que cualquier universidad y cualquier grupo de investigación. Es alucinante lo de esta gente. Todas esas cosas van sumando. Que sí, que de momento lo que tenemos es una web y muchas flautas, pues sí, pero en algún momento esto cristalizará de alguna forma. No lo sé, esta misma gente, muchos de los que estamos aquí en esta plaza, dentro de 5 días o de 15 años seremos directivos de empresa, o yo qué sé, políticos y movidas raras, esto es así, y a ver qué pasa.

¿Cuales son los retos más importantes que tiene por delante el 15M como movimiento?

Hay una cosa que me preocupa bastante y es el tema de la violencia. Estamos en un cambio de gobierno, por lo que habrá un cambio de sensibilidades en ese control policial de la protesta del que hablabas antes, y entonces no sé si en los desahucios o en algún otro tipo de ocupaciones o de acciones va a ver un cambio

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[26] El porcentaje de adjudicación de la vivienda por parte de la entidad financiera en caso de que la subasta quede desierta subió en julio del 50% al 60% del valor de tasación. Véase http://afectadosporlahipoteca.wordpress.com.

[27] Forma despectiva de designar a los participantes del 15M.

en la actuación policial. Y ahí tenemos que tener mucho cuidado y no tenemos que dejar que sigan la típica senda de criminalizarte. Tenemos que seguir como estamos. Ayer hemos visto la situación ridícula de que un periódico que se llama ABC, un periódico de este país, sacó una foto en la portada donde hablaba de las movilizaciones en nuestro país, pero claro, como había una plaza llena de 50.000 personas pacíficamente sacó una foto de Italia de un coche ardiendo y un señor tirando un extintor. Bueno, pues lo que queremos hacer es que el año que viene tengan que sacar la misma foto porque aquí no tiramos extintores y no quemamos coches, nos dedicamos a hablar mucho, a ser muy pesados, a gritar, a mover la manitas, y a irnos para casa a seguir trabajando. Yo creo que tenemos que concentrarnos en eso. Y poco a poco las cosas se irán concretando, o a lo mejor no, no lo sé. Ya me gustaría.

Ilustración 5: Aplaudiendo, Puerta del Sol, Madrid, 20.5.2011 (cc Julio Albarrán)

¿Qué proyectos relacionados con el 15M tienes en marcha?

El día 16, el primer día de la acampada, yo me dije: "joder, aquí está pasando algo, no sé qué es pero quiero participar, ¿qué puedo hacer?" Y hace un par de meses, lo mismo, en el verano: "joder, aquí sigue pasando algo, sigo sin entenderlo, me sigue emocionando mucho, quiero seguir participando". Junto con otras dos personas [Pablo Soto y Patricia Hornillo] decidimos juntarnos

para ver qué hacer, cómo ayudar, y pensamos que lo que tenemos que hacer es difundir esto. A lo largo de estos meses me he dado cuenta que hemos generado poca información en idiomas extranjeros. Es una pena, e incluso había gente que lo demandaba, que me escribían o que leía por ahí sobre que no hay cosas en inglés y todo eso. Esto que ha pasado, que está pasando aquí, vamos a intentar de alguna forma fijarlo con algún tipo de medio y difundirlo. ¿Qué hacemos? Un libro, un documental y una web. Lo vamos a hacer con una licencia copyleft. Lo ponemos en Internet y que se multiplique, con la máxima intención de difusión. Lo hacemos para difundirlo. Es un proyecto que no es comercial, no buscamos ánimo de lucro. Sí buscamos recuperar la inversión. Queremos hacerlo en comunidad, muy 15M. Vamos a desarrollar unos sistemas de participación donde la gente pueda cohacer con nosotros o autorear los trabajos y una vez que estén acabamos vamos a dedicarnos una serie de meses al tema de la difusión. Lo puedes ver en www.15m.cc. Estamos todavía empezando, es una tarea bastante gorda y a lo mejor nos hemos equivocado, hemos disparado muy alto, pero es básicamente hacer una película, un libro de ensayo y una web interactiva en la que tú puedas navegar por distintos conceptos que intentan explicar y reflexionar en torno a lo que ha sido el 15M y a dónde vamos.

El 15 de mayo del año que viene nos gustaría tener los materiales disponibles. La idea es inundar; bueno, es un poco soberbio, pero se trata de inundar el mundo con esta información. Yo he tenido una buena experiencia con *Copias Malditos*, que ha sido un documental que ha estado en Internet para descarga libre. Llevo 5 ó 6 películas y *Copias Malditos* es la única que se ha visto por todos lados y cada día me entero de proyecciones que hay en universidades y otros sitios. Con esto queremos hacer un poco lo mismo. Con mucha humildad y con mucho miedo, porque le tenemos mucho respeto al 15M. Yo estoy harto de leer definiciones del 15M. Lo leo y siempre digo: "no sé, no sé". Y ahora resulta que... ¡somos nosotros los que vamos a [hacerlo]! Esto tampoco tiene pretensiones de ser, no sé cómo decirte, la "película oficial" del 15M, pero sí queremos seguir con el rollo inclusivo y participativo del 15M en el desarrollo del proyecto e intentar plasmar ahí nuestra visión, que será nuestra visión y la de todos los que participen, y ponerlo a disposición de la gente e intentar que eso llegue y que eso se mueva.

Para terminar, y a propósito del tema de la difusión, ¿qué vínculos internacionales crees que ha establecido el 15M?

Para empezar yo estoy muy orgulloso –y orgullo no es una palabra que utilice mucho- de que nosotros hemos más o menos estandarizado una forma de protesta, copiando de Tahrir. Esto es todo remezcla y copio. Pero el formato de: coja usted su tienda de campaña que no necesita piquetas, localice usted la plaza céntrica de su pueblo, hágase fuerte con sus amigos y mueva las manitas; eso lo hemos inventado aquí y lo hemos exportado. En este país nada más que

exportamos naranjas y vacaciones. Y ahora de repente hemos exportado ese sistema de protesta. Y se ha multiplicado, hay acampadas por todos lados. Lo de Occupy Wall Street es un calco de aquí, lo estamos viendo en todos lados. Está funcionando, y son referencias e imágenes. ¿Qué relaciones ha habido? No sé, yo creo que de todos modos estamos todos en lo mismo y es lo que te decía al principio: lo que queremos es tener una vida digna. Supongo que somos conscientes de dónde vivimos, que es más o menos lo que nos tocas, que posibilidades tiene nuestro entorno, y la gente de Sidney que protestaba el otro día no querrán lo mismo que la gente de Praga, ni que los de aquí, ni que los de Wall Street ni que los de Tahrir, pero todos queremos tener una vida digna y que se nos respete como personas. Y estamos ahí, a ver cómo somos capaces de entre todos juntar esfuerzos, ver intereses y... no creo que hagamos un consenso de mínimos planetario pero, ¿por qué no? Tenemos las TIC, y lo mismo que hacemos un foro y un grupo de discusión aquí con la gente de un grupo cualquiera, que es una lista de correo con 30 personas, ¿por qué no hacemos una cosa con 6.000 millones de personas y discutimos un consenso de mínimos global?

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Horizontal Democracy Now: From Alterglobalization to Occupation[1]

Marianne Maeckelbergh

Abstract

This article examines the 15 May movement in Barcelona to explore some continuities and discontinuities between social movement responses to the economic crisis and previous experiments with horizontal democracy within global social movement networks. Specifically, this article examines two meeting structures embodied in the occupied square in Barcelona to explore the mechanisms through which decision-making within the 15 May movement foster diversity and embrace conflict. Based on a decade of involvement in the alterglobalization movement, attendance at meetings in the acampada in Barcelona at the height of the 15 May uprising, as well as follow up interviews and discussions with long-time activists in Barcelona, this article shows how the decision-making practices used in the squares in Barcelona mimic, build on and expand on horizontal decision-making methods practiced within the alterglobalization movement. Some of the dilemmas created by the grounding of horizontal decision-making within local squares and the much larger scale of these meetings are explored.

Keywords: social movements, economic crisis, horizontal democracy, 15 May movement, occupy, decision-making, Barcelona.

Introduction

When the hundreds of thousands of people who marched in Madrid on 15 May 2011 began to occupy public squares across Spain, social movement networks well beyond Spain took notice. In no time I was receiving emails, text messages and facebook invites telling me that I should go to the Damrak in Amsterdam to "Take the Square!" in solidarity with the hundreds of thousands who had taken so many of their local squares across Spain. My email inbox was overflowing with emails about what was alternatingly being called the #spanishrevolution, the Real Democracy Now movement, the Indignant/Outraged movement, the take-the-square movement and the 15 May movement. Within days there were squares being (temporarily) occupied all over Europe, and within six months,

there were occupations all over the world, culminating in 951 occupations in 82 different countries on 15 October 2011.[2]

Officially the protests were linked to the upcoming Spanish elections which were scheduled for 22 May 2011, but the 15 May movement continued under the slogan "we are not commodities in the hands of bankers and politicians." Faced with governments that defended finance and banks at the literal expense of the people, many people stood up and demanded, "a real democracy, a democracy no longer tailored to the greed of the few, but to the needs of the people" (Rodríguez and Herreros 2011). For some participants these political statements are part of an anti-capitalist agenda, but for many, they are primarily an expression of outrage about the way contemporary political and economic structures make input into decision-making on the part of those most affected by economic and political decisions impossible.

In this context of heightened distrust for both economic and political institutions, the 15 May movement set about creating more inclusive models of political decision-making. This model of decision-making is based on a set of principles that pre-date the rise of the 15 May movement and in this article I argue that in order to understand the significance of these political practices, we have to place these practices not only within the historical context of each town, city or country where these practices have emerged, but also within the historical trajectory of experiments with participatory democracy and horizontal decision-making in social movement networks internationally. In what follows I therefore contextualize my findings not in relation to a deep insider knowledge of the ins and outs of the 15 May movement, but rather in relation to my deep knowledge of horizontal decision-making within social movements over the past ten years. It is my hope that this 'insider'-perspective-from-elsewhere will nevertheless shed some light on the political importance of the 15 May movement for the history and evolution of horizontal decision-making.

This article therefore first sketches a brief, and necessarily partial, historical context for horizontal decision-making and then examines two different decision-making procedures enacted during the height of the 15 May movement in Barcelona to show how these procedures are remarkably similar to the procedures practiced by the alterglobalization movement over the past ten years. Many activists and several scholars have already demonstrated that there are important continuities and discontinuities between the alterglobalization movement and the 15 May movement or the Occupy movement more generally (see Anonyous 2012, Graeber 2011, Klein 2011, Razsa 2012, Reyes 2011, Wainwright 2012) with one important continuity being that activists perceive the 15 May and Occupy movements to be in part a response to a crisis of representative democracy (see Razsa 2012).[3]

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[2] More recent accounts estimate around 1,400 occupations worldwide (see Occupy Together, 2012)

[3] Even in countries where there may appear to be primarily a rejection of foreign powers (such as the IMF) intervention, the activist responses mimic for a large part those of the

In this article I focus on two characteristics of horizontal decision-making that figure centrally in both the alterglobalization movement and the 15 May movement: the pursuit of multiple and open movement goals through decentralization and diversity and the willingness to embrace conflict as a potential source of creativity. Although my intention is to demonstrate continuity, I also explore some of the important innovations introduced into these horizontal decision-making practices through the occupation of public space within the 15 May movement to show how the context in which decision-making is practiced can transform the enactment and the significance of these decision-making procedures. To this end I explore both the 'grounding' of these previously disembedded practices in geographical (urban) space and the increased scale of decision-making as circumstances that raise new questions and dilemmas for horizontal decision-making.

In order to make this comparison I draw on decades of social movement organizing and eight years of ethnographic research that focussed specifically on practices of horizontal decision-making in global social movement networks. In 2003 I began doing research into these decision-making practices in order to explore the broader implications of these decision-making mechanisms as a model for decentralized network forms of 'democracy' exploring the question of what happens to democracy when it is enacted through a network structure instead of the nation-state (see Maeckelbergh 2009). For years I participated in hundreds of planning meetings for the mobilizations against the G8 in Evian (2003), Sea Island, GA (2004), Gleneagles (2005), part of the planning process for the anti-G8 in Heiligendamm (2007), and Lake Toya (2008). I also helped organize parts of the European Social Forum in Paris (2003) and London (2004) as well as the World Social Forum in Mumbai (2004). The information about the 15 May movement presented here is drawn from meetings I attended in the Plaça Catalunya at the height of the uprisings, a follow up visit in November 2011 as well as interviews and informal discussions with long-time activists in Barcelona. These visits and conversations were buttressed with the many email discussions, statements issued, twitter feeds, facebook updates, blog entries, websites, and videos that were continuously appearing online.

From day one I was working with activists I have known for years from the alterglobalization movement who are now active in the 15 May movement. I instantly found myself in the middle of discussion after discussion about horizontal decision-making, life in the *acampada*, and politics in general with both people who had been in the square from the start and with other people, like myself, who had just turned up from abroad. In addition to the friends I had arranged to meet, I kept running into people I had known for years; people who

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alterglobalization movement which rejected international intervention and multi-lateral organizations not in favour of a nationalist agenda, but in the pursuit of a 'globalization from below' that was grounded in the creation of new models for participatory democracy and international cooperation that rejected forms of fixed 'representation' all together (see Juris 2008, Graeber 2009, Maeckelbergh 2009).

I had met at mobilizations against the G8 or other actions in other countries, contexts and time-zones.

This article also draws somewhat more implicitly on research done as part of a film project on social movement responses to the economic crisis (see www.globaluprisings.org). In 2011 this film project brought me to various cities including Athens (May 2011), New York (July-August 2011 and December 2011-January 2012), London (October and November 2011), Cairo (December 2011) and Oakland (January 2012). In most cases these trips included attendance at general assemblies and lengthy discussions with those attending the assemblies about how the assemblies are structured, why they are structured that way, what works well and what works less well, as part of a collaborative attempt to improve these decision-making processes.

Although there are many important differences between all these contexts that are beyond the scope of this article, the experiences and conversations I had in all of these places have shaped the way I think about which questions are of central importance in a discussion about horizontal forms of decision-making. This article, therefore draws on these other experiences when making choices about which elements of the meetings in Barcelona to emphasize, in the hope that the discussion here can become a constructive contribution not only to the study of the 15 May movement, but to our understanding of horizontal structures more generally.

The assumption underlying this article is that the more we know about the history of these processes of horizontal decision-making, the better equipped we will be to improve them. In this way we can, when appropriate, draw on lessons learned in the past and come to understand horizontal decision-making today not as an entirely new invention, but as part of a much longer political process that is continuously evolving. The current historical juncture has brought about unprecedented opportunities for experimentation with horizontal decision-making and decentralized forms of democratic governance, and as such it seems an apt moment to reflect on the politics of these procedures as part of an attempt to remain open to the new lessons as we learn them.

A very brief history of horizontal decision-making

Although the alterglobalization is the immediate historical predecessor to the 15 May movement and the Occupy movements in terms of the organizational structure of horizontal decision-making, neither the alterglobalization movement nor the 15 May movement can be credited with 'inventing' horizontal decision-making. Although it is impossible to trace the exact way in which movement practices diffuse from one place and time to another, what we can say is that the thousands of people in the square in Madrid or in Barcelona who were waving their hands in the air, 'twinkling' in agreement, were not the first to use this hand signal within social movement praxis as a signifier for agreement, nor were they the first to attempt to create inclusive and participatory structures

and procedures for democratic decision-making on a large scale based on principles of 'horizontality'.

Two key practices that seem to be defining of the current historical moment actually have a long history: 1. the refusal of singular demands, ideologies, or programmes for social change (linked to the movement terms 'diversity' and 'horizontality'), and 2. the idea that the political practices the movement itself develops are part and parcel of the movement's aims (prefiguration). These two political assumptions became quite prevalent during the 1960s and have been growing more central to social movement praxis ever since. The New Left was characterised by a rejection of unitary programmes for revolutionary change and pursued instead notions of participatory democracy as a way to embody multiple movement goals (Gassert 2007, Horn 2007, Miller 2004, Polletta 2002, Klimke and Scharloth 2008). This merger of the pursuit of multiple goals with practices of participatory democracy has undergone many mutations over the past fifty years, as have the decision-making practices that grew out of these ideals: from the New Left in the 1960s to feminist movements, anti-nuclear and peace movements in the 1970s and 1980s, to environmental and Do-it-Yourself movements in the 1980s and 1990s all the way through to the alterglobalization movement at the turn of the century (see Maeckelbergh 2011a).[4]

Although horizontality only became a key movement concept in the first few years of the twenty-first century, the idea of non-hierarchical social and political organization far predates the use of the term horizontality.[5] In the case of the alterglobalization movement, horizontality refers to the active creation of nonhierarchical relations through decision-making processes. Horizontality is both a value and a practice. Rather than assuming that equality can be declared or created through a centralized authority that is legitimated to rule by 'the people', movement practices of horizontality rest on the assumption that inequality will always permeate every social interaction. This shift in assumptions results in an acknowledgement that these inequalities always exist and that each person is responsible for continuously challenging these inequalities at every step of a decision-making process.

The importance of horizontality, especially within the autonomous strands of the alterglobalization movement, is directly linked to movement actors' assumption of a prefigurative strategy for social change (see Maeckelbergh 2011b). Many alterglobalization movement actors rejected the notion that social change would be possible by seizing power at some future moment after which an egalitarian social structure would be instituted (see Nunes 2005). Instead,

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[4]   Anarchism as a both a political philosophy and a set of political practices was crucial for the development and improvement of non-hierarchical decision-making practices within most of these movements (see Epstein 1991, McKay 1998 ; Franks 2003).

[5]   I trace the use of the term horizontality within the context of US and European social movements here, but it cannot be separated from at least two essential historical developments outside of Europe and North America. First, the meeting structure of the *encuentro* popularized by the Zapatistas and secondly the Argentinian uprising in 2001 where *horizontalidad* was a key organizing concept (see Sitrin 2006)

social change was often spoken of as far more likely to stem from a process of setting up alternative democratic structures to take the place of the existing political structures of nation-state based representative democracy.

With the rise of the 15 May movement, many more people are involved in these decision-making practices than during the alterglobalization movement, and consequently many of these political values have become blurred and the political structures are entering into a new phase of transformation. The structures being used to run the meetings I witnessed in Barcelona, however, are the legacy of this long and winding history and in the sections that follow I explore the *acampadaBCN*, the inter-barrio meeting and the general assembly in detail with some of this history in mind.

Acampada BCN: spatial continuities

It was early morning when I first arrived at Plaça Catalunya in central Barcelona. I intentionally made the square my first stop, but when I arrived, the camp was still sleeping. Contrary to what I had seen on the internet and heard from friends, the square seemed pretty empty. There were a few people sleeping in the middle, but otherwise those sleeping in the camp were mostly off to the sides in the grassy areas and impressively, up in the trees. Despite the empty core, the square was extraordinary. All around the outsides of the inner square (which was more of a circle really), there were information stands – exactly the types of stands you find at an anti-G8 camp: a medical/first aid stand, a kitchen, legal support, a media centre, a women's space, a 'serenity' space for meditation, message, relaxation, etc. On the opposite side of the square there was a library with radical books and comfy chairs to sit in. All in all, then, the square mimicked almost exactly the infrastructure that is usually set up during the temporary camps that accompany large-scale mobilizations against the G8/G20.

In addition to these, for me, familiar sights, there was a stand that provided raw materials for people who wanted to build their own living structures or meeting spaces, there was a drop box for sleeping bags and mats so that anyone who wanted to could stay the night in the square and there was a community garden where the tomatoes that had been planted two weeks earlier appeared to be ripe and ready to eat. At the main entrance into the square there was a large wooden structure that was labelled "*acampadaBCN*" that served as the general information stand for outreach to the public. At the other end of the square was the little platform that served as a type of stage from which people could address the general assembly and the many other meetings that would be held in the square that night and every night.

These differences, although few, were significant. Since the square was meant as an occupation, the goal was to stay as long as possible. During anti-summit mobilizations, the goal is to stay only a few weeks at the most. The supplies for building lasting structures as well as gardens growing vegetables were a sign of the intent to stay, to cultivate a space for living. There were differences on the level of content as well that exposed this long-term vision. The incorporation of so many local concerns – most notably the problem of housing evictions in Spain for example – showed how the space was being used not just for living but also for the coordination of ongoing long-term campaigns.

Finally, probably the most striking and politically important difference was the openness of the space. This is an innovation that was introduced by the occupation of public squares and parks. In order to understand the significance of the introduction of the tactic of occupation of public space it is worthwhile comparing it with how the camps during the alterglobalization movement were organized. The occupation of public squares is different in at least three ways: first, the space is often being occupied (semi-)illegally; second, the space is in the middle of an urban centre; and third, the people within the space are welcoming to strangers, curious people, cameras, etc.

The camps during the alterglobalization movement, although they looked very similar in terms of infrastructure, were much less welcoming. They were often on a big piece of land outside of the city centre – with the result that mostly only people who intended to camp there ever came there (plus a few curious locals). Although technically anyone could come and stay there, the camp was meant

only for people who were in the area for the purposes of protesting the G8 (or whichever summit). This was not always said explicitly, but the whole point of the camp was to provide space for people to sleep and to plan actions. Especially the latter made it a much more 'closed' environment. Activists were often planning illegal activities, had often experienced repression in the past and were therefore wary of being 'seen' – of being recognizable. Cameras of any sort were considered dangerous by many and meetings would spend hours discussing the fact that no pictures could be taken of anyone anywhere in the camp without explicit permission.

In strong contrast, the Plaça Catalunya was always full of people filming and taking pictures, sometimes even with live streaming. There was no need for me to commit to taking action in order to participate in the camp, nor was there even any need for me to know what the square occupation was about; I could just walk in and ask. Also, the political topics that defined the occupation of the square were topics for which the target audience was perceived of as much larger, as all the people in the city, country, world and not just those that came to 'protest'. In the case of Barcelona these topics included Health, Education and Housing – three political issues that effect everyone in the city and part of the aim of the occupation was to have a place where anyone could come to learn about these issues and to take part in the general assembly decision-making process and the struggle to change the way these issues were decided upon.

For many of us who were veterans of the anti-summit camps, the *acampada* in Barcelona had a strikingly open atmosphere where people who wandered in off the street felt welcome. And for all its flaws, and of course it had flaws, I can confidently say that in over 20 years of political engagement I had never seen anything like it before. And if innovation is essential to social movement organizing, which I believe it is, then at least this was a clear example of innovation.

But the innovation was not only in the spatial organization of the square, although this was important; the real innovation came in the combination of occupation of public space with the meeting structures and assemblies. The meetings were the movement's way to embody their own demands and the physical geography of the public and open space meant that the meetings intended as an embodiment of a 'real' democratic process were open to far more people than similar meetings within the alterglobalization movement had ever been. This new-found openness was not without its exclusions and its problems (see Anonymous 2012 for an important critique), and the activists involved are the first to identify these limits, but if we can forgive these processes for not being perfect, we can perhaps identify some of the important innovations that are at the very least an improvement on representative democracy as it functions today.

The inter-barrio meeting: decentralized diversity

The initial emptiness that I encountered in the early morning at the square was hard to imagine when I returned at noon. By then the square was swarming with people and there were activities going on in every corner and at every stand – it seemed every inch of the square was enthralled in activity. And this, everyone told me, was nothing compared to what it had been a week earlier. I couldn't imagine, it was already almost too much to wrap my head around. The Barcelona-based activists I was with laughed at me when they saw the look of surprise on my face at the sheer number of people. When I told them that the square was almost empty earlier, one replied with the humorous comment, "well, yes, the revolution will not be in the morning".

We had come to the square to take part in the Catalonia-wide inter-barrio assembly that was planned for twelve noon. It was clear to me from the very start of this meeting that I was witnessing a democratic potential that I had imagined many times during my research into decision-making within global movement networks, but which I never really expected to see with my own eyes. It was a geographically-based, decentralized network of inclusive decision-making. I had seen this model of decentralized decision-making put into practice for years within the alterglobalization movement, but in those cases, the 'barrios' in the inter-barrio meetings, were artificial – they didn't exist – they were created within the geography of the temporary anti-summit campsite just for the purpose of decision-making. I'll explain the importance of this distinction below, but first I need to describe how this decentralized inter-barrio assembly was structured so that the significance of the similarities and differences will be evident.

The meeting structure

The meeting began with a woman on the small podium at one end of the square who took the microphone and started calling for people to gather around. A few hundred people came and sat down on the ground in front of the podium and the rest (probably more than a thousand in total) stood behind them all in a semi-circle. Some people had come prepared, holding a small hand-made sign with the name of their town, province or region written on it. For those who had not come with their own sign, the facilitators (by now there were three people up on the podium) had prepared printed signs for many of the towns and regions within Catalonia. The facilitator on the podium would then call out the names of the different regions or cities and pass the paper to someone from that region or point out someone in the crowd who already had a sign for that city/region. As she did this, the crowd reorganized itself into the different regions and cities/towns. As people joined up with other people from their area, they would go off to the side, out of the centre of the square, to discuss. In this way, the larger meeting of over a thousand people, split into a series of smaller meetings of twenty to a hundred, or in the case of the "Barcelona" barrio, a couple hundred people.

My friends and I went to the Barcelona-barrio meeting. The agenda for this meeting consisted of report backs from each of the different barrios within the Barcelona "barrio", of which there were many. The report backs were about all of the assemblies and actions that had taken place in each barrio of Barcelona over the past week and any concerns they had or lessons they learned. The second half of the meeting was focussed on the future — on which actions they should coordinate with each other on a Barcelona-wide scale for the next week. Several action days had already been identified before hand, so the discussion was rather structured and involved mostly questions of when and where the actions should take place and fewer questions about which actions to take.[6]

This barrio-meeting had two facilitators, one man and one woman, who kept track of all the lessons learned, the concerns raised, and the actions planned for the next week. After all the groups had given their report back, the facilitators briefly summarized a compiled list of actions, past and future, and checked for consensus on action plans for the future. They checked for consensus by first summarizing what the plan was, then asking if anyone had any comments, suggestions or concerns, if someone did they let that person speak and then incorporated the concern or suggestion into the proposal, and checked for

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6   There were already some action days set — there was an action day for education/healthcare, and action day against Puig, and an action planned at the parliament.

consensus again. In the case of these actions, there was very little disagreement and the process went smoothly.

After about two hours of updates and action planning in the smaller barrio meetings, all the barrios regrouped in the centre of the square and began a feedback session between the barrio-level discussions. One or two people from each group summarized briefly for everyone else what had been done in their region/city/town over the last week and what they were planning for the next week. This meeting structure made it possible for people from other regions to know all the highlights of what was going on in each of the many barrios/regions of Catalonia without having to be present at each of the two-hour discussions. Consequently, everyone was able to focus on what needed to be done in their own area without becoming ignorant of what was going on elsewhere. This made it possible to exchange far more information and be much more effective in planning actions than it would have been if everyone in the group would have had to listen to every update and every action idea.

Inter-barrio meetings from alterglobalization to Plaça Catalunya

This basic meeting structure from large group to small group to large group is *exactly* the idealized meeting format within the meetings for the anti-summit mobilization of the alterglobalization movement. For years, whenever activists within the alterglobalization movement would talk about how they envisioned their decision-making system should work and what made it a better alternative to systems of representative democracy, they would mention small-group-to-large-group, network-based decision-making as a way to allow everyone to be included at the local level in decisions being taken at the national or international level (see Maeckelbergh 2009).

The most obvious legacy of the alterglobalization movement, aside from the use of facilitators, the circular seating pattern, the report-back structure, reaching consensus through a process of taking proposals from different groups and the making amendments to proposals through collaborative discussion (see the next section for more on this), was the use of hand signals to facilitate discussion. This linguistic practice was developed during the 1970s within feminist, peace and anti-nuclear movements (especially in the Anglo-Saxon world) and carried on at a smaller scale during the 1980s within environmental and Do-it-Yourself movements, especially within the more autonomous or anarchist strands of these movements, but the movement that most recently brought these practices into the mainstream political practice of social movement networks across Europe was the alterglobalization movement. When I stood there at this meeting of thousands of people, together with fellow veterans of the alterglobalization movement, I couldn't help but remark to them, "remember when we thought these hand signals were what made us marginal freaks? Now everyone is using them and they don't seem to think it is alienating at all!"

The use of hand signals in the case of this meeting also signified something of how these decision-making practices were learned by participants. We were

three weeks into the 15 May movement and at this meeting; the hand signals were never explained. It wasn't until I attended the general assembly the next day that I saw the hand signals explained. At the inter-barrio meeting, the hand signals were just used, but they were not used by everyone. Instead there was a mixture of hand signal use and non-use that created a type of embodied learning. Rather than some veteran of the alterglobalization movement explaining to participants how and why these hand signals were used, the meaning and value of the hand signals became clear through practice. Whenever people would agree with a statement made, most people would raise their two hands in the air and 'twinkle' their fingers in agreement. While most people would twinkle, the rest of the people would clap. This partial clapping meant that as the meeting progressed, the meaning of finger twinkling as being synonymous with agreement (normally expressed through clapping) was obvious.
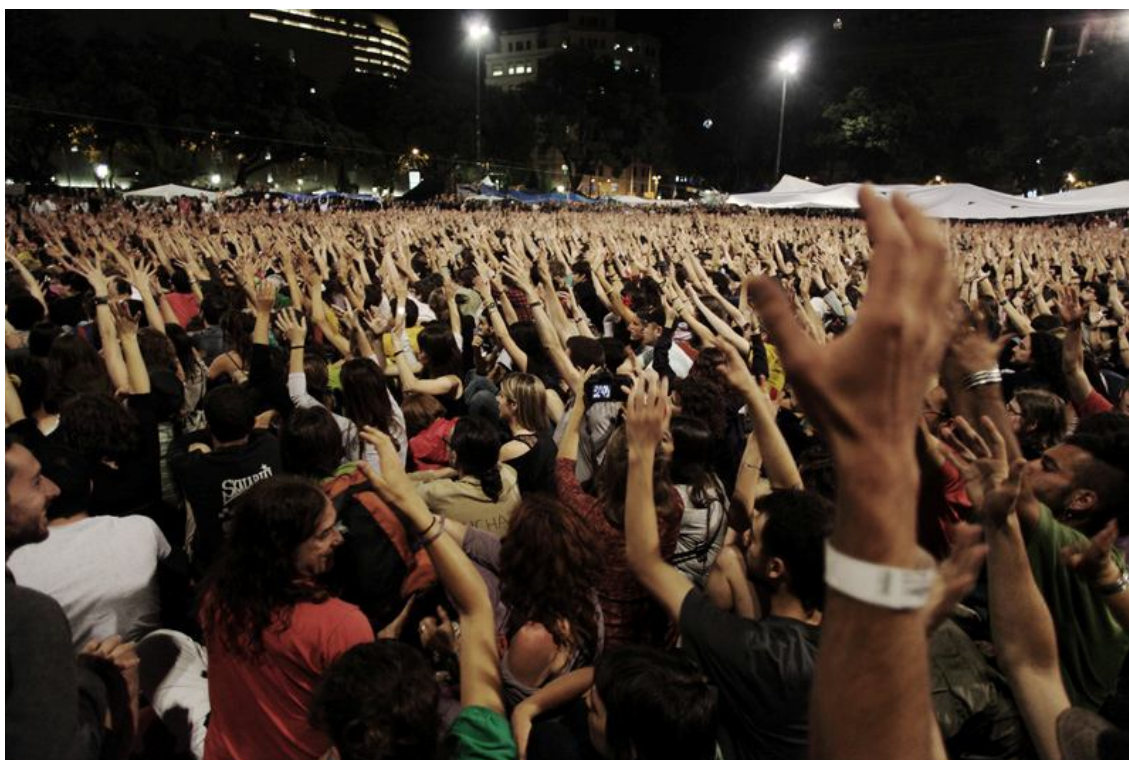
After ten years of ethnography into the alterglobalization movement, I had never before seen this decision-making method performed so perfectly. At most of the campsites set up to house people during an anti-summit mobilization, the campsite is artificially divided into separate 'barrios', and the inter-barrio meeting (which is what it was often called) would consist of people representing 'barrios' that they only moved into the day before. The barrios that made up the inter-barrio meeting were barrios that consisted of people who just happened to pitch their tent in that part of the campsite (or groups of people who travelled

together form elsewhere). Wherever you ended up pitching your tent, therefore, would become your most direct line of intervention into the political process of the camp. At the time, this meeting structure was certainly one of the most effective ways to ensure democratic participation for everyone living in the camp. Each person could attend their morning barrio meeting and have a direct line of influence into camp-wide decision-making without having to attend a whole days worth of meetings.

But after watching the meeting in Barcelona unfold in front of me, I was struck by how superficial these temporary anti-summit barrios had always been. The people who were at the Barcelona barrio meeting were people who live in Barcelona, who have long-standing relationships with the other people in their neighbourhood and who have jobs, networks, skills, resources at their fingertips. Everything did not have to be invented from scratch as it often needs to be during an anti-summit mobilization where people just turn up from all over the world with a backpack and a tent.

Grounded decentralization

The fact that the meeting was taking place in the middle of the day in a city centre and that people had come to the square from their homes just for the meeting transformed the dynamic. Usually at anti-summit campsites, the only people in attendance are the ones who are capable of spending a week or more in a tent. The Barcelona-barrio meeting, on the other hand, was attended by people of all ages and physical conditions. Some of the older or less-able participants were given chairs to sit on while others stood around the outside and the more physically flexible sat on the ground so that the meeting was structured in concentric circles going outwards from those sitting on the ground, to those in chairs, to those standing. This concentric circle formation is also an important political statement that mimicked the alterglobalization movement practices (and several movements before it). People faced each other, listened to one another and did not privilege the role of facilitator or speaker above the role of participant.

This meeting structure made the inter-barrio meetings both inclusive and efficient. In just a few hours updates had been exchanged for the entire region so that people could gain inspiration and concrete lessons from each other and a whole week of "coordinated actions" had been planned. In the ten years that I have been following this type of decentralized decision-making, I had rarely seen it function so effectively. Part of this efficiency seemed to stem from the fact that people came to these meetings prepared. The inter-barrio meeting was not the site where people discussed all the details of political action and tactics, these discussions were held at the barrio-level. The basic meeting structure that the alterglobalization movement had been trying to achieve for over ten years was being enacted right in front of my eyes in this occupied square. In the context of anti-summit mobilizations the official plan often required that all the local groups should discuss the meeting agenda *before* the national or

international meeting and come to the meeting prepared with local updates and action proposals, but rarely had I seen this actually materialize.

This improvement on decision-making since the alterglobalization movement has everything to do with the fact that in Barcelona, the 'barrios' were not temporarily created arbitrary zones and the people coming from these barrios were not brought together by affiliation to some group that had to be actively held together through meeting coordination. The neighbourhoods were real, they had histories, pre-existing social relationships, infrastructures, common points of reference, a physical architecture that made it easy for people to find each other – most importantly the neighbourhood square where people could find each other. This was in effect a decentralization of the "occupation" tactic from the Plaça Catalunya to many neighbourhood squares and it was essential for grounding the 15 May movement in the everyday lives of people living in Barcelona. It was also explained to me as the source of sustainability for the movement in the hopes that if people could get involved in the movement in their own neighbourhood and collectively address the issues they face everyday, then the movement would have a stronger and long-lasting base.

The specific history of Spanish social movements and prefigurative politics in Spain and of neighbourhood organizing in Barcelona become important factors here. This inter-barrio structure would probably not have worked so smoothly in other cities or places in the world. Although I do not know how many of the people involved in this inter-barrio meeting were active before the 15 May movement, when I returned to Barcelona six moths later, the barrios that were the most active were ones that had a history of political organizing or at least had inhabitants who were politically active prior to the 15 May movement. When I was in New York in December 2011 and January 2012 there were similar attempts by those involved in Occupy Wall Street to create neighbourhood assemblies, but at that time only a few of these were taking root.

From *encuentros* to decentralized horizontal decision-making

For people who are familiar with the alterglobalization movement and its history, the description above might ring some bells for being incredibly similar to the *encuentro* structure of the Zapatistas that has functioned as an inspiration for movement organizing since the mid-1990s. *Encuentros* are large participatory meetings that are aimed not at making universally binding decisions, but at creating and facilitating networks of communication and resistance to help people organize against neoliberal globalization.

The People's Global Action (PGA) network was born out of the second *encuentro* held in Spain in 1997. PGA was one of the first international network-based movement structures to organize Global Action Days against, among others, the WTO in Seattle in 1999. For the more horizontally inclined activists within the alterglobalization movement, the PGA hallmarks and the PGS process played an important role in creating and expanding practices of horizontal decision-making. As one participant at the second *encuentro* put it:

> In spite of vastly different contexts, we discovered that our struggles are increasingly similar in every part of the global empire, and that a new, horizontal form of solidarity is emerging (Style 2002).

The PGA hallmarks served as a very vague (and thus not too restrictive) common ground within the highly disparate and diverse alterglobalization movement. If there is a birth place at all for 'horizontal decision-making' as a key international social movement practice, then it might be in the *encuentros* of the Zapatistas. These practices merged with movement experiments with participatory democracy in Europe and the US and before long they became the guiding principles of the anti-summit mobilizations and to a lesser degree the European Social Forums. Now, it would seem these decision-making practices have become the guiding principles within the 15 May movement, at least for the inter-barrio meetings.

Chesters and Welsh (2005: 195) argue that the encuentro is a meeting structure based on "the concept of creating a global 'mirror and lens' (collective recognition and focus) for antagonistic movements" and that "[t]his process enabled activists to 'bridge worlds' through the deliberate construction of spaces wherein links between diverse movements could be made." This meeting practice of the 'encounter' was applied differently each time it was enacted, but despite, or perhaps because of this malleability, it has had a strong influence on the alterglobalization movement over the past ten years.

What the alterglobalization movement learned, however, through years of practice with this type of meeting ethos, was that the *types* of links that are made is of crucial importance. The links that were most valued within the alterglobalization movement were the links that brought people into, "new spaces, meet new situations, establish different relations" (Nunes 2005) and links that had a transforming capacity — an ability to help each actor to see with the eyes of the other actors, a process sometimes referred to by activists as 'reciprocal contamination' (de Angelis 2003).

With a heightened awareness of the importance of how and what kinds of links were being made, the alterglobalization movement developed an embodied understanding of how conflict functions and at times dysfunctions within horizontal decision-making. Chesters (2004) argues that *encuentro* always:

> implies a degree of friction and confrontation. Which can energise or debilitate depending upon how it proceeds. Such friction is often a necessary part of movements traversing problems and oppositions and provoking intensities that leap the gap separating the potential from the actual.

If friction can be either debilitating or energising, then the important question that emerges is under which circumstances does it become debilitating and how can we help to enhance the role of conflict as energising?

The general assembly: incorporating conflict

The next evening, there was a large general assembly in the Plaça Catalunya. The meeting began with an introduction to the *process* of the meeting. The details of how the meeting would be organized began with the announcement that there would be translation into Urdu, Arabic and Sign Language. Then the facilitator, a women who was stood on the podium at the front of the thousands-strong crowd, introduced the process of the meeting and the different roles that the facilitation group would be playing – including her role as facilitator and the others who were in the crowd who would go around and count the hands when something needed to be voted on. Then the hand signals were explained. First, the hand signal for agreement: two hands in the air and fingers 'twinkling'. Then she explained the hand signal for blocking a decision which is making an X with both forearms up in the air; the hand signal for "speed it up": two fists rolling over each other in a circular motion; and the hand signal for sexist language or behaviour – banging two fists together with your arms raised in the air (to be used whenever someone speaks with or exhibits sexist or racist behaviour). These hand signals were almost identical to the hand signals used within the alterglobalization movement as was the practice of explaining how horizontal decision-making works at the start of the meeting to make sure everyone knows what the meeting procedures are.

In the case of the *acampadaBCN*, however, the situation was considerably more difficult. First, there were far more people than I had ever seen at an everyday planning meeting in the alterglobalization movement and because the space was open, people kept arriving throughout the meeting, which meant that many people did not hear the 'instructions' or understand what was going on. When I spoke to one of the facilitators later, he expressed exhaustion about the general lack of familiarity with decision-making mechanisms:

> So people were arriving, because it is obviously in the street, people were arriving in the middle of the meeting and they would understand that there is someone telling them 'you vote.' And they were wondering who is this person, they didn't know that there is this figure of the facilitator. So you have start from the very beginning, stop the meetings and say, look this is a facilitation, this is the third or fourth time I am explaining today. Because there is no facilitation culture at all in Spain. Even among activists. Now that has changed a bit.

This lack of 'facilitation culture' in Spain is hard to imagine in the aftermath of the 15 May movement and in the case of this particular general assembly, at least the introduction of facilitation was going very smoothly: after explaining the hand signals, the facilitator then went on to explain that there would be two parts to the meeting. The first part would be the organized part, meaning that

there were a series of proposals that had already been developed within the different working groups that needed to be discussed by the general assembly. The agenda for this part of the meeting was relatively fixed. The second half of the meeting would be an open part in which anyone could take the microphone and add their item to the agenda for discussion. The facilitator then requested one more time that people please use the hand signals to express agreement or disagreement because cheering, booing, or clapping creates an atmosphere that can impact the way decisions are made.

The first item on the organized part of the agenda was a proposal to support a statement for the self-determination of Catalonia and other regions that do not want to be a part of Spain. I had earlier noticed that there were surprisingly few Catalonian flags in the square – previously a common sight at mass mobilizations in Barcelona. When I enquired about the lack of flags, I was told that the assembly had voted against having flags of any nation, union or political party in the square. Now there was a proposal on the table to support a declaration. This proposal, I was told, had already gone through several general assemblies, but never passed. It had already been changed from support for self-determination for Catalonia to include also self-determination for other regions of Spain, but the assembly on this day was still not keen on approving the statement.

The statement was read out loud from the podium and almost immediately arms raised in the air, many in agreement, but also many in disagreement, with Xs raising all around me. First, the facilitator asked two people for and two people against the proposal to come up and make their case. The main concerns with the statement seemed to be that it was too focussed on Catalonia and that there are people all over the world who need support for their independence and self-determination in a non-nationalistic framework. These concerns were incorporated into the wording of the statement, but disagreement continued. After the four interventions, the facilitator explained that if there were more than 40 people who had their forearms crossed in an X to block the proposal (which there were – many more), then the proposal is supposed to go back to the working group for further discussion. Those who opposed the proposal were supposed to join the working group meeting in order to help improve the statement until it took the concerns of the blockers into account.

Incorporating conflict, fostering diversity and rejecting uniformity

At this point I was astonished to see how similar, into the details, these meetings were to the hundreds of meetings I had taken part in over the past ten years within the alterglobalization movement. Not only were the hand signals and the basic notions of participation and horizontality the same in the *acampada* as they were in the anti-summit mobilizations, but it seems even the process for dealing with conflict was the same. This is an important point because one of the key innovations within the decision-making of the alterglobalization movement is this particular approach to conflict. In the

alterglobalization movement conflict is not avoided, but embraced, because it is believed to be necessary and even beneficial to fostering diversity:

> If Fora [Social Forums] will be capable of expressing the diversity of the movement(s) they say to bring together and serve as a public arena, it'll be because of their capacity to incorporate conflict, not to subsume it under a semblance of forced consensus (Nunes 2004: 8).

Allowing diversity to flourish, in turn, is thought to be necessary for the development of a truly democratic politics.[7] As the Horizontals (2003) statement issued in the run-up to the 2004 European Social Forum concludes, "diversity is healthy and necessary, as no political process however inclusive can lay claim to represent the totality of social movements and alternatives." It was widely believed that if the types of people that can be involved is restricted, or if the types of ideas that can be expressed are limited, due to an over-emphasis on a singularity of purpose, then the political space closes off to all those who have conflicting beliefs or identities:

> The issue is no longer to express a common way of struggle, nor a unified picture or one-dimensional solidarity, neither an ostentatious unity nor a secretly unifying sub-culture, but the profound understanding and the absolute will, to recognise the internal differences and create flexible groups, where different approaches connect with each other reasonably and for mutual benefit (Lang and Schneider 2003).

A truly inclusive democratic process therefore is one that remains open to new people, new ideas, and new aims.[8] This inclusion of diversity and opposing beliefs leads to conflict, but this conflict is not viewed negatively, instead it is considered to be one of the ways in which creative new solutions to problems

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[7]   This point differentiates the movement's praxis from most democratic theories and practices. Even deliberative democratic models which are presented as alternatives to liberal representative democracy consider univocity to be the aim of the democratic process (see Gould 1996: 172). It is precisely this normative principle of uniformity that is being challenged here. Mouffe (1996: 246) argues that "pluralism is not merely a *fact* . . . but an axiomatic principle. It is taken to be constitutive *at the conceptual level* of the very nature of modern democracy and considered as something that we should celebrate and enhance." The alterglobalization movement welcomed conflict as a sign of diversity, resolving it by rejecting the normative principle of singular unity and refusing to "choose between unity and plurality" (Hardt and Negri 2004: 105). For a discussion of the implications of this rejection of 'univocity' for the way we understand and theorize 'democracy' see Maeckelbergh (2009: chapter 4).

[8]   This openness, however, occurs, and in fact requires, rather strict guidelines of behaviour to ensure that some people are not excluded by the inclusion of other people's beliefs or practices. For example, the common anti-racist and anti-sexist guidelines would certainly exclude some people from the process, but does so to ensure that women and people of colour can be included in the process.

and better political analyses (better in the sense that it better represents the diverse needs of the people) are developed.

Despite these similarities, there were some important differences too. First, the idea of trying to reach consensus about a statement is something that within the more autonomous strands of the alterglobalization movement would (probably) be quickly identified as a trap that will lead only into deterioration and endless discussion about specific wordings. Within the alterglobalization movement, I often heard people point out that it is rarely possible, and almost never necessary, for a whole large group of people to all agree to support a single statement. When declarations or statements were issued by certain groups within the alterglobalization movement, it was usually done in the name of the smaller group and not in the name of the movement as a whole. One common solution to the "we need a statement" problem within the alterglobalization movement was to issue statements on behalf of a given meeting, for example, 'statement of the meeting of 25 May'. In this way the group avoided speaking on behalf of anyone who was not present and who did not get the chance to have input into the statement.

From networks to neighbourhoods: resisting uniformity

Employing this tactic was made more complicated in Barcelona, however, because of geography. The alterglobalization movement was a diffuse network with no beginning and no end and consequently there was no sense of "one group" of thousands of people – there was no movement as a whole. Although there is only a vague sense of nationhood or city-hood at the *acampadaBCN* there was still an apparent belief in the need to decide all together about nearly everything. What the inter-barrio meeting had shown, that most decisions can be taken at the barrio level and merely communicated at the inter-barrio level – creating a sense of autonomy between interconnected neighbourhoods – was being somewhat undermined by the general assembly format. The general assembly was being treated as the "highest authority" in the decision-making system of the *acampada* and this meant for many people that no decisions could be approved without going through the general assembly first.

Many of the people camping in the square pointed out to me that this had an unintended stifling effect on the creativity and autonomy of the movement, leaving people feeling as though their actions had to be "approved" by the general assembly before they could do anything. Given the lack of time and the complex set of structures that determined which proposals made it to the general assembly and which did not, for many people it was not an option to bring their action plans to the general assembly for approval. For the people I spoke with most frequently, this very idea that they should need approval from some centralized authority was a problem in and of itself.[9]

In the case of the Barcelona meeting, bringing the statement to the general assembly, although possibly unnecessary (it is of course hard to know what would have happened if the statement were not brought to the assembly), helped to transform the statement to better represent the positions and beliefs of a wider group of people, even though it never managed to fully incorporate the positions of everyone. In this case the general assembly proved useful for the improvement of proposals so that they better represented a diversity of interests, but in this case there was little chance that the proposal would ever be acceptable to everyone. Given the sheer numbers of people present at the meeting and the meeting format which was geared towards unanimity, requiring an overwhelming majority to pass a proposal, without any structure for granting autonomy to those who want to issue statements or carry out actions without the explicit agreement of everyone else, it was impossible to either pass or reject the proposal without violating the procedures of the meeting.

