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# Interface

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## **Interface volume 6 issue 1**

### **Reinventing emancipation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the pedagogical practices of social movements**

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## **Cover art**

**Photo credit:** The cover photo of this issue was taken in Warsaw, Poland, on November 16 2013. It is an image of the Clown Brigade during the Global Day of Action March, at the COP19 UN Climate Summit. The image was taken by John Foran, Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and co-director of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory ([www.iicat.org](http://www.iicat.org)). He has an event analysis about the Global Climate Justice movement in this issue.

## **About *Interface***

*Interface: a journal for and about social movements* is a peer-reviewed journal of practitioner research produced by movement participants and engaged academics. *Interface* is globally organised in a series of different regional collectives, and is produced as a multilingual journal. Peer-reviewed articles have been subject to double-blind review by one researcher and one movement practitioner.

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

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

## **Reinventing emancipation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the pedagogical practices of social movements**

**Sara C Motta and Ana Margarida Esteves**

This issue of *Interface* aims to make a contribution to the ongoing politics of knowledge of those marginalized, made illegible and spoken-over by the contemporary geopolitics of capitalist coloniality. It engages with the rich heritages of popular pedagogical practices, subaltern philosophies and critical theorisations by entering into dialogue with the experiences, projects and practices of social movements who are at the forefront of developing a new emancipatory politics of knowledge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In this introduction we situate historically, politically and theoretically the centrality of the pedagogical in both the learning of hegemonic forms of life, social relationships and subjectivities but also in practices of unlearning these and learning new ones. We identify the general themes that emerge from the rich cornucopia of experiences discussed in the issue as a contribution to the mapping and nurturing of the ecology of counter-politics of knowledges flourishing across the globe.

Our intention is that this dialogue and systematisation will itself constitute a pedagogical intervention which can facilitate and inspire experimentation, reflection and collective learning by social movements, communities in struggle, and activist-scholars. We hope that this issue of *Interface* can play a performative utopic function visibilising the 'others' of capitalist coloniality and posing open questions which support the flourishing of multiple grounds of epistemological becoming.

Thus we aim to weave the generic insights and thematics of our contributing authors throughout this introductory overview.

### **Theorising the geopolitics of knowledge of capitalist coloniality**

Marxist, decolonial, post-colonial, feminist, anti-racist, queer, post-structuralist and autonomist/anarchist critical traditions with differing foci, demonstrate the exclusions and violences at the heart of the emergence and reproduction of capitalism (see for example in the Marxian tradition, Holloway, 2002; Vaneigem, 1967; Negri, 1999; di Angelis, 1996; for the anarchist tradition, Kropotkin, 1896; Day, 2005; for black and decolonial feminisms, Anzaldúa, 2007; hooks, 2003; Lugones, 2010; queer tradition, Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990; anti-racist (postcolonial) Fanon, 2008; and post-structuralist, Foucault, 1980). They foreground how capitalism/modernity is built upon alienations and separations embedded within a world view of individualism, maximization of material gain and processes of subjectification. The worldview or cosmology of capitalism is one based on an instrumental and indifferent relationship to

nature, denial of 'other' worldviews and devaluing of the emotional and embodied. This is manifested in relationships of power-over, hierarchy and competition in the subjective and social realms and (re)produced through a spatial logic of separation, division and dispossession.

Crucially, as feminists have demonstrated these alienated subjectivities and social relationships are also gendered. Emotionality is a feminised construct associated with the irrational, the unruly and the shameful - something to be controlled to avoid disruption to the normal and rational social and physic order (Anzaldúa, 2007, pp, 38-40; Lorde, 2000, pp. 1-4). Alienation thus becomes embedded in our bodies, impoverishing our bodily relationships with each other and ourselves, and distorting our emotions resulting in toxic blockages and repressions (Lorde, 2000). Yet as Jamie Heckert (2013) describes 'to realise that the intertwined hierarchical oppositions of hetero/homo, man/woman, whiteness/color, mind/body, rational/emotional, civilized/savage, social/natural and more are all imaginary is perhaps a crucial step in letting go of them. How might we learn to cross the divide that does not really exist except in our embodied minds?'

And it is here where analytic and political attention to the pedagogical becomes crucial. Underlying and enabling the reproduction of such alienated and alienating ways of inhabiting, knowing and creating the world are a politics of knowledge which, as many of our contributors demonstrate is deeply monological, authoritarian and violent. This involves a conception of the world reflective of the particular interests of dominant groups, becoming 'incorporated into everyday life as if it were an expression of it, and to act as an actual and active guiding force, giving direction to how people act and react' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 268). As constructing consent to domination involves learning subjectivities, worldviews and ways of relating, it is, as many of our contributors acknowledge, inherently pedagogical. As Paulo Freire showed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2001), such understandings of the self and the world that reproduce domination often continue even after the structural relationship that has caused that domination in the first place has been eliminated. The character and relational mode of oppressed people tends to be marked by the identification with the oppressor and an often unintentional desire to emulate him/her in terms of identity, position in the social structure and ways of relating to the "other". If that often unconscious tendency is not identified and actively deconstructed, the odds are that the oppressive relationship will be reproduced, this time with new protagonists.

Hegemony is not however closed and determinant. Rather the subaltern are also historical subjects with past political struggles, cultural practices, and moral economies. The residues of such histories infuse everyday consciousness and are conceptualized in Gramsci as good-sense, which "rough and jagged though they always are, are better than the passing away of the world in its death-throes and the swan-song that it produces" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 343). Therefore everyday consciousness is contradictory and fragmented even when hegemonic, leaving



the immanent possibility of the articulation of counterhegemonic moral economy and political practice in the subaltern.

Or as decolonial feminist Maria Lugones argued, it is not enough to deconstruct the ontological and epistemological violences at the heart of the geopolitics of knowledge of capitalist coloniality. To remain within this move is to reinscribe the colonised into the coloniser's logics of representation and to assume that as Lugones (2010, p. 748) describes 'global capitalist colonial system is in every way successful in its destruction of people's knowledges, relations and economies'. Rather we must remember through creating an incarnated peopled memory that 'it is her belonging to impure communities that gives life to her agency' and she is,

Neither simply imagined and constructed by the coloniser and coloniality...but is a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, where the sides of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation'(Lugones, 2010, 7p. 48).

Building upon good sense or the fracture in the colonial locus means that as bell hooks argues (1990, p. 15) '[that] after one has resisted there is the necessity to become- to make oneself anew...That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one invents alternative habits of being and resists from marginal space of difference inwardly defined'. This implies that the construction of counter-hegemony, anti-hegemony or decolonisation involves 'learning to cross the divide', unlearning these relationships and practices and learning new ones by building upon fragments of good sense and the fractured locus between processes of subjectification and active processes of subjectivity. It is thus also necessarily pedagogical. This learning and unlearning can occur in the formal education, in the informal spheres of everyday life and centrally, in the pedagogical practices (formal and informal) of social movements.

### **Understanding the contemporary geopolitics of knowledge of capitalist coloniality**

In the contemporary geopolitics of knowledge, as forcefully demonstrated by many of our contributors, hegemonic pedagogies produce and reproduce a form of "abyssal thinking" (Sousa Santos, 2007) which renders illiterate, illegible and non-subject those millions of the global South and Global North thrown on the margins by contemporary capitalist logics. This epistemological politics posits 'the thinker' as the pinnacle of the knowing subject. This individualised 'Europeanised' subject has particular embodied attributes and affective practices. His detached, masculinised rationality is able to control the unruly and irrational emotions and bodily desires and the irrationalities of all others

named as disorderly and underdeveloped (Lorde, 2000; hooks, 2001, 2003). He is the subject fit for rule and ruling, a being of mind and reason as opposed to those non-subjects of irrationality and inhumanity.

Such geopolitics of knowledge is inherently produced through a violent relation against the 'other' as it attempts to render invisible, mute and absent through dominant pedagogies of power non-hegemonic subjects. As Lugones (2010, p. 745) describes this is:

the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanisation that fits them for classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings.

Yet of course such particular forms of producing knowledge and the knowing subject are represented as views from no-where, eliding questions about power enacted through, and by, this particular subject and practice of knowledge production. In the contemporary period these logics have been deepened as externally designed (often by elites of the North) and implemented systems of ranking and evaluation of education are imposed in ways that create disciplinary mechanisms and self-disciplining subjects that devalue local, indigenous traditions of pedagogy, education, epistemology and ways of life (Motta and Cole, 2014). This seeks to create a set of institutional mechanisms, discourse and pedagogical practices that prevent the development of critical and autonomous communities of praxis. The result of these practices is to deepen in every more insidious ways the geopolitics of knowledge of capitalist coloniality by situating the masculinised European epistemological, monological and individualized subject as the centre through which all other contents and forms of epistemological practice are judged devalued and ultimately eradicated (Agathangelou and Ling, 2004).

Importantly, ways of knowing are also ways of inhabiting and creating the world and each other. To eradicate the former therefore enacts not merely a discursive eradication but an ontological denial of being 'otherwise'. As Lugones (2010, p. 745) describes the on-going politics of coloniality

justifie[s] the colonization of memory and thus of people's sense of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity and social, ecological and cosmological organisation...the normativity that connect[s] gender and civilization [becomes] intent on erasing community ecological practices, knowledge of planting, of weaving, of the cosmos.

Within this as our authors demonstrate those of the margins of Africa; Latin America, North America and Europe are marked by their representational absence as rational subjects. If they are brought into view it is as the

pathologised non-subjects outside of the bounds of normality, insane, deviant, and subject of criminalisation or 'education'.

Of course the absence of these subjects in dominant pedagogies of power necessitates the agency of the knowing subject of capitalist coloniality. This 'knowing' subject speaks over the needs, desires, realities and struggles of the subaltern, to suggest the forms of education, politics and practices that she would need to become a political subject. Yet the contours of political economy into which she is inserted as non-subject reproduce the violent logics of ecological, material, political, epistemological and ontological denial, through which she becomes a gendered, classed and raced object of rule.

Such logics of denial of the presence, being and ways of knowing of oppressed communities implies that to make visible and re-place these subjects necessitates exceeding the logics of capitalist coloniality in thought and practice. To render visible, in this way, the non-subjects of contemporary capitalism as knowing subjects is an act which shatters the violences at the heart of the contemporary geopolitics of knowledge. This is something which many of our contributors enact and which we aim to practice through this Introduction. Practices of visibilisation (be that textual, visual, embodied, audio) are an act of public pedagogy embedded in ethical and political commitments to recognising the epistemological privilege of those represented as uneducated, irrational and illiterate.

The geopolitics of knowledge produced through the colonial capitalist pedagogies of everyday life enacts therefore a violent monological closure and silencing of all 'others'. Emotional, embodied, oral, popular and spiritual knowledges are delegitimized, invisibilised and denied. Other ways of relating to the earth, each other, the cosmos and our selves are annihilated. These epistemological logics are not external to the colonised and oppressed subject. Rather the long process of subjectification of her to the internalisation of the hierarchical and alienating dichotomies of being, knowing and relating of capitalist coloniality creates as Gil, Purru and Lin describe 'epistemological wounds and ontological wounds' (2012, p. 11).

As our contributors suggest it is not only in the shape of public pedagogies which render visible, literate and subject those made superfluous by capitalist coloniality which constitute counter-hegemonic pedagogical practices. Rather movements are involved in unlearning the oppressor's logics as they reproduce and mark who is heard, seen and rendered knowing within movement struggles and practices. The pedagogical practices of social movements therefore have two moments; one to deconstruct and rupture dominant pedagogies of epistemological and ontological denial by appearing as knowing-subjects. The other moment is the affirmative co-construction of becoming otherwise to these logics as communities and subjects.



## **Counter-politics of knowledge: 'Other' histories**

The pedagogical practices of the movements and struggles analysed and systematised in this issue emerge from and build upon rich traditions of subaltern philosophies, knowledges and pedagogies. These include indigenous cosmologies, liberation theology, traditions of popular education, participatory action research (PAR) and practices emerging from anti-racist, queer and black feminist traditions.

In the case of our contributions from Latin America these pedagogical practices are descendants of Simon Rodriguez's project of epistemological emancipation. Escobar elaborates on this project (cited in Cendales, Mejia and Muñoz, 2013, 7),

[Rodriguez] wanted all - blacks, indigenous poor, direct descendants of the coloniser-to be equals; he intuited that education could fulfil this task because he had no doubt of the intellectual capacities of anyone, and believed conversely, that the people should be the basis from (which) popular democracy is constructed.

In the Latin America and South African contributions they also build upon the heritage of critical educators such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. For Freire knowledge does not exist as a fixed object of facts (a bank) from which individuals might make withdrawals. Rather knowledge is constructed through the dialogical process of engagement between the self and the other, mediated by the world (Freire 2006, p. 25). The understanding of knowledge as an abstract object which constructs its subjects is critiqued as a stagnant, degenerate knowledge by which "words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated verbosity" (Mignolo, 1999 p. 52). As Jonathan Mansell (2013) explains,

In such circumstances, knowledge becomes the master of people; people become mere vassals to be filled with knowledge. Knowledge is in this context anti-democratic: distant, remote, imperial grammar, to be recited without innovation, without questioning, in this context knowledge disembodies people, turns them into mere repeaters, imitators rather than allowing them to develop their radical personhood as unique creators of meaning.

Traditions of Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 2001; Rahman, 1993) also frame movement practice with a commitment to, as Jonathan Langdon, Kofi Larweh and Sheena Cameron argue in their article about the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum of Ghana, 'anti-Eurocentric desire to stop studying the exoticised others'. Such traditions critique colonial knowing subjects and practices of knowing as reproducing the silencing of the exoticised underdeveloped 'other'. Instead they favour practices and pedagogies of

knowing which emerge from the context of community struggle. As in traditions of popular education, knowledge is practiced as a verb not a noun, and emerges from the collective reflective practices of subaltern subjects.

Within both the African and Latin American contributions the role of spirituality and indigenous traditions has played an important role in creating the conditions of emergence of counter-politics of knowledge of the oppressed. One such subaltern spirituality is liberation theology – a radical and popular Catholic tradition characterized by an ethical commitment to the body of suffering poor, faith realized through action for the oppressed, the Bible reread collectively, a focus on direct access to the word of God, and a commitment to self-actualization of the oppressed through their own liberation (Boff and Boff, 1987: 1–9). As Boff and Boff (1987: 9) describe it, it is a biblical frame of reference in which “knowing implies loving, letting oneself become involved body and soul, communing wholly—being committed.”

As Sandra Carvalho and José Mendes demonstrate in their contribution ‘Práxis educativo do Movimento 21 na resistência ao agronegócio’ and John Hammond in his piece reflecting on the role of *Mística* in the MST, liberation theology has played a role in facilitating a structure of emotion based on solidarity and a collective affective commitment to courageous action in the face of injustice. These traditions facilitate the unlearning of hegemonic emotional landscapes of fear and degradation and the learning of emotional attachments of inspiration and dignity. The collective practices and moral economies influenced by this tradition inflect the movements with an ethical commitment to all having the right to speak and to playing a part in realizing their faith and self-liberation.

In the case of the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum of Ghana as Langdon, Larweh and Cameron describe, communities create ecologies of activism in which the struggle for life and community is bound up with literacies based in oral traditions of storytelling. Here knowledge is shared and developed inter-generationally. Everyday spiritualities come to the heart of the constitution and practise of a counter-hegemonic politics of knowledge. They enable a contestation and transgressing of the dominant politics of knowledge of capitalist coloniality which separates the word from the world and as Langdon et al argue create ‘learning that reinforces local ownership of this conversation in opposition to narratives of globalization and state-led visions of large-scale development.’ Here communities create practices of naming the world through telling their own stories and collective authoring an ‘other’ historicity. This contests dominant historiographies which erase and deny them as knowing-subjects.

In the European context these practices build upon the heritages and traditions of working class adult and community education and informal and formal educational struggles. In both the European and North American contexts our contributors Timothy Luchies (*Anti-Oppression as Pedagogy: Prefiguration as Praxis*), Joe Curnow (US movement United Students for Fair Trade) and Rhiannon Firth (*Critical Cartography as Anarchist Pedagogy*) highlight the importance of anti-racist struggle, feminist praxis, anti-colonial struggle, queer

politics and autonomous/anarchist traditions in the development of movement pedagogical practices. In differing ways these heritages have shaped a moral economy and cultural practise committed to inclusion and the fostering of radical difference and dialogue. They explicitly contest the silencing and authoritarian logics of monological constructions of identity, politics and meaning. These traditions shape movement philosophies and political commitments through their attention to how the logics of capitalist coloniality and patriarchy enact processes of subjectification which deny oppressed communities' autonomy, criticality and creativity. Movements have thus developed theorisations arising out of their experiences of the oppressor's logic shaping internal movement practices in the form of habits of being, ways of relating and forms of subjectivity. This has inflected the pedagogical practices of movements with a deep concern to foster internal pedagogies that seek to unlearn dominant logics of being and relating so as to facilitate meaningful inclusion, voice and the conditions of co-construction of movement praxis.

These subaltern educational heritages, traditions, philosophies and practices dethrone the knowing subject of patriarchal capitalist coloniality, which (emphasises) *his* mastery of others and production of the word as separate from the world. In contrast, emancipatory pedagogy fosters processes of mass intellectuality and creativity which build from the embodied experiences of oppression and alienation. They are embedded in commitment to self-liberation, reconnecting pedagogy with politics and educator-educatee with their intellectual-political capacities. These enable communities to re-author themselves through the power of the word which, as Freire argued, is the power to name and change the world (1996, p. 69). This politics embraces multiple forms of knowledge, including the affective, embodied, oral, cognitive and cultural. It experiments with collective and horizontal pedagogies which enable communities to autonomously produce themselves and their communities. Centrally, these communities and movements enact in their knowledge practices the creation of an 'other' history to that of dominant historiography and weave as Lugones describes 'an incarnated peopled memory' (2010, 48)

### **Thematics in the pedagogical practices of social movements: privileging the epistemological margins**

Many of our contributors demonstrate that movements and scholar-activists are committed to a politics of knowledge that privileges the epistemological margins. Movement praxis therefore involves rendering visible and knowing those superfluous non-subjects of contemporary capitalism. As bell hooks (1990, 149) describes, 'I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose- to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre- but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes ones capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds'. Here the margins become transformed from a space of deprivation and lack into a privileged space of epistemological possibility.



The pedagogical comes to the heart of this politics, not conceptualised as a set of methods but rather but as a philosophy of life and practice of struggle. This can imply in the case of the movements from the Global South developing heritages of popular education to create pedagogies and practices which enable collective and critical reflection on the experiences of oppression. As our contributors Cerianne Robertson, Gerald Gill and Anne Selmeczi who write in relation to Abahlali baseMjondolo (Abahlali) from South Africa note, it involves an ontological and epistemological ‘turning on its head’ of dominant pedagogical practices of producing shack dwellers as politically illiterate, irrational and ignorant. This is achieved through developing embodied public and internal pedagogies of presence, voice and intellectuality. It can also imply, as shown by Kowzan, Zielińska and Prusinowska, the creative use of disruption as a way of opening spaces of interrogation and possibility within mainstream, formal pedagogical practices. In their analysis of case studies of politically motivated disruption, by members of the audience, of university lectures in Poland, the authors show how such oppositional practice not only opens space for the public acknowledgment of epistemological margins, but also is in itself a pedagogical act that promotes learning from the part of disrupters, as well as the institutional structures of the university. The result is changes in the methods of disruption, as well as in the way public university lectures are organized.

In the case of North American movements, as Timothy Luchies demonstrates, this involves visibilising those on the epistemological margins *within* movement politics through traditions of anti-oppression praxis. Here the voices of queers, people of colour, women and subjects who face intersecting oppressions take centre stage. They help to configuring internal pedagogies which facilitate the unlearning of the oppressor’s logic of hierarchy, power-over and closure which often structure who is heard and who is silenced within movement practices.

### **Dialogue of knowledges and multiple literacies**

The pedagogical practices of social movements decentre the knowing-subject of capitalist coloniality through unveiling the violent logics at the heart of this practice of knowing. To different degrees this practice of decentring does not attempt to replace one form of knowing with another monological form of knowing but rather facilitates dialogues of knowledge. This is demonstrated in our contributions which reflect and analyse the experience of the MST and Movimento 21 of Brazil and the Ghanaian Ada Songor Advocacy Forum. In these experiences critical political economy, legal theory, non-textual narratives, cultural practices and participant experience are combined to create readings and interpretations of the world which facilitate and strengthen the collective agency of oppressed communities.

This dialogue does not remain within as Mignolo describes ‘the content of the conversation’ of capitalist coloniality but ‘change[s] the terms of the conversation’ (2009, 4). Thus to know and the knowing subject are not separated from the embodied. A crossing of the separation between the mind

and body is enacted and thus knowledge and knowledge practices are not delimited to textual abstraction. Rather multiple literacies are embraced. The experiences of the Ghanaian Ada Songor Advocacy Forum which build on community cultural practices of storytelling is a prime example of the (re)-creation of what it means to know, what knowledge is and who constitutes a knowing subject. Oral dialogues of knowledge are developed in which metaphor and symbolism are created to (re)present the world. These visibilise the capacity to make history of those rendered 'silent' objects of 'development', and (re)create the present and possibilities for the future through analysis of external power and internal movement power dynamics.

As Rhiannon Firth demonstrates in her contribution about '56a Infoshop map archive' in London multiple literacies and knowing-subjects can be created through co-constructing visual forms of representation and shifting spatialities of knowing. Key to this are embodied practices of creating counter-narratives of the city which expose its multiple realities and how power is spatially constructed. Here one comes to 'know' ones place in the urban landscape with greater intensity and depth. It can also involve co-constructing other practices of creating the city both in representational form and through embodied practice. This facilitates as Firth describes 'epistemological pluralism' as a grounds for radical political practice as subjectivity, process and protest. In these examples those denied voice learn to speak in multiple tongues re-working what it means to theorise, to know and be. As Gloria Anzaldúa (2007: 81) describes in relation to the Chicana experience but eminently applicable here, 'I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing; I will have my voice....I will have my serpent's tongue- my woman's voice'.

### **Informal pedagogies: facilitating movement emergence and sustainability and/or reproducing exclusions?**

Many of our contributors demonstrate how the pedagogical practices of social movements involve practices of learning and unlearning internal to the movement. These occur in the micro-practices of movement everyday life. They can included anything from the organisation of campaigns, resource management, development of tactics, distributions of tasks, socialising and storytelling, meetings, and development of movement strategy and understanding. Informal pedagogies enable the learning of specific skills. They also embody learning of the practices and understandings which (re)produce a movement's dominant political meanings, knowledges, subjectivities and relationships. As Joe Curnow describes in his contribution in relation to US student movement United Students for Fair Trade 'Essentially, the community itself is the curriculum that members are learning, reproducing, and innovating through their collaboration'. And as Carvalho and Mendes also demonstrate in the case of the Movimento 21 much of the construction of movement practise and strategy has occurred in everyday movement spaces such as meetings, marches and assemblies. In these an on-going dialogue of knowledges has been

facilitated to enable a coming together of diverse communities, forms of knowing and subjects of knowing.

Such informal pedagogical processes are often at the heart of the consolidation and sustainability of movement culture, relationships, institutions, identity and strategies. They transgress a practice of learning as separate from experience, systematisation as separate from struggle and knowing as a noun. Rather they suggest that movement knowing is an interactive process in which strategy, identity and belonging are continually negotiated and potentially transformed through collaboration and collectivity.

These experiences also demonstrate how the pedagogical does not refer to a method of learning but rather a political project of struggle in which practices of learning are embedded. As Curnow (in this issue) argues, such situated learning 'is a social learning rooted in participation in a community rather than an individual's uptake of content.' The pedagogical in this sense cannot be confined to the narrow limits of hegemonic understandings of education, which alienates and separates the body from the mind, the classroom from the community, and the knower from the known. Rather learning occurs in multiple spatialities, through multiple subjects and these knowing-subjects become creators of political agency, movement practises and imaginaries, and in some cases collective self-liberation.

However, as demonstrated by both Curnow and Luchies in their contributions in relation to North America, what is learnt through such informal pedagogies are a movement's dominant understandings and practices. These can often be exclusionary along race, class and/or gender lines. Both authors underlie how movement practices can mirror the coloniser's logics and how to unlearn these logics involves a politics of knowledge and pedagogies that emerge out of the dissonance experienced by the subjects on movements' margins. As Curnow argues, out of such dissonance can be fostered and facilitated 'oppositional consciousness and opportunities for conscientization'. Here questions about dominant practices, norms and sociabilities and what these obscure from view, what remains unarticulated in their languages, and what has been absent from their thought can be collectively asked (Nakata et. al. , 2012).

If we fail to do such internal pedagogical work then our movements can reproduce the very logics of ontological and epistemological silencing that they seek to transform. As Luchies describes 'When we fail to confront the materiality of White supremacy, settler-colonialism., heteropatriarchy, dis/ableism and capitalism we fail to address some of the most powerful institutions structuring social movement action. And because these institutions directly impact participation and internal dynamics in our movements, failure to address them undercuts our potential to create effective strategies of resistance'

This involves visibilising internal privileges and power structures through creating practices other than the norm. To facilitate such possibilities involves fostering the conditions of possibility for speaking, listening and voice, not as a



means to name and shame others but rather opening the conditions for the possibility of anti-authoritarian practices in all aspects of movement reproduction. Here the role of monologue also becomes central, not monologue to silence and deny others, but rather to facilitate the appearance on the political stage as knowing subjects of those who are denied voice and legibility in our movements. As Luchies describes often those who speak out in relation to internal hierarchies are misnamed as disruptive and problematic. This suggests that the pedagogical practices of social movements can also involve unlearning ourselves, ways of inhabiting the world and forms of relating to others which reproduce the logics of capitalist coloniality.

### **Formal pedagogies: multiplicity in praxis**

Movements also develop formal pedagogies and educational practices that enable the emergence and consolidation of counter-hegemonic politics of knowledge. Methodologies, curriculum, stimulus, programs, and autonomous sites of learning are created. As Edgar Guerra Blanco demonstrates in his contributions about the experience of Frente Popular Francisco Villa (FPFV) movement of Mexico, a militant school was set up to provide political education. This enabled the flourishing of a rich and diverse left universe of intellectual discussions, debate and strategies. It ensured that educational practices were generalised across the movement, undercutting the formation of intellectual hierarchies.

Or as Sandra Gadelha and Ernandi Mendes demonstrate, the movements and organisations involved in the emergence and consolidation of the M21 have been involved in developing Educação do Campo, an understanding of rural education that is *in* and *for* the rural population. This has resulted in the development of 'other' teachers and 'other' schools which contest the dominant politics of knowledge in Ceará and Brazil in which peasants are represented as ignorant, backward and uncivil. Rather it develops a situated politics of knowledge in which learning is reconnected to ethics and political commitments, knowing to everyday life and the spatialities of learning are multiple including all areas of movement life. This formalisation of situated learning enables a qualitative shift in the levels of systematisation and generalisation of movement education. Their practice decentres and re-orders academic knowledges to facilitate the collective construction of knowledges for social transformation. In many ways these are prefigurative epistemologies (Motta, 2011) which dethrone the knowing subject of capitalist coloniality.

Similar practices of formalisation of learning and knowledge practices have occurred in Abahlali baseMjondolo. As Cerianne Robertson demonstrates in her contribution, 'Professors of our own poverty: Intellectual practices of a poor people's movement in post-apartheid South Africa' the movement contests hegemonic politics of knowledge which present shanty-town dwellers as illiterate and 'out of order.' Rather, they resignify such terms through concepts such as living learning and the shack intellectual. They have developed a deep

critique of the colonising logics of formal education through creating their own University of Abahlali. Here learning is linked to reflection on experiences of oppression and exclusion and is again necessarily outside of any sanitised and separate educational space. They create a dialogue of knowledges but on their own terms not on the terms of the dominant, thus inviting outsiders to engage with them but in their placed based practices.

Some might suggest such movement knowledge practices can reify hegemonic common sense and become conservative localism. However, the movement hopes to create alliances, practices and knowledges across epistemic, social and geographical borders as a means to contest and transform the global nature of capitalism but also enrich and deepen their own processes of transformation. This politics of knowledge supports epistemological pluralism. It does not seek to hegemonies the poor's struggle under one banner but facilitate radical and multiple differences *of* and *from* the margins.

In the case of North America as Luchies demonstrates the influence of anti-oppression, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism heritages and increasing turn to post-representational forms of political life have shaped political cultures which are committed to the contestation and transgression of authoritarianism. This situated movement learning has often resulted in relatively formalised norms of political engagement for example the use of particular methods of decision-making such as consensus or specialised techniques of facilitation of meeting spaces and workshops. However, as Luchies demonstrates, this can lead to a separation of the pedagogical from its political and philosophical underpinnings in which 'anti-oppression has sometimes become a set of methods that reproduces exclusions and silences'. Eurig Scandrett in his Action Note 'Popular education methodology, activist academics and emergent social movements: Agents for Environmental Justice' also demonstrates that when popular education becomes a method separated from its methodological roots in a critique of oppression '[it] can be used by reactionary groups in support of colonial and neoliberal projects.'

Edgar Guerra Blanco demonstrates how as the FPFV entered the electoral arena the logics of governance and power took over elite practices. In this scenario the militant school and political education became emptied of their emancipatory theoretical and political underpinnings. This undercut the conditions for the formation of the intellectual, cultural and institutional conditions that could enable the emergence of internal dissent to such processes of de-radicalization. These cases suggest that counter-politics of knowledge are deeply pedagogical but that if such pedagogies are separated from their theoretical and philosophical underpinnings they can become methods that (re)produce hegemonic ways of being, social relationships and subjectivities.

Luchies thus suggests that an emancipatory pedagogical-political project must place *continual* critical collective reflection on practice at its heart. This can be facilitated and fostered by maintaining an emphasis on the relationship between content and method of learning/creating movement practices. This can enable, as he continues, movements to 'produce tools that empower and educate

communities against violence and marginalisation with movement organising; into every aspect of anti-authoritarian politics including decision making, organisational structure, division of labour, resources management, tracts, subcultural norms and security.’

Another form of formal learning and knowledge production occurs between movements and activist-scholars who inhabit both the space of the university and movement. Laurence Cox in his teaching note, which reflects from the perspective of one of the founders and facilitators of an MA course in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism, specifically designed for activists, argues that the course creates the temporalities which allow critical reflection on practice that help in the development of the organising capacities and reflexivity of participants. Central to this is the creation of alternative spatialities from those of movement spaces which are often concerned with the demands and needs of everyday organising. Rather spaces are created which bring activists together in small groups in which they might build the conditions of trust to reflect critically, through engagement with each other’ struggles and other subaltern traditions of knowledge, on their own practise. His contribution foregrounds the important role that dialogues of knowledges in radical education spaces outside of the everyday of movement struggles can have in deepening processes of movement theorising. For these processes to facilitate a democratising of movement knowledge practices they need to maintain and embed their connection to movements to prevent the reinforcing of epistemic privileges and exclusions.

### **Teaching as a reconfiguration of the public**

As our contributors so poetically demonstrate the pedagogical practices of social movements affirmatively create other ways of knowing and being in the world through a weaving of multiple literacies and grounds of epistemological becoming. However, movements also enact pedagogies of negation, disruption and rupture against hegemonic politics of knowledge which systematically deny the subjectivity, knowledges and ways of knowing of those on the margins. This involves processes of resignification of dominant ways of producing public space, political agency and normalised subjectivities.

Appearing as embodied knowing subjects, as Anne Harley demonstrates in ‘The Pedagogy of Road Blockages’ involves not only situated learning by movements but situated practices of teaching the broader community. Such teaching as she describes can be conceptualised as a Gramscian ‘war of manoeuvre’ which enacts an affirmative contestation of hegemony. The movement seeks to teach that those presented as criminalised surplus count, think, and are not voiceless but need to be listened to. As she argues ‘road blockages potentially allow for a rethinking and re-theorising of social movement pedagogy not only as learning within such movements, but as a conscious ‘teaching’ of an alternative truth’.

Such a reconceptualization of movement pedagogy stretches our understanding to include practices of deconstruction and displacement through embodied

public practices of presence and resignification. As Anne Selmeczi in her article, 'Dis/placing political illiteracy: The politics of intellectual equality in South African shack-dwellers' argues, Abahlali disrupts (mis) representations and spatialised practices which (re)produce them as politically illiterate. As she shows the movement is excluded from the public and labelled as disruptive and violent. Thus to become legible subjects involves a disruption of the terms and spatial constitution of the public. Such disruption of necessity creates multiple literacies as the hegemonic praxis of the political makes them mute, silent and unintelligible. In such conditions of life the embodied occupation and disruption of public space becomes a literacy which creates speech, visibility and intelligibility, re-framing the terms of the debate.

These disruptions facilitate processes of active subjectification in resistance to processes of signification which seek to produce shack-dwellers as politically illiterate. As Selmeczi describes these practices '[are] performances of the shack-dwellers' self-affirmation as "questioning people" effectively disrupting the order of knowledge that seeks to mask the contingency of equality and keep the shack-dwellers in their place.... [they] work to reassert the shack-dwellers' self-articulation as speaking beings.' This recalls Walter Mignolo's (2009) argument for epistemic disobedience as both a geo and bio-politics of knowledge. By this he means disobedience against the contemporary positioning of colonised people as less than human who act to rupture such placement of political illiteracy. It also resonates with Wiredu's (1995) appeal to 'epistemic awakening' as a means to counter epistemic obedience to the violent logics of contemporary capitalism.

### **On the margins of the margins: the embodied, affective and spiritual in becoming otherwise in theory and practice**

Existing on the margins of reflections on the politics of knowledge is attention to the embodied attachments, affective commitments and spiritual practices that are valued and devalued in hegemonic politics of knowledge but which become central in the creation of an emancipatory politics of knowledge.

The pedagogical practices of movements disrupt the 'normal' embodied attachments and affective commitments of the hegemonic subject of knowing. As demonstrated by Luchies the painstaking commitment and work to transform internal movement violences and exclusions involves developing the conditions of voice of, and active listening to, those who have been silenced. This transgresses the hegemonic subject of knowing who seeks to master the world and others in order to demonstrate the truth of their arguments and knowing. Rather it involves creating ethical commitments to each other and recognition of the other within and without, of that which is exiled and cast out by the violent logics of capitalist subjectification (see, Motta 2013 for discussion of the other within and without).

An intellectual-philosopher from the margins as our contributors demonstrate is of necessity in relation with others, collectively co-producing and facilitating

emancipatory knowledges. Such subjects transgress practices of shaming and (mis) naming characteristic of the knowing subject of capitalist coloniality and instead as Figlan describes (cited in Robertson, this issue) ‘someone who, firstly, knows their surroundings, knows their environment, and secondly, someone that humbles themselves not to be bullying or arrogant but instead to show a big mind by being able to adjust to their environment in a way that is not intimidating or undermining for the people in that environment’.

New emotional literacies are fostered in movement’s practices which nurture the coming into being as political subjects of oppressed communities. Spaces are created, as both Gerald Gill in his contribution about knowledge practices in Abahlali and Cynthia Cockburn in her contribution ‘Exit from war: Syrian women learn from the Bosnian Women’s movement’ detail, in which trauma can be witnessed and stories of everyday oppression spoken. Here vulnerability is not repressed and denied but rather embraced as a form of strength and courage. The power of tears creates openings in which enforced silence can become active voice. This recalls the practices of feminist consciousness raising in which honouring and speaking without fear the embodied experiences of oppression and trauma was a fundamental building block of enabling the appearance of subjugated knowledges and oppressed subjects (hooks, 1990; Anzaldúa, 2007).

This also speaks to the reflections in the action note by Ed Lewis and Jacob Mukherjee “Demanding the Impossible? An experiment in engaging urban working class youth with radical politics” in which they discuss their experience of organising a London based summer school about radical politics and activism for 16-19 year olds. When the course focused on oppression and exploitation as something external to participants lives it didn’t motivate the forming of collective solidarities or collective political agency that stretched beyond the ‘classroom’ space. However, when they revised the structure of the course to bring participant experience to the centre of the summer school this resulted in the formation of collective solidarities and a qualitatively different relationship between the young people, the course and political activity. Key to this was pedagogy of disruption that challenged taken for granted assumptions of participants through creating a dialogue between their experiences and other knowledges. The authors-facilitators were able to develop pedagogies of discomfort that were productive and creative, demonstrating the important role of affective pedagogies in creating transformatory learning spaces (see also Boler and Zembylas for a conceptualisation of pedagogies of discomfort). As they argue this demonstrates the narrowness of rationalist assumptions about what motivates and inspires political action and agency.

Such affective commitments and practices do not exclude pedagogies of embodied resistances, as occupations and resignification of the public foregrounds. However, in constructing the conditions for epistemological pluralism and multiple grounds of epistemological becoming, our contributors also foreground the expectation that those outside movements also actively resist hegemonic processes of subjectification as knowing-subjects. Abahlali

seek to step across the false epistemological, social and geographical borders that separate us. However, as Gerald Gill shows in his contribution, they expect that 'outsiders' walk with humility and have willingness to learn from and with the poor. This recalls a recent contribution by Jamie Heckert, *Anarchy without Opposition* (2013) in which he asks 'what new possibilities arise when we learn to cross, to blur, to undermine, or overflow the hierarchical and binary oppositions we have been taught'. This involves not fostering critical distance- a common imperative of hegemonic knowing practice- but rather nurturing critical intimacy. When stepping across these (false) borders the embodied attachments and affective commitments learnt in such encounters involve activist-scholars unlearning those elements of themselves that reproduce the oppressor's logics and learning themselves anew (Motta, 2013).

Other contributors focus on forms of embodied and spiritual knowing as essential to the creation and flourishing of counter-politics of knowing and becoming. Rhiannon Firth analyses how processes of collective map making can create a new sense of place and of dwelling in the city, which deepens the capacity to autonomously author the map-creators' lives and communities. The maps in the process of their creation and their existence as a subaltern language reconstitute social bonds and horizons of hope. Through constituting sociabilities and solidarities they can facilitate the emergence and consolidation of autonomous communities and ways of life. As Firth describes 'the process of mapping has the potential to reconstitute subjectivities through affective learning, to reconstitute social bonds through affinity and to act as a basis for bringing new worlds into being'.

As Langdon et al. demonstrate symbolism and spirituality are essential elements in the development of epistemic disobedience and appearance for the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum. Meaning making and being in the world are constituted through the literacies of symbolism, storytelling and embodied connections with the land and broader cosmos. It is worth citing at length Kofi Larweh, one of the article's authors, for his ability to capture this epistemic-ontological inter-connectedness

When we were growing up, knowledge and wisdom was presented in the form of Ananse Stories and you have animals and trees talking and it helps to build the imagination so that one is led in the spirit to experience what is good. Now, our people are storytellers. All the history of the community is, is written in songs, in stories that are handed over from one generation to the other and so, people would even say what is going on in the community in the form of animals or trees, birds or whatever, in a certain way. Our people are great storytellers. That is the reason why I started by saying that what has been expressed has two forms, the spirit and the letter...And our work, in the field, is to help people tell their stories. Is to help people come out with these images so that it will stick, the images stick better, because that is what people will remember. Even up to this day, those who said these things and those who heard will know that, when you're talking of the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon, they know what they are talking about



John Hammond in his contribution about *Mística* in the MST also demonstrates how Christian mysticism and symbolism are central elements that help understand the sociabilities, solidarities and commitment of the movement. *Mística* as he describes abounds in symbols, material objects with deep meaning, incorporating everyday products and tools. It involves the enactment of performances which bring dignity and pride to communities who are constructed as ignorant, politically illiterate and uncivil in dominant literacies. The collective spirit and energy created in such performances enact a utopic function. This helps create and sustain emotional literacies that support continued embodied commitment and courage in the face of injustice and capitalist violences. As Roselli Caldart (cited in Hammond, this issue) describes 'Mística is the seasoning of the struggle, the passion that enlivens militants.' This is echoed in the contribution by Gerald Gill in which he demonstrates how Abahlali develop a new concept and ethical orientation to their praxis related to the Southern African Philosophy of Ubuntu 'a duality of individuality and simultaneous unity'. This facilitates processes in which taking care of one another is experienced as a form of power and dignity. It can result in public embodied processes such as protest dance, *toyi-toyi* which embodies this unity in diversity and enables, as Gil describes 'distanc[ing] from fear and symbolize[s] a triumph of spirit.

Nathalia Jaramillo and Michelle Carreon in their contribution 'The Pedagogy of *Buen Vivir*' foreground recognition of the multiple cosmologies that underpin emancipatory politics of knowledge. They suggest that these are epistemological-ontological struggles and practices of (re)-learning ways of life and forms of subjectivity other than those of neoliberal capitalist-coloniality. Dialogical spaces of engagement and relating become central in this pedagogy but as they argue (citing Walsh, 2011, p. 51) 'The principles of struggle and transformation are no longer simply about identity, access, recognition or rights, but about perspectives of knowledge that have to do with the model and logic of LIFE itself'. Echoing other contributors these emancipatory pedagogical practices are rooted in commitments to solidarity and reciprocity in which care for self, other and the earth/cosmos become central to processes of transformation.

Our contributors highlight therefore the important role of embodied commitments, affective attachments and everyday spiritualities in the weaving of subjects, social relationships and communities differently from the logics of capitalism. They bring to the centrality of this process practices of learning how to build community, solidarity and forms of listening to each other which challenge the knowing subject and knowledge practices of coloniality. Affective practices of opening and openness weaved through emotional literacies which value humility, kindness and care create the pedagogical possibilities for transforming processes of subjectification into active processes of multiplicity and becoming.

## **Non-thematic contributions**

There is a strong resonance between the topic of this issue of *Interface* and the contributions for the non-thematic area: The need to broaden our focus from the “macro” level and the abstract to the “micro” level, that of the concrete, of the everyday life, of embodied identities, as well as of the embodied experience of political projects. Such broadening of focus helps us not only to understand the hidden, often silenced dynamics of oppression that often underlie emancipatory and revolutionary projects, but also how such dynamics are either kept “silent”, reinforced and reproduced, or unlearned and dismantled as a result of internal learning processes.

This section also shows the importance of community organizations as sites of “unlearning” of hegemonic worldview and assertion of counter-hegemonic identities and political projects. It also shows how they can be a backbone for grassroots struggles when “old” social movement organizations, like labour unions, are defeated by a too unequal power relationship with capital or become co-opted by the semantics and modes of functioning of mainstream interests. Schaumberg and Sarker’s pieces call our attention to these realities by showing the importance of community organizations in the infusion of new strength in labour union struggles. Schaumberg uses the relative placidity of organized labour regarding “socially acceptable” job cuts at Opel Bochum (Germany) as an example of how the vertical, bureaucratic dynamics of labour unionism, with their implicit learning mechanisms, socialize their top officials into a mode of operation that make them think and act in a way that is more in tune with the interests of top management than that of the workers.

Sarker’s article shows how, despite the neoliberal reforms that marked Indian politics in the last two decades, which are likely to deepen with the election of the new executive led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the labour movement remained a strong, significant and class-rooted force of opposition to neoliberalism. That happens because, unlike in Schaumberg’s account of the labour movement in Bochum, labour unions in India work closely with community-based struggles and have been partnering with grassroots organizations of small entrepreneurs, unemployed youth, the urban poor, landless peasants and other groups of non-unionized workers marginalized by the capitalist economy. The fact that many of these groups are inspired by Gandhian and other social reform ideologies that are not directly associated with “classical” Marxism helped to infuse the labour movement with grassroots epistemologies that contributed to the development of a comprehensive counter-hegemonic stance against neoliberal reforms. Such epistemological cross-fertilization from grassroots struggles also contributed to the recent trend, from the part of labour unions, of organizing these workers and incorporating their demands among those of organized labour.

Ilyas’ piece on the Al-Muhajiroun radical Muslim movement Al-Muhajiroun calls attention to the role of a totally opposite process in the facilitation of embodied, emotional and spiritual experiences that facilitate learning of the movement’s objective: That of the use of often violent public performance in the

streets, as well as in multi-media platforms, to transcend identifications with community-based specificities and promote a global socio-political and religious community, based on an emotional and religious identification with suffering Muslim communities in war-ridden zones. Through these methods, the movement aims to achieve its goal of deconstructing Christian/Western hegemony and promoting religious awakening, as well as adherence to political causes of the Muslim world, among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The article shows how movement leaders developed over time a significant degree of “brand awareness” that led them to apply this strategy in an increasingly more sophisticated way.

Foran and Wael’s contributions invite us to “look under the radar” of what appear to be “victories” or “defeats” of social movements and into how the resulting embodiment and learning outcomes by participants. Foran shows that the setbacks that the environmental movement experienced at COP 19 actually resulted in learning processes that contribute to what “may well be the unglamorous, under the radar organizing” around “a re-imagined vision of climate justice” that “will take place at all points of the compass as the global justice movement does the hard work of building itself into a force to be reckoned with”. Such “under the radar organizing” is leading to a more inclusive strategy that aims “to include everyone from the young radicals to the long-standing and slower moving NGOs, institutions from local governments to schools and universities, communities of faith, labor organizations whether unionized or not, indigenous movements, and intergenerational activism”. Wael’s feminist analysis of the Tahrir Square movement in Egypt shows how “the foundation of nationalism and the technicality of revolutions” are based on a masculine, patriarchal approach to politics. In the absence of embedded and well-organized mobilizations around issues of identity, the voices of women and other social groups made subaltern by patriarchy will end up being marginalized and instrumentalised by the male, heteronormative “movement elite” and silenced as soon as its major goals are achieved. That will happen, despite the creation of “safe spaces” where non-normative identities can be expressed, if patriarchal norms and behaviours are not problematized and deconstructed.

The book review section follows a similar focus, with reviews of publications on non-western feminism, the embodied, the everyday life and modes of knowing the world beyond western rationality, namely in the fields of the imaginary and the spiritual. Maeve O’Grady offers a review of Brookfield and Holst’s *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World*, which shows how critical pedagogies of adult education contribute to problematize and politicize the everyday life. Edgar Guerra Blanco reviewed Daza, Hoetmer and Vargas’ *Crisis y Movimientos Sociales en Nuestra América: Cuerpos, Territorios e Imaginarios en Disputa*. Sara de Jong offered a review of Srila Roy’s *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*. Kristen A. Williams reviewed David Harvey’s *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Markus Kip reviewed a powerful account of the importance of grassroots embedment and bottom-up organizing for movement success in *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Eilís Ward reviewed

Laurence Cox's *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-Culture and Beyond*, which analyses how a non-western form of spirituality can be culturally reinterpreted and used as a tool for the building of counter-hegemony in a semi-peripheral western country with a strong Catholic tradition.

## **Conclusion: pedagogising the political and politicising the pedagogical**

In this Introduction we have systematised some of the key thematic that emerge from the rich cornucopia of contributions that make up this special issue, *The Pedagogical Practices of Social Movements*, of *Interface*. We hope that the Introduction plays a performative utopic function in stimulating debate, reflection and engagement in our movements with the pedagogical in all its multidimensionality.

Clearly, counter-politics of knowledge are at the centre of our emancipatory struggles. At the heart of this is the pedagogical, understood as those processes, practices and philosophies that enable the unlearning of hegemonic forms of life, social relationships and subjectivities. As our contributors demonstrate the pedagogical practices of social movements involve the creation of embodied peopled memories, the (re)covery and (re)invention of subaltern philosophies and theorisations through an embrace of multiple literacies; and an epistemological privileging of the margins in which those made superfluous by contemporary capitalism appear as the emancipatory subjects of our times.

These philosophical and epistemological commitments are embodied in informal learning in everyday life of a movement, including the unlearning of the oppressor's logics in our internal practices and processes; formal educational spaces in which dialogues of knowledge are fostered; movement teaching which resignifies and reconfigures the public; and embodied and affective pedagogical practices which are embedded in the spiritual and cosmological.

As our contributors in this issue powerfully demonstrate the pedagogical practices of social movements are at the heart of the reinvention of an emancipatory politics of knowledge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They help to create the conditions of possibility for the emergence of subaltern subjects and movements, support the flourishing of multiple grounds of epistemological becoming and can enable reflection upon and unlearning of the oppressor's logics as they mark our practices and struggles. Arguably, it is time to pedagogise the political and politicise the pedagogical.

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## **Call for papers: Movement practice(s)** **Issue 7/1 (May 2015), deadline November 1 2014**

**Theme editors: Cal Andrews, Laurence Cox, Lesley Wood**

The May 2015 issue of the open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>) invites contributions from activists and scholars on the theme of “how we do activism”. We are particularly seeking scholarly articles, biographies, self-portraits, and practice notes that address one or more of the following:

- What actually makes for good activism? How do activists evaluate strategy?
- What are the challenges (or benefits?) of putting various understandings of “good activism » into practice and translating these strategies into tactics, coordination and communication plans, at organisational and movement levels?
- How have organisations and movements integrated personal experience, reflective practice, theory and research (or not), in day-to-day operations, training, recruitment, and evaluation procedures? What have been the outcomes and broader implications of such integration?
- How do activists effectively balance competing demands at personal, organisational, or movement levels? How useful are existing resources, support networks, and where are the gaps?
- Other questions relevant to the theme of “practice” and how it intersects with diverse issues, movements and approaches.

As in every issue, we are also very happy to receive contributions that reflect on other questions for social movement research and practice that fit within the journal’s mission statement (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/who-we-are/mission-statement/>).

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 (refereed) articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews — and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors

to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Arabic, Catalan, Czech, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Maltese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) for details of who to submit to.

### **Deadline and contact details**

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published May 1, 2015, is November 1, 2014. 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 and should always be used – *Interface* is an entirely voluntary effort and the formatting which authors don’t do has to be done by volunteers. Thanks!

## **The Thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon: enriching social movement learning theory through epistemically grounded narratives emerging from a participatory action research case study in Ghana**

**Jonathan Langdon, Kofi Larweh and Sheena Cameron**

### **Abstract**

*Over the past 3 decades, a local Ghanaian movement has been defending communal access to West Africa's largest salt flat – access that is the backbone of an artisanal salt production process that is over 400 years old and supports the livelihoods of roughly 60 thousand people. While this movement has been largely successful in these efforts at defense, it currently faces new challenges from Ghana's petro-chemical industry, spurred on by Ghana's recent oil discovery, and from small-scale enclosures by local elite. This current context has challenged the movement to reconfigure its approaches, even as it builds new partnerships with the area's local community radio station. It is into, and more than partially because of this shifting terrain that a group of researchers and movement members began a participatory action research study of this social movement's learning. Along with sharing the methodological contributions of this study, the participatory case study shared here also adds a rich exemplar of locally-framed learning narratives to discussions about the way learning is disseminated. Not only are imagery and proverbs central to narratives of learning within this movement, they are also central to its popular education approach. The critical importance of local history and spirituality are also revealed to be key sites of epistemically grounded learning – learning that reinforces local ownership of this conversation in opposition to narratives of globalization and state-led visions of large-scale development. The sheer rootness of these local narratives is proving to be a strong source of resistance and alterity.*

For me, this whole thing is like somebody without thumbs, who is cutting morsels of food, he is hungry, but he wants to cut, you know, banku, you have to cut a morsel, and you need to roll it into a certain shape, before you can [eat it]... You need, you need a thumb... so for me it is a thumbless hand trying to mold a morsel of banku... So, we had, we had everything, but we lacked something, we lacked something to make our intentions and our aspirations complete. And for me, the thumb is important.

- Nomo Abayateye, Traditional Priest, member of the older generation of male activists

The symbol that we selected was a chameleon, and, it was in reference specifically to the chiefs, who were participating in Atsiakpo, and to how the chiefs would be doing, some - , would be involved in Atsiakpo, but at the same

time, like I mentioned, they would be saying “oh yes, Atsiakpo is very bad, I’m gonna stop it.” And so, like a chameleon, they would be in one environment looking one way, but then they would change when they went to another environment, they would change their appearance.

- Tom, representing youth activist group

“What symbolizes the group’s view?” We said dog. Our reason for choosing dog is that the dog works for us, when we [are] going for hunting, take the dog along. When we need an animal to take care of our house, we take the dog. But what do we do to the dog? What, when we, even when we go to hunt with it, do we even give it the meat? After cooking, do you remove some meat for the dog? No! It’s what we’ve chewed, the bones that you feed it with, that’s what we do to the dog. So, that’s it, that is what the Songor is.

- Jemima, representing older generation of female activists

## **Introduction**

The above quotations emerge from reflections on over 3 decades of struggle to reclaim and defend communal access to West Africa’s largest salt flat – access that is the backbone of an artisanal salt production process that is over 400 years old and supports the livelihoods of roughly 60,000 people. At the heart of this struggle is a Ghanaian social movement, called the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum in its latest iteration,<sup>1</sup> that has been largely successful in these efforts at defense. Yet, it currently faces new challenges from Ghana’s petro-chemical industry, spurred on by Ghana’s recent oil discovery, and small-scale enclosures by local elite, called “atsiakpo” locally. This current context has challenged the movement to reconfigure its approaches, even as it builds new partnerships with the area’s local community radio station. It is into, and more than partially because of this shifting terrain that a group of researchers and movement members undertook a participatory action research study of this social movement’s learning. This study makes important contributions to the field of social movement learning, as well as participatory research methodologies. This paper will provide an overview of these emergent contributions, including an in depth discussion of each of the symbolic and epistemically rooted pedagogic reflections, or narratives, introduced above.

Social movement learning, a sub-field to critical adult education, has “enormous...breadth” (English & Mayo, 2012, p. 110), and yet, according to Hall & Turray (2005) research that studies African contexts is underrepresented. In this sense, the study reported on here adds an important sub-Saharan African case study to discussions about the ways in which movements learn. However, as advocated by Kapoor (2009) and emphasized by English & Mayo (2012), it is

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<sup>1</sup> The previous iteration of the movement, in the 1980s, was much more closely associated with the cooperative than is ASAF – though the salt cooperative continues to be a member of ASAF.

crucial that such studies of movements in contexts outside of Euro-America be understood through their own epistemic lens. It is for this reason, and also as part of efforts to make this research movement-owned, that a participatory action research approach was mutually agreed upon. This approach to the study of social movement learning is not unique (Hall & Turray, 2005), but using a mutual design process has helped ensure this research is grounded in movement articulations, and not academic ambitions (c.f. Choudry & Kapoor, 2009). From a methodological perspective, the extensive participatory research framing process that took place from 2008 to 2010 has meant that this study has also been an important part of movement learning processes, even as it helps document and disseminate the learning that has emerged. Furthermore, it has ensured a widespread sense of ownership of the research process (Langdon, 2012; Langdon & Larweh, 2013).

Going back to the quotes above, they have emerged as integral parts of locally-framed learning narratives that reveal as well as enact Foley's (1999) notion of learning in struggle – the informal, non-formal and incidental ways in which movements learn through engaging in particular struggles. Not only are imagery and proverbs central to narratives of learning within this movement, they are also central to its popular education approach. The critical importance of local history and spirituality are also revealed to be key sites of epistemically grounded learning – learning that reinforces local ownership of this conversation in opposition to narratives of globalization and state-led visions of large-scale development. The sheer rootedness of these local narratives is proving to be a strong source of resistance and alterity – one that is gaining momentum in many different local forums (e.g. mobilization surrounding climate change in Ada is taking a similar shape). At the same time, while rooted, these narratives have not remained static over the course of the research. As the movement evolves and changes, the reflection and learning that emerges informs and shapes the narratives. Finally, the importance in this case of community radio's role in enhancing local ownership of and investment in the movement through radio dramas and community-owned broadcasts that disseminate narratives such as those shared here cannot be ignored. The power of these synergies is something that has been emphasized in collective reflections by ASAF members on what has been learned about learning.

### **An overview of the struggle over salt in Ada**

There are two recent efforts within the movement to detail the long history of the relationship between the Adas and the Songor Lagoon that inform this section. The first of these is a recent report by one of the core ASAF members on revitalizing the salt cooperative (Ada Songor Salt Cooperative, 2013) (see also Amate, 1999). A second effort by ASAF documenting this history is also in the finishing stages: a collectively written Peoples History of the Songor Struggle



book project (ASAF 2013).<sup>2</sup> Both of these descriptions are important examples of movement-produced research. These two efforts add to a collectively written history from the last iteration of the movement, called *Who Killed Maggie?* (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989), as well as research by Manuh (1994) on the previous iteration of the movement and a book about Ada's overall history by Amate (1999).

Turning to the historical relationship between Adas and the Songor, according to records of British colonial correspondence, this history predates the establishment of the Gold Coast colony by over a hundred years (Amate, 1999). Oral history of the Adas establishes the relationship between the Ada-Okor people and the lagoon as foundational to their current existence (ASAF, 2013). It is this foundational narrative that lends weight to the saying amongst the Adas that "salt is life." This is also reflected in the phrase "Ee yon ngo," which is literally translated as "does that person eat salt", but is used to ask if someone is fluent in the local language, Dangme. Moreover, implicit in its meaning is that the person understands the cultural customs and norms of the Dangme people. It is important to foreground this strong cultural identity linkage between the Ada-Okor people and the Songor Lagoon, as it helps underscore from the outset that understanding the social mobilization of Adas around the Songor as simply defending a livelihood, or a way of life misses a large portion of the symbolic meaning this lagoon holds for those who call themselves Ada-Okor. In fact, as the report, and many other publications (c.f. Amate, 1999; Ada Traditional Council, 2011; 2012; 2013; ASAF, 2013), rightly points out, the cultural celebration in Ada, the Asafotufiame Festival is a symbolic reenactment of the process of defending the salt lagoon from external aggressors. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the resource directly supports the livelihoods of over 60,000 people around the lagoon, and has indirect economic connections to double that figure (Barbersgaard, 2013; Ada Songor Salt Coop, 2013). Women figure prominently in those who most directly draw their livelihood from the resource (Manuh, 1994).

However, understanding how this history is enacted in current and recently past struggles concerning the lagoon means examining colonial and post-colonial government policies. In other words, we need to trace how the struggle to defend the resource has continued within the confines of a decolonizing West African nationstate. Amate (1999) shares how colonial policies in relation to the Songor backed competing sides concerning who had rights to proceeds from the lagoon – a classic divide and rule strategy. Many of the tensions established in this period can be traced to current issues surrounding atsiakpo. At the same time, after Ghana became an independent nation in 1957, the central government at the time decided to move ahead with a big electrical dam project on the Volta river. This decision dramatically effected the natural flooding cycle of the Songor lagoon, and led to a major reduction in salt yields (Manuh, 1994).

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly, this latest effort has also been translated into Dangme, and recorded for broadcast – thereby returning their stories to movement members and the broader Songor communities.

This led a small group of elites to grant small concessions to two companies provided they help revitalize the resource. One of these companies, Vacuum Salt Limited (VSL) used duplicitous tactics to doctor their concession, and lay claim to a huge portion of the lagoon – including the majority of the area used by artisanal salt winners, as they are called in Ada (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). Despite changes in military and civilian governments through the rest of the 70s and into the early 1980s, VSL was able to maintain a stranglehold over not only the resource, but the area. VSL treated the entire lagoon as its property, and attacked local artisanal salt winners simply engaging in salt collection practices they had been doing in the lagoon for 400 years (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989; Amisah Commission, 1986).

Oral testimony gathered and broadcast in 2002 by Radio Ada, the local community radio station and member of ASAF, as well as oral testimonies gathered by the research documented here, reveals deeply violent accounts of company behavior during this period – including the force feeding of raw salt on those captured practicing artisanal salt winning (Radio Ada, 2002; ASAF, 2013; Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989; Amisah Commission, 1986). These were not people who were stealing from the saltpans the companies had established (not that this would excuse this human rights violation). This treatment, as well as the refusal to permit local artisanal salt-winning led to growing unrest amongst the Adas. When the December 31st, 1981, revolution occurred, and a rhetorically socialist military government came into power many people in Ada thought the situation would change – and it did for a short while with the establishment of a People’s Defense of the Revolution committee to take over and run the saltpans of the companies. Unfortunately, the companies were able to regain their hold over the area, and used police and military forces to enact even more abuse (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). At the same time, a local salt cooperative had been established that countered the two companies’ claim over the resource – a partial explanation for the growing tension in the area.

This tension and conflict resulted in the death of the pregnant Maggie Kowunor, in 1985, who was killed by police fire. Her death led to the national Amisah Commission of investigation (1986), and the establishment in 1992 (just prior to the return to democracy) of PNDC law 287 – a law that annulled the two company concessions and held the resource in trust for the people of Ada, and of Ghana. A key element to underscore here is the fact that the mobilization by the Adas to defend their resource, even after it had been given out by members of the Dangme elite, was crucial in returning communal access to the resource to Adas. However, as will be discussed further below, Manuh (1994) notes that despite the importance of the resource to women, and the fact that it was a woman’s death who led to the commission of inquiry, women were not well represented in the cooperative leadership that had emerged to counter company rule.

Since 1992 a number of notable things have happened in Ghana, such as the return to democratic rule in 1993, the peaceful electoral transition of

government in 2000, and a second peaceful transition in 2008. Also notable are the two government sponsored plans for the Songor salt resource that emerged throughout this period. The first of these, embedded in law 287, is what is simply known as the Master Plan (Ghana Government, 1991), produced by a Cuban consulting team in 1991, with broad community and cooperative participation, and which imagines the resource accommodating local artisanal salt production through cooperatives co-using the lagoon alongside industrial salt producers intent on serving West Africa's petro-chemical needs. The second plan, called the Land Use Plan (Ghana Government, 2003), produced by the largely pro-capitalist winners of the 2000 election, used the same base research of the Cuban team in-terms of production potential, but re-oriented the direction of policy to instead focus on privatizing the whole resource as a concession to an outside company. Needless to say, this second plan met with much local resistance, and when this government lost power in 2008, this plan was (temporarily) shelved.

Another critical shift happened in 2008 when oil was discovered in commercial quantities off of Ghana's coast. Suddenly the interest of many elites in salt, both within the Ada area and at the national level, was peaked. As Affam and Asamoah (2011) note, the economic potential of using Ghana's salt in petrochemical processes is large. With this dawning awareness, many new forces are looking at the Songor with interest. Already, in 2011, ASAF managed to publically expose a government delegation, that was talking to the area's traditional leadership, of relocating the one-hundred thousand plus Ada residents who live around the lagoon – the core idea of the Land Use Plan. Largely as a result of the public education efforts of the movement, as well as the creative contributions of Radio Ada, the central government and the local chiefs who support the move have been forced to abandon language of relocation and are (for now) taking a more slow and consultative approach to planning around the lagoon. This is the current context of the struggle. Yet an important dimension of this background has not yet been described.

Since 2003, the communal artisanal approach to salt winning in the lagoon has been facing another threat besides government and external expropriation. An internal process of carving out salt pans along the edge of the lagoon, called "atsiakpos" in the opening quotes, has been gaining ground. This balkanization of the resource emerged in response to private concessions disrupting the traditional communal process and has continued with the explicit or implicit involvement of local elite and custodians of the land. Though there was much initial resistance to this emerging trend by local youth (Langdon, 2011), the failure by local decision-makers, police and national government to put an end to the practice has led many of those who resisted initially to create their own astiakpos within the lagoon – making it more and more difficult for women especially to access the communal salt fields. Needless to say, this has led to severe internal divisions and tensions, with families divided over the practice. Before the emergence of relocation plans connected to oil, the majority of the focus of ASAF members was to combat atsiakpo. In fact, in 2008 Radio Ada and the Ada Traditional Council managed to establish a ban on the practice – but

the failure of traditional leadership involved in this ban to account for seized goods delegitimated this route in future efforts to end the practice. In this sense, there are two fronts upon which the current movement has been working: the specter of supplying salt to the oil industry leading to expropriation and exploitation of the resource, and the current realities of divided communities dealing with unregulated seizure of the lands around the edge of the lagoon. It is into this complex context, with both internal and external challenges facing the movement, that the current research entered. Before turning to delve deeper into what has emerged from this research, it is important to share here how this study evolved.

### **Studying social movement learning through participatory action research**

Participatory and collaborative research approaches have been identified as being an important and synergistic method for studying social movement learning (SML) (Hall & Turray, 2006). Hall & Turray (2006) reveal how integral participatory action research processes have been, and continue to be for movement research in adult education circles. This stream of research, known as social movement learning, has a strong tradition of participatory collaborative research, and yet, as Walter (2007) has pointed out, the majority of these studies are dominated by Euro-American dichotomies drawn between Old Social Movement (Marxist and labour movements) and New Social Movement (identity based movements, such as the LGBTQ movement) theories of organizing (c.f. Holst, 2002). Kapoor (2008) has underscored the dangers of assuming the portability of this dichotomy in Southern contexts. He, like others (c.f. Foley, 1999; Walters, 2005), advocates a strong connection to context when analyzing social movement learning.

This echoes warnings of Eurocentric dominance in critical theories that write from an African context, such as Mamdani (1996) who argues for using context rich approaches to analyzing African phenomena. Hall (2005) and Fals-Borda (2006) have written reflective pieces on the history of participatory research and its connection with adult education, in the case of the former, and, in the case of the latter, its connection with an anti-Eurocentric desire to stop the studying of exotized 'others', and rather generate spaces of mutual meaning-making. Along these same lines, Choudry & Kapoor (2010) have argued that participatory research, and PAR in particular, must be owned by the movements at the centre of social movement learning studies, rather than being used by academics – especially in the North – carrying out studies ultimately more concerned with extracting information than in responding to movement needs and priorities. They note that the relationships that frame such research, along with the way in which the research is conceived (i.e. is it owned by the movement from the outset) is critical to avoid this type of extractive relationship.

First in 2008 and further in 2010, members of ASAF, including representatives of Radio Ada, as well as two of the three authors began to design a long-term study of learning in the salt movement. While an ongoing research project emerged from this process, what was ultimately more important to the movement membership was the quick reconfiguration of the design process by members to be a reflexive learning process in and of itself. Foundational to this emerging vision was a mutual education process that not only formed the basis of the research study to follow, but a conceptual collectively-constituted understanding of the struggle at hand and the important lessons from the past to move forward. So, while the design process asked, “what themes and processes should frame a potential longer-term study of movement learning in the Ada movement?”, this question was reconfigured to focus on “how do we achieve a similar and collectively determined understanding of what our struggle is today and the best way to tackle it?” In this sense, what was originally envisioned as a movement research design conversation, became in and of itself a part of movement education, planning and reflection processes. As such, this synergistic parallel structure, where movement research design and movement processes feed the one into the other, exemplifies the call by Choudry and Kapoor (2010) for research embedded in movements from its very outset.

Subsequently, the three past years of the actual research project have seen the research continue to “move with the movement” (Langdon, 2012). As the new challenge of government relocation plans emerged, the focus and energy of the movement shifted. The action-research was part of the reflection process that led to this shift and has been embedded in the ongoing community dialogue processes that informed communities of the new challenge, and worked with them to plan their responses. All of these processes were planned by movement members in an organic way, based on the evolving situation, and all research activity went into documenting the processes, and also contributing to reflective discussions on the situation by sharing the documentation – culminating in many ways in the People’s History of the Songor Struggle book project mentioned above (ASAF, 2013). One interesting phenomenon that has emerged is that many overlapping activities undertaken by different groups within ASAF have become part of movement activity, or support movement goals (such as Okor Nge Kor, a radio soap opera series on Songor issues started by Radio Ada, or research on revitalizing the salt cooperatives by the Ada Songor salt cooperative mentioned above). In this sense, the research has been able to incorporate into the case study a wide array of related activities that also move with the movement, describing a kind of ‘ecology of activism’ (Langdon & Larweh, 2013).

It was in the first workshop after the design period, held in May 2011, where the priorities and strategies of the movement were being articulated that the three narratives that began this paper emerged. Continuing on the tradition that emerged during the design process, this first workshop was imagined by all involved as a mutual education process, to find out what we all knew, what we all thought of the Songor situation, and what our perspectives could teach

others even as we learned from them. Before turning to these three narratives, it is important to situate them in a context of challenging epistemic norms.

### **Challenging how the root causes of struggle are framed**

As noted above, embedded research allows for the kind of epistemic challenge of ongoing legacies of colonial relations as it foregrounds the ways in which subjugated ways of knowing and being are actually defining struggle – rather than locating this struggle within Euro-American theoretical containers. For instance, the Ada case challenges the false dichotomy between livelihood and identity concepts as a root source of struggle. In ASAF's current work the two are absolutely intertwined, as the history of struggle about the Songor, along with its linkage with foundational narratives of the Okor people is as much a part of the strength of the movement as is 60,000 people fighting to protect their livelihood. Before turning to the three narratives that provide different lenses through which we can understand this current movement and struggle, we would share an example of epistemic shifting to help illustrate this point.

This example concerns the link between livelihoods and resource use. From the outset, ASAF has focused not just on the defense of communal access, and inclusive planning processes in connection with government decision-making about the resource. The movement has also consistently emphasized the importance of the Okor forest in these discussions. In many ways, this forest – located on the southern edge of the lagoon – symbolizes the current situation in the Songor, and also the larger Ada nation. It is heralded as the forest through which the founders of the Ada nation were guided by the Yomo spirit – a wise old woman who alone knew the way to the Songor. This forest serves practical spiritual purposes, as it is a major shrine to the Ada people, and is the first place a newly enstooled Ada king, or Paramount Chief in the current lexicon, is to go to be spiritually fortified and educated in the roles and responsibilities of his new position. Although it is still unclear as to when this encroachment started, but the forest has dwindled in contemporary times to a fraction of its original size, and has also been shunned by the current Paramount Chief of Ada. The only parts of the forest that remain are the four shrine areas of the founding Ada clans.

Radio Ada, along with other members of the movement, have consistently linked the dilapidated nature of the forest to the atsiakpo encroachment on communal access to the Songor, as well as the dwindling of the lagoon's salt production levels. In making this link the movement has both connected with the foundational narratives of the Ada nation and Ada identity, as well as established a strategic support to the consistent message of the movement that this is about improving not just the lives of Songor residents but revitalizing the culture of the Ada nation – a difficult thing to openly criticize. From a social movement learning perspective, this strategy emerges from long-term learning in struggle, which could be thought of as learning from struggle (Langdon, 2011), connected to previous iterations of the movement. This is expanded upon

in one of the narratives below. During the conflict with the two companies described above, defenders of communal access at the time were able to have the Yomo shrine site (not the Okor forest) declared outside the purview of the company concessions (Ada Songor Salt Cooperative, 2013). In several ASAF discussions, this victory was described as an important beachhead for the later annulment of the concessions. From this perspective, linking spiritual and cultural identity markers to the Songor struggle was an important lesson to apply to the current struggle. Along slightly different lines, Radio Ada also saw this link with the forest as an important demonstration of the station's commitment to address multiple community issues – a point often used to undermine attempts to paint the station as becoming too deeply involved in Songor issues alone. This sense of the need to show balance emerges from the learning of the station staff in how to deal with contentious issues, enacting the station's mission to be the voice of the marginalized and ruffling the feathers of the local and national elite, while at the same time performing neutrality, or a form of balance in the station's relationship with traditional authority. As is discussed elsewhere, this is not an easy balance to achieve, and is a constant source of learning and adjustment (Langdon, Quarmyne, Larweh & Cameron, 2013). But the pragmatic approach this account of learning suggests should not overshadow the very palpable importance this forest has for many Adas, and the very real need to do something to protect and regenerate it – something a wide number of people, including many traditional authority figures, support.

The importance of this many-leveled interconnection was demonstrated at a movement forum in the Songor community of Goi in August, 2012. Without delving into too much detail, ASAF and the station effectively undermined attempts to paint the movement as anti-Ada and anti-development by broadcasting live from the community and focusing not only on Songor issues, but also the regeneration of the Okor forest. This strategy, described elsewhere (Langdon, Quarmyne, Larweh & Cameron, 2013), allowed the movement to effectively position itself as both defender of livelihoods and Ada identity. This approach forced the Ada Traditional Council to meet with ASAF members, where some openly discussed their mistake in working with the government relocation effort. This kind of grounding within what Mignolo (2000) calls 'local histories' has been the two legs upon which the movement has had success. It is precisely from these local histories that the three symbols and surrounding narratives described below emerge. Kofi Larweh, one of the authors of this paper and member of the movement, described the importance of this narrative approach in connection with the epistemically rooted symbols at the heart of this paper:

When we were growing up, knowledge and wisdom was presented in the form of Ananse Stories and you have animals and trees talking and it helps to build the imagination so that one is led in the spirit to experience what is good. Now, our people are storytellers. All the history of the community is, is written in songs, in stories that are handed over from one generation to the other and so, people would even say what is going on in the community in the form of animals or



trees, birds or whatever, in a certain way. Our people are great storytellers. That is the reason why I started by saying that what has been expressed has two forms, the spirit and the letter. And so, if you take the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon, this is the letter, that is what is physical. The spirit behind it is the feelings that the people are able to express, looking at the whole thing, at these things as they said or as they live with the humans. The understanding is that, normally you will hardly, for example, if you have a bad leader, our people would not say that, “you have a bad leader”, you would say that “our leader has bad advisors”. The same way you don’t want to talk to the people in the face. And so, the simple thing is to use the logic of the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon in the form of objects that can give meaning to what they feel, deep down their hearts. And our work, in the field, is to help people tell their stories. Is to help people come out with these images so that it will stick, the images stick better, because that is what people will remember. Even up to this day, those who said these things and those who heard will know that, when you’re talking of the thumbless hand, the dog and the chameleon, they know what they are talking about.

This analysis is a fitting introduction to the three narratives that form much of the ongoing strategic analysis of the ASAF movement.

### **The Thumbless Hand, the Dog, and the Chameleon**

With so much history of struggle in this movement, one of the major issues identified by movement members early on in collective conversations was a need to share inter-generational knowledge, while also learning from the past in today’s struggles. As has been documented elsewhere, and as is discussed in the youth section below, there has been a disconnect between the generation of older male activists and many of the young protestors (Langdon, 2011). It is in part because of some of these tensions, and a desire to regenerate organizing around the Songor that the initial conversations around this research began in 2008. At the same time, cross-cutting this issue, and very much linked to continued mobilization and concern by women in the Songor communities regarding atsiakpo also re-emphasized a point Manuh (1994) had made previously, that it is especially women who are affected when communal access to the Songor is restricted. It was based on these three key elements of the current iteration of the Songor movement, now called Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF), that the organic perspective groups emerged during this first workshop, held on June 6th and 7th, 2011. Each perspective group had taken on the task of detailing their understanding of the issues confronting the lagoon, concluding with a symbol that captured the core issue for them. It is from this process that three images – now deeply entrenched in the movement’s popular education processes and public analyses – emerged.

## **The Thumbless Hand**

In their group discussions, the older generation of male activists shared much history of struggle, detailing the layers upon layers of intrigue and undercover moves associated with the 20 years plus of company presence in the lagoon (1970 to 1992). While being a combination of older men from both within the Songor community, including some elders, chiefs and traditional priests, and from the educated Ada civil servant community, the entire group were mutually involved in the last wave of struggle over the resource. A key dimension of this group's reflection on the past was the difficulties they had in meeting under successive military regimes, the challenges they had in finding out what was planned at the national level, even while others detailed the intrigue of discerning who within the broader Ada community, and within the Songor communities themselves were aiding the companies in their operations.

With the revolution in 1982, this all became more fraught, with a sense that the resource would be returned, but also witnessing the ambiguous moment where the revolutionary government issued a proclamation encouraging the formation of cooperatives in the Songor, while at the same time re-granting the concessions for the companies (Songor Salt Cooperative Committee, 1989). In pursuing the formation of the cooperatives, the people of Ada now had a tool through which they could reassert their right to win salt. And yet, this tool was necessarily blunt, as it had to face repeated police raids, intimidation, etc. It was one of these raids that led to Maggie's death. It was in the midst of these reflections, over what was regained, but also the terrible price paid, that the notion of the thumbless hand emerged. As Nomo Abayateye said, quoted at the outset of the article, "we had, we had everything, but we lacked something, we lacked something to make our intentions and our aspirations complete." This idea of the hand with the missing thumb became important, as it captured the way in which the mobilization in Ada was successful at regaining access to the lagoon, but there was a lack of something to concretize the aspirations of the people to guarantee this access. Broad agreement emerged that this was the perfect image to describe both the success and the shortcomings of the last struggle over the lagoon. However, of perhaps greater pedagogic interest, the issue of the missing thumb provoked a debate that instigated critical analysis. First, discussion centered around whether the missing thumb was mismanagement of the resource by those who managed to seize control at particular moments during the 1980s. Then a discussion emerged, provoked by Radio Ada and movement member Kofi Larweh who said:

When we had the opportunity to manage the resource, was management composed of women? And, for, for that special ability of women to be added, or, management of the time was so made up of men, that the missing thumb could be alluded to the missing role of women in managing at the time that we took over?

Thus, the inability to use the resource well was connected to Manuh's (1994) critique that the previous organization around the movement provided very little room for women's leadership. Debates also surfaced regarding who removed the thumb: was it removed by internal strife, or by external threats? Upon reflection, many answers were found for these different questions. Importantly, many of the answers provoked lines of action that were ground directly in learning from the past. The most relevant of these was to ensure women are not only playing a lead role in the movement, but also in articulating the struggle.

## **The Dog**

“Look behind us, there comes Government after us Okor People. I repeat, turn and look behind Dangme People, Government is catching up with us [...] They told our Elders, they are going to take over Songor, to quell conflicts so that we live in peace. Radio Ada heard of this development, took on their broadcast armour, mobilized us; we entered the communities and started informing the people; we are spreading it.” – Translated excerpt from a song by Akpetiyo, the ‘Divine Singer’ of the movement.

Akpetiyo is a leading voice within ASAF. Her social commentary songs, like the one drawn from above, capture the essence of the current struggle in Ada. She was not present the first day of the imagery workshop. Yet, when she joined the following day, she immediately connected with the symbol of the dog. She describes the lagoon in a similar fashion, calling the salt from the lagoon, “abomination salt”:

My family and I no longer win salt because we consider the current salt from our lagoon to be abomination. We were not using this Atsiakpo method of salt winning in the past. I grew up to meet the Songor lagoon free to all. It was the main source of livelihood for our mothers and also served as their source of income. Today, people are balkanizing Songor lagoon and selling them.

This analysis by Akpetiyo is crucial at grounding the current struggle in the livelihood contexts being felt by communities around the Songor, and by women in particular. Partially as a result of the missing thumb conversation described above, the notion of the taken for granted, and ultimately mistreated dog was applied by Songor women on themselves, and not just the lagoon. This was an important link, as it foregrounded in the midst of discussions about the history of struggle around the resource, how women's labour has always been at the heart of salt winning, and yet their opinion is never sought when decisions are being made about the lagoon. A key learning that has emerged in this iteration of struggle is that women must play a leadership role in the Songor movement.

The combination of this image, as well as the idea of the missing thumb articulated by the older male activists, as well as women's grounded analysis has made this conclusion clear. Akpetiyo is a key example of this leadership, as her voice, and her songs have emerged as the crucial popular education tools of this movement. For her, it is the atsiakpo balkanization of the resource that is the key example of the disregard for the lagoon and the livelihoods that depend on it. Her thoughts on this provide a bridge to the final symbol, that of the chameleon:

Some Atsiakpo practitioners are seated among us. We are the same people making noise against such Atsiakpo. If we really want to change, it must start with us... because we need to unite and fight for Songor.

This statement reflects the dialogue and learning space at the center of ASAF, where dialogue often involves both calling people out on their contradictions, while at the same time offering a path to collective action. Unafraid to call it like she sees it, she illustrates how having a "thumb" like her may have changed the last iteration of struggle, even as she composes songs in the current one pointing out people's duplicitous colour changing.

### **The Chameleon**

The final symbol came from the mostly young men's group, though it was self-described as a youth (both male and female) group. Being much less versed in the history of struggle than both the older men and women, the focus of the youth was on the current situation – atsiakpo. It was the internal betrayal by those in leadership positions, saying one thing and doing another, that rose most firmly to the surface of their analysis. As can be gleaned from the opening quote at the outset of this article, there is a common understanding that many traditional authorities – those who have the power to grant land usage – are directly involved in the atsiakpo process. Nomo Abayataye confirmed this, saying "what the youth said is so effective, it affects [and touches] the chiefs." He went further to link the importance of publically declaring this chameleon behavior as being crucial to end atsiakpo, as well as to build a strong united front to undermine any attempts by central government to expropriate the resource:

The [radio] drama, as is going on, showing that a chief is giving money to somebody to do Atsiakpo for him. And, the same chief, in the drama, was asked to arbitrate over a case where the person he was sponsoring is caught constructing Atsiakpo, and the chief fined the, the culprit, and the chief gave money to the culprit to come and pay at his own court, that was in the drama. That it is true, that is exactly what is happening.

This avowal by a key traditional priest is crucial at legitimating the critical analysis of the movement, especially its younger generation. As important as it is to be rooted in women's articulations of this struggle, the voice and energy of youth is critical to the success of this movement. What was so important, if also disheartening, was that the community discussion forums that followed this workshop around the *atsiakpo* issue and the threat of government relocation confirmed both the applicability of the chameleon image, and the stories of elite involvement in the *atsiakpo* phenomenon.

### **Movement learning through struggle**

Based on a reworking of Foley's (1999) idea of learning in struggle by Langdon (2009), to include how learning emerges over a long period of social action, the three narratives reflect different forms of reflective learning embedded in local stories, images and knowledges/epistemes. In August 2013, two years after these images were first articulated, a session on movement learning over the past three years was held. While many aspects of learning were noted, including the fact that women now described themselves as "wolves, protecting the resource" rather than dogs – an indication of how their activism had become central to the effort – the most telling description of learning came from Isaac, a leading member of Radio Ada. "We have learned to change," he noted. Others joined in to say the movement had learned on the move, trying different strategies, and moving on if they didn't work. For instance, the hope that the Salt Cooperative revitalization effort would help spread the movement was stalled by some of the ambiguous history of the previous leadership of the cooperative, as articulated in the *thumbless hand*. As such, ASAF shifted focus, even as the women's core emerged to leave this issue behind – organizing successful demonstrations, as well as popular education tools that continue to teach a radical questioning of large scale development of the resource for either oil industry needs, or those of local elites.

The voice of Akpetiyo, and women's analysis of the problems in the Songor have been the consistent guide through the different strategies – a clear reason why not only movement members, but even community youth implicated in *atsiakpo* processes are now coming around to seeing the women's vision of change as the one that must be followed, despite it being hard on them personally. This last point came to light when the Dangme broadcast version of the "People's History of Struggle in the Songor" was outdoored in the community of Toflokpo – one of the most conflicted communities about *atsiakpo* when the research began. Rather than defending the practice, as they had in the past, a number of young men in the town publicly spoke of needing to end *atsiakpo*, and implicated themselves in the practice. They pointed to the women assembled and explained that they had come to understand the devastation this balkanization was having on the family structure. Perhaps this shift captures best what it means that women in the movement have gone from seeing themselves as dogs to the wolves, protecting the Songor.

## **Frequencies and learning in struggle – an open conclusion**

There is much more to write about this struggle, and yet there are clear indications of the ways in which the learning in struggle process at the center of this movement is creating an impact. As Foley (1999) notes, this impact can often surface in complex and ambiguous ways. This context is no different, as the emergence of women's leadership has made a tremendous impact, where women salt winners led demonstrations, created a popular education tapestry of the Ada relationship with and struggle over the Songor over time, and also built bridges with sympathetic elements in the traditional leadership of the community to restore the Songor to the moral center of the Adas – seeing the many sides of its importance (spiritual, historical, community building, etc.) rather than just its rent seeking potential. In doing so, they are consciously challenging notions of trusteeship that don't include consultation and transparency. These are also the very themes of the *Okor Nge Kor* Radio Ada drama series that Nomo Abayateye mentions above – a series that has used the drama form to openly discuss corruption, chameleon-like behavior by authority figures, and the potential of women's leadership in destabilizing some of these practices. With the success of this show, as well as Radio Ada's general ability to become a conduit for the issues of communities like those in the Songor who are most affected by decisions, and least consulted, it is perhaps not surprising that community radio in Ghana is under a lot of pressure from powerful forces in both the government and commercial radio sector. This is the ambiguous side to learning in struggle. As Kofi puts in, "our success is our greatest challenge." And yet, as Foley (1999, p. 134) notes:

We need to recognise the complex, ambiguous and contradictory character of particular movements and struggles. Analyses of these complexities provide a necessary basis for future strategies.

It is the ongoing mutual reflective analyses of these complexities, and collective and epistemically rooted perspectives of the analyses that are contributing to this movement's ability to strongly push for the continued communal access to this resource. It is hoped that as a result, this time around, ASAF has learned the truth of the proverb that "Unless the thumb helps the other four fingers, they cannot hold anything well."

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## **Práxis educativa do Movimento 21 na resistência ao agronegócio**

**Sandra Maria Gadelha de Carvalho e José Ernandi Mendes**

### **Resumo**

*O modelo do agronegócio tem se expandido no Brasil nas duas últimas décadas. Com ele aflora conflitos agrários, ambientais e sociais. No contexto surge, no município cearense de Limoeiro do Norte, o Movimento 21 (M21) que reunindo diversas instituições, entidades e movimentos sociais tem procurado resistir à lógica de desenvolvimento, denunciando os problemas por ela ocasionada. Neste trabalho tem-se como objetivo compreender os processos educativos constituídos na prática política dos sujeitos coletivos que compõem a articulação M21. Procura-se identificar os novos aprendizados relevantes para a luta, em quais espaços acontecem, desvelando novas formas de diálogo e resistência das forças que atuam nesta articulação política. A pesquisa compreendeu estudos bibliográficos e numa vertente empírica a observação participante das atividades diversas do M21 e conversas informais com alguns de seus ativistas e com professoras do Tomé com o objetivo de identificar os saberes construídos em suas lutas e organizações. Neste processo, percebe-se, ao tensionar-se o medo disseminado pela pedagogia do opressor, a construção de uma pedagogia do oprimido na perspectiva de sua emancipação que ganha força nas práticas coletivas de sujeitos oriundos de instituições e movimentos sociais distintos, que compõem o Movimento 21.*

**Palavras-chave:** Movimento 21; práxis educativa; movimentos sociais e educação do campo; agronegócio; pedagogia do oprimido; práticas pedagógicas não-formais.

### **Introdução**

O modelo econômico brasileiro adotado nos últimos quinze anos está em sintonia com a globalização e o neoliberalismo hegemônicos das três últimas décadas no cenário internacional. Neste período a lógica de intensificar a exploração dos recursos naturais e atividades agrícolas com vistas à exportação tem gerado o que alguns teóricos denominam de neodesenvolvimentismo. No meio rural, esta perspectiva é caracterizada pela alta concentração da terra, modernização no maquinário agrícola, constituição de massa de assalariados e incremento de insumos que elevem a produtividade em patamares não vistos antes.

É nestas bases que o agronegócio – grandes empresas agropecuárias – associado ao mercado financeiro e impulsionado pelo estado se torna a referência econômica das políticas agrícolas no Brasil, em detrimento da agricultura familiar, maior responsável pela absorção de mão de obra e produção para o consumo interno. Frente a este modelo e suas consequências

relacionadas à expulsão dos camponeses, a degradação do meio ambiente com utilização massiva de agrotóxicos, fato que ocasiona o envenenamento dos mananciais d'água, do ar e dos alimentos, transformação das reservas indígenas às necessidades do mercado e criminalização dos movimentos sociais, levantam-se sujeitos coletivos do campo e da cidade.

No campo, os movimentos sociais constroem estratégias de luta pela histórica bandeira da reforma agrária tantas vezes adiada, em defesa da agricultura familiar, da produção agroecológica e do meio ambiente, empunhando a igualdade social com justiça ambiental, através de uma prática ecossocialista na percepção de Löwy (2011). As relações sociais que se estabelecem entre os dois modelos – do agronegócio e da agricultura familiar – em disputa geram inúmeras práticas pedagógicas tensionadas pelo contexto vivido.

Neste trabalho discutimos as pedagogias presentes nas práticas dos diferentes sujeitos sociais em conflito no contexto do agronegócio após implantação do Projeto do Perímetro Irrigado da Chapada do Apodi, nas fronteiras dos estados do Rio Grande do Norte e do Ceará na Chapada do Apodi, nos municípios de Limoeiro do Norte e Quixeré na região do Vale do Jaguaribe, no estado do Ceará, Brasil, conforme figura abaixo:



Figura 1 – Localização do Vale do Jaguaribe, Ceará.

Fonte: IPECE (1988); INPE (2005); organizado por Freitas (2010).

O M21 é uma articulação política formada por: Cáritas Diocesana da igreja católica em Limoeiro do Norte; Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST); representantes do Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (MAB) e do Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores (MPA); Associação dos Moradores do Tomé – comunidade do município de Limoeiro do Norte, localizada na Chapada do Apodi; Sindicato dos Funcionários públicos de Limoeiro do Norte; Rede Nacional de Advogados e Advogadas Populares (RENAP); e, grupos

acadêmicos, envolvendo professores e alunos da Universidade Federal do Ceará (UFC), através do Grupo Trabalho Meio Ambiente e Saúde para a Sustentabilidade (TRAMAS)<sup>1</sup> e da Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE), pelo envolvimento da Faculdade de Filosofia Dom Aureliano Matos (FAFIDAM), através do Laboratório de Estudos da Educação do Campo (LECAMPO) situado neste campus da UECE, em Limoeiro do Norte. A denominação do movimento se constitui uma homenagem e memória do ambientalista José Maria Filho, conhecido como Zé Maria do Tomé, assassinado em 21 de abril de 2010. O crime aconteceu no contexto da luta contra as políticas governamentais neodesenvolvimentistas, as quais fomentam o agronegócio instalado na Chapada do Apodi, no estado do Ceará, Brasil.

Ao serem os autores professores universitários participantes do M21, através da inserção no Laboratório de Estudos da Educação do Campo (LECAMPO) na Faculdade de Filosofia Dom Aureliano Matos (FAFIDAM), campus da Universidade Estadual do Ceará (UECE), no município de Limoeiro do Norte, nos interessamos em identificar e compreender melhor as práticas pedagógicas e aprendizados construídos na ação social do Movimento 21.

Procuramos desvelar: como, no seio de relações tão tensas, tem se construído tais pedagogias? Quais os espaços de sua construção? As práticas pedagógicas e metodologias empregadas são instrumentos de fortalecimento da identidade do M21? Em considerando a composição do M21, com participação de grupos acadêmicos, instituições religiosas, rede de advogados populares, movimentos sociais e sindicatos, qual o elo de sua aproximação, quais papéis desempenham na construção de um necessário diálogo entre atores com lógicas e atuações tão distintas?

A metodologia da pesquisa baseia-se na referência real dos conflitos agrários e ambientais e das lutas pelo direito à educação, tendo a observação participante e entrevistas como elementos catalisadores dos dados. Envolve estudos teóricos interdisciplinares, a partir das contribuições de: Freire, em *Pedagogia do Oprimido*; relação entre movimentos sociais e processos educativos e educação do campo, em Gohn, Caldart, Molina, Ribeiro, E. Furtado, S. Motta; o caráter destrutivo do capitalismo em Sousa Júnior, R. Furtado de Sousa e Leher; a perspectiva ecossocialista, em Löwy; e, agrotóxico e saúde e vida do trabalhador no contexto do agronegócio em Rigotto, Teixeira, dentre outros. Numa vertente empírica foram registradas observações nas atividades diversas da articulação Movimento 21 e ouvidos alguns de seus participantes, em suas falas públicas e em conversas informais, além de entrevistas com professoras municipais da Escola de Ensino Fundamental (EEF) João Batista Ribeiro, situados no Tomé, com o objetivo de identificar os saberes construídos na relação com as lutas desenvolvidas na comunidade, os espaços onde se formam e os papéis dos sujeitos nessa construção.

Dada a visibilidade das ações públicas do M21, partimos da hipótese que os espaços não-formais predominavam, com princípios da educação popular e

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<sup>1</sup> Ver Site do TRAMAS - <http://nucleotramas.webnode.com.br/>

educação do campo na construção de novos saberes. Identificamos que em parte a hipótese se confirmava, todavia a inter-relação com sistemas formais de educação também tem impactado nos aprendizados e saberes construídos. Evidenciaram-se nos discursos em disputa na Chapada, repercussões de práticas pedagógicas cujo conteúdo volta-se para a reprodução ou transformação das relações econômicas, sociais e ambientais lá enfrentadas.

Para efeito de análise, ao conjunto de práticas voltadas para a preservação da estrutura capitalista e em consonância com a perspectiva neodesenvolvimentista, classificamos em acordo com o educador Paulo Freire, de pedagogia do opressor. Ao conjunto de práticas desencadeadas pelos sujeitos coletivos que resistem à lógica do agronegócio e suas consequências e propõem alternativas agroecológicas, socialistas e em defesa da saúde da população e trabalhadores do campo, denominamos, também em conformidade com Freire, de pedagogia do oprimido. Ambas ecoam simultaneamente nas lutas e vidas dos moradores e envolvidos com a Chapada, portanto também afetam o M21, desafiando-o em sua práxis educativa, apontando para a urgência de uma nova epistemologia.

Para melhor entendimento do leitor, organizamos o texto em duas partes fundamentais: na primeira, apresentamos um breve contexto do agronegócio, mostrando contradições do modelo neodesenvolvimentista, situando-o no conjunto das relações capitalistas contemporâneas e antagonismo com a agricultura familiar e seus desdobramentos na Chapada do Apodi, onde se originou o M21; na segunda parte, procuramos evidenciar a presença da educação no conjunto de práticas, hegemônicas e contra hegemônicas, identificando as principais ações, metodologias e espaços onde ocorrem, com foco na práxis da articulação Movimento 21 e dos sujeitos coletivos que a compõe: movimentos sociais do campo, grupos de pesquisa da UFC e UECE, pastoral da Cáritas, sindicatos da região jaguaribana, rede de advogados populares, dentre outros.

O trabalho ganha relevância à medida que denuncia a necessidade de aprofundamento sobre o avanço do capital no campo, os rumos e consequências nefastas que a produção agrícola no molde do agronegócio, no âmbito das políticas neodesenvolvimentistas, impõe as comunidades circunvizinhas, fato o qual, guardadas suas especificidades, toma uma dimensão mundial, conferindo urgência ao debate da questão ambiental numa nova sociabilidade. O enfoque nas práticas pedagógicas do M21 inaugura um olhar sobre a questão a partir dos princípios da educação do campo e do ecossocialismo, no qual não somente se evidencia seus aprendizados e a resistência destes sujeitos sociais, mas a importância de articulação de sujeitos diversos e seus saberes específicos nos enfrentamentos vivenciados. Nesta perspectiva, impõe-se a construção de novos papéis e formas de pesquisa dos intelectuais nas quais se constroem saberes em diálogo com os movimentos sociais bem como uma epistemologia da resistência à morte, mediante criação de uma ciência para a vida digna de todos e todas. Esperamos trazer luzes à temática e dialogar com outros movimentos que se ponham na perspectiva emancipatória.

## **O contexto de opressão e de resistência é o mesmo**

O entendimento da nova realidade do campo brasileiro se dá a partir de sua inserção na ordem mundial caracterizada por: globalização da economia, que incrementa drasticamente o comércio internacional, com multiplicação da oferta de produtos; organização do trabalho num sistema de produção flexível, que permite ao capitalista acelerar o processo de acumulação de riquezas; revolução técnica científica, que com o suporte da robótica e da informática, eleva exponencialmente a produtividade dos meios de produção; o neoliberalismo que se constituirá na racionalidade de gestão encontrada pelos setores hegemônicos, para expansão do mercado.

A unidade econômica passa a ser o planeta e as partes (nações) que o compõem não são necessariamente interdependentes. Ademais, a transferência de dinheiros, recursos materiais e humanos de um país para outro não obedece a qualquer regra não consoante com as novas relações de mercado globalizado.

O capital mundializado é um sistema que nega sua *raison d'être* na medida em que se pauta na: dispensa relativa e crescente de trabalho vivo; perda relativa de capacidade dos Estados nacionais (em geral, mas especialmente os da periferia do sistema) de imporem limites e mecanismos de controle ao capital mundializado; negação prática dos ideais liberal-democráticos da escola (Sousa Júnior, 2010, p.231).

A perda da racionalidade burguesa está relacionada à necessidade ilimitada de expansão e acumulação. O capital – a princípio fundamentalmente industrial – aprofunda a sincronia entre os setores: financeiro, serviços e agropecuário. O sistema educacional também se adequa a ideia de empregabilidade, sendo o estado isento de maiores responsabilidades sobre a problemática do (des)emprego na sociedade. O setor agropecuário passa a se inserir num contexto, no qual o ideário burguês de sociedade é redefinido historicamente.

No Brasil, as políticas estatais de “desenvolvimento” com ampliação de fronteiras agrícolas remontam à década de 1970. Estas políticas têm priorizado o esquema de grupos industriais e grandes empresas envolvidas no setor primário, em detrimento de medidas de maior apoio à produção familiar, como a reforma agrária, créditos agrícolas significativos, assistência técnica contínua, garantia do preço mínimo e comercialização entre outros.

Este modelo tem nova expansão no Brasil, no final da década de 90 e passa a ser denominado de neodesenvolvimentismo. Entretanto essa expansão não altera o lugar do país na divisão internacional do trabalho, enquanto exportador de matérias primas e produtos primários, como há um século. Todavia, desta feita tem o agronegócio como protagonista do campo num cenário de expropriação da terra, superexploração do trabalho assalariado e degradação ambiental.

Na primeira década do século XXI, o Censo Agropecuário – 2006, nos mostra parte das consequências da investida capitalista com grandes empresas do agronegócio ocupando cada vez mais o campo brasileiro. No Brasil, o supracitado Censo (IBGE, 2009) mostrou um Índice de Gini<sup>2</sup> de 0,872, superior aos anos de 1985 (0,857) e 1995 (0,856). Tais dados permitem constatar um aumento de concentração de terras na década de 1996 a 2006, pois a área ocupada pelos estabelecimentos com mais de 1.000 hectares concentra 43% da área total e aqueles com 10 hectares para menos ocupam somente 2,7% da área total. O latifúndio permanece como estrutura da agricultura brasileira e é perceptível sua expansão atual. A reforma agrária nunca realizada na realidade brasileira se põe mais distante ainda, e, no próximo Censo, previsto para 2016, corre-se o risco da constatação de maior concentração fundiária do que hoje.

A expansão do negócio capitalista no campo se dá através da modernização da agricultura na lógica de complexos industriais, compostos pela indústria química, pesquisas transgênicas e produtos primários agropecuários. Como esclarece Ribeiro (2012, p.04), o agronegócio “envolve o setor de implementação de máquinas, a produção agrícola e a industrialização desta produção com o setor de distribuição e serviços. Essa cadeia articulada da produção, comércio e financiamento acaba por gerar uma quantidade pequena de postos de trabalho”. R. Furtado de Souza (2013) alerta para a pressão que esta cadeia produtiva exerce sobre a agricultura familiar, muitas vezes, obrigando pequenos agricultores a produzir para o agronegócio, perdendo assim sua autonomia e saberes relacionados ao seu trabalho, levando-os ao desemprego quando os contratos de produção não são renovados.

Leher (2011) mostra que as políticas neodesenvolvimentistas postas em prática no Brasil se inserem num complexo do modo de produção capitalista, tendo vínculos profundos com o capital internacional, o qual para reagir à crise atual investe na ampliação da expropriação e hiperexploração de força de trabalho e recursos naturais, sendo recorrente a narrativa desenvolvimentista pelas grandes corporações dos setores mineral, do agronegócio e da exportação de *commodities* em geral. Sobre este modelo de sociedade, as consequências têm classe:

As primeiras vítimas dos desastres ecológicos são as camadas sociais exploradas e oprimidas, os povos do sul e em particular as comunidades indígenas e camponesas que vêem suas terras, suas florestas e seus rios poluídos, envenenados e devastados pelas multinacionais do petróleo e das minas, ou pelo agronegócio da soja, do óleo de palma e do gado (Löwy, 2012, p.14).

O aparelho de estado nos três níveis administrativos federal, estadual e municipal se constitui num elemento impulsionador desta lógica neodesenvolvimentista, que avança sobre os ecossistemas, degradando o meio

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<sup>2</sup> O Índice de Gini revela a distribuição da terra na estrutura agrária de um país, e, quanto mais próximo de 1, indica maior concentração.

ambiente, ameaçando a biodiversidade, poluindo o ar e a água, ampliando a presença dos agrotóxicos nas frutas e legumes, pondo em risco as vidas dos trabalhadores e moradores das comunidades próximas a ação do agronegócio (Melo, 2010), seja pelo veneno que respiram e ingerem, seja pelas ameaças e ações violentas contra os que ousam afrontar a perversa lógica, na defesa do modelo de agricultura ecológica e familiar.

Nos dois governos Lula (2003-2006, 2007-2010), no qual os movimentos sociais depositaram confiança política na efetivação da reforma agrária, embora se registre maior repasse financeiro para a estruturação produtiva dos assentamentos de reforma agrária, não se logrou alteração profunda da questão agrária e agrícola do país.

O Prof. Dr. Ariovaldo Umbelino, do Curso de Geografia da Universidade de São Paulo (USP), pondera o fato de em suas pesquisas haver constatado o assentamento de apenas 154 mil famílias durante oito anos do Governo Lula, e denuncia que no segundo mandato há uma política de legalização da grilagem, pois, aproximadamente, 67 milhões de hectares de terras pertencentes à União, ao INCRA, são transferidos para o agronegócio. Desta forma em vez de cumprir a meta de Reforma Agrária, o governo pôs em prática a contra-Reforma Agrária (Aggege, 2011).

O tratamento dado ao financiamento da agricultura segue na mesma direção. Apesar de ser responsável por 70% do consumo interno de alimentos, a agricultura familiar recebe somente 14% do crédito disponível para a agricultura, enquanto o agronegócio abocanha 86% (Jornal Brasil de Fato, 2013).

Tal quadro tem ocasionado o aumento da violência no campo. Dados da Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) contabilizam 638 conflitos em 2010, envolvendo posseiros da Região Norte, com 235 registros (36,8%), com os Sem-Terra, num total de 185 conflitos (29%) e assentados com 65 casos (10,2%) (Aggege, 2011).

A região do Baixo Vale do Jaguaribe no estado do Ceará, sobretudo a microrregião que envolve o Perímetro Irrigado Jaguaribe-Apodi, na Chapada do Apodi é um exemplo concreto e emblemático deste quadro de disputa no campo brasileiro. É sobre este contexto socioeconômico e político, de relações entre projetos de sociedade e de campo opostos, que emergem contradições e práxis educativas, refletidas neste trabalho.

O Governo do estado do Ceará, Brasil, criou o Programa Cearense de Agricultura Irrigada (PROCEAGRI) em 1998, o qual incentiva a ocupação da Chapada do Apodi por grandes empresas nacionais e internacionais voltadas para a fruticultura de exportação. O incentivo à expansão do agronegócio se aprofunda mediante isenção integral de impostos ao comércio de agrotóxico, facilitando a generalização de seu uso<sup>3</sup>, e, por conseguinte, a contaminação do ar, do solo e da água, inclusive do subsolo do aquífero Jandaíra, na fronteira

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<sup>3</sup> Ver vídeo *Sucata de Plástico* (2014)

com o vizinho estado do Rio Grande do Norte, conforme pesquisa<sup>4</sup> do grupo TRAMAS/UFC.

A exploração e expropriação de pequenos produtores rurais na região do Baixo Vale Jaguaribe, no entorno do perímetro Irrigado Jaguaribe-Apodí, em confronto com as agroindústrias de produção de fruticultura para exportação, ali instaladas, se registra desde os anos de 1990 (Lima, Vasconcelos e Freitas, 2011). O acirramento das questões focalizadas, principalmente, quando os agricultores se contrapuseram ao modelo de produção com uso massivo de agrotóxicos através de pulverização aérea, que os expulsa de suas terras, tornando-os subalternos e convertendo-os em força de trabalho assalariada, eclodiu no assassinato do líder comunitário José Maria do Tomé<sup>5</sup>, no município de Limoeiro do Norte, em 21 de abril de 2010.

O fato divulgado internacionalmente, através de redes sociais e no âmbito nacional nas reportagens: “O Sol da Terra” e “O polígono da exclusão”, na revista Carta Capital de 25/08/2010 e 08/09/2010, respectivamente, não arrefeceram os ânimos dos participantes dos movimentos na Região. É após esse primeiro momento de choque e temeridade, que uma conjugação de forças criou a articulação política Movimento 21 (M 21) que comporta vários sujeitos coletivos que atuam no Baixo Vale Jaguaribe.

O Movimento 21 constitui-se como expressão de reação ao avanço do capital no campo brasileiro, o qual se expande através do agronegócio, e a conseqüente ampliação dos latifúndios, expulsando e submetendo os trabalhadores rurais, alterando profundamente o equilíbrio ambiental com o desmatamento necessário a monocultura e o uso massivo de agrotóxico com produção voltada à exportação.

A reunião prática dos movimentos sociais do campo, setores da Igreja Católica vinculados à Teologia da Libertação, organizações de esquerda, ambientalistas e pesquisadores das universidades públicas (UECE e UFC) representa a constituição de um poderoso sujeito coletivo, com práxis político-educativa de características peculiares, comprometido com a denúncia das “forças destruidoras” do capitalismo contemporâneo no campo e anúncio de uma práxis política e científica na perspectiva de uma sociedade justa e racionalmente ecológica.

A construção de uma atuação em rede, além de efetivar a solidariedade às populações mais vulneráveis, percebidas justamente como aquelas comunidades que mais sofriam com a expropriação de terras e com a contaminação ambiental decorrentes do agronegócio, ampliou o conceito de

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<sup>4</sup> Pesquisa “Estudo epidemiológico em populações expostas à contaminação ambiental em áreas de uso de agrotóxicos na região nordeste”, Edital MCT-CNPq/MS-SCTIE-DECIT/CT – Saúde – n<sup>o</sup> 24/2006, coordenada pela Prof<sup>o</sup> Raquel Rigotto da Universidade Federal do Ceará.

<sup>5</sup> José Maria era presidente da Associação dos Moradores da localidade Tomé, na Chapada do Apodi.



‘atingidos’ e de atores sociais legítimos a reivindicar direitos (Teixeira, 2011, p.532).

As comunidades da Chapada do Apodi nos municípios de Limoeiro do Norte e Quixeré, dentre elas a do Tomé, que sobreviviam da prática da agricultura e comércio familiar, presenciam seu modo de vida se modificar drasticamente. Sujeitas aos mecanismos de hegemonia do agronegócio, inclusive a ideologia neodesenvolvimentista e seus mitos de mais dinheiro e mais emprego, não conseguiram impedir que a grande propriedade moderna invadisse seus territórios de subsistência, dando uma nova configuração agrária à região. As terras públicas são gradativamente ocupadas pelo agronegócio, que conta com as benesses do estado através de incentivo direto ou omissão nos processos de transgressão da lei tanto na posse da terra quanto, posteriormente, no uso abusivo de agrotóxicos, que provoca o envenenamento da água e, por conseguinte, dos moradores da Chapada.

Hoje, a população trabalhadora, assalariada do agronegócio, é privada de água potável para o uso diário. Rotineiramente, a água envenenada que sai das torneiras é usada no banho, lavagem de roupas e louças. Num lugar onde há abundância d’água, a de beber é comprada em garrações. A lógica de mercado prevalece em todos os sentidos relacionados às necessidades básicas da população. Nas escolas das comunidades da Chapada o quadro é gravíssimo. A irresponsabilidade governamental, municipal e estadual, permite que as crianças sejam obrigadas a beber a água contaminada das torneiras.

Em meio a fatos inaceitáveis do ponto de vista humano, trava-se uma disputa de discursos que buscam se firmar na representação da realidade. O agronegócio e representantes protagonizam a construção do mito do desenvolvimento do campo contrária às ações de resistência dos trabalhadores, moradores e simpatizantes. Os mitos construídos são poderosos na contenção de ações de resistência e tentam, a todo custo, impor a crença de que a condição de empregado que manipula diariamente venenos nas plantações da grande propriedade ou prepara o abacaxi para exportação constitui-se numa melhoria geral em relação à realidade anterior caracterizada pela prática da agricultura familiar. Sem mencionar a política do estado brasileiro de total apoio ao modelo de desenvolvimento no campo, os poderosos propagam a representação social de que a água abundante e empregos em período de seca são conquistas propiciadas pelas empresas agrícolas que atuam na Chapada. Desta forma, naturaliza-se a metamorfose do mundo do trabalho e novo modo de vida no campo, com largo apoio do estado.

A construção de mitos vai de encontro com dados da realidade, os quais comprovam que 74% do emprego de toda mão de obra no campo brasileiro está na agricultura camponesa, enquanto o “mito” da empregabilidade do agronegócio reduz-se a somente 26% (Censo Agropecuário, 2006) (IBGE, 2009).

Esta prática ideológica, própria dos setores hegemônicos, constitui-se num mecanismo de conservação das estruturas, nas quais assentam os robustos lucros que as empresas agrícolas têm com o modelo de desenvolvimento vigente. Faz parte da pedagogia das classes privilegiadas da Chapada e dos seus representantes dos municípios envolvidos a inculcação do seu modo de pensar e da formação de consciência adequada aos processos de dominação e exploração. Os trabalhadores e moradores da Chapada são instados a aceitar tanto às representações criadas sobre o neodesenvolvimentismo, quanto à cultura do medo: medo das pessoas perderem o emprego, medo de falar sobre o mal dos agrotóxicos, o medo de se organizar para resistir na perspectiva de uma pedagogia do oprimido e ser assassinados como foi Zé Maria etc. O medo é, portanto um instrumento do opressor, e, sua pedagogia, não se restringe a um fato psicológico, mas um fenômeno social, cultural, político e educativo, pois incide na prática das pessoas.

Na contramão do medo que beneficia o opressor, membros da articulação política M21 procuram encorajar a comunidade, através de presença constante das denúncias, de formação de lideranças, por meio de um paciente processo de educação popular.

A articulação do M21 procura tecer práticas diversas no enfrentamento da lógica do agronegócio, através da investigação e divulgação científicas comprobatórias dos males do uso do agrotóxico na atividade agrícola e de práxis política que iniba a ação de violência às pessoas e ao meio ambiente. Estes sujeitos produzem uma articulada pedagogia libertadora a serviço dos oprimidos e dados os pressupostos ecológicos vinculados a uma perspectiva de transformação do sistema produtivo pode-se relacioná-la à prática ecossocialista.