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[9] According to one of the facilitators, the facilitation team would decide ahead of time how many interventions they would have time for during the meeting and then send between 15 and 20 volunteers out into the crowd to select the people who would get a chance to speak. Proposals usually came through the working groups/commissions and were discussed first in a 'parallel' meeting structure (also open to anyone) and prepared before they were brought to the general assembly and opened up to thousands of people without any clear structure.

Apparently, in this case, those who opposed the statement had not attended the working group meetings where the proposal was being written and therefore did not make use of the avenues of input available to them. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the very well-structured conflict-embracing general assembly ended up violating its own principles in order to pass this proposal. The very tired facilitator first concluded that there was clearly no consensus, so we would need to talk about it again later, but then after a bit more discussion she decided to simply approve the proposal even though a bit less than half the hands counted (hundreds of people) were opposed to the proposal. When she passed the proposal, the crowd got upset and she simply said, "You fix the methodology if you don't like it. We've been talking about this text for three weeks." This was an expression of exhaustion and in a sense, she was admitting defeat, that there was no way for this proposal to ever satisfy everyone, and it was taking up much needed time to discuss other matters, so she just passed the proposal on a majority rule principle and moved on to the next item on the agenda.

On the surface this looked like a failure of the decision-making structures, which clearly reject the principle of majority rule on the grounds that it always necessary excludes minority opinions. It would be unrealistic and unfair to expect these meeting structures to work perfectly all the time and to expect the facilitator to be able to come up with a clever solution on the spot with thousands of people there just waiting to pass judgement on the decision and the process. Nevertheless, this example raises important questions about how to keep decision-making horizontal and inclusive when dealing with topics about which people will never agree. In this case, those who wanted to have input into the statement had already had three weeks to give their input, they had a clearly identified (by the facilitator) channel through which to provide that input, and when they did not did take advantage of this channel, their block was negated.

Within the alterglobalization movement the principle was that people could not just block decisions for no reason. One common definition for a block was that people could only block decisions when the decisions went against their most deeply held beliefs or the beliefs of the group as a whole (if the group had such shared beliefs). In practice this meant that people could 'stand aside' instead of blocking – choose to not take part in an action or not sign a statement or issue their own statement. Less frequently, when it was something really important to them they would be given the chance to have direct input into transforming the proposal together with those who originally drafted the proposal. A block was therefore only recognized as such when someone was willing to engage with the process.

In the square in Barcelona though, there were so many people and so many blockers that the proposal probably should not have passed, but on the other hand, it is easy to block something just because you don't like it and that is a scenario that should be avoided because people will always disagree and agreement cannot work as the guiding principle of horizontal processes. If a proposal seriously violates the most important values of those involved then it

should not pass, but then the question of how to establish the 'seriousness' of a block has always been a difficult one. One way to assess this could certainly be whether those blocking are willing to do the work required to help reshape the proposal, and if they are not, then this might be a good indication that the block they are expressing is not 'serious' enough to impede the passing of the proposal.

However, while this approach might have been a useful one for the alterglobalization movement, this 'solution' is confounded in the larger more diffuse movements such as the 15 May movement because the people in attendance at these assemblies are not only different people every day, but also different people at the start of the meeting and at the end of the meeting due to the coming and going made possible by the open square. Under these circumstances, giving one or two people the chance to input their criticism into a proposal is not enough to satisfy the people who just arrived, not to mention all the people who do not follow the assembly process closely.

Although the *acampada* was disbanded soon after this meeting and much bigger problems quickly presented themselves, the principles that this example highlights are crucial. When should decisions be taken to a general assembly? What kinds of decisions should be taken at a general assembly and, especially, which ones should *not* be brought to the assembly? Should the assembly be a decision-making body at all or a rather space for collaboration and communication as in the inter-barrio structure? If it is to be a decision-making space, then what are the procedures for overriding blocks? What are the procedures for incorporating concerns into proposals? These are questions that have to be answered if the alternative democratic process that the 15 May movement is developing is to become a viable and more inclusive alternative to existing systems of democratic governance.

Conclusion

It is my feeling that the only real way these questions will be answered is through praxis. An article can perhaps highlight implicit values, explain practices and draw on historical examples as comparison, but the circumstances have changed since the alterglobalization movement and solutions to current dilemma's will likely have to be found through what Sturgeon (1995: 36) calls 'direct theory': theory developed through action.

When I first began to analyse the theory of democracy that underlies global social movement networks, one of the key limitations for which I had trouble finding a solution in the practices of the movement, was the idea that in order to embrace conflict, which is necessary for horizontality, and in order to create *real* equality and not just an officially 'declared' equality between 'the people', then time and space needed to be divisible – in other words, geography cannot be fixed. This was a working solution for many situations that the alterglobalization movement faced partially because it was a global disembedded network structure that travelled across time and space. If you had three groups who all

wanted to protest the G8, but they could not agree on a common mode of action, then you divided up time and space. If the location was very important (for example if everyone wanted to hold their protest at the conference centre where the G8 was meeting) then you divide the time – one group does Monday, the other Tuesday, or one group goes in the morning the other in the afternoon. If, on the other hand, the timing was very important (everyone wants to take action right before the opening of the summit meetings) then you divide the space – those who want to hold a march follow the a given route through the city centre, those who want to smash windows go to the main shopping street, and those who want to blockade the delegates from getting in go into the 'red zone' around the conference centre. This didn't work every time, but it became common practice within the alterglobalization movement and meant that the mainstream political parties and the anarchists rarely had to agree on a single course of action.

This system of dividing either time or space worked as a practical solution, but theoretically, it was a serious limitation to the alternative democratic decision-making system they were developing because you cannot divide geography infinitely. If the democratic system were a real governing system, people would live in particular places and need to be satisfied with the decisions taken for their locality and could not just move elsewhere every time they disagreed. The current developments in Spain and occupy movements more generally, are precisely interesting for this reason. They are employing many of the same decision-making structures, but they are doing so in a way that is very grounded in the material reality of neighbourhoods and pre-existing communities that cannot be easily shifted based on the types of decisions taken. People cannot simply realign themselves politically, keeping the wider network intact, as was so often done as a solution to conflict within the alterglobalization movement.

And yet, I was surprised by the results of this grounding in geography. When I witnessed the inter-barrio meeting, based in actual barrios, a curious effect arose that I had not anticipated and which laid many of my concerns to rest. I realised that although space can less easily be divided, time gets much longer – the process becomes more permanent and so the question of time becomes less restrictive. When the 'barrios' are real, then the number of decisions that have to be taken together are even fewer than within the alterglobalization movement. The various barrios in an anti-summit camp are by virtue of their presence at the anti-summit mobilization implicated in a common process of opposition. With the barrios in Barcelona, it was relatively easy to reach agreement between the various barrios, and even to incorporate differences because each group had a degree of autonomy from the other groups. Much more so, at least, than within an anti-summit camp where the barrios had this autonomy in principle, but depended on each other for carrying out effective action or for maintaining the running of the camp.

The general assembly structure as developed in the example above has also raised some important lessons learned since the days of the alterglobalization movement. The first is that these assemblies work very well for the exchange of

information, ideas and lessons across contexts but perhaps less well as a decision-making body when the tactic of decentralization is not used (the small group to large group structure). Second, they result in far more dynamic proposals because of the meeting structure of preparing the proposal before the meeting, presenting the proposal to the large meeting, and reworking the proposal in the working group meetings and smaller 'parallel' meetings. However, although this is an effective way to merge some of the conflicting opinions and needs, it is not a perfect solution and other ways to incorporate conflict might be necessary – perhaps through counter-acting the idea that the general assembly needs to approve people's actions and promoting instead decentralization so that people can turn to multiple decision-making bodies and even create their own spaces and procedures of decision-making.

Prefiguration as a strategy for social change relies on movement actors (or those involved) to remain open to the idea that goals may shift and may need to be multiple in order to accommodate everyone. The decision-making process itself, therefore, also needs to remain open and fluid. As soon as a coherent and singular political platform becomes the basis of unity, as the alterglobalization movement has learned over the past ten years, the political space closes off to new ideas, new people and new potential structures of democracy. One of the more innovative guiding principles of the alterglobalization movement was that in order to create more inclusive forms of democracy, structures are needed that can incorporate diversity and differences – even incorporate the people who hate meetings. These structures also have to account for the power inequality implicit in any one group of people (even the general assembly) determining for everyone else what the aims should be.

Within the alterglobalization movement this openness was facilitated by the liminality of the process – the temporary coming together of people for a weekend or a few weeks usually in a different location each time combined with an action-oriented focus. This made it much easier for those involved to stay open to new ideas and people because there was so often a new context to be taken into consideration. In other words, the structures developed by the alterglobalization movement were continuous but never permanent.

This liminality, therefore, was also a constraint. Prefiguration relies on the creation of a process that transforms those involved through practice. In other words, social change arises when a collective process is able to transform the way power operates between individuals. This transformation takes time and continuity – people do not change quickly without the use of force. One of the limits to the alterglobalization movement's strategy was that the continuous process required for prefiguration to work had to be moulded out of a series of disparate events (summit mobilizations and social forums). Without the infrastructure to ground this collective process in the lives of those involved, prefiguration stood little chance of succeeding.

The 15 May movement, however, has added the key innovation of the tactic of occupation, and with it an element of permanence (whether the occupation itself is permanent or not, the organizing continues in a given locality). The 15

May movement, for all its faults, may finally make it possible for this continuous process to be grounded in our everyday lives. If it succeeds in this, as the inter-barrio meeting in Barcelona did, then there is a real chance for the development of democratic decision-making structures in the here-and-now that can replace those that are currently crumbling around us.

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15-M: Trajectòries mobilitzadores i especificitats territorials. El cas català

Fabià Díaz-Cortés i Gemma Ubasart-Gonzàlez

Resum

El present article té l'interès d'analitzar especificitats territorials en el marc del 15-M, partint d'una concepció on, després de contextualitzar temporalment i temàticament el 15-M, es considera rellevant i necessari tenir present i analitzar dinàmiques mobilitzadores que tenen una radicació en el temps anteriors al 15 de maig de 2011. Aquest plantejament no és casual, sinó que parteix d'una realitat viscuda per les dues autores, on el fet de combinar i compatibilitzar activisme i ciència, fruit de la vinculació associativa i política que ambdues tenen vers els seus respectius entorns quotidians, fa possible el desenvolupament d'aquest relat, on l'anàlisi política, geogràfica i sociològica té el seu origen en l'experiència personal-col·lectiva.

Paraules clau: *15-M*, Estat espanyol, Catalunya, especificitats territorials, moviments socials.

El present article té l'interès d'analitzar especificitats territorials en el marc del *15-M*, partint d'una concepció on, després de contextualitzar temporalment i temàticament el *15-M*, es considera rellevant i necessari tenir present i analitzar dinàmiques mobilitzadores que tenen una radicació en el temps anteriors al 15 de maig de 2011. Aquest plantejament no és casual, sinó que parteix d'una realitat viscuda per les dues autores, on el fet de combinar i compatibilitzar activisme i ciència, fruit de la vinculació associativa i política que ambdues tenen vers els seus respectius entorns quotidians, fa possible el desenvolupament d'aquest relat, on l'anàlisi política, geogràfica i sociològica té el seu origen en l'experiència personal-col·lectiva.

Així doncs, en un primer i segon apartat de l'article es durà a terme una mirada descriptiva dels esdeveniments del *15-M* i dels seus antecedents més immediats. En un tercer apartat s'aprofundirà en una contextualització estructural del moviment per desprès, en un quart apartat, poder introduir una anàlisi de la mobilització. En el cinquè apartat s'introduiran les especificats territorials, la constatació que el territori i les trajectòries militants tenen també a veure amb la configuració de la protesta. Finalment es parla del reforçament del cicle mobilitzador prenent el cas concret de Catalunya, per poder així apuntar unes primeres conclusions per poder continuar el recorregut activista i investigador.

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Trajectòries mobilitzadores i especificitats territorials

1. Introducció: 15 de maig de 2011

Era 15 de maig, una setmana abans de la celebració de les eleccions municipals i autonòmiques[1]. En més de 60 ciutats de l'Estat espanyol es portaven a terme manifestacions convocades per la plataforma *Democràcia Real Ja!* sota el lema "no som mercaderia en mans de polítics i banquers". Encara que les organitzadores feia temps que preparaven les marxes, ningú podia imaginar que aquella convocatòria anava a desembocar en el que ara coneixem com a moviment del *15-M* o *de les indignades*. Cal dir, però, que no es partia de zero, sinó que es provenia d'un clima social difús i no organitzat on el sentiment de desafecció amb la classe política era important, sense oblidar la pròpia dinàmica mobilitzadora de diferents moviments socials sobretot en àmbits urbans i metropolitans de l'Estat espanyol. La plataforma convocant albergava de manera informal diferents nodes d'agregació, que havien anat sorgint a la xarxa, però no solament, i que recollien d'una forma o una altra el malestar d'una part cada cop més important de la societat sobre com s'estava gestionant la crisi econòmica i, en general, sobre què s'entenia per democràcia. Alguns d'aquests nodes tenien un caràcter simplement expressiu, altres buscaven crear eines organitzatives; uns presentaven un format estrictament virtual, altres un de molt més vinculat a espais i moviments socials i polítics que podríem considerar més tradicional, organitzats i, més o menys, establerts. Per no estendre'ns, entre altres citar *Malestar.org* que organitzava cada divendres concentracions a diverses ciutats i *Nolesvotes* que feia una crida al vot responsable pel 22 de maig —amb un origen a la polèmica Llei Sinde i de crítica al Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), Partido Popular (PP) i Convergència i Unió (CIU), partits que van donar un impuls a la llei contra l'anomenada "pirateria informàtica" des del Senat espanyol (Abellán, 2011).

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[1]   El 22 de maig es celebraren eleccions autonòmiques a tot l'Estat, excepte a Andalusia, Catalunya, Euskadi, Navarra i Galícia, i eleccions municipals.

Imatge 1. Manifestació del 15 de Maig a Barcelona, al seu pas per Via Laietana (Font: Fabi)

Pero també hi havia antecedents directes al carrer. *Juventud sin futuro* el 7 d'abril havia reunit milers persones als cèntrics carrers madrilenys. La convocatòria es va difondre eficaçment per les xarxes socials i, encara que sorgia de grups juvenils que portaven temps treballant en els moviments socials, va arribar més enllà del cercle activista. La seva taula reivindicativa era senzilla i àgil de comunicar: "Somos conscientes de que las medidas de salida a la crisis se han caracterizado por un constante recorte de nuestros derechos así como por una socialización de las pérdidas"; "pretendemos ser motor de cambio que hasta el momento parece que no va a ser abrazado por la clase dirigente" (veure Ubasart, 2011a). Radicalitat democràtica, en forma i contingut. En el cas de la capital catalana, la manifestació havia estat precedida el dia anterior per una altra multitudinària convocatòria en defensa dels serveis públics (sanitat i educació), però una i altra eren diferents, com ressaltava el politòleg Joan Subirats en un article d'opinió "avui diumenge, en el mateix lloc, tindrem una expressió i una reacció menys convencional, menys institucional i menys moderada enfront de la mateixa situació" (Subirats, 2011).

2. *15-M*: La indignació es reapropia d'espais públics centrals arreu de l'Estat espanyol

Els lemes principals de la convocatòria del 15 de maig foren "democràcia real ja!", "Ningú ens representa" i "no som mercaderia en mans de polítics i banquers". Es tractava d'una mobilització on milers de persones, més enllà d'una identitat política i/o sindical concreta, mostraven de manera activa la seva indignació cap als programes d'ajustament neoliberal que estan sent decidits més enllà dels espais de sobirania popular (corts generals, parlaments autonòmics i ajuntaments) i la submissió i complicitat de la política institucional amb els mercats. Mentre que a Madrid va ser la mateixa nit del 15 de maig que un grup de persones decidia acampar a la Puerta del Sol, a Barcelona no seria fins al dia següent -quan els efectes del desallotjament per part de la policia a Madrid havien suposat un efecte reactivador i multiplicador de suport a l'acampada madrilenya- quan es decideix impulsar l'acampada a Plaça Catalunya. Es tractava de dues places de caràcter global, simbòliques, on les persones que es concentraven provenien de barris de les dues grans ciutats i les seves respectives àrees metropolitanes.

Imatge 2. Descansant durant la nit a l'acampada de Plaça Catalunya de Barcelona, maig de 2011
(Font: Albert Garcia, *Setmanari La Directa*)

Interface: a journal for and about social movements   *Article*
Volume 4 (1): 235 - 250 (May 2012)   *Díaz-Cortés i Ubasart-Gonzàlez,*
Trajectòries mobilitzadores i especificitats territorials

Un cop recuperats espais públics tan simbòlics i emblemàtics com la Puerta del Sol i Plaça Catalunya, s'inicia un procés d'autoorganització i participació directa i horitzontal on la implicació individual a favor de la discussió-decisió-acció comuna i col.lectiva destaca per sobre de tot. Si bé la tasca autoorganitzativa i participativa es concentrava en aquests dos espais públics globals de Madrid i Barcelona -una referencialitat que també van ajudar a consolidar els mitjans de comunicació institucionals, silenciant el que estava passant de forma generalitzable a molts altres llocs- ràpidament aquestes acampades i dinàmiques d'autoorganització i participació s'estenien pel territori, passant de la plaça global a les places de barris i pobles. Un procés que des de la Plaça Catalunya es reforçaria molt ràpidament i que portaria al desmantellament de l'acampada permanent una vegada que el funcionament de forma horitzontal i interconnectat dels diferents espais i iniciatives ja estava en marxa, descentralitzant-se a barris i pobles, un procés que trigaria una mica més en el cas de la capital espanyola. La xarxa, dels llocs i de les complicitats, ja estava en funcionament.

Imatge 3. Assemblea impulsada pels i les indignades a Barberà del Vallès, 27 de maig de 2011
(Font: Fabi)

3. Contextualització (estructural) del *15-M*

Arribades aquí ens podem preguntar, però, en quin context (estructural) situem la mobilització? Anem a veure ara en quin marc més general situem l'emergència d'aquesta mobilització. Així doncs, podem apuntar que a principis dels 80' —en plena efervescència dels governs de Thatcher i Reagan— els economistes neoliberals ja assenyalaven que qualsevol canvi profund i regressiu de model econòmico-social requeria d'una crisi —que si no existia es podia crear. Trenta anys després i els ecos d'aquestes paraules ressonen, encara que amb major radicalitat si això és possible.

Interface: a journal for and about social movements   Article
Volume 4 (1): 235 - 250 (May 2012)   Díaz-Cortés i Ubasart-Gonzàlez,
                                        Trajectòries mobilitzadores i especificitats territorials

Segurament ja no estem davant d'una crisi cojuntural i cíclica que s'opera a l'esfera econòmica. Els desafiamens que es plantegen van molt més enllà, en un terreny també polític i cultural. Així doncs, els pilars de l'estat del benestar, nascuts del pacte entre el factor capital i el factor treball a l'Europa Occidental democràtica, fan aigües. Cal destacar la lleugeresa amb la que són tractats cada cop més aquells drets i garanties que es trobaven en la base de l'estat de dret garantista. I en el cas de l'Estat espanyol, a més, es poden observar importants retrocessos en el respecte a la diversistat cultural, plurinacional i plurilingüística. En general, es posa en entredit la política econòmica keynesiana, la lluita per la cohesió social i la redistribució de riquesa o els propis valors liberals, democratacristians i socialdemòcrates –ciments del pensament i l'acció política institucionalitzada del vell continent fins a l'actualitat.

Els governs cada cop més van a remolc dels dictats del mercat; perden capacitat de marcar la seva pròpia agenda i exercir lideratge. Les empreses de qualificació juguen de manera capritxosa a etiquetar el deute sobirà, amb importants dosis de xantatge i manipulació, buscant desestabilitzar certes economies. Els poders econòmics exigeixen a les administracions públiques plans d'austeritat que sempre van en la direcció de retallades de drets socials i laborals i de la privatització del que fins ara havien estat serveis públics bàsics. I aposten per un sistema fiscal cada cop més dèbil i que prioritzi els impostos indirectes i rebaixant la progressivitat. Així les coses, qualsevol observadora pot constatar que els actors polítics transformadors tradicionals es mostren paralitzats, situant-se com a funcionals als interessos de l'èlit econòmica mundial i local. En aquest sentit, els partits de centre-esquerra i els sindicats majoritaris dimiteixen de fer política. Els interessos econòmics es globalitzen mentre la classe política és incapaç de pensar propostes i projectes polítics més enllà de l'Estat-nació, sense anar més lluny, impedint que l'Europa política i social no arribi a veure la llum, així com un model polític i cultural més vinculat als diferents pobles i regions europees.

En aquest sentit, el *15-M* és una plasmació al carrer del procés de desafecció amb la classe política – que no amb la política – que s'està vivint (Bonet, 2010). Però no solament això. És un exercici de dignitat, presa de consciència i d'iniciativa. Davant la deriva econòmica neoliberal i de cadaverització dels actors i els imaginaris polítics tradicionals, la ciutadania surt al carrer. En un moment de canvi radical de model, les velles demandes de democràcia -real i formal- reapareixen, encara que amb innovadors repertoris, llenguatges i subjectivitats (Errejón, 2011; @galapita i @hibai_, 2011).

4. Sobre el moviment *15-M* (en particular)

En els esdeveniments que segueixen a les marxes del *15-M* s'idientifica una important dosi d'espontaneïtat i desbordament institucional (incloent partits i sindicats); segons Tarrow (2002) aquests "moments de bogeria" precedeixen a qualsevol mobilització que aconsegueix trencar la normalitat quotidiana. En aquest cas, les protestes van més enllà del que s'esperava, encara que en aquell

primer moment ningú s'atrevia a desenvolupar hipòtesis de futur[2]. Paradoxalment, en la recta final de la campanya electoral, moment central pels partits polítics, l'agenda pública es va veure creuada per les acampades. El moviment del *15-M* va seguir el A-B-C descrit a la literatura sobre moviments socials perquè la mobilització sigui exitosa. Existien unes condicions materials i simbòliques que provocaven un sentiment de greuge en un sector cada cop més gran de la població i l'existència de grups que transformaren en polític i acció col·lectiva els malestars. Però amb això no n'hi ha prou per desencadenar la mobilització, i això les activistes que porten anys lluitant per una societat millor ho saben per experiència. Els processos socials no es regeixen per una lògica mecanicista ni tampoc basada en el voluntarisme d'uns pocs grups socials.

Així és com la primera mobilització trobà, però a la vegada provocà, una estructura d'oportunitats polítiques. I aquí és on cal entendre el seu èxit. L'elecció de la data una setmana abans de les eleccions (fora voluntària o casual) així com la repressió policial i de la Junta electoral central, catapultaren la protesta. Això es va produir junt amb un bon emmarcament del discurs: el relat que dóna el moviment, el diagnòstic de la situació i unes possibles solucions, encara intuitives, encaixa amb inquietuds de la major part de la societat. El reperetori d'acció utilitzat fou fàcilment replicable i mediàticament difundible. No fou menys despreciable, tampoc, la coincidència amb el "temps universal". Les indignades, altament formades i amb capacitats comunicatives molt desenvolupades, coneixien i s'interessaven per les revoltes àrabs, les lluites socials a Grècia i l'exemple que suposa Islàndia en assumir una altra resposta a la crisi en el marc de les especificitats europees o les mobilitzacions més de caràcter juvenil i d'estudiants a Portugal, Xile i el Regne Unit. No estaven soles, doncs, en la lluita per la democracia i expressar el malestar d'una forma activa al carrer[3].

En aquest sentit, Santiago Alba Rico apunta en els seus textos d'anàlisi sobre el *15-M* que la clau de la reivindicació d'aquests joves, i no tan joves, es la demanda de democràcia, en els seus processos i en la seva materialitat. Així ens diu que "els joves del *15-M* s'han apoderat del llenguatge políticament correcte que invoquen i *pategen* els polítics i s'ho han pres seriosament contra ells" (Alba Rico, 2011a), i continua Santiago Alba exposant que "per això, a Tunis i a Madrid, els joves demanen precisament democràcia; i per això, a Tunis i a Madrid, han comprès encertadament que la democràcia està orgànicament

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[2] Per demanda de diferents editorials, el dia 22 de maig es tanquen diversos llibres dedicats al moviment del *15-M*. Davant del desconcert dels primers dies de mobilització molts autors apliquen marcs teòrics i normatius que ja es venien desenvolupant per explicar la protesta social. Segurament d'aquests primers analítics el més descriptiu, i realista, perquè fuig de l'exercici citat, és el de Carlos Taibo (Taibo, 2011a).

[3] "Les protestes a Espanya s'inscriuen sens dubte a la mateixa falla tectònica global i perllonguen i readapten el mateix model organitzatiu inventat a Tunísia i a Egipte (i a Bahrein, Síria, Iemen, etc.). El capitalisme ha fracassat en tot, excepte en globalitzar les respostes" (Alba Rico, 2011b).

lligada a aquesta cosa misteriosa que Kant situava rotundament fora dels mercats: la dignitat" (Alba Rico, 2011b).

Les anàlisis de l'autor són molt il·lustratives de les primeres passes del moviment, però parlen d'un marc general i d'un "moment de bogeria", i també cal que ens endinsem en les seves fases de desenvolupament, a partir de l'exploració de possibles camins a recórrer. Nosaltres, en aquest sentit, creiem important analitzar i concretar l'existència de particularitats des d'un punt de vista territorial, ja que pensem que és on es pot observar de manera més ràpida els caminars del moviment, al nostre entendre, i essent coherents, també amb les experiències de la nostra pràctica activista i política en els nostres entorns quotidians (Díaz-Cortés, 2010; Alemany, Serrà, Ubasart, 2010). I no és gratuït tampoc. La radicació i radicalització del *15-M* és més fàcil que es porti a terme allà on les articulacions espai-política-societat estaven tenint un desenvolupament molt actiu en la defensa de pilars bàsics de l'estat del benestar, com seria l'ensenyament i la sanitat públiques, la protecció social a col·lectius vulnerables i dret a l'habitatge. El cas de Catalunya és paradigmàtic, sobretot amb l'entrada del nou govern de Convergència i Unió (CIU)[4] al govern autonòmic, sense oblidar la trajectòria i dinàmica d'autoorganització i mobilització dels moviments socials urbans de la regió metropolitana de Barcelona. Aturem-nos un moment a analitzar el que hem anomenat especificitats territorials.

5. Radicant i radicalitzant les mobilitzacions: especificitats territorials?

Convé recordar que aquestes protestes no han estat les úniques que marcaren aquell periode pre-electoral del maig de 2011 (Fernández, 2011). I és necessari apuntar-les per entendre per què la naturalesa de la mobilització és diferent en el territori pel cas català i, també destacaríem, pel cas basc. Per raons diferents, el *15-M* s'inserta i es desenvolupa en aquests territoris d'una manera diferent a com ho fa a la resta de l'Estat. Les trajectòries en les seves respectives vides política, social i cultural en aquests contextos modela també la mobilització pre-electoral (i post-electoral) i la seva interrelació amb la protesta de les *indignades*. En tot cas, no estem dient que a la resta de l'Estat el *15-M* es desenvolupi amb les mateixes formes i característiques, en contraposició als casos català i basc, sinó que ressaltem que cal fer també fer una anàlisi i lectura territorialitzada, ja que el mateix fet del funcionament descentralitzat, en xarxa i horitzontal ja suposa que a cada barri i ciutat tingui unes característiques pròpies, compartint-se d'altres. En tot cas, considerem que la vida política, social i cultural que es desenvolupa a territoris com el català i el basc dóna unes

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[4]   Dreta nacionalista catalana. CIU va guanyar les eleccions el novembre de 2010 posant fi a 7 anys de governs de centre-esquerra i catalanistes, amb un coalició entre el Partit Socialista de Catalunya (PSC), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) i Iniciativa per Catalunya/Verds-Esquerra Unida i Alternativa (ICV-EUiA).

pautes diferents a tenir presents quan analitzem les mobilitzacions socials que estan tenint lloc arreu de l'Estat espanyol.

A Catalunya des que el govern de CiU va anunciar un primer paquet de retallades socials —en educació, sanitat i protecció social, i després vindrien altres- es multiplicaren les mobilitzacions ciutadanes i de treballadores, a la capital però també a ciutats i pobles de tot el país. L'acte més visible i massiu en aquest primer període fou la manifestació abans apuntada que es portà a terme a Barcelona el 14 de maig, convocada per 200 entitats socials i sindicals del país. Així doncs, i com apunta l'historiador Xavier Domènech, per comprendre les característiques de les lluites catalanes cal tenir en compte que el *15-M* "eclosionà enmig de les mobilitzacions contra les retallades socials" (Domènech, 2011). Així doncs, les lluites de les indignades i en defensa dels drets socials es troben, col·laboren i hibriden; velles i noves subjectivitats construeixen comunitats de resistència a les polítiques neoliberals.

En el cas basc, a Euskadi i Navarra el principal debat pre-electoral va girar al voltant del procés de pau i, en concret, al fet que l'esquerra independentista basca pogués presentar-se o no a les eleccions municipals. Després de la il·legalització de Sortu[5], es va constituir la coalició electoral Bildu, de marcat caràcter sobiranista i d'esquerres[6]. Per reclamar que aquesta formació pogués concórrer a la contesa electoral es desencadenaren importants mobilitzacions socials i mostres de solidaritat, la més destacada durant la nit en que s'iniciava la campanya electoral, moment en què el Tribunal Constitucional havia de decidir si aquesta coalició podia concórrer o no a les eleccions municipals. Les urnes parlaren i Bildu quedà la primera força en nombre de regidors i la segona en nombre de vots a Euskadi, aconseguint l'ajuntament de Donostia (Sant Sebastià, capital guipuscoana) i la Diputació de Gipuzkoa. Els resultats a Navarra no van ser del mateix nivell però també destacables. Així doncs, i pel cas basc, podem considerar que les iniciatives transformadores s'estan construint amb un peu a les institucions, ja no solament locals, a partir de la irrupció de Bildu en altres escales de govern, fet que posa de manifest una vinculació entre protesta popular i activa al carrer i expressió electoral. I l'anunci del cessament definitiu de l'activitat armada de ETA considerem que accelerarà i reforçarà aquest fet en territoris com el basc.

Pensant també en clau electoral, i tornant al cas català, en les eleccions municipals del 22 de maig de 2011 tampoc han de passar desapercebuts els resultats electorals de candidatures alternatives i populars (en el marc estricte de la comarca del Vallès Occidental a través de les Candidatures Alternatives del

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[5]   Partit que inscriu l'esquerra abertzale el passat, amb referències explícites a l'ús exclusió de formes polítiques democràtiques no violentes. Malgrat tot és il·legalitzat pel Tribunal Suprem espanyol.

[6]   La coalició estava formada por Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) —el primer president d'Euskadi fou d'aquest partit, i durant molts anys ha format coalició electoral amb el Partit Nacionalista Basc (PNV)- i Alternatiba —escissió d'Ezkerra Batua/Izquierda Unida (EB/IU)- i independents i militants de l'esquerra abertzale.

Vallès i, en el marc general del país, de les Candidatures d'Unitat Popular), amb increment de vots i de representants polítiques als consistoris, essent també un clar exemple de relació entre lluites socials i polítiques arrelades al territori, des de l'àmbit municipal, i expressions electorals i institucionals (Elisenda, Serrà i Ubasart, 2010).

Un i altre cas, responen a pràctiques, discursos i demandes que cal situar-les amb antelació al 15 de maig de 2011, però destacant-se el retroaliment, i per això reforçament, d'aquestes pràctiques, discursos i demandes en particular i en general, tant des de l'acció política a les institucions com per la pressió dels moviments socials i les mobilitzacions del *15-M*, encara que no puguem parlar estrictament d'una unitat d'acció organitzada, homogènia i coherent. Però tampoc creiem que es vulgui ni es busqui, sinó que les característiques mobilitzadores que s'han posat de manifest en els darrers temps, reforcen clarament l'horitzontalitat i complementarietat difuses en el temps i en l'espai i que pot, o no, configurar-se en dinàmiques coordinades de lluita social en temps i espais concrets on es sumin majories socials molt destacables, encara que no siguin sempre les mateixes.

En aquest sentit, podem dir que en aquell moment de naixament del *15-M* quedava clar que l'agenda política dels moviments socials, pel cas basc, prioritzava la defensa de drets civils i polítics, la consolidació d'una resolució negociada al conflicte polític i armat, així com la lluita per aconseguir representació política a les institucions locals (i, com hem dit, per seguir aplicant polítiques i formes de fer política coincidents amb les demandes des de les mobilitzacions del *15-M*). I l'aposta concreta pel *15-M*, en el cas basc, fou bastant minoritària i fragmentada. Mentre que en el cas català podem considerar que les diferents lluites, en el marc del *15-M* estrictament o no, es trobaren de manera més productiva des d'un punt de vista mobilitzador; en el cas basc el *15-M* es va quedar en una simple anècdota, però sense oblidar que es reforçaven espais de transformació política ja existents i se n'obrien d'altres.

6. El *15-M* a Catalunya: reforçant un nou cicle mobilitzador

Des d'un posicionament situat (militància activa en espais polítics i sindicals alternatius a la regió metropolitana de Barcelona), i de persones que vam participar en la mobilització del 15 de maig a Barcelona i que després ho vam fer a les nostres respectives poblacions de Barberà i Castellar del Vallès, no entenem, doncs, la irrupció del *15-M* sense emmarcar-la en un nou cicle de mobilització a Catalunya que té les seves normals particularitats respecte altres indrets de l'Estat espanyol, com hem anat apuntant, i respon també a dinàmiques de moviments socials amb més recorregut en el temps (Leiva, Miro i Urbano, 2007; Bonet, 2010). En tot cas, s'ha de reconèixer al moviment *15-M* en general un paper important i destacable perquè ha sabut fer aglutinar, autoorganitzar-se i activar generacions i sectors socials desmobilitzats i també ha suposat la construcció de dinàmiques d'interacció entre persones organitzades políticament i sindicalment (i no de tot l'espectre polític i sindical al nostre

entendre, sinó del més combatiu i alternatiu) i les no organitzades. El *15-M* ha suposat que de forma massiva i referencial les persones prenguessin el carrer, la paraula i la iniciativa, obtenint un suport i simpatia molt alts entre la població en general, i facilitant, a més, que es donés altaveu i legitimació social a demandes que es feien i es fan des d'espais polítics, sindicals i associatius més concrets o organitzats.

Però el fet que la multiplicació d'espais i iniciatives i la consolidació del procés mobilitzador arran del *15-M* sigui un fet destacable i diferenciat a Catalunya ens ha de portar a reconèixer contextos i situacions que no són únics ni homogenis, i que expliquen el dinamisme i l'enfortiment d'aquest nou cicle de mobilitzacions socials. Podríem parlar de les consultes per la independència, amb 500 referèndums a tot el territori, organitzades sense suport institucional, i on han participat 850.000 persones. Podríem parlar de les dues vagues generals i la convocatòria del 1r de Maig, on el sindicalisme alternatiu, els moviments socials i col·lectius més precaritzats han jugat un paper determinant, desmarcant-se del discurs hegemònic del sindicalisme oficial (CCOO i UGT). Podríem parlar dels resultats del municipalisme alternatiu en les eleccions municipals del 22 de maig a Catalunya, on la tasca municipalista dels últims 4 anys en molts pobles i ciutats, centrada en la majoria de casos en demandes i pràctiques que són bàsiques en el moviment *15-M* (autoorganització des de la proximitat, transparència i participació), ha suposat que es passés de 30 mil vots, i 30 representants a consistoris, a uns 80 mil vots, unes 120 representants a consistoris i 5 alcaldies. I aquestes iniciatives populars i de base, anant més enllà del programa polític o sindical, el que tenen de particular són el canvi de cultura política i sindical, on l'oficialitat i la institucionalització queden desbordades per la iniciativa popular. Un aspecte que considerem que encara s'ha reforçat més amb les mobilitzacions del *15-M*.

En el mateix sentit cal entendre els dos focus d'atenció i actuació més importants a nivell popular, en l'etapa *15-M* a Catalunya: les ocupacions de centres d'atenció primària (CAP) i hospitals i les ocupacions de portals d'edificis per evitar desnonaments, que són dos processos de lluita social que tenen els seus orígens d'auto-organització i suport mutu més enllà del *15-M*, ja que existia un treball previ des de diferents col·lectius i plataformes, però que aquest moviment ha ajudat a amplificar, i legitimar socialment accions com les mateixes ocupacions. Si bé el tema dels desnonaments és una lluita que, nascuda al nostre país, s'estén per tot l'Estat, el fet de les ocupacions a Catalunya, i sobretot en el cas de CAPs i hospitals, sí que suposa una reacció popular i activa que respon a les polítiques neoliberals aplicades pel nou govern autonòmic dretà i regionalista de CiU a Catalunya. Aquestes ocupacions són la resposta popular a l'anunci i posada en marxa del tancament parcial o complet de centres sanitaris públics, serveis i horaris. En aquesta mateixa lògica cal entendre la iniciativa popular que a escala metropolitana es va prendre per paralitzar el Parlament de Catalunya el passat 15 de juny amb l'eslògan "Aturem el Parlament", coincidint amb la discussió parlamentària de les retallades socials impulsades pel govern de CiU. O la massiva manifestació del 20 de juliol, el mateix dia que s'aprovaven els pressupostos del govern autonòmic, amb un

pacte entre partits de dretes a Catalunya (CiU i PP). I, en el cas dels desnonaments, la pressió popular ha suposat que s'hagin paralitzat nombrosos desnonaments i que molts ajuntaments, davant la pressió popular estiguin aprovant mocions per evitar aquesta pràctica i reclamar que la legislació competent a nivell estatal faci possible la dació en pagament.

Imatge 4. Ocupació del Centre d'Atenció Primària de Castellar del Vallès, 1 d'agost de 2011
(Font: Gemma)

Imatge 5. Ocupació del Centre d'Atenció Primària de Badia del Vallès, 18 de juliol de 2011
(Font: Fabi)

Imatge 5. Concentració popular per evitar que una família fos desnonada de la seva llar, Barri del Clot (Barcelona), 26 de juliol de 2011 (Font: Albert Garcia, *Setmanari La Directa*)

Parlem, tant en els casos de les ocupacions de CAPs i hospitals, com de les ocupacions de portals per aturar desnonaments, de petites victòries però, en definitiva, de victòries que ajuden a enfortir la mobilització social. En aquest sentit, es posa de manifest que l'hegemonia del discurs neoliberal s'està ressentint, estenent i socialitzant-se una crítica a l'actual sistema que es sustenta també amb l'actitud activa i autoorganitzada de cada vegada més persones, un aspecte que contrasta amb les dinàmiques desmobilitzadores que s'han anat desenvolupant a partir dels anys vuitanta a l'Estat espanyol, una vegada posada en marxa l'anomenada Transició política.

Amb el que s'ha comentat fins ara, es posa de manifest una de les realitats i virtuts del *15-M*, que s'enforteix a si mateix enfortint experiències amb més recorregut en el temps, a més de compartir, coordinar i sumar contextos, iniciatives i dinàmiques generals que superen l'escala més local per passar a una de més global, com es va posar de manifest el passat 15 d'octubre amb les mobilitzacions estenent-se a una escala internacional i global. Del respecte a aquesta realitat en construcció i de política prefigurativa i l'enfortiment de la coordinació en xarxa a diferents escales (Bonet i Ubasart, 2004) i al fet de sumar, dependrà el reforçament i consolidació d'aquest nou cicle mobilitzador davant l'hegemonia discursiva i pràctica del neoliberalisme.

7. Conclusions. Punt i seguit…

No hi ha cap dubte que el *15-M* ha suposat una politització de generacions que havien estat allunyades de la cosa pública, alhora que també ha significat trencar l'hegemonia i la idea d'*inevitabilitat* de la resposta neoliberal a la crisi i reforçar dinàmiques d'acció social i política pre-existents. Aquestes són les conclusions que a dia d'avui podem apuntar. Ara bé, a mig termini, haurem de preguntar-nos sobre les conseqüències d'aquesta mobilització en el marc tant

del seu origen com del que es reclama, i creiem que seria encertat per a l'anàlisi remetre'ns a la literatura sobre moviments socials que sol centrar-se en els efectes sobre tres àmbits: el de la *politics*, les formes i pràctiques de fer política dels diferents agents socials; el de les *policies*, les polítiques que es defineixen i es desenvolupen des de l'-acció política; i, la *polity*, les formes i caracterització dels governs a diferents nivells. És també a partir d'aquests tres àmbits des d'on també podrem tenir una mirada més ampliada del que està passant en el nostre entorn des d'un punt de vista social i polític, reconeixent necessàriament dinàmiques estructurals, però també especificitats i particularitats. En aquest sentit, la suma interrelacional i horitzontal de dinàmiques d'acció social i política és una característica pràctica de les actuals mobilitzacions a casa nostra, una forma, de moment, de transformar la *politics* i que està tenint una certa incidència en els altres dos àmbits esmentats però en l'escala municipalista i local, ja que no podem dir el mateix d'altres escales des d'on es defineixen i apliquen polítiques i es configuren governs.

I, com a darrer comentari i referència, el present article també és una forma de posar de manifest i reclamar la necessitat de preguntar-nos, com fa Carlos Taibo (2011b), d'auto-reflexionar i compartir, mentre seguint fent camí, mentre segueix transcorreguen la nostra acció política i activista, una forma de viure la nostra quotidianitat, tant des del punt de vista polític com acadèmic, i que tenim molt present que coincideix amb molts i moltes companyes i que traspua en la dinàmica mobilitzadora dels darrers mesos a casa nostra.

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Public squares and resistance:
the politics of space in the Indignados movement

Puneet Dhaliwal

Abstract

There has recently been growing resistance in response to the current crisis of neo-liberal capitalism, from the Arab uprisings to European mobilizations against austerity measures and the global spread of 'Occupy' movements. Many of these movements make use of the occupation of public space. This paper analyses the strategic value of this practice with reference to the Indignados movement in Spain. First, I offer an outline of the Indignados movement and its 'politics of space' in terms of the occupation of public squares. Second, I explore the potential of this politics of space in three steps: (a) I draw on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space to suggest how occupations may enable the emergence of new social spaces; (b) I emphasize the importance of transforming space as a means of transforming social relations; (c) I then elaborate the way in which the transformation of social relations in such spaces may contribute to the broader contestation of the existing hegemonic social order. Drawing these considerations together, I conclude that the occupation of public space is strategically valuable when it can undergird a sustained transformation of social relations, particularly when this is directed outwards towards transforming other social spaces.

1. Crisis and resistance

> Capital is in its deepest crisis in many years ... Could it be that the crisis is not just a breakdown of capitalism but the breakthrough of another world? Demonstrations all over the world proclaim that the capitalists are the cause of the crisis. And yet ... this cannot be so. We, not the capitalists, are the cause of the crisis. Capital is a relation of subordination, it drives towards the subordination of every aspect of our lives to the logic of capital. If it is in crisis, it is because of our insubordination, because we are saying 'no, no more'. (Holloway 2010, 250).

Social movements across the world are currently expressing this selfsame insubordination, or resistance, to neo-liberal capitalism through mass public demonstrations and the articulation of their own cry of 'no, no more' to the existing social, political, and economic order. The Arab uprisings have resulted in political revolutions ousting President Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Mubarak in Egypt, the eventual overthrow (albeit with foreign intervention) of Gaddafi's government in Libya, and ongoing uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon, amongst other countries. Taking inspiration from these uprisings,

Europe has seen sustained demonstrations against government austerity measures, particularly in Greece and Spain. More recently, there has been a proliferation of 'Occupy' protests, taking their name and inspiration from the Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City that are targeting social and economic inequality and corporate influence in the political system.

This cursory overview of recent mobilizations highlights a sharpening crisis of the contemporary economic and political order and growing resistance being mobilized against it. There is, though, a complex interaction between crisis and resistance such that Holloway's above remarks repay careful reflection. The current crises —economic, political, and social— are, in one sense, certainly a 'breakdown' of the existing order, or what Gramsci termed a 'crisis of hegemony' whereby the perceived legitimacy of the existing order evaporates (Gramsci 1971). This breakdown presents shifting political opportunities for social movements such as weakened governments, divisions within elites, and growing possibilities of political alliances in opposition to the government. These various political opportunities may consequently enable sustained resistance by movements in opposition to the existing order (Tarrow 1998). To assert that '*we* are the cause of the crisis', then, seems to downplay the significance of such political opportunities over which we may have no direct causal control.

Holloway's remarks are, however, useful in directing theoretical attention towards the political agency of active resistance in such crises. Crisis, under this view, can be conceived as an attempted 'breakthrough' of an alternative mode of social organization. This implies a rejection of two distinct understandings of crisis that downplay the role of popular mobilizations in determining the nature of a crisis. First, Holloway rejects the "traditional concept of the crisis as an *opportunity* for revolution", in which a big economic crisis occurs as a moment where revolution becomes possible. This approach conceives crisis as economic crisis, distinct from struggle, rather than itself being struggle. Second, Holloway rejects the view that equates crisis with 'restructuring', whereby crisis is merely 'functional' for the persistence of capitalism through destroying inefficient capitals and imposing discipline on workers. Against these understandings of crisis, Holloway emphasizes the 'essentially open' character of crisis, whereby the restructuring of capital is not presumed since struggle has always played an important role in the contestation of the social relations of capitalism (Holloway 2002, 204). While remaining cognizant of the importance of political opportunities (Tarrow 1998; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), I proceed by focusing on the political agency of active resistance.

2. The politics of space: from Tahrir Square to the Puerta del Sol and Plaça Catalunya

In this paper, I aim to present a theoretical analysis of a key resistance strategy that has characterized many contemporary struggles: the occupation of public space. This paper proceeds in three sections. First, in this section, I highlight the prevalence of the occupation of public squares in contemporary mobilizations,

which often take inspiration from the occupation of Tahrir Square in the Egyptian Revolution. In particular, I focus on the politics of space in the Indignados movement in Spain. Second, I employ Henri Lefebvre's theory of space in order to explore the potential and limitations of the strategy of occupying public space. With reference to the Indignados movement, I outline the role that occupying public space can play in the transformation of social relations, which can contribute to the broader contestation of the existing order. Third, I conclude by offering tentative suggestions as to how the strategy of occupying public space may most effectively be employed by today's social movements.

The most enduring and influential image of recent struggles is perhaps that of the sustained occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo. Tahrir (Freedom) Square served as the focal point of the Egyptian Revolution, with hundreds of thousands of demonstrators assembled at a time. This image, widely broadcast by international media, has inspired many of the current mobilizations in the West. This is evident in the attempt by student activists in the UK to occupy London's Trafalgar Square for 24 hours and turn it into Tahrir Square.[1] More recently, the current wave of 'Occupy' protests has adopted the image of turning various public spaces into a 'Tahrir Square' (Figure 1).