A educação está profundamente imbricada com o M21 desde sua origem, tanto por sua composição em grande medida de sujeitos, cuja atuação profissional está vinculada à educação básica e superior, quanto pela prática educativa de transformar as relações sociais hegemônicas a partir das instituições, entidades e movimentos, os quais pertencem. A partir do entendimento de educação como inerente a qualquer processo social que promova aprendizagens, conhecimentos e construção de saberes, podemos afirmar que a educação está na presente no M21 desde a motivação dos sujeitos de não se conformar com a realidade dada, de injustiça e desigualdade social, às práticas de organização para denunciar a situação existente e anunciar nova sociabilidade.

### **Práticas pedagógicas dos sujeitos coletivos em luta**

As relações sociais no campo brasileiro são decorrentes de um longo processo histórico de concentração da terra que remonta a constituição das capitânicas hereditárias<sup>6</sup>, quando o Brasil era colônia de Portugal. Hoje, a contradição

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<sup>6</sup> Capitânicas hereditárias foram as primeiras divisões do território brasileiro imposto pelos portugueses. Entre 1534 e 1536. Portugal dividiu o Brasil em quinze lotes de terra para doze

capital – trabalho em geral e a contradição no campo brasileiro em particular constituem-se, objetivamente, relações sociais entre sujeitos com distintos e antagônicos interesses. Nestas contradições, no que pese o poderio e a hegemonia do agronegócio, pauta-se também sua superação pela ação histórica dos movimentos sociais. Afinal, as circunstâncias formam os indivíduos e estes se fazem, apesar das circunstâncias (Marx e Engels, 1980).

No contexto de luta de classes, a educação é, portanto, inerente aos processos formativos das classes, que constroem seus distintos projetos históricos nas lutas sociais. Portanto, os sujeitos sociais, em complexas relações, se educam objetiva e subjetivamente (Mendes, 1993).

A educação, desde sempre, se espalha no conjunto do tecido social, compondo as relações sociais, vinculada a interesses distintos e também antagônicos. Ela se apresenta em formas, lugares, sujeitos, tempos e pedagogias diversas (Brandão, 2007).

Se as relações sociais são a essência genérica do homem; se a linguagem e consciência são mediadoras de toda práxis, além de serem produtos dela; se o homem é um ser que se constrói no conjunto das relações, num movimento constante, num processo infinito, então não há como se recusar o caráter educativo imanente a toda a história da formação do homem (Sousa Júnior, 2010, p.23/24).

A educação, portanto, é inerente às práticas sociais, humanas, e se faz presente na história, através da luta de interesses, na disputa de hegemonias. No cenário da Chapada, a hegemonia se faz por dentro do poder econômico, político e cultural, sendo as ideias predominantes as “ideias das classes dominantes”. Na contra hegemonia, os sujeitos sociais se formam e através de suas práticas disputam a formação de novas consciências e práticas que põem em cheque o *status quo* dominante. Na disputa de práticas e ideias, a ideologia dominante tenta restringir o espaço da educação à escola.

É frequente ao se reportar a educação, principalmente nos meios de comunicação, ou na linguagem cotidiana, a referência aos sistemas formais de ensino. Todavia, no âmbito da academia brasileira a reflexão sobre os processos educativos que ocorrem em outras esferas da vida, como o trabalho, a família, a criação artística e cultural, a participação política, em sindicatos, partidos, associações e movimentos sociais dentre outros, vem se acumulando, notadamente a partir da segunda metade do século passado, tendo como marco, a Pedagogia do Oprimido, de Paulo Freire, editado pela primeira vez no Chile, em 1968. Nesta obra Freire identifica duas pedagogias em constantes embates: pedagogia do opressor e pedagogia do oprimido.

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donatários. Esta divisão é a origem dos atuais estados que se localizam na costa brasileira e também da atual estrutura fundiária baseada no grande latifúndio.

Ao denunciar as formas de negação dos saberes e “desumanização/ coisificação” dos oprimidos, Freire (1987) anuncia uma pedagogia, como reconstituição da “hominização/humanização”. Mas não se atém somente a escola, menciona processos que ocorrem fora dela, citando em várias passagens, momentos de seu trabalho de alfabetização com os camponeses chilenos no Instituto Chileno para a Reforma Agrária (ICIRA).

Dentre os saberes e aprendizados produzidos no seio dos movimentos sociais populares, é perceptível o desvelamento das relações de poder na sociedade, o funcionamento do aparato estatal, a elaboração de políticas voltadas a seus interesses, entre outros, que transformam e tem contribuído para democratizar a sociedade (Gohn, 2011). São saberes não formais, que complementam ou substituem os saberes inúteis aos processos de transformação social.

No contexto de luta de classes, a relação entre opressor e oprimido produz educações, as quais se voltam aos interesses de um ou de outro (Freire, 1987). Frente às pedagogias opressoras do agronegócio e seus representantes no aparelho de estado, no âmbito federal, estadual e municipal, emergem pedagogias dos oprimidos, dos “atingidos” socialmente, sintonizadas com as premissas da educação do campo<sup>7</sup> (Carvalho, 2006).

As pedagogias das classes hegemônicas juntas ao estado são orientadas por seus próprios interesses. Assim é que o poder político local do município de Limoeiro do Norte, prefeito e a maioria da bancada de vereadores aliados, realizam articulação política com empresários do agronegócio e derrotaram a lei anti-pulverização aérea de agrotóxicos, seis meses após o assassinato de Zé Maria.

Na Chapada, dada a pouca tradição democrática dos municípios envolvidos, a construção do consenso na sociedade, anda lado a lado com a coerção e a opressão. Neste caso, a pedagogia do opressor alcança eficácia no clima de violência e construção do medo quase generalizado que oprime a população das comunidades atingidas pelo agrotóxico. A sociedade civil local depara-se com ambiente pouco democrático. Frente à disseminação do medo aterrorizador e imobilizador emerge a articulação M21.

O êxito da pedagogia dominante é medido pelo tempo, no qual as ideias dominantes se mantêm em forma de “hospedeiro” na consciência e prática dos oprimidos. A cultura do medo disseminada pelo agronegócio na comunidade do Tomé e comunidades vizinhas, após o assassinato do Zé Maria, que corajosamente enfrentou os “hospedeiros” da Chapada, é uma das expressões da pedagogia do opressor. “Em verdade, instaurada uma situação de violência, de

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<sup>7</sup>Furtado, Iório e Peixoto (2009) e Carvalho (2006) mostram as distinções entre a educação do campo, protagonizada pela demanda dos movimentos camponeses e a educação rural com escolas onde o currículo historicamente foi dissociado dos interesses dos camponeses. Além do vínculo com a terra, sua cultura, seus trabalhos e lutas, essa educação se conjuga a um projeto de desenvolvimento popular para o país. Neste sentido Caldart (2004) e Molina (2009) alertam que educação do campo, seus currículos e escola estão para a agricultura camponesa e a educação rural para o agronegócio.

opressão, ela gera toda uma forma de ser e comportar-se nos que estão envolvidos nela” (Freire, 1987, p.45).

As grandes empresas usam os meios de comunicação para descredenciar as pesquisas realizadas, tentam legitimar o discurso da geração de emprego assalariado, escamoteando as péssimas condições de trabalho denunciadas nas duas greves realizadas pelos trabalhadores e trabalhadoras da empresa Delmonte Fresh Produce<sup>8</sup>. Trata-se da disputa ideológica que travam os proprietários das indústrias e seus aliados para que sua visão de mundo seja predominante.

Na objetividade da exploração capitalista, que subjuga uma massa de trabalhadores à alienação, subsistem também dimensões educativas, tanto nos que oprimem, quanto nos que oprimidos se unem na superação do modo de vida alienado. O esforço que os trabalhadores fazem na construção de resistências à exploração e opressão, na compreensão da realidade alienante e nas ações de transformação se constitui em práxis formativa do ser social e histórico.

A (trans)formação (ou educação) – neste caso esses conceitos apresentam elementos comuns na direção semântica da educação como permanente processo de constituição/transformação do ser – ou ainda elevação dessa massa como classe potencialmente revolucionária a classe efetivamente revolucionária também aparece como momento educativo e aqui surge com força a categoria da práxis, como atividade político-educativa dedicada à transformação social. Resumindo: a passagem da classe-em-si à classe-para-si não é outra coisa senão a efetivação da práxis política como práxis educativa (Sousa Júnior, 2011, p.122).

A práxis educativa que alça os oprimidos, as classes populares, a condição de sujeitos históricos se dá em vários espaços: movimentos sociais, escola, pastorais, intelectuais orgânicos, sindicatos, partidos, meios de comunicação, entre outros. Alguns destes espaços como o M21 e seus sujeitos, se constituem em instrumentos voltados aos interesses dos trabalhadores, portanto, bem definidos quanto à emancipação social; outros, como a escola e os meios de comunicação – embora predominantemente atrelados a preservação do *status quo* – são campos de disputa.

No que concerne ao Movimento 21 são vários os momentos formativos. A partir das observações realizadas em reuniões, planejamento de atividades, dos registros empíricos em entrevistas com professoras e conversas informais com

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<sup>8</sup> Já ocorreram duas greves de trabalhadores da Empresa Delmonte Fresh Produce, a qual produz fruticultura para exportação, situada na Chapada do Apodi. A primeira, em 2008, relativa às más condições de trabalho e alimentação (Teixeira, 2011) e a segunda, em 2012, na qual os agricultores reivindicavam “alimentação na empresa, fim do assédio moral, horas extras optativas, entre outros pontos de direitos trabalhistas”. Jornal Diário do Nordeste, Caderno Regional, em 06 de junho de 2012.

seus participantes e tomando-se em conta os limites de um artigo, mencionaremos adiante alguns mais expressivos, quanto à auto-formação, construção de saberes coletivos e visibilidade pública.

Em relação às práticas educativas da articulação Movimento 21 podemos destacar alguns eventos, os quais podem ser reconhecidos no âmbito da educação não-formal, bem como processos educativos do campo da educação informal e ainda, em menor escala, alguns ocorridos na educação formal.

Nas primeiras podemos identificar os eventos que exigem planejamento, organização, mobilização, com protagonistas e objetivos definidos, ou seja, há uma intencionalidade. Como destaca Maria da Glória Gohn:

Na educação não-formal, os espaços educativos localizam-se em territórios que acompanham as trajetórias de vida dos grupos e indivíduos, fora das escolas, em locais informais, locais onde há processos interativos intencionais (a questão da intencionalidade é um elemento importante de diferenciação) (Gohn, 2006, p.3).

Embora possam ser considerados educação não-formal, no sentido de que não se inserem no sistema de educação oficial, pública ou privada, não se direcionando a certificação de qualquer grau ou aferição de cursos, próprios da educação formal, constituem-se práxis educativa organizada, com metodologias e objetivos específicos no contexto da luta social.

Neste sentido podemos identificar no percurso do M21: as reuniões agendadas entre participantes, entidades, movimentos e universidades; as duas audiências públicas<sup>9</sup> que ocorreram no estado do Ceará, na FAFIDAM, campus da UECE, no município de Limoeiro do Norte, em 12 de maio de 2010 e na Assembleia Legislativa do Ceará, na cidade de Fortaleza, em 21 de maio de 2010, sobre a problemática da pulverização aérea de agrotóxicos na Chapada do Apodi e suas consequências para o meio ambiente e saúde da população. As marchas realizadas a cada ano, no dia 21 de abril, após o assassinato de José Maria do Tomé, nas quais, além da população da Chapada e dos demais participantes do

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<sup>9</sup> Sobre as audiências públicas e marchas podem ser encontrados maiores detalhes em Teixeira (2011), em jornais locais online, como Diário do Nordeste, Jornal O Povo, e na web, postados por ativistas no YouTube. As audiências públicas são requisitadas por parlamentares, a pedido dos movimentos sociais. O presidente das casas legislativas, tanto Câmara de Vereadores, como Assembleias de Deputados Estaduais ou Federais, convidam os movimentos, entidades e sociedade civil envolvida com a questão para pronunciamento agendado previamente. No entanto, a palavra é sempre facultada aos presentes e são eventos abertos ao público. Busca-se a intervenção e medidas do poder público sobre a questão. São espaços que podem favorecer a ampliação da democracia à medida que o Estado, no sentido conferido por Gramsci, ou seja, sociedade civil mais representantes da sociedade política são tensionados, pressionando-se o governo, por medidas de garantia de direitos, no caso em apreço, o direito a saúde, moradia e terra para trabalho.

M21, somam-se as pastorais sociais<sup>10</sup> da Igreja Católica, influenciadas pela Teologia da Libertação, as Cáritas do Estado do Ceará, congregando participantes de todo o seu território e mais recentemente, do vizinho estado do Rio Grande do Norte.

Em todos estes momentos acontecem aprendizagens, seja do próprio âmbito da mobilização e organização para o alcance dos objetivos, tais como elaborar notas para jornal, realizar convites, participar de debates que anunciam a problemática em foco, nas rádios, televisões e outros, pensar todos os momentos do evento, os convidados, local, enfim montar a infraestrutura; seja através da apreensão dos conhecimentos científicos divulgados, posto que a participação dos grupos e professores universitários trazem os saberes de pesquisas e estudos sobre o assunto, bem como os saberes populares, daqueles cujo cotidiano insere-se na problemática, são divulgados. Dá-se assim uma “popularização” dos saberes científicos e voz aos saberes populares, pois há um pressuposto na prática de que “todo ser humano é um filósofo” (Gramsci, 1978). Ambos saberes dialogam e levam a reflexões sobre o mundo, as relações socioeconômicas vividas sob a égide do capital, as causas dos problemas enfrentados, desmitificando-se o discurso neodesenvolvimentista e vislumbrando-se alternativas de superação. Ocorre no dizer de Paulo Freire (1987) uma “leitura do mundo”, necessária à superação das consciências ingênuas e mágicas, fundamental a construção coletiva de uma consciência crítica.

Nessa perspectiva, vale ressaltar os registros de Teixeira (2011) quanto à realização do Seminário “Agrotóxicos no Vale: novos ares e desafios para atuação pública”, em agosto de 2008, construído coletivamente por várias entidades públicas, instituições de ensino superior e movimentos sociais, a saber: o Ministério Público Estadual, Diocese e Cáritas Diocesana de Limoeiro do Norte, FAFIDAM/UECE, Núcleo TRAMAS/UFC, Instituto de Educação e Política em Defesa da Cidadania (IEPDC), 10<sup>a</sup> Célula Regional de Saúde (CERES), Instituto Centro de Ensino Tecnológico (CENTEC), Centro de Pesquisa e Assessoria (ESPLAR) e Via Campesina. Os debates contribuíram para maior visibilidade pública das consequências da pulverização área.

Teixeira (idem) também se refere à “Oficina de mapeamento de vulnerabilidades socioambientais e contextos de promoção da saúde ambiental em comunidades rurais da Chapada do Apodi e do Tabuleiro de Russas” promovida no âmbito da Jornada “Mundo Rural, Agrotóxicos e Saúde”, em agosto de 2009<sup>11</sup>. Segundo seu relato a dinâmica de trabalho envolveu

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<sup>10</sup> Segundo o site da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB, 2014), a “Pastoral Social integra, junto com outros setores, a dimensão sócio-transformadora da ação evangelizadora da Igreja no Brasil”. Com participação de fiéis, clérigos e religiosos, as Pastorais sociais são onze: da terra, operária, da criança, do menor, da saúde, carcerária, do povo da rua, dos pescadores, dos migrantes, da mulher marginalizada e dos nômades. Além delas, o Setor responde também por três organismos: Cáritas Brasileira, Ibrades e Ceris.

<sup>11</sup> O acúmulo de denúncias acerca das nefastas consequências do uso do agrotóxico para o meio-ambiente e para a saúde humana levaram a deflagração de campanha de denúncia pelos

representantes de quatro comunidades da Chapada em cujas preocupações já se incluíam a pulverização aérea. Os mesmos relacionaram em matrizes distintas “os elementos que ameaçavam e os que promoviam a vida em seus territórios”, registrando-os em cartazes diversos. Para melhor visualização desenharam um mapa de cada comunidade sobre seu cotidiano e elegeram entre as ameaças à vida, a pulverização aérea registrada em desenhos e mapas por todas as comunidades (Teixeira, 2011).

Nesta mesma ocasião, na praça central da localidade Tomé, o Prof. Vanderlei Pignati, da Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso, convidado a apresentar suas pesquisas acerca do avanço do agronegócio em seu estado discorreu também sobre o acidente rural ampliado no município de Lucas do Rio Verde, ocasionado pela pulverização aérea<sup>12</sup>. Estavam presentes moradores e participantes da Jornada. Foi um momento formativo de intercâmbio entre vivências e saberes.

Ainda neste mesmo ano de 2009, na localidade do Tomé, em dois espaços públicos, os moradores desenharam o muro das lamentações e a árvore dos sonhos, os quais até hoje persistem. No primeiro pode-se ler: poluição do ar, desigualdade social, violência, alcoolismo, degradação do meio ambiente, prostituição, falta de assistência aos idosos, exploração do solo, greve, corrupção, entre outros. Na segunda está escrito: água de qualidade, adubação orgânica, ambiente saudável, segurança, saúde, paz, consciência, mais educação, cooperação, entre outros. São “simbologias que buscam representar o contexto de sofrimentos e esperanças, denúncias e anúncios vivenciados na comunidade” (Teixeira, *idem*, p. 534).

A desigualdade social, a violência, o abuso na exploração da terra e dos homens postos no muro das lamentações denunciam a alienação da vida imposta aos oprimidos nas relações inscritas no modo capitalista de produzir a existência. Nesta mesma situação, as metodologias reflexivas são recursos capazes de contribuir não só para a compreensão desta opressão, como acontece neste território, mas possibilitam “sonhações” de resistência, em outras palavras: “os oprimidos que se ‘formam’ no amor à morte, que caracteriza o clima da opressão, devem, encontrar, na sua luta o caminho do amor à vida” (Freire, 1987, p.55).

Através destas metodologias buscou-se discutir por vários caminhos a realidade e possibilidade de superação dos problemas, fortalecendo o amor à vida. Neste percurso, os envolvidos vão aos poucos se apropriando do mundo e de si mesmos, dando vazão a sua voz. Na comunicação, no diálogo coletivo, reconstruímo-nos, recuperando nossa humanização confrontada com a coisificação opressora. Parece-nos ser este um papel fundamental desta Pedagogia do Oprimido: a construção do diálogo libertador. Tal não é de

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movimentos sociais em âmbito latino americano, no ano de 2012. Neste contexto, foi lançado o filme documentário “O veneno está na mesa” (2012) de Silvio Tendler. Acessível em 01/06/2012, no Site: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIwsVL75m8c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIwsVL75m8c)

<sup>12</sup> Para maiores informações ver “Chuva de veneno” (2013).



pequena monta, pois, como oprimidos não raro hospedamos práticas opressoras, como a desvalorização dos saberes populares.

Entre vários processos resultantes da educação não-formal, apontados por Gohn (2006), o conjunto das referidas ações podem propiciar: “consciência e organização de como agir em grupos coletivos; a construção e reconstrução de concepção(ões) de mundo e sobre o mundo; contribuição para um sentimento de identidade com uma dada comunidade” (Gohn, 2006, p.4).

Na experiência do M21 esta pedagogia, inscrita na educação não-formal, dialoga com a educação formal? E a escola, como se põe diante deste caudaloso ambiente educativo, além dos seus muros?

A escola como instituição do aparelho estatal burguês reflete, em grande medida, as contradições da sociedade burguesa. Os professores e outros sujeitos sociais da Chapada, refletindo as duas principais pedagogias em disputa, reagem de forma variada entre a indiferença, o medo, a indignação e alguma ousadia. A oposição ao modelo neodesenvolvimentista se dá de forma indireta, através da recriminação a longa jornada de trabalho dos pais, que inviabiliza o acompanhamento da formação (educação) dos filhos, ou de forma direta quando a problemática vivenciada pela comunidade invade os muros da escola. Os lançamentos do livro organizado por Raquel Rigotto (2011) “Agrotóxicos, trabalho e saúde: Vulnerabilidade e resistência no contexto da modernização agrícola no Baixo Jaguaribe/CE”, no final de 2011, e do Almanaque em linguagem popular com os resultados de pesquisas, em janeiro de 2013, reverberam na escola<sup>13</sup>.

Apesar destas iniciativas, mais externas do que internas à escola, a prática educativa do dia-a-dia é marcada pelo conformismo de pais, professores e diretores quanto a ingestão de água contaminada da torneira, pelos alunos. Tão cruel quanto esta contradição é o medo e o trato da memória do Zé Maria. Sem meias palavras diz uma professora: “o acontecimento de sua morte, as pessoas meio que se fecham quando tocam no assunto”. A esperança ainda está na juventude, nos alunos que reagem positivamente quando algum educador decide abordar o assunto: “o agronegócio é isso e isso, a gente vive aqui, e, aqui é muito atingido pelo veneno e os meninos gostavam da temática e participavam à vontade”.

Impõe-se à escola e aos seus sujeitos e aos que participam de movimentos sociais, a superação de concepções de educação num e noutro espaço. De um lado, cabe aos que fazem a escola acolher a grande experiência educativa produzida na práxis cotidiana do trabalho, das lutas e produções culturais, e de outro, cabem aos movimentos sociais compreender a educação que se espalha em todo processo formativo, inclusive na escola.

A proximidade com os movimentos sociais vai impactando o ensino formal tanto nas escolas do ensino fundamental, quanto no ensino superior na

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<sup>13</sup> Para melhor visualização desta problemática ver vídeo *Chapada do Apodi Morte e Vida* (2014).

graduação e na pós-graduação. Na Escola de Ensino Fundamental João Batista Ribeiro, da localidade Tomé professoras organizaram projetos sobre a água e meio ambiente, envolvendo as crianças. As reflexões foram apresentadas na praça central, de forma artística, como teatro e música, durante a Marcha de um ano após o falecimento de Zé Maria. As professoras passaram a refletir sobre a temática e aos poucos alguns temas ambientais são tratados no currículo das várias séries.

O conjunto de ações de resistência dos diversos sujeitos sociais que atuam na Chapada e municípios do entorno produz uma diversidade de práxis educativa com características relacionadas aos campos<sup>14</sup> de atuação de cada coletivo envolvido. As práticas podem ser mais diretas, mais dialogais, mais teóricas, mais corajosas, mais ponderadas, mais institucionalizadas, etc., em relação com os vários campos.

As lutas e os movimentos sociais, enquanto práxis têm forte conteúdo educativo, uma vez que levam os seres sociais, sentirem-se como sujeitos históricos de superação da realidade alienante. Constitui-se uma das mais vibrantes conquistas educacionais a ocasião em que os oprimidos se apropriam do fazer história. É inerente aos movimentos sociais a formação (educação) para uma consciência de recusa à condição de objeto das classes hegemônicas. Foi assim na grande audiência pública da Câmara Municipal de Limoeiro do Norte para discutir a pulverização aérea vinte dias após o assassinato do Zé Maria, realizada no maior auditório da cidade, na FAFIDAM/UECE; nas manifestações na Chapada, após seis meses da morte do ambientalista, sem a Justiça encaminhar nada do Inquérito; nas greves dos trabalhadores das empresas multinacionais em 2008 e 2012, quando se tornaram públicas as condições de trabalho desumanas na manipulação dos agrotóxicos. Nestes três casos, a definição dos distintos projetos em disputa ficou bem evidente, e por isso todas estas experiências têm forte teor formativo.

A articulação política M21, dada suas características de rede, em que “cada elo desempenha um papel específico e complementar”, produz práticas relacionadas a reunião de diferentes sujeitos sociais, a produção científica interdisciplinar, a metodologia multifacetada, a socialização de pesquisas, a mobilização política dos sujeitos ‘atingidos’ pelo agro(tóxico)negócio. Gohn (1997, p.239) observa que “os movimentos locais que trabalham com demandas globais como as reivindicações culturais dos indígenas, as ecológicas, pela paz, direitos humanos etc. se fortaleceram”.

Desde o assassinato de José Maria do Tomé, a indignação de todos os sujeitos coletivos da região, já mencionados anteriormente, os quais já se irmanavam com as comunidades da Chapada, na denúncia ao adoecimento pelo uso abusivo de agrotóxicos (Rigotto, 2011), contra a exploração dos trabalhadores nas agroindústrias, as quais sequer respeitam a legislação trabalhista, na

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<sup>14</sup> Os campos são “...lugar de uma lógica e necessidades específicas. Por exemplo, o campo artístico, o campo religioso, ou o campo econômico obedecem a lógicas diferentes” (Bourdieu apud Bonnewitz, 2003, p.60).

organização pela conquista da terra e contra a expropriação, esse conjunto tomou a decisão do engajamento na promoção de atividades públicas nos dias 21 de cada mês, como forma de pressionar os poderes públicos a fim de se identificar e penalizar os criminosos, bem como dá prosseguimento as estas lutas.

As reuniões da articulação política M21 são, em si mesmas, momentos autoformativos. A construção de um diálogo entre organizações e movimentos com trajetórias e objetivos diferenciados, requer de todos e todas, no sentido proposto por Freire, “uma escuta amorosa”, ou seja, em que realmente estejamos dispostos a ouvir o outro, suas razões e lógicas, construindo-se um diálogo sincero.

A educação se manifesta na simples práxis de reunir, dialogar e discutir coletivamente problemáticas acadêmicas e políticas, rompendo as barreiras da perspectiva positivista de “cada coisa no seu lugar”. Isto também impõe desafios e contradições, também educativos.

A manutenção do diálogo, num sentido de uma transformação social, pressupõe ter claro o modelo de Estado e de sociedade que se quer construir. Neste tocante os participantes da articulação M21, declaram-se com o objetivo de construir, uma sociedade justa, igualitária e ecologicamente sustentável.

Nesta perspectiva o grupo avaliou a importância da sociedade ser mais informada sobre as más consequências do uso do agrotóxico, dando prosseguimento, as pronunciações públicas de José Maria, antes de seu assassinato, e cobrando dos poderes públicos decisões de preservação do ambiente e saúde das comunidades envolvidas.

Para tanto, foram efetivadas marchas na Chapada, em Limoeiro do Norte, nos municípios vizinhos, por ocasião do Grito dos Excluídos, o qual é organizado pela Igreja Católica, Movimentos Sociais e Sindicais, a cada dia sete de setembro, dia que se comemora a independência política do Brasil; e passeatas promovidas por outras entidades, na Capital do Estado, Fortaleza, portando faixas, distribuindo boletins sobre a problemática.

À medida que os resultados da pesquisa coordenada pela professora Raquel Rigotto, anteriormente mencionada, denotaram o envenenamento da água distribuída pelo serviço de abastecimento para a comunidade do Tomé, a gravidade da situação ampliou-se e ainda durante a pesquisa foram realizados seminários, audiências públicas com a presença de representantes dos poderes Legislativo e Executivo<sup>15</sup>, construídas por vários atores como: Ministério Público Estadual, Diocese e Cáritas Diocesana de Limoeiro do Norte, FAFIDAM/UECE, TRAMAS/UFC, Central Sindical CSP CONLUTAS e alguns militantes e simpatizantes do Partido Socialismo e Liberdade (PSOL) e do Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificados (PSTU) dentre outros.

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<sup>15</sup> Uma descrição detalhada de muitas destas manifestações pode ser encontrada em Teixeira (2011).

No bojo destas ações a temática da (in)sustentabilidade ambiental passa a ser amplificada e dessa práxis, a qual envolve estudos e ações políticas, os aprendizados se produzem para todos. Entre eles, aos poucos, a desmitificação do propagado progresso, que as agroindústrias trariam, como elucida uma das moradoras<sup>16</sup> do Tomé, participante da associação São João, ao se referir a carga horária de trabalho dos pais nestas empresas:

Esse modelo de desenvolvimento não desenvolve, pois como uma comunidade pode se desenvolver com o pai separado dos filhos a maioria do tempo, onde uma criança vê o pai e a mãe no domingo, quando os pais saem à criança está dormindo e quando chegam também, então, não existe convivência na família, não existe lógica de desenvolvimento nesse modelo de produção.

Fruto destes aprendizados conjuntos deu-se a publicação de artigos, apresentação de trabalhos em Congressos científicos nacionais e internacionais, lançamento do livro organizado por Rigotto (2011), boletins e almanaque sobre a problemática, distribuído nas escolas com os resultados das pesquisas em linguagem acessível à população. Paralelamente várias reportagens na imprensa escrita e falada do estado do Ceará, somadas as demais iniciativas conferem dimensão internacional à problemática. Assim se fortalece a luta da comunidade e se pressiona os poderes públicos quanto às políticas de saúde, de trabalho, de educação e penalização dos que assassinaram José Maria.

Concomitantemente, o campo acadêmico também se alarga, incorporando demandas da realidade e se realizando em diálogo com ela. Aos grupos das universidades, os objetivos ultrapassam a explicação da realidade, pois tencionam contribuir para sua transformação e participam de muitas das ações planejadas. O conjunto de desafios enfrentados levou a formação do Grupo de Pesquisa M21(GPM21)<sup>17</sup>. Neste caso os conteúdos do mundo real passam a ser debatidos na escola de ensino fundamental, do Tomé, através de projetos pedagógicos, os quais selecionam conteúdos curriculares sobre meio-ambiente, água e alimentos saudáveis, com apresentação em praça pública pelas crianças na manifestação de um ano de falecimento de José Maria. emergentes.

A prática de produzir ciência crítica, deliberadamente associada às questões políticas que afetam à população pobre em confronto com o modelo neodesenvolvimentista do agronegócio e o pragmatismo científico da ciência-mercadoria empenhada na satisfação do mercado, tem uma dimensão educativa transcendental.

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<sup>16</sup> Por motivos éticos, garantimos o sigilo quanto ao nome dos entrevistados.

<sup>17</sup> Sob a coordenação geral da Prof<sup>a</sup> Dr<sup>a</sup> Raquel Rigotto, foi cadastrado em 2013, no Diretório dos Grupos de Pesquisa do CNPq, Plataforma Carlos Chagas com o título: “Ecologia de saberes para promoção da equidade ambiental e em saúde no trabalho no contexto da expansão do agrohídronegócio nos territórios do Vale do Jaguaribe-CE”.

Quanto ao ensino superior, na FAFIDAM/UECE, projetos de monografia dos estudantes para conclusão da graduação passam a focar a temática, bolsistas de iniciação científica participam de pesquisas de seus professores<sup>18</sup>. No âmbito do LECAMPO, nos projetos de extensão de Educação de Jovens e Adultos (EJA) desen \_ volvidos pelo Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária (PRONERA)<sup>19</sup>, a elaboração do livro didático “Mais um passo na educação do campo” (Carvalho e Brito, 2010) destinado ao ensino fundamental de quinto ao nono ano para jovens e adultos, contou com professores de diversas áreas da faculdade. Ao apresentar conteúdos relacionados à problemática agrária, socioeconômica e ambiental de forma interdisciplinar, traz também reportagem jornalística sobre os problemas da Chapada e morte do líder comunitário, estimulando o debate e divulgando estas questões, posto que, nas vinte turmas deste projeto de EJA, aglutinavam-se educandos de várias regiões do estado ligados ao MST. As investigações e projetos de extensão enriquecem as temáticas em sala de aula, em encontros e nos seminários na Faculdade, tais como “A reafirmação dos territórios de resistência no Vale do Jaguaribe”, ocorrido em 04 de agosto de 2012, na FAFIDAM, promovido pelo Movimento 21.

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<sup>18</sup> Mesmo antes da formação do M21 algumas pesquisa já proporcionaram aos estudantes e professores aproximação com as problemáticas da região. Podemos destacar as seguintes: “Educação do Campo: uma análise do PRONERA/UECE e o desenvolvimento socioeconômico do Vale do Jaguaribe”, coordenado pela Prof<sup>a</sup>. Dr<sup>a</sup>. Sandra M. Gadelha de Carvalho e pelo Prof. Dr. José Ernandi Mendes, foi contemplado em edital nº 03/2006, Infraestrutura de Laboratórios, da Fundação Cearense de Apoio a Pesquisa (FUNCAP), permitindo a instalação do LECAMPO no qual o aprofundamento das dinâmicas socioeconômicas recentes do Vale e suas repercussões para a educação, tem propiciado um trabalho interdisciplinar, envolvendo até o momento, os cursos de Pedagogia, Geografia e História. As dissertações de Mestrado de vários docentes: Mendes Segundo, M. das Dores (1998): Qualidade de vida e perspectivas dos irrigantes do Projeto Jaguaribe-Apodi; Soares, Hidelbrando dos Santos (1999): Agricultura e (re)organização do espaço: a rizicultura irrigada em Limoeiro do Norte - Ceará; Chaves, M. Lucenir Jerônimo (2004): Urbanização e modernização da agricultura em Limoeiro do Norte: impactos socioespaciais; Freitas, Bernadete Maria Coêlho (2010): Marcas da modernização da agricultura no território do Perímetro Irrigado Jaguaribe-Apodi: uma face da atual reestruturação socioespacial do Ceará. Também envolveram alunos da graduação, mais recentemente (2012-2013), os estudos de pós- doutorado do Prof.Dr. Mendes, J. Ernandi – Educação e sujeitos sociais: Denúncias e anúncios no contexto do agronegócio(CAPES) e da Prof.<sup>a</sup> Dr<sup>a</sup>. Carvalho, Sandra M. Gadelha de - Movimento 21: Aprendizados em novas formas de resistência social à lógica do mercado (CNPq).

<sup>19</sup> O PRONERA instituído desde 2008 compõe a política pública de educação do campo aprovada pelo Decreto Lei nº 7.352, de 04 de novembro de 2010, sendo desenvolvido pelo Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário (MDA) através dos Institutos Nacionais de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA) regionais, universidades e movimentos sociais tem sido desenvolvido de 2006 a 2011, em parceria com o MST e coordenado pelos Profs. Drs. Sandra Maria Gadelha de Carvalho e José Ernandi Mendes, coordenadora e integrante do LECAMPO, respectivamente. Ao longo deste período foram desenvolvidos quatro projetos: Dois de Escolarização de trabalhadores em área de Reforma Agrária do Ceará – I Segmento do Ens. Fundamental (2006-2008), Magistério da Terra (2006-2010) e Mais um Passo na Educação do Campo- II Seg. do Ens. Fundamental (2008-2011). Em todos eles as questões agrárias, sociais e ambientais da região foram debatidas envolvendo alunos e professores da FAFIDAM. Mais informações podem ser obtidas em Carvalho (2006) e Carvalho e Mendes (2011).

A identidade com as lutas da Chapada faz com que algumas conquistas reafirmem a presença de seus ideais personificados no nome do líder ambientalista cruelmente assassinado. A turma do Curso de Licenciatura da Educação do Campo<sup>20</sup>, projeto desenvolvido no âmbito do LECAMPO(FAFIDAM-UECE) foi autodenominada pelo conjunto dos estudantes como Turma José Maria do Tomé. Com o mesmo sentido o Centro de Referência em Saúde do Trabalhador e Ambiental- CERESTA Regional Rural, conquistado pelos movimentos sociais e sindicais da região junto a Secretaria de Saúde Estadual, para a cidade de Limoeiro do Norte, no ano de 2011, tendo como forte argumentação o adoecimento crescente dos trabalhadores na Chapada, será denominado José Maria do Tomé.

Em relação à Pós-Graduação, tanto dissertações de mestrado como teses de doutorado voltam-se para tais questões em vários programas da Universidade Federal do Ceará. Destaca-se o Programa de Saúde Pública da UFC, cujas investigações da linha de pesquisa Produção, Ambiente, Saúde para a Sustentabilidade no Nordeste Brasileiro, coordenada pela Prof<sup>a</sup>. Raquel Rigotto originou o livro “Agrotóxicos, Trabalho e Saúde” (2011), no qual a problemática da Chapada é estudada por diversas áreas do conhecimento.

O conjunto destas ações também influenciou a criação da linha de pesquisa Trabalho, Movimentos Sociais e Educação no Mestrado Acadêmico Intercampi em Educação e Ensino (MAIE), aprovado pela Coordenadoria de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal Superior (CAPES) do Ministério da Educação, em 2012, o qual engloba a FAFIDAM, campus da UECE em Limoeiro do Norte e a Faculdade de Educação, Ciências e Letras do Sertão Central (FECLESC), campus da UECE na cidade de Quixadá.

Aos poucos se constitui um grupo de pesquisadores de várias áreas, construindo novas veredas investigativas, como indica Breilh, a partir de categorias gramscianas, citado por Rigotto (2011, p.47):

...[...] somente quando o movimento organizado do povo é perpassado pelo pensamento crítico, somente quando o pensamento crítico torna-se povo, ou seja, quando há essa aproximação dos dois extremos da corrente dialética, o das organizações sociais e dos núcleos acadêmicos e especializados é que se constrói uma hegemonia de sinal contrário, uma contra hegemonia[...]

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<sup>20</sup> O Curso de Licenciatura em Educação do Campo foi um projeto elaborado por professores da FAFIDAM e movimentos sociais da região como o MST, MPA e MAB, embora no conjunto da turma estejam também contemplados a Cáritas Diocesana e a Secretaria Municipal de Morada Nova. Tendo concorrido ao Edital N<sup>o</sup> 2, de 23 de abril de 2008 do Programa de Apoio à Formação Superior em Licenciatura em Educação do Campo (PROCAMPO) do Ministério da Educação, com objetivo de formar professores para a educação básica das escolas e projetos educativos no campo, como forma de expandir o acesso a educação nas zonas rurais. As aulas tiveram início em 2011, com um total de cinquenta alunos.

Pensar o papel dos intelectuais ativistas neste percurso aponta exatamente para a construção de uma contra hegemonia, neste sentido, sem dúvida o saber científico o qual detém a chancela social da busca da verdade, confere o reconhecimento da importância das denúncias elaboradas pelos movimentos sociais e moradores da Chapada, fortalecendo o polo oposto ao agronegócio à medida que as pesquisas desmitificam o progresso “inodoro”, o desenvolvimento para todos e todas, evidenciando quão destruidor tem sido para as comunidades e meio ambiente. Ou seja, se desvela a insustentabilidade deste modelo.

O que põe em pauta as políticas de desenvolvimento envidadas por parte do Estado. Se na concepção gramsciana também o compomos como sociedade civil, trata-se de exigirmos outras políticas, outra sociedade, fortalecendo à contra hegemonia num processo de ampliação das relações democráticas.

Os intelectuais vinculados à academia e também aos movimentos sociais põem em marcha uma teoria profundamente imbricada com a prática, ultrapassando a ideia de universidade apartada dos problemas sociais e do povo em movimento, aliando-se ao protagonismo de ações políticas contrárias ao modo de produção capitalista que atenta contra a vida das pessoas e a natureza. Surgem novos parâmetros de conhecimento científico:

“As reflexões ontológicas e epistemológicas sobre tais processos de construção coletiva do conhecimento e teorização empurram para a necessidade de desenvolvermos práticas epistemológicas (em oposição à fórmula científicista), na qual o papel do acadêmico é desestabilizado e pode levar (dependente dos processos de que o pesquisador ou pesquisadora é parte) a uma variedade de práticas e formações de pesquisadores(as) dos movimentos sociais que investigam as formas de políticas emancipatórias”<sup>21</sup> (Motta, 2011, p.181).

Os docentes envolvidos com a articulação M21 incorporam através de práxis educativa multifacetada a função intelectual apontada em Marx (2013) na oitava e décima primeira Teses sobre Feuerbach:

“A vida social é essencialmente prática. Todos os mistérios que seduzem a teoria para o misticismo encontram a sua solução racional na práxis humana e no compreender desta práxis”; “Os filósofos têm apenas interpretado o mundo de maneiras diferentes; a questão, porém é transformá-lo”.

As universidades, através dos seus grupos de pesquisa, têm tido muitos aprendizados na articulação Movimento 21. Estão aprendendo na práxis, quanto à produção do conhecimento científico é um campo de disputa e que não sendo a ciência neutra há muito de político na decisão do que, para que e

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<sup>21</sup> Tradução livre dos autores.

para quem pesquisar. As universidades aprendem que sua ação reforça modelos de desenvolvimento que podem atender preferencialmente os interesses do mercado ou da sociedade.

Ao dialogar com práticas e saberes políticos populares e religiosos, a universidade contribui para aproximar as ciências da experiência vivida. Neste processo há um afastamento da perspectiva cientificista, na qual concebe a ciência como o único lócus da verdade. A interação com sujeitos coletivos de diferentes campos produz práxis integradas científico-político-culturais.

Os pesquisadores do TRAMAS/UFC e da FAFIDAM/UECE de diferentes áreas do conhecimento: geografia, medicina, sociologia, enfermagem, pedagogia, filosofia etc aprendem a atravessar as fronteiras impostas pelo positivismo hegemônico na academia.

Há um grande aprendizado político de docentes e discentes da universidade na relação direta com os movimentos sociais – MST, Caritas e Sindicatos – seus rituais de organização e suas estratégias de luta.

Grande dimensão de práxis educativa é encontrada também na participação da Igreja Católica local, a qual anima a mobilização, e contribui para a formação de um “senso de justiça” à causa da articulação M21, à medida que na pastoral social, nos sermões, nas missas e outras atividades eclesiais, padres referenciados na Teologia da Libertação, defendem a importância da luta, a seriedade das informações científicas, participam e mobilizam para os eventos do Movimento.

Integrantes da teologia da libertação ensinam práticas transformadoras através do paciente trabalho pedagógico de encorajamento dos membros da comunidade do Tomé, após a instalação da pedagogia do medo, imposta pelo opressor. Demonstram capacidade de ouvir na apreensão da realidade. A paciente prática de intervenção no processo de conscientização imprime muito respeito no trabalho dos sujeitos coletivos.

Os movimentos político-sociais, dentre eles a articulação M21, através de uma agenda emancipatória têm contribuído para a crítica da ideologia desenvolvimentista do crescimento econômico, através das denúncias ao modelo desigual de sociedade e anúncios de alternativas de sociabilidade que sendo democráticas respeitem os recursos naturais. Trata-se de um ideário ecológico e socialista:

Ecossocialismo implica uma ruptura radical com a civilização material capitalista. Nesta perspectiva, o projeto socialista visa não somente uma nova sociedade e um novo modo de produção, mais também um novo paradigma de civilização<sup>22</sup> (Löwy, 2011, p. 101).

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<sup>22</sup> Tradução livre dos autores.



Ao instalar o dissenso, a ação dos sujeitos coletivos da articulação M21 mexe no jogo das forças políticas, altera a conformação do Estado e amplia a democracia.

### **Considerações finais**

Nos conflitos sociais na Chapada do Apodi decorrentes do modelo neodesenvolvimentista para o campo brasileiro, no qual o agronegócio é protagonista da hegemonia de classe, há uma produção diversa de pedagogias que se confrontam e se cruzam formando (educando) sujeitos sociais. De um lado, a prática do agronegócio e de seus representantes no aparelho de estado para manter suas ações de exploração da terra e dos trabalhadores e a lógica de degradação ambiental corresponde ao que Paulo Freire denomina de “pedagogia do opressor” na manutenção da hegemonia. De outro, as práticas produzidas por sujeitos sociais “atingidos” pela exploração do trabalho e degradação ambiental do lugar onde residem, incluindo aliados provenientes de instituições diversas, igreja, universidades sindicatos e movimentos sociais são portadoras de práxis educativas contra-hegemônicas, identificadas com pedagogias dos oprimidos.

As lutas envidadas pelos sujeitos coletivos os quais compõem o M21 se revelam de diversas formas, tais como a construção da possibilidade de diálogo entre atores diferenciados, a produção de material com preocupações didáticas sobre a problemática do uso de agrotóxicos e o adoecimento da população da Chapada, a crítica contundente das relações de produção e trabalho no seio das agroindústrias instaladas na chapada, o desvelamento das relações intrínsecas entre o aparato estatal, o poder municipal com o avanço do capital no campo. A partir da elaboração de saberes entre os vários movimentos sociais e os grupos de pesquisa, com professores e alunos universitários se descortina um fazer científico diferenciado, crítico, comprometido e atuante nos desdobramentos destes conhecimentos. Tais compromissos impelem os pesquisadores a participar e organizar ações políticas e pedagógicas, desmitificando a neutralidade da ciência, criando uma epistemologia compromissada.

Embora o medo esteja lá implantado pelo opressor e ainda hospedado pelo oprimido, a prática política tem suscitado vários aprendizados: a desmistificação do “progresso para todos” advindo do agronegócio lá implantado; a atuação coletiva com várias comunidades como forma de pressionar o poder público em suas demandas; novas formas de envolver a sociedade nas lutas enfrentadas, articulando-se com alguns grupos acadêmicos para pesquisas e divulgando os debates em boletins, vídeos, seminários entre outros.

A crítica contundente ao modelo neodesenvolvimentista, que além da superexploração do trabalho exaure os recursos ambientais, degradando à fauna, a flora, a água e o ar aproxima a utopia mobilizatória do M21 da proposta ecossocialista de defesa da justiça social e ambiental, ideal incompatível com o caráter destrutivo alcançado pelo modelo capitalista de produção na era de globalização da economia: “O ecossocialismo é uma estratégia de convergência

das lutas sociais e ambientais, das lutas de classe e das lutas ecológicas” (LÖWY, 2010, p.231).

Da mesma forma, as ações e concepções da articulação política Movimento 21 são compatíveis com os pressupostos da educação do campo à medida que suas reflexões interligam o trabalho no campo a um projeto de desenvolvimento popular, que garanta condições de vida no campo a partir da agricultura familiar, com saúde, educação, respeito à cultura local e à agroecologia.

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## **Utopía y pragmatismo. Enseñanza y aprendizaje en una organización urbana popular<sup>1</sup>**

**Edgar Guerra Blanco**

Para Miriam Alfie Cohen,  
por la enseñanza y por el aprendizaje

### **Resumen**

*En este artículo estudio las metodologías de enseñanza y las prácticas pedagógicas que el Frente Popular Francisco Villa (en adelante, FPFV) instituyó entre su militancia, a lo largo de casi tres décadas, como parte de la estrategia en su lucha por transformar su entorno social e impulsar la transformación política de México. La pregunta de investigación que guio esta parte del proyecto<sup>2</sup> fue: ¿cómo ocurrió la politización y el adoctrinamiento en la lucha social de los miembros de la organización popular FPFV, en el contexto de los significativos cambios sociales y políticos del país, y cuáles fueron los efectos de estos procesos? Con el objetivo de responder esta interrogante, en las siguientes páginas describo tanto las diversas metodologías formales, como también las prácticas pedagógicas informales, que a lo largo de treinta años acompañaron al movimiento popular, en su misión de “concientizar” a sus militantes como paso previo y necesario para lograr la transformación social y política del país.*

*Haciendo uso de la evidencia recolectada en múltiples fuentes (documentos de la organización, fuentes bibliográficas y hemerográficas) mediante diversas técnicas de recolección de datos (entrevistas semiestructuradas, observación participante) y con base en el análisis de la información recabada -a través del método documental-, en este artículo argumento que si bien las prácticas pedagógicas formales e informales del FPFV permitieron, durante los primeros años de existencia de la organización, la politización de sus militantes y su preparación para la lucha revolucionaria, poco después, tanto el paulatino tránsito hacia la democracia que ha experimentado el país, como la inserción del Frente Popular en la política institucional, así como la*

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<sup>1</sup> Agradezco a los dictaminadores de este artículo por las observaciones y sugerencias que hicieron para mejorar este trabajo. Por supuesto, los errores y omisiones son de mi exclusiva responsabilidad.

<sup>2</sup> Esta investigación se inscribe dentro del objetivo más general de reconstruir la historia social y política de un conjunto de organizaciones populares en la Ciudad de México; tarea que se realizó con el fin de estudiar las prácticas políticas y las formas de organización popular y de movilización social entre actores en un mismo campo de conflicto. En esta parte del proyecto me interesó observar los procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje y socialización política, en términos de organización social y lucha popular, de los miembros del FPFV, hasta el reciente cambio que conllevó su participación en la política partidista y electoral.

*diversificación de las actividades del FPFV, condujeron a una transformación sustancial en los contenidos del conocimiento técnico y político que se impartía en la organización, mientras que, al mismo tiempo, se produjeron diferenciaciones internas y exclusión entre los miembros que poseían o no tal acervo de conocimientos. En este sentido, el trabajo que aquí se presenta reflexiona sobre las relaciones entre conocimiento y poder dentro de este tipo de organizaciones militantes, lo cual, se espera, sirva como base para futuros análisis académicos; además, se provee evidencia empírica sobre cómo ocurren concretamente estas interrelaciones, de tal forma que sean los propios activistas quienes reflexionen sobre estos procesos con base en sus circunstancias y experiencias concretas.*

**Palabras Claves:** movimientos sociales, acción colectiva, organizaciones populares, teoría de sistemas.

## **Introducción**

Durante las últimas tres décadas y en el marco de un acompasado proceso de transición y consolidación democrática,<sup>3</sup> la Ciudad de México ha sido el escenario de recurrentes movilizaciones políticas y sociales, especialmente durante las álgidas coyunturas electorales en las que se ha votado por la Presidencia de la República, a saber: 1988, 1994, 2000 y 2006. Estas intensas campañas de movilización política y social han sido nutridas por una gran cantidad de organizaciones y movimientos, las cuales han concentrado a sus militantes en torno a diversas reivindicaciones y demandas: desde mayores libertades políticas, por ejemplo, hasta la ampliación y profundización de los derechos sociales, civiles o culturales.<sup>4</sup> En consecuencia, la presencia de tales organizaciones y movimientos en la vida pública ha sido significativa y, sin duda, fundamental en el proceso de cambio político, no sólo de la urbe sino del país.

Tales organizaciones y movimientos han sido estudiados desde la academia con el objetivo de observar los cambios que, como actores de la sociedad civil, han impulsado en las instituciones políticas, así como también para explicar su incursión en la política institucional dentro del proceso más general de transición hacia la democracia en México (cfr. Álvarez Enríquez y Bolos 2003; Álvarez Enríquez 2004; Bolos 1999).

Sin embargo, a pesar de la riqueza de la evidencia empírica que tales investigaciones han provisto, el análisis aún no ha profundizado en ciertas dimensiones de la vida cotidiana de estas organizaciones y movimientos. En este sentido, aún falta dirigir la mirada, por ejemplo, a la investigación de los procesos internos de enseñanza aprendizaje; a la evaluación de su efectividad y

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<sup>3</sup> Sobre el régimen político mexicano y la transición hacia la democracia en México, véase: Cansino Ortiz, 2000; González Casanova, 1972; Meyer Cosío, 1998; Millán Valenzuela, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Las organizaciones y los movimientos sociales han jugado, sin duda, un papel clave en la transición política mexicana. Sobre el tema, consúltese: Bizberg & Zapata, 2010; Durand Ponte, 1994; López Leyva, 2007; Olvera Rivera, 2001; Ramírez Sáiz, 1994.

eficacia en relación con sus objetivos o a la transformación real que, eventualmente, inducen en la militancia. De ahí que aún sea pertinente plantear preguntas como ¿qué tipo de metodologías utilizan estas organizaciones para fomentar la politización de sus miembros? ¿Cuál es el contenido de los programas educativos? ¿Qué objetivos tienen y cómo se diferencian entre ellos? ¿Cuáles han sido sus funciones en el desarrollo de los movimientos y organizaciones? ¿Cómo han cambiado y se han adaptado a la transformación de su entorno, principalmente a las nuevas condiciones políticas? ¿Qué tipo de prácticas pedagógicas informales acontecen durante las actividades cotidianas de organización y movilización? ¿Qué impacto tienen sobre la militancia y sobre la organización?

Para ensayar algunas respuestas a estas interrogantes y aportar conocimiento sobre la relación entre metodologías formales, prácticas informales y su impacto en la organización y la militancia, el presente artículo tiene como objetivo presentar el estudio de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de una organización urbana popular:<sup>5</sup> el Frente Popular Francisco Villa. El FPFV es una organización militante, con características de movimiento social, que se ha erigido como un actor político clave en la ciudad de México, concretamente en la región de Iztapalapa.<sup>6</sup> Se trata de una organización urbana que logró construir, mediante un programa de politización y educación de sus bases, una nutrida militancia, la cual, históricamente, suscribió un compromiso, a veces místico, con la organización social y las luchas populares. El caso del FPFV es, además, interesante, porque es una organización que, en sus inicios, desafió al régimen político a través de la protesta social pero que, a la par de los cambios políticos del país, terminó por integrarse a la vida política institucional. Sin embargo, a lo largo de este largo tránsito, la organización también se vio obligada a transformar los métodos y contenidos de enseñanza, al tiempo que cambiaron las prácticas de aprendizaje de sus miembros. De ahí el interés por estudiar este giro en la pedagogía y las prácticas de enseñanza del FPFV, observando su impacto en la organización y en la militancia y, además, considerando en el análisis los cambios políticos.

De ahí que el trabajo de investigación conllevó un análisis en tres niveles: un nivel micro que diera cuenta de los procesos y estructuras internos de la organización; un meso nivel que observara los discursos y campos semánticos en que ha operado; y, finalmente, un análisis macro de carácter descriptivo que diera cuenta de las transformaciones estructurales del sistema político.

Mi argumento es que el FPFV, como uno de los herederos de la tradición de las luchas populares y comunitarias urbanas de los años setenta y ochenta en México, desplegó un complejo programa de enseñanza aprendizaje que tenía un

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<sup>5</sup> Sobre el Movimiento Urbano Popular, consúltese Haber, 2009; Ramírez Sáiz, 1986, 1987, 1989a, 1989b.

<sup>6</sup> La Delegación Iztapalapa es una demarcación política del Distrito Federal, entidad federativa con la cual se nombra, políticamente, a la Ciudad de México. Iztapalapa se encuentra al oriente de la ciudad y es la demarcación más poblada y la que presenta mayores problemas sociales en la urbe.



doble objetivo. En primer término, “la transformación de las conciencias”, es decir, la politización de su militancia y la educación formal de los “compañeros” en las tareas de la lucha popular y revolucionaria, como paso previo -y este es el segundo objetivo- para la transformación social del país y su tránsito hacia el socialismo (cfr. *Programa Estratégico*). Tal programa de enseñanza aprendizaje se desplegó en tres dimensiones: 1) como un conocimiento formal que se impartía en la Escuela de Cuadros de la organización; 2) como un conocimiento práctico e informal que se aprendía y practicaba durante las tareas comunitarias y en las actividades de protesta; y 3) como un conocimiento normativo y afectivo que, a través de experiencias colectivas, coadyuvó a la construcción de solidaridad e identidad social entre los miembros de la organización. Sin embargo, tanto la implementación del programa de enseñanza aprendizaje de la organización, como la paulatina incorporación del Frente Popular a la política partidista y electoral, tuvieron dos efectos determinantes para su trayectoria.

De un lado, se produjeron desigualdades entre la militancia sobre la base de las diferencias en los niveles educativos de sus miembros, lo cual se tradujo en desequilibrios en la asignación de responsabilidades y beneficios dentro de la organización. De otro lado, paulatinamente, y sobre la base de las desigualdades en el acervo de conocimiento de los miembros de la organización, el FPFV obstaculizó sus mecanismos colectivos de toma de decisiones, por lo que este proceso de decidir se concentró en un círculo dirigente que, poco después, excluyó a una gran parte de la militancia de la toma de decisiones fundamentales. En este sentido, este trabajo sugiere, tanto a académicos como a activistas interesados en este tipo de organizaciones militantes, centrar su atención en los usos del conocimiento técnico y normativo que se adquiere durante los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, ya que si bien, en un primer momento, permite constituir ciudadanos autónomos con conocimiento de sus derechos y obligaciones, este conocimiento, eventualmente, se deshace de su carácter rupturista y revolucionario y se entrelaza con la lógica del poder para hacerla funcional.

Con base en lo anterior, en lo que sigue se procederá a (I) exponer la estrategia metodológica que guio la recolección y análisis de los datos; en seguida (II) se reseña, brevemente, los orígenes e historia social y política de la organización FPFV, así como la forma de su estructura organizativa. A continuación (III) expongo el funcionamiento de las metodologías formales y prácticas pedagógicas informales que, dentro del FPFV, se implementaron durante su etapa de organización popular y lucha social, así como los cambios que se suscitaron a partir de la etapa político-electoral (IV), lo cual trajo consigo una serie de tensiones y conflictos internos (V). Finalmente, el apartado (VI) aporta algunas conclusiones.

## I. Comentarios metodológicos<sup>7</sup>

Dado que la investigación buscó adentrarse en el horizonte de sentido que se ha construido dentro de la organización FPFV a lo largo de su historia, para desde ahí elaborar una descripción que sirviera como base para la comprensión de los procesos internos y su transformación, el diseño metodológico se planteó bajo los principios de un estudio cualitativo. La unidad principal de análisis fue la comunicación y se buscó, principalmente, observar las expectativas que se (re)producen en las comunicaciones dentro de esta organización popular. Si bien el concepto de comunicación del que hago uso es radicalmente distinto a las definiciones tradicionales (Luhmann, 2012), el cual cristaliza, además, en un análisis sistémico de la protesta social (Estrada Saavedra, 2012), para los propósitos de este artículo es suficiente señalar que la comunicación adquiere diferentes formas dentro de las organizaciones -como documentos, discursos o conversaciones-, por lo que puede observarse a través de las entrevistas o la participación directa, mientras que, al mismo tiempo, es posible documentar el sentido que contienen las comunicaciones y el horizonte que configuran para posibilitar la acción social de los actores.<sup>8</sup> Así, para ganar acceso a la comunicación dentro de la organización, el trabajo de campo se diseñó en dos fases.

La primera fase correspondió al trabajo de gabinete, durante el cual se realizaron tareas de investigación bibliográfica, documental y hemerográfica. El objetivo fue obtener información *sobre* los actores. En general, se buscó hacerse de estudios previos que me permitiesen, tanto situar socialmente, como contextualizar históricamente, al FPFV.<sup>9</sup> De ahí la importancia, por ejemplo, de los análisis sobre el sistema político y la evidencia sobre sus cambios a lo largo de los últimos treinta años. También se recopilaron, hasta donde fue posible, dada su escasez, los documentos constitutivos de la organización, sus programas, estatutos y sus propias descripciones históricas, los cuales se

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<sup>7</sup> Como sociólogo político me he interesado en realizar investigación académica en el área de acción colectiva, movimientos sociales y violencia política. De ahí que haya estudiado el movimiento altermundista y sus formas de organización, movilización y protesta en espacios locales, a través de un estudio de caso. Asimismo, he investigado los procesos de politización, radicalización e institucionalización política de organizaciones populares en la Ciudad de México, como el Frente Popular Francisco Villa. Mi trabajo con los movimientos sociales ha transcurrido más como académico, que como activista, impulsado por mi deseo de aportar en la producción y difusión de conocimiento en el área de sociología de los movimientos sociales y, además, de coadyuvar en la formación de científicos y profesionales en esta área de investigación.

<sup>8</sup> Esta perspectiva analítica, la de los sistemas sociales, ha tenido sólo una reciente aceptación dentro del campo de los estudios sobre protesta social. Como ejemplo de esto, véase Estrada Saavedra (2012) y (2012<sup>a</sup>) para tener una referencia de estudios empíricos y, si se quiere conocer un modelo analítico novedoso, que tiene como base una perspectiva sistémica, revítese Estrada Saavedra (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Existe una rica bibliografía que es necesario revisar para entender de mejor forma al FPFV. Véase, por ejemplo, Alceda Cruz, 2009; Álvarez Enríquez, 2004; Paladino, 2010; Sánchez Ríos, 2007.

trataron como fuentes primarias que proporcionaron información desde el horizonte de sentido de los actores.<sup>10</sup>

La segunda etapa de investigación, el trabajo de campo, se circunscribió a la zona poblacional de Iztapalapa, en la Ciudad de México, y en la cual se detectó un consistente y numeroso contingente de organizaciones urbanas y populares, entre las que destaca el FPFV. Para analizar el plexo comunicativo de la organización FPFV se condujeron 30 entrevistas semiestructuradas, tanto con sus miembros como con militantes de aquellas organizaciones y movimientos sociales afines, así como con actores políticos que actualmente tienen relación con esta organización popular. Las entrevistas exploran diferentes dimensiones de las estructuras y procesos de la organización, como su configuración interna, los mecanismos de toma de decisiones y su cultura organizacional, así como sus métodos y procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje, a lo largo de las distintas fases en su historia.

La recolección de datos se efectuó, principalmente, durante dos periodos de trabajo de campo. En primer término, en Julio de 2009 se realizó un estudio exploratorio que ofreció los primeros datos para elaborar cuestionarios que permitieron llevar a cabo las entrevistas. Con base en las entrevistas piloto y en el análisis preliminar de la información, una serie de nuevas interrogantes y dimensiones analíticas surgieron, las cuales fueron incorporadas en los subsiguientes cuestionarios para profundizar en la investigación de procesos organizativos o para ampliar la información sobre las relaciones de la organización con otros actores relevantes. La segunda fase de trabajo de campo se realizó entre agosto y septiembre de 2009 y febrero-marzo de 2011.

La selección de la primera muestra se efectuó por medio de la técnica de conveniencia. En efecto, el contacto con los entrevistados se realizó con el apoyo de académicos que ya habían realizado investigación con organizaciones populares en el área de estudio. A partir de las entrevistas iniciales se pudo construir y expandir una red de informantes mediante la técnica de bola de nieve que permitió diversificar la selección de los entrevistados, pues a partir de entonces seguí diferentes criterios de elección tales como género, edad, posición o cargo dentro de la estructura organizacional o su antigüedad dentro de la organización. Una vez que resultaba claro, dada la información disponible, que la organización había transitado por distintas fases en su historia, se redactaron preguntas específicas para cada periodo y la selección de la muestra se apegó a este criterio temporal y a premisas teóricas. Así, por ejemplo, se buscaron informantes que habían participado en las diferentes etapas de lucha de la organización y a aquellos que tuviesen información relacionada con el funcionamiento de la jerarquía o que conociesen la historia y proyecto político de la organización FPFV.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Los documentos básicos consultados sobre este punto son: *Declaración de Principios, Nuestros primeros pasos, y Programa Estratégico*.

<sup>11</sup> Las entrevistas se realizaron en español. El promedio de duración de las mismas es de aproximadamente 55 minutos. De 30 entrevistas realizadas, 28 son individuales y 2 son

Los datos recabados se analizaron, principalmente, con la técnica del “método documental” (Bohnsack, 2007), pues dentro de la investigación social reconstructiva aparece como una técnica viable para, precisamente, reconstruir la cadena de comunicaciones que constituye a las organizaciones como el FPFV.

## **II. Orígenes del Frente Popular Francisco Villa**

Con base en la información proporcionada por los estudios previos y a través del análisis de las entrevistas y de los documentos de la organización, fue posible reconstruir la historia del FPFV. El Frente Popular Francisco Villa fue fundado en 1989 para hacer frente al problema de la escasez de vivienda en la Ciudad de México. Su proyecto inicial consistía en organizar a individuos de las clases populares para promover la invasión de terrenos deshabitados o abandonados y levantar, ahí, campamentos en los que habitaban, la mayoría de las veces, durante años. Además, entre sus actividades iniciales, el FPFV se caracterizó por el uso recurrente de la protesta contra las autoridades encargadas de la política de vivienda para, eventualmente, financiar la adquisición de los terrenos y la construcción de unidades habitacionales. Formada por activistas de sectores sindicales y algunos líderes universitarios, la organización FPFV se proponía, además, establecer un programa de enseñanza con la finalidad de “concientizar” a sus miembros (cfr. FPFV, *Nuestros primeros pasos*), es decir, instruirlos en las tareas de construcción de los campamentos, adoctrinarlos en temas de activismo y lucha social y, finalmente, prepararlos para el objetivo final de transformar el país y conducirlo por el sendero del socialismo (cfr. FPFV, *Programa Estratégico*). Sin embargo, a pesar de este último objetivo claramente político, la línea programática del FPFV dictaba, desde el inicio, mantener su autonomía como organización frente a la política institucional, rechazando y condenando, incluso, la política partidista (cfr. FPFV, *Nuestros Primeros Pasos; Declaración de Principios*).

En términos generales, las actividades cotidianas del FPFV y la estrategia para alcanzar sus objetivos tenían como base una estructura de posiciones y una cultura organizacional propia. De un lado, un diseño organizacional que, con la forma de una jerarquía, distribuía distintos cargos de evaluación, dirección, coordinación y ejecución de programas. En la estructura organizacional del Frente se evaluaba una enorme variedad de temas, como el planteamiento de

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entrevistas colectivas que requirieron dos y tres entrevistados. De las personas entrevistadas 9 se adscriben al género femenino y 21 al masculino. 14 son miembros activos del FPFV, 3 son exmiembros y 13 de ellos son parte de la militancia de diversas organizaciones populares -entre las que destaca la Unión Popular Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata (UPREZ) y el Frente Popular Francisco Villa-Independiente (FPFV-I)-, así como militantes del partido político de izquierda en México: el Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). Entre los entrevistados que son miembros del FPFV se encuentran personajes que ocupan diversas posiciones de responsabilidad en la estructura organizativa: miembros de base, coordinadores, líderes y líderes históricos. Además, 10 de los entrevistados han sido parte de la organización desde los tiempos de su fundación y 4 son de relativo reciente ingreso. Así mismo, se realizaron entrevistas con dos de los llamados “líderes históricos”.

programas y objetivos; y se tomaba una enorme cantidad de decisiones acerca de las estrategias y tácticas para alcanzar las metas, acerca de las soluciones más idóneas para resolver problemas internos y contingencias externas, etcétera. De otro lado, una cultura organizacional que enmarcaba todas las tareas organizativas, tanto dentro de los campamentos como sobre los métodos de protesta y las formas de activismo político. La cultura organizacional fue, por supuesto, un elemento que se fue construyendo a lo largo de los años, no sólo como resultado de las actividades cotidianas, sino también a través del programa sistemático de enseñanza que, durante los primeros años de historia del FPFV, se planteó como objetivo la formación de “ciudadanos” que se transformarían, más adelante, en cuadros de “luchadores sociales” (cfr. FPFV, *Programa Estratégico*).

Dos procesos cabe resaltar y que son consecuencia de la evolución de la organización a lo largo de su historia. Por un lado, tanto la forma de la jerarquía de la organización como la cultura organizativa experimentaron ciertos cambios a través de la historia del FPFV. Por otro lado, se produjeron ajustes en los contenidos del conocimiento impartido en la Escuela de Cuadros; en el conocimiento práctico e informal que se aprendía y practicaba durante las tareas comunitarias y en las actividades en la calle; y en la forma en que las normas y los afectos generados durante las experiencias colectivas coadyuvaron a la construcción de solidaridad e identidades entre los miembros de la organización. Tales cambios se hacen más nítidos para el observador si se distingue, al menos, dos periodos históricos en la organización FPFV; periodos durante los cuales los “villos” o “panchitos” –como se les llama entre las organizaciones afines- han redefinido sus estrategias y tácticas y transitado por diversas vías de “lucha”, a saber: en primer lugar, el periodo de formación, consolidación y represión y, en segundo lugar, el periodo político-electoral. En lo que sigue, describo cómo tal programa de enseñanza aprendizaje se desplegó en tres dimensiones durante estas dos etapas en la historia del FPFV.<sup>12</sup>

### **III. El saber comunitario**

En la etapa de formación, que va de 1983 a 1989 (fechas que sólo tienen un propósito ilustrativo), el FPFV estableció sus principales criterios programáticos y de funcionamiento. En términos generales, las decisiones y actividades organizativas, las alianzas con diversas organizaciones sociales, los roles en los distintos niveles jerárquicos y gran parte de los elementos de la cultura organizacional funcionaban sobre el doble criterio de generar soluciones frente al problema de la escasez de vivienda en la ciudad y formar “ciudadanos conscientes”. Principalmente, la organización se ocupaba de la búsqueda de

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<sup>12</sup> Analíticamente se pueden distinguir tres etapas en la historia del FPFV si dividimos la primera etapa, la de formación, consolidación y represión, en dos: un periodo en el cual la organización se formó y durante el cual se abocó a actividades estrictamente comunitarias. Y un segundo periodo en el cual inició sus actividades de protesta y propició la reacción del gobierno mexicano a través de acciones de represión.

terrenos baldíos, de su invasión, de la construcción de campamentos en estos espacios, así como de su acondicionamiento como área habitacional. Además, un rasgo permanente fue la organización de movilizaciones y protestas frente a las oficinas de las autoridades políticas y de gobierno. Los eventos de protesta tenían el propósito de presionar a las autoridades para que respetasen el terreno invadido y la construcción erigida, regularizaran su situación legal y, finalmente, acondicionaran el terreno aportando servicios públicos. Tales actividades requerían de miembros plenamente socializados en las tareas de acondicionamiento y de movilización social, así como cuadros dirigentes que resolvieran los problemas y conflictos internos, organizaran las actividades colectivas y mediaran en los conflictos frente a las autoridades políticas.

De ahí que, pronto en la estructura del Frente se hizo necesario resolver, técnicamente, problemas que conectaban directamente con entornos más complejos -como la administración pública y la política-, por lo que, paulatinamente, no sólo normas prácticas, sino también conocimientos técnicos, se incorporaron a la cultura de la organización. Así, por ejemplo, los procedimientos relativos a la gestión de vivienda requerían de conocimientos sobre el funcionamiento de las políticas gubernamentales de vivienda, de los requisitos para obtener créditos financieros y de los procedimientos jurídicos que regulan el uso del suelo, el reglamento de construcción y la gestión de servicios urbanos. Más aún: tales actividades requerían de posiciones jerárquicas especializadas, así como roles (el de gestor social) que las realizaran. De este modo, poco después de su fundación y dados los propios requerimientos de operación, en el FPFV se instituyen los procesos de enseñanza aprendizaje necesarios para su funcionamiento interno y el cumplimiento de sus objetivos programáticos. En la organización FPFV pronto se enseñó, se empleó y se diversificó un acervo de saber imprescindible para las faenas cotidianas, para las tareas de gestión social de la organización y para las actividades de protesta.

### **Escuela de Cuadros**

La Escuela de Cuadros del FPFV fue el mecanismo diseñado para la implementación de todo un plan de enseñanza-aprendizaje en distintos ámbitos de acuerdo a las necesidades operativas de la organización. Así, junto al conocimiento técnico necesario para la organización y mantenimiento de los campamentos y de las marchas de protesta, se impartía, también, conocimiento sobre la política en general y el funcionamiento del sistema político mexicano en particular. Además, de forma implícita la Escuela ejercía una selección de cuadros que, con el tiempo, impactarían en la distribución interna de posiciones y en la efectividad de los procedimientos colectivos de toma de decisiones, pues sólo aquellos miembros que cumplieran con ciertos requisitos, como un número determinado de asistencias en clase, podrían participar en los congresos de la organización.

De esta forma, desde el principio, el plan de estudios se impartía en tres niveles: un nivel elemental para las bases sociales; uno intermedio para los

coordinadores de andadores, manzanas o comisiones; y, finalmente, un programa de estudios diseñado para los coordinadores de campamentos y dirigentes. A las bases sociales se les dictaba cursos sobre los objetivos de la organización, sus tareas, sus fines y los medios de lucha. Además, se impartía ciertas bases sobre doctrinas políticas. Si los miembros de la organización aprobaban esta etapa, podían avanzar al segundo nivel de aprendizaje, más denso y complejo, que consistía en el estudio del materialismo dialéctico e histórico. Finalmente, en el tercer nivel se ensayaba la aplicación del conocimiento adquirido a la realidad política nacional. El programa consistía en seminarios conducidos por los dirigentes del Frente, por profesores de universidades públicas invitados expresamente para impartir clases y por diferentes grupos de acción y debate, como el grupo de mujeres Defensoras Populares, en el que se discutían temas que iban desde la organización y funcionamiento de los campamentos hasta la movilización de masas, además de practicar desde la lectura en público hasta la discusión y el debate. Como lo dicen dos militantes, de lo que se trataba, al final del día, era de “concientizar a la gente, [acerca de] qué era el movimiento; en realidad, nosotros hemos dicho que antes de vencer hay que convencer, y esa era la tarea principal, que es lo que queríamos lograr y trabajar, el trabajo de convencimiento, y delimitar qué es lo que queríamos y hasta dónde queríamos llegar” (César González y Héctor López, comunicación personal, junio de 2009).

El programa de enseñanza pronto dio frutos y entre los miembros de la organización FPFV se construyó una idea, más o menos homogénea, acerca de la política, de los partidos políticos y de la naturaleza del poder. El acervo de saber, no sólo sirvió entonces para la construcción de un horizonte de sentido, que permitiese interpretar la realidad política y social de los miembros del FPFV, así como su posición en ella, sino que también indicaba soluciones para hacer frente a los problemas políticos y sociales y ofrecía estrategias para construir un “mundo mejor”. Además, el conocimiento básico que se impartía sobre doctrinas políticas y el énfasis que se puso en el marxismo, el tema de la revolución y el socialismo tenía la función de fundamentar, sobre la base de cierta científicidad, la necesidad de las actividades y el proyecto a largo plazo de la organización.

Otro elemento importante de los contenidos del programa de enseñanza fue el tema de los derechos y obligaciones de las personas, tanto ante la sociedad como ante el gobierno.<sup>13</sup> En efecto, dado que una parte de los miembros del Frente

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<sup>13</sup> Así relata una informante, algunos de los asuntos que se aprendían en la organización: “bueno aquí lo que se puede aprender, en un momento dado, es cómo luchando y organizándose se puede conseguir varias cosas. Lo primordial para la organización era la vivienda y de antemano sabíamos que sólo organizados podíamos ver una vivienda digna, es un aprendizaje, es decir, todo lo que conlleva la lucha, la movilización, la marcha, el mitin, el plantón se aprende; que en realidad de ahí también se puede sacar algo digno, que es la vivienda, en este caso, y eso es lo que a nosotros se nos da a entender y se le da a entender a la gente, que luchando y organizados podemos lograr más, y ese es un proceso de aprendizaje, pero también hay que saber que muchas veces el gobierno no te lo va a dar, y entonces sabemos de antemano que solamente en este tipo de situaciones, si nosotros salimos y exigimos, vamos a ser escuchados, a lo mejor no

provenían de zonas rurales y poseían bajos niveles de educación, sus esquemas cognitivos para interpretar su posición social carecían de los contenidos básicos. Desconocían, por ejemplo, parte de sus derechos en distintas esferas: como los derechos humanos, sociales, ciudadanos, políticos. Así, bajo el programa de enseñanza del FPFV, los nuevos miembros de la organización adquirirían esquemas cognitivos distintos a los hasta entonces empleados, y con los cuales podían interpretar su lugar en la sociedad: por ejemplo, la idea de persona como sujeto de derechos. En efecto, a través de un proceso de educación/socialización –que también transcurría por los canales informales de la experiencia cotidiana– se transmitían diferentes contenidos cognitivos en los que la persona era figurada con esos derechos y obligaciones que le permitían incluirse en los diferentes ámbitos de la sociedad: en la educación, salud, economía y política, independientemente de su condición económica y de género, entre otras. De ahí que, hoy en día, no es casual escuchar las voces que los miembros de la organización utilizan para describir su condición como “seres humanos”; aludir a la “dignidad de las personas”, y la protección nacional y universal que gozan “todos” los “hombres” a través de la “Constitución” y de los “derechos humanos”. En este sentido, los esquemas de interpretación que las personas aprendían para observarse a sí mismas tuvieron la función de proporcionar a los miembros una nueva imagen de sí mismos en la sociedad, pero también de sí mismos como parte de una organización popular, lo que en el futuro construiría fuertes lazos de identidad dentro del FPFV.

### **Experiencias colectivas**

El programa de enseñanza aprendizaje de la organización FPFV, además de desplegarse en un contexto formal institucional como la Escuela de Cuadros, lo hizo como conocimiento práctico e informal que se aprendía y practicaba durante las tareas comunitarias y las actividades de protesta.

En efecto, durante las actividades cotidianas, las personas eran requeridas para la realización de labores al interior de los campamentos. Entre las constantes actividades colectivas se hallaba el levantamiento de los “módulos” en los campamentos, la limpieza de los mismos y del terreno habitado y adyacente, así como la habilitación de servicios y la solución de contingencias. La gente ponía en acción los precarios conocimientos técnicos sobre construcción que previamente habían aprendido en cursos impartidos al bote pronto. Al mismo tiempo, mediante el trabajo conjunto se afinaban los conocimientos y se compartían durante las tareas cotidianas. No es casual, por tanto, que paulatinamente y durante el transcurso de los años, las personas fuesen especializándose en diversas labores, pues ya había quien sabía utilizar de mejor

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nos van a dar todo, pero nos van a dar algo, y eso es lo que nosotros aprendemos, que tenemos que luchar, que organizados se tiene que luchar y que se pueden conseguir las cosas” (Minerva Rivera Munoz, comunicación personal, septiembre de 2009).



forma las herramientas de trabajo que otros, así como aquellos que podían preparar el terreno de mejor manera frente a quienes levantaban los módulos de forma más rápida y segura. Al mismo tiempo, gracias a la mutua convivencia durante toda la jornada laboral, al constante intercambio de conocimientos y experiencias y, fundamentalmente, al hecho de compartir el mismo espacio en el cual transcurría la existencia de la gente, la militancia del FPFV aprendía a conocerse, a ayudarse, a quererse y a pelearse; en fin, a reconocerse como un colectivo solidario con una historia propia.

Con el tiempo, hacia el interior de la organización las manifestaciones de protesta, los plantones y las marchas también se convirtieron en espacios de aprendizaje y de práctica, y no sólo en demostraciones de fuerza hacia el gobierno. En efecto, durante los plantones, por ejemplo, la militancia del FPFV ponía en práctica sus conocimientos y habilidades para organizar grupos y contingentes de manifestantes, colocarlos en lugares estratégicos y asignarles tareas que iban de la entonación de consignas, al bloqueo de avenidas. Al mismo tiempo, desarrollaban sus habilidades de liderazgo y de conocimiento entre los participantes. Además, durante las protestas se generaban y consolidaban rasgos de identidad y solidaridad a partir del uso recurrente y con fuerte carga emotiva de la distinción ellos/nosotros. Las consignas y su evocación dejan ver parte de esos fines programáticos, el autorreconocimiento de la comunidad como un todo y la articulación de una identidad colectiva. Es importante anotar que el aprendizaje no se reducía a los miembros adultos de la organización FPFV. Los hijos de los activistas eran, también, una veta de socialización, y para quienes, además, los plantones resultaban una experiencia de aprendizaje: “los niños son los que más fácil aprenden, porque vas a una marcha y ellos se saben todas las consignas, así: sí ellos son los que llegan de la marcha y andan haciendo según su marcha [dentro del campamento] y andan gritando sus consignas (Gregoria Pinal Sierra, comunicación personal, junio de 2009).

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Vemos entonces que a los mecanismos formales de impartición de conocimiento y a las experiencias colectivas que contribuían a generar afecto, confianza y solidaridad entre la militancia, se sumaba el aprendizaje informal que ocurría en el día a día, mediante la observación mutua, en el desempeño de las actividades y en la puesta en práctica de las habilidades y de la experiencia en las tareas cotidianas. No es casual que pronto la organización FPFV haya acumulado un enorme acervo de saber, de conocimientos y normas. Acervo que se generaba y se distribuía desde la organización hacia los campamentos y ahí se condensaba e institucionalizaba, y se convertía en tradición que alimentaba, y alimenta, al FPFV. Así, se sedimentaba un andamiaje estructural y de sentido que formaba y forjaba no sólo este acervo de saber, sino también, el cúmulo de experiencias colectivas, la solidaridad, la confianza y el compromiso moral que,

sin duda, coadyuvaban en la transformación de las “conciencias” y de la organización, como un todo.

Pero ¿de qué sirvió este esquema de enseñanza aprendizaje? Por un lado, desde el punto de vista de la organización, tanto el esquema formal de enseñanza aprendizaje, como las prácticas informales, impactaron en la especialización en el desempeño de las distintas tareas y en la profesionalización de los diferentes cargos. En efecto, como se indicó más arriba, la organización cuenta con un entramado de distintas posiciones de gestión, coordinación y/o dirección, a los cuales los miembros del Frente Popular tienen acceso siempre y cuando cubran ciertos requisitos de aprendizaje, competencia, experiencia y confianza. Si bien todos tienen, en principio, la oportunidad de acceder a los distintos cargos de autoridad, el procedimiento es sinuoso y lento, pero posible mediante esfuerzo, aprendizaje y constancia. Así, un militante, al desempeñar el cargo de coordinador de campamento realiza la gestión de vivienda, por ejemplo, lo que conlleva el conocimiento sobre el funcionamiento de las políticas de vivienda, de los créditos financieros y de los procedimientos jurídicos que regulan el uso del suelo, el reglamento de construcción y la gestión de servicios urbanos. De ahí que, por otro lado, desde el punto de vista de los militantes del FPFV, las diferentes ganancias de conocimiento, ya sea técnico, normativo o afectivo, posibilita el crecimiento personal y su adaptación a distintos escenarios: con los años los militantes adquirieron, aprendieron y desarrollaron el conocimiento, normas y habilidades suficientes para ejecutar diversas tareas y desenvolverse en múltiples espacios.

#### **IV. El ingreso a la polis**

Con el tiempo, el éxito del programa de enseñanza-aprendizaje, de la política de alianzas y la estrategia contenciosa del FPFV traería consigo un mayor crecimiento social y político de la organización –en cuanto a número de afiliados, terrenos, campamentos y viviendas. Lo anterior se tradujo en una mayor fortaleza del FPFV en su capacidad de protesta y contención frente a las instituciones políticas, además de una mayor independencia ante el esquema corporativista y clientelar que el régimen político había construido con las organizaciones sociales desde mediados del siglo XX. Bajo estas premisas el conflicto entre el FPFV y el gobierno no sólo se polarizó sino que escaló a una etapa distinta, ya que el gobierno local inició una campaña de persecución y represión de la militancia, lo cual derivó, incluso, en la aprehensión de algunos de los líderes a mediados de la década de 1990.

Sin embargo, a la par de los problemas entre el Frente y las instituciones políticas, México experimentaba un lento proceso de cambio político, en particular, de transición democrática. Pronto, tales cambios en el entorno social y político sentarían las bases de una nueva forma de activismo y una nueva manera de entender y hacer política, lo cual traería consecuencias determinantes en la organización.

En efecto, a partir de 1990 es posible observar, de forma más nítida, los profundos cambios en el entorno del FPFV. Por un lado, junto a las organizaciones y movimientos sociales tradicionales se había construido un “nuevo tipo” de organización de la sociedad en México (Álvarez Enríquez, 2004) y de las luchas urbanas por vivienda (Bolos 1999) que manifestaban una relación cualitativamente distinta frente a la política. Se trataba de una forma distinta de entender la lucha social, de una nueva cultura política participativa, y de practicar el diálogo entre sociedad y gobierno como una vía legítima para resolver las demandas sociales que, además, permitiese involucrar a las organizaciones y actores colectivos en el diseño e implementación de las políticas públicas (Álvarez Enríquez, 2004:205). Por otro lado, los cambios en el sistema político apuntaban a una mayor autonomía y diferenciación del sistema político, que se traducían en la creación y consolidación de instituciones democráticas, lo cual cristalizaba en mayores posibilidades de inclusión política –a través de reformas legales, por ejemplo- y de equidad electoral –al introducir mayores controles sobre los recursos públicos ante la competencia electoral.

Tales cambios en el entorno del FPFV habían expuesto a la organización a ciertos ajustes en su diseño jerárquico y en su cultura organizacional, pues en el Frente pronto se hizo más habitual otro tipo de relación con las instituciones políticas, así como alianzas con otro tipo de movimientos sociales, ya no radicales, y cuyos objetivos eran de corte más propositivo que reivindicativo. Por otra parte, el proceso de educación/socialización dentro del FP que aquí hemos reseñado, además de preparar a la militancia con conocimiento técnico y práctico sobre la política, la lucha social y el activismo, fomentaba la exposición de los militantes a distintos discursos políticos, a experiencias con otras organizaciones y movimientos, y a un contacto más cercano con las instituciones de gobierno, lo cual redundó, a través de los años, en que decenas de personas se hicieran con suficientes herramientas cognitivas para reinterpretar los cambios en su entorno y hacer más viable la aceptación de la participación político-electoral como una forma legítima de “lucha”.

Es, por tanto, en este contexto de persecución política contra la organización, de los cambios en el sistema político y en los actores sociales, de los propios cambios internos y de la preparación de la militancia, que el FPFV decide incursionar en la lucha político-electoral, etapa que inicia al formar una alianza con el Partido de la Revolución Democrática en 1997.

### **El conocimiento para la polis**

A lo largo de la etapa histórica del FPFV –que aquí llamamos político-electoral (1997- a la fecha)- se ha ampliado la complejidad interna de la organización pues, con el tiempo, al conocimiento sobre organización popular, gestión y protesta, se adhirieron los saberes necesarios para la competencia electoral y la actividad política. En efecto, las nuevas actividades de la organización como aliado del principal partido de izquierda en el país y, especialmente, en la ciudad de México, trajo consigo la aparición de nuevas funciones y cargos en la

estructura jerárquica, en la cual se hacían necesarios diversos mecanismos de gestión y dirección, así como una militancia capacitada que pudiesen lidiar con los requerimientos de la competencia electoral y la política partidista. De ahí que, pronto en la estructura del Frente se hizo necesario resolver, técnicamente, problemas que conectaban directamente con tareas más complejas en los ámbitos de la política, pero también, de la administración pública y la economía, pues con el tiempo el FPFV diversificaría, aún más, sus actividades.

En términos generales, las decisiones y actividades organizativas, las alianzas con organizaciones sociales y actores políticos, las actividades a desempeñar en los distintos niveles jerárquicos y gran parte de los elementos de la cultura organizacional se refuncionalizaron sobre el criterio político-electoral, lo que desplazó la lucha y la protesta social como forma exclusiva de activismo. Principalmente, la organización se ocupó, en esta nueva etapa, de sumar militantes que, eventualmente, aportaran votos durante los procesos electorales, aseguraran el triunfo del partido político en las elecciones y les permitiese llegar a cargos en el partido político, en el gobierno local e incluso en la Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal (en la Ciudad de México), lo cual lograron en el año 2000. De esta forma, una vez en el gobierno, la dirigencia y los principales cargos del FPFV se ocuparon de organizar las alianzas y acuerdos con el partido político, así como de gestionar los apoyos sociales y las políticas públicas en su área de influencia. Los mandos medios de la militancia tendrían, por su parte, la encomienda de organizar y realizar las campañas políticas y de promoción del voto entre la ciudadanía para difundir el proyecto político de la organización y del partido al cual se habían aliado. Finalmente, las bases militantes eran el ejército de promotores que, de puerta en puerta, hacían campaña política. Tales actividades requerían de miembros con conocimientos sobre ingeniería electoral -léase cartografía, legislación electoral y de promoción del voto. Además, la nueva posición dentro del partido y dentro de la configuración local del poder político exigía habilidades para “hacer política”, pues entre las funciones que se realizaba se encontraba diseñar e instituir las tareas de promoción electoral en coordinación con autoridades del Partido de la Revolución Democrática. De ahí que se requiriera de individuos plenamente socializados en las tareas de competencia electoral, diseño de campañas, administración pública y representación popular.

Es sobre la base de tales requerimientos funcionales que la organización FPFV vislumbró, como tarea ineludible, proporcionar a su militancia, mediante el mecanismo ya conocido -de las experiencias colectivas-, los conocimientos y normas necesarios para incursionar con éxito en todas estas nuevas tareas: a) por un lado, un programa de enseñanza formal en estrategia y táctica de campañas electorales y, por otro lado, b) el aprendizaje informal que lentamente formó políticos dentro de la organización.

a) La politización de la militancia era, como hemos visto, un objetivo programático que no sólo se llevaba a cabo a través de los canales formales de instrucción sino, sobre todo, a través del trajín cotidiano en la calle. La gente aprendía sobre lo político y cómo ser un político, sobre el sistema político, los

partidos y los procesos electorales, desde el comienzo de su militancia. Tal como lo narra una informante: “aquí [en la organización] en uno de los módulos, cuando hay procesos electorales, pues tenemos que ver los asuntos electorales, la propaganda, la estructura electoral; tenemos que saber quiénes se van a las brigadas y entonces, pues, vas escuchando todo lo que se tiene que hacer y uno aprende los procesos de negociación y aprendes a negociar con nuestros compañeros (Miranda de la Cruz, comunicación personal, junio de 2009).

En esta nueva etapa, pues, durante la enseñanza se hacía énfasis en la dinámica del sistema político, especialmente en lo relativo a ganar elecciones. Si bien en la etapa histórica anterior, el FPFV impartía tal conocimiento mediante la Escuela de Cuadros, en esta etapa electoral se hace a través de otros canales, principalmente mediante organizaciones y políticos que no eran miembros de la organización. En efecto, gracias a su alianza con el partido de izquierda la organización recibía un afluente generoso de información sobre competencia electoral, concretamente estrategias y tácticas a seguir, así como sobre el funcionamiento interno del proceso electoral. En reuniones de comité, de planeación o de evaluación se profundizaba en los métodos del marketing electoral, de movilización de cuadros y de propaganda a ras de tierra. Sin embargo, esta forma de compartir conocimiento no se fundamentaba en una metodología, no tenía un plan sistemático de implementación y no tenía otro propósito más que salir adelante de la coyuntura político-electoral.

Por otro lado, el contenido temático de los conocimientos sobre doctrina política y sobre política de gobierno también experimentó cambios. Lo anterior porque el nuevo escenario de transición democrática requería de otro tipo de discursos, que diesen coherencia y legitimaran la transformación social y política en marcha, más acorde con la idea de transición democrática que de cambio radical revolucionario. Así, por ejemplo, la narrativa socialista y el marxismo comienzan a desaparecer de los esporádicos cursos que aún se daban sobre el tema. Junto a estos contenidos, en el Frente se introducen discusiones con respecto a políticas públicas, política de gobierno y administración pública, teniendo como referencia las posiciones políticas que los dirigentes empiezan a adquirir en el gobierno local y en el partido político.

Las entrevistas conducidas con la militancia durante el trabajo de campo permiten observar cómo el conocimiento político-electoral ha permeado toda la organización FPFV. Uno escucha, por ejemplo, diagnósticos de la realidad nacional, del funcionamiento del sistema político y de la coyuntura electoral del momento; soluciones integrales de los problemas políticos, económicos, sociales y culturales; así como sobre las reglas de la competencia electoral y las prácticas prohibidas que marca la ley; sobre las características de las organizaciones políticas, de sus estrategias, formas de operación en las competiciones electorales y sobre los aliados políticos. Tal como lo dice una informante: “yo siempre le he dicho a mis compañeros que tenemos que trabajar muy duro para convencer a la gente acerca de nuestras principales propuestas, acerca de las propuestas políticas de la organización [del FPFV]; porque eso de una u otra manera se refleja en la posibilidad de mejorar las condiciones sociales de la

gente, de los compañeros pero también de los niños, por eso es importante saber que entre más influencia podamos tener en el gobierno, más oportunidades tendremos para adquirir una casa; y el trabajo electoral con las bases, con los compañeros es que ellos trabajan para sí mismos, para su futuro y no sólo para la organización; y la forma de hacer esto es a través de la participación en las elecciones y por medio de ganar esos procesos [electorales] (M. de la Cruz, comunicación personal, agosto de 2009).

b) Este conocimiento sobre lo político también se aprende y se pone en marcha en el día a día de las actividades cotidianas. La práctica durante los mítines, en las campañas, en las discusiones en el partido y durante las jornadas electorales permite instruir, de forma más profunda, en la cuestión política a un segmento de la militancia, específicamente a aquellos miembros de la organización que se encuentran inmersos en las actividades de promoción. Lentamente, en la ya de por sí politizada militancia aparecen nuevos personajes, los “políticos”, es decir, militantes que se describen a sí mismos con tal sustantivo y que se consideran parte del círculo de la política, así como aquellos otros que “entienden” de la lucha política. Sin embargo, tal cambio cualitativo en términos de los conocimientos y habilidades aprendidos por un sector de la militancia sólo ocurre en una región muy reducida de la organización: entre los dirigentes y coordinadores de campamento. Así, por ejemplo, el rol de coordinador de campamento experimentó no sólo una refuncionalización de sus actividades –al pasar de la lucha popular al activismo político- sino que los miembros que ocupaban tal posición dentro del FP experimentaron, también, cambios: dentro de la organización, la imagen recurrente del luchador popular fue paulatinamente desplazada en importancia por una figura más: la del activista político.

En efecto, sobre la base del conocimiento adquirido y de la práctica cotidiana, los coordinadores de campamento se convirtieron en *políticos*. El coordinador poseía conocimiento, específicamente, sobre ingeniería electoral, además de cartografía, legislación electoral y de promoción del voto; al mismo tiempo, tenía habilidades para “hacer política”. Pronto los coordinadores devinieron en expertos en diversas tareas tales como identificar zonas de mayor y menor presencia de posibles votantes; en entrenar a promotores del voto y coordinarse con autoridades del Partido de la Revolución Democrática para diseñar y realizar las tareas de promoción electoral. Además, los coordinadores de lo electoral debían, también, identificar y cooptar los recursos humanos necesarios para la ejecución de las tareas político-electorales y de representación partidista en las casillas de votación durante los días de jornada electoral. Finalmente, el aprendizaje y los conocimientos recién adquiridos de los militantes a cargo de las coordinaciones tendría un impacto más dentro del FPFV: permitirían una mayor profesionalización de los roles. El coordinador y los líderes detentaban, así, los conocimientos y normas necesarias para el manejo de la comunicación política, así como las herramientas que les permitirían un mayor control interno de los campamentos y viviendas, de las cuotas y obligaciones de la militancia y de los puestos en el gobierno y posiciones políticas.

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Acerca del giro en los contenidos de las prácticas pedagógicas del Frente Popular Francisco Villa habría que hacer, al menos, dos reflexiones. 1) La priorización de la vía política institucional no necesariamente conllevaba, como paso obligado, el abandono de la estrategia socialista, ni al nivel de los objetivos programáticos de la organización, ni tampoco en el ámbito discursivo. De hecho, la narrativa marxista-leninista que se impartió en la Escuela de Cuadros, durante los primeros años de existencia de la organización, aún se utiliza, hoy en día, durante las discusiones de Comité e, incluso, aparece aquí y allá en las consignas de protesta, en los cantos, y en las banderas. Al mismo tiempo, y en lo que a los documentos oficiales de la organización se refiere, el FPFV se describe, a sí mismo, como una organización popular que tiene por objetivo estratégico, aún hoy, la instauración del socialismo en el país.

Por otro lado, tal programa político de ninguna forma es incompatible, incluso en el régimen político electoral de la época, con las reglas de la política institucional y de la competencia electoral, y el FP muy bien ha permitido el traslape de los dos discursos, el marxista-leninista y el liberal-democrático, tanto en sus declaraciones y actuaciones públicas, como en los procesos y actividades internos. Sin embargo, la narrativa del socialismo sí ha abandonado su lugar preponderante dentro de la organización; se ha desgastado, tanto por cuestiones internas como externas. En primer lugar, dada su alianza con el partido de izquierda, de tendencia social-demócrata, la organización fue adoptando el discurso electoral más eficaz y, sobretodo, más competitivo: el de la social democracia. En segundo lugar, como esquema de interpretación de la sociedad moderna, la narrativa socialista no aporta las herramientas necesarias para el análisis y la crítica. De ahí también que, paulatinamente, se fue excluyendo de la discusión cotidiana en las asambleas. En este sentido, con fines “tácticos” o de cálculo político puro, pero también por su inadecuación para armar una estrategia política realista, los contenidos pedagógicos del Frente experimentaron los significativos cambios que aquí se han señalado.

2) Por otro lado, si bien el FP ingresó a un nuevo escenario político, las formas de hacer política se mantuvieron relativamente estables. En otras palabras, si bien no se experimentaron variaciones en términos de las prácticas políticas, sí hubo cambios, bastantes y profundos, en las reglas de competencia, en los actores e instituciones involucrados y en los incentivos para participar. Por un lado, el rediseño del marco legal y electoral y el de las instituciones políticas crearon un escenario de competencia más simétrico y competitivo entre los distintos partidos políticos institucionalizados. Lo anterior permitió que actores de la sociedad, como el Frente Popular, pero también, organizaciones civiles de los más diversos ámbitos de activismo, dejasen la periferia de la política y se insertaran, plenamente, como actores políticos. Sin embargo, las formas de hacer política que el FPFV había practicado en su relación con las instituciones

públicas y con las autoridades políticas y de gobierno, se mantuvieron bajo el antiguo esquema corporativista y clientelar, el cual había sido funcional desde tiempo anterior a la transición democrática. Así, en su nueva faceta de actor político el Frente popular ya no protestaba, con marchas y plantones, para obtener beneficios de las instituciones políticas, como la regularización de terrenos invadidos y el acondicionamiento, a través de obra pública, de sus espacios habitacionales.

En esta faceta, el Frente era, hasta cierto punto, gobierno y los recursos fluían de forma constante y menos accidentada hacia los campamentos y unidades habitacionales. A cambio, la organización movilizaba su militancia con fines electorales, es decir, con fines de apoyo a candidatos a elección popular mediante el voto. Más aún. En este nuevo escenario, los incentivos para participar en la política se volvieron más atractivos, puesto que ahora, los militantes tienen la certeza de conseguir sus objetivos, dada su alianza con el partido en el gobierno, y ya no se enfrentan a la incertidumbre y el riesgo que acompañaba sus movilizaciones de protesta durante el régimen anterior. Esta nueva política es, por tanto, la reproducción de la vieja forma de hacer política, la cual había regido la relación entre la organización popular y el gobierno. Sólo que, ahora, es legitimada con el discurso de la democracia y dentro de un escenario político u tanto distinto. Más aún. Si durante los primeros años de existencia del Frente Popular las relaciones internas entre militancia y dirigencia sí habían logrado construirse sobre la base del diálogo, la tolerancia y ciertas libertades como plataforma para la toma de decisiones colectivas y vinculantes, el esquema corporativista y clientelar que imperó en las relaciones externas terminó por imponerse, internamente, en el Frente. No es casual que los contenidos pedagógicos adquirieran un contenido más conformista, en que lo importante ahora ya no es la crítica radical al sistema sino la adopción de estrategias de adaptación y de maximización de los beneficios.

## **V. Tensiones y conflictos internos**

En retrospectiva, los cambios que ocurrieron en el FP a lo largo de su historia se traducen, de forma nítida, en el crecimiento de la organización, en la diversificación de sus tareas, en su capacidad de adaptarse a las cambiantes condiciones de su entorno y en el cumplimiento de no pocas de las promesas de su programa. Uno de los cambios fundamentales fue, como he tratado de demostrar, al nivel de las herramientas cognitivas y de los patrones normativos de su militancia. En efecto, en el FPFV los militantes experimentaron una verdadera transformación en su vida y en su existencia social a partir del aprendizaje adquirido dentro de la organización. Los miembros del FPFV aprendían y ponían en práctica conocimiento básico sobre sus derechos y obligaciones, sobre la sociedad, la política o el sistema legal, lo cual contribuyó en la transformación de sus vidas, familia y entorno social y, al mismo tiempo, redundó en la maximización de las dinámicas del Frente como actor social y, posteriormente, como actor en la política institucional. Sin embargo, el



programa de enseñanza-aprendizaje del FP traería problemas internos a partir de sus desiguales criterios de aplicación en dos diversos contextos.

Por un lado, sobre la base del conocimiento que se impartía a la militancia, así como por el hecho de operar en un ambiente político que se abría a la adopción de los procesos democráticos como una de las formas de legitimar la elección de los gobernantes (o de los líderes), dentro de la organización FPFV pronto se formó una tendencia a reclamar mayores oportunidades de participación en la toma de decisiones. Los miembros del FPFV buscaban, con mayor ahínco, mejores mecanismos internos y colectivos de discusión, decisión y dirección; una opción claramente vislumbrada en las constantes discusiones y lecciones sobre el régimen político, la democracia y la transformación de la sociedad. Sin embargo, en contraposición a las expectativas de la militancia, cada vez más, dentro del FPFV, la toma de decisiones se concentraba en la dirigencia, fundamentalmente, en los llamados líderes históricos. Paradójicamente, la incursión del Frente en la política-electoral y en un contexto de democratización exigía una organización con capacidad inmediata e informada de decisión; una condición que, por sí sola, presionaba por la unilateralidad en las decisiones internas del Frente. De ahí que, paulatinamente, algunas decisiones dejaron de tomarse colectivamente, ya por que se requería inmediatez, ya porque no toda la militancia estaba informada sobre el tipo de alianzas y acuerdos entre la dirigencia y los actores políticos y, por tanto, carecía de la información suficiente para decidir. De esta forma, tanto las contradicciones entre las expectativas de los militantes (como, por ejemplo, la narrativa de las decisiones colectivas) y la realidad de las operaciones internas dentro de la organización, produjo tensiones internas y conflictos.

Por otro lado, la desigual impartición del conocimiento y, fundamentalmente, el hecho de que éste último se concentró en algunos sectores de la organización, como en los coordinadores o líderes, produjo diferenciaciones internas, exclusión y dominación dentro de la vida organizacional. En efecto, el rol de la figura de coordinador, que he brevemente descrito, sintetizaba una posición de respeto hacia el interior de la organización sobre la base del abanico de saberes y conocimientos que los coordinadores poseían para organizar la vida interna dentro de los campamentos y para organizar las actividades durante la invasión de terrenos, la organización de mítines y marchas y la puesta en marcha de campañas electorales. Así, estructuralmente, se creó una distinción entre quienes poseían más herramientas cognitivas -y, junto con ello, poder- y quienes no poseían todo ese instrumental. A pesar de que en el programa del Frente Popular se asentaba como uno de los objetivos principales la concientización de la militancia para “liberarse de sus ataduras” (cfr. *Nuestros primeros pasos*), no todos lograron adquirir ese conocimiento “liberador”.

Por el contrario, el conocimiento se convirtió, hasta cierto punto, en un recurso que lentamente se delimitó y concentró en círculos concéntricos cada vez más estrechos; y sólo aquellos militantes con más elementos para evaluar y tomar decisiones tenían acceso a posiciones de poder dentro de la jerarquía organizativa, al tiempo que adquirían poder y autoridad frente a las bases.

Los conflictos y las tensiones internas como consecuencia de la contradicción entre expectativas (de democracia interna) y estructuras sociales (toma de decisiones unipersonales y excluyentes) y como consecuencia del empoderamiento, sobre la base de conocimiento, de un sector de la militancia en detrimento de la mayoría, no se resolvieron construyendo una organización completamente democrática en sus procesos y mecanismos de decisión y dirección. Los problemas internos, que en cierta medida son consecuencia de los procesos formales de aprendizaje y de las prácticas informales del FPFV, se entreveraron con las necesidades de la política-electoral y terminaron en tensiones internas y rupturas. No es casual, por tanto, que las deserciones de la militancia o los conflictos con los líderes pronto se convirtieran en un evento recurrente dentro del Frente Popular.

## **VI. Conclusiones**

En este artículo he mostrado que, como parte de su programa de transformación del país hacia el socialismo, la organización popular Francisco Villa aplicó una serie de metodologías de enseñanza formales, que se complementaron con prácticas pedagógicas informales, con el objetivo de politizar a su militancia y prepararla para impulsar cambios sociales y políticos en el país. Si bien durante los primeros años de existencia de la organización, la politización de sus miembros y su preparación para la lucha revolucionaria produjo cambios evidentes y positivos entre la militancia, que redundaron en la eficiencia y el cumplimiento de los objetivos de la organización, con el tiempo, el esquema de funcionamiento del sistema de enseñanza aprendizaje del Frente cambió de dirección y mostró sus inconsistencias. Por un lado, tanto las transformaciones en el sistema político mexicano como en los objetivos del Frente Popular produjeron cambios en los contenidos y usos del conocimiento y técnicas impartidos dentro de la organización. Por otro lado, las metodologías formales de enseñanza y las prácticas informales de aprendizaje experimentaron deficiencias en la impartición de esos conocimientos, lo cual produjo distinciones internas que se tradujeron en exclusión y dominación. Tres reflexiones más, cabe hacer.

Por un lado, el tema de la relación entre expectativas y estructuras. El conocimiento impartido en el FP, durante los primeros años, logró crear un horizonte de sentido que no sólo creó una narrativa acerca del rol de la militancia en la transformación del mundo sino que coadyuvó, mediante la práctica cotidiana, a crear lazos de identidad y solidaridad internos. Al mismo tiempo, se formaron una serie de expectativas que anclaban en el marco de la democracia y que compelían a los miembros del Frente a experimentar tales procesos democráticos a nivel interno, dentro de sus actividades cotidianas. Sin embargo, como organización, el Frente distaba, por mucho, de favorecer los procesos democráticos internos, ya que su estructura estaba diseñada a concentrar ciertas decisiones en la dirigencia de la organización. De ahí la contradicción fundamental en el FP, entre las expectativas de democracia interna y la realidad de las estructuras y procesos de toma de decisiones. Sin

embargo, el marco de expectativas sembrado en la militancia permitiría que muchos de los miembros efectivamente “rompieran sus cadenas”, ya que tanto las herramientas cognitivas y analíticas, como los esquemas normativos aprendidos y practicados en el Frente, permitieron que muchos abandonaran la organización e iniciaran sus propios proyectos de lucha social y activismo político por cuenta propia. Si uno observa que este proceso no es exclusivo del Frente Popular no sorprende, entonces, que en esta región de la ciudad hayan proliferado, desde la década de los ochenta, los proyectos populares de autogestión hasta hoy en día.

Por otro lado, está el tema de los usos del conocimiento. Sin duda, en el FP el conocimiento se instrumentalizó; adquirió otra lógica de impartición, de propiedad y de uso. Pensado como un mecanismo que permitiese concientizar a los militantes acerca de su posición social, pronto emergieron dinámicas adyacentes o no previstas en la impartición y práctica del conocimiento: el conocimiento impartido generó poder, el conocimiento no impartido generó exclusión y sobre la base de ambos procesos se construyó una relación de dominación. En este sentido, nuevamente, hizo falta construir mecanismos internos que mediaran la creciente distancia entre los que tenían conocimiento y poder y aquellos quienes sólo los poseían de forma precaria. Al monopolizarse los recursos cognitivos en regiones cada vez más reducidas de la militancia, se exacerbaban las tradicionales diferencias entre líderes y militancia, que ahora devino en la diferencia entre expertos y no expertos. Por tanto, es sobre la base de estas dinámicas de conocimiento-poder que sólo algunas "voces" terminan siendo representadas en la toma vinculante de decisiones colectivas.

Finalmente, el tema de la estructura jerárquica de la organización y su influencia en la relación poder-saber. La estructura jerárquica de la organización tiene la particular forma de un centro con su periferia, lo que implica la concentración de recursos no sólo simbólicos y materiales sino, fundamentalmente, cognitivos. Lo anterior se tradujo en dos momentos en la vida del Frente: en un primer momento, el centro funcionó como núcleo de la difusión del conocimiento y espacios desde el cual se fomentaba, sobre la base del programa organizativo, la democratización de las relaciones organizacionales. En un segundo momento, y ya con el frente funcionando como una maquinaria electoral, la misma estructura bloqueó, por así decirlo, la toma de decisiones colectivas. Sin embargo, como he demostrado, el saber se había extendido de tal manera en la periferia de la organización que la consecuencia fue la aparición de conflictos entre los dirigentes, que monopolizaban las decisiones y las tomaban de forma unilateral, y los militantes que contaban con las expectativas de democratización y con los recursos cognitivos suficientes para observar y criticar a su dirigencia y, además, para tomar sus propias decisiones autónomas. Sin embargo, dentro de la periferia del Frente popular hubo un sector a quien no llegó, suficientemente, el saber que se enseñaba en la organización. Y es, precisamente en ellos, en los que queda constancia palpable la concentración del poder y el saber en un centro frente a una militancia sin voto en su organización y sin información para actuar.

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## **Anti-oppression as pedagogy; prefiguration as praxis**

**Timothy Luchies**

### **Abstract**

*Experiments in alternative politics saturate the radical Left in North America. The most compelling of these build on multidimensional analyses of violence that impact activist communities. An applied pedagogy called 'anti-oppression' has emerged in this work, providing a new language to facilitate the construction of radically inclusive and empowering forms of political community.*

*In this paper I contextualize anti-oppression via its emergence in North American anti-authoritarianism. Introducing this discourse and practice as it has been developed in key activist texts, I suggest that it represents a powerful development in the painstaking but empowering struggle to politicize racism, hetero-sexism and dis/ableism within social movement struggle. Yet the practices and concepts that bear its name must continually evolve and adapt if they are to carry forward this important project. To address this tension, I theorize anti-oppression's critical relationship towards feminism and anarchism as a pedagogical one: it presents a grounded application of feminist work on intersectional power and it further radicalizes the prefigurative impulse central to anti-authoritarianism.*

**Keywords:** anarchism, feminism, anti-oppression, intersectionality, prefiguration, pedagogy, affinity, activism, social movements, North America

### **Introduction**

Alternative political, economic, and cultural institutions are all around us. From free schools to radical childcare provision and financial district 'occupations', these projects are part of a long history of prefigurative political struggle to build a new world 'in the shell of the old' (Avrich and Pateman 1995; Bey 2003; Schantz 2006; Ervin 2008; LA COiL n.d.). That is, they approach movement building as an applied pedagogical project of developing capacities and infrastructures. While many such projects reproduce dominant relations of power and exclusion, a growing number of them embed prefiguration within a multidimensional analysis of oppression and anti-authoritarian organization. They attempt to problem-solve power and privilege within movement organizations while building empowering forms of political community. Many on the radical Left call this work 'anti-oppression'.

Contemporary forms of anti-oppression practice emerged in North America alongside an anti-authoritarian tendency in the mid-1990s. Gordon writes that this occurred through "convergences of radical feminist, ecologist, anti-racist

and queer struggles, which finally fused in the late 1990s through the global wave of protest against the policies and institutions of neoliberal globalization” (2008, 32; see also Dixon 2013). Similarly, both the new social movements of the 1960's and “older' traditions of marxist and anarchist socialism” form the roots of what I will refer to as anarchistic movements (Day 2005, 4; see also Foucault 1982, 780). These movements consist of a wide range of broadly anti-authoritarian radicals who are actively renovating theories of oppression and resistance traditionally associated with the 'old' and 'new' Left. The editors of *Upping the Anti* conceptualize this process as an interweaving of three critical tendencies: “anti-capitalism, anti-oppression, and anti-imperialism” (Conway et al. 2006, 7-11).

Such an intentional interweaving of resistances is significant because it transforms the composition and trajectory of social justice struggle. Pushing beyond liberal and socialist political theory, it suggests that creation (of alternative ways of being) and destruction (of the oppressive and exploitative status quo) are implied within each other. And it explicitly connects revitalized pedagogies of communal reflexivity and empowerment with their work to radically transform society. Activists' cross-pollination of this theoretical and practical work produced a network of novel social movements that gained international recognition as they agitated against the violence of neoliberalism at the turn of the 21st century (Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2011; Notes 2003). The mass convergences of the alter-globalization movement in North America were produced by innovative networks of grassroots activists drawing on repertoires of anti-authoritarian and new social movement practice. Their fusion of community organizing and large scale demonstrations were pivotal to the consolidation of an identifiable anarchistic politics. They were also the site of emerging exchanges in North America concerning activist anti-oppression (Bevington and Dixon 2005, 195; Gelderloos 2010; Martinez 2002; Starr 2004; Thompson 2010).

With this in mind, I propose that anarchistic engagements with anti-oppression – whatever their limitations – constitute a pedagogical project of movement knowledge and practice. Evolving alongside negotiations of power and privilege throughout the Left, anarchistic forms of anti-oppression draw broadly from anti-colonial, anti-racist, radical dis/ability, feminist, and queer organizing. Distinct pedagogical effects are evident in activists' collective work to identify both how oppression is reproduced at personal, communal and systemic levels and how to interrupt this process. Anti-oppression functions in these exchanges as a collective project of teaching and learning in which different practical experiments in interrupting (raced, classed, cis-gendered, able-bodied, heteronormative) domination are studied and learned from.

As a shared analytical and practical project, the radical potential of anti-oppression is lost when it is reduced to singular or static responses to power and privilege. Indeed particular routinized concepts and practices attributed to anti-oppression are increasingly facing criticism from within anti-authoritarian circles for reifying particular forms of oppression and resistance. As evident in



projects like Colours of Resistance, critical interventions of this sort have fed broader struggles around how to 'do' anti-oppression, and are vital to the continued power of this work (Smith 2006; Fellows & Razack 1997). In ideal cases, this process promises to fundamentally reorganize movement dynamics as activists challenge normalized accounts of alternative and autonomous community with feminist, anti-racist, queer, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and radical dis/ability analysis. By conceptualizing this process as pedagogical, both anti-oppression's particular relationship to intersectionality and its broader prefigurative potential become apparent.

As shown in different contexts by O'Brien (n.d.), Srivastava (2006), and Millar (2008), anti-oppression is conditioned and constrained by the organizational and ideological environments in which it is embedded. Practices associated with anti-oppression are always partial, and without careful analysis of immediate and broader contexts of struggle they can replicate and reinforce existing power relations. Anti-oppression workshops for example, are a primary method of teaching and learning about interlocking systems of power on the Left, though their effectiveness in radicalizing individuals and movements is doubtful (Jones n.d.; O'Brien n.d.; Srivastava 2006). As such, there is a problematic relationship between what I will call anti-oppression as a logic of struggle and anti-oppression as a collection of practices. By clarifying this relationship, we – that is, those interested and implicated in anti-oppression or anarchistic politics – can begin to assess how articulations of anti-oppression become normalized and stale, and explore other methods of bringing anti-racist, feminist, dis/ability, and anti-capitalist politics into anarchistic organizing.

Activist knowledge networks, including archives like [zinelibrary.info](http://zinelibrary.info) or [anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca](http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca), are saturated with critiques of how anti-oppression is practiced. These interventions, presented through biographies, movement histories, action critiques, and manuals, can help us to trace how the radical work of anti-oppression has been derailed and disavowed. Some writers have attempted to distill lessons from such work and re-/present them in a manner digestible for immediate activist use (see Crass 2013, 143-8, 267-83; Khan et al. 2006, Starr 2004). This paper begins from a different sort of approach, one which attempts to clarify the problem we are facing in anti-oppression work by posing it in a more difficult and hopefully more compelling manner than it has been previously expressed (Foucault 2000).

The problem is not simply to disseminate anti-oppression practice within anarchistic movements. Instead, it involves questioning how we actually define and categorize anti-oppression work, and meditating on what sort of transformation is required of anarchistic movements if we are to invest them with a logic of anti-oppression. To begin to address these two questions, I re-frame anti-oppression as a logic of struggle, more specifically as a pedagogical project, in order to bring its collective and cumulative operation into view. This shift in perspective reveals networking as an often neglected condition for effective anti-oppression practice. It also provides some insight into how we might use the idea of prefiguration to further integrate an intersectional politics

into anarchistic movements.

Drawing from key activist texts, I show how anarchistic engagements with anti-oppression represent a powerful development in the painstaking but empowering struggle to politicize class, racism, hetero-sexism and dis/ableism within social movement organizations. I also show how the pedagogical process by which anti-oppression is applied and contested might push anarchism towards an intersectionalized praxis of 'prefiguration'. It strengthens feminist applications of intersectional privilege and oppression, and thereby accentuates the anti-authoritarian impulse central to anarchistic thought. In the first section of this paper I sketch the contours of 'anti-oppression' pedagogy in relation to its precedents and to complimentary academic applications of intersectionality. I situate the pedagogy of anti-oppression more fully in the second section of this paper through an examination of how it challenges accepted frameworks of anarchistic politics.

### **Anti-oppression and intersectionality**

With roots in anti-nuclear, civil rights, and radical feminist movements, anti-oppression draws from multiple resistance discourses to reinvent social movement praxis. While academic work has only tangentially engaged with this grassroots project, activist writing and workshopping has facilitated the development and spread of anti-oppression principles and practices throughout the Left. Activists – anarchist, anti-racist, feminist, dis/ability, queer and indigenous – have produced a range of tools to problem-solve privilege and oppression within social movements. Examples of such tools include sexual assault survivor support networks and accountability processes, participatory meeting facilitation, workshops and skillshares, reading and action groups, open letters and call-outs, concept and language guides, blogs, archives and distros, mission statements, and direct action interventions.

Each of these can be useful for building more inclusive and effective organizing practice. But when they are relied on too heavily, practiced in isolation, or become unquestionable as methods to work through particular forms of power and violence, they actually reproduce oppression in a variety of ways. Taking the model of anti-racist workshopping again as our example, it becomes problematic when leaned on as the primary means of working through white supremacy, when it is separated from engagement in multi-racial coalition and anti-racist action, and when critiques of its methods or function are avoided or ignored (see O'Brien n.d.; Crass 2013, 257; Jones n.d.). Uncritical routinization of such practices can produce a sense of stability and either despair or accomplishment that deters the ongoing creation and critique of anti-oppression tools. The pedagogic networking of anti-oppression across movements and tactics is integral to its ongoing relevance to collective liberation struggle.

In this way, anti-oppression is a political project more often understood as developing practice than theory, yet a project embedded in rich theoretical

terrain. This will become clear as we situate it alongside complimentary social movement research and the framework of intersectionality. Academic work documenting and problem-solving oppression within social movements both compliments and contrasts with its grassroots relative. Despite their overlaps in content, anarchistic anti-oppression is best theorized separately as a grassroots pedagogy and a forum for experiments in interrupting oppressive power relationships.

Some of the most powerful and relevant academic precedents for theorizing anti-oppression come from anti-racist feminist research in social movement and community organizations. Deeply critical of conventional social science, these scholars employ theoretical frameworks informed by intersectionality to produce critiques of how domination inflected by race, class, gender and sexuality impacts movement settings. Importantly, while this work is written and published from the academy, Ward (2004) reminds us that intersectionality emerged as grassroots feminist and anti-racist critique from the margins of civil rights and feminist struggle. And that for many of these scholars, strengthening social justice struggle is the focus of their critical work. Anti-racist and feminist researchers are doing invaluable work to excavate the silences in mainstream social movement theory and fuse academic and activist resources toward anti-oppressive ends.

Yet the affinities between such scholarship and grassroots anti-oppression should not obscure the primary pedagogical work of naming and responding to oppressive dynamics within activist spaces. This has never been primarily an academic pursuit. Rather, a vast body of analysis and practice has emerged from and intervened into activist spaces often complementary to academic analyses of intersectionality. Such work can be traced back even before Collins' (2000) and Crenshaw's (1989) seminal analytical works introduced the language of intersectional and interlocking oppressions to Black feminist theory and legal critique. While their work solidified this framework in feminist and anti-racist discourse, intersectionality was already a vital component of grassroots struggles against racism and sexism. This is expressed clearly in the Combahee River Collective's Black Feminist Statement (1977). A collective articulation of personal and political struggles against racism, hetero-sexism and economic exploitation (Combahee 1977, s2), it is perhaps the most widely reproduced example of anti-oppression writing emerging from and addressed to grassroots practice.

Activists within anarchistic networks draw from similar experiences and analysis in hopes of building transformative organizing practice. The parallel academic literature does something different. What it provides most consistently are reasons why a networked and pedagogical approach to anti-oppression is vital to its continued relevance and effectiveness. It does so through incisive analysis of how oppression impacts movement-building and is systematized through broad social and political institutions.

Jennifer Correa (2010) models such an analysis, combining an intensive critique of mainstream social movement research with an intersectional study of

state sanctioned repression and systemic social and economic violence. Drawing on the history of the Brown Berets, she shows how situated processes of oppression experienced at community and interpersonal scales are often submerged in broad discussions of context or 'political opportunity' (Correa 2010, 84–5). Understanding and responding to systemic violence in the course of our activism and research is only possible if we are attuned to the situated movement knowledge produced across the radical Left. When we fail to confront the materiality of White supremacy, settler-colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, dis/ableism and capitalism, we fail to address some of the most powerful institutions structuring social movement action.

And because these institutions directly impact participation and internal dynamics in our movements, failure to address them undercuts our potential to create effective strategies of resistance. Gender regimes influence not only activists' capacities to adopt different organizational forms, but the risks they face in doing so (Zemlinskaya 2010; for a class-focused analysis, see Piven and Cloward 1979; regarding race, see Ostrander 1999; on sexuality, see Ward 2004). This is undoubtedly related to the ways in which multiple and conflicting critiques of power and privilege have emerged from resistance at different intersections of race, class and gender (Poster 1995; see also Breines 2006). Poster (1995) shows how feminist activists' incomplete experiences of and perspectives on oppression and exploitation can delimit movements' organizational goals and structures.

Similar dynamics are evident in Morgensen's (2011) interrogation of the cultural and historical grounding of queer settler counterculture, and in particular the Radical Faeries. Situating their repertoires of neo-paganism and homesteading community within the settler colonial erasure of indigenous peoples and histories, he shows how renewed anti-colonial accountability and alliance are integral to building alternative political futures (Morgensen 2011, 125). Without accountable and networked engagement across interlocking forms of domination, ignorance adhering to privilege distorts movement-building work. It reproduces oppressive and power-laden relationships within and between activist communities, and prevents opportunities for collective and transformative action.

This has been documented time and again by historians of anti-poverty activism (Piven and Cloward 1979), feminism, anti-racism and anti-colonialism (Breines 2006; Davis 1983; Smith 2005), and anarchism (Crass 2013; Ferguson 2011; Olson 2009). These authors suggest that submerged and marginalized histories of resistance (not always recognized by the largely White, middle-class Left) are an important resource to begin re-learning how to build coalition and affinity-based struggle. They also suggest the importance of troubling common-sense understandings of social movement strategy and organization. Their work shows that when our organizational practices become rigid – when we stop learning from each other – our capacity to struggle against multiple oppressions is compromised. Acknowledging the historical and continued consequences of unaddressed domination to our movements is a vital task for anti-oppression.

Equally important for the White and settler-dominated Left is engaging with emerging networks of analysis and practice that are proliferating and problem-solving tactics for responding to such domination. Such steps are crucial to transforming anarchistic politics, which claims a structure notable for both its networked activisms and its counter-cultures of self-imposed isolation, and claims active opposition to all forms of hierarchy while saturated with dis/ableism and White and cis-Male supremacy. Like much of the Left in North America, anarchistic analysis and organizing suffer from the inertia of over a century of theoretical and movement-building work insulated from resistance as articulated by colonized and oppressed peoples (Shannon and Rogue n.d.).

To get a more nuanced understanding of this inertia, we need to examine how the mechanics of our activism and organizing are intimately tied to regimes of racism, settler-colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, dis/ableism and capitalism. Ostrander (1999) takes us about as close as we can go in social movement scholarship to anti-oppression, and thus illustrates the limitations of such research for internal social movement processes. She uses intersectionality to examine how challenges faced by a Community Fund were raced and gendered: the marginalizing effects of consensus decision making, divisions of labour and responsibility, and perennial conflicts around structural reform. She also clarifies their importance: “organizational transformation toward a feminist and progressive vision is a process, a goal to be reached for, with its course perhaps best described as an ongoing and unstable project” (Ostrander 1999, 641). Ostrander provides us with a polished form of analytical work consonant with anarchistic anti-oppression, and so gestures to potential lines of intervention and collaboration for activists and academics. An important difference however, lies in where this intervention is taking place: outside of circulations of anti-oppression experience in activist networks. Just as Ostrander and others have adapted intersectional or interlocking analyses to identify, criticize and reflect on particular conflicts and developments within movement organizations, so too do many activists in their day-to-day anti-oppression work. But such work produces – to a greater or lesser extent – more direct pedagogical effects through participants' collective engagement in anti-oppression, and through its dissemination via bookfairs, workshops, and other social media.

The history of social movement struggle in North America is peppered with such interventions. At its best, this pedagogical work disturbs unspoken White, hetero, middle-class, settler/citizen and cisgendered norms within social justice organizing, and helps to clarify and present alternative and suppressed modes of political struggle. Building on historical and theoretical analysis, activists connected to anarchistic networks are attempting to expand the boundaries of the political to account for oppression in social justice struggle. Like the Combahee River Collective, recent work by *Unsettling Minnesota*, *generationFIVE*, *INCITE!*, *Colours of Resistance* and the *Catalyst Project* politicize and respond to the complex power dynamics faced by social movement organizations and networks. They too adapt an intersectional analysis of oppression to activist spaces to produce tools that empower and educate their communities. Activist projects such as these blur the boundaries

between anti-oppression theory and practice, engaging their communities with insights drawn from feminist, anti-racist, queer, indigenous, dis/ability and anarchist struggle. Anti-authoritarians' renovation of organizing practices and reclamation of multiple histories of struggle has lent their work new potency for addressing internal hierarchies. Radicals from a range of backgrounds are now collectively innovating and implementing practical responses to marginalization and violence within movement organizations. It is this work, rarely represented in academic journals, but referenced in workshops and working groups, zines, web portals and other activist media that might, more meaningfully, be called 'anti-oppression'.

Anti-oppression usually refers to a cluster of tactics bent on identifying and eliminating violence within movement organizations, and building empowering forms of political community (see Khan et al. 2006; Love & Rage 2011; Collectif 2011). It frames these struggles as multidimensional (personal, relational, organizational) and progressive subversions of normalized White and cis-/male supremacy, dis/ableism, hetero-sexism, imperialism and capitalism. Anti-oppression entails a broad historical understanding of how these forms of domination operate at global and regional levels, and politicizes their infiltration into movement building (Crass 2002a; 2006).

As noted by scholars above, oppression and exploitation take many forms in social movement organizing. Anti-oppression practice similarly takes diverse shapes within anarchistic communities across North America. The pedagogical work of anti-oppression in anarchism is evident in unique interventions into every aspect of anti-authoritarian politics including decision making, organizational structure, division of labour, resource management, tactics, subcultural norms and security (see Walia 2006; Miriam & Ali n.d.; Threat n.d.). On interpersonal and networked scales, such interventions are integral to a grassroots process of “becoming aware and naming the mechanisms of power that are active at the points of junction of different systems of oppression, to better combat them” (Collectif 2011, 2). Anti-oppression therefore also entails pro-active development of norms and structures responsive to internal critique – a task that dovetails nicely with anarchistic notions of prefiguration, as we will explore below. The ebbs and flows of this critical and constructive process is visible in the development and spread of how-to manuals, narrative histories and critical reflections.

The proliferation of anti-oppression in these different forms within anarchistic politics is a product of evolving ideas about where and how oppression is re/produced and where and how it might be interrupted. Anti-oppression is not a stable or homogenous body of work, though there are practices that, through their adoption by influential training centres or coalitions, seem to render them unquestionable. Nor is anti-oppression drawn from a single theoretical framework for understanding inter/personal and systemic power dynamics, though this is a highly polarizing subject. Anarchistic anti-oppression theory and practice has been spurred on by multiple understandings of how oppression works, drawn from multiple histories of resistance. One shared characteristic is

how anti-oppression organizes these multiplicities through anti-racist feminist theories of interlocking or intersectional oppressions (see Davis 1983; Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000; hooks 2000). These approaches to identification and oppression redefine it as multiple and intersecting, and a product of interdependent systems of domination, including imperialism, capitalism, White supremacy, heteronormativity and patriarchy. As such they provide a powerful rejoinder to powerful, yet over-simplified theories of state and class power that continue to drive movements on the Left.

Intersectionality is also useful for responding to clusters of privilege, including those adhering to white, middle-class and activist masculinities often problematized by anti-oppression activists (Said the Pot n.d.; Social Detox 2007; Crass 2002b; see Brittan 1989; Connell 2005). It encourages multiple resistances, positing “a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility ... continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination” (hooks 1990, 153). This is an important facet of intersectionality – in its expanding work to expose the complexity of the particular 'matrix of domination' (Collins 2000, 227) operative in North America, it does not rule out struggles across the differences it reveals. It rather provides theoretical tools with which to do so more effectively (Collectif 2011; INCITE! 2005; see Smith 2006; Fellows & Razack 1997).

Concentrating on the intersectional basis for anti-oppression work can help us to attend to the varied ways anti-oppression has been operationalized and contested within anarchistic movements. Creative innovations and critical interventions into anti-oppression that dovetail with poststructuralist and queer theoretical work are increasingly important to how anti-oppression is developing on the radical Left. There have been a number of important interventions by activist/academics applying and expanding intersectionality and queer theory in particular to renovate anti-authoritarian politics. These adaptations include theoretical syncretical work (Ben-Moshe et al. 2009; Sheppard 2010; LA COiL n.d.; Shannon and Rogue n.d.), critiques of actions and organizational norms (Principle 1998; Hewitt-White 2001; Highleyman 2002; Martinez 2002; Nopper 2005; Walia 2006; Russell n.d.) and alternative building (Crass 2002b; Crass and Geoff 2002; INCITE! 2005; Gaarder 2009; Jeppesen 2010b).

While there is not space here to address the nuances of these interventions, they hold a number of commitments in common with other queer and poststructural critique (see Butler 1990; Foucault 1990). In different places, and for different tactics, these authors openly contest problematic notions of autonomy and individualism historically embedded in anarchistic politics. These values are critiqued for their role in reproducing masculinist, dis/ableist, racist, Euro-centric and class-based subjectivities antithetical to collective liberation struggle. Moreover, while they problematize static and exclusive frameworks for categorizing and adjudicating identity, they also promote the kind of sustainable

communal accountability vital to building movements across privilege and oppression. Yet they accomplish this not so much through distanced theory-building, as through collective problem-solving around practical questions of accountability, decision-making, divisions of labour and tactics.

Anti-oppression as pedagogy encompasses critical work on all of these theoretical and practical problems, many of which may not seem directly relevant to the internal power dynamics of a movement. Even so, applications of anti-oppression critique are often met with resistance – including willful and aggressive defences of privilege and power. For example, one of the most contentious issues among anarchists concerned with alternative building is strategy. The classical anarchist understanding of revolutionary anti-state and anti-capitalist struggle leaves little space for more nuanced approaches to power, and often inhibits the difficult work of building critical knowledge around colonialism, racism, cis and hetero-sexism and dis/ableism. This pre-occupation with the power of the state and capital often corresponds to activists' deferral of anti-oppression work as a distraction from the central programme of fomenting insurrection or building revolution (Dixon 2011; see Gelderloos 2010; Croatoan 2012). Likewise, certain anarchist and situationist notions of prefiguration obscure the consequences of self-imposed insularity. While the propagation of counter-culture lifestyles against White, bourgeois ways of being (punk, vegan, DIY) can be a powerful form of resistance, they are often reduced to political strategies of 'opting out' or removing oneself from relations of exploitation and hierarchy. This not only produces its own form of exclusivity, such strategies are actually counterproductive to building intersectional and effective resistance against domination (Martinez 2002; Ervin 2008; Alchemy 2009; Olson 2009).

While there is value in both revolutionary and prefigurative approaches to movement-building, and in many cases they have been transformed into conduits for anti-oppression work, each of them is also bound to Euro-centric, White and male-supremacist understandings of power and resistance. The first by subsuming all histories of oppression and resistance into a problematic framework of class, and the second by elevating the agency of a human subject beyond the reach of systemic and structural power. The most promising responses to this divide in anarchistic thought refuse the binary between inter/personal and mass organizing (Khan et al. 2006; Crimethinc 2013, 40–3). Informed by an intersectional analysis, they call for creative coalition-building attuned to the ways in which race, class, gender, ability and sexuality are interwoven with the power of the state, market, and culture.

Alongside strategy, the language of identification and oppression articulated in texts and workshops focusing on anti-oppression has also been a point of struggle in North America (O'Brien 2003; Gelderloos 2010; Shannon and Rogue n.d.). Anti-authoritarian theories of identity drawing from existentialist, postmodern, or queer theory sometimes function to obscure and dismiss the power dynamics revealed by intersectional critiques of activist practice. In the absence of a material analysis of how racialization or binary sex and gender



regimes impact people's lives, drawing attention to the precarity of such processes is at best an intellectual exercise. Subversion and collective refusal to conform to the dictates of such regimes can be powerful, but not without understanding their limitations and the conditions for their possibility.

For example, a popular anarchistic theory, the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone', promises a postmodern subversion of bourgeois norms of respectability enforced by the state. But it is devoid of analysis of the other overlapping forms of power that affect this autonomy. Participation in this "revolutionary nomadism" (Bey 2003, 122) requires that one be both unattached – with no binding commitments to family, children, rent – and primarily interested in a form of psychological and cultural liberation with no likely impact on the material conditions of one's life. In contrast, non-white, non-cis/male inflections of similar tactics to construct spaces less dominated by White, cis-/male supremacist culture are condemned. One way is by denouncing it as 'identity politics', a pejorative term applied by the Left to a range of organizing methods and ontologies used by oppressed peoples that do not immediately fold them into White settler and cis-/male dominated movements (see Jarach 2004; Anonymous 2010). This kind of response further reduces any chance of productive collaboration across oppressions.

Other activists work with contemporary theories of identity to challenge received understandings of anti/oppression and to nuance and strengthen resistance against domination in activist spaces. Part of this work is articulating innovative intersectional concepts of identity, and – like Ang's identity blues (2000), Ahmed's notion of stickiness (2004a; 2004b), or Alcoff's provocative question ('Who's afraid of Identity politics', 2000) – recognize that identities are indeed fluid and constructed, but also violently and systemically mapped onto people by institutions and relations of power. This also entails acknowledging how these identities can be a locus of resistance. An important thread of anti-oppression pedagogy, such theoretical work has been most fully developed by activists confronting male supremacy and sexual violence on the Left (The Revolution 2008; INCITE! 2005; O'Brien 2003; Principle 1998).

Even so, anti-oppression practice is not 'performative' (Ahmed 2004a, para. 11; see also Srivastava and Francis 2006, 290), and therefore requires much more than discursive and/or theoretical intervention. The language associated with anti-oppressive visions of identity can actually function to obscure and restrict our analysis of power. Concepts of privilege and allyship, or 'fishbowl' exercises and race or gender-specific caucuses can be useful in some situations and counter-productive in others. We need to be realistic about the limited utility of the tools we have adopted to teach and learn about power and oppression. Many of them are based on simplified understandings of power, reproduce White and cis-/male centrism, or simply fail to really capture the messy reality of oppressions (Jones n.d.; Smith 2013; O'Brien n.d.). It is only through a framework of pedagogy, through sustained and self-critical networks of teaching and learning that we can address these limitations and move beyond them. Such networks can allow us to develop anti-oppression as a transformative project

that has relevance for all of anarchistic politics.

Implicit struggles around the discursive construction and the material consequences of power and privilege are ongoing in movement politics. They are part of a range of contestation evident in anarchistic writing on empowerment (Alchemy 2009; Gelderloos 2010; Ruby n.d. Anger; Tov n.d.), liberation (Crass and Geoff 2002; LA COiL n.d.; Clarke n.d.; O'Brien 2003), community (Nomous 2007; Aguilar et al. 2008; Ben-Moshe et al. 2009; Knoch n.d.), and accountability (Aguilar 2007; Anonymous, Celeste & Gorrión 2012; Crass 2006; Crimethinc 2013; Thomas n.d.). Like the cases discussed above, the different content packed into these concepts functions to erase or engage a political analysis of gender, class, race, sexuality and ability. When these ideas are informed by an intersectional analysis of power, they can be transformed to account for the particular requirements of collective liberation struggles in different places and by different peoples. When a term like accountability or community is developed or applied without taking this particularity into account, it lacks the analytical content required to be realized in any substantive way, and likely perpetuates or reinforces normalized relations of power and oppression. The next section will explore this more fully through anarchistic theories of direct action, affinity, and consensus.

I have argued above that anti-oppression necessitates a collaborative grassroots project of analyzing and confronting intersectional power within radical Left. Anti-oppression as such is distinct from scholarly research mapping oppression in relation to social movement organizations. It is not singular or static, but rather a cluster of reflexive theories and practices marked by a systematic – if incomplete – application of anti-racist, feminist, dis/ability, anti-capitalist, anti-imperial and queer critiques. The pedagogical networking of anti-oppression within anarchistic networks is visible in the theoretical contention underway by activists problem-solving their politics. This collective work discursively and materially constructs anti-oppression politics as a distinctly intersectional project. It also provides important feedback on the feasibility of different experiments across broad networks of anti-oppression practice. As will be discussed further below, anti-oppression in different forms is a key component to prefigurative praxis.

## **Prefiguration and anarchistic renewal**

The innovative project of anti-oppression is well underway within contemporary anti-authoritarianism. Alongside the difficult theoretical work discussed above, anarchistic repertoires of direct action, affinity, and consensus reflect and filter movements' engagement with anti-oppression pedagogy. These tactics emerged from the overlaps and experiences of multiple resistance struggles. Yet it is painfully evident that relations of power and privilege as structured in the dominant settler societies of North America remain a problem for anti-authoritarian activists. Direct action tactics, consensus process and affinity-based organization – the building blocks of contemporary anti-authoritarianism

– do not by themselves dissemble White and cis-/male supremacist, ableist, hetero-sexist and classed power relations. And despite decades of struggle, they remain to be substantively transformed by anti-oppression. As will be discussed below, the commonsense ways in which consensus, affinity, and direct action are often applied by the Left are neither anti-oppressive nor prefigurative. Nonetheless, these tactics cannot be reduced to their problematic operation on the White, cis-/male dominated Left. They take many forms, some of which have been reclaimed by organizing in marginalized communities. Embedded in anti-oppression pedagogy, direct action, consensus, and affinity could hold strategic potential for dismantling power relations both at a societal level and within social movement organizations.

Recent developments in activist analysis and tactics in have inspired a burst of theory concerned with the development of 'small-a' anarchism (Gordon 2008, 24), the spread of 'anarchistic' politics across the radical Left (Day 2005), and the emergence of 'new anarchists' (Graeber 2002; Williams 2007). As discussed earlier, the evolution implied here was produced by a cross-pollination of prefigurative ideas and practices on the radical Left. These authors suggest that anarchist ideas and tactics have taken on new significance in these movements (Graeber 2002, 62; Day 2005, 19-20; Gordon 2008, 12-14; Williams 2007, 298-299), while their modified descriptors (small-a anarchism; new anarchism; anarchist-ic) are imperfect attempts to acknowledge how this political tendency has been shaped by a range of struggles over the past half-century. This anarchistic current is infused with an innovative and evolving understanding of power informed by the interaction of feminist, indigenous, queer, anti-racist and radical dis/ability struggles. Drawing attention to the concrete shifts in alter-globalization struggle and the activist groups networked within it, Day (2004; 2005) provides us with a useful framing for these developments.

Writers in postmarxist and postanarchist traditions often emphasize and encourage conceptualizations of revolution and social movement as perpetual and contingent (Mouffe and Laclau 2001; Hardt and Negri 2004; Holloway 2002; May 1994; Newman 2001). Day (2005) shares this emphasis, but notes an evolution of intersectional and anarchist practice in North America not fully expressed by these frameworks. He notes a shift on the radical Left from working to build formal mass organizations to affinity-based networks of struggle, and from totalizing critiques of bureaucracy or capitalism to political analysis responsive to multiple and overlapping systems of domination. It is the resulting logic of struggle that he introduces as anarchistic, for which the manifold oppressions faced today “are ever-present as possibilities, and therefore must be continuously acknowledged and warded off to the greatest extent possible” (Day 2005, 155; see also Gordon 2008, 43).

In such language, we find the idea of social transformation embedded in a collective process of teaching/learning grounded in an intersectional understanding of power. Day suggests that this process connects reflection and resistance in a compelling way through “conscious attempts to alter, impede, destroy or construct alternatives to dominant structures, processes, practices

and identities ... [and] not just the *content* of current modes of domination and exploitation, but also the *forms* that give rise to them” (Day 2005, 4, italics original). This does not mean that anarchistic movements are not concerned with state or capitalist oppression, but that they are also invested in intersectional strategies that go deeper than restructuring political or economic institutions. Feminist, anarchist, anti-racist and other radical projects have provided the groundwork for contemporary expressions of these strategies in pedagogical networks of anti-oppression. These ideas are implicit in theories of anarchistic anti-oppression, and fostered through participatory processes and networks. This transformative process is ongoing, even as attempts to refine or realize an explicitly intersectional politics continue to be marginalized or silenced by the Left.

Alongside intersectionality, anarchistic pedagogies of anti-oppression are indebted to notions of prefiguration. This idea has long been a powerful force in anti-authoritarian movements, where it is used to create and seize opportunities for activists to build new subjectivities and relationships 'in the shell of the old'. At its most basic it is a radical strategy of social transformation that emphasizes building alternative political, economic and cultural infrastructures while working to dismantle existing oppressive contexts (Crass 2013, 27; Graeber 2009, 203; Day 2005, 37). Maeckelbergh (2011, 3) stresses its practicality as follows: “prefiguration is something that people do... the alternative 'world' is not predetermined: it is developed through practice and it is different everywhere.” Prefiguration comes to anarchistic movements through a range of progressive political work, most notably from turn-of-the-century anarchism and the new social movements of the 1960's and 70's in North America. Contemporary anti-authoritarians have adapted and extended repertoires of prefigurative practice developed by these movements – including innovative forms of community organizing, consciousness-raising, and cultural production (Graeber 2002; Notes 2003; From Act Up 2002; Maeckelbergh 2011).

Some of these adaptations can be insular and uninterested in broader social change. But prefigurative praxis takes on special significance as it is intertwined with anti-oppression to problem-solve movements' latent white supremacy, dis/ableism, class-ism, sexism, homo- and transphobia. A prefigurative framework is a central means through which anarchistic work on anti-oppression sets itself apart from more mainstream and bureaucratic variants of anti-oppression (see INCITE! 2005; generationFIVE 2007; see also LA COiL n.d.; Shannon and Rogue n.d.). Unlike liberal and bureaucratic applications of anti-oppression principles, activists in this tradition position themselves to work explicitly toward radical and cumulative transformations of relationships and infrastructure (Srivastava 2006; Millar 2008). This has resulted in the innovation of anti-oppression praxis that refuses the traditional polarization between inter/personal and systems change. In the following pages, I will examine some of the implications of this in relation to the intertwined anarchistic theories of direct action, consensus and affinity.

Direct action blending cultural and political activism including radical arts

(theatre, music, poetry) and the claiming of space (social centres, freeschools, workplaces) has been central to anarchist organizing in North America since at least the late 1800's (Avrich and Pateman 1995; Ferguson 2011). In theory, direct action is a 'dual strategy' of simultaneously challenging domination and directly enacting alternatives (Gordon 2008, 18): at its best, it practices anti-oppression in concrete acts of resistance. Direct action is practiced in many different forms from collective childcare and cooperative houses to blockades and black blocs.

Yet direct action can be taken without a nuanced analysis of how interlocking systems of domination produce aggressive and confrontational tactics as more 'radical' or 'militant' and thus deserving of greater time and energy. Likewise it can be organized without a critical understanding of how racism, cis-sexism and dis/ableism alongside experiences of poverty and family affect the access and relevance of such tactics to differently oppressed peoples. That these are not only potential but regular occurrences on the Left may be attributed to "a mode of political activism" rooted in Euro-centric political theory (Ruby n.d. Anger). But direct action also has radical histories across anarchist, anti-racist and feminist struggles (Barrow 2002; Breines 2006; Moynihan 2002; Graeber 2009), which are important to how anti-oppression is developed outside of and beyond NGOs and unions. Direct action sees the reclamation of state or foundation resources for activist purposes as a subversive, but ultimately unreliable project (Jeppesen 2010a, 13; see Smith 2006; generationFIVE 2007; Crass 2013). Rather, activists and community members engage in a form of Friereian pedagogy to build critical consciousness as they identify, analyze, and respond to particular tasks collectively (Friere 2009, 54).

Feminist, queer, dis/ability and anti-racist applications of this form of action increasingly dovetail with anti-oppression. While such applications remain exceptions to general anarchistic practice, they are growing in number and influence on the radical Left. Intertwining anti-oppression and prefiguration, activists are building empowering political relationships and spaces through actively confronting systems of oppression and exploitation. There is a broad spectrum of direct action tactics at the overlaps of varied social movement struggles that are beginning to reflect this transformative impulse (Day 2005, 22-36; see also From Act Up 2002; Notes 2003; Jeppesen 2010b). Through critical interventions into strategy sessions and protest tactics, activists are breaking down the exclusivity and irrelevance of direct action politics for differently oppressed peoples (Nopper 2005; Walia 2006; Martinez 2002; Hewitt-White 2001). And not just by critiquing accepted practices or drawing on marginalized histories to reclaim tactics from the White and cis-/male dominated Left. Certainly direct action tactics are more effective when it is made accountable for who is or is not being empowered or engaged by them. But 'new' tactics (for the Left) are also being shared by indigenous, queer and other marginalized communities.

One powerful example of this can be seen in activists' work to foster methods of conflict mediation and restorative justice, adapting them to domestic violence

work in movement circles. Here we find anti-oppression has been combined with direct action in the development of support networks organized to empower survivors of intimate violence outside of – or alongside – a criminal justice process, and develop lines of accountability for those who have done harm (see generationFIVE 2007; The Revolution 2008; Crimethinc 2012). As with many of the tactics addressed above, there are limitations inherent to these projects due to the impacts of dis/ableism, racism, cis-/sexism, colonialism and capitalism on activist networks. And the adoption of such transformative justice frameworks by settler activists needs to be carefully positioned against 500 years of cultural and spiritual appropriation. It is here, in such messy but potentially transformative spaces of learning, that alternative modes of direct action are emerging. This is a key function of anti-oppression pedagogy: to infuse direct action with an intersectional analysis and intervene into and transform relations of violence long left unaddressed by the Left. As we will see below, this is inseparable from critical engagements with affinity and consensus as overlapping pillars of anarchistic organizing. All three need to be built around a kind of anti-oppression process that infuses the (strategic) fragmentation of the radical Left with an intersectional politics of resistance.

As with direct action, affinity is an important part of contemporary prefigurative praxis. Affinity is a model of organization – small groups, networked by politics or geography – intended to balance intimate relationships and tactical effectiveness. On their own or within larger projects (a social centre; a bookfair), tightly-knit and self-selecting clusters of activists are adopted as the motor for political organizing; values like honesty, trust, accountability, and collective growth are viewed as vital to their functioning. In this way, affinity “is immediately addressed towards action, basing itself not on the quantity of its adherents, but on the qualitative strength of a number of individuals working together in a projectuality that they develop together as they go along” (G.C. and O.V. n.d., 15). These affinity groups are a primary vehicle for direct action by way of working-group specialization and networked organization.

While we will return later to the networked aspect of affinity, the small group itself is relevant for the work of anti-oppression because it represents a space of intense interpersonal relationships and a launchpad for intervention into broader systems of domination. Activists on this continent are organizing in political environments produced by violent neo-/colonial power relationships. The pressures to conform to 'legitimate' modes of political expression and organization, as well as hierarchical and exploitative interpersonal relations, are backed by powerful social norms as well as threats of police or military intervention. In such a context, activists' adaptation and innovation of a distinctly anti-authoritarian model of affinity to bridge social movements and struggles makes a compelling statement. While this will be addressed more fully in our discussion of consensus, part of this contrast lies in the way affinity groups are often conceptualized as prefigurative spaces. Whatever their faults, they are constructed as a model for problem-solving hierarchical and oppressive relationships, and as spaces for personal and collective development. This provides a valuable opening for activists applying and extending anti-

oppression into the mechanics of affinity, which is more often embraced for how it concentrates activists' skills and energy.

Freeman's (2002) widely circulated critique of 'unstructured groups' provides an early example of this, though it seems to mark the affinity group something of an exception. For Freeman, "the idea [of structurelessness] becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over the others" because it allows only informal, possibly covert, and often unaccountable allocations of power (2002, 55–7). Her insightful analysis of the quiet but insidious forms of power circulating in small group settings has been corroborated many times by critics and reflexive practitioners of anarchist, feminist, and other anti-bureaucratic forms of organizing. But contemporary applications of affinity can also be highly structured to facilitate organizational flexibility and to multiply "the various contributions of each person to their fullest, nurturing and developing individual input" (Levine 2002, 63).

The amount of anti-racist and feminist critique accessible in [anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca](http://anarchalibrary.blogspot.ca) or [spunk.org](http://spunk.org) suggest that affinity groups, structured or unstructured, regularly fail to incorporate an intersectional analysis of privilege and power into their internal relations and organizing principles. This failure is in part a function of activists' tendency to make direct action and protest politics their primary focus. But regardless of how effective or efficient an affinity group may seem to be, the oppressive functions of White and cis-/male supremacy, hetero-sexism, dis/ableism and capitalism can remain operative and naturalized. It does not matter if this politics is built around 'interstices' (Holloway 2002), 'autonomous zones' (Bey 2003), or 'counterpublics' (Sheppard 2010); economic and social hierarchies do not magically disappear in such spaces. With Freeman and Levine, we need to return to and expand upon feminist commitments to collective empowerment to realize affinity's prefigurative potential. This means grounding affinity within a critical intersectional understanding of social and political context. Outside of the work of anti-oppression to contextualize and problem-solve its claims to inter/personal empowerment and liberation, the idea of affinity holds limited prospects for prefiguration. It is not enough to balance groups' insularity or specialized focus with inter-movement networking and solidarity, a practice I will address in a moment. Rather, bringing affinity groups into the realm of anti-oppression pedagogy involves extending existing power-sharing and accountability measures to account for the ways in which resources, experience and capacity are produced through regimes of privilege and oppression. And it requires re-orienting affinity to wage feminist, anti-racist, radical dis/ability, queer, and decolonization struggles within the Left.

As implied earlier, anarchistic notions of affinity have two key elements: small groups and networks. This second element is also viewed by many activists as a prefigurative project. In theory, networks of affinity are malleable, self-selecting, and horizontal, and are constituted through a wide range of social media. In this way, networks act as checks on the bureaucratization and centralization of power, yet are capable of large scale creative and cooperative

political action. Governed only by voluntary association, networks facilitate the specialization of affinity groups around concrete and complimentary direct action work: “copwatching, communications, health care, street theatre” (Notes 2003, 88). Their connectivity is “based on diverse, ad-hoc coalitions – giving rise to a pluralist orientation which deemphasizes unity of analysis and vision in favour of multiplicity and experimentation” (Gordon 2008, 42; Day 2005, 35). In North America such flexible and networked systems of mutual aid have been most visible on the Left in summit protests and other large scale demonstrations (Juris 2005, 2008; St. John 2008).

But networks of affinity also undergird much of anarchistic movement, including circulations of anti-oppression teaching and learning. It is such networks that make affinity groups a conduit and platform for allied and accountable modes of activism. The uniquely participatory nature of affinity-based organizing makes it vulnerable to anti-racist, feminist, radical dis/ability, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial interventions. Activists in North America have taken advantage of this from the beginnings of the alter-globalization movement to expand their repertoires of direct action and foci of struggle. Unfortunately, the flexibility provided by affinity-based organization also provides many ways to avoid or disengage from groups or individuals presenting difficult critiques. Because anarchistic networks are based on principles of self-selection and voluntary association, they function as much by disconnection and insulation as they are by interconnectivity – activist knowledge and energy do not flow in all directions at all times. Rather, groups make decisions regarding what parts of the network to engage with and when. These are not always explicit or completely conscious decisions, but they have important implications.

One implication is that anti-oppression has, for many activists, become one specialized and elective form of knowledge and set of skills alongside others, like fundraising or meeting facilitation. While this may be unavoidable at some level, such specialization nonetheless absolves many activists and producers of knowledge from problem-solving oppression directly. Instead, it is the job of a discrete and separate 'anti-oppression' analysis to educate and transform anarchistic politics. This occurs in a variety of ways, from seemingly the innocent partitioning of movement knowledge by specialized workshops, web portals or zine collections, to more overt and outspoken forms of voluntary (dis-)association and retractions of affinity. Here we see again the limitations of prefiguration enacted without an applied intersectional analysis of power and oppression. Premised on ties of friendship and mutual support, affinity-based networking can all too easily reproduce networks of privilege and patronage constitutive of settler societies in North America.

That said, these problematic applications of affinity are based on a relatively limited understanding of collective organizing. While the idea of affinity-based networks is sometimes reduced to the forms it took in the alter-globalization movement, there are diverse and instructive histories for such organizing (Day 2005, 182-6; see also Olson 2009; Ervin 2008; Barrow 2002; Dupuis-Déri 2010). The ideas and practices latent in anarchistic notions of affinity have



multiple referents, going back to not only Spanish, Argentinian and French anarchists, but more recently to radical feminists, Quakers, and the Black Freedom movement. Each of these holds insights for a more intersectional kind of affinity – whether through particularly compelling models of participatory economy and popular education, shelter and support networks, spiritual community, or long-term organizing. The importance of these precedents for anarchistic forms of anti-oppression cannot be overstated. These submerged histories contain analysis and practice with the potential to activate a distinctly prefigurative form of affinity-based organizing. And activists are using affinity to radicalize small groups as spaces of personal transformation and to engage in strategic and pedagogical linking of different communities oppressed and resisting (Crass 2013; Aguilar et al. 2008; Barrow 2002; Smith 2006).

Also implicated in the (re-)emergence of anarchism and anti-oppression is the theory and practice of consensus. In both senses, consensus is tightly bound to contemporary models of affinity and direct action as small group and networked organizing models. But it is discussed by activists primarily in reference to its practical form: a participatory and collaborative process of decision-making. Usually approached as a commonsensical anti-hierarchical alternative to executive or voting systems, its actual operation is highly specified. Affinity groups' small scale and task-orientedness are often cited as important pre-conditions for anarchistic consensus practice (Dupuis-Déri 2010, 49). It is in these small working groups that a majority of strategic and tactical ideas are hashed out. The practice of consensus is said to function by way of activists' mutual trust and humility, and a restricted focus “not on questions of definition but on immediate questions of action in the present” (Graeber 2009, 321).

Such broad commitments are operationalized in specialized facilitation roles and complex deliberation and conflict-mediation processes with multiple ways to register dis/agreement or concerns with the group (see Gelderloos 2006; Vannucci and Singer 2010). Movements to 'block' (veto) a decision or move to modified forms of consensus, for example, are available on the condition that such moves are not in tension with a group's founding principles. Whatever the particular nuances consensus practice takes for a group, it is supposed to allow for a thicker form of deliberation and a fuller representation of participants' politics in group actions. This intentionality is also reflected in activists' decentralized networking and coordination. A prime example of this is the use of 'spokes-councils' in which each 'spoke' (delegate) is primarily a conduit for dialogue: they relay actions, proposals and information between the network and their own affinity group (Graeber 2009, 37; see also Moynihan 2002, 168; Gordon 2008, 71). Such councils are often used by affinity groups to facilitate large-scale collaborative projects, but councils have little power of their own. Because they are premised on a principle of voluntary association, decision-making power effectively belongs to participant groups. In this way, consensus is tightly linked with ideas of affinity-based organizing, and saturates anarchistic movements.

Alongside these models of participatory decision-making, consensus' highly

specified processes produce their own forms of knowledge and expertise, and thus differing capacities to effectively engage and influence the development of collective ideas and actions. Moreover, consensus tools are not immune to manipulation. They can be abused by individuals (or affinity groups in the context of larger networks) to dominate the time and attention which has been dedicated to a task, construct problematic and fallacious oppositions between alternative courses of action, or simply bully others into agreement or tacit acceptance (see Vannucci and Singer 2010). Such behaviour not only undermines the anti-hierarchical claims of consensus, most of the authors cited above readily admit how regularly it corresponds to and reproduces social hierarchies of gender, age, race, ability and/or class. As such it is of obvious importance for anti-oppression, whether or not such domination becomes systematized in activist milieus by its repetition or through the emergence of structured or unstructured 'cores' of influence. To fully address such misuse or exploitation of others' trust, consensus practice requires an anti-oppression analysis. But we must not confuse controlling behaviours with the whole of what an intersectional perspective offers to consensus. The amount of energy spent on troubleshooting consensus practice belies the depth of its ambiguity to an intersectionally informed prefigurative politics. To go deeper, we need to think about the unexamined ways of thinking that produce consensus as a model for political organizing.

Activists' adoption of consensus practices reflects both a commitment to prefiguration and an adoption of a particular way of thinking about how to 'do' collective liberation. This way of thinking, and its political assumptions and prescriptions, is what I referred to above as the theoretical element of consensus. It is just as integral to consensus as any facilitation technique, and of just as much significance for anarchistic and anti-oppression politics. Alongside the complex and qualified set of mechanisms by which consensus is practiced, its way of thinking is part of a system of managing difference and dissent. As suggested above, the purpose of consensus is to not only facilitate creative thinking but to funnel it towards anarchistic – not necessarily anti-oppressive – frameworks of political action. That is, consensus is tightly bound up with the consolidation of affinity and the production of direct action. Its function is to reinforce and link these other projects in prefigurative praxis. As such, while consensus can produce compelling forms of anti-racist or feminist action, it is rather ambivalent towards activists applying critical analysis or problem-solving oppressive dynamics to movement settings. The relationships of respect and support necessary for sustainable anti-oppression work requires rather different forms of thinking about collective liberation than those produced in consensus.

This quickly becomes visible in situations where activists do not share an intersectional analysis of power. Positional critiques of raced, gendered and other intersectional forms of oppression must first contest sedimented notions of power as already fully theorized and deconstructed by anti-hierarchical organizing methods (see *The Revolution* 2008; Nopper 2005). Here, anti-oppressive interventions into group dynamics and tactics may be constructed as threatening both to the principled forms of organization central to the group

and its tactical purposefulness. Interventions may be viewed as conflicts requiring a predetermined mediation process, and thus be interpreted as threatening to the bonds of mutual trust and friendship implied in consensus. They can be discouraged and deflected in the same way as other 'disruptive' behaviours.

For example, 'blocks' to proposals adhere only when interpreted by a group as rooted in its founding principles. They are also relatively rare since such principles are usually felt to be commonsensical, and the adoption of them is a precondition to membership. Each of these discourage interventions into problematic direct action tactics. Considered alongside the organization of spokes-councils, this means that the general trajectory of affinity-based struggle, and the consideration of alternatives to it, is structured by previously articulated political analysis and strategy. Further, in the service of efficiency, consensus places groups' guiding principles beyond the reach of politics as usual, and stipulates something very close to perfect agreement in order to revisit or amend them. This means that difficult negotiations relevant to anti-oppression can be sidelined in the interest of a groups' cohesion, its tactical orientation or for the sake of its 'collective process' (as advised by Vannucci & Singer 2010, 92,3).

But groups' founding principles are embedded in widely held anarchistic notions of collective process and action. And these cannot be separated from the unacknowledged systems of oppression and power alongside which they have been theorized and practiced. They draw heavily from particular White and cis-/male centred struggles around state power and capitalism. And the investment of consensus politics in Enlightenment universalism, self-interest and rationality is manifested in "certain very white, middle-class understandings of sociality: the need to suppress unseemly emotions, particularly contentious or angry ones, the emphasis on keeping up the appearance of mutual civility, or of appearances more generally" (Graeber 2009:332). One activist describes their participation in this politics as "an exercise in the risk of compromising and being obedient to [its male and white supremacist] attitude or in confronting it," and expecting defensiveness and marginalization (Ruby n.d., Anarcha). Such felt pressures to conform to problematic consensus culture indicate our need to think deeply about the ambivalent role of consensus in building an anti-oppressive model of prefiguration.

Activists are already doing such work, showing how we can draw on the undertones of prefiguration in consensus to frame applications of intersectionality as consistent with anarchistic values. And in some cases, where anti-oppression has been explicitly named as a guiding principle, it can provide further leverage for progressive change. But even explicit anti-oppressive principles can be turned to defer or defend against interventions by feminist, dis/ability and anti-racist activists. They can be used to argue that oppressed peoples' and allies' critique of internal dynamics are over-reactions, counter-productive, even breaches of a trust in the group's intention and principles. Consensus' commonsensical conditions of civility and group solidity can prevent

anarchistic spaces from actualizing the prefiguration they seek. Its primary goals and assumptions about collectivity must be refigured through an intersectional analysis. For critical voices will not be heard, and intersectional strategies will not be recognized for their value to collective liberation as long as consensus is theorized within the 'ideological straitjacket' of Euro-centric anarchist history (Ervin 2008:s2).

Despite this, consensus is still valued by a range of activists as a method to pursue prefiguration at a micro level. And by re-framing it through the pedagogical work of anti-oppression opens up radical possibilities for anarchistic politics. As it binds with direct action and affinity, consensus produces “alternative subjectivities and ways of being” (Day 2005, 35). But this productive machinery of subjects and relationships, primed towards anti-hierarchical critique, is limited. It is rooted in settler, White, cis-/male and able-bodied experiences of oppression. If this project of new subjectivities is to progress, we must address how it is also a product of power relationships. This anti-hierarchical impulse must be linked with networks of anti-oppression, which are focused on applying and problem-solving intersectional critique. Bringing these together is integral to realizing the prefigurative potential of such spaces “[w]here psychological struggle intersects political involvement” (Levine 2002, 65; see also Ruby n.d. Anarcha).

Already this co-extension is emergent in pedagogies of collective engagement and support, and activists' incorporation of anti-oppression into anarchistic movement-building, from men's anti-sexist groups to survivor support networks and people of colour forums (generationFIVE 2007; Crimethinc 2013; Aguilar et al. 2008; Gaarder 2009). This sustained micro level work of reflection and relationship building is a core factor in taking anti-oppression and prefiguration efforts deeper than workshops and mission-statements. Sara Ahmed suggests that “race, like sex, [class, sexuality and ability] is sticky; it sticks to us, or we become 'us' as an effect of how it sticks, even when we think we are beyond it” (2004a, para. 49; see also Ahmed 2004b). The communal wrestling with the effects of this stickiness and its impact on alternative building in anarchistic spaces is the realm of anti-oppression pedagogy. As a pedagogical project, it represents a compelling and durable application of intersectional critique through networks of teaching and learning. As illustrated in this section, it provides insight into how anarchistic theories of affinity, direct action and consensus might be further radicalized as forms of prefigurative praxis. Each of these are important sites of anti-oppression struggle and through such struggle they become important sites for the intensification of the prefigurative impulse central to anarchistic politics.

## **Conclusions**

If it is to be of continuing relevance to movements for social justice, anti-oppression must not be reduced to the principles and practices bearing its name. Anti-oppression's power lies in its growth as a multifaceted pedagogical

project by which activists are innovating social movement practice. Within anarchistic political organizing, such activism works to identify naturalized forms of oppression and eliminate institutions reproducing white and male supremacy, dis/ableism, homophobia and transphobia, racism and capitalism. Anti-oppression is ongoing, and through its collaborative and cumulative practice we can see glimpses of radically inclusive and empowering forms of political community. Its day-to-day operation prefigures alternative ways of organizing and resisting together.

This paper began by contextualizing the production and dissemination of anti-oppression in anti-authoritarian networks. I end with the suggestion that a praxis of prefiguration takes on new meaning through the pedagogical work of anti-oppression. The transformative power of prefiguration does not lie in some utopia marking the completion of anti-oppression or the realization of a 'new' anarchism. Rather, its most transformative and revolutionary promise lies in the subversive and productive work of anti-oppression. It can be found in grassroots processes of building empowering horizontal modes of resistance responsive to different experiences of oppression and exploitation. This is no small task. It requires ruthless and regular examinations of our personal and collective complicity with social structures of gender and race, sexuality, ability and class. And it requires that we shift towards alliances “not solely based on shared victimization, but where we are complicit in the victimization of others... to develop resistance strategies that do not inadvertently keep the system in place for all of us, and keep all of us accountable” (Smith 2006, 69). Anti-oppression as pedagogy can facilitate this movement, and in its transformative approach to prefiguration it provides a powerful push to anarchistic struggles against domination.

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## **Climbing the leadership ladder: legitimate peripheral participation in student movements**

**Joe Curnow**

### **Abstract**

*This article examines the learning and leadership development processes of a social movement organization in order to understand the ways that student movements sustain themselves. Using United Students for Fair Trade as a case study, I trace the learning processes of students in the leadership of the national organization and students involved in the affiliated campus groups. I apply situated learning theory within social movement studies in order to understand how activists learn through legitimate peripheral participation. This analysis showcases the explanatory power of legitimate peripheral participation for social movement learning studies while shedding light on the limitations of learning and engagement for students at the periphery of student movements. I suggest an approach to the leadership ladder that allows more affiliates to have access to the full practices of student movement organizations in order to increase political learning opportunities and sustain the movement.*

**Keywords:** Social movement learning, situated learning, communities of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, student organizing

### **Learning, action, and student movements**

In student movements, learning, participation, and leadership are intimately connected. This article asks how activists in social movements learn, and how that learning enables and constrains their actions. How does learning in social movements shape the ways people participate in the movement? And how does participation produce leaders that shape the practices and vision of a movement? Using United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) as a case study, I trace the learning processes of students in the leadership of the national organization and students involved in the affiliated campus groups. I apply situated learning theory in order to understand how activists learn through legitimate peripheral participation. This analysis showcases the explanatory power of legitimate peripheral participation for social movement learning studies while shedding light on the limitations of learning and engagement for students at the periphery of student movements. I suggest an approach to the leadership ladder that allows more affiliates to have access to the full practices of student movement organizations in order to increase political learning opportunities and sustain the movement.

For decades, student-led social movements have captured the imagination of youth and been at the vanguard of social change initiatives in the US, from the

US Civil Rights movement (Perlstein 1990; Morgan and Davies 2012) to the campaign to divest from apartheid South Africa (Soule 1997) to anti-war struggles (Heineman 1994) and beyond. Internationally, student movements can be traced through Paris (Seidman 2004), Iran (Mahdi 1999), China (Yang 2000), and many other places. These movements have been described in an abundance of academic work, investigating their histories, repertoires, resources, networks, frames, philosophies, and outcomes. More recently, literature around student and youth social movements has focused on mobilizations throughout the Arab Spring (Murphy 2012), Occupy (Reimer 2012), and anti-austerity campaigns addressing the neoliberalization of education, as in Chile (Guzman-Concha 2012), the UK (Rheingans and Holland 2013; Cammaerts 2013), Canada (Al-Saji 2012; Sorochan 2012), and Greece (Karamichas 2009). This research tends to focus on the motivation and tactical repertoires of the day, documenting what these movements do and why they do it. Motivation is generally understood as the conditions and resources that provoke collective action, and learning is an implicit component of this, but is not engaged directly.

The act of learning itself has rarely been the focus of sustained inquiry into student movements. I understand learning as contextually bound. Thus, while I make no claims here about the learning dynamics of student movements being unique and substantially different from that of other social movements, I do think that specifying the context of youth organizing is meaningful. The practices and participants in student movements can be distinct, and I am interested in capturing and understanding the learning process within these movements in particular. This is an important area because it has the potential to help student organizers and educators understand the dynamics at play when people decide to get involved in social action, why they decide to get involved, and how they get involved. It is also a crucial way of understanding everyday learning and the ways people's consciousness changes through their actions in communities.

In order to extend studies of social movement learning and pay particular attention to the learning dynamics within student movement activism, I suggest situated learning theory and community of practice theory as lenses through which to view the ways young adult activists learn in social movements. Bringing these conceptual frameworks to USFT, I will address how student activists learn and how that learning is shaped by and shapes their participation in the broader social movement.

In the sections that follow, I first bridge social movement studies with a discussion of situated learning theory, including communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation. I then introduce the case of United Students for Fair Trade, describing my methodology and USFT's work as a student movement. I then address the ways power dynamics influence access to the practices of a community, and this impacts members' experiences of leadership development. I then trace the ways student leaders learned in the USFT's Coordinating Committee as they moved toward full participation within the

community of practice, and the ways students in USFT's affiliates learned from the periphery of the organization. I then use two different affiliate groups to demonstrate the lack of consistency in USFT's practices, repertoires, and joint work before offering an analysis of how USFT's differential access to learning and full participation undermined the organization's ability to build a politically coherent, sustainable movement.

### **Legitimate peripheral participation in student movements**

Situated learning theory conceptualizes learning as a social process rooted in participation in a community, rather than as an individual's uptake of content, as mainstream cognitivist approaches to learning tend to. This view holds that learning is co-constructed within groups of people, continually negotiated, and contextually bound (Lave and Wenger 1991). People learn through immersion in the activities of a given community; through the activity they learn the skills and the cultural performances, and as part of that process, they learn the meanings embedded in those skills and performances. Practices are negotiated by the community and are not static; they change in response to the people involved, the lessons participants learn, and the work to be done. Essentially, the community itself is the curriculum that members are learning, reproducing, and innovating through their collaboration (Wenger 1998).

Communities of practice theory, a related body of work, argues that people learn within the groups they are a part of. A community of practice is understood as the set of relations that create the context for learning – the people, the practices, and the broader social world (Lave and Wenger 1991). A group of people could be considered a community of practice if they were mutually engaged in joint work based on shared repertoires (Wenger 1998). Within this view, learning is a process of becoming part of the community and being able to fully function within it (Lave 1996).

This view has been widely critiqued for focusing on the reproduction of norms and practices in organizations rather than accounting for changes and innovations (Hager, 2005). Extending those critiques, I have argued elsewhere for a more robust view of learning in a community of practice that allows space for contestation of the dominant practices and consciousnessraising within communities of practice that leads to shifts in practice and centres of power (Curnow 2013). These critiques are valid and must be taken seriously. For this student movement context, though, I believe that communities of practice theory is very descriptive of the relations of power and reproduction within the established group. This case demonstrates how new members are brought into a community of practice and learn the dominant practices of the existing established members, and are also able to innovate new practices from both the periphery and the centre. It also illustrates how sub-communities of practice emerge and relate to other communities of practice.



Brown and Duguid extend the theorization of communities of practice, arguing that they must be seen as nested or overlapping communities. They claim organizations should be viewed as “communities of communities of practice” (1991: 856) where sub-communities of practice hold a more specific identity than the larger community because of the different standpoints they represent. Sub-communities of practice are suggested as a strategy for understanding the ways that communities do not stand alone, but are embedded in other communities and broader social relations that influence their practices.

Legitimate peripheral participation is one of the key concepts emerging from situated learning approaches. It theorizes that newcomers to a community of practice learn through their immersion in the community, gradually becoming more able to participate in the community as they take on increasingly significant or complex tasks within the community (Lave and Wenger 1991). As they become more immersed in the community they move from the periphery through a centripetal process toward full participation. Through their increased exposure to tasks and ability to complete them independently, novices learn the reasoning behind the approaches and come to understand the philosophy of the community. Peripherality refers to the legitimate ways that members participate in certain practices or partial performances of the community. For example, a new member would not be expected to have mastered every task that was important within a community, nor would all members be expected to perform leadership roles. In contrast, full participation in a community of practice means that a member has come to identify, and been identified by others in the community, as a full member able to perform and model the dominant practices of the community. The concept of dominant practices is used here to describe the common practices of the community that one must become competent at performing in order to become a full member, and “mastery” is used to describe the accomplishment.

However, not everyone is expected to achieve full participation; being peripherally engaged in a community of practice is also considered a legitimate mode of engagement within this view (Lave and Wenger 1991), though Lave and Wenger note that peripherality can inhibit forms of learning. Access to full participation is a political issue, as Lave and Wenger note and Contu and Willmott (2003) have expanded. Contu and Willmott argue that participants cannot be expected to learn practices they do not have access to, and that power dynamics within a community are of central importance to analyses of who is able to learn which practices, and why they have access and others may not. Salminen-Karlsson (2006), Paechter (2003, 2006), Hodges (1998), and Callahan and Tomaszewski (2007) address the ways that women and queer people can be marginalized in a community of practice, arguing that the dominant practices of a community may be gendered in ways that prevent certain people from performing the practices or put them at a disadvantage when performing them. While communities of practice theorists have not, to my knowledge, engaged questions of the racialized and classed nature of full participation in a community of practice, the same logic holds, locking certain

people into positions of peripherality based on their ability to reproduce the classed and racialized performances that constitute full participation.

Legitimate peripheral participation is a useful conceptual framework for social movements because it describes the ways that participants learn through the community in daily interactions with peers and more experienced members. Much of what is learned in social movement activism is tacit learning rather than explicit training, and legitimate peripheral participation provides a framework for understanding this process of becoming an activist within a particular context. A small number of authors have applied sociocultural learning lenses to social movements, including Kirshner (2008), Ebby-Rosin (2005), Curnow (2013), and Evans (2009). These studies have attempted to theorize the learning that occurs within social movements. They draw from different theoretical traditions, including apprenticeship and guided participation, embodied learning, and conscientization in order to demonstrate the varied ways that participants in social movements learn in communities of practice and how their learning impacts their social action. My research extends their theorizations by demonstrating legitimate peripheral participation as it is mobilized in a student movement. Additionally, this study illustrates the ways that sub-communities of practice vary in their form and relationship to the community of practice. It also problematizes how sub-communities of practice do or do not have access to the full practices as a potential barrier to leadership development and political learning.

In order to extend these studies and more fully describe the process of learning through legitimate peripheral participation in a youth-driven social movement, I provide a case study of USFT. I trace the ways participants learned, and pay particular attention to the ways they report learning from their peers and their community. I then compare the central members' learning to that of peripheral members in order to see different expressions of legitimate peripheral participation. This study demonstrates the ways that leadership development and legitimate peripheral participation are linked, examines the ways that student movements support and constrain the learning of members, and explores how that learning impacts broader social movements.

### **USFT's Fair Trade campaign and the leadership ladder**

USFT is a student movement organization built to promote fair trade products, principles, and policies (USFT 2011). Emerging out of Oxfam America coffee trainings in the early 2000s, USFT began as an effort to expand awareness of fair trade certified products and increase their sales on university campuses across North America. From this beginning, USFT expanded to hundreds of affiliated groups conducting over 350 campaigns, converting hundreds of dining halls to fair trade and educating thousands of consumers as they did so (Wilson 2010).

I was involved with USFT as a student organizer and later as the National Coordinator from 2003-2008. Through this experience I gained extensive insight into the day-to-day functions of the organization, as well as the learning processes that shaped the organizing strategy and campaign work. These experiences inform this article, as does the longitudinal study on which I am collaborating with Dr. Bradley Wilson. As part of this project, we attended and took ethnographic notes on 18 conferences. We also conducted interviews and surveys with 25 former coordinating committee members in 2011. These interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours and covered a range of topics, including people's learning experiences, shifts in consciousness over time and experiences of identity development within the community.

All former coordinators were invited to participate in the survey, and interviews were requested based on the survey responses, thus the interviews do not represent the whole of all of the Coordinating Committees' members. Additionally, because we only sought contact with former coordinators, the racial and class dynamics of the organization with overrepresentation of white and upper-middle class participants are present in the data. Interviews and survey responses were selectively transcribed and coded thematically, and all identifying information has been anonymized. Codes included organizing, individual learning, mentorship, and collective learning. My initial analysis was drafted and circulated among interested interviewees, and their feedback has been integrated throughout. A portion of the responses are analyzed here in order to illustrate the ways that activists learned through legitimate peripheral participation, particularly when it came to learning how to be a USFT student organizer on campus and internationally.

USFT's base was made up of university, college, and high school students organizing voluntarily to do the work of promoting fair trade through their affective labour (Wilson and Curnow 2013). Organized as an affiliate network, USFT's members were student groups on university and college campuses. These student groups affiliated with USFT and educated their friends and colleagues, negotiated with their dining hall managers and school administrators, and promoted fair trade certified products throughout their communities. On campus, campaigns often focused on coffee conversion, where a student group would work to educate their peers and negotiate with the administration and food service providers to provide either an initial fair trade certified coffee offering or an entire line of certified coffees. Other campaigns that later emerged included advocacy to make fair trade bananas available in dining halls, to source fair trade chocolate on campus, to use fair trade rice in cafeterias, or the 'Full Monty', a campaign that encouraged campuses to take up the whole range of available fair trade products. Advocacy campaigns complemented this work, ranging from campaigns opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement to campaigns targeting Taco Bell for their exploitation of farmworkers to union solidarity campaigns (Wilson and Curnow 2013).

These affiliates were organized regionally and interacted with other affiliates at the International Convergence, USFT's annual conference, which brought affiliates together with cooperative coffee farmers, fair trade NGOs, and the fair trade certifier, TransFairUSA. Some individual members of affiliates might also participate in 'trips to origin' which enabled groups of students to travel to coffee, cocoa, or craft producing communities for exchanges with partnering cooperatives. For most individual affiliate members, though, their immediate community of practice was their campus group, which was nested within USFT's larger community of practice.

A small proportion of these students became involved in USFT at a national and international level, joining or being elected by the membership to the leadership of the organization. USFT was governed by a Coordinating Committee of 15-22 students representing the different regions, campaigns, and initiatives within the organization. The Coordinating Committee made decisions through a consensus-based process and was officially non-hierarchical in structure. Their work was significantly different from the affiliate conversion campaign work. Rather than work at campaign work on campus, they focused on recruiting and supporting the grassroots affiliates, building leadership, developing and delivering anti-oppression and fair trade trainings, and coordinating nationwide campaigns. They planned and facilitated the International Convergences, the trips to origin, and any other exchanges and meetings that occurred with affiliates or international partners. These students invested significant amounts of time in USFT's governance and campaigns, with students reporting spending more than 20 hours a week on USFT activities, in addition to their school and paid employment commitments. For Coordinating Committee members, their communities of practice included their campus affiliate and the Coordinating Committee, and for some coordinators, also the larger fair trade movement, including certifiers, NGOs, and farmers.

For the Coordinating Committee, the scope of the international coordination spanned the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe. This included supporting emergent student fair trade work in Canada, the UK, and Australia and working with farmer and producer organizations. Additionally, these students set the direction for the organization and worked with TransFairUSA, the Fairtrade Labelling Organization, and other fair trade stakeholder organizations which coordinated the fair trade movement internationally. This work was the most contentious, as students sat at the table negotiating the future of the fair trade movement and the various certification policies that formed the core of the "scaling up or selling out" debate of the time (see Wilson and Curnow 2013). At these tables, coordinators learned the ins and outs of certification and were deeply embroiled in the internal debates of the international movement, from questions of producer voice to transnational corporations' involvement and beyond.

Newcomers to USFT's Coordinating Committee faced a steep learning curve when they joined and attempted to master the dominant practices of the community. They were expected to move through a "leadership ladder"—the

explicit leadership development process for coordinators. The leadership ladder was the approach to bringing new members in by asking them to do smaller tasks and gradually (or not, in some cases) ramp up to more complicated and high-stakes projects. The leadership ladder was conceptualized by USFT's Coordinating Committee as a process wherein new members assumed increasing responsibility as they became more proficient. In structured and unstructured ways, they incrementally took on higher-stakes tasks, like negotiating with large corporations or the certifying agency. Novice coordinators operated at the periphery for many organizing tasks, though they were quickly required to do more complex and important tasks. People's immersion in the Coordinating Committee meant that they were rapidly expected to participate as members who had mastered their roles, even as they were still very much in a process of learning the full practices of USFT's Coordinating Committee themselves.

When I refer to the full or dominant practices of USFT's community of practice, I am centring my analysis on the activities of the Coordinating Committee. While the practices of the Coordinating Committee changed over time, the activities reflected a deeper engagement with the social movement, more intentional approaches to regional organizing, and more nuanced critiques of anti-oppression, colonialism, and capitalism than many of the peripheral members at the affiliate level. Though affiliate conversion campaigns were a legitimate mode of participation, the engagement was peripheral in that most affiliates played no role in deciding what the standardized practices would be and had very little contact with other movement participants.

New members of the Coordinating Committee were also expected to move the affiliates within their regions through a leadership ladder. For example, once an affiliate group had coordinated a campaign to get fair trade coffee on their campus, they might be encouraged to engage in the Full Monty campaign, where they would use the same skills and relationships they had developed before to get more fair trade products, like tea and bananas, in their campus dining hall. Or an affiliate who attended a Convergence might be asked the next year to bring a group of students or to conduct a workshop. The idea behind this practice was to develop leadership by constantly asking people to take on more responsibility, supporting them in accomplishing the goal, and then challenging them to do something more complex and which required greater commitment and accountability to the organization.

Because the leadership ladder was dependent on relationships with established members of the Coordinating Committee, it was unevenly deployed. Thus, the learning and leadership opportunities of affiliates and coordinators varied widely, and this serves as the basic problematic for my analysis. Because the primary active form of recruiting was through people's social networks, the network of people already involved tended to reproduce itself, including its demographic makeup. It is important for me to acknowledge here that all of the practices were shaped in relation to participants' race, class, and gender. The likelihood of being recruited, one's experience within the leadership, and one's

ability to perform certain tasks in the ‘right’ way were undoubtedly tied to people’s bodies and lived experiences within a colonial, patriarchal capitalist society. What coordinators understood as indicators of potential ‘leadership’ was shaped through their own cultural lenses, and the tendency for white, upper and middle-class students at private institutions to be elected to the Coordinating Committee happened in relation to those recruitment strategies.

### **Full participation and power**

Participation in communities of practice is shaped by and shapes participants’ experiences of power. Who can participate and how depends not only on an individual’s ability to perform competently, but also on their access to learning spaces, mentorship, what the practices are, and who evaluates their performance. Because who we are as racialized, gendered, and classed people shapes who we become as activists, this section interrogates how USFT’s core practices were developed and the ways that social relations enabled and constrained different members’ forms of participation. Problematizing the nature of participation enables us to acknowledge the racialized, classed, and gendered ways that learning is shaped and communities of practice are reproduced so that as we look at the ways participants move through processes of legitimate peripheral participation, it is understood that people necessarily navigate the process differently based on their social location.

USFT’s full practices were initially established by early generations of USFT leaders in coordination with non-governmental organizations and the certifier, and reflected the theory of social change and political ideologies of the founding group. Yet even within the initial group of leaders, the practices and politics of USFT were contested. The full practices of USFT – from the ways conversion campaigns occurred to the facilitation of Convergences – were continually negotiated by members of the community of practice. The ways that the dominant practices of USFT were established and maintained was an ongoing process – as people collaborated and worked together, regularities emerged in the strategies that they used, the resources they relied on, the roles that were available, and how those roles should be performed. Every time the group interacted was an opportunity to change the practices, some of which did change over time, but which largely remained consistent. In part, this was because of the power dynamics within the group; the way new members established themselves as legitimate and competent was by proving themselves able to act according to the dominant practices of the Coordinating Committee, and so these practices reproduced themselves and reinforced power among people who acted in that way. This meant that while the community could and did shift their practices over time, there was inertia that pulled the community of practice toward maintaining the established practices.

Layered on top of this was the influence of social identities that empowered certain people from privileged groups to exert inequitable influence on the community of practice. Within USFT, most of the established members of the

community were white and many were enrolled in elite universities, thus the dominant practices were racialized and classed in particular ways that made them differently accessible to people from different race and class identities. These practices formed the core of what new members needed to master in order to become full participants in the community of practice, but they could also innovate new practices and introduce variations on dominant practices. In this way the full practices of fair trade student organizing were not fixed, but emergent and constantly being performed and reformed.

Fair trade as a movement and ethical consumption as a strategy have many limitations. Fair trade in North America and Europe has been a markedly white, upper middle class movement (Hussey and Curnow 2013). The political act of buying premium coffee or artisan crafts is a decidedly classed approach to social action, one that participants identified as inaccessible to poor and working-class communities, particularly those of colour. Some argued that it was unethical to promote a social change strategy that excluded poor communities of colour from participating, especially when many of the migrants who might have been willing to engage but were excluded had migrated because of the effects of free trade policies and the coffee crisis in their home communities. Despite these critiques, the privileged students in the founding Coordinating Committee and in later cohorts focused their approach on selling more fair trade certified coffee and other products.

The sales and marketing approach that USFT promoted was also a racialized, gendered, and classed domain of activism. Campaigns to get fair trade coffees on campus relied on students working with their administration and food service providers to win their goals. Working with the administration of the university and dining services often required students to present themselves as professional colleagues. Unlike other campus activism, many affiliate members embraced wearing suits to meetings, having access to power brokers on campus, and using business strategies to accomplish their social justice goals. These performances reflected the white privilege, masculinity and upper-middle class status of many members who not only assumed they would be welcome at the boardroom table but that their recommendations would be heard and accepted by the campus administrators. The tactic that USFT promoted assumed that affiliate members would be capable of and comfortable with interacting in spaces with administrators and would be welcomed in. Navigating bureaucracy and speaking the language of the administration served students well in this campaign, and though there was an understanding within certain Coordinating Committees that this tactical approach reinscribed racialized, gendered, and classed power relations, the tactic remained the centrepiece for complex reasons (see Curnow 2013 for a more thorough treatment of these pressures).

Within the Coordinating Committee the racialized, classed, and gendered dynamics were different than affiliates, but shaped the experiences of participants in similar ways. For example, coordinators often travelled across the country for meetings with other fair trade stakeholders. While USFT worked to make these accessible by paying the travel costs of representatives, people on

the Coordinating Committee who had access to personal wealth and flexible time were able to attend more of the meetings and benefitted from greater access to information and recognition from other movement leaders. Another example is the Specialty Coffee Association Expo, a trade event where USFT students attempted to lobby coffee importers and transnational corporations to source fair trade certified coffees. This event is predominantly attended by white businessmen, and so even though USFT's delegations were often much more diverse, the students who were identified as cis gendered<sup>1</sup> men were engaged in conversations much more frequently. In this space whiteness and masculinity were unintentional prerequisites in order to engage fully in the practices.

Because of the ongoing anti-oppression work they engaged in, USFT's Coordinating Committee understood some of the ways that their practices reflected race, class, and gender biases. They worked together to mitigate many of what they identified as the problematic processes, by intentionally developing relationships with affiliate groups that were more racially diverse and including community colleges in outreach, recruiting people of colour for leadership roles, etc. However, as is the case in many places they struggled to understand many of the ways that they reproduced oppressive relations and to consistently intervene in effective ways. This wasn't because they were bad people acting malevolently or even uncritically, but because of the materially racialized, gendered, and classed society that they were working within. Even while actively resisting the social relations of racism, sexism, and classism, they reproduced certain dynamics.

While a critique of the racialized, gendered, and classed nature of participation in communities of practice is not the primary analysis I am bringing to bear here, it is necessary that we understand legitimate peripheral participation as a process that tends to reproduce not only the dominant practices of the community of practice, but also the larger systems the community is part of. Thus, while my focus now shifts to the ways that student activists learned and did not learn the practices of USFT's community, it is understood that these practices are power-laden, and people's abilities to enact them fully depends significantly on their access to full participation, as well as larger social relations.

In the sections that follow, I examine the ways members of the Coordinating Committee and affiliates learned through legitimate peripheral participation, and how their experiences of the leadership ladder, and by extension their access to the full practices of the community of practice, enabled or limited their participation and access to learning, recognition, and power within the movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Cis gender individuals "have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity"(Schilt and Westbrook 2009)



## **Learning by organizing in a community of practice**

Legitimate peripheral participation is a strong framework for describing and theorizing learning within student movements. It is particularly descriptive of the dynamics at play within loosely structured and non-hierarchical organizations when new members enter the community and learn their way into full participation through their activities.

Within USFT we can see this happening in several ways as novice coordinators moved from peripheral positions into more central positions. They learned through immersion in the community of practice, experimenting and attempting to practice the requisite performances of the community. They also learned from their colleagues, and through exposure adopted more sophisticated practices and philosophies of change. Additionally, they learned from more established peers within the coordinating committee. They also learned through their relationships with elders from outside their immediate community of practice in the broader fair trade movement.

One former Coordinating Committee member who was interviewed, Chelsea, described how she learned how to be an organizer, saying, “We learned by doing it!” She described her process of experimentation as a regional coordinator. She tried to do targeted outreach to campuses in her region by making a list of schools and attempting to find organizations that seemed relevant, but did so without guidance. Through doing recruitment work, she learned which strategies worked, seeing what her peers were doing and learning what worked for them. Similarly, Bill explained his learning process as experience-based, describing the organizing framework he learned through his campus organizing experience, saying:

I learned, like, cut an issue<sup>2</sup>, empowering, relationship building ... we were figuring it out and we had mentors to teach us. And we were just trying to figure it out and strategizing... transferring the skills to a broader base, like marketing, mobilizing a lot of people to come out.

He named a few of the skills and concepts that were part of the community of practice’s rhetoric and identifies his relationships with peers and mentors as the site for fostering this knowledge. He also suggested the sort of learning-by-doing that was common. Inexperienced organizers tried their best to use tools they had been trained in, but spent a lot of their energy experimenting and making it up as they went along. They tried different tactics and strategies, learning from their experiences and reflecting on their successes and failures.

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<sup>2</sup> “Cutting an issue” refers to the practice of selecting and framing campaigns that strategically address systemic issues rather than individualized problems. It is a common process for moving from a political analysis into an actionable campaign.

Through an ongoing cycle of experimentation and reflection in the community, coordinators developed an organizing practice.

Immersion in the community was a key part of developing and teaching new members the practices and ideologies of USFT. Leadership summits in Nicaragua were a major component of the learning process for new coordinators. These trips to coffee farming communities were important for introducing new members into the full practices of the community, from using consensus decision-making to relationship building with farmers' cooperatives. Over the course of ten days, new members would form ties with the returning members and other novices and gain practical experience talking about fair trade, designing outreach strategies collectively, and participating in trainings on anti-oppression and other core values. While some of these components were explicitly instructional, most of the learning occurred through participating in the group practices, planning, making decisions, and hanging out during meals or on the bus. In interviews, all of the students who participated in the Nicaragua leadership summits identified them as learning opportunities that enabled coordinators to understand what fair trade was and how USFT worked to promote fair trade coffee as a pathway to alternative economies and international solidarity.

After they returned from Nicaragua and throughout the year, the primary way coordinators learned within the community of practice was through ongoing interactions with their peers on weekly conference calls. Through these interactions, they learned about each other's approaches to student organizing and campaigning. Roxy described this, saying:

There weren't necessarily people we were trying to learn from, but as we were each trying to do our own thing in the roles we were in, we were basing that off of conversations we were having with others in the group, and everything built together. There was definitely a lot I didn't know that I know I assimilated from other people- that I picked it up from working with them, but I can't always say that was *The* person that taught me that, but I know it was in this group setting, working with people that I gained so much more knowledge.

The coordinators were constantly learning from each other because the community of practice was constituted by peers with similar passions, politics, and contexts, whether the learning focused on ways to explain fair trade to a campus affiliate, a more radical meaning of fair trade, or a facilitation skill in practice. The immersion in a dynamic community of learners meant that people were constantly forming and reforming their theory and practice of activism and organizing in concert with their peers.

Another way participants reported learning within the Coordinating Committee was through relationships with elders. These relationships included formal and informal mentorship with movement elders in some cases. For other coordinators, their engagement with elders centred on joint work where they

were attending meetings and negotiating with the certifying agency and developing strategic plans for the movement at a national level. Particularly for older generations of coordinators, this dynamic was one of the most salient points for them in interviews and when they reviewed my analysis. As Bill noted above, relationships with mentors and elders helped shape his practice. He describes how coordinators learned from outside mentors, often elders in activist spaces, who could guide participation and scaffold learning experiences to meet younger activists at their stage of political development. Their mentorship moved students through legitimate peripheral participation, enabling students to take on new repertoires of action on their own, which may later be taken up and institutionalized within USFT's community of practice.

Respondents stressed the importance of relationships with movement elders, ranging from staff at the non-governmental organizations involved in Fair Trade to the founders of the earliest Fair Trade companies in North America. One set of elders anchored leaders like Miles to a broader critique of capitalism and colonialism and played a key role in USFT's development as they helped establish what would become the legitimate full practices. For many of these Coordinators, including Bill and Rita, the relationship with elders was focused on the social movement philosophies. Other coordinators, including Linda and Olive, got specific feedback on organizing and how to do it. Both described the importance of staff at certain organizations providing tactical support on whom USFT should reach out to and collaborated on strategies for building skills among coordinators and the affiliates strategically. This relationship was sometimes instructional, but more often based in reflection or negotiation. This is something of a challenge to some of the discussions of sub-communities of practice, in that the people establishing the legitimate practices were outside the sub-community itself. It demonstrates the importance of relationships between communities of practice in social movement analysis<sup>3</sup> and extends the understandings of how learning can happen and who can establish full forms of participation in a community of practice.

Within the Coordinating Committee, people learned in different yet social ways, and through their learning and participation they became more central in USFT's community of practice. Through their relationships and their action in community, they adopted specific understandings of the role of social movements and particular repertoires of engagement. Lizzie said

I was really fortunate to get involved with USFT because it was more about building power as a movement. At first I was like, I don't really understand what organizing is, but it is about getting people to understand an issue, getting them

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<sup>3</sup> The relationships and influences between communities of practice and sub-communities of practice is related to social movement network analysis and the importance of ties across movements and social movement organizations. It is outside the scope of my argument to engage that connection here, but other research would do well to question the strengths of bridging communities of practice and social movement network analysis.

on board with things, rather than just throwing events, which is what I think some organizations were more focused on.

She described in detail the ways that she learned this through her work recruiting new members and developing leaders across her region. In the process of doing the work, experimenting, learning from colleagues and more experienced student activists, she moved into a position of full participation within the community of practice. Mastery and competence were measured by the skills that were learned, how and when they were employed, and the extent to which coordinators adopted the framework of organizing as the primary activist activity to create social change.

Throughout my data, it is clear that coordinators who became central figures within the community of practice did so through their close relationships with other coordinators and their joint work together. Through the process of campaigning and organizing across the US, they developed a shared philosophy of student movement action and the skills to mobilize a broad base of students.

### **Learning from the periphery: affiliates learning to campaign**

The discussion of Coordinating Committee learning through legitimate peripheral participation in order to achieve full participation illustrates key social movement learning principles. It also serves as a counterpoint to the experiences of individual members of affiliates at the grassroots of the fair trade student movement. An analysis of the learning process of affiliates stands in contrast to the experiences of coordinators and exposes a significant gap in USFT's leadership ladder strategy.

Where coordinators were exposed to full participation in the USFT community, affiliates' participation was frozen at the periphery, with individual members lacking access to full participation in the organization. This happened because of the types of contact that affiliates had with the central organization. For the bulk of participants, contact with USFT was through a published organizing guide and introductory trainings. A smaller subset of people had more concerted contact with experienced members through participation in the annual Convergence or trips to origin. Even more rare was the campus affiliate group with one or more Coordinating Committee members involved in their group. This range of engagement shows different experiences of learning and participation in the USFT community of practice.

Affiliates most often learned how to do campaigns through highly structured guidebooks and Fair Trade 101 workshops that were focused on training people to do particular tasks in particular ways. The guidebooks were developed by previous generations of Coordinating Committee members and posted online and distributed at trainings, laying out clear instructions for running a coffee conversion campaign. The trainings were conducted at conferences and on

campuses and outlined the basics of the coffee crisis, explained fair trade certification, and also laid out specific instructions for campaigning. USFT's affiliate campaign process was designed to make conversion campaigns easy for anyone to start and win, regardless of their level of engagement. The coffee conversion campaign created a highly structured 'recipe' for a campaign with step-by-step instructions for how to organize a group, collect signatures for support, and negotiate with food service providers.

These steps were easy to follow with little contact from regional coordinators. Most people involved as affiliates ran their campaigns but never moved toward deeper engagement in the fair trade movement; for most, that level of full participation was never a goal. The learning that occurred within the affiliate chapters based on the workshops and guides did little to produce stronger identification with the community of practice. In many ways, the role of affiliates was a position as a peripheral participant, though affiliates experienced peripherality differently based on their access to the full practices of USFT's Coordinating Committee and the broader fair trade movement.

For students who sought out more contact or were sought out by regional coordinators, the annual International Convergence offered an intensive immersion into USFT over the course of a weekend once a year<sup>4</sup>. During the Convergence, affiliates would be exposed to the philosophies of USFT and see the values demonstrated through prefigurative politics, including an institutional focus on popular education, anti-oppression, and cooperative solidarity. Throughout the weekend, attendees could participate in workshops, panels, and other gathering spaces in order to experience in an embodied way how USFT's Coordinating Committee talked about fair trade and envisioned social change. However, there were real limits to the learning through legitimate peripheral participation. Although people participated in the Convergence, they did not have access to the full practices. Convergence participants were more passively involved, engaging in workshops and keynotes, but not involved in the coordination and behind-the-scenes debates that brought students, farmers, NGO-staff, and the certifier together. The new members were not actively constructing the conference, with the exception of one session, a co-developed process called Open Space Technology<sup>5</sup>. For three days, they might have close contact with the practices of the Coordinating Committee, but beyond that, their contact would likely be limited.

A small number of students from affiliates experienced even more intensive immersion into USFT through trips to visit farmer communities. In particular,

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<sup>4</sup> Attending the Convergence, like other practices, reflected particular class dynamics. Though USFT's Convergence Coordinators worked hard to make the Convergence economically accessible to everyone through scholarships, sliding fees, and other strategies, affiliated students often needed to raise money from their college or university to cover the costs, which required attending an institution that had those resources available as well as the acumen to navigate the bureaucracy to access conference funds.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

USFT coordinators led trips to Chiapas and East Africa. These trips lasted from 1 week to 5 weeks and exposed participants to USFT as a national organization and the practices of the Coordinating Committee. Trips included meetings with farmer and artisan cooperatives and reflections on the experiences and the role of students working in solidarity from North America. Participants learned about coffee production and the certification process through their exposure to farms and export cooperatives, but they did not necessarily adopt new practices or become part of USFT. Participants never worked together and their commitment to each other only lasted a few weeks beyond their trips, though the goal was that trips would bring people into roles on the Coordinating Committee. The leadership summit (detailed above) accomplished drastically different ends, in large part because of the established community of practice. The 2006 East Africa delegation, during which 18 students applied to the project, co-planned it, and then travelled throughout Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda visiting Fair Trade coffee, tea, and craft cooperatives, is a prime example. With only one staff person and one novice coordinator, there was no claim to an established centre, and throughout the trip the dominant practices of USFT were contested in practice, notably that of popular education pedagogies and consensus decision making. Participants rejected participatory training and decision-making processes, arguing against the perceived inefficiency of the processes and requesting lectures and majority rule votes instead. On this trip, people were exposed to the dominant practices, but did not adopt them through participation or seek leadership positions within USFT.

Participants from affiliates where a coordinator was based were more likely to engage in the dominant practices of USFT, from decision-making processes to national campaigns. People who had better access to the full performances of the community of practice ended up being more likely to seek and master the full practices of USFT and be recognized by the Coordinating Committee and beyond. They were also likely to have contact with other coordinators beyond their own regional coordinator. Through this interaction and work, these affiliates adopted the dominant practices, and in many cases shaped the dominant practices: the coordinators from their chapters brought their personal iterations of the practices to the fore as they became central in the Coordinating Committee. These affiliates also had better access to information and were more likely to be engaged in the leadership development processes of USFT, which meant that certain schools were continually represented on the Coordinating Committee and at Convergences.

Across these different learning trajectories, affiliates could successfully learn to conduct campaigns on their own campuses, but members had limited opportunities to become more engaged in USFT's practices. Although they experienced legitimate peripheral participation, they were frozen in peripheral positions and kept from accessing the other practices that would enable them to learn and become more deeply engaged in the student fair trade movement, with very few exceptions.

### **In name only: joint work, shared repertoires?**

In USFT's Coordinating Committee and within affiliates there were clearly differences in how and what people learned, predicated primarily on their access to performances of mastery of the practices in the community. Their work was also profoundly different, and these differences combined to create an organization, and indeed a movement, that had widely variant practices and theories of change. Rather than being understood as a singular community of practice, each affiliate should be understood as an independent community of practice with some overlapping practices with USFT as a national organization, but where the practices may or may not track with each other. This also produced a stratified system of affiliates, where some had closer relationships and more shared identity with USFT as the central student movement organization. Looking at two specific affiliates demonstrates the wide range of practices and illustrates how legitimate peripheral participation and access to the full practices varied, and how in many cases the connections between and across affiliates' practices were weak. In these schools, which were both sub-communities of USFT's community of practice, the expressions of centrality were so different that they were at odds with each other.

University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) was a particularly strong chapter that was engaged in USFT from the beginning. Members played an important role in shaping the dominant practices of USFT and hosted the first Convergence, setting the bar for subsequent conferences. Members of UCSC's group helped organize trips to origin, coordinated campaigns, and were always engaged with planning the Convergence. Nearly every year, the West Coast regional coordinator was based at UCSC. To be a full participant of their affiliate community of practice, one had to be engaged in broader food system work, notably in the Community Agroecology Network (CAN), and other food justice work, including migrant labour organizing or the Real Food Network. Their approach to fair trade was much broader than a focus on certified products; in fact their coffee conversion campaign opted not for a certified coffee but a CAN coffee roasted and imported directly from cooperative communities where UCSC students studied and built partnerships in Central America. Solidarity and alter-capitalist food system development were essential to their conceptions of fair trade.

In contrast, University of South Florida (USF) was engaged with USFT very peripherally. Their fair trade campaign was initiated in partnership with the Christian student association and centred on helping poor people through charitable purchasing of fair trade certified coffee. Their contact with USFT was through a regional coordinator based in another state, and no one from the affiliated group ever attended a Convergence. They launched a campaign and worked closely with TransFairUSA, and as a result focused on the certified label.

There is little overlap in terms of the politics or practices of these two groups. Mapped against USFT's Coordinating Committee's dominant practices, it is even clearer that these affiliations were tenuous, and one could argue that

without a shared repertoire of joint work, they should not be considered to share a community of practice. They shared a commitment to fair trade and conversion campaigns, but what those meant in practice and how they planned to accomplish them were actually quite different.

Looking at these affiliates' interactions of legitimate peripheral participation reveals the disparate practices and outcomes of these ostensibly related sub-communities of practice. USF, like most USFT affiliates, had little contact with how the USFT coordinators performed their activities or discourses, so while USFT in some ways established the norms, the practices were taken up quite unevenly. The guidebooks and trainings made campaigning so simple that anyone could participate and could do so independently of USFT. There were many positive aspects of this decentralized structure; it made it simple for many campuses to become involved with few resources and allowed for authentic local control. The possible lack of relationship with the rest of the student movement, though, proved a challenge for many affiliates. Most affiliates' contact with USFT was only through their regional coordinators, many of whom were new to their positions and were working toward mastering USFT's full practices in their own processes of legitimate peripheral participation. Additionally, most affiliates had no contact with the broader fair trade movement; they would never interact with farmers' organizations, the certifiers, or the NGOs that coordinated the fair trade movement. This isolated them from setting policy, but more significantly it kept people from understanding much of the complexity of certification and the contested nature of solidarity across the movement.

### **Extending the leadership ladder**

These disparate practices among affiliates reveal broader significance anchored to questions of learning and consciousness. Within USFT, political education happened largely among established members as part of the practices of full participation. Through engaging in the central practices, one would learn the community's theory of social change. Through immersion and action, new members moving toward centrality would have access to conscientization processes and be embedded in a politically active community of practice where at a minimum emergent anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics were a fundamental performance. As one former coordinator said, "The students who come into USFT from the simple end of fair trade products were very quickly connected and linked up to other students who were absolutely committed to asking those hard questions about race and class and gender and capitalism." When affiliates did not access the broader movement community, they often did not have an opportunity to engage with other students debating the politics of the movement as part of the practices of being part of the fair trade movement.

Though USFT prided itself on the ease of entry into fair trade activism, optimizing the conversion campaign for ease of entry undermined the movement politically and tactically. As laid out in the Fair Trade 101s and the organizing guides, conversion campaigns required very little learning in order to



engage and offered few avenues toward broader collective action in the community. Being so easy as to not require contact with or support from other affiliates or Coordinators meant that participants did not have to engage with USFT in order to access more resources or pursue more sophisticated practices. Without these relationships, there was little to encourage affiliates to consider moving into full participation in the movement. The easy campaign produced a dynamic where affiliates did not necessarily experience any of the political learning that might emerge through the leadership ladder process and legitimate peripheral participation as people moved into full participation in USFT. In effect, the easy campaign tactic limited USFT's ability to build a movement, instead merely enabling it to mobilize short-term campus-specific campaigns.

The conversion campaign tactic may have seemed like joint work, in that affiliates were all launching the same types of campaigns asking for the same things at different campuses. However, the work was never really shared; campaigns between campuses had little impact on one another, and learning on one campus would likely not influence the full practices of USFT's other affiliates or Coordinating Committee. The campus-specific conversion campaign itself was inadequate for moving people into full participation. There was not a mechanism for most people to be involved in shared work more meaningfully – access to full participation was limited, and the central roles available to people were generally those of being a leader of an affiliated chapter or a coordinator, with few other options and a gulf between them in terms of learning and leadership development. There were no sustained national campaigns where people could work together, compare their repertoires with other campuses, build relationships, and develop a critique of the social relations in which fair trade was embedded.

Promoting tactics that bring people from different affiliates together in order to collaboratively build strategies and co-negotiate systems creates fertile ground for learning. Coordinated campaigns offer a number of affordances that the guide-based campaigns do not. The first is contact with other affiliates, extending one affiliate's practices through exposure to another's and building relationships. Through contact with other approaches, affiliates can learn new strategies, as well as the different philosophies that underpin them. In this way, affiliates like USF and UCSC could have influenced each other, as they learned about the successes and struggles of each others' approaches. The second is a need to be in communication with the Coordinating Committee rather than the ability to independently carry out a campaign in isolation. The impetus for consistent contact could provide opportunities for more peripheral groups to experience the full practices of USFT and allow them to experiment with those practices in their campaign work. Additionally, necessary and sustained contact with the Coordinating Committee could disrupt the tendency toward some affiliates having no meaningful relationship with USFT, though it may not be enough.

Joint work could include a coordinated campaign that targets one company or elected official and leverages the power of all of the affiliates in order to collaboratively achieve the same goal. This type of work would require collaboration and communication across the affiliate network and would bring affiliates into some of the messier dynamics of choosing strategies and reframing them when they do not pan out, something that participants in conversion campaigns were insulated from. In collaboratively designing and launching a campaign, affiliates could play a more active role in establishing the practices, learn from the performances of Coordinating Committee members, and contest or reshape the dominant practices through their engagement.

Collaborative work becomes a key link here. It is the practice that potentially binds affiliates together and to the established members of the community of practice. In later years, USFT attempted to launch a coordinated campaign that had the potential to unite different affiliates, but the target that was chosen was relevant to only a handful of them. If executed well, this type of engagement may have been effective at connecting affiliated groups together in joint work to create shared tactics. This type of collaboration could leverage the strength of the affiliate base while creating a shared sense of full participation in USFT, making those performances available to participants beyond the Coordinating Committee. Joint work could have had the potential to bridge the leadership ladder across peripheral affiliates if it had brought them into closer contact with each other and the Coordinating Committee. In that community of practice with full participation at the periphery and at the centre, there may have been more opportunities for members, new and established, to learn and co-develop the political ideology of USFT through their practice.

Additionally, shared work has the potential to become an intervention that can disrupt some of the racialized, classed, gendered nature of the dominant practices. The standardized campaign meant that affiliate members only moved into full participation if the tactics chosen by people in positions of mastery worked for them and their context. The potential of shared work is that when the tactics break down, there is an opportunity for a co-negotiation process. The communication and negotiation can, though does not necessarily, shift the practices to allow other people to be successful. Working together on the same campaign can provide space for people in positions of peripherality and mastery to co-develop and co-shape the tactics, thereby changing the performances of full participation.

The implications of shared work as a mechanism to foster legitimate peripheral participation for social movements are significant, particularly around building and sustaining critical social movements. For federated student movements, building a coherent leadership structure that can sustain the movement requires ongoing leadership development and widespread access to full participation in the social movement, not only for those in leadership. Affiliates and chapters need to have increased contact with performances of full participation through engagement in shared work in order for the movement to produce qualified and capable leaders. Relationships amongst affiliates are important to building a

shared community of practice, and established members must engage in joint work with affiliates in order to bring people into shared practices in meaningful and appropriate ways. Without these relationships rooted in practice, learning outcomes become disparate and the coherence of the work—and by extension, the movement—suffers.

For communities of practice that prioritize developing systemic critiques and particular social analyses, people involved at the grassroots level have to be engaged at a deeper level than the cookie cutter campaign if they are to successfully access and engage in critical conversation. Rather than suggest that centralization of social movements is necessary for learning, or in the interest of all social movement organizations, I am suggesting that for USFT it would have been useful to reproduce the environments that enabled critical consciousness to develop and thrive, rather than merely engage affiliates in an easy, step-by-step campaign that insulated them from other affiliates and the internal contradictions of fair trade certification. I am not arguing that the practices in peripheral groups were detrimental for the movement, but merely acknowledging that those affiliates with less access to the practices of USFT experienced dramatically different learning.

Divergent practices in the national organization and at the affiliate level are not a problem from my vantage point, and they will no doubt continue in decentralized organizations and movements. These divergent practices stem from the particular contexts of the sub-communities of practice and reflect the conditions and learning of the people engaged in the group. The diverse tactics are important for sustaining grassroots social movements and pushing the national social movement organizations they are a part of. I am not calling for tighter control of grassroots base organizations, but more coordination, engagement, communication, and accountability between affiliates and the leadership body, as well as among different affiliates. Shared repertoires for joint work and mutual engagement allow people to learn from each other and could have enabled a deeper political critique of fair trade certification to emerge, but affiliates were largely isolated from the work experiences and exchanges that enabled Coordinating Committee members to become critical of the certifier, neo-colonial development strategies, and capitalism more broadly.

It is important to note that the types of joint work, shared repertoires, and mutual engagement that I am calling for do not address the limitations that structured certain groups' abilities to participate in the full practices of USFT and other student movements. This closer contact will not ameliorate the racialized, gendered, and classed dynamics at play that enable certain people to participate fully while others, because of their social locations, remain uninterested in the tactics, unable to perform the established practices, or unlikely to be judged as adequately performing them by participants in privileged positions. Addressing these barriers requires more than a leadership ladder and legitimate peripheral participation. In fact, it requires a radical reconceptualization of the full practices and those that are privileged to establish and judge them. In other work, I have noted how experiences of

marginalization and the dissonance of peripherality can produce oppositional consciousness and opportunities for conscientization (Curnow 2013). This remains a key area for learning theorists to explore so that as social movement participants we are more intentional and strategic about the ways that our framing and tactical repertoires invite meaningful engagement from people across social difference, rather than reproducing and re-entrenching racialized, classed, and gendered social relations in our movements.

Applying situated learning frameworks to USFT enables us to better understand how people learn within social movements. Legitimate peripheral participation helps explain why people learned what they learned depending on their engagement in the movement. Situated learning and communities of practice theory describe the learning within USFT very well, as people moved toward full participation within the Coordinating Committee and as they acted peripherally as an affiliate. Legitimate peripheral participation also brings a theoretical foundation to the practice of the leadership ladder, as it explains the types of learning and access that people have access to as they move from the periphery of a community of practice toward the centre. These tools for theorizing the pedagogical practices in student movements help centre our analysis on the practical ways that action, participation, and learning happen in social movements and offer direction for the ways that movements can broaden their base and foster consciousness-raising through strategic participation in a leadership ladder.

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## **Critical cartography as anarchist pedagogy? Ideas for praxis inspired by the 56a infoshop map archive**

**Rhiannon Firth**

### **Abstract**

*Critical cartography is a methodology and pedagogy that begins from the premise that maps are embodiments of power. It advocates utopian possibilities for other mapping practices, providing tools for communities to spatially illustrate their struggles whilst reconstituting social bonds through collective knowledge production. Whilst critical cartographers gesture towards activist initiatives, a lot of the literature focuses mainly on theory and is light on alternative practices, failing to explore their pedagogical and transformative value. Furthermore, those literatures that do study practice tend to focus on 'counter-mapping', for example enabling indigenous communities to make resource claims. Such practices undoubtedly have progressive uses but have also been criticized for investing in dominant spatial practice and for perpetuating exclusions and hierarchies. This paper argues for a critical cartographic practice based on an anarchist ethos of anti- rather than counter-hegemony, drawing ideas of cartographic pedagogy as affect, affinity and performativity. Furthermore it argues that such practices already exist and ought to be expanded. Using David Graeber's ethnographic methodology of 'utopian extrapolation' the paper will draw on material found in the 'map archive' of the 56a infoshop in London to begin to inspire and imagine an anarchist cartographic pedagogy.*

**Key Words:** Anarchism, cartography, mapping, pedagogy, Infoshops, radical archives, London.

### **Introduction**

Critical cartography as a methodology, and pedagogical methods involving alternative mapping practices, have become increasingly prominent over the last two decades, particularly in human geography literatures, but also intersecting with a range of fields including education (Kitchens 2009; Ruitenbergh 2007) and art theory (Cosgrove 2006; Kanarinka 2006). This interdisciplinary paper aims to explore the potential to use critical cartography as a participatory pedagogical method for working with anarchistic groups and autonomous social movements, defined as groups that organize anti-hierarchically, are independent from traditional political parties and trade unions, and are self-managed and oriented towards the transformation of everyday life, rather than appealing to reform from above (Katsiaficas 2007, 7-8; Counter Cartographies Collective, Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012, 444). They operate in and through utopian spaces such as direct action protests, occupied protest sites, autonomous social centres and squatted buildings. Examples



include the alter-globalization movement, urban social movements across Latin America and the Occupy movement, all of which draw on diverse ideas of anarchism and autonomy (ibid, 444) as well as more localized sites and spaces that follow these ethics, such as the 195 Mare Street squatted social centre in Hackney<sup>1</sup>. Such groups have raised issues for methodologies and methods which have tended to recuperate and colonize their radical potential and transgressive otherness by reducing their activities to the terms of existing discourses and structures (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Motta 2011; Firth 2013). Anarchistic mapping practices might also be used to inspire non-hierarchical, non-vanguardist pedagogical spaces within existing institutions such as schools and universities.

The paper argues that critical cartography, as a methodology that has both pedagogical and utopian-performative aspects, has particular affinities with anarchist theory and organization. The primary question informing the paper is: What does cartography (as a pedagogical process) have to offer anarchism (as a movement)? This can be disaggregated into the following, smaller questions: what might an anarchist, anti-hegemonic cartography look like? How might we study this? How might we use it to effect social change? The aim is to critique and build on existing theories and practices to develop anarchist critical cartography as a methodology and method.

The paper begins with a brief review of existing research using participatory cartographic methodologies, which are critiqued and developed from the perspective of anarchist theory. The paper goes on to outline an approach for studying existing anarchist mapping practices based on David Graeber's procedure of 'utopian extrapolation' and a theoretical framework inspired by anarchist and post-structuralist concepts of 'affect', 'affinity' and 'the performative'. The paper then considers possibilities for praxis and method, undertaking an exercise in utopian extrapolation, inspired by maps in the map archive at the 56a infoshop in London, to formulate some suggestions for practical pedagogies inspired by but transgressing existing anarchist mapping practices. Map-making is a potentially useful pedagogy because it can facilitate learners to understand, in spatial terms, how power claims can be asserted as truth and the effects that this has on everyday lives, as well as empowering them to spatially illustrate their own struggles and desires. Furthermore, the process of map-making can be at least as important as the produced maps, building collectivity between participants (Counter Cartographies Collective, Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012, 441-44). The purpose of the present paper is to begin from an account of spontaneous mapping practices occurring in a local anarchist space, in dialogue with existing theory, and based on this exposition to offer practical pointers for those wishing to set up new utopian mapping spaces as part of a research or pedagogical praxis.

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<sup>1</sup> During the writing of this paper, I facilitated a critical cartography workshop loosely based on principles outlined in this paper at 195 Mare Street, and would like to thank participants for their discussion and feedback.

## Critical cartography

Critical cartography is a methodology that arises at the interstices of critical theory and human geography, proceeding from a critique of the alleged scientific status of the discipline of cartography and the value-neutrality of maps and map-making practices. As a methodology it encompasses negative critique and a positive, utopian method, defined by Crampton and Krygier (2006, 12) as “a one-two punch of new mapping practices and theoretical critique”. This definition implies affinities with both epistemological and political anarchism, insofar as the theoretical and practiced aspects of critique and change are mutually complementary and necessary: ‘if the map is a specific set of power-knowledge claims, then not only the state but others could make competing and equally powerful claims’ (ibid, 12). Instead of participating in the academic discipline of cartography’s search for ever-more authentic, factual or meticulous representations of pre-existing reality, ‘critical cartography assumes that maps *make* reality as much as they represent it’ (ibid, 15). Further, critical cartography pays attention not only to maps themselves, but the meta-practices and processes by which they are produced: ‘some maps, by their design, preclude empowerment because of the erasures, silences and gaps inherent to that design’ (Eades 2011), whilst ‘this conceptualization of maps necessitates an epistemology that concentrates on how maps emerge’ (Kitchin, Perkins and Dodge 2009, 21).

Thus critical cartography transgresses the ‘ontic knowledge’ of traditional cartography which consists of ‘the examination of how a topic should proceed from within its own framework where the ontological assumptions about how the world can be known and measured are securely beyond doubt’ (ibid, 11). This has much in common with human and social geographic approaches more generally, yet in critical cartography these examinations do not proceed only on the theoretical plane but also in the realm of praxis: ‘Mapping can then be conceptualised as a suite of cultural practices involving action and affects’ (ibid, 17). Critical cartography thus provides alternatives to disembodied, abstract practices of dominant geographic knowledge through the perspective of embodied experience: ‘Maps do not then emerge in the same way for all individuals. Rather they emerge in contexts and through a mix of creative, tactile, and habitual practices’ (ibid, 21). This assumes a multiplicity of valid perspectives and partial knowledges, and thus is potentially a non-vanguardist approach to knowledge production and social change, implying strong resonance with anarchism.

Despite the emphasis on alternative mappings, much of the literature (e.g. Crampton 2001 and 2010; Harley 1989; Pickles 2004; Wood 1992) is based mainly in theoretical critique and is light on alternative practices or practical guidance. Theoretical expositions highlight why it is important to contest dominant mapping practices. Maps mark out ownership and control of land, resources and commodities (Pickles 2004, 7) inscribe boundaries, identities and subjectivities (ibid, 12; Piper 2002), they contribute to the ideological formation

of communities, and they are deeply implicated in the colonial project and the rise of capitalism (Pickles 2004, 13; Huggan 1991).

Whilst critical cartography literatures are theory-heavy, a small collection of literatures recounting alternative practices has also arisen, the most prominent of which is a variety of participatory action research called 'counter-mapping' (e.g. Peluso 1995; Bennagen and Royo (eds.) 2000; Harris and Hazen 2006; Denniston 1994; Briosius, Tsing and Zerner (eds.) 2005; Sletto 2009). Counter-mapping has emerged as a participatory approach to international planning, development and conservation particularly in the Global South, and is argued to have progressive potential for subordinate and marginalised groups. In practice it is largely used by NGO and academic researchers as a method for working with indigenous communities to make land and resource claims.

Whilst such practices are undoubtedly indispensable in asserting local and indigenous rights against the encroachments and enclosures of state and capital, they should also be problematised for the risk of 'using the master's (blunt) tools to frame the infinite complexity of local places and peoples on the planet within a two-dimensional global grid of property rights and political authority' (Roucheleau 2005, 327). Counter-mapping, like dominant practices of mapping, can involve presenting a single representation of 'often divergent, imagined futures' (Sletto 2009, 444). This can be a necessary strategic act when attempting to make rights or resource claims to hierarchical entities such as states or trade organizations, yet also implies perpetuating and legitimating such structures, which is a particular problem when working and acting with anarchist groups and movements. This is not to say that alternative mapping practices do not have a place in anarchist movements and studies. Anarchist groups and social movements already use cartographies as ways of producing and communicating knowledge, yet these have rarely been accounted for in the academy (notable exceptions include Cobarrubias and Pickles 2009; Counter Cartographies Collective, Craig Dalton and Liz Mason-Deese 2012; Holmes 2002 and 2003).

### **Anarchist cartographic pedagogy**

In trying to think through anarchist alternatives to counter-mapping, it is useful to examine the distinction between counter- and anti-hegemony. Counter-hegemony, as conceptualised by Richard Day, refers to the idea that social change can only be achieved either through simultaneous mass revolution, or through influencing state power through pluralistic processes of co-operation and conflict (Day 2005, 8). These strategies – Marxist and Liberal/postmarxist respectively, imply both an organizational form and an approach to knowledge production that rest on assumptions of unified voice or 'truth' that can speak *as* or *to* power, through vanguards or representatives. Anti-hegemony refers to processes of radical change that do not seek to take nor influence state power, but rather act autonomously by creating alternatives in the here-and-now (Day 2005: 8). A core strategy of anti-hegemonic organization and knowledge

production is through ‘utopias’ (Coté, Day and de Peuter 2007, 5) conceptualised not as totalising blueprints for a future perfect society, but rather as processes of creating ‘spaces for becoming – through resistance, hope, and reconstruction in the here-and-now’ (ibid, 3).