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[1] See Matthew Taylor, "Anti-cuts campaigners plan to turn Trafalgar Square into Tahrir Square", *The Guardian*, 22 March 2011. Online: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/22/anti-cuts-campaigners-trafalgar-square-tahrir (accessed 25 October 2011).
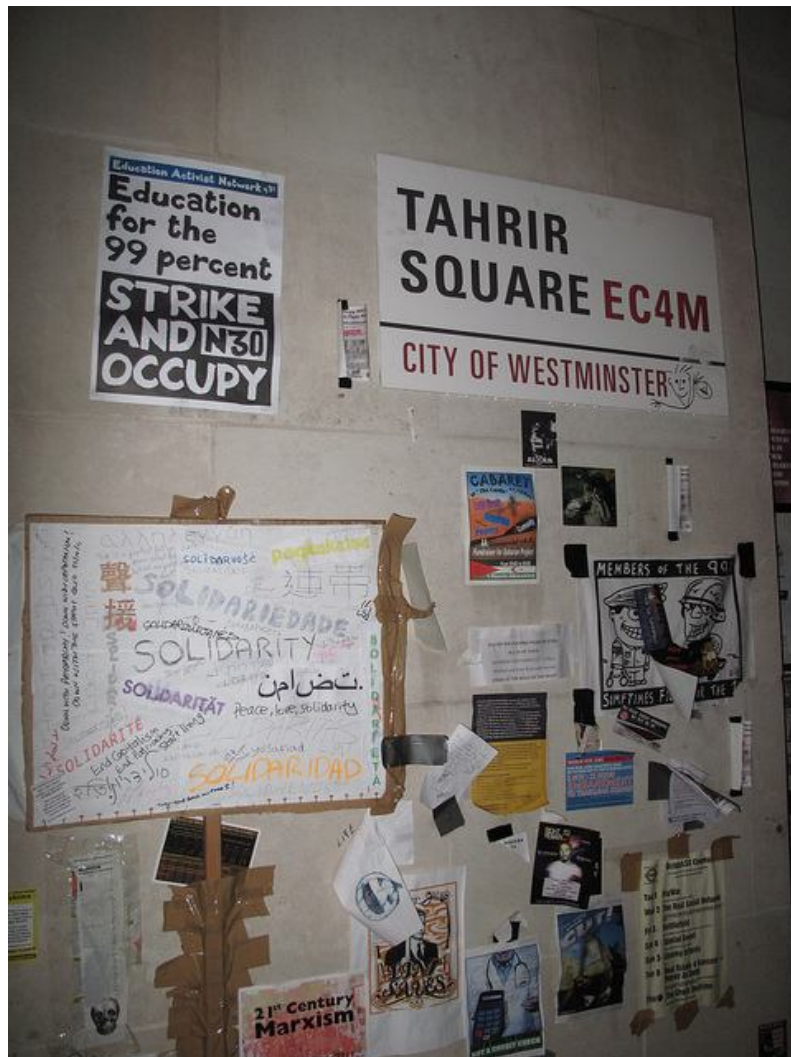
Figure 1: Sign at the Occupy London Stock Exchange protest

Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/duncan/6310191643/

Author: Duncan Cumming

One of the most notable examples of movements in the West engaging in this 'politics of space' is the Indignados movement in Spain.[2] The Indignados movement is also known as the 15-M Movement, which began on 15 May 2011 with an initial call for action by the unemployed, the poorly paid, the subcontractors, the precariously employed, and young people in over 50 cities across Spain. With 4,910,200 unemployed at the end of March 2011, Spain stands as a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe at

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[2] The term 'indignado/a' is usually translated as 'outraged', but may also be rendered as 'indignant' or 'incensed'.

21.3%.[3] The youth (16-25) unemployment rate of 43.5% is also the highest in Europe.[4] In order to address the economic crisis, the government implemented various economic reforms to revive the economy, including facilitating the hiring and firing of workers and increasing the retirement age from 65 to 67.

In response to the government's policies, Spain saw a general strike on September 29 2010 and continued demonstrations and mobilizations for strikes since. The current wave of demonstrations was called in the run-up to local and regional elections on 22 May 2011 and has been joined by various social networks and 200 small associations. They have brought together a diverse group of people, from the 'ni ni' generation (youths that are 'neither studying nor employed') to angry professionals.[5] This fledgling movement is demanding change to a political system in which the demonstrators feel unrepresented by traditional parties and marginalized by their policies. The desired changes include the elimination of privileges for the political class, increased regulation of the banking industry, a reduction in military spending, more participatory democracy, and measures to combat unemployment, promote housing rights, and improve public services in teaching, health, and public transport (15-M 2011, 13-16).

Very much evoking the spirit of Tahrir, these demonstrations made a call to 'take the square' and resulted in the occupation of public squares, most notably the Puerta del Sol in Madrid and the Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona. The influence of Tahrir is evident from the slogan: 'Tahrir de Madrid = Puerta del Sol de Madrid' (15-M 2011, 145). It must be noted, though, that the occupation of Tahrir Square emerged from the eminently practical concerns of the Egyptian demonstrators following their 'day of rage'. It has long been the site of mass protests before the 2011 revolution, such as the March 2003 demonstration against the Iraq War.[6] It also has the tactical advantages of remaining in the eye of international media and allowing crowds to coalesce for the purpose of self-defence in the face of brutal repression. The idea of Tahrir as a central encampment, held for as long as possible and acting as a hub for the revolution, then, developed organically in this process of struggle. Given the widespread,

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[3] See EITB, "Unemployment in Spain rises sharply to 21.3 percent", 29 April 2011. Online: http://www.eitb.com/en/news/detail/646452/unemployment-spain-rises-sharply-213-percent/ (accessed 25 October 2011).

[4] Juan Oliver, "El desempleo juvenil alcanza en España su mayor tasa en 16 años", *La Voz de Galicia*, 2 April 2011. Online: http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/dinero/2011/04/02/0003_201104G2P26991.htm (accessed 25 October 2011).

[5] Soledad Alcaide, "Movimiento 15-M: los ciudadanos exigen reconstruir la política", *El País*, 17 May 2011. Online: http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/05/16/actualidad/1305578500_751064.html (accessed 25 October 2011).

[6] See Menna Taher, "Tahrir Square: Where people make history", *Ahram Online*, 20 January 2012. Online: http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/32175/Egypt/Politics-/Tahrir-Square-Where-people-make-history.aspx (accessed 3 May 2012).

and almost instinctive, employment of this practice in the West, though, it is important to scrutinize its value as a *strategy* of resistance. The aim of this paper is not to pronounce the final word in endorsing or rejecting this strategy. Rather, I aim to draw theoretical reflections that may guide contemporary social movements engaged in such practices.

3. Strategies of resistance: occupying public space

This section draws theoretical reflections from the Indignados movement in order to critically evaluate the potential and limitations of the strategy of occupying public space. There is, of course, nothing to preclude the adoption of complementary strategies to compensate for whatever limitations it might exhibit. This paper, though, focuses on analysing this strategy in itself rather than on how it might intersect with other strategies. This analysis of occupying public space is informed by Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, with a particular emphasis on two aspects: first, his account of the 'trialectics of space', which outlines how space is produced and re-produced; and second, his distinction between the 'abstract space' that exists under capitalism and the 'differential space' that could potentially arise from the occupation of public space. This section proceeds in three steps: (a) I begin by outlining the process by which space is produced and re-produced, emphasizing the possibility of the emergence of new spaces; (b) I then highlight the importance of transforming 'abstract space' into 'differentiated space' in terms of contesting social relations; (c) I end by elaborating the way in which the transformation of social relations may contribute to a broader contestation of the existing hegemonic social order.

(a) The production of space

The Indignados movement, through its occupation of the Puerta del Sol in Madrid and the Plaça Catalunya in Barcelona, has engaged in a 'politics of space', by which public space is taken as the focus of resistance. The importance of public space as a site of resistance is clear when viewed through the lens of Lefebvre's theory of the 'production of space'. Lefebvre argues that social space "is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity" (Lefebvre 1991, 73). That is, space is not a "pre-existing, empty or neutral space, or a space determined solely by geography, climate, [or] anthropology" (Lefebvre 1991, 77). Rather, space is an ongoing production of relations between diverse objects, both natural and social, including the networks that facilitate the exchange of such objects. The Indignados movement's occupations of public space, then, are not simply a seizure and re-organization of physical space, conceived as an instrumental resource for the purposes of mobilization and publicity. They are also interventions in the very process of the production of social space. That is, they are attempts to produce an alternative form of public space to that which currently pervades society.

More specifically, Lefebvre understands the process of the production of space in terms of a 'conceptual triad', or 'trialectics' comprised of three 'spatial moments' that affect each other simultaneously: (i) the first, 'spatial practices' (*l'espace perçu*), refers to space in its *real*, physical form, as it is *perceived* and generated; (ii) the second, 'representations of space' (*l'espace conçu*), refers to space in its *imagined*, mental form, as it is *conceived* and imagined; (iii) the third, 'representational spaces' (*l'espace vécu*), refers to space as it is *lived* and modified over time through its use. This form of space is both *real-and-imagined* (Lefebvre 1991, 33-38). Lefebvre's theory thus entails a significant break from the linear, teleological view of historical change found in traditional Marxist dialectics, in which a third moment would be conceived as a synthesis of two elements of a dialectical relation rather than as an equally significant moment in that relation. This signifies a move towards a "much more fluid, rhythmic understanding" of historical change, in which the production of space is understood in an open-ended, non-teleological manner (Elden 2004, 37). Recalling Holloway's affirmation of the 'essentially open' nature of crisis/resistance, the character of space remains in a constant state of emergence, dependent on the interactions between the three spatial moments.

Applying this 'trialectics of space' to public squares, we can see how the Indignados movement's occupations can contribute to the re-definition of the meaning of social space. Consider first, the representation of public squares – space as it is conceived, designed, and produced by dominant groups and institutions in society. These dominant representations of space are "tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose" (Lefebvre 1991, 33). To make this more concrete, consider the dominant representation of space in Plaça Catalunya, Barcelona. This square is conceived by dominant groups as the city centre – a hub for tourist activity with numerous tourist attractions and commercial outlets nearby. This conception of space contributes to the prevailing representation of Plaça Catalunya that is perceived by the residents of Barcelona. Furthermore, this representation of the square embodies distinctively capitalist relations of production and the social order that arises from those relations. Dominant spatial relations under capitalism are, for Lefebvre, characterized by abstraction. This 'abstract space' signifies homogeneity, hierarchy and social fragmentation (Lefebvre 1991, 52). That is, social life is subordinated to the logic of capital as opposed to being directed towards fulfilling the diverse needs of human community. In Marxian terms, space is conceived so as to maximize its commercial *exchange value* rather than to enhance its *use value* for local communities.

Second, spatial practices perceive the dominant representations of space and generate the modern landscape through the production and reproduction of spatial relations between objects. Found in the signs, codes, and routines of social space, spatial practices can be understood as the glue that holds a social group together, ensuring some degree of cohesion and continuity. In terms of social space, and an individual's relationship to that space, this implies a certain level of 'competence' and 'performance' from that individual in terms of maintaining such cohesion (Lefebvre 1991, 38). For instance, to continue with

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the example of Plaça Catalunya, spatial practices may be defined by the daily routine of residents of Barcelona and symbols propagated through advertising and the media that resonate with, and propagate, the dominant representations of that space.

Third, representational spaces are "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (Lefebvre 1991, 39). Lived space is informed of representations of space by spatial practices, though it does not necessarily use space in the way it was conceived by the dominant groups or institutions (Garmany 2008). Social agents in lived space may consume space according to spatial practices and representations of space, or they may 'misread' or defy their prescriptions and thus alter the way in which spaces are consumed.

The occupation of Plaça Catalunya by the Indignados movement is an unmistakable example of this. The encampment in Barcelona explicitly rejected the inequalities of the given economic and political system and sought to organize space in resistance to the existing order. Specifically, this involved the establishment of a participatory people's General Assembly in the Plaça. Such lived experiences of social space constitute clear defiance of the dominant representations of space outlined above. As a result, the abovementioned 'abstract space' may give way to a new kind of space. This process occurs through the dissolution of old spatial relations and the generation of new spatial relations. Lefebvre calls this 'differentiated space' to emphasize that the hitherto subordinated differences and peculiarities of human social life may now be accentuated and affirmed (Lefebvre 1991, 52).

Lefebvre contends that these three spatial moments constantly relate to each other in an open-ended process through which space is produced. Social space, then, is not a rigid and static object, but is a set of relations between objects that is constantly in a state of flux (Lefebvre 1991, 83). Lefebvre's theory of spatial production is important, then, in highlighting the possibility of the emergence of new social spaces, and the process by which this may occur. In analysing the occupation of public space, the main issue of concern is the extent to which these spatial relations can be contested and re-articulated for the purpose of altering social spaces. Put differently, we are concerned with the potential scope for lived space to defy 'abstract space' in favour of 'differentiated space'. From this Lefebvrian perspective, the Indignados movement has certainly engaged in practices that may contribute to the emergence of a new 'differentiated' space. This is most notable in the consciousness of those involved in the occupations. The group Abrasad@s de Sol wrote of the occupations:

> "the occupation and liberation of the Puerta del Sol has opened a crack in the wall of the established order, routine and even the domesticated common sense, through which has sifted the spirit of liberty, embodied in the assemblies, commissions and working groups and their horizontal operation based on free discussion of resolutions and rotating delegates, as well as solidarity, real communication and mutual support, in real democracy; in short, we are trying to reinvent and experience as the best and most legitimate means to truly control our destiny, without the dictatorship of money nor the auspices of politicians." (15-M 2011, 25)

The lived space of these squares —experienced as 'liberated spaces'— used public space in opposition to the dominant representations of that space. That is, rather than homogeneous and depoliticized spaces, these squares became sites of mass public deliberation, the politicization of thousands of citizens, and the building of a nascent movement that aims to profoundly transform society. The Abrasad@s de Sol group further described the occupation of the Puerta del Sol as having "freed it from consumerism, from loneliness, and boredom to transform it into a melting pot of experiences and projects and a magnetic furnace where strangers that once walked anywhere alone meet, mix, and melt" (15-M 2011, 27). Underpinning this transformation is a rejection of the subordination of public space to the representations of space, as conceived by dominant groups. Most notably, the development of grassroots participatory democracy in these squares through people's assemblies and committees played a significant role in this process. For instance, protestors in Plaça Catalunya convened to construct proposals, without intermediaries or representatives, and to find solutions to the political and economic problems that they had identified. Of particular note is their proposed 'urban policy':

- That citizen participation is binding and that processes of community self-organization are guaranteed and prioritized.

- Moratorium on the execution of urban plans while these are not guided by the general interest, materialized in effective citizen participation.

- To not construct housing in spaces allocated for facilities, which aggravates the shortages in facilities (15-M-acampadaBCN 2011, 3).

Although the mass occupations have exhibited the potential for the emergence of new spaces, they were not without their limitations. After a month of intense activity in the occupations, the demonstrators in the Puerta del Sol decided on 12 June 2011 to leave the square, dismantling the encampment, packing up tents and libraries, and removing placards from the occupation sites.[7] The demonstrators in Plaça Catalunya also dismantled the encampment, leaving only a minimal infrastructure in the square.[8] Such actions, it must be noted, were combined with strategic actions looking beyond the squares, such as strengthening the grassroots of the movement through neighbourhood

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[7] Miguel Pérez Martín, "Los indignados del movimiento 15-M se levantan bajo el lema "No nos vamos, nos expandimos"", *El País*, 12 June 2011. Online: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/indignados/movimiento/15-M/levantan/lema/nos/vamos/nos/expandimos/elpepuesp/20110612elpepunac_1/Tes (accessed 28 October 2011).

[8] "Los indignados de Plaza Catalunya levantan el acampamento entre hoy y mañana", *El País*, 11 June 2011. Online: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/espana/indignados/Plaza/Catalunya/levantan/campamento/hoy/manana/elpepuesp/20110611elpepunac_1/Tes (accessed 28 October 2011).

assemblies and building for further mobilizations and demonstrations. The dismantling of the encampments, then, should not be immediately regarded as capitulation or a failure of this radical politics of space. Nonetheless, it is clear that a mass occupation of a public square in the centre of large cities like Madrid and Barcelona is difficult to sustain, particularly in the face of police repression. Those demonstrators involved in occupations eventually face conflicting pressures to study, to look after their families, to work, or indeed to seek employment in the first instance. There is, then, a constant threat that dominant spatial relations associated with abstract space may re-assert themselves if the occupation of public space is short-lived.

The importance of longevity in occupying public space can be noted by comparing occupations of public squares with the concept of the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone' (TAZ). Hakim Bey developed the concept of TAZ as a certain kind of "free enclave" that lives a short but intense life (Bey 1991, 99). It is "like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere / elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it" (Bey 1991, 101). As a conception of social change, though, it has been criticized by Richard Day as being "a little too reliant upon what seems to be an ethos of fleeting, individualistic encounters". Consequently, itt seems to offer little more than "temporary respite to a small number of individuals" rather than holding the potential for "broader and deeper social change" (Day 2005, 163-164). The Indignados encampments certainly share some characteristics with the TAZ, particularly their relatively short but intense lifespan and eventual dismantlement that led to this fleeting energy of freedom being dissolved and directed elsewhere. The occupations, however, are certainly much more than this in that they have resulted in the sustained collective organization of demonstrations and the articulation of identifiable proposals and demands. The Indignados are thus certainly involved in *some* kind of sustained engagement with, or rather against, the state. In this sense, the occupations are best understood, not as the practice of a group engaging in TAZ, but in terms of Charles Tilly's conception of social movements. Tilly describes social movements as a "sustained *interaction* between a specific set of authorities and various spokespersons for a given challenge to those authorities ... The broadest sense of the term *social movement* includes all such challenges" (Tilly 1984, 305).

The effective emergence of new space, then, requires the occupation of public space by a sustained social movement, rather than as a TAZ. Despite the limited longevity of the mass occupations themselves, the Indignados movement appears to have effected a notable change in spatial relations with sustained mobilization throughout the summer of 2011, including the occupations of alternative public squares, continuing street demonstrations, and repeated attempts to re-enter the Puerta del Sol. On 19 June 2011, the movement took to the streets in an international day of action against neo-liberal austerity measures being imposed across Europe, with 100,000 marching in Barcelona alone. More recently, the 15th October mobilizations grew from the Indignados

movement, with half a million filling the streets of Madrid and marching towards the Puerta del Sol and a quarter million marching in Barcelona. Thus, while the physical space of the squares is no longer that of the Indignados encampments in May 2011, the social space has been altered through these occupations. The abstract spatial relations of capitalism have been challenged and the potential for a new differentiated space has been experienced.

(b) Contesting social relations

It remains an open question, however, as to how the emergence of new social spaces can be sustained through the practices of movements like the Indignados. How, if the encampments in the Puerta del Sol and Plaça Catalunya last only a matter of weeks or months, can the emergence of new spaces be nourished rather than smothered? The key, for Lefebvre, is the development of new social relations alongside the production of new space. He writes: "'Change life!' Change society!' These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space. A lesson to be learned from Soviet constructivists of 1920–1930, and from their failure, is that new social relations call for a new space, and vice-versa" (Lefebvre 1991, 59).

This mutually reinforcing connection between social spaces and social relations is an integral aspect of a radical politics of space. First, new social relations require new social spaces, primarily because social space encompasses the very relationships between objects, including social agents. For particular social relations to obtain, then, there must be an appropriate social space in which these relations can be sustained. Second, new social spaces require new social relations because space is not lived or experienced by social agents in isolation. The production of space is an ongoing process that takes place through the intersubjective interaction between social agents embedded in a particular social space. Social agents may, of course, consume or use social space in some instances in a way that is relatively individuated. An indispensable aspect of the consumption of social space by social agents, however, is certainly concerned with how social agents consume social space in connection with other social agents. In this sense, movements concerned with the effective emergence of new social space require a focus on the integral role of social relations in a radical politics of space.

This potential for new social relations has certainly been evident in the practices of the Indignados movement, above all its use of grassroots participatory democracy. Developing as a federation of people's assemblies, this form of participatory democracy is notable for its horizontality and collectivism. People's assemblies have become the main decision-making forum of the movement, both in organizing practical operational tasks and formulating political demands and actions. The Madrid occupation, for instance, was comprised of over 20 commissions, each with its own assembly. These commissions would then report to the General Assembly, the highest decision-

making body in the federation, where the most important political issues of the movement were discussed in mass meetings of hundreds of people.

The egalitarian nature of the occupation was fortified by the use of consensus decision-making in the meetings, characterized by attempts to promote the equal participation of all involved and avoid the emergence of leaders and hierarchy. Many of the assemblies typically employ rotating positions, whereby no singular group or person holds a position indefinitely, since this would run the risk of hierarchies in terms of controlling information, contacts, and certain operational decisions. Additionally, assembly start and end times are typically publicized so that decisions are not simply made by those that are able to stay for the longest period of time.

Key positions include moderators, secretaries, and spokespeople. The moderators facilitates the meeting in terms of focusing discussion on the topic of debate, ensuring that a few individuals do not dominate the discussions, adhering to the agenda, and closing the assembly at the agreed time. The secretary takes minutes on the final decisions reached by consensus: agreement with proposals is signalled by waving hands up in the air, whilst disagreement is indicated by putting them down or forming a cross with one's arms in order to block a proposal. If someone disagrees, they express their arguments for further discussion and their concerns are accommodated in the discussion. In case agreement cannot be reached, each assembly defines a mode of action to break this impasse, such as majority votes. Spokespeople are responsible for serving as the link between commissions and taking the voice from an assembly to the General Assembly to reach common agreements. Spokespeople respect the decisions of their respective assemblies and do not present their own individual proposals as if they were the decision of an assembly. The new social spaces of the occupations have, in many ways, thus enabled the development of corresponding new social relations that tend towards horizontality, egalitarianism, and collectivism as opposed to hierarchy, inequality, and social fragmentation.

There are, of course, well-documented limitations and challenges of such ostensibly 'horizontal' and 'participatory' modes of organization, particularly that of informal hierarchies or the 'tyranny of structurelessness'. Reflecting on her experiences of the attempted horizontal nature of feminist collectives in the 1970s, Jo Freeman argued that self-avowedly horizontal or 'structureless' groups will inevitably come to be characterized by informal power hierarchies. Structurelessness thus becomes a way of masking power in such groups and is advocated most by the most powerful in such groups (Freeman 1972). Movements, like the Indignados, that are engaged in attempts to foster horizontal social relations must certainly engage in critical self-evaluation in order to resist such pernicious tendencies within horizontal groups. The contestation of hierarchical social relations and re-articulation of horizontal social relations, then, is never complete and finalized, but is a constant struggle and negotiation. The development of horizontal social spaces, though, plays an integral role in this process. In a critique of Freeman, Cathy Levine thus wrote:

"Contrary to the belief that lack of up-front structures lead to insidious, invisible structures based on elites, the absence of structures in small mutual trust groups fights elitism on the basic level – the level of personal dynamics" (Levine 2005).

Despite certain challenges and potential limitations, then, the new social spaces that arose through the occupations have facilitated the development of new social relations. In particular, this change in social relations can be observed in the extent to which the movement's politics of space has extended beyond the initial occupations of the Puerta del Sol and Plaça Catalunya. In many ways, a far-reaching radical change in social space and social relations has long been at the core of the Indignados movement's aspirations. In one reflective piece, the 15-M movement wrote:

> "Therefore we must extend the principle of collective liberation that has allowed us to re-appropriate the Sol for all of Madrid, to all its unused spaces and places that the economy spoils and politicians forget. The public squares are to be converted into spaces to do politics without politicians, we have every right to assemble and protest in public squares, since these squares are the people's property. Therefore, just as this has been produced instinctively in the Sol, the squares should be spaces without money, without leaders and merchants, they are the seeds of a new world and the only power that they recognize is that of the assembly of your neighbourhood or town. But that desire for liberation is not in the Sol, because without houses to inhabit or places where we meet, there are no assemblies, nor real democracy, nor new society that is valuable (15-M 2011, 28).

In this vein, the movement has sought to extend its radical politics of space beyond the city centre and into the grassroots of the movement through the establishment of neighbourhood assemblies that are linked to the city's General Assembly (Figure 2).
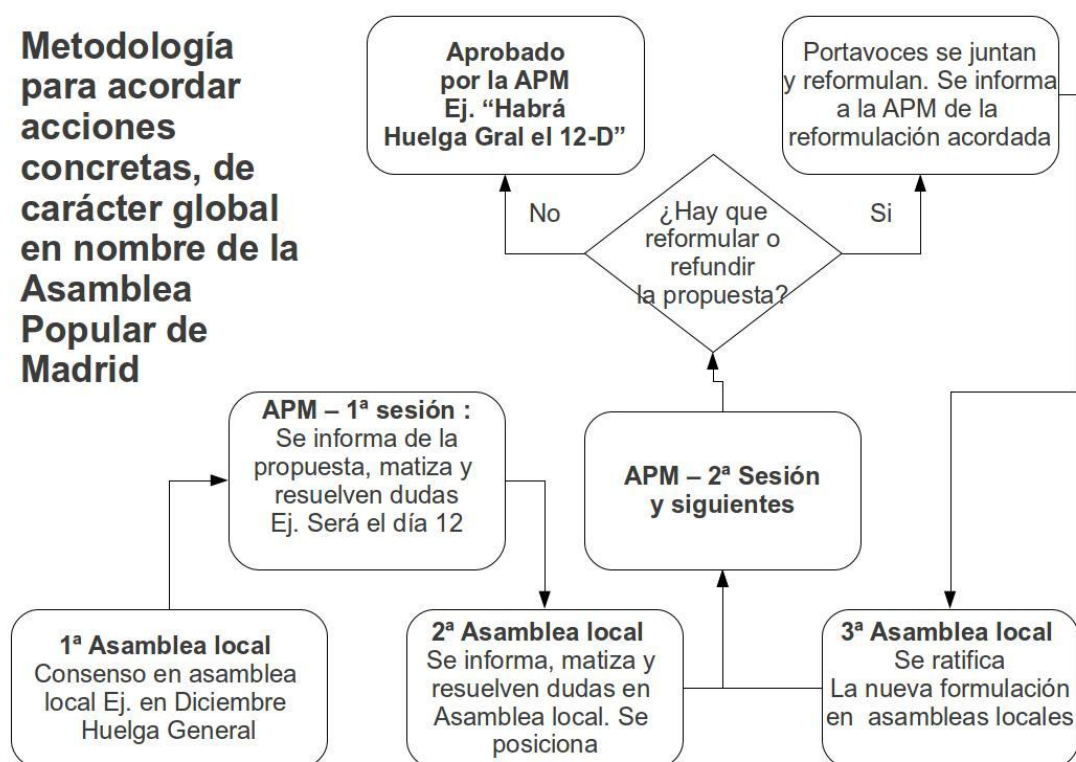
Figure 2: Method to agree concrete actions in the name of the People's Assembly of Madrid, connecting local assemblies to the general assembly.

Source: http://madrid.tomalosbarrios.net/metodologia-asamblearia/

Author: Asamblea Popular de Madrid

In Barcelona, local assemblies are playing an important role in the maintenance of the movement's politics of space through grassroots participatory democracy. This typically involves holding weekly meetings in public spaces to address local problems and issues. For example, local initiatives in the Raval neighbourhood are attempting to reclaim public space from the dictates of dominant representations of such spaces. Their manifesto reads:

> "The imposition of a theme park for tourism, the substitution of the trade of basic products for expensive establishments, large entertainment events, and elitist cultural consumption, have suffocated life and neighbourly living, giving public space to an alien population and to a business network without any roots in the neighbourhood. It is important to recover the ability of local residents to define coexistence, to generate our own places of entertainment, our parties and our meetings places. This includes the restoration of the street as a place of political communication, where light is shed on the conflicts and necessities of the neighbourhood." (15-M-acampadaBCN-Raval 2011).

A key criterion for the effectiveness of this development of new social space and social relations is, of course, a widespread level of involvement by citizens in such practices. Although the Indignados movement has articulated proposals and demands for radical social changes, it is notable for its attempted inclusivity in its 'non-partisan' call-out to all citizens. Their manifesto begins by identifying the movement as composed of normal people with diverse views and perspectives, but united by common experiences:

> "We are normal and common people. We are like you: people who get up in the morning to study, to work, or to look for work, people who have family and friends. People who work hard every day to live and give a better future to those around us. Some of us consider ourselves more progressive, others more conservative. Some believers, others not. Some of us have well-defined ideologies, others consider ourselves apolitical ... But we are all worried and outraged by the political, economic and social landscape that we see around us. By the corruption of politicians, bankers ... By the helplessness of ordinary people. This situation harms us daily. But if we all unite, we can change it. It is time to get moving, time to build a better society between us." (15-M 2011, 7).

This drive towards unity and inclusivity is further emphasized by characterizing the movement as a 'peaceful movement' that "will not organize, encourage, nor tolerate any type of violence, acts of vandalism, racism, homophobia, or xenophobia by any persons, groups, or associations" (15-M 2011, 10). These affirmations of inclusivity are not mere rhetorical flourishes, but sincere principles of operation of the movement, which is evidenced in the level of involvement by citizens in it. Of a national population of approximately 46 million, between 6 and 8.5 million people have been in some way involved in the movement, attending the assemblies or demonstrations that have been called. Of these, between 0.8 and 1.5 million have participated intensely in the movement's initiatives. Furthermore, in a poll conducted in June 2011 by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Centre for Sociological Investigations), of those that had followed the events relating to the movement, 70.3 % had a 'very positive' or 'quite positive' opinion of it, compared with 12.7% that had a 'very negative' or 'quite negative' opinion of it.[9] The occupations, then, are far from being a marginal engagement by a minority of obstinate activists. The level of involvement in, and support for, the movement highlights its potential for a broader contestation of social relations through its politics of space.

(c) Contesting hegemony

Yet, even if new social spaces can be sustained through the emergence of new social relations, we might wonder if this politics of space can ultimately be

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[9] See Eduardo Romanos, "El 15M y la democracia de los movimientos sociales", *La Vie des Idées,* 18 November 2011, p.6. Online: http://www.booksandideas.net/IMG/pdf/20111118_romanosESP.pdf (accessed 2 May 2012).

effective in contesting the existing hegemonic order and bringing about an alternative social order, as the Indignados movement hopes to do:

> "Community control, the image of the self-organizing mode which frames the Indignados movement and the Barcelona encampment, should become the tool to transform the economic, political, and social system, as it is the only viable way to control the weakness of municipal and parliamentary representatives before the audacity of the elites in power. In addition, community control must be developed to ensure the deployment of self-organization processes in assemblies and commissions, towns and neighbourhoods, as well as places of work and study, as a basis and platform of the future society." (15-M-acampadaBCN 2011, 8).

More precisely, we are concerned with addressing how, if at all, the transformation of abstract space into differentiated space may contribute to the broader transformation of the existing economic, political, and social system. Is the transformation of spatial and social relations through occupations inevitably a transient and rather localized phenomenon? Or perhaps such occupations might develop into what Lefebvre termed a 'counter-space' – alternative spatial arrangements and practices that function as a point of possible *rupture* in the existing system (Lefebvre 1991).

Contesting spatial and social relations is, I suggest, certainly a necessary aspect of radical social change and cannot be neglected from strategic concerns. As João Pedro Stédile, the coordinator of the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, remarked: "The question of power is not resolved by taking the government palace – that is the easiest thing and has been done many times – but transforming social relations." (Zibechi 2007, 56). This perspective mirrors the distinction between political revolution and social revolution. Whereas a political revolution ('taking the government palace') may replace the government or alter the form of government, the underlying capitalist social relations will remain intact without a social revolution that changes the social, political, and economic foundation of society. A key part of this is the need for social revolution to be *prepared* "in the sense of furthering the evolutionary process, of enlightening the people about the evils of present-day society and convincing them of the desirability and possibility, of the justice and practicability of a social life based on liberty" (Berkman 1929, 200-201). Contesting spatial and social relations, then, plays an important part in preparing such social transformation.

It does not, however, necessarily follow that a politics of space is sufficient for the radical social change towards which the Indignados movement seems to aspire. That is, 'community control' of public spaces might hold limited transformative potential in terms of actually contesting the existing hegemonic order, even if it is a necessary component of broader social transformation. Indeed, in a critical reflection on the movement, one member, Pedro Honrubia-Hurtado, expressed doubts over its revolutionary potential. Despite the obvious objective conditions for social revolt (high unemployment, labour and pension

reform, increasing poverty and evictions), Honrubia-Hurtado notes that the subjective conditions that triggered the mobilizations "are not exactly those of an awakening to bring about a truly revolutionary process". He continues to argue that the mobilizations are

> "more focused on the desire to recover an individual space within the system, without questioning if it is just or unjust, rather than a real consciousness of the need for a shift in the political, social, and economic paradigm that results in a system that is, by definition, unequal, like capitalism, whether in its neo-liberal face or in whatever other version, more or less reformed." (15-M 2011, 84-85).

In this sense, Honrubia-Hurtado sees the movement as merely rebelling against parts of the system without being anti-system; it thus remains "within the limits and approaches of the system" and ultimately "at the service of the system" (15-M 2011, 79). Given the expansive and diverse nature of the movement, there are certainly varying degrees of radical or revolutionary consciousness within it. Honrubia-Hurtado's characterization of the movement as a whole as insufficiently radical, however, lacks foundation, particularly in light of the explicitly anti-capitalist analysis driving the movement in Barcelona:

> "A cry of rage and indignation unites us before the increasing precariousness and deteriorating living conditions in all areas, caused by capitalism, which is no longer capable of resolving its internal contradictions, and also increases its potential for destruction. Our outrage stems not only from the unwillingness of the political class to exercise its function of public service for the people, but its growing submission to the power of banks and speculative capital, favouring monopolies and promoting privatization of public services. The economic crisis accentuates the levels of exclusion and unemployment by the labour reform, cuts, and the worsening of pensions." (15-M-acampadaBCN 2011, 1).

In many ways, Honrubia-Hurtado's critique recalls a dualistic debate that has long divided the radical left: whether radical social change can be achieved through the development of autonomous spaces or whether the focus of revolutionary efforts should be directed towards the state: whether we should pursue power-to vs. power-over (Holloway 2002), or engage in the politics of affinity vs. the politics of hegemony (Day 2005). This critique, I suggest, erroneously posits a false dichotomy between recovering space within the capitalist system and engaging in struggle against the capitalist system. The value of this critique, though, is that it critically scrutinizes the transformative potential of a politics of space —even if anti-capitalist in motivation— that engages in practices to recover 'individual space within the system'. In the language of social relations, the issue at stake is whether the emergence of new spatial and social relations can act as an effective basis for contesting hegemony, or if its effect is consigned to merely converting individual spaces within the system into 'free enclaves' that can have no broader impact.

The Indignados movement's spatial politics, with its focus on developing horizontal social relations through grassroots participatory democracy, is a clear example of 'prefigurative politics', which aims "to develop the seeds of liberation and the new society (prior to and in the process of revolution) through notions of participatory democracy grounded in counter-institutions" and community (Breines 1980, 421). That is, the desired future egalitarian society is 'prefigured' in the horizontal social relations of community control that frames the movement's operation. Movements guided by prefigurative politics do not seek totalizing effects across all aspects of the social order by taking state power; nor do they seek change on selected axes by reforming state power (Day 2005). Although the prefigurative politics of the Indignados movement begins to develop the very substance of social transformation, Honrubia-Hurtado's critique still looms large. Namely, does prefiguration unjustifiably neglect the question of power such that contesting spatial and social relations simply is not sufficient to contest hegemony?

Here it is important to distinguish between two distinct modes of prefiguration: what I call 'closed prefiguration' and 'open prefiguration'. The former looks inwards and tends towards operating as an insular enclave, whereas the latter looks outwards and tends to exhibit a commitment to contesting the existing hegemonic order, albeit not in a totalizing, state-centric fashion. In this vein, Richard Day, discussing *movements* guided by prefigurative politics, notes that they "set out to block, resist and render redundant both corporate and state power in local, national and transnational contexts." (Day 2005, 45). Indeed, the Indignados emphasize that their practice of community control should become a 'tool' with which to transform the existing hegemonic order. The Indignados movement, then, is characterized more by open-prefiguration rather than closed-prefiguration, and thus exhibits greater potential in contesting hegemony than Honrubia-Hurtado admits.

Open prefiguration enables the contestation of hegemony by disrupting, in both direct and indirect manners, the power relations that underpin the existing social order. First, alternative spatial and social relations directly contribute to the contestation of hegemony by acting as a basis for 'blocking' or 'resisting' the flows of capital and state power. Such disruptions of 'normality' may take the form of strikes in order to assert the power of labour against capital, election boycotts in order to challenge the legitimacy of the political system, and blockades of parliaments in order to disrupt the operation of the political system, all of which have featured in the strategic action of the Indignados movement.

For example, on 15 June 2011, the movement in Barcelona attempted to blockade the regional parliament, which was debating measures to cut regional spending on social services by around 10 per cent.[10] Several thousand protesters formed a human chain and constructed barricades, blocking entrances to the

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[10] BBC, "Barcelona: Angry crowd pursues Catalan MPs", 15 June 2011. Online: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13774761 (accessed 28 October 2011).

Catalan parliament. Riot police eventually dispersed the protesters and this demonstration, called by a nominally non-violent movement, eventually resulted in violent clashes between protesters and the riot police. The violence/non-violence debate is certainly a complex one that will divide any radical movement and this paper does not directly address it. This mobilization was nonetheless notable in terms of the movement's willingness to be more confrontational and disruptive of the system. The radical politics of space underpinning the movement, then, holds significant potential in terms of galvanizing such collective action to contest hegemony.

Second, open prefiguration may indirectly contribute to the contestation of hegemony by rendering redundant capital and state power. The contestation of capitalist social relations and the development of non-capitalist social spaces and relations together entail a rejection of the operation of social life according to the dictates of capital and state power. Instead, communities attempt to meet their needs collectively and cooperatively rather than as private individuals; they also attempt to address their local issues through their own participatory institutions rather than the official state procedures. In this way, communities developing new spatial and social relations can meet the diverse needs of human community, not as an insular 'free enclave', but as part of a chain of action that draws power away from state and capital and towards local communities. Furthermore, the existence of new spatial and social relations demonstrates to others the spuriousness of the dogma that 'there is no alternative' to the existing hegemonic social order. A radical politics of space can thus propel broader practices of resistance to the existing hegemony.

4. Concluding remarks

There is, of course, no completion, finality, or purity in a politics of space concerned with radical social transformation. The contestation of hegemony is a perpetual struggle and the spatial politics of the Indignados movement should thus be understood as an intervention, an attempted rupture in dominant spatial relations, from which a broader contestation of the existing hegemonic order may result. The politics of space, then, facilitates radical social change more in the fashion of an 'interstitial' process than some totalizing one-shot Revolution aimed at the state. That is, revolution exists in the interstices, or 'cracks' in society, where a crack is understood as a current insubordination rather than a *project* for the future. These cracks may certainly embody visions and ideals of a future society, though they are not programmatic in this respect. The transformation of social spaces and social relations, then, serves primarily to enable the empowerment of people in opposition to the existing order. From this perspective, the revolutionary aim becomes to expand and multiply the cracks and promote their confluence in order to achieve a breakthrough of a new world (Holloway 2010).

The occupation of public space, then, is significant insofar as it enables the emergence of new spaces. By living and asserting a different way of doing and

organizing within public space, the Indignados movement has shown the potential for occupations to contest dominant spatial relations. This shifts the boundaries of the way in which space is produced such that the 'abstract space' that obtains under capitalism may give way to a more 'differentiated space', whereby the diverse needs of human community determine the way in which space is conceived and used. This attempt to develop new social spaces, however, must be conducted as a coherent strategy of a sustained movement, rather than a fleeting experiment of a Temporary Autonomous Zone. That is, the effective emergence of new space requires the durable contestation of social space. A necessary aspect of a radical politics of space is thus the development of new social relations to underpin the emergence of new social spaces. In this regard, the Indignados movement's occupations have facilitated the development of new horizontal social relations through experiments in grassroots participatory democracy. There are, of course, notable challenges in terms of remaining vigilant to the possible development of informal hierarchies within apparently egalitarian spaces, but the trajectory towards greater horizontality in such spaces is clear.

For movements concerned with a radical transformation of society, this politics of space must be resolutely employed as a tool for the broader contestation of the existing order. In part, this entails a commitment to *inclusive coalition building* – securing high levels of involvement, and intensity of involvement, from wider sections of society. This requires an 'open' form of prefigurative politics that looks outwards in order to unite broader struggles with a common commitment to disrupting the flows of state and capital power. More substantively, this politics of space must be regarded as part of a *repertoire* of action available to movements. As such, it may be employed so as to fortify direct confrontational tactics such as strikes and blockades of legislatures. It may also facilitate more indirect methods of rendering state and capital redundant through carrying out core social, political, and economic functions for the diverse needs of human community rather than in subordination to the demands of capital.

In slightly less contentious terms, a politics of space also serves to provide greater weight to discrete protest demands such as the Indignados movement's demands for electoral reform, nationalization and regulation of the banking sector, and improved public services. From this perspective, the occupation of public space is best regarded as an ongoing rupture of the regular flow of power in the existing order. Of course, there remain open questions concerning the possible and desirable relationships of a politics of space with other strategies, particularly those that more directly posit a desirable future society. Such issues certainly merit further theoretical attention. The fundamental insight developed in this paper, though, is that the occupation of public spaces plays a crucial role in the important task of transforming social relations from below.

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Mobilizing against the crisis, mobilizing for "another democracy": comparing two global waves of protest

Donatella della Porta

Just about ten years after the emergence of the Global Justice Movement, the new wave of protest that swept Europe in reaction to the financial crisis and the austerity measures chosen to address it has for sure continuities with the past. But there are also, as this special section shows, discontinuities. In this intervention I want to stress especially one diversity (in the forms of transnationalization of the protest) and one similarity (in the focus on "another democracy").

Starting from the latter, while both waves of protest talk a cosmopolitan language, claiming global rights and blaming global financial capital, the global justice movement moved from the transnational to the national (and the local), while the new wave took the reverse root. In fact, protests followed the geography of the emergence of the economic crisis, which hit with different strength and in different times European countries. First, between the end of 2008 and the beginning of the following year, self-convened citizens in Iceland—the first country hit by the crisis--demanded the resignation of the government and its delegates in the Central Bank and financial authority. Protests in the traditional forms of general strikes and trade union demonstrations contesting the drastic cuts to social and labour rights followed in Ireland, until shortly before considered as a showcase for the economic miracles of neoliberal economy, and then as an illustration of quick economic deterioration. Next, in Portugal, a demonstration arranged via Facebook in March 2011 against the growing economic difficulties, brought more than 200,000 young Portuguese people to the streets.

Gaining global visibility, the *Indignados* movement developed in Spain, a country which was quickly moving from the 8th (maybe 7th) position in terms of economic development down to the 20th (according to some estimates). They occupied the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona and hundreds of squares in the rest of the country from 15 May, calling for different social and economic policies and indeed greater citizen participation in their formulation and implementation. The *indignados* protests in turn inspired similar mobilisations in Greece, where opposition to austerity measures had already been expressed in occasionally violent forms. It moved then to the US, and beyond.

Research has already singled out numerous examples of cross-national diffusion of frames and repertoires of action from one country to the next. Both direct, face-to-face contacts and mediated ones have contributed to bridge the protest in various parts of the world, in a sort of upward scale shift. On October 15th a Global Day of Action launched by the Spanish *Indignados* produced

demonstrations worldwide: protest events were registered in 951 cities in 82 countries.

The degree of transnational coordination of the protest seems, however, lower than for the Global Justice Movement at the turn of the millennium, for which the world Social Forums and then the macro-regional Social Forum, had represented a source of inspiration and offered arenas for networking. At the same time, surveys carried out in various European countries, indicated a growing importance given to the national level of government. The forms of transnational brokerage in the newest social movements emerged as, if not weaker, at least different: more grassroots and mediated through new media. Faced with different timing and depth of the financial crisis, mobilizations were also more sensitive than the global justice movements—that mobilized on common transnational events--to national political opportunities (or the lack thereof).

This (important) difference notwithstanding, there are also continuities with the previous wave of protest. A main one is the attention to democracy: to its deterioration and the potential for a renewal through change. A "*Democracia real ya!*" was called for by the Spanish *indignados* protesters, and democracy was indeed a central concern also in Iceland, Greece and, later on, in the Occupying movement. The contemporary crisis is in fact a crisis of democracy even more and before than a financial crisis. Neo-liberalism was and, in fact, is, a political doctrine that brings with it a deteriorated vision of the public and democracy. It implied not only the less political interventions to balance social inequalities produced by the market (with policies of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation), but also a very elitist (mainly electoral) conception of citizen participation, as well as an increased level of influence for lobbies and strong interests, through forms of direct and indirect (read high fees to politicians for participation in administrative boards) corruption.

The new wave of protest in fact took up some of the principal criticisms of the ever-decreasing quality of representative democracies, that were already presented in the global justice movement. Starting with the Arab Spring, the movements of 2011 and 2012 criticized corruption in the political class and of political parties (of the right but also of the center-left). To this corruption – that is the corruption of democracy – is attributed much of the responsibility for the economic crisis, and the inability to manage it. Additionally, the slogan "they don't represent us" is also linked to a deeper criticism of the degeneration of representative democracy, to elected politicians' failure to 'do politics', giving up important choice to the belief in the magic capacity of the market to regulate itself, and that no alternatives are available. Representative democracy is also criticised for having allowed the abduction of democracy, not only by financial powers, but also by international organisations, above all the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. Pacts for the Euro and stability, imposed in exchange for loans, are considered as anti-constitutional forms of blackmail, depriving citizens of their sovereignty.

In a line of continuity with the previous wave of protest is, however, also the search for another democracy, based on different democratic qualities beyond representation. The proposals and practices of the *indignados* and occupying movement—as well as those spread in and by the Arab Spring—resonate in fact with (more traditional) participatory visions, but also with new deliberative conceptions that underline the importance of creating multiple public spaces, egalitarian but plural. Another conception of democracy is prefigured by the very camps built in squares, transforming them into public spheres made up of "normal citizens". The attention given to the respect for different opinions aims at creating high quality discursive democracy. Highly inclusive, these spaces recognize the rights of all citizens to speak and be heard, as well as their competences and skills in the search for solutions to complex problems.

This prefiguration of deliberative democracy follows a vision profoundly different to that which legitimates representative democracy based on the principle of majority decisions. Democratic quality here is in fact measured by the possibility to elaborate ideas within discursive, open and public arenas, where citizens play an active role in identifying problems, but also in elaborating possible solutions. It is the opposite of a certain acceptance of democracy of the prince, where the professionals elected to govern must not be disturbed—at least until fresh elections are held. It is a search worth continuing.

About the author

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Algunas ideas sobre política y políticas en el cambio de época: Retos asociados a la nueva sociedad y a los movimientos sociales emergentes

Joan Subirats

La política ha ido sufriendo los impactos de los cambios tecnológicos y sus estructuras de relación entre instituciones, ámbitos de decisión y el conjunto de la población, han ido cambiando a medida que se modificaban los instrumentos y las dinámicas sociales que esos cambios tecnológicos generaban. Hoy estamos dejando atrás la sociedad industrial tal como la conocimos, con sus pautas laborales y sus dinámicas económicas. Y el cambio tecnológico está propulsando con gran rapidez cambios en todas las esferas vitales. No podemos pues, y confundir Internet y las nuevas tecnologías de informacion y comunicación (TIC) con nuevas versiones de los antiguos instrumentos de comunicación. Es otro escenario social.

Una de las características más significativas de las nuevas sociedades en las que Internet y las TIC ganan terreno y se desarrollan, es la creciente aparición y existencia de espacios de autonomía y de redes relacionales nuevas, en las que florecen comunidades plurales, que hacen de su especificidad (o de su micro o macro identidades) su punto de referencia. La explosión de comunicación y de hiperconectividad que ha supuesto el afianzamiento de las TIC, ha facilitado y facilita esa continua emergencia, y permite una reconstrucción de la política desde parámetros distintos a los habituales.