Creating utopias has always been an important aspect of anarchist organization, not least because it is a potentially non-hierarchical approach to social change that does not rely on vanguards or mass politics. Furthermore, an oft-neglected aspect of utopias is their pedagogical value – practicing new ways of living and relating can help us to ‘unlearn’ dominant knowledge practices. Utopias give us a glimpse of a ‘pedagogical *Other*’ (Burdick and Sandlin 2010: 349) which acts to de-essentialise, critique and transgress taken-for-granted educational and cultural assumptions, institutions, discourses and mores (Sargisson 2000). Utopian experiments are anti-hegemonic because they emphasise learning through practice and embodied experience rather than through abstract theory and fixed curricula handed down by ‘experts’ (Ellsworth 2005: 1). They create pedagogy at a micro-social, embodied level utilising functions that can be partially understood through concepts of affect, affinity and performativity.

‘Affect’ as a core aspect of my conceptualization of anarchist cartographic pedagogy is drawn from Deleuzian theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 265 and *passim*). The term refers to an intensity of experience that exceeds individualised emotions and feelings, drawing attention to the ways in which desire flows through and changes multiplicities including peoples, groups and the spatial environment (de Acosta 2006, 28; Thrift 2004, 60). These theories suggest that *desire* should be a focus for pedagogic transformation because of the important role of emotional and affective factors such as need, desire, hope and love in mobilising social change against purely rationalistic and scientific theories (Routledge 2009, 87; Zembylas 2007). Such an approach treats the pedagogical moment as becoming-other (Kitchens 2009, 224; Motta 2013) rather than imbuing fixed knowledge within a fixed being, cultivating awareness of multiple perspectives on processes of alienation so as to open one’s own perception to the perspectives, traumas and oppressions of others (Boler 1999, 185; Zembylas 2006, 306). ‘Affinity’ is a term drawn from activist praxis that refers to a way of relating and organising in non-hierarchical and mutually supportive and nurturing relationships whilst refusing hegemonic or fixed identity categories (Day 2005, 181; Routledge 2009, 85).

Maps have the potential to create, visibilise, communicate, and enact local and decentralised knowledge (Turnbull 2000, 13), but this need not be an appeal to power as is the case with ‘counter-mapping’ practices. Rather, it can be a way of linking multiple spaces and practices through the network form (Cobarrubias and Pickles 2009, 53) using bonds of affinity, without positing overarching hegemony or commensurability (Goyens 2009, 445). ‘Performativity’ refers to the potential to construct or perform new realities or understandings through actions, language or indeed maps (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 14). Producing and using maps in the mainstream sense already mobilises performativity rather than purely cognitive skill, yet there is a tendency to disguise this element

behind 'truth' claims and scientific status (Krygier 2006, 41). Anarchist mapping pedagogy parodies and transgresses the alleged scientific and purely representational status of mainstream maps, whilst seeking to surprise, provoke and propose alternatives (Crampton 2009, 841). Anti-hegemonic maps are utopian in this sense, that they do not simply reflect or represent the world – either in the dominant sense or by positing a counter-hegemony – but rather bring new worlds into being through transgression and active creation. This leads to possibilities for imagining critical cartography as pedagogy where 'pedagogy is politics by other means' (Castree et. al. 2008, 682). Understanding the performative aspects of alternative mapping practices links pedagogy to social change: the process of mapping has the potential to reconstitute subjectivities through affective learning, to reconstitute social bonds through affinity and to act as a basis for bringing new worlds into being.

This article itself also hopes to fulfil a utopian performative function, using an approach inspired by David Graeber's 'utopian extrapolation'. This involves 'teasing out the logic or principles underlying certain forms of radical practice, and then, not only offering the analysis back to those communities, but using them to formulate new visions' (Graeber 2009: 112). The approach is similar to that taken by other anarchist writers such as Colin Ward (1973) and earlier, Kropotkin (1987). This is based on the assumption that ethnographic research is useful: first, in creating movement-relevant research, whilst avoiding intellectual vanguardism (Graeber 2004: 12, Bevington and Dixon 2005; Motta 2011) and second, in visibilising and valourising marginal and hidden practices in the hope that they are taken up in other, new and different ways.

My hope in this paper is that by discussing, making visible and theorising anarchist mapping practices in a utopian space, I might be able to inspire others to undertake similar practices, opening up utopian spaces elsewhere. For this reason the paper uses a dialogue between existing theories and practices to formulate some practical pointers for critical educators and activist-scholars who may wish to develop their own cartographic workshops with social movements or within existing institutions. My interest in writing this paper arose from my own desire to facilitate cartographic workshops in the various critical spaces I sometimes inhabit, including radical social centres, occupied and protest sites, academic conferences, university seminars and lectures. Looking for inspiration in the literature I found there was a dearth of practical guidance, so I sought out other sources of inspiration. This led me to the 56a infoshop, where I found the map archive and conversations with activists a fruitful starting point for developing my own praxis.

## 56a map archive<sup>2</sup>

The 56a infoshop is on Crampton Street, near the Elephant and Castle underground station in South London. It is a Do-it-Yourself social centre run on anarchist principles. The building was originally squatted in 1988 and opened up as Fareshares Food Co-operative, and the 56a Infoshop was created in the backroom in June 1991. The two groups still share the space, which is now legally rented since 2003, with the food co-operative occupying the space at the front of the building and the infoshop using a room with tea-making and restroom facilities at the back of the space. A cycle workshop is held outside during opening hours. The infoshop hosts a large archive of radical books, pamphlets, posters, zines and other cultural materials. These are largely drawn from the anarchist tradition but also include feminist, queer, ecology movement, Marxist and libertarian texts.

Hidden on a bottom shelf in a dark corner is a large, old-fashioned case full of maps, referred to as the 'map archive'. The map archive arose out of the 'You Are Here but Why?' map festival held in June 2005. The festival was a free-form event held within and beyond the infoshop. A programme of events was organised by a small map festival collective with a lot of space for participants to also contribute what they wanted to see. This included hosting a 'map room' gallery of maps, collective mapping workshops, radical history walks, collective wandering, map-drawings and discussions. Prior to the festival there was a small collection of hand-drawn maps called 'The Map Room (is open)', which was about the size of a document wallet. These maps became the basis of the festival map exhibition. After the festival, any maps that were contributed from its duration were added to the archive. Other versions of the map festival, inspired and part-organised by 56a members took place worldwide, for example in Trento, Italy and Sao Paulo, Brazil, and maps from these events were added to the archive too. Since then, visitors and members of 56a have been encouraged to add maps to the archive that are found or created.

On top of the map archive box is a big yellow card that describes the map archive, lists some types of maps that it includes, the archive's history beginning with the festival and signals towards how the maps might be used: 'It functions to build a collection of different guides to towns, cities, and treasure islands that can be taken away for free by travellers. Not every map is as useful as a topological map but you might have some interesting adventures and meetings from some of our maps'. The map archive contains several hundred, perhaps up to a thousand, variously hand-drawn, printed and published maps<sup>3</sup>, booklets

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<sup>2</sup> The following section is based on several afternoons spent at the 56a infoshop working on the map archive and holding informal conversations with volunteers, in particular Chris who maintains the map archive, and initiated the 2005 mapping festival that the archive grew from. Information has also been drawn from the 56a infoshop website at <http://www.56a.org.uk/> last accessed 26 June 2013.

<sup>3</sup> I have attempted to supply reference information for professionally produced maps mentioned herein, although this was not always available.

containing maps, map posters and a small number of map-related books. Some of the maps are filed into folders with the following categories: 'Walks', 'pre-printed, personal etc.', 'radical maps/researches', 'self-location', 'hand-done maps (cities etc.)', 'you are here but why? Map festival UK, Malia, Brazil etc.', 'large-scale and artistic', 'diagrams' 'scientific/physical, etc.', and a couple of 'miscellaneous' and unlabelled folders. About the same number of maps remain loose in the box, un-filed and un-categorised. In discussion with 56a volunteers I was told that the filing categories are currently not felt to be very useful, and there are plans to re-order them, as well as to build a full online catalogue of maps.

The use of the map archive as the basis for an academic paper raises some specific ethical and methodological issues due to the unusual nature of the 'data' and of the knowledge produced. Traditional understandings and uses of research data tend to reflect individualised capitalistic modes of property ownership, with, for example, interviews requiring a consent form which hands over 'ownership' of the data from the participant to the researcher in a relation resembling the transference of property rights. Since the map archive contains contributions from multiple anonymous participants in different circumstances, for varied and ultimately unknown reasons over time, it is impossible to trace individual contributors and indeed contradictory to the purpose of the archive as a collective enterprise.

I engaged in conversations about the research with volunteers at the infoshop, and in particular with Chris, who initiated the festival of mapping and maintains the archive. Whilst volunteers expressed support, and helped me greatly by providing invaluable information about the archive, I was told that the archive was a 'public place' and that therefore it was not up to any particular individual to give permission. Even were official 'consent' to be obtained from anyone at the infoshop this would be almost meaningless considering the nature and ethos of the archive practice, created by multiple anonymous participants for public access, to which formal notions of individual ownership and control would not seem to apply. Nonetheless, the nature of academic knowledge means that this article might be partially recuperated into the capitalist domain. As the researcher I have been paid for my time in producing the article, and academic knowledge is frequently used for profit-making and hegemonic purposes.

However, there is an ethical basis for communicating the maps in this way. If, as would seem to be the case from materials about the archive on the 56a website and within the archive itself (discussed later), the maps are intended at least in part as disruptions and interventions in cartography and politics, then bringing them to the attention of a wider sympathetic audience might be partially justified. Yet in doing so practices of intellectual vanguardism ought to be avoided. Rather than attempting to colonize or objectify these practices, one might 'offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts' (Graeber 2004, 12), whilst also communicating these practices more widely in the hope of opening up possibilities for new, non-hierarchical utopian spaces (Graeber 2009, 112). This echoes arguments in

social movement research that research should be relevant to the movements themselves (Bevington and Dixon 2005; Motta 2011), whilst Routledge (2003) argues that research concerning the work of resisting others should be shared with those others prior to publication. This latter point has not been entirely possible since the 'resisting others' are untraceable, yet in solidarity, I have chosen to publish the article in this open access journal, with an intended readership including radical academics and activists, and will contribute a printed copy to the archive.

Thinking about how to describe or communicate the maps herein has been a difficult task, since representing them as fixed knowledge is somewhat in tension to the approach I wish to take. Furthermore, spending a lot of time with the maps gave me a strong feeling that maps communicate something that cannot be expressed in words, and that one could write a paper on each individual map and still not fully capture its essence – each map is in a 'category' of its own in this sense. Nonetheless, I think that it is a worthwhile and not entirely contradictory task to identify various loose categories of maps in terms of their pedagogic functions, in order to further explore the kinds of knowledge produced in the maps and the ways they might mobilise learning and change. My hope is that in writing this, others may be inspired to go and look at the maps in 56a themselves, and to create their own maps and ways of working with maps.

Whilst working through the maps in the archive, some of the functional categories that I identified reflect themes, ideas and concepts that already exist within various (sometimes unintegrated) literatures on mapping. Other maps seem to merit the creation of new mapping categories and concepts. Many other categories besides those I outline below are possible, and most of the maps overlap and exceed this categorization. Furthermore, some types of maps that existed in the archive, particularly those in the 'scientific/physical' folder and one miscellaneous folder have not been included. These functioned more as examples of dominant mapping practices than utopian alternatives, for example there were various topographic, Ordnance Survey and Automobile Association maps of various places<sup>4</sup>. Critiques of such maps already exist in the literature, yet their presence in the context perhaps functions as critique through absurdism, making the familiar seem strange by juxtaposing with transgressive maps, and mobilises the production of situated critical knowledge. For each category that I identify below, I describe some examples, signal to corresponding literatures, and attempt to interpret and highlight utopian pedagogical functions of affect, affinity and performativity. Nonetheless, these

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<sup>4</sup> The presence of these maps may also be explained by their use-value for navigation, coupled with the fact that the one of the archive's intended functions is as a kind of library for participants to borrow maps. The potential to create maps with high navigational use-value using anarchist methods could be the topic of another paper. Useful starting points might include Colin Ward's (1973, 59-66) studies of anarchist planning methods, David Turnbull's (2000, 163-164) study of non-centralised Pacific navigation techniques, Bruce Chatwin's (1998) account of Aboriginal oral mapping techniques, and studies into potentially participatory technologies such as GIS (e.g. Dunn 2007).



categories should be understood to be explorative rather than definitive; they are intended to open up existing ideas of mapping practice to difference and critique through illustrating alternatives rather than fixing or limiting other possibilities.

## **Geopolitical Maps**

Several maps spoke to a category, identified by Cobarrubias and Pickles (2009, 36) as 'geopolitical mappings'. There were many such examples in the archive, most of which were professionally produced by radical activist research groupings. One example, produced by Preemptive Media (2006) was entitled 'Fossil Fuel map' showing supply routes of oil, coal and gas along with production and consumption statistics, lists of top producing countries for each resource, top consuming countries, top importers to the US, top CO2 emitters and other facts and figures. A map produced by Bureau d'études and Université Tangente (2003) called 'infospace, infowar' focuses on global information infrastructure and the governmentality of information. A further map with a more local focus, yet which signals to global influences and dynamics, is the 'Countermapping Queen Mary' campus map, with a board-game on the reverse that tracks border policy, labour conditions on campus and resistance movements. It purports to be "a visual representation of the ways in which the university functions as a knowledge factory but also as a border" (3Cs Counter Cartographies Collective 2013), and draws connections between the borders, institutions and regulatory systems that operate in and around the university. Aside from these three notable examples, there were several other published and professionally produced maps which shared the similar functions of representing and visibilising power/discourse networks or structures, with or without spatial ordering.

Such maps are produced by collectives including academics, activists, students, migrants and workers (Counter Cartographies Collective, Dalton and Mason-Deese 2012, 441-443). The process of collectively producing these maps is seen to be important (ibid, 443) yet they also have a wider function as "efforts to understand global processes and the constitution of power and empire" (Cobarrubias and Pickles 2009, 36; see also Holmes 2006; Holmes 2002). The maps can visibilise systemic oppression, giving people an understanding of the forces that shape their lives, and also offering a knowledge-base for actions of resistance. Jameson (1991, 54) sheds light on the affective pedagogic function of this cartographic aesthetic (which he terms 'cognitive mapping'), arguing that it 'seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system' (ibid, 54). This embodied, affective function is a basis for a performative function, simultaneously representing the 'truth of postmodernism ... the world space of multinational capital' whilst reforming resistant individual and collective subjects who 'regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralised by our spatial as well as our social confusion' (ibid, 54).

There are some potential problematics revealed by Jameson's discourse of representing truth. It assumes a single vision and unified interpretation of truth, which might veer somewhat towards counter- rather than anti-hegemony, and furthermore in the assumption that highlighting oppressive structures might automatically read-off into social change. Discussions at the infoshop raised the issues that the sheer amount of information presented in such maps, as well as the use of technology to produce them, can seem alienating and confusing, and questions were raised over how the maps might be used (see also Holmes 2002). There is a danger that when the maps are moved from the situated context in which they are produced to a wider audience their pedagogical function might veer towards vanguardism, as they offer little opportunity for potential map-users to insert their own interpretations or transgressions. Nonetheless, the sheer variety of information produced by collectives such as Bureau d'études<sup>5</sup> functions as a radical transgression of dominant mapping practices, highlighting exclusions and elisions in maps that claim to be fixed representations of spatial practice.

### **Collective walks and radical history trails**

I did not find any maps in the archive that reflected the literatures on counter-mapping, which was perhaps to be expected due to the nature of the archive, which is not situated in a manner intended to make claims from powerful agencies. Nonetheless, several maps of specific areas and spaces existed, whilst their intended functions transgressed the marking out of territories, boundaries and resources. The published Manchester Free Social Foundations map (McCloskey, Sullivan and Yuill 2008) explores the current condition of spaces of free and open assembly in Manchester, comparing spaces created by the public themselves and those created for public use. The map links areas with stories from local residents and working class oral histories gained through interviews. This map seems to function as a protest against gentrification, countering discourses of enclosed, privatised, commercial 'public' space with grassroots practices of commoning (Midnight Notes Collective 1990). Conversations in the infoshop highlighted that such maps do not need to be published like this one, and indeed often a similar function is served without any paper map being produced at all through collective walking through landscapes that have taken place around the infoshop and elsewhere. These walks lead to conversations and mutual learning together in the territory. Themes for discussion can include spaces that have disappeared or are in danger of being lost due to regeneration, mapping contemporary life and how it is informed by what happened in the past and what may happen in the future<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See Bureau d'études at <http://bureaudetudes.org/> accessed 26 June 2013

<sup>6</sup> Several projects and events linking walking, art and politics in this way are documented on the Southwark Notes website: <http://southwarknotes.wordpress.com> accessed 26 June 2013.



Figure 1: Camberwell Hidden History map



Figure 2: Southwark Radical History map





Figure 3: Detail from Southwark Radical History map

The practice of critical learning through walking was also reflected in the archive through a large number of published and hand-drawn radical history trails and walks. Indeed, this was perhaps the most visible category in the archive. Examples included a London Sugar and Slavery map (London Docklands Museum 2005), produced by the Docklands museum and a Glasgow West-end women's heritage walk. There was also a series of hand-drawn or hand-printed maps including writing and picture collage showing radical histories of Camberwell, Southwark, Elephant and Castle and Hammersmith. Whilst these maps were hand-made originals they were very clear and detailed, produced as though for photocopying and distribution. These radical history trails, like counter-mappings, visibilise marginal histories and worldviews, yet unlike counter-maps they are not produced to make claims against powerful structures, but rather place emphasis on immanent performativity and utopian pedagogy. In this case, somewhat conversely to geopolitical mappings, the affective function follows rather than precedes the performative function: the maps are made to be followed whilst the user learns through direct affective experience within the architecture and landscape itself (Ellsworth 2005) about marginal voices, positionalities and histories. The affective potential of cartographic discourse and practice reflects concerns of the Situationists (Pinder 1996) who demanded that attention be paid to the embodied aspects of alienation (Vaneigem 2006, 34) and that resistance also begin at the scale of embodiment and everyday life, through practices such as the *dérive*: a

psychogeographical wandering alone or in groups through the urban environment seen to constitute a process of dis-alienation and resistance (Debord 1956). Members of the infoshop explicitly mentioned the influence of the Situationists as inspiration for mapping and walking practices.

## Art Maps

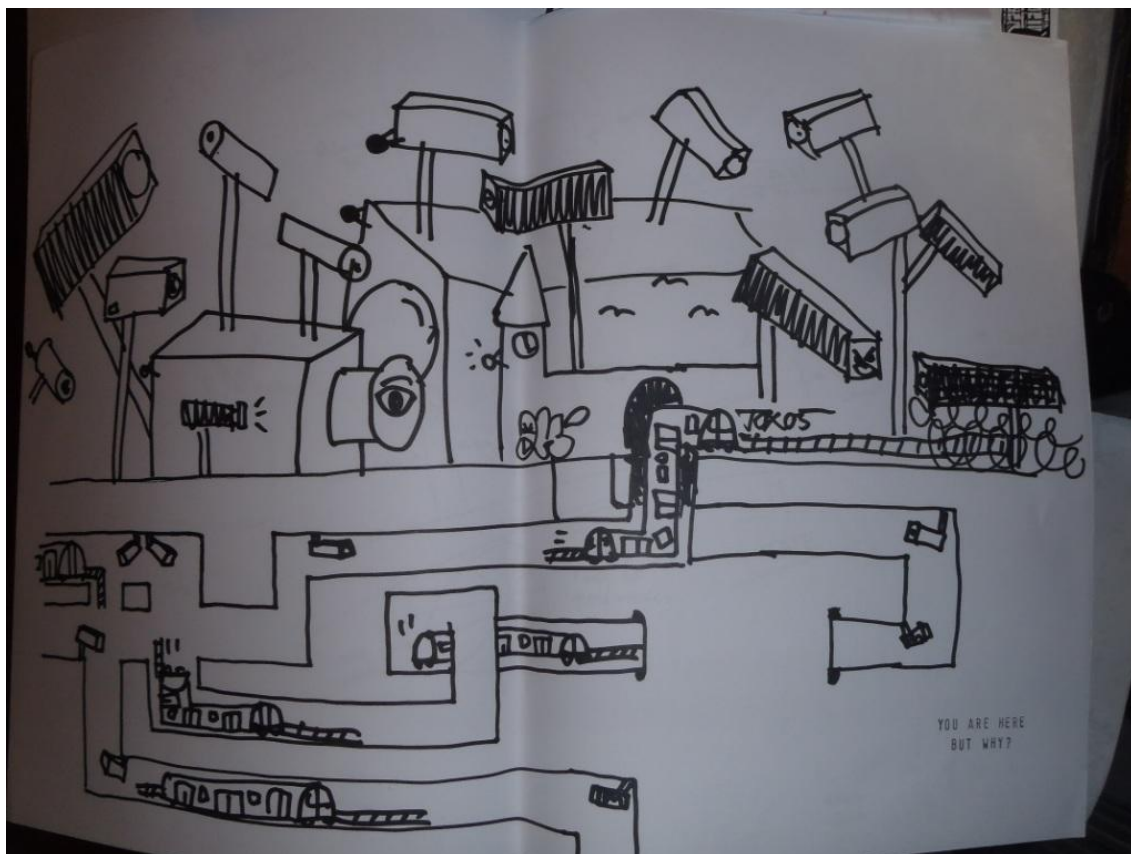


Figure 4: Artistic CCTV map

A whole folder was dedicated to ‘artistic’ maps, mostly containing images with no words or labels, often parodying traditional maps in humorous or unusual styles. An example included a series of photographs of stones, drift-wood, seaweed and other beach materials laid out on a sandy beach in streets and pathways, with bridges and buildings. Another map pictured above showed images of intertwined streets that were exaggeratedly twisty and overlapping, with over-sized CCTV cameras sprouting from the roadsides like trees. These maps raise issues of irony, using absurd or subversive mapping criteria, visibilising the arbitrariness and false authority of mapping conventions by mobilising affects such as humour, nostalgia and dissonance. The maps also potentially have a performative function of subverting dominant habits and opening routes for experimenting with new ways of seeing. They raise critical awareness and act as pedagogies showing the constructedness and

constructability of reality. Art maps again reflect themes in Situationist literatures, calling for a fusion of art, politics and life in a 'project of a liberated creativity' (Debord 1963), through techniques such as *détournement* which subverts and parodies mainstream representations by bringing them into new combinations and contexts, thereby devalourising them in order to begin to create new values (Jorn 1959).

### Practical maps and immanent utopias

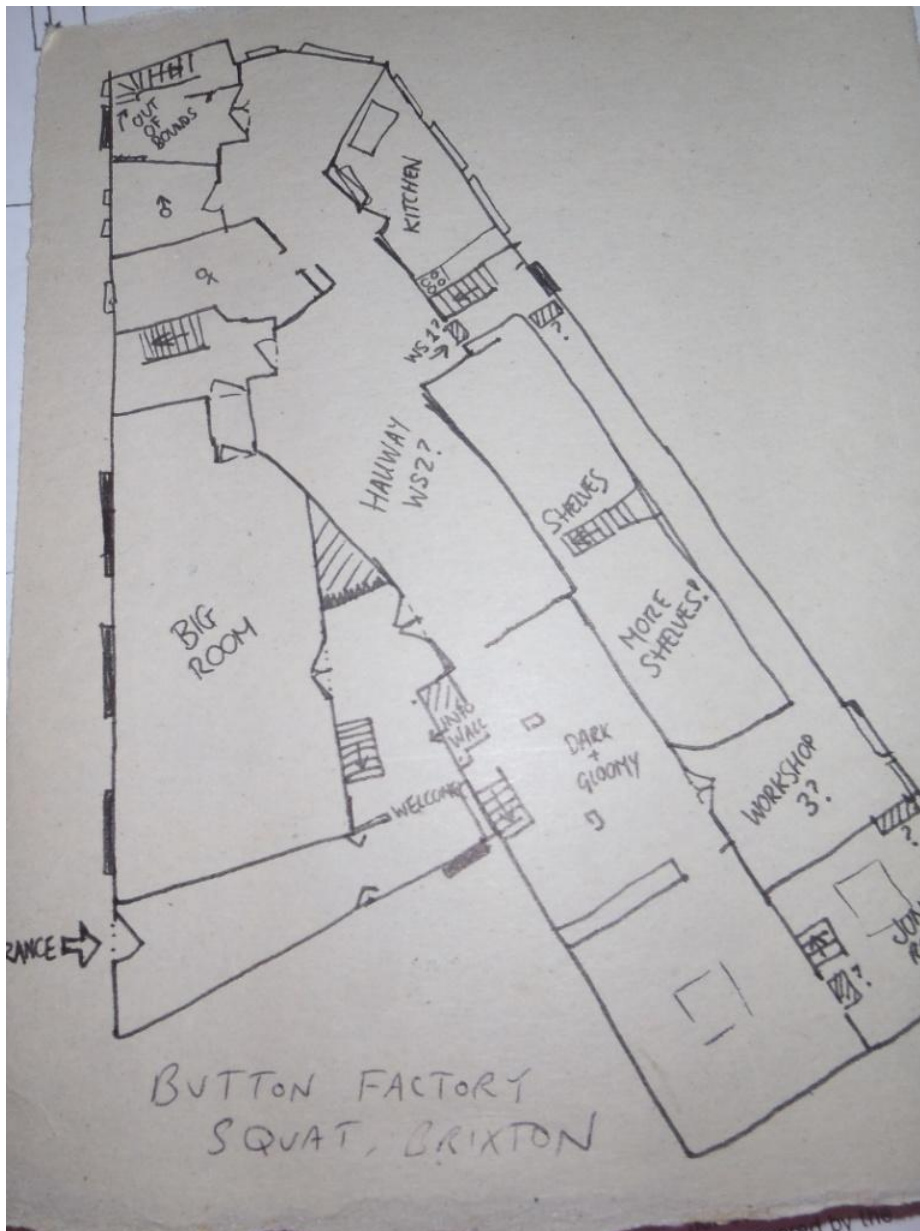


Figure 5: Button Factory Squat plan





Figure 6: Elephant and Castle Urban Forest map

Notable for their absence were explicitly utopian maps, or maps expressing future-oriented fantasies or articulations of revolutionary desires in spatial form. Nonetheless, there were several examples of maps expressing utopian desire for creating and/or visibilising alternative spaces. This category included a hand-drawn, photocopied 'local food map', showing the locations of edible plants in the local area and the times of year that they can be collected, sites for foraging, along with sites for viewing various types of wildlife. Similarly, pictured above was an 'urban forest' map, which also signalled to spaces of wildlife and food for foraging in the context of plans for regeneration. Another example was a hand-drawn map seemingly from memory of a section of the river Thames, showing various bridges labelled: 'Grosvenor train bridge', 'Chewed bridge', 'Albert bridge' and 'Battersea bridge'. Battersea power station is also marked. The map marks out stairs and access points to the Thames, signalling where these are locked and also where they are monitored by CCTV.

A folder entitled 'queer maps' contained hand-drawn maps of several cities, marked with venues and spaces, claiming on the front to offer 'party plans'. Another example was a photocopy of an architectural ground-plan of a large building, which was presumably squatted (or planned to be) as a social centre, which has been marked up with highlighter pens and ballpoint. Various areas have been highlighted and labelled with new functions, including café; back of





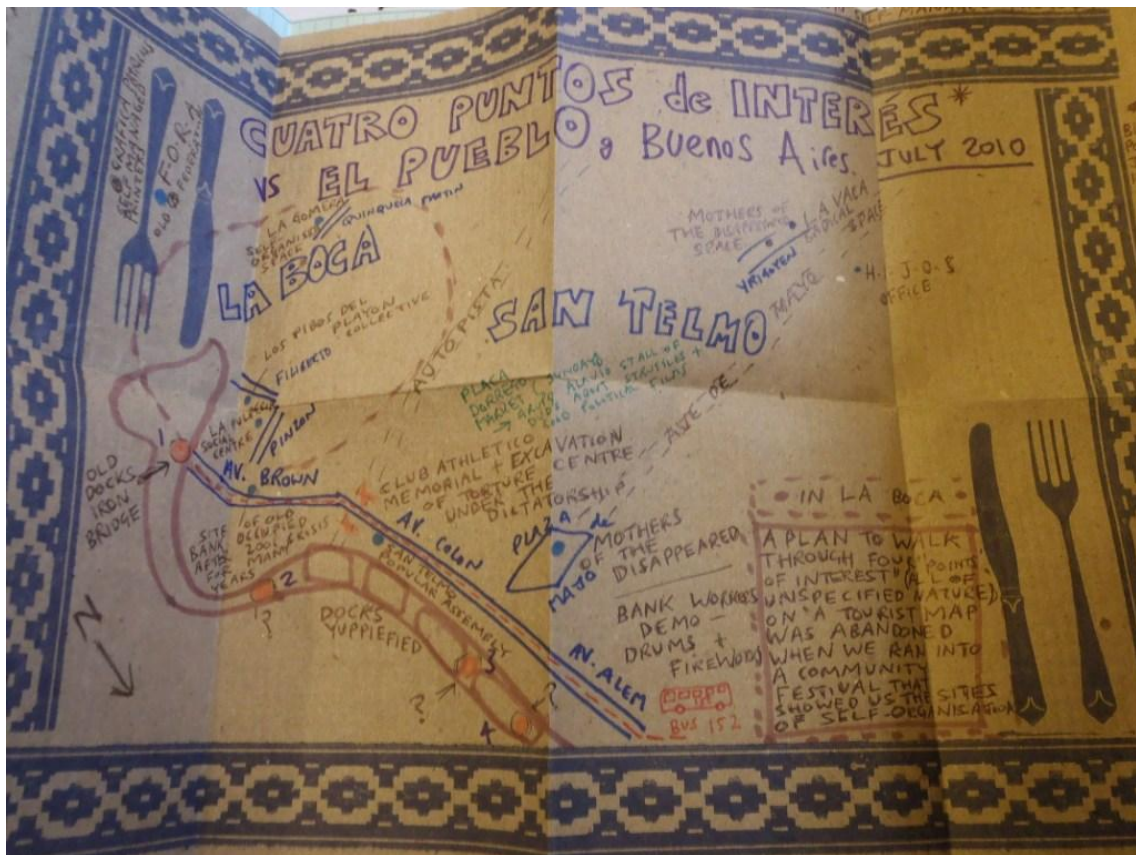


Figure 8: Buenos Aires points of interest map

Several maps in the archive had functions that emphasised highly personal aspects of knowledge production, and might be termed, following Iturroiz and Wachowicz (2010) ‘affective cartographies’, designating maps which ‘recognise and point out those places that bear subjective meaning for us’ (Iturroiz and Wachowicz 2010, 75). These included a map entitled “Rio downtown June 2010”. The map labels various road names along with areas and drawn buildings and signals to “prostitutes”, “cops with guns”, “tourist Boutiques”, “clubs”, “trash sellers”, “Salad Bar Gloria (falafel)”, “Cine Landia (beer falafel)”, “Art zone” and “supermarket”. A Buenos Aires ‘points of interest’ map, drawn on a napkin and pictured above, claims to show what happened when official tourist maps were abandoned and more spontaneous adventures & local knowledges were mapped. Another map entitled “How I survived the winter of 2004/5” indicates places of warmth, places where blankets and fleeces were found and houses where baths could be taken, which I was informed was drawn by someone living in a very cold squatted flat. Similarly ‘Hello London How do You Do’ is a zine-style colour-photocopied booklet of several hand-drawn maps, including various maps of experiences and areas of London, shading out places which are as yet unknown and highlighting places of personal significance, with cartoon-style pictures of key spaces and events.

These maps emphasise qualitative, personal experiences of space, visibilising a particular individual's psychological experience of lived, sensory and emotional aspects of the space whilst concealing the experience of actors other than the artist (Thrift 2004). The presence of these maps can partly be explained by one of the asserted functions of the archive – that maps can be taken and used by travellers, whilst simultaneously expressing a transgressive and communicative purpose, visibilising uncommon experiences. Many of these maps were individualised and preoccupied with laying out streets and borders in a similar manner to a conventional street-map.

This raises the issue of parodying dominant map-making practices, which was the basis of another discussion at 56a. Having facilitated several mapping workshops, Chris said that it is very difficult to get people to think beyond the traditional street-mapping style, and also that people often map individually rather than collectively, which is a problematic I have personally encountered when facilitating cartography workshops with both academics and activists. This issue is also identified in the counter-mapping literature: 'I can recall several instances where people tried to replicate the official maps they had already seen' (Rouchleau 2005, 342).

In an effort to think through and overcome this, Chris had facilitated a collective mapping workshop in Hackney, entitled 'Uncommon Places'. The result of this workshop is to be found in the mapping archive, on a huge piece of paper. After discussion with participants on how to map Hackney without following the usual street-map style, people lay down on the paper in various positions and the outline of their bodies was traced. Afterwards, the group considered what emotion each outline conveyed, for example excited, happy, despairing, fearful, and then discussed as a group the places in Hackney that aroused these emotions, with which the outlines were labelled.

Still other maps were highly personal or reflected on personal experience or emotion, yet without replicating the street-map style. An example included a personal timeline, with years numbered from the artist's birth to the present. Other lines were marked alongside this signalling to different houses the artist had lived in, different movements they had been part of, when they became an anarchist, times that they had lost people or missed them, and various other important life events. The purpose of such a map transgresses and denaturalises fixed knowledge by visibilising and expressing emotions and life events, yet it may also have a performative and political pedagogic function, highlighting ways in which systemic oppression can impact on individual lives opening up communicative pathways for forming solidarities and affinities for resistance (Amsler 2011). This function seems to have been the basis of the 'Precari-Punx' project<sup>7</sup>, the outcomes of which also resided in the archive as a folder containing photocopied posters of an outline of a body, which participants were asked to

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<sup>7</sup> Information on this project is available at <http://www.56a.org.uk/precari.html> Accessed 28 May 2013

mark up with the ways in which their precarious labour was affecting their minds and bodies.

### Affinity Maps

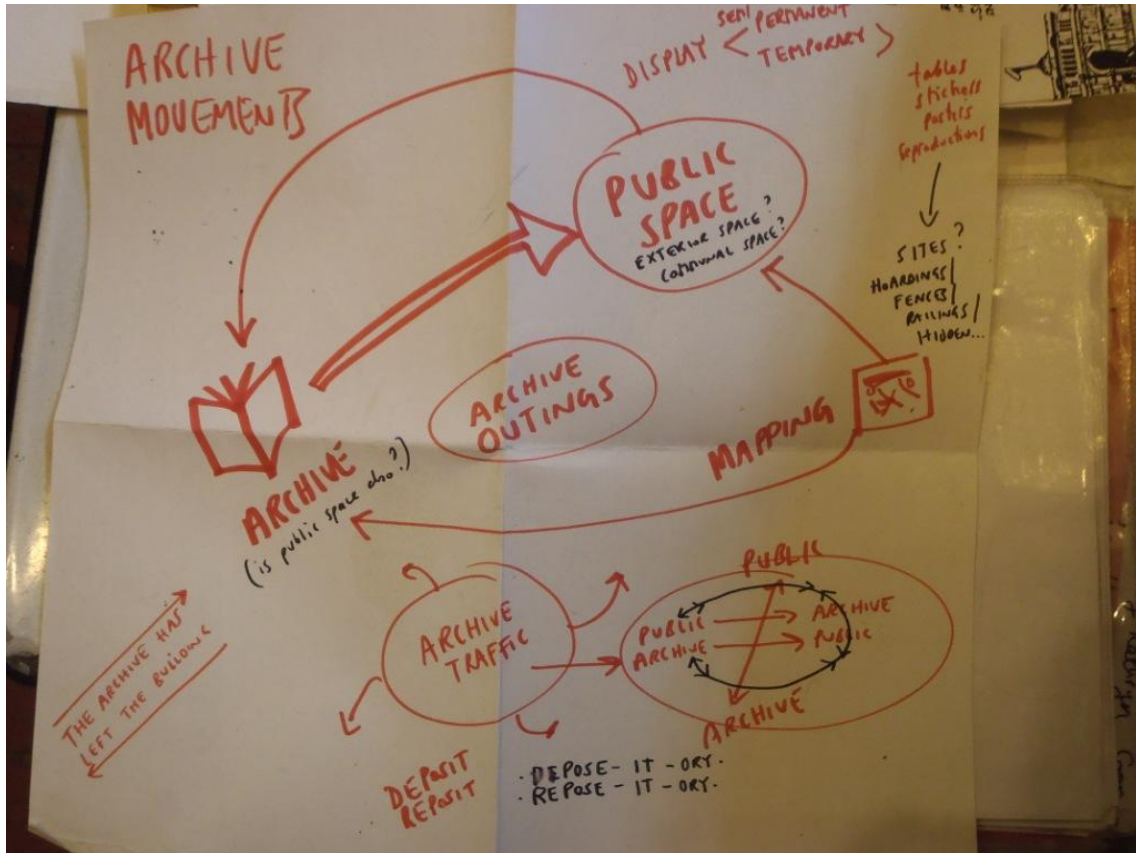


Figure 9: Archive travels map

Maps with an emphasis on relationships and organization were fairly sparse within the archive yet deserve a mention. One example was a hand-drawn map entitled 'small world: A friendship network Zine map'. This map showed lines between people and descriptions of relationships and where or how they met. People with red lines under their names, they key tells us are 'People I have never met / don't know very well' and a dotted line means people who know each-other but the author does not know where from. The map as a while looks rather like a spider-web or network. Possible functions of such maps might include valourisation of the network form of relationships, the examination of unintended hierarchies and exclusions, and the expression of reflexivity and social situatedness.

One of the most poignant of the maps is a very roughly drawn visualization on scrap paper that maps the travels and influence of the map archive itself, showing places that the archive has travelled, and also the different forms of

travel. It includes 'Archive (is public place also)' indicating that people who use the open-access archive leave with knowledge and experience gained from the archive; 'the archive has left the building' and 'archive outings' indicating that the whole archive itself has travelled to various places and events; a circle labelled 'archive traffic' with arrows pointing in and out, indicating that maps are taken out for use and new maps also come in. What is interesting about this map, and speaks to this present paper more than any of the other maps, is that this particular map appears to be signifying the ways in which the archive itself has acted as a pedagogical and utopian-performative device, by making local knowledge (developed in the festival and the archive project) mobile to wider spaces and movements through the network form and bonds and practices of affinity.

### **Possibilities for pedagogy**

Rather than a conclusion, which signals closure and fixed knowledge, I would like to end this paper by opening up possibilities for further anarchist mapping practices. The purpose here is not to present a recipe or list of instructions for running specific workshops with clearly defined cases or groups. Mapping practices are as multiple as the individuals and groups that do, and have the potential to, make and use maps and my aim here is not to define or to limit practice. Nor, however, do I wish to remain trapped within circling critiques of theory, but rather draw together some of the foregoing themes to offer some concrete suggestions for opening up spaces and conditions from which anarchist cartographic pedagogies could begin. Following anarchist ethics, there should be no separation between the means and ends of utopian space: the process is as important as the outcome. The conditions for pedagogical spaces offered here roughly to correspond to previously theorised functions of anti-hegemonic, anarchist cartography: affinity, affect and performativity. The suggestions put forward arise from a dialogue between the theories and practices discussed herein but also transgress these, following Graeber's prerogative that the utopian research project 'would have two aspects, or two moments if you like: one ethnographic, one utopian, suspended in a constant dialogue' (Graeber 2004, 12). For example, following the practices at 56a infoshop I place emphasis on multi-layered practices of affinity, immanent affect and practical performative value, yet transgressing these practices I posit more emphasis on collective map-making.

### **Affinity and consensus**

Affinity is a method of organising and relating that is non-hierarchical and which builds social bonds and solidarity across multiple differences without abstracting these to abstract or fixed identities or knowledges. Graeber argues that methodologies for working with and within anarchist spaces should attend to only two principles, the utopian principle that another world is possible, and the rejection of intellectual vanguardism (Graeber 2004, 10-11). An anarchist

pedagogy should therefore 'reflect a similar humility towards "Truths" in a fluidity of form that such an educational space can adapt to the needs and perspectives of those who create and participate in it' (Armaline 2009, 136). Furthermore, 'none of us can claim to define anarchism, or what an anarchist society *should* (or even worse, "will") look like and impose those views on others' (ibid, 137).

This latter point reflects the lack of future-oriented utopian maps in the archive, and also brings into focus the role of the facilitator in opening up utopian pedagogical spaces for critical cartographic map-making. The role of a facilitator of a critical cartographic workshop might begin by forming bonds of affinity with potential collaborators (Routledge 2009, 85), consisting of the creation of 'supportive, sympathetic spaces for its members to articulate, listen to one another, and share concerns, emotions or fears' (ibid, 84-85), leading to 'a politics of research based on consensus decision-making – which is non-hierarchical and participatory – embodying flexible, fluid modes of action' (ibid, 85). Creating such an environment involves attending to and problematising intersubjective power relationships between the researcher and participants, which involves openly discussing and critiquing one's own position of power whilst also 'being attentive to the power our collaborators bring to the research process' (ibid, 86).

Consensus is a process used most often for decision-making purposes in a wide range of anarchistic spaces that aim to organise non-hierarchically. Whilst imperfect in overcoming all hierarchies (Firth 2012, 100-105) it offers the best available conditions for the articulation of difference, since all participants have to agree on decision before a course of action is taken, and minorities have the power to veto so cannot be ignored. Consensus is arguably not just a practical method for organising decision-making, but is also an ethical approach and a pedagogical practice, which encourages the free articulation of ideas and desires of all participants, therefore fostering situations of epistemological pluralism. All must be willing to modify beliefs and desires in light of new perspectives and information brought to the space by others. Nonetheless consensus should not be viewed necessarily as the complete agreement of all participants with a transcendental goal or belief, but rather the process itself can be understood to initiate a kind of polyphonic dialogue that can prevent ideas from becoming stagnant, or fixed, at an epistemological level (Bakhtin 1984: 21), facilitating epistemological transgression and becoming-other. This enables the collective construction of new knowledges in processes that do not assume a predetermined or fixed outcome or conform to transcendental models of morality or truth, often leading to more creative results (Firth 2012: 92). Practical guides to consensus within activist literature (for example, The Seeds for Change Collective 2007) can be consulted for more detailed advice on working with consensus, yet many groups find their own informal procedures through practice.

Consensus combined with critical cartography would mean that collaborators in the process would spend some time discussing the mapping process, asking



such questions as: What will be mapped? What materials or technology will be used? What will be visibilised? What will be excluded? What will be drawn, in what style, what colours? How will the map continue its life outside this space? How might the map function as a tool? Who will be able to access it and how will it be used? What kind of knowledge is produced? How might the product of the mapping process trigger other cycles of pedagogy elsewhere? What are the political implications of these decisions? Such a process is about group self-reflection through dialogue and about action, re-constituting collectivity and building new knowledge to be communicated and used. Working with consensus also helps to overcome the issue discussed above that neoliberal subjects, often raised to view knowledge as an individual attribute or endeavour, can tend also to individualise critical map-making. Whilst there is no reason that the consensus procedure cannot result in individual outputs, if this is what is mutually decided, it is likely that introducing the moment of epistemological pluralism might raise and problematise this issue whilst immanently building social bonds and collectivity.

### **Attention to embodiment and affect**

Affect refers to the ways in which desire flows through and connects subjectivities and spaces producing connections and transformations at a non-abstracted, embodied level. Consensus procedures often involve attending to the embodied aspects of discussion, for example hand-signals or coloured cards are often used in the place of vocal approval or disapproval, to avoid interrupting speakers. Attention to embodiment and affect should also extend to a consideration of exclusions and bodily needs within the space – will childcare be provided, or children included in the process? Is the space physically accessible to everyone who might attend? Questions of affect should also inform the map-making process. As has been previously argued, affect is a potentially subversive and critical force, drawing attention to oppressive silences and erasures in dominant map-making practices, which tend to take an abstracted and disembodied ‘God’s eye view’ (Pickles 2004, 80). Bringing attention to this in discussion, including expressions of affect in any maps that are produced as part of the process, and discussing the potential for mobilising affect in the ways the maps are intended to be used may help to overcome problems associated with the urge to replicate mainstream mapping practices.

### **Performativity: action and intersections with power**

Performativity refers to the ways in which mapping produces and deploys new knowledges and operates these strategically, bringing new worlds into being. Anarchist cartography has the potential to operate performatively on a number of levels. Perhaps most importantly, the process of organising collectively under conditions of consensus is immanently performative, expressing a Do-it-Yourself political ethos, reclaiming space and time from capital, reconstituting social bonds and dis-alienating participants from each other and the spatial

environment. Furthermore, the maps operate as pedagogies if they continue their life outside the space. Any maps produced have the potential to intersect with and resist hierarchical power at a number of different levels, without positing a unified counter-hegemonic knowledge to make claims to powerful structures. The example of geopolitical maps shows that maps can expose hidden power relationships and structures, which can form a basis for acts of resistance. Maps can also be practical, offering tips for utopian living and immanent political change. Maps can mobilise affect, leading to subjective and social transformation and can visibilise and valourise alternative forms of relationships such as affinity and the network form as well as marginal spaces and histories.

A further, perhaps more controversial use of maps which has been suggested throughout this paper is as a rich form of qualitative data for academic research projects. This level of articulation is somewhat problematic, as the academy can be interpreted as a realm of power wherein the anarchistic ethos of maps might be recuperated into an alienated discourse. Nonetheless, it is also worth recognising that universities are also sites of struggle, resistance and possibility (Motta 2013; Neary 2012) whilst radical academics' identities are also fluid and multiple, often shifting between roles as activist, practitioner and academic (Minh-Ha 1991, 226; Routledge 2009, 89; Motta 2012). Rather than speaking counter-'truth' to power, then, any research drawn from collaborative mapping practices can work to prioritise 'grounded, embodied political action, the role of theory being to contribute to, be informed by, and grounded in such action, in order to create and nurture mutual solidarity and collective action – yielding in the end a liberatory politics of affinity' (Routledge 2009, 90-91).

What I hope to have done within the present paper, therefore, is to open up suggestions for future anarchist practices, rather than to offer fixed conclusions that speak a single truth. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the theoretical framework and concepts I develop a particular understanding of pedagogy and anarchism, which could potentially define and limit practice in powerful ways. It is for this reason that such concepts and the power relations that underlie them should be opened up for discussion in conditions of epistemological pluralism through local processes of consensus.

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## **Professors of our own poverty: intellectual practices of a poor people's movement in post-apartheid South Africa**

**Cerianne Robertson**

### **Abstract**

*This paper addresses how a poor people's movement contests dominant portrayals of 'the poor' as a violent mass in contemporary South African public discourse. To explore how Abahlali baseMjondolo, a leading poor people's movement, articulates its own representation of 'the poor,' I examine two primary intellectual and pedagogical practices identified by movement members: first, discussion sessions in which members reflect on their experiences of mobilizing as Abahlali, and second, the website through which the movement archives a library of its own homegrown knowledge. I argue that these intellectual practices open new spaces for the poor to represent themselves to movement members and to publics beyond shack settlements. Through these spaces, Abahlali demonstrates and asserts the intelligence which exists in the shack settlements, and demands that its publics rethink dominant portrayals of 'the poor.'*

**Keywords:** Abahlali baseMjondolo, the poor, movement, intellectual and pedagogical practices, South Africa, post-apartheid

### **Introduction**

On August 16, 2012, at a Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, South Africa, 34 miners on strike were shot dead by police. South African and global press quickly dubbed the event, "The Marikana Massacre," printing headlines such as "Killing Field", "Mine Slaughter", and "Bloodbath," while videos of police shooting miners went viral and photographs showed bodies strewn on the ground (Herzkovitz, 2012). In September, South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* reported that more striking miners "threw stones at officers" while "plumes of black smoke poured into the sky from burning tyres which workers used as barricades" ("Marikana," 2012). The police had "sworn to...stamp out the illegal gatherings, illegal weapons, incitement and threats of violence that have characterized the protests," while President Jacob Zuma's spokesperson argued that the police response was appropriate given the protests' "violence and threats of intimidation" ("Marikana," 2012).

Another aspect of the story was much slower to emerge: the miners' story of increasing participation in organized mass meetings in the weeks preceding August 16. A poor people's movement in Durban, South Africa, called Abahlali baseMjondolo (isiZulu for "residents of the shacks"), sent a representative to visit the striking miners shortly after the massacre. The representative reported that

the organized discussions amongst miners about working conditions and increasing tension with Lonmin officials had informed mobilization and began long before the violence in August made global headlines.

Moments of violent confrontation between the poor and the police, which are increasingly common in post-apartheid South Africa, routinely appear in the mainstream news. At the same time, recent academic literature on shack settlements and movements of the poor has characterized the urban poor as a suffering and unproductive surplus population, depicting a global poor who lack agency and intelligence (Davis, 2006), or labeling the protests of poor communities as transient and violent, reactionary rather than revolutionary (Harvey, 2006).

In contrast, the thinking behind the action, as exhibited by the meetings before the Marikana protests, goes largely unremarked in South African public discourse. Accordingly, this paper asks how poor people's movements contest dominant portrayals of 'the poor' as a violent, unthinking mass in contemporary South African public discourse. To explore how Abahlali baseMjondolo, a leading poor people's movement, articulates its own representation of 'the poor,' I examine two primary intellectual and pedagogical practices identified by movement members: first, discussion sessions known as 'Living Learning' in which members reflect on their experiences of mobilizing as Abahlali, and second, the website through which the movement archives a library of its own homegrown knowledge. I argue that through behind-the-scenes intellectual practices such as meetings, overnight 'camps' in which members gather for political discussions, political education workshops, the movement's website, and interactions with allies and opponents alike, Abahlali has developed a collective identity as 'the poor' in post-apartheid South Africa based on its members' experiences of sustained material poverty and inequality. The booklet in which participants reflect on the Living Learning sessions and Abahlali's website open new spaces for the poor to represent themselves to movement members and to publics beyond shack settlements. Through these spaces, Abahlali demonstrates and asserts the intelligence that exists in the shack settlements, and demands that its publics rethink dominant portrayals of 'the poor'. Ultimately, these platforms insist that South African middle-class publics engage with the poor in order to have any chance at successfully reducing poverty, inequality, crime, and other concerns of residents in post-apartheid society.

This paper is a condensed version of my undergraduate thesis, the culmination of two months spent in Durban, South Africa where I conducted interviews with movement members and engaged in participant-observation in the movement's activities, in addition to analyzing documents produced by movement members. Abahlali provides a useful lens through which to study the intellectual practices of poor people's movements because members constantly engage in theorizing that very topic. Durban, in turn, is a critical site for this topic not only because it is home to Abahlali, but also because it served as a hotbed of protest by shack settlement residents both in recent years and during the apartheid period (Bond, 2012; Pithouse, 2008; Gibson, 2006; Bond, 2004). An estimated nearly

one-third of the eThekweni municipality's population lives in shacks (Pithouse, 2008).

Abahlali baseMjondolo emerged in Durban in 2005 as a movement of poor shack dwellers led by shack dwellers. Less than a year after its founding, the United Kingdom's *The Times* reported that the movement had "shaken the political landscape of South Africa" (Clayton, 2006). Documenting the movement's formative months, academic Richard Pithouse noted that "every important decision [was] made in collective decision-making forums and every individual or group to have traveled elsewhere [was] elected and mandated and [took] the obligation to report back very seriously" (Pithouse, 2006b). Abahlali continued to prioritize this grassroots, democratic structure of mobilization as it developed in the following years into the largest contemporary movement of and for poor people in South Africa, with over thirty member communities estimated to be constituted by tens of thousands of individual members ("A Short History," 2006).

Over the years of key successes – such as its defeat of part of KwaZulu-Natal's 2007 Elimination and Prevention of Re-emergence of Slums Act – and struggle against relentless, sometimes violent, opposition, Abahlali has garnered substantial academic attention. However, this paper constitutes the first study of Abahlali's Living Learning booklet and, perhaps more surprisingly, the first study of the movement's extensive website archives.

### **'Living Learning' as an intellectual practice**

In 2007, Abahlali baseMjondolo and its affiliate movement in northern KwaZulu-Natal, the Rural Network, were invited by a local NGO to send a few of their members to study for a Certificate of Education in Participatory Development (CEPD) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The movements' communities deliberated and voted to accept this opportunity. However, questions remained as to what a university course could actually offer South Africa's largest movement of poor people. By 2008, six members of the movements were participating in the CEPD program. They also began meeting as a group once a month outside of the structured university course schedule. In these meetings they discussed how the UKZN course pertained to daily life in shack settlements and reflected upon the role that their venture into the formal institution of the university could play in the movement for the poor. They labeled the meetings as 'Living Learning' sessions, borrowing from the Abahlali term 'living learning' to describe the processes of gaining knowledge directly from experiences in shack communities.

The stated purpose of Living Learning is to "[match] the theory with the reality of the life of the people" (Figlan et al., 2009). By "theory," Abahlali members mean the ideas they are exposed to in the CEPD course, where they discuss theorists like Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, and Frantz Fanon, as well as contemporary articles and studies on development. By "reality," the movement means the everyday lived experiences of the poor in post-apartheid South Africa,

including the shacks, the poor service-delivery, the protests and the resulting arrests, and the evictions. Some of the content of the conversations feeds directly into movement materials, such as when ideas and quotes from one Living Learning session were incorporated into informational pamphlets for an Abahlali event. More frequently, though, the ideas generated together in discussion serve to inform the individual members' understandings of their movement and the society in which it exists and serves.

According to Abahlali members, an additional purpose of the Living Learning meetings is to think constantly about how to "report back" on learning at university to the members of their communities (Figlan et al., 2009). Because Abahlali aspires to have every single member understand and be able to articulate what the organization is fighting for, Living Learning participants are responsible for connecting ideas from the university to the community members' existing understandings of the world and their politics. This responsibility includes explaining terms they identify as "difficult" such as globalization and neoliberalism, a task that requires "good translation and interpretation to make it really a living politics" (Figlan et al. 2009).

At the beginning of each meeting, the participants each identify topics stemming from that month's CEPD curriculum or experiences within the movement that they want to discuss. Examples of these topics include ideas of communication within the movement, 'top-down' versus 'ground-up' development, respecting others when working in a group, and Freedom Day -a South African holiday that Abahlali members refer to as "UnFreedom Day" (Figlan et al. 2009). In addition to the movement members, there is a discussion facilitator from the Church Land Programme (CLP). The CLP is one of the few NGOs that the two Abahlali and Rural Network members say respects that leadership of the poor must come from the poor. After compiling the session participants' ideas, the facilitator asks the group which topics are most pertinent to discuss. The facilitator then takes notes on the discussion for all participants to check and edit after the meeting.

The participants decided to co-author a Living Learning booklet to document the discussions throughout the 2008 meetings. A second edition that will reflect new ideas responding to changing conditions over the past six years is in the works as of early 2014. However, the original booklet is important to examine here because it is a consolidation of the first year in which Abahlali and the Rural Network theorized at the deliberate, semi-structured level that Living Learning sessions offered, laying the groundwork for the years to come. Through this first Living Learning experience, participants redeployed language from South African public discourse to articulate a new collective identity of 'the poor' as 'oppressed' by the post-apartheid 'order' but uniquely positioned to develop a liberating pedagogy as 'shack intellectuals.' The resulting booklet both asserts and demonstrates the intelligence of shack residents.

As a unique experiment in reconstituting formal education along the lines of Paulo Freire's concept of a liberating dialogue among 'the oppressed', Abahlali's Living Learning program should be of significance to anyone interested in how that concept can function in the actual practice of social movements. In *Pedagogy*



*of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that an education in which knowledge is only allowed to flow in one direction, from an authority to a recipient, actually oppresses the recipient and dehumanizes both participants. Instead, education should be viewed as an exchange from which all parties learn. According to Freire, individuals cannot be told that they should engage in revolution, but they must engage in dialogue in order to reason for themselves that revolutionary change is necessary for their freedom and humanization (Freire, 2005).

Freire writes that it is the “great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire, 2005). However, he fails to detail how a liberating dialogue spreads from within the ranks of the poor to ultimately include the ‘oppressor’ factions of society. The Living Learning booklet, along with the movement’s website, serves as a potent example of how the poor can engage publics beyond their communities in their processes of reflection and meaning-making.

### **Identifying ‘the poor’ in the post-apartheid ‘order’**

From Abahlali’s perspective, post-apartheid South Africa is constituted by a rich elite that has monopolized political power, a middle class that has made substantial gains since the apartheid era, and millions of poor South Africans who continue to live in shacks with poor food security, limited access to employment and quality education, and the constant threat of eviction. Abahlali members view post-apartheid living conditions and class relations as both a) historical, inextricably linked to the apartheid past, and b) global, shaped by a neoliberal development regime. They do not blame their experience of poverty, therefore, solely on the national ANC government or the local ward councilors. However, despite acknowledging the complexities and transformations over time that shape that experience, for the purposes of conceptualizing a collective identification as ‘the poor’ Abahlali consolidate the actors and conditions that contribute towards maintaining the current status quo into one coherent, totalizing ‘order.’

#### **A. Apartheid legacies**

Abahlali members demarcate clear differences between their perception of oppression in today’s order and the oppression that existed under apartheid. During apartheid the people who resisted the regime represented a clear majority of the South African population that was institutionally distinguished by race and ethnicity. In contrast, the law today guarantees equality for all races and ethnicities such that those who take to the streets in protest make up a less easily defined segment of the population. The anti-apartheid struggle occurred in very different political conditions in a time when there was no pretense at universal suffrage. The government in power did not claim to represent everyone, but rather promoted policies of autonomy for each racial group. Since apartheid, the ANC has been elected to power the national government in every national election with overwhelming majorities of votes. Living Learning participants observe that many ANC party members work to promote a sense of national pride (Figlan

et al. 2009).

On the other hand, the participants also draw many parallels between the two 'oppressive' orders. Even though class has replaced race as the primary determinant of status, they argue that both orders presuppose a "politics" that is "founded on the view that only some people matter" (Figlan et al., 2009). Abahlali press statements and the Living Learning booklet routinely insist that the poor today are "still" not free. This language implies a continuation from the apartheid period when, as nearly all South Africans would agree, non-white citizens were not free. The Living Learning participants write:

We have often said that we are not free because the politics of the poor is treated like a criminal offence by the Municipalities while real criminals are treated like business partners. We have often said that we are not free because the councilors are treated like the people's masters instead of their servants. We have often said that we are not free because even many of the people who say that they are for the struggles of the poor refuse to accept that we can think for ourselves. (Figlan et al. 2009)

This passage reflects three clear patterns from the apartheid era. First, during apartheid, anti-apartheid organizations were banned while individual organizers and protesters were frequently arrested or assaulted by the police. Although anti-apartheid mobilization was especially criminalized, all black South Africans were criminalized by the state, which treated them as objects to be monitored and made them carry identification cards at all times. Similarly, Abahlali and Rural Network members face arrests for their protests, but articles posted on Abahlali's website posit that poverty is criminalized overall (Patel 2007, "Police Attack"). Similarly, they notice that the current government labels the movements as "out of order" (Pithouse, 2006a) just as the apartheid government described anti-apartheid activists. Zikode argued in one interview that, because they obviously want to maintain their control, powerful elites in any given regime will label a group that critiques the system as criminal, dangerous, or 'out of order' in order to defray support for that group (Zikode, 2012).

Secondly, during apartheid black South Africans held little of the nation's wealth and worked the most unwanted jobs, frequently as domestic workers for white families who maintained the role of the colonial masters. The poor today, who still live and work in much the same conditions as they did during apartheid, still see the wealthier classes (of all races) as trying to dictate what the poor should do.

Thirdly, during apartheid the Black Consciousness movement asserted that black South Africans needed to show that they could think for and lead themselves. Today, Abahlali and the Rural Network reject assistance from NGOs or left-wing academics who want to lead the movement of the poor or tell the poor what they should do because now, they argue, poor South Africans need to show that they can think for and lead themselves.

In addition to these implicit parallels, Abahlali press releases frequently question

why the poor are “still living the apartheid life” (Mdlalose, 2012), explicitly linking the two eras. Zikode argues that engagement in a movement of the poor allowed Abahlali members to make this significant realization: that the struggle in which many of them also engaged during apartheid never ended. In an interview he explained:

Why is it problematic when the country is in the black hands? Why can't they turn things around because they are in charge? You realize it's no more the racial question. It was really not that we were oppressed by the whites because they were whites. You learn something else now. That there was nothing wrong about skin, there was nothing wrong about race, ...it's all about power, other than anything else, it's about greed, it's about wealth accumulation. (Zikode, 2012)

For Zikode, the fact that a class of elites today has the power to ‘oppress’ the poor in spite of laws that establish all races as equal, demonstrates that race alone could not have been the basis of inequality and oppression under apartheid. Even the system that so blatantly established a hierarchy based on skin colour, he argues, was more fundamentally about establishing a particular group as the elite class with wealth and power. Again, Abahlali members are aware of the complexities that constitute ‘the order’ as apartheid legacies intersect with the new political landscape. Here, however, Zikode simplifies the conceptualization of ‘the order’ for the purpose of claiming that, like under apartheid, one group oppresses another.

## **B. The global development regime**

The Living Learning participants make clear that ‘the order’ is also shaped by the contemporary neoliberal development models which have informed South African policy since the 1990s. Development theories profess goals to raise living standards and increase equality, but Abahlali members often experience development as maintaining, or sometimes even worsening, the situation of many of South Africa’s poorest citizens. The Living Learning participants write:

Africa is rich in its people and resources – but we are poor. We are poor because the bourgeois classes take the resources, chow the money, and oppress the people. We are left with nothing – just maybe begging for some loans from the IMF [International Monetary Fund] or the World Bank. And even if these are given, nothing comes down to the people on the ground. Those on top just keep on taking – through running the companies, taking bribes and, as if that’s not enough, even through taking back our money through tax. We are really poor and oppressed by these things. (Figlan et al., 2009)

Here, the booklet’s contributors suggest that the reason that poor people do not have better living conditions is because the middle and upper classes take and

consume a supply of resources which would otherwise be plentiful. From Abahlali's perspective, then, the poverty of its own members is the fault of another group of people and centrally, the structures that allow one group to oppress another.

The perceived failure of the IMF and World Bank's development projects is important because it leads Abahlali members to challenge models that are created by academics, maintained by elite educational and development institutions, and taken up by governments around the world. Several Abahlali members who were interviewed stated that they enjoy learning about development theories in the CEPD course and that they often find ideas with which they agree. That said, throughout my interviews the very word "theory" was employed more frequently in a negative sense than it was used in either a positive or neutral sense. Participants described the difficulty of "[challenging] the theory of the government" (Figlan et al., 2009), and labeled local councilors against whom they protested as "the theorists." Several of the participants posited the idea that if one learns about a subject through theory, "the outcome will be theory" (Figlan et al., 2009), or, in other words, will not have a real impact.

While most participants did employ the word "theory" to refer to various academic ideas and ideologies, one Rural Network member told a story in which he used "theory" to effectively mean "the wrong analysis," which is a unique but valuable usage to explore closely. He recounted a land dispute in which a wealthy farmer claimed land where poor families were living. He stated that "the theory part of it says, no, the farmers, they are good. They are taking care of the community members." In contrast, "the practical part of it says, come, let's see the whole. Come, let's see the destruction that took place" (Rural Network Member, 2012). He argued that some people analyzed the situation by assuming that the farmer was a good person, which he identifies as "the theory part." However, he suggested that anyone who actually took the time to learn what happened on that land – "the practical part" – would find that assumption wrong, as they would see that the farmer had hurt the residents' livelihoods. It is important to emphasize that this example does not reflect the way in which the term "theory" is employed by all Abahlali members or for all situations. However, the fact that it is used in place of what might otherwise be called "the wrong analysis," even in this one example, reflects the distrust felt by movement members for theory and the way they see it playing a destructive role in the day-to-day lives of the poor.

Time and time again, the Living Learning participants have seen development projects – initiated by the government or NGOs and promoted by academics – that aim to address poverty and to make life better for the poor. In many of these projects, they argue, the development actors fail to consult with the poor people they hope to help, and instead dictate 'top-down' solutions:

There are many at the University who think they are there to learn what to come and 'teach the poor' when they are finished studying. It is clear that they imagine they are our educators. They assume we are empty enough and stupid enough for others to learn what they decide, and that they will come and think for those of

us who are poor and cannot think. (Figlan et al., 2009)

NGOs, too, the participants write:

...are always denying and undermining the knowledge of the people. In their minds, the poor must be given capacity building, education and training, political education which, of course, they will provide. (Figlan et al., 2009)

From their exposure to NGOs and academics, the participants perceive that the poor as a group are considered to be stupid and uneducated. With these stereotypes, academics and NGOs then assume that the poor need them to solve their problems, to lift them out of poverty. The participants thus articulate how the stereotype of stupidity establishes 'the poor' as passive objects of development projects. Moreover, the language of these two passages – particularly the words "assume" and "of course" – suggests that the participants doubt these so-called experts will ever think critically about their presumed role as "teachers" of the poor.

The 'order' in which Abahlali locates itself as 'the poor' is thus the set of specific post-apartheid conditions shaped by the intersection of apartheid legacies with a growing global development regime. For the writers of the Living Learning booklet, the state officials, academics, NGO representatives, and the general middle-class public that constitute this 'order' are likely to perceive 'the poor' as stupid, criminal and 'out of order' objects of development.

### **Redeploying 'out of order'**

Although Living Learning participants articulate that members of the government and middle class society disdainfully label them as 'the poor' and 'out of order', it is obvious from Abahlali's website that members self-identify as 'the poor,' and 'out of order.' These terms, then, are not entirely externally imposed labels. In fact, Abahlali's understanding of 'the order' allows the Living Learning participants to redeploy the terms 'the poor' and 'out of order' to challenge the perception of 'the poor' as violent, criminal, and uneducated masses. If today's post-apartheid order, as Abahlali members argue, has not substantially altered the 'oppressive' structures of the apartheid order, then those who fight against today's order are continuing the unfinished struggle for liberation. Similarly, if today's post-apartheid order promotes ineffective projects to reduce poverty while simultaneously removing agency from the poor, then those who are 'out of order' are simply seeking to address poverty more effectively. In both these cases, for Abahlali, being 'out of order' becomes a good thing.

Reflecting on their Living Learning meetings, the booklet's authors state explicitly that it is good to be 'out of order':

The kind of education and knowledge, the searching for truth that we are doing, is too generous for the powerful. It has no formal 'syllabus' except the life and priorities of the people themselves...This kind of education and knowledge recognizes that, as comrade Mnikelo (Ndabankulu) would say, 'it is better to be out of order,' to be outside the prescribed curriculum. (Figlan et al., 2009)

Abahlali thus contests the idea that being labeled as 'out of order' is a bad thing. Instead its members redeploy the phrase to argue that being 'out of order' is essential in a movement that hopes to substantially change 'the order'.

This passage also reveals that when Abahlali members use 'out of order,' they refer not only to engaging in protest, but also to the education and thinking that takes place in the movement. On its website, Abahlali asserts that constituents of "the institutionalized left" – academics and NGOs – are often "competing elites," but they are "united on the position that the poor should not think their own politics and that doing so, no matter how calmly, peacefully and rationally, rendered the movement 'out of order' and even criminal" ("University"). Abahlali members believe, therefore, that even just to claim that the poor can think is to be in opposition to elite power structures. Anne Harley, the coordinator of the CEPD course at UKZN, writes:

Publishing their reflections was thus a political act, intended not simply to allow others engaged in struggle to learn from their reflections, but to consciously critique the assumption that knowledge is generated only in the academy. (Harley, 2012)

Living Learning participants imagine that some state officials, NGO members, or academics view their monthly meetings as 'out of order' in a negative sense because the poor should not think. In turn, they themselves view the monthly meetings as 'out of order' in the most positive sense, exactly because they constitute a space for thinking and for challenging stereotypes of 'the poor' by doing so.

Thinking 'out of order' becomes particularly important in light of the following tale, recounted at a Living Learning meeting:

Someone in the group told the story of a pig that had been kept in a cage. Then one day, the pig was released from the cage and tied to a tree instead. And the pig celebrated, saying, 'I am free now'. We all laughed about this story – and then our story-teller added: 'But you know, even if you cut that rope, the pig will still just circle around the tree and not move away.' We realized that this is what apartheid has done to us. (Figlan et al., 2009)

This is a critique of those who are not 'out of order.' In this story, the pig fails to fully understand freedom, as it celebrates a change of scene in which the pig is still

in no way “free.” The participants interpret this story as a metaphor for the millions of South Africans who celebrate the end of apartheid on Freedom Day each year despite still living in shacks and facing crime, unemployment, and eviction. The idea that the pig would not leave the tree even if the rope were cut speaks to the participants’ perception of those who do not use what freedoms they do have in order to take action to make their lives better. In spite of the threats and harassment they have faced as movements of the poor, Abahlali and the Rural Network claim that they have found space outside of ‘the order’ in which to use some of the small freedoms they do have – the right to protest, the right to free speech – to try to move away from the ‘oppressive tree.’

In this societal order, the poor are in a unique position. First, they do not have the access that upper and middle-class members do to the institutions that they believe produce obedient people. In one interview a Living Learning participant argued that formal education is “all about colonizing your mind,” producing individuals who shift seamlessly from readily accepting what they are told in school to readily accepting the views of a political party (Abahlali member 1). While Abahlali locates obedient individuals across all classes, the exclusion of the poor from institutional education establishes the lower class in a position of particular outsiders to ‘the order.’

Secondly, the poor have another source of knowledge that directly contradicts what they are taught to believe in school and what municipality officials tell them. The daily experience of material conditions in shack settlements teaches residents that the post-apartheid South Africa does not guarantee the equality promised by the anti-apartheid liberation struggle, and that post-apartheid efforts for development have not substantially improved shackdwellers’ livelihoods. Every human learns constantly from his or her experiences, but the life experiences of the poor provide the most stark material for opposing the post-apartheid order.

### **Producing ‘shack intellectuals’**

Out of South Africa’s poor communities and their residents’ mobilization, then, comes the production of a new kind of intellectual – what Abahlali calls the ‘shack intellectual’ – in contrast to the perceived obedient upper or middle-class intellectual. The shack intellectual is one who engages in learning and theorizing from the shacks, from poverty. Shack intellectuals can be anyone in the shack settlements; they do not constitute an elite group within the movement. Indeed, the participants argue that the well-educated individual should not be evaluated by standards of “good English...good isiZulu...not breaking the rules of grammar...having lots of degrees and qualifications” (Figlan et al. 2009). Instead, they define a truly well educated person as:

Someone who, firstly, knows their surroundings, knows their environment, and secondly, someone that humbles themselves not to be bullying or arrogant but instead to show a big mind by being able to adjust to their environment in a way that is not intimidating or undermining for the people in that environment.

(Figlan et al., 2009)

In fact, this redeployment of the word ‘educated’ is essential for a movement of the poor to assert their ability to think for themselves. With few exceptions, the poor in South Africa are typically excluded from the opportunities that would allow them to become ‘educated’ by the upper or middle-class definition. If good English, good Zulu, and degrees from institutions defined an educated person or an intellectual, then there would necessarily be a lack of educated people in Abahlali and the Rural Network. By redeploying the term ‘educated’ to mean someone who learns from his or her daily experiences, the Living Learning booklet’s authors assert that it is possible for even the poorest individual to be well-educated. When asked to give examples of learning from experience, Abahlali members provided a range of responses from learning about eviction law by living eviction cases, to realizing that putting thousands of people on the street forces municipality officials to listen, to simply understanding what it is like to live in a shack. The assertion that this education is valuable, and essential to understanding poverty, allows for the existence of shack intellectuals. At the same time, this assertion also critiques the in-order intellectual who appears to always want to impose on those who are less ‘educated.’

It is important to note that the quote defining the well-educated person emphasizes humility. By humility, the participants mean that those who have opportunities such as university courses must constantly be aware of the dangers of seeing themselves as educated and the other community members as uneducated. Living Learning participants suggest that they must always remember that, if learning from experience is the best means to understanding the conditions in shack settlements, then every individual, regardless of formal qualifications, is equally capable of participating in the reflection and production of meaning that is essential to the movement. This humble character is not only deemed important for leaders within the movement, but also for outsiders with whom the movement engages. While Abahlali eschews intellectuals who would seek to lead the movement from above, the movement has worked with academics, NGO workers, and religious leaders who have demonstrated humility through their willingness to learn from and with the poor.

Several interviewed movement members expressed the belief that there is great wisdom in the shack communities. In the Living Learning sessions they articulate that the key for a ‘shack intellectual’ to remain a ‘shack intellectual,’ rather than assimilating the obedience of the elite classes’ intellectuals, is to remain grounded by constantly listening to the thoughts of his or her community members. Listening to the community involves physically going to a shack settlement and asking for a mandate for any major decision that affects its residents, sitting in open meetings for hours until everyone that wants to speak has been heard. In poor communities many residents are unemployed or out of school, so they can engage in these long, open discussions in a way that middle or upper class citizens may not have time to do. Likewise, a ‘shack intellectual’ living in poor communities is expected to have the time and dedication to listen to everyone’s



opinions and ideas. In contrast, Living Learning participants suggest that many officials and academics demonstrate little desire to go the settlements to listen to shack dwellers' opinions.

'Shack intellectuals' can therefore fill what appears to Abahlali to be a large hole in the effective knowledge and sincere concern on the part of the officials, NGO workers, or academics who are, according to 'the order,' supposed to be helping the poor. The movement members make a strong distinction between the perspective, and thus the potential, of the 'shack intellectual' from that of the upper or middle-class intellectual:

We noticed that there is a difference when the poor say another world is necessary and when civil society says another world is possible. We conclude to say that it is the formations of the poor and the grassroots that are the agency to make this world come – not civil society. (Figlan et al. 2009)

The participants observe that experiencing daily life in conditions of poverty and being grounded in the thinking in poor communities serve to make the shack intellectual desperate for a better world in a way that an upper or middle-class intellectual could never be. When they write that "civil society says another world is possible," they suggest that, for government officials, NGOs, and academics, the whole concept of development is just an interesting experiment to see whether change can be made to benefit different segments of society. In contrast, because they themselves are theorizing from positions of poverty, they know that the poor engage in thinking and action for change because they have no choice. It is "necessary" that conditions improve for them. Thus they ascribe a greater need to effect real change to the 'shack intellectual,' and conclude that 'shack intellectuals' may be able to bring about actual freedom where middle or upper class intellectuals have failed.

Freedom, real freedom, and the experience of real freedom, has to be something that is outside what is prescribed to us; it will come from becoming masters of our own history; professors of our own poverty; and from making our own paths out of unfreedom. (Figlan et al. 2009)

Here, the Living Learning participants reject the notion that the terms "master" and "professor" must be used to demarcate an elite expertise. Instead, they redeploy the terms to insist that every shack dweller can engage in intellectual reflection in order to overcome "unfreedom."

By rejecting given definitions in this passage, the participants argue explicitly that thinking 'out of order' or beyond "what has been prescribed to us" is the essential means to freedom. In the perceived post-apartheid order that 'oppresses' the poor and establishes them as an unthinking mass, the 'shack intellectual' is produced out of the very necessity for the poor to have their own 'out-of-order'

thinkers to counter this ‘oppression’. He or she is suited to that role precisely because of his or her experience of shack life and grounding in the knowledge produced in reflection with other shack dwellers. In other words, Abahlali’s notion of a ‘shack intellectual’ is only possible in the specific material living conditions and class relations of post-apartheid, development-focused South Africa.

### **Digital archiving as an intellectual practice**

‘The University of Abahlali’ is perhaps the movement’s most explicit redeployment of language that typically reflects exclusion in the post-apartheid order. Acknowledging that poor South Africans face huge obstacles to attending formal university, Abahlali has created its own university. The ‘University of Abahlali’ has neither a campus nor a set curriculum. Rather, it refers to the members’ thinking, experiencing, and learning through the struggle of daily life in post-apartheid South Africa. One movement member explains that the reason for the name is:

...To acknowledge the fact that education is not only happening in recognized institutions but also to acknowledge the fact that there is an indigenous knowledge that people can learn from anywhere and at anytime. We learn in the streets, in courts, in community meetings, in camps, workshops, political education and in protest. Where we resist evictions, we resist oppression, resist poverty, resist inequality we say struggle is a school... We view it as an intellectual space outside the mainstream institution. (Abahlali member (1), 2013)

By claiming the term ‘university’ and defining it to include informal learning, Abahlali rejects the idea that learning from textbooks or professors offers greater knowledge or expertise than can be gained through experience. The term, ‘the University,’ developed organically from a hand-painted banner at one of the movement’s first protests, where a youth had written, “University of Kennedy Road.” In their interviews, several of the movement members recalled this moment and their immediate appreciation of how suitably the words matched the way people felt about constant learning through mobilization.

When the quoted movement member lists examples of ‘University of Abahlali’ spaces where movement members learn, it is notable that these locations constitute a mix of spaces within the communities, spaces outside of the settlements, and the workshops and political education which could take place in either environment. The spaces she lists outside the shack settlements are ones that Abahlali members only occupy as a result of their mobilization as a movement, for it is in engaging with and making demands of the municipality that Abahlali members move into the streets and courts, engaging publics beyond the poor in the poor’s dialogue on poverty and post-apartheid society. This variety of spaces demonstrates that Abahlali members, by being politically active, have entered into some new spaces that poor residents of shack settlements would not

typically occupy.

One of these spaces is the movement's website, featuring an online component of the University of Abahlali. The 'University of Abahlali' page breaks a collection of over 1,900 links into twenty-two organized sections featuring archives of political writings by movement members, primary documents from other movements around the world, relevant institutional reports and policies, and extensive ethnographic, historical, and theoretical research on poverty and political mobilization. The theory section alone cites 244 documents, from the works of Karl Marx to Steve Biko. The sections on material produced by Abahlali contain about 1,250 links that archive what movement members deem to be the essential background information on important events or experiences that shaped the trajectory of the movement, such as Abahlali's first year of protests, or its successful campaign against the Slums Act in the Constitutional Court. The University's introduction page explains:

Most of the intellectual work done in Abahlali baseMjondolo is undertaken in discussions in meetings, innovations in song etc rather than via written dialogues but this page archives a selection of some of the digital (written) traces of the various kinds of ongoing intellectual work undertaken in and around the movement in the form of press statements, pamphlets, articles etc produced from within the movement as well as the odd newspaper article etc that has been particularly important. ("University of Abahlali")

The website content therefore reflects only a portion of the intellectual practices within the movement. However, through thousands of press releases and articles, and hundreds of photos and video clips, the website does paint a picture of the events and ideas that are important to the movement, shown through media selected by members rather than filtered externally.

The website archives close to 3,540 pages of press releases, representing a wide range of the movement's intellectual practices. On January 17, 2013, for example, the press releases on the homepage featured a video of former Abahlali President S'bu Zikode speaking in Oslo, Norway in November 2012 ("S'bu Zikode"), a video of a Abahlali-led panel discussion in Baltimore, USA about *Dear Mandela*, a 90 minute documentary on living conditions in shack settlements and the movement's Constitutional Court victory over the 2007 Slums Act ("From South Africa"), and two press releases criticizing government policies and misguided NGO responses for exacerbating the devastation brought about by a recent massive shack fire ("Abahlali with QQ", "Government"). The press releases assert that democratic meetings and deliberations are taking place, informing the website's viewers that the post-apartheid South African poor are creating new spaces in which to produce their own knowledge, excluded as they are from more traditional schools and universities. While the Living Learning booklet compiles reflections upon movement practices overall, these press releases are uniquely valuable for capturing the intellectual practices of the poor in real time, as shack settlement residents respond to the activities, events and ideas that are most

relevant to the present moment. The authors of these press releases and articles write with interpretations and emotions drawn directly from recent experience.

The online 'University of Abahlali' is therefore a digital space in which Abahlali members can represent their movement themselves, emphasizing the intellectual nature of their activities and asserting the ideas generated in their intellectual practices. By entering this new digital space, Abahlali invites academics, potential critics and supporters from around the world, and other movements of the poor to learn at and contribute to the 'University of Abahlali'.

### **Producing publics at formal academic institutions**

The Living Learning booklet and the reflections of the 2008 meeting participants revealed that movement members sometimes use the word "theory" in contexts that give it a negative connotation, opposing it to the "practice" from which movement members gain valuable knowledge that informs further action. Abahlali proposes that academics could avoid the tendency to misunderstand the needs of the poor if they were to actually work with movements of the poor in developing proposals and theories to raise living standards. In March 2006, S'bu Zikode gave a speech at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in which he introduced the traditional "university of the academics and students" to the concept of the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, "where we think our own struggle" (Zikode, "Rethinking"). He invites his listeners to the latter University in order "to unite and think and fight together where the poor are, where the poor live, where the poor suffer" (Zikode, "Rethinking"). This invitation establishes the idea that one can be a student at both universities, that the movement's university is also open to those who are not poor.

A key component of the invitation, however, is that the students and faculty of formal universities come to the poor communities. Although the 'University of Abahlali' does not have a formal campus, Zikode makes it clear that one learns about the poor by entering the spaces where they live. The invitation therefore draws a significant parallel between the movements necessary for the two universities to come together. Abahlali members want to be included in the institutional university in order to represent themselves. Their participation in events like Zikode's speech signals movement into a space that the poor do not usually occupy. In turn, the academics need to learn from the day-to-day experiences and thinking within the shack settlements in order to shape more effective policies on poverty. This need requires them to move into a space that Abahlali believes academics do not occupy enough, preferring to theorize from within the removed academy. Abahlali's invitation to academics mirrors the same invitation the movement offers to journalists and government officials to spend time in poor communities, imploring them to experience the life of the poor for themselves rather than making assumptions.

The online 'University of Abahlali' archives contain documents about the movement produced by formal university academics, including student researchers, who have spent time with members and participated in movement

activities. Abahlali members emphasize that they appreciate academics who come to poor communities in order to learn and think ‘with the poor’ at the ‘University of Abahlali,’ rather than making assumptions about the poor from afar and trying to think ‘for the poor’. In one of his interviews, Zikode stated:

By engaging different people, different researchers, they come here, we also learn. Not only that they come and learn from us, we also learn when people come and interview us. (Zikode, 2012)

Through interviews and conversations with researchers, movement members reflect on their experiences of protests and material conditions in shack settlements. Visiting researchers or activists may offer new interpretations or draw connections with theories, historic events, or other movements that Abahlali members were not aware of. By archiving works written about the movement by these visiting academics, Abahlali publicly asserts that the movement is engaging with different thinkers and external interpretations of the movement.

The ‘University’s’ “Academic research on Abahlali baseMjondolo” section features 57 academic writings on their movement and an additional ten focused on the closely allied Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC). Other sections document academic research on shack settlements more generally, reports on housing and evictions, and essays on violence in South Africa. Despite the negative connotations that Abahlali members associate with the word ‘theory,’ the ‘University’s’ “theory” section contains 244 writings. The 63-item “history” section provides background on the South African and global contexts in which the movement exists. Through these archives, Abahlali demonstrates that its members engage in thinking about the reasons for and manifestations of poverty and protest beyond their local context. Additionally, because they are intermingled on the ‘University of Abahlali’ homepage with the materials produced by movement members, these external writings provide evidence that Abahlali members see a very important space for the intellectual contributions of those who have received a more traditional educational training at formal universities. The ‘University of Abahlali’ thus constitutes a space for the thinking and ideas produced by the poor to interact with the thinking and ideas produced about the poor by academics.

### **Producing global publics**

The massive expansion in Abahlali’s contacts around the world is in part due to the increase in travel opportunities that have become available to movement members. These travel opportunities, in turn, have often arisen because other organizations around the world have learned of Abahlali through its website, clearly underscoring the importance and effectiveness of the website as the movement’s globally public platform. The 2006 press release that declared Abahlali was “no longer on [its] own,” identified Harare, Zimbabwe as the

movement members' only destination outside of South Africa. In contrast, in the second half of 2012 alone, movement members visited four countries to meet with solidarity movements and speak about Abahlali's mobilization as 'the poor.' S'bu Zikode traveled on two separate trips to Mexico and Norway.

When the movement's headquarters and the homes of many members at the Kennedy Road settlement were attacked on September 29, 2009, it was a crucial moment in the movement's history for many reasons, one of which was the subsequent influx of evidence that Abahlali had entered the awareness and conversations of individuals and communities around the world. The movement received and posted letters and statements of support from organizations and individuals in South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Nigeria, the United States, Canada, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, New Zealand, and Australia, as well as some transnational organizations. Abahlali posted images and reports on the solidarity protests in Grahamstown, Cape Town, New York, and London ("The attack").

In fact, a significant majority of materials posted on the website in the immediate aftermath of the attacks were external materials, articles written in the mainstream news and statements from other organizations. This majority reflects the simple fact that in the month following the attacks, more material was produced outside of the movement than within, with the global community reacting strongly at the same time as Abahlali members were facing dislocation that hindered their ability to meet and produce press statements. A letter from Abahlali to the South African clergy, many of whom had publicly supported Abahlali since its beginning, reveals a very important second reason for why Abahlali posted so many external documents in response to the attacks. The movement writes:

There are many people who can only see the poor as dirty, dishonest, criminal, short-minded, ignorant and violent. Whenever we organise and mobilise there are many people who can only see us as people who be being used by someone else and as people who are a threat to society. We constantly face all these stereotypes and prejudices. But with you standing with us many people's minds are opened and we have a better chance of being recognised as human beings, human beings who are poor. ("A Letter," 2010)

Most of the ideas in this passage reflect an essential part of Abahlali's experience-based understanding that the poor are viewed as criminal, dangerous, unthinking, and always directed by someone else. But within these familiar concepts, a new idea emerges. Abahlali asserts that the clergy's public support has the power to make the general population think twice about assuming those stereotypes of 'the poor,' partly because of the respect they have for the clergy specifically, but also because the clergy members are recognized as human beings. The passage implies that without the clergy, the poor are not considered human beings, so cannot be listened to as human beings. Abahlali thus identifies the particular importance of having support from outside of the poor to make the rest

of the population more willing to listen.

This does not mean that Abahlali claims any dependence on the clergy or other supporters. Rather, the movement states that external supporters can play a significant role by contributing ideas to the 'University of Abahlali,' thereby magnifying and drawing attention to the perspective of the poor represented in it too. In this view, voices that "count" in the eyes of the state and middle-class public are not limited to the clergy, but can come from anyone who is not identified as poor, particularly those in esteemed positions as academics, government officials, or organizations like Amnesty International. From the perspective of Abahlali members, people in such esteemed positions "count" because they are widely considered to be intelligent, often experts. As a result, other upper and middle-class publics both in South Africa and abroad appear to the poor to believe that what these experts have to say is important and a true reflection of post-apartheid conditions.

Knowing that a global public views its website, Abahlali employs the words and documents of people, like clergy members, that its members believe will "count" for that global public. The representation of external writings does not diminish the importance of Abahlali's own documents on the website, but rather Abahlali posts both internal and external documents so that that they support each other. The public availability of these documents then attracts the attention of other individuals and organizations around the world that, in turn, also engage with and show support for Abahlali. The website facilitates this cycle and builds an ever-growing network of solidarity across the world. The website's documentation of this deliberate global network further contests the notion that 'the poor' constitute a homogenous unthinking mass.

### **Engaging the global poor**

In their notes in preparation for a conference on gentrification in Manchester, England in August 2009, Abahlali members analyze the extent to which they perceive the global poor to be fighting the same struggle around the world. The authors of the notes state that they "fully support the struggle of the poor against the rich everywhere in the world" ("Notes on Gentrification," 2009) using the singular of the noun to project the image of a unified global struggle. Many of the similarities Abahlali members observe in different countries today are tied to the pressures of development.

However, the authors of the conference notes observe that some of the specific terms they know are used in other countries, such as "gentrification," do not apply exactly to Abahlali's experiences. They reject the idea that they should "[try] to fit [their] story to match the theories and ideas developed elsewhere by others who do not know [their] story" ("Notes on Gentrification"). This statement reveals that although the broad story of the poor fighting the rich might be the same around the world, Abahlali believes that varying local conditions mean that the experiences of 'the poor' are not the same from one place to another. Even one group of the poor, they argue, should not speak for another. This idea reflects

their emphasis on democratic structures within Abahlali, where one settlement or leader cannot make decisions for others. This is an important insight when considering the potential for a global movement of the poor, as the creation of democratic structures that allow for a balance of strong leadership and grassroots activism would be difficult to scale up to the international level. Despite the shared experiences of ‘top-down’ development and the powerlessness felt by those without money in a money-driven society, the knowledge of the poor remains grounded directly in experience within local communities.

Even with substantial differences among movements of the poor around the world, materials like these conference notes reflect that Abahlali’s movement into new intellectual spaces and the resulting exposure to related global movements’ allow the movement to expand upon its own theorizations of being the post-apartheid poor. In the gentrification conferences notes, Abahlali members reflect that their experiences with evictions do not really mirror what they understand as the gentrification of urban areas in cities like Manchester. However, applying the term “gentrification” to their own experiences leads the notes’ authors to arrive at a new conceptualization of their struggle. They propose that “what we might call ‘resistance against the gentrification of our struggle’” is “one of the most interesting conversations to have” (“Notes on Gentrification”). They reflect:

Through our struggle/s, we create new political spaces for contesting power; this inevitably creates speculative interest from professional vanguardist ‘activists’ and ‘civil society’ looking for constituencies to populate their imagined fantasies of resistance and revolution; they try by all means to invade and take over (often with offers of money) the space our struggle opened up and; unless we sustain a living politics militantly against this onslaught, the result looks very much like what the academics describe as the result of gentrification: namely; the poor get moved out once again. (“Notes on Gentrification”)

In these notes, Abahlali members articulate that new spaces where the movement’s intellectual practices thrive are continually at risk of unwelcome infiltration by those who want to lead the poor. They observe a trend in which certain members of the middle class public are drawn to the intellectual spaces initiated by the poor, like meetings and conferences, but then seek to dominate these spaces with their own agendas. The poor, they argue, must constantly be aware of this trend and act to resist it, or face dislocation from their own intellectual practices. It is precisely through one of these new intellectual spaces of the poor – a conference in the United Kingdom – that Abahlali is able to view this phenomenon as concretely tied to a different concept that resonates in many other parts of the world: gentrification.

By presenting these thought processes on its website, Abahlali asserts that the poor engaged in politics in South Africa contextualize their post-apartheid experiences by examining the forces that create and maintain poverty around the world, gleaning new insights into their own circumstances through these



comparisons. Even though Abahlali's understanding of its own struggle is first and foremost informed by the experiences of its members in the shack communities, awareness of other problems and movements around the world does shape Abahlali's understanding of how the post-apartheid order it contests fits into a broader global context.

The 'University of Abahlali's' "Documents from other movements and struggles," "History," and "Links" sections highlight that Abahlali's awareness of similar movements extends to all continents, to rich and poor countries alike. Currently, the collection encompasses 82 documents from other movements, including movement manifestos and charters, speeches, interviews, letters & statements, and essays ("Documents"). The number of documents alone stands as an assertion of the range of new people and ideas occupying space within the 'University of Abahlali,' people and ideas with which the non-militant poor in South Africa would have little reason to interact. The list begins with "The Twelve Articles" from the Peasants' War in 1525 Germany ("The Twelve"), and two documents from English peasants in 1649 ("A Declaration"). The website offers no explicit contextualization of these documents, and makes no claims that 'the poor' in South Africa today are the same as 'the poor' four to five hundred years ago in Europe.

However, it is clear that even these earliest documents explicitly reflect several of Abahlali's core critiques of society. Other documents include the Mexican Zapatista declaration of the revolutionary potential of the dispossessed poor ("El Despertador"), West Bengal Shramik Sangram ('Workers' Struggle') Committee's call for organizations built and led by the poor ("Fight Against"), and an article by American activist Willie Baptist on the importance for activists to study and understand the contemporary conditions in which they mobilize (Baptist, 2010). For each of these documents, Abahlali makes no claims that the other movements or poor populations in question see the world in the exact same way that its own members do. However, by highlighting the words of these other groups on its website, Abahlali accomplishes many important goals.

First, precisely by giving no introduction to these documents, Abahlali lets the voices of others move into the 'University of Abahlali' and speak for themselves. This is particularly important given that Abahlali members' experiences teach them that they, as the poor, have to struggle to make their voices heard. Often, they argue, NGOs and academics try to speak for them, making false assumptions without really listening to what the poor have to say themselves. They know from their exchanges with many other movements of the poor that this trend has been experienced all over the world. Therefore, Abahlali uses its website as a platform for other movements of the poor to represent their experiences and ideas, unhindered by the judgments of outsiders including Abahlali members.

Second, there is sense in amplifying the same message through as many voices and platforms as possible, given Abahlali's assessment that they as the poor "do not count." Even if Abahlali's claims have not yet begun to "count" for the general public, there is a chance that upper or middle-class publics do believe that Martin Luther King or Steve Biko's ideas "count". By displaying the ideas of these

historic activists who have risen to global acclaim, Abahlali's members take up their responsibilities as 'shack intellectuals' and draw connections between what these activists said then, and what Abahlali is saying now. The addition of these external voices to the 'University of Abahlali' thus serves to strengthen the 'University's' voice outwardly.

Third, by presenting documents which were produced independently from Abahlali members' experiences but which draw on similar experiences of the poor elsewhere, Abahlali is able to assert the reliability of knowledge drawn directly from day-to-day life. The fact that many movements and organizations have come to the same critiques of development and capitalism is useful to Abahlali both as affirmation of its emphasis on informal learning and as apparent confirmation that the post-apartheid order is inextricably shaped by global factors. The addition of these external voices to the 'University of Abahlali' thus serves to strengthen the internal confidence of the 'University,' and empower all its participants.

Despite the fact that the website cannot capture the full experiences of their movement, the website is a crucial new space for the poor engaged in protest to occupy. It serves as a secure space for the ideas generated in the communities of Abahlali to interact with the ideas generated by poor movements and other supporters from around the world, strengthening the 'University of Abahlali' both as an external platform of engagement and an internal space of empowerment. As an archive of the movement's intellectual practices from the beginning of its founding through to the present day, the website contests the notion that the protests of poor people are constituted by unthinking masses; instead, it demands that middle-class publics acknowledge the depth of thought and learning occurring in poor communities.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to the Marikana massacre, it has become increasingly apparent over the last year that the immediate media coverage of the incident paid relatively little attention to the miners' story. An analysis of South African newspapers' sources found that "from 12 to 22 August, a moment when opinions were strongly influenced...27 per cent of references were business sources, 14 per cent were managers and owners of mines, and only three per cent were 'workers'" (Alexander et al. 2012, Duncan 2012). The government's Marikana Commission of Enquiry has since confirmed that the event, which seemed to observers around the world to be an explosive and spontaneous moment of violence that spiraled out of control, was actually preceded by the miners' conscious efforts to organize and articulate demands that arose from reflecting as a group. If we accept that these intellectual practices are particularly susceptible to being overshadowed by the more public occasions of protest and violence in mainstream media, then we, as academics, policy-makers, or anyone interested in the nature of politics of the poor, must make an extra effort to push behind-the-scenes intellectual activities to the forefront of public discourse in order to fully understand contemporary

South African politics.

Furthermore, ignoring the intelligence in shack settlements has serious implications for policy and development projects. Not only does excluding the poor from decision-making processes increase the likelihood that a policy or project will not address people's real needs, but removing their agency also risks alienating them such that they seek to actively resist imposed initiatives.

I hope that nobody will mistake this paper for a full exploration of Abahlali's intellectual practices. The Living Learning booklet and the website are only two particular products of collective intellectual reflection that occurs constantly in everyday life experiences and could never be represented in its entirety. I also cannot make broad claims about poor people's movements around the world, for these movements are tremendously diverse in how they articulate their identity and claims even within South Africa alone. I do believe, however, that the need to highlight the intellectual practices that shape these movements' identities and claims is a global one.

These forms of self-representation both state and demonstrate that intelligent thinking is occurring in shack settlements, addressing my question of how movements of the poor contest dominant perceptions of 'the poor' as a violent, unthinking mass. I aim for this paper to serve as another testament to the fact that there is deep thinking and reflection taking place within shack communities in post-apartheid South Africa. It should also serve as a suggestion that we should pay attention to intellectual practices in poor communities around the world. As the movement's website demonstrates, Abahlali members regularly encounter other movements that are engaging in the same discussions about how to convince publics that the poor are capable of theorizing and representing their own movements. The rapid expansion of digital communications technology, in particular, provides new accessible platforms through which poor people can share their experiences and magnify each other's voices. The extent to which policymakers and other local and global publics will listen, however, remains to be seen.

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## **Knowledge practices in Abahlali baseMjondolo**

**Gerard Gill**

### **Abstract**

*Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) are a South African shack dwellers' movement that struggles for land, housing, basic services and the dignity of the poor. This article explores the movement's ideology and knowledge practices. It then relates these to broader ideas in the activist and academic world in order to suggest what these knowledge practices might contribute to that world. AbM is based around a 'living politics' – a politics based on the concrete experiences of the people in the movement. As such, the movement does not subscribe to any outside model or ideology, it has its own. 'Abahlalism' is described as a new concept to form a new ideology for the movement. It draws some of its ideas from the southern African philosophy of Ubuntu. The relationship between community and individual described in Ubuntu and the living politics of the movement greatly influence its structure and activities. While emphasis is placed on concrete lived experience, I argue that as similar ideas can be found elsewhere in social movement practices and literature, some of the lessons of the movement are broadly applicable to social movement struggles and research practices in regards to them.*

### **Introduction**

This article discusses the knowledge practices of Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). AbM is a shack dwellers movement in South Africa. It was formed in 2005 as a response to the treatment of shack dwellers by the state. Shack dwellers are routinely subjected to violence, eviction and the denial of services (Huchzermeyer 2010, 131; Pithouse 2008, 73). They are also lied to by politicians and offered empty promises, particularly in the run up to elections, to placate them. The movement demands that the poor are given land, housing, and the basic services that they need to survive, but also that they are listened to and treated with dignity. In early 2013, I spent some time in Durban, speaking to some members of AbM and observing the movement's practices. The main topic of these interviews was the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by the movement, but during this time it became apparent that this topic would need to be complemented by discussions around the movement's ideology and knowledge practices. This paper does make some reference to the use of ICTs in the movement but it is these latter discussions that this article is primarily concerned with.

AbM is based around a 'living politics'. Simply put, this refers to a politics that comes from the lived experiences and struggles of the people in the movement, rather than external theory or analysis. This can be seen in contrast to the top-down, technocratic practices of the state. It also differs from the practices of NGOs and academics who often seek to assume or impose their own ideologies

or views on the poor, rather than listening and crediting them with their own intelligence. This view partially accounts for the movement's communitarian ethic, as it affords the poor a voice of their own, and their commitment to radical, grassroots democracy, though these practices are also informed by the groups homegrown ideology, Abahlalism.

Abahlalism is described as a new concept to form a new ideology for the movement. It is humanistic, and based on the concept of the responsibility to stand up to injustice. It can also be related to the southern African philosophy of Ubuntu. Present in Ubuntu is a '...duality of individuality and simultaneous unity...' (Oppenheim 2012, 370). This is a concept that can be seen reflected in the knowledge practices of AbM, which are communitarian yet deeply concerned with the voice and freedom of the individual, encompassing a complex interplay between the universal and the particular.

The final section of this article is dedicated to situating the movement's knowledge practices within the context of social movement scholarship. While AbM's living politics in some ways invite readings that are contingent and context-dependent, I argue that broader lessons can be found in the movement's knowledge practices that can benefit a range of progressive causes. I illustrate this by comparing the ideas explored in the discussion of AbM with other ideas and arguments within social movement struggles and academia, highlighting emergent trends and areas of contention. I conclude with some suggestions as to what readers might gain from reflection on these knowledge practices.

## **Emergence of a movement**

In 2008, Africa was the fastest urbanising continent, with 72% of people living in 'informal settlements' or 'shack settlements' (Gibson 2008, 6). Sources in a report by the Housing Development Agency (2012, 31) vary in their estimate of the number of these settlements in South Africa – the highest estimate is 2754, the lowest 1016. A 2007 Community Survey indicates that 1.2 million households live in 'shacks-not-in-backyards'<sup>1</sup>, though again this figure differs depending on data source (Housing Development Agency 2012, 23). Grant Saff (1994, 377) attributes this situation to the widespread urbanisation of the black population after the decline and end of Apartheid, coupled with a lack of sufficient economic growth<sup>2</sup>. Marie Huchzermeyer (2010, 144) explains the reaction of the country's new African National Congress (ANC) government:

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<sup>1</sup> In some neighbourhoods it is common to see shacks in the backyards of peoples' houses. The survey does not include these in its figures, referring only to shacks in informal settlements.

<sup>2</sup> This is, however, a somewhat simplified account. Other factors have also been noted, for instance by authors such as Adam Habid and Vishnu Padayachee (2000, 259) who have remarked that '...the ANC's implementation of neoliberal economic policies has meant disaster for the vast majority of South Africa's poor'. Nigel Gibson (2011, 74) also alludes to this. Also, Matt Birkinshaw (2008, 2) mentions a desire for independence or an escape from violence, political or otherwise, as some reasons that people end up living in shack settlements.



In a technocratic and perhaps late-modernist determinism, the political leadership of the post-apartheid state chose first to focus simplistically on the delivery of one million houses in its first term, and then on the target of eradicating slums or informal settlements by the end of its fourth term.

Particular attention should be paid to the use of the term ‘technocratic’. In this political sense it can be read as meaning rule by those who consider themselves the most intelligent (Pithouse 2008, 72). Technocracy is not the only relevant concept that can be used to understand the situation. S’bu Zikode’s (2010) critique of a ‘regressive left’ which assumes that only NGOs and academics can think implies a vanguardist mindset. This can also be seen in Patrick Heller’s (2012, 664) description of an ANC which, seeing itself as the heir of the anti-apartheid movement, is hostile to a civil society it does not control. Technocracy, however, is a useful concept for understanding what activist and academic communities can learn from AbM’s knowledge practices.

Richard Pithouse (2008, 72), refers to the government’s ‘Slum Clearance Project’ as being ‘based on an authoritarian technocratic decision-making model’ wherein the state uses escalating violence to ‘defend its status as the sole planning authority’. In recent times, the movement has been subjected to murder, repression and violence (Bullock 2013; Nicolson 2013). Force, eviction and forced relocation are commonly directed at shack dwellers by state authorities<sup>3</sup> (Huchzermeyer 2010, 131). As the ideal government plan has been for new housing and settlement eradication, settlements are considered ‘temporary’. Because of this, upgrades to settlements were suspended then stopped in 2001, as was maintenance and services such as water provision (Pithouse 2008, 73). It was in this environment that, in 2005, AbM was born.

On March 18, 2005, at the Kennedy Road settlement, work was started on building a brick factory on land long promised by the council for housing. Shack dwellers moved to the site and demanded an explanation from the council, and were arrested. ‘Instead of housing, people found themselves facing bulldozers as well as removal twelve miles outside the city (a ten-dollar cab ride), far from work opportunities, schools and hospitals’ (Gibson 2007, 61). A mass meeting was held at the settlement, and a mass demonstration took place in the morning that led to a confrontation with riot police (Pithouse 2008, 75). AbM members Lindela Figlan, Bandile Mdlalose and S’bu Zikode explained to me that from this beginning the movement was formed out of a realisation by shack dwellers that they had common concerns – mostly a dissatisfaction with the broken promises of their government. In 2007 the movement described itself in the following terms: ‘Abahlali baseMjondolo is a radically democratic, grassroots and entirely non-professionalised movement of shack dwellers in South Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> These events are routinely documented on the AbM website (abahlali.org). At this time (late September 2013), evictions and demolitions are occurring at Cato Crest, Durban. Earlier in the year, an AbM activist was murdered at this place.

It grew out of a road blockade organized by residents of the Kennedy Road Shack Settlement in the City of Durban in early 2005. The words Abahlali baseMjondolo are Zulu for people who stay in shacks.’ (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2007). As I will argue, the movement does not only fight against the conditions the shack dwellers endure. It also, in its grassroots and radically democratic nature, constitutes a rebellion against the technocratic and coercive logic that is behind their situation.

### **Meeting the shack dwellers**

For my research into AbM, I spent two and a half weeks in Durban, South Africa. During this time, the majority of my data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the group. Due to the flexibility of the group’s operations, appointments for these interviews could often only be made in quite vague terms. This meant that I spent a large amount of time waiting in the office, observing its day-to-day activities. I also sat in on a number of meetings, some of which were translated for me (meetings were typically conducted in Zulu and Xhosa). On two occasions I had the opportunity to visit shack settlements in Foreman Road and the area of Shallcross. Here I met some residents and observed first-hand the communities in which the shack dwellers live. The data from these activities has been supplemented by data from secondary sources – information from the AbM website, news articles, and other academic research.

During my time with AbM I was told that the movement’s meetings used to take place in the shack dwellers’ communities. This was considered preferable, but is no longer a good idea since the armed attack on the movement in the Kennedy Road settlement in 2009<sup>4</sup>. Since the movement was attacked in the Kennedy Road settlement it has, with church support, rented an office in the Durban city centre. Most of my interactions with people from AbM occurred at this office. There is a computer in a partitioned ‘reception’ area in the entrance, as well as a second one in the main room. These seemed to be shared by those who regularly inhabit the office. The way the office is run emphasises inclusion, in keeping with the movement’s democratic ethos – there is an open-door policy in place as the nature of people’s problems means appointments are not always feasible. The general meeting that I attended was standing-room only, with people flowing out into the hallway. Even so I was still welcomed and provided with translations of the proceedings. Meetings go for as long as they need to, with care taken that everyone present has a chance to speak. Democratic processes

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<sup>4</sup> The armed attacks on the movement at the Kennedy Road shack settlement in 2009 were perpetrated by an armed gang associated with a local ANC branch. However the ANC initially blamed the violence on AbM and twelve of its members were arrested and detained in prison without bail. They were all later acquitted when the state was not able to provide any evidence against them (Socio-economic Rights Institute of South Africa 2011). More information on the attacks is available at Abahlali baseMjondolo (2012) and Chance (2010).

are not compromised in the name of efficiency. The same cannot be said for the representative democracy of many modern governments.

I also visited two settlements and spoke to some of the residents. I spent some time at Shallcross with Albert Ngubane. Ngubane is the AbM committee chairperson at Shallcross, ePhuleleni. The movement is involved in a legal battle in Shallcross regarding corruption within a housing project. A final court decision is still pending. AbM members Mnikelo Ndabankulu and Philani Ntanzi live in the Foreman Road settlement. Foreman Road is located right next to a neighbourhood consisting of conventional houses. Many of the settlement's residents work in these houses – this is an important point as relocation to rural housing as often mandated by the government would mean long and expensive commutes to work. This is an example of the kinds of pertinent issues that would warrant discussion, if those in the government were willing to engage with the poor about their lives. This emphasis on dignity for the marginalised and the realities of life in the shack settlements is a crucial part of the discourse of the movement as will be discussed.

### **Abahlalism and living politics**

AbM is based around a 'living politics' – a politics based on the concrete experiences of the people who the movement is comprised of. Former AbM president S'bu Zikode explains that, as such, the movement does not subscribe to any outside model or ideology, it has its own. 'Abahlalism' is described as a new concept to form a new ideology for the movement. Zikode describes it as being about 'humanistic characteristics' – fear the bad, have sympathy for others. It is about the responsibility of being a human, the responsibility to act when wrong is occurring. Importantly, it entails the acceptance that freedom will never be delivered on a silver plate. People need to know that their situation is not God-given – for Zikode, this attitude is some of the greatest damage that the Apartheid system has left as its legacy. In reality, people are made poor by political decisions. Abahlalism emphasises the importance of being conscious of the forces that create poverty and inequality. Zikode talks about how the people in Haiti were made to believe that the earthquake which devastated the country was God's will. But, he points out, in the aftermath somebody has chosen that they suffer, and somebody benefits. For this reason also, he criticises charities that ignore the politics of such situations.

In the case of South Africa, it is a politics that denies agency to the very subjects of the issue of poverty – the poor (a common AbM slogan reads 'talk to us, not about us!'). As a main concern of the movement is the dignity and voice of the marginalised poor, it is not surprising that the AbM is critical of those who assume that they know better than, or can speak for the poor. This includes a number of academics. AbM Secretary General Bandile Mdlalose considers that many academics use their own terms and vocabulary, and can't relate well to activists. While academics have much more time to think, activists are

concerned with action. She is critical of academics that do not get involved, engage, experience:

Academics who sit behind a desk are no better than the government who breeds poverty, who criticises the people on the ground, who think that we are poor because we make ourselves poor, who have not gone down to the people and realised what is really really happening to the people on the ground...

This is not to say that academics and intellectuals are not needed or wanted among the struggles of the poor. Zikode stresses that this struggle needs to be for everyone. Jacob Bryant (2008, 50) notes that links with the middle class (such as academics) connect the struggle to a 'network of resources'. Academics and shack dwellers also engage in mutual learning, aiming to '...combine the two universities – the one of experience and the one of academics...' (Figlan et al 2009). However, AbM is conscious to avoid 'zim zims' – dogma, terminology or nomenclature that privileges those who know it above those who do not (Pithouse 2008, 80). Such language can be seen as a tool to reinforce technocratic and vanguardist notions around who is fit to think and philosophise and theorise, and who is fit only to be subjected to the well-made plans of the elite.

The assertion by AbM that the poor can think for themselves has not always made them popular. There have been many efforts to crush the group, from both the right and the left. In the words of Zikode, 'Our crime has been, "Who the hell are you that you can speak for yourself, because you should have known your place in the first place, which is, your place is in the shack".' Similarly, AbM member Thembani Ngongoma notes that those who associate with the poor are seen as tainted by that association, the exception being once every five years at election time when politicians appear in the settlements appealing for votes. This attitude from a government (among other groups) that is supposed to represent the people has led AbM to conclude that it is better that they speak for themselves, and get their mandate from one another. Ndabankulu points out that what AbM are fighting for, they will be the direct beneficiaries from. This is unlike political parties, where your camp may win, but you don't really win anything, the party or candidate wins. The shack dwellers, in contrast, are fighting for land, houses and services for themselves, not the AbM leadership. The reality of AbM's 'living politics' is that, for the shack dwellers, these politics are inseparable from life, victories or losses directly correspond to the conditions of shack dwellers' lives. Put this way, it seems perverse for such a politics to be seen as lesser to one that is more removed or abstract.