Estamos asistiendo al surgimiento de una sociedad en la que la relación forma parte intrínseca de la comunicación, y no es un mero resultado de esta última, o un subproducto comunicativo. Los dos elementos clave son la creciente subjetividad o individualización de los actores (que no forzosamente desemboca en el individualismo) y la enorme facilidad de comunicación que generan las TIC. En ese contexto se da una gran demanda de autonomía (que va más allá del esquema libertad-control tradicional de la sociedad moderna), surgen mercados alternativos, aparecen nuevas redes y agregados sociales, y emergen nuevas culturas que hacen de la diferencia su valor añadido. En la perspectiva tradicional, las esferas de las instituciones públicas parten de un concepto de libertad y de participación muy vinculado a la libertad y al ejercicio del voto, mientras el control se relaciona con el cumplimiento de unas leyes emanadas de esa voluntad popular expresada con el mecanismo representativo. En el nuevo contexto social que estamos describiendo, la libertad se basa en una idea de intercambio que parte de la reciprocidad, mientras el control se confía a las propias reglas del intercambio asociativo.

En ese contexto Internet y las TIC son al mismo tiempo, los factores fundamentales con el que explicar esa nueva realidad, y asimismo constituyen el marco natural que permite su desarrollo, autonomía y sus constantes posibilidades de innovación y articulación (Chadwick, 2006; Chadwick-Howard,

2009; Sunstein, 2007). Gracias a las TIC es posible empezar a hablar de pluralismo reticular o de promoción o potenciación de la autonomía social capaz de generar singularidad, reciprocidad y comunidad al margen de las medidas uniformizadoras y de los derechos muchas veces percibidos como abstractos por parte de la ciudadanía. Surge, en ese marco, una forma específica de ciudadanía social que encuentra sus propios valores en la urdimbre asociativa y cívica que se va tejiendo, más allá de una respuesta instrumental a problemas de sostenibilidad de las políticas de bienestar (que es como muchas veces se ve a las ONG desde las insuficiencias actuales de los poderes públicos en relación a las políticas de bienestar).

La política, la configuración e implementación de las políticas, en ese escenario, se vuelven menos previsibles, más difusas, adquiriendo características diferentes en cada ámbito, sin que puedan seguir considerándose monopolio de los poderes públicos o coto cerrado de las administraciones públicas. Las instituciones políticas no ocuparían ya el centro o el vértice de las condiciones de ciudadanía, de bienestar. Por debajo y en su periferia, se ha ido tejiendo ese entramado cívico, fundamentado en las lógicas y los bienes relacionales. Es precisamente este aspecto autónomo y relacional lo que caracterizaría ese nuevo tejido social. Y esas mismas características son las que, al mismo tiempo, le dan ese carácter fragmentario, de multiplicación de grupos aislados, en que puede resultar difícil articular o reconocer una "sociedad" como tal. En esa fragmentación, llena de potencialidades y de posibilidades, pero también de riesgos, puede resultar difícil reconciliar pluralismo con justicia, diversidad con pertenencia o democracia con diferencia. Por otro lado, no podemos caer en un ciberoptimismo ingenuo, y conviene recordar que las dinámicas de la red pueden generar nuevas jerarquías, controles y monopolios. A pesar de ello, lo cierto es que, a la sombra de las TIC, crece sin parar la realidad y el entramado cívico y asociativo, haciendo surgir nuevas comunidades reales o virtuales, desarrollando nuevas identidades, nuevos espacios o esferas públicos, nuevas vías de gestión de los asuntos colectivos, e incrementando la reflexividad política y las nuevas autonomías sociales.

El reto, desde la política, está en poder y saber combinar legitimidad electoral con legitimidad de la acción. Hasta ahora, esa legitimidad se conseguía en las negociaciones a puerta cerrada entre representantes políticos y también entre ellos y los intereses organizados. Ahora, la exigencia cada vez más presente y expresada asimismo con fuerza por movimientos sociales de nuevo cuño como los aparecidos en España el 15M y que se han ido extendiendo a otros países (hasta el punto de constituir la portada de la revista *Time* como protagonistas del 2011), es más transparencia y más presencia directa de la ciudadanía. Sin que todo ello pase forzosamente por la intermediación de *lobbies*, sindicatos, patronales o cámaras de comercio. Antes, los políticos justificaban su privilegiada posición, por el hecho de que tenían información, construían su criterio y tomaban decisiones con el respaldo mayoritario de los representantes. Ahora, la gente, mucha gente, tiene información, construye su criterio y quiere o puede querer participar directamente en las decisiones que les afectan a diario. Como ya hemos mencionado, lo que Internet y las TIC ponen en cuestión es la

necesidad de la intermediación. Sobre todo, de la intermediación que no aporta valor, y que además, en el caso de los políticos, reciben la consideración, justificada o no, de personas que gozan de privilegios que ya no se consideran justificados.

Desde el punto de vista de las políticas públicas, el cambio de época obliga a replantear de arriba abajo el esquema y las formas que poco a poco se habían ido asentado para explicar los procesos de formulación, elaboración, decisión e implementación de políticas (Fuster Morell y Subirats, 2012). Las lógicas en que se movían los esquemas analíticos partían de la hipótesis de escenarios de debate, conflicto y negociación presididos, por un lado, por la presencia de actores que eran capaces de canalizar, organizar y representar intereses; y por el otro, por la presencia de actores institucionales que basaban su legitimidad en su capacidad de representar los intereses generales, a partir de elecciones realizadas periódicamente que permitían renovar esa legitimidad. Los actores disponían de recursos distintos según su peculiar caracterización y posición, y todos ellos interactuaban para conseguir influir en la configuración de la agenda, en la definición de problemas, en su capacidad para presentar alternativas, para influir en la decisión (en manos de las instituciones), y para determinar en un sentido o en otro la puesta en marcha de esa decisión y su posterior evaluación.

Acostumbrábamos a decir que cada política genera lo que denominábamos su propio espacio. El espacio de una política pública conecta un problema que se considera resoluble en el ámbito público, con la acción de los poderes públicos y otros actores implicados en ese problema. En el interior del espacio de una política es en el que interactúan ese conjunto de actores. La estructuración de ese espacio no es neutra, ya que produce efectos tanto en el comportamiento de los diferentes actores como en las modalidades de acción elegidas en el momento de la intervención pública. La delimitación de ese espacio a veces se produce de manera formal (cuando ciertas normas así lo reglamentan o prevén), o en otras ocasiones sus límites son más fluidos y ambiguos. Se considera que son los actores institucionales los que representan la "cosa pública", pero, como sabemos, ello no impide la presencia e intervención de otros actores. De hecho, el principio del Estado de derecho así como la propia concepción democrática exigen la participación de los actores privados cuyos intereses y objetivos se encuentren afectados de alguna forma por el problema colectivo que se intenta resolver. De esta manera, el espacio de una política pública es el marco más o menos estructurado, formalizado y poblado por actores públicos que interactúan con diversos grados de intensidad con actores no públicos, posibilitando estrategias de acción alternativas.

Una política pública, por tanto, se concibe y se gestiona por actores públicos y privados que, en conjunto, constituyen, dentro del espacio de esa política pública, una especie de red o entramado de interacciones, que opera a distintos niveles. Ese núcleo de actores tiene un gran interés en no perder su posición y, por tanto, pretenden controlar, incluso limitar, el acceso a nuevos actores a ese espacio. Y así, al mismo tiempo que luchan para hacer valer sus propios intereses o ideas, buscan asimismo el diferenciarse de los individuos y grupos que operan

en el exterior de ese espacio. No es inhabitual que los actores del espacio de una política pública determinada acaben desarrollando, por ejemplo, un lenguaje propio coherente con "su" política, controlando los circuitos de información o intentando evitar una "politización" (entendida como ampliación y grado de apertura) de esa política que podría conllevar el riesgo de sobrepoblar "su" espacio, cambiando así las relaciones y los equilibrios de poder.

Pues bien, la difusión y generalización de las TIC y su creciente integración en la cotidianeidad, modifica notablemente, abriéndolo, ese escenario. Las posibilidades de acción directa, de movilización *on line*, de producción de contenidos, de búsqueda de información a escala global, de influencia en la propia producción de noticias, hace menos necesaria la articulación en entidades, asociaciones o grupos para poder actuar en los procesos vinculados a las políticas públicas. Se multiplican los actores potenciales, se diversifican sus intereses, se redistribuyen sus recursos. Las fronteras que delimitaban ese espacio se convierten en mucho menos significativas. Todo ello no implica que los actores tradicionales desaparezcan, ni tampoco que ese conjunto de cambios tienda forzosamente a equilibrar los recursos disponibles por parte de los actores, ni mucho menos a democratizar los procesos de formulación y decisión de las políticas públicas. Pero, lo innegable es que estamos en un nuevo escenario, en el que las cosas no funcionan como antes, y la capacidad de control de los procesos por parte de los actores habitualmente decisivos, se ha reducido o al menos se ha vuelto más impredecible.

Tenemos pruebas significativas de los diferentes puntos de vista en las medidas tendentes a regular las descargas y los canales para compartir archivos de todo tipo en la red, o lo que comúnmente se ha denominado la "ley Sinde" (en alusión a la ministra de cultura española, González Sinde que la impulsó durante el ultimo Gobierno del Presidente Zapatero). Por el lado favorable a que se aprobara la legislación mencionada tendríamos a los actores que habían ido conformando el núcleo duro del *policy network* que se ocupa de esta problemática. Por la parte de los que estaban en contra, es difícil identificar actores significativos, si por tales entendemos entidades, grupos, empresas o colectivos organizados, con razón social y con liderazgos o representantes acreditados. Más bien deberíamos hablar de un conglomerado de usuarios de la red, articulados de manera informal en torno a ciertos nodos o personas que servían de referencia, junto con una fuerte capacidad de movilización en la red, con pequeñas demostraciones presenciales en ciertos momentos (premios de cine español Goya, acciones anti SGAE (principal sociedad de gestión de derechos de autor en España),...). Desde la perspectiva que podríamos denominar como clásica en el análisis de políticas públicas, todo estaba a favor de los partidarios de la aprobación de la normativa, y se podría dar por descontado que la oposición lograría una presencia meramente simbólica. La realidad ha sido muy distinta. Podríamos decir que en ese caso, tenemos una prueba del paso de la "acción colectiva" a la "acción conectiva", mediante la cual se ha bombardeado con mensajes a decisores políticos, parlamentarios y medios de comunicación convencionales, con acciones virales que han ido convirtiendo repetidamente en inviable una decisión que en un contexto sin los recursos que

brinda Internet no hubiera tenido problema alguno en ser aprobada. Y si bien, la aprobación del reglamento de aplicación de la Ley Sinde es un hecho, hemos de ver como su implementación se lleva a cabo, y con que modulaciones y concesiones. Ejemplos similares los tenemos en boicots a programas de televisión realizados desde Internet, o en los casos, sin duda clamorosos, de los nuevos movimientos en los países del Norte de África, España (15M), Israel o Estados Unidos (*Occupy Wall Street*), y sus repercusiones en la agenda política y de las políticas públicas.

Tenemos pues una fuerte alteración en lo que sería el mapa de actores y de sus recursos en lo que sería el proceso de las políticas públicas en sus diversas fases. Lo cual resulta muy significativo, ya que todo el proceso está absolutamente condicionado por la interacción entre actores. De hecho, como ya estudió Lowi, (1972) era precisamente la distinta configuración de alianzas y conflictos entre actores lo que caracterizaba y diferenciaba a unas políticas públicas de otras, y lo que hacía suponer niveles más o menos previsibles de influencia de las líneas de fuerza ideológica en cada espacio de política (distributivas, redistributivas, regulatorias,...). La gran fluidez del escenario de las políticas hoy, debido a la apertura de los espacios propios de cada política y las fertilizaciones y contaminaciones cruzadas entre actores tradicionales y conglomerados de usuarios conectados por Internet, convierte a los procesos de conformación de las políticas en mucho más complejos e impredecibles. No es extraño que la sensación general es que ha aumentado la incertidumbre, y ello genera una mucha mayor complejidad tanto sobre los diagnósticos como en relación con las alternativas y su viabilidad técnica y social.

Y ello se debe esencialmente al gran cambio que implica Internet en el acceso a recursos basados en el conocimiento y en los recursos que podríamos denominar relacionales. Todos sabemos que el conocimiento es uno de los elementos básicos en la capacidad de intervención de los actores públicos y privados. Se trataba hasta hace relativamente poco de un recurso escaso y muy desigualmente repartido entre los actores de una política pública. Nos referimos a los recursos cognitivos, es decir el grado de conocimiento que se puede tener en relación a elementos técnicos, sociales, económicos y políticos del problema colectivo a resolver. Se trata por tanto de una especie de "materia prima" de una política pública, que comprende los elementos indispensables para la conducción adecuada de la misma a todos los niveles (definición política del problema público, programa de actuación político-administrativo, implementación y evaluación de los efectos).

Hasta hace unos años, se trataba de un recurso cuya producción y mantenimiento resultaba muy costoso, y por tanto considerado escaso. Se consideraba que la producción, reproducción y difusión de este recurso requería la existencia de sistemas de información cada vez más sofisticados, y una importante calificación específica de los usuarios. No era inusual el hecho de que cada actor protegiera su información, para así conseguir más capacidad de influencia sobre el proceso de la política. Por otro lado, tradicionalmente, la producción y, sobre todo, el tratamiento y la difusión de los datos estadísticos de

las políticas públicas eran competencia de servicios especializados, generalmente de carácter público. Hoy día, este aspecto es probablemente el que más ha cambiado gracias a Internet y su gran fuerza como plataforma de generación de conocimiento compartido. Crece sin parar la presencia de datos e informaciones en la red, no siempre fiables, pero constantemente depurándose y mejorando. Y ello conlleva una evidente democratización de los recursos cognitivos, y una capacidad de conexión global al conocimiento que estaba al alcance de poquísimos hace sólo cuatro cinco años.

En el ámbito de los recursos organizativos o de interacción, el impacto que ha supuesto Internet es el de conseguir generar impactos en las políticas y en su proceso de conformación, sin disponer ni contar con estructuras organizativas previas que lo permitieran. La propia red es el soporte de la acción, y sus múltiples conformaciones y su plasticidad, permiten a cualquier individuo o grupo interactuar, promover, lanzar ideas y propuestas con esfuerzos mínimos. El *hardware* de las administraciones públicas, sus edificios, sus cuerpos de funcionarios, sus potentes equipos de expertos, su datos, o estructuras y equipos parecidos de actores privados clave, deben interactuar y entrar en conflicto (o colaborar) con un conglomerado de personas, grupos y colectivos, sin estructura, sin *hardware*, sin portavoces claros, pero con una capacidad innegable de presencia en el ágora colectiva y por tanto en la propia configuración de las políticas. Y ahí seguramente está una de las clave para saber aumentar las capacidades de innovación de las administraciones públicas.

Debemos referirnos asimismo al recurso o factor tiempo. Los procesos de elaboración de las políticas públicas han generado siempre problemas debido a la desigual valoración que el conjunto de actores atribuían al factor tiempo. Los actores públicos, tendían a disponer de más tiempo que los representantes de grupos sociales, quienes en algunas ocasiones se veían presionados por el esquema de voluntariado que les nutre o por los costes que implicaban las dilaciones. Los tiempos no hay duda que se han acelerado para todos, y por tanto en los nuevos escenarios, los actores que "viajan" más ligeros, con menos ataduras y rigideces, se mueven mucho mejor que los actores quizás aparentemente más fuertes en capacidades y recursos, pero menos ágiles para moverse en dinámicas cada vez más aceleradas e imprevisibles.

No pretendemos ni podemos, en el marco de este artículo, ir repasando punto por punto, el nivel de impacto de Internet sobre el esquema tradicional de fases de una política pública. Pero, partiendo de la hipótesis que los efectos son profundos y significativos en todas y cada una de esas fases, si quisiéramos destacar algunos aspectos. Uno de ellos, quizás de los más significativos, es el que tiene que ver con la definición del problema y la incorporación a la agenda. Sabemos que no todos los problemas sociales se convierten necesariamente en problemas públicos, es decir, en objetos de controversia política y de posible punto de arranque de una política pública.

Los problemas públicos representan una prolongación de los problemas sociales en la medida en que, una vez que surgen en el interior de la sociedad civil, se debaten en el seno de un espacio político-administrativo. En este sentido, la

definición de un problema público es esencialmente política. En otras palabras, un problema se vuelve público sólo tras su inclusión en la agenda política, lo que condiciona su potencial innovador. De hecho se ha teorizado que para poder calificar un problema social como "problema público" es necesario que exista una demanda procedente de grupos sociales determinados, que ello de lugar al desarrollo de un debate público y que se genere un cierto grado de conflicto entre los grupos sociales organizados y las autoridades políticas.

En todo ese proceso, los actores juegan un papel esencial. Y, en algunos casos, lograban mantener fuera de la agenda pública determinadas cuestiones sociales, bloqueando así de hecho la posible innovación. También se han analizado los factores individuales, las convenciones y las normas colectivas que favorecen o, por el contrario, frenan, la toma de conciencia de que una situación problemática privada puede pertenecer al ámbito social y en consecuencia, definirse como un problema social y no estrictamente privado. Y se ha apuntado, asimismo, que el debate sobre definición de problema e inclusión en la agenda se articula en torno a los movimientos sociales, los medios de comunicación y los procesos de toma de decisiones.

Temas como la intensidad del problema (el grado de importancia que se da a las consecuencias del problema, tanto a nivel individual como colectivo); el perímetro o la audiencia del problema (es decir, el alcance de sus efectos negativos sobre los diferentes grupos sociales que se ven implicados en el mismo, la localización geográfica de tales efectos negativos y el desarrollo del problema en el tiempo); o la novedad del problema (es decir, su no cronicidad o su no reiteración); la urgencia del problema (que habitualmente facilita la apertura de una "ventana de oportunidad") se han considerado extremadamente relevantes a la hora de evaluar las probabilidades de que un tema o conflicto social acabe incorporándose a la agenda pública y pueda desencadenar una política pública. Pues bien, la presencia de Internet tiende a alterar de nuevo, de manera muy profunda, este escenario que habíamos ido considerando como aplicable de manera genérica al *policy making*.

Al no existir espacios claros de intermediación, al margen de la propia red, la interacción se produce de manera aparentemente caótica y agregativa, con flujos poco predecibles y con capacidades de impacto que no pueden, como antes, relacionarse con la fuerza del actor o emisor de la demanda. Obviamente, la gran pluralidad de intervinientes (dada la dimensión potencialmente universal del perímetro implicado), hace que la importancia que se dé a un problema pueda ser mucha o poca, con notables dosis de aleatoriedad. La tendencia a convertir en "nuevos" ciertos temas de largo recorrido, es también visible, dada la novedad del propio medio en que circula la información y el hecho que el grado de *expertise* sobre cualquier asunto puede ser de lo más variado imaginable.

Más arriba, hay que tener presente los límites de una aproximación estrictamente instrumental de la relación entre Internet y el funcionamiento de las administraciones públicas. Son conocidos los datos que apuntan a los discretos resultados que ha tenido en España la fuerte inversión realizada para informatizar a las administraciones públicas. Los estudios más recientes sobre

utilización de las vías informáticas para acceder a la administración y resolver trámites, apuntan a muy bajos porcentajes de uso (estudio Aeval 2011). La hipótesis que mejor explica esa desproporción entre inversión y efectos, lo tendríamos desde, mi punto de vista, en que la estrategia básica ha consistido en incorporar los nuevos instrumentos informáticos a los antiguos procesos administrativos, sin cambiar la lógica de los mismos (es como aquel profesor que sigue explicando lo mismo y de la misma manera, pero ha cambiado la tiza por el *power point*). En base a motivos de seguridad jurídica (en muchos casos vinculados a la idea de desconfianza cruzada entre operadores) y sin aprovechar las potencialidades de Internet, se ha preferido agilizar partes del proceso, pero despersonalizando el mismo, y generando así incluso mayores dosis de rigidez en los casos en que la estandarización de situaciones no resulta tan fácil.

Los retos en el escenario de la gestión pública están muy relacionados con los temas de transparencia, control y evaluación desde una perspectiva ciudadana y no estrictamente interinstitucional. La palanca de cambio del funcionamiento de las administraciones públicas no está en la mejora interna de su funcionamiento, por importante que ello sea, sino en su capacidad de servir y responder a las necesidades públicas, y para ello transparencia, control y evaluación resultan estrategias imprescindibles. Estrategias que con Internet pueden verse notablemente facilitadas y activadas. Pero, ello no es en absoluto ineluctable. Dependerá de como se aprovechan esas oportunidades y a quiénes benefician.

No pretendo cerrar este ensayo con forma alguna de conclusiones. Se trata de una reflexión abierta, sin duda imprecisa e incompleta. Pero, justificable ante la creciente distancia entre las formas en que algunos operaban y otros analizábamos el funcionamiento de las interrelaciones entre política, políticas y gestión pública, y las nuevas realidades emergentes que ponen en cuestión muchos de lo que hasta hace poco considerábamos paradigmas canónicos. Deberemos profundizar en el tema y repensar muchas cosas. Vivimos la transición entre dos épocas.

Como hemos ido afirmando, entendemos que todo se mueve a nuestro alrededor, y vivimos con muchas más incertidumbres. ¿Cómo tomar decisiones individuales y colectivas sobre esta realidad movediza y cómo incorporar a esas decisiones las perspectivas y los efectos a largo plazo? La política, en su capacidad de gestionar de manera pacífica y consensuada la toma de decisiones que afectan a una comunidad, padece de manera directa ese conjunto de problemas y de cambios. Y lógicamente también las políticas públicas y su administración y gestión. Pero, es precisamente la voluntad de defender la política y la democracia lo que ha constituido el hilo conductor de estas reflexiones.

Nuestra propuesta ha sido la de repensar los problemas, examinar e integrar su complejidad en nuestras formas de ver la política, las políticas y las administraciones públicas, para desde esa reconsideración de los temas, y desde esa aceptación de la complejidad no como obstáculo sino como condición, poder repensar la política y las políticas de respuesta. Proponemos un cambio profundo en la concepción de la democracia y la forma de conceptualizar y llevar

a cabo sus políticas vinculándolas a las dinámicas económicas, ambientales y sociales. Incorporando las potencialidades del nuevo escenario que genera Internet, e incorporando a la ciudadanía de manera directa, comunitaria y autónoma a la tarea de organizar las nuevas coordenadas vitales.

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Collective identity formation and collective action framing in a Mexican "movement of movements"[1]

Marina Adler

Abstract

In this paper I analyze the popular social movement in Oaxaca, Mexico (APPO; The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) as it evolved since its 2006 beginnings. The key research question is: how did hundreds of autonomous groups with divergent agendas generate collective identities and coalesce around a particular set of issues in a repressive regime? In order to address this question, I first describe the emergence of the Oaxacan movement and then place it in the historical context of Mexican politics.

Based on evidence from multiple sources (field observations, in-depth interviews with activists and residents, local newspaper accounts, eye witness blogs, and follow-up electronic conversations with two local scholar-activists), I argue that this movement has features that may be characteristic of 21st century social movements, particularly in repressive regimes or post-colonial context: (1) the transformation from a popular uprising into a coalition of movements and citizens in conjunction with indigenous communitarian living and governing principles, and (2) collective identity formation based on the use of collective action frames (common origin, oppositional, and "prefigurative") and the use of public space and place-based rituals.

Introduction

The recent movements of the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East, the Spanish 15-M and Indignado movements, and those initiated by "Occupy Wall Street" in the US inspire questions about the nature of social movements in the 21st century. The new technological tools – from cell phones with digital cameras to real-time internet access – facilitate visibility and mobilization with a speed not seen in previous times. At the same time, many of these new movements rely on traditions and rituals rooted in indigenous cultures that were effectively used by the Zapatistas, such as collective identity building around collective action frames the occupation of public spaces, and participatory democracy using assemblies. In addition, these movements demand direct democracy and reject established political structures deemed as corrupt or repressive. They not only

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appeal to activists and social movement leaders but involve the mobilization of "regular people" who usually do not attend demonstrations.

Strategies involving coalition building, creative combination of new technology with the establishment of indigenous-inspired communities in key public spaces and ruled by assemblies were also practiced in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2006. Beginning in May of 2006, long-standing public discontent with a corrupt and repressive state government and related deteriorating social conditions spontaneously erupted into massive, relatively uncoordinated protests, so-called "megamarches" of hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of the state capital of Oaxaca.

The spark leading to this popular uprising[2] was the repressive reaction of state governor Ruiz to the annual strike of the National Union of Educators (SNTE). The transformative moment that formalized public resistance occurred on June 14, 2006, when governor Ruiz' storm troopers raided the peaceful encampment of the strikers at night. This act of state violence resulted in numerous injuries and public outrage (see Waterbury 2007), expressed in another megamarch of an estimated 500,000 protestors. It also solidified the commitment of the strikers to continue their encampment community, mobilized the general public to support the strikers, and led to the formal creation of a "coalition of movements," the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO; Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca). There is a debate among the activists and scholars interviewed in this research about whether APPO is a social movement organization (SMO), a network of organizations, or a social movement, a fact that will be discussed later in this paper. Based on my analysis I argue that the APPO became the umbrella SMO of the Oaxacan popular movement, which I refer to as a "movement of movements" in this paper[3] .

On the surface these manifestations of social resistance appear to mirror various Mexican upheavals in the 1990s, such as the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. While the Oaxacan movement clearly shares characteristics with other Mexican social movements, I posit that this movement has features that may be characteristic of social movements in the 21st century, especially under repressive conditions and in post-colonial context. Similar to transnational movements like the anti-WTO and Global Justice Movement (see Flesher

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[2] I use the term "popular uprising" to characterize the initial events in 2006 as opposed to "revolt," "rebellion," or simply "protest" because it involved spontaneous mass demonstrations based on political dissent and resistance rather than formal political organization (see Waterbury 2007).

[3] The literature on social movements that are composed of a number of autonomous groups tends to focus on coalitions among organizations within a particular movement (see Staggenborg 1986) or cross-movement coalitions (see Rose 2000; Van Dyke 2003). A well-known transnational movement of this type is the "Global Justice Movement," which also has been referred to as a "movement of movements" (Flesher Fominaya 2010). While Esteva (2007) refers to APPO as a movement of movements, I consider APPO as an SMO.

Fominaya 2010) and the more recent "Occupy Wall Street" movement, the Oaxacan movement bridges multiple ideologies, issues, agendas, and identities. This poses challenges to organizers' strategic choices in terms of collective identity formation and sustained cohesion. In addition, like movements in the former GDR and the Middle East, the Oaxacan movement faced particular challenges because of the repressive regime in which it emerged.

This case study contributes to the growing literature on coalition building across movements as a strategy of bridging intra-, inter-, and cross-movement diversity (Rose 2000; Flesher Fominaya 2010; Hewitt 2011; van Dyke 2003; Staggenborg 1986) and resisting repressive regimes (Houtzager 2001; Pfaff 1996; Ross 1994; Shefner 2004). It examines the organization and strategies of Oaxacan movement activists with particular attention to collective identity building. The analysis shows how public "moral shock" (Jasper 1998) about repression and increased threat levels (see Staggenborg 2003) created the political space in which the cross-movement coalition could arise. The paper also analyzes how activists strategically used collective identity formation based on (1) specific collective action frames and (2) public space and place-based rituals. It is hoped that insights from these observations can inform current and future efforts to increase the endurance of coalition-based movements.

After describing the research methodology employed for this study and the emergence of the Oaxacan movement in 2006, I provide a brief analysis of the historical and political context in which the uprising occurred. Next, I examine the strategies of the APPO involving collective identity formation. I argue that in order to create solidarity among diverse groups of constituents, "common origin" frames, oppositional frames, and "prefigurative" frames depicting a desirable society characterized by participatory democracy and social justice were used. The concept of "prefigurative politics" introduced by Breines (1982 and 1989) to characterize the "New Left" in the 1960s is applied here to show how the vision of an anti-hierarchical way of communal living based on participatory democracy was framed in Oaxaca as practiced in indigenous communities. My research indicates that these frames are rooted in indigenous community life and were reinforced in the occupation of public spaces, space-based rituals, and assembly decision-making practices. Finally, I address the debate surrounding APPO as related to questions about leadership and questions of movement endurance.

Methodology

This case study was part of a larger research project on Mexican grassroots organizations initiated in 2007. The data collection methods included fieldwork in Oaxaca in the summers of 2007 and 2008, semi-structured interviews with movement participants and local residents, review of local newspaper articles (Noticias), and eye witness blogs (NarcoNews.com) during the time of fieldwork and subsequent (until 2011) ongoing electronic conversations with two Oaxacan scholar-activists originally

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interviewed in 2008. The author and two female graduate students gained entry based on contacts with local grassroots activists and their networks.

The description of the events leading to, during, and after the popular uprising in 2006 is based on eyewitness accounts in *Teaching Rebellion. Stories from the Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca* (Denham and CASA 2008), Nancy Davies' blogs at NarcoNews.com, and Esteva's 2007 account of "The Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, APPO: A Chronicle of Radical Democracy," in addition to various other published reports. In addition, analyses using a longer-term view of the events related to APPO published in various journals and reports are also referenced in the text. Only data that could be cross-referenced and verified was included in the analysis.

Information based on interviews with 19 key informants, who are leaders in grassroots organizations, movement activists, or local residents is included. After verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant, the interviews with 13 respondents were conducted in Spanish and translated into English simultaneously; the remaining six interviews were conducted in English. The interviews took place where the interviewees worked or resided, varied in length from one to three hours, and were recorded in writing by the interviewer and one of two note takers. The author worked with the two graduate students, one of whom served as translator for the Spanish interviews. The two resultant transcripts for each interview were cross-referenced to ensure accuracy and reliability. The two scholar-activists were initially interviewed in 2008 and later engaged in several follow-up electronic conversations about the movement until 2011.

The interviews were designed to elicit background information about the respondents and their work and an open-ended assessment of APPO and the Oaxacan social movement. Respondents varied in age from 22-71 and 3 were women. Efforts were made to include more women but it became clear that they were mainly active "behind the scenes" and difficult to reach through our networks. The levels of education varied from less than a high school degree to a Ph.D. Eight of the respondents considered themselves "Mestizo" and one "white" (the local resident US scholar). No specific ethnic information was obtained for four respondents, who characterized themselves as "Oaxeño" or "Mexican." The remaining respondents named an indigenous tribal affiliation as their ethnic identity.

The analysis of the materials collected for this study involves a holistic approach to the data to tell the story of coalition building and collective identity formation in Oaxaca. I use evidence from the interview transcriptions and field observations to document instances of frame utilization, and uses of public space and rituals. The frames that most commonly emerged were those of common origin, opposition, and prefiguration of a better society. I will provide examples from movement-related discourse and observation in order to illustrate their relevance to solidarity building.

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The Oaxacan movement in context

The 2006 popular uprising

In 2006 Oaxaca City became the microcosm of the clash between repressive state government and citizenry.[4] On May 21, 2006, *Seccion 22* of the SNTE began its annual teachers' strike with the usual encampment (*Plantón*) in the main square (*Zócalo*) of Oaxaca City. This marked the 25th consecutive year Oaxaca's educators were striking in civil disobedience for increased educational resources, better wages, and more support of public education. In the past these annual strikes resulted in the reigning governor hearing the demands, some negotiation, and some granting of demands (see Zafra 2007). However, Ruiz routinely used violent means at his disposal to suppress opposition to his policies and refused to negotiate with the teachers in 2006 because of his policies favoring the privatization of education.

This triggered widespread spontaneous popular mobilization: on June 2 and again on June 7, 2006 an estimated 75,000 – 200,000 people began marching in Oaxaca City in opposition to Governor Ruiz. These marches became known as the first of many "megamarches" because of their large size and popular support. In the night of June 14, 2006 Ruiz used military force to suppress this popular dissent: about 3,000 police in riot gear attacked the unarmed teachers' encampment on the *zócalo* at 4 a.m. with helicopters, tear gas, clubs and guns. This attempted eviction of the strikers was temporary because the teachers returned the next morning and continued their encampment community, which was now supported by the outraged general public. Residents of nearby neighborhoods erected barricades against police and military, effectively shut down inner city Oaxaca, and supplied the encamped strikers with food, water, blankets, and means of sanitation.

Public outrage, or what Jasper (1998) calls "moral shock," over state violence against peaceful protesters increased perceived threat levels and galvanized hundreds of different organizations into a coalition – a movement of movements. Contrary to expectation, state repression failed to deter public mobilization but rather shocked them into organizing their movement more formally (see also Pfaff 1996 for the case of the GDR). After several attempts at negotiation between teachers and the state failed and after another megamarch of 500,000, APPO was formally founded on June 17, 2006. It was an assembly of representatives from over 350 organizations and was organized according to the principles of democratic governance in the Oaxacan indigenous communities. A distinguishing feature of the APPO is that it was formed as a convener of assemblies along indigenous governance principles, in which hundreds of groups participated. It was designed as an association with a horizontal organizational structure, participatory democracy, and a decision-

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[4] The data on the accounts of the events in this section are taken from various published sources (for example, Denham and CASA Collective 2008; Davies 2007; Esteva 2007; Waterbury 2007).

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making process rooted in the indigenous communal assemblies. The APPO assembly was intended to serve as an "equalizer" for the constituent autonomous groups in terms of giving equal voice to all members in the assembly, disregarding group size or influence.

Hence, APPO was formed as a coalition of grassroots organizations *after* the initial mobilization of the general public had already occurred. Both the first large demonstrations and the actions of citizens in solidarity with the strikers encamped in the *zócalo* arose organically from within the surrounding communities and neighborhoods — the residents themselves started megamarches, supplied the encamped strikers, and organized the barricades. These collective actions were not based on formal SMO organization but emerged from already-established interpersonal networks within the communities. Pfaff (1996) described a similar, somewhat "reverse" process of movement formation as instrumental in the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 and suggests that this may be a characteristic of popular mobilization in the context of repressive regimes. In his analysis of the movement in the GDR, which of course occurred prior to digital networking and access to the internet, he described the importance of word of mouth, trusted relationships among neighbors, and local interpersonal networking systems as crucial in mobilizing the public. The initial collective protests in Oaxaca were also loosely-structured events conducted without extensive planning, a defined leadership, or formal organization. However, in 2006 the use of cell phones was crucial to extensive networking and mobilizing. It seems that the popular uprising itself created a space in which various grassroots organizations with divergent agendas were then able to coalesce and take on more prominent roles as organizers.

In 2006 APPO was in control of Oaxaca city for about 5 months, a period that was called "the Oaxaca Commune" in reference to the Paris Commune of 1870 (Esteva 2010). This was the time period when the movement came close to establishing the community it envisioned based both on the indigenous past (common origin) and the desired future (prefiguration) in Oaxaca. However, during this time police and military violence escalated to include assassinations of various activists, attacks on media outlets, mass arrests, and "disappearances." On November 25, 2006, outgoing Mexican president Vincente Fox sent in 4000 of his "federal preventive police" troops to restore Ruiz's control over the city (Campbell 2008). According to the National Commission for Human Rights (LASA 2007), by December 2006, the official human toll of the conflict had reached at least 23 deaths, 370 injuries, 349 imprisonments, and an unknown number of "disappeared." According to various news and blog sources, these numbers are low estimates and rose by at least 3 deaths, over 50 injuries, and over 65 arrests in battles with police during 2007 (see NarcoNews.com newsletters).

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The historical and political context of movement emergence

A number of economic, political, and social factors have precipitated the historic moment of 2006, which gave rise to the mobilization of the Oaxacan public. Among the key factors are the neoliberal market liberalization policies that created increased economic hardships for the majority of Oaxacans, the corruption of the political regime leading to a crisis in governmental legitimacy, and a long history of popular agency, especially among regional teachers unions and indigenous groups (see Denham, Lincoln, and Thomas 2008; Stephen 2007).

The effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the Oaxacan state economy, which historically has been heavily reliant on agricultural production, include the rural population's increased dependency on limited low income generating activities within household production (textiles, arts, crafts), often for tourist consumption. As a consequence of the shift from small family farming to agricultural mass production and shrinking opportunities in the agricultural sector, migration out of the region to large urban centers and the U.S. has increased rapidly since the mid 1990s (see Bacon 2008; Stephen 2007).

The surrounding indigenous communities are particularly marginalized by low access to educational and employment opportunities. As a response, various local groups have become actively involved in the cultural, social, and economic survival of their communities via grassroots organizing. Resistance to market liberalization and privatization of public enterprises gave rise to a large number of local grassroots organizations dedicated to improving different aspects of life in Oaxacan communities – from access to health care, education, sustainable livelihoods and social services to women's and indigenous rights (see Neal 2008).

When Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO) of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) took office in 2004 under suspicion of election fraud, his government was immediately faced with widespread public discontent. Historically the Oaxacan state was prone to crises of legitimacy, to various waves of repression to coerce the population into consent, as well as to popular resistance. In fact, collective action was used to depose three previous state governors, in 1946, 1952, and 1977 (see Waterbury 2007). In Mexico public distrust of government, politicians, and political institutions is very high, and data from 2009 show that Mexico held rank 89 on the Transparency International Perception of Corruption Index (Morris and Klesner 2010).

The power of the PRI, which had ruled Mexico for over 70 years eroded over time under a cloud of corruption until it lost the presidential election to the right-centrist National Action Party (PAN) and Vincente Fox in 2000. In the 2004 state elections the left-centrists Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) won over the PRI but the highly unpopular Governor Ruiz (PRI) remained in office with little party or popular support (Chibnik 2007). These circumstances made the state essentially ungovernable by democratic means and the political

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situation became highly volatile. Hence, by 2006 the Oaxacan political landscape was characterized by an economic crisis, fraudulent elections, government corruption and political instability, including political violence and repression so that the political space for public rebellion was opened.

Already starting in pre-Columbian times and continuing during and after Spanish colonization, indigenous popular resistance to domination and outright rebellion have shaped the Oaxacan political landscape. Oaxaca is, with Chiapas, not only the poorest, but also the most ethnically-diverse state in Mexico: Oaxaca is the home of sixteen ethnic groups who speak distinct languages and additional dialects and have their own cultural heritages. Muñoz (2004; 2005) offers a historical analysis of the unique process of the "politics of recognition" of indigenous rights in the state of Oaxaca, starting in the 1970s. He explains the comparatively rapid establishment of multicultural reforms in Oaxaca since the 1990s with the capacity of indigenous organizations to access the political decision-making process and to build alliances in the context of eroding government legitimacy.

Recently, Mexican popular movements, inspired by the *Zapatismo*[5] of neighboring state Chiapas, have increasingly taken on broader issues, such as social justice and neo-liberalism (anti-NAFTA, migration), are networking beyond regional and national borders, and their "new organizers" are adept at using communication technologies (radio, TV, internet, digital cameras, and cell phones) to advance their causes and to create large trans-regional support networks. These new movements combine ethnic pride in cultural heritage, class-based politics, grassroots mobilizing strategies, and digital media to build collective identities in opposition to repressive governments and elites, and to frame their struggle as "inclusive," i.e. as including all Oaxacans disregarding gender, ethnicity, or class. These movements are often organized around a broader set of social values than class-based or identity-based issues, such as demands for human rights, direct democracy, and social justice, and are characterized by a more inclusive range of ethnic and other group identities rooted in local grassroots activism (see Binford and Campbell 1993; Shefner 2004; Melucci 1996; Hewitt 2011).

The diverse constituencies of Latin American popular movements, consisting of coalitions of workers, unions, indigenous groups, women's groups, peasants, and students, value economic and political justice as much as community agency over state rule, and reject the hierarchical structures of bureaucratic decision-making predominant in movements of the past. Like the US student movements in the 1960s, they explicitly oppose the traditionally dominant ruling parties and government corruption, and are voicing general demands, such as social justice and participatory democracy (see Breines 1989). As also seen in the recent Occupy movement, networks of local grassroots organization

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[5] Zapatismo refers to the philosophy of the Zapatista movement. For an account of the Zapatista rebellion, see Ross 1994.

are coordinated to mobilize people in a decentralized manner and share resources for direct action and protests. The target of this type of grassroots organizing in a global age is the protection of "ways of life, living standards, and other interests from the intrusion of global corporations, the ravages of global market forces, and the penetration of the global cultural apparati" (Flacks 1996: 113).

Conventional wisdom and research in Western nations holds that mobilization is more likely to occur in open democratic regimes than in the "pseudo democratic," post-colonial, or repressive regimes often found in Latin America, Eastern Europe before 1989, and the Middle East because freedom of expression and assembly are granted. Conversely, repressive actions by the government via police or military may prevent collective action because of high levels of perceived risk and threat, fear and intimidation. While it appears that some different rules of movement building may apply in non-democratic or repressive regimes than in Western advanced societies (see Binford and Campbell 1993; Pfaff 1996; Houtzager 2001), recent movements in different parts of the world have utilized similar approaches to coalition building and collective identity formation.

Collective action frames as tools for collective identity formation

According to Melucci (1996), mass mobilization depends on developing a collective identity, which is based on a collective understanding of the goals (and the means and opportunities to achieve them) and the common vision of the movement. However, this identity is embedded in social networks and communities with shared values and, while necessary for mobilization, may precede the involvement of a formal structure in the form of a SMO (see Eckstein 1989).

Part of collective identity formation involves framing processes that (a) identify the overarching themes requiring collective action (collective action frames) and (b) connect individual identities to collective identities (collective identity frames) (see Benford and Snow 2000). Framing theory (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988) states that familiar interpretative schemas (frames) are used by movement actors to attach meaning to events and experiences in order to inspire and legitimate an emerging social movement. Benford and Snow (2000) explain that part of the work of social movement organizations is to produce, negotiate, and maintain interpretive collective action frames. These "collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Benford and Snow 2000:614). In the context of the Oaxacan movement, oppositional, prefigurative, and common origin frames were the most salient to encourage collective identity formation among various organizations and the public.

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Oppositional Frames

Collective identities traditionally have been established around class (unions, intellectuals, workers), political (peasants) or cultural categories (ethnicity or indigenous status). As such, these identities create and uphold the boundaries among categories and are focused on particular group-specific goals and demands. In fact, while most Latin American movements were initiated by the Left, they often aligned themselves with party politics or relied on allies within left-leaning parties. By contrast, as in the new movements in Brazil, in the Oaxacan movement class is framed very broadly and is "defined not in conventional sociological terms, but as broadly as possible – that is, as the poor, the oppressed, and the working people … who stood in direct opposition to the rich, the dominant class, or the capitalists" (Houtzager 2001:25). This distance to those in power is reflected in efforts to provide broad oppositional frames that explain the problem and identify the enemy (diagnostic frame [see Snow and Benford 1988]) and how to solve the problem and get rid of the enemy (prognostic fame [see Snow and Benford 1988]). As Hewitt (2011) shows, for inter-organizational solidarity building, the exclusive use of broad diagnostic frames may be advantageous because they do not require coalition partners to agree on solutions.

Mansbridge (2001a and b) refers to the development of "oppositional consciousness" when discussing the problem of opposing dominant structures. She explains that the recognition of injustice and shared interests and the demand for rectification are central to this process. In Oaxaca the governor, his party (and other parties), and his policies were identified as the common problem and the broad solution was the defeat of this regime and its replacement by participatory democracy in a just society. The regime became the target of the struggle and APPO purposely distanced itself from the "state apparatus" and all political parties. Hence a 35-year old indigenous activist clearly used oppositional framing - words like "war," "fight," "resisting conquest," and "rejecting invasion" to characterize the actions APPO engaged in.

The goal of what Flacks (1996) calls "democratic activism" and coalition building is to organize different groups around the defeat of a common threat, such as a corrupt government or neoliberal trade policies, thereby downplaying their initial different agendas. Of particular interest in the Oaxacan case is the framing of larger collective identities that can take priority over specific autonomous group identities. Organizational constituents and the public defined themselves in mutual recognition of affinity, interests, structural location, and common origin. During the megamarches, participants constructed the broad collective identities of "Oaxeños" and "el pueblo" (the people) to replace that of the specific "los maestros' (the teachers). Later APPO succeeded in broadening its SMO identity to be inclusive of the general citizenry as well, which is reflected in the chants and slogans: "shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow, we are all the APPO" and "A people united will never be defeated." The view of the majority of the respondents is reflected in the following statement by an activist: "…this is an Oaxacan movement, it belongs to

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Oaxaca. It is a cry of desperation against oppression started by the teachers but [it was] picked up by everyone who felt it in their bones: unemployment and extreme poverty."

In this process, the oppositional frame of an "us" against "them" implies not only the meaningful unity of in-group members (APPO, Oaxacans, the people) but also the relational nature of collective identities in opposition to dominant groups (Ruiz, major political parties, corrupt regimes). For example, the "anti-corruption" and "anti-repression" demands of the movement became the collective action frame of "anti-Ruiz," as reflected in the slogans "Ruiz va caer" (Ruiz will fall) and "Ulises ya cayó" (Ulises is out), which were prominently displayed on banners and chanted. Hence, in order to establish a sense of unity, fractions within and between groups had to be ignored and a common threat — the repressive regime - identified. A respondent for this study, the 40-year-old director of a key organization involved in APPO, credits the movement with developing in Oaxaca "... a higher consciousness not to accept the repression, the violation of human rights, or that governors act like kings..." According to him, APPO decided to "... 'citizenize' politics..." because "the parties are frauds and not representatives." Another 40-year old activist supporting APPO states about the coalition:

> "This [repression] brought us to a union with the assembly of organizations. The agreement we made was to be in solidarity with the teachers and other organizations. We always say: not one pueblo, not one organization should fight alone. The best way to fight is in an organized form."

Prefigurative frames of communal living and participatory democracy

In contrast to oppositional frames, prefigurative frames are articulations of what the movement is for, not against. Prefigurative frames are only prognostic in the general sense that they are representations of a common vision for the future. They lack the specificity of prognostic frames detailing the solution to identified problem. In the case of Oaxaca, this vision entailed a society characterized by social justice, communal living and participatory democracy.

Breines (1983:6) defines the concept of "prefigurative politics" as follows:

> The term *prefigurative politics* is used to describe characteristics of the movement, as well as parts of the new left leadership, and may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics. Participatory democracy was central to prefigurative politics.

The notion of "community" is central to the prefiguration of the desired society and involves the creation of egalitarian social relationships and de-centralized communitarian institutions (see Gregory Calvert's 1966 treatise on the "beloved

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community" of the Civil Rights era). Breines' (1983; 1989) research shows that this rejection of hierarchical power structures by the New Left in the 1960s in the US resulted in the dilemma of how to create effective "leaderless" movements, a dilemma also faced in Oaxaca. This community-oriented philosophy requires prefigurative activists to use anti-hierarchical leadership principles grounded in a participatory democratic process. The question of how to structure coalitions without invoking the usual hierarchical power dynamics in strategic power brokering is answered by the use of assemblies in present movements all over the world.

In Oaxaca in 2008, the 40-year-old director of a constituent indigenous grassroots organization explains: "there are no leaders in APPO... APPO is a construction of many organizational expressions." In his view the ideal form of indigenous governance — the leader-less assembly that is an expression of radical democracy - was actually practiced by APPO. Nevertheless, several other respondents were less idealistic and conceded that leaders did exist in APPO and that some became corrupt, leading to difficulties in the ranks. In fact, the key activists in APPO were targeted by the regime and quite a few are among the arrested, assassinated, or "disappeared" (see Denham and CASA 2008; Esteva 2008, Waterbury 2007).