Mdlalose asserts that every individual should have dignity and in AbM, 'We don't need to be inside [government/politics] to speak' - the shack dwellers have dignity as an organisation. She notes that in reality, most people do not count, and there is a need for techniques and strategies to correct this. Many have

protested against councillor Nigel Gumede<sup>5</sup>, but he is still in power. Mdlalose states that she cannot remember a time when an elected councillor listened to the people. She has thus concluded that voting amounts to taking your power and giving it to someone else. A well-known AbM slogan is ‘No land, no house, no vote’. This basically means ‘if you don’t give us what you promise then there is no point voting for you’. This rejection of formal politics in favour of living politics and democracy permeates all aspects of the movement’s practices.

While the movement is ethnically diverse (Figlan et al 2009; Zikode 2010), certain cultural influences can be seen. Zikode states that Abahlalism can be related to the southern African philosophy of Ubuntu. The word ‘Ubuntu’ comes from an isiXhosa proverb – ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ – ‘a person is a person through their relationship to others’ (Swanson 2007, 53). Claire Oppenheim (2012, 370) states that, ‘Ubuntu is a spiritual ideal, a way of life that is conceptually represented in a wide range of sub-Saharan African societies. While Ubuntu exists in many variations within different African cultures and languages, each conceptualization retains the same core of meaning...’. Zikode notes in his explanation of Abahlalism that personal virtue is not enough - the state of the community is important. This has obvious parallels with the ‘...duality of individuality and simultaneous unity...’ present in Ubuntu, where true personal enrichment is naturally compatible with the nurturing of community (Oppenheim 2012, 370). Nicolito Gianan (2011, 63) argues that this core concept here can be found in other cultures. For instance, a comparable view of the relationship between the universal and particular, the general and specific, can be found in descriptions of the Global Justice Movement (GJM)<sup>6</sup>.

The phrase ‘Unity in Diversity’ has roots in non-western cultures back hundreds of years, such as indigenous North Americans, Taoists and Bahá’i (Lalonde 2004). It is a well-known slogan of the GJM. With some irony it can be noted that it has also been adopted by some nation-states, including South Africa. When asked whether he considers AbM to be part of the GJM, Zikode answers yes with some caveats. The term ‘global’ raises a lot of questions. For Zikode, there is a link between the local and global, and both views are necessary. It can be problematic, however, when people have no base or foundation in local movement, but want to be big from the start. Any universality needs to be grounded in popular movement. Part of AbM’s living politics is ‘living solidarity’. Zikode says that he believes that the movement underestimated the power of global solidarity during the Kennedy Road attacks. Due to the personal pain and frustration of those affected, which others elsewhere did not feel

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<sup>5</sup> Gumede is a long-time opponent of the movement, the AbM website ([www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)) states clearly its position (Nigel Gumede must go!), while Gumede himself has openly threatened S’bu Zikode (Pambazuka News 2011).

<sup>6</sup> It is also a theme that spans a vast range of scholarly works. This is noted by Chantal Mouffe (2000, 34) – ‘Let’s just recall that the anti-essentialism I am endorsing, far from being restricted to post-structuralism, constitutes the point of convergence of many different currents of thought and that it can be found in authors as different as Derrida, Rorty, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Dewey, Lacan and Foucault’.

themselves, or see themselves, it at first felt somewhat unreal. However, this view has changed after witnessing solidarity marches in New York and London, and their impact in South Africa. He notes that many injustices are similar in nature around the world, so to a certain extent one can identify with this, and recognise what is common with other movements. An attempt to identify such commonalities is made in this article, in the ‘discussion’ section where I suggest what the insights from AbM’s knowledge practices can contribute to other social movements and scholarship. In the next section, though, the implications of the movement’s discourse for its practices will be explored.

### **Movement praxis**

The above provides a brief illustration of the ideas that underpin the movement. These can be seen as informing the movement’s praxis in several ways. A communitarian ethic unites the poor and affords them power in their struggle. At the same time, however, awareness of the delicate relationship between the universal and the particular, community and individuality, means careful articulation of the struggle is needed to maintain a true living politics. As well as this, the movement is concerned with reasserting the identity of the poor as people who matter, and who have agency and intelligence. This is achieved through a radical commitment to grassroots, participatory democracy.

In the spirit of Abahlalism, love, taking care of one another, is power. On this, Zikode states:

I have always also viewed this power as a basin that collects tears...In one of the meetings we had in Pietermaritzburg about four years ago, one woman stood in the meeting, the hall was fully packed, the woman stood and said “I’m a single mother, I have no husband, when I voted then I put my trust on my councillor”, and she burst into tears, saying that “today, I have no one to report to. The pain that I have, I have nowhere to share.” ...and that’s how people get frustrated and for us, that moment of being able to be a platform for people to speak for themselves. It’s really important because we don’t know what kind of damage happens when tears fall inside a person.

Zikode notes that this is one thing that the shack dwellers have that the rich lack. In South Africa, he says, rich people have gated communities, they don’t know their neighbours, so they have no sense of community. For AbM community makes a human being complete. You can only be a human being if you recognise other human beings around you.

Zodwa Nsibande came to Durban in 2003. Her mother was one of the people who first formed the movement, and she got involved over time. She studied Information Technology for two years until she was injured in an accident. Though it was not revealed in the interview, I later learned that this accident

was a shack fire (*The Guardian Weekly* 2009). Nsibande had wanted to be a private investigator - she considers that many of those skills have been transferable to her work with AbM, as it concerns itself with finding facts about corruption and duplicity in government. Knowledge can be power, Nsibande says, and she considers that AbM speaks truth to the powerful. Powerful people are scared of things being written about them. She states that she knows that some in the government have good intentions, but the government is detached from the people. AbM tries to inform those with good intentions so they can act well, but the government often doesn't like this. Nsibande asserts that as political parties do not help the poor, the poor must unite.

Zikode argues that, 'The reality is that there are many forces in our society that contest power...' The poor people who have united as AbM have in doing so become one of those forces. This illustrates one of the bigger questions within the movement – challenging the assumption that poor cannot think for selves and need to be represented by someone else (Zikode notes that this assumption is also made if you are black, female, young...). Shack fires, a serious and often fatal problem in the settlements, are often seen as happening because shack dwellers are careless, or drink too much, rather than a consequence of the state not providing electricity to the area. This dismissiveness belies the fact that shack dwellers are quite aware of the circumstances surrounding shack fires, as shown in a report by Matt Birkinshaw (2008). As Zikode points out, people in Berea (a richer area of Durban) also drink - they just don't have burning candles to knock over. This perception means that the shack dwellers first need to define themselves and stand firm that they count just like anyone else – they possess the same intelligence, the real question is of opportunities that they may not have had.

Zikode notes that AbM is viewed in different ways by different people. A difficult task for the movement is to develop its principle that there are no human borders – that a human is a human – into organisational unity across spatial locations. For a movement that insists that it will only struggle with people, and not for people, organisational unity requires constant and time consuming interaction, AbM's main base in Durban maintains some solidarity with other regions through phone communication, but this is not enough to sustain a living politics. In fact the Western Cape AbM is fairly autonomous from AbM in Durban. Ndabankulu says that this is partially because of lack of resources. Another difficulty is that questions often arise over the movement's political affiliation - for instance, the ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) have a history of bitter conflict and it is often asked whether the movement is secretly aligned to the IFP or ANC. Others try to use membership as a career move, seeing it as an opportunity to leverage themselves into NGOs or political parties, which shows a misunderstanding about the fundamental character of the movement.

AbM believes in, and practices, grassroots democracy. In Durban I witnessed several of the movement's meetings and the great lengths that were gone to in

order to maintain a democratic praxis. Pithouse (2005) explains the process involved:

A democratic practice within struggle has to have structural mechanisms to take account of the fluidity of struggle and it has to take account of the fact that mass participation in decision making is vastly more democratic and renders movements vastly less vulnerable to co-optation or coercion than representative approaches to democracy. A radically democratic approach also makes gender representation come right and ensures that lots of people get experience reducing dependency on individuals.

Abahlali baseMjondolo is approaching decision making in a genuinely democratic manner. All movement meetings are preceded by community meetings at which representatives to the movement meetings are elected and mandated for that meeting only. If the movement meeting has to choose a delegation (or individuals) to undertake negotiations with council, meet with other movements or take a platform on the radio etc then people are elected and mandated for that one specific task. There is always a report back and discussion.

ICTs are used where possible to further communitarian and democratic aims. This is complicated, however, by the need to operate outside of the communities for safety reasons since the Kennedy Road attacks (not to mention various violent incidents since then, documented on the movement's website). Unfortunately, Zikode points out, in the office a computer with internet access makes it easier to communicate with outside world than with the movement's own, computerless comrades. For instance the website serves more to communicate in solidarity with the outside world than with AbM members. The movie *Dear Mandela*, a documentary by Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza, has also served as a powerful tool in this respect. It has allowed the movement to travel around the world without having to actually travel. Also, the spread of phones with internet access is helping close the gap. The nature of the movement's use of ICTs is an example of AbM's knowledge practices in action.

Some of the discussions with AbM members seemed to suggest that the barriers to ICT use created by poverty, and the unequal access to ICTs within the movement, is at least slightly mitigated by the dedication of AbM to community, and direct, participatory democracy which keeps everyone in the loop. When I ask Ndabankulu, he is quick to stress the importance of technology, especially cell phones:

...A comrade which doesn't have a cell phone is one of the most difficult comrades to work with. Because even to coordinate the meetings, we rely on the mobile phones. You have to phone the coordinator or the chairperson of a particular branch to tell the comrades that there is a general meeting, and then that person who received a call from the office can then use the word of mouth to the locals...



Ndabankulu relates an anecdote that illustrates why he believes in the worth of ICTs to the movement. Ndabankulu and Nsibande are Facebook friends. When there was a protest at Kennedy Road, Nsibande was in Pietermaritzberg, outside of the city. Ndabankulu took a photo of the protest on his Blackberry and uploaded it to Facebook. The media called Nsibande, who was not well informed of what had happened, but was able to comment on behalf of AbM via information on Ndabankulu's Facebook page. Ndabankulu emphasises that you can't trust everything on Facebook, but if it comes from a trusted source you can. Ndabankulu notes that the relationship between the two, and Ndabankulu's status within AbM as a respected leader, who takes the struggle seriously, means Ndabankulu's posts are considered reliable. He also mentions that Facebook and Twitter are useful to communicate with comrades outside of South Africa because of their low cost. Even so, most shack dwellers have very limited or no access to such technology, so its usefulness is dependent on the particular way that the movement conducts its business, with an emphasis on inclusion.

This was illustrated further by Albert Ngubane. Ngubane has been involved with AbM since 2010. He is a committee chairperson for the area where he lives, in Shallcross, ePhuleleni, where there are about 87 AbM members. As committee chairperson it is his job to pass information on to the community. He states that many people in Shallcross have houses now because of AbM. Indeed, Shallcross settlement consists of both shacks and government houses. Ngubane has a house but is hesitant to leave his shack as ownership of the houses is disputed at the moment and it is possible he could lose it. He showed me a large folder of documents relating to an ongoing legal battle. When the houses were built, it was discovered that none of them were being allocated to the shack dwellers living in the area. AbM fought this in a court battle. This exposed corruption within the housing project. For instance, houses were being sold to multiple buyers. Some of the culprits have since been jailed, but at the time of the interview the final court decision on ownership of the houses was still pending. Ngubane explains that it is this side of AbM's activities that he is involved in – information gathering and legal challenges, rather than protests.

Ngubane agreed to take me to his area in Shallcross, where he introduced me to several women from the neighbourhood, who I talked to briefly. Importantly, none of them regularly used ICTs themselves but all recognised their importance in the movement. Bongiwe Nkabinde is a community organiser and coordinator in the area. She has been involved with AbM for 2.5 years. Nontokozi and Phileleli are AbM members. Nontokozi joined AbM after the municipality tried to evict her family. Nkabinde states that she has seen technology used by AbM. It was used to inform people about court dates and provide information around evictions, she also remembers the presence of the media. Phileleli relates how AbM contacted them with cellphones during evictions. She also recognises the media power it affords them. Nontokozi has likewise seen ICTs being used to disseminate information. She stresses importance of working together and the confidence this provides people. She also stated that she thinks seeing me at the settlement means the organisation is

growing. This echoes a point made by Lindela Figlan back at the office. He stated that mostly, people in the movement don't know much about using technology, but also pointed out that it was the AbM website that led to my very presence in the AbM office in Durban.

In keeping with its living politics, day-to-day AbM says little about the big institutions. Zikode explains that the World Bank, or the IMF, are too abstract for ordinary people with more immediate concerns like electricity or sanitation. Still, these institutions work by working with smaller entities to promote injustices. For the shack dwellers this is where the fight is – '...it makes sense for people in Abahlali to deal with local councillors, they can see them, they interact with them, they lie to them, they steal from them...' The AbM website statement on this highlights the importance of the particular in keeping the universal relevant and legitimate (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2006a):

The kind of 'radical' academics who like to write about the struggles of the poor without deeming it necessary to speak to the poor or to attend their meetings or take any attempt to learn their language have often considered these mobilisations a consequence of ignorance or false consciousness. They would prefer a march on the World Bank, or, at least, the president or capital or white power. But ordinary people live and work in local places and are watched and controlled by the state, via the party, in these local places. No popular radicalism is possible without first taking on the local relations of dominations that immediately restrict the possibilities for subaltern militancy. Local councillors chair the local ward committees and Branch Executive Committees of the ANC through which local and micro-local political control is exercised over an often restless populace.

It is not only in this sense that the living politics of Abahlalism can be seen in the practices of AbM. Not only does the movement eschew grand narratives and ultimate theories of social change or revolution, it shows aspects of local practices and culture which are specifically relevant to their particular struggle. For instance, meetings sometimes, seemingly spontaneously, break into song, or start with one, as well as prayer. This is another example of the many ways in which the struggle is inextricably part of how the people of AbM live their lives.

This is also seen in one particular protest action undertaken which integrates the idea of 'toyi-toyi', a protest dance used regularly in the anti-apartheid struggle. Toyi-toyi distracts dancers from their fear, and during apartheid symbolized a 'triumph of spirit'. It is now often used by post-apartheid social movements for similar purposes (Nevitt n.d.). Figlan describes a 'cellphone toyi-toyi' conducted by a group of AbM members. Tired of marching and being on the road, AbM members coordinated phone calls to the housing department. Someone would call, asking 'W questions' ('When are you going to build our houses? How?' etc.). When this call ended, the next one would begin, asking the same questions. This would continue all day, wearing down their quarry with comparatively little energy expenditure for the callers.

## Discussion

In the same way that Gianan argued that the core concept within Ubuntu can be found in other cultures as well, certain themes within the knowledge practices of AbM can be found in other schools of thought. This accords with the emphasis on shared humanity in Ubuntu, as well as the idea that similarities can be found in injustices and struggles in many places. It is important because it helps to make the case that activists and academics anywhere can potentially learn from the knowledge practices of a group like AbM. Meditations on the relationship between the universal and particular have been shared by a range of philosophers as well as academics studying groups within the GJM. These insights in turn can serve to inform the way that social science is conducted – as noted by AbM, governments are not the only institutions that seek to wield technocratic power, this can also be seen as a sickness within academic circles, one which seriously compromises some academics' ability to form relationships with other social actors committed to social change.

In a 1972 conversation, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze discuss political representation as a ploy to maintain total (and totalising) power. In a way that corresponds with Mdlalose's argument that voting is an act of giving one's power away to someone else, Deleuze asserts the importance of the fact that 'only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf.' Attempts by those concerned to speak for themselves threaten the power of those who seek to maintain their dominance over the population. Metaphorically, 'If the protests of children were heard in kindergarten, if their questions were attended to, it would be enough to explode the entire educational system.' (Foucault and Deleuze 1972). This is a fact that the activists of AbM can surely relate to, as their attempts to speak for themselves have met with severe repression. In an interview, Zikode notes, '...the system makes it impossible for everyone to count. If ordinary people counted it would collapse immediately' (Pithouse 2009, 46). AbM is a current example of the validity of forms of democracy that eschew the idea of representation by the political class.

Claims by the state that it represents the people, coupled with attempts to crush any people who challenge this claim, are fundamentally incompatible with the universal/particular relationship articulated in Ubuntu, which strongly influences Abahlalism. There does appear to be some ideological kinship, however, between this articulation and sentiments expressed by Ernesto Laclau (1996, 35):

The universal is incommensurable with the particular, but cannot, however, exist without the latter. How is this relation possible? My answer is that this paradox cannot be solved, but that its non-solution is the very precondition of democracy.

This idea is to an extent reflected in some other social movements around the world today. Richard JF Day (2005, 202) describes what he refers to as the 'newest social movements' (as opposed to 'new social movements') - 'Groundless solidarity arises from a precarious 'unity in diversity' of its own, a complex set of (partially) shared experiences of what it means to live under neoliberal hegemony, what it means to fight it – and to create alternatives to it'. SA Hamed Hosseini (2009, 31) argues in an article on the GJM theory of justice that this theory contrasts with the inadequacies of past theories of justice, social movements and globalisation that have failed to capture the real complexities (fragmentation, tension, interdependence, interconnection) of these issues today. The topic of the rest of this section will be the implications of the themes of this article for theory and social science research.

Charles Tilly (1995, 1594-1596) describes a tendency in academia to look for invariant models to explain cases, an assumption that all will fit if the right model is found. He warns against this approach. To borrow his metaphor - political phenomena are not like the tides, easily explained and predicted with the right knowledge, but like great floods, coherent to the casual viewer but variable in structure, sequence and consequence due to many factors – you can understand water flow and physics but there are always other variables (Tilly 1995, 1601). To this end, the construction of invariant models in any study of social phenomena like protests or revolutions is counter-productive. Tilly instead advocates a focus on the smaller, contingent principals which together make up the larger phenomenon (Tilly 1995, 1605). This is not only a matter of 'doing it right'. It has an ethical dimension. Bent Flyvbjerg (2005, 39) comments on the dangers of the search for invariant models, of treating social sciences as natural sciences. He argues that it serves to produce technocratic practices, where theories and models are applied to social situations by those who presume to know best. 'If societies that suppress conflict are oppressive, perhaps social and political theories that ignore or marginalize conflict are potentially oppressive, too' (Flyvbjerg 1998, 229).

Flyvbjerg's argument seems to be supported by the experiences of AbM, who have faced the wrath not only of a technocratic government but also the authoritarian tendencies of the vanguardist left. Another criticism of academics by AbM concerns the use of specialist language that reinforces the privilege of those who are schooled in it. This is an issue that has been raised within academia, for instance in Noam Chomsky's (2003) criticism of Foucault:

Foucault is an interesting case because I'm sure he honestly wants to undermine power but I think with his writings he reinforced it. The only way to understand Foucault is if you are a graduate student or you are attending a university and have been trained in this particular style of discourse. That's a way of guaranteeing, it might not be his purpose, but that's a way of guaranteeing that intellectuals will have power, prestige and influence. If something can be said simply, say it simply, so that the carpenter next door can understand you. Anything that is at all well

understood about human affairs is pretty simple. I find Foucault really interesting but I remain skeptical of his mode of expression.

This statement can be likened to Denis Dutton's (1998) 'Bad Writing Contest' in which he criticised various writers for what he considered to be deliberately obscure writing meant to convince readers of the author's intelligence<sup>7</sup>. In the case of AbM it is clearly apparent that the relationship between activists and academia is a work in progress, and could benefit from increased reflexivity. This is hardly a new discovery, but it remains a pertinent issue.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a basic description of AbM's knowledge practices. It is limited in scope and without doubt excludes valuable detail and nuance in the thought and action it describes. This is inevitable in any attempt from an outsider to explore a social movement, particularly one whose politics are drawn explicitly from living the movement's struggle. This is why I have largely stuck to the use of the interviewees own words, with little extrapolation. However, it is also noted that many struggles share some traits, which is what makes the shack dwellers' experiences relevant to scholars and activists. This is shown in how the knowledge practices can be (partially) situated in broader themes and debates.

Most important, I argue, is the rejection of the technocratic knowledge practices that are the logic behind the repression of groups like the shack dwellers. Acknowledging that the poor can think calls into question those who would rather ignore those thoughts. It is not without importance that the ANC was once hailed as a force of liberation in South Africa. This illustrates that it is not only the most obvious authoritarians who can fall into technocratic behaviour patterns. It is also a tendency that anyone seeking social change (and engaging in the accompanying power games) must guard against, including sympathetic scholars of social movements.

The movement gives an account of a 2006 march on its website (Abahlali baseMjondolo 2006b):

When Abahlali marched, (entirely peacefully and to put a reasoned position) into the University of the state under this banner ['University of Abahlali baseMjondolo'] in late 2006 a number of 'left' intellectuals, in the precise manner of the state, declared them criminal in the national press!

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<sup>7</sup> One of the targets of this criticism, Judith Butler (1999), accused Dutton of being politically motivated, and indeed the context of the contest, in the midst of the 'Science Wars', gives some credence to this. Chomsky is also a partisan in the wars, as evidenced by his current dispute with Slavoj Zizek (Chomsky vs Zizek debate 2013). This aspect, however, is tangential to the discussion here.

At that moment it was clear that competing elites in the state and the institutionalised left were united on the position that the poor should not think their own politics and that doing so, no matter how calmly, peacefully and rationally, rendered the movement 'out of order' and even criminal. Abahlali's intellectual project is founded on the decision that "when order means the silence of the poor then it is good to be out of order".

The order being spoken of in this passage seems to suggest some kind of respectability or credentials that mean membership in an intellectual vanguard. If this is so, surely those who wish for another world would do well to stay very much out of order.

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## **Dis/placing political illiteracy: the politics of intellectual equality in a South African shack-dwellers' movement**

**Anna Selmeczi<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*This paper starts out with the claim that the contemporary spatio-political order of the South African “world class” city is conditional upon constructing many lives as superfluous and disposable. This construction partly rests on the inherited topography of apartheid displacement which continues to push the poor black majority into zones of invisibility and inaudibility. Beyond this physical distancing, the production and abandonment of surplus people also depends on rendering them as improper political subjects. In the prevailing political discourse, poor people’s struggles are deemed less than political through notions such as the idea that all protest is related to the pace of “service delivery” or accusations of violence, as well as often explicit characterizations of dissenting people as ignorant. Such discursive moves imply and reinforce a conception of the poor black majority as unable to think and practice their own politics; that is, as politically illiterate group of people. Working with a conception of intellectual inequality as always fabricated and contingent in nature, this article elaborates the deployment and disruption of political illiteracy by focusing on the politics of South African shack-dwellers’ movement Abahlali baseMjondolo. The discussion moves through the dis/placement of the legal charge of public violence, the state violence of illegal evictions, the discourse of service delivery, and the educative trusteeship of abandonment. The article concludes with some concerns that emerge through the movement’s practice and the very attempt to research political illiteracy.*

**Keywords:** urban struggles; shack-dwellers; intellectual equality; Jacques Rancière; South African politics

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## The beginning

For reasons that are spelled out further below, let me start with the story of how I got to the point that is now somewhat arbitrarily designated as the beginning. Due to a series of more or less contingent factors, events, encounters, as well as genuine interests and commitments of a political theory student, I applied to the doctoral program of International Relations and European studies at the Central European University (Budapest, Hungary) with the proposal to study resistance to biopolitics. In the then still fresh conceptual debate between the two main politico-philosophical renderings of biopolitics, (due to a series of more or less contingent factors, etc.) I sided with Michel Foucault's ideas as opposed to those of Giorgio Agamben. That is, as opposed to an ancient aspect of the sovereign power to ban life and thus relegate it to a zone where it can be killed with impunity, I thought of biopolitics as a form of rule that emerged with modernity to efficiently govern what the contemporaneously developing social sciences named as 'the population'. While this conception of biopolitics is predominantly productive – it seeks to create subjects that conduct themselves in ways that enable the efficient government of the polity – it certainly has a dark side to it, hence Foucault's (2003, 241) aphorismic formulation: the power "to make live and let die". Thus, while Agamben's (1998) notion of abandonment is indeed symptomatic of contemporary biopolitics, his decisionist idea of sovereignty and the subject of abandonment, which he associates with the ancient *homo sacer* or the walking dead of the Nazi lager, forecloses the possibility to meaningfully think resistance to this form of politics. Thanks to my supervisor who, as a Foucauldian himself, shared my concerns with Agamben, the predominantly theoretical question of how we might think resistance to technologies of power that let die was the point of departure of the moderately unruly path of my dissertation.

More important than the struggles of trying to mould a project like this into the rather stiff epistemological and methodological frames of political science, at some point during my first year in the doctoral program I found the South African shack-dwellers' movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo's (Abahlali) website. Having read almost everything uploaded there and having gone through all the photos and documents of their protests, I was absolutely convinced that theirs is indeed an instance of resistance to being rendered superfluous and disposable, of being "let die". As I soon learned, the movement has a protocol that interested researchers needed to follow: whoever wished to write about Abahlali (2007a), should visit them and talk to them so as to see and hear what life in the shantytown feels like. Although this meant quite a leap for a politics student based in Budapest, so as to fulfill Abahlali's request, I decided to integrate ethnographic methods into my project, and in the northern fall/southern spring of 2009 I landed in Durban, where the movement started from and where their national office is located.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the project recounted here, I conducted research with Abahlali baseMjondolo in Durban and the eThekweni (Greater Durban) area in two phases: between April-July 2009 and September-November 2010. Over the years to follow, I remained engaged with Abahlali's work

My time in Durban on this first occasion was defined by daily visits to the shack settlement on Kennedy Road in Clare Estate. This included conducting interviews with Abahlali members in English and sitting through their meetings conducted mostly in isiZulu; the preparations and the journey to the Constitutional Court hearing of Abahlali's appeal against the "Slums Act", as well as the task to write up an article focusing on the theoretical side of my research for a special journal issue on Foucault and global politics. One would be tempted at this point to recount this experience as that of the oscillation between my room in the middle class neighbourhood of Glenwood and the Abahlali office in the huge shack settlement on Kennedy Road, and thus as the literal and metaphorical movement between the space of theoretical and empirical work; but I feel obliged to tell this story now precisely because the encounter with Abahlali taught me to resist such epistemological ordering. Getting to know the shack-dwellers' struggle against what they and I both thought was their abandonment to a life barely livable meant beginning to understand why they insist that researchers come and speak to them: beyond the experience of "living in the mud like pigs" (Abahlali, 2010a), being rendered disposable is experienced as being rendered as someone who is denied speech and who need not be spoken to. It was beginning to appreciate the significance of Abahlali members asserting themselves as thinking and speaking beings, and what it meant when they declared their shantytowns to be the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. Crucially, these declarations are not uttered from the assumed position of superfluous life. Instead, they suggest that the emergence of political subjectivities that reject the very allotment of insignificant life is never completely foreclosed – neither by the production of superfluous life and its abandonment to infrastructural decay on the level of governmental rationality, nor by increasing state violence in local practices of executive power.<sup>3</sup>

Circling around such considerations, this period of my project thus marked the beginning of a research trajectory that, although still had its anchor in the question of how to think resistance to technologies of power that let die, moved into the context of neoliberal urbanism and took on the *problematique* of urban governmentality, thereby formulating the question: What rationalities and technologies of power shape the urban order that produces and abandons superfluous life? On the other hand, but contemporaneously, due to encountering the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière both through people within and close to the movement and professors at my university back in Budapest, I articulated the following inquiry: What does it mean to think

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from afar. During my current postdoctoral work – based in Cape Town – I have maintained contact with the Western Cape organization of the movement; although less so as a researcher than a sympathizer or activist.

<sup>3</sup> See Selmeczi (2009) for an elaboration of my understanding of the concept of abandonment. See also Sharad Chari's (2013, 132) discussion of Durban-based environmental justice activists' refusal "to be forgotten in the toxic valley of South Durban", that is, their rejection of "detritus life".

politics in the face of the sensible order of the neoliberal “world class” city that produces and abandons superfluous life through, among other techniques, constructing it as mute and ignorant?

It was, then, the resonance between Abahlali’s assertions of their equality as thinking and speaking beings, and Rancière’s (1999; 2004) conception of politics as the disruptive logic of equality that defined the interpretive framework of my research, within which the biopolitical order of abandonment appeared as a spatiotemporal order of the visible, audible and sensible (as in perceptible both physically and rationally). The site of the power that lets die emerged as the urban government of distinct aesthetics – be it those of superfluity in Achille Mbembe’s (2004) rendering or the experience of lives discarded to spaces of infrastructural decay – that is conditional upon the construction of hierarchies; a segmentary topography that relies upon the contingent production of the difference and inequality of those who (wish to) dwell in it.

My entry point to the particular rationalities of power which operates this way was the notion of the “world class” city, that is, the ideal/ideational space of “the circulation of both people and things” in the age of globalized capitalism (Foucault, 2007: 71). Drawing on a body of literature that studies what happens to cities when the neoliberal fetish of competition launches them on an interterritorial rivalry for capital investment (Brenner and Elden 2009), I approached the measures of the City of Durban and the KwaZulu-Natal Province to dislocate the urban poor as state attempts to create a desirable milieu for the market. Surely, such efforts entail favouring some areas over others, and require that the movement between these areas be policed. For the circulation of people and things to be smooth, people, things and events perceived as non-conducive to the logic of market competition have to be moved out of its way.<sup>4</sup> Hence, in about a decade after lifting all constraints to the movement of black people in South Africa, a governmental rationality different from that of minority rule under apartheid rearticulates the problem of urban access (and excess), albeit with a significant twist. Under “the new dispensation”, by the early to mid-2000s the ultimate question of urban development becomes this: how is it possible to contain the undesirable movement of people who, given their rights as free citizens of the democratic South Africa, are supposed to be as mobile as the rest (cf. Huchzermeyer 2010)?

The spatial order of apartheid outlived the demise of its political ideology, and thus this question of containment is partly resolved by the hardly challenged spatial and infrastructural segregation. Yet, taking seriously the experience of the urban order of abandonment articulated through the struggle of Abahlali baseMjondolo demands that we trace the containment of excess mobility in realms beyond the territorial. Indeed, following up on the resonance between

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<sup>4</sup> The conception of the *ordinary city* (as the colonial city) elaborated by, e.g. Jennifer Robinson (2006; 2008) and Edgar Pieterse (e.g. 2010) would open an alternative, potentially more productive route that I can explore here. I thank Gary Minkley for the suggestion.

Rancière's thought and Abahlali's interrogation and appropriation of the name of *the people* and *the public* required that I had to look into how the problematization of the (supposedly) superfluous people's excess mobility kept redefining the scope of the subject of economic and political government, and how, thereby, it reconstructed the urban poor as less than equal political and economic subjects.<sup>5</sup> It was while working my way through this imperative, and picking up cues such as those resounded in the italicized texts that intersperse the paper that I arrived at understanding the notion of *political illiteracy* as a crucial means of constructing people who have been rendered superfluous as less than equal subjects. Emphatically, far from labeling poor people, Abahlali activists, or (local) government agents politically illiterate, through deploying this notion I seek to problematize the discursive construction of the intellectual and political inequality of those who are deemed to be in excess to the aesthetic order of the postcolonial turned neoliberal city. Albeit only latently in this article, this aim necessarily disturbs the assumptions of a body of work that diagnoses political illiteracy as an objective factor contributing to political apathy and, consequently, the so-called democratic deficit in contemporary liberal regimes (see e.g. Bron, Guimarães, and Castro 2009; Gidengil 2005; Wood 2010), and finds remedy in some form of citizenship education (see e.g. Wood 2009; Heater 2010). Closer to the critical approach motivating this article is Paulo Freire's (1985) conception of political illiteracy that he juxtaposes to critical literacy as the practice that pedagogy should nurture. Yet, Freire, too, posits the former as an existing attribute of those who have a "naïve outlook on social reality", taking it as "a given" (Ibid., 103; see also Giroux 2001; 2013).

As opposed to the presumption of inequality that, in understanding political illiteracy as a real condition prior and contrary to political consciousness I elaborate the operation and disruption of political illiteracy according to a conception of intellectual inequality as always fabricated and contingent in nature.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the dis/placement of the legal charge of public violence, the state violence of illegal evictions, the discourse of service delivery, and the educative trusteeship of abandonment, I hope to share what I learned about the politics of, or rather, against political illiteracy primarily through my work with Abahlali. I conclude by briefly reflecting on some of the concerns that emerge through the movement's practice and, more emphatically, through researching the deployment and disruption of political illiteracy.

While our national and provincial elections are significant, the local government elections we are having next month are even more important for each one of us. It

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<sup>5</sup> See Selmeczi (2012b) for a discussion of a methodological approach articulated by such a back-and-forth dynamics between questions and problems intermeshing empirical and conceptual.

<sup>6</sup> Despite these conflicting connotations, I stuck to "political illiteracy" so as convey in the expression the sense of materiality that characterizes the construction and contestation of intellectual and political inequality; to allude to the importance of the palpable (because inscribable and legible) existence of equality, upon which the questioning of inequality so often turns (Rancière 2007; see also Selmeczi 2012b).

is about service delivery right where you are in your local government. It is very much about you. And I mean each and every one of you. It is about the daily basic needs of each one of you. It is about water, it is about your electricity, it is about the education of your children. This is an election which affects us very directly. It is a pity that the lion's share of the budget goes to the national and provincial governments. The resources in the fiscus are skewed in favor of both national and provincial governments rather than local government. The trouble is that with so much political illiteracy in our country most of our people tend to expect too much from local government than it can actually deliver, in terms of its miniscule budget. In a situation where national and provincial government is under the governance of a different party and where local government happens to be under a different party there is a lot of conflict that results from the ignorance of the different roles of the three tier-levels of government. I have noticed that there is deliberate exploitation of this ignorance of our people (Buthelezi 2011).

### **"Who decides what is 'public violence'? Who is the public really?"<sup>7</sup>**

The story of Abahlali baseMjondolo's emergence as a social movement has been told many times both by the movement itself and scholars working with them (cf. e.g. Abahlali 2006; Zikode 2010; Pithouse 2005; Bryant 2007; Chance 2011). In the context of political illiteracy, the assessment that such narratives are "manufactured by intellectuals" is hardly negligible (Webb 2013, 465), but this point will be returned to later. The point of departure for the discussion here is the trope of "public violence" and the role it played in formulating the political subjectivity of the shack-dwellers of Kennedy Road. On the day of their first road blockade in early 2005, fourteen protesters from the settlement were arrested on charges of public violence. Having collected the funds for the bail of the captives now referred to as the "Kennedy Road 14", the following Monday the Kennedy Road Development Committee led a 1 200 people strong march to the Sydenham police station where they were being held. As the movement's historian later recalls, "[t]heir demand was that either the 14 be released or else the entire community be arrested because 'If they are criminal then we are all criminal'" (Abahlali, 2006 : 1). In former chairperson S'bu Zikode's words "They say we committed public violence but against which public? If we are not the public then who is the public and who are we?" (Zikode in Pithouse, 2005: 15)<sup>8</sup>

The work of political illiteracy – disrupted in these very utterances – can be traced along two lines in the ways "public violence" is put in place. On the one

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<sup>7</sup> Abahlali (2007b).

<sup>8</sup> See also a quote from a talk given by Zikode (2010a, 01:13:34"; emphasis added) at CUNY: [T]hrough the courage and strength of the people, we marched the next day to demand that those who were arrested be released or all of us be arrested because they were charged for public violence. Now, which public, because we are the public. [...] Rather, take them out because we are the public that should have been the victims of their act. But if you cannot release them then arrest us. And again, the protest in the next day was also dispersed with... guns and so on. The movement grew up like that."

hand, the shack-dwellers' questions around the subject of this criminal charge point to how, in its deployment, protestors come to be removed from, and opposed to, the collective subject of the republic. While of course the possibility that protestors could commit criminal offences cannot be excluded in principle, the fact that charges of public violence against the many Abahlali members arrested during protest have, with one exception, always been dropped before cases go to trial suggests that arrest functions more as a spatio-political antidote: it discursively and literally separates "the public" from those who decide to use public space to demonstrate their dissent (cf. UPM 2011).<sup>9</sup> Among other means, some of which are discussed below, this interplay between the name of "the public" and the law deployed in defence of its alleged referents certainly contributes to filtering out poor people's dissent from the city's sensible order. Suggestive of the second line of constructing political illiteracy through "public violence", on the other hand, their separation from "the public" is justified by equating the demonstrative use of public space with violence.<sup>10</sup>

Illustrative of the shack-dwellers' challenge to such mechanisms, both of these moves are carefully deconstructed in an essay written by Mzonke Poni (2009), then chairperson of Abahlali baseMjondolo in the Western Cape, on the occasion of his public violence trial where he represented himself and won. Through a semantic analysis of "public violence", the text first delinks the charge and its usual suspects, "the poor". Citing a dictionary definition of public violence, Poni (2009) argues that unlike the shack-dwellers' acts of trespass and civil disobedience (such as blockading roads or occupying land), the violent and illegal actions of the police and the Anti-Land Invasion Unit<sup>11</sup> during evictions or the dissolution of protests might well be read as "public act[s] of violence by

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<sup>9</sup> As activists know very well, public violence charges are effectively deployed as spatial, temporal and financial impediments to their political practice (cf. e.g. UPM in, Gabb 2011; Poni 2009; Tissington in De Waal 2012). Apropos the news that all charges were dropped against one of the KwaNdengezi Four (in KwaZulu-Natal), Abahlali (2013) comments thus: "[...T]hese charges against all four comrades were fabricated and meant to redirect our focus away from the politic of truth. [...] Why should the poor suffer before the truth could be told? Why should our struggle for land and housing be forced to the courts when we expose corruption in housing?" In accordance with Michael Neocosmos' (2011) analysis of the depoliticizing aspects of transitional justice in post-apartheid South Africa, these questions arguably point to yet another aspect of the post-democratic state's instrumentalization of the rule of law that ultimately works toward replacing politics with litigation (Ranci re 1999; cf. Selmeczi 2012b).

<sup>10</sup> I refer to "the public" as the name of the collective political subject in politico-legal discourse and Abahlali's interrogation thereof. For a discussion of Abahlali's politics in relation to a differently conceived notion of the "publics" – as predominantly middle-class media consumers and direct spectators of shack-dwellers' protests in urban spaces – see Chance (2011). Kerry Chance rightly cautions analysts about the limitations of understanding politics as that which can be seen by the "publics", thus overlooking important mobilizing practices performed to and by publics within the shantytown, beyond what is mediatized. In my view, to reaffirm, Abahlali's political practice – e.g. challenging through appropriating the name of "the public" – disrupt the very distribution of what gets to be seen by whom, and thus the spatial clustering of publics too.

<sup>11</sup> See the City of Cape Town's description of the unit [here](#).



an unruly mob”.<sup>12</sup> Proceeding with the re-allocation of the common associations of public violence, Poni (2009) then asks whether or not the inaccessibility of legal aid, the state’s failure “to provide people with basic essential services”, or its enforcement of its own version of “development” realizes public violence. The fact that these conditions are generally not considered to do so, and that, in turn, poor people’s land occupations are not recognized as a form of legitimate grassroots land-distribution and thus the promotion of the public good is, he points out, telling of the discursive demarcation alluded above: “The fact that our minor and non-criminal offences are treated as criminality – as public violence – shows that in reality we are not included in the definition of the public. [...] Therefore we have to rebel just to count as the public” (Poni, 2009.).

While pointing right at the heart of politics as the disruption of the common sensibility, Poni’s last quoted sentence at the same time gestures toward the double-edged operation of political illiteracy. Whereas the shack-dwellers’ rebellious appropriation of the name of the public makes visible the miscount of the urban order where the poor should suffer in silence on the peripheries, their spatio-political containment turns upon reconstructing rebellion it as violent and (or therefore) thoughtless. A heated exchange between Abahlali baseMjondolo in the Western Cape and a group of civil society organizations led by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), along with the local branch of an ANC affiliated trade union federation and the, also ANC affiliated, South African Communist Party (SACP), is exemplary of these dynamics that, as Michael Neocosmos (e.g. 2011) has consistently argued, is due to the depoliticizing effects of transitional justice, among them, the post-apartheid construction of violence as atavistic and antithetical to democracy (cf. Selmeczi 2012b).

The debate between TAC (and allies) and Abahlali dates back to September 2010, when Abahlali in the Western Cape<sup>13</sup> (2010b) called for a “Week of Informal Settlements’ Strike”, a national week of action where people living in shack-settlements were invited “to take to the street for the whole week with a view to show our dis[s]atisfactions of the conditions in which we are living...” Although the strike was scheduled to take place during the last week of October 2010, it already erupted in several settlements in Khayelitsha in Cape Town during the days of preparatory mobilization early that month, thus resulting in Abahlali in the Western Cape’s decision to extend the time-frame of the strike to the whole of October (Majavu and Obose 2010). Protest action mostly took the

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in line with Western Cape Abahlali’s (2010a) interpretation that “[b]lockading a road is not violence”; “[v]iolence is harm to human beings”, Abahlali members often make the point that protests usually turn violent only when the police intervenes (cf. Sacks 2012). As, for instance, spokesperson Mnikelo Ndabankulu notes (interview, 28 October 2010): “[...U]sually harm is only experienced when police come. Before police come, no harm happens, whether we sing and burn tires as part of our expression [...] So, when we burn tires, we sing our songs, the only thing: we’re causing traffic, which traffic always happened by the way. And then, when police come, that’s where harm take place, and usually we are only the victims”. In fact, Abahlali protests have never resulted in harming anyone.

<sup>13</sup> Abahlali in the Western Cape operates with considerable autonomy from Abahlali in KwaZulu-Natal and there are some important differences in how the two have organized.

form of road blockades – including parts of the N2 highway and Mew Way, a major road running through the area – mainly built of burning tires and debris. On one occasion a bus was set on fire and, according to the spokesperson of the City of Cape Town, a fire station was also damaged.<sup>14</sup>

A couple weeks into the strike, COSATU Khayelitsha,<sup>15</sup> the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), and Equal Education published a joint statement entitled “Reject Abahlali baseMjondolo’s call for violence and chaos!”. Describing themselves as organizations whose members “work patiently, educate themselves and build local leadership to change the system of inequality”, the statement calls “progressive people in churches, clinics, schools, universities, homes and local organizations (in Khayelitsha and elsewhere) to distance themselves from mindless violence and calls for chaos...” (TAC et al. 2010). In a similar spirit, a day later the South African Communist Party (SACP) of the Brian Bunting District issued a statement that declares “Abahlali baseMjondolo’s tactics reactionary”, as well as “opportunistic, anarchist and populist”, and condemns the organization for vandalizing state property, i.e., “the already existing infrastructure in our communities” (ka-Nggentsu 2010).<sup>16</sup> Clearly drawing a line between their own ‘thoughtful’ politics (which remains within the frames of the rule of law and protects state property), and the thoughtless chaos Abahlali is imagined to create, these texts reproduce the pedagogical myth of progress and development, thus not only obliterating the role of violent civil disobedience in the victory against apartheid, but also necessarily constructing protestors as not yet political: “We know that mindless violence and chaos have never brought freedom, decent jobs and a better life. Freedom and equality comes through patient organization, education, and sustained struggle”.<sup>17</sup> As Abahlali points out in its response, similarly to the

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<sup>14</sup> According to police reports, on the night of 19 October ten vehicles were stoned and set on fire. Abahlali claimed that the perpetrators of this incident were “unaffiliated to them” (Burns 2010). As one of my anonymous reviewers notes, many of the protest actions condemned by the authors of the statement were, in fact, claimed by the ANC Youth League (cf. Samodien 2010; Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape 2010c).

<sup>15</sup> COSATU stands for the Confederation of South African Trade Unions that, together with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) formed the still extant, although slowly crumbling, Tripartite Alliance in 1990.

<sup>16</sup> See also TAC’s General Secretary, Vuyiseka Dubula’s (Dubula 2012) opinion piece arguing along the same lines in reaction to a similar wave of protests in Cape Town in 2012. For a critical response, see Sacks (2012).

<sup>17</sup> As I have noted elsewhere (Selmeczi 2012b), in formulating their practice as “the politics of the present tense” (interview with former vice-chairperson, 2 November 2010) Abahlali (e.g. 2006b) has always rejected the temporality of that myth imbuing what they call the “politics of patience” (interview with S’bu Zikode, 26 October 2010). As Richard Pithouse (email correspondence, 18 February 2014) noted, this term entered the South African discourse around housing via Shack-Dwellers International (SDI); (cf. Appadurai 2001), and was adopted by former Minister of Housing Lindiwe Sisulu – to Abahlali’s significant concern (cf. Zikode 2010b). That this smooth discursive movement between a (supposedly) grassroots urban movement and the highest levels of state and global politics should be worrisome is aptly pointed out by urban rights scholar Marie Huchzermeyer (email correspondence, 12 February 2014) in relation to the nomination of SDI’s president, Jockin Arputham, for the Nobel Peace

work of state agents' "public violence" discourse, in deploying such an account of violence, the signatory organizations too separate protestors from their version of the properly political subject: the patiently organizing local activist, or the "poor and the working class" (TAC et al 2010). "We have long experience of the state calling protests in which no person is harmed violent. We did not expect a social movement to do so" (Abahlali Western Cape, 2010)

Proving the contingency of the intellectual order molded by such instances intermeshing protest, violence and thoughtlessness, over the past several years Abahlali have articulated various interpretations within which public protest appears, in fact, as the enactment of the equality of speech and thought. For one, they frequently refer to spontaneous protests or organized marches as discourse. In this metaphor, as I have mentioned elsewhere (Selmeczi 2012a), demonstrations become continuous with other forms of supposed dialogue and, as such, speak of a sensible order where the shack-dwellers' utterances are not received as speech. As S'bu Zikode (2005, 2) put it in his "Third Force" essay: "We discovered that our municipality does not listen to us when we speak to them in Zulu. We tried English. Now we realize that they won't underst[an]d Xhosa or Sotho either. The only language that they understand is when we put thousands of people on the street".<sup>18</sup> Offering a slightly different rendering of public demonstration as speech, Ndabankulu (interview 28 October 2010) explains the popularity of protests by juxtaposing them to the unequal distribution of voice at official political events:

Some people keep on saying "Hey Mnikelo, I like a protest [more] than a rally because in a rally we just get into a bus and enjoy singing while we are on the bus. But we get to the stadium, you are quiet and listen to speeches, which you cannot even question them!" Understand? The speaker of the day speaks and speaks and speaks and speaks, and you go home. But in a march everybody takes a mic and

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Prize 2014. As Huchzermeyer argues in her comments on SDI's press statement published apropos the nomination, citing Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums* the organization takes the view that urban poverty inevitably leads to violent strife, thereby justifying their strategy of "dialogue" and "cooperation", which they simplistically oppose to "confrontation" (cf. Huchzermeyer 2011). As such, they reinforce the governmental attempt to contain and condemn protest action and other forms of militant struggle through constructing these as violent and therefore threatening. Rancière's (1999) writing on the police order's aim to impede the confrontational enactment of *dissensus* seems greatly relevant here.

<sup>18</sup> On the "Third Force", cf. below. When five years later I asked S'bu about the then raging debate between TAC and Abahlali of the Western Cape, he recalled his response to others' similar inquiries: "I said: what would you do, if language is a barrier? Now, you want to talk to a person, the person does not understand, you use your normal isiZulu, or even the English, [still] they don't understand. You send emails, you write letters, and then you'll have to keep trying other methods. Now, this is one of the methods, which we know that it has passed in the past: the popular protest. [...] So, again, the normal procedures being followed as protocols; not working, you have to do other way: you are *popular*. It's popular to us – to those who do it, but it's unpopular to the allies and the state" (S'bu Zikode, interview 25 October 2010; emphasis added).

sings his favorite song, so everybody enjoys, so people love marches more than rallies.<sup>19</sup>

Another one of Abahlali's counter-interpretations exposes constructions of violence which put political illiteracy in place as erasing not only thought but also history. On the one hand, when referring to their protests as one tactic among others, Abahlali declare their actions to be thoughtful by definition. As in response to TAC et al.'s (2010) condemnation of the informal settlements' strike as "immature, ignorant and [contemptuous] for our communities" Abahlali states, "yes we have chosen a different form of struggle to TAC in this campaign. But that does not mean that we did not come to this campaign after careful thinking" (Abahlali Western Cape 2010a; cf. Abahlali 2010b; Ndabankulu in Patel 2013; Abahlali 2014).<sup>20</sup> Beyond rejecting the subjectivity suggested by the trope of "mindless violence", on the other hand, when Abahlali talk about protest action as a tactic, they often establish an explicit continuity between their practice and the anti-apartheid struggle (e.g. Abahlali 2011; cf. Anti-Privatization Forum 2009). In light of the post-apartheid reconfiguration of violence as antidemocratic and atavistic (Neocosmos 2011), such linkages to the struggle for liberation have major significance, for they point to the gap that the apotheosis of the rule of law and the consequent process of depoliticization leaves in the country's very recent history of popular militancy.<sup>21</sup>

The transformed, arguably amnesiac, interpretation of "ungovernability" is a case in point. In paralyzing the apartheid state, the massive wave of civil disobedience in the mid to late 1980s rendered townships and later the whole country ungovernable and was once seen as the direct route to People's Power

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<sup>19</sup> The immediate context of the quote suggests that marches are opposed to political party rallies, yet, a bit further on, Ndabankulu juxtaposes them to "boardroom politics", which seems to suggest that members prefer marches to the movement's more formalized meetings too. On another note, although here I have neither the space nor the capacity to do so, the connections between the joy of (carnavalesque) politics and thought that this quote gestures towards would be worth further inquiry.

<sup>20</sup> Announcing the occupation of the SOHCO Owned River View Flats, a block of empty social housing units, in Cato Manor, Durban, Abahlali (2014) declares: "If we are repressed we will organize simultaneous road blockades across the city during peak hour traffic. If people are left homeless we will occupy unused land or unused buildings owned by government or so-called public-private partnerships like Sohco. For years we have warned that if politicians and officials refuse to negotiate with us we will go to the streets and the courts, and that if these tactics fail we will take direct action to access land and housing and to force our oppressors to negotiate with us. We have called this Plan B."

<sup>21</sup> Conversely, around the time of Abahlali's first mass protests, in the mid-2000s, criticism took the opposite angle: it was precisely because they were resorting to the same modes of dissent as those of the anti-apartheid era that protestors were condemned. As Thabo Mbeki (quoted in Patel and Pithouse 2005) urged in 2005: "We must stop this business of people going into the street to demonstrate about lack of delivery. These are the things that the youth used to do in the struggle against apartheid". In his study of COSATU's attitudes towards Abahlali, Alexander Beresford (2006, 69) shows that union members share the same sentiment, i.e., that "it's like we bare fighting our own people who are government in the same way as we fought the people in the old regime, and we can't block the road and use the vulgar language against our own people".

and thus liberation (ANC, 1986). However, in today's context, it refers to the persistence of violence and ignorance in spaces that are no longer supposed to be townships, a combination certainly sub-political.<sup>22</sup> The excerpt from Mangosuthi Buthulezi (2011) of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) preceding this section, as well as his earlier piece entitled "We're reaping the bitter harvest of ungovernability" (Buthulezi, 2009), is an apt illustration of how that notion is being reconfigured as ignorance. To see, in turn, ungovernability rendered as violence – which is deployed in an unethical electoral rivalry so as to undermine municipal efforts to efficiently run the Western Cape and the City of Cape Town – the Democratic Alliance (DA) offers a useful archive. From "hate speech" and "violent protest" to "land invasion", the DA's (2012) "Timeline of the ANC and ANCYL's WCape Ungovernability Campaign" lumps all instances of popular unrest to the machinations of the ANC and its Youth League. To be sure, the involvement of the latter is evident in some cases (cf. Earnest, 2013), but to attribute all sorts of protests to the sinister plan of a party political contestant, while integrating them into a chronicle of various forms of violence adds up to denying the political agency of the protestors themselves. At the same time, this trivializes the appalling living conditions over which they decided to take to the street. The discourse around the now infamous "poo protests" spotting the province clearly exemplify this dynamic (cf. Phamodi 2013, Schutte 2013). Less obviously but no less importantly, together with the current criminalization of protest, the ANC's almost complete appropriation of the ungovernability campaign for the narrative of their role as the sole agent of liberation equally erases the political capacity of local struggles – both then and now (cf. Mayekiso, 1996).<sup>23</sup>

That the pathologization of violence comes with a familiar pedagogical reflex was certainly confirmed in the aftermath and the discourse of the wave of popular xenophobic violence in 2008.<sup>24</sup> While the upsurge of workshops and educational projects would require a study on its own (but cf. e.g., Desai and Vahed 2013; Atlas 2009), in conclusion to this section's discussion of political illiteracy as violence, here I constrain myself to citing Abahlali's reaction to this reflex, for it precisely targets the links between the urban order of abandonment and the usual allocation of intellectual capacities.<sup>25</sup> In their "Statement on the xenophobic attacks in Johannesburg", following a poetic exercise in discrediting typical prejudices against foreigners and a list of the steps they decided to take

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gibson (2001).

<sup>23</sup> I thank Patricia Hayes for raising the important point about Mayekiso's "correction" to the ANC's narrative. I could not do justice to it here.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Neocosmos (2011) for a thorough analysis of the xenophobic violence as the consequence, and not the antithesis, of the operation of transitional justice and the human rights discourse in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as a discussion of Abahlali as affirmative of a political subjectivity that challenges this assemblage.

<sup>25</sup> It also has to be noted that there were no attacks against people of non-South African origin in settlements affiliated to Abahlali.

in order to prevent attacks, Abahlali (2008) turn to political illiteracy under construction:

We hear that the political analysts are saying that the poor must be educated about xenophobia. Always the solution is to “educate the poor”. When we get cholera we must be educated about washing our hands when in fact we need clear water. When we get burnt we must be educated about fire when in fact we need electricity. This is just a way of blaming the poor for our suffering. We want land and housing in the cities, we want to go to university, we want water and electricity – we don’t want to be educated to be good at surviving poverty on our own.

As shown in the next section discussing the dis/placement of political illiteracy that enables illegal evictions, on the other side of the pedagogical reflex under attack here, the sensible interplay between the scope of “the public” and various interpretations of violence is also conditioned by ideas about what is *not* included in the education of the poor. In turn, claiming one’s space in the public and thus physically disrupting the urban order of abandonment remakes politics as an experience of learning.

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*In January 2012, South African circles of the middle class left were shaken up by a conflict between a leader of the Unemployed People’s Movement (UPM) and a lecturer at Rhodes University. At the heart of the conflict were three wandering books: The Communist Manifesto, a volume of selected writings by Marx and Engels, and another by Antonio Gramsci (UPM, 2012). According to the lecturer, the books were stolen by the activist to whom she opened her house when he was threatened, and, although she had been asking him to return them for months, the activist failed to do so (Martinez-Mullen, 2012). She then proceeded to lay charges of theft against him with the police. According to the activist, who suffered physical abuse at the police station after his arrest, the books were “misplaced, not stolen”, and the charges against him indicate the anger of a previously supportive academic over her failure to turn him and the UPM into proper Marxists, over his insistence to keep reading Fanon and Biko (UPM, 2012). While the lecturer claimed that the “issue” between the activist and herself is “a private, not a political, issue”, her statement centers on a binary between her “political integrity” – evidenced by a poem from Dennis Brutus who originally gave the three treasured books to her as gifts – and the activist’s and the UPM’s lack thereof (Martinez-Mullen, 2012). In turn, defending their freedom to endorse or reject any theoretical approach, statements from the activist and UPM invoke machinations of the “regressive left” and apartheid practices to punish black people’s disobedience with accusations of criminality (Kota, 2012; UPM, 2012).*

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**“It’s like as if I’ve been illiterate all this time...”<sup>26</sup>**

In the short video entitled *From Shack to the Constitutional Court*, as preview to *Dear Mandela*, filmmakers Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza document Abahlali baseMjondolo’s literal and metaphorical journey to the highest court in South Africa (Sleeping Giant 2009 and 2011). In one of the scenes recorded before that journey, Abahlali spokesperson Mnikelo Ndabankulu stands in front of his brother’s tuckshop in the Foreman Road shack settlement in Durban, where Mnikelo lives and works, reading aloud Section 26 of the Constitution, on Housing Rights. Interspersing the text with his comments and analysis, he concludes that the KwaZulu-Natal Province’s “Slums Act” clearly contradicts the Constitution and its prohibition of arbitrary evictions, as it would empower landowners and the Municipality to evict people without the adequate court procedure ordering eviction, which the Constitution prescribes. “So, there it is. If you read this one carefully, it contradicts, I think you heard that” (Sleeping Giant 2009, 02:16”-02:22”).

In a scene of the final version of *Dear Mandela*, Mnikelo visits a shack settlement in Mpola (KwaZulu-Natal) where earlier that day the municipality’s armed demolition crew destroyed several shacks, leaving six families homeless (cf. Abahlali 2009). Standing next to a young woman who was evicted, Mnikelo pulls out a pocket edition of the Constitution, and starts reading it. (For the sake of accuracy, these are quotes from the movie’s transcript):

**Girl:** What is this?

**Mnikelo:** The Constitution. Housing, Section 26.

**Girl and Mnikelo (Reading together):** ‘No one may be evicted from their home or have their home demolished without an order of court made after considering all of the relevant circumstances. No legislation may permit arbitrary eviction.’

**Mnikelo:** This thing is unconstitutional.

A few shots later, Mnikelo is talking to a group of evicted people:

**Mnikelo:** We will rebuild these shacks but these people will come back tomorrow. When they do you must ask them “Where are your court documents? And if you want to demolish my house, you have to produce a court order. And if you do bulldoze it, who is going to compensate me?” *He will think to himself “I*

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<sup>26</sup> Chairperson of Abahlali baseMjondolo in Motala Heights, KZN (interview, 30 September 2010).

*thought I was dealing with an idiot!”* (Sleeping Giant 2011, 08:38”-9:50”;  
emphasis added).

Continuing on with my discussion of how political illiteracy is being deployed and displaced, this section is built precisely around Mnikelo’s last sentence and the assumption he refers to. It is when taking a close look at the roles the letter of the law and legal knowledge play in Abahlali’s politics that we can trace a rather intangible, yet hugely detrimental presumption on the part of national and local governments: that people living in shack settlements or other precarious forms of dwelling need not be dealt with as rights-bearing citizens of the democratic Republic of South Africa. Interpreting the operation of the new South Africa as conducted through “distinct modes of rule within different political domains”, Michael Neocosmos (2011, 369) writes that in the domain of the “working-people [...] the exercise of (illegal) state violence is central”. Similarly, having described the municipal practice of illegal evictions in their study of “the lived experience of formally granted socio-economic rights”, Mark Butler and Richard Pithouse (2007, 2) arrive at the conclusion that:

[T]he local state acts in a systematically criminal manner towards its poorest residents on the assumption that this behavior is within the norms of a shared social consensus amongst the social forces and institutions that count. That elite consensus is that rights formally guaranteed in abstract principle should not, in concrete practice, apply to the poor.

If this consensus, as Mnikelo’s comment above makes evident, remains implicit almost by nature, in enabling the illegal eviction of the surplus people, it is one that exercises a crucial function in maintaining the spatial order of abandonment. In turn, the fact that since its formation Abahlali baseMjondolo managed to stop a large number of illegal evictions in KwaZulu-Natal (and countrywide) is not only a vast achievement on its own right, it also teaches us a lesson about the truly empowering moment of recognizing and articulating oneself as knowledgeable.

I have recalled this instance many a times, but it was in my interview with Abahlali member TJ Ngongoma in October 2010 that this moment gained one of its clearest articulations (cf. Selmeczi 2012b). Talking about Abahlali’s successful resistance to illegal evictions – that very often materializes as physically blocking the way of demolition units and their bulldozers – TJ (interview, 3 October 2010) told me about “that normal resistance” as the power to “use verbal resistance without any backing”. On my request to elaborate, he described this power as the event of claiming one’s space: “Then you automatically... That ‘uumff’ comes up within you and you automatically reclaim that space, that political space, and then you become somebody, out of nowhere!” (Ibid.). Precisely exposing the epistemological hierarchy that sustains the societal consensus on the permitted lawlessness of state violence, during our



discussions Abahlali often referred to these moments, and their power to stop illegal eviction, as a process of education.<sup>27</sup> In the words of the Motala Heights Chairperson, quoted in title of this section, joining Abahlali “was actually a learning phase [...]. It was like going back to school because I was learning all about my rights and how it can be used. And it’s like as if I’ve been illiterate all this time! (interview, 30 September 2010).” Similarly, when talking about their resistance to forced relocation, members of the Motala Heights (group discussion, 22 October 2010) branch agreed: “We became wise through Abahlali... they cannot evict us”. Again, resonating with TJ’s account of the bodily experience of political subjectivization, at a recent three-day “workshop” of Abahlali baseMjondolo taking place in the Sweet Home Farm shack settlement in Philippi, Cape Town, an elderly woman from the Marikana Land Occupation stood up, and in a loud voice, with tears in her eyes declared that with the knowledge she now has, next time the bulldozers come, she will stop them and chase them away.<sup>28</sup> She will organize the youth, and together they will stop the City’s Law Enforcement Unit from destroying their shacks once again; “We must be out of order!” (Author’s research notes, 28 July 2013).<sup>29</sup>

On occasions like these, resistance to relocation or being rendered homeless is linked to a process of claiming political space through acquiring and declaring knowledge that, in turn, is set against the assumption of local governments and their enforcement agents that abiding by the law is not imperative when dealing with shack-dwellers. Certainly, as the repeated demolition of shacks in the Marikana Land Occupation shows, often times there is no space, time or wavelength for shack-dwellers to assert themselves as rights-bearing. In the flurry of rubber bullets or the cloud of teargas, as another Marikana-dweller said in response to the legal advice from a SERI attorney at the recent workshop,<sup>30</sup> there is hardly a way to cite Section 26 of the Constitution and call for a court order permitting eviction (research notes, 28 July 2013).<sup>31</sup> At such moments, clearly, the work of law reaches the limits of its temporality, and even though such events of state violence might as well display the “political illiteracy” of the

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<sup>27</sup> Based on a series of interviews conducted over the first two years of the movement, Jacob Bryant (2007, 26-28) has made the same observation.

<sup>28</sup> In late-April 2013, about 15-20 shacks were built on a vacant piece of privately owned land near Symphony Way in Philippi East, Cape Town by shack-dwellers and backyard-dwellers who were no longer able to pay the rent for their homes in the surrounding areas. A few days later the Anti-Land Invasion Unit appeared on the site and began a thus far endless series of shack-demolitions and evictions (see a video of one [here](#)). Soon after the first incident, the occupiers named their community Marikana, in memory of the striking mineworkers who were killed by the police in August 2012: “we too are organizing ourselves peacefully and are willing to die for our struggle” (community member quoted in Sacks 2013a; cf. Sacks 2013b).

<sup>29</sup> For the Motala Heights members (group discussion, 22 October 2010) too, the process of “becoming wise” goes together with acquiring the courage to resist: regardless of the various threats of the landlord and the local municipality, they declare “we are not fearful anymore”.

<sup>30</sup> Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa: <http://www.seri-sa.org/>.

<sup>31</sup> At other times, however, litigation is indeed productive (see Langford et al. 2013); even in terms of emancipatory politics (Selmeczi 2012b).

agents of government themselves,<sup>32</sup> asserting their epistemic equality cannot provide immediate protection to those deemed less than equal, and thus forcibly removable, citizens. Taking note of this impossibility, yet with the aim to share further aspects of learning and education within the politics of Abahlali, I now move on to discuss the articulation of these aspects at moments when the shack-dwellers challenge attempts to locate and fix their politics through the reductive notion of service delivery.

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*Dear Mandela, the documentary directed by Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza about Abahlali baseMjondolo's struggle for a place in the city, and in particular their Constitutional Court case against the "Slums Act" of KwaZulu-Natal Province was awarded the "Best South African Documentary" prize at the 2011 Durban International Film Festival. According to the jury (Dear Mandela Blog, 5 August 2011): "A movie about courage, this documentary is beautifully shot, socially relevant and still manages to offer humor as it reveals a growing grassroots political literacy in South Africa's informal settlements".*

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### **"Since when was democracy only about 'service delivery'?"<sup>33</sup>**

Following the prohibition of their march on the Durban City Hall on Human Rights Day in 2010, Abahlali baseMjondolo decided to move ahead with their plans and, despite the court order, stage their protest. In a press statement published on this occasion, beyond criticizing the frequent deployment of "technical arguments" to limit the shack-dwellers' demonstrative usage of public spaces, they also touch upon the notion of service delivery, this all too common signifier of poor people's dissent in South Africa:

Many journalists have been phoning us and asking if our "service delivery protest" will be going ahead tomorrow. We appreciate the interest of the media but we really want to stress that this will not "be a service delivery protest". We have never organized "a service delivery protest." [...] The language in which

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<sup>32</sup> I thank Gary Minkley and Suren Pillay who, although in different ways, both made this point. Regrettably here I cannot explore it in any depth, but to get a sense of the phenomenon, see a [video](#) by Pablo Pinedo Boveda (2013), whereby from behind the camera he keeps asking members of the Anti-Land Invasion Unit and the accompanying police whether they can present to the Marikana community a court order permitting the demolition.

<sup>33</sup> Abahlali baseMjondolo of the Western Cape (2011).

people's struggles are turned into 'service delivery protests' is a language that has been imposed on our struggles from outside – it is not our language. Of course we are struggling for land and housing, water and electricity. But we do not accept the limited way in which these 'services' are 'delivered'. Often an important part of our struggles is to reject that the way that services are delivered. For example we do not accept transit camps. We are struggling for the full recognition and realization of our humanity in a society that denies our humanity at every turn. [...] To call our struggles 'service delivery protests' is a way of making them safe for our oppressors./We appeal to the media, and to other groups too, like academics, NGOs and churches, to please exercise an important discipline when talking about struggling communities and movements. That discipline is a simple one but it is a very important one. That discipline is to speak to people before speaking about them or for them. As we have said so many times before we are poor in life, not in mind. If you want to know why we are struggling just ask us and we will tell you (Abahlali 2010b).

Unmistakably, Abahlali put their finger on the operation of political illiteracy here by criticizing the reductive effect of translating poor people's struggles into service delivery protests. Acquiring a technical connotation, and through its endless iteration, this discursive shortcut normalizes and depoliticizes popular dissent, thus allowing for the vast majority of middle-class media consumers to stay completely detached from struggles waged in the "no-go areas" (cf. Herrmannsen 2013, Schutte 2013). Furthermore, it reinforces assumptions about the proto-political, survivalist drives behind popular mobilization. As such, it attaches these protests to a physiology of immediacy that cannot grasp the complexities of government (e.g. Buthelezi 2011) or the temporality of development (cf. Gibson 2006; interview with S'bu Zikode, 26 October 2010). "Service delivery protest" thus cannot accommodate claims about humanity or assertions of equality that are frequently at the center of demonstrations.<sup>34</sup> As the following quote from Mzonke Poni (2011) beautifully captures, beyond the substantive limitations of operating post factum as an automatic label for popular dissent, the notion of service delivery also works to circumscribe what (and where) politics for shack-dwellers can be:

We are [...] concerned that your chief of staff has said that a meeting would only deal with "service delivery issues" and would not deal with "unrelated issues". Since when was democracy only about "service delivery"? Since when was human dignity only about "service delivery"? We reject many aspects of the "service delivery" provided by your government. For instance Blikkiesdorp is, for us, a scandal and a place that is more like a prison than any "service" that is being

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. e.g. a report from the Informal Settlements' Strike in Khayelitsha: "Nkanini community leader Lillian Zono said protest is not only about the lack of service delivery. 'We are also angry at what law enforcement officers did to residents of Hout Bay. We face the same challenges,' she said" (Majavu and Obose 2010). Zono refers to the violent eviction of a community in Hangberg, Hout Bay, by the City of Cape Town a few weeks before the strike started (cf. Mnguni 2010).

“delivered” to the people.<sup>35</sup> We have a democratic right to take this view and to argue for it when we engage the state. In fact we reject the whole paradigm of “service delivery”. [...] Your chief of staff wants to confine us to discussions of peripheral importance just as we are already confined on peripheral land on the outskirts of the city.

Beyond clearly marking how the discourse of service delivery works to reinforce the spatial order of abandonment, this quote is also illustrative of Abahlali’s politics as an intellectual practice.<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere I have discussed how Abahlali’s (2006, 7) declaration that “we know that we are not supposed to be living the way we do” inscribes them into the sensible order as a collective political subject, for it simultaneously exposes their living conditions as a contingent allotment and articulates the subject of the declaration as equally knowledgeable to those with a more fortunate lot (Selmeczi, 2012a). This is exactly why it is significant that the statement “We shouldn’t be suffering like this” is so often accompanied with assertions like this one: “We always say that the fact that we are poor in life does not make us poor in mind” (Hlongwa, 2007). Taking this point further, I suggest we read the previous quotes as reiterations of Abahlali’s subjectivization; performances of the shack-dwellers’ self-affirmation as “questioning people” effectively disrupting the order of knowledge that seeks to mask the contingency of equality and keep the shack-dwellers in their place. Such a disruption occurs in these instances through Abahlali’s occupation of an analytical position from which speakers undermine their counterparts’ attempts at safely containing their politics within the limits of service delivery demands. Indeed, the pronounced attentiveness to language in both excerpts is directly opposed to the necessity-drivenness of the “service delivery protest” phrase, and works to reassert the shack-dwellers’ self-articulation as speaking beings.<sup>37</sup>

It is precisely in thus rejecting the reductiveness of the “imposed language” of service delivery, that Abahlali re-enacts the disruption of their emergence; the litigious appearance of “ordinary men and women [who] insist on their right to speak and to be heard on the matters that concern their daily lives” (Zikode, 2009). The quoted texts re-enact this disruption because they discursively perform the shack-dwellers’ decision that “we will no longer be good boys and girls that quietly wait for our humanity to be finally recognized one day” (Zikode, 2011). In turn, as they make it clear throughout a discussion of their

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<sup>35</sup> Blikkiesdorp is the nickname of the Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area in Delft, Cape Town; it is the Afrikaans word for “Tin Can Town”.

<sup>36</sup> On Abahlali’s intellectual practices, see also Robertson (2013).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Rancière on Aristotle’s distinction between freemen and slaves (in *Politics* I, 1254 b 24-25): Positing that slaves (who, like tame animals, “contribute to the necessities of life with the aid of their bodies”) participate “in the linguistic community by way of comprehension but not understanding”, Aristotle can distinguish between “the contingent naturalness of the freedom of the man of the people” and “the naturalness slavery” “without referring back to the ultimate contingency of equality” (Rancière 1999, 17).

own pedagogy, stepping out of the position of “good boys and girls” for Abahlali and allies means denouncing a mode of being where they “take [their] place in the system that benefits the powerful without questioning it” (Abahlali and Rural Network, 2009: 22). Indeed, in juxtaposition to the “kind of education that others always want to impose on us” (Ibid., 44), this move configures an imperative of questioning and critique: “We must always interrogate the information we are given! And when we work with the people too, we must do this thing so that people are encouraged and allowed to interrogate everything too – there is no ‘generally accepted version’” (Ibid., 64). Hence, the distinction made between imposed education and their own approach to teaching and learning: “*this* kind of lifelong learning is a learning that helps us become questioning people – to the powerful we become suspicious, we become trouble-makers...” (Ibid., 22; original emphasis).

While Abahlali’s pedagogical practice aligned to their critical attitude will be the subject of the following section, in the remainder of this one I would like to touch upon the suspicion and epistemological disturbance that, in deploying this attitude on “service delivery”, the movement triggers among supposedly progressive “activist intellectuals” (Walsh, 2009). Providing one of the central tenets of a set of arguments surfacing on the rather troubled waters of the South African Left, Abahlali’s insistence that their struggles are not about “service delivery” has led several politically engaged academics to question the radicalism and the authenticity of the shack-dwellers’ politics. For these authors, Abahlali’s rejection of the service delivery language is part and parcel of a counterproductive discourse that, on the one hand, originates in, and is maintained by, the work of researchers sympathetic to the movement and is therefore not genuine to the shack-dwellers and, on the other hand, masks its otherwise rather conservative politics. As the argument goes, Abahlali’s claims for dignity and voice “is pretty wooly stuff” that disguises its actual wish “simply to be included in decision-making”, and thus renders the movement into a liberal NGO completely detached from “the tectonic forces that enliven South African society, such as race, ethnicity, capital accumulation and service delivery riots” (Böhmke, 2010).

Radical as they may intend to be, these utterances end up amplifying the mostly government and/or ANC-fostered accusation about a “Third Force” working behind the mobilization of the shack-dwellers (Mabaso and Mchunu, 2006; cf. Zulu, 1992, Zikode 2005; Pithouse, 2012, 2013). Just like that discursive clutch of political paranoia, the Leftist intellectuals’ arguments also turn upon a fundamental doubt about shack-dwellers’ capacity to theorize and conduct their own struggle. Furthermore, the insistence that the movement and similar organizations do, or should, indeed fight for service delivery, takes these struggles from the realm of political thought right back to the physiology of immediate needs (cf. Sinwell 2011, Webb 2013).<sup>38</sup> Further yet, in the consequent

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<sup>38</sup> In his otherwise sympathetic review of the *No Land! No House! No Vote! Voices from the Symphony Way* volume written and compiled by the Symphony Way Pavement Dwellers (2011), commenting on the “critical scholarly literature on the failures of the post-apartheid state to

argument that an authentically progressive politics requires an organization with the appropriate leadership of the enlightened, here again we witness how the good old structure of trusteeship is being built over “the masses” of the politically illiterate.

Importantly, the point is not necessarily to reject these claims by insisting that Abahlali’s “vision is actually far more complex than that and much broader than simply the delivery of services” (Ekine, 2009). In fact, often times Abahlali (2010b) do indeed demand service provision or the upgrade of existing settlements – as stated above: “Of course we are struggling for land and housing, water and electricity”. Throughout my own engagement with the movement too, I encountered differing views on this issue: while some would emphatically reject the discourse of service delivery in line with the quoted statements, others argue that “the only thing that we need is service delivery, nothing more” (MM<sup>39</sup>, interview 24 October 2010).<sup>40</sup> Yet, taking seriously Abahlali’s politics as an intellectual practice means not only to take these very contradictions as the vantage point of thinking what politics can be in the face of the urban order of abandonment.<sup>41</sup> More straightforwardly perhaps, it means recognizing in them the “questioning people’s” resistance to being defined and pinned down to a particular idea of politics, and thus the rejection of a system “in which ordinary men and women must be good boys and girls and know that their place is not to think and speak for themselves” (Zikode, 2009).

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“It is clear to us now that the majority of the elite, of government officials and of police have contempt for the poor. To them we are not human beings and we deserve to be evicted, shot and made homeless. To them we are not quite

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provide basic services for the mass of poor South Africans”, Chris Webb (2013, 465) provides the following iteration of this move: “in many cases, these accounts embellish what are more often immediate struggles for basic needs”.

<sup>39</sup> This interviewee preferred to be anonymous.

<sup>40</sup> Adding another aspect to the discursive struggle around service delivery, prevalent in local politicians commentary on popular protest is a distinction between “genuine claims” and “political concerns” (e.g. News24 2012); the latter often being penalized with violent repression. Since demands around service delivery tend to be perceived as “genuine” and “legitimate” by local elites, it might well be safer to label struggles as such. I thank Richard Pithouse for pointing out this constraint.

<sup>41</sup> Here I can but signal a potential direction for such thinking: instead of trying – sympathetically – to establish the purity or the elevatedness of Abahlali’s politics, taking these contradictions as cues for their debasement of the ancient opposition between material concerns and the supposed subject of the political.

civilized, we are lazy, and we have a culture of non-payment and of violence. But we are none of these things” (AEC, 2011).<sup>42</sup>

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## **The University of Abahlali baseMjondolo**

Tracing back the story of my current research, at the beginning of this paper I talked about Abahlali’s request to researchers and journalists wishing to write about them to come and hear, see, feel what life is like in the shantytown. Resonating with much of the discussion so far, the current section addresses that request as a crucial principle of the movement’s intellectual work, one that targets the basic tenets of constructing the political illiteracy of shack-dwellers and other people commonly referred to as marginalized. Forging the movement’s politics and pedagogy into one practice, this principle effectively disrupts the architecture of educative trusteeship erected above the surplus people; in our case, above those whose mobility is deemed to be in excess for the “world class” city. Educative trusteeship, as Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton (1996) show, is at the heart of the modern idea of development that, essentially, was borne by the necessity to deal with the surplus population produced by the ebbs and flows of capitalism in the age of industrial revolution. In rendering both colonized people and the “lumpenproletariat” of Western cities as not yet autonomous subjects, educative trusteeship allowed the *dispositif* of development to suspend these people’s freedom which, according to the political doctrine of the age of revolutions, is supposed to be granted by nature to everyone equally. While the idea and practice of development has gone through a whole series of transformations since then, it still features among default governmental techniques, so it is not surprising that we regularly encounter it in the South African “world class” city as well. Except maybe that with regards to the surplus population of this context, due to the reinforced dynamics of spatial segmentation, development now takes shape as its own negation. Without the promise of ever reaching so-called “ratepayers” level of freedom and wellbeing, the task for the surplus people becomes learning to live with the conditions of abandonment.<sup>43</sup>

As the title of a journalistic essay – “Take your shit and live with it” – poignantly suggests (Phamodi, 2013), returning to the sad controversy around the “toilet wars” of the Western Cape allows an insight into the condescending pedagogy of

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<sup>42</sup> The [Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign](#) (AEC) is an umbrella body of over ten grassroots organizations mobilizing around housing and basic services in the province. In 2008, together with Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape, the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) in Gauteng, and the Rural Network in KwaZulu-Natal it formed the Poor People’s Alliance. The AEC, LPM and the Rural Network have declined dramatically in recent years, however AbM continues to grow and to thrive in KwaZulu-Natal.

<sup>43</sup> In the neoliberal paradigm of development, this task is framed as “resilience”. See Julian Reid’s (e.g. 2012; 2013) work for an analysis of the notion and its political implications.

biopolitical abandonment. Aside from attributing the “poo protests” to the ANC’s Youth League, in responding to a series of instances when shack-dwellers emptied containers of feces in various high profile public spaces, the City of Cape Town repeatedly defined these people’s ignorance as the root cause of the scandal. Beyond wordy statements articulated in the register of expert discourse on Portable Flush Toilets (PFT) – the city’s celebrated solution for sanitation in marginal areas – Premier Helen Zille (2013) urged “communities” to take responsibility for the “costly” communal infrastructure and “get involved in improving their circumstances” (Zille, 2013). In turn, Mayor Patricia de Lille turned to the South African Human Rights Commission “to help in educating residents about the benefits of PFTs, to help eradicate bucket toilets” (*City Press*, 2013). Of course, beyond to the previously mentioned calls to “educate the poor” in order to prevent xenophobic violence, Abahlali in KwaZulu-Natal also have a substantial experience of such pedagogy. Whether coming from the spokesperson of the provincial Department of Housing condemning Abahlali’s outrage over yet another shack fire (cf. *Daily News*, 2008), or church organizations acting out of compassion, teaching shack-dwellers how to survive their poverty seems to be the default solution:

After the fire, people were basically telling us to teach people how to use a paraffin stove properly – how to use a paraffin stove is not something I need to teach to the people who have used them all their lives! Why is this the thing they think must be taught when we have said clearly the problem is that we are excluded from getting electricity (Abahlali and Rural Network, 2009, 45)?

Indeed, as we have already seen on the example of Abahlali’s challenge to the discourse of service delivery, the crux of “imposed education” is the construction of intellectual inequality, the denial that the target of education is a “knower” herself. Educative trusteeship turns upon the temporal distance drawn between the trustee and the not yet developed masses; their freedom is suspended up until the time they acquire the capacities of a responsible, rational subject. That is, until the time they learn to fully appreciate the city’s gift of Portable Flush Toilets, and remain quiet and content about the indignities and dangers of living in a shack settlement. “Imposed education” or, to put it in Rancière’s words (1991), the “pedagogical fiction” of modernity rests precisely upon this spatiotemporal distance of explanation, the distance that knowledge emanating from the politician-expert and the charity-expert has to travel in order to enlighten the dark pockets of ignorance.

Producing the same effect as their critical attitude discussed above, the two aspects of Abahlali’s intellectual practice that I present here, work to disrupt the construction of precisely this distance.<sup>44</sup> Almost institutionalizing that

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<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere I have discussed Abahlali’s contestation of this epistemic distance as one element of what I call their politics of proximity: the imperative to stay physically, experientially, and epistemically close to the life of shack-dwellers. (Selmeczi 2012a).



disruption – and providing the context for their cited request to researchers – both aspects center on the idea of the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo. What, in fact, is the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo?

It's also part of the idea of passing on the message and grievances or exposing the life-conditions. Because what was happening: Abahlali was inviting the senior to come to shacks and live the life and experience the same conditions that we are experiencing. And then tell us that how long can he or she live in that conditions. So, one night, it is obvious that he will get up with one big lesson. [...] If you don't believe it, come and experience it and then tomorrow you'll talk a better language, because you know exactly what you're talking about. Rather than strategizing from the office and impose something that you think... that you think is better or is going to improve our lives. [...] Or, it might give you a chance to discuss issues with us and come up with a better plan. Because writing letters to you or the particular department: it doesn't help, or maybe marching to the street, it doesn't speak the language, but at least, maybe what it takes is education. So, education – we're not going to build up a class or any normal university or college that it is around the country because those colleges don't teach any of these conditions or lives that we're under but there's only one university that does that, will be the university of Abahlali (Former Vice-president of Abahlali, Interview 2 November 2010).

As Jacob Bryant (2007) argues in relation to the shack-dwellers' announcement of the "University of Kennedy Road" (and later the "University of Foreman Road" and "University of Abahlali") on protest banners in the early months of the movement's life, this act is equivalent to declaring the shantytown as a place of learning. Pushing this argument perhaps a bit further, I believe that announcing life in the shack settlement as the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, that is, the University of Shack-dwellers articulates these spaces as those of knowledge production, and dwelling in them as a process of cognition, which consequently declares their residents as knowers. In his essay reaffirming the movement's "No land, no house, no vote"-campaign ahead of the 2009 elections, Abahlali member M'du Hlongwa (2007) expresses this most beautifully: "I want to say clearly that I am a Professor of my own suffering. We are all Professors of our suffering".<sup>45</sup> For it eliminates the distance between the expert and the student, it is exactly in this declarative equation between the subject and object of knowledge that the disruption of the educative trusteeship of abandonment occurs.

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<sup>45</sup> See also the second epigraph to Tshepo Madlingozi's (2010, 209) article: "I am not educated. Nomarussia Bonase is uneducated. I don't have a degree. But I can tell you I have a degree. I went to a university; the university of East Rand. My lecturers are the citizens of South Africa, especially the people of East Rand. That is where I got educated. Nobody can come and tell me anything. I can beat the experts, the professionals who have those degrees. (Nomarussia Bonase, Khulumani Support Group East Rand Coordinator, Thokoza, Interview, 10 October 2009)"

And hence we arrive at the challenge that was already touched upon in relation to the imperative of the “questioning people”, and is taken up in the second aspect of Abahlali’s intellectual work addressed here. As their political thought is certainly not anti-intellectual or against theory (quite to the contrary), and they are aware that knowledge is often the fuel of their struggle (see the role of legal knowledge discussed above), the practical and theoretical challenge that derives from the disruptive establishment of the University of Abahlali lies in maintaining the equivalence between the subject and the object of knowledge in the face of the factual inequalities of accessing institutionalized higher education. This very problem is the subject of many exchanges in a series of conversations between members of Abahlali and the Rural Network who, within the framework of UKZN’s Certificate for Education in Participatory Development, gained access to formal higher education (Abahlali and Rural Network, 2009). The conversation sessions that were hosted, facilitated, and later published by the Church Land Programme (CLP), were named “Living Learning” by the participants and, through the learners’ reflections, took on the task of configuring a pedagogical practice that would not reproduce a distance of explanation.<sup>46</sup>

As the participants made very clear, such distance often takes shape as the physical distantiation of those who enter higher education. “Education can sometimes destroy our struggle – when education makes leaders think of the people that they came from as the ‘uneducated’ ones, those who ‘do not understand’, those that we ‘move away from’” (Abahlali and Rural Network 2009, 60). Therefore, the role of Living Learning emerges as that of keeping the “two universities” at the closest proximity possible, which means that the knowledge which mandated learners acquire in the formal university must be made relevant for and shared within the space of the University of Abahlali, that is, life in the shack settlement. It is only through preserving this proximity, that they can avoid the separation between being and articulating the subject and the object of knowledge:

Some writers on research separate the researcher from the material being researched – and this is part of that model that says that it is objective, “neutral”, scientific. We can see that the ideas behind this model have some similarities with the ideas behind a much bigger approach to thinking about, and acting in, the world. It is the idea that you work “from the outside”, and that things are “done to”. As movements of the poor, we see this in the way that many outsiders and elites treat us and our issues. It is also true that you can have a kind of “participation” that fits into this model – but it is not at all the participation model we want. In a way, the struggles of our movements [are] an eruption against this model, an eruption that starts with declaring “Enough is enough”. Only the space created by this eruption creates the possibility of a really new kind of participation, one where outsiders can be invited to participate in what is being

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. the insightful and admirably self-reflective essay on Living Learning by Anne Harley (2012), one of the instructors of the Certificate program that learners from Abahlali and the Rural Network were (and still are) admitted to.

made in and through that eruption – and so we make the paths by walking (Ibid., 64–65).

To be sure, maintaining an eruption, if possible at all, requires constant and careful work where the risk of recreating educative trusteeship with the attached notions of delay and backwardness is always present. Just like the event of politics in Rancière's (1999) understanding, the practice of radically egalitarian pedagogy, which I think emerges in the idea of Living Learning, is most difficult to sustain. Yet, considering the detrimental effects of the order physical and epistemological hierarchy that it runs up against, it is most desirable too. This, anyway, is my motivation for taking along this research by aligning it with the work of another social movement operating from the urban periphery, this time around in the Western Cape. While this ongoing collaboration cannot be accounted for in this paper, it has already made an impact through triggering many of the questions that now define my perspective on the problem of political illiteracy, as well as on my own position in relation to that problem. Below I conclude by outlining some of these concerns.

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“How did I escape the oppression where so many people are still living in a kind of darkness? Because I really see the world differently. How to remove that membrane from others' eyes? So many people see things in this way – that how the world is, is how God meant it to be, that we are meant to suffer. How can we enlighten all others – not to think like us, but to think, to see the world?” (Abahlali and Rural Network 2009, 60; original emphasis)

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## **Conclusion**

Primary among the questions that emerge out of the discussion above is whether the very aim of working towards other people's political and/or intellectual emancipation is bound to reintroduce political illiteracy in some other form. From the position of the questioning people, how does one see those who do not yet seem to have appropriated the imperative of interrogation? And how are such questions qualified by the very conditions that movements like Abahlali fight against? In other words, how far can the practice of Living Learning be extended, when, as M'du Hlongwa (2007) notes before declaring himself to be the professor of his own suffering, “[m]ost of our time goes into just trying to survive”? As I suggested above in relation to the movement's apparently contradictory discourse on service delivery, instead of binding shack-dwellers' politics to a primal level of survivalism, it seems to me that a possible

route to responding lies in scrutinizing the collocation of these two statements – that Abahlali are the professors of their own suffering and that most of their time is spent on sustaining themselves. Thus, one needs perhaps to look more into, for instance, how various actors and groups within the movement negotiate their horizontal approach to resolving particular concerns of affiliated communities, that is, the idea “the office is not the movement” (research notes, October 2010) and “we are not here to struggle for you but we are here to struggle with you” (Zodwa Nsibande interview, 2 November 2010). While the political literacy of the general membership is hardly questioned within the movement, one could ask what sort of dynamics are (re-)enforced by the supposed representability of the organization in media and academia, and the institutional context it has to navigate, when so few shack-dwellers can actually afford to dedicate their time and resources to Abahlali’s political practice, or what observers like me tend to register as their political practice.

Indeed, how are we (activists and researchers) even to think and work around these problems without yet again rewriting political illiteracy? As noted above, at the heart of Abahlali’s intellectual work is the demand to stay close to shack-dwellers’ life; to keep their political thought relevant to, and accessible from (both physically and discursively), the space of this life. At the beginning of this paper and the journey it is produced by, I stated my aim to remain in fidelity to this demand. It is only fair, then, to ask how well I have fared: is this work relevant to and accessible for Abahlali? Attesting to my own political illiteracy, it is not, certainly not in its entirety. Among other deficiencies, whereas my encounter with the movement doubtless transformed my epistemological assumptions and methodological preferences, it took years and further encounters within and beyond Abahlali and South Africa to find, in collaborative research methods, a mode of inquiry that seems to be the most attuned to the politics of equality (cf. Strohm, 2012). Even so, collaboration and the co-theorization of political illiteracy that my current project with SOS, a radical hiphop collective in Cape Town, seeks to undertake pose an endless series of questions about the dynamics of knowledge production that are co-articulated when working within, and staying close to, the experiences of life in the face of urban abandonment.

For one, as Bernard Dubbeld asked me on the occasion of discussing its earlier version: “What of this paper” that takes shape as a seminar presentation or an academic publication?<sup>47</sup> More generally, Dubbeld inquired: Can the university give home to liberatory knowledge practices that could disrupt the order of political illiteracy? And, I must add: Abiding by Abahlali’s work to displace the distance of explanation, how can the university as an academic institution inhabit a space closer to the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo? In a gesture towards some possible answers, I recall Richa Nagar’s (2014) seminar

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<sup>47</sup> South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 8 October 2013.

presentation on truth-telling and co-authorship in feminist alliance work.<sup>48</sup> At the end of her paper, Nagar includes an excerpt of *The Jungle is Burning*, a street play co-created in 2010 by activists of the Sangtin Peasants and Workers Organization (SKMS) in Sitapur, India. Enacting a kind of truth-telling through which activists disrupt the suppression of the knowledge of those “who must at once absorb the system and reproduce it” (Ibid., 265), the Third scene is made up of speakers’ analysis of their situation, for instance:

[A]ll these tears and complaints of ours have gone on for decades. No matter which government comes or goes, the poor continue to be subjected to the same old games. Policies and schemes are run in our names; research and analyses are conducted in our names, but it’s the mansions of the rich that become taller.

The resonance of these lines with Abahlali members’, among them M’du Hlonwga’s (2007), account is striking:

We are supposed to suffer silently so that some rich people can get rich from our work and others can get rich having conferences about having more conferences about our suffering. [...] We must even be invisible when people are getting paid to talk about us in government or in NGOs! Everything is done in our name.

The reverberation of this resonance takes shape in questions around how well academic discourse does in the face of the “crudeness of truth” put forward in these excerpts and so much of the movements’ discourse that remains unwritten.<sup>49</sup> Tying back, finally, to previous concerns about “the two universities” (Abahlali and Rural Network 2009, 7), perhaps the point is to find ways to (writing) politics that take up the epistemologies of such crude truths, and thus disrupt the in/visibilities of working in “their” name.

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<sup>48</sup> South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 27 August 2013.

<sup>49</sup> I adapt the expression of “crudeness of truth” from Sanil V.’s talk (“A Conversation on The Courage of Truth and Fearless Speech by John Mowitt and Sanil V.”, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 5 July 2013).

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## The pedagogy of road blockades

Anne Harley

### Abstract

*Road blockades have long since been a tool of struggle, and in recent months have featured in protests in South Africa, Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Palestine, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada, Turkey, and probably in most other countries in the world. Whilst some road blockades might be considered spontaneous eruptions of anger, with little reflective thought involved, others are clearly part of conscious praxis, a tactic reflecting Gramsci's 'war of manoeuvre'. However, I argue, road blockades are also used as a counter-hegemonic pedagogical tool in a 'war of position', as one of the associated pedagogies within the "multi-faceted praxis and political strategy" of Subaltern Social Movements (Kapoor, 2011). The article uses two such movements, Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, and the piqueteros in Argentina, to explore this claim.*

**Keywords:** road blockades; barricades; 'war of manoeuvre'; 'war of position'; social movement pedagogy; piqueteros; Abahlali baseMjondolo

### Introduction

Last night, and again this morning, hundreds of us blocked roads around the Kennedy Road shack settlement with burning tyres...we blockaded the road again to demand that the Mayor keeps his promise to meet with us to discuss our demands.

We will continue to educate the politicians in their duty to obey the people. (Abahlali baseMjondolo, 2013).

Road blockades have long been a tool of protest. They were famously used, inter alia, in the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, as well the 1968 moment of rupture, becoming a worldwide phenomenon by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Traugott 2010, Appendix A). Recently, road blockades have featured in protests in South Africa, Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria, Palestine, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, India, Canada, Turkey - and very probably in most other countries in the world, since, as Gibson reminds us, "from Damascus to La Plaz and London the reality is constant and daily revolts" (2011).

Many blockades may be 'spontaneous' expressions of anger or frustration rather than carefully thought through strategies. However, in some cases, and particularly in relation to social movements, blockades appear to be more consciously and strategically used, as part of a 'war of manoeuvre' à la Gramsci

(1971); and as the quotation above suggests, certain social movements see the road blockade as more than simply one more tool in an arsenal of potential tactics - they see it as a pedagogical device, as part of a 'war of position'.

This article considers the road blockade as a conscious tactic ('war of manoeuvre'), and as a pedagogical device ('war of position'), in the light of the thinking of two social movements - Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa, and the piqueteros of Argentina. The discussion draws on current work on thinking and learning within social movements, arguing that the conscious involvement of movements in the 'war of position' has been relatively under-studied.

### **Road blockades as 'war of manoeuvre'**

Gramsci (1971) used the concepts of 'war of manoeuvre' and 'war of position' to explain how he thought the proletariat might successfully overthrow Western capitalist regimes. By 'war of manoeuvre', Gramsci meant direct confrontation with the state; 'war of position', by contrast, was about engaging in the contested terrain of hegemony. Writing in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gramsci argued that a 'war of position' would be more tactical against Western capitalist governments than a 'war of manoeuvre'; nevertheless, many road blockades act as direct confrontation with the state both in the 'West' and elsewhere.

In his vast study of barricades in Europe between the start of 16<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Traugott (2010) attempts to classify barricades in a "database of European barricade events" (Appendix A). He specifically confines his study to Europe, and ends it at this point in time, because it simply becomes far too difficult to systematically track barricades once they became a global phenomenon (Appendix A). I have thus made no such attempt (neither has anyone else) - but even a brief internet search identifies dozens of recent road blockades, across the globe.

For example, in recent months, roads have been blockaded to protest against shale gas exploration in New Brunswick, Canada, a hike in bus fares in Maputo, Mozambique, the marginalisation of people with disabilities in Owerri, Nigeria, and crooked elections in Conakry, Guinea; to demand the nationalization of Kyrgyzstan's largest gold mine; to prevent Israeli forces invading the village of Nabi Saleh in Occupied Palestine; and for a wide variety of other reasons in other countries around the world (Agence France Presse, 2013; CBC News, 2013; Gordon, 2013; International Solidarity Movement, 2013; Lopes & Mapote, 2012; Ndidi, 2013; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2013; Reuters, 2012). The blockaders have included indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, the poor, the politically marginalised or disaffected; and involved between 40 and 'thousands' of protestors.

In looking at blockades instituted by people who are protesting (i.e. not barricades set up by the police or other state institutions) over the last several months of 2013, common themes of recent road blockades would seem to be:



1. Roads are blockaded for a range of reasons, but almost all relate to a sense of frustration at not being heard/consulted/counted.
2. Roads are thus typically blockaded by people who are not counted/do not count, “surplus humanity” (Gibson 2011). As Alain Badiou argues:  

Today the great majority of people do not have a name: the only name available is ‘excluded’, which is the name of those who do not have a name. Today the great majority of humanity counts for nothing. (Badiou, in Neocosmos, 2009a:265)
3. Road blockades are often seen by the protestors as the ‘last resort’, other tactics having already been tried. As one Canadian protestor said, “We’ve tried to speak to politicians, we’ve petitioned, we’ve marched to the legislature, we’ve done everything that we should be doing” (CBC News, 2013).
4. They are often characterised by the state and the mainstream media as criminal, illegitimate, and violent. Of course, in this respect, road blockades are treated no differently from many other tactics used by those who ‘do not count’, a point Nigel Gibson (2011) made with regard to the London riots of late 2011, citing Quadrelli’s discussion of the Paris revolt of 2005:  

Like the Paris Banlieues revolt of 2005, the London revolt has been dismissed as reactionary—destructive and criminal. Much of the destruction in London occurred in poor neighbourhoods and the descriptions of the French revolt could easily be applied to London: “desperate,” “senseless,” and “criminal” acts by “victims of social exclusion,” “indistinct and indiscriminate, a destructive luddite force that sometimes recalled the disturbing, incoherent and irrational action of the open crowd”. (Quadrelli 2-4)
5. They are often responded to with violence and/or arrests, precisely on the grounds of being criminal, illegitimate, and violent, even when they are patently not: “The RCMP is coming in here with their tear gas - they even had dogs on us. They were acting like we’re standing there with weapons, while we are standing there, as women, with drums and eagle feathers” (former chief of Elsipogtog aboriginal reserve, quoted by Gordon, 2013).

Many of the road blockades have been short-lived and apparently fairly ‘spontaneous’ expressions of frustration and anger. This is hardly surprising. Fifteen years ago, Pierre Bourdieu (1998, cited in Martin, 2003) spoke about ‘legitimate rage’ in response to the way things were, and Ian Martin has argued for “the importance of staying angry” (2003, 574). He argues that agency “may be expressed as anger because, in a sense, it can be expressed in no other way” (Ibid.). John Holloway (2010) suggests that ‘the scream’ is the only appropriate way to begin in a society mutilated by capital. Agency thus starts simply with a No, a refusal, an insubordination (Ibid.).

So many roadblocks are simply a ‘No’ a refusal. In my country, South Africa, there have been thousands of municipal revolts since 2004; and the most



commonly used tactics are road blockades and vote strikes (Pithouse, 2013: 339). So visible has the tactic of the road blockade become, a very recent article (Sacks, 2014) focuses specifically on road blockades used by shack dwellers in Cape Town). Frequently, road blockades in this country are referred to as spontaneous (Manzi, 2013). Spontaneity (and its efficacy) has concerned political theorists for some time, and was a particular interest of Frantz Fanon:

At certain times the anger erupts and is directed toward what is called “the system”. Seemingly unorganized, the intensity of these revolts is their strength. They win local battles but, Fanon argues, this becomes a strategic weakness. Often built on the basis of resentment and feelings of deprivation, which let it be said are entirely objective, the revolt becomes a release of pent up frustration – a moment of collective catharsis. It is often reactive and without any clear political goals...For Fanon the weakness of spontaneity is its immediacy, its reactive action, a reaction against brutality that leads to a counter-brutality and also a brutality of thought. And though there is no immediacy without mediation and no spontaneity without prior thought, the weakness of spontaneity is when it fetishizes immediacy. Reduced to Manichean reaction it invariably becomes expressed in a politics of hate when what is needed is a nuanced analysis (Fanon in Gibson, 2011).

So for Fanon, some element of self-reflexivity is necessary, some thinking through; and indeed a number of writers have queried the very notion of spontaneity. Gibson (2011), for example, suggests that “there is no such thing as pure spontaneity—there is always thinking before and during an event”; and Zibechi (2010) argues that labelling the activity of the oppressed ‘spontaneous’ is precisely about rejecting the notion that such actions are conscious and political. There is certainly evidence that some social movements consciously use road blockades as a tactic in ‘war of manoeuvre’. Raul Zibechi (2012), for example, argues that blockades have become an important technique of social movements in Latin America, and is now “perhaps the most widespread form of action among [these] movements” (84):

The roadblock is a technique with multiple uses. It ranges from interruption of the flow of merchandise and the protection of regions or cities to, in its “aggressive” version, a gradual fencing off with the threat of isolating the municipality or state bodies (84-85).

There is plenty of evidence of the conscious use of this technique in South Africa, too. For example, former residents of backyard shacks in Delft, near Cape Town, evicted from a flagship government housing project they had occupied on the invitation of their local councillor, took up residence next to the road directly outside the project. They permanently blocked the road for almost two years – one of the longest protest actions in South Africa’s history (Symphony Way

Pavement Dwellers, 2011). Sacks' (2014) discussion of road blockades by the Sweet Home shack dwellers also shows the deliberate use of this tactic.

Below I discuss in detail this conscious use of roadblocks by two social movements, one South African, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and one Argentinian, the piqueteros - the piqueteros perhaps more so than Abahlali. Their thinking and experience raises remarkably similar themes to those identified above.

### **Abahlali baseMjondolo**

Abahlali baseMjondolo is a social movement of shack dwellers. Abahlali grew organically out of grassroots struggle. On Saturday morning, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2005, 700 people from the Kennedy Road shack settlement in the middle-class suburb of Clare Estate in Durban, South Africa, blockaded a major thoroughfare for four hours when they discovered that land nearby, which had been promised to them by the local African National Congress (ANC) councillor, had been leased to a brick manufacturing company. The blockade came after attempts by the community to meet with the councillor and the owner of the company (who failed to arrive at the scheduled meeting) (Bryant, 2006). The protest was ended by police with dogs and teargas, and 14 people were arrested (Ibid.). By September, the Kennedy Road shack dwellers had been joined by other shack settlements to form Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM). The organization claims to have around 10,000 members in 64 different shack settlements in South Africa.

The movement has been subjected to considerable State and police harassment over the years. On 29 September 2009, the Kennedy Road settlement was brutally attacked over a period of several hours by an armed mob, leaving many shacks destroyed, hundreds of people displaced, and two people dead (Chance, 2010). The police refused to come to the help of the community. Two weeks before the attack, the ANC Chair for Durban publicly stated that Abahlali was a threat to the ANC, and the day after the attack the ANC Provincial MEC for Safety and Security said that a decision had been taken to disband the movement, and described the attack as a 'liberation' of the settlement (AbM, 26/9/2010).

Bizarrely, in the wake of the attack on Kennedy Road, twelve Abahlali members were arrested and tried for charges ranging from public violence to murder. All twelve were acquitted of all charges on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011, some two years after the attack, when the magistrate found the state witnesses to be unreliable and dishonest. There is little doubt that the Kennedy Road attack profoundly affected the movement; many of the leadership were traumatized, and forced into hiding, so "for some months we had to organise underground" (AbM, 26/9/2010); and the movement was unable to run large and open meetings as had been the norm prior to the attacks. However, as the movement says, "It damaged our movement in some ways but it has not destroyed our movement" (Ibid.).

Road blockades have thus been an important feature of the movement from the start; and in recent months the movement has repeatedly used this tactic as a

conscious strategy. In late September 2013, thousands of Abahlali members marched to the city hall in Durban to deliver a memorandum to the mayor. They made it clear that they expected a response within seven days - this was not forthcoming, and the movement thus decided to blockade roads around the city “to demand answers to all our unanswered memoranda” (AbM, 26/9/2013). “As always instead of James Nxumalo (mayor) coming to scene to talk to us he sent his police force. The shoot to kill crew” (Ibid.). Three people were arrested, and charged with public violence, “our normal crime”. The movement expressed some frustration at having to resort to road blockades: “What is the point of having the so called legal march if it doesn’t deliver fruitful result to our demands? What is the point of going to court when court orders are ignored?... If showing our power with a legal march of thousands gets no response then we will engage in disruption with road blockades” (AbM, 26/9/2013).

Some days later, a 17 year old school girl was shot dead by police at a road blockade at Cato Crest shack settlement. A second girl was wounded. Both were shot in the back. The blockade had been organised by about 500 members of the settlement. The police claimed they had shot in self-defence (although they have offered no evidence of the protestors being armed), something which the movement rejected. “We note that some media are reporting the police statement on this matter [i.e. that they shot to save their lives] as if it is the truth. We would like to remind the media that the police in Durban have a long history of lying”. Abahlali stated they intended to expose this in court, as they had done many times before (AbM, 30/9/2013).

The following month, the blockades continued, this time in other communities, including Clare Estate, iSiyanda and Umlazi. Again, these were attacked by the police, this time with tear gas and rubber bullets (AbM, 4/10/2013). The iSiyanda community issued its own press statement, reiterating that the blockade came only after a series of telephone calls, emails, letter writing, protest marches, and promised meetings: “This is the result of the frustration when the majority of the poor people, the marginalised, the forgotten, only count when it comes to voting time...After all the peaceful attempts to meet the responsible officials, by the poor people, these are only met by the arrogance of government officials, police brutality, constant arrest of the protestors and even murdering the leadership of the movement”. The blockades were thus an attempt “to show to the world their [iSiyanda shack dwellers’] anger and frustration” (AbM, 4/10/2013).

Tellingly, Abahlali now linked their use of the road blockade tactic to the anti-Apartheid struggle, during which the road blockade had played an important role in many townships across the country: “Utata [Father] Mandela said that if the ANC does to us what apartheid did to us then we must do to the ANC what we did to apartheid...Therefore we are back to the streets. In these actions we are honouring Madiba” (AbM, 4/10/2013).

A week later, in response to further police attacks on road blockades, Abahlali again raised its concern about the ways in which their actions were cast as violent not only by the state, but the mainstream media:

As usual the media reported the very violent and near fatal police attack on us as 'a violent protest'. It is becoming very clear that some of the media will always consider any protest during which people are violently attacked by the police (or the Land Invasions Unit or private security firms) to be 'a violent protest' even when the only violence comes from the police. They take our suffering as normal and they take state violence as normal. At the same time they take our demand that our dignity must be recognised as violent and criminal. We are supposed to remain in silence in our dark corners (AbM, 11/10/2013).

### **The piqueteros**

Although, like Abahlali, the piquetero movement arose out of road blockades, this tactic has been a far more conscious and fundamental part of their praxis. The piquetero movement consists of a variety of local groups of the 'socially excluded', who organised themselves as a result of unemployment, poverty and repression arising from neoliberal structural reforms (Dinerstein, 2010). Under the then president Menem, unemployment in Argentina rose dramatically: "People went from being on the margins to being completely 'outside' the system" (Khorasane, 2007: 766). In June 1996, workers laid off by the state-owned oil company YPF blocked National Route 22 (Young, Guagnini & Amato, 2002). Originally confined to small towns in remote provinces, this form of protest spread rapidly (Sitrin, 2003). By the following year, there were 77 roadblocks in the country (Ibid.), by 2002, there were 2 336, with so-called piqueteros (from 'piquete', 'picket') demanding jobs, public works projects and relief funds. As a piquetero commented in 2003, "the piquetero movement grew by using that method of roadblocks" (Sitrin, 2003: 473). Initially, the road blocks were massive blockades, of up to 10 000 people (Zibechi, 2007):

On main national roads or on important highways, which sometimes last for days. The *Piqueteros* set up barricades made of burning tyres, nails and broken bottles, thousands of men and women sit on the road, preventing the traffic from passing and only allowing emergency vehicles through. They cook, eat and take turns to sleep (Colmegna, 2002: 5).

These road blockades often involved whole families, and some 60% of blockaders were women (Sitrin, 2003: 472).

The blockade method was a fairly deliberately chosen strategy. Piqueteros themselves say that the tactic of road blockades was an old one used by the workers, at factory gates - they were now moved to highways where oil was transported, or merchandise from companies was transported, because although factories were employing fewer and fewer workers, there was still a need to transport goods made in factories (Sitrin, 2003: 472, 473): "traffic piles up, trucks can't move, factories can't get supplies. These are the functional equivalents of factory workers downing their tools...Instead of directly stopping

production, they stop input and outputs from production” (International Socialist Review, 2002). So road blocks were often carefully planned:

For example, we would decide that the negotiations with the government [for the subsidy] hadn't advanced in the meetings or petitions. So in the neighbourhoods we would take 15 days to quietly plan an action, without anyone knowing what highway we would block when. And then we would go organized, we would get there before the police and then we would have to stand firm despite the police pressure. This meant burning tyres, making some sort of barricade, and keeping our families safe in the middle of the *piquete* and protected by the *compañeros* that would stand in front in case of police repression (Sitrin, 2003: 473).

Momentum built as the economic situation in the country worsened. Initially,

there was a huge debate within the movement, because the so-called progressive trade union leadership thought it could win over the middle class by blocking main streets but allowing alternative streets to function. This was opposed by the more militant unemployed movements, which said you either close the streets, or you don't (Ibid.)

The tactic worked. By December 2001, the piqueteros had been joined by thousands of Argentineans, with every city and town in the country paralysed by mass demonstrations (International Socialist Review, 2002). Within a week, four presidents had been deposed (Bassi & Fuentes, 2004). In February 2002, 7 000 piqueteros met in the Plaza de Mayo for the first National Assembly of the Employed and Unemployed Workers, with delegations attending from all over the country (Fuentes, 2002).

The considerable leverage of the movement meant that it “played a major role in securing subsistence programs from the government and public works for at least a sector of the unemployed” (Ibid.). However, as momentum built, so too did the state response. By early 2002, ‘5 or 6’ people had been killed in police confrontations (Ibid.), and in June two young piqueteros were shot dead when police fired into a demonstration of about 1 000 piqueteros at a road block in Buenos Aires (Chretien, 2002), and a further 90 were injured by lead or rubber bullets or tear gas inhalation. 160 people were arrested (ArgentinaNow, 2002). Police claimed that ‘the piqueteros shot each other’ although evidence clearly showed otherwise (Ibid.). The deaths merely increased public support for the piqueteros, with some 20 000 people demonstrating in the Plaza de Mayo some days later, many of them chanting “tonight we are all piqueteros” (Chretien, 2002).

Gradually, the movement became more organised, and protests expanded from road-blocking to blockading other areas, such as supermarkets (with people taking food to feed their families) or government buildings; and into alternative forms such as co-operatives and factory occupations. The subsidy now paid by

the state allowed those receiving it to pay a small contribution to their local piquetero wing, which in turn allowed the creation of community kitchens, libraries, literacy projects, and workshops (Birss, 2005; Colmegna, 2002; Epstein, 2003), a “network of subsistence” (Colmegna, 2002: 9). At the same time, different tendencies emerged within the movement, with different organisational forms being favoured by different branches in different places (Birss, 2005; Colmegna, 2002). It would thus be inaccurate to call the piqueteros a single, organised movement - rather, there are multiple, often fairly autonomous groups.