Assemblies are central to the political process in the Oaxacan indigenous communities. They are based on the principle of 'usos y costumbres' (traditional usages and customs), which refers to indigenous communal decision-making practices. Gustavo Esteva (2006) defined a community in Oaxaca as "...a group of people linked by obligation, by mutual obligations, not by rights," and he described the consensus-based decision-making principle of the assemblies as follows:

> "...we are an assembly when we are together and we are a web when we are separated. When we come together we have a very precise mandate from our communities, from our people, and we can discuss and compromise and come to a consensus, have an argument."

This process is neither fast nor smooth and critics among the interviewees for this study stated that the assembly members are mostly male, thereby excluding female voices from "the web." Others argue that while the consensus-building process can be very slow and conflict-ridden, it does lead to decisions that reflect the views of the majority.

Several respondents for this study mentioned the Zapatistas and/or Ricardo Flores Magón's philosophy of "Tierra y Libertad" (land and liberty) as inspirations of the movement and the future, and that they have had a profound influence on the movement. One 37-year-old director of a grassroots organization supporting APPO echoes the prefigurative theme of the movement's uniting vision: "Ricardo Flores Magote's (RFM) philosophy... [what] he expresses — be faithful to yourself and your identity.... APPO had to

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move into a new direction – towards their ideal. [It] became an urban movement with rural components." However, several voices from the indigenous communities in the mountains confirm the urban character of the movement by denying the existence of APPO outside the city and associating APPO with negative events like burning busses and urban violence. This view contradicts the quest for community as a place of peaceful coexistence.

Even if this vision for the future is one constructed based on a mythical version of past indigenous ways of community life (see next section on common origins framing), it serves to reinforce the hope generated by the movement. In this sense prefigurative framing, as a specific form of motivational framing, becomes a way to stir the collective imagination and to galvanize various groups on a combined vision of positive societal transformation. This "pro better world" framing clearly complements a purely oppositional framing in terms of fighting "against the status quo," and may be particularly effective in gaining support from the public. Hewitt (2011) also found that prognostic or motivational framing can successfully combined with "anti" frames. However, these frames have to be broad because the divergent solutions to the common problem (what is being fought for) based on a range of ideological strains lead to friction; in Oaxaca this was the case between APPO and the public.

Common origin frames

According to Houtzager (2001), the success in movement mobilization in Brazil depended on collective identities being based on reinterpreting the dominant ideology and undermining claims of state legitimacy. In addition, he argues that these reinterpretations should correspond to "folk conceptions" of how normative society operates that build the glue of local communities and invoke a common origin. In the case of education in Oaxaca, the dominant neoliberal ideology that encourages privatization was reframed as being in violation of both the Mexican constitution and indigenous practices – privatization of education violates the rights of citizens to a free education. This "anti-privatization" frame was extended based on indigenous philosophies about communal stewardship to a rejection of any attempts by the state to privatize natural resources, public spaces, or cultural events. Examples include protests against privatization of the national oil company, against costly remodeling of the main square (*zócalo*) that included installation of parking meters, and against the takeover of sponsorship of the Guelaguetza festival by the state or Coca Cola, Inc.

The comprehensive strategy to build a collective identity for a movement of movements focused on creating and fostering internal solidarity among constituent groups and other participants after initial mobilization. The foremost task here is the reaffirmation of existing alliances among networks of autonomous groups, using informal networks within communities, and the identification of common issues. This requires that the key actors not only do the political work of identifying common goals and demands, but also do

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cultural work; that is they have to invoke a common cultural origin, heritage and history of struggle for autonomy and rights. To that end activists use shared symbols and narratives from their regional cultural legacy to attach an umbrella identity to themselves that superseded any specific heterogeneous group identities (see Stolle-McAllister 2007). The articulation of the movement discourse and demands are rooted in the cultural traditions and practices of local peoples and local communities. Gustavo Esteva[6] explains that "a movement of movements does not have goals, but compelling forces, impulses... Forces coming from the past, from experiences, compelling us to do something..."

The ideological view of the movement as a symbolic extension of past struggles, and an example of "myth-making," is echoed in the words of a 30-year-old activist in the movement: APPO is "... a consequence of 500 years of colonization that resulted in interrupted lives of the people and oppression with the goal to eliminate culture. It grew out of the resistance of 500 years." This idealized use of the past as leading up to 2006's uprising is part of common origin framing to build collective identities – the historic struggle of Oaxacans. Clearly this strong articulation of unity in past and present focuses on an edited, entirely positive construction of a common history and downplays the considerable historical evidence of divisions within and between communities. Conflict and competition as well as corruption are part of the interaction within assemblies and networks, and most of the interviewees acknowledged this problem. While the frame of common origin and unity among communities is not quite authentic, it serves the purpose of collective identity building well and is the basis for the "prefiguration" of an ideal future society – or a return to a common mythical past.

The role of public spaces and place-based rituals in collective identity formation

Fernando Bosco (2001) contributes to the literature on the spatial dimensions of collective identity formation with a focus on the role of space in the sustainability of a movement. He argues that "place-based collective rituals" serve to maintain social network cohesion both spatially and symbolically. Places that are collectively identified as meaningful to the cause become symbols to build and maintain existing network connections (see also Leach and Haunss 2009; Creasap 2012). Collective rituals reinforce participants' feelings of group membership, their "basic moral commitments and group solidarity and ... their activist identities" (Bosco 2001; p.315).

The identification of a central place that belongs to the activist community fosters interpersonal networking and sustains a shared identity. In Oaxaca

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[6] Gustavo Esteva is the president of the board of Unitierra, an alternative university in Oaxaca. He agreed to be interviewed in depth for this research and consented to have his name used.

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movement activists were able to strategically use sacred places and rituals in Oaxacan indigenous culture, to reinforce the common origin frames. APPO recognized the relevance of repeated gatherings in particular public spaces and on culturally significant days in sustaining the viability and duration of a movement. In order to solidify a collective identity of "the people," collective rituals confirmed common interests, shared grievances, and common bonds. Between 2006 and 2008 culturally significant elements were successfully injected into political events – cultural processions turned into silent marches and fiestas into rallies in the same public spaces.

The expression of dissent, or more specifically resistance (social activism based on dissent), occurs most effectively in public spaces (see Roberts 2008). The occupation of public spaces for the purpose of continued resistance facilitates social networking among movement constituents, increases the visibility of the movement, and aids mobilization. The choice of the main square as the location of the annual teacher encampment community reflects the significance of the central public space as a "homeplace" of resistance (see hooks 1991; Bosco 2001). The *zócalo* is a highly politicized space – the symbol of the struggle and the space of resistance, collective memory and recruitment. The movement participants had a strong sense of ownership of public places and fought to protect and maintain control of the *zócalo* as the center of public visibility, media attention, and resource mobilization.

The *zócalo* is also where local indigenous crafts merchants and street vendors traditionally sell their wares because of ready access to tourists, who flock there to admire the adjacent churches and colonial architecture as well as enjoy the lively cultural activities and restaurants. In fact, tourists became a target and tool for the movement as organizers used large posters to educate tourists about the struggle and repression, stage fund raising installations like the *kilómetro del peso* (kilometer of pesos; a long marked line on the ground on which people put coins and bills) to help the families of those arrested in the struggle, and prevent tourists from spending money on state-sponsored cultural events.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, the square was filled with political banners and the permanent stands of the grassroots groups that constituted APPO. In addition, stands that sold political T-shirts, DVDs documenting the demonstrations and police brutality, and CDs with protest songs abounded. A permanent resistance art installation (*arte de resistencia/ perfomance instalación*) of a large web covered the entire square, symbolizing the social network and community of the movement participants, while on a stage and in the streets, song and dance performances expressed the message: "Oaxaca no está de fiesta... está de luto" (Oaxaca is not celebrating, it is in mourning). In addition, graffiti artists opened "...new spaces of expression by reclaiming every wall in the city for the people in resistance" (Denham, Lincoln, and Thomas 2008:36). Of particular note is an artist collective, ASARO (Revolutionary Artists Assembly of Oaxaca), who supported the movement by creating woodcut prints for sale and stencils for graffiti production that depicted symbolic scenes of the Oaxacan struggle, including common origin, oppositional, and prefigurative frames.

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The extensive use of digital media – cell phones with cameras and access to the internet (youtube) - served to expose and publicize police brutality. Photographs of those brutalized by police graced long laundry lines crisscrossing the square. This space also marked the beginning and end point of the megamarches, many of which also included a visit to a monument of Benito Juarez, the first indigenous Mexican president.

Other marches included stops at the *fuente de las siete regiones* (fountain of the seven regions of Oaxaca), which symbolizes common regional identity. This monument unifies the key features of the traditions in the seven regions of the state into a cultural mosaic. At the *plaza de danza* (dance square) pre-Hispanic dances were performed under the banner of a common cultural heritage and identity. The performance art in this space was expanded to include mock trials against the governor. Of particular significance are the collective ritual processions honoring the sites where violence took place; for example, the places where APPO members Jose Jimenez Colmenares and Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes (Campbell 2008), and independent journalist Bradley Will (Waterbury 2007) were killed by police became shrines and regular stops during the megamarches. Similarly, *la marcha de silencio* (silent march) in 2007 featured family members who prominently carried the photographs of the victims of police brutality with the message: "For our dead and disappeared not a minute of silence but a whole life of struggle." These actions and messages reinforce the collective moral commitment and serve to maintain collective identity (see Bosco 2008 and Jasper 1997).

As Roberts (2008) further points out, the state can use its power to sanction and pre-empt the use of public spaces for the purpose of dissent. In Oaxaca this was done in 2008 by "renovating" and "modernizing" the central square in order to strip it of its historical significance as recognized place of resistance. The high value of public spaces to the local population is the cornerstone of protests against the governor's use of public funds to remodel the *zócalo* to enhance tourist attraction (see Chibnik 2007); the removal of ancient stone pavement, the installation of parking meters in the free public parking zone, and the eviction of indigenous street crafts vendors caused public outrage and extensive vandalism. In retaliation of the state taking over the people's public spaces, Oaxacans started taking over government spaces by putting up barricades on highways, blocking access to the *Guelaguetza* amphitheater, occupying toll booths on state highways, setting city buses on fire, and ripping out the newly installed parking meters.

Another example of the connection between use of space, framing, and collective identity is the annual *Guelaguetza* Festival in July, a celebration of cultural diversity that dates back to pre-Columbian times. In the Zapotec language *guelaguetza* means "reciprocal exchanges of gifts and services," but over the last decades it has become a state-run commercial enterprise to attract tourists. Local scholar Ronald Waterbury addresses the symbolic nature of

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starting an annual *Guelaguetza Magisterial y Popular* (the people's Guelaguetza) to compete with the "official Guelaguetza."[7] He states

> "this is clearly a counter-hegemonic move (in a Gramscian sense) against the appropriation of indigenous culture by the state for its own economic and political goals. The terms "popular" in the title makes reference to the populace and to the APPO as the movement's symbol."

In 2007 the "official" festival was sponsored by Coca Cola Inc., which led to a public boycott of the festival, a blockade of the city's open-air amphitheater where it is normally held, clashes with police, and busloads of people being brought in by the state to serve as an audience for the TV covered performances.

The strategic use of space to voice resistance goes beyond physical space and includes the media (air waves) and cyber space. Early on the teachers' union broadcast news of their encampment via their radio station *Radio Plantón* (encampment radio) and when their transmitter was destroyed in the police raid on the encampment, students at Benito Juarez University started broadcasting from *Radio Universidad* in solidarity. Another example is the *marcha de las caserolas* (march of pots and pans) in which some 2000 women marched while banging on pots and occupied the state run TV and radio stations in order to broadcast news about the movement. Several women's groups were part of APPO, foremost COMO (Coordinating Body of Oaxacan Women), which was the women's branch of the movement. In general, women played an active role in the movement from the beginning because teachers are predominantly female and women supported the encampment with food, water and blankets (for women's stories, please see Yakira 2007). Of particular note are the specific actions organized by COMO in front of the Santo Domingo cathedral to help the families of the killed, arrested and "disappeared."

APPO was able to create a website that allowed them to portray themselves in a manner different from official accounts that showed them as criminals. This virtual space served to disseminate written and video information, recruit members, and mobilize resources. The internet was also crucial for international social networking and mobilizing international support via petition signatures to impeach the governor. It allowed the movement entry into a global public virtual space that enabled participation in real time social networking among people resisting repression across the globe. The recent uprisings in the Middle East and elsewhere show how immediate access to eyewitness accounts on social networking sites can fuel solidarity with a movement and facilitate social mobilization. Nevertheless, as Philip Howard (2011) warns, "...overemphasizing the role of information technology diminishes the personal risks that individual protesters took in heading out onto the streets

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[7] Ronald Waterbury is the director of the Welte Institute in Oaxaca. He agreed to be interviewed in depth for this research and consented to have his name used.

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to face tear gas and rubber bullets." In the "Arab Spring" and in Oaxaca many died and were injured in the streets.

Endurance of a movement of movements

The allegiance of constituent autonomous groups to a movement of movements can be somewhat tenuous due to the fact that the overall collective identity is "artificially created," or purposely constructed by organizers. Jasper (2004), in his discussion of examples of strategic choices in political agency, mentions "the extension dilemma" in movements with diverse constituencies and coalitions. He argues that coalitions among member organizations make the movement goals less coherent, which results in rivalries and the fact that the coalitions rarely survive more than a few years. The more diverse and the larger the number of groups and alliances in the movement, the broader the collective identity has to be. Because the collective umbrella identity of APPO is not based on shared ideology at the grassroots, questions arise about its endurance. Collective identities in single focus movements, which are the social glue keeping movements cohesive, are not static but involve a process of bond formation based on social interaction, communication, and shared rituals (Melucci 1996). This process is complicated by the additional level of organization introduced by bringing together heterogeneous groups. Hence the collective umbrella identity of a movement of movements is by definition more general and has to be embraced both by individual group members and by the constituent autonomous groups.

According to most sources, during the peak of the megamarches and the barricades in Oaxaca the solidarity across groups and the public was strong. The sense of urgency created by the threat of violence enhanced the need for cross-group collaboration in a perceived state of emergency. Neighborhoods considered themselves under siege and residents defended their spaces against police and military forces without regard to group membership or ideological differences (see Denham and CASA 2008). Nevertheless, the fact that there remains disagreement of the nature of APPO reflects the splintering of solidarity. One of the interview questions for this research was: "In your view, what is APPO, and what are its goals?" The statement by a 55-year-old resident in an indigenous community interviewed for this research, "APPO is not the movement. The Oaxacan people are the movement," appears indicative of the split between the coalition of organizations constituting APPO and the movement of the general public. Thus, another respondent, a 35 year-old key activist in one of the indigenous organizations that was part of APPO commented that APPO "is an organization of communities that fights to get our [indigenous] rights," and that this is why he decided their grassroots organization should "...be in solidarity with the [striking] teachers and other organizations."

After the immediate threat passed, however, fissures at the ideological fault lines of the various groups re-emerged, giving rise to speculations about

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corruption and greed within the APPO leadership ranks itself (Campbell 2008; Waterbury 2007). It appears that while the diagnostic oppositional framing was clear and broad, the discourse on the prognostic framing was very ideologically diverse even though the prefiguration of hope was broad. The divergent solutions to the common problem (what is being fought for) based on a range of ideological strains led to friction, particularly between APPO and the public.

Contrary to some of the respondents' view of APPO as leaderless, key figures in the constituent organizations were arrested, "disappeared," or accused of using the movement for their own agenda. APPO's motives and intentions were questioned and conflict over strategy and goals gave rise to infighting, which in turn lead to a lack of public support. The same distrust that was used to mobilize against the common enemy – the Ruiz government – was now levelled against constituent autonomous groups of the movement, but mainly against the APPO. It was perceived as having gained too much power and as having its own agenda. While distance from the repressive power structure and rejection of institutionalization were prominent goals for APPO, in the end the accusation of practicing the same anti-democratic tactics were levied against it.

Local scholar-activist Gustavo Esteva acknowledges that there were major tensions between the teacher's union and APPO early on because the union stopped striking. In addition, conflict within APPO along the political fault lines of the constituent groups over strategies and ideologies have reduced the effectiveness of the movement and weakened the unity. Ron Waterbury adds that some larger groups, like the Popular Revolutionary Front (FPR; communist group) have taken over and are imposing hierarchical structures on the decision-making process. Hence he argues that "... APPO no longer represents the movement, it represents these particular groups [who are] squabbling over who is in control."

One 42-year-old leader in a grassroots organization states: "the movement has been sold out... but the effervescence of the movement is still there... [It] is enduring and maturing and it will return, and the government won't be able to do anything." The director of another key organization involved in APPO adds that it "was a good movement" and it "represented the hope of Oaxaca in its best moment." It is "an expression of the people who wanted to stop being subjugated and to convert themselves to people with rights." To him, in 2008 "APPO is a little divided but the movement is alive. APPO as an organizational structure is fractured. APPO as a movement is still alive and doing things." Again, different observers consider APPO a different entity and are divided over its effectiveness and endurance.

The Oaxacan movement ultimately did not succeed in gaining the demanded regime change. Part of the reason is that the movement was no match for the state's monopoly over the means of violence. The brutality and human rights abuses of the police, military, and paramilitaries (assassinations, beatings, torture, disappearances) against ordinary citizens were immense. The toll of risking health, life, liberty, and income by regular participation in demonstrations proved too much over the long term, especially given the small

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probability of success in a repressive context. Waterbury states that the multiple causes behind the movement, such as government repression and corruption, poverty, neoliberalism's negative impact on the local economy are still present in 2011. However, the coalition of organizations and the assembly of the APPO already started disintegrating in 2007 and the regular demonstrations of the coalition have stopped by 2009. Instead, the constituent organizations are acting separately or in smaller federations to push their agendas "as though 2006 never happened."

In 2011 the Oaxacan movement seemed to be at a crossroads; while APPO no longer operates as a SMO, the movement appears to survive in a latent manner. Waterbury and Esteva expressed differing perspectives on the future of the movement in 2011. While Ronald Waterbury is decidedly cautious in his outlook on the future of APPO, Gustavo Esteva sees promise in the continued movement and its goal of major social transformation. Waterbury argues that the social movement, after its spontaneous beginning in 2006 is ongoing today; "but action is initiated by other organizations" and "APPO remains a very powerful symbol of the movement." By distinguishing APPO as a structure from the movement, he is able to see a fractured, dissolving SMO and an ongoing, if latent, movement. He argues that one of the lasting successes of the movement is the hope it instilled in the public that political change is possible, and that this, coupled with the anti-PRI sentiment generated by APPO, may have brought about the end of PRI rule after decades. Anti-PRI sentiments motivated many who usually do not participate in elections due to fatalistic beliefs and widespread resignation to the status quo of corrupt politics to actually vote. Overall, he is cautiously optimistic about the movement reaching some of its goals under the current government.

Gustavo Esteva is more optimistic about the resilience of the movement and describes it as "the product of a slow accumulation of forces and many lessons gathered during previous struggles" and as "born at the grassroots, from the core of Oaxacan society" (Esteva 2008:338). He further argues that the APPO is fighting institutionalized repression by paramilitary groups on one side and the attempts by the institutional Left to discredit it on the other. He agrees with Waterbury that mobilization of people is based on the hope for change. According to Esteva, in 2011 "the movement is very much alive. They are still marching and trying to bring about changes." He believes the various groups that were under the APPO umbrella will differ in their visibility and actions on the political front but they will not disappear because "the APPO represents above all a great awakening" (Esteva 2010: 990). Like Zapatismo, the APPO "... opened a new horizon of hope, whose innovative character, especially in terms of bridging cultural diversity and applying the assembly tradition to the present, is a source of inspiration for many other movements in Mexico and in the world" (Esteva 2010: 990). Hence frames of common origins in the pre-colonial past also were the inspiration for the prefigurative frames of these egalitarian communities in the future. For movements in the North this connection between past and future poses a dilemma because of the post-modern distance to the collective memory of "community."

Conclusion

The questions guiding this research involved the reasons for the formation of a coalition of divergent organizations under repressive conditions with specific emphasis on the role of collective identity formation based on framing and the use of space and rituals. Evidence from this research offers valuable insights for the research and activist communities. The findings suggest that after the initial public "moral shock," collective identity formation strategies involving common origin, oppositional and prefiguration framing, and the use of public spaces and rituals were instrumental for coalition building among heterogeneous movements and the public. Of particular importance in Oaxaca were the indigenous influences in the articulation of collective identities: use of assemblies and place-based rituals in spaces with cultural and historical significance and framing based on a common threat, origin, and future.

While assemblies, regular demonstrations, occupation of public space, and oppositional framing also are features of current movements in the North (anti-WTO, Occupy), it appears that common origin and prefigurative frames take on a different significance in post-colonial contexts. While the broad goals of all of these movements deal with sustainable livelihoods in the future, the vision of what this looks like varies in the North and South in a number of ways. The community ties and the cultural rituals in Oaxaca involve a deep sense of common bonds and heritage that may evoke higher emotional investment and feelings of solidarity than is found in Northern democracies.

In Oaxaca community is not merely a distant memory but a clearly articulated vision in Oaxaca. Based on Melucci's (1995) process-oriented view of collective identity, it appears that the interaction based on informal networks in communities was instrumental in linking the grassroots groups and the public. The organic involvement of established neighborhood networks allowed the public to take ownership of the movement. These insights extend Lichterman's (1996; 2009) work on "social capacity", i.e. the ability of mutually responsible people to engage in coordinated problem solving in an inclusive manner for public benefits. Furthermore, according to Evans (2002:56), "collective capabilities" of "organized collectives" can "...provide the arena for formulating shared values and preferences, and instruments for pursuing them, even in the face of powerful opposition." In this context Adler (2012) also discusses the concept of "community capacity restoration" in Oaxacan grassroots organizing based on "collective efficacy" (see Sampson et al. 1999).

These concepts all point to the relevance of *relational collective resources*, such as interpersonal connections based on affective loyalties (Berezin 2001), norms of reciprocity, and mutual interests that generate ties that go beyond instrumental coalitions established for short-term organizational purposes. Future research should continue to examine the dynamics of community in building social capacities for long-term solidarity, trust, and loyalty to the movement. A related expanding field of exploration for scholars and activists is the emotional dimension of collective identity formation. In a recent review Jasper (2011) outlines the value of research on various forms of emotional

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energy for uncovering the hidden mechanisms at the core of activism, mobilization, and movement endurance.

I speculate that these features of popular mobilization and movement maintenance may be key characteristics of movements in the 21st century in which post-colonial politics are important, particularly in conjunction with the effective use of mobile technology, such as cell phones with cameras and internet capabilities. It will be the task of future studies to investigate these claims. However, the findings from this study clearly support recent literature (Flesher Fominaya 2010; Davis and Rosan 2004; Houtzager 2001; Pfaff 1996) suggesting that the understanding of recent movements, particularly in repressive regimes, requires a retooling of concepts from a variety of social movement perspectives. Additional research is necessary to refine existing concepts so that they are more sensitive to the special dynamics present in the current globalization context.

Technically, APPO no longer exists – at least not as the umbrella SMO it once was. The movement of movements also appears to have disbanded due to a lack of popular support. The government repression, killing, threatening, disappearances, and internal power struggles have taken their toll. However, according to local observers like Campbell (2008), Esteva, and Waterbury, various initiatives born from the movement continue to exist. In repressive conditions with major power imbalance in terms of the means of violence, continued involvement and risk taking by the populace is difficult to sustain long-term. On the other hand renewed moral shock and outrage can help refocus public attention and reignite protest (see Brockett 2005). Hence a strategic tool for activists is the rouse the public with new information that challenges accepted knowledge and yet appeals to the sense of community to inspire collective solidarities (see Jasper 2010; 2011).

In Oaxaca it appears that the collective identity frames did not withstand fragmentation and ideological in-fighting. One lesson is that organizers did not capitalize on popular support and outside allies in a sustained manner. Almeida and Walker (2006) show the importance of favorable public opinion in sustaining a movement. While the strategies to distance the movement from the state and official parties, and the rejection of formal organizational structures were in line with oppositional framing efforts, they also prevented using potential support from existing sympathetic elements within the power structure. More generally, the sustained enthusiasm and desire for change in the population at large could have been more effectively harnessed by using clearer expectations for the future. APPO was unable to maintain its momentum because it did not generate positive public awareness beyond the city and could not galvanize commitments from other potential allies.

In addition, this research points to the need for more sociological research on the issue of leadership in coalition and collective identity building (see Barker et al. 2001; Jasper 2010; 2011). While decentralized organizational structures in assemblies can be effective, the concept of a "leaderless" movement organization appears to be problematic in the long run. Internal hierarchies seem to develop

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inevitably in movements of movements, resulting in the emergence of informal (and formal) leaders, even when the autonomous movements are ideologically and strategically opposed to this label. Both activists and scholars benefit from continuing reflection on how to combine participatory democracy in action with effective "key organizing team building" rather than focusing on a leader/non-leader dichotomy. As Jasper (2011) points out, organizing and strategizing work such as alliance building and fame alignment involves group dynamics at multiple (and not only horizontal) levels. As seen in Oaxaca, the ideological and strategic denial of having movement leaders, while effective in the short term, may be counter-productive in the long run.

Recently several Mexican movements, such as the Other Campaign and the "Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad" (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity) have emerged with an emphasis on public involvement, anti-corruption frames, and decentralized, horizontal movement organization. They bring civic pressure on the Mexican government and cut across ethnic and class boundaries by invoking solidarity in civil society against a common threat. As in Oaxaca, they also rely on local community networks and established inter-movement linkages. Potentially successful strategies to draw public support include using broad master frames that are anti-violence and pro-community, focusing on existing informal networks within local communities, and "modelling" the prefigured future society within the movement. Here a promising concept is that of the "social movement scene," defined by Leach and Hauss (2009:259, emphasis in the original) as "a *network of people* who share a common identity and a common set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms, and convictions as well as *a network of physical spaces* where members of that group are known to congregate." Of course the notion of "space of resistance" moves beyond the static physical realm into a process (see Creasap 2012) and into the virtual dimension by means of technology.

Both Esteva and Waterbury, coming from very different perspectives, agreed that the generation of "hope" in the populace based on prefiguration was a lasting contribution of the movement. The importance of this vision is eloquently stated by a 40-year old indigenous male activist supporting APPO: "When they kill the spirit, the hope, and the heart, even though we are alive, we are nothing." Hence one lesson for activists is that prefiguration may be a key component not only of coalition building but of sustaining a movement over time.

The realization that collectively Oaxacans or Mexicans can voice their demands and be empowered to act upon their rights as citizens is promising vis-a-vis the decades-long fatalism in the face of authoritarian rule. According to Richard Flacks (1996:104)

> ...movements are inherently the primary framework for direct democracy, providing the moments in which ordinary people directly and consciously participate in the exercise of voice rather than allowing others to speak for them.... It is in the movement moment

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that the people show, at least spasmodically, that they can decide, can take control of their history.

In the Oaxacan case, the collective voice converged on common origins, opposition to the local regime, and the vision of a better society. Interviewed movement participants actively engaged in the "prefiguration" of the movement outcome, that is, they "prefigured" the desirable future society by articulating it as an anticipatory image. When the path to participatory democracy was violently blocked by corrupt elites in a repressive regime, Oaxacans decided to march despite high risks to themselves and their families. Future research should continue to investigate how prefigurative frames are used in conjunction with the formation of communities and social movement scenes (see Creasap 2012) in emerging movements in Latin America or elsewhere. It appears they are part of a global trend of numerous alternative movements fighting for a new world. They envision a more egalitarian society, a post-capitalist society, a community free of repression, corruption and violence, and use these positive ideas in collective action framing as strategic tools for mobilization.

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Participatory Budgeting in the City: Challenging NYC's Development Paradigm From the Grassroots[1]

Nancy Baez and Andreas Hernandez

See also the Youtube video "From budget cuts to a people's budget: participatory budgeting in NYC" at <ins>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7JwPekH5U0</ins>, produced by the authors and others in the International Film Studies Collective at Marymount Manhattan College. A longer video based on this article is promised for later in 2012.

Introduction

Four New York City Council members have adopted Participatory Budgeting (PB) for their Districts' capital funds in the 2011/2012 budget cycle. This essay examines the New York City (NYC) PB process, and analyzes why this experience has been among the most grassroots-led and organized of PB initiatives yet implemented anywhere in the world. We argue that while the PB process in its most elementary form is a reallocation of municipal money by residents through participatory deliberation and voting, this basic process can become a very different project depending on the city, its history and its wider relationships with politics and capitalism. The way PBs are designed and implemented depends on how PB engages the general imagination for development in a particular city. NYC has been structured since the 1970s as the financial command center of global capitalism, spatially polarizing Manhattan and impoverishing the City as a whole. We argue that, in the context of the 2007-8 economic crisis and the attendant severe cuts in the municipal budget, grassroots community organizations, in concert with local progressive politicians, are using PB to challenge the dominant development model of the City itself.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a democratic and deliberative decision-making process which empowers citizens to directly decide how a portion of the public budget is spent. This process was developed and consolidated in Porto Alegre, Brazil where up to 21% of the yearly municipal budget has been decided through participatory

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process since 1989. PB has since been implemented in over 1,000 cities worldwide on every continent, although initiatives are largely concentrated in Latin America and Europe. The PB is generally associated with city budgets, however it has also been implemented by states, counties, schools, universities, housing authorities and coalitions of community groups. PB processes vary in scale from small towns to major metropolises such as Pune (India), Rome (Italy), Matam (Senegal) and Sao Paulo (Brazil). The World Bank and the United Nations have identified PB as an important tool for inclusive and accountable urban governance, based on its ability to promote transparency, inclusion and equity.[2]

Municipal PBs generally involve several core steps. First, the guidelines of the upcoming budget cycle are set and decisions are made about how the process will operate. Dynamics are established such as timelines, appropriate incentives, participation guidelines, and core values of the system. Second, neighborhood assemblies are held, where residents or other defined stakeholder groups under the budget's jurisdiction meet, learn about PB, and then draw up specific projects based on community needs. Third, assembly participants who are especially interested in staying engaged with the process throughout the cycle become budget delegates, through a vote in some cases or on a volunteer basis, as occurred in NYC. These delegates are charged with turning ideas that were imagined at the assemblies into feasible projects, and establishing their costs – often with the help of experts. Fourth, projects are presented to another round of neighborhood assemblies at a final vote where the participants decide which projects will be funded according to those that garner the most votes within the allotted budget.

The Politics of PB and Project of the City

While the PB process at the city level, in its most elementary form, is a reallocation of municipal money by residents through participatory deliberation and voting, this basic process can become a very different political project depending on the city, its history and its wider relationships with politics and capitalism. To begin to answer the question of why the NYC PB has been one of the most grassroots-led PB experiences, it is useful and perhaps necessary to examine not only its local trajectory, but also its wider relationships to political economy and the very project and political imagination of the City. The design and implementation of PB initiatives are structured and conditioned by this context of the City in which they are embedded. Every municipality around the world exercises differing roles within wider networks of the global political economy, depending on its dominant historical functions and development paradigm. In this way, although PB across various locations may share a number of technical similarities, they may also

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[2] See for example Shah 2007 and "Participatory Budgeting". *UN Habitat.* Retrieved April 20, 2012 from http://www.un-habitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=533&cid=4475

constitute very different political projects. NYC is unique in that it has been successfully structured as the financial command center of the global economy, the contradictions of which, we argue below, help explain the political project and grassroots nature of PB in the City.

The Neoliberal Restructuring of New York City

NYC was an important manufacturing and financial center throughout much of the 20th Century. We draw upon the geographer David Harvey (2007) to outline the restructuring of NYC in the final decades of the century, into the dominant financial command center of the global economy, while spatially polarizing parts of Manhattan and impoverishing the rest of the city, including the other four boroughs (Queens, Brooklyn, The Bronx and Staten Island). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s a situation of excess capital and declines in manufacturing resulted in much of the surplus going to real estate speculation and a massive boom in new construction. When the property market crashed in 1973, NYC was left with empty buildings, lack of property taxes which they had forgiven during the time of surplus, and a shortage of jobs. In 1973, the Federal Government entered a financial crisis and dramatically cut its funding to cities. However, it was the decision by investment bankers to terminate loans that actually caused the City to file for bankruptcy in 1975. Private lenders stepped in as the stream of federal funds to NYC declined, but the City was increasingly using money for social welfare goals, redistributing this borrowed wealth at a time when manufacturing was declining, but unions were still influential and anti-banker and anti-corporate sentiment prevailed.

From the perspective of those propping up NYC, business interests were not enough of a priority in the budget, and so the investment bankers set out to change this. Since the City was primarily receiving funds from the private sector, the stage was set to launch a "financial coup" and with the sudden withdrawal of all funding the investment bankers brought NYC to its knees. Immediately following the bankruptcy, all budget decisions were transferred to the significantly less accountable Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC), later referred to as the Emergency Financial Control Board, composed of the investment bankers, a few state representatives, and a couple of city representatives. Jobs and services were cut as the MAC used city taxes and even municipal union pensions to pay off debts. At that point, the health of the financial institutions had taken precedence over that of the population. As the MAC worked to discipline municipal finances, they knew they were also dealing with an impoverished city, one which would have to be "cleaned up" before it could be marketed.

In 1973, this revival effort needed funding, while oil prices had risen enormously. Along with all the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia suddenly had tremendous wealth, and following some speculation that the US was going to invade Saudi Arabia's wells to

bring the oil prices back down, Saudi investors became involved in the New York investment banks. The backing was now available to turn New York City into the financial capital of the world. To further revive the economy, the Downtown Business Partnership was established by investment bankers and corporations to really sell the city, from its cultural institutions to its tourist attractions. The now-infamous "I 'heart' NY" logo was designed to seal the deal.

In order to handle problems still on the ground, from garbage collection to crime prevention, the Partnership was forced to deal with the functions of city government. At the same time, employment of public servants and their wages had been slashed, catalyzing police and fire unions to launch a counter-campaign, "Fear the City," seriously tarnishing the "I 'heart' NY" image and actually discouraging tourists from visiting. To recover their development vision, the Partnership rehired the union members in exchange for an end to their campaign efforts. The catch: they were mostly hired in Manhattan. The Bronx was plagued by fires. Queens accumulated uncollected garbage. Services were effectively sealed off within small privileged areas, made as safe and pleasant as possible, reoccupied bit by bit by financial interests. The city government refocused from social interests to financial interests, making central New York City alone an optimal place for investment.

The Long Road from the World Social Forums to NYC[3]

In 1994 a group of New Yorkers, some of which were homeless, many who relied on welfare, and others who were unemployed, came together to counter especially vicious attacks on the poor under the Giuliani administration. They founded Community Voices Heard (CVH) to organize, educate, and challenge the contemporary urban conditions they faced. Several staff and members of CVH attended a National Jobs with Justice Conference in Chicago where they met Diana Cohen, then with the Solidago Foundation, who introduced the group to the World Social Forums (WSF), being held in Porto Alegre. She alerted them to the fact that a group of funders were interested in supporting grassroots organizers from the USA, so that the struggle from within the "belly of the beast" was represented. Porto Alegre had been chosen as the site for the initial WSFs by French and Brazilian NGOs and movements, precisely because the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT: Workers Party) city administration was developing new kinds of participatory democracy, with a focus on social justice and inclusion – and specifically PB.

In 2002 a CVH delegation of four including Sondra Youdelman, then Director of Public Policy and Research, the Executive Director, and two Board members, participated in the second WSF in Porto Alegre. PB Workshops were conducted, and CVH was exposed to the process for the first time. Every year following, CVH

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3   The historical narrative of this section was constructed based on a series of interviews with members of Community Voices Heard and the Participatory Budgeting Project.

has sent representatives to the WSF encouraged by those who attended previously to find out more, excited about the idea of implementing a PB process in NYC. During the time that CVH was digesting these new possibilities, as they continued their advocacy work in empowerment and activism, Josh Lerner, involved in PB efforts in North America, and Mike Menser, of the CUNY Graduate Center, initiated a New York City PB campaign, collaborating with the Urban Justice Center (UJC) and the NYC Aids Housing Network. After a few meetings it never really came together, so Josh and Mike continued their efforts by coordinating two sessions on PB at the US Social Forum in 2007. Earlier in January of the same year, at the Right to the City Conference in LA, the Miami Workers Center, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (Los Angeles), and Tenants and Workers United (Northern Virginia) had convened over twenty grassroots organizations along with intellectuals, officially launching the Right to the City (RTTC) alliance, uniting their common struggles to create a "public space to fight neoliberalism and build an alternative for our cities." CVH soon became a core member of this new alliance. And RTTC was in fact one of the key organizers of the 2007 US Social Forum.

It was at this time that the housing bubble of the late 1990s and early 2000s, inflated by deregulation and Wall Street speculation, popped, leading to the stock market crisis of 2008 and provoking a largely global recession. In NYC, this led to further drastic cuts in City spending on education, transportation, social programs and all manner of basic services.

Just over a year after RTTC's official launch, in March 2008, Lerner connected with Laine Romero-Alston of the UJC who was helping to coordinate the RTTC New York City Chapter, to provide expertise regarding PB and participatory planning. Later that year, in December 2009, Lerner was asked to present about PB to the RTTC Alliance. He and Mesner presented as experts on PB at a day-long event of small panels initiating the RTTC-NYC Platform Development Process. It was here where they met Vincent Villano, staff member of RTTC-NYC as the Research and Policy Coordinator of one of their core members, CVH.

Villano had joined CVH in 2008 following Youdelman's promotion to Executive Director, and was currently working on a research project about the official resident participation system of NYC public housing. A month later, in April 2009, Villano contacted Lerner for information about PB in Toronto Community Housing, a process ongoing in Canada since 2001, as a best practice example for the report. In 2009, Lerner along with Gianpaolo Baiocchi of Brown University launched the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), an organization aimed at empowering community members by working with governments and civil society organizations to provide technical assistance that can help make PB possible. PBP worked with Chicago Alderman Joe Moore to initiate PB in his district in 2009, the first example of PB in the United States.

Villano's completed report, *Democracy (In)Action: How HUD, NYCHA and Official Structures Undermine Resident Participation in New York City Public Housing* (2010), was the first time CVH formally pushed for PB in NYC. It recommended that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) conduct a pilot PB project with Tenant Participation Activity (TPA) funds, allocated from the federal government to support resident participation within NYCHA. The TPA budget had been prone to past misuse, and only 14% of 1100 survey respondents were even aware of the fund's existence. After the report was published, the feasibility of this plan was further examined through a trip to Toronto in May 2010 to observe the process. CVH worked with Lerner to plan this opportunity for first hand observation, in which two CVH staff, Villano and Henry Serrano, and two CVH members, Keith Massey and Anne Washington, spent three days in Toronto watching the process unfold and speaking to participants and members of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). This trip allowed CVH to recognize some of the potential pitfalls of applying PB within the NYCHA system. Villano returned home with the conviction that a grassroots community organization like CVH would really have to be the cornerstone of the PB process in order for its values to be followed, and to benefit low-income communities and build power among them, a principle which has come to guide the first year of NYC PB.

A few months following CVH's Toronto trip, in September 2010, the PBP started working with Ayse Yonder and Eve Baron at the Pratt Institute in New York City to plan a public talk by Chicago Alderman Moore about his experience with PB. Lerner contacted CVH about this as well, and member Anne Washington, who had gone to Toronto with CVH, agreed to speak. From this point on, these two organizations collaborated in the ongoing efforts to bring PB to NYC. Once the event date was set at Pratt, Lerner and Mesner of PBP planned an additional talk at Brooklyn College. Both events took place in November 2010. PBP, Pratt, and Brooklyn College invited all 51 New York City Council Members (CMs) to attend and speak at both events. CVH helped encourage some of the CMs they had previous relationships with to attend.

CM Lander spoke at the Pratt event, which CM Mark-Viverito also attended, and CM Williams spoke at the Brooklyn College event. Williams was one of the first to step forward and commit to implementing PB in his district after he heard about it. CM Leticia James also attended the Pratt event and was interested, but ultimately decided to just observe PB's initial implementation in NYC. Finally, CM Lander, who was most active in these initial advocacy efforts of rallying other CMs, felt it was essential that this initiative be bi-partisan, and was able to engage Republican CM Eric Ulrich in the process, as the other three are Democrats.

Lerner continued to work with CM Lander's office to secure the commitment of members of the City Council for the initiative and get as many people involved as possible. On March 1, 2011 CM Mark-Viverito, CM Lander, CM Ulrich, and CM Dan

Garodnick co-sponsored a Council Briefing on PB, at which a total of 20 CM offices were represented. Later in March, four CM Offices committed to implementing PB in their district for the first year, including Mark-Viverito, Lander, Williams, and Ulrich and each agreed to pay around $5,000 from their FY12 discretionary budgets for the services offered by the PBP, becoming the lead technical assistance partner. In April 2011 the CMs agreed to work with CVH as the lead community engagement organization for the process.

Mark-Viverito of District 8 represents East Harlem and part of the Upper West Side in Manhattan, and a section of the Southern tip of the South Bronx. Lander of District 39 represents Park Slope and other neighborhoods in the western part of Brooklyn. Williams of District 45 represents Flatbush and Flatlands in another region of Brooklyn. Ulrich of District 32 represents the furthermost area of Queens, of which he allocated the peninsula known as the Far Rockaways for the pilot project. Each Council Member agreed to commit at least $1 million from their discretionary funds, which are spent on either expense projects (services), or capital projects (tangible "bricks and mortar" projects). The CMs collectively decided to use capital funds for the pilot year.

From May 2011 through June 2011 the PBP, CVH, and the CMs worked to assemble the Citywide Steering Committee (CSC). The CSC is composed of representatives from each CM's office, city-wide organizations working within five areas including good government, research, policy, community organizing, and community education, Community Boards from each district, and local Community-Based Organizations from each district. This included RTTC and UJC as well. The CSC is responsible for designing the basic process of PB in NYC and making major decisions during the implementation. Two co-chairs are responsible for administration, Villano of CVH as the liaison with community groups and Rachel Goodman, Lander's Chief of Staff, as liaison with the other CM offices. In July 2011 the CSC met at the CUNY Graduate Center at workshops to write the guidelines for the process.

The CSC held a series of workshops producing the *2011-2012 Handbook,* which is the guiding document for PB in NYC. The Handbook sets forth three core principles that the pilot project seeks to uphold: transparency, equality, and inclusion – reflecting the grassroots character of the Committee. In addition to the expectations set by these guidelines for the PB process to abide by, the workshop itself was a session of participatory decision-making. In a room with individuals from a myriad of neighborhoods and backgrounds, choices had to be made regarding an appropriate timeline, how responsibilities would be divided, and the requirements for those voting on project proposals at the final stage. On September 14, 2011 a press conference on the steps of City Hall formally announced the launch of PB in New York City.

Throughout October and early November, Neighborhood Assemblies were held in each district. Everyone who would consider themselves a stakeholder, anyone who cared about their district, was encouraged to come out and attend one of these meetings. In the first half of each meeting, a Power Point presentation explained PB and how it works in NYC, followed by a period of Q and A to clarify any confusion. In the second half, everyone split up into small groups to brainstorm and discuss issues the district faces, and how the funds allotted for PB for the year in question could address them. Meetings concluded with each thematic group presenting their top three proposals.

Nearly 250 participants who decided they wanted to remain engaged in the process and be part of its unfolding became budget delegates. Divided into thematic groups, they worked on all the ideas from the assemblies within their category from mid-November to February to turn these thoughts into concrete proposals. This required the delegates to research the feasibility limitations, meet with experts, conduct site visits, establish costs, and write up the final proposal themselves to present at a second round of neighborhood assemblies to their community for feedback. Finally in late March and early April, voting was held in each district to select the projects to be funded. Each district set up a series of voting stations over the period of a week. The projects with the highest number of votes were selected until the funds put aside for PB by each council member became exhausted. CM Mark-Viverito, CM Lander, and CM Williams each decided after the vote to put forward more than their initial commitment of $1 million, to enable more projects to be funded.

Throughout the process, the CSC met regularly and broke up into work groups to continue facilitation of the process, discussing and sharing progress reports on the various elements of the PB's practical components. The CSC members and the organizations they represented persistently pursued their respective parts of upholding the process, including responsibilities like research, materials, agenda setting, and governance. A critical part of the entire PB cycle was the intensive outreach conducted by community-based organizations in each district, both via the outreach work group of the CSC, and through the district committees (DCs) in each of the four districts. The DCs ensured that everything necessary to holding a successful meeting was in place, from securing a venue, to offering child care, to including food.

To raise awareness about PB and how to get involved, organizations posted and handed out flyers, went door to door, tabled, made phone calls, and particularly sought to mobilize the most marginalized members of their communities to participate in deciding the project priorities for their area. In preparing and facilitating the first year of PB in NYC much time and energy went into the basic implementation of the process, as its preparation occurred in a very short time span, but organizations like CVH plan to put more resources towards outreach for the next PB cycle. At the time of writing it is likely that several more Council

Members will adopt the PB for the next budget cycle, following intensive outreach by CVH and other groups.

Challenging the Dominant Development Model of NYC

In NYC, movements and activists brought the concept of PB from the WSF and convinced sympathetic politicians to adopt this form of participatory decision-making, transforming the relationships between elected officials and citizens in four Council Districts. The CMs had never heard of PB before being approached by community-based organizations. This is in contrast to how PB has been implemented in much of the rest of the world. Most PB initiatives have been developed and implemented by city administrators, from the top down — sometimes responding to, and sometimes working against more organic organization in the cities. In Porto Alegre, where PB was first developed as Brazil was transitioning from a military government, a socialist-led city administration implemented PB in response to demands from highly organized neighborhood groups for greater participation in governance. PB became such a core part of urban governance in Porto Alegre, that when a center-Right coalition came to power in 2004, they continued the PB process. The city administration of Seville, Spain implemented PB at the municipal level in 2003, as a way to increase transparency and build closer relationships with citizens. Seville has become a global reference for PB initiatives. Neighborhood groups in Seville initially opposed the PB, fearing that the process would undermine their privileged communication with City officials. In Cordoba, a similar PB initiative failed, largely due to resistance led by neighborhood groups.

We have argued above that while the PB process in its most elementary form is a reallocation of municipal money by residents through participatory deliberation and voting, this basic process can become a very different political project depending on the city, its history and its wider relationships with politics and capitalism. The way participatory budgets are designed and implemented depends on how PB engages the general imagination of development for a particular city. NYC has long been a global manufacturing and financial center, and has historically developed an imagination of being "at the center of the world," betrayed by popularly held notions such as NYC being the "world's greatest city." This popular imagination, which also defines much of the NYC administration's political rhetoric, may be understood as being embedded within and defined by the historic role of NYC as the business center of the US as it rose to become the dominant global power, beginning in the late 19th century. However, the 1970s marked a crisis with the core capitalist countries experiencing severe stagflation, a crisis in the post WWII monetary system based on the US dollar, exacerbated by the oil crisis, which ultimately led to a significant proportion of manufacturing being relocated to the Global South. NYC experienced the crisis through rising

poverty, a loss of the middle class (through impoverishment and through suburbanization), and a crisis of profit for the wealthy.

Following the 1970s crisis, economic and political forces in the Global North sought to reclaim (and retain) power through consolidating the direction and flow of global finance capital, and NYC was a key site in this project. Increasingly the state (and its funds) became implicated within this project of reclaiming economic power that had been lost in the 1970s, in a project that institutionalized a new configuration of state- capital relations under the neoliberal project from the 1980's. This project also became central to NYC's urban imagination as its primary political and economic task, eclipsing all other populations and plans deemed inconsequential to the new targets of developmental strategy.

This restructuring of NYC and the resulting polarization pitted two extreme visions of governance against each other, the capitalist state (supporting business, especially finance capital to consolidate NYC's position as the center of the world's financial capital) versus the welfare state (supporting the city's poor and their needs without any conceivable financial gain). Needless to say this created an artificial split in the City's perception of the ideal form of public policy, for the administration was inherently value- laden in favor of a capitalist state, within a system of logic where there "was no alternative". Without the middle class, the wealthy were able to project their vision for Wall Street as the project for the entire city.