However, it is possible to discern certain common features across the piqueteros movement/s. The piqueteros emphasise human dignity, with many piquetero organisations claiming that dignity, rather than employment, is the driving force behind them. The MTD, a group of a number of autonomous piquetero blocs, use the motto “Work, dignity and social change” (Birss, 2005). The piqueteros provide a fundamental critique of capitalist work and its social relations (Dinerstein, 2010). Khorasaneh also argues that fundamental to the piquetero politics is “the reclaiming of direct democracy and the rejection of capitalist norms” (2007, 766).

So both of these movements have consciously used road blockades as a tactic to confront the state; but to what extent is this tactic also intended as pedagogical?

### **Road blockades as ‘war of position’**

Writing in the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci sought to explain why it was that the Russian revolution had not led to more widespread revolution within the Western European states. From his analysis, Gramsci argued that no regime (and particularly no Western parliamentary regime) could sustain itself primarily through force. He thus identified two distinct forms of political control - domination, by which he meant direct physical coercion by the police and armed forces; and hegemony, by which he meant ideological control and consent:

The “spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production (Gramsci, 1971:12).

Gramsci referred to this process of manufacturing consent as hegemony. However, if this process failed, the State would resort to force: “The apparatus of State power ... ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively” (Ibid.). Gramsci argued that Western regimes maintained power through a combination of force and hegemony, although

hegemony was often used to make the use of force appear appropriate, 'common sense':

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary régime is characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force dominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion - newspapers and associations - which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied (Gramsci, 1971: 80).

Gramsci's conception of hegemony goes beyond simply ideas, as Cooper explains: "While ideology is the way in which power struggles are fought out at the level of signification, hegemony operates at the multiple levels of ideology, culture, politics and the economy" (Cooper, 2005: 13). Gramsci argued that civil society is deeply implicated in state hegemony. However, because "the will and initiative of men (sic) themselves cannot be left out of the account" (Gramsci, 1971: 244), hegemony is constantly open to negotiation and re-negotiation; constantly being renewed and recreated. There are also moments when the whole process undergoes a crisis (Mayo, 1999: 38).

Owing to the tendency for ruling class interests (as opposed to working class interests) to be revealed in times of crisis, Gramsci argued that the 'war of position' could most usefully happen at times of crisis within the system. A 'war of position' was about a war of ideas and of practice, creating a 'hegemony of the proletariat' that allows for the elaborating and propagating of a new conception of society (Bobbio, 1979), which can then lead to the creation of such a society. According to Gramsci's analysis, the working class could not confront the state head-on if it wanted to transform it - rather, it must engage in a 'war of position', a process of wide-ranging social organisation and cultural influence (Mayo, 1999: 38). However, according to Gramsci, in the creation of any kind of counter-hegemony, "a politics of truth is necessary" (Thomas, 2011).

Gramsci saw education as playing a pivotal role in hegemony. Firstly, because we learn hegemony, so "[e]very relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship" (Gramsci, 1971: 350). Secondly, because educational institutions, controlled by the bourgeois state, deliberately create bourgeois hegemony, along with the church, the media, and the family (Ibid.). However, education could play the opposite role, could help turn the 'commonsense' of hegemony into 'good sense' (Gramsci argued this was the important role of 'the party' (Cooper, 2005)). Gramsci himself was involved in exactly this kind of education (Mayo, 1999), and retained a lifelong interest in exactly how such an education might work.

Since Gramsci's time, the role of education in making and unmaking hegemony has been picked up by a number of writers, particularly those writing 'from

below', within a field now often termed 'critical pedagogy'. Such writers see education as serving particular interests:

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and brings about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Thompson, 1980: 26, quoted in Mayo, 1999: 5).

One of the most famous writers of this school is the Brazilian educationist, Paulo Freire. Much of Freire's work focuses on the pedagogy of this process - i.e. how to bring about conscientization through critical reflection (and thus, many of his seminal works included 'pedagogy' in the title). Freire argued that it is not sufficient to change only the content of education - we need to change the pedagogy as well (Kane, 2001: 39). In other words, "pedagogy is never innocent" (Bruner, 1996: 63). Thus it is not surprising that pedagogy is a somewhat contested term. Much contemporary work on pedagogy, particularly in the global North, tends to treat it as something approaching didactics (Smith, 2012); but there is a strong tradition of an alternative conceptualisation of pedagogy, largely born out of the work of Paulo Freire and relatively better developed in the global South (although a number of the leading exponents of 'critical pedagogy' are increasingly Northern intellectuals). This understanding of pedagogy is associated with the radical tradition of adult education and of popular education, although it is increasingly also associated with postmodernism. For example, the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* features work largely within a postmodernist paradigm (and also, incidentally, largely within formal education, in particular schooling).

The alternative view of pedagogy is thus more than the content, and more than the method, although "In our experience of doing popular education we have found that the method used often communicates a more powerful message than the content discussed" (GATT-Fly, n.d: 19). Critical pedagogue, Ira Shor defines critical pedagogy as:

Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse (Shor 1992: 129).

Until recently, critical pedagogy contained little theory of social movements despite arguing that power and knowledge are intimately linked, largely because



social movements were not seen in terms of cognitive praxis (Holford, 1995). Recently, however, there has been growing interest in this field.

### **Social movement learning and pedagogy**

There is a growing body of literature about the politics and processes of knowledge and theory production from within social movements (Choudry, 2009), with several special editions of key journals appearing in the last five years (McGill Journal of Education 44(1) (Winter 2009); Studies in the Education of Adults 43, No.2 (Autumn 2011); and, of course, the very first edition of *Interface* (January 2009)). This interest in social movements as sites of cognitive practice emerged in the early 1990s when Eyermann and Jamison (1991) argued that social movements should be seen as such. Seminal works by inter alia Foley (1999) appeared shortly after, making a particularly important contribution to the field (Choudry, 2009). From the beginning, social movement learning was seen as both informal learning of people involved in social movements, and learning in the broader community as a result of social movements and their actions (Hall & Turay, 2006, cited in Gouin, 2009); although learning within social movements has tended to dominate.

However, “...even in many supposedly alternative milieus, voices, ideas - and indeed, theories - produced by those actually engaged in social struggles are often ignored, rendered invisible, or overwritten with accounts by professionalized or academic experts” (Choudry, 2009: 5). Thus some recent work, mostly notably by Choudry and Kapoor, has focused on actor-generated knowledge and learning; and Kapoor (2011) has argued for looking particularly at what he terms Subaltern Social Movements (SSMs), as distinct from so-called New Social Movements or Old Social Movements. Zibechi also suggests that movements in Latin America, whilst sharing some traits with New Social Movements, mark a departure from these (2012).

Drawing on the work of Partha Chatterjee, Kapoor suggests shifting focus to movements operating within ‘un-civil’/political society - the politics of the ‘lower’ orders and their political consciousness:

Following Chatterjee, it would seem that anti-colonial SSMs are agents of and simultaneously constitute *political society* since: a) they face unequal treatment under the law or are victims of the law, b) are expendable or burnable through multiple and racial/ethnically targeted dispossessions and subjected to other forms of violence if need be (since they are not lawfully constituted civil society), and c) are compelled to resort to extra-legal collective activism through land occupations by stealth or *uncivil* activism and transgressions of laws that are there to keep them out (Kapoor, 2011: 135).

Some recent work has looked at learning and SSMs. The editors of the first edition of *Interface* argue that attempts to look at how movements produce

knowledge have raised, inter alia, the issue of subaltern knowledge as against official knowledge, and suggest that “the relationship between knowledge from below and action from below is... a central one” (Cox & Fominaya, 2009:5). Zibechi (2007) has also considered the issue of learning and SSMs. However, learning and SSMs has again tended to focus on learning within such movement; when pedagogy is talked about, it’s about teaching others within the movement. Gregorčič for example, gives a fascinating account of the pedagogical practices used by the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the Civil Council of Peoples and Indigenous Organizations in Honduras. She argues that there is “a heritage of radical, autonomous, non-institutionalised, and especially indigenous pedagogy that has been, to date, inadequately documented” (2009: 358). She comments that many innovative pedagogical practices are not in fact new, but on the contrary are old practices, passed down through practice.

Whilst there is some work about the ways in which movements ‘get their message across’ (eg. Mattoni 2012, cited in Bergfield) looks at the media practices of the precarious workers movement in Italy), there has been relatively little consideration of the ‘war of position’ aspect of social movement knowledge production, despite that fact that Slater (1985), writing before the advent of leftist governments in Latin America, argued that social movements might play exactly this role:

In countries like Brazil and Argentina with relatively densely-structured civil societies a war of position is indispensable and the radical democratic struggles of the new social movements provide a crucial contribution to just such a ‘war’...in the palpable absence of more immediate prospects of radical transformation of state power, new social movements generate new sources of political hope. And optimism of the will can invariably attenuate pessimism of the intellect. (Slater, 1985: 18-19)

A recent exception is the work of Meek (2011) on the MST in Brazil. Meek considers how the movement’s journal is a pedagogical device in a ‘war of position’ - but his discussion focuses on its role within the movement, raising the consciousness of grassroots members and ensuring their continued participation in movement politics even after they have gained their immediate goal of land.

I would argue that both Abahlali and the piquetero movement could be classified as Subaltern Social Movements, and that this helps us understand their praxis; including their use of road blocks as ‘war of position’. I am not asserting here that road blocks have been primarily pedagogical in intent; as Epstein points out in relation to the piqueteros’ blockades of strategic roads, “the most immediate purpose of such an occupation of public space is to induce government officials to pay attention to the economic needs of the participants” (2003: 12), something which the piqueteros themselves have acknowledged. However, I am suggesting that in some cases road blocks have included a conscious pedagogical element.

## **Road blockades as pedagogy**

As argued above, “hegemony operates at the multiple levels of ideology, culture, politics and the economy” (Cooper, 2005: 13); and is a contested space wherein the *meanings* of these are fought out. For the ‘excluded’, “the great majority of humanity [who] counts for nothing” (Badiou, quoted in Neocosmos 2009a : 265), the task is to disrupt the existing meanings, and to create alternative meanings. Kapoor (2011) reminds us that SSMS necessarily operate outside existing spaces:

Anti-colonial SSMS constitute and take root in political society as movements that are primarily located outside and against the state-market-civil society nexus and the laws and institutions constructed and strategically deployed by this nexus (134).

Or, as the Zapatistas say, “we are perfectly ordinary people, therefore rebels” (quoted in Holloway, 2007, interview by Marina Sitrin, response 11).

So, for movements such as Abahlali and the piqueteros, the use of extra-legal methods is not only understandable, but essential. But why block roads?

## **The meaning of roads**

It is clear that for both the piqueteros and Abahlali, the road blockade is a deliberately chosen tactic (although for Abahlali, like many other ‘spontaneous’ protests, it is often chosen as the last resort, rather than the first). Zibechi (2007; 2012) argues that the growing use of road blockades by newer forms of struggle is partly because traditional forms of protest – such as the strike – are no longer appropriate. However, it is clear that it is also to do with the symbolic and spatial dimension of blocking roads, something which has always been part of this tactic, as Traugott recounts about his study of barricades:

I needed an explicit and carefully constructed definition of the insurgent barricade as something more than a physical object, requiring both a certain shared understanding of the concept and a clearly articulated relationship to the insurrectional setting. (Traugott, 2011)

Roads carry meanings with them, something which has been explored by writers continuing the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991), who argued that space is more than a neutral container of activity. Space is actively produced, not just physically but in terms of social meaning (Hammond, 2013: 500). Harvey (2008) suggests that urbanization is a class phenomenon - cities arose through geographical and social concentrations of surplus. Urban areas are increasingly divided along class lines and conflict-prone, with privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance, and the masses “dispossessed...of any right to the

city whatsoever” (2008:37). But it’s about more than access. According to Lefebvre, “dominant ideas are...consolidated through the built environment of the city” (Loftus & Lumsden, 2006: 103). “Elites try to manipulate hegemony, not simply by changing the physical environment...but by reshaping the way in which people relate to that environment through their concrete, everyday activities” (Kipfer, 2002, quoted in Loftus & Lumsden, 2006: 103). Thus hegemony is physical and not simply ideological - and so the city is also a contested terrain, a site of struggle, a terrain for challenging dominant ideas. “As rulers attempt to turn space into abstract space, devoid of particular properties and amenable to social control, subordinates construct counter-spaces in which they strive to maintain their attachment to particular localities and assert their right to determine the activities that go on in particular spaces” (Hammond, 2013:500). The recent occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul is but one example of this - an occupation to demand an end to the ‘privatization’ of public spaces that became the creation of an entirely alternative commons (Jourdan & Maeckelbergh, 2013).

The same is evidently true for roads. “Walls and roads obviously privilege certain kinds of activities and inhibit others, support the projects of one type of actor and deter the goals of others” (Boano, Lomarca & Hunter 2013: 313). In Apartheid South Africa, roads were used to divide people on the basis of their ‘race’, as so-called ‘buffer-strips’ between residential areas for different ‘groups’ in terms of the Group Areas Act. Now, roads are used to demarcate poor areas from rich ones, and to allow easy access into the city for the wealthy who increasingly live outside of the city. Thus although roads are ‘public’, they frequently belong more to some of the public than others; and are increasingly ‘privatised’ - blocked by booms and guards to keep poor people out of rich gated communities. And sometimes, roads are used to move shack dwellers, their land expropriated for the ‘public’ good. None of this is unique to South Africa, as Harvey (2008) argues, being a feature particularly of the so-called developing world. In Angola, some 25 000 people in the city of Lubango were recently moved to make way for re-opening a railway line, the beautification of city, and a new road (Smith & Jenkins, 2013: 152).

So when people block a road, they are making a statement about meaning: “People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes” (Smith & Jenkins, 2013:314). Zibechi (2007; 2012) has argued that the occupation of space is a critical part of Latin American movement tactics, and Hammond (2013) has recently argued in this journal that “control over space, and struggles for the possession of space, are an important factor in the course of social movements” (Hammond, 2013: 515). Hammond considers in particular the case of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). Occupations are obviously quite specifically about space; and change space, create counter-space. They are a growing phenomenon, used in the last three years in Libya, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Turkey, and all over the USA. Hammond draws on Tilly’s notion of ‘symbolic geography’ (2000: 137, cited in Hammond, 2013: 501) - that choice of location symbolizes something about the movement, because location is not normally chosen at random: “locations have meanings, and those meanings can

telegraph the message that the movement wants to convey” (501). Hence OWS’s choice of Wall Street, a space that had symbolic significance, because of its association with the corporate financial control that OWS was targeting. However, Wall Street was very well guarded, and so OWS occupied Zuccotti Park instead, “a privately owned public space”. OWS sought to expand the meaning of ‘public’ in ‘public spaces’; this is a common thread in occupations:

The occupation is also likely to claim legitimacy on the basis of a concept of public space; occupiers are claiming their right to determine the use of space formally designated as available to the public (501).

Confrontation with the authorities is thus inherent; and comes with its own advantages and disadvantages:

Participants in gatherings that are forbidden or subject to repression realize that they *can* transgress normal rules and act on their beliefs. The act of transgression, especially when it is repressed, ratifies the belief in their rights, the conviction that those rights are being trampled on, and the determination to assert them (Hammond, 2013: 512).

However, Hammond argues, occupations are structurally limited - because when movements lose the space they have occupied, the movement is weakened. Hammond raises the concern that occupations fetishize space. The occupation, the space, becomes the central concern, rather than reason for it.

There is much in Hammond’s discussion that has relevance for road blockades, and for movements who use road blockades as a tactic in a ‘war of manoeuvre’. Clearly, particular roads can carry particular symbolism, which is why main access roads are so often chosen; and as public space becomes increasingly privatised or subject to surveillance, roads remain a key public space. The point about being public is fairly self-evident - road blockades, like occupations, are a way of being seen, particularly when “We are supposed to remain in silence in our dark corners” (AbM, 11/10/2013). A number of studies have shown that movements “consciously choose different mediums, technologies and tools of communication to achieve the greatest possible degree of visibility” (Bergfield 2013: 546). Mattoni (in Bergfield, 2013: 156), in her examination of the precarious workers movement in Italy, looks at how they have used different methods to raise awareness: “in doing so, they rendered themselves visible as political subjects instead of mere victims”, and in her consideration of the piqueteros, Colmegna (2002: 7) has argued that “the very act of mobilisation renders them visible to society”. Conflict with authorities is thus inherent in the road blockade, as it is in an occupation of public space. However, a key difference between road blockades and occupations is that the space itself, and holding onto it, is not the point - so the problem of fetishisation is less likely. Of

course, there is also less opportunity to create an alternative space, but as the piqueteros have shown, this is not impossible:

The biggest change was the relationship with other people in the neighbourhood, the development of friendship and the possibility of sharing...When you're on a roadblock and you have nothing to eat, the people next to you share their food. Now I feel I'm living in a large family, my neighbours are my family (Sitrin, 2003: 476).

Kapoor argues that SSM pedagogies are “a multi-faceted praxis and political strategy” through strategic and political necessity (2011:138). But if road blockades really are sometimes intended as pedagogy, then what is it that movements are trying to teach through the method of road blockades?

### **The message of road blockades**

In the quote that started this article, Abahlali say: “We will continue to educate the politicians in their duty to obey the people”. I would argue that this statement is underpinned by a set of fundamental assertions, consistent with the knowledge-creation and theorising of both Abahlali and the piqueteros, and precisely at odds with current hegemony:

1. That people count. Their experiences count. Their feelings count.
2. That people think.
3. That people count and think equally.
4. That, contrary to what others might argue, people are not ‘voiceless’. The issue is about listening and hearing, rather than speaking.
5. That change is both necessary and possible.

### **People count**

Both Abahlali and the piqueteros have asserted that people count in the face of a situation and its accompanying hegemony that excludes them. Thus for both movements, the issue of dignity is a critical one. The then president of Abahlali, S’bu Zikode, made this clear in the early days of the movement: “For us the most important struggle is to be recognised as human beings” (Zikode, 2006a), but in the meantime, they assume this: “Our politics starts by recognizing the humanity of every human being” (Zikode, 2008).

In a speech to the Economic Justice Forum of the Council of Churches in Durban in 2008, Zikode said:

We take our place as people who count the same as everyone else. Sometimes we take that place in the streets with teargas and the rubber bullets. Sometimes we take that place in the courts. Sometimes we take it on the radio. Tonight we take it here. Our politics starts from the places we have taken. We call it a living politics because it comes from the people and stays with the people. It is ours and it is part of our lives. We organize it in our own languages and in our own communities. It is the politics of our lives. It is made at home with what we have and it is made for us and by us. (Zikode, 2008)

Fairly early on, the piqueteros began to form an identity “that has primarily to do with dignity”, not just during a roadblock, but beyond (Sitrin, 2003: 475), and hence organise under the slogan “Work, Dignity and Social Change” (Sitrin, 2003: 474). “We think that dignity as well as social change has to be built by us. It’s not something we demand from the government. We think that we have to build that up and they have to allow us to do so” (Piquetero quoted in Sitrin, 2003: 474):

We are regaining dignity from having organized ourselves, from fighting capitalism...we want to...put together a new society, to build a more fair society where there would be neither oppressors nor oppressed, a society where there wouldn’t be exploiters and exploited (Ibid: 474).

Horizontal, rather than vertical, organisation is seen as an essential part of the movement, the antithesis of trades unions and political parties. As already discussed, unlike Abahlali, the piqueteros were able to use the road block as a means of creating alternative spaces, possibly because their road blockades tend to last longer.

Part of the road blockade as pedagogy is thus an affirmation that people are there, that they do count, despite the system that organises them out of it; and that new spaces can be created that treat people as if they count. Freire (1972, 48, quoted in Crowther, 2009: 79) asserted that

the oppressed are not marginals...living ‘outside’ society. They have always been inside - inside the structure which made them ‘beings for others’. The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structures of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’.

I would argue, however, that what Abahlali and the piqueteros are showing in the roadblock is that they are *already* ‘beings for themselves’; that they are, as Zikode insists, taking their place, or as a Kondh ADEA leader puts it, “demanding a place for ourselves” (quoted in Kapoor 2011: 142). This is why the visibility of the roadblock is so important, why the method becomes as powerful as the message.

## People think

One of the most fundamental tenets of ubuhlalim (the name used by Abahlali baseMjondolo to refer to its ideology and praxis) is that everyone thinks. This has been an absolutely consistent theme from the movement since its inception. In a documentary made about the Kennedy Road blockade shortly after it happened, an Abahlali member, Nonhlanhla Mzobe says, “We think. People must understand that we think” (quoted in Pithouse, 2006: 37). Connected to this is the plain fact that thinking results in understanding, in (new) knowledge. Very early on, one of the banners carried by Kennedy Road residents read “University of Kennedy Road”; and by the march of 14 November 2005, “University of Abahlali baseMjondolo”.

Ordinary member of Abahlali are insistent about their capacity and right to think, and their subsequent knowledge and understanding. Interviewed in 2007, one said:

I'm not that educated, but I always say...that you may take Mlaba [the mayor], you may take him, and let him sit with me. And then you sit with us and listen, and you may find that I know more of politics than him. But he is in politics! He is practising it day and night. But you might find that I know more than him. (Mdu Hlongwa, quoted in Ngiam, 2007)

Abahlali have long recognised that it is precisely this assertion that they think, and that they have a right to speak and be listened to, that is most threatening to hegemony; as Zikode wryly remarked in mid-2006, “The state comes for us when we try to say what we think” (Zikode, 2006b); “it is taken as a crime when people want to think and speak for themselves” (AbM, 9/3/2011). This is because “We are the people that are not meant to think” (Zikode, 2008).

The piqueteros argue along exactly the same lines. “Here everyone has a voice and a vote, everyone can express their opinion. It's not like no-one knows anything but that we all know something.” (Sitrin, 2003: 477). For the piqueteros, building community kitchens, organic gardens, bakeries, popular libraries is a threat to the state, because it is about “other ways of thinking”, gaining consciousness. “I believe that is what they are afraid of, of people with a conscience, of people that think...The state is very afraid” (Sitrin, 2003: 480). This is precisely why the state responds with violence and why “they portray us in the media as violent” (Ibid.). Some of the autonomous piquetero groups have specifically set aside time for reflection: “For example, Friday, the day that we focus specifically on reflection, is the time we most work on this. How can we continue to learn with this group of compañeros that I have at my side?” (MTD Allen & Khorasane, 2004). “We are able to do many things through our work, our thoughts, and our ideas. This is also a revolution” (Ibid.).

Gramsci believed that engaging in a war of position was possible precisely because everyone could think, “everyone' is a philosopher” (Gramsci, 1971: 330);



something which has been reiterated by a number of ‘counter-hegemonic’ (Gramsci never used this word) writers since then, including Fanon:

One of Fanon’s contributions to revolutionary theory, a contribution that remains controversial today, is his belief that the “damned of the earth”—the poor, landless, unemployed, the marginalized and less than human—are not only thinking and rational beings but can organize themselves as forces that can change the world and make it a more human place. In other words, those people who are considered outside of society, the cast-offs and dregs, the worthless and stupid, the lazy and uncivilized, the irrational and ill-tempered, are the very people on which Fanon’s hopes for a “new humanism” are based (Gibson, 2011).

It is not surprising, then, that hegemony precisely rejects this claim; and reacts with such violence when the claim is made. It is also not surprising that any ‘war of position’ needs to assert it so powerfully; and because they are so visible, and so obviously ‘out-of-order’ (as Abahlali call it), road blocks are a pretty convincing way to do this.

### **People count and think equally**

Like many movements, and particularly subaltern movements, Abahlali claims a universalising humanism, in which all people are essentially the same, and all people are essentially equal:

There is only one human race.

Our struggle and every real struggle is to put the human being at the centre of society, starting with the worst off. (AbM, 21/5/2008)

This idea, of everyone being essentially the same, was also picked up in the mass response to the shooting of 2 young piqueteros in June 2002, when thousands of Argentinians took to the streets under the slogan “We are all piqueteros”.

It is in this respect that the movements perhaps show the most radical praxis. As Rancière argues, the current idea is that people are not equal, but we could get there if we worked hard enough. Rather, we need to start from an ‘axiom of equality’ (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009):

What if equality, instead, were to provide the point of departure? What would it mean to make equality a *presupposition* rather than a goal, a *practice* rather than a reward situated firmly in some distant future so as to all the better explain its present infeasibility? (Ross, 1991: xix).

In fact, Rancière asserts, we are all already equal because we all already think; and we think equally well, because we are equally intelligent. Learning requires two faculties - intelligence and will. Will is what accounts for differences in what is learned (Rancière, 1991). For Rancière, then, hegemony is not about persuading us that the way things are is normal and natural, or that we cannot do anything about it, it is about persuading us that others do not think. If we simply accept that they/we do as the ultimate truth, then it is axiomatic that we can act in the world to put precisely the fact of our equality into practice. So emancipation is “that every common person might conceive his (sic) human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it” (18).

This impacts on our pedagogy:

The normal pedagogic logic says that people are ignorant, they don't know how to get out of ignorance to learn, so we have to make some kind of itinerary to move from ignorance to knowledge, starting from the difference between the one who knows and the one who does not know (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009).

Even Freire ultimately argues this. Rancière, by contrast, sees the process of learning “not as a process from ignorance to knowledge but as a process of going from what is already known or what is already possessed, to further knowledge or new possessions...the idea is that the ignorant always know something, always ask something and always has the capacity, and the problem is how to make the best of this capacity and start from equality”. Thus there is no specific pedagogy of the oppressed - no specific education for poor people, oppressed people (Rancière, interviewed by Lawrence Liang, 2009). What there is is ‘symbolic rupture’: “symbolic rupture [is] when people start talking about things that were not supposed to be their business” (Ibid.).

Both Abahlali and the piqueteros have started talking about things that are not supposed to be their business; but more than that, both assume the capacity of themselves, and of everyone else (including the state) to understand what they are saying.

### **People are not ‘voiceless’**

People who can think (i.e. everyone) have something to say; and are perfectly able to do this for themselves. Thus one of the things that Abahlali and the piqueteros have been most insistent on is their right to speak for themselves; and they have been highly critical of those who attempt to speak on their behalf.

From fairly early on, Abahlali began using the phrase “Talk to us, not for us” (Zikode, 2006c: 7): “Words from everyone have to be heard. They [the ANC] mustn't listen to just the words of the rich, or the big people, they must listen to the words from everyone....We're trying to make something because we're

talking. They must listen to us, we mustn't listen to them" (Linda Motha, 2007, interviewed by Kate Gunby). One of their consistent criticisms of government and of civil society has been that they attempt to speak for them; or that, when the poor do speak, they are not listened to: "because we have always been considered as people who do not count in our society our claims are always dismissed with contempt" (AbM, 9/3/2011).

In his *The Third Force* article in December 2005, Zikode (2006a) responded to claims that there was a "Third Force" behind the movement. Zikode conceded that there was one:

The Third Force is all the pain and the suffering that the poor are subjected to every second in our lives....It is time for us to speak out and to say this is who we are, this is where we are and this is how we live. (2006a: 1)

Later in the article, he said, "This is the struggle of the poor. The time has come for the poor to show themselves that we can be poor in life but not in mind" (4). Indeed, the so-called leaders had been of no help. "It is the thinking of the masses of the people that matters" (4).

The piqueteros have been rather more ambivalent about their ability to speak, arguing that it was difficult to speak after such a long period of being silenced (MTD Allen & Khorasanee, 2004; Sitrin, 2003). In many ways, this is precisely the function of hegemony.

The claim to speak on behalf of others rests precisely on an assumption that they are unable to speak for themselves. Often, ultimately, this is because they are assumed to be unable to think for themselves, as discussed above; but often it is because they are seen as having been so mentally mutilated by oppression that they have no voice. I would argue that Freire himself has a lot to answer for in this respect; and it continues to be a key reason given by those who speak 'on behalf of' others, such as Wangari Maathai, speaking on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize:

When people are poor and when they are reduced to beggars, they feel weak, humiliated, disrespected and undignified. They hide alone in corners and dare not raise their voices. They are therefore, neither heard nor seen. They do not organize but often suffer in isolation and in desperation. Yet all human beings deserve respect and dignity (Maathai, 2005)

A South African NGO who has attempted to break this practice in their own work has recently written:

In civil society organisations, the overwhelming tendency is to speak - and the unerring consequence is to reinforce the silencing of the people. In fact much

civil society practice and thinking proceeds really on the assumption that speech is not a capacity of the people...A central idea that emerged [in our exploration of an alternative path] was that 'our voice is our praxis' - or indeed, 'our praxis is our voice' - and that the discipline of that principled praxis requires of the organisation much more listening than speaking (Church Land Programme, 2013).

If you have a voice, and yet no-one will listen, how do you make yourself heard? You enter the public domain, through for example, the media, including social media (and recent studies have looked precisely at how movements do this - see, for example, Hall, 2011; Malone, 2011; Mattoni 2012, cited in Bergfield, 2013); or you shout very loudly in a public space. As Hammond (2013) argued in his discussion of occupations, because occupation is about recasting the public space - who can do what in it - "Occupation is therefore an exercise in freedom of speech and public communication" (501).

### **Change is both necessary and possible**

The praxis of both Abahlali and the piqueteros rests on an assumption that it is possible to change things; and yet both movements admit that their actions in fact helped to prove this to themselves. Some piqueteros, for example, have said that they did not believe that it was possible to fight the politicians until they had blocked the roads: "So many years of politics with state control over the people...generated a lack of self-esteem in us... The piquete kind of broke that passivity and people are able to recover their self-esteem" (Sitrin, 2003: 474). The similarity between this and Fanon's concept of living organization, of "action that creates a new reality and thus changes consciousness" (Gibson, 2011) is inescapable: "By exploding the former colonial reality the struggle uncovers unknown facets, brings to light new meanings and underlines contradictions which were camouflaged by this reality" (Fanon, 1968:147, quoted in Gibson, 2011); potentially not only for those engaged in the struggle, but for those they are struggling against. As a piquetero commented about the State, "if they don't gain consciousness and keep doing it, they are always going to find resistance everywhere" (Sitrin, 2003: 480).

A number of writers have talked about the importance of social movement precisely as places that keep the hope of something different alive within a hegemonic insistence that there is no alternative. Crowther (2009) says that "utopian thinking has undeservedly fallen into disrepute", because it is defined as unrealisable. He thus argues for a "critical pedagogy of real utopias" (86), something fundamentally different from other types of educational activity. Dinerstein and Deneulin (2012) argue that what they call 'hope movements' have recently sprung up. These are movements that are "creating alternative economic arrangements conducive to the pursuit of a dignified life" (585). They argue that the term 'social movement' does not really adequately capture what these movements are. These movements "are engaged in an autonomous *search*

for a new way of life which is more conducive to creating an environment where human beings can live in dignity” (589).

I am not convinced that these are something entirely outside of current understandings of social movements (one of their examples is the Zapatistas), but I think the point they are making about the potential, the hope, for something allowing a life of dignity is an important one (and, of course, one that Freire made over and over). There are, as we know, many intellectuals who remain hopeful; and I would argue that these are to be found particularly amongst those who are actually actively engaged with real struggles of real people (as was Gramsci). Holloway (2007, interview by Marina Sitrin), for example, says “These are not miserable times. Perhaps that is the most important point” (response 1). The times may be awful, and frightening, but they are full of struggle, and therefore full of hope.

## **Conclusion**

So what does this mean for the road blockade within the praxis of movements of those ‘without’ (Zibechi, 2012)? According to Gramsci, “Not all practices are equal to each other, or rather, not all practices have the same capacity to mobilise and valorise other social and political practices” (Thomas, 2011), so choosing which practise to use is critical. As we have seen, Zibechi (2007) argues that road blockades are an essential tactic of such social movements because they rely on the occupation of space and territory, and macro-economic shifts have meant that it is necessary to move from occupying the factory floor to occupying more public space; but also because they are simultaneously both defensive and offensive: “a roadblock is a way of establishing a border, a break marking the territory controlled by the state and that controlled by the movements”.

However, road blockades also need to be consciously employed as part of a ‘war of position’, i.e. as a critical pedagogical tool, both because of the symbolism of the road and because of the ways in which road blockades can make visible a counter-hegemonic ‘truth’, as discussed above. Thomas (2009) reminds us in his seminal analysis of Gramsci’s thought that Gramsci argued we cannot always choose the form of war we want, especially if we start from a subordinate position; and as we have seen road blockades are often a last resort. However, when roads are blockaded, even as a last resort, it is possible for “the war of manoeuvre [to] increasingly [become] the war of position” (Gramsci, 1971: 243). In this, we need to remember that for Gramsci, a ‘war of position’ is not a programmatic strategy, but a realistic political strategy of the proletariat within the constraints imposed on them (Thomas, 2009).

Thus road blockades potentially allow for a rethinking and retheorising of social movement pedagogy not only as learning within such movements, but as a conscious ‘teaching’ of an alternative truth.

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## **Intervention in lectures as a form of social movement pedagogy and a pedagogical method**

**Piotr Kowzan, Małgorzata Zielińska and Magdalena Prusinowska**

### **Abstract**

*Despite the proclaimed crisis of the university, lecture halls attracted unprecedented attention from social movements in Poland in 2013. This paper presents interventions in lectures and analyses the consequences of such interventions, focusing on the learning of various actors. Our scope of interest includes protests revolving around academia, but we focus especially on interventions in lectures in Poland in 2013. We compared three cases of interventions in lectures with one from 2009, in which we participated, and upon which we had previously drawn a model of learning. As a result of this comparison, we added an external, watching subject to our model, because with the growing use of video recording, such interventions easily turn into a spectacle.*

### **Introduction**

There are many aspects of social movements' functioning that are pedagogical – they include learning of the movement's participants, as well as creating opportunities for learning of those outside the movement. Some authors recognised social movements' educational aspects in terms of the learning of individuals (see e.g. Cunningham and Curry 1997, Clover and Hall 2000, Dekeyser 2000), while others focused on collective learning (McFarlane 2011). In another article (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011) we described a university movement, called OKUPÉ, established at the University of Gdańsk, Poland, in 2009 (see also: Prusinowska, Kowzan and Zielińska 2012.) Looking at the movement from within, we described a number of types of learning in the movement, such as: 1) situated learning, or learning by doing, for example through taking part in a workshop organised by one member for other members; 2) more conventional learning at seminars with presentations, during which e.g. other movements' methods of action were presented; 3) incidental learning (not planned), for instance, learning to take responsibility for one's place; 4) collective inquiries into issues concerning the movement's and the local community's interests. These inquiries are an example of knowledge creation by the movement. An important part of learning within the movement was a demotivational side of learning – some members felt that they learned that effective action and cooperation was impossible, especially in bigger groups without clear rules.

Apart from learning of the activists, we felt that also the institution in which we acted had learned something – the evidence of which can be found in changed

structures and procedures at the university. Moreover, we claimed that “by intervening in the dialectic relation between people and the world (Miller 1981), social movements also educate the public” (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011, 265). Examples that we provided were twofold – one was stigmergic learning involving the creation of collective patterns of action that can be followed or copied by others. The other – was trying to intervene in the knowledge transfer that took place during one lecture by protesting. By coming to a meeting with the Minister of Science and Higher Education with banners, we intervened in the lecture, creating a constellation of subjects possibly leading to learning through detecting ambiguities of the world. We argued that social movements can be called “educators - provocateurs”.

We would like to focus in this paper on this specific type of pedagogical method, which we will call intervention in lecture (IiL). The main reason for this choice is that in 2013 there was a number of protests at public lectures in Poland, which were highly controversial and which forced us to revise and reconsider our previous analyses of this method. IiL is a method of action from the social movement repertoire, but it is also a pedagogical phenomenon. Its pedagogical aspect is grounded in the learning possibly occurring due to IiLs, but also in the fact that the classical pedagogical form of lecture is affected by it. Therefore, in this paper we would like to analyse IiL as a pedagogical method, and look at some consequences of its usage by social movements. After a short literature review, we will show our theoretical frames of reference related to IiL and lectures as such. Finally, we will compare and analyse four cases of IiL from the perspective of the rationale behind them, media coverage, the reactions to the interventions, as well as pedagogical implications of the protests. Our study is a comparative case study (Campbell 2010) with one case taken from our previous, more exploratory study (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011).

## **Authors' background**

The authors of this paper are PhD students and former participants of a local university movement called OKUPÉ. The movement, consisting of students, PhD students, employed researchers and graduates of the university, had various goals, from those related to the campus (such as protesting against its fencing), to ones that were concerned with the conditions of studying and working in the Polish higher education. One of its methods of action was intervention into a lecture of the Minister of Science and Higher Education. Now the movement is latent, but we continue to be concerned with the state of academia, and we have, additionally, become interested in studying learning in social movements from an academic point of view.

Our participation in OKUPÉ was an example of militant research, in which we gathered information and studied the world around us in order to make certain community stronger through acting (Colectivo Situaciones 2007). The present inquiry also joins our academic and activist interests but now we cannot refer to a bigger group of people developing through this process. We are still trying to

understand our own actions and see them in a context, but we started our analysis of IiLs, for an academic reason, because our previous paper concerning this issue seemed to be over-optimistic in regard to the democratic dimension of such a form of protest. We realised this when contemporary right-wing movements included IiLs into their repertoire.<sup>1</sup> Thus, our goals are both academic and practical, which is commonplace in educational research. Contrary to traditional sociological work, where authors still feel they need to defend their involvement in the issues under research (see e.g. Wiewiorka 2014), in educational sciences the research is often conducted by educators themselves and aims at developing and improving pedagogical practice. We see our work as a part of this tradition. Our study of IiLs in the context of university is also an analysis of our working environment, where we both learn (as PhD students) and teach students. IiLs taking place in Polish universities influence our pedagogical practice (e.g., they create a horizon of what is possible in academia), therefore, as pedagogues we decided to study this phenomenon as an element of the academic environment and our practice. In a more general perspective, this analysis is a part of the broad field of studies on informal adult education and adult learning (see e.g. Brookfield 1991), in this case, concerning learning processes designed by and involving social movements.

## **Theoretical background**

### **Learning as a result of IiL**

In another article (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011), we analysed one IiL as a configuration of three subjects: the speaking one (the lecturer), the listening one (the audience) and the (out)standing one, that is, the protesters. We argued that the activists change the communication between the lecturer and the audience by their protest. They provoke and surprise the other two subjects and point to ambiguities in the world, and in the lecturer's message, showing their resistance to the ideology behind it. Thus, they play a part of an "educator-provocateur" (Rutkowiak 2011) and influence learning processes happening in the lecture hall. The subjects may learn about the content of the protest, but they may also learn resistance techniques. They can

"explore - after the initial astonishment - unsuspected connections between different domains of their experience (...). But before an effective surprise happens there are provocateurs, i.e., committed people who recognise the conventions of the place and decide to alienate themselves from the rest by starting the action, which encourages the audience to go beyond common ways of

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<sup>1</sup> The growing popularity of the right-wing movement in contemporary Poland creates additional context for our analysis, as it suggests that we will see more of IiLs in Poland in the future. However, in this text we wanted to focus on the method itself, as used by both the right wing and the left wing, so we will not expand on the movements themselves.

understanding the world." (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011: 258).

As a result of the intervention, the audience is challenged to negotiate the words of the lecturer with the message of the protesters. In order to theorise this, we used the definition of education (Polish: *wychowanie*) by Romana Miller, for whom it is "an intervention into the dialectic relation between a human being and the world; it regulates their reciprocal relations by [taking] creative interaction concerning development of society and the individual" (Miller 1981: 122). In this article we will try to explain how contemporary cases of IiLs enrich our model of learning through IiL.

## **Heckling**

There is little research regarding IiLs as such, but one can find relevant analyses in research about heckling. Proshanta Nandi defines heckling as a strategic "disruption of communication in public places [...] a form of symbolic aggression with varying purposes, but almost always involving the attempt to discredit a speaker or a point of view" (1980, 14).

Nandi points to the role of emotions in such disruptions, as these disruptions may not be planned but rather spontaneous, undertaken by individuals who perceive formal ways of dealing with their grievances unavailable. She refers to collectively supported heckling as bearing resemblance to social movements (1980). In our analyses we stress the importance of social movements' collective actions being pedagogical tasks, in which actions undertaken by protesters as a group have stronger educational effect on the public than individual activities. Therefore, we will not analyse individual acts of heckling, but only concentrate on IiLs as a collective form of disruption, belonging to the social movements' repertoire. Another difference in our approach is the aim to look closely into the particular context created by a lecture situation, and not as broadly as previous analyses of the heckling phenomenon, i.e. at artistic performances, parliamentary debates, stand ups and all types of public speeches. Nevertheless, heckling analysed as a social performance (including: a setting, audiences' expectations and their interpretative frames) is a point of reference to us.

## **Lecture as a pedagogical method**

Before we describe interventions in lectures, we would like to look into the lecture itself as a didactic form and an event, since the two – lecture and intervention in it – are inseparable pedagogical methods – two sides of one event, with conflicting goals and actors opposing one another.

For the purpose of this paper we will define lecture as a teaching method consisting of an oral transfer of information and/or knowledge and its reception by the listeners. An interesting view on lecture has been given by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons (2002, 2012, 2013) who understand it as a public pedagogic form, which in its core means „a reading together and the



gathering of a thinking public around a common text” (2013, 109). According to these authors, the strategic goal of such a meeting is profanation, understood as disturbing, questioning or disrupting all kinds of stabilizations, fixations or crystallisations, to which a necessary condition is detaching ideas from their regular use. However, experiencing lecture as a particular form of being together is rarely so profound. The profane quality of lectures occurs rarely, because the whole process of lecture is formalised, or as Masschelein and Simons put it, immunised against creating knowledge together. It is also immunised against transforming individuals into community, which could make the lecturer intellectually indebted to everybody taking part in the encounter.

The immunisation – or formalisation of lectures – is a historical process which brought about some fixed qualities of lecture, e.g., that lecture is time-bound (it should usually take 90 or 120 minutes), it includes some questions at the end and often includes reminding all those gathered about hierarchies, divisions, as well as the importance of research methodology. Still, the lecturer may choose to conduct the lecture in a more or less immune way, that is, s/he may treat the discussion as a way of questioning fixed ideas or – on the contrary – s/he can ignore the questions. Immunisation makes some people less vulnerable (e.g. professors are asked different questions than students) and it prevents some topics from becoming an issue. Eventually, immunisation makes us see human subjects as individuals rather than collectives and protects them from transforming into more revolutionary subjectivities under the influence of collectively produced knowledge.

In the paper we will look more closely into public lectures, not lectures as part of an academic course, since the IiLs happening during regular lectures are rarely made public. The usage of the form of public lecture is characteristic for universities, but it cannot be limited to them. For example, in connection with the tradition of independence struggles, e.g. in the 19th century, when Poland was under foreign control and later, during World War II or the communist regime, there was excessive immunisation of lectures against the sharing of subversive ideas – preventive censorship was used and both students and professors could be arrested for what they said. In these times, public lectures were organised in private apartments, churches, workplaces etc., constituting the “Flying University” (Krajewski 4.11.2009). Also nowadays and worldwide, lectures are not only organised by academia, but they have become a part of social movements’ repertoire of action, especially lecture tours and teach-ins. Holding a lecture itself can be a form of protest, for instance, during strikes against cuts in education in 2004, students and professors organised a 72-hour physics lecture on Potsdamer Platz in Berlin (Guinnessy 2004). Moreover, both academia and social movements distribute online lectures in diverse forms, which makes these lectures more available and, thus, increases the tactical value of this pedagogical method.

## **Intervention in lecture as a method of action**

To clarify the terms: intervention in lecture is a specific form of protest. It involves a direct confrontation of activists with the lecturer and challenging the audience in a lecture hall or another location where the lecture takes place, using different protest techniques, e.g. shouting, presenting banners, performances etc. Although particular activists may do different actions during IiLs, the collective character of this tactic is central to our understanding of the IiL. Collectiveness of the actions differentiates IiLs from individual acts of disruption (heckling). When we speak of protest, we treat it as a broader term, since it includes actions taken before and after the lecture and not necessarily at the exact place of lecturing. The protest can take a form of letters, boycotts, petitioning, hacktivism, etc. Such protests are, still, an important context for our analysis of interventions.

We would like to propose here two typologies of IiLs – one is based on the criterion of the object of the protest and the other – on the techniques used. Both typologies are based on actual IiLs that we got to know about. We started building typologies of IiLs by searching databases, and the Internet in general, for articles describing similar protests in other than the Polish context. We searched EBSCO using the term 'lecture', combining it with 'intervention', 'protest', 'dissent', 'social movement' and 'heckling'. Rarely did we get academic papers concerning the issue, though such events were covered extensively by academic press. We benefited from comments to some of those articles, where activists continued discussions referring to further sources.

A. Based on the object of the protest, we found six different types of lecture disruption, in which the object is:

- 1) the lecturer as a person – for example, the past of this person or membership in power structures, which may, according to the protesters, disqualify this person from speaking in public; an example can be interruption of a lecture of the former Pakistani president (Schaffer 22.10.2009);
- 2) the country or organisation where the lecturer comes from (e.g. during protests against meetings with Israeli ambassadors or politicians (Horowitz 17.10.2009; Lesslie 26.10.2012) – that is, the lecturer is seen as a part of a bigger institution and his/her own biography is irrelevant;
- 3) the political affiliation of the lecturer – e.g. in acts of protest as retaliation against “the leftists” who are thought to have gained control over the university;
- 4) the content of the lecture, e.g., homophobic arguments or creationism;
- 5) the form of the lecture – e.g., lecturing instead of discussion or discussion instead of a rigid lecture;
- 6) something outside the lecture and lecturer as such – e.g., if the protest is a

part of a student strike or a bigger protest against the authorities.

B. In terms of protest techniques we found the following types of IiL:

- 1) Collectively leaving the lecture during its course to reduce the number of audience, i.e., walk-out.
- 2) Unravelling banners during a lecture.
- 3) Chanting, singing or shouting – which can be either humorous, argumentative or offensive. An example can be chanting "Racist, sexist, anti-gay, Douglas Wilson, go away" – at a speech given by an evangelical pastor at Indiana University in the USA (Husk 2012).
- 4) Dancing or performing at the front of the hall.
- 5) Throwing items or other objects at the lecturer or into the lecture hall. Example: stink bombs thrown at Rudolf Steiner's lecture in 1922 (Rudolf Steiner 29.10.2013).
- 6) Electronic intervention in the lecture, such as calling the lecturer on Skype (especially if the lecture itself is mediated through Skype or other communicators) (Dziennik.pl 16.10.2013).
- 7) Arresting and/or attacking the lecturer – disruption from the side of the authorities. During the communist regime, in 1978, Polish authorities first arrested Adam Michnik and the next day organised an attack on his lecture held in a private apartment using violence and tear gas (Lipski 1985).
- 8) Moreover, a simple act of asking questions can be perceived as a basic intervention in a lecture, if the question or the statement made by the participant is aimed at challenging the lecturer's views. Still, the individual act of asking questions, even if they are meant to challenge the lecturer (see e.g. Dehaas 8.03.2013), is a part of the lecture convention itself and is rarely contested. We could, then, call it an IiL, only if it is a collective action, for example if a person from the audience is denied access to the microphone and other people amplify his/her voice by the use of human mic. This way, the act of speaking (asking questions) becomes a collective intervention (Tudoreanu 8.12.2011).

When it comes to all kinds of protests related to lectures and not only interventions, we can see other types:

- 1) Boycotting the lecture – usually announced.
- 2) Pressing the authorities to cancel the lecture, e.g. in Gdańsk far-right groups managed to cancel a debate by sending a letter to the rector and threatening that their members would come to protest (TVN24 25.02.2013).

- 2) Organising an alternative lecture – taking lectures away from lecture halls, teach-ins in movements of the 60's can be an example of lectures functioning as interventions. Moreover, holding lectures outside of university can be an element of protest against the institution itself.
- 3) Recording the lecture in order to use its fragments against the lecturer.
- 4) Blocking the entrance, so that the audience cannot get in (Paquette 2011).
- 5) Finally, being present at a lecture may also be controversial either because of the pressure (e.g. from the public opinion or the authorities) not to participate or it may be perceived as a sign of political protest (if the number of participants is so great that it shows support for the lecturer or the content of the lecture).

This typology, although it may not be complete, since this subject is very susceptible to new creative ideas, seems to support our conviction that liLs are a diverse field of social movements' actions, which is mostly overlooked in theoretical analyses.

### **Protests at lectures in contemporary Poland**

The year 2013 was very intensive in Poland when it comes to IiLs. In order to show the intensity of the activities, we made an online [Timeline](#), showing some protests happening in Poland, related to academic lectures or protests against public lectures and speeches. The [Timeline](#) shows not only interventions, but also other protests related to academia. In order to find the information about such protests, we searched online versions of Polish daily press, information portals and used key-word internet searching. The list might, however, not be complete, since some smaller protests may have remained unnoticed.

In short, we could describe the main actors at the IiL scene as two sides of the political conflict. One would be the leftist activists, protesting against homophobia or against attacks on gender studies, and the other – far-right activists concerned with the nation, historical wrongs and anti-communism. The different protests were very much interlinked – the first IiL in 2013 was triggered by a cancellation of a meeting organised by the far right. The connection between the protests was sometimes characterised by “vengeance” (which could be paraphrased as: “If we could not have our lecture, you will not have yours.”) and sometimes by the fear of being associated with ones political opponents, because of using the same protest techniques.

Protests organised by the far right were most frequent in 2013, but it is not to say that IiL is an inherently “rightist” tactic. IiLs had been used in Poland by anarchist and leftist movements in their fight against right-wing organisations during the 1990's. One example involves an IiL at the University of Warsaw initiated by RAAF (Radykalna Akcja Antyfaszystowska/Radical Antifascist Action) and MRE (Młodzież Przeciwko Rasizmowi w Europie/ Youth Against

Racism in Europe), whose call for action resulted in interrupting a lecture by Bruno Gollnisch from the National Front (CIA 16.02.2013).

It is unclear whether contemporary movements chose this particular tactic consciously using past movements' actions as an inspiration or at least as a reference. In a broader historical perspective, previous usages of this tactic could be a framing element for the movements' actions in the present. However, if such actions do not become a part of the collective memory (that is, a live memory which forms identities, but which is also very selective), they might be limited to “history”, that is to “dead memory” as Halbwachs calls it (Olick and Robbins 1998).

Right-wing groups, such as NOP (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski/National Rebirth of Poland) or NSA (Niezależne Stronnictwo Akademickie/Independent Academic Association) do not openly connect their use of IiLs to a possible point of reference from the history of right-wing IiLs, i.e., the 1930's Bench Ghetto at Polish universities, which forced Jewish students to take particular places in classes; during that time some lectures were interrupted by right-wing activists in order to prevent Jewish students from participating. Neither do they take an official stance to reclaim the tactic from the anarchists and the left. It seems that any reference to the 1990's is invisible or at least faded away.

Similarly, the left-wing groups of today seem to respond to the context created by the right-wing IiLs, rather than to historical movements. This, as a result, frames their actions as a dialogue with their opponents' choice of tactics. It is not a matter of simply copying each others tactics, but rather of a struggle, as CrimethInc. describes it, “[a struggle] for tactics and narratives – for the territory of struggle itself” (CrimethInc n.d.). For instance, the new context has been used to revive the memory of the past actions: after the intervention into Magdalena Środa's lecture (IiLMS), an anarchist website posted a text about an IiL in the 1990's, where the left-wing movements were intervening as a stronger group (CIA, 16.02.2013). This is an isolated example of historical perspective on IiLs from within the discussed movements, but it is coherent with the struggle to symbolically reclaim the tactic.

What also comes out of the [Timeline](#) is that most of the interventions in 2013 included some kind of performance, no matter if they were organised by left-wing or right-wing groups. There were also interventions where banners and shouting was used, or those where many different techniques were joined. The mixing of various protest techniques was very common. Another popular protest technique was an attempt to cancel a lecture. Many such attempts were successful, especially if they involved the far right – either as the protester or the organiser, which was explained by some of the rectors with security issues, that is, a threat of confrontation with the protesters.

## **Methods of analysis**

We are going to describe in details three recent events and compare them with

our intervention from 2009. Since we were interested in how the method of IiL differentiates itself in the hands of different sorts of activists, we decided to compare the IiL we have conducted with those conducted by right-wing activists. We included also one event conducted by LGBTQ activists, in order for the analysis to show the variety of IiLs. At the time of our analysis (October, 2013) it was the only IiL conducted by left-wing activists that we found in our registry, which was the reason for choosing it. From the pool of events conducted by right-wing activists we chose two events, which had gained a lot of media attention and individual comments in online versions of articles in the daily press. We expected that the amount of comments in the media will compensate for the lack of insiders' perspective in these cases. There were a number of other interventions in Poland at that time, as we have shown, but these three – that is, the interventions in lectures of Magdalena Środa (IiLMS), Zygmunt Bauman (IiLZB) and Paul Cameron (IiLPC) – were most similar to one another in terms of the actions taken and artefacts used and to the one in 2009 (IiLMSHE), and, therefore, proved to be best suited for a cohesive analysis.

All the three interventions in which we had not participated, were filmed and videos were shared online (see the [Timeline](#)). Our analysis is based on these visual documents, as well as on media relations showing reactions to the protests. We have also analysed comments under online articles looking for: a) verbs describing personal transformations caused by the given event; b) references to alternative footage of the given event; c) testimonies from the supposed participants providing further details of the event.

Regarding a), our research failed to find comments declaring that interventions led to personal changes in knowledge or opinions. Regarding b), we found that post-production, such as adding text to videos or photos, eliminated the message from appearing in the mainstream media, but the number of views was massive anyway. Regarding c), there were very few actual testimonials in comments, rather quarrels about the interpretation of the actions. In general, comments were fierce and formed two-dimensional fights of supporters and opponents of the protesters. Since media coverage of the IiLPC was much smaller than that of other protests, we decided to write to one participant about inexplicit details of this intervention. We found his name in a news report and asked him a number of questions about his motivation, the course of events and his thoughts about the results of the intervention. We did not manage to contact other participants of this protest. We have not contacted organisers of the two other protests (IiLZB and IiLMS), since there was an abundance of activists' opinions published online.

## **Four interventions**

Below, we will compare the four protests. First, we will shortly describe the course of actions in all four cases, and later we will focus on particular questions, such as motivations behind the protests, techniques used, media coverage and some consequences of the interventions. This will allow us to draw some

conclusions regarding pedagogical aspects of the interventions, later in the paper.

### **The lecture of the Minister of Science and Higher Education**

First, we are going to describe briefly the protest we took part in, which we already analysed in another paper:

On 22 April 2009, OKUPÉ organised a public reading and discussion of the project of proposed reforms in Polish higher education. [...] Incidentally, the day of the discussion preceded the Polish Government's Minister of Science and Higher Education's visit. The visit was not broadly announced, even though it was a part of the 'public consultations' on the project. Deans of faculties were asked to bring 20 students each. Since OKUPÉ's meeting was the only public discussion about reforms, activists were able to collect questions for the Minister. They prepared banners, being afraid that formalisation of consultations would prevent them from asking questions. Some activists came in prepared T-shirts with the logo of the International Student Movement and a provocative question: 'How much are social sciences worth?'. As anticipated, the supposed consultations turned into a lecture. When it became obvious that there would be no time for questions from the audience (eventually, only three questions were asked [...]), activists unfolded two banners and stood with them next to the Minister giving the speech. The banners said: 'Wiedza nie jest towarem' [Knowledge is not a commodity] and 'odZYSKaj Edukację' [Reclaim your Education]. The audience applauded and the lecture continued in a new political configuration. Power relations changed as a result of this action, because the TV cameras focused mostly on the protesters, who were later interviewed, as was the Rector of the university and the Minister ( Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011, 257).

### **Magdalena Środa's lecture**

The second of the events chosen, iILMS, happened on February 19, 2013. Professor Magdalena Środa (a philosopher, feminist and former Polish Government Representative for Equal Status of Men and Women, who can be perceived as controversial by the right wing due to her critical comments on religion and in favour of gender and marriage equality.) gave a lecture on „Morality of public life” in the Auditorium Maximum at the University of Warsaw. The lecture was fifth in a series of eight planned for that year. Simultaneously with the professor and the rector of the university, approximately 40 masked protesters (wearing masks of gorilla, a horse, a clown and balaclavas) entered the lecture hall through another door.

Because of the protesters' noisy and aggressive behaviour in the lecture hall, they were asked to leave and eventually they were effectively removed from the hall by university guards. The number of guards were doubled this day, because right-wing activists had announced a campaign of “regaining higher education” from the control of the left wing (Winnicki 13.2.2013). During the process of

removing the protesters, the entrance door was broken. Outside the hall, protesters started dancing to the music from their phones.

The protest was organised by NSA. The group was founded in 2010 and consists of students from Warsaw higher education institutions. They describe themselves as “committed students, who popularise patriotism with deeds and words” and who focus on the educational aspect of their activism (NSA n.d).

### **Zygmunt Bauman's lecture**

The third IiL we have chosen happened on June 22, 2013 when the world famous sociologist Zygmunt Bauman held a lecture on “Dilemmas of social democracy – from Lassalle to liquid modernity” (Harlukowicz 22.06.2013). He was invited to speak at the University of Wrocław by The Ferdinand Lassalle Centre for Social Thought, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Institute of Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Wrocław. His public lecture was a part of commemorating the 150 years of German social democratic party – since the founder of the party (the first labour party in Germany), Ferdinand Lassalle, was born in Wrocław. Four days before the lecture, under an article informing about the event at the website of one of the main Polish newspapers, “Gazeta Wyborcza” (Gazeta.pl 18.06.2013) one could read a statement signed as “NOP”, where a protest was announced.

The organisers were informed and police were present in the building at the day of the lecture. The protesters took seats in the lecture hall. When Bauman together with the mayor of Wrocław came there, they stood up and started shouting offensive and anti-communist slogans, e.g. “Nuremberg for the communists”. They unravelled banners with anti-communist symbols and the name of a local football club. After a couple of minutes police came, followed by the anti-terrorist brigade, and they removed the protesters. The audience welcomed the removal by clapping their hands. Soon, the organisers introduced the lecture and apologised for the protest to the lecturer. Bauman said that no apologies were needed and that it was him who should apologise for becoming the reason for the protest, but also said he was glad that the protest illustrated some of the topics he was going to talk about. The lecture continued with no further disruptions.

### **Paul Cameron's lecture**

The last IiL we are going to describe was organised against the lecture of Paul Cameron, known for his controversial statements about homosexuality. He had lectured previously at Opole University (2009), but his other lectures, e.g., in Warsaw and Szczecin (2010), had been cancelled after protests. He visited Poland again in October 2013 to give a series of lectures. On October 22 he held a lecture in the Polish Federation of Engineering Associations in Warsaw.

Just after the beginning of the lecture a group of six protesters started a



happening. They stood up, took out placards (“GAY IS OK. Fuck you Mr Cameron!”) and a rainbow flag, then moved to the centre of the small lecture room, in front of the lecturer, and some of them started kissing. The protesters dropped to their knees pretending to be in pain caused by homosexuality and asked to be healed by Cameron (“Help us Mr Cameron, we are totally sick and we want to be free!”). Members of the audience and organisers intervened: someone shouted (“Get out!”) and some of the protesters were dragged out. A few participants tried to discuss with the protesters, e.g. asking them to first listen before protesting, others asked them to “adjust/conform”, after which the protesters started chanting “Away with homophobia!”. Members of the audience asked them not to shout, because they were disrupting the lecture. The video recording shows a discussion between protesters and some of the participants about the allegedly impolite form of the protest and the content of the placards. Later there was a scramble, in which a door was allegedly damaged, the police was called and security guards together with the organisers kept the protesters in the building (not allowing them to leave) – a type of citizen's arrest.

### **Motivation behind the interventions**

What led us to our own intervention (IiLMSHE) was an opportunity to join the Global Week of Action “Reclaim your Education”, which had just started. Moreover, a new reform of Polish higher education had been announced. OKUPÉ organised a meeting, in which we discussed the reform and found some parts of it we were strongly against of. During the meeting, we found out that the Minister had just announced her arrival to Gdańsk the next day, as a part of public consultation. We decided to act and right after the meeting we started preparing banners and organising the intervention. There was no real discussion about which techniques to choose – the idea with banners has been quickly accepted by all the activists taking part.

During the second intervention, IiLMS, there were leaflets distributed, which explained that the action was taken as a response to cancelling a debate at the university in which leaders of several far-right organisations were supposed to meet. The leaflets were signed by NSA (a previously little-known organisation), which seemed to be associated with the National Movement (NM, an alliance of several far-right organisations), since NM published a statement of the protesters.

IiLMS was acclaimed by the organisers as a success, since it granted them access to the broader public, even if the media misrepresented their message, as the protesters stated on their Facebook page (NSA 20.02.2013). Interestingly, the organisers in their statement point to their source of tactics inspiration being hardbass, which – as they describe it – is a method involving dancing to a type of techno music in public spaces, used all over Europe to draw the society's attention to important issues, e.g. drug abuse (NSA 20.02.2013). Although NSA points to the European dimension of their choice, Miroslav Mareš, a Czech academic researching far-right movements, traces hardbass origins to the

Netherlands, and argues that Russian nationalists are the main inspiration source for the Central-Eastern European hardbass scene (Kenety 21.06.2011). This shows again that the transfer of knowledge and tactics may flow in surprising ways, even to the activists themselves. Such a rationale of NSA reveals that the action was aimed at a younger public, whose music interests it might appeal to. Nevertheless, “hardbass” was not deciphered in the media (as far as we can tell) and instead, it was mostly criticised as unexplainable barbaric behaviour, which even some of the supporters called dishonourable because of the masked faces (NSA 20.02.2013). NSA stated that they will continue to disrupt lectures at left-leaning universities:

Leftists and liberals have always tried to grab the public space, in a totalitarian manner, for themselves to disseminate their views. We state that, within framework of their promoted “equality”, as a student organisation, we will disrupt conferences at universities of leftist character, until there is real “equality” and patriotic groups will be included in debates at universities (NSA 19.02.2013).

NSA, similarly to LGBTQ activist, as we will show below, had to face its supporters' critique and their response concentrated on the affirmation of the direct action:

To the critics from the 'salon right'. Students in Warsaw, Radom and Gdańsk [Authors: places where IiLs took place] through their actions did more for the freedom of speech at universities than you with your babbling since 1989 (NSA 26.02.2013).

The action resulted also in support from the leadership of a right-wing group MW (Młodzież Wszechpolska/All-Polish Youth), Robert Winnicki, whose statement was published online:

I think that the fight with leftists, who are multiplying and ruling at universities, by using happening and humour is worth continuing. However, those who want to take it up, need to very carefully plan their actions, calculate the risk and possible manipulations, and, of course, they have to learn on their mistakes (Myśl24.pl 22.02.2013).

The third IiL described, the protest against Zygmunt Bauman, was another one organised by the far right. The rationale for the intervention was Bauman's participation in the military intelligence in his youth and being a committed communist at that time. In their statement, NOP wrote “We are protesting against inviting to a public university – that is, funded from our taxes – a person,

whose past in the communist terror apparatus should exclude him totally from the public life forever” (Gazeta.pl 18.06.2013). Apart from the communist rationale, the leaders of the protest were openly antisemitic (Harlukowicz 25.06.2013), and even though Bauman’s ethnic origin was not addressed in the protest, it might have played a role in the decision to organise it.

NOP is a far-right, openly nationalistic and homophobic political party with no seats in the parliament. It was founded in 1981 as a nationalist youth discussion circle, later it broadened its actions and became a nationalist movement, which evolved into a political party in 1992 (NOP 01.01.2011). It can be perceived as a type of social movement, due to its network of non-associated supporters and affinity groups, which involve for example football fans, who participated also in iLZB (NOP 24.06.2013).

Media attention resulted in a possibility to further describe the protest's rationale. In an interview, one of the participants, who was stopped by the police, stated that he would repeat his involvement in the iL because he felt that for Bauman it was “the smallest possible punishment” (Gazeta Obywatelska 12.07.2013). Also statements from the courtroom got out to a wider public through media, e.g. one defendant's statement that his involvement in iL was a civic duty (TVN 24 17.03.2014).

Finally, the intervention at Paul Cameron's lecture happened in order to protest against his anti-gay rhetoric. A participant of the protest in Warsaw, Krzysztof Marczewski, wrote in response to our questions that the protest was spontaneous, at least from his point of view, although there were people who brought some “rainbow gadgets” and printed the placards:

The protest was not organised, it was spontaneous. There were people from various groups and environments. [...] I went there to show to these people my objection against the ideology of hatred propagated by Cameron, and to protest against him spreading lies about homosexuals. I didn't expect that it would be possible to stop the lecture. But I wanted to stay there until the end in order to record and later describe Cameron's speech – unfortunately this was not possible, because everybody got a bit nervous (personal communication 31.10.2013, translated from Polish).

He also explained that he had been following Cameron's activity in Poland for a couple of years:

Once there was a success in cancelling his lecture at UKSW [Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw] after the case had been touted by the media. Unfortunately, later in Warsaw the organisers did not use lecture halls at public universities, but used the ones from private entities. I don't understand the consent to activities of this kind – after all, if Cameron propagated similar statements about any other minority group, he would face prosecution charges for

instigation to hatred and violence. Yet, he gets away with turning the society against homosexuals. (...) I went there because my heart told me to, I was motivated by frustration and the feeling of helplessness rather than hoping to achieve any measurable effect (personal communication 31.10.2013).

As we can read here, the IiL was the third choice of protest, when the first one (cancellation) did not work out. Contrary to other protesters, who wanted to protect universities from the ideologies they were against of, this participant wished that the organisers of the lecture had used halls at public universities, because then the lectures could have been cancelled. In such a case one would be able to appeal to the universities' role as public institutions, which belong to the society, while it was more difficult to cancel a lecture at a private property. The second choice of protest for the activist was recording the lecture and using it against the speaker, but this did not work out either, because the situation escalated.

Looking back at the typology of IiLs, based on the object of protest, and at the particular cases of IiLs analysed, we can see that one protest may target more than one of the objects described. Out of the four protests which we analysed – one was based on the figure of the lecturer (the past of the lecturer, IiLZB), another on the content of the lecture and the lecturer as well (lecturer as a person who tries to convince others that homosexuality is an illness, IiLPC), the third one on the political affiliation of the lecturer (seen as leftist and associated with gender studies, IiLMS) and the fourth one – the one conducted by OKUPÉ – against the form of the lecture instead of public consultation, against the content of the lecture (the new higher education reform), and also as a part of the Global Week of Action “Reclaim your Education”.

Still, it may be argued that the audience is the predominant object of protests at the lecture hall. It is especially the case when activists do not interrupt the process of lecturing but try to challenge the audience as if the lecturer's efforts in this regard were insufficient (as in IiLMSHE). In Masschelein's and Simon's terms such intervention would be based on the premise that the cardinal quality of a lecture should be profanation of the regular use of ideas. Some other protesters – even though they can share some tactics with those in favour of deep, transformative discussions among peers – may, on the contrary, base their actions on the premise that the process of lecturing is not immune enough and the audience might be vulnerable, that is, manipulated and misled (as might have been the case with IiLPC). Such vulnerability might occur because of the lecturer's baseless generalisations, inadequate research, being a secret lobbyist. In both cases, the protesters might think that the framing of the meeting eliminates salient questions.

### **Intervention techniques**

If we look again at our typologies of protest techniques within IiLs, we can gain additional insight into tactical decisions made by the organisers of the four IiLs.

The choice of protest techniques was clearly linked to the supporters' preferences. During IiLMS and IiLZB there was a strong representation of football fans among the protesters and it seem to have influenced the choice of techniques. Moreover, football fans were targeted as possible supporters of both movements. IiLZB was a mixture of two types of protest techniques mentioned in our typology, that is, an interruption by unravelling banners and by shouting – reminiscent, in style, to football stadium chants and banners. While in IiLMS protesters wanted to enter the lecture hall to conduct their performance in front of the audience (type: dancing or performing), they were not allowed to enter and had to perform outside. Nevertheless, the performance had its impact both on the lecturer and the audience. In this case, the type of dance used – hardbass – was clearly bonded with football fans and right-wing organisations in Central-Eastern Europe (Smolík and Vejvodová 2013).

IiLPC and IiLMSHE represent a type of protests where very small groups (4-6 persons) intervened. The former is an example of “protest performance” (i.e., activists pretending to be “dying of homosexuality”), but there were also flags and posters used. The latter intervention involved only unravelling banners as its protest technique. Although there was also an attempt to ask questions during the Q&A session by one activist holding the banner, who simply raised her hand following the typical academic etiquette, it was easily ignored.

In each case, the choice of a particular technique influenced the protest's reception – both by the media and by the audience. It had also some impact on the consequences for the protesters, as we will show below.

### **Media coverage**

The IiLMSHE was shown in the local media, there was an interview with the Minister, but the organisers have not heard of any wider coverage of their protest. They themselves published information about the intervention on their blog.

After the IiLMS, the video recording of the dance in masks, outside the lecture hall and featuring fights with the security went viral in the internet giving ground to heavy criticism of the protest to the extent that some right-wing leaders suspected that the whole protest was just a left-wing provocation.

The third protest (IiLZB) was shown in the mainstream media, for example at the website of “Gazeta Wyborcza”, where also the whole video of the lecture was published. Later the newspaper published opinions of seven public figures condemning the protest (Gazeta.pl 23.06.2013), as well as interviews with academics calling for excluding organised groups from universities (Wodecka 24.06.2013). Comments under these articles included heated debates (396 comments after the first article), where supporters of NOP fought with those who condemned the protest. A piece of an article from Wikipedia about Bauman's biography was quoted a number of times, but much of the argumentation on the side of the far-right activists focused on claiming that

communism was more deadly than fascism.

After the first intervention into Paul Cameron's lecture, Catholic media showed their outrage by referring to the protest as a crude attack of “LGBT/homosexual militant groups” (Ozdoba 23.10.2013, Gość.pl 23.10.2013). Other media, e.g. “Gazeta Wyborcza” (in its internet portal “Gazeta.pl”) referred to the incident stressing controversies around Cameron himself: “In the capital city lecture of a known homophobe, Cameron, was interrupted” (Gazeta.pl 24.10.2013).

Not surprisingly, those protests that were most controversial, brought most media attention. The controversiality meant here doing something against the culture of the particular place (dancing in masks at a university, that is, bringing what was called barbarianism to the place where knowledge and civilisation is valued) or against cultural norms (threatening violence against a respected and famous professor). Moreover, the recording of the interventions by protesters themselves or by the audience was crucial for gaining media attention.

### **Some consequences of the four interventions**

Obviously, after no more than a couple of months from the protests, we cannot speak about all the consequences of the protests we described, nor do we have methods to study them. We can, however, show some very immediate reactions to the interventions, which may suggest their consequences.

The IiLMSHE did not cause any consequences towards the protesters, and it is impossible to say if it changed the course of the reform in any way. The only consequence seems to be the feeling of a common goal that united the protesters and some of the audience, who saw the intervention and applauded it.

After the IiLMS, which has been shown in the mainstream media and the video of which went viral, the same day, the prime minister commented on the event. While referring to the film “Cabaret” he said that the happening cannot be dismissed as if “nothing has happened”, since such aggressive behaviour at the university seems to be a new trend, which needs to be objected. Prof. Środa gave a few interviews referring to the past communist regime, when socialist youth organisations were attacking informal lectures of the political opposition, which eventually led to closing the project of the “Flying University”.

After the IiLZB, the football club “Śląsk Wrocław”, whose symbols were on the banners, condemned the protest and said that there was no place for nationalism at their matches, which was a reaction to the claim that the fans of their club constituted a big part of the protesters. Other consequences of the protest included the mayor's reaction, who said that there was no place in Wrocław for “the nationalist rabble” (there were other cases when far-right groups attacked e.g. left-wing cafes or marched through the city, but the mayor had not reacted at that time), he gave additional funds to the police to fight nationalist crime, and decided to fund programmes promoting tolerance. Also the Minister of Science and Higher Education (the exact person whose speech we protested four years earlier) tweeted that she hoped courts and police would secure that universities

would again become places of academic debate and not unrest (Jałoszewski 24.06.2013) and later wrote a letter apologising to Bauman for the protest (Pezda 24.06.2013). 15 protesters were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace.

In the aftermath of IiLZB, NOP was able to conduct actions in order to mobilise new members and supporters, even using attacks on them and the media attention to their advantage. Firstly, after the intervention some participants were interrogated by the police and NOP's website gave tips on how to behave under such a situation and where to call for legal support, which showed how organized and prepared to support its members the movement was (NOP 22.06.2013). Moreover, the city president attacked NOP in the media (suggesting its banning from the public life), which gave NOP a chance to respond – their website informed that they would not be intimidated by such threats and they addressed “all Polish nationalists” to join NOP. This call was followed by links to informations about the history of the movement, registration forms for membership and to information on how to support them financially (NOP 24.06.2013a). The website reported also support from other conservative groups (NOP 24.06.2013) and presented the movement spokesman's statement: “I think that the whole action was conducted in a cultural manner.” (NOP 24.06.2013a). The trial of this IiL's participants was also used to show support for the movement, e.g. NOP's website informed that during the trial one of Solidarity movement participants was there to show his support (NOP 18.03.2014). There was also a fanpage created on Facebook, calling for a solidarity picket outside the court (NOP n.d.). The picket took place and possibly showed the defendants that “they are not alone”, as one NOP member stated (TVN 24 17.03.2014).

The protesters at the fourth IiL – IiLPC – were photographed by the police. They were accused of causing property damage and of insulting the lecturer, and, finally – fined. Marczewski, who was not a part of the group preparing slogans on placards or bringing the rainbow flag, but joined the protest, explained to us that reactions to the IiL were mixed in the LGBT community:

Well, I got some information from many people from the so called community that they were uplifted by this action in some way. But then I also heard a lot of criticism, that it [the IiL] is damaging, because it puts us in one row with neonazis from Bauman and Środa [’s lectures], shows us as aggressive and so on. And that it would be better to discuss with Cameron and his supporters in a factual way, using scientific arguments. But I think that it doesn't make sense, because these people are not interested in such a discussion and getting to know the arguments of the other side. (personal communication 31.10.2013)

The next day after IiLPC, Paul Cameron held a lecture at Opole University. During Question and Answer part of the lecture, Cameron referred to the incident that took place the previous evening. He stated that it was positive that

the protesters who interrupted the lecture were arrested (this was a civil arrest) unlike the protesters who had crashed the American Psychological Association (APA) meetings in the sixties. In his opinion, such treatment may prevent protesters from pressuring authorities into accepting their claims (he referred to crossing out homosexuality from the list of disorders by the APA). Instead, he compared protesters to children:

I am called, what... the leader of the homophobes [...] Guru of the homophobes. Consider this. They have not come with the champion who wants to discuss facts. I am substantiating. If they could defeat my facts they would come and they would say: You're wrong here and here and here. Instead, like little children, they call names: homophobe, homophobe. Phm... Children call names because they can't think. We're adults, we can and if they had the facts, they would bring the facts. All they have is name calling. (transcribed from video – inter.blog TV 23.10.2013)

Comparing these four interventions we can see that IiLMSHE brought fewest negative consequences to the protesters, probably because the lecture was not stopped and the protest was peaceful. IiLPC, on the other hand, where norms of the audience were transgressed and where vulgar words were used against the lecturer, brought not only fines to the protesters, but they also experienced physical violence and were verbally abused. Yet, only IiLMS and, especially, IiLZB engaged politicians, who promised a change in their politics – although contrary to what the protesters might have hoped for. The reason seems to be that these protests targeted people rather than issues (see our typology above) and they targeted well-known individuals. IiLZB targeted the guest of the president of the city, who came to the lecture by himself, and probably therefore, his reaction was strong.

## **Learning from interventions**

In order to look closer at IiL as a pedagogical method, we need to establish, who the learner is and who wants to put themselves in the educator's position. In the paper we wrote on learning in OKUPÉ, we proposed analysing lecture disruptions as a configuration of three actors – the speaking one (the lecturer), the listening one (the audience) and the (out)standing one, that is, the activists. Also artefacts, such as banners, played a role here, which we interpreted according to Latour's (2005) sociology of non-humans: "The unexpected presence of banners challenged the audience to negotiate the words they heard from the authorities with the words they saw from the activists." (Zielińska, Kowzan and Prusinowska 2011, 258). We suggested that the notion of "wychowanie" (in Latin: educare, in English: education/formation/upbringing), defined by Romana Miller, could be useful here.

But how does it look in the case of other, different IiLs?

First, let us look at the configuration of actors in these social performances.



Although in all the lectures analysed, there is the lecturer (the speaking subject), the audience (the listening subject) and the activists (the outstanding subject), it seems that another subject no less important is the media (the mediating subject) and the audience watching videos from protests or reading about them online or in newspapers, which we could call the watching subject. In the case of IiLMSHE, only some fragments of the protest were reported in the mainstream media and there was no video recording taken by the participants, so the clue of the event took place at the actual lecture hall. Contrariwise, in the other three cases it is not only the lecture where the protests happened, but it involved also:

- 1) preparation before the intervention – in the case of IiLZB and IiLMS, the organisers of the protest warned about it, so everybody could prepare for the event, also the watching public. It seemed nearly as an invitation for a spectacle.
- 2) media war – different media showed the protests differently, depending on their political affiliation. One could also see a growing role of post-production of the recordings.
- 3) mobilisation on internet fora – supporters of the protest not only encouraged the protest of IiLZB before it happened, but they also fought battles on arguments after the intervention.
- 4) discussions following the protests – since protests involved much controversy, many opinion articles followed, mostly written from the normative perspective of what the university or debate should or should not look like.

Although we do not know it for sure, it seems that it is the watching public who was the most important target of the three recent protests, rather than the audience present at the lecture. If we look at who the audience at the lecture was – then for IiLZB, IiLMS and IiLPC it consisted mostly of the lecturer's supporters, i.e., people who were interested in the lecture's topic or who had interests in sustaining the event. This was contrary to the attitudes of students coming to regular university lectures, which seem to be more diverse or accidental.

This is especially evident when we look at the audience's reaction to the protest, which involved in all three cases clapping to the lecturer's words, sometimes clapping to the police (IiLZB) and aggressive attitude towards the protesters (IiLPC). If it had not been for the media and the watching public, the intervention would only be a way to show the lecturer and his/her supporters, that s/he is not welcome in the city/university and that one is against his/her ideas or past or present memberships. Adding media to the scene allows also for another rationale for the protest – to show the public that such lectures are organised (while they should not be) and bringing the public's attention to the issue. In the case of IiLMSHE this was not needed, as the audience was diverse and it was enough for the protesters to convince the listeners, as well as to show

the lecturer dissent to the planned reforms.

But can we say that all the protesters were intervening in “the dialectic relation between a human being and the world” (Miller 1981, 122)? In order to answer this question, we need to find what the “world” means in the context of the lecture. On the one hand, the lecture hall is a sort of isolated lab for creating new ideas and since they do not necessarily need to be useful, the lecture hall can be perceived as a “world” in itself (“world” meaning here a system of created things and a sphere of human activity). In this small world people have some expectations about certain roles of individual human beings in that place, but still, during the lecture they can establish new relations between each other and the matter of their concern. On the other hand, an intervention usually ruins the relative isolation of the lecture hall. The place turns into a theatre and the play – if recorded – will be viewed and commented long after the actual event. Thus, the very act of intervention brings back the suspended relationship between individual actors and the outside world. Moreover, because of external viewers, every aspect of the event can be assessed from the perspective of benefits for the development of the society.

The IiL, thus, changes the way lectures are seen – they become a part of a broader political struggle. The IiL changes also the audience from being mere listeners to becoming actors – they may support the lecturer with their voices and actions (clapping, fighting with protesters), or may support the protesters. They also take a role of reporters and record the event. Thus, their dialectic relation with the lecture and the world changes – they are both changed by the actions of others (they get to know something about the object of the protest, find out that it is controversial, make their opinion about the protest and the actions of the protesters, the lecturer, the authorities and other members of the audience), but also they become active participants in the lecture, who may change the course of action, as in the case of IiLPC.

Still, this type of intervention into the relation between humans and the world may not be what protesters had hoped for. Those who intervened in the four lectures described did not do it in order to activate the audience, and probably hoped that the audience would stay passive or support their protest. They might have thought that they would be able to teach the audience something and change their opinion. Instead, they found that the audience supported the lecturer, since they had come to see her/him. It is difficult to force the audience to support the protest, especially when the intervention seems violent.

Adult learning theorists, such as Stephen Brookfield claim that adults learn most effectively when they want to learn and are motivated to do it (1986). This could suggest that the audience who do not want to learn what the movements want to teach them will not do it. They will resist learning the content prepared by the movement (e.g. the critics of Zygmunt Bauman), but may learn something contrary – for instance, that right-wing movements are too strong in Poland and need to be stopped. Yet, Brookfield claims that real transformational learning cannot happen through self-directed learning and comes only if imposed on the learner – e.g., learning through life-crises or traumatic experiences. This way,

even if the events themselves were appalling to the audience, they may have forced them to reconsider their positions. Finding out if they actually did so, would however need a different methodology, as we were not able to conclude it from seeing the protests or reading comments to articles about them.

### **The IiLs' effectiveness**

If it is, however, so difficult to find out what people would learn from the intervention, is this method worth using? Why are IiLs chosen over other tactics, especially when the public might be concerned with the use of violent or disruptive methods? Many studies show the efficacy of disruption or even strongly support such tactics (Larson 2013). The main arguments for this are:

- ◆ low costs of intervention – as in all described IiLs, a relatively small number of protesters were involved and financial costs were much lower than needed for a bigger campaign (fewer posters, leaflets, flags and other props);
- ◆ big publicity – even the smallest intervention (IiLPC) received a fair share of publicity also in mainstream media.

These advantages are especially important for small social movements and protest groups or for expanding movements which want to mobilise new members. The same may concern movements or protest groups that have problems mobilising their supporters and inactive members for large scale actions. On the other hand, IiLs also have a few risks. Disadvantages include:

- ◆ The costs might actually be substantial. The IiLPC is an example of such a situation. It was organised without support from a broader social movement (although the protesters were members of the LGBT activist community) and, therefore, the financial cost were borne by the protesters, as each of them received a fine (300 PLN).
- ◆ Negative response of the activist and supporters' community – some perceive disruptive methods as unsuitable or unacceptable and may criticise the tactic choice. However, this disadvantage did not seem to affect IiLZB and IiLMS protesters as much as IiLPC ones (possibly because of differences in both movements in their willingness to be associated with force and violence).
- ◆ Losing possible new members and supporters if they do not accept violent or disruptive methods of protest.
- ◆ Larson (2013), after Titarenko et al., lists other possible risks of disruptive methods including injuries and arrest, which also require high levels of commitment.

As we have shown, the four interventions had various consequences – from personal ones (fines for protesters, detention in police custody) to those involving the audience and the public. We have argued that the learning of the audience may not, however, be the same, as the protesters had assumed. Consequences for the lecturer are also that the public learns more about them, not only by hearing about them in the media, but also by looking more closely into their biography or watching their lectures online, as we did. Moreover, organisers of future lectures may change their willingness to invite them again. Other consequences were related to increasing police order and control, e.g. controlling who enters the lecture hall or giving more money to police in order to fight the nationalist movement.

If we recall the difference we described between activists who demand less immune lectures and those who demand more immune ones, then this difference is often blurred, because the actual results of a protest can be mistaken for its demands – e.g. if the activists demand a “real discussion” on the issue and that the lecturer actually listens to the discussants and takes conflicting ideas into consideration – it can result in resigning from the lecture form and organising rigidly structured panels with people with radically different ideas. This is because the “profanation” of rigid knowledge is difficult to preordain, so the only answer that can be expected from authorities is always changing the police order, which means further immunisation.

Looking at the effects of different protest techniques, we can say that IiLMSHE was treated as a serious and acceptable protest (the academic audience clapped), since it did not stop the flow of the lecture and it did not really transgress the culture of the academia, or the cultural norms of the audience. Still, it was not very controversial, so the media coverage was little. In the three other interventions the lecture could not continue because of the shouting, the protests were considered aggressive (using vulgar language at IiLPC or threat of violence at IiLZB) and they transgressed the norms of the audience. Protesters at IiLMS and IiLZB were criticised as barbarian and unacceptable, while protesters at IiLPC were considered to be aggressive and indecent (kissing publicly).

Thus, the audience turned against the protesters, even to the extent that the audience became violent (IiLPC). The high resistance from the audience indicates that they had not learned what the protesters wanted to teach them, so the pedagogical value of the protest was low in terms of educating the audience. On the other hand, the protests were controversial and, therefore, gained a lot of media attention, so there was more chance to educate the watching subjects, the public, about the issues that protesters found important, even to the extent that debates were organised in order to discuss the condition of the university – who should or should not be given voice there, and in which way.

It is interesting in this context to see that protesters rarely identified themselves with the exact institution in which the lecture took place. Apart from IiLMSHE, they did not identify themselves as students of the exact university. Still, the protesters started a debate about limits that should or should not be set at universities. Such discussions were mostly normative – many people wanted to

comment and say what they feel about the role of the university and about what and who should be excluded from lectures. One of these debates showed that something has been learnt, and it influenced the shape of IiL as a tactic. During the debate which was a response to the IiLMS, representatives of far-right organisations behaved in a more toned down manner (sitting at the lecture hall, clapping and showing marks on pieces of paper) (CIA 09.03.2013).

Finally, if we were to speculate about the future use of IiLs in Poland, then the contemporary increase in numbers and publicity of IiLs may suggest ignoring the official channels of communication and action. As long as interventions in lectures are seen by protesters as rewarding in any sense, there is little chance that the protesters will enter regular forms of communication (such as taking part in discussions during lectures) – as the analysis of heckling shows – “no matter what accommodations are made or attention given to the issues raised” (Nandi 1980, 18). If the main aim of protesters is reaching out to existing and prospective members or simply becoming more visible in preparation for intensive political activity requiring broader mobilisation, then we can expect IiLs popularity. Leftist movements in Poland may, however, resign from the method that has been associated with nationalism, unless they try to change its image.

## **Epilogue**

In November 2013, after we submitted this article, a visit of Zygmunt Bauman was announced at our university. Actually, there were two lectures on one day – in the morning and in the afternoon – which made us expect the right-wing's protest. We were tempted to transform the results of our analyses into meaningful practice, which could save us from being put into a position of passive audience. We discussed this online with other former OKUPÉ activists and decided to be active during the IiLs and shout back, although there was no unanimity as to what should be shouted. In the end, when Bauman was presented in the lecture hall, and several men stood up with anti-communist banners, shouting anti-communist aggressive slogans, activists from the University of Gdańsk stood up as well, and shouted “Fascists go home!” as a response. The slogan had been rather spontaneous, copied from other left-wing protests.

This clearly confused the protesters, but after a short moment of hesitation, they continued shouting. Then, they were ridiculed by the meeting's moderator, which stopped the shouting for some time. The men were, however, still shouting some remarks about Bauman's past from time to time, until they left the hall in the middle of the lecture. Their intervention caused strong emotions among the audience. One of us stood outside the lecture hall and observed those who were leaving. Some were clearly very disturbed, such as one woman who told us she was not able to stay until the end of the lecture, as her hands were shaking, she was all jittery and in shock. Later, we heard from other members of the audience, mostly women, that they, too, were very disturbed and unable to

understand what had happened in front of them. They had deep respect for the lecturer and were shocked by the protest. At the same time, some students leaving the lecture hall expressed their bewilderment in a less emotional way, saying “What a show!”, in line with the analyses of heckling as a performance (Nandi 1980).

The analysis we had made helped us reflect on the IiLs and choose the way to act during such events. It brought our attention to the active role that the audience can play, rather than being a passive object of activists’ and lecturer’s pedagogical actions. We had not, however, included in our analysis the role of a moderator, as it had not come out as important in the four cases we had described. After the IiL in November 2013, we think, however, that this role should be looked closer into in future analyses of this method.

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## **Popular Education methodology, activist academics and emergent social movements: Agents for Environmental Justice**

**Eurig Scandrett**

University-based activists constantly find themselves at an interface between the institution that employs them and the social movements to which they are committed. The university is itself a site of struggle and contestation over pedagogy, curriculum, academic freedom, intellectual property, labour processes and political economy. In recent decades these processes have been subjected to the demands of capital in new and intensified ways. Universities throughout the world have faced outright privatisation or various forms of commodification, individualisation, labour discipline, managerialism and curriculum controls. Within these constraints however, academics still enjoy a degree of autonomy for political action not experienced in many other forms of public sector employment. For social movement activists employed in the sector, this brings opportunities (but also considerable risks, that the social movements themselves become embroiled in contestations that can serve to weaken their engagement in political struggle). Moreover, academics also have the opportunity to be critically self-reflective in public on their endeavours, through publication and conferences. The contested role of activist academics within – or outwith – the university is certainly not new and remains a perennial discussion, constantly responding to changing contexts, especially as universities mediate a neoliberal political economy in diverse cultural and policy contexts (see, for example Cresswell, Karimova and Brock 2013). This paper is a short and critical reflection on the author's engagement with attempts to use pedagogical skills and curricular resources for the benefit of social movements by drawing on popular education methodologies in education and research outwith and within a university in Scotland.

It seems to be the experience of many emergent social movements in the post-industrial capitalist world that locally experienced oppressions periodically erupt into specific campaigns but largely remain fragmented and the potential for these to connect into social movement projects is often not realised. In the terminology of social movement process used by Nilsen and Cox (2013), local rationalities develop into militant particularism and occasionally a campaign, but the development of building a social movement project remains frustrated. The term 'emergent' is used, not to imply any inevitability in the progression of this process, but rather to emphasise that options, opportunities and strategic discernment is distinctive when struggles are distributed amongst fragmented local or particular conflicts whose interconnections and commonalities are not fully realised. The step from local conflict to movement building is partially organisational but significantly also pedagogical, since it involves a development of critical consciousness through praxis of the limitations of the campaign within existing hegemonic arrangements. The question posed here is whether

activists located in higher education (and, to some extent professional NGOs) can play a role in supporting this social movement process through their pedagogical practice.

Agents for Environmental Justice was an initiative of Friends of the Earth Scotland, an environmental NGO and part of a confederation with a strong activist base in many countries (Doherty and Doyle 2014), in collaboration with Queen Margaret University, a small Higher Education institution in Edinburgh. Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) had taken advantage of new opportunities for democratic interventions opened up by the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, to pursue a campaign for environmental justice whilst at the same time working on a popular education project with communities directly affected by environmental pollution, degradation and neglect, poverty, discrimination and exclusion. For several years, FoES had been providing training and *ad hoc* advice to largely working class, poor and geographically isolated communities fighting against damaging developments and pollution incidents, and was exploring how this could be offered in a more sustained and systematic way. Communities facing a range of social oppressions are disproportionately also affected by pollution and are often denied access to the physical and cultural resources required to oppose it. Effective environmental justice movements have emerged where affected communities have linked together and mobilised around a common cause (see for example Bullard 2005). With the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, the opportunity arose to influence policy being developed by political elites, while at the same time contribute to the emergent social movement comprising community action campaigns against local environmental pollution.

The methodology of popular education provided the pedagogical response to the issues and learning needs of the communities, enhancing their capacity to tackle environmental injustices. It is argued that popular education should be regarded as a methodology which cannot be reduced to particular pedagogical methods. As Kane (2001) points out, popular education methods such as participatory, group-based and active learning approaches, if detached from their methodological roots in an analysis of relations of oppression, can be used by reactionary groups in support of colonial and neoliberal projects. Derived from the innovations of Paulo Freire (1972) the methodology of popular education moreover takes an explicitly political position in favour of popular movements and the interests of popular struggle. In practice this involves education that is led by, or stands alongside, the oppressed, the poor and the exploited. Through popular education methodology, the collective interests of the exploited engage in dialogue with those who have access to the knowledge that may be useful for popular liberation, but which has been denied to, or distorted against, the oppressed.

A widely used definition of popular education is that it is “popular, as distinct from merely populist, in the sense that it is:

- rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people
- overtly political and critical of the status quo
- committed to progressive social and political change.

The process of popular education has the following general characteristics:

- its curriculum comes out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle
- its pedagogy is collective, focused primarily on group as distinct from individual learning and development
- it attempts, wherever possible, to forge a direct link between education and social action” (Crowther, Galloway and Martin 2005:1).

For FoES and the community environmental justice campaigners, popular education was thus able to start from the skills and experience that local activists had already gained through self-directed learning, whilst also contributing skills and knowledge to strengthen this capacity collectively within the community and indeed between community campaigns. The methodology was also able to connect the necessity to react to polluting incidents with the importance of taking action to improve conditions globally for the long term: what Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2003) have called ‘just sustainability’.

The ‘Agents for Environmental Justice’ project also drew on the tradition of ‘community agents’ in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in the global South, as well as in rural Scotland. Such agents are local activists usually supported by development agencies or NGOs to mobilise for community development and action in their own localities. Community agents are not necessarily in support of popular movements but the model can be applied to this context. Here, individual activists from communities engaged in struggle were selected for intensive education with a view to enhancing their capacity to analyse their adversaries and mobilise against them. As Freire has noted, the motivation for participation is rooted in struggle: “For what and for whom do I study? And against what and against whom? . . . It is not by resignation but by the capacity for indignation in the face of injustice that we are affirmed (2001:73-74)”.

By adopting a self-consciously popular education methodology, academic and other sources of knowledge was assessed in terms of its relevance to the struggles of communities involved in promoting environmental justice. Whilst academics and FoES professionals brought their specialist knowledge to this assessment process, so community activists (agents) brought with them a selection from another body of knowledge, derived from the experience of living in a community with environmental pollution and being involved in a struggle against those who are responsible. Teaching staff from FoES and the university worked with the agents to generate a dialogue between their experiential

knowledge and the prepared curriculum in the educational process, thereby ensuring that learning was relevant to social action. In this process the main objective was that the community's reality was changed by the social action leading to an improved environment for the community. Change also took place within FoES in as much as the interests and struggles of local communities were incorporated into its campaign priorities, its understanding of environmental justice and ultimately contributed to the body of knowledge of environmentalism (Scandrett 2007). The potential was also present for the academic institution to be changed through the experience of being accountable to popular struggle through popular education dialogue.

This provided a certain challenge to the processes of quality control within the university, which was required for the accreditation of the education to the level of Higher Education Certificate – the equivalent of first year of undergraduate study at a Scottish university, recognised internationally for direct entry to the second year of appropriate Higher Education degree courses. Academic quality control in Scotland is assessed on the basis of academic rigour but also centrally imposed criteria of 'graduate attributes', which reflect government policies and professional interests.

Whilst the educational demand was driven by communities fighting environmental injustice, mediated by FoES activists and supported by committed academics, some slippage was perhaps inevitable in the negotiations with the standardisation processes seeking to impose a model of education which is linear, canonical and instrumental to the purposes of a Scottish political economy which has been described as 'neoliberalism meets social democracy' (Scott and Mooney 2009). This included retaining a degree of individualisation which undermined aspects of the collectivity of popular education - Freire warned that "one of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for individual success" (1972:149). However, during the programme, the students themselves spontaneously organised collectively and insisted on the temporary exclusion of educators in order to develop a set of demands. These demands, ranging from the food and accommodation to the curriculum and assessment, formed the basis of negotiations with educators until an acceptable resolution was achieved. Such spontaneous mobilisation of students (or 'invented participation') could not have been prepared for, and challenged the 'Student-Staff Consultative Committee' model of ('invited') student participation sanctioned by the university.

The communities in which two of the agents were active were later included in a study of how activists learn through participating in the movement, especially the role played by information and communication technologies (Crowther et al., 2009). Our research suggests that much of the learning by those in leadership positions in the campaigns (as our agents were), took place through their activism, but in a rather haphazard form. These activists reported the importance of accessing particular kinds of knowledge at certain times, the value of access to academics, environmental campaigners, trades unionists or a

variety of professionals, identifying sources of information on the internet and the conjuncture of particular circumstances in which connections are made and insights emerge. Within this range of learning situations, the academic environmental justice course featured little. However, the processes of organisation, selection and critique which were obtained on the course did feature in the haphazard learning.

Scandrett, Crowther and McGregor (2012) have referred to popular education methodology in the absence of structured pedagogical methods, where a dialogue occurs between groups experiencing and resisting oppression, and specialist and academic knowledge. Academic knowledge is not intrinsically either elite or critical but becomes one or the other on the basis of engagement in dialogue with organised resistance to oppression. Employing the distinction between popular education methodology and method provides a useful analytical critique to the incorporation of pedagogies derived from popular education within the mainstream curriculum or processes of domestication. Popular education pedagogical methods can provide structures for facilitating the process of dialogue between knowledges of the academy and of popular struggle when based on popular education methodology. But so also can other social processes that are based on popular education methodology, such as organising protests, discerning strategies and allies, resolving intra-movement conflicts, negotiating relationships with NGOs and other actors ('discursive encounters', Baviskar 2005) even applying for funding. The application of more structured popular education methods during some parts of the social movement process can facilitate critical learning processes well beyond this application.

The research into the agents for environmental justice project raised some interesting contradictions. At the end of each presentation of the course, an external researcher conducted independent evaluation of the student/agents' experiences. Students generally reported that they had found the structured educational component useful and positive, albeit with helpful criticisms and suggestions. However, later research suggests that when asked about their learning experience in the movement, the course was of less value than the unsystematic support given by sympathetic intellectuals at particularly crucial times. These insights can be compared with the findings of Johnston (2005) who, investigating the political activities of academics involved in popular education, discovered that where these academics are active in social movements or protest groups it is seldom as educators. They are asked to conduct literature searches, interpret others' data, access and digest policy documents, write briefing papers etc, but seldom provide explicit education. Protest groups do make use of the expertise of sympathetic academics but not necessarily on the academics' terms.

This is not to dismiss the possibility of popular education in the university, but to contextualise it. The point of popular education is that those engaged in struggles against oppression set the terms of their own learning, but popular education is more than supporting haphazard learning. There were certainly

occasions during the environmental justice course in which the content of the curriculum was resisted as irrelevant by students at the point of delivery and then valued retrospectively later. For example, one of the students' 'demands' resulting from their mobilisation was to reject some curricular content which involved a critical analysis of the economics of environmental externalities, which students found difficult and irrelevant to their immediate struggles. During negotiations, educators insisted on the importance of this analysis as a means of interpreting the common origins of diverse and apparently unconnected environmental justice struggles. This negotiation was itself educative and at the end of the course, one of the graduates noted his appreciation of this episode and the insistence of the educators to retain this content. Popular education methodology involves a dialogue between academic knowledge and engagement in struggle which, for the academic activist requires a sustained commitment. This may come in the application of structured popular education methods but may also come in other ways. At the same time academics who sustain a commitment to movements of struggle may be required to serve different functions whilst others – campaigners, trades unionists, other movement activists - with more relevant knowledge, may be recruited as 'teachers'.

As political opportunities changed, Friends of the Earth Scotland directed its attention away from pollution impacted communities, and the policy environment of the University constrained further work of this kind on environmental justice. There have been some important developments of campaign building amongst key sectors focusing on incinerators, open cast coal, land use planning and, more recently, unconventional gas extraction (including fracking). However the environmental justice movement in Scotland remains fragmented and emergent. Arguably, for the decade in which FoES and QMU collaborated to work with communities impacted by environmental injustices, academic activists, along with the environmental NGO, played a key role in supporting the building of the movement through the use of popular education methods but also the application of popular education methodology.

Within the university, the collaboration with FoES was used as a model to develop new curricula with other social movement organisations, with mixed success. A successful course involved collaboration with Scottish Women's Aid, the national campaigning organisation reflecting the movement of local women's aid groups that provide services for women escaping domestic abuse. The course *Gender Justice, Masculinities and Violence* has been offered successfully for seven years to a mixture of honours year university-based students of Psychology and Sociology along with practitioners, professionals and activists in campaigning and service providing organisations related to gender justice and gender-based violence. The course curriculum derives from the experience of the feminist movement and thereby aims to synthesise practice and theory through a pedagogy delivered by educators from SWA and QMU (Orr, Scandrett and Whiting 2013). Whilst this course has undoubtedly provided an educational resource of value to the women's movement, it has done so at a point where the movement itself is mature and relatively successful



in its strategy of incorporation into established institutions of state, quite a different place in the 'war of position' from the emergent environmental justice movement. In this case, the role of pedagogy will inevitably be different and has tended to include testing the limitations of this 'incorporation' strategy and discerning new opportunities for hegemonic change.

Collaborations with other social movements have include those that are emergent, for example *Mad People's History and Identity*, jointly with CAPS advocacy group of mental health service users, and *Critical Race Dialogues* with a range of anti-racist activists. However, attempts to combine such courses into an undergraduate or postgraduate programme which might use popular education to build alliances across diverse movements have not succeeded. Courses whose objectives include movement building and activist resourcing are ultimately treated by the institution in market terms, as a source of income directly or as a distinctive 'brand' to promote the university in the competitive marketplace. Unsurprisingly, courses have been successful where they can attract external funding or fees, and collaborations with social movement organisations are regarded as little more than a 'business model' which carries a high level of risk. Activist-academics often reproduce this discourse in order to justify their participation in this work. However, the experience of the environmental justice course demonstrates that within the marketised institution it is possible for university-based activists to respond to emergent social movements with a pedagogy that can contribute to a social movement process.

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## **“A Masters for activists”: learning from each other’s struggles:**

**Laurence Cox**

### **Abstract**

*This teaching note discusses the MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism at the National University of Ireland Maynooth. This is a practitioner course in social movement practice, now in its fourth year of operation. The note explains the MA’s origins, discusses how it works in practice and explores some unresolved challenges. It concludes with some reflections on the role of such educational projects in relation to movements.*

**Keywords:** social movements, radical pedagogy, adult education, popular education, Ireland

### **A tractor, an arrest, a recording<sup>1</sup>**

On March 31st 2011, a woman was occupying a tractor on a remote road in the Erris peninsula, NW Ireland while another was filming from the grass verge. This was nothing unusual: the activities of Shell, operator on a controversial gas pipeline project, are routinely disrupted and blockaded by local residents and solidarity activists. Police asked the woman on the tractor to get down; after she had done so and they had walked some distance down the road the police arrested them. The camera was taken by a police officer who left in another police car.

Later that day, the women were released without charge and their property was returned to them, including the camera which one, Jerrie Ann Sullivan, was also using in fieldwork for her dissertation on the MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism (CEESA) at the National University of Ireland Maynooth. The camera had been in use when it was seized and the police had failed to switch it off, thus recording the conversations between police as they joked about raping and deporting protestors.

Intense discussions followed that weekend among campaigners who had heard the recordings. Aggression and violence, as well as sexually aggressive comments, were widespread in the policing of the protests, and had been the subject of formal complaint in the past to no avail. That Monday, Jerrie Ann and a friend who was also taking the course asked to take one of their classes to share what had happened with their colleagues and ask them for advice. The group was shocked at the conversation and supportive of the campaign, but also

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Jerrie Ann Sullivan for her comments and corrections on an earlier version of this article. Any mistakes or misrepresentations are entirely my own responsibility.

stressed to Jerrie Ann that she should not feel under any obligation to put herself through the media circus that was bound to ensue.

### **Trying to shift the blame**

Jerrie Ann decided that she did want to make the recording public, and the Shell to Sea campaign posted the relevant section on Indymedia and elsewhere, with a transcript<sup>2</sup>. The recording went viral, tapping into widespread experiences of police behaviour around vulnerable groups but also shocking women's groups who had hitherto been silent on the issue and had been proud of their record in delivering training to the police around issues of rape and domestic violence.

The state, naturally enough, attempted to reframe the issue. An inquiry was launched "in the public interest", while the address Jerrie Ann had provided to police was leaked to tabloid journalists. The police ombudsman, GSOC, soon turned its attention to Jerrie Ann and her university lecturers, demanding the camera. Campaigners had virtually no confidence in GSOC by this point, as more than 100 complaints about the policing of the protests in the two years following its establishment had failed to lead to any repercussions either for individual police officers or to any review of policing practices. Even more importantly, the camera also included confidential interview data – a discussion with activists about the campaign.

At this point threats of legal action and criminal proceedings descended on Jerrie Ann and her supervisors on the MA, together with pressure from a university manager to hand over the camera. Jerrie Ann and her supervisors noted that both university and sociological codes of conduct, as well as explicit written arrangements with research participants, meant that the confidentiality of her research data had to be paramount. GSOC refused all offers to have this data deleted by a mutually acceptable third party and continued to pursue a strategy of threats; in the end the data was deleted in the presence of a number of academics and the recording of the police handed over. Following an interim report from GSOC which was severely criticised for its misleading nature (Shell to Sea 2012), GSOC eventually backed down and threats of legal action were withdrawn.

Jerrie Ann completed her thesis despite these attacks and has continued to be involved in campaigning against the pipeline. Her work shares the learning of community members and solidarity campaigners against the gas pipeline with similar rural communities now facing the threat of fracking in Ireland. This kind of engaged research fits within the broader perspective of the CEESA MA: to use radical education and research methods to support activists in developing their own practice. The complexities and conflicts involved in the story of the "Rosspoint recording", meanwhile, highlight the difficulties in keeping such

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/99445>

research within neat boxes: the challenge to power does not always come where we expect it to.

### **Creating a space for radical education**

The MA had a long prehistory. An activist researcher in the Sociology department had prepared a proposal for a movement-oriented BA in Environment and Community in the late 1990s at another institution, which had never been used. Lecturers in Adult and Community Education (ACE) had been considering options for an MA for their graduates which would be broader than a strict vocational qualification. In the mid-2000s both departments found themselves needing more Masters courses, and interested staff from both departments came together to explore the possibility for a course oriented towards social movements and social change. In a series of meetings people involved came up with a lot of innovative ideas and processes that helped to give the course a coherent shape.

The initial team shared a commitment to the fundamental importance of movement knowledge and to radical / popular education processes. With backgrounds in the alliance-building experiences of working-class community activism and the anti-capitalist “movement of movements”, individual participants also had strong starting links with feminism, ecology movements, a range of left traditions and international solidarity. A core goal was to carry out joint activities and develop longer-term relationships with movement projects that would benefit both.

Over the two years that it took to connect a team of people interested in making the project work and to build support for it at various levels, various principles became clear. The course would be a practitioner course, not a purely academic one; but it would be at Masters level in practitioner terms – not providing an ABC of activism to newcomers but rather working with people who already had practical experience in the area and wanted to take time out for reflection and development (a personal statement and interview are key elements in the application process.)

### **Out of the box**

In the context of the emerging financial crisis – and the collapse of “partnership” (funding and policy access) between the Irish state and social movement groups – the course would aim not to provide training to enable graduates to be *employed* as providers of the narrowly-technical skills involved in working with elites (media, legal, funding, policy work etc.) for the kind of funded organisations which were dying off all around. Instead it would acknowledge this situation clearly and help people to think strategically about the new situation – supporting people to create organisations and develop movements in a radically-changed environment.

Furthermore – and almost uniquely – it would not replicate the existing fragmentation of the social movement landscape, with courses focussing on women’s studies, environmental advocacy, labour organising, peace studies, development work and the like. In many ways, the ever-narrower channelling of organising traditions and models of social change within individual movements is a product of isolation from one another, and of movements captured not only by organisational elites but also by the government departments, EU funding streams and other institutional frameworks which shape the movements.

“Learning from each other’s struggles” – the unofficial motto of the course – is all about *not* taking it as read that the existing history of a specific movement, in an individual country, as it is now understood by organisational elites, is necessarily a good guide to what that movement could or should be doing. In many ways, too, alliance-building is weakened by forms of training which repeat uncritical origin myths about why one movement should be hostile to another. In the year in which participants spend in a small-group setting together, they come to have a much clearer understanding of each other’s needs and experiences, movement cultures and ways of talking – the building-blocks for alliances that go beyond existing comfort zones.

The course’s slightly awkward title reflects a combination of the two departments’ particular strengths in popular education and social movements and the shared value of equality – as well, of course, as an understanding that equality cannot be reached without the collective action of the exploited, oppressed and marginalised, and that a bottom-up approach which connects theory and practice represents the only way to achieve this after the collapse of top-down models of change.

Paradoxically, the title also expresses the politics of neoliberalism: it was proposed as *Community Education, Equality and Praxis*, but the university committee struck out “praxis” as incomprehensible to likely participants and in effect commented “if you are teaching people about activism, just say so”. Where an earlier kind of university would have stifled at least public expression of what such a course was about, the neoliberal approach is to view activists as just another niche market: if staff know what they need and how to reach them, the thinking runs, let them at it.

### **Activist pedagogy in practice**

Perhaps the single most important element of the course’s pedagogy is the small-group encounter between activists from different generations, movements, political traditions, class and ethnic backgrounds. The deep learning provoked by this, the close work with the small number of staff (all themselves practitioners in social movements and / or community education) and the wide range of other practitioners encountered as visiting speakers, on fieldtrips, at course events and in the activism which regularly bursts into the not-very-sealed classroom environment seem to have a range of effects.

The diversity of the group is striking: already in its second year recruitment had gone far beyond staff members' existing networks and movement connections. Participants to date have come from movements as distant as Tahrir Square and Mississippi popular education, refugees from dictatorship and women's refuge workers, anti-austerity and anti-war campaigns, disability rights and GLBTQ activism, development work and trade unions, community organising and popular education, feminist and environmental struggles, international solidarity and migrants' self-organising.

While participants come to have a much better sense of the other people they will need to build alliances with for long-lasting structural change for equality, they also come to have a clearer sense of themselves and their own political socialisation, giving them a chance to reflect on this outside of the stress of routine organising – whether they come to an easier identification with a pre-existing position or rethink their place in movements. Even more importantly perhaps, for those who are not already long-term activists, is a sense of being able to take themselves seriously as movement and community practitioners for the long haul; that this can be a perfectly viable way to be in the world (whether or not it is also a source of income) and one which can earn the respect of one's peers and elders.

As might be expected, the course uses a wide range of pedagogical tools, both to cater for the diversity in culture and educational backgrounds and to equip participants with a greater sense of flexibility in their own practice. The general orientation is naturally towards participatory and democratic classroom practice, and comparable assessment methods, although more traditional techniques are also used when necessary.

At the core of the curriculum is the practitioner thesis – a substantial piece of work ideally designed to support the development of one's own movement or pedagogical practice and presented in a format meaningful to other practitioners in the field (if necessary, this format may be “sandwiched” between more conventional academic elements). An archive of these theses is being developed to support the wider dissemination of this learning.

The core classroom element is the “community of praxis” module which is designed to allow the learners to present their own practice to one another and express their own needs and struggles as practitioners on the course. Along with this come modules in equality and social justice; power and politics; radical education; and feminist theory and practice – which started out as optional but became a core element because of its transformative effect on many participants. A range of options running from macro-sociology (market, state and social movements) via critical media and environmental justice to participatory action research complete the for-credit material, which is supplemented by workshops, fieldtrips, visiting speakers, events organised by students, engagement in the wider movement scene and meditation for personal sustainability.

## **Challenges: does education make a difference?**

The course is now concluding its fourth year, in the course of which some 60 activists and community educators have taken part. It has also contributed to the development of a wider community of engaged social movements research linking the university with movements and communities outside, hosting a wide range of workshops and public events with participants ranging from autonomist theorist John Holloway to media activist Firoze Manji and from lifelong campaigner Selma James to popular educator Eurig Scandrett. Good relationships have been built with a number of key movement organisations and individuals, giving the course a grounding and recognition within a much wider community of practice in Ireland and beyond.

Participatory action research is in process to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the course; at present it seems fair to say that the course is more effective at supporting individuals in articulating their own positions, deepening their commitment and learning how to act more strategically than it is in making alliances, although there are some loose networks developing.

Students say that they greatly value the opportunity to learn through discussion with peers, the experience of a more democratic and egalitarian classroom environment and the widening of their intellectual and practitioner horizons. The practice of engaging in real reflection and discussion on self, power and praxis within such a diverse group is clearly an effective one – for staff as well as students.

It also seems perhaps most valuable for those who are embedded within a clearly-defined movement or community but still open to learning. Students who have not previously engaged with movements and have not sought this engagement have not always moved as far as might be hoped. Conversely, those who are already tightly-linked to a specific political party or movement organisation have often been resistant to the course's critical and questioning components and have sought to turn the classroom into a space to defend their organisations.

However those who are clear that they are committed to the struggle for equality and social transformation but are still open to debates and reflection on strategy, method, goals and group dynamics seem to be able to use the course to develop these concerns for themselves. In this sense, without being the property of any single movement or organisation, the course acts to support the development of a reflective community of practice in the struggle for social justice.

**Course website:** <http://ceesa-ma.blogspot.com>



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## **Exit from war: Syrian women learn from the Bosnian women's movement**

**Cynthia Cockburn**

### **Abstract**

*A five-day conference was held in Sarajevo in February 2014 designed to be an exchange of experience between two social movements - active and organized women in Bosnia-Herzegovina and counterparts from women's organizations emerging in war-riven Syria. Organized by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the meeting coincided with an early stage of peace talks in Geneva between the Assad administration and its armed opposition, in which context WILPF, UN Women and others were pressing for the representation of women and women's interests at the negotiating table.*

*The 1992-95 conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, like the war in Syria today, drew many women into humanitarian work and peace activism. Now they recounted how, postwar, impeded by constitutional deficiencies resulting from peace negotiations at Dayton, Ohio, from which they had been entirely excluded, Bosnian feminists had been engaged for two decades in a losing struggle for transitional justice amid maladministration, economic failure, corruption and continuing male violence.*

*Popular protests against the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, simultaneously occurring in the adjacent streets of Sarajevo, signalled clearly to the Syrian visitors that if they did not strategize right now to play an active part in the forthcoming state-building process, they would be driven to renew their own protest movement, the Arab Spring.*

**Keywords:** Bosnia-Herzegovina, constitution building, peace negotiations, postwar, protest, Syria, transitional justice, war, women's movement

It sometimes seems as though social movements are doomed to discontinuity. On the time dimension, they flower and die. We speak, for example, of three successive but separate 'waves' of feminism over the last hundred years, with intervals in which the movement lapsed. In 2011 we watched the Occupy movement against austerity and economic injustice surge in scores of cities and countries, only to stall. Things learned are forgotten, then recalled and taught anew. In the spatial dimension too, movements are often discontinuous - trans-localism and trans-nationalism are achieved, not given.

### **Transmitting experience: an inter-movement conference**

As if to defy this law, a five-day conference was held in Sarajevo from 10-14 February this year that aspired to pass the torch from one social movement to another, to keep a flame alive to warm a new generation in a new place. It was

organized by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>1</sup> WILPF's belief was that activist, organized women, survivors of the current war in Syria, might have something useful to learn from activist, organized women of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), with their experience of war and its cessation, of living with an unsatisfactory peace agreement, and pursuing elusive justice in an impoverished and unequal post-conflict world.



*Image 1: Madeleine Rees, Secretary-General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (left) with Barbro Svedberg, project manager of WILPF's 'MENA Agenda 1325'. All images by Cynthia Cockburn*

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.wilpf.international.org/>> The conference was funded by the OAK Foundation, Kvinna till Kvinna of Sweden, and Norwegian Aid (NORAD).

Writing in October 2013, Madeleine Rees, secretary-general of WILPF, described her thoughts on the initiative this way.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the outcome of the conflict, the crisis in Syria will leave the State in a long reconstruction period. It is critical that the tragic mistakes of the BiH post-conflict reconstruction process are not repeated...The first step is to make sure women are ready and able to meaningfully participate in any peace negotiation process, and that they have a framework for a transitional model for justice and development which will help the state to move from conflict to sustainable peace.

The questions that would need to be addressed in a post-conflict Syria, she believed, would include the following. From women's perspective, what would be 'justice' for the wrongs they experienced in the war? What mechanisms could government introduce to ensure they receive it? How should the return of refugees to their homes be handled? How were economic and social rights for all to be secured, including, of particular importance to women, appropriate and attainable health care, employment possibilities, education for their children? How could NGOs support a new government in these measures? Above all, is male violence against women, rampant during the conflict, liable to continue? In what forms? What measures of protection and prevention of women and children would be needed?

Alongside WILPF, some other international non-governmental organizations participated in the conference planning, including MADRE,<sup>3</sup> based in New York, and the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna (KtK) <sup>4</sup>, long active in the Balkan region, and together they identified and gathered to the event an impressive range of Bosnian women's organizations. The forty-three Bosnian women who attended included representatives of Women to Women (*Žene Ženama*) of Sarajevo, *Vive Žene* of Tuzla, Association BiH Woman (*Udruženje Žena BiH*) of Mostar, *Budućnost* of Modriča, Foundation United Women Banja Luka (*Udružene Žene Banja Luka*), *Forum Žena* of Bratunac, Association of Women "Lara" (*Organizacija Žena "Lara"*) of Biljelina and Medica Women's Therapy Centre Zenica (*Udruženje "Medica" Zenica*) and *Infoteka*, also of Zenica.<sup>5</sup> These organizations have in many cases been at work since, or even before, the end of the war in 1995, and many of their activists see themselves as feminists.

Together with many other organizations that were not represented at the Sarajevo conference, these organizations and their activists constitute a

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/madeleine-rees/syria-women-peacework-and-lesson-from-bosnia>>

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.madre.org>>

<sup>4</sup> <<http://kvinнатillkvinna.se/en/>>

<sup>5</sup> Where no English translation of an organization's Bosnian name is given, it is because they themselves do not make use of an English version.

practised and articulate women's movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, albeit one that is somewhat institutionalized.<sup>6</sup> Many are old enough to remember the formal - if not fully delivered - gender equality of the Yugoslav past. Some bring with them memories of the autonomous feminism that flowered for some years in major Yugoslav cities during the 1980s. Here and there, even during the war, indeed prompted by the war, projects had sprung up in Bosnia-Herzegovina that were consciously feminist. Some had survived and continued into a period of advocacy and campaigning for post-war justice for women.

Syrian participation in the conference had been prepared in two meetings in Beirut to which WILPF had brought Syrian women during the autumn of 2013. An open invitation to Syrian women's organizations for applications to attend the conference had followed, generating the diverse group that eventually travelled to Sarajevo. Some of the women came from regime-controlled areas, some from those held by the Free Syrian Army and other opposition groups, yet others from scattered refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. No way, in the midst of war, could they have met each other on home ground.

Four women came from the Syrian Women's League (*Rabitat al-Nisa'a al-Soriyat*),<sup>7</sup> based in Damascus, a venerable organization that began life in 1948 as the women's wing of the Syrian Communist Party. Nawal Yazeji told me that its work back then had been disseminating the Party's ideology to women, while featuring gender equality and women's rights within the Party. It has always promoted secularism, opposed the *hijab*, and encouraged girls' education. The League's eventful history involved splitting from the Stalinists and then surviving pressure to disband, as the Ba'ath Women's Federal Union became the only expression of women's interests tolerated by the Assad regime. Attending the UN's Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995 and espousing the resultant Platform for Action had given the Syrian Women's League a new, and now fully autonomous, feminist impetus.

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<sup>6</sup> Bosnian feminists do not agree among themselves as to whether these organizations and their activists, along with others that were not involved in the Sarajevo conference, may be said to constitute a contemporary 'women's movement'. I choose to term them such, in the belief that movements are of many kinds and, what is more, they shift in composition and character over time. The present movement in BiH lacks a mass base of mobilized individual feminists but comprises many organizations co-operating for social, juridical and constitutional change in women's interests. For an account of Bosnian feminism as I encountered it in the course of an empirical study in 2012, see Cockburn, Cynthia 'Against the odds: sustaining feminist momentum in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina', in *Women's Studies International Forum*, No.37: 26-35. 2013.

<sup>7</sup> The League describes itself as follows: 'The Syrian Women's League is one of the oldest women's organizations in Syria and one with influence with human rights organisations, the international community and secular segments of the civil society. The Syrian Women's League has a number of qualified gender specialists and provides a clearly feminist and legalistic, constitutional and institutional perspective to a transition process in Syria. Many of their members have previous experience of working in Government positions, and had an important role of monitoring, advocating and critically analysing the Syrian implementation of CEDAW.'



*Image 2: Nawal Yazeji of the Syrian Women's League.*

Some of the other Syrian women's groups and associations gathered in Sarajevo for the conference differed considerably from the League and its partners, in style and in politics. There was a wide age range, with a majority being young - in their twenties and thirties. Several women were actively involved in support work with refugees - for instance Majed Sharbajy of Women Now (*al-Nisa'a Ala'an*),<sup>8</sup> and Muzna Dureid of Refugees Not Captives (*Lajiaat Lasabayaa*).<sup>9</sup> These and other women were also involved in Soriyat for Development (*Soriyat min ajl al-Tanmiya*)<sup>10</sup> which serves to maintain links between humanitarian work in refugee camps over the borders in all Syria's neighbouring countries. Although many women spoke of having been swept into the Syrian 'revolution', its moment in the Arab Spring of 2011, their women's movement was as yet fragmented and exploratory, as that of BiH had been in the period of Yugoslav disintegration.

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<sup>8</sup> Women Now is a project of *Soriyat*, see <<http://www.soriyat.org/>>

<sup>9</sup> <<http://www.facebook.com/Lajiaat.Lasabayaa>>

<sup>10</sup> <<http://www.soriyat.org/>>

## **The prompt: a new round of peace negotiations**

The key issue for the Syrian women, as foreseen by WILPF in bringing them together, was their relationship to peace negotiations. In the summer months of 2013 the beginnings-of-the-beginnings of moves to end the conflict in Syria were initiated by the then UN peace envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan. The first round of talks in Geneva, later known as 'Geneva I', progressed neither far nor fast. But by now women in many countries are well-informed advocates of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, reaffirmed in Resolution 2122 of October 2013, that obliges member states to recognize that women have unique experience of war and gender-specific interests in peace, and that they must be enabled to play an active part in peace processes, including negotiations.<sup>11</sup> So a mobilization began to get Syrian women and their interests represented in Geneva. The presence of women in the talks would, it was believed, not only serve to represent women's gendered interests but also afford a foothold to civil society as a whole. Bronagh Hinds, member of the Women's National Commission of Northern Ireland and former Deputy Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission in Belfast, who attended the Sarajevo conference, explained there, 'Women are more than women and have the right to be so... Women know what exclusion is, and so can lay a pathway for the inclusion of other groups'.

In December 2013, some weeks after the Syrian women met for the second time in Beirut, as mentioned above, WILPF and Human Rights Watch (HRW) brought representatives of the Syrian Women's League (*Rabitat al-Nisa'a al-Soriyat*), the Syrian Women's Network (*Shabaket al-Mara'a al-Soriya*)<sup>12</sup> and the Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (*Markaz al-Mojtama'a al-Madani wa al-Democratiya fi Soria*)<sup>13</sup> to a 'side event' at the Human Rights Council session in the Palais des Nations in Geneva. It was a high-level affair, attended by the Deputy UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Executive Director of UN Women and, signally, by Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria who was to be the key mediator in the forthcoming peace negotiations. The Syrian women forcefully made the case for their inclusion in the talks. Brahimi mouthed agreement with this idea in principle, but failed to propose concrete mechanisms for achieving it.

The women, by contrast, now set out in writing what 'inclusion' could mean. As 2013 closed, a group of international NGOs (they were WILPF, HRW, KtK, Oxfam, ICAN<sup>14</sup> and Democrashe<sup>15</sup>) working in close consultation with Syrian

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<sup>11</sup> < <http://www.unfpa.org/women/1325.html> >

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.swnsyria.org/>>

<sup>13</sup> <<http://www.ccsdsyria.org/>>

<sup>14</sup> ICAN, the International Civil Society Action Network, is a US-based NGO whose mission is to support civil society activism in promoting women's rights, peace and human security in countries affected by conflict. It works particularly through helping to bridge the divisions between activists and the policy community. It is mainly active in the Middle East and North African region. <<http://www.icanpeacework.org/>>

civil society partners, produced a 'five-step approach' to achieving the representation of women and women's interests in the next phase of the peace process, the anticipated 'Geneva II' round of negotiations.<sup>16</sup> The first of the five steps was **inclusion of women in formal delegations** - and they should be women sensitive to gender issues and committed to equality. The second was **an independent women's delegation**, to act as a third party and represent the voice of diverse and inclusive civil society. Third, **gender experts and expertise** must be provided to inform negotiators on all agenda items in the talks. Fourth **briefings on gender issues** should be prepared to guide the mediators and delegates. And finally, an **Independent Civil Society Forum** should be set up, with a fair representation of women. Based in Syria, it should ensure the full participation of a range of Syrian civil society organizations committed to peace, human rights, good governance and equality. This was considered specially important because the choice of Geneva as the site of the negotiations put them far out of reach of ordinary active and engaged Syrians back home on the ground.

Already a group of 60 Syrian women and men, convened by the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy (*Tajamo'o Soriyat min ajl al-Democratiya*) had looked ahead to the nature of a future peaceful Syria, debating and drafting principles for a woman-friendly Constitution.<sup>17</sup> Their proposal contained specific and clear provisions for full equality between women and men, in the family and in the state. It gave precedence to international instruments, such as the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), over national laws, in order to protect against abusive interpretations of rights on the pretext, as they put it, of 'cultural specificity' - meaning religious or social 'traditions'. Indeed the women's draft constitution specified complete separation between religion and politics in a future Syria. It also included a 30% quota of seats for women in legislative, executive and representative bodies, with 'aspiration' to eventual parity. Eighteen women's organizations had subsequently signed up to and agreed to promote this document's principles.

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<sup>15</sup> Democrashe is an NGO co-founded by Bronagh Hinds in the wake of the Northern Ireland Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the year she received the UK 'Woman of Europe' award. The aim of the organization is to advance women's leadership in politics, civic society and peace-building at home and abroad.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ensuring the effective participation of women and women's rights in the Syrian peace and mediation process: a five-step approach', Working Paper prepared by WILPF, ICAN, Human Rights Watch, Kvinna till Kvinna, Oxfam, Democrashe. Based on Consultations with Syrian civil society partners. 28 December 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy, *Looking for a Democratic Constitution*, Damascus, Syria, 2013. Online at < [http://www.wunrn.com/pdf/syria\\_1.pdf](http://www.wunrn.com/pdf/syria_1.pdf) > accessed 6 March 2014.



## **Peace negotiations: “Geneva II”**

Meanwhile, the prospect of actual, renewed, peace talks between the Assad government and its armed opposition revived early in 2014. A continuation of the summer's negotiations, 'Geneva II' was to begin on 23 January. The women's first step for inclusion began, however, not in Geneva but in New York. A week before, on 17 January, WILPF's Gender, Peace and Security Programme,<sup>18</sup> with its office in New York, achieved a meeting for Syrian women with the UN Security Council.<sup>19</sup> They briefed the thirteen member state representatives on the situation of women in the Syrian conflict and a key point in their advocacy was the right of women to participate meaningfully in Geneva II.

Back in Switzerland, in the week of 20 January, WILPF and others organized an alternative summit, 'Women Lead to Peace', hosted by the Graduate Institute of Geneva. It was attended by eighty women from many countries, not a few with recent experience of war and peace-processes. Women from Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Western Sahara and Northern Ireland, as well as from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Syria, contributed to the discussions. Advantage was taken of the presence of the Syrian participants in Geneva to organize meetings for them with UN officials and foreign diplomats there.

While the women were conferring in the Geneva Graduate Institute, the long-awaited official peace talks began in nearby Montreux. Anticipating the moment, the United Nations agency UN Women had earlier flown into Geneva forty-seven Syrian women, some representing women's organizations inside Syria, more from refugee centres beyond its borders. However due to unfortunate planning and timing, most of them had been obliged to return home before the talks actually began. Only ten now flew back again as a 'continuation committee' to maintain a presence in Geneva during the talks. It was clear that these official negotiations were going to be a manly affair. And indeed, it turned out that present at the meeting in Montreux were male international leaders - John Kerry, US Secretary of State and Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister - while representing the warring sides were politicians and military commanders of the Assad regime and the opposition. The women who were included in these official delegations, one or two on each side, observers reported, did not identify themselves as holding any brief for women and had no speaking roles. The Syrian 'continuation committee' could do nothing but wait in the wings. A few determined women took banners and placards, the day the talks began, and went up the mountain to picket the negotiations.

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<sup>18</sup> < <http://peacewomen.org/> >

<sup>19</sup> < <http://www.whatsinblue.org/2014/01/arrria-formula-meeting-on-womens-participation-in-resolving-the-syrian-conflict.php> >

## **The Syrian regime and war**

To return now to our Sarajevo conference the following month, between 10 and 14 February 2014, it just so happened that the Geneva II negotiations reconvened this very week. And there could have been no greater contrast in style of encounter. While the war fighters were spending these days in unmitigated animosity, concealing as much as possible of their 'hand', conceding nothing, the Syrian and Bosnian women, a thousand miles east in Sarajevo, were generously eliciting each others' stories, looking for common ground and imagining shared strategies.

The Syrians informed their Bosnian counterparts about the onset of their war. It had begun with arrests and shootings in response to the protests of 2011, followed by a rapid escalation of weaponry, they said.<sup>20</sup> The regime had armed Alawites and Shias, aggravating relations with the 60% of the population that is Sunni. An estimated 100,000 had died already, and more than nine million been displaced.

The story of Najlaa Alsheekh, a young woman participant, now a refugee in Turkey, was not uncharacteristic of the personal accounts women gave. She comes, she says, from the village of Izaz in the extreme north of Syria. Not far from Aleppo, it is about 8 kilometres from the Turkish border. But recently Najlaa, now married, with two young sons, had been living in Daria, a suburb of Damascus. She is clearly a born activist, and was one of the first women to join the demonstrations of 2011. Then her husband was seized and detained. Next her father, a vulnerable and disabled man, was arrested as he followed a coffin at a friend's funeral. Unable to bear seeing him in captivity, wounded, in ragged underwear, she was obliged, she said, to humiliate herself to secure his release. Her husband she could not find.

One night she saw security forces closing in around their home. Dragging her family in their nightclothes across neighbouring roofs, she slipped the noose and made her way to her parents' home in Aleppo, joining other family members. It was August 2012. Aleppo too was under continual bombardment. When the windows of their home blew in and covered them in splintered glass, they moved on once again, crammed together in a small car, this time to Izaz, the very village where her life had begun. Held by the Free Syrian Army, the village was shelled by regime forces. On a night in which eighty people were killed, a barrel bomb smashed their balcony to the ground, carrying her son with it. At first they told her, 'he's dead'. 'When I heard that I all but died myself', Najlaa says. Miraculously, he was not - but injured. She decided now their only recourse was to leave Syria. Driving the children and her brother, she sought out her aunt and uncle from a hospital where they were being treated, and set off for the border. With one passport between them, she smuggled the entire family

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<sup>20</sup> For a 'timeline' to the Syrian civil war see <<http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syria-conflict-timeline-34-months-civil-war-1433301>>

across the border, and found herself, as she told me, 'in a place where I didn't even know how to say "hi!"'



*Image 3: Najlaa Alsheekh (left) of Kareemat, with Muzna Dureid of the Syrian Humanitarian Relief and Development Institute Najda-Now and Refugees Not Captives, and (right) Marijana Dinek, Foundation Bosnia-Herzegovina Women Initiative.*

During all these phases of war-affliction, Najlaa had been caring for the displaced people around her. Now in the town of Kilis, in south-eastern Turkey, she set up a small project to empower refugee women, obtaining craft materials, teaching knitting and sewing, finding a market for their products. It was as a representative of this small humanitarian NGO, Dignified Women (*Kareemat*)<sup>21</sup>, a project of the Syrian Non-Violence Movement (*Alharak Alselmi*)<sup>22</sup> of which she is a member, that she applied to attend the Sarajevo conference.

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<sup>21</sup> Dignified Women (*Kareemat*) is a project of the Syrian Non-Violence Movement (*Alharak Alselmi*), see footnote 19.

<sup>22</sup> The Syrian Non-Violence Movement (*Alharak Alselmi*) are grant-aided by the Sigrid Rausing Trust, whose website at <<http://www.sigrid-rausing-trust.org/Grantees/Syrian-Non-Violence-Movement>> says of the movement, 'Founded in April 2011, the Syrian Non Violence Movement (SNVM) is a collective of Syrian activists committed to a non violent approach in realising change in Syria. Its members advocate a non-violent transition to democracy and aim to ensure,

The Syrian women, as they recounted such war-stories to the Bosnians, often harked back to 'our revolution' of 2011, their moment in the Arab Spring. The street protests so cruelly swept into armed conflict, had been, they said, 'a strike for dignity' against forty years of overbearing rule by Assad father and son. The protests had been non-sectarian. They had opposed all oppressions, by one religious group of another, of poor by rich, of women by men. Women had been active and visible for the first time. Najlaa told the Bosnian women, 'We didn't know what organization was before that'. Another woman added, 'There was no women's movement at that time. We had to be present in the revolution or not at all'.

However, these stirrings of women's self-expression - feminism even - and mutual support and organization in and around the protest movement in 2011, had been crushed by the fighting. Women's interests have been eclipsed, they said, and their lives torn apart. They have new and heavy responsibilities - nursing the injured, supporting the bereaved, seeking the disappeared. And they must live with grief for what is already lost. Militarization has led to ever deeper masculinization of Syrian society and, with it, greater misogyny. Religion is more strongly emphasized due to extremists entering Syria in support of both sides in the conflict. There has always been polygamy in Syria, but today, many more girls are being sold into early marriage, both as a source of desperately needed cash and to 'keep them safe'. More and more as the conflict heightens, Syrian society is investing honour in women, so that men's weapon of choice for humiliating enemy men is the harassment and humiliation of 'their' women. Rape is increasingly common and is deeply felt as stigma, so that women are silenced. Wearing the *hijab* has become a norm that women are penalized for flouting. 'It's ever harder to go out of doors without head cover and a man,' one young Syrian participant told the conference. Religion, another concluded, is 'the regime's trap for us'. For the most part they were strongly rejecting any hint of 'sectarianism', saying 'We are just Syrian, nothing else'. And they stressed the importance of resisting any social and political arrangements qualified by the term 'having respect for culture', which invariably means repressive of women.

### **The Bosnian peace moment: the Dayton framework**

Alternating with the stories from Syria, the conference heard accounts from Bosnia-Herzegovina. There had been several attempts by international actors, the Bosnian women told them, to mediate peace in BiH before the accord they brokered at Dayton, Ohio, in December 1995.<sup>23</sup> The 'Vance-Owen Plan' of early 1993, sponsored by UN Special Envoy Cyrus Vance and European Community representative Lord Owen, was the only one of these to attempt to salvage some

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both now and in the future, that all the parties involved in the process of change adhere to international humanitarian law and other international human rights standards.'

<sup>23</sup> < [http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content\\_id=380](http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content_id=380) >

kind of unified country with culturally diverse citizenry.<sup>24</sup> Other initiatives, and ultimately the General Framework Agreement for Peace that issued from Dayton, were predicated on territorial separation of the warring nationalist movements.



*Image 4: Nela Porobić and Gorana Mlinarević, Bosnian participants at the conference.*

The Dayton process had been a notable example of what Madeleine Rees, who was the local representative in Bosnia of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1998 to 2005, calls 'the mediaeval narrative': an unwinnable war can only be ended by negotiation between armed warriors.<sup>25</sup> No other parties to peace are relevant. Thus, civil society - loosely definable as the many associations and organizations, small and large, created by citizens and expressing their multiple interests, outside the market and separately from the state<sup>26</sup> - had no presence and voice in the process that ended

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<sup>24</sup> < [http://www.partitionconflicts.com/partitions/regions/balkans/peace\\_process/05\\_05\\_02/](http://www.partitionconflicts.com/partitions/regions/balkans/peace_process/05_05_02/)>

<sup>25</sup> < <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/madeleine-rees/syrian-women-demand-to-take-part-in-peace-talks-in-geneva>>

<sup>26</sup> For conceptualizations of civil society see Keane, John (1998) *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. And, as Nela Porobić told the Syrian women, 'The space we failed to insist on at Dayton was never recovered later'.



*Image 5. A session chaired by Bronagh Hinds of Democrashe, N.Ireland.*

Bronagh Hinds spoke of the highly unusual, and commendable, Northern Ireland peace process in which she had been closely involved. It had included multi-party talks and a long process of consultation in which community groups and others had been able to formulate and express views.<sup>27</sup> The lack of such inclusiveness had been the more deleterious in BiH due to the fact that the peace-making process was simultaneously a country-building process. Dayton *constituted* the future country and its signature institutions. It created a state of two almost autonomous 'entities', the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in which the constituent peoples were Bosniaks (Muslims) and Croats, and the Republika Srpska (RS), the constituency of Serbs. Each ethnic group was considered a 'minority' in the 'other' entity and, along with people of other identifications and none, they lacked equal rights. Although, under pressure from the European Court of Human Rights, certain modifications were later

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<sup>27</sup> For equality and inclusion aspects of the Northern Ireland peace process see Campbell, Beatrix (2008) *Agreement! The State, Conflict and Change in N. Ireland*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

made to this undemocratic system, it remains hostage to an ethnic paradigm that does not reflect the sense-of-self of many ordinary citizens.<sup>28</sup>

The Dayton peace agreement effectively recognized only one reason for the war: internal ethnic rivalries. Economic factors, including competition for markets, infrastructure and the resources of the former Yugoslav state, the personal ambitions of unscrupulous leaders, and the concurrent reshaping of East and Central Europe consequent to the disintegration of the USSR - such things were not part of the thinking. The negotiators heard only the nationalists' narrative. In short, the Bosnian peace was negotiated between men for whom the key motive was to stay in power and achieve control over the maximum amount of land and resources, ideally rid of any but their 'own' people. Thus, although the right of 'return' of refugees and internally displaced people was assured in the peace arrangements, in practice returning to your old home in an area now dominated by those who had driven you out was costly, uncomfortable and potentially dangerous.

Apart from its arbitrary racism, the Bosnian women explained, the constitutional structure of Bosnia-Herzegovina is overly complicated.<sup>29</sup> At state level there is a bicameral legislature and a three-member (ethnically-specified) Presidency in which each has a power of veto. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is further divided into ten cantons, each with its 'parliament'. There are besides 74 municipalities in the Federation and 63 in the RS, each with its own local government. Furthermore, a unique district, Brčko, with its own constitution, courts and local government, belongs to neither entity. Full rights do not hold even across municipal and cantonal borders, let alone those that separate the entities. As one woman told the conference, 'Everyone has minority status somewhere, and some have it wherever!' The lesson was driven home to the Syrians by Lena Ag, secretary-general of Kvinna till Kvinna, 'Above all, don't let peace negotiators decide on a constitution for you!' <sup>30</sup>

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< [http://eudo-citizenship.eu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=203:european-court-of-human-rights-rules-against-bosnia-and-herzegovina/](http://eudo-citizenship.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=203:european-court-of-human-rights-rules-against-bosnia-and-herzegovina/) >

<sup>29</sup> < [http://www.ccbh.ba/public/down/ustav\\_bosne\\_i\\_hercegovine\\_engl.pdf](http://www.ccbh.ba/public/down/ustav_bosne_i_hercegovine_engl.pdf) >

<sup>30</sup> KtK stress that only equal representation of women at each step of the way from peace to war can prevent a relapse into conflict. For evidence from Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and Liberia, as well as Bosnia, see their publication Selimović, Johanna Mannergren et al (2012) *Equal Power- Lasting Peace: Obstacles for Women's Participation in Peace Processes*. Johanneshov, Sweden: Kvinna till Kvinna.



*Image 6: Nela Pamuković, Croatian Center for Women Victims of War ROSA (left) with Lepa Mladjenović, Autonomous Women's Centre, Belgrade.*

### **The pursuit of post-war justice**

The Bosnian women tried to help their Syrian counterparts foresee the prospects for post-war justice. How could they ensure that impunity does not prevail, as in so many countries after war? The experience of BiH in this respect had been mixed. On the one hand, as Lepa Mladjenović, feminist activist and therapist from Belgrade, pointed out, we should celebrate the fact that the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia has not only defined rape as a war crime for the first time, but convicted a number of men as perpetrators of war-related rape, the first time this act has been penalized in the thousands of years human society has been beset by war. On the other hand, the Court's justice is woefully incomplete. The ICTY tried only the most notorious cases, a tiny proportion of indictable offenders. The judicial system of Bosnia-Herzegovina was left to deal with the remainder - but only eighteen cases had so far been heard. Even those eventually convicted had been observed to serve relatively short sentences. With remission, these men soon walk free again, recognizable to those they abused.

What could be done to prevent such an experience in Syria, as and when the guns are silenced? The Syrian women affirmed the efforts they are making to document crimes, but also stressed the difficulties in the way of this. How to get death certificates, medical reports, tissue samples in the chaos of war? However, the Bosnian women repeatedly stressed that judicial settlement is not the only



face of post-war justice. The phrase 'transitional justice' is often used to flag up the need for something more than sentences delivered by courts.<sup>31</sup> For instance, apologies count for something. And reparations are vital. Payment must be made to survivors for the harms they have suffered, whether it is rendered in money or in support services, such as health and social care, and free education for children. Security forces that have been implicated in crimes must be visibly reformed, and confidence in them restored. Memorialization of crimes is psychologically important. Truth commissions may help understanding, healing and acceptance. The Bosnian women stressed that little of this had been achieved in their country, nineteen years from the conflict's end.

Meantime, new victimizations have been growing year by year: trafficking in women, enslavement of women and girls in brothels, debt bondage. So women's rights need not only to be instituted in law but also backed up by gender-fair political representation. Gorana Mlinarević pointed out that though the state is signatory to the CEDAW, its provisions are by no means respected. And though the constitution provides for a 40% quota in women's political representation, the level achieved in BiH today is only 25%.

Furthermore, economic wellbeing must be considered an aspect of transitional justice. People victimized in war deserve a healthy and equal economic environment in which to recover a sense of normalcy, the feeling that a 'fair' life with a prospect of a liveable future has replaced the dead end of war. Misgovernment and corruption, together with the effects of the world financial crisis since 2008, had brought economic ruin and very high levels of unemployment to BiH. What is more, women observed, the political parties that went on to govern BiH, being for the most part those that had fomented the war, shaped their economic policy to appease the men who had fought at their behest, the 'veterans', sustaining their post-war income at a level considerably higher than that of non-combatants. Bosnian women have been short-changed.

### **Drawing closer, resolving tensions**

It was the practice during the five days of our conference for the Syrian and Bosnian 'teams' to meet separately each morning. For one thing, this helped them to work on relationships with each other, the quality of which was sometimes neglected or trampled upon in the busy exchanges with the other side during the main sessions. Soon after the start of the conference it had become clear that a degree of tension existed between the highly diverse Syrian participants. For instance, some suspected their elders of compromise. Simply surviving under two generations of Assad rule suggested a degree of compliance with the regime, they felt. There were differences in relation to the armed conflict. We have seen that one belonged to the Syrian Non-Violence Movement, *Alharak Alselmi*. But others had doubts about the word 'reconciliation' - they

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<sup>31</sup> <<http://ictj.org/about/transitional-justice>>

wanted peace, yes, but they also hungered for 'victory'. One woman said, 'I would carry weapons to end this regime'.



*Image 7: Majed Sharbajy, Syrian Education Centre and Women Now.*

As the five days passed, we saw them gradually drawing closer, laying their differences on the table, finding a shared language. They paid attention to Bosnian women when they said, with long experience of working across ethnic divisions, 'See yourself as human first and foremost'. They heard Mirha Pojskić, a psychotherapist formerly of Medica Women's Therapy Centre in Zenica, urge them to recognize common ground in pain and loss: 'everyone is subject to trauma'. This spirit began to infuse the discussions. Majed Sharbajy had been imprisoned for seven months. She said now, 'I saw my guards as human in the end. That was important to me.' And Marcelle Shehwara told us, 'I know who killed my mother. I watch them. I know their daily lives. I want to get over the thought that they are devils. I want to know them as humans. The fighters asked me, "Do you want us to kill them for you?" And I told them, "No." When the war ends, then I will get closure.'

On the last day we heard a Syrian woman say, 'In Syria we so like to attack each other. Personally I need to work on that. We need to start accepting each other, respecting each other even if we disagree. We have seen that modelled here in Bosnia.' And Nawal, *doyenne* of the Syrian Women's League, said thoughtfully, in the final session, 'This has tested my ability to learn from the younger generation. If I am open to them, I myself am young.'

Another aspect of the conference organization fostered this bonding between the women across challenging differences: respect was accorded to emotions as well as thoughts, to feelings as well as analysis. The organizers, with long experience of feminist methods, had set aside a room to which participants could repair at any moment, taking a break from the tough debates to enjoy "wellbeing" sessions run by feminist therapists. Sarah Abu Assali told me she had found here in Sarajevo, for the first time in a long while, the capacity to weep, and the knowledge that her tears were understood and valued. Another gift, providing a feeling of being in touch with each other, well-connected and well-understood, was skilled and sensitive three-way language interpretation between Arabic, Bosnian and English.

### **The Bosnian street protests**

The Syrian women, telling their stories, constantly referred back to women's presence in the 'revolution' of 2011, their moment in the Arab Spring before nonviolent uprising was brutally crushed by the regime and turned into civil war. Bosnian women had no such history to tell. There had been quiescence in the Yugoslav years until interference by the international monetary institutions in the eighties, bringing unemployment and discontent, had opened the door to nationalist politicians greedy for wealth and power. Their war had been one not of popular uprising and repression but of ethnic 'cleansing' by Serb and Croat nationalists against Muslims, and against each other.



*Image 8: Sarajevo*

What now gave heightened meaning and a degree of excitement to our conference was that, during the week before we arrived in Sarajevo, and even now as we spoke, protests were taking place in the streets outside. And not only in Sarajevo - similar scenes were being reported from Zenica, Tuzla, Mostar, and from Banja Luka and Prijedor in the Republika Srpska. Here was something entirely fresh for BiH - undifferentiated citizens, on their feet, opposing the authorities with no nationalist agenda. Were we living in a Bosnian Spring? Several of the Bosnian participants in our conference were doubling at night as protestors, and ferried back news to us. They participated in the first 'plenum' of the Sarajevo street, a thousand-strong, in a hall made available to them by the cantonal authority. Women had been well represented, they told us. They were fully half of the organizing group, and a third of the forty or fifty protestors who took the microphone. Many more speakers waited to be heard on following nights.

At this first plenum, our colleagues reported, important demands were formulated and agreed. The protestors called on governmental bodies at all levels to resign - as the Sarajevo canton 'parliament' already had. They called for governments of 'experts' to replace them until elections due in October. They should be non-partisan, and consult with the people's plenum. The salary structure of parliamentarians and public officials should be revised, pay and perks drastically cut - nobody should receive more than half the average individual's earnings. An end to corruption. The protestors called for a reversal

of the privatization process - big firms and utilities should be returned to public ownership. Finally, there should be an independent commission of enquiry to look into the burning of buildings in the protests: Why had the police and fire brigade not staunched the fires? Were *agents provocateurs* behind the violence? The women who reported all this to us were emphatic that what they had heard had not been expressions of individual rage. There was analysis backing every demand.

The Bosnian conference participants clearly felt that the rebellion we were witnessing on our TV screens at night, relayed first hand by them each morning, was the clinching argument in their advice to their Syrian friends. The Bosnian political system had been a stitch-up between rival nationalisms - militaristic, patriarchal and corrupt - reducing ordinary people, and especially women, to impotence and penury. Learn the lesson, they warned their Syrian sisters. If civil society doesn't get a say in shaping post-war Syria, if sectarianism is allowed to dictate the reconstruction, before long you too will need another revolution.



*Image 9: Sarajevo*

And so the Syrian women packed their bags and left for the airport, saying goodbye not only to their new-found Bosnian friends but to each other, as they scattered to their war-torn towns and villages in Syria and refugee camps beyond its borders. As they went, I heard one call out to the Bosnians waving

them off, 'We have learned a lot from you. And be sure that in our turn we shall pass it on to other women when the next war comes along!'

### **About the author**

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## **Demanding the Impossible? An experiment in engaging urban working class youth with radical politics**

**Ed Lewis and Jacob Mukherjee**

### **Introduction**

In this article we report on and discuss Demand the Impossible, a London-based summer school about radical politics and activism for 16-19 year-olds. Demand the Impossible (DI) has run twice – a week-long course in 2012 at Goldsmiths University and another in 2013 at City University (hereafter DI #1 and DI #2). We believe the courses have been of pedagogical and political interest for a variety of reasons, but the most striking outcome of DI so far is that it has led to the formation of a new political group called Unite the Youth (UTY), the core of which is currently comprised of people who have attended DI events. UTY describes itself as “a movement for the marginalised, misrepresented and disenfranchised youth, against inequality and systems of oppression.” This points to the distinctive nature of UTY in the context of the UK political scene – it is a group of working class, ethnically diverse young people aiming to advance radical goals which, in our experience, is sadly all too uncommon.

To date, UTY's activities include: participating in demonstrations and direct actions organised by Disabled People Against Cuts and student activists occupying Senate House; organising a debate on Tory plans to cut housing and unemployment benefit for the under-25s; a social event and the development of social media platforms. Following these initial activities, Unite the Youth launched on March 22nd with Uprise: a six hour long youth-led political festival featuring political discussion, interactive workshops, live dance and rap. The event was planned by around ten young UTY activists, with support from us, and was facilitated on the day entirely by Unite the Youth members. Around 120 young people from inner-city London attended. Uprise was a great success in terms of providing the space, atmosphere and platform for working class young people to express their views (and anger) on political and social issues; it was slightly less successful in achieving another of its stated aims – establishing the group identity of Unite the Youth and producing concrete plans for future action.

We regard these developments as exciting and potentially important. In this article we discuss the context and development of DI to the point where we were able to create the conditions for the development of UTY. As we will show, although DI #1 had a number of strengths, it took significant revisions in our pedagogical approach, implemented in DI #2, to create these conditions. We conclude by tentatively offering some general lessons about political pedagogy that we draw from our experience.

## Context

A distinctive feature of DI is that it is an attempt to discuss left and radical approaches with young people who had shown little prior interest in such ideas. Application forms and initial comments suggested the most common reasons for taking part in DI were for instrumental reasons, such as to enhance university applications, and to have “something to do” during the summer. Few of the young people on the course had previously taken part in any political activity or expressed typically “left” opinions. On the first summer school, we were struck by the way most participants were adamant that British society was fair and meritocratic. One young person, thought it self-evident that capitalism was “a system based on exploitation”, but simultaneously argued that “anyone could get to the top”. DI #2 attracted some young people with slightly more critical perspectives, but in some cases this sat alongside a belief in the inherent fairness of Britain. Intriguingly, this notion seemed linked to the fact that many participants were first, second or third generation migrants. An Afghani-British young man who saw conscious rapper Immortal Technique and Che Guevara as role models insisted that – although capitalism should be overthrown – Britain was fair and egalitarian compared to other countries, and that private schools should not be abolished.

Almost all of our participants met “Widening Participation” criteria used by universities to identify those under-represented in higher education: they came from postcode areas associated with social deprivation, were eligible for financial support such as free school meals or did not have parents who attended university. They were overwhelmingly from ethnic minority backgrounds, and a majority were Muslim. Among the 30 participants on our second summer school, we counted thirteen different ethnicities and national origins. An overwhelming majority of participants were young women, although the gender ratio was slightly less skewed on the second summer school. Most of the young people were currently studying A Levels, but academic achievement varied widely – two participants had offers from elite (Russell Group) universities, others were planning to take an enforced “gap year” after failing to receive any university offers.

In summary, then, the typical Demand the Impossible participant was a young woman aged 16-20, from a working class, ethnic minority background who attended an inner London state school or sixth form college, and who had little prior interest in radical politics or activism. Our experience suggests that young people from these backgrounds are not well represented in organisations describing themselves as “socialist”, “radical” or “left-wing.” Despite the current interest in intersectionality on the British Left, which of the recent radical initiatives of any significant scale – from Occupy, to the Peoples' Assembly, to Left Unity – can boast large numbers of non-white, working class young women and men at the heart of their organisation?

It is not our intention here to present a comprehensive critique of what we feel is the failure of radical social movements and Left groups in the UK to engage with a broad demographic. Our own involvement in activism over the last



decade does, however, point to a disjuncture between the Left's professed aims and the reality of its practice. All groups on the Left want to mobilise the most oppressed groups in society, but few have been able to engage with the way urban, working class young people see themselves and their world.

As humanities teachers in urban state schools, we have noticed a disconnect between the values, assumptions and discourses of the contemporary radical Left and those of the young people we work with. We have found that many young people tend not to offer criticisms of “the cuts”, economic inequality or individualism, and that alienation from mainstream politics does not tend to provoke a radical response. We consistently find that anti-immigrant feeling, hostility to benefit claimants and opposition to taxation can coexist with a strong commitment to fairness, justice, and even “revolution” (Russell Brand's interview with Jeremy Paxman was especially popular). In Politics lessons we have taught, some have expressed sympathy with critiques of capitalism, but have rarely seemed particularly motivated by this as they appear to regard capitalism as natural and inevitable.

We had also previously worked with some young people of a similar demographic in activist projects – the anti-fees activism as part of the 2010-11 student movement and Shake!, an arts-activism project coordinated by the charity Platform. We found them to be enthusiastic participants in these initiatives, but, at the same time this did not generally lead to more sustained involvement with social movements, let alone the radical Left.

Thus, our decision to create Demand the Impossible emerged from our sense that an experiment in engaging working class youth with radical politics would be possible, but that this would require an approach different from that of many activist groups. It was also an opportunity for two experienced humanities teachers to escape the bureaucratic and ideological constraints of the British educational system whilst simultaneously utilising some of the pedagogical skills that we have gained within that same system, in the service of radical goals.

### **Demand the Impossible #1: Goldsmiths College, summer 2012**

DI #1 primarily consisted of a week-long series of sessions that aimed to develop a critical engagement with the broad outlines of a radical worldview – critique of existing social structures, visions of alternative possible futures and strategies for social transformation. Sessions were either delivered by us or by outside speakers. In addition to this, participants had the opportunity to carry out some political activism on the fourth morning, and the course finished with participants devising their own campaign project. Through these elements we hoped that participants would develop a more critical perspective of social structures, a greater sense of the possibility of radical social change and the motivation to become politically active – leading ultimately to the development of a network of activists.

In retrospect we see that our general pedagogical approach was to create a kind of radical version of formal school. The main way in which it reflected formal education was the use of various pedagogical techniques drawn from that field – the sessions that we ran mostly consisted of a variety of highly structured activities, using some of the repertoire of 'active learning' techniques that are in vogue in mainstream education. Some examples: we used different debating formats to debate both capitalism and alternatives to capitalism; participants analysed case studies about activism in small groups before engaging in 'peer teaching' about them; participants' ideas about the 'shape' of society were physicalised using ribbon and the arrangement of bodies; 'graffiti walls' about society as it is and how it could be were created; there were also 'activist show-and-tells', where participants talked about anything to do with activism that was of interest or importance to them. Also in the mould of formal education, most of the content of the course came 'from outside' – the ideas, case studies and facts were mostly introduced to participants, rather than coming from their experiences. There were exceptions to this – such as the activist show-and-tells – and participants often brought their own experiences into discussions, but those experiences were not generally starting points for the sessions.

Another way in which our pedagogical approach reflected formal education was that, beyond being clear that we thought that there was value to the material we were introducing, we did not reveal or seek to argue for our own views – just as we typically do not in the school or college classroom. Rather, we positioned ourselves as facilitators of the participants' engagement with the material. We were at pains to ensure that this was a critical engagement, which we achieved in part through ensuring that our sessions always involved the presentation of a range of perspectives. The speakers we invited did have the freedom to advocate for their views, but here again, to facilitate a critical distance from the material, we ensured a diversity of views – speakers represented anarchist, revolutionary socialist, feminist and other radical traditions.

It is important to note, however, that there were important ways in which our pedagogy broke with mainstream conventions. The most obvious manifestation of this was the activism session, where we gave young people an opportunity to take some political action themselves. This was probably the most innovative and distinctive feature of the course, especially since over 75% of the participants had never engaged in any activism before. Evaluation feedback showed that it was also the most popular part. Given participants' inexperience and age, we ensured that most actions were quite gentle – most groups petitioned members of the public around one of the issues that we had discussed on the course. With the help of some experienced adult activists, however, one group carried out a much more ambitious action – performing a 'flashmob' about the living wage in a Sainsbury's store, where they stayed until they were ushered out by security. The actions were then integrated into the theoretical aspect of the course, as they were used as a way of discussing different strategies for social change.

DI #1 was a success in many ways. Participants had almost no prior investment in the course (having not had to pay anything and having had the simplest of application processes) and often had long journeys to get to Goldsmiths, but most attended every day of the week, with almost all of them attending at least four days. The evaluation feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants reporting changes in their views, satisfaction and motivation from having participated in political activity and in many cases that it was a personally important experience. Some were extremely effusive, such as the two participants who gave the following answers:

Q: How significant has this experience been for you, if at all?

A: It has been educative, enlightening, fascinating, fun and thoughtful. I would recommend my friends. It was not for a second boring like in the class. Just after learning about the pussy rioters [sic][it was written in lower case on the original form] it came up in the news the next day and I could relate. It made me feel good.

Q: Has this course increased the likelihood of you engaging in more political activism in the future?

A: Yes, particularly the active demonstrations as they have showed me I can do it and this week has made me feel a lot more compassionate so I care a lot more now and because of this and my prior principles I want to do as much as I can to help others. You could say I want to change the world.

Indeed, all participants said that they were more likely to engage in more political activity in the future. This was further discussed on the final afternoon, where there were high levels of interest in carrying out further political activity as a whole group and continuing the process of learning more about radical politics.

However, as noted above, no network or group did in fact emerge from DI #1. This stemmed, we think, from a number of weaknesses of DI #1 – primarily from our adoption of a relatively conventional pedagogy. The most obvious problem with this was the degree to which the material for the course was externally generated, which inhibited the extent to which participants related the material to their own lives – their engagement seemed more driven by curiosity (no bad thing) than any sense of personal investment or recognition of their own relationship to structures of oppression and domination. We should note that in the initial planning stages we had discussed the importance of drawing on the personal experience of participants directly but this became marginalised in the process of prioritising and concretising our plans – reflecting the influence of the familiar (the role of the teacher), as well, perhaps, as a somewhat rationalist set of assumptions about what motivates political engagement.

## **Demand the Impossible #2: City University London, summer 2013**

As a consequence of these and other reflections on DI #1 the second course was designed significantly differently. In this section, we identify the main points of contrast between the two summer schools.

One important development from DI #1 that enabled this was that three of the young people who had enjoyed the first summer school returned in the role of “organisers”. They were to feed back on how other participants felt about the week as well as take the lead in facilitating, provoking and mediating in discussions and other activities. The presence of these organisers (who, along with three other 20 year old volunteers, were slightly more experienced and politically committed than most participants) was crucial, since it helped establish the skeleton of the organisation that would emerge from DI #2: Unite the Youth.

The prospect of the development of a new youth organisation (or, as we and the participants somewhat grandiosely called it, a “movement”) meant the motivations, behaviour, and experiences of all involved were very different from the first summer school. While DI #1 had been conceived as something of a laboratory where radical ideas could be sampled and tested, DI #2 was framed as both an exploration of ideas and at the same time an exercise in political organising and movement building. Participants, organisers and facilitators quickly began to think and behave as though they were already part of a new collectivity. We should stress that the notion of a new youth organisation did not emerge spontaneously from the young people on the course. In a meeting with the organisers just before the start of the course, we tentatively suggested the idea that a movement could be formed. The organisers enthusiastically adopted the idea, and before long all participants were talking about “our movement” even though they (and we!) did not yet fully understand what this meant.

One reason participants felt like they were taking part in a movement was that we drew on the practices and processes of political organising as well as education. Throughout the week, the young people used consensus techniques to create a collective statement of beliefs, aims and identities. When given the option of abandoning the search for consensus in favour of majority decision making, participants almost always refused. They seemed to value the negotiation and exploration required to use consensus processes. Consensus was not the only mode in which they operated; antagonism and robust debate were also encouraged. It was here that, despite the significant changes to our pedagogy from DI #1, some of the techniques of the classroom again came in handy: various debate formats helped create dialogic and dialectical discussion that allowed participants to explore their own politics and relate this to that of others in the group.

Other parts of the week resembled a political rally, with emotional testimony, supportive applause and motivational chanting all featuring (we christened one such activity the “raucous caucus”). These varied practices enhanced

participation and fostered a strong sense of group identity. This togetherness was apparent in the way the young people sat in a large circle discussing politics (but not only that, unsurprisingly) during lunchtimes and breaks. It could be seen most clearly during the activism session in the way most of the group chose to join forces to plan a protest in the City of London: smaller groups combined their concerns to produce a mini-demonstration against tax evasion, welfare cuts, increased tuition fees and spending on war. In DI #1, by contrast, all the actions had been carried out by small groups, who did not show the same will to work together as part of a larger collective.

Reflecting on DI #1, we realised that it involved too little discussion of the social and political identities of those involved. For the second summer school, we addressed this by ending the first day with a prolonged discussion focussed on participants' identities in relation to race, class, age, gender and their relationship to wider society and the state. Although many participants were initially reluctant to identify themselves in relation to these categories (preferring to see themselves as autonomous agents), this changed during the course of the week. We also invited speakers who would focus more on their own identities than the speakers for DI #1 had – disabled, transgender, feminist and migrant activists spoke openly about their own identities and political struggles. And we ourselves discussed our own experiences of education (as both teachers and students), class barriers and gender identity. The demonstration in the City of London raised the question of how the young, multi-ethnic, working class protesters were seen by relatively privileged City workers: several participants spoke of feeling “like a stranger in my own city” after the demo. These inputs and experiences seemed to cause many of the participants to re-assess their socio-political identity. The group's collectively-agreed declaration on the final day that they were “a movement of marginalised and misrepresented youth” serves as a striking testament to the way conceptions of identity developed during the course.

For the second summer school, we decided both to surrender some control over what “learning outcomes” would be met, and to remove at times our own mask of objectivity. We – along with our organisers and external speakers – often made provocative interventions in discussions and challenged participants to respond. The course began, for instance, with a session led by a Marxist anti-fees activist on capitalism and anti-capitalism, which fed into a lively debate on the merits and demerits of capitalism today. The neat activities of DI #1, with their relatively pre-determined outcomes, were largely replaced by structured but open-ended discussions and debates. Overall, there was much more “talk” than on the first course: from us, from our speakers, from the organisers and – most of all – from participants themselves. For us, this was an unsettling but exhilarating experience.

For our participants, the mode of operation on DI #2 seemed to give them the confidence to think and act politically. This can be seen in the actions the young people planned. Unlike on DI #1, participants were given complete freedom to come up with an issue to protest over and the format of the action to be taken.

We were delighted when the two groups reported back to us on what they had planned: a protest against rape culture in the mass media and the occupation of a bank headquarters! (Unfortunately, the constraints imposed by our relationship with City University meant we had to reluctantly suggest that this latter action be changed to a demonstration on the streets outside the bank.)

## Conclusions

What, if anything, can be learned from the experience of Demand the Impossible? The most obvious point is that we have shown that it is possible to engage urban working class youth with radical ideas – something which happens all too rarely. But the more interesting question is what kind of pedagogical approach is best suited to this task. To consider the approach we have developed it will be useful to contrast it with other positions. In our experience, radical political organisations and groups often have pedagogical approaches that lie near, or are some variant of, one of two poles. Presented simplistically, the first of these is a didactic approach in which the task of radicals is to bring revolutionary consciousness to the working class and oppressed groups, who will be otherwise unable to attain it. The second is a libertarian one in which radicalism is held to develop spontaneously from within, given appropriate conditions, as expressed by a woman from the radical funding body Edge Fund, who was sceptical of our role in DI: “why don't you just give them the resources and leave them to it?”

In retrospect, we can see that, despite its participatory nature and our positioning ourselves as neutral facilitators, DI #1 was closer to the didactic pole, given the predetermination of ideas and concepts to be engaged with. In learning from that experience and redeveloping the course, however, we would not say that we simply moved closer to the libertarian pole. After all, despite the greater freedom and ownership that participants had in the discussions of DI #2, a good deal of content was still externally generated – and deliberately so. Rather, what we sought to bring about was an articulation between radical ideas and everyday experiences and political understandings. This contrasts with the didactic approach by adopting a more flexible attitude to matters of doctrine and theory, but it is also unlike the libertarian approach in having a disruptive quality – participants were encouraged to express and explore their political ideas and identities, but had many of their assumptions challenged by ideas, perspectives and identities they had not encountered. So if there is any pedagogical message to take from our work so far, it may be that a pedagogy based on articulations and disruptions of this sort is worthy of consideration.

These conclusions need qualifying, however. Firstly, there was a large set of contingencies that has made DI possible. We both work with working class young people, have experience of activism and are reasonably well networked on the Left, which has been useful in attracting speakers. We were also able to obtain free space at Goldsmiths for DI #1 because Jacob was studying there part-time. Second, our approach is still in development, and we expect DI #3 to

be different yet again from its forerunners, as we continue to reflect on our pedagogy and learn from others, not least former DI participants. Lastly, it remains to be seen what will happen with respect to Unite the Youth. Our hope is that the group will soon be able to organise without our support, but they have not yet reached this stage. This creates certain tensions and difficulties around our role: how do we ensure that the “scaffolding” we provide builds, rather than limits, Unite the Youth’s capacity for autonomy? How do we respond to the deference the young people involved sometimes show to us as older adults and teachers? How much strategic and political advice should we offer as the group attempts to establish itself? Much of the next few months will be about dealing with these questions. And as we go through the process of reducing and ultimately withdrawing our involvement in the group, we will also see how well they are able to operate as an autonomous youth organisation. In terms of evaluating the effectiveness of the pedagogical approaches we have adopted, this will be the most significant test yet.

### **About the authors**

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## ***Mística*, meaning and popular education in the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement<sup>1</sup>**

**John L. Hammond**

### **Abstract**

*The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) works to create solidarity and collective identity among its members through a variety of pedagogical practices. One such practice is *mística*, which is at once a public, expressive dramatic performance and, drawing on Christian mysticism, an way of making contact with a transcendent reality. *Mística* draws on Christian theology generally, and specifically on the practices of the Christian base communities associated with liberation theology which were key in the emergence of the MST. It fortifies activists with the high commitment needed to engage in land occupations and the creation of farming communities through which the MST pursues its central goal of agrarian reform.*

The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* or MST) is a militant rural movement that occupies farmland to provide livelihood for its members and to press for broader land reform. Those in the movement make substantial sacrifices and take substantial risks. To encourage people to make those sacrifices and take those risks, the movement engages in a range of pedagogical and motivational practices to achieve solidarity, identification, and conviction for collective action. Among these practices (and in a sense subsuming all of them) is *mística*.

This untranslatable word refers to an expressive performance, mainly nonverbal, that incorporates themes central to the goals of the movement and affirms confidence in the achievability of those goals. It is a regular practice of the MST. It is intended to promote a sense of identity as a separate group and commitment to the group's purposes. The term *mística* refers not just to the performance, however, but to the whole world view that underlies it, drawing on traditions of Christian mysticism to affirm unity with a transcendent reality. *Mística* is sacramental in that its manifest physical reality is taken to represent the deeper meaning. It is impossible to separate the enactment of *mística* from the engagement with transcendence. Through participating in or observing *mística*, people express their ideals and believe that they come closer to attaining them.

In August, 1998, I participated in a meeting of activists and supporters of the MST in a church basement in Passo Fundo, a middle-sized city in the agricultural highlands of Rio Grande do Sul state close to the area where the

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<sup>1</sup>A revised version of a paper presented at the symposium on Latin American Media: Distortions and Resistance, Georgia State University, April 2, 2009.



MST arose.<sup>2</sup> The meeting began with a *mística*. In the middle of the large room, performers pantomimed various ills of urban life: robbery, begging, a homeless couple with a baby (played by a real live baby). A crowd stormed the performance area and drove out the evils; they unfurled on the floor a very large MST flag (bright red, with a circle in the center showing a map of Brazil and a farm couple, the man holding a raised machete)-MSTv2. A young person recited a poem alluding to poverty in Brazil and hope in the midst of that poverty. Then all chanted "This country is ours," and invited the audience to stand up and join them in marching around the flag in a circle. There was singing and poetry, but no dialogue; the enactment was carried out in silence.

The group was part of a contingent of the March for Brazil, a mobilization organized by the MST and allies through many cities and towns to draw attention to the anti-neoliberal platform calling for agrarian reform and other social and economic policies presented in the book *A Opção Brasileira* ("The Brazilian Option;" Benjamin et al., 1998). (I later learned that the baby and her parents were taking part in the march.) They and their local supporters were meeting for a briefing on the platform, preparing to canvass in neighborhoods the next day to invite people to a meeting to discuss it. The *mística* was repeated at the mass meeting, in a larger auditorium. I wrote in my notes, "It had less impact because it was on a stage, and the audience could not participate in the conclusion."

As I detail below, members and leaders of the movement widely credit the practice of *mística* with the creation of a collective spirit and identity that motivates their participation in militant action.

### **The Christian Origins of Mística**

The practice of *mística* has Christian origins. The land struggle arose during the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, following the dictatorship's repression of earlier peasant movements. Liberation theology was then a powerful force in the Brazilian Catholic Church as well as in some protestant churches, notably the Lutheran. Liberation theology called on the faithful to make a "preferential option for the poor," serving the needs of poor people not just for spiritual nourishment or a promise of a life hereafter but for social justice in the present world. Advocates of liberation theology constituted themselves as the "popular church" and formed nuclei known as Christian base communities in their parishes (Berryman, 1987; Cleary, 1985; Mainwaring, 1986). The option for the poor implied that Christians must work for social justice, notably--because poverty is most severe in rural areas--including agrarian reform.

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<sup>2</sup>Between 1996 and 2003 and again in 2009, I made brief visits to MST camps and settlements in four states (Natal, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul) and an MST training center in São Paulo, observing *místicas* and interviewing militants about the practice. As the reader will note, I have in addition drawn freely on the ethnographic accounts of others who have studied the practice of *mística*.

The churches promoted rural organization and became an important base for land occupation movements. The movements adopted the practices of the popular church. Liberation theology was closely linked to the practice of popular education, and the performance of *mística* in the MST owed elements to both. Popular education means education of, by, and for the people. Many of the principles of popular education are derived from the work of the Brazilian literacy pioneer Paulo Freire, who proposed (in the title of his best-known book) a *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), a pedagogy for poor people which made learning part of the process of liberation. Popular education is always a political and organizational process as much as an educational process; it puts into practice an ideology that declares the equality of all and insists on the full development of their capacities (Hammond, 1998).

Freire's method is designed to stimulate poor and uneducated adults to learn by engaging them politically. Popular literacy teaching therefore uses material derived from the real lives of poor people, and engages in practices of reflection, games, and dramatic and musical performances. Learners participate actively rather than absorbing passively as in the traditional classroom. Through reflection they come to a clearer understanding of the causes of their poverty and deprivation and become aware that these are not facts of nature or due to the will of God. The process of critical reflection, in other words, is a process of emancipation. "In educating adults, to avoid a rote, mechanical process one must make it possible for them to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write" (Freire 1973: 56). People come to exercise their intellectual potential, and as they do, they become aware of the social forces that constrain them and prevent them from being free. They see a connection between the physical occupation of *latifúndios* (the rural properties owned by large landowners that the MST targets for expropriation) and the occupation of the "latifúndio of knowledge" (Dutervil, 2005, quoted in Nascimento and Martins, 2008: 12).

Freirean pedagogical techniques are thus designed to encourage participation and bridge the hierarchical gap between teacher and learner. In fact, the teacher is often a fellow community member with only slightly better education than the learner. Freire argued that the goal of education should be *conscientização*, the development of a critical consciousness to enable learners to recognize and combat the sources of their oppression. Education is not just the acquisition of skills; it is the development of the whole person. Through it people come to exercise their capacity for independent and critical thinking. It therefore involves not just intellectual activity but noncognitive elements of emotion, physical movement, and collective activity embodying solidarity. *Mística* is an important part, including performances at public events outside of the school context.

In Christian traditions, mysticism is a form of religious ecstasy, a direct communion with the divine: "a way for the soul to free itself from the sphere of the body and reach the sphere of divinity. . . . For the mystic it brings feelings of such grandeur that words are inadequate to express what is experienced in that

direct union" (Lara, 2007: 3, 6). Characteristically, mysticism is an individual experience confined to a select few religious adepts.

Liberation theology, however, rejected both the exclusiveness and the individualism. The Brazilian churches became the support and mainstay of the social movements that sprang up and struggled against the dictatorship in its waning years. *Mística* underwent two important transformations in the social movements: it became collective rather than individual, and it was translated from the other world to the present world. Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff argues that *mística* is the force which sustains the social movements that have proliferated in Latin America in recent years, whether their inspiration is Christian, Marxist, or humanist. Frei Betto, a Dominican friar and well-known political commentator, insists on the legitimacy of the political use of *mística*, rejecting the objections of many church people (Boff, n.d.; Frei Betto, 2006; cf. Lara, 2007: 9-10).

In the MST, *mística* underwent a further transformation: its meaning became secularized from God to political struggle. Despite the importance of the church in its gestation, the MST embraces no explicit Christian commitment. But it has preserved the forms of dramatic enactment, marching, and music of *místicas* that came from the church.

From the start the MST defined itself as a radical movement, engaging in direct action rather than lobbying or more institutionalized forms of political pressure, even after the restoration of democracy (though it has not abstained from the latter; see Hammond, 2009). It adopted the occupation as its principal tactic, and the occupation was militant, transgressive, and not only directed at seizing a particular property for a particular group of occupiers, but part of a massive struggle whose goal was general social transformation, beginning with a generalized agrarian reform that would do away with the *latifúndio* (Fernandes, 2000).

Yet it also sought to transcend the doctrinaire Marxist orientation that had dominated the Brazilian left before the military coup and continued to play a major role in the opposition to the dictatorship; the old left's tactics were instrumentally focused and looked to a base in the urban working class, presumed to be conscious of its objective interests. This orientation left little space for a search for transcendental meaning. The traditions underlying the MST embraced conscious symbolic production that would give meaning and direction to the individual and to group affiliation in the movement (McNee, n.d.; Sampaio, 2002). Breaking from traditional left orthodoxy, national MST leader João Pedro Stédile declared that the movement is open to "all truths, not just one" (Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 59). Both the sense of larger purpose echoing its Christian origin and the radical ideology rejecting more conventional forms of political action led the movement to promote identity formation through the self-conscious use of symbols and ritual activity, infusing participation in the movement with a transcendent purpose. In its land occupations it also emphasized constructing community, something the traditional Marxist left had never attempted to do.

## The Process of Land Occupation

The MST grew out of a series of land occupations beginning near Passo Fundo in 1978 and was formally constituted in 1984. It grew in strength and activism through the 1990s to become the liveliest and most influential political movement on the Brazilian scene. It is not the only rural land occupation movement, but it is by far the largest (Brumer, 1990: 25; Fernandes, 2000; Hammond, 1999; Hammond and Rossi, 2013; Ondetti, 2008; Wright and Wolford, 2003). Typically the movement's collective action can be described in three phases: occupation, camp, and settlement.<sup>3</sup>

**Occupation.** The MST and other rural movements occupy idle farmland and pressure the state to expropriate it and turn it over to the occupiers to be farmed cooperatively. Brazilian law provides that agricultural land that is not being farmed productively can be expropriated and redistributed to those who want to farm it. Brazil's vast size, unequal land distribution, rural poverty, and oligarchical domination assure that there is ample idle land and a large number of poor rural people seeking to work it. But the state does not typically initiate expropriation, even where the criteria are clearly met. Instead, it only acts when direct action forces its hand. A rural movement identifies a property that appears to be eligible for expropriation, either because it is not being farmed productively or because the owner's title is fraudulent. The movement recruits a corps of occupiers from among the rural (and sometimes the urban) poor. Several hundred families together enter the targeted property at night and set up makeshift housing. They then seek legal title under the cover of the various federal and state laws. Their immediate goal is to create pressure to get the occupied properties expropriated under the country's agrarian reform law. In the longer term, they call for a more general agrarian reform.

An occupation sets in motion a process of conflict among several parties: the occupiers, the landowner (and possibly allies on both sides), and various governmental authorities, including the police forces, the courts, and the federal agrarian reform bureaucracy. Expropriation usually requires a long legal process in which landowners can intervene to defend their property rights. If the property is found to be expropriable, the owner is compensated and the property is turned over to applicants who meet an income test and other criteria. Normally the occupiers meet the criteria; the land is often awarded to them, but only after a delay of months or years following the initial occupation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This description must be somewhat simplified, because the MST is a nationwide movement in a huge country with a great variety of local social, economic, and agricultural conditions, so its actual practice varies from place to place.

<sup>4</sup>Occupations have declined in recent years. During the second term of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1998-2002) measures to suppress occupations were imposed; they were not revoked during the two terms of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) (2003-2010), despite the historic commitment of the PT to land reform and the longstanding alliance between the party and the movement. The PT administrations were friendlier to land reform than those of Cardoso, however, ceding government-owned land for settlements (Welch, 2011; Ondetti, 2008).

Joining a land occupation therefore entails a high commitment, as occupiers leave their entire life behind and wait to find out whether their gamble will pay off. In many areas of the country police and privately organized goon squads have conducted violent raids on settlements (Hammond, 2009). Not only do occupiers risk discomfort and possible repression, but the payoff is uncertain and at best distant. They would not risk so much without being firmly committed and anticipating a reward that will go beyond the hoped-for material payoff. For this reason, the MST uses communal and symbolic practices to cultivate identification with the movement and commitment to its goals.

**Camp.** In the interim, evicted occupiers may be resettled on land other than that which they originally occupied, either state-owned or already expropriated for agrarian reform. More often they erect a camp (*acampamento*) of improvised houses or tents somewhere in the vicinity, generally in the right-of-way of a public road, and wait for expropriation; on public property, they are likely to be safe from another eviction. The rural landscape is marked with dense groups of tiny shacks covered in black plastic sheets where land occupiers wait months, or even years, to be settled on a farm (D'Incao, 1991: 91; Paiero and Damatto, 1996: 41, 119).

**Settlement.** If they win title to the land, the payoff is high: they win the right to remain, create a settlement (*assentamento*), and farm the land, usually by some combination of individual and collective production. Not all settlements succeed, but those that do provide settler families a very good living compared to their former rural poverty (Ondetti, 2008: 231-38; Sparovek, 2003). Some even sell their farm goods to multinational corporations to market under nationally known brand names, diversify to such activities as a distillery, and promote ecologically sustainable agriculture. They create not only a farm enterprise but a community.

The movement is committed to the education of children and adults, and has created schools in many of its camps and settlements. The MST gives high priority to the education of the settlers, who are generally poorly educated and often illiterate. It promotes literacy among its militants, educating them with Freirean pedagogy. It assures universal schooling for all children. MST settlements create their own elementary schools, staffed by occupiers (usually without professional credentials), but they also seek and often achieve recognition and support from the local government, so that their schools have official recognition and their teachers are on the municipal payroll. The MST operates secondary boarding schools where young people from settlements across the country study agronomy, pedagogy, and political organizing (Caldart, 2000). It has founded the university-level Florestan Fernandes National School in São Paulo state, and has partnership agreements with universities in other states. These arrangements sometimes require the negotiation of conflict over the model of society, agriculture, and education taught in these institutions (Fernandes, 2012).

The settlements have become vibrant communities that provide a base for ongoing politicization and mobilization of participants. The MST cultivates

identification and commitment through political education and solidarity rituals such as *mística* and other artistic performances.

Though its main actions are extralegal occupations, the MST also takes full advantage of opportunities in institutional politics, most importantly to get land expropriated and win legal titles, as well as enjoying government benefits like agricultural credit. The movement promotes a maximal program: each expropriation is viewed as a step toward a general agrarian reform of all *latifúndios* and, in the long run, socialism. It is the most active land reform movement in Latin America and one of the leading national organizations behind *Via Campesina*, the international peasant movement (Fernandes, 2005; Hammond, 1999; Wright and Wolford, 2003: 315-330).<sup>5</sup>

### **Strategy and Identity**

Social movement theory is polarized between the concepts of "strategy" and "identity," or between the resource mobilization approach and the new social movements approach (Cohen, 1985; see also Hammond, 2012). Resource mobilization theory sees collective action as an effort to acquire collective goods--that is, goods that are shared by a whole collectivity and not possessed individually. The theory attempts to explain what determines the rise of collective action to achieve them and the means they use. Though not exclusively tied to the assumption of rational choice theory that actors rationally pursue their individual self-interest (Olson, 1971), it does treat social movements as strategic collective actors, calculating what forms of collective action will best achieve goals in the face of opposition from adversaries with opposed interests or from the state (sometimes conceived as an adversary, sometimes as a neutral party subject to political pressure; McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1998).

Collective identity theory<sup>6</sup> examines social movements primarily to address the changes they effect in the consciousness of their participants and the nature of interaction in a social movement that produces those changes. Francesca Polletta and James Jasper define collective identity as

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<sup>5</sup>The movement also presents its message through a number of periodicals and newsletters, some of them with very attractive production values, at the local and national levels. It further communicates with its supporters in other countries through a news agency, web site and e-mail list (Carter and Carvalho, 2009).

<sup>6</sup>Collective identity theory is a subset of a diverse array of theoretical approaches often referred to as "new social movements theory," because the social movements arising in the US and Europe since the 1970s were regarded as a new form (Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield, 1994; Melucci, 1995; Touraine, 1985). Because "new" is not a substantive description, however, I prefer to refer to "collective identity theory," that facet of new social movements theory that most closely fits the practice of internal organization and motivation in the MST.

an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities. . . . Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials--names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on. . . . Collective identity does not imply the rational calculus for evaluating choices that "interest" does (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 285).

Polletta and Jasper go on to argue that collective identity theory's account of motives to participate in a movement--satisfactions and obligations assumed--explains participation better than any account based on material incentives, because the latter are necessarily uncertain. The theory also addresses the cultural effects--transformation of lifestyle--that can be an important part of social movement participation. Finally, the authors argue, some strategies are pursued because the actions are intrinsically appealing more than because they are instrumentally effective.

Both these approaches to social movements are clearly relevant to the MST. The success or failure of the MST's strategic choice to give primacy to the land occupation can best be analyzed in terms of resource mobilization theory. So too, the MST's efforts to influence its image in the public media is an important element of its strategy and one intertwined with its other strategic choices (Hammond, 2004).

Its internal practices, on the other hand, put a premium on identity formation as discussed by collective identity theory. It is surprising that a theory which developed in western Europe in response to social changes of advanced industrial societies in the last third of the twentieth century would apply to a movement in a third world country--though one rapidly advancing to the status of industrial superpower--and in one of its most economically underdeveloped sectors, namely family agriculture. The terminology of collective identity theory reflects its origin in advanced industrial societies in ways that are jarring when applied to rural Brazil. For example, the term "lifestyle" implies a wide range of choices and hardly seems to fit the cultural styles of poor, landless Brazilian rural workers. But becoming an MST settler evidently entails a dramatic change of lifestyle, if we abstract from that term's connotation of choice.

In summary, the combination of strategic action to secure land reform and identity formation to promote adherence and loyalty to the movement suggests the need to synthesize resource mobilization and collective identity approaches.<sup>7</sup> This discussion concentrates on the identity work performed by mística,

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<sup>7</sup>Two recent studies of the MST illustrate the two approaches: Gabriel Ondetti (2008) emphasizes political opportunities in an analysis that grows out of the resource mobilization approach, and Miguel Carter (2010) emphasizes the emotional satisfactions derived from movement participation, though each also recognizes the importance of factors put forward by the other theory.

reflecting the religiously formed viewpoint of participants rather than the theoretical categories of outside observers (although, as we will see, the movement's own leaders think theoretically and analyze their movement's behavior from a perspective intermediate between those of the wholly engaged participant and the theoretical analyst).

The physical separation of people into camps before winning land and then into settlements where they create a farm and community provides the opportunity to cultivate an alternative identity and an alternative set of values. The historical root in Christian base communities and the support of the church--strongest in the early years--promoted a pedagogy of consciousness-raising based on *mística*. *Mística* was already emphasized in an organizing manual produced when the movement was only two years old.

### **Mística and Meaning**

I have called the *mística* in Passo Fundo with which I began this paper a "performance," taking the viewpoint of an outside observer. To those taking part and to many who were watching, however, it had a much deeper meaning. Herein lies the ambiguity and at the same time the richness of "*mística*." The word refers to specific performances like this one; but it also refers to the spirit with which they are undertaken and their central purposes: to encourage commitment to the movement, identification with the movement as a central element of one's identity, the aspiration to the ideal future (many speak of "utopia" in explaining *mística*), and the belief that by their efforts they will secure that future. Many participants and observers express the firm conviction that it is *mística* that sustains movement participation through a difficult struggle, one whose favorable outcome would appear anything but assured to those who do not participate in *mística* and share the convictions that arise from it. If I emphasize the observable practices of *mística*, I urge the reader to keep in mind the underlying meaning and aspiration. For practitioners the performances cannot be separated from them.<sup>8</sup>

*Místicas* abound in symbols, material objects with a deeper meaning, expressing aspects of the struggle for land and the hope for the future. Some symbols relate to the land and agriculture, others to political struggle. They incorporate farm products--seeds, plants, even animals--and tools--scythes, machetes, hoes, often held raised in a position of defiance. The negative counterparts of these symbols are the symbols of the life of the city, to which the peasant deprived of access to land is forced to migrate. Political struggle is symbolized by the MST

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<sup>8</sup>Some *místicas* can be seen on line, e.g. *Mística de abertura do MST no Encontro de Amigos do MST 08/12/07* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlx6HhKMFLU>>, *25 Anos MST—Socialismo Mística* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9q2qdWZ6dk>>; *Mística - Inauguração do Curso de Serviço Social do MST na UFRJ* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLwPYPEgOVO>>; *La Mística* <<http://vimeo.com/63254594>>.



flag, the map of the country, and also by symbolic behavior: singing, assembling in groups, and assuming postures that display defiance. Again, there are also negative symbols, representing the political forces that impede the realization of their goals: the landowner, the banker; more recently, agribusiness and the International Monetary Fund (Issa, 2007: 133; Lara, 2005: 120-21; Medeiros, 2001).

These are symbols of a deeper meaning: the right to land, the reasons why the workers are entitled to that land, and the political process of achieving it. Because *mística* is intended as a motivating process, its intellectual content is never separate from the emotive or motivational aspects. Indeed, the intellectual is underplayed in *mística*, which "responds to the need to create an environment for deepening ideas that is less univocal and rational," according to Ademar Bogo (Souza, n.d.). Symbols convey meaning indirectly and appeal to the emotions as much as to the intellect; the purpose is to create a feeling as much as it is to convey a rationally articulated set of beliefs. The nonverbal, nonintellectual aspect of mystical experience (communion with the transcendent) is conveyed by physical, kinetic aspects of performance of *mística* (Lara, 2007: 5, 15, 18; Boff, 2004). The content is utopian: it is intended to foreshadow and help to bring about a better future in which social justice prevails, fundamentally through the mechanism of agrarian reform which permits landless workers to labor honestly to earn their living in the countryside (Lara, 2005; Lara and Lambiasi, 2007; Sampaio, 2002). According to Claudemiro Godoy do Nascimento and Laila Chalub Martins, it is "an action that teaches and strengthens actors in their daily struggle" (2008: 115). In an interview I asked Luiz, a settler in Itapeva in São Paulo state, to explain *mística*. He exclaimed, "It is to make the impossible possible."

*Mística* embodies artistic presentation including performance, plastic arts, and music (Lara 2005 75; McNee, n.d.). The artistic elements constitute "mobilizing forces of the sense of belonging and the establishment of a distinction between 'us' and 'them.'" Songs, dance, and theater contribute to identity formation: they are "the expression of a collective feeling that unites, identifies and strengthens their spirit of resistance and struggle" (Harnecker, 2001). Collective participation creates a sentiment of unity, and helps the movement to visualize the "antagonistic other" and to constitute its own identity on that basis. Once again, the expressive mode means the predominance of the emotions over the intellect. Stories and music convey unity and emotive content. They have a substantive content as well, but it is less important than the artistic representation (Lara and Lambiasi, 2005; McNee, n.d.).

Some *místicas* refer to the heroic figures of agrarian struggles from Brazil's past. Zumbi dos Palmares, who led a community of escaped slaves in the seventeenth century; Canudos, a nineteenth-century community of rural withdrawal; the war of the Contestado against land grabbers and the railroads in the early twentieth century; and the Peasant Leagues of the 1960s--all are important references, along with the ubiquitous Che Guevara. Sue Branford and Jan Rocha (2002: 43) describe the *romaria da terra* (land pilgrimage) in 1988 to Palmares, site of

Zumbi's community, sponsored jointly by the church, the MST, and a rural trade union.

These must be regarded as invented traditions. Although they are real historical events, there is little if any direct continuity between them and the landless movement that emerged in the 1980s, but the MST uses *mística* to affirm a connection which becomes real in the process. Martyrdom is also a prominent theme: the hundreds of landless and their supporters who have been murdered in land struggles are frequently commemorated (Bonin and Kersten, 1993: 222; Hammond, 2009; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992; Issa, 2007: 134).

The themes of the performances are chosen to represent

a cry of the poor: . . . a cry that breaks out of the silence of many, deprived of being human beings inside of this voracious system based on capitalist relations of production. For the MST, there is a crying reality, a reality of beings who are denied in their existence--the poor, those who hide behind the desire to cry out in a profound silence, suffocated and destroyed (Nascimento and Martins, 2008: 117-118).

*Mística* is intended to create unity: collective ritual acts bring people together, to act in unison, in pursuit of common ideals. Rituals are a common practice in social movements, perhaps especially movements of withdrawal (Jasper, 1997: 184-85; Kanter, 1972: 99-102; Taylor and Whittier, 1995: 278-80).

Most importantly, *mística* contributes to the formation of identity. Shared identity makes struggle possible and has to be cultivated. Correlatively, *mística* identifies an enemy, an Other over-against whom the landless define themselves and their struggle. So the unity is produced within the group and at the same time separates the group from adversaries in conflict. The MST has devoted significant resources and attention to the cultivation of identity. Identity is essential to any movement because while movements may be rationally organized and instrumentally directed, their success depends on the voluntary adherence of their followers. The distant possibility of material reward cannot by itself win that adherence; the main incentive is the solidarity they feel with their fellow activists.

The landless suffer from negative stereotypes. Many Brazilians regard them as poor, as criminal, or as seeking a government handout. They may internalize them, as oppressed people often do. *Mística* becomes a means of overcoming them through a process of reappropriation: "taking a negatively evaluated label, and revaluing it positively, a group can change the value of the label and thus, in at least some important ways, the value of the group" (Galinsky et al., 2003: 228). Verity Burgmann calls this process transvaluation and finds it in many social movements of subordinate groups (2005: 7):

From the 1960s new social movements roused new constituencies of subordinate groups, such as women, homosexuals, racial and ethnic minorities, with their rhetorics of difference and their emphasis on identity. "Black Power." "Gay Pride." "The woman-identified-woman." Numerous slogans come to mind . . . [M]ovements propounding identity politics have utilized the power of words to mediate between being and consciousness, to persuade subordinate groups to recognize and act upon their oppression (Burgmann, 2005: 4-5.)

According to Fabiano Coelho, "a stigmatized image of the landless has been created, as vagabonds, criminals, abused, destroyers of order, among other pejorative adjectives. And when the subjects internalize what is now being called the identity of the landless, that stigma comes to be broken down slowly" (2010: 198).

Some make a distinction between "*sem-terra*," or a landless person (with negative connotations), and "*Sem Terra*," an activist in the movement who has recovered a positive identity. As Salete, another activist, proudly proclaimed, "I am a Sem Terra with capital letters! I am Salete Sem Terra" (Prado and Lara, 2003). Not only does she invert the status of landless from pejorative to proudly acknowledged; she converts it from an attribute to a noun, from an incidental characteristic to the essence of *what she is*.

Many MST militants transvalue their identity in this way. The *mística* performed in Passo Fundo shows one element of this transvaluation, portraying urban life as physically and socially unhealthy, to be replaced by the sound, healthy life of hard work in the countryside. Again, Salete indicates the process:

In the camp we began to recover our dignity. In my time, for example, when you said you were from Natalino Camp or from Danone Camp, my God in heaven, [people said to us] you are vagabonds, you are I don't know what, the worst names. *Mística* accomplished a lot for us to value ourselves, that after all we are people, we are part of a movement that is struggling not just for land but for dignity, for sovereignty, for a different society (Prado and Lara, 2003).

The strategic phasing of the MST's collective action from occupation to camp to settlement provides a natural setting for identity formation. These locations constitute what Bernardo Mançano Fernandes calls an "interactive space" encouraging "exchanges of experiences, learning one another's life stories, raising consciousness of their condition as expropriated and exploited, in the construction of identity as landless" (2008: 33).

In addition, geography favors this exchange within the movement. The MST belongs to a category of social movements identified by Raúl Zibechi as movements of resistance, existing on the margins of society, spatially as well as socially, where they are beyond the reach of the powerful. They can therefore resist subjection to the dominant institutions of society, including the state, and organize their own institutions (2012: 67). Zibechi includes the MST under this

heading (although the MST both at the national level and in individual camps and assentamentos has a closer relation to the state than Zibechi acknowledges, depending on it to recognize their possession of the land as well as for various forms of financial assistance). Assentamentos are relatively isolated, forming communities unto themselves; their isolation both demands and contributes to their search for a shared identity that excludes those who are not part of the movement.

Identity can also be formed through deliberately planned activities, of which *mística* is an important one.

As a collective practice in the constitution of a common identity, the sense of group belonging is fundamental. . . . [*Mística* reinforces] a set of values, beliefs, interests that define the collective identity of a group. . . . Enacting *místicas* stimulates the sharing of a definition and understanding of social structure, thus guaranteeing that intra-group relations achieve unity (Prado and Lara, 2003).

It is in everyday life that *mística* makes its presence felt. According to an MST training manual for the practice of *mística*,

A meeting, a ceremony, a festive activity can and should be full of moments that make present the reasons why we are struggling and the motives that make us comrades [*companheiros*]. so the beauty around us, the climate of confidence, happiness, music, poetry, arts, symbols, war cries [i.e., slogans chanted in demonstrations]--everything should express the values and certainties that inspire our path (Peloso, [1997]: 10).

According to Arnildo, an activist,

All those in the camp who don't get into that practice, . . . or don't participate much, or don't get engaged so that they stay outside of the *mística* . . . they are the first to retreat . . . and many of them drop out of the camp exactly for one reason, in my opinion: for the lack of *mística* (Prado and Lara. 2003).

*Místicas* are performed on a variety of occasions: group meetings, gatherings, assemblies, demonstrations, congresses, and occupations (MST, 1986: 103). They are performed locally, in camps and settlements. According to Nadir Lara (2003), the camp is the ideal setting for drawing participants into the organization of the movement. When people have come together to occupy a property and discover that their first effort is unsuccessful and their success may be far away, the motivating power of *mística* is especially important.

*Místicas* become more elaborate on occasions when MST occupiers and settlers come together from different settlements or different regions: at the

movement's congresses and regional meetings, public demonstrations, and training courses--especially those dedicated to political themes but also at other kinds of courses. At such events, an assigned group prepares the *mística* and presents it, usually at the beginning of a session. For events lasting several days and bringing together groups from a wide area, each locale (each settlement, or each state delegation at a congress) is responsible for presenting a *mística* to open the proceedings on a particular day. At these events occupiers and settlers learn firsthand the reach of the movement. *Místicas* are carefully prepared and often elaborate, with costumes, props, and accompanying music. The groups engage in a friendly competition to offer the best *mística* and show the whole body that they excel in commitment and organization (Lara, 2005: 123-28; Vieira, 2007).

These occasions should be joyous, as national MST leader João Pedro Stédile emphasized: "Why should someone get involved in a march to Brasília? Because he feels good, he feels happy. Everyone looks and says, 'What a sacrifice!' But the guy is enjoying himself" (Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 129). *Mística* is offered in a spirit of celebration, lightening up the atmosphere of serious decision-making at formal gatherings.

These performances generally have a distinctly amateur quality: enthusiastic and lacking in subtlety. They are not dramatic in that they lack real delineated characters or any but the most stereotyped plot. They present an ideological message that is meant to provoke reflection but whose truth, at the same time, is unquestioned. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster (1927) discusses "flat" and "round" characters. Flat characters are "constructed round a single idea or quality," and thus their meaning is transparent, while round characters offer surprises to the reader. Forster does not disparage flat characters, because they perform useful roles in a novel, providing atmosphere and playing to readily accessible, noncomplex emotions.

In *místicas*, *all* the characters are flat. They are presented not as three-dimensional people but as archetypes. Their flatness is a function of the purpose of *místicas*: not to arouse complex sentiments but to reinforce those that the audience already feels, and to ratify their unity which is exemplified by the expectation that all will respond homogeneously to the ideas presented, in shared celebration.

### **The Power of *Mística***

Participants and observers are unanimous in claiming that *mística* is effective. It is hard to evaluate in any precise sense, but *mística* is integrated to the overall practice of the movement, which has, indeed, been effective: winning actual land in the form of settlements for over 600,000 peasant families<sup>9</sup> throughout the country and winning the battle of public opinion, at least for the issue of

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<sup>9</sup>This includes all families who have received land through agrarian reform, not just those in MST settlements.

agrarian reform and to some extent for the movement itself, though with fluctuations (Hammond, 2004; Ondetti, 2008).

I know of no evaluation of the effectiveness of *mística* by a neutral observer. Not only participants and leaders but sympathetic outsiders, for example in the academy, declare it to be very powerful, however. According to national MST leader Stédile, *mística* provides "ideological sustenance." He goes on to say, "people participate in a march because it makes them feel good; it is a sacrifice, but they stay a long time because they have *mística*" (Stédile and Fernandes, 1999: 129).

Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, an academic economist, movement supporter, Workers Party congressman and later presidential candidate of the Socialism and Liberty Party: "What motivates the MST to carry on its single-minded work? It can all be summed up in a single word: *mística*, or mysticism" (Sampaio, 2002).

Roseli Caldart, movement activist who is a national leader of the MST's educational projects: "*Mística* is what kept people on the march [to Brasília in 1997];" *mística* is "the seasoning of the struggle, the passion that enlivens militants" (quoted by Lara, 2007: 14-15).

Cândido Grzybowski, general director of IBASE (Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Econômicas e Sociais), a leading NGO: "[The MST] manages to maintain what they call '*mística*.' People stay very engaged in the struggle; they believe in it" (interview, 1998).

Arnildo, a settler in Encruzilhada Natalino: "It creates an inner strength in the group; it makes the whole group have strength to react to repression" (Lara and Lambiasi, 2005: 75).

As a social scientist, I am wary of trusting self-reports of effectiveness, because (especially in social movements) people are capable of self-deception and disposed to overrate the validity and effectiveness of their actions. These self-evaluations raise the issue of whether insider or outsider perspectives are better able to attain the truth; the insider-outsider debate is an old one (Merton, 1972). In this case, as we have seen, there are many analytical minds in the movement, and the staying power and political success of the movement are sufficient testimony to its effectiveness that we can allow insiders to have the last word.

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## **Pedagogies of resistance and solidarity: towards revolutionary and decolonial praxis**

**Nathalia E. Jaramillo and Michelle E. Carreon**

### **Abstract**

*In this essay, the authors examine the theories and concepts that animate several social movements across the globe. The authors are particularly interested in linking the theoretical with the pedagogical, what they refer to as the praxis of social movements. Central to this analysis is an examination of the revolutionary struggles of Latin America and the pedagogy of buen vivir / living well. The authors utilize a decolonial framework to examine social movement pedagogy and extend their analysis of the central themes of reciprocity and solidarity in buen vivir to U.S. based social movements and the emergence of solidarity economies.*

**Keywords:** buen vivir, Latin America, neoliberal subjectivity, pedagogy, reciprocity, solidarity economy.

### **Confronting the invincibility of power: occupation and the capitalist crisis**

The global financial crisis, which began in 2007, collapsed the banking industry, generated heightened rates of unemployment (from 9% in the United States to 21% in Spain (United Nations 2011)), and increased national debts, left the most alienated sectors of society to deal with the consequences of severe austerity plans. Those who took to the streets in protest, such as the global Occupy Movements, the *Indignados* in Spain, and the resistance movement in Greece, were oftentimes met with brute forms of state-military violence. The ‘state’ was under threat of collapse following decades of neoliberal economic reforms and a deregulated banking and corporate sector. By 2012, the notion that capitalist democracies (a contradiction in itself) could secure abundance and harmony for the world’s populace was a proven falsehood. The veil of equity and justice associated with democratic nations had been stripped bare. While these social movements have left their mark on the public imaginary, the tangible and concrete effects of their sustained occupation of public spaces remain limited and frequently relegated to the level of the symbolic (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortes 2013).

Recent analyses of social protests from 2006-2013 indicate that the global community is experiencing a concentrated period of ‘high’ civil disobedience (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortes, 2013). According to a report published by the *Initiative for Policy Dialogue*, a majority of protests happen in high-income countries among varied social groups that represent both middle and lower classes and differing political sectors. This, in fact, marks a new era in social movements. No longer characterized by a unified social subject, today’s wide-

scale movements include vast numbers of people who fall under the rubric of the ‘general public.’ From 2007 onward, there has been an intensification of protest linked to the economic injustices spawned by the collapse of the global financial industry and the austerity plans that followed in its tumultuous wake.

While economic inequality, job losses, and reduction of social safety nets (among other issues) reflect the most common reasons for public outrage, a growing dissatisfaction with democracy has ushered millions into the street. The interplay between economic injustice and the failure of governments to safeguard basic needs for survival of its citizens in many so-called developed nations propelled forward new forms of protest. Civil disobedience, direct action, and the occupation of public spaces defied the state’s authoritarian power and concession to the capitalist elite. Yet, an overwhelming majority of protests (63 percent) have not achieved their intended demands or short-term grievances. This does not signal a failure in and of itself. But for the purposes of this essay, it does hint towards the need to develop other forms of assessing social protest not as an acute act defined by a concrete objective but as processes that require sustenance from alternative philosophical and social schemes altogether.

In this essay, we examine the theories and concepts that animate several social movements across the globe. We are particularly interested in linking the theoretical with the pedagogical, what we refer to as the *praxis* of social movements. Our analysis is shaped by vast expressions of resistance that emerged over the last decade, with specific consideration to the revolutionary struggles of Latin America. The correspondence between Latin American struggles and those occurring in places such as the United States oftentimes goes unrecognized. The occupy movement, as one example, has taken up Latin American notions of reciprocity, solidarity, and *horizontalidad* as referents for its own pedagogical practice. Similar associations are evident in emerging solidarity economies across the U.S. This should not come as a surprise. Latin America has experienced economic crisis since its very formation, its veins opened (to paraphrase Eduardo Galeano) to exploitation from its more dominant capitalist counterparts. The region has now opened its revolutionary spirit instead, allowing those of us in the northern hemisphere to learn from the conceptual schemes and social relations that characterize acts against colonial-neoliberal capitalist exploitation.

The overriding question we engage in this essay can be framed thusly: What forms of praxis does it take to initiate (or consider) deep social transformation? Our gaze is admittedly directed in a complex and perhaps unperceivable direction, but just as the social movements and protests over the last several years have reignited the slogan ‘another world is possible,’ our curiosities have also been cut loose. We are interested in thinking about the possibilities when discrete and organized acts of protest generate new concepts and understandings about transcending the central antagonisms of capitalist society.

The protagonists of Latin American struggles are mixed-bloods, *mestizos*, female, male, indigenous, rural, urban, cultural and linguistic hybrids, workers and peasants. They represent polymorphous subjects, motivated by an

interrelated set of historical and economic relations that impact self and collective identities. Their struggles are important, not least in part because of their tenacity and resolve to confront overwhelming domination that has attacked their very core of being. Local and autonomous resistance (such as the Zapatistas) have harnessed the world's attention and inspired global movements that challenge the authority of world economic power. In other instances, Latin American mobilizations have accomplished the rewriting of constitutions to disrupt colonial-capitalist hegemony. In Bolivia and Ecuador, prolonged social struggles anchored in the philosophy of *buen vivir*/living well achieved constitutional reform to include economic, cultural, historical, transnational, intergenerational, and gendered justice (see Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo 2009). As we chart a revolutionary and decolonial praxis of social movements, we give close attention to the following interrelated issues:

1. The relationship between neoliberal capitalism and subjectivity as it pertains to the emergence of new social actors in revolutionary movements and its influence on the emergence of a pedagogy of *buen vivir*.
2. The ways in which concepts such as *buen vivir* offer alternative readings of reciprocity and solidarity and its relation to social movement pedagogy.

Our essay concludes with an in-depth examination of solidarity economies in the U.S., as they illustrate one of the more concrete outgrowths of organized resistance. In the context of the U.S., solidarity economies represent a massive undertaking to break free from capitalism's stronghold. Solidarity economies also provide a common reference point for social movement pedagogies, as organized resistance against neoliberal capitalism increasingly advocates an ethos of solidarity to establish new economies and forms of governance based on direct participation and collective struggle.

### **Latin American social movements**

Latin American social movements represent some of the most varied and complex efforts currently underway to demand reparations from the injustices periled against a continent under the historical ruse of economic development. The impact that neoliberal economic policy had on the region from the 1980s onward not only lent itself to gaping income inequalities between the wealthy oligarchy and all 'others.' It had additional enduring effects. The cultural apparatus of neoliberal doctrine extended the colonial legacy of conquest and exploitation that shaped the tragic founding of the Americas and gave rise to continued forms of racial, sexual, epistemological and gendered hierarchies, or in the words of Ramon Grosfoguel (2009), heterarchies. Put simply, neoliberal capitalism (and capitalism in its entirety) patterns the way we think, communicate, and relate to one another and our environment.

Neoliberal capitalism is the outgrowth of a historical system of economic exploitation and alienation that is entangled with relations of social stratification. In the Latin American context, wide-scale social movements are supported by popular education methods that create the conditions for participants to critique and act upon relations of dispossession. Dispossession is about the effects of capitalism on a people's economic livelihood, but it extends into other realms of sociability. The exclusion of non-Western and non-Eurocentric knowledge, human and natural relations, and cosmovisions, form part of an overarching system of dispossession that social movements contest simultaneously. Conceptually, pedagogical efforts to undo the legacy of colonial-capitalism demonstrate a pronounced attempt to delink from the conceptual apparatus of neoliberal subjectivity altogether.

### **Challenging neoliberal subjectivity and the coloniality of power**

Neoliberal subjectivity depends upon a view of the self-directing individual as the heart of decision-making (Bondi 2005). Liz Bondi (2005), in her study of psychotherapeutic practice (though she is also an academic geographer), examines the contradictions of working within "neoliberal governmentality." Psychotherapeutic practice, according to Bondi, is critiqued as overwhelmingly individualizing and de-politicized. Many of its advocates, however, see their work as empowering and politically subversive. A point shared by political activists as well.

Bondi does not assume an either/or position. She does, however, shed light on the paradox of neoliberal governmentality that "obliges us to be free" (2005, 512). On this point, she is worth quoting in extenso

The model of human subjectivity associated with neoliberal governmentality is deeply problematic...neoliberal subjectivity does not inevitably generate subjects oriented solely to the narcissistic gratification of individual desires via market opportunities. Indeed aspects of neoliberal subjectivity hold attractions for political activists because activism depends, at least to some extent, on belief in the existence of forms of subjectivity that enable people to make choices about their lives. (499)

Within neoliberal subjectivity, the individual, considered a rational being capable of seeing through the fallacy of market principles rooted in freedom of choice, becomes the central figure to contest capitalist exploitation. This, in fact, has been the cornerstone of theories of resistance. We can trace this inception to anti-capitalist provocateurs Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/2014), who advocated for a conception of the individual and working classes as the 'engine' of history. Through negation of the capital-labor relation, workers were conceived as subjects with the ultimate capacity (power) to transform society from one based upon human alienation to human development. Or as Marx

would say, “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (1875). Marx defined revolutionary practice as “the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change” (Cited in Lebowitz 2007). In other words, we develop our capacities and capabilities through our activity, and as a consequence of self-change we change the circumstances in which we live and labor. That is, we change ourselves through our activity (Jaramillo 2012).

When we consider the recuperation of factories in Argentina following the economic collapse of the country in 2002, or the establishment of worker-run cooperatives during the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela (see Lebowitz 2010), we take notice of the primacy of place given to workers’ developing skills and habits of mind to subvert the capital-labor relation. Recruiting the historically dispossessed into active self-management builds upon neoliberal conceptions of individual freedom. Bondi refers to this as “neoliberal left ideology” (2005, p. 504). Empowerment as the practice of self-governance is seen as a way for subjects to work for themselves, to make them *free*.

From wide scale social movements in Latin America such as Bolivia, Ecuador and the autonomous communities of southern Mexico, neoliberal subjectivity is challenged on multiple dimensions. Social subjects have emerged that extend our understanding of neoliberal subjectivity through the lens of coloniality. Comprised of multi-ethnic, multi-vocal, peasant and indigenous peoples, social struggle is characterized by conceptual frameworks that uphold collective wellbeing (as opposed to individual rationality) as the centerpiece to transcending capitalist relations. In the context of Ecuador and Bolivia, such efforts stem from the indigenous concepts Sumak Qamaña and Sumak Kawsay, Kichwa and Aymara terms respectively. Loosely translated as *buen vivir* or living well, Sumak Qamaña and Sumak Kawsay propel a new social subject forward and redefine the very meaning of freedom.

Both Sumak Qamaña and Sumak Kawsay establish collective wellbeing as a centerpiece to social transformation. The focus is on understanding the interconnectedness of subjectivity, linking “economics with the political, socio-cultural, and environmental spheres, as well as in the necessities, capacities, and potentialities of human beings” (Walsh 2010, 16). In recognizing the relationship between the economic structure of society and all other forms of human sociability, indigenous epistemologies disrupt conventional theoretical dichotomies (i.e. class struggle versus ethnic, gendered, sexual, racial or environmental struggle) and advance a holistic rendering of social life. Self-change, in this instance, is about self-recuperation. The recuperation of sociability that has been rendered nearly obsolete through conquest, militarism, exploitation, and the alienation of subaltern knowledge(s).

### **Against neoliberal subjectivity: pedagogy of *buen vivir***

The *pedagogy of buen vivir* emerged following decades of social struggle against colonial-capitalist domination. In Bolivia, it began in the 1960s through



wide-scale literacy campaigns that addressed the lack of formal education among the indigent underclass. Literacy campaigns are a common practice for political empowerment among Latin American social movements altogether. We recall that a community's need for historical literacy is what brought Subcomandante Marcos to the Lancandon jungle in the early 1980s in the role of teacher to instruct a cadre of six indigenous leaders. The people had requested teachings in literacy and Mexican history to develop what they called *la palabra politica*, the political word (Higgins 2004). Yet, as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire made clear, literacy as a transformative praxis requires a reading of the word through a reading of the world (Freire 1972). In the context of popular indigenous uprisings, the reading of the world was based on an embodied recollection of the sensations, affect, spirit, and oral traditions that communicate historical memory embedded in land-based traditions. This was a lesson that Marcos quickly learned among the Zapatistas, compelling him to reorient his conceptual understanding and pedagogical practice. It so follows, the initial efforts in popular education to teach people 'how-to-read' across Latin America had to move from a linear and uni-directional act of teaching into educative spaces of dialogue. Here, the role of listening as a pedagogical act becomes central.

The onset of military dictatorships in Bolivia and the Latin American region in the 1970s brought a wave of repression that systematically eradicated the potential of opposition movements that had organized against capitalist exploitation. The bloodied attacks against all forms of leftist ideas and influence forcibly silenced many worker-based movements, and gave license to the Chicago Boys of the Friedman ilk to experiment with neoliberal economic policy, ultimately transforming the state into an apparatus for transnational capital. Neoliberalism's impact on human subjectivity proved difficult to break in the years that followed, as the tropes of individualism, greed, and consumption became part of the nation's collective consciousness. Social antagonisms regenerate and gain power within the death-world of neoliberal capital, as the politics of life hinges on either being an asset or casualty to the logic of economic power. Popular education would undergo another transition, as the discourse of worker's organization and rights (largely attributed to Soviet traditions) had been systematically torn down.

From the 1980s forward, popular education was characterized by deep dialogue that allowed for the visions and narratives of subaltern groups to emerge as organizing principles of resistance. This took place in an era of "cultural expressionism" that followed the end of military dictatorships (Terrazas 2011). Pedagogically, popular education was driven by the needs of communities. The need to restore sustainable ways of life was steered by the humility required of educators to listen to the other and accept that it was possible for many worlds to fit in this one (Terrazas 2011). It is not sufficient simply to listen to the other as an act of recognition. Dialogic listening is about accepting different rationalities in the construction of knowledge. In the act of listening, *buen vivir* emerges as a central paradigm shift that implies a deep criticism of neoliberal subjectivity.

Constructing collective knowledge relies upon the strengthening of class-consciousness that reinforces the class character of social actors. This is often understood as the language of critique in critical pedagogical practice. Developing the analytical categories that allow for a critique of capitalist exploitation and alienation is important, but in *buen vivir*, critique is accompanied by a radical questioning outside of developmentalist paradigms. As noted by Eduardo Gudynas, radical questioning within the indigenous traditions of *buen vivir* was made possible by a culture that lacked concepts like development or progress (2011). The pedagogy of *buen vivir* ultimately strives for a post-capitalist alternative, and this is made possible by two interrelated constructs. On the one hand, dialogue ushers a critique of neoliberal capitalism and subjectivity. And on the other axis of dialogue, an emancipatory politics emerges from the ethical-moral commitments of indigenous, non-developmental epistemology. Constructing collective knowledge through dialogue strengthens political identities and sets forward a liberatory practice based upon the rubric of living well as opposed to living better at the expense of others and nature. The vision is transcendental. In negating the logic of growth as development, individualism as freedom, and self-activity as the organizing principle of change, the pedagogy of *buen vivir* prioritizes life. As stated by Catherine Walsh, in the pedagogy of *buen vivir*, “Principles and base of struggle and transformation are no longer simply about identity, access, recognition or rights, but about perspectives of knowledge that have to do with the model and logic of LIFE itself” (Walsh 2011, 51).

*Buen Vivir* is a multilayered approach to recognize and address the entanglement of social realities. It represents a way of understanding the world as the configuration of an array of relationships, a way of life, and addresses the capacity we have to participate and alter the course of history (Macas 2010). *Buen vivir* transcends the ontological split of the ‘subject’ of Western rationality, with a focus on complementarity and the convergence of strengths between women and men (Macas 2010). In doing so, indigenous led struggles are simultaneously acts for direct restitution from colonial capitalism, but they also represent efforts to contest the coloniality of power (see Quijano 2000) that has shaped racial, epistemic, cultural, sexual, gendered, anthropocentric relations within the onset of capitalism as a colonizing process. Within the coloniality of power asymmetrical relations of power are recognized as byproducts and the active constitution of a global capitalist society that began with the 15<sup>th</sup> century conquest of the Americas. Proponents of decolonial thought emphasize the geopolitics of knowledge and a body politics of knowledge in their production of systems of intelligibility. As such, the decolonial school supports the production of knowledges from below, that is, knowledges produced by subalternized and inferiorized subjects (Jaramillo, McLaren and Lazaro 2011).

Methodologically, *buen vivir* translates to an array of practices based in communities, and allows for the visions, values and traditions of subaltern groups to shape the aims of the social movement. Based upon this alternative way of conceptualizing social life and relations, the pedagogy of *buen vivir* has resulted in two major frameworks. First, there is the framework of justice,

where the concept of ‘rights’ undergirds the objectives of social movement practice. The aim here is to transform dominant institutional arrangements by incorporating the rights of indigenous knowledge (Walsh 2010). Justice is thus amplified to include the rights of nature, culture, autonomy, and equity among men and women. The other framework has to do with the ethical commitments of *buen vivir* that opens the space for pluriversal conceptions of knowledge and ways of life (Gudynas 2011). In this sense, the struggle for autonomy and creating the conditions for localized formations of sustainable living take precedence. On this note we are reminded of what John Holloway (2010) refers to as the “cracks” of capitalism.

Social movements that work within neoliberal subjectivity and those that spring from the periphery of developmentalist paradigms provide us with an opportunity to interrogate the conditions that foster the emergence of new social practices. Our aim is to bring these forms in conversation with one another as they reveal the complexity of profound transformation within existing economic structures. While impossible to examine in great lengths the multiple and overlapping practices that characterize new social movements, our attention is directed to the tropes of reciprocity and solidarity that figure centrally in this potentially revolutionary conjecture.

### **Reciprocity and solidarity: widening the scope of social movement pedagogy**

The pedagogical model of *buen vivir* derives from a concept of reciprocity that precedes capitalist formations. It was key to social organization pre-conquest, connected to an ethical value system based on giving and receiving. Reciprocity is a socio-cultural form of praxis and an ideological construction evidenced in the mantra “dar, recibir y devolver” (give, return, and give back) (Quispe 2012, 161). The social movements of Bolivia and Ecuador recuperate reciprocity from the legacy of colonial exploitation by demanding that the state redistribute goods based on necessity (Quispe 2012). Within these movements heterarchies are contested as a more complete view of life is moved forward through decolonial conceptual terms. Reciprocity underscores a set of practices that requires the other or others to make an equivalent response and it is meant to be a permanent relation inclusive of all members of the community (Myer, Kirwin and Toober, 2010, 389). Reciprocity is a “model constructed from below and is based on territorial and educational control, self-sustainable development, care of the environment, reciprocity and solidarity, and the strengthening of communal organizations, languages, and cultures” (Meyer, Kirwin and Toober, 2010, p. 393). Here, we are reminded that “our activism must be embedded within, and never separate itself from, the multivoiced hemispheric conversation on resistance, hope, and renewal” (Ibid., 397).

As communitarian praxis, reciprocity considers woman and man not solely as a work force, but principally as being with knowledge, beliefs, and thinking. Put plainly, reciprocity advances an integral subject (Quispe 2012, 169). Notions of

individual freedom, will, and choice are replaced by a holistic rendering of social life that emphasizes interdependence and interconnectedness. Reciprocity within this decolonial frame is an important counterpoint to the Western subject that equates reciprocity with social cooperation. Proponents of reciprocity as cooperation rely on notions of fairness that are presumably secured by property-dependent democracy. Within western epistemological frameworks, reciprocity is understood as a necessary component to a well-ordered society (Brooks 2012). As a form of political justice, reciprocity depends upon citizens who can build towards a common political identity. This is most evident in Rawlsian notions of justice that undergird “property-owning democracies” (Brooks 2012, 21).

When the fundamental relations of capital are neither contested nor condemned, reciprocity emerges as a form of “mutual recognition.” Within this societal framework, it is understood that economic inequality subverts democracy altogether given that citizens who do not have basic needs met are unable to be seen or heard on equal terms. Economic inequality is seen as a threat to political bonds that limits the possibility of achieving consensus through public reason (Brooks 2012). The need to establish acceptance and respect for others thus depends upon a basic measure of equality where the other is recognized for having a voice worthy of being heard.

If we extend this understanding of reciprocity (as mutual recognition) to the practice of sustained protest as evidenced in the Occupy Movement in the US, then a more critical view of the emphasis placed on horizontal spaces of freedom is disclosed. The occupation movement set forward a range of social practices that include recovery of public space, the implementation of human microphones, decision-making via consensus, and the organization of social practices to ensure that its participants’ basic needs are met. Philosophically, occupy pedagogy is oriented towards *horizontalidad*, a concept inspired by workers who engaged in long-term political protest following the economic collapse of Argentina in 2002 (Sitrin 2011).

Horizontalidad forms a new kind of ideological framework that emphasizes social and individual autonomy, the use of direct democracy and the application of processes “in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created” (Sitrin as cited in Marcus 2012, 4). Marina Sitrin conceives of horizontalidad as a “living word” that foments social relationships based upon a flat plane upon which to communicate (Sitrin 2006). The practice of self-management and autonomous organization fulfills a horizontalist ethos. This ethos “believes that revolution will begin by transforming our everyday lives” (Marcus 2012, 5). Local debates, decentralized circuits of exchange and deliberation, voluntary association, and loose networks of affinity groups propose a way of acting and thinking as if one is already free. Here, individual agency is stressed in the pursuit of freedom, dignity and political voice. Connected to a new experience in which cooperation and mutual recognition is upheld, the social subjects of occupy movements pursue self-management on the premise that autonomous

social organizations function best when the state is absent from everyday decisions.