The Left was also declining more generally during this period of time, and in NYC the power of neighborhood community-based organizations which had exercised considerable influence in the 1960s with prominent voices such as that of Jane Jacobs (Greenwich Village), who encouraged a grassroots vision for the City, radically differed from the determinist Grand Plans that the likes of Robert Moses had institutionalized. However, by the mid 1990s community-based organizations were reemerging in resistance to the neoliberal transformation of NYC, mirroring a wider trend of countermovement rising in places where neoliberal governance had been implemented. CVH was organized in Harlem at this time through the work of those marginalized by the City's project, in opposition to its detrimental effects on their population.

The crisis of 2007-2008 led to the toppling of core financial institutions, almost falling over each other like dominoes in a very small space in lower Manhattan, and the state, whose role had been internalized into capitalist workings since the 1980s, had to come out publicly to bail out Wall Street. In the larger world economy, global imaginations regarding finance capital and state-capital relations were deeply questioned after many years. For NYC, it meant that the core of what had been defined as the City's project for over three decades was deeply shaken, and segments of the city administration became open to alternate imaginations, as NYC's political project as a city suddenly came up for critique.

The role of the state was again questioned: should public funds be used to bail out banks or can these funds serve other purposes? The crisis of Wall Street created an ideological public space to constructively criticize the project of neoliberal governance, not only on a wider scale, but in terms of NYC's specific authority-structures. The consolidation of the RTTC alliance affirms the city as a site of claim making, as social movements like Occupy Wall Street have come to question the role of the state in privileging the interests of finance capital. It is amidst this context of resisting and questioning the neoliberal project of NYC in which we argue that grassroots community organizations, in concert with local progressive politicians, are using PB to challenge the dominant development model of the City itself.

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Struggling to unite: the rise and fall of one university movement in Poland[1]

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Picture: Dominik Krzyminski

Abstract

The recent wave of student protests in Europe, which gained momentum in 2008, has had some impact on appearance of a number of Polish student movements, such as one movement in Gdańsk, called OKUPÉ – Open Committee for Liberation of the Educational Space. Using international student networks as background for our analysis, we focus on OKUPÉ, which we were participants of. The movement had an active beginning and managed to gather a considerable number of people demanding changes at

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[1] Some ideas from this article were presented by the authors at the XVII World Congress of Sociology (16.07.2010) under the title "Struggling to get united. A contemporary student movement in Poland as a part of international networks."

the university, including relations of power, surveillance policy, equality issues, participation in decision-making processes and spatial planing at the new campus.

However, the promising beginning has not yet led to a continuous mobilisation and the movement had to face internal conflicts, burning out of the members, fragmentation of interest and problems with decision-making and communication. The methods of decision-making brought from other European movements have not worked properly in the local context. In this paper we are going to describe the rise and fall of OKUPÉ, giving special emphasis to the possible reasons for the latter. We are arguing that in the specific context of academia, where conflicts may be perceived as beneficial for its members, balance – that is, avoiding opponents and meeting friends – is often not sought, which suggests that balance theory may not have an explanatory power in this particular case.

Introduction

Recent years have been very active for student movements in Europe. Many universities have been occupied and numerous student movements appeared as response to the Bologna Process and reforms commercialising higher education (Ovetz 1996, Baćević 2010). Universities have gone through neo-liberal changes and student social movements should be analysed in relation to the organisational structure of universities within which they operate. At the same time, it has been argued that contemporary students identify with broader social issues, because higher education has become a target for widespread austerity measures (Sotiris 2010, Younis 2011, Hopkins Todd 2011) and because students have lost their special "elite" status and have more in common with the rest of society (Zugman 2005).

Still, such an explanation of student activism, that is, through showing their interests, in accordance with the rational choice theory, cannot alone explain changes in students' involvement in activism, so there have been some attempts to improve the theory, e.g. by treating activism as a learning process, where individual interests change through interactions (Kim Bearman 1997). There is also a growing interest in rituals (Oxlund 2010) and the role of emotions in student activism (Yang 2005, Wettergren 2009). Still, mostly positive, if not euphoric emotional events have been analysed, while as we will argue, negative emotions appearing in movements also shape them and are crucial in analysing their life-cycle.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss a movement formed at the University of Gdańsk in Poland, called OKUPÉ (Otwarty Komitet Uwalniania Przestrzeni Edukacyjnych – Open Committee for the Liberation of Educational Spaces). The movement could be treated as a part of the International Student Movement against commercialisation of education, but it has also had its distinct characteristics, goals, mobilisation frames, and outcomes. It consisted mostly of PhD students, but also of other groups at the university and in the local

community. In this paper we are going to show OKUPÉ in a global and national context and then describe it in more details, analysing also its life-cycle from mobilization to its current latency state. We are going to focus on the reasons for the group's formation, as well as on the possible reasons for the current lack of activity. We hope that by doing this we can contribute not only to academic knowledge about social movements, but we can also show potential pitfalls to other social movements, particularly university movements.

Student movements in Poland

Researchers (Piotrowski 2009, Rose-Ackerman 2005, Petrova and Tarrow 2007) have been pointing to a low level of engagement in contentious politics in Poland, as well as in other Central and Eastern European countries. This should not be mistaken for the development of the third sector, with many NGOs being established and building alliances with each other (Petrova and Tarrow 2007). Here, we are basing on Żuk's (2001) differentiation between the third sector, that is, organisations with a narrow scope of interest, which work as a part of the existing political system, usually as NGOs; and the fourth sector, that is, social movements that have a broader scope of interest and want to "change the rules of the game" (Żuk 2001, 119). This difference was considered crucial by social movement participants, interviewed by Żuk (2001) and Piotrowski (2009), even though attitudes to both sectors varied.

The low level of engagement in protests and activism in Poland has been attributed to several factors. One of them is the high precarity of the labour market, low social security and low salaries, which makes young people work long hours and prevents them from engaging time in social movements (Rose-Ackerman 2005, Żakowski 2011). In the case of students, spending much time working is especially characteristic for Poland, where students who do not rely on their family support spend the highest in the EU number of hours working, and the overall students' time budget (studying plus working hours) is particularly high (Orr Gwosć Netz 2011). Another factor is the low public support for violent protests – as Rose-Ackerman puts it "most people in Central Europe would never join an unlawful strike or occupy a building" (2005, 27). This low support for contentious politics can also be connected with a generational shift that happened in social movements in Poland after 1989, which resulted in considering protests as something for the rebellious youth. Piotrowski describes it in the following way:

> "[B]ecause the new sphere [of activism] was created mostly by young people, the size of it was much smaller, especially after the transformation, when many former dissidents became the new elites or moved to businesses. This kind of generational gap on the one hand stigmatizes the alternative movement as connected to youth (sub)culture, and on the other hand might result in its smaller (compared to Western countries) size. Also, with the shift of the elites, many parts of the society became obsolete for the new elites, or at least they lost their representation, with the best examples of the workers and Solidarność movement. With 'cultural anticommunism' dominating the mainstream

political discourse, the rise of the left-leaning groups was difficult, so some parts of these abandoned groups were 'managed' by the radical right and populist parties and groups." (2009, 186)

Piotrowski points here to another very important factor, that is, condemnation of all leftist ideas as "socialist" or "communist" in the mainstream discourse. Żakowski (2011) has also argued that most members of the Polish society compare the current situation only with the communist past, and are, therefore, relatively content with it. Leftist movements are, thus, portrayed as a threat of coming back to the grim communist times.

Furthermore, researchers have also pointed to the disappointment of Polish citizens with parliamentary politics, resulting not in appearance of social movements leading to political change, but — on the contrary — to withdrawal from the public life and all political activity (Rose-Ackerman 2005, Zielińska 2012).

Still, even with all these above mentioned factors in mind, one will notice that political protests do happen in Poland. Recently (early 2012) mass demonstrations united Poles from a broad political spectrum against the ACTA agreement[2] which could potentially limit one's ability to download music and videos from the Internet. The frame of the protest, that is, addressing potential limitations to freedom, was well-rooted in the anti-communist past, and thus, aligned with right-wing movements, and at the same time it was in accordance with more anarchistic views. This coalition of enemies was only possible due to the limited demands. Thus, the protest did not connect to other social issues (Bendyk 2012). Such a situation of seeking broad alliances was initially present in the student movement we are going to describe and, arguably, has become the reason for its downfall.

When we look historically at student protests in Poland, it is important to mention student protests in March 1968, which were brutally suppressed, causing silencing of students for many years (Górski 2009). In terms of student organisations that operated before 1989, two main ones need to be noticed. One of them was ZSP (Association of Polish Students), which started in the 1950's, and worked between 1973 and 1982 with their name changed to SZSP, that is, the Socialist Association of Polish Students (Rose-Ackerman 2005). The organisation was closely linked to the political regime and membership in it gave tangible benefits to students, so it was very far from being a social movement. The other organisation, NZS (Independent Students' Association), was a part of the political opposition. Rose-Ackerman summarises its beginning in the following way:

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[2] The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement [ACTA] is a controversial multinational treaty concerning intellectual property rights.

"[NZS] began as a mass movement among students in September 1980 just after the strikes in Gdańsk. It was legalized in February 1981 after some strikes by students. According to Witold Repetowicz, a leader in the 1990s, some of the original leaders of NZS were also low-level members of ZSP. NZS grew out of earlier free student associations, some connected with Solidarity. For example, in Kraków there was a Student Committee of Solidarity in the second half of the 1970s, and in 1979 a national group existed called the Movement of Young Poland (Ruch Młodej Polski). In the fall of 1980, students lined up to join the organization; at that time, it was a true mass movement that supported the ideals of Solidarity without a formal association. Nevertheless, Repetowicz points out that even at that early time it struggled over whether to be a students' labor union or a more broadly political organization." (197)

Even though NZS could be called a mass student movement, Żuk argues that more radically oriented cultural and political activists in the 1990's perceived it as an example of canalising resistance, and, thus, as a negative point of reference (2001). As a result, "Western" movements, especially French ones, became a model for Polish radical movements of the 1990's, and not Polish movements from before 1989 (Żuk 2001). Both ZSP and NSZ have lost most of their support after 1989 and are now involved mostly with cultural activities, while some individuals use membership in these organisations as a stepping stone toward a political career (Rose-Ackerman 2005, ZSP 12.05.2010).

As Gill and DeFronzo (2009) indicate, referring to Nella Van Dyke's research, one factor determining appearance of student protests is tradition of political activism at a particular university, but on the condition that such activism subculture was maintained and could facilitate new outbreaks of resistance. After 1989, student movements were almost non-existent in Poland (Żuk 2001), for reasons described before, and even the few ones that existed, such as the one we will analyse in this paper, did not refer to traditions from 1980's, even though its participants had been aware of them, some had even done research in this field. However, the tradition of Solidarity was not maintained and did not change into contemporary student activism. One explanation of why it was so, is the shift of many former dissidents into elites (Piotrowski 2009). Another is that, according to David Ost (2007) and Żuk (2001), Solidarity moved from the class discourse into identity issues – economic conflicts were transformed into conflicts on who is "a real member of the community" and previous leaders of the Solidarity movement (now in the establishment) strongly opposed the class politics (Ost 2007, 378).

Such an approach could make it difficult to mobilise new generations of students, especially when the contemporary student movements are becoming "university movements", which are built around work issues, with precariat emerging as a new class. Moreover, student movements being part or using repertoire of "alternative culture" (streetart, flashmobs etc.), similarly as in 1960s (Hanna 2008), risk being rejected because of broadened distance to older generations and "serious" groups of society – including former social movement members. To sum up, the Solidarity tradition, together with students' protest of 1980s in Gdańsk, were transformed into a petrified symbol, which is celebrated in rituals of "high culture of protest", as we call it, that is, through official galas

Interface: a journal for and about social movements   *Article*
Volume 4 (1): 327 - 359 (May 2012)   *Prusinowska, Kowzan, Zielińska,*
      Struggling to unite

and formal meetings with the authorities, rather than through a continuous struggle. Thus, even in Gdańsk, their legend has been "fossilized", that is, put into history coursebooks and safely celebrated as a part of local history, rather than a source of inspiration.

Methodological framework

The authors of this paper were members[3] and co-founders of the movement in Gdańsk. We have engaged a lot of time and emotions into the movement and, thus, we are now facing a difficult task of trying to look at it from a distance and evaluate our actions. The perspective from which this paper was prepared joins our experience as activists and researchers. However, the research was not planned at the beginning of the movement. Although we were engaged, together with other members, in constant discussions and informal evaluations of OKUPÉ's activity, there had been no attempt to analyse it in a broader and more rigid academic way and share this analysis with external researchers and activists.

Our involvement in the movement's activity resulted in feelings of trauma and unwillingness to continue actions, and this feeling was shared by some other members as well (more in: Zielińska, Kowzan, Prusinowska 2011). Therefore, after not being active in the movement for a number of months, we decided that an analysis of what had happened and what went wrong, could be both therapeutic for its members and useful for avoiding the same mistakes in the future.

The article will be based on our observation and a content analysis of computer-mediated communication via OKUPÉ's mailing list. At the same time, in the analysis and interpretation of the movement, we will be using both our own post-factum considerations, and the analysis provided by other members in previous discussions within the movement. We found that it is almost impossible to distinguish the two from each other, since discussions have shaped our current understanding of the movement. Thus, OKUPÉ's collective inquires will not only be analysed in this text, but they will also be a tool of this analysis.

Our research methodology is action research with its potentially subversive presumption that researchers can be deeply involved and, thus, facilitate social change, since the whole process of our research intersects "between investigation and political action" (Morell 2009, 21). Although we entered the movement first and foremost as activists, later we have interwoven our experience of being involved in the movement with theoretical reflection. It is our hope that this text balances both activist approach and the aforementioned theoretical perspectives.

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[3] In this article we will use the word "member" as a synonym of "participant", even though there was no official membership in the movement and no formal structure. People who joined the mailing list will be considered members in this article.

The International Student Movement

From the historical perspective, international networks were present in the student movements of the 1960s and they were an essential factor supporting mobilisation (Klimke and Scharloth 2008). In this respect, OKUPÉ can be treated as a part of an initiative called the International Student Movement (ISM). ISM has been formed as an independent platform uniting groups struggling for free and emancipatory education. OKUPÉ's participation in ISM was neither tight nor permanent, but as in the case of the 1968 movements' transnational network, it ensured "rapid spread and mixture of new forms and tactics of protest [and] formed a widespread resource for mobilization" (Klimke and Scharloth 2008, 5). In fact, this was one of the reasons for joining ISM, considering scarcity of visible student protests at the University of Gdańsk and in Poland as a whole. By joining ISM, OKUPÉ could frame its actions as a part of a global struggle.

The first big event of the ISM network – "International Day of Action against the Commercialization of Education" (5/11/2008) was a series of coordinated protests in over 25 countries around the world (ISM 2008). Although Poland was not among these countries, information about ISM reached Polish activists and some groups were formed, as we will describe later.

The second wave of ISM's protests was characterised by massive demonstrations and occupations (especially in Spain, Germany, Croatia and the USA). The choice of methods (e.g. occupations of university parliaments and boards' meetings) indicates problems with democratic procedures at universities – there had been no space for students' participation in decision-making processes. The issue of democratisation of university and society has been one of the demands, just like in protests of 1968 (Gassert 2008). At the same time, methods used against students, including violent police repressions of many groups (ISM 2009a), strengthened international support for ISM initiatives.

The main goal of the international network was to support groups involved in it, by spreading information about the protests (as the information was often marginalized, misrepresented or even omitted in the mainstream media) and encouraging the international community to unite, e.g., to send solidarity letters or to plan future actions together.

Student movement initiatives were diverse; they included occupations of universities in e.g. Austria, Germany and Spain. In Croatia the Independent Student Initiative for the Right to Free Education organized a peaceful occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy – this protest spread to other cities, lasted for 35 days and gained support from the international community (e.g. through an online petition), including Noam Chomsky, Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler (OKUPÉ, 3.05.2009). The educational context of this protest is especially visible, as students have organized alternative lectures, film screenings and workshops instead of formal classes (ISM 2009).

The origins of OKUPÉ

In Polish university cities, such as Gdańsk and Wrocław, activists involved in other social movements heard about ISM and the struggle in other countries, but there was no organisation oriented towards change in the educational system and institutions ready to join the international protests. To illustrate the situation we can refer to a radio interview with activists from Wrocław – one of them stated that he was waiting for a group to start "a branch" in Poland, but as no such thing had happened, he started to organise a new group for this purpose (Altergodzina, 06.05.2009). A similar process of using the political opportunity created by ISM took place in Gdańsk. Although the situation of higher education was not the same in Poland and in other countries (no reform was announced in Poland at that time), activists felt that the international attention and cooperation could help changing the existing conditions of studying and working at universities.

At the University of Gdańsk the resistance was triggered by a number of issues, such as lack of scholarships for PhD students, who were the main initiators of the movement. Due to insufficient information at the application process, many students learned that there were no scholarships only after they had been accepted to the programme. Their disappointment and feeling of deprivation was one of the main reasons for starting the movement and mobilising academia to act for change. In other words, the starting point for this movement in Gdansk was a particular interest of one group pointing at deteriorating conditions of doing research at the university, which formed a platform for collecting other grievances – from students, staff and even graduates.

During conversations between activists in Gdańsk, it was decided that there was a need for an active and open organisation empowering students' voices and articulating grievances, in particular against the security policy at the university (an increasing number of cameras inside buildings, fencing of the previously open campus, and security guards controlling everybody who entered the library) and lack of satisfactory terms of student participation in decision-making processes. The name was chosen before the meeting, during a process of consensus decision-making among PhD students and it was supposed to both convey the message about a need to liberate educational spaces (from corporations, surveillance etc.), but also – due to the sound of the contraction – to trigger occupations[4], which were a common ISM tactic in Europe at this time.

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[4] Ironically, the most accurate Polish translation of the word "occupations" (that is, reflecting its double meaning: a job and taking control) is "zajęcia", which in fact is the same term used for describing usual lectures and daily courses at the university.

Picture: Małgorzata Zielinska

A recently built fence around the university was chosen to be the most important and urgent issue, as it meant for OKUPÉ's members not only a practical problem of crossing the university's territory, but also a symbolic closing of the university for outsiders and joining the growing number of gated communities. Spontaneously, the demand to liberate the university space (from the fence and in general) — started to be treated as an "empty signifier", joining demands of different groups into one nodal point (Laclau 2005) and, thus, helping to build a chain of equivalence between particular interests, in Laclau's words, or, to put it bluntly, a collection of equivalent demands. Laclau's theory explains how different social movements with a variety of demands can build hegemony by establishing one demand, as long as it has a component abstract enough to represent every single demand. The theory was in use for the first time three days after the first open meeting of OKUPÉ. Even though it was employed by one activist to understand the organisation itself, it helped to conceptualise the issue of the fence later.

Our chain of equivalence started to be negotiated after a call for the first meeting in form of a poster addressing two problems: of the fence and of the library, and suggesting (by asking to bring sheets for banners) that action should be taken. The call was hung on noticeboards at the university. At the first meeting, on March 11, 2009, around 50 people came. The issues of the fence

and the library control were widely recognised as a symptom of the university's condition and there was a heated discussion about everything else that should be changed at the university. Problems mentioned included the organizational structure, student-teacher relations, gender discrimination, as well as the above mentioned security measures at the university.

What is interesting, the Bologna Process, which was criticized in most other European movements, was not of major concern for OKUPÉ (although there were some attempts to utilise this frame in the Gdańsk movement), since it had different consequences for Poland than for other countries – it brought more international mobility and not fees, which had already been there for some students (at private universities or for part-time students; Kowzan 2009). Only while trying to unite with ISM, did OKUPÉ try to extend its frames and focused on the commercialisation of education and the new higher education reform plans of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. These were published shortly after the formation of OKUPÉ and just before the international "Reclaim your Education – Global Week of Action" (20-29/4/2009), which groups from Polish universities, including OKUPÉ decided to join. In Gdańsk, the main actions during that week were an open discussion, a demonstration during the Minister's visit and producing T-shirts related to our claims.

Student Soviets or Student Unions - why had Polish universities been free from activism?

It has been argued that "the formal aspect of student representation [in higher education governance] has largely been settled" (Bergan 2003, 4) in Europe and it can be seen as an outcome of the student revolt of 1968. Student unions, which in many countries are often considered an obstacle for student political activity (since they are more occupied with business than political representation of interests; Swain 2011), in Poland do not actually exist, which is – paradoxically – the basic obstacle for students' independent political activity as well. In order to show why the grievances in Gdańsk were not addressed to official democratically chosen decision-making bodies, it is essential to mention characteristics of the Polish university self-government system.

Firstly, student self-government includes all bachelor and master level students, while PhD students form a separate body. Formally, both bodies enjoy some level of autonomy within the university. Secondly, in Poland, student councils (elected representation of student self-government, i.e., of all students at the university), whose name refers to "soviets", are not unions, that is, they are not formally acknowledged organisations with membership open to all students, with independent budget based on membership fees. Moreover, councils do not represent other student organisations and have limited autonomy and influence. Additionally, there is no possibility for students at any level of education to form separate trade unions, as the Ministry of Science and Higher Education stated in response to our PhD Student Council's inquiry.

Therefore, there are formal features which need to be taken into account when analysing Polish student movements, such as the fact that all the funding of their official representation (councils) depends on the university administration. There is no membership fee for students and, as a result, neither student nor PhD student councils have independent resources. Thus, students in Poland usually do not have their own media on campuses and in case of protests, there are no "student resources" to use or claim back from unions. Such resources could be a good starting point for any student movement, as even the cost of printing some posters may be quite an obstacle when no money has been collected. The councils themselves are elements of formal administration with particular set of competencies and they are bound by administrative procedures. They do not control any institutions strategically important for students, such as bookshops, cafeterias, housing, printing facilities etc. The main field of councils' activity is production of documents — applications, proposals, opinions — and sending representatives to collective bodies of university administration (Kowzan and Krzymiński 2011). Therefore, they are rarely perceived as an effective body for dealing with problematic issues or for taking decisive actions. Moreover, the paradigm of student politics all over Europe is to avoid conflicts, and to keep contentious social issues away from the campuses (Bergan 2003).

What is more, at the University of Gdańsk, and in other European universities, student councils tend not to attract much attention. Issues concerning individual campuses shape the field of students' political battles, which, together with the growing temporality of students' stay at these places, may explain why participation in student election is low in Europe, i.e. far less than half of student population choose their representatives (Bergan 2003, Klemenčič 2011). A measurable index of students' (non)involvement and, subsequently, the lack of legitimisation for councils, is the attendance rate in student councils elections. In 2010 at the Faculty of Languages (where recruitment limit for PhD studies that year was 80 people; Kowzan and Krzymiński 2011) only two PhD students voted in the election to the Faculty PhD Student Council. As far as BA and MA students are concerned, a survey conducted in 2009 showed that only 13% of those questioned have participated in election that year or the year before (dlaStudenta.pl 2009). Data presented here apply to elections conducted after the formation of OKUPÉ, however, as they reflect a general situation — we use them to sketch the background in which our group had been formed.

To summarize, neither the PhD Student Council nor BA and MA student councils were structures which could have enabled activists to mobilize resources other than provided by the administration or the university community in general. Nevertheless, thanks to the PhD Student Council at the Faculty of Social Sciences', some improvements were introduced, for example doctoral scholarships. This was done in cooperation with OKUPÉ - one

organisation provided the official means of pressure on the authorities, while the other escalated the conflict and forced authorities to some reaction.[5]

Demographics of the movement

As it has already been mentioned, student protests in Poland after the political and economic transformations have been almost non-existent (Żuk 2001). There may be many reasons to this, such as lack of time due to working apart of studying. What is more, following the Bologna Process, the previously five-year studies in Poland have been divided into three-year Bachelor studies and two-year Master studies. Therefore, students spend relatively less time at the university and their willingness to invest time in its change might decrease. Students who spend the longest time – four years and more – at the university, are PhD students. Also this group experiences the strongest relative deprivation comparing to the previous way of doing a PhD, that is, being employed at the university. Nowadays, many PhD students in Poland do not receive any scholarship or any form of payment for their research (Kaczmar 2009, SDUW 2009). Most of them also do not have the opportunity to earn by teaching at the university, while many are told to teach there for free.

 It is therefore probably not surprising that PhD students formed a big part of both OKUPÉ and other student movements in Poland in 2009 (though OKUPÉ consisted also of BA and Master students, as well as academic teachers and some graduates of the university). Interestingly, some Polish activists have applied to PhD studies after being their involvement in OKUPÉ and other Polish movements. What is more, PhD students in Poland are generally in the same age as students of the last years of studies in Germany, where they tend to "graduate in their late twenties" (Morgan 2009). This may also explain the movement's composition in Poland.

Thinking about what activists at universities in Gdańsk and across Poland have in common, we found that there is a noticeable number of former Erasmus exchange students among them, unlike general numbers of graduates with this experience – less than 4% (EC 2010). During discussions about university reforms, these students often referred to other European countries (mainly Scandinavian ones) as examples, whereas administration officers referred only to policies implemented by the University of Warsaw or American universities.

In terms of gender, the composition of the movement was rather equal and both women and men were active during discussions. The majority of OKUPÉ's activists were associated with social sciences, but it is worth noticing that in other cities in Poland, PhD students from natural sciences appeared to be more radical (Compare: Kaczmar 2009). Also, the main actors in Polish movements

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[5] Such utilisation of the PhD student council in order to support a non-formal organisation and its more radical actions bears some resemblance to the Situationist Interantional's [SI] history (Hecken and Grzenia, 2008). References to SI and taking over the councils with their resources made even an inside joke in OKUPÉ.

were students enrolled in full-time programmes at public universities and not the ones who needed to pay for their studies (weekend students and students at private higher education institutions). It is difficult to say exactly why it was so, but possible explanations include less spare time – as such students would often work during the week and study from Friday to Sunday – and being more accustomed to treating education not as a common good but as a service similar to other services one needs to pay for. Using Albert Hirschman's theory of exit and voice (1970) we can also assume that in the market logic introduced by university fees, it is more natural to exit an institution, if one is not satisfied with it, than to speak out and try to change it.

The structure of the movement

In contrast to mass student movements from the 20th century, contemporary social movements at universities try to organise themselves in a leaderless way, often inspired by the Zapatista movement (Zugman 2005, Juris and Pleyers 2009), which makes them more immune to co-optation of their members by political parties (della Porta Diani 1999, Johnston 2010). Also the movement in Gdańsk was based on the idea of horizontalism, consensus decision-making, together with forming working groups for particular issues. Two of the co-founders had taken part in consensus decision-making during European activist camps – called Ecotopia. The process seemed to them to work very well for big groups and, therefore, was introduced as a way of decision-making for OKUPÉ.

Thus, this intentional act of "borrowing" the idea of consensus can serve as an example of a frame diffusion process. The frame of consensus was not tailored to fit the host culture, because it was not considered culture-dependent, since it seemed to work well on the international level. Also sign language and a facilitation method learned at the camps were to be used at bigger meetings. It was also decided that every issue which members found important to focus on, would be dealt with by a separate working group, consisting of those interested in this particular problem. After the first meeting, five groups focusing on particular issues were formed, along with six other groups focusing more on their preferred working methods, e.g. a graphic group or a filming group. It was also suggested that between meetings everything would be decided at an online mailing list. It appeared later that big group meetings were rare (only two), working group meetings did not necessarily bring their findings back to the rest of the group, while the mailing list was the main arena for decision-making.

OKUPÉ also faced problems with finding local political alliances. Due to the group's diverse goals and ideological backgrounds, finding an alliance acceptable for all members was problematic, and as a result only two actions were openly conducted in cooperation with other organizations, such as one with a local branch of a country-wide leftist organisation, Krytyka Polityczna.

OKUPÉ's actions

During the first months (March-May 2009) many single actions were taken, some resulted in success, some in awakening public discussions, while some did not result in any significant or anticipated changes. Besides action at the university or in the public, such as demonstrations, flash mobs, happenings and petitions, as well as negotiations with authorities, a lot of effort was also devoted to researching the situation — finding out what students and the local community felt about particular problems (by surveys, interviews, films and studying fora), studying possibilities for change (such as a survey among library staff), as well as reasons for particular decisions (about the fence, surveillance cameras, etc.) and possibilities of support from the university staff. The latter was an effort to "study up" (Latour 2005, 98), that is, to produce knowledge about academia, about actions of people with "cultural capital" much higher than ours, which is quite a unique situation in social sciences, though common for collective action research exploring their own territory (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias 2007, 113). The process was collective and involved many movement's participants. Some did their own research and shared it at the mailing list, others went in groups to do interviews.

It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss and evaluate all the actions, thus we are presenting a table with a brief description of main actions.

Issue	Actions	Results
Fencing the previously open campus	an open letter to the rector + a discussion panel + a clandestine direct action + a film + interviews in the media	no changes with the fence; discussion at the university and in media
Police-like **control** in the library	research + petition + meetings with the administration	some changes introduced by the administration
Lack of **scholarships** for PhD students	a flash mob + T-shirts with slogans + letters from the PhD student council to the dean	a growing number of yearly scholarships for PhD students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, granted based on performance.

Cameras at the university and over-reactive university police	fake cameras installed	no changes, minor repressions of the members of the movement
New reforms — growing **commercialisation** of public universities	demonstrations, banners, discussions, T-shirts with slogans	difficult to evaluate
Solidarity with other movements	solidarity letters + meetings/conferences + coordinated film screenings	some degree of unity, an attempt to form a new organization on the national level
Cars parked on the grass and sidewalks at the campus	discussion with the rector	university guards dealing with the problem
Autonomy of the university vs. police control at the campus	letter to the rector, legal research, individual interventions (asking police officers to leave the campus)	more awareness among activists about the autonomy at the university

Table 1, OKUPÉ's actions. Own elaboration

During the summer holidays of 2009 OKUPÉ's members travelled and seized to be active. A couple of activists went to study or work abroad and did not come back after the holidays. One of the attempts to overcome the "holiday crisis" was a project initially called The National Education Congress (Narodowy Kongres Edukacji), suggested by a group of members. The idea behind it was to use a rule from the Polish Constitution stating that "Supreme power in the Republic of Poland shall be vested in the Nation" (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997) in defense of free education for all, in form of a congress consisting of delegates from the whole country, However, the idea and it's scope did not gain support from other members of OKUPÉ. The most heated discussion was about the name of the project — the National Education Congress — which introduced a narrow ethnic perspective[6] in the eyes of many members.

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[6]The understanding of the word nation in Polish differs from its English or French understanding. Due to the partitions of the country in the 19th century, the meaning of the word

The consensus decision-making was a long process , and it resulted in a new name — The Common Education Congress (Powszechny Kongres Edukacji). But as the conflict revealed big differences in understanding ethnic diversity, which constituted a strong part of some members' ideology and identity, there was no will to cooperate in this project, and the will to cooperate in other actions decreased. Although it was proposed that the initiators would carry it out on their own, other members did not want the name of OKUPÉ to be associated with it.

The process of monitoring changes at the university continued, but mostly in form of informing one another about them. There were also other actions in 2010 and 2011, but they were sporadic or undertaken by individuals who used the name of the movement without asking for other activists' consent. In 2011, after a long period of latency, OKUPÉ's online action (a Facebook event) attracted attention of many students and the local media. However, even though some members opted for broadening the actions and organising a series of 'real-life' events, this did not gain enough support or enthusiasm in the group and no other action followed.

The fall of the movement

In the beginning, the movement in Gdańsk had approximately 50 members at the mailing list. In April 2011, 37 people were still there. The decrease in numbers is not significant but some of the most active members including those who were focused mostly on feminist issues, left the group or stayed only as observers. Most of the people who left were dissatisfied with the discussion online, which included aggressive comments, sarcasm and many conflicts about the goals of OKUPÉ.

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shifted from "the citizens of the state" to people of ethnic Polish origin, speaking the same language. Nowadays, using this word may suggest exclusion of ethnic and national minorities living in Poland.
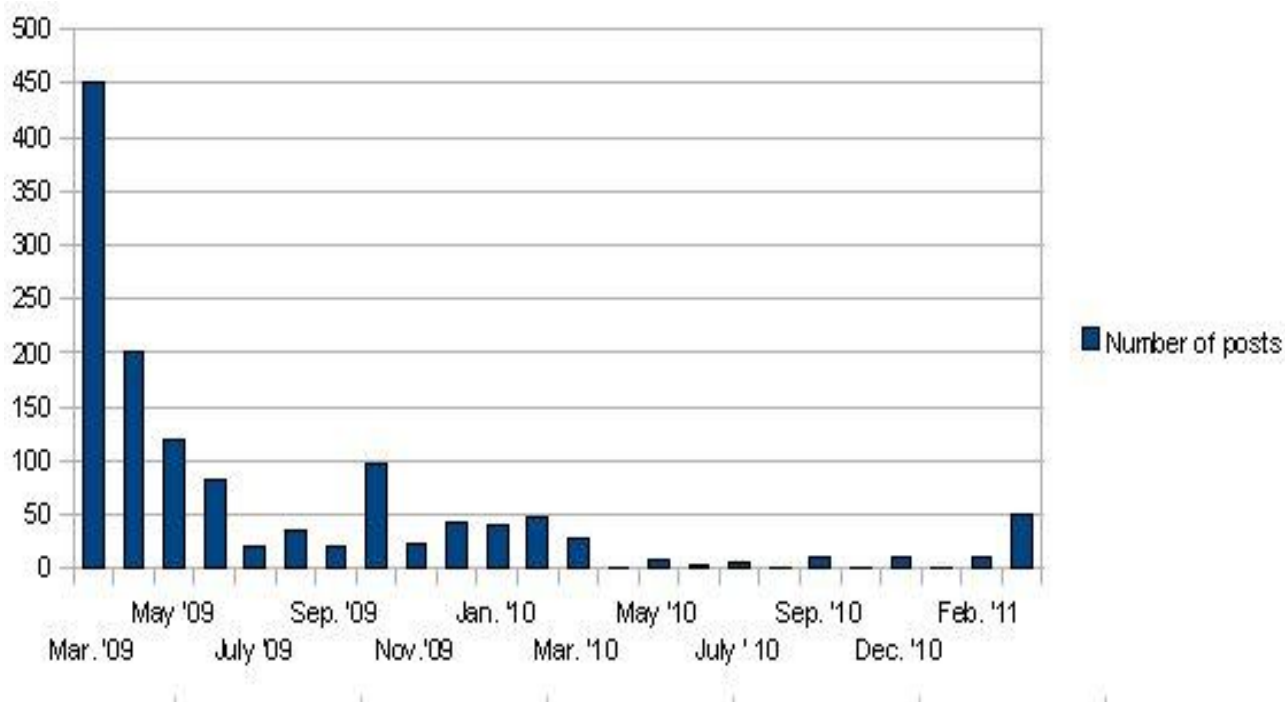
Graph 1, Number of posts per month in the OKUPÉ discussion group, from March 2009 to March 2011. Own elaboration

Also, as mentioned earlier, the group's activity – both online and in terms of real actions – decreased with time. People were active at the beginning but the first enthusiasm dropped at the end of the academic year. The next academic year (2009/2010) in October there were efforts to start actions again, but this time focused mostly on protesting against higher education reforms. Even these did not attract much attention of the "old" participants, while no new members were recruited. Although there were several calls for promoting OKUPÉ at the university and recruiting new members, hardly any actions were taken, as the enthusiasm had already been gone. The reason for a decrease in activities of the movement can be explained by the so called summer holiday crisis, which is usually the main threat for student activism, because the engagement is rarely sustained for more than one academic year (Altbach 1989, 99). It takes several months to reproduce movements' resources after the break, because of the outflow of more experienced students from academia and the inflow of newcomers. Below, we will try to list other factors possibly contributing to the decline in the movement's activity.

Repressed without repressions

OKUPÉ's actions have led to heated discussions at local fora and media. Many people supported the actions, almost 700 students signed a petition for changes in the library, but there was also criticism both from academia and from the general public. Some fellow PhD students were outraged that OKUPÉ was

destroying the brand of their studies and their elite image. Both people of the public and some other students were claiming that students should be grateful for the opportunity to study for free and should treat authorities with much more respect, including wearing formal suits while meeting the rector. However, framing higher education as an institution for elites was incompatible with the movement's frames.

Other members of academia were treating OKUPÉ as a collector of their complains. Thus, OKUPÉ faced the problem of "free riders". Instead of joining the movement or being mobilised to do something on their own, people came to OKUPÉ with suggestions of what the group should rather do instead of the actions taken. Others were asking us to act in cases that they found important but did not want to risk their position at the university to fight for.

Another problem was that unlike the members of OKUPÉ, who decided to treat the university as a place of their own and express their voice, many other students were treating it as a very temporal place, not worth investing their time in. This was shown in a film in which a member of OKUPÉ interviewed other students (Emeschajmer 2009).

As we have already mentioned, OKUPÉ did not refer to student movements in the 80's and there was a clear generational gap between members of both movements. OKUPÉ's actions were ridiculed in the media and by some members of the academic community even in the "cradle" of the Solidarity movement and Polish contemporary democracy. Since the majority of OKUPÉ's actions were focused on local campus issues and they only once openly targeted the national government, they were not considered political by the older generation of academics, whose expectations for student political participation were the result of experience of old social movements.

The misunderstanding can also be explained by a difference between old type of movements such as Solidarity, which were focused on expansion of "rights", and new social movements, which focus on expansion of "autonomy" instead (Katsiaficas 2006, 380). As we mentioned earlier, Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of hegemony became a reference point for OKUPÉ and liberating space (especially from the fence surrounding the campus) was chosen as a common denominator — an "empty signifier". The authorities broke the chain of equivalence by deciding to process different demands separately. As a result, hopes vested in the dialogue effectively blocked the mobilisation of resources. When most of the hopes failed, deprived of influx of new members and burnt out activists dispersed.

Problems and conflicts in OKUPÉ: 3 cases

One of the characteristics of what we were doing together in 2009 was unpredictability. The energy during meetings, discussions interplaying with actions and reactions that we provoked with the movement were beyond so-called human agency — one action resulted in another and went beyond the control of individual members. It was enough to mention "another injustice"

during the meeting and immediately this issue was on the agenda and something was planned to solve the problem. Despite the feeling of enormous power to act in the world around us, we were helpless facing some inner dynamics of the movement, which had been shaken and divided by several splits.

By presenting a detailed description of inner conflicts we would like to shed light on "deliberative, utilitarian and goal directed" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 624) processes of choosing interpretative frames by the movement. Opp suggested (2009, 250) that rational choice theory could be used to analyse such strategic processes. However, in the OKUPÉ's case, costs and benefits of articulating movement's frames to unmobilised individuals were rarely calculated. Instead, the strategic processes themselves have been reduced to minimum, due to the costs of conflicts in a specific environment of the mailing lists.

The first conflict concerned gender equality issues. At the first meeting, the problem of women discrimination at the university was raised and a working group called "Equality group" was formed. Proposed forms of action included researching the scale of the problem and lobbying for establishing a position of a university equality officer. Due to the structure of communication in OKUPÉ, the initial discussions happened at the common mailing list, open for all members and without banning procedures. The "equality discussion" included 65 e-mails by 12 people (5 men and 7 women) in only 5 days (13-17.03.2009).

At the beginning, one female member suggested to broaden the group's goals and fight against all kind of discrimination at the campus. When one man supported this idea attacking at the same time what he perceived as a "narrow" feminist perspective, his choice of wording angered three women and a longer discussion followed. Some women opted for focusing only on women discrimination as the most important and the most common problem, while other members argued that dealing with ethnic, racial, religious or other types of discrimination was equally significant and one could address all of them at the same time. Finally, when somebody posted a law regarding the national government's Representative for Equal Status of Men and Women, which addressed diverse types of discrimination, others agreed that they should opt for such a position to be established on the university level.

However, the discussion continued, since one male member started inquiring about the limits of what could be called discrimination and what could not, giving an example of a male football team refusing to include women in the club. Such an attempt to define boundaries of someone's demand, even if conducted in a good will, may cause tensions in a group. Thus, it is an example of "friendly fire" - a term employed to describe situations when "primarily male actors [...] are both help and hindrance to feminist strategizing" (Taylor 1998, 687). Two female members felt that this post was meant to ridicule their actions and ridiculed its author in their posts as a consequence. One participant without long academic background attacked him using vulgar words and short aggressive messages. A series of mutual personal attacks and accusations of

fascism followed, even though other members asked for ending the conflict. The discussion stopped after the next face-to-face meeting where goals and methods were discussed again and the main initiators of the group's actions decided it would be easier to move the project to a feminist organisation they were part of, so as to avoid conflicts over their values.

At the end of the discussion three of its participants complained that the medium – online discussions – provoked misconstruction of one's ideas, which caused unnecessary conflicts. At the same time scheduling of meetings proved to be long, since everybody was busy with their work and other projects, so online discussions were treated as an important activity between "real" meetings.

Another example of frame alignment was the issue of ecology at the university, also discussed at the mailing list. There were 52 e-mails sent in this thread during 4 days (19-22.03.2009). 12 people took part in the discussion, during which 3 other left the mailing list. It started with a few demands: ranging from adjusting the new campus to the needs of people who walk or bike; organising a campaign to recycle waste; to demanding vegetarian and vegan meals in canteens. At the beginning, the number of demands was growing and they even became more radical, e.g., a demand that all new buildings on the campus should become energetically passive.

After several e-mails, there was one voice claiming that car drivers were not solely responsible for parking their cars on pathways, but professors' parking privileges together with fees at the parking place had caused the problem. This started an emotional discussion about cars, which revealed that for two activists being a driver was a question of identity. The interpretation of the general goal of the movement - stated in its name – "the liberation of educational spaces" was questioned too, which revealed its ambiguous meaning. The term liberation had attracted those who wanted to liberate campus e.g. from cars and those who were rather against regulations. Discussion at this stage has also shown that consensus and compromise where often understood interchangeably and were both opposed to "thinking the same". Its understanding was therefore different than in many other social movements (Graeber 2004) and instead of meaning unanimity and the agreement of all, it meant for many members compromising one's ideas.

An ironic opposition between "the radical, extremist and fundamentalist" bikers and "tax-paying, over-worked and busy" drivers has been established in this thread. It was ironic, because in parallel discussions on the list, words related to fighting, such as "militants" were used in order to achieve reconciliation. At some point, a few activists withdrew some of their demands saying that they could achieve their goals outside this movement, which implies that some analysis of costs and benefits was undertaken by them. There was also an attempt from the drivers' side to bypass the conflict around cars through a proposal to focus on something else, i.e., on planting trees. However, a careless use of words which suggested antisemitism of the person, who started the discussion about planting trees, prevented any action points.

The final and the only result of this emotional discussion was incorporating 3 ecological demands into the manifesto, which, however, has never been published, because the process of collecting and negotiating all demands lasted longer than OKUPÉ's capability to mobilise people to struggle for these demands.

The "ecological" thread turned to be a discussion about identity, and probably that is the reason why people often felt attacked. Careless use of words was too visible to ignore and forget, unlike face-to-face conversations.

Finally, the third most discussed topic and the only frame which survived the strategic process of frame alignment was the fence. This issue appeared frequently in all threads on the mailing list. Our general conclusion from the threads revolving around the fence is that – contrary to the aforementioned discussion topics – it did not cause a big conflict between different understandings of concepts, and therefore, actions could follow. In discussions about ecology and equality, the processes of defining hindered transition from dialogue to planing actions. In the discussion concerning the fence, the majority of posts were clearly pragmatic and not ideological.

Negotiating frames and meanings also took place in this discussion, but the importance of dealing with the fence as a legitimate concern for the movement was not questioned. The only cases when the fence's relative importance was disputed was during negotiations about the hierarchy of claims, because in comparison to the fence, other issues were claimed to be marginalised and their supporters wanted to bring this process to attention.

Although discussions were not as aggressive as in other threads, there was also a conflict concerning the fence. This division can be reduced to a simple dichotomy: radical-reformative. It is essential to underline that this conflict did not concern the fence itself. There was a shared assumption that the fence was a problem (or a symptom of more general problems), and therefore deliberations on what was radical or too radical concerned the level of planing actions which should be taken (e.g. destroying or covering the whole fence with fabric). It is precisely at this level that a few unpleasant exchanges of posts happened.

In this context, the problem of online communication was raised, too: a few posts were warning to take into consideration the fact of obstacles in online communication resulting from its form and lack of direct contact. Regardless of a more positive and constructive atmosphere, the discussion did not result in consensus about the mode of further actions: radical or reformative. However, one group who communicated outside the main mailing list conducted a direct action of closing the gates, which went smoothly because of the small size of the group and its unanimity. As a result, externalisation of the demand of an open space was made through action, which had not been decided upon in a consensual way. This suggests that only those frames of the movement are externalised, which are supported by participants who are ready to act in the public.

Reformative vs radical approach

While members of OKUPÉ were trying to understand how the university functions and what causes policy changes in this institution, some of its activists were focusing on blaming particular people behind policies, while others concentrated on undemocratic procedures. With some degree of simplification we can say that the former ones had internalised the Weberian conception of power (compare: Cheater 1999, 6) in which people manipulate each other in the political struggle, where you can either win or lose. At the same time, the latter ones were acting along Foucault's concept of power, where the focus is not on agents, but on the politics of voice. For those seeing politics and power in Weberian terms, empowerment means taking control over resources and Foucault's conception is a dangerous mystification, which blurs the existing corruption and the gender and class-biased structure of power (Cheater 1999). On the other hand, for those who had internalised Foucault's understanding of power, the Weberian thinking is a part of the problem, not the solution, since it reproduces the same patterns of power, even if authorities are replaced by other people.

The dilemma of deciding on radical or reformative character of social movements is an old one. In order to shed some light on this subject, let us refer to a typology of student movements by Jungyun Gill and James DeFronzo (2009). This typology deals with the spectrum of student movements' cultural and structural goals on a scale ranging form moderateness to radicalism, and consists of the following elements: reform student movements, identity radicalism student movements, structural revolutionary student movements and social revolutionary student movements.

According to the authors of this typology, one of the factors playing a role in shaping the profile of a particular student movement is the perception of power and its character (systemic or personal). The personal perspective, which we have called Weberian before, points to reform movements, whereas the systemic perspective — based on Foucault's concept of power — implies revolutionary ones. Gill and DeFronzo (2009) point out that universities have a long history of being the place of revolutionary movements because of their tradition of autonomy, as well as a greater extent of freedom of expression. What is more, especially public educational institutions have been proved to facilitate development of student activism. Taking this into account, it is easier to understand why some activists entering OKUPÉ (as a student movement at a public university) have had big expectations aimed at radical programme and actions.

The ground for reformative aims might be, as Gill and DeFronzo (2009) imply, the experience of successful mobilisation in the past and, generally, a belief that the institution respects democratic rules and ensures space for negotiations. This claim can be supported by the example of OKUPÉ, where some moderate activist had participated in student representative bodies at the university.

In this typology, structural revolutionary movements do not aim at a cultural change either. Instead, they target broad structural changes, for example of the political system. Members of OKUPÉ who could be ascribed to the structural revolutionary category, were interested in ecology and equality issues. The members who were intensively involved in these issues could be perceived as displaying identity radicalism. As Gill and DeFronzo claim, the origins of such activism might be members' personal experience of discrimination and their opinion that discrimination patterns are culturally rooted. In OKUPÉ, this mechanism might have played a role in formation of the feminist fraction within the movement, which could also help to explain such great resistance against this group's claims among other members, who lacked such experiences and beliefs.

The last of the discussed types – the social revolutionary one, focused on both structural and cultural change – was less visible and seemed to be interwoven with the identity radicalism fraction.

To summarize, the flow of online discussions in OKUPÉ seems to support Watler Adamson's claim, made in reference to movements of the left, that focusing on the "revolution-reform" opposition "produces less a confrontation than a mutual isolation of two self-enclosed dialogues" (1978, 429). On OKUPÉ's mailing list, threads involving conflicts over "too radical" or "too moderate" actions ended mostly without decision to take any action at all – everyone simply stepped back to their positions and withdrew from the discussion.

Consensus decision making and its pitfalls

Consensus decision making is a difficult process and needs good facilitation (Graeber 2004, 3). In OKUPÉ, there were both moments of success (such as working together on the name of the group or on parts of the manifesto), but also moments of aggressive conflicts and unwillingness to include the point of view of others. Two of the authors were so tired of the ever-lasting conflicts in the group that they were relieved when they went to study abroad and decided to take a break from activism. At some point, however, they decided to join some meetings of a local Icelandic student movement. They were astonished how smoothly their meetings were going, how the consensus decision-making was implemented without visible problems and how united in their actions the members of the group were. This raised a question – why could there be no unity in OKUPÉ, while it worked in other movements? We will not be able to present here a thorough comparative analysis of the two movements, but some of our suggestions include:

1. A smaller and more ideologically coherent group at the University of Iceland, recruited from people already cooperating in other movements. In Gdańsk, members were mostly leftist – but there were conflicts on the lines of social-democracy vs. libertarianism, such as the conflict about

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whether there was a need for regulations or for cooperating with authorities, which persisted in many discussions.

2. Different traditions in regard to consensus decision-making – in Poland there is a history of failure of the consensus-based parliament in the 18th century (the "liberum veto" rule) and it is taught at school as an example of why majority rule is more successful. Other examples of consensus decision making are hardly known in Poland, even among left-wing activists.

3. Strong degree of authoritarianism in Poland (according to Katarzyna Growiec [2009] – the strongest in Europe after Greece), and a strong sense of hierarchy, which results in problems with cooperating in an organization without leaders and a strong structure. Lack of structure and leaders was raised in OKUPÉ's discussion several times as a problem, even by members who associated themselves with anarchist ideology.

OKUPÉ had also some of the features, enumerated by Jane Mansbridge in "Consensus in Context: A Guide for Social Movements" (2003) – that turn consensus decision making into a process with high costs. Members did not have experience with consensus and the group was not homogeneous (e.g. in terms of ideological views), which made decision making more difficult. One of the explanations of the problem with cooperation can be different goals of the group's participants, as well as different values and experiences of its members. There was also a lack of clear rules that one could refer to during conflicts. Some members were referring to the consensus rule, while others where saying it was not important. The idea of consensus decision-making was used in order to enhance the unity of the movement, but it was very difficult to implement, as it appeared that members had different goals and different ideas for the purpose of OKUPÉ. What is more, members did not treat harmony as a higher priority than other values, which according to Mansbridge (2003) has also an impact on the cost of consensus. Here, the particular background of the activists could have had an impact on the members' approach.

Consensus in academia

Discussions in OKUPÉ (both online and face-to-face), even though many times resulted in surprising and satisfactory solutions, proved to be very energy-consuming. One of the reasons may be little experience in facilitating such meetings. Stubbornness of the conflicts indicate some cultural easiness in building "platforms of disagreement", around which stable group coalitions may occur. If we take into consideration that many participants have achieved some kind of educational success, then David Graeber's analysis of academia can be of use. He claims that the culture of consensus is contrary to the organizational culture of contemporary universities (Graeber 2009). He has pointed to cultivating differences and some sectarian attitudes in academia. According to him, this is caused by the academic training, which emphasises how to criticise other academics (Graeber 2009).

In OKUPÉ's discussions, arguments were often long and well developed, and those who participated were usually PhD students or university teachers. Students took part too, but they were sometimes criticized for breaking discussion rules (such as using personal attacks and sarcasm). On the one hand, discussions in OKUPÉ hindered some actions, since they were long and showed the lack of unanimity. On the other hand, they were the goal in themselves – for example, many participants did not believe in the possibility of destroying the fence. They did, however, aim at discussing this issue and being heard, so organising a debate about the fence at the university, as well as in the local media, was considered a success in itself. One member whose comments attracted strong emotions, admitted later in a discussion about the future of OKUPÉ (March, 2010) that for him the movement was an opportunity to train oneself in discussions with people who have completely different opinions. For him the differences were beneficial, while for many others they were obstacles that hindered actions.

Aggressive comments

There was a number of complains against particular individuals' aggressive rhetoric, but there was no rule about how, and if, to exclude members, so as a result of this, the strongest ones survived in the movement, while the ones who were dissatisfied left the group or stayed inactive. There were several attempts to set the rules later, so that the organization could work more easily, but none of them succeeded due to different ideas of particular members. In other words - not everyone would consent to excluding members who were against consensus and who were aggressive, sarcastic or used remarks that could be treated as racist, although their authors claimed they were not. Outside the mailing list, some members were asking for excluding other members, but it was countered by other people arguing that the movement needed to stay open and that no decision could be taken by only a part of the group. Even though conflicts were often, after putting much effort in common actions, none of the members wanted to resign and form another group, and thus, OKUPÉ was brought to latency, and communication was limited to a minimum, so as to avoid conflicts.

Conclusions: What have we learned from this analysis?

The OKUPÉ movement had an active beginning and managed to gather a considerable number of people demanding changes at the university, including relations of power, surveillance policy, equality issues, lack of participation in decision-making processes and spatial planing at the new campus. It became a part of the International Student Movement's network of organizations struggling against commercialisation of education. However, the promising beginning has not led to a continuous mobilisation and the movement had to face internal conflicts, "burning out" of the members, fragmentation of interest and problems with decision-making and communication.

In this paper we tried to provide some hypotheses for reasons why the enthusiasm within OKUPÉ declined and the group seized to be active. These reasons were:

- internal conflicts, resulting from some differences in the group (such as different attitudes: to authorities, to radicalism, or to gender issues) and an academic culture valuing dispute, not unity;

- lack of clear rules about unacceptable behaviours and remarks (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011);

- lack of experience with consensus decision-making and with efficient facilitation;

- few face-to-face meetings, as opposed to many online discussions;

- negotiating (with authorities) particular demands separately and vesting too much hope in these negotiations – thus, suspending mobilisation of new members.

It is difficult for us to say which factor was the most crucial one, using only observations and analysis of computer-mediated discussions, but we feel that they all played a role in bringing OKUPÉ to the latency state.

At the same time, while analysing these obstacles one could ask why the movement was active for a couple of months even though there were so many hindrances. Here, we propose following explanations:

- the very idea of consensus decision-making was particularly important for students and PhD students, who have a long experience of not being listened to (as in Mansbridge 2003, Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011);

- some degree of uniformity of the group, e.g. being unanimously against commercialisation of higher education, against corporations and state police at the campus, against the fence and surveillance;

- relative deprivation of PhD students who, as a result of poor funding of their research and the lack of scholarships, had some spare time, which they would probably have devoted to their research if they had been properly funded and had not needed to fight for decent working conditions;

- lack of scholarships was contrasted with extensive investments in the university's new buildings, which both caused feelings of injustice and gave an opportunity to try to have a voice about the new changes;

- accumulation of grievances which have not been addressed before, as no other movement had existed at the university for a longer time;

- attention and support from other groups of activists and movements outside academia.

Finally, we would like to suggest what lessons we have learned from this analysis, that is, what we would change in the future[7]:

- writing down clear rules for cooperation and a clear set of most important values in a smaller group, before calling for a big meeting and recruiting other members;

- moderation of posts;

- organising more face-to-face meetings;

- treating negotiations with authorities as a step in the process, but not its final point;

- discussing particular issues consequently in small working groups and sharing the results with the rest of participants later. This way, many exhausting discussions about the basic ideas could have been avoided with people who admit they like discussing just for the sake of it. On the other hand, this could lead to discussing all the crucial points twice - at the meeting and later, when the results are being presented, but some collective identity (of those who cooperated in the group for the final result) could make people less vulnerable in these discussions.

- knowledge how to organise a movement, as well as histories of activism - both failures and successes - need to be transmitted to the next cohorts of students coming to academia (compare: Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011).

As we have suggested, consensus decision making is not a well-known method in the Polish context, even in social movements. The method did not work as smoothly, as the founders had anticipated. This raises a question if the method should not be adjusted to the local context or changed to something else. Still, as activists and researchers we have decided not to resign from it too easily. We have even started teaching courses using this method. There are several reasons for this. First of all, we believe that movements with agenda set on democratisation should exercise the most democratic methods, and it is difficult for us to find a more democratic one. Second of all, the sole usage of the method was an important experience for us, as it changed our thinking about the university, democracy and the role of an individual in an institution. Consensus decision making was a challenge, but if we had not had it, we would probably not have started the movement at all.

OKUPÉ was an effort to unite on three levels: in the academic community, even though we knew of existing differences; with the international student movement; and with the local community, basing our struggle on the issue of fence that divided space into academia and the rest of the city. However, fence as a symbol and an empty signifier, just like other empty signifiers in Polish contentious politics, such as, one could argue, Solidarity or Stop-ACTA, can form movements characterised by size rather than durability. Due to broad

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[7]The topic of learning in OKUPÉ is analysed in Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011.

mobilisation and extended frames, bridging between particular demands, as well as unity in decision-making is a laborious task.

Enriching frame alignment theory with Fritz Heider's balance theory, a move suggested by Opp (2009), does not seem to work when applied to academics. The theory assumes that an individual can have either positive (likes) or negative (dislikes) affective relationship with objects (e.g. social movement organisations) or ideas (in case of social movements – demands). Balance is achieved when positive relationship to objects is combined with meeting it regularly, while avoiding disliked objects. However, in the specific context of academia the theory seems to lose its explanatory power, because – as we tried to illustrate above – academics may try to "cultivate differences", which means that they "like to criticise" some objects and, subsequently, they do not avoid them, that is, they stay in the movement, even if they do not agree with most of its demands.

In this article we tried to analyse OKUPÉ - its rise and fall, as well as its main characteristics, but possibly shedding some light also to struggles of other movements in Poland. It is our hope that the material presented here will be useful for a better understanding of contemporary social movements in Poland and East-Central Europe, and that it would also have some value to other activists who struggle to unite internally and with other movements.

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The Water Pressure Group: Lessons learned

Jim Gladwin and Rose Hollins

Abstract

This action note is a history of the Water Pressure Group (WPG) in Auckland, New Zealand. Founded in 1998, the WPG was made up of diverse community members who boycotted user charges with the aim of abolishing Metrowater Ltd, the new Auckland City Council water company. For about three years it was a non-hierarchical and fully democratic group, non-party-political, embracing a wide range of political and ideological viewpoints. The action note also explores the wider historical context around privatisation of local council assets in New Zealand.

Introduction

Why would a fire engine arrive at the Bolivian Consulate in New Zealand, in a posh Auckland suburb, and be used to hose the premises off *when there was no fire?*

It was April 2000, and in Bolivia soldiers were shooting at citizens — and one person had been killed — in the successful battle to oust Bechtel Corporation from its privatised hold over Cochabamba's water. In New Zealand, about

twenty Water Pressure Group (WPG) activists, described in Cochabamba as "friends on the other side of the world", were extending their local struggle against commodified water services in solidarity with the Bolivian people. The Auckland protest received wide coverage, and within hours, WPG's photographs were on the web with copies sent to contacts in Cochabamba. A tabloid daily there gave the story a three-page spread — front page and pages two & three — copies of which were sent to the WPG.

Between 1998 and 2001 the Auckland WPG carried out highly organised militant actions. It cannot be emphasised enough that this, given New Zealand's conservative political culture, was a breakthrough. Never had such a sizeable citywide group — with up to 2000 members — openly engaged in defiant mass civil disobedience and sustained such an organisational structure over a lengthy period. The WPG also gave active support to water groups in NZ and around the world. The group purchased an old fire engine still equipped with a water tank and pump, flashing lights and horn-siren. A good sound system was fitted to make an instant travelling billboard, platform, tool box, and form of transport.

Background

In 1997 Auckland City Council established a water company, Metrowater Ltd, and introduced unquantifiable wastewater charges a year later. After the company was formed there was a public outcry. In early 1998 several women collected an extraordinary 20,000-plus submissions calling for the council to scrap Metrowater. Also, unknown to each other, a number of residents across Auckland City were refusing to pay their Metrowater bills.

What brought these people together was the drastic action taken by Metrowater Ltd to deal with an unpaid account of a member of the Fair Deal Coalition. The Fair Deal Coalition was a progressive, Auckland-wide non-party-political umbrella for unions, churches, and a diverse range of community groups like Grey Power. The company dug up the pavement and removed the feed pipe between the street main and the meter point of its "customer". This followed three earlier attempts to restrict or stop water supply at the meter, all of which were easily reversed.

 Coverage in the local paper on 21 August 1998, of this first Metrowater disconnection of the kind, brought an immediate telephone and door visit response from about fifteen people who were also refusing to pay, offering support. A house meeting was soon held — bringing strangers together — and the WPG was formed to organise a mass bills boycott.

Informing the actions of the WPG was the premise of mutual aid and support. For the next three months the disconnected member was supplied water by a neighbour, also a bills boycotter and Fair Deal member. WPG began as it continued, defying the council and its water company openly and by issuing a media release publicising this rejection of disconnection. The group's rapid growth increased confidence to boycott and risk disconnection — a very intimidating event when it happens to an individual. The movement snowballed

and within a year, experience and collective wherewithal had become incredibly strong.

Members came from all walks of life, and various plumbers, other tradespeople and specialists made vital contributions. Tools from blue tack to angle grinders were employed in the struggle. The turn-on squad was launched and a website conveyed information, such as diagrams explaining how to unrestrict and reconnect. Many people inexperienced in plumbing learnt to do this for themselves and their neighbours.

Apart from reversing what became hundreds of "normal" restrictions and disconnections, by 22 November 1998 the turn-on squad was confident enough to embark on a major street dig-up and reinstatement of the pipe to the meter at the address first mentioned in this Action Note. The turn-on squad grew to about 25 people and actions were invariably taken openly and in daylight.

At the height of the WPG campaign there were about 2000 people on the membership list, and a newspaper reported a comparable number of disconnections were taking place annually in Auckland City as in the whole of England, Scotland and Wales.

Ironically, at a time when the British Medical Association was successfully lobbying the British parliament to outlaw disconnections altogether, the then Auckland Health Officer called for legal reprisals against the WPG and damned the street dig-ups as "dangerous and un-hygienic". Similarly, all other "public watchdogs" proved useless to this people's cause.

The largest public turn-on was at Chaucer Place – a cul de sac in the suburb Blockhouse Bay – in June 1999. Several households in this small street were boycotting and their water had been disconnected at the meter. Metrowater had

excavated and removed the pipe to the meter of one of the residents, who was a pensioner and WPG member. As well as the boycotters, the WPG education sub-committee met several times with a senior member of the School Trustees Association (STA) — responsible for operating schools — who explained that Chaucer Place Primary School was withholding payment too.

After invitations to city councillors and media, a protest of about 150 people greeted the arrival of a WPG motorcade following the fire engine, and members proceeded to dig the street up. Two councillors attended — one against, and one strongly for the action. The street was dug up, new pipes installed from the main to the meter, and, as a finale, concrete was poured to encase the entire pipework and make any future disconnections virtually impossible.

Metrowater workers on this and other occasions provided information as to where the valves were to isolate the street main. It's worth noting that while the WPG received support from more than a few Metrowater workers, the relevant union offered no solidarity and refused invitations to discussions.

Two street dig-ups like this were publicised and mass-attended, of about 40 done in the following year. The culmination was a resounding victory, renowned by WPG members as "The Blitz". Working flat-out, in only two days, the turn-on squad re-laid and cemented-in 19 pipes mass-butchered by Metrowater at homes across the city. Metrowater attempted no more cut-offs at the mains after this campaign action.

Hands-on direct action was the order of the day — involving people as diverse as pensioners and solo mothers, firefighters and professors. This was the period when the greatest number of people were involved in the WPG, not only collecting signatures on pro-forma submissions (after thousands of petition signatures had been counted by council as a single submission), but deciding upon, planning and carrying out a myriad of actions ranging across:

- boycotting bills
- digging up streets and reinstating removed pipes
- marching against APEC
- organising numerous public meetings, rallies and fundraising events
- production and distribution of countless leaflets across Auckland City
- organising around the trial of a WPG member for daring to display signs. (Others were arrested and taken from their jobs and homes to undergo debt collection proceedings, and High Court injunctions won by Metrowater are still in place to this day).

Of course, there was also much, much more. All activities were financed through donations and fundraising and there were no membership fees.

What gave the WPG its political edge was its horizontal organisational structure

and grounding in non-hierarchical politics. A treasurer kept the books, and there were one or two media spokespersons, but no formal leadership structure as such. There was no particular "chair", "executive" or special "leaders". The WPG deliberately avoided becoming an incorporated society and was organised upon a simple set of progressive principles and objectives, rather than embracing any corporate-like "mission statement".

Another strength of the group lay in the continuity of weekly meetings, with often 50 - 70 members attending. These forums were where initiatives and ideas for actions and tactics, and any other matter, were put forward. Further, sub-committees were formed as necessary to research, develop, or organise particular areas and events. They had no powers and were open to all members to be part of, reporting back to weekly meetings for their suggestions to be considered, approved, modified, and/or rejected. Sub-committees were recallable. Continued argument and debate took place in weekly meetings and this was a crucial factor in maintaining the shape of the group. Significantly, at one point a small business and landlords sub-committee was formed. This group decided to enter into direct contact and negotiations with Metrowater. The next weekly meeting voted the sub-committee out of existence, first for the reason that it hadn't sought group endorsement for their actions, and second because the WPG had a firm policy to deal only with the council's politicians on the basis that they were the only ones with the power to disband the water company.

Attrition

From late 2001 and early 2002, as the campaign passed its peak, the group's politics began to change. The WPG adopted more conventional leadership-driven "managed campaign" methods used typically by NGOs around the world. A number of members unsuccessfully resisted these changes.

Consequently, the mass character and visibility of the WPG was diminished and outsiders saw the organisation as carried by a leader. This exacerbated decreasing participation, as divisive electoral attempts took place and democratic vitality shrank. Meanwhile, a dwindling number of stalwart boycotters maintained a determined stand for about five years more. This is not noted to attack any individual WPG members, nor is it meant to detract from the positive outcomes the WPG has achieved in recent years or might still in the future. Rather it's to record the process by which autonomous resistance by a community can be diverted towards inertia.

In modern capitalist society it has become almost expected that people will rely on individuals, lawyers, dignitaries and publicity agents to represent them — who are often personally ambitious or have other agendas. However, this tendency was not the deciding factor in the WPG shrinking and succumbing to a more traditional style of leadership. One could argue that a slow-motion defeat came about by some of the elected councillors betraying their undertakings to the public that Metrowater would be abolished. One senior politician from the

New Zealand Alliance, in visits to several homes, used his reputation to persuade some boycotters to abandon their stand.

WPG actions were timed around the council's annual plan political cycle. Late in 1998 a new council was elected on a promise to scrap Metrowater, including some members from the political Right. Yet three years of vote betrayals in relation to the annual plan followed, including from some supposedly progressive councillors comprising the City Vision ticket on Auckland City Council (from the "centre-left" Labour Party and "left" Alliance Party). This led to disillusionment and burnout in increasing numbers of WPG members. Predictably a large majority of right aligned councillors won the next election. We note however, that several councillors held true to their positions and one in particular maintained an exceptionally firm stand.

It's reasonable to argue that the media was another pressure on the group adopting more conventional leadership-driven methods. The WPG faced many challenges in relation to publicising itself and its actions. Mainstream media promotes a concept of individuals being of greatest importance in the public arena, and therefore usually want to interview and take photos only of prominent people in order to compose profiles about leaders. Such offers can be seductive and can serve to eclipse a group's aims and actions. One way to address this challenge, which WPG members consistently attempted, was to implement a liberatory media strategy based on emphasising the movement's goals, values, and collective effort.

In the climate of the times

In retrospect, it might have seemed the only substantial change coming from WPG protest action was the higher business tariff being levelled down to the user charges of ordinary people — not at all a win for the community. But time has shown a largely unrecognised victory, which is that the process of commercialisation, privatisation, and user charges for water services throughout New Zealand has been interrupted.

In Chapter 10, *"Towards privatised services"* of Tony Garnier's *Business Auckland* (1998) he states:

> A 1995 review of Auckland's water supply requirements has recommended full integration of all Watercare and territorial water and wastewater activities to form a single entity. Decisions on integration are due to be made in the year 2000…

The Auckland region often shapes municipal governance and funding priorities before they are extended throughout New Zealand. Neoliberal measures always impact harshly on the working class, while favouring business interests and the wealthy. User pays regimes for water were already in place in some municipalities in the region, but the extension of these charges to include wastewater (sewerage) could only be legally achieved by a local body either

privatising the service (by franchise contract) or establishing a council-owned water company (then called Local Authority Trading Enterprises (LATEs) and analogous to State Owned Enterprises). Greater Auckland was the theatre for this to play out.

Throughout the region municipal revenue raising had been converted from traditional property-valued taxes (rates) into various flat or user charges, especially rewarding the owners of the most expensive properties. And as intended, this also increasingly impacted on tenants who were unable to afford their own home. By these means, user charges are – still – transferring a large slice of the burden of council funding from the wealthy onto the poorer section of the community, especially large families and people on fixed or single incomes.

The process continues. It is of enormous significance that NZ's 2007 Local Government Rates Inquiry was conducted on a nationwide scale, while the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, in 2008/2009, was looking at ways to amalgamate and restructure the seven Council areas of this region. Its terms of reference dictated that the Royal Commission had to take into consideration the 96 main recommendations of the Rates Inquiry, most of which touted user pays, privatisations and regressive taxes.

In other words, once that a general model for council "rates" had been installed throughout the Auckland region the ruling class wanted it spread throughout New Zealand. The next stage locally – un-mandated by the electorate across the seven municipal areas – was the 2010 Auckland so-called super city, again as the model for eventual application nationally. (Legislation to restructure combined council regions to create such "super city" areas right across NZ was announced in early 2012 by the National Party government.)

Another major part of the brief for the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance was vertical integration of water services – precisely that *single entity* urged in 1995 as vital to advancing privatisation. It was imposed in the legislation that established the new Franklin-to-Rodney Auckland Council.

But what obstructed this for more than 10 years? Firstly it was the chilling effect on politicians of prolonged mass civil disobedience against Metrowater. Secondly, that the 2001 Auckland Water Review, which aimed at vertical integration, saw overwhelming public support for The People's Option. This framework for non-commercialised water was written and promoted by the WPG and sister groups WPG Papakura, Citizens Against Privatisation in Waitakere City, and activists from Manukau and North Shore cities.

The Fair Deal Coalition

1997 was a crucial year in terms of Auckland region water politics. Papakura District Council, in southern Auckland, decided in February to privatise its water services by franchise to multinational United Water. This followed a consultation process over the 1996 Xmas holiday period, which effectively kept

people in the dark. Last minute resistance came from local residents, a group called Water for All, and the Fair Deal Coalition which organised a packed public meeting in March.

Also, from the Fair Deal Coalition the west Auckland group Citizens Against Privatisation (CAP) was formed in 1997 and organised successful civil disobedience and direct action to prevent Waitakere City Council forming a LATE for water.

A year later, Fair Deal Coalition initiated the Community Support Network, a non-hierarchical united front, when the Fire Service came under threat. Professional firefighters saw planned restructuring as not only jeopardising their industrial conditions and efficiency of service, but also a step towards privatisation. The Community Support Network concentrated on mobilising ordinary people behind the firefighters and also held several public meetings — including one at the University of Auckland — working alongside other groups and political parties, and liaising closely with the Firefighters Union. The firefighters' wide-ranging campaign peaked on 26 June 1998 with large marches in the four main centres throughout the country. Concurrently, the union sought specific ideas from some Fair Deal members as to how the Community Support Network could augment their contribution to the struggle. The suggestion of fire station occupations was formulated and the union agreed with the plan, which was put into effect on 5 July 1998 in defiance of fire service top brass.

The union counted roughly 700 citizens taking part throughout greater metropolitan Auckland, which saw Community Defence Teams (CDTs) form around some local fire stations. These CDTs organised on-going public meetings at stations and took part in weekly Support Network meetings as autonomous parochial elements on a non-hierarchical fully democratic basis. Again, Fair Deal successfully argued for this organisational model. The Community Support Network was maintained until court action by the Firefighters Union succeeded in derailing the restructuring three months later.

Other histories

For the sake of historical accuracy, that some political parties made significant contributions in support of the Fire Service cause needs mentioning. One such party was the Alliance, a parliamentary coalition largely consisting of elements disenchanted by the aggressive free-market measures introduced by the Labour government between 1984-90. The introduction of the multi member proportional electoral system in 1996 saw the entry of Alliance into parliament, and they enjoyed relative success in government ranks until their virtual demise a decade later.

The Fair Deal Coalition, although prepared to work alongside the Alliance, found that its basic approach of mass public action was the very opposite of that of a party which in classic style placed emphasis on representative parliamentary dynamics centred around career politicians. The concept of fire station occupations especially was anathema to the Alliance, resulting in an

hysterical attempt to prevent them happening by branding them "nothing but a left sectarian dream".

In December 1998, within two months of the successful culmination of the campaign against restructuring, an Alliance MP produced a book that literally wrote Fair Deal's contribution out of history. In this publication, the occupations were described as: "Members of the public and union leaders also became involved and organised weekend meetings at local fire stations. The Auckland Chief Fire Officer banned the meetings but the public decided to ignore him". Then in 2009, a substantial history spanning more than 60 years, written by a well known fire service character, further distorted that description by paraphrasing: "Alliance and Labour members had organised a stream of public meetings in support of firefighters at local fire stations. In Auckland, the Chief Fire Officer was placed in the invidious and embarrassing situation of endeavouring to ban those meetings, but the public elected to ignore him".

Fair Deal's earlier contribution through Citizens Against Privatisation met a similar fate. In 2008 an erstwhile Alliance MP and cabinet minister claimed at the *Privatisation by Stealth Conference* in Christchurch, that 1997 Waitakere City Council plans to form a water company were stopped when the Alliance "did a very simple thing" and "wrote a single letter" to the council.

Conclusion

Non-hierarchical organisation inspires internal strengths, where know-how, experience and practical creativity of members flourish. The result is not the chaotic outcome the public is conditioned to expect.

This structure is, arguably, not unlike the world of academia where particular knowledge is practised in a relatively autonomous and free way, within a milieu of peers — notwithstanding that some academics have noted that neoliberalism is undermining those conventions. And incidentally, the Water Pressure Group's campaign might have been strengthened by a greater presence of politically progressive academics, joining with ordinary citizens.

As well, an important lesson is that the ability to accurately record the history of any non-hierarchical group should never be neglected. In a relatively loose (horizontal) structure, there is likely to be no immediate access to professional researchers and writers — unlike parliamentary parties who employ such minions as government-funded personnel. As with all other practical matters, this becomes a particular organisational imperative.

What's of paramount importance is the future organising the working class community does, and how past experiences might contribute to collective struggles against the capitalist system and its on-going anti-social — deadly — free-market madness.

NOTE: This history is by no means comprehensive, but is part of the people's history of Auckland. Names have been omitted because it is an account of a collective struggle against Auckland City Council and their company.

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Jim Gladwin was born in 1945. He was raised in a working class public housing suburb in Auckland, New Zealand, and has lived almost his entire life in that city. He became politically active in opposing the American War in Vietnam and has identified with the left movement since. He has participated in various progressive causes like anti-apartheid, indigenous land rights, anti-nuclear and prisoner solidarity. He was a member of the Communist Party of NZ from 1974 to 1983, and Chair of the Fair Deal Coalition at the time of the events covered in this article.

Rose Hollins grew up on a small poultry farm in Henderson, west Auckland, New Zealand, later moving into the city. She was born in December 1949, one of five children of English immigrant parents. Her earliest protest was on a Hiroshima Day march as a schoolgirl, before taking part in actions against the war in Vietnam and in many other left causes since the late 1960s. She is a poet, wage worker, and sometime proofreader. For many years she has worked alongside Jim Gladwin and others on the left in music and writing, as well as on workers', prisoners', internationalist and community initiatives.

Book review: Interface volume 4 (1)

Reviews editor: Mandisi Majavu
Assistance with sub-editing: Jessica Dreistadt

Books reviewed this issue:

Chenoweth, Erica and Stephan, Maria J. (2011). *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent action.* New York: Columbia University Press. (320 pp)
Reviewed by Brian Martin

Manji, Firoze and Ekine, Sokari (Eds). (2012). *Africa awakening: The emerging revolutions.* Cape Town: Pambazuka Press. (323 pp)
Reviewed by Karen Ferreira-Meyers

Starr, Amory, Fernandez, Luis and Scholl, Christian (2011). *Shutting down the streets: Political violence and social control in the global era.* New York and London: New York University Press. (202 pp plus index)
Reviewed by Deborah Eade

Kolins Givan, Rebecca, Roberts, Kenneth and Soule, Sarah (Eds). (2010). *The diffusion of social movements: Actors, mechanisms, and political effects.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (270 pp)
Reviewed by Cecelia Walsh-Russo

Heβdörfer, Florian, Pabst, Andrea, and Ullrich, Peter (Ed.). (2010). *Prevent and tame: Protest under (self) control.* Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag. (120 pp)
Reviewed by Lucinda Thompson

Observatorio Metropolitano. (2011). *Crisis y revolución en Europa: People of Europe rise up!* Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños (147 pp)
Reviewed by Michael Byrne

Lemonik Arthur, Mikaila Mariel (2011). *Student activism and curricular change in higher education.* Surrey, England: Ashgate. (220 pp)
Reviewed by Christine Neejer

MacKinnon, R. (2012). *Consent of the networked: The worldwide struggle for internet freedom.* New York: Basic Books. (320 pp. $27.00)
Reviewed by Piotr Konieczny

Chenoweth, Erica and Stephan, Maria J. (2011). *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent action. New York:* Columbia University Press. (320 pp)

Reviewed by **Brian Martin**

Imagine you live in a country with a repressive government and you want to do something about it. You are ready to take strong and risky action. What's the most promising way to have an effect? Some of your young friends have left university to join an armed guerrilla movement; others, who don't want to use violence, are calling for protests in the streets. Which of these options is more promising?

The debate over how to challenge oppressive regimes and policies has been going on for over a century with little resolution in sight. Armed struggle has a long tradition, including but not restricted to Leninists. Prominent successes include struggles in China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Algeria. Proponents usually assume armed struggle is the only way to overthrow a regime willing to use unlimited force against challengers.

In contrast is another tradition whose most prominent figure is Gandhi, who led major nonviolent struggles in South Africa and India. Gandhi objected to using violence to promote change; his approach was followed in the US civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. Less well known than these campaigns are a host of other unarmed struggles against repressive governments in places like Guatemala, Indonesia, Iran, Philippines, and Serbia.

What do researchers say about challenging repressive regimes? Most attention has been on conditions that enable or hinder success using frameworks such as resource mobilisation and political opportunity structures. Scholars have not systematically compared different methods of struggle. Most of them assume peaceful protest can be crushed by a sufficiently ruthless ruler. As a result, researchers have not provided much guidance for activists. After all, if the key is political opportunities and the prospects are not very good right now, then the methods used by challengers should not make that much difference.

The assumption by proponents of armed struggle and by many scholars is that success without armed struggle depends on a regime being soft. In this way of thinking, Gandhi faced a weak opponent, the kind-hearted British. Likewise, the collapse of Eastern European communist governments in 1989 is attributed more to weaknesses of the regimes than to citizen action.

Due in part to these assumptions, there has been no systematic testing of the comparative effectiveness of armed and unarmed struggles against repressive governments. Until now. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan in *Why Civil Resistance Works* have provided a powerful statistical analysis that undermines claims for armed struggle and, incidentally, the assumptions of most social

movement researchers. (In the context of their study, civil resistance means the same as nonviolent action.)

The basis for their analysis is a database of 323 campaigns, between 1900 and 2006, of resistance to regimes or occupations -- or in support of secession. Included in the database are, for example, the 1944 October revolution in Guatemala, the 1955 Naga rebellion in India, the 1960–1975 Pathet Lao campaign in Cambodia, and the 1974 carnation revolution in Portugal. The database has all sorts of information, such as locations, key protagonists, lengths of campaigns, maximum numbers of participants, methods used, and outcomes.

For Chenoweth and Stephan's core argument, the key bits of information are the methods used (either primarily armed struggle or primarily civil resistance) and the success or failure of the campaign. Deciding whether a campaign is successful is sometimes difficult; maybe only some of the goals of the challengers were achieved or maybe the goals changed along the way. This is only one of many difficulties faced in quantifying the elements of resistance struggles. The authors report a careful process for validating the information in the database including checking judgements about campaigns with experts on the countries and events involved.

With such a database, it is possible to test various hypotheses. Their most significant and striking finding is that nonviolent campaigns are far more likely to succeed than violent campaigns.

A sceptic might claim the nonviolent campaigns were against softer targets. Chenoweth and Stephan tested this: one of the elements in the database is how repressive the regime is. The answer: the strength of the regime makes very little difference to the success of the resistance. This is remarkable. It means that civil resistance works against even the most repressive regimes, and with a much greater chance of success than armed resistance.

What happened to the idea, widely used by social movement scholars, that movements succeed because political opportunities are favourable? Chenoweth and Stephan have replaced it with a quite different conclusion: the keys to success are the methods and strategies adopted by the challengers. Conditions such as the level of government repression don't make very much difference to outcomes. This means that success depends far more on what activists do than scholars, political analysts, or governments have ever realised.

The statistics in the book are supplemented with many illustrations, including four detailed case studies: the 1977–1979 Iranian revolution, the first Palestinian intifada (1987–1993), the 1983–1986 people power movement in the Philippines, and the 1988–1990 Burmese uprising. These vivid stories give flesh to, and help validate generalisations from, the statistical findings.

If Chenoweth and Stephan are right, social movement scholars should reconsider their frameworks and focus on agency, namely what activists choose to do. Why haven't scholars done this before? One answer is that it means relinquishing some of their authority to experienced activists.

What are the lessons for activists? The first and foremost is that armed struggle is not a promising option. It is less likely to succeed and, when it does, it is more likely to lead to a society lower in freedom and more likely to lapse back into civil war. Mixing armed struggle and civil resistance is not such a good idea either. The best option, statistically speaking, is to forego any armed resistance and rely entirely on nonviolent methods.

Why are nonviolent methods so much more effective? Chenoweth and Stephan argue that the key is greater participation. Most of those who join an armed struggle are young fit men, a relatively small sector of the population. Methods of civil resistance include sit-ins and public protests which allow involvement by a greater proportion of the population. Methods such as boycotts and banging pots from balconies allow nearly everyone to join in. It turns out that participation is a key factor in success. The maximum number of participants, as a fraction of the population, is highly correlated with success of the campaign -- and a large number of participants is more likely to be achieved with a nonviolent campaign.

Participation is crucial, in part, due to spin-off effects. More participants, especially when they include a wide cross-section of the population, means the resistance builds links to more people with the likelihood of causing shifts in the loyalty of security forces, which are absolutely vital to success. This process can happen in both violent and nonviolent struggles, but high participation is more likely in nonviolent struggles because there are fewer barriers to involvement. Joining a guerrilla movement or a terrorist organisation requires high commitment, especially due to a high risk of death, whereas joining a large rally or participating in a general strike requires less commitment, thereby allowing the movement to grow. The case studies -- each of which involves a primary nonviolent struggle in which there was a parallel armed struggle -- vividly show this.

Why Civil Resistance Works is an academic work published by a university press. It contains statistical data, explanation and justification of database construction, careful analysis of contrary hypotheses, and much else. Unlike some scholarly writing, it is clearly written, logically organised, and provides helpful summaries. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to become bedtime reading for activists. What then are the takeaway messages?

Here is my list.

- Civil resistance works. A well-organised unarmed campaign against a repressive government is much more likely to succeed than a well-organised armed campaign. The message from nonviolent activists to those who advocate armed struggle should be "show us some good evidence that your approach works better, because the best study so far shows civil resistance has better prospects."

- When civil resistance works, the outcomes are likely to be better. Use nonviolent methods if you want a nonviolent society; use armed struggle if you want a militarised successor regime.

- The key is participation. The more people involved in a campaign, and the more diverse the participants, the more likely its success. Beyond this general conclusion, I think it is a plausible extrapolation from the data for activists to say, "let's choose actions that will involve the most people from different sectors of society."

- Winning over the security apparatus is crucial. Undermining the loyalty of those who maintain order should be a central goal.

- Plan, innovate and strategise. The evidence shows that the methods used by challengers are crucial to success. In other words, how a campaign proceeds sensitively depends on the actions by the players, so it is vital to be creative, respond wisely to opponent movements, and be able to survive repression.

Regimes strategise too, so there is no set of steps that guarantees success; campaigns need to innovate against opponent strategies. Struggle against injustice is like a game: to win, it has to be played well. This is why diverse participation is important, because it brings in people with different skills, ideas, and contacts. Running a campaign from a central headquarters, with a fixed ideology, is not a promising approach. Having widespread participation and encouraging experimentation and diversity is.

The more people understand the dynamics of nonviolent action and learn to think strategically, the more likely a campaign is to develop the staying power, strategic innovation, and resilience to succeed. *Why Civil Resistance Works* is not an activist manual, but its findings should be used by anyone writing one.

About the reviewer

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Manji, Firoze and Ekine, Sokari (Eds). (2012). *Africa awakening: The emerging revolutions*. **Cape Town: Pambazuka Press. (323 pp)[1].**

Reviewed by **Karen Ferreira-Meyers**

The editors assembled 32 essays, some of which were previously published as summaries of events in Pambazuka News in 2011, around uprisings and revolutions that took place in Africa since 2011. Although popularly referred to as the "Arab spring," the 2011 uprisings were not confined to the Arab-speaking world. There have also been protests, strikes and other actions -- many of which were brutally suppressed -- in Western Sahara, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Gabon, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Madagascar, Mozambique, Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Djibouti, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Botswana, Namibia, Uganda, Kenya, Swaziland, South Africa, Malawi, and Uganda. Whether large or small scale, all these are manifestations of an underlying mood of discontent and disenchantment with the social and political order. According to Manji, "we are witnessing not so much an Arab spring as an *African awakening*" (p. 3).

In various articles, reference is made to Franz Fanon (e.g. pp. 94-95) to underscore the idea that each generation approaches "revolution in the context of their moment in history" (p. 23), as well as to the changed use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, which online activists use to spread information and revolutionary ideas. Nani-Koffi's contribution focuses on Côte d'Ivoire and in particular its political crisis since 2000. The author sees this disaster as another manifestation of the crisis of post-colonial Africa. Esam Al-Amin compares the 1978-79 revolution in Iran to the 2010-11 uprising in Tunisia: what took 54 weeks to accomplish in Iran took less than four in Tunisia. His conclusion is that "real change is the product of popular will and sacrifice, not imposed by foreign interference or invasions" (p. 50). Khadija Sharife's overview of Gabon's "awakening" does not directly refer to a possible revolutionary upsurge, but rather focuses on the economic corporate-state deals (like the 25-year tax holiday given to China with regard to the Belinga iron-ore mining deal) of the "focal point of Françafrique," France's Africa policy, for the reader to deduce the possibility of revolution in this country.

Horace Campbell's articles dated 27 January 2011 and 3 February 2011 (the latter directly linking the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions), and Melakou Tegegn's contribution of 3 February 2011 comparing Tunisia to Ethiopia, complement Al-Amin's analysis of the revolutionary process in Tunisia. The Egyptian revolution built on the three revolutionary stages visible in Tunisia (1. self-immolation and sacrifice of Mohamed Bouazizi; 2. Self-mobilization of the popular forces of Tunis and removal of office of Ben Ali; and 3. Dismantling of Ben Ali's regime) by adding a fourth one: "the power of numbers and the test of creative means of self-defense" (p. 70).

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[1] This book is available from http://www.fahamubooks.org/

On page 79, Campbell summarizes the key characteristics of the Arab Spring and African Awakening movements:

1. The revolutions are made by ordinary people;
2. Independent networks of networks are typical tools of these revolutions;
3. Self-mobilization of the people;
4. Non-violence; and
5. Ultimate goal: dignified human beings.

On 17 February 2011, Hassan El Ghayes published his personal viewpoint of a middle-class Egyptian of the Egyptian revolts. In this journalistic piece, the author gives a witness report of the Tahrir ("Liberation") Square demonstrations, including the so-called "Friday of rage", 28 January 2011. Another article, this time by Nigel Gibson, looks at the Egyptian situation and explains the notion of "Revolution 2.0," the revolution without leaders, "a Wikipedia revolution" (p. 94) aided by social media. The focus of Fatma Naib's contribution is on women: on Asmaa Mahfouz, the 26-year old founding member of the April 6 Youth Movement, on Mona Seif, researcher and daughter of an imprisoned activist, on 24 year-old political activist Gigi Ibrahim, and on 33 year-old filmmaker Salma El Tarzi.

Kah Walla, the presidential candidate for Cameroon Ô'Bosso, proposes excerpts from her protest diary recounting the peaceful protest of 23 March 2011 which was met by violent police repression. J. Oloka-Onyango writes about Uganda's most recent elections and analyses why ruling president Yoweri Museveni did not suffer from any meaningful opposition while at the same time "warning" the ruling party of similar consequences as those witnessed in Tunisia and Egypt. In doing so, the author uses comparisons with Egypt, Libya and Tanzania to explain the elections' victory: Uganda is not yet a fully functional multiparty democracy, Museveni bribed certain parts of the population during the elections, people feared the omnipresence of the military, and the existing opposition parties don't have firm ideological positions. The diplomatic, financial, economic, and social impact of the Ivorian 2010-11 post-election crisis is discussed by Massan d'Almeida mainly from the viewpoint of two women's rights activists, Mata Coulibaly and Honorine Sadia Vehi Toure.

Protests in Morocco and the Western Sahara are examined by Konstantina Isidoros. These protests surround the "hot geopolitical potato" (p. 122) of the Western Sahara conflict, which started more than 35 years ago with the invasion of that territory by Morocco and which threatens the "fundamental tenets of our modern Western political system, which espouses the inviolable sanctity of a nation-state's own sovereignty, the basic rights of human beings and regional socio-economic stability" (p. 123). The author puts together reactions from bloggers and journalists from Morocco and Saudi Arabia to show the growing discontent about the Moroccan absolute monarch. Lila Chouli's contribution draws the attention on the March peoples' revolts, culminating in the April 8

general strike and a threat of a military coup on 14 April 2011 in Burkina Faso, which explicitly referred to Tunisian and Egyptian revolts through various slogans. Even though "things calmed down from this point on in the capital," "spontaneous protests continued," (p. 142) which needed "marathon negotiations" to bring the country "sitting on a volcano" (p. 145) to proposed political reforms.

In a not always very logical article entitled "North African dispatches: Why Algeria is different," Imad Mesdoua describes some of the attempts by the Algerian people to follow suit of the other Arab Springs. Lakhtar Ghettas complements the picture in his article entitled "Unrest in Algeria: the window is closing fast". Mahmood Mamdani evaluates the humanitarian interventions in Libya, following UN Security Council's Resolution 1973. Jean-Paul Bougala's article gives a detailed account of Libya's financial assets, within the country and abroad, to underline the West's involvement in its events. A further analysis of the Libyan situation is given by Yash Tandon in "Whose dictator is Gaddafi?" and "How might things move forward in Libya."

This author makes a third contribution, "Imperial neurosis and the dangers of 'humanitarian' interventionism," in which the Arab Spring is analyzed in terms of the reactions of the empire. According to the writer, the "imperial neurosis" has only two possible consequences: "tightening of control over the political economies of the neocolonies of the third world" and "the emerging disintegration of the Euro-American system" (p. 232). The last chapter dealing with Libya has been written by Charles Abugre; it makes explicit the "true costs of war" (p. 297).

Peter Kenworthy reports on the 12-15 April "campaign" (p. 155), preceded by the 18 March marches, against financial turmoil, youth unemployment, and the undemocratic political regime in Swaziland. Still in Southern Africa, the recounting of Andries Tatane's murder by Richard Pithouse gives the readers an opportunity to learn about South African police brutality and repression of grassroots dissidents.

Mahmood Mamdani connects the Egyptian Tahrir Square events with the subsequent African "awakenings," but also linking it to the historical 1976 Soweto uprising and the 1987 Palestinian intifada. In addition, in his conclusion, the author states the remarkable fact that "no major event in contemporary history has been forecast, either by researchers or consultants, whether based in universities or in think tanks" (p. 208).

As "the detonator of the wave of protest and uprisings which have spread across North Africa and the Middle East since January 2011" (p. 218), Tunisia's particular context receives further attention in an interview with Sadri Khiari. Samir Amin's analysis somehow counters the viewpoint of the majority of the authors participating in this volume: while these look for similarities in this stories of the Arab Spring countries, Amin warns against easy generalizations about the whole Arab world and delves deep into Egyptian history, socio-economic makeup, and the different blocs constituting the reactionary front

before looking at the peculiarities of some other "awakening" nations and peoples (in addition to others discussed in the volume, Samin adds Syria, Bahrain and Yemen).

As can be seen from the overview above, the first articles/chapters are day-to-day accounts of the heat of the uprisings, what happened where, and who was involved, while the articles towards the end of this compilation are more general in nature, more analytical of the long-term consequences of the revolts and revolutions. While quite often overlapping in content, most articles bring new information and analyses to the fore and therefore contribute to the world's knowledge and interpretation of the dawn, evolution and effects of the Arab spring and its impact on Africa's further awakening in which the geopolitical interests of the West (US and France namely) are at stake. This volume delivers on its promises: it contains a rich selection of reports and reviews, it gives links to additional reactions on Twitter, in blogs, newsletters and interviews (pp. 311-312) and has an index which facilitates referencing. The publication is well-edited (in the sense that it contains few grammatical errors or spelling mistakes) but could have benefitted from a general conclusion summarizing a number of cross-cutting assumptions and deductions.

About the reviewer

Karen Ferreira-Meyers is the Coordinator of Modern Languages/Linguistics to the Institute of Distance Education (University of Swaziland) since October 2010. Between 1993 and 2010 she lectured in the Department of Modern Languages and was the Head of the same department between 1998 and 2010. She obtained various qualifications: MA Romance Philology, Honours Portuguese, Post-Graduate Diploma Translation, MA Linguistics, LLM Degree, PhD Degree.

Starr, Amory, Fernandez, Luis and Scholl, Christian (2011).
Shutting down the streets: Political violence and social control in the global era. **New York and London: New York University Press. (202 pp. plus index)**
Reviewed by **Deborah Eade**

As I started reading this book, the Occupy London encampment in the precincts of St Paul's was in the process of being dismantled, the demonstrators evicted and the cathedral steps ritually cleansed. Within a few hours, there was no physical trace of the settlement. At one level this was a minor news event, although it had already resulted in the resignation of a senior cleric and some consternation about the proper role of the church in providing sanctuary to those opposing the unfettered accumulation of wealth. At another, it symbolised the local expression of a global Occupy movement against casino capitalism -- the "right" of the 1% to become spectacularly wealthy -- even as millions in the North swell the ranks of the Global South. For the popular media, however, the focus was on the dirty, work-shy "occupiers", a stain on "decent" society, and a threat to tourism. Politicians took up some of the agenda issues of "excessive pay" and the "bonus culture" while carefully avoiding expressing anything that might suggest sympathy with the unkempt demonstrators.