Horizontalidad as the exercise of free will and self-management is intrinsically connected to neoliberal subjectivity. It could be argued that horizontalidad, a deeply anti-institutional framework, approaches a type of free-market leftism. Our intent here is not to place Western notions of horizontalidad and reciprocity in opposition to pedagogies of buen vivir that advocate for reciprocal practices based on holistic, historical, and decolonial renderings of social life. We focus on the epistemological particularities of these frameworks as they indicate the complexity of detaching from the conceptual apparatus of neoliberal capitalism in the pursuit of alternative social and institutional formations. The point here is to underscore the intimate relationship between productive economic relations and epistemological frameworks that guide social practice. Here we are reminded by a question posed by critical educator John Holst who asks, “How do we understand pedagogically the objectively revolutionary demands that are not always understood subjectively as revolutionary?” (2011, 125).

Bridging the subjective and objective dimensions of revolutionary efforts is multilayered and difficult to ascertain. Pedagogy is a generalized term that covers the roles of social movement participants, their aims, ideas, and the philosophies that undergird everyday practice. It is easier – to some extent – to quantify objective revolutionary demands. Organizing to meet participants’ basic needs or strategizing to achieve political demands, for example, reflect tangible and concrete efforts. It is more difficult to ascertain the subjective conditions that reflect profound shifts towards revolutionary consciousness. Granted, a movement’s participants define the terms of revolution. Yet we need to remain aware that actions do not precede subjectivity. They are dialectically intertwined, embedded within larger social and historical apparatuses that guide the very ideas and acts that we in turn label transformative.

The movements that we have discussed thus far are relatively new, experimental, and replete with hope and possibility. The concepts that animate their social practice, aims, and visions differ in significant ways but also reflect a shared pedagogy of refusal. Across northern and southern continents, the protagonists of today’s social movements refuse to accept gaping inequality and alienating economic, cultural, and political relations. They also do not stand in isolation. Efforts to develop social relations predicated on solidarity, mutualism, reciprocity and cooperation have been underway since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is perhaps best evidenced by solidarity economies; forms of economic and political organization that attempt to create communal economic and social practices outside of capitalism’s value form.

### **Solidarity economy: origins and definitions**

The *solidarity economy*, at its core, is rooted in principles that prioritize life forms over profit within economic structures (i.e., production, exchange, and consumption). Principles of a solidarity economy include: solidarity, mutualism,

cooperation, reciprocity, sustainability, an emphasis on human dignity and the environment, and democratic forms of decision-making. While one or many of these principles connect the various initiatives that fall under the umbrella of a “solidarity economy”, the complexities of this framework are visible in both the multiple origins of these practices and the diverse definitions practitioners and scholars assign to the concept.

In the words of Ethan Miller, the origins of a “solidarity economy” as social organization date back to 1937 “when Felipe Alaiz advocated for the construction of an *economía solidaria* between worker collectives in urban and rural areas during the Spanish Civil War” (Miller 2010, 2). The Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain, which has its origins in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, remains one of the most well known and long lasting cooperative systems. According to George Cheney, the Mondragon system “grew out of fifteen years of small-group discussion and analysis (1941-1956), with the guidance of a Basque priest, Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, and the active involvement of five young engineers” (Cheney 1995, 187). Father Arizmendi (as he is often referred) envisioned the cooperative system as a “‘third way’ between the options of unbridled capitalism and centralized socialism that preserved individual economic incentive while emphasizing collective commitment and goals” (Cheney 1995, 187). Larraitz Altuna-Gabilondo comments on Father Arizmendi’s philosophy of solidarity economy thusly:

solidarity is characterized as a common good. A moral virtue, something on a par with equality and freedom. Solidarity is a human responsibility. The commitment to solidarity is something expansive, it has no limit and it has to proceed from the nearest to the farthest: among workers, from producers to consumers, from savers to investors, from one economic sector to another, from industry to the countryside, from one generation to another, and so on. In his view, solidarity has a strong link with its peer fraternity or brotherhood, which appeals to those who are close by and somehow connected. So, the different others are neither in conflict nor separated. They appear integrated into the same framework of understanding. (Altuna-Gabilondo 2013)

Arizmendi’s ethic of fraternity and his focus on the interconnections between social actors resonate with philosophies of liberation that emphasize ethics in paradigms for social transformation (see Maldonado-Torres 2012). The plight of industrial capitalism alters notions of solidarity as human responsibility when ownership of the means of production takes a central role. This is the case in the context of Latin America where solidarity economies emerged primarily in the 1980s as a counterpoint to the devastating effects of massive unemployment and social exclusion. Here, we begin to see a shift in the conceptualization of solidarity economies as a movement driven by the need to meet basic worker demands.

To organize and achieve worker demands, a pedagogy of empowerment was put

into place. Ana Margarida Esteves (2013), in her examination of the solidarity economy in Brazil, highlights two pedagogical dimensions in particular. Esteves discusses the work of popular educators to promote both economic and political empowerment. To achieve economic empowerment, workers were encouraged to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for the creation of self-managed production units. For political empowerment, workers developed the knowledge of structural economic oppression to drive the collective action necessary for change. Together, economic and political empowerment form an overarching critical literacy that joins the construction of ‘ideas’ about social reality with ‘actions’ to undo systems of exploitation. The iteration between thought processes and social acts echoes the underlying philosophy of critical consciousness attributed to Freire. Critical consciousness is not the root or precondition of social transformation but the byproduct of living one’s commitment ethically and corporeally. The solidarity economy, with its focus on actively creating concrete practices of collaboration, reflects the principle that we educate ourselves with others.

Ethically and politically, the solidarity economy emerged from diverse enterprises that “share a common ‘economic rationality’ of cooperation and solidarity” (Miller 2010, 2). Like many of the prolonged social movements against colonial-capitalist exploitation, it also fails to fulfill a singular definition or characterization. For some, solidarity economy is a strategy of economic liberation and for others it implies other forms of sociability that broaden the scope of liberation altogether. It has emerged from a common source of struggle against economic domination and exploitation and attempts to enact values and commitments outside the logic of capital.

### **Solidarity economy in the United States**

In his 2009 report of the first national gathering of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, Carl Davidson quotes Elandria Williams, activist and staff member for the Highlander Research and Educational Center, as saying, “We’ve been engaged in the solidarity economy for our survival for a long time. We just never applied that name to it” (Davidson 2009). One can argue that, historically, there have been countless examples of initiatives forged by people who made a conscious effort to work and live based on principles of cooperation, mutualism, and sustainability.

Despite the newness of the term within the U.S., there have been expressions of ideals at the core of the solidarity economy throughout U.S. history. These expressions arise from historical moments in which people have responded to their circumstances and mobilized to change their situations by relying on specific values of cooperation. Early examples include American communal experiments during the 1800s, such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands in Massachusetts and New Harmony in Indiana. While these utopian experiments did not last, they reflect moments when people came together with the intent of living and working together based on values of cooperation and communalism.

Other examples include farmer's alliances and forms of cooperativism during the Populist movement. Worker and consumer cooperatives have arguably been around for generations.

Jessica Gordon Nembhard's and Ajowa Nzinga Ifateyo's article "African American Economic Solidarity" provides other examples that highlight the role of racial struggle in the histories of cooperativism. Nembhard and Ifateyo note, "African Americans have a strong but often hidden history of economic solidarity—of building cooperative enterprises in response to market failure, poverty and marginalization" (2006, 24). They recall moments in history when African Americans started cooperative enterprises, such as the establishment of a cooperative shipyard, the Chesapeake Marine Railway and Dry Dock Company, in Baltimore during the 1860s, as well as cooperative meat markets in Memphis in 1919, operated by the Citizen's Co-operative Society. Among other projects was the Young Negro Cooperative League in New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and other cities in the 1930s, as well as the Consumer's Cooperative Trading Company in Gary, Indiana during the 1930s. The authors also mention Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA), a worker-owned cooperative of primarily Black and Latina women, which was established in the 1980s in the South Bronx. These are only a few examples of initiatives that sprung up over the course of history from communities of color. While these examples did not explicitly identify as "solidarity economy" practices, they do reflect values at the core of this contemporary framework and provide historical context to a growing movement in the present.

One of the main actors of this growing national solidarity economy is the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (SEN). The SEN has its origins in the World Social Forum and specifically, its regional forums. With its connection to the global justice movement, the solidarity economy can be viewed as a "movement of movements" (Miller 2010: 1). It brings together different social movements, such as labor and environmental movements, under a unifying dedication to a more people-centered way of doing economics and creating livelihoods. Importantly, the growing solidarity economy in the U.S. emphasizes the importance of diversity in practice. According to proponents of the U.S. solidarity economy,

Yet this desire not to squelch diversity in order to achieve a comfortable and homogenous uniformity, but rather to consciously pursue a bottom-up approach, is part of the very ethic of solidarity economy. It is a framework of practices held together by values, in contrast to the abstract theoretical models of socialist alternatives to capitalism that describe egalitarian, oppression-free utopias. These utopias always seem disappointingly out of reach, but the solidarity economy framework has evolved to describe and make visible the plethora of actually existing economic alternatives that are growing up all around us, in the midst of neoliberal capitalism. The solidarity economy framework allows for and values diversity, and honors local knowledge. (Allard and Matthaiei 2008, 6-7)



Through this emphasis on pluralism, there appears to be a strategic effort to allow for collaboration, dialogue, and a vision for a unifying framework that allows for economic practices that are influenced by local contexts, such as specific cultural factors and needs of local communities.

Social movements, in all their complexities, are sites of knowledge production. In order to sustain a movement, there needs to be room for self-reflection and evaluation of context. Among many elements, this involves evaluating the next steps to take based on opportunities that arise, as well as the environment within which actors are mobilizing. The solidarity economy movement is no different. In addition to public policy work and research in academic and activist circles, mapping projects, which highlight and provide geographical locations of various solidarity economy initiatives,<sup>1</sup> are effective tools in producing knowledge, increasing visibility, and helping to build a movement. These mapping projects, which include a diversity of technologies, are useful for solidarity economy practitioners (i.e., networking) and researchers (i.e., awareness and gaining support).<sup>2</sup> Such knowledge production serves other purposes beyond increasing visibility. They reveal the transformative potential of applying concepts such as solidarity and reciprocity to the technological realm, creating additional conditions for power to disperse and knowledge to develop, among a collective network.

### **The pedagogical implications of solidarity economies**

From historical and emergent solidarity economies in Latin America and the United States, a broad ethical and political foundation emerges to inform revolutionary social movement pedagogy. Euclides Mance (2011), in his discussion of solidarity economies as “well-living,” recuperates several of the commitments set forward in the pedagogy of *buen vivir*. Mance writes,

From an ethical perspective, Solidarity Economy should ensure the economic means to the ethical and ecologically sustainable fulfillment of the public and private freedoms of all the people in a way that promotes the ‘well living’ of each one of them, as well as of all humanity. From a political perspective, it should promote equality of rights and decision-making power in the economic sphere for all the people. In other words, it should effectively democratize the economic sphere, ensuring the self-management of enterprises and other economic initiatives by workers and their communities (3-4).

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of solidarity economy initiatives include cooperatives (worker, consumer, housing, etc.), fair trade, eco-villages, community supported agriculture (CSAs), participatory budgeting, bartering systems, and more. For more examples, see: <http://www.usсен.org/solidarity/what>

<sup>2</sup> For more information about mapping projects and specific web-based tools, see Emily Kawano’s essay “Mapping and Economic Integration” on SEN’s website: <http://usсен.org/mapping-economic-integration>

Mance goes on to illustrate the methods of internal democracy that rely on one member, one vote, participation in deliberative and consultative bodies, egalitarian participation of male and female associates, circulation of coordinating functions, collective property of the main means of production, practices of reciprocity and mutual help and a focus on network based flows. The collaborative, horizontal, and solidarity based processes of liberation are understood as “phenomena of inter subjectivity and of historical transformation of concrete relations” (Mance 2011, 8). In this way, solidarity economies approach the ethical commitment of living well based upon plural and historical conceptions of the social as an interrelated set of economic, political and cultural relations. Liberation is pursued for those participating in the immediate construction of an-other society but is also recognized as a permanent process for the creation of a post-capitalist alternative. As such, the pedagogical acts that generate horizontal decision-making and mutually productive economic relations are fundamentally activities rather than a contemplation of abstract concepts. In this way, they approach what Boaventura de Santos (2009) refers to as an *acto in proximis*, meaning that the pedagogy in question must have a practical effect in the world. But such acts or forms of praxis need something to give the emancipatory act not only ballast but direction. That is, it must also be implicated in an *acto in distans*, or the utopian aspect of pedagogy directed towards social transformation. An *acto in distans* is the larger movement within these forms of praxis towards a post-capitalist alternative built upon the principles of living well, solidarity, and reciprocity (see Jaramillo, Ryoo and McLaren 2012).

From the work of popular educators in solidarity economies or those who advance the pedagogy of buen vivir throughout Latin America, we glean an understanding of the engagement among participants for social transformation. But it is impossible to discuss the pedagogy of these social movements in singular terms. There is no how-to manual. There are no set rules of engagement. Solidarity economies and the Latin American struggle for buen vivir are varied in form and content. The social actors, histories, and material conditions of each setting animate them. Our intent in this essay has been to reveal the theoretical guideposts that anchor relations among participants and the aims and objectives of each social struggle. They converge by a shared ethical commitment to individual and collective humanity, to dialogue, to reciprocity and solidarity, and to the active listening of subaltern knowledge(s). Together, they change “the terms of the conversation” (Mignolo as cited in Motta, 2013) of resistance to produce emancipatory knowledge(s). As Sara Motta writes, the production of emancipatory knowledge(s) “involves shifting our focus to the subjects of knowledge construction and reconceptualizing the nature of intellectual production in a ways that overcomes the epistemological politics of capitalist coloniality” (2013, 7). For emancipatory knowledge(s) to emerge and transformational practice to follow, educators-activists-participants need to continuously reflect upon their practice and ask the questions: what are the philosophies and knowledge(s) that provide direction for our pedagogical acts? What, in fact, is the

philosophy of praxis?

## Conclusion

In all likelihood, protests and alternative social movements will not abate in the foreseeable future. And the questions that emerge from new social protests should challenge us to consider further the relationship between the system that we oppose and the way in which it shapes our opposing acts. Transcending the enduring logic of colonial neoliberal capitalism is a dialectical, interdependent, and ongoing process. There is clearly no one-way to sustain or enact the vision of revolutionary and decolonial social movements. The vision is pluriversal. We can say, however, that the active production of solidarity and reciprocity in current social movements stems from a collective rage. It is a rage against helplessness.

The global community is coming into a new phase of neoliberal policy reform that will indefinitely alter its ability to confront injustice. Whereas neoliberal policies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century established the corporation as ‘individual’, neoliberalism as projected through free trade agreements such as Transnational Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) extend corporate rights over national rights. Recent negotiations between the European Union and the United States on TTIP signal a particularly daunting era of neoliberal reform that will most likely inform future social uprisings. Though in a nascent policy stage, TTIP, if passed, will remove regulatory differences between European nations and the US. Yet most disturbingly, TTIP establishes investor-state dispute rules that allow corporations to contest nations’ laws and policies that limit corporate rights over social welfare (Lennard 2014; Monbiot 2013). The idea of offshore tribunals, presided by the very same lawyers (turned judges) that represent corporate entities underscore an egregious assault on the notion of democracy and sovereignty. These changes will continue to shape social movements in the years ahead, and for such reasons, it becomes particularly pertinent to examine in greater depth movements that have or are in the process of articulating alternatives to the presiding social order.

Revolutionary and decolonial praxis is fomenting within communities and across nations, revealing new concepts and practices to challenge colonial-neoliberal capitalism. From Latin America we garner a sense of radical hope as we witness the *possibility* of another society in the making, predicated on collective wellbeing. In the Occupy movements, we hear the chants of members of society who challenge the death-world of exploitation in pursuit of a life-world rife with cooperation and solidarity. In solidarity economies, we see attempts to reconcile local needs and knowledge with an overarching economic structure that could be sustainable. Across these scenarios, emancipatory philosophies and subaltern epistemologies offer us opportunities for reflection and inspire our radical imaginations. Whether through the human microphone in Zucotti park, the rhythms of marching feet in the lowland provinces of Bolivia, the anger-filled mantras in Syntagma square, or the parliamentary chambers of

Ecuador, we recognize that objecting neoliberal capitalism is only one dimension to the profound processes of transformation. Our struggle is multi-pronged, and it necessitates conceptual, philosophical, and epistemological shifts to our understanding of the social.

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## **General Motors is attacking European workers. Is there no resistance? The example of Opel Bochum**

**Wolfgang Schaumberg**

Since 2001, General Motors (GM) – active throughout Europe under the brand name “Opel” – has reduced its number of employees in Europe to 40,000. That’s 8,000 less than in the year 2008. GM now has 55,000 employees in China. After two factories were already closed in Portugal and Belgium, GM announced last year that it would end production in one of its four German factories, in Bochum, at the end of 2014 and sell the production area, which is as large as about 200 soccer fields. For decades, Opel Bochum was GM’s largest production facility, and in 1992 it still had 19,200 employees. Step by step, the labor force was reduced to 3,500, but always in the face of tough resistance struggles unlike those in any other facility. Even at an international level, the Opel labor force attracted attention through its independent, so-called “wildcat strike” in the year 2000 (3 days) and in particular in 2004 (6 days).<sup>1</sup>

### **General Motors is decisive, not “Opel”**

Opel is the biggest loser on the European automobile market (we cannot go into the reasons for this negative development here). But whoever speaks of Opel also has to take General Motors into consideration. The second largest automobile corporation in terms of sales numbers -- Toyota being the largest – GM has divided the globe into profit zones, and one of these is GM-Opel/Vauxhall Europe. The most important one after the USA/Canada division is “GM International Operations” encompassing Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Russia, with a headquarters in Shanghai. Particularly in China, the largest automobile market in the world, GM is the leading automobile multinational with its 11 joint ventures with Chinese companies such as SAIC and Wuling. Among many other brands, GM sells its Opel brands Zafira, Astra, and Antara there. GM has also had record success in Russia, which is why it has expanded its factory in St. Petersburg from 98,000 to 230,000 cars annually, and announced investments of \$1 billion over the next 4 years.

After its bankruptcy on June 1st, 2009 due to the financial crisis, and its rescue through nationalization, General Motors recovered surprisingly quickly since its return to the stock exchange in November 2010. GM is once again in the same situation as in 2004 of being able to deploy a billion dollars in order to implement “socially peaceful” downsizing in Europe, including closing Opel Bochum. Due to the 2004 strike at Opel in Bochum, GM spent this amount on severance packages, and was able to convince 53-year-old electricians with 28

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://vimeo.com/44512168>, a film with English subtitles about the 2004 Opel Bochum strike.



years of employment to give up their jobs in exchange for €190,000 in severance pay. It's clear that GM will now attempt anything in order to get back into the profit zone within the indispensable European market as quickly and cheaply as possible.

### **What is IG Metall – the largest German labor union, which has around 80% of the workers in auto plants (including Bochum) as members – doing?**

The IG Metall leadership refers to GM as “extortionate” and demands: we need better managers! “Management is resorting to extortion instead of a whole strategy... the management is cheap and without a plan.” (IG Metall newspaper, June 2012). Huber, the IG Metall chairman (until November 2013), demanded: “we need a decisive board that deals with problems, that has vision, and will bring Opel forward, together with the labor force.” This is typical for the union leadership in the large workplaces: they want to “rescue” both, GM/Opel's profits, and the workers. So it's not surprising that in its membership newspaper “metall” (January 2013), IG Metall only raised two demands: “...exclusion of the possibility of forced redundancies, and providing a plan for growth.”

Through the “voluntary” giving up of jobs with the help of severance agreements, employees are to accept the closing of the factory. This strategy is often referred to by the IGM leadership and in the media as “socially acceptable.” But the massive dismantling of jobs by severance agreements is at most “acceptable” for affected individuals. For society as a whole, the effect is terrible. It would be truer to say that the powerful in Germany, including within IGM, propagate “socially acceptable” destruction of jobs with the hope in the back of their minds that there won't be any social unrest...

### **Struggle Against the GM Attack?**

#### **The Joint Works Council and the European Works Council**

All German GM factories have an elected works council, with delegates in the “joint works council,” and all are IGM members. All European workforces send delegates to the European Works Council. The chairman of both the Joint Works Council and European Works Council, Dr. Wolfgang Schäfer-Klug, revealed the course of action against GM's redundancy plans: all participants are allegedly “in agreement, that Opel must operate profitably and implement measures in order to increase its sales volume, increase its profit margins, and reduce its costs,” and want to “work out together the optimal strategy to improve the financial situation of the enterprise.” When GM announced in May 2012 that in 2015 it would shift production of the “Astra” model from the main Opel production facility in Rüsselsheim to Ellesmere Port in England and to Poland, Schäfer-Klug criticized management and emphasized the better competitiveness of “his” Rüsselsheim location: “the current Astra from

Rüsselsheim is 219 euro cheaper than the one from Ellesmere Port, and of better quality.” This attitude shows the competitive mindset of the works council chair, who like a co-manager is primarily concerned with Opel’s profit, particularly in “his” factory... he has also accepted the closing of Opel Bochum.

### **Struggle Against the GM Attack? The Works Council in Bochum**

Of course, the works council chair Einenkel also criticized the relocation of the “Astra” model to other factories: “we’re tired of being lied to... those who provide shitty quality are the ones allowed to build the cars.” The decision is therefore “nonsensical”, since Astra production in Bochum is about €500 cheaper than for example in England. If the works council chair praises the quality of the work of his labor force, that might be understandable. But to disqualify the labor force in the English GM/Opel factory exhibits a competitive mentality, similar to that of the chairman of the European works council...

Since voices arguing for the organization of a tougher resistance or even a strike became louder, Einenkel had to address them. On the one hand, after the announcement of the relocation of “Astra” production, the press reported: “Works Council at Opel Threatens Spontaneous Strikes. Einenkel announces spontaneous work stoppages ‘at the first statement about closing’.” On the other hand, there was a typical warning the day after the actual announcement of the plant’s closing: “We won’t allow ourselves to be provoked into going on strike!” Earlier, Einenkel had already promised “not to succumb to ‘blind actionism’, but rather work together with the labor force, IGM, and politicians to seek ‘smart solutions.’” And on June 1, 2012, Einenkel announced a “last resort”: “As a last resort, the union might threaten a long legal process...”

### **Struggle against the GM attack? The labor force in Bochum is stubborn...**

In the labor force, from the very beginning, there were heated debates about the course of action, but other than short-term production stoppages due to informational meetings of the works council, there were no tough attacks on GM. One has to keep in mind:

1. Many of the 3,500 colleagues, particularly the older ones, are still waiting for a settlement (the average age at Bochum is over 47 years).
2. Particularly since the disappointing experiences of the Bochum strikes of 2000 and 2004, which were not supported by IGM, the workers have almost no hope that their union will mount a tough opposition to GM. In the labor force, there were demands for a “national boycott action against Opel”, “solidarity strikes in all factories,” but such ideas contradict the declared goal of IGM and works council leadership that Opel has to regain “growth” and profitability.

3. The workers no longer saw themselves as having the power, as they did in 2004 with over 8,000 employees, to force all of GM/Opel-Europe into a standstill by illegally occupying the factory for days.
4. There was and is no unity around the demands of the labor force: “Settlement!” means giving up the factory. “Keep building Opel cars here” appears unrealistic and questionable in terms of its competitiveness with regard to other Opel workers at other locations, as well as ecologically short-sighted. However: even in the case of many younger workers, an unattractive settlement offer might be “the last straw”...

### **A discussion proposal: the struggle against such attacks by multinational corporations needs a long-term perspective...**

Many individuals and leftist groups have attempted to support the Bochum labor force in solidarity. This showed that defensive struggles in individual workplaces in Germany, mostly under official union leadership, are far removed from the numerous anti-capitalist protest events, just as the latter are far removed from the defensive demands and everyday consciousness of most wage-workers. Out of the factories, in front of the city halls, with frequently proclaimed demands like “6-hour day at full wages!” or “Stop social cuts” and “We won’t pay for your crisis!” -- for that, there is no mass movement in sight.

The current development of the crisis will cause fundamental debates to heat up on the part of the mass of employees in the automobile industry concerning our economic and social system. “Conversion of key industries to communal property” (§ 2.4 of the current IG Metall statutes!) -- most colleagues right now do not have any hope in such demands, and not only because they see power firmly in the hands of the capitalists and their politicians. They also correctly ask: what could we expect in that case? Whoever speaks of “expropriation”, also has to discuss *appropriation*: how can we imagine a process that brings power over production and distribution under the direction of the vast majority of people?

### **About the author**

Wolfgang Schaumberg worked for 30 years at Opel in Bochum, was a member of the works council for 25 years, and today as a retiree is still active in the Opel working group GoG (Gegenwehr ohne Grenzen, or “Resistance without Borders”), in the union and Occupy movements and in projects to connect with people in China. See [www.forumarbeitswelten.de](http://www.forumarbeitswelten.de)

## **Neoliberal state, austerity, and workers' resistance in India**

**Kanchan Sarker**

### **Abstract**

*Despite being divided on the consequences of liberalization, people of India put up significant resistances against the neoliberal state and its austerity policies under the leadership of the Left and the broader Left. Some of the battles were won, some were lost. Yet, struggles are continuing to win the war. This paper is an empirical and analytical description primarily of workers' resistances against the state's withering away from its responsibilities in a pluralistic society like India as well as some of the other movements against these neoliberal policies.*

**Keywords:** Economic reforms, austerity, workers' resistance

David Harvey in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) has given a wide-ranging definition of neoliberalism:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices... Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture.

However, the term 'neoliberalism' is not as commonly used in India as in the West. Instead, terms like 'globalization,' 'liberalization,' and 'SAP' (Structural Adjustment Programmes) are more common and widely used in India to describe the changes to the Indian economy in the last 25 years. The differences in the Indian and the Western common discourses are significant. In Western 'developed' countries, the term 'neoliberalism' more appropriately describes the changes in the last 30+ years or so; whereas 'globalization,' 'liberalization,' 'SAP' are more appropriate terms and used interchangeably to depict changes happening almost during the same period in 'developing' countries, most of which were Western colonies at some point of time or other. However, this paper is not about the debate on the nomenclatures of those terms, but to focus primarily on the workers' struggles in India against the neoliberal state. There are four sections in this paper: in section I, India's economic plans before India initiated reforms (i.e. from 1951-1983) and its consequences are discussed;

section II has a detailed discussion about India's economic planning from 1984 to the present (i.e., the liberalization phase and its consequence); section III is about resistance through institutional as well as through non-institutional politics; and finally, a conclusion in section IV.

The data for this paper were collected from primary as well as secondary sources. The author himself has observed some of the movements; in addition he has interviewed movement organizers from all the central trade unions and some other organizations. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, newspapers, pamphlets etc.

### **I. India before Reforms: 1951-1983**

When colonial rule came to an end in India in 1947, more than half of its population was in abject poverty with a per capita annual income of Rs. 228 (\$48 at 1947 rates). The average life expectancy was 32 years, less than 10% of its population had access to safe drinking water, the literacy rate was only at 17% and, between 1900 and 1950, and its economic growth rate was a sluggish 0.8% (Sarker 2009). After independence, India embarked upon a path that combined a mixed economy with a federal political structure with unitary bias. It was not a closed economy in the truest sense, but India intended to stand on its own proverbial feet after 200 years of shameful and disastrous colonialism. It embraced centralized planning, an import substitution industrial policy, state intervention in labour and financial markets, a large public sector, and business regulation.

Though most heavy industries and mining operations at that time were publicly owned, there were some big bourgeoisies who held significant influence over Indian economy. They owned much of the manufacturing sector, including the production of automobiles, textiles, consumer durables, and capital goods. Any private company that wanted to open an industry in a province in India needed a license from the federal (central) government. Thus, this era was sarcastically termed as *license raj* (license regime). To protect the public sector from foreign competitors, eighteen industries were reserved exclusively for the public sector. These industries included iron and steel, heavy plant and machinery, telecommunications and telecom equipment, minerals, oil, air transport services, and electricity generation and distribution. There was protection for national bourgeoisies also; restrictions were placed on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) equity shares. In 1961, many banks (fourteen in all) were nationalized, which also complemented India's path to 'socialistic development.' In fact, in December, 1954, parliament adopted a resolution that stated in one of its clauses, 'The objective of economic policy should be a Socialistic Pattern of Society.' And in 1976, by the 42nd amendment, three words were incorporated into the preamble to the constitution of India: socialist, secular, and democratic (Sarker 2009). However, this socialism is not Marxian Socialism, but more in the line with P. Samuelson's Mixed Economy.

During this pre-reform period from 1951 to 1983, India's average GDP growth rate was 4.7%, which was higher than most other Asian economies. Yet, at the end of 1983, India's unemployment rate was 9.22%, 44.93% of its people lived below the poverty line, and inequality (Gini<sup>11</sup>) was 31.5 (ibid 2009). In the social sector, the literacy rate was 43.5, life expectancy 56.2 years, and 38.2% (1981) of its people had access to safe drinking water (World Bank 2010).

## **II. India after Reforms: 1984-present**

Though India has started embracing neoliberal policies more aggressively from 1991 onward, its foundation was laid during mid-1980s with some pro-business policies (Kohli 2006) like opening up the doors of restricted public sectors for private investment, the dissolution of the MRTP Act (Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act), liberalizing credit for big borrowers, reducing corporate taxes and import taxes, and removing price control, etc. (Sarker 2009). From 1991, India started liberalizing its economy in all major sectors, including industrial policy, trade and exchange rate policy, tax reforms, public sector policy, and foreign investment policies. Visibly, India was making the historic shift towards a pro-market economy (Kohli 2006). The measures taken resulted in a devaluation of India's currency, disinvestment, dismantling of the industrial licensing regime, the allowance of foreign direct investment, and the abolition of the MRTP Act. In addition, the Indian tariff rates declined sharply in the 1990s from a weighted average of 72.5% in 1991-92 to 24.6% in 1996-97. Although the tariff went up slowly in the late nineties, it managed to reach 35.1% in 2001-02 (Balakrishnan 2004). The simple average of India's tariff rate is now 13.72% (WTO 2013). Whereas a pro-market strategy supports new entrants and consumers, a pro-business strategy mainly supports established products (Rodrik & Subramanian 2005).

The intricacies of politics of shifting from 'Socialist India' to 'Incorporated India' lies in its failure to redistribute wealth to the poor as well as in its bowing down to the pressure from the Indian big bourgeoisies: new and old. Whereas, the old enterprises are mostly interested in catering for the domestic market, represented by India's two main national chambers of commerce: the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Associated Chambers of Commerce (ASSOCHAM), the new entrants are mostly export oriented modern industries like engineering and IT firms represented by newly constituted Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), who has become more powerful than FICCI and ASSOCHAM (Kohli 2006).

From 1985 to 1990, India enjoyed an economic growth rate of 6.2% before it opened up its economy to foreign investment in 1991. In 1990, India's unemployment rate was 8%, the number of people living below the poverty line

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<sup>1</sup> Gini Coefficient: The measurement of inequality. It ranges between 0, where there is no concentration (perfect equality), and 1 where there is total concentration (perfect inequality).

was 37% and inequality (Gini) was 29.7 (Sarker 2009). Its literacy rate was 48.2%, life expectancy was 58.5 yrs, and 62.3% people had access to safe drinking water (World Bank 2010).

After liberalization from 1991 to the present, the average GDP growth rate is around 7%. Yet, 37.2% of the Indian population still live below the National Poverty Line (DNA 2010);  $\frac{3}{4}$ s of its population live below Rs. 20 (\$0.50) per day (Sengupta 2007) with a per capita GDP of \$3,337 in the corresponding year. Unemployment rate is 10.7% (estimated), and the income inequality (Gini) is 36.8. Its literacy rate amongst adult has increased to 74%, life expectancy has increased to 66 years, and 92% of its population has access to safe drinking water. The overall HDI rank is 136 (World Bank 2013; UNDP 2013) among 186 countries.

There are many reasons cited for embracing reforms. These include the (in)famous debt crisis of 1991, depletion of foreign exchange reserve, slow GDP growth, unemployment, inequality, poverty and its associated indicators. The debt crisis was one of the most serious among others in 1991 as cited by the reformers. From 1980 to 1991, India's domestic public debt increased steadily, from 36% to 56% of the GDP, while its external debt increased (more than tripled) to \$70 billion (Ghosh 2004). At this juncture, India entered on the Fund-Bank approach to development that has been mentioned above.

According to Government of India, there was no alternative other than opening up the country's economy to get rid of the debt and to restore the foreign exchange reserve. But Patnaik et al (1995), Bagchi (1999) opine differently. Patnaik argues that there was enough foreign currency to cover almost 3 months' imports.

The central objective of this phase was economic growth through structural reform, deregulation, liberalization, and privatization in which government will have little role, and the market will be the key player.

Apart from these changes, there were other changes that were quite significant in this context. Firstly, the definition of small-scale industry has undergone considerable changes. While, in 1985, it was defined as an industry with fixed capital investment of Rs 3.5 million, by 1997, this limit became Rs 30 million. After some criticism, this was redefined to Rs 10 million in 1999. In addition, the reservation of items exclusively for the small scale sector forms a significant aspect of the industrial policy, review for dereservation of such items is also undertaken by the Government at periodic intervals. During the last 5 years itself more than 600 items have been dereserved. At present only 20 items are reserved for manufacture in the small scale sector.

The role of small scale industry in India's economy is significant as it contributes 40% of the total industrial output in India and has 35% share in exports (India Business News 2010). It gets various government and legislative support, such as product reservation, fiscal concessions, preferential allocations of credit and interest subsidy, extension of business and technical services, and

preferential procurement by the government. Hence, the increase in investment level will help big investors to the disadvantages of the small investors.

To regulate labour, one of the major steps taken was to set up the Second Labour Commission on Labour (SNCL) in 1999 (30 years after the first) under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. The recommendations of the Commission came in June 2002. Trade unions saw this as an attack on the rights of the working class that would only facilitate the exit policy. Some of the anti-labour recommendations were:

1. To keep all the supervisory personnel, irrespective of their wages / salary, outside the rank of worker and labour laws meant for workers.
2. The industries employing fewer than 300 persons can retrench or close the industry at will. Industries with 300 or more workers shall need permission from government to retrench workers. However, if the government does not respond within 60 days under bureaucratic plea, the industry can go ahead with its plan.
3. Secret ballot for a strike has been made compulsory, and it will be considered legal only if 51% vote in favour of the strike. But in the case of essential services, the government shall immediately refer the dispute to arbitration or adjudication, thus depriving the workers of the right to strike. The management shall negotiate with only the recognized unions, which have membership of more than 25%.
4. Unfettered freedom to contract out non-core jobs completely and also core jobs, subject to some spurious limitations. The SNCL recommends the employment of contract labour to meet the seasonal demands of human power even for perennial core jobs like production, and the giving of even perennial non-core services, such as canteen, watch & ward, and cleaning on contract observes.

The Commission also makes some labour-friendly recommendations: the firm should clear all its dues to workers before effecting retrenchment or closure, and the government has to closely scrutinize employers' actions. It also recommends that contract labourers receive equal payment as the regular workers for the same types of employment in an organization. Besides, the Commission also recommends a lower rate of compensation in the case of sick firms and a higher rate of compensation for healthy firms (Sundar 2005).

Another attack on labour by this neoliberal state was a Supreme Court's decision in 2003 that government employees had no legal right and no moral justification to go on strike (*Rangarajan vs. Government of Tamil Nadu and Others* case: Supreme Court Act No. 5556). This was not completely new, as courts had declared some strikes illegal before; and this verdict, in some ways, is contradictory to Industrial Disputes Act (IDA), Trade Union Act of India, and the mandate of ILO. Nevertheless, the Indian workers disregarded this verdict.



One of the inevitable features of liberalization is the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to avoid export tariffs and bypass labour regulation. To make it more attractive to foreign investors, the SEZ Act was passed in India in 2005, which stated that workers would not have any trade union rights.

In some cases, attacks were waged against workers even without changing laws during mergers and acquisition of industries. In many such events the employees are not paid the legitimate dues (i.e. provident fund etc.) under the onus of the Factory Act of 1948.

Labour regulation was attempted not only through changes in labour laws, but also through various ways, such as the 'Voluntary Retirement Scheme' (VRS), wage freezes, and hiring freezes. The other major ways of regulating labour are through contracting out, outsourcing, contractual employment, no or minimum benefits, the absence of medical and accidental benefits, no insurance, and long, unregulated hours of work.

The VRS is the most popular technique undertaken to shed the number of employees both in public and private enterprises. VRS is so aggressively used to cut down regular, salaried jobs across all forms of enterprises that it actually did not remain voluntary anymore and became infamous among trade unionists as CRS, or 'Compulsory Retirement Scheme.'

While recruitment was frozen, especially at lower levels, the government also froze the centralized wage bargaining process for a few years after 1992 in public sector enterprises (PSE). It later opened the negotiation process and announced that any wage increases would have to be absorbed by the specific enterprise. In other words, the new policy clearly stated that any additional wage burden would not receive budgetary support (Bhattacharjee 1999). The share of budgetary support for public enterprises came down from 23.5% in 1991-92 to 15% in 1999 where it has remained constant (Roychoudhury 2003). At the time of writing, it's unlikely that the present Indian National Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government would extend any budgetary support to state-run companies, but push for their divestment to mobilise resources. Besides wages, sometimes bonuses are not given to the workers under the same pretence of austerity. Hiring is also literally stopped in the organized manufacturing sector. Both in percentage and absolute number, jobs in the organized sector are decreasing. The decline of the labour force in the organized manufacturing sector is the most severe at the expense of the growing informal sector.

Thus the most significant feature of this economy is the contracting out or outsourcing of jobs, which gives rise to enormous casualization of the workforce to keep cost down by not entitling them any benefits, coupled with low wages and termination without any severance package. Regular violations of the Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act of 1970, which bans contract labour in all forms of work deemed 'perennial,' is one of the most crucial examples of austerity. While there is no official data available on the number of contract workers in India, the government is one of the biggest users of contract

labour. In many public sector firms, contract workers make up over 70% of the staff and majority are paid only 40% of regular wages with no social protection (Economic Times 2010). A study by Meenakshi Rajeev (2009) on both the public as well as the private sector shows that the majority of contract workers do not even get the stipulated minimum wage. The proportion of casual workers to the total number of workers enumerated by the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) had been consistently increasing since 1977-78 (Deshpande et al 2005). Another study by Venkata Ratnam (2003) shows that temporary and contract workers are increasing by up to 30% in the organized sector. They get eight times fewer wages and are 30% more prone to accidents in some sectors. According CITU, 70% of contract workers do not even get minimum wages. In fact, contract labour, has been seen one of the principal methods used by employers to gain flexibility in the labour market (Sharma 2006). They are also used as a reserve force to substitute regular workers during the period of strike (Roychoudhury 2004).

To ease the path of reform, the Board of Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) was established in 1987 and a National Renewal Fund had been set up in 1993 to finance the VRS –both in the public and private sectors. The main objective of BIFR is to determine sickness and expedite the revival of potentially viable units or closure of unviable units. It was expected that by revival, idle investments in sick units will become productive and by closure, the locked up investments in unviable units would get released for productive use elsewhere. In continuation of this process, in 1996, the Disinvestment Commission was established to select and recommend disinvestment of PSEs. While, in 1991-92, it was announced that the government would divest up to 20% of its equity in selected PSEs in favour of mutual funds, financial, and institutional investors in the public sector, the Disinvestment Committee divided the PSEs into strategic and non-strategic areas and recommended that government's shareholding should be brought down to 26% on case to case basis, excluding strategic areas like arms, ammunitions, atomic energy, and railways. The current policy of disinvestment was announced on 6 July 2009 by the Finance Minister of India:

The Public Sector Undertakings are the wealth of the nation, and part of this wealth should rest in the hands of the people. While retaining at least 5% Government equity in our enterprises, I propose to encourage people's participation in our disinvestment programme. Here, I must state clearly that public sector enterprises such as banks and insurance companies will remain in the public sector and will be given all support, including capital infusion, to grow and remain competitive.

However, it is not that all labour laws in India are anti-worker as mentioned before. There are also some pro-worker laws. But, it is often found that those laws are not implemented or followed properly. Workers, particularly those unorganized, are the regular victims of such situations.

The state's austerity measures have also profoundly impacted the social sectors, such as the public distribution system, health care, and education in India. This is more significant as unorganized sectors accommodate 94% of the total workforce in India.

*Public Distribution System:* Its aims are to provide a price support system to the producers and food subsidies to consumers. Since it was established in 1951, it has put an indirect check on the open market prices of various items and attempted to socialize the distribution of essential commodities. The public distribution system (PDS) functions through this chain of ration and MR shops. There are around 47,80,000 such shops all over the country. The role of the Central government is procurement and transport of commodities; the state governments are responsible for distribution to the ration shops. The commodities included are rice, wheat, sugar, cooking oil and cooking fuel (kerosene/ LPG) at approximately half the market rates. But in the wake of liberalization in 1991, which encourages government expenditure reduction and the removal of subsidies, the government has increased the issue prices of essential commodities like rice, wheat, and edible oil, which resulted in a price rises in the market and reduced poor people's access to subsidized essential commodities at fair priced shops.

Despite its successes, the PDS has its inherent shortcomings that result from mismanagement and massive corruption. In fact, the per capita availability of food grains in India declined from 449.3 grams in 1990-91 to 395.5 grams in 2000-01, and then increased to 444 grams in 2009 (Chand 2005; Commodity Online 2010). In 2013, India's Hunger Index Score was 21.3; the comparable data for China and Vietnam were 5.5 and 7.7. Its GHI rank is 63 out of 78 countries and in South Asia, it is at the bottom most position (GHI 2013). In 1990-92, the proportion of undernourished people was 24%. In 2004-06, there was a slight decline of only 2%. In terms of absolute numbers, the number of malnourished individuals has actually increased from 210.2 million to 251.5 million during the same period (FAO 2010). However, the buffer stock of India for rice and wheat has crossed 67 million tonnes as opposed to the required limit of strategic and buffer stock of 31.9 million tonnes. The food grains are rotting in storage and the government is paying huge exchequer for carrying these stocks, while its citizens are starving. The NCRB figures across 18 years for which data exist show that at least 2,84,694 Indian farmers have taken their lives since 1995. Divide that 18 years into two halves and the trend is dismal. India saw 1,38,321 farm suicides between 1995 and 2003 at an annual average of 15,369. For 2004-12, the number is 1,46,373, at a much higher annual average of 16,264. The figures in the second half occurred against a steep decline in the numbers of farmers in India and are hence even worse than they appear (Sainath 2013).

*Health Care:* The government expenditure in health care has been declining steadily during the last few decades. It was 1.05% in 1984-85, 0.96% in 1990-91, and 0.91% in 2003-04, as expressed as a percentage of India's GDP (Gupta 2005; Ghuman 2009). Currently, only 2% of the national budget is spent on

health care (The Financial Express 2010). India ranks 171st out of 175 countries in percentage of GDP spent in the public sector on health and 17th in private-sector spending (Singh et al 2004).

India is liberalizing health services under Modes 2 (health tourism) and 4 (export of health professionals) of GATT. India, which is a major exporter of health professionals, has a domestic deficit in the number of physicians, ranking 119 of 184 countries (IDRC 2010). India has six doctors per 10,000 people, as compared to 12 in Brazil, 14 in China, and 43 in Russia (Financial Express 2010).

From 1990-1991, with the introduction of user fees in public health care, the proportion of people unable to access any health services has doubled, primarily among disadvantaged castes, religious minorities and low-income people with disabilities (Duggal 2009). Moreover, the National Health Policy of 2002 legitimizes the ongoing privatization of health care. While domestic and foreign private insurance companies, health care management organizations, medical technology and pharmaceutical companies have proliferated, often with government support, poorly-funded public health care that has traditionally cared for the poor has collapsed (Sengupta et al 2005). Only around 10% of Indians have some form of health coverage (Gupta et al 2005), and only 13% of rural population has access to primary healthcare centers as per a survey done in 2009-10 (The Financial Express 2010).

Additionally, privatization and deregulation have resulted in rising drug prices. The number of drugs under price control decreased from 347 in 1979 to only 35 in 2004 (Gupta et al 2005). In 2005, under pressure from the WTO's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) agreement, the Indian government changed its Model Patent Act of 1970, thereby raising the cost and reducing the availability of essential drugs. The increased cost of medical care is the second most common cause of rural indebtedness in India (People's Health Movement – India 2007).

*Education:* Since liberalization, India has allowed 100% foreign direct investment in higher education and is still encouraging private investment. In the period from 1990-91 to 2004-05, the share of higher education fell from 0.77% to 0.66% in a total 3% spending on education as a percentage of GDP (Mukherjee 2008). In fact, per student in real terms, there was a 28% decline in public expenditure from 1990-91 to 2002-03 since liberalization has started. There are enormous escalations in the fees structure in public institutions in some provinces, introduction of self-finance courses, and, at the same time, mushrooming of private institutions charging students exorbitantly. From 1950-51 to 1990-91, 5,180 new colleges were established in forty years; however in the next twenty years (1990-91 to 2010-11) 25, 677 new colleges were established. For reasons understandable, most of these new colleges are unaided private colleges. Thus, we see that India has one of the worst educational inequalities (the Gini coefficient of educational inequality of India is .56) in the world (Bardhan 2006). It is not that India did not have private educational institutions before liberalization; in fact, private philanthropic and no-profit driven initiative took the leading role in higher education at the beginning.

What the present ministry is trying to do is to bring about a structural change in higher education in favour of marketization.

Comparative data on some of the socioeconomic indicators of the three phases will tell us more about the consequences of reform.

**Table 1. Selected economic performances:  
 Pre-reform, pro-business, and pro-market periods**

Year/ Period	GDP growth (%)	Per Capita GDP (PPP)	Unemployment (%)	People below poverty line (%)	Inequality ( Gini)
1983	4.7 (1951-83)	\$527.47	9.22	44.93	31.5
1990	6.2 (1984-90)	\$832.74	8	37	29.7
2012	7 (1985-12)	\$3,813	9.4	37.2	39.2

*Source: UNDP, World Bank, and others*

**Table 2. Selected social indicators:  
 Pre-reform, pro-business, and pro-market periods**

Year/ Period	Access to Safe Drinking Water (%)	Life Expectancy (%)	Literacy (%)
1947	10	32	17
1983	38.2	56.2	43.5
1990	62.3	58.5	52.3
2012	92	66	74

*Source: UNDP, World Bank, and others*

The above discussion clearly indicates that since the reform has been introduced, the Indian state has started relinquishing its responsibility over its citizens in the name of austerity. As a result, inequality and unemployment have increased and there has not been a significant decrease in the percentage of people living below the poverty line in the last 25 years, despite significant increase in GDP growth. Even there is not much improvement in the poverty ratio since 1947; proportion of people below the poverty line decreased from over 50% in 1947 to 45% in 1983 to 37% in 2009 (the other two indicators i.e. inequality and unemployment rate of 1947 are not comparable due to the absence of authentic data on these indicators of that year). In the social sectors (table 2), however, in some areas, like access to safe drinking water, there is

significant improvement since 1947, but data show that reform has not played any role in it; the same is true for life expectancy and literacy.

A recent study by Petia Topalova (2005) from the IMF, documents that Indian communities with a concentration of industries that lost protection have experienced smaller declines in poverty than the national trend. Topalova's study documents that workers in industries that experienced larger declines in tariffs observed declines in their relative wages, and it appears that adults in affected communities do not experience the same increases in income as experienced in communities better positioned to take advantage of the tariff declines (Edmonds 2008). In fact, the more India has opened itself to foreign investors, the more inter-provincial and rural-urban inequality has been increased (Sarker 2009). Another study by Venkata Ratnam (2003) shows that three industries that did well in the post-reform period were those, which were labour-intensive: garments, gems- jewellery, and software.

### **III. Resistances**

It is understood from the above discussion that liberalization did not contribute positively to the conditions of common people of India, regardless of an emerging vibrant consumer class with changed priority in consumption. The people are confused. For them, neither the mixed economy or 'socialistic pattern of society' nor the neoliberal state has worked. Reform did bring quality treatment through private hospitals, reduced significantly the waiting time for electricity and telephone connections, increased number of engineering and medical seats through private schools, brought more choices of products to them, but the costs of most of these are beyond the capacity of common people. Along with the abundance of opportunities, reform has brought unprecedented stress and strain at work, uncertainty, indebtedness as well as the commodification of social relations. Besides, both periods are marked by huge corruption and bad governance in different degrees.

The political parties in India are divided on ideology as well as on their support base. National parties like the Indian National Congress (INC), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are represented by big bourgeoisies, but they both have significant base among the middle class and the poor. Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM) are represented by workers and peasants. There are two other national parties, and a significant number (around 50) of regional (state) parties in India, but in terms of organizing national movement, the above four national parties are the most powerful, because of their mass base and trade union strength. Out of the first five of 11 central trade unions recognized by the government (to be recognised, a union has to have 4,00,000 members), four central trade unions ( BMS, INTUC, AITUC, CITU) are affiliated to these four national parties, the other union in this group is HMS, who generally go with the Left unions. Of the remaining seven central trade unions, four belong to other Left parties. Besides,

CPI and CPIM have strong organizations among the peasantry and public sector employees.

Despite this pluralism, political parties, workers' organizations, peasant organizations, civil societies, community organizations, and various mass organizations did exhibit strong resistances against this neoliberal state. The following discussions examine such resistance movements. Though the objective of this paper is to discuss primarily the workers' resistance against neoliberal policies, however, I would briefly mention about some other movements which are important to understand the perspectives within which the workers resistances are taking place.

The first major anti-privatization movement in India was the protest against the Enron Corporation's Dabhol project in Maharashtra. Until 1992, the power generation in India had been reserved for the public sector. The demand for power was growing but there was a shortfall in the supply, which was caused by the high rate of industrial growth that occurred in the 1980s as well as by the figuring out of future demands. The government de-regularized the power sector for private investment, expressing its financial inability. Enron Corporation was invited to set up a \$2.8 billion power plant at Dabhol in 1992. The protest began immediately, first by an environmental group, the Bombay Environmental Action Group, which was subsequently joined by consumer protection groups, citizens groups, NGOs, researchers, political parties, and trade unions, etc.

These groups eventually formed an umbrella organization: *Enron Virodhi Sangram Manch* (Forum for Struggle against Enron). The protest was massive and nationwide. In 1995, the Government of Maharashtra announced the cancellation of the project. Enron Corporation sought a massive compensation from the provincial government. There were streams of negotiations between the provincial government and Enron and finally a new deal was signed to revive the project with many modifications that were in line with the demands of the protesters in 1996. The new deal was welcomed by most of the protest groups, barring a few that thought that the present deal was worse than the previous one. Though the public debate on Enron died down quickly, but it remained as the first major protest movement against the state walking away from its responsibility as a part of its liberalization process. Protests against privatization of electricity continued even after Enron. More than 10,000 electricity employees, representing almost all of the states of India, marched to parliament on March 1, 2006 under the banner of National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees & Engineers (NCCOEEE), demanding the review of Electricity Act 2003. Recently, nearly 60,000 Punjab State Electricity (PSEB) employees stopped work for 24 hours on March 30, 2010 to protest against the state government's decision to privatize the company.

If *Enron Virodhi Sangram Manch* (Forum for Struggle against Enron) is the first major anti-privatization protest in India, *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada) may be called as the first major movement in India which questions the present neoliberal development paradigms. The protest against

the India's largest dam project Sardar Sarovar Dam was begun in 1985 and eventually became India's one of most influential social movements in India and later we also saw the birth of National Alliance and People's Movements (NAPM), a network of social movement organizations against the present discourse on development.

There have been numerous protests in other sectors almost from the beginning of the liberalization process. Indian farmers, fishermen, villagers, on different occasions, have put up resistance against the state's liberalization process, which has affected their livelihood. India decided to join the WTO in 1991. Soon after this decision, a million farmers across the country came to Delhi in March, 1991 on a national platform called National Coordination Committee of Indian Farmers to protest against India's induction in the WTO, which would inevitably open India's market to subsidized food grains, imported seeds, and agricultural inputs. There were a number of protests against multinational corporations (MNCs) entering India after liberalization. Farmer's organizations like *Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha* (Karnataka State Farmers' Organization), *Bharatiya Kisan Union* (Indian Farmers' Union), *Krishi Jami Raksha Samiti* (Organisation for Saving Agricultural Land), *Bhumi Uchhed Pratirodh Committee* (Committee against Land Evictions), *All India Krishak Sabha* (All India Peasants Front) led by CPI and CPIM, fishermen's organization like National Fishworkers Forum, and other organizations like *Samajwadi Abhiyan* (Socialist Memento), *Swadeshi Jagaran Manch* (A Vision of Self Reliance) did exhibit strong resistance against Cargill, Monsanto, KFC, Coke, Pepsi, Salim Group, Tata Motors, and the government's decision to allow MNCs to deep-sea fishing, etc.

Not all these movements have seen immediate, tangible successes; some of them definitely achieved success, while others did not, but the issues they had raised were transmitted into the political circle of India, as well as to the general masses. With this presage of the resistances against liberalism, in the following few paragraphs, I will briefly discuss a few of the people's resistance movements which were centering on privatization of three vital social sectors: water, higher education, and the health care system, and finally labour resistances will be discussed at length briefly followed by peasants and tribal protests against corporate looting of agricultural and forest land in India.

The National Water Policy, 2002 clearly encourages the privatization of water in its recommendations: "*Private sector participation should be encouraged in planning, development and management of water resources projects for diverse uses, wherever feasible.*" Even before this policy, Madhya Pradesh State Government had sold a part of the Sheonath River to a private company in 1998. *Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha* (Chhattisgarh Liberation Front), *Nadighati Morcha* (River Valley Front), along with Left parties organized several protests against this sale and demanded the cancellation of the agreement. In 2003, the provincial government (now Chhattisgarh) succumbed to the pressure of the people and announced that it would cancel the deal. However, a huge compensation was demanded by this private company and the replacement of



the then chief minister of Chhattisgarh province allowed maintaining the status quo. There are a greater number of instances of the privatization of rivers, canals, and ground water in India in the name of austerity. Organizations like Water Workers Alliance, *Tarun Bharat Sangha* (Young India Front), Science Technology and Ecology, *Paani Morcha* (Water Forum) have been constantly organizing protests and seminars against government's policy of privatization, as well as its decision to privatize water resources in some cities in India, such as New Delhi, Tirpur etc.

The National Forum in Defence of Education (NFDE) held a protest march and rally at Parliament Street on December 2, 2010 to denounce the centralization, privatization and the commercialization of the education sector in the country. The protest saw participation from the left student and youth organizations, Democratic Teachers' Front, among others. The marchers comprised students, teachers, as well as non-teaching employees of educational institutions. However, in general, teachers' movements have reacted to the government's policies in a piecemeal way without striking at the root. Even the students' unions are unable to put up strong resistance against the phenomenal growth of private colleges and universities.

As in the case of higher education, there were not many protests against privatization of the health care system. However, there were significant protests against intellectual property rights (TRIPS) from different platforms like political parties and even by the government of India in the WTO's ministerial meetings.

As mentioned above, different community organizations have been participating in the movements against this neoliberal state, sometimes alone, sometimes with others. These are small groups of social activists, landless peasants, marginal farmers, unorganized labourers, displaced people, urban poor, small entrepreneurs, and unemployed youth etc. Most of them are not affiliated to any political parties, but have lineage in the Gandhian, socialist, communist, and social reform movements (Seth and Sethi 1991)

Organized labour constitutes only less than 6% of India's total workforce of 459 million (NCL 2009). The numbers of unionized workers form only 2% of the total labour force: 5.5% of non-agricultural work and a decreasing 20% of wage-earning organized sector labour. Union membership in the public sector enterprises is almost 90% of the 2 million workforce (Uba 2008). However, a study on the three provinces of India, Kerala, West Bengal, and Maharashtra, shows that union density is much higher than commonly believed, indicating that government data underreport the number of unionized workers (Teitelbaum 2006). In addition to that, members of small trade unions are not included in this number. However, even considering all these factors, unionization in India is low and one of the prime reasons is the dominance of informal sectors. Despite the low unionization, we know that the political and economic importance of the working class lies in its ability to monopolize existing labour markets and, thereby, challenge the structural power of capital. In this context, the mobilization capacity of the working class vis-à-vis industrial

capital is the crucial factor to consider, not the size of the organized manufacturing relative related to the informal sector. Though not a common occurrence, when labour rises, it can shake the social order to its very core, exposing basic fault lines, unsettling deeply rooted social hierarchies, and revealing the degree of social power that can be realized in collective action.

When a state like India, which had a robust public sector presence in its economy, tries to increase private stakes, freeze recruitment and wages, curtail union rights, and reduce social sector expenditure, it always does so in the name of austerity. Today, the unions are facing many challenges, the most important of which is to ensure workers' interests, while at the same time making the organization profitable in an extremely competitive environment.

Since 1991, there were 15 nationwide strikes organized against liberalization and its impacts like unemployment, casualization, price rise etc. by major political parties (mostly the Left parties), trade unions, peasant organizations, and employees federations, particularly by the left (CITU, AICTU, UTUC, UTUC-LS) and socialist unions (HMS) in India. These have been accompanied by hundreds of strikes at enterprise and firm levels. The Indian National Congress and its union, INTUC, participated in the last three of these 15 nationwide strikes: on Sept. 7, 2010, on February 28, 2012, and on February 20-21 2013. BMS of BJP did participate in three of them, one independently, when its own government tried to implement recommendation of SNCL in 2002 and in the last two mentioned above. It is interesting to observe that though the central leadership of the two rightist trade unions, INTUC and BMS, decided to refrain from participating in most all the nationwide strikes against liberalization process, at the regional, local, and enterprise levels, a section of their workers did participate in those nationwide strikes.

The recent two consecutive nationwide strikes in successive years called by all the central trade unions need to be discussed. In an unprecedented show of unity, all trade unions in the country have come together on the same platform and given a call for a general strike on February 28, 2012. This is the first time since Independence that trade unions, cutting across ideological and political affiliations, have joined hands to register their protest on a wide range of issues arising out of the liberalisation policy (The Hindu 2012).

“The liberalisation and new economic policies unveiled since 1991 have undermined the interests of workers to such an extent that trade unions representing the Left, Right and Centrist parties have been forced to come together. Such unity was not witnessed even during or after Emergency,” All India Trade Union Congress general secretary Gurudas Dasgupta told The Hindu (ibid).

The very recent nationwide general strike was called for two-day strike on February 20-21 2013, which completely shut down many parts of the country. The trade unions have 10 demands that constitute the major problems facing the working class. Of the ten demands put up at least six of them relate to problems of informal workers. These are: a national floor wage of Rs. 10,000

per month, the removal of contract labour and in the meantime contract workers should receive the same wages and facilities as permanent workers, the compulsory recognition of trade unions by management within 45 days of application, retirement benefits for all workers, pension for all workers and social security cover for informal workers (Bhowmik 2013).

What is significant is that all trade unions have come together to fight for the rights of labour. This itself is a significant advance for the working class in the country that is badly divided. This was the first time when trade unions called for a two-day strike and stuck to it despite the government trying to mislead the unions with empty last-minute gestures. There was unprecedented participation of unorganised labour including largest sections like agriculture, construction apart from other rural and urban workers. Significantly Contract workers have joined the strike in a magnificent way.

In the present industrial relations of India, there were more lockouts than strikes. Since 1965, the number of lockouts is increasing as compared to the number of strikes. The latest data available on industrial disputes in 2005 show that there were 227 strikes and 229 lockouts in India (Sengupta 2009). It has been suggested that lockouts were more responsible for workdays to be lost than strikes and this reflects the increase in the bargaining power of employers (Sundar 2005).

However, despite the recommendations of SNCL, establishment of Disinvestment Commission as well as BIFR, the government of India has, so far, been able to privatize only 10 of its 244 PSEs and sold shares of 51 others by 2011. While, not many PSEs were sold to private enterprises, but the increasing tendency towards selling shares of PSEs, particularly the *Navratna*<sup>2</sup> Industries is definitely a move towards gradual privatization.

As mentioned above, SEZ is another area of regulation of labour. When the SEZ Act was passed in 2005 during INC lead United Progressive Alliance government, the left parties were supporting the government from outside the cabinet. The central government proposed to keep a clause in the Act that workers in SEZ will not fall in the purview of IDA. But, because of the protest of the left MPs, the central government was forced to exclude this anti-labour clause and let respective provincial governments make decision on it. In three provinces of India, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, CITU has been able to organize SEZ workers. However, the dilemma is that the CPIM led Government in West Bengal forcefully tried to acquire land in Nandigram, an area in East Medinipur district of West Bengal to allow Salim Group of Indonesia to establish a chemical hub under SEZ, which ended in a tragic violence that killed at least 14 people on March, 2007.

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<sup>2</sup>*Navratna* Industries: *Navratna* was the title given originally to nine most successful and prestigious Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs), identified by the Government of India in 1997 which allowed them greater autonomy to compete in the global market. The number of PSEs having *Navratna* status has been raised to 19.

I have already mentioned that the composition of the labour force has been changing; contractualization, outsourcing, and casualization are the features of manufacturing as well as service sectors in India. Permanent workers have trade unions, employees have federations, pay commissions, and regular wage negotiations, but unorganized, casual, and contract labourers are mostly non-unionized, and even if they are unionized, trade unions did not pay much attention to them. Even leftist unions were not serious about these workers in the recent past, despite having unions in the organized sectors for a long time. These workers are the most disadvantaged, exploited, and unattended. Pay hikes for the government employees brought more problems for the casual as well as contract workers, and especially for the workers of unorganized sectors because of inflation and price rise.

However, with recent changes, trade unions started organizing these workers and incorporating their demands among the demands of the workers of organized sector. Besides CITU, AITUC, INTUC, HMS, BMS, National Centre for Labour (NCL), Self Employed Women Associations (SEWA), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), and National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) are some of the unions that work among India's massive informal sector (433 million workers according to NCL). In fact, 7% of those employed in the organized sector have been identified as informal workers as well (NSSO 2004-05). Whereas, NTUI works among the non-core sectors, NASVI is an umbrella organization of street vendors; SEWA, as the name suggests, is a women's organization, started organizing women street vendors, and gradually extended to women workers in other informal sectors as well. Organizing informal workers is too difficult considering their scatteredness, low density, casual nature of job, and fear of the employers. However, according to Registrars of Unions, India (2002) about one-fourth of the union members are informal workers.

Change of attitude of the unions also forced the government to change its approach toward these people. While wages (minimum) and social security along with job security are the pressing demands of most of these workers, right to vending and social security are the two most important demands of India's 10 million street vendors.

Minimum Wages Act, 1948 provides for the fixation and enforcement of minimum wages. This act is a very important weapon to save informal workers from exploitation and provides a moderate wage. But, the problem is the implementation of this act in a country of more than 94% informal labour force. Unions, peasant organizations, as well as various social justice groups have been struggling to ensure the implementation of minimum wages, but there has not been much success in this regard due to the lack of organizational strength, improper attitude of the employers, inadequate inspecting staff with corrupt practices, and massive size of the country.

Another important issue is the social security benefits for the unorganized workers. The central (federal) government enacted the Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008. The Act provides for consultation of National Social

Security Board which shall recommend social security schemes like life and disability coverage, health and maternity benefits, old age protection and any other benefit that may be determined by the state (provincial) government for unorganized workers. The central government did come up with an extremely important labour act, but it did not create any fund for this, instead put the implementation as well as financial responsibility on the provincial governments.

Street vendors are the most visible and a significant section of the informal sector. Their existence was always a question of legality as they conduct their business on public places. However, since the 1990s, they have been facing acute problems of eviction in the name of building 'World Class City' modelled on London, New York etc. In 1998, the NASVI was formed. It initiated a survey on street vending in seven cities in 1999. Based on the findings of NASVI, SEWA advocated for a national workshop in 2001 on the problems faced by street vendors. The minister of urban affairs announced that a National Task Force on Street Vendors, with the objective of drafting a National Policy on Street Vending, would be set up. A new version of the policy was framed, which was very similar to the earlier one. A model law which has few major discrepancies with the national policy was also framed in 2009 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. The bill has not been introduced in the parliament so far (Bhowmik 2009).

Finally, I would like to mention the current peasant movements in India. Whereas, peasantry have joined all the 13 national strikes against liberalization, they also have their own specific issues like minimum wages, Implementation of NREG Act, along with corporate looting of their land. There are sporadic movements for minimum wages as well as implementation of NREG ( National Rural Employment Guarantee) Act across India, but the peasant movements that shook the corporate India as well as MNCs were the movements against land grabbing by the corporations. Whereas the parliamentary Left parties like CPI-M, CPI participated in few of those movements, it was the tribals and *dalits* (lower caste), the inhabitants of those areas, alone or under the leadership of CPI-Maoist, the largest group of erstwhile CPI-ML (Marxist-Leninist) Party, who has taken this cause and put stiff resistances against these corporations. In some cases, the corporations either had to withdraw (Salim, Vedanta etc.) or change their original plans (Posco etc.), while in others, peasants had to retreat. However, the struggle did pay as always. The increasing consciousness and solidarity among the poor along with better compensation package, environmental regulations, and cultural sensitivity from the neo-liberal state and its associates are the gains of these movements.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In this postmodern, post-communist era in which the mainstream media plays a significant role in people's lives, yet the media is mostly owned by corporate sectors, it is extremely difficult to organize workers under the banners of

unions. Unions are often made to be scapegoats without any valid rationales for corporate failures. The masses are in a deep ideological crisis along with the unions and political parties. The objective condition is very dilemmatic: 'World Class Cities' with flyovers and shopping malls, wide, smooth, metalled roads, modern cars, 10 times more aeroplanes in the sky, well-dressed men and women in branded attire, a thriving consumer class on one side, and on the other side with vast majority of people struggling for the bare necessities of life: 77% of people living below Rs. 20 per day, unemployment is increasing with massive casualization of work and inequality is on the rise. Along with these, the government is also trying to curtail the right to protest either through enacting laws or through changing the workforce structure. What is responsible for this dichotomy? Is it individual fate, skills, achievement or the unequal social system? Is Privatization better for the common people or State Ownership? In India, people have mixed experiences about government control. Before liberalization, one had to wait for 3-5 years to get an electric connection, cooking gas supply, or telephone connection. Even to buy a good quality Black & White TV (EC TV owned by Government of India), the waiting time was more than a year. Corruption at all levels of government is another factor. It is not that the privatization does not bring corruption; it does so in a different ways and probably on a larger scale; but people's expectation from government institutions is certainly different from the private institutions. People want good governance.

At present, neoliberal philosophers and corporate sectors with their enormous financial, political, and military strength and with the media in their hands are on the winning side – at least for the time being. They have successfully created a dilemma among the general masses regarding 'what is to be done' to get out of this situation.

The power structure at the apex decision making body in India will explain more about it. The Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh is also the ex-officio Chairman of Planning Commission of India, is a pro-liberalization man; the Deputy Chairman Dr. Montek Sing Ahluwalia is an ex-World Bank and ex-IMF employee, and the current Minister for Home Affairs, Mr P. Chidambaram who had been Indian's Minister of Commerce twice (1996-98 and 2004-2008), is a multibillionaire and happens to be on the corporate boards of various companies. It is obvious that they will speak in favour of neoliberal policies.

There are opposite views also. Blanchflower and Oswald's study (1994) shows that almost all over the world, higher wages are associated with higher employment, implying that unemployment could be the result of many factors except higher wages. A recent ILO study, based on the data collected from 162 countries, concludes that stronger trade union rights do not generally hinder trade competitiveness, including trade of labour-intensive goods, and indeed countries with stronger trade union rights tend to do comparatively well (Kucera et al 2004). Sudha Deshpande et al (1998) found that unionized firms are more likely to introduce technological changes, change product range, and improve the quality of products. Most Left intellectuals see globalization in a

black and white manner, which does not conform to every experience of common people. When their experience tells that they can reach their homes by a better bus on a metalled road, they can get electric connection, telephone connection, cooking gas supply without years long waiting, and see that some of them are elevated to enjoy the increased GDP of India and abundance of products, they probably want to give 'globalization' a chance.

As we know, commoners have enormous capacity of patience. But there is a limit. To give an example, INTUC never participated in any of the 14 national strikes except the last two. When I asked their president about their changed position, he said that the economic conditions of their workers forced them to join formally with the Left unions. In addition to that, we have seen that a section of workers of INTUC and BMS have joined the Left unions in those nationwide strikes. There is confusion also among the Left as well as its supporters. Not all the Left supporters are fully convinced of launching a strong protest against everything of this neoliberal state, as their experience of the past is also not good. The leaders are not also immune to this confusion. The parliamentary Left sometimes failed to recognize the neoliberal offensive or a part of it. The incidences of Nandigram, Singur, Posco, Koodankulam nuclear power project are some of the examples of the failure of the Left. Besides it needs to consider that the Left has moderate support base in Indian politics. They are not in a position to introduce a national policy, but can certainly exert influence over the BJP led or Congress led central government with their trade unions, peasant organizations, and employee's federations. The BJP or Congress on the other hand, though represented by big bourgeoisies, also needs the support of the commoners who eventually will vote them to power. That's why we see the introduction of various social assistance programmes within a neoliberal state and participation of their trade unions in nationwide strike on February 28th, 2012.

Despite all these, Indian workers as well as peasants have seen their success to a large extent in stopping privatization of its public enterprises as mentioned above. People's struggles continue through success and failures. Whereas Indian Iron and Steel Company (IISCO), Nationalized Banks, and Insurance Companies are success stories of the 90s, followed by the recent success in stopping Vedanta Aluminum Limited, a UK-based firm from opening mining in sensitive tribal forest land, the stories of failure are the disinvestment of VSNL (*Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited*), BALCO ( Bharat Aluminum Company), and Maruti Udyog Limited. However, the biggest achievement among these struggles was the stoppage of the privatization of public financial institutions, which has saved India from the recent global meltdown. If these are some of the shines of success of the people's resistance, the major defeat is the failure to stop casualization, contractualization, and outsourcing along with the failure to ensure a minimum wage to informal sector workers.

People's relentless struggles inside and outside of institutional framework did also result in other significant successes in favour of the poor. The introduction

of National Agricultural Insurance<sup>3</sup>, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act<sup>4</sup>, Right to Forest Act<sup>5</sup>, Social Security Act<sup>6</sup> for informal workers, the Food Security Bill<sup>7</sup> are some of the landmark successes of people's resistances in India.

This paper does not boast to claim a strong theoretical engagement, but once again it is proved that it is the people's united struggles which determine the fate of the people. The people of India are divided not only on the basis of class, but also on the basis of ethnicity, religion, caste, kinship, regionalism etc. as well on the level of education and degree of consciousness. Thus it is extremely difficult to bring them under a single umbrella to fight against neoliberalism; still the account of the people's protests in India indicate that it is the class, not the primordial identities, which united the working class against capital.

### **Trade Unions and Affiliations:**

AICCTU: All India Central Council of Trade Unions: CPIML (Liberation)

AITUC: All India Trade Union Congress: CPI

BMS: Bharatiya Majdoor Sangha: BJP

CITU: Center of Indian Trade Unions: CPIM

HMS: Hind Majdoor Sabha: not directly affiliated with any political party, but to some extent with different fractions of Janata Party

INTUC: Indian National Trade Union Congress: Indian National Congress

UTUC: United Trade Union Congress: Revolutionary Socialist Party

UTUC-LS: United Trade Union Congress-Lenin Sarani; Socialist Unity Centre of India.

### **Interviews:**

*Amarjit Kaur*: All India General Secretary, AITUC.

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<sup>3</sup> National Agricultural Insurance: Introduced in 1999 to provide insurance coverage and financial support to farmers in the event of failure of any of the notified crop as a result of natural calamities, pests and diseases.

<sup>4</sup> National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005: 100 days guaranteed employment in rural India at minimum wages.

<sup>5</sup> Right to Forest Act of 2006: Tribal people got back their rights over forest land including both individual rights to cultivated on forestland and community rights over common property resources.

<sup>6</sup> See explanation above.

<sup>7</sup> Food Security Act of 2013: People below poverty line will get 25 kg of food at highly subsidized price (Rice @Rs.3/kg; Wheat @Rs. 2/kg.; Millet etc. @ rs.1/kg.). This would cover almost 75% of rural population and 50% of urban population.



*Anuradha Talwar*: Paschimbanga Khet Majdoor Samity.

*Basudev Bose*: General Secretary, WB State Committee, AICCTU.

*Chandan Sanyal*: Founder member of various federations including NTUI, Ex-All India General Secretary, National Federation of Sales Representatives union.

*Jyotirmoy Pal*: Organizing Secretary, West Bengal Government Employees Union (Naba Parjay).

*Kingshuk Dutta*: General Secretary, Association of Chartered Accountants.

*Lakshma Reddy*: General Secretary, BMS.

*Piyus Roy*: General Secretary, Coordination Committee of Central Government Employees and Workers.

*R.A. Mital*: General Secretary, HMS.

*Subhasish Gupta*: Writer and Left Activist.

*Subrata Mukherjee*: Ex-President, INTUC WB State Committee.

*Tapan Sen*: General Secretary, CITU.

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## The “Al-Muhajiroun brand” of Islamism

Mohamed Ilyas

### Abstract

*Although Al-Muhajiroun and its offshoots ‘no longer exist’ as organised groups in the UK because they have been proscribed by the British government, their ideology and worldviews have gained a constituency in a number of European countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, Germany and Norway. The evolution of these groups can be categorised into three generations, and parallels the commercialisation and the availability of new modes of communication technology. The first generation during the 1990s and early 2000s used VHS and audiotape, the second generation started to use personal computers, the Internet and CDs, while today’s third generation, continues to use personal computers, but now also takes advantage of Smartphones, iPad and the emergence of Web 2.0 technology – social media platforms.*

*These groups are best known for their ‘shock and awe’ activism, which often resulted in members burning the flags of Western nations, especially the American flag. Flag burning has become an iconic image and a frame to understand the groups. It was a powerful symbol because it aimed to subvert and reject, as well as symbolically challenge everything that Western countries represent.*

*Great attention has been paid to these groups over the last two decades by the British and international media, and some academics and think tanks. Although there has been ample media coverage of the groups and their members, there are only a few academic publications. Among these, the best known are those by Wiktorowicz (2005) and Baxter (2005), Pargeter (2008) and a report published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) (Raymond, 2010). These works provide a good understanding of the history, ideology and activism of Al-Muhajiroun and its immediate offshoots but they do not consider how the groups laid down the foundations for a brand of political Islam, which I call ‘brand Al-Muhajiroun’, that is provocative, in your face, performance and salvation oriented.*

*This paper focuses on how the first generation of Al-Muhajiroun groups started to develop their brand of political Islam. In doing so this paper will not try to establish connections with the Al Qaeda type groups or brand, nor will it detail the radicalisation processes, the ideology or the topologies that are used by experts, policy makers and the media to describe the groups because they are contingent and determined by a number of continuums that have different purposes, as well as members having a ‘plasticity of positions’ on a range of social issues.*

**Keywords:** Islam, Muslims, Islamism, Al-Muhajiroun, Muslims Against Crusaders, Shariah4Belgium, Jihad, Islamic State, Europe, the West

## Introduction

Islamist groups have been part of the British socio-political landscape since the 1980s. The French Secret Service dubbed London ‘Londonistan’ due to the number of Islamists operating in the city (Kampfner, 2002). Journalist Melanie Phillips used the term as a title for her book, published in 2006. Al-Muhajiroun re-appropriated the term to describe London as an Islamic state (Interview 2).

The groups understood the world through the lens of local, regional and global events, which involved Muslim suffering, as well as through the ‘us versus them’ binary. The global events were the Afghan war in the 1980s, the 1990s Bosnian war, the on-going Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the first Gulf war in 1991, the Afghanistan invasion in 2001, the Iraq invasion in 2003, 9/11 (New York), 7/7 (London), and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe. These events fostered a climate that facilitated members wanting to change the socio-political and religious conditions of Muslims, not only in the UK but also across the world through various means, as evidenced through their activism.

The history of Al-Muhajiroun and its successors is one of precariousness. The groups and their members have always had a tightrope existence because of their provocative activism and anti-terrorism and incitement to violence legislation. Consequently, the British government regarded them as a security threat. According to the British government’s 2011 *Prevent* document, about 15% of people convicted for terrorist-related offences here between 1999 and 2009 had been connected with the extremist group Al-Muhajiroun (Prevent, 2011, 20).

However, this has not stopped members from re-grouping under different names. I argue that Brand Al-Muhajiroun has had three development phases, with the first being the focus of this paper. Al-Muhajiroun, the progenitor group, was set up in the UK during the 1990s by Omar Bakri Mohammed and it was disbanded in October 2004 (Johnston, 2004). In 2005 it was replaced by the ‘Saved Sect’, which in turn was banned in 2006 (Travis, 2006). During the same period ‘Al Ghurabaa’ was established, and it was also proscribed in 2006 (BBC, 17 July, 2006).

These groups were replaced by what I call the second generation, which consisted of Islam4UK and Muslim Against Crusaders (MAC) and which have now been replaced by a third generation. This generation is a network of diffused groups and individuals scattered across European countries, such as Holland, France, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Belgium and Kosovo. According to media reports, groups such as Shariah4Belgium have become an access point for some European Muslims to engage in Jihad in Syria (Russia Today, 16 April, 2013) furthermore, a report published by a anti-fascist organisation - Hope, not Hate - stated that Anjem Choudary, former leading member of Al-Muhajiroun, has facilitated British Muslims in travelling to Syria (Hope, not Hate, 25 November, 2013).

This paper will discuss how the first generation of groups - Al-Muhajiroun, The Saved Sect and Al Ghurabaa - laid down the foundations for ‘brand Al-

Muhajiroun' by using interviews that I carried out with individuals that had been members of the aforementioned groups. The interviews took place in London. Additionally, I also use academic publications and media reports to make my argument. I will first outline the key Islamic concepts that the groups adhered to, not because of their ideological importance but due to the impact of their public performance, which was the key mechanism that the groups used to distinguish themselves from their counterparts, as well as being the basis to foster brand identification. I then move on to detail the activities that the groups used to develop their brand. I argue that they did this by engaging in provocative activities such as burning sacred symbols, 'free riding' on Al Qaeda violence, and staying abreast of the latest media communication technology to engender an assertive and aggressive political Muslim agency. Through this the groups developed an emotive brand, where 'shock and awe and moral outrage' were tools for expressing social and political grievances and engendering a new type of activist within the British Muslim context.

### **Key concepts**

The first generation of brand Al-Muhajiroun groups were the product of a uniquely British multiculturalism, the introduction of political Islam, and events that involved Muslim suffering in the Muslim majority countries and Europe during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Most members of the groups were from second-generation British-Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim backgrounds, as well as some black and white converts (Wiktorowicz 2005: 91).

The groups understood the world by combining a constellation of concepts - *aqeedah*, *taweed*, *takfeer*, and *jihad*. The public performance of these concepts was essential, and they were used to develop a hierarchy of Muslim-ness that aimed to place group members at the top. Together these concepts and their performance not only dictated the continuum that determined the 'politics of group members' and, by implication, which Muslims would gain salvation.

For the first generation of groups Islam was not only a issue of the heart but also of action, meaning that *iman* (faith) automatically translated into action, and public performance of Islamic concepts was essential because it was the most visible way to demonstrate that one was a 'real Muslim' (Abedin, M. 2005). These performances are best illustrated by the numerous protests the groups organised, sometimes involving flag burning and the carrying of placards that demonstrated support for Al Qaeda activities and their Muslim brethren.

For such performance and salvation orientated understanding of Islam to work it needed to have three ingredients, which also aided the development of brand Al-Muhajiroun. These were witnesses, authentication and sacredness. For members, God as a witness was not sufficient because the performance of the concepts constantly needed to be authenticated to have impact, to be meaningful and for members to gain affirmation for their commitment to group ideology and attaining salvation. This authentication came from other group members, bystanders and the global media that covered the protests.

The performance and authentication were of such significance that the groups would inform the media and public well in advance of any demonstrations and conferences that they were planning because they were aware of the media interest in their activism and world views. This enabled the groups to carve a position for themselves within the British Islamist scene and develop a hard ‘no-nonsense’ image.

Islam as understood by the groups resulted in four necessary beliefs and corresponding actions for members and sympathisers. Firstly, the concepts are sacred and performing them constitutes working towards one’s salvation, thus making activism unavoidable; secondly, activism is made sacred because it is performed in the path of God; thirdly, adherents automatically become activists because they are performing sacred concepts in the path of God, and finally, salvation could not be delegated to collective action, it was dependent on the individual and his actions. All of these elements ensured that members were locked into a circular performance-orientated logic that is underpinned by notions of sacredness and salvation.

Although the constellation of concepts is shared by other Muslim groups, what set Al-Muhajiroun groups aside from others was how they combined and performed them during their protests, through burning of flags, and by accusing other Muslims of engaging in *shirk* (following man-made law and not fully adhering to shariah). These performances demonstrated, at least for group members of their superior Muslim-ness and their politics, which is evidenced through what they chanted and what was written on the placards they carried.

The foundational concept in the constellation was *aqeedah*. The concept is complicated, and has no set agreed meaning, but in the simplest terms it means belief in the Islamic faith. The groups claimed that they followed *aqeedah* of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama’aha, meaning ‘following the companions of the prophet’. However, the groups did not have a monopoly on the concept, in that other Salafi-orientated and political Islamist groups claimed that they also followed the same *aqeedah*. In this sense the group were part of the global Salafi trend. The only way they could distinguish themselves from others, as I have noted earlier, was through provocative public performances, which would both affirm their conviction to their faith and determine them as ‘real Muslims’.

The most visible way the first generation groups differentiated themselves from other groups was by being witnessed engaging in a provocative activism. This strategy was employed because the groups were aware that the majority of Islamist groups shared the same concepts and it would be very difficult to recruit only on this basis (Wiktorowicz 2005: 184), as well as to develop an attractive and distinctive brand. Visibility and provocativeness were essential markers to distinguish themselves from other groups, not only through the shock value of their activism but also via the media attention they received. In some cases this led members to engage in high-risk activism, such as inciting violence through their chanting and the placards they carried during protests (Casciani, 2007).



The second concept in the constellation was *taweed*, which is performatively connected to *aqeedah* and the groups placed great emphasis on the performative element of *taweed*. This enabled the groups to distinguish themselves from their competitors, such as Hizb ut Tahrir, and to emphasize that they were the only ones that adhered to *taweed* in its entirety and by default were ‘real Muslims’ (Wiktorowicz 2005: 184). The concepts of *taweed* and *aqeedah* enabled members to demonstrate their emotional attachment to, and support for their Muslim brethren that were suffering as a result of being oppressed by their leaders or Western aggression.

The groups understood *taweed* as the connectedness of all things to, and the belief in the oneness of God, which made Islam inseparable from other domains of life, including how the human body was represented and politics. This unification is commonly expressed through the statement ‘al-islam din wal dawla’, meaning that Islam is both religion and state (Mandaville, 2007, 12). *Taweed* has two constitutive parts. The first is *taweed rububiyya*, which is the belief that God is the sole Lord and sovereign of the Universe, but the groups also believed that in *taweed al-asma’ wa al-sifat*, meaning that the Quran can only be understood literally.

The second part of *taweed* is *taweed al-ilah*, which means the worshipping only of God. This part of *taweed* was used by the groups to distinguish themselves from, and to verbally attack and accuse other Muslims of *shirk*. In the main the groups accused Barelvi Muslims and leaders of Muslim countries of *shirk* for worshipping saints and not ruling by the shariah. They based their accusations on an understanding of shariah that they regarded as the correct version. This resulted in the groups having considerable latitude in defining which activities involved engaging in *shirk* (Wiktorowicz 2005: 174). One could be accused of engaging in *shirk* and therefore contravening *taweed* by voting, calling for secularism, mocking religion, being friends with non-Muslims and not praying. These activities were sufficient for the groups to declare *takfeer* (excommunication for engaging in practices that contravene shariah) on other Muslims (Wiktorowicz 2005: 176).

According to the groups, emanating from the correct understanding of *taweed* were three divine duties, which they claimed needed to be performed in order for members, and other Muslims to attain salvation (Wiktorowicz 2005: 177), as well as be considered as ‘real Muslims’. The first of these duties was to propagate the correct interpretation of Islam to Muslims and call non-Muslims to Islam. This included making Muslims aware that they must support jihad and in not doing so would jeopardize their salvation. The groups advocated supporting jihad in three ways - verbally defending those that are fighting in the jihad, financially supporting the jihad and joining the jihad and fighting. This action-orientated understanding of Jihad led to individuals that were affiliated with the first generation groups, especially Al-Muhajiroun being convicted for supporting terrorism.

For example, Abu Izzadeen, who was associated with Al-Muhajiroun and a spokesman for Al Ghurabaa was convicted for verbally supporting jihad in 2008

(Gardham, D. 2008). According to media reports members of the 2007 fertilizer plot were involved with Al-Muhajiroun (Summers, C and Cascinai, D. 2007), and Britain's first suicide bombers were suspected of having links with Al-Muhajiroun (Britten, N et al, 2003). The second duty emanating from *taweed* was to command the good and forbid the evil. Evil covered everything that was outside the interpretation of Islam that the groups held to be authentic (Wiktorowicz 2005: 144). Commanding the good for members was to call for the creation of an Islamic state, and inform Muslims not to engage in activities that would lead to *shirk*. The third divine duty was to call for and work towards establishing an Islamic state. Members of the groups took every opportunity to call for the creation of an Islamic state through protests and the literature that they produced and distributed (BBC, 29 April, 2004). For the first generation groups anyone who did not adhere to and act upon *taweed*, as well as the accompanying criteria, would not attain salvation and was not a real Muslim. Adhering to these duties often involved members engaging in high risk activities, which resulted in house raids, surveillance by the security services and arrests during protests (BBC, 30 July, 2003, Guardian, 7 March, 2007).

For the first generation of Al-Muhajiroun groups the public performance of the aforementioned concepts and visibility were essential in distinguishing themselves from other groups and they were embedded within a set of values and attitudes about the West and other Muslims. Moreover, the performances enabled the groups to develop an image and reputation for a brand of political Islam that was aggressive and highly emotive.

In the next section I will outline how the first generation groups started to develop brand Al-Muhajiroun in order to gain popularity by engaging in provocative protests, using the media to gain maximum exposure, and producing and distributing VHS and audio tapes, CDs and magazines.

### **The media and brand Al-Muhajiroun**

For any brand to be successful it has to be able to deliver its message clearly, it has to be able to connect with its audience emotionally, it has to be able to convince its audience that they need their product or that it is essential for them to adopt their ideas and practices, as well as have a consistent message that will foster loyalty through emotional identification. To this extent the first generation of Al-Muhajiroun groups used all the tools at their disposal to develop a successful brand. In the main the groups used both the media to gain publicity and develop their profile because it was free, as well as producing and distributing their own material, which I will discuss in the next section. But at this point it is important to make some rudimentary comments about the material in order to highlight why the groups relied so much on the media.

Al-Muhajiroun came into existence according to Baxter (2007) in 1996, and during the 1990s VHS, audiotapes and magazines were the dominant media communication tools. However, the tools were limited because VHS and audiotapes could not be produced in bulk, meaning that, as one former member

of Al-Muhajiroun describes, ‘we used to watch the videos and listen to the audiotapes in a groups (Interview 5). Not being able to disseminate material to a wider audience not only hindered the development of brand Al-Muhajiroun but also the recruitment of new members. This forced the groups to rely heavily on the media in order to cultivate an audience, deliver a clear message, or sufficiently mobilize Muslims.

Therefore, from the outset Omar Bakri Mohammed, the founder of Al-Muhajiroun, recognised how important national and international media were, such that the media were present at every event the groups organised. According to Wiktorowicz (2005), Al-Muhajiroun members were obsessed with media coverage of the group (Wiktorowicz 2005: 150). This influence has continued with members of successor groups avidly reading newspaper articles and watching and critically analyzing news clips and documentaries that reported on their activism (Interview 2). Furthermore, as one former member of the Al-Muhajiroun stated to me ‘the media wanted to see flag burning, they wanted to hear us say anti-Western things, so we gave them what they wanted’ (Interview 1).

It is clear that from the inception of Al-Muhajiroun had a media strategy and Omar Bakri Mohammed was aware that the media was a powerful vehicle for agenda setting, issue framing, and consciousness-raising (Wiktorowicz 2005: 150). Consequently, the first generation of groups became very skilled in using the media, especially broadcast and print media. This is evidenced by how Omar Bakri Mohammed interacted with the media. By using the media strategically Omar Bakri Mohammed and other senior members were able to set the group agenda, frame issues, make Muslims aware of Muslim suffering, as well as cultivate a media profile for themselves. The groups did not have any preference over which media outlet they interacted, in that Omar Bakri Mohammed even welcomed Israeli media despite his anti-Israel stance (Wiktorowicz 2005: 151).

The groups used the media to propagate their ideologies, evoke moral outrage, and promote religious and political awakening among Muslims and non-Muslim communities through street protests (Wiktorowicz 2005: 151). The protests often involved protesters using volatile language, which ensured that the media had a story to tell, as well as fostering anger among some members of both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The politics and the form of protests that the groups engaged in resulted in many documentaries being made, as well as leading members being interviewed by national and international television and radio stations: Omar Bakri Mohammed, Anjem Choudary and Abu Izzadeen have all been interviewed by various British and international news outlets, such as BBC News (Watson, 2005) and FOX News (Choudary, 2011). All the media reporting about group activities and on television and radio by senior members fostered brand awareness.

Another way the groups tried to gain media attention and agenda setting was by making controversial statements that targeted Muslim and Western leaders. For example, it was reported that Omar Bakri Mohammed stated in a 1991 article that the then Prime Minister of the UK, John Major, was a legitimate target for

attack (Ulph, 2005). He later revoked his comments, saying that he had been misquoted and clarified his statement by explaining that John Major would be a legitimate target if he entered a Muslim country, with the same applying to Tony Blair. He also said that he would not condemn the killers (History Commons, n.d.).

Additionally, he also made a similar statement regarding the 9/11 bombers. In 2001 he is reported to have called the 9/11 bombers ‘the magnificent 19’ (Blomfield, 2010). The statement was complemented by Al-Muhajiroun organising protests and conferences that celebrated the 9/11 attacks. Protesters carried ‘pictures of the 19 hijackers around a backdrop of the World Trade Centre in flames and a smiling Osama bin Laden’ (O’Neill, 2003). Other members of Al-Muhajiroun also used controversy as a tactic, such as Abu Omar, who was quoted in the Telegraph newspaper stating that ‘the hijackers were completely justified and quite splendid and that any Muslim who thought otherwise was an apostate’ (O’Neill, 2003).

These controversial statements resulted in some members of the first-generation groups being prosecuted for glorifying terrorism and violence. Abu Izzadeen was convicted for glorifying terrorism in 2008, he reportedly had made comments such as, ‘so we are terrorists - terrifying the enemies of Allah. The Americans and British only understand one language. It’s the language of blood’ (Gardham, 2008). In addition, four men were convicted for inciting racial hatred after carrying provocative banners inspiring Al Qaeda type attacks during the protests against the publication of cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed in 2006 (Casciani, 2007).

However, despite having a lot of national and international media attention, the groups neither had control over their image nor were able to offer their audience their product in a comprehensive way. The product, in the case of the groups, was an anti-Western and Islamist ideology, aggressive in your face Muslim agency and a form of protest that engendered intense emotions among its supporters, competitors and enemies. Not having full control over their media profile, the groups found it very difficult to effectively develop a positive self-image and make people amenable to their ideas. Moreover, experts on Islamist groups and Muslim leaders added to the negative image of the groups and their members by referring to them as ‘whack jobs’, ‘loonies’, ‘clowns’ and ‘lunatic fringe’ (Wiktorowicz 2005: 45-46). In the next section I detail how the groups addressed the aforementioned concerns.

### **Self-branding: Brand Al-Muhajiroun**

In order to address these concerns, the groups started to produce VHS and audiotapes and magazines, which members sold during *dawah* stalls (calling non-Muslims and Muslims to Islam) and conferences. The material and the modes of dissemination helped to cultivate a small audience for their ideology. However, the material was not of a high quality. One former member of Al-Muhajiroun, in an interview for this paper stated, ‘our early material was

amateurish and the content was very dense and difficult for people to understand, especially for those that had little knowledge about Islam'. He further added, 'our early products were produced by individuals that had little knowledge of, or skills in production, design and marketing. Therefore the quality and dissemination was not effective, meaning that the groups were not successful in being able to convey their ideology and a 'Muslim conscious' brand of Islamism to the wider Muslim community' (Interview 2).

As the groups became well known through their activism and *dawah* stalls that they held in town centres and on university campuses, as well as by word of mouth, they started to attract new members with useful skills. As one former member of Al-Muhajiroun stated, 'when I joined Al-Muhajiroun, I had qualifications in computing (Interview 4). The new additions had knowledge and qualifications in business and computing, as well as possessing skills in video production and graphic design. This, according to former Al-Muhajiroun members, took the production and dissemination of material to a different level (Interviews 2 and 3). With the injection of new members with skills, the groups no longer produced amateurish VHS videos, audiotapes and magazines. Instead, the material had a structure and narrative from cover to content, which aimed to attract and evoke religious and political awakening among visitors to the *dawah* stalls.

From the early 2000s the groups introduced a number of changes to the production and dissemination of the material that they produced, which helped brand development. The first change was to replace VHS and audiotapes with CDs because they were the latest mode of storing data, as well as being a quicker and cheaper way to produce a quality product. This ensured that group members and sympathisers had their own copies of lectures and could watch and listen to them at their leisure. This was also facilitated by personal computers becoming cheaper to purchase, meaning that the households of many members and sympathisers owned at least one computer. Secondly they introduced a more organised network of production and distribution, as well as using the Internet to set-up websites to propagate their ideas and sell their CDs. The introduction of a structured production and distribution system enabled the groups to quickly produce high quality CDs containing lectures, conferences and documentaries that focused on politics and Islam (Interview 2).

One aim behind the material was to cultivate among Muslims the de-linking of Islam from culture in favour of a transnational and universal set of practices (Roy, 2004: 120). The aim of de-linking was twofold. Firstly, to dis-embed individuals from their local sociocultural and religious communities and re-embed them into a global socio-political and religious community (*ummah*). Through this dis-embedding process the groups wanted British Muslims to reject both Western culture and the culture of their parents. The aim here was to foster a community based around what Roy (2004: 124) calls neo-ethnicity, as well as way of life that was concretely embedded in their version of Islam. Another aim was to establish an emotional relationship between the Muslim communities, brand Al-Muhajiroun, and Muslims that were suffering in conflict

zones.

The sellers in this system approached their role in an interesting way. According to former members of Al-Muhajiroun the audience was cultivated by giving them samples of the product, which they liked, and they then came back for more until they became addicted, much like selling drugs (Interviews 1, 2 and 3). This approach corresponds to Omar Bakri Mohammed seeing his followers as ‘men of the street’ (Wiktorowicz 2005: 148). By this, he meant that the groups had their fingers on the pulse of the street. Therefore, selling magazines and CDs, as well as promoting the brand was simple for members because they were aware of the issues that concerned the Muslim communities, especially young Muslims. This was not only because they possessed the language and social skills of the street, but also the street was where they felt most comfortable and at home (Interview 2). The combination of members having IT skills, street credibility, as well as employing production, distribution and sales strategies, not only enabled Al-Muhajiroun ideology to be disseminated but also ensured that a constituency members and sympathisers was being developed and brand awareness was being cultivated.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that the first generation of Al-Muhajiroun groups, in the form of Al-Muhajiroun, Al Ghurabaa and The Saved Sect, were instrumental in laying down the foundations for ‘brand Al-Muhajiroun’. The brand was based on a constellation of Islamic concepts and anti-Western politics that also employed an emotive, aggressive, proactive and provocative form of activism. This type of activism became a distinctive hallmark of the groups, which also meant that the groups were easily identifiable and attracted new members.

The paper also contends that central to the brand development was group members staying abreast of technological advancements and being media savvy. Meaning that they employed the latest communication technology and used national and international media to set the agenda and influence debates concerning Muslims, which also enabled them to cultivate an audience for themselves, and drive a wedge among Muslims and between Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK. Staying abreast of technology went hand-in-hand with recruiting new members that had skills and qualifications in marketing, computing, and business. This ensured that everything had a structure, from production, distribution and use of the media to market the brand, enabling the groups to carve out a position and take advantage of political opportunities that arose from political and social events.

Together the Islamic concepts, engaging provocative activism, the use of the media and staying abreast of technology ensured that the foundations of brand Al-Muhajiroun were laid and brand awareness was cultivated. These foundations have paved the way for the second and third generation of groups to emerge and continue to develop the brand through similar activities, make use of Web 2.0 Internet platforms, gain an international audience, as well as

increasingly attract female and male converts from various parts of Europe.

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### **About the author**

Mohammed Ilyas gained his PhD from the Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2011. The PhD adopted an original and innovative approach to investigate why and how some Muslims from Europe join political Islamist groups and some volunteer to become suicide bombers. He has recently completed an international project that looked into the experiences of Muslims in Western societies. At present he is independently researching inter-Muslim hate, Islamophobia, and the attraction of convert Muslims to violent Jihadism.

## **“iVolveremos! / we will return”: The state of play for the global climate justice movement**

**John Foran**

The warmest November ever recorded, worldwide. The strongest typhoon ever to hit land. The previously nonexistent Northwest Passage in the Arctic opened. The latest climate reports telling us that climate change is not coming, that it's already here. The data on global warming and severe climate impacts mount up inexorably.

Meanwhile at the nineteenth annual U.N. climate summit, the COP19 (Conference of the Parties) in Warsaw, Poland, between November 11 and 22, 2013, a lot happened but little was achieved. I was in Warsaw with my co-director Richard Widick of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory (<http://www.iicat.org/>), and a team of five UC Santa Barbara students and alumni, calling ourselves the iicat [Climate Justice Project](#). Richard focused on filming interviews with some of the COP's more powerful players among the delegates, corporate lobbyists, and experts for a feature film about the struggle over the new global climate treaty to cut greenhouse gas emissions deeply enough to keep the planet below a temperature rise that would threaten a social catastrophe. The rest of us interviewed young activists and filmed demonstrations inside and outside the COP for another documentary project and a book of their voices.

A negotiator from the global South moved people to tears. Two climate scientists got very political. Negotiators for the more than 100-nation strong Group of 77 staged a walkout from one of the closed sessions in frustration with the global North's lack of ambition or generosity. Then global civil society matched this with the biggest walk-out of participants from a COP ever seen.

What does it all amount to? What is the state of play in the negotiations? What are the prospects that the global climate justice movement can pressure the nations into the kind of serious negotiations that will be required for the 2015 deadline of a binding climate treaty that takes into account the urgency of the science? This essay will explore these questions as it charts some of the high and low points of the Warsaw COP, including the situation leading up to it, and the prospects for a stronger global climate justice movement going forward.

### **The run-up**

In late September the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a “Summary for Policymakers” derived from its much-anticipated Fifth Assessment Report (AR5). Its findings are as definitive as science can be: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have

diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased” ([IPCC 2013](#)).

The report goes on to conclude in the measured tones that characterize IPCC reports but which nevertheless state the deadly facts:

Human influence has been detected in warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes. This evidence for human influence has grown since AR4 [the Fourth Assessment Report, issued in 2007]. It is *extremely likely* [emphasis added] that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century....

Continued emissions of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and changes in all components of the climate system. Limiting climate change will require substantial and sustained reductions of greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC 2013).

Meanwhile, on June 25, 2013, in the steamy heat of Washington, D.C., Barack Obama unveiled his administration’s new climate action plan (Executive Office of the President 2013), stating “The question now is whether we will have the courage to act before it’s too late. And how we answer will have a profound impact on the world we leave behind not just for you but for your children and your grandchildren” (Chemnick 2013).

He also proclaimed “We’ve got a vital role to play. We can’t stand on the sidelines.” The Obama climate plan rests on a combination of enforcing existing or enacting new Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulations for emissions from new and existing power plants, new federal government targets mandating energy efficiency and renewable energy, and a variety of lesser measures. Interestingly, and to its credit, the United States has registered an 11 percent drop in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions since the peak year of 2007; the country is now about on par with its 1990 levels ([Adams 2013](#)). While bold compared to the lack of ambition on climate in his first term, Obama’s plan is far from the breakthrough needed at the COP, despite praise for it from the U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern, who said the president’s plan would help him in his work, because it demonstrated U.S. seriousness on the issue.

“The more that they see that the United States is acting with vigor and determination, the more credibility and leverage we have internationally, there’s no question about that,” Stern said, adding that negotiators from other countries had already responded to the comments Obama has made on climate change since his re-election in 2012. “Any sign – and this certainly is – of strong presidential action and strong leadership on this issue [has] a very positive effect and translates into a boost for our credibility” (Chemnick 2013).

In the days after Typhoon Haiyan’s devastation of the Philippines, Walden Bello, a member of the Philippine House of Representatives and a board member of Greenpeace International, wrote in *The Nation*:

For a time earlier this year, it appeared that Hurricane Sandy would bring climate change to the forefront of President Obama's agenda. It did not. While trumpeting that he was directing federal agencies to force power plants to cut carbon emissions and encourage movement toward clean-energy sources, Obama will not change the US policy of nonadherence to the Kyoto Protocol, which Washington never ratified. Although 67 percent of Americans believe in climate change, Obama does not have the courage to challenge the fanatical climate skeptics in the Republican Party and the business establishment.

Washington's military-led relief effort in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan should not obscure its fundamental irresponsibility regarding climate change, not only when it comes to curbing emissions but also on the matter of aid to developing countries suffering the consequences of the carbon-intensive economies of the developed world. Large-scale compensation is out of the question, says State Department envoy Todd Stern, who also said at a London seminar in October that "lectures about compensation, reparations and the like will produce nothing but antipathy among developed country policy-makers and their publics" ([Bello 2013](#)).

Or, as Bill McKibben ([2013](#)) recently put it, under Obama, the United States has become a "global-warming machine."

Elsewhere, the national-level political news was not good for the planet. In Australia, the Labour Party that had instituted a successful if not universally popular carbon tax was ousted from power in favor of a climate-denying prime minister who professes to believe that climate change is not real (much like the majority of elected Republican Party congresspeople in the United States). The new prime minister, Tony Abbott, considers the science "absolute crap" and called his predecessor's legislation of a carbon tax a "so-called market in the non-delivery of an invisible substance to no-one" ([Boer 2013](#)), saying it was "basically socialism masquerading as environmentalism, and that's why it's going to get abolished" ([Weymouth 2013](#)).

Citing the country's retreat from nuclear power following the 2011 Fukushima meltdown, Japan's new government announced it was reneging on its previous Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 25 percent under 1990 levels by 2020. Japan is now going for a target of *increasing* emissions by three percent by 2020!

In the Maldives, climate justice hero Mohamed Nasheed, the "Island President" ([2012](#)) who had spurred delegates to take action at the Copenhagen, Cancún, and Durban COPs, was denied the election in a hard-fought and dirty campaign, removing one of the most eloquent and prestigious voices for a strong treaty from the crucial COPs that remain in this decade ([Foran and Gray 2013](#)).

Canada's Harper administration dragged the country's reputation further into the mud with its all-out extraction frenzy in the Alberta tar sands fields, a dystopian dead zone of pollution and climate wreckage.

China's industrial growth continued apace, pushing its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to a global annual record, while its citizens choked on the pollution its development entailed. In fairness, 2013 was perhaps the year when both the Chinese citizenry and government said they had had enough and that strong measures are now needed to rein in the "economic externalities" caused by China's rise in the global economy. Chinese solar production, for both domestic and international markets, remained the strongest in the world, an achievement deplored by both the United States and the World Trade Organization on the grounds that it was the result of "unfair trade practices."

Even the European Union's climate champion, Germany, which pulled off the miracle of generating one-half of its electricity from renewable sources on one fine summer's day, saw its emissions rise as lignite coal picked up the slack caused by phasing out nuclear power.

Host Poland, for its part, retained the dirtiest, coal-fired electrical grid in all of Europe, and arranged for the World Coal Association to hold its annual summit during the two-week long COP, while the COP itself was underwritten and sponsored by fossil fuel corporations like Lotos (whose brand was stitched into the handsome shoulder bag given freely to all inside the COP) and emissions-leading countries and industries such as Emirates airline, whose logo graced the comfy beanbag cushions that weary participants slept or worked on as the COP went into its second week.

So the outlook going into Warsaw was not bright, although the scientists had clearly indicated that this COP had to start to reverse some of these trends, or else the strain put on the planet's climate and its people would sooner rather than later become too much to bear.

## **Plenaries, side events and climate trains**

### **An opening plenary to remember**

The motto for this COP, chosen by the host country, was "I care." Beata Jaczewska, Poland's head negotiator, picked up the phrase for her remarks at the Opening Plenary on Monday, November 11: "I care for the Earth. I care for climate. I care for the outcome of this negotiating process, of this conference. I care for the future. I care. Do you care?" The plenary featured the usual statements of welcome, a heartwarming and polished video of young children in a Kiribati village named "Poland," and grand speeches full of promise. The problem, of course, is that most countries, including China (regularly) and the United States (sometimes) say the right things, but none of the big emitters actually does anything courageous in the negotiations. The COP itself can be seen as a terrain of struggle, with the progressive nations locked in mortal combat with the vested interests of the wealthy North and the developmental ambitions of the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

Then, in the middle of the proceedings, something new happened, providing the first sign that the world might not stand idly by while the COP took only baby steps in the negotiations. The chief delegate from the Philippines, Naderev “Yeb” Saño, addressed the assembled nations with these words ([video](#) at IISD 2013):

To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare you to get off your ivory tower and away from the comfort of your armchair. I dare you to go to the islands of the Pacific, the islands of the Caribbean and the islands of the Indian Ocean and see the impacts of rising sea levels, to the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the Andes to see communities confronting glacial floods, to the Arctic where communities grapple with the fast dwindling polar ice caps, to the large deltas of the Mekong, the Ganges, the Amazon, and the Nile where lives and livelihoods are drowned, to the hills of Central America that confronts similar monstrous hurricanes, to the vast savannas of Africa where climate change has likewise become a matter of life and death as food and water become scarce. Not to forget the massive hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard of North America. And if that is not enough, you may want to pay a visit to the Philippines right now....

What my country is going through as a result of this extreme climate event is madness. The climate crisis is madness....

It is the 19th COP, but we might as well stop counting, because my country refuses to accept that a COP30 or a COP40 will be needed to solve climate change. And because it seems that despite the significant gains we have had since the UNFCCC was born, 20 years hence we continue to fail in fulfilling the ultimate objective of the Convention. Now, we find ourselves in a situation where we have to ask ourselves – can we ever attain the objective set out in Article 2 – which is to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system? By failing to meet the objectives of the Convention, we may have ratified the doom of vulnerable countries.

We find ourselves at a critical juncture and the situation is such that even the most ambitious emissions reductions by developed countries, who should have been taking the lead in combating climate change in the past two decades, will not be enough to avert the crisis. It is now too late, too late to talk about the world being able to rely on Annex I countries to solve the climate crisis. We have entered a new era that demands global solidarity in order to fight climate change and ensure that pursuit of sustainable human development remains at the fore of the global community’s efforts. This is why means of implementation for developing countries is ever more crucial....

We cannot sit and stay helpless staring at this international climate stalemate. It is now time to take action. We need an emergency climate pathway....

This process under the UNFCCC has been called many names. It has been called a farce. It has been called an annual carbon-intensive gathering of useless frequent flyers. It has been called many names. But it has also been called the Project to save the Planet. It has been called “saving tomorrow today.” We can fix this. We can stop this madness. Right now. Right here, in the middle of this football field.

I call on you to lead us. And let Poland be forever known as the place we truly cared to stop this madness. Can humanity rise to the occasion? I still believe we can ([Saño 2013](#)).

Saño's speech moved people to tears in the overflow hall where I sat. There was nothing to match its power and import in the last two COPs in Durban and Doha which I attended. Saño's words drew up a glaring contrast, often noted by its critics, between the official COP where middle-aged men (mostly) in suits show up year after year to fumble their mandate to do something historically meaningful, and what we might call "The People's COP," the efforts of global civil society to inject reality and creativity into the discussions. In a telling sign of the UNFCCC's increasingly hard-line instincts to stifle strong civil society input, Executive Secretary Cristiana Figueres issued a five-year ban to three young activists who had gone into the Plenary with banners of solidarity to escort Mr. Saño out of the hall. This formed part of a wider pattern of exclusion and dismissal of civil society, which had already taken the form of severely restricting the size of civil society delegations, and would be followed by the Executive Secretary's appearance at the World Coal Association summit a week later as a keynote speaker. Figueres would leave Warsaw with her reputation severely damaged in the eyes of a wide swath of civil society.

### **Radical scientists at the side events**

While the negotiators dithered and dined, civil society took up its responsibilities as best it could. At the formal side events, there was the usual small-scale thinking and self-promotion by the countries and corporate greenwashers, but there were also some bright exceptions. There was a lively forum on the 350.org-inspired fossil fuel divestment movement that swept U.S. universities in 2013 and was moving into other Northern countries, most notably the United Kingdom, as the 2013-14 academic year opened. Young representatives from the global South effectively got across the point that in most of their countries such a campaign would have little traction, unless coupled with one based on truly adequate sustainable development funds and technology for their countries' efforts to adapt to climate change and extreme weather catastrophes.

Kevin Anderson and Alice Bowes, climate scientists at the Tyndall Centre in Manchester, England, did what more scientists need to do: they not only analyzed the climate problem, they used their knowledge to confront the political problem that lies beneath it, a vision already signalled in the subtitle to their well-attended side event: "Global Carbon Budget 2013: rising emissions and a radical plan for 2 degrees." They gave a sobering presentation of the numbers: we have an atmospheric carbon budget remaining of about 1,000 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> for a 66 percent chance of staying under two degrees Celsius (the upper limit agreed by the COP, although itself quite possibly too high for humanity). The world is putting up about 35 gigatons a year right now, annual



emissions rose 3.5 percent per annum for the ten years before 2008, and despite the recession, have continued to rise 2-3 percent every year since. Then they got down to the policy implications of our predicament:

- Avoid 4 degrees at all cost
- The global North needs to cut 70 percent of our emissions over the next decade
- Only the richest several percent of the world population need do radical mitigation
- Market solutions won't achieve any of this

As they noted, “we’re not short of capital, just the initiative and courage.” Even more stunning are the political implications that Anderson drew just before the Warsaw COP: “Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2°C budget demands revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony” ([Clarke 2014](#)). Anderson said in another interview during COP