The authors of this excellent -- and beautifully written -- monograph examine the expression, representation, and suppression of dissent. What makes it special is that they write not from the outside -- although placing their enquiry within a theoretical framework -- but as activist scholars, who have themselves exercised the democratic right of assembly and been involved in organised, and repressed, dissent.

Their focus is on the series of G8 and G20 meetings held in OECD countries between 2001 and 2010. They describe both the experience of being part of the attempt to influence the outcomes -- or at least to highlight an alternative reading of the agenda -- and the nature and cost of the security measures employed to prevent any interruption to a smooth event replete with "photo-opportunities," eleventh-hour deals, and press conferences for public consumption. The authors show, in almost forensic detail, the choreography of militarised policing as the increasingly visible means of "protecting democracy".

Two themes running through the book are fluidity and fear-- both of which, in different ways, are intended to discredit and demobilise dissent. Although each major event takes its own course, certain features are by now familiar. Locations are selected both because their relative inaccessibility places a physical distance between the public and our elected (and unelected) world leaders, and because they make it possible to cordon off the delegates from the sight and sound of dissent, and whisk them away to safety if security is breached -- a mobile "gated city". The financial costs are all the more eye-watering at a time of global recession. For instance, to "secure" the 2010 meetings of the G8 and the G20, Toronto spent US $929,986,110 -- comprising "three types of expenditures:

those for security itself, operational costs of a secure summit, and collateral costs to the locality" (2011: 51). The fluidity includes the re-drawing of the geography of a city or region — the 2007 G8 held in the East German resort of Heilgendamm that was supposed to "Make Poverty History" became literally a "no-go" area, ringed with "metal fencing with concrete foundations" and "designed to cradle a curlicue of razor and barbed wire" (2011: 1). At a more mundane level, it includes determining exactly which route a demonstration may take -- those who transgress the proper "respect for democracy" (2011: 27) risk imprisonment, harsh treatment, and aggressively punitive sentencing. Police may even arbitrarily decide on the size of banners and the angle at which they may be displayed, and demonstration marshals are responsible for enforcing such idiocies.

Fluidity also includes the temporary expansion of prisons as de facto police detention in the form of "kettling", or encircling demonstrators and preventing them from moving outside the "kettle", sometimes for several hours with no toilet facilities or water. Although these people are not actually under arrest -- and have been known to include passers-by like office workers on their lunch break who were not even aware of the demonstration -- they are in effect being held against their will, without charge. Yet this is done with impunity, as a means to separate and re-direct marches -- to place opaquely defined restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly. We know from our own particular national history that had women not been prepared to transgress their assigned gender roles, female suffrage would have been an even longer time coming. And civil rights movements, which included resistance and direct action, or civil disobedience, from Gandhi to Luther King to Mandela, helped to usher in more democratic systems of government across every continent.

This very fluidity is where fear comes into play. The show of military force is clearly meant to deter public action more than reassure the general public. Helicopters flying overhead, surveillance cameras, ostentatious riot gear "along with striking weapons, chemical weapons, projectiles (plastic, rubber, and wooden bullets), water cannons (sometimes with pepper spray in the water, which has a high rate of dispersal and which, unlike tear gas, is invisible), and concussion and shock grenades (for former meant to make a scary explosive sound, the latter used to simultaneously create a disturbing flash of light; both have been linked to severe injuries when they land on or close to people). Sonic weapons were used for the first time in the United States at Pittsburgh 2009 G20. The U.S. National Institute of Justice is planning to implement the use of microwave weapons developed by the U.S. military for crowd control" (2011: 83–4). There have been cases of blinding, permanent injury and even death -- and the fear of pain and injury is a major disincentive, to say the least!

Yet the media portrays the protestors as "having brought this on themselves" and, by extension on "us". The focus is on the "need" to enforce security against the "rabble", rather than on the "duty" to protect the democratic right of assembly and to express political dissent. A few people are caught committing overt acts of violence, and the right to protest is tacitly erased, all protestors

labelled as "troublemakers" or worse. This derogatory labelling serves to create a divide among: "law-abiding" citizens, those who assert the right to peaceful protest; those who challenge the obligation to express dissent only within "state-sanctioned" boundaries; and those who find that some previously acceptable activity has been criminalised.

One bizarre example of the latter is of an exclusive shopping mall in the UK that banned entry to anyone wearing a hoodie — yet several of the shops in the mall actually sold hoodies! Shifting boundaries are designed to dissuade people from getting involved in what might turn out to be "subversive" issues. Signing a petition on saving polar bears seems innocuous enough, but who wants to find that having posted an anti-capitalist slogan on Facebook makes them a potential target of surveillance? Let alone risking a criminal record for the sake of joining a march to protest against greedy bankers. This is one reason why demonstrations use the power of laughter — clowns, dance, masks, and music are a means of maintaining a non-threatening approach to maintaining the boundaries of legitimate dissent, although I fear it is easy to lose any serious message in such a carnival atmosphere.

Of the authors' many troubling insights, two areas resonated for me. The first is of the shifting geography of the repression of the basic rights to freedom of opinion, speech, and peaceful assembly in situations of political violence, such as Central America, where I worked throughout the 1980s. While still committing egregious violations of human rights, the military could easily prevent legitimate access to the rural civilian population via passes and temporary checkpoints -- you could be turned back on the slightest pretext "for your own safety". The message being: if you go ahead, on your own head be it. Fear instils self-censorship and undermines the trust on which social organisation depends -- confide only on a "need to know" basis, and handle no more information than you need.

But the second area of resonance is that repression is the mother of courageous, but very focused, resistance -- risks limited to the most essential, with no room for derring-do. Women would smuggle out information on human rights abuses written on encoded notes hidden in their plaited hair; villagers created tunnels in which to hide from aerial bombardments, which became -- quite literally -- underground schools; people would "re-invent" their backgrounds by abandoning their traditional form of dress; communities would cultivate minuscule plots that were invisible from an overhead helicopter.

In concluding that "dissent is being treated as insurrection and that political violence is now directed against the foundation of democracy," (2011: 152) these thoughtful and thought-provoking authors suggest that these resonances are perhaps louder than we realise.

About the reviewer

Deborah Eade is a freelance writer and editor. From 1991 to 2010, she was Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Development in Practice*.

Kolins Givan, Rebecca, Roberts, Kenneth and Soule, Sarah (Eds). (2010). *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms, and Political Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (270 pp)

Reviewed by **Cecelia Walsh-Russo**

If nothing else, the recent spectacular displays of protest seen during the Arab Spring and Occupy Movement have served as reminders to analysts and activists alike of the frequency with which social movements as expressions of resistance can be mimicked from one location to the next. Social movements -- as a bundle of protest events, organizations, and committed participants --can appear to outsiders to spread like a contagious "fever," with little warning of where the next "infection" may pop up.

The spread of movements--geographically, organizationally, among and between individual activists--has been a longstanding focus of studies on social movements. The focus of "diffusion" of social movement ideas, tactics, and personnel features either in the foreground or background of a significant number of studies.

From Sidney Tarrow's investigations into *cycles of protest* (1983) to Doug McAdam's study of the civil rights era *Freedom Summer* (1986) to Nancy Whittier's *Feminist Generations* (1995) examination of how and when movements learn from other, earlier movements presented enough puzzles to consume significant attention for researchers. The recent collection of ten areas of focus within Kolins, Roberts and Soule's *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms and Political Effects* offers a dynamic range of case studies and theoretical contributions to the study of diffusion within political protest. Drawn from a 2007 conference entitled "Contentious Knowledge: Science, Social Science, and Social Protest" held at Cornell University, the editors sought to create a volume representative of the questions and analysis of existing research on the spread of movement tactics, ideas, and social networks.

The goal of *The Diffusion of Social Movements* is a crucial one to the study of how social movement forms--in their varying incarnations--spread. The volume asserts that political agency is at the heart of learning, adapting, and creating something anew in the contexts of diffusion within social movements. *The Diffusion of Social Movements* as a volume seeks to challenge the oft-repeated notion that actors merely imitate tactics and ideas that came before or somehow are known to their movement as "successful."

Instead, the aim of *Diffusion* is to reveal *how* actors make sense, interpret, and respond to whatever is diffused. The edited volume seeks also to tease out the various dimensions of diffusion studies. As such, the volume cyphered its essays into three parts. The first section provides four essays on the dynamics of framing processes. The second provides four studies on the mechanisms of diffusion. The third and final section provides two essays that offer more

theoretical discussions on what may be termed a "contentious politics" approach to diffusion. These final essays synthesize discussions of mechanisms with examination of the consequences of diffusion on broader social processes. The "broader processes" include explaining the impact of diffusion on the broader "field" of social movement organizing particularly in the context of international or transnational institutions and organizations.

The essays included draw from an impressive range of case studies: the spread of sexual harassment claims across a range of European states; US Labour's attempt to reframe labour struggles as human rights struggles; the spread of support for claims of creationism and its opponent, evolutionism; the framing of challenges to the use of genetically modified food; the spread of non-violent tactics between Gandhi's India and burgeoning US Civil Rights activists through personal networks; and so on.

The introductory essay by Rebecca Kolins Givan, Kenneth M. Roberts and Sarah A. Soule provides an elegant and comprehensive account of diffusion studies within social movements. For students of political sociology and contentious politics, the introductory essay is a vital read for anyone seeking a coherent and brilliantly clear narrative of the central questions and research findings within the sub-field of social movement studies. As the editors attest, the authors within the volume pose three central questions in their studies: "What is being diffused?," "How does diffusion occur?," and "What is the impact of diffusion?." The three central questions not only define the volume's content but give readers useful and thoughtful categories for understanding how diffusion within social movement literature may be assessed and understood. For readers with limited engagement with this literature, the volume's introduction does a highly effective service in providing a richly detailed account.

Diffusion is about movement. As a social and cultural process, diffusion presents a research challenge for analysts because observation of it requires stopping or freezing the dynamism and movement of whatever is spread. Given that the often large geographic, cultural and political differences become tangled up and intertwined with the spread of tactical repertoires, this challenge remains particularly acute when studying transnational diffusion processes within social movements. Many of the essays throughout the various sections successfully take up this challenge, including Conny Roggeband's "Transnational Networks and Institutions: How Diffusion Shaped the Politicization of Sexual Harassment in Europe", Lance Compa's "Framing Labor's New Human Rights Movements", Sean Chabot's "Dialogue Matters: Beyond the Transmission Model of Transnational Diffusion between Social Movements", Valerie Bruce and Sharon Wolchik's "Transnational Networks, Diffusion Dynamics and Electoral Change in the Postcommunist World".

In his wonderful synthetic essay entitled "Dynamics of Diffusion", Sidney Tarrow conceptualizes among other processes and mechanism how the effects of upward and downward shifting of the scale of coordination affects international organizations, domestic states and other non-state actors. The varying arguments raised by the authors of the transnational diffusion essays in

particular are nuanced and contribute significant research ground towards an understanding of political agency, adaptation, and creativity as integral to the diffusion processes within social movements.

The remaining five essays offer an equally compelling range of diffusion topics, from James E. Stobaugh and David A. Snow's "Temporality and Frame Diffusion: The Case of the Creationist/Intelligent Design and Evolutionist Movements from 1925 to 2005" to Ronald Herring's "Framing the GMO: Epistemic Brokers, Authoritative Knowledge, and Diffusion of Opposition to Biotechnology" to Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport's "The Diffusion of Different Types of Internet Activism: Suggestive Patterns in Website Adoption of Innovations" to Jayson Harsin's "Diffusing the Rumor Bomb: 'John Kerry is French' (i.e., Haughty, Foppish, Elitist, Socialist, Cowardly and Gay)" and Michael Biggs and Kenneth T. Andrews' "From Protest to Organization: The Impact of the 1960 Sit-Ins on Movement Organizations in the American South."

The particular collection of essays on transnational diffusion—and indeed the entirety of the collection of essays—represent among the most dynamic authors and case studies within the field of social movement diffusion. As such, the volume makes a noteworthy and significant contribution to the field of social movements, not only in terms of discussion of the three fundamental research questions mentioned earlier but as a volume dedicated to more fully expanding how actors themselves interpret and make sense of diffusion processes, mechanisms and consequences.

About the reviewer

Cecelia Walsh-Russo is currently Assistant Professor of Sociology at Hartwick College. She teaches courses on race and ethnicity, sociological theory, human rights and social movements. She received her PhD from Columbia University's Department of Sociology in 2008. Her research has centered on the spread of tactics within human rights campaigns, beginning with the Anglo-American abolitionist movements of the early 19th century. She is currently conducting research on the dynamics of tactical diffusion within global human rights-based movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. Most recently she has been a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University. Email: Walsh_russoc AT hartwick.edu

Heβdörfer, Florian, Pabst, Andrea, and Ullrich, Peter (Ed.).
(2010). *Prevent and tame: Protest under (self) control.* Berlin:
Karl Dietz Verlag. (120 pp)

Reviewed by **Lucinda Thompson**

Which is more important: the act of protest or the aims of protest? Which is more painful: the cure or the prevention? There is no straight answer but rather a site of debate which requires urgent address. *Prevent and Tame* seeks to challenge the current framing of social movements and protest. It highlights cases where protestors, their campaigns, and the relations of power that shape society are far from separate. It brings together a diverse range of articles to shed critical light on the complex interactions between movements and authorities whether they are the police, the government, or simply workplace bosses. This collection reveals that there is a growing need for public criticism of the typical representations and popular conventions of protest and for recognition of how this impacts on the practice of democracy.

The book begins with a preface by Stephen Gill, who pinpoints the wider implications of the prevention and taming of protest:

> What the authorities seem to also wish to prevent when tackling such protest or dissent, is the possibility of a more democratic, public and socially accountable surveillance of the activities, forms of regulation and indeed the social and political links between ruling classes and the upper echelons of capital. (p. 7)

It is becoming clearer in today's society that rights to freedom of expression, speech, and protest are heavily, yet subtly, constrained within regimes of prevention and discipline. With representations of protest come the threat of escalated violence by unknown and anarchic troublemakers; this threat dictates the treatment of protest in popular discourse, expecting protest to be tamed within reasonable boundaries of convention. As Heßdörfer suggests in this volume, there is typically a loud call for protesters to grow up and stop having hysterics: "*Stop that noise! Get a life! Look around you! We understand your anger, but....*" (p. 24) *Prevent and Tame* presents evidence to contend that call as hysterical in its own way.

This collection of papers is the result of two panels in the 2009 conference, *Shaping Europe in a Globalised World: Protest Movements and the Rise of a Transnational Civil Society.* One panel explored "Preventionism and Obstacles for Protest in the Era of Neoliberalism — Linking Protest Research and Governmentality Studies," while the other examined "Taming Protest: The Rituals of Violence." The papers are rich and varied, including a report by Andrej Holm and Anne Roth into Andrej's arrest and detainment under suspicion of terrorism, a case study of the experiences of a non-violent movement at the hands of the authorities in Genoa, 2001 (Boyle), and a

discussion of discourses of prevention in the medical world and its implications for representations of protest (Ullrich).

The variety of articles presented a multi-faceted overview of the issues surrounding protest movements. Indeed, papers spanned a spectrum of debates: modes and motives of protest, authoritative discourses to prevent and police demonstrations, and the neoliberal regime of governance and surveillance that frames the protest environment. Such a diversity of topics raised many questions; the two panels in 2009 must have provoked some discussion. Did everyone, for example, agree that prevention was the most apposite term for organising the debate? The introduction to these works might have benefited from elaboration on the concept and prevalence of preventionism and its implications for the study of protest, as this in turn would have more clearly framed the rest of the papers.

Nonetheless, this book serves as a useful collection of case studies for researchers of social movements, and several articles stood out for their critical and well-structured arguments coupled with detailed examples. Montgomery's critique of traditional readings of counter-hegemony through a case study of the anti-Olympics movement, for example, expressed an empowering re-appraisal of protest strategy. He notes that the lack of a set of coherent demands, alternatives, or claims by protesters may be seen as a weakness in the framework of hegemony/counter-hegemony, but in other contexts serves as an emancipatory politics which is not confined to the State or its authority. For me, this provoked a re-reading not only of protest but also wider politics of conflict.

As Montgomery's article demonstrates, this book brought together a variety of topics and cases with the daunting task of challenging prevailing wisdom and updating theoretical approaches to social movements and protest. As the editors note, the papers:

> aim to overcome the common dualistic approach that predominantly sees movements and power (the state, government and others) as independent antagonists and thereby often ignores their entanglement. (p. 11)

Many papers went further than this in the examples they outline, not only demonstrating their entanglement, but also critiquing their representation and highlighting the extent to which these inter-connections can be exploited to reframe the authority of preventionism. Heßdörfer's article highlighted this by demonstrating the pedantic use of anti-social behaviour orders to prevent what might be described as personal acts of protest (or simply odd behaviour) in the UK. A list of seven examples, by no means the only ones to be found, undermine the rationale of preventionism by exposing us (the general public) as over-protective, over-sensitive, and over-irritated and by exposing the authorities as over-reacting and disproportionately punitive. We cannot help but be caught up

in this power play whether as actors, observers, or even authorities, but perhaps we can challenge how our interconnectedness is understood.

Leach and Haunss' article, comparing two events and the differences in interaction between campaign organisers, demonstrated complex relationships between different activist groups, authorities, and standpoints. There was a strong sense of constructed ambiguity in both activists' and authorities' public statements about the use of violence. This highlighted the problematic nature of the term *violence* and the way it is represented in the media. Activists would benefit from reading this collection to affirm how their cause is situated within a macro-political framework: the tactics employed by a movement and the causes for which it fights can be easily isolated from and used against each other.

Indeed, Shane Boyle's article on the colourful VolxTheaterKarawane's experience in Genoa suggests that to challenge relations of power invites violent intervention by the state. What is striking about the Karawane's treatment is that the aesthetics of their non-violent protest (comedy, satirical drama) were marginalised and replaced with the aesthetics of traditional discourses of prevention. Police regularly searched the Karawane's belongings looking for items of black clothing and weapons; ubiquitous symbols of terrorist activity.

Today's demonstrations and campaigns are often inconveniently dominated (to put it mildly) by discourses of terrorism and the threat of catastrophic violence. Such preventionism seems to dictate the (violent) policing of protest and the nature of relations between police and protestors, which all serve to detract from the problems in hand. It is to the authors' credit that the discussions in *Prevent and Tame* overcame the obstacles presented by this discourse and successfully pinpointed some of the issues at stake.

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Observatorio Metropolitano. (2011). *Crisis y revolución en Europa: People of Europe rise up!* **Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños (147 pp)**

Reviewed by **Michael Byrne**

The notion that the people of Europe can understand neither the financial crisis nor the need for "fiscal restraint" has been recurrent since the emergence of the austerity agenda. The people of Europe, like dumb animals, "feel the pain" of austerity; our protests are seen by the powerful as nothing more than the whimper of a dog when kicked. Meanwhile, the enlightened technocrats take "tough decisions" to solve a crisis only they can understand. This has been the rhetoric of the European political elite since the crisis began.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is the political elite, blinkered by the financial interests to which they are tied, and the technocrats, schooled in outdated orthodox economics, who are incapable of grasping the dimensions of the crisis, the power relations at its heart, and the ever increasing contradictions that haunt the hegemony of financial capitalism. It is to the practices of the movements and the "wisdom of antagonism" that we must turn for a real understanding of our political present.

Crisis and Revolution in Europe: People of Europe Rise Up! (C&R) is, above all, a book which aims to think from the perspective of the collective intelligence of the networked movements flowering across the Euro-Mediterranean "geographies of crisis." The book provides an invaluable analysis of financialization, a razor-sharp critique of contemporary accumulation, and a fascinating survey of the social movements emerging to challenge the economic and democratic crises of our time. But C&R is also an intervention into these movements, proposing possible alliances and concrete strategies.

The production of the book also reflects something of the political practices of the movements under consideration. It is written by the Observatorio Metropolitano, a Madrid-based militant research collective, and published by Traficantes de Sueños, which is an activist-led publishing project and book shop committed to creative commons licensing[2]. The free-to-download book[3] is currently being translated by a number of activists working voluntarily and using N-1 software, developed by hacktivists as a resource for social movements. Originally published in Spanish, it will be released in English, French, and Catalan in Summer 2012 and future months will see the release of the German, Greek, Gallego, Italian, and Euskara translations[4].

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[2] More information about these two projects is available in this English language article: http://www.observatoriometropolitano.org/2012/04/19/militant-research-madrid/

[3] Download here http://traficantes.net/index.php/editorial/catalogo/otras/Crisis-y-revolucion-en-Europa

[4] The translations will be available here http://traficantes.net/index.php/editorial

Financialization: "no es una crisis, es una estafa"

A central insight framing C&R is that the standard distinction between the "real" and the "financial" economy is outdated. In this sense, the analysis differs from that which sees the present crisis in terms of a financial system conceptualized as the overgrown appendix of a more "wholesome" manufacturing and services sector. Such analyses ignore the scale of the transformations of the last decades. What we confront today is a system in which the primary mode of accumulation is financial, a financial capitalism which is "not founded on forms of generating profit based on...the production of goods and services, but...on buying and selling financial assets" (p. 17). In evidencing this claim, C&R provides some dizzying facts. For example, the money in the financial system is between four and seven times greater than the entire global GDP. At the same time, the distinction between financial and "real" economy obscures the fact that even classic industrial companies, such as the car industry, often obtain more profit from financial activities (shares etc.) than by selling the products they manufacture.

One of the most significant elements of this shift is the growing distance between capital and the organization of production. The figure of the capitalist is today closer to a *rentier* than an entrepreneur. Here C&R follows a line of analysis associated with contemporary post-autonomist political economy, arguing that accumulation operates primarily through the appropriation of collective wealth based on ownership of property (e.g. a bond). The "investor" (the prototype of today's capitalist) resembles the landlord of yesteryear, who simply expropriates collectively generated wealth without any involvement or role in the production process (Fumagalli et al. 2009). As the distance grows between financial capitalism and production, the former takes on a pronounced "parasitic" relationship with the actual forms of social production.

C&R identifies three central dynamics at the heart of financialization. Firstly, it depends on ever-increasing financialization; new money needs to be injected into the system and new areas of life must be opened up to investment (e.g. the price of grain, pensions, health insurance, student debt). All too often, most notably in the case of housing, the financialization of new areas of life depends on the withdrawal of the state from the provision of services and guaranteeing rights (Vercellone 2009; López and Rodríguez 2010).

Secondly, this expansion operates via a multiplication of debt. Increasingly, this debt is not backed up by capital nor is it destined for investment in the "productive economy." Rather, financial assets themselves are the collateral for issuing credit, credit which is in turn invested in yet more financial products. Hence the "bubble" nature of finance; a bubble which bursts when new money stops entering the system and when, at some point in the great chain of debt, someone can't pay, as was the case in the US subprime mortgage crisis. Finally, financialization generates a massive concentration of economic power. The authors note that just twenty of the largest financial players manage more money than the annual GDP of the USA while Black Rock, the world's largest

investment manager, holds financial assets with a value equal to everything Germany produces in a year.

In sum, recent decades have seen a massive expansion of the financial system which has invaded many areas of life, playing with the savings and the needs of ordinary people in order to generate a huge concentration of debt-based wealth and granting finance a hegemonic role in the economy. As such, the financial sector has been able to dictate, with the complicity of the European political class, the handling of the crisis, imposing austerity and pillaging public wealth via bank bailouts.

C&R situate Europe's sovereign debt crisis in this context. Following the crash of 2008 the big financial players searched for suitable investments in a rapidly shrinking financial market. Government debt became an increasingly attractive investment. The turn towards speculation on government debt was made possible, indeed facilitated, by the architecture of the European Union. In addition to the general deregulation of the financial system, the fact that the European Central Bank can not lend money to member states but has been lending cheaply to banks has left member states at the mercy of the markets. Here C&R reveals yet more shocking examples of the sheer extortion rampant in the financial system. Banks and financial institutions can borrow at around 1% interest from the ECB and then use that money to buy government bonds that come with a much juicier interest rate. In many cases bailed-out banks which have swallowed billions of public money in recapitalisations use that money to speculate on government debt, instead of lending to the small businesses we hear so much about.

C&R thus provide an analysis which resonates with the slogans of Syntagma square or the occupy movements, slogans such as "no es una crisis, es una estafa" (it's not a crisis, it's a con); slogans that grasp the consequences of huge concentrations of economic power and the expropriation of collective wealth.

Political crisis: "que no nos representan"

Furthermore, and again much in the style of today's social movements, C&R critiques the role of the European political class in all of this. Our political "leaders" have completely failed to recognize that the massive concentration of wealth, deregulation, and sovereign debt speculation need to be challenged. Instead, there has been a combined effort by politicians, lobbies, think tanks, and the media to single out public spending as the cause of the debt crisis and to propose austerity as the solution. This has left the population of Europe, especially the periphery, trapped in a cycle of debt and austerity. All manner of anti-democratic measures have been employed to back up this discourse, from imposing "technical governments" in Greece and Italy to threatening expulsion from the euro, not to mention the current "fiscal compact" which, in conjunction with existing EU treaties, grants austerity a quasi-constitutional status.

What remains of the traditional left has failed to propose any meaningful alternative, relying on outmoded national Keynesian arguments. In the case of

Ireland, to take one example, socialist parties (such as the Socialist Workers Party and Sinn Féin) have been arguing for a solution which essentially involves leaving the euro and using a regained monetary and fiscal sovereignty to create employment and to tax wealth on a national level. Such approaches fail to recognize that the massive concentration of wealth in the financial system leaves peripheral nations vulnerable to speculative attacks on sovereign debt, a fact which would only be reinforced by leaving the euro or, indeed, the European Union.

What is needed, instead, is a dimension of European resistance with the capacity to face up to financial blackmail and willing to directly attack the international financial oligopoly. One of the most inspiring aspects of C&R is the fact that it identifies such a possibility, or even embryonic reality, in the practices of the movements mushrooming across the Euro-Mediterranean space. The second chapter of the book is a masterful review of the many-headed hydra these movements represent, from the Arab spring to occupy style movements, from the revolt of urban youth to resistance to dismantling the public sector. C&R refers to these movements as the "spectre haunting Europe." But this "spectre" is not the proletariat Marx and Engels described in the 19th century; it is a plural movement of new social subjects that emerge at the *point of expropriation* (which financialization generalises across society) rather than the *point of production*.

Proposals: "it's not our debt"

This last chapter of the book is dedicated to articulating and strengthening the potential of the movements. Of course, this is not a "neutral" reflection of what is happening in the movements (if such a thing were possible) but a political intervention.

In my view, the most significant of the book's proposals is the repudiation of illegitimate debt. Here the notion of the "political default" is central; non-payment represents an explicit act of resistance designed to destroy the concentration of wealth in the financial system and extortion by speculators. "It's not our debt" and "we won't pay" are slogans which are brave enough to contemplate a confrontation with the financial superpowers.

What is refreshing about C&R's intervention here is its honesty. In stark contrast to much of the traditional left, who argue that repudiating debt will lead to a Keynesian recovery, C&R fully recognizes that:

> Generalized default -- from families to the state -- would accelerate the banking crisis...It would surely set in motion a series of bankruptcies while at the same time undermining private credit and the traditional ways in which states have financed themselves (p. 134).

Despite these challenges, the inequalities and contradictions of financial capitalism -- and the increasingly authoritarian forms of state power needed to

support it -- make it vital to free ourselves from any dependency on the banking and financial system. For C&R, alternative ways of organizing credit and production will need to form part of this process.

This in turn throws up the question of how we manage and exchange resources. The authors propose the "commons" as a useful concept here. The notion of the commons escapes the increasingly meaningless dichotomy between public and private, proposing that resources are common precisely to the extent that they directly belong to all of us. They are neither private property nor property of the state, mediated neither by a bureaucratic institution nor exchange value. The commons is proposed as a weapon to fight against the privatization of public services because it positions the state as a "mere intermediary," thus challenging the state's right to privatise what does not belong to it (p. 142).

Against the crisis of democracy, C&R point towards the movements' invention of new forms of horizontal democratic practice, operating in decentralized networks that connect disparate nodes to create an increasingly effective counter-power (Iceland's "wiki-constitution", the "plazas" of the 15-M movement and the Occupy assemblies being just some examples). The challenge here is "how to institute new forms of democracy: what type of electoral reform, what new instruments of participation and decision making..." (p. 138). More importantly, "the movement has learned that the force which makes democracy effective does not arise solely from institutions, but from something much less tangible" which C&R describes as "the possibility that literally everything can be questioned, the capillary extension of political discussion...and the participation between equals as the elemental principle of decision making" (p. 139). They also set these democratic challenges in a European context, arguing that the movements already enjoy an inherently transnational dimension. This must be strengthened over and above the national-based tendencies which still linger in our movements. C&R is categorical in its critique of national based strategies:

> Even if the 15-M movement or that of the Greek squares had the force to challenge the alliance between governments and oligarchies in their respective counties, or to impose a unilateral default on their states, they could not achieve a viable and economic alternative in their own country. The punishment inflicted by the financial markets against those countries would escalate, beginning with a flight of capital, followed by the closure of all channels of state finance and finishing with an exit from the euro and a dramatic economic crash (p. 143).

The empowering alternative they set out is the "extension and contamination of the movement on a continental scale" (p. 143). Here they see the democratization of European institutions as an objective around which movements might coalesce. They propose several reforms including the exclusion of lobbies from Brussels, the democratization of the European Central Bank, and the creation of genuinely democratic institutions in place of the decrepit European parliament. A democratised European political space would be in a position to implement redistributive and regulatory mechanisms that

meet the international scale of capital. The authors propose a number of such measures including the abolition of tax havens, tax on movements of capital and financial transactions, and taxes on "hidden" costs (e.g. ecological costs).

These proposals represent an intervention as innovative as it is challenging. What is most innovative is the capacity to announce effective, meaningful and transformative demands without compromising the radicality of the critique of capital. They transcend the redundant division between "reform and revolution" to engage, from the point of view of the movements, with real challenges in a manner which is intelligent, honest and concrete. What is most challenging in this book is that it slaughters some of the "sacred cows" of the radical left social movements. For instance, they argue that, given that political default would cause an acceleration of the banking crisis, alternative forms of credit such as cooperatives or public credit might be developed. This suggests that the revolutionary process they propose as the only way out of the cycle of austerity and debt would be one in which production continues to be linked to credit. The more "traditional" anti-capitalist wings of the social movements would no doubt see in such a position a failure to fully break with the logic of capital. Likewise, C&R argues that the fact that financialization threatens not just the welfare of ordinary people but also economic growth itself opens the possibility of an alliance between social democratic groups and more radical social movements. Finally, the notion of reforming European institutions will be controversial for many.

To my mind, the proposals put forward by C&R succeed in maintaining their radical edge while developing concrete strategic possibilities because they are founded on a nuanced analysis. This is evident in the form of political economy at stake here, a form which takes full account of the transformations in accumulation linked to financialisation and hence grasps the new antagonisms which are not captured by traditional radical politics (e.g. outmoded conceptions of class). This vision operates from the potentiality of actually existing conflicts discernible in the movements. In this sense, C&R might be described as Marxism at its finest; it is a Marxism of the "real movement which destroys the present state of things."

On the other hand, a nuanced view of the relationship between movements and the state or EU institutions underpins the analysis. Rather than an "all or nothing" approach, C&R takes cognizance of the way in which the very act of forcing radical demands on the state involves its own radical dimension that transcends the terms of the state. They consider the state relevant, but not as a vehicle for emancipation. Rather, they seem to see the state and EU institutions as a kind of presence against which social movements must maintain an antagonism that can subject those institutions to the egalitarian and democratic energy of the movement.

That said, the reader will be left with some questions. The possibility of an alliance between radical anti-capitalist movements and more social democratic leanings is suggestive, but what of the dangers here; for example, in reproducing discourses which are ultimately supportive of capital? How might the tensions

here be negotiated? In addition, arguments about alternative credit sources and alternative forms of production are underdeveloped and ambiguous. Nevertheless, this book is a manifesto and no one should expect it to develop a blueprint for the post-revolutionary society. The debates generated by the questions left open by the book will no doubt be as fruitful as the book itself.

This book is priceless for anyone who wants to participate in building a critique of financialization, or critically understanding debt, speculation and their relationship with austerity. In other words, this book is for anyone interested in the political economy of the present. But it is also a vital *intervention* into the movements – an invitation and challenge to kick start a series of discussions which are badly needed. What is more, the book is not only a must-read manifesto against a Europe of debt and austerity, it is a manifesto for the power of a form of critique immersed in antagonistic subjectivity and an example of the possibilities of radical analysis enriched by the potentiality of everyday struggles.

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Lemonik Arthur, Mikaila Mariel (2011). *Student activism and curricular change in higher education.* **Surrey, England: Ashgate. (220 pp)**

Reviewed by **Christine Neejer**

From cable news reports to informal chatter, negative portrayals of college students are easy to find. Under the current guise of millennials, college students are often criticized as apolitical, prioritizing career ambition and social networking over "learning for learning's sake." When involved in activism, a notable amount of mainstream media coverage, as well as some activists of previous generations, frame college students' motives and tactics as irrational and poorly planned. News coverage of the Occupy Movement has provided numerous examples, as many journalists conceptualized students' activism against corporate and political greed as a trend lacking sound ideology and strategy.

Fortunately, the recent work of Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur provides a refreshing view of college students' activism that diverges from these stereotypes and assumptions. In *Student Activism and Curricular Change in Higher Education,* Arthur broadens the scope of social change analysis beyond outside actors demanding change from the state. Her project aims to understand the particular process of social change within organizations. Arthur's organization of choice is American colleges and universities and she understands students as both outside and inside actors. Using case studies of six colleges (she gives them pseudonyms), Arthur documents the internal campaigns to bring interdisciplinary fields of Women's Studies, Asian-American Studies and Queer Studies into each school's curriculum.

Arthur opens the text by outlining the activist roots of each interdisciplinary field. Women, Asian-Americans and queer activists challenged traditional curriculums that excluded their lived experience as well as practices which limited their access to higher education. Arthur locates each field within the institutionalization process, positioning Women's Studies as most institutionalized, queer studies as least institutionalized, and Asian-American studies between the two. Arthur then discusses previous models of understanding social change including irrationality, framing, leadership, resource mobilization, political opportunity, and meditation theory along with the market and neo-institutionalism. Arthur believes each approach is limited because they focus on outsider actors addressing the state. She also explains how scholars have given little attention to actually measuring the concrete impact of particular social movements regardless of the actors or targeted institutions.

Arthur proposes the "organizational mediation model" to assess the impact of organizational campaigns by insiders, activism which she positions within the scholarship of social movements (p. 10). Using her case studies to test the model, Arthur argues that the impact of campaigns to establish Women's

Studies, Asian-American Studies, and Queer Studies can be predicted by comparing activists' use of "contentious politics" with the internal dynamics and context of the college (2011: 17). The organizational mediation model suggests that campaigns have a greater impact when they mirror, not conflict, with their context, specifically the organization's mission, openness and flexibility in the administration, and roles of other actors. Arthur therefore argues there is no single activist strategy that will increase the impact of a campaign. She instead proposes that studying activists' choices in their unique context can best assess their impact.

Interestingly, Arthur's model thus suggests that students attending schools already favourable to the incorporation of interdisciplinary studies should use assertive tactics, while students at schools less likely to support such additions should use assimilative tactics. To put concretely, students attending a college with history of activism, progressive mission, or flexible administrative procedures -- all elements that assist campaigns for interdisciplinary studies -- are mostly likely to have an impact if they engage in public, contentious forms of protest, such as media campaigns, picketing, and even chaining themselves on a school building. Students interested in studying these subjects in a school with ideological or bureaucratic barriers, such as a conservative or religious mission, little democratic decision making, or funding issues, should run a less confrontational, assimilative campaign that does not overtly challenge the school itself.

For example, "Abigail Adams College" is a private, prestigious women's college with the longstanding mission to educate women. Students' assertive "pressure campaign" to create a Women's Studies program made sense in a feminist-orientated campus with a vocal student body, active alumni, and engaged local activists (Arthur 2011: 48). Similarly, students at "Jeffery University" occupied a building for six days because the administration failed to respond to their proposals for an Asian-American Studies department. "Jeffery University" has a rich history of student activism, and students have been occupying buildings since the 1960s. The administration, used to aggressive tactics, responded with negotiation meetings and eventually a number of the students' demands were met.

To contrast, students who attended the private, Catholic "College of the Assisi" were able to incorporate Women's Studies into their curriculum when they reframed the subject as womanist and cut ties with polarizing topics such as abortion, birth control, and lesbian rights. "College of the Assisi" students and faculty furthered campus-wide interest in Women's Studies by organizing a symposium of student research on women and incorporating women's experiences into conversations on religion, life and belief. They never used aggressive, public tactics such as protests and they purposefully removed political issues from their campaign that challenged the college's mission. According to Arthur's model, all three campaigns had a successful impact because they were aligned with the existing frames of each college.

Despite the title, students are not the only actors in campaigns for curricular change. In all six colleges, faculty, staff, and students worked together at varying levels of comfort and mutual understanding. In some colleges, faculty directly led efforts to incorporate interdisciplinary fields. While at "Technopark University" for example, students were inspired to advocate for Women's Studies due to informal mentoring from feminist faculty. Non-teaching staff at "Jeffery University," who were not subject to worries of losing tenure, were the central support for student activists advocating for Queer Studies. Throughout the case studies, Arthur highlights the significance of these alliances and their timing. Students' campaigns moved smoother and quicker when a supportive college president was hired or feminist-identified faculty gained tenure. Yet Arthur is quick to note alliances and timing can lessen the impact of campaigns as well. For example, she suggests that the lack of a formal Queer Studies program at "Sagebrush University" speaks not to ongoing homophobia but a remarkably positive campus climate. Arthur argues that "Sagebrush" is currently so supportive to LGBTQ students that many view Queer Studies as unnecessary and mobilize around other issues they believe are more pressing.

This book provides numerous insights that could be useful to readers interested in interdisciplinary fields, campus activism, or social change more broadly. Arthur's case studies are diverse and rich. While the schools represent various levels of acceptance of Women's Studies, Asian-American Studies, and Queer Studies, they illustrate that these fields can interest a wide range of students in numerous educational settings. A history of campus activism, progressive political leanings, size, or prestige does not necessarily predict students' desire for interdisciplinary study or their ability to lead effective campaigns to change their colleges. What does matter, according to Arthur, is their choices. Arthur refreshingly views college students not as apathetic or rash but as "educated and strategic thinkers with sophisticated understandings" of social change (p. 165). Arthur's work also highlights the impact of campus activism from the late 1970s and 1980s, periods that are not commonly known for their activist impulse. Arthur's research reiterates what many activists know well: social change often takes many years. In some schools, decades passed between the first students to advocate for Women's Studies and the establishment of a major. Activists struggling to see the fruits of their labour would benefit from keeping this in mind. Arthur's model is not limited to education and could be used to study activism within other types of organizations as well.

The particular impact of students' socio-economic class could have been more fully explored in the book. For example, "Promenade University" is a commuter school with high dropout rates and little student activism. The working-class student body, many of whom are first generation college students, have "busy lives" and lack "the means and the knowledge" to advocate for curricular change (p. 67). Arthur believes "more could have been done" at "Promenade" as current interdisciplinary programs are small and struggling (p. 70). The case study could be an interesting starting point to discuss how students' socio-economic status can limit their access to interdisciplinary fields as well as their abilities to mobilize.

Perhaps some success stories in the book are in part because those students did not have to care for children or work numerous jobs. They could afford to take theoretical courses instead of pre-professional or vocational programs, and they understood the systems and cultures of higher education because their family members also attended college. Similarly, students able to attend private schools faced significantly different challenges in their activism compared to those in public schools with more direct state involvement. Arthur could have addressed this difference directly in her analysis. Arthur acknowledges that a more in-depth look into resources is needed, and perhaps she will take on such a project in her future work.

These are minor qualms in a book that is engaging, informative, and accessible. The text clearly shows the importance of tracing the history of curricular change and thinking critically about what knowledge "counts" and who engages in the "counting." The book illustrates the potential of the campus as a space for inspiring and achieving social change, an important reminder to activists and academics alike.

About the reviewer

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MacKinnon, R. (2012). *Consent of the networked: The worldwide struggle for internet freedom*. New York: Basic Books. (320 pp.)

Reviewed by **Piotr Konieczny**

Consent of the Networked has attracted attention even before its release in early 2012. Since then, it has been covered in mainstream media (such as the Guardian) and numerous digerati sites, such as TechDirt and BoingBoing. In the midst of this, a question arises -- should this book be of concern to activists and scholars of social movements?

It is my opinion that yes, this is a book worthy of attention. MacKinnon makes an excellent point that as cyberspace is affecting more and more of our lives, it has become much more than just a tool -- it is a new front in the continuing struggle for our freedoms. As the author demonstrates time and again, the Internet can and does affect our lives to an extent that the online freedoms are becoming an integral part of our everyday rights.

Consider the example of the Arab Spring: it was about much more than the Internet, and there is no denying that to whatever extent the new media were used, they were just tools for achieving something greater. At the same time, those tools proved vital for organization of activists and for their communication with the outside world. Revolutions happened before the Internet, but in the era of the Internet, they have to utilize the net to be effective. If there are forces which are trying to make it harder for us to be able to use the new media for activism, they are striking directly at our ability to speak out as free citizens of the world. As Manuel Castells, quoted in the book, once noted: while online insurgent communities have scored some victories, those are not guaranteed to be permanent, as power holders will try to "enclose free communication in commercialized and policed networks".

Relatively few of us, however, pay attention to the minute details of laws being passed all around the world, or to the actions of for-profit companies delivering our online services. Both of those forces, however, are trying to affect the code -- the underlying software that makes the Internet what it is. The governments do it in the interest of security, the companies -- in the interest of profit. The result is a steady erosion of privacy and restriction of our rights to speak and to congregate in cyberspace.

On the bright side, there are activists and groups (like the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Free Software Foundation, the Pirate Party or the Sunlight Foundation) that are campaigning to protect our rights. The struggle for "Internet Freedom" is not lost yet, but it is quickly emerging as a vital part of the human rights struggle in the 21st century (particularly as the question of whether the right to access the Internet is a human right itself begins to be treated seriously).

The book covers many themes in a manner that on occasion seems a little chaotic, as certain issues are repeated several times. This is however only a minor problem; overall, the flow of the book is rather good, making it stand out from the crowd of recent publications on digital activism. The numerous examples are woven into a coherent thread, with the book divided into several distinct parts. After the introduction to the concept of digital commons -- how the Internet has been built "by the people for the people,"-- the influence of governments, both democratic and authoritarian, is covered with a discussion of censorship throughout the world.

One of the book's major strengths is in its coverage of the complex relations between the governments and for-profit enterprises, a relation that often seems to be aimed at – intentionally or not – reducing the influence and freedoms of regular citizens. When the governments ask (demands) that corporations do something the government way, they often see no reason not to; and at the same time, if there is something they want from the government (such as a stricter copyright enforcement), they have skills in government lobbying that few can match. This is not something that is unique to places like China; while the censorship that is happening in those places is expected, the attempts to introduce it, often under the guise of fighting crime and terrorism, in the more democratic countries is perhaps even more worrisome. As MacKinnon notes: "Politicians throughout the democratic world are pushing for stronger censorship and surveillance by Internet companies to stop theft of intellectual property. They are doing so in response to aggressive lobbying by powerful corporate constituents without adequate consideration of the consequences for civil liberties, and for democracy more broadly."

Another powerful observation in the book concerns the fact that throughout the world much of the political discourse happens both through privately owned and operated digital intermediaries (Internet service providers) and within spaces that, despite appearances to the contrary, are not public (such as Facebook or Twitter). The companies that run them are at best "benevolent dictatorships," creating and enforcing whatever rules they want, and their customers are bound by the rarely-read, complex terms of service. As MacKinnon points out, those companies "may have deployed tools that people are using around the world in pushing for democracy but they are no democrats."

If the public, led by activists, does not demand that they become more socially responsible, it is unlikely they will do so through their own will. As the book succinctly illustrates, it is rare for the companies to seriously take the initiative and push for individual rights, and neither can we expect the governments or international intergovernmental organizations like the UN to be our ally.

The book ends with the argument that people of the world need to become netizens, educated about and involved with Internet issues, taking action to protect their (our) rights on the Internet, and through it, in the real world. The issues of Internet governance may seem obscure at first, yet the outcome of relevant power struggles can and will significantly affect the extent to which, as

the author notes, "any speech that displeases powerful governments or large brand-name corporations can have safe passage and a safe home on the Internet."

On a final note, there is more to the book than just its printed version. The Web 2.0 website promoting the book has a number of resources, from regular errata to a regularly updated (as of late April 2012) blog (http://consentofthenetworked.com/author/rebeccamackinnon/) and a "get involved" section directing readers to places on the web where they can learn more about and join one of many organizations promoting the causes of Internet freedom. This, like nothing else, shows that the author truly cares about the issues she writes about -- something that is not without importance in the fields of journalism and activism.

About the reviewer:

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Call for papers vol 5 issue 1 (May 2013)

Struggles, strategies and analysis of anticolonial and postcolonial social movements

Issue editors:
Aziz Choudry, Lesley Wood, Mandisi Majavu

Scholars of empire (e.g. Ananya Roy 2005 & Derek Gregory 2004) point out that the "colonial present" is not only the initial moment of the colonial encounter, but also the constant manufacturing of 'democracies', 'freedoms', economies and histories in a manner that advances the goals of empire even long after empire has supposedly withdrawn from the colony. Raghavan (1990), for example, described economic globalization through the GATT (now the WTO) as 'recolonization' of the nominally independent states of the global South.

While anticolonial and postcolonial movements are the subject of a rich body of thought and sites of significant knowledge production in themselves, challenges to the conceptual accuracy and appropriateness of the widely-used terms 'postcolonialism' and 'postcolonial' also come from Indigenous scholars and activists (L.T. Smith, 1999; Venne, 2004; M.Jackson, 2004, 2007; Coulthard; 2011; Watson, 2008; A.Smith, 2005) and critical race feminists (Thobani, 2007) based in settler colonial states such Australia, Canada, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the USA.

This special issue of the open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (http://www.interfacejournal.net/) links anticolonial and postcolonial accounts of movements and their praxis to resist the 'colonial present' that is embodied in state policies, intergovernmental institutions, processes and agreements such as the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, domestic and global capital.and indeed in some cases, NGOs and 'civil society' movements themselves..

The editors are seeking papers that examine the praxis and the politics of anti-colonial and postcolonial movements. How are the ideas of Fanon, Cabral, Cesaire and other activist/intellectuals relevant to movements today in continuing struggles for self-determination, justice and liberation, and against the co-optation of independence struggles by domestic elites and contemporary forms of colonial violence and imperialism? How do these movements conceptualise feminism? Do middle class activists, NGOs and academics have a role to play in these movements, and popular struggles in present-day, or formerly colonized territories?

Papers may question the meaning of postcolonialism, anticolonialism or decolonization and its relevance/implications for organizing. How do analyses

of colonialism and practices towards decolonization inform contemporary struggles in different contexts?

Contributors are encouraged to explore regional and historical and other contextual differences in the way that these movements have developed.

General submissions

As in all issues of *Interface*, we will accept submissions on topics that are not related to the special theme of the issue, but that emerge from or focus on movements around the world and the immense amount of knowledge that they generate. Such general submissions should contribute to the journal's mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements — in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews — and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Arabic, Catalan, Croatian, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page for details of who to submit to.

Deadline and contact details

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published May 2013, is November 1 2012. For details of how to submit to *Interface*, please see the "Guidelines for contributors" on our website. All manuscripts, whether on the special theme or other topics, should be sent to the appropriate regional editor, listed on our contacts page. Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page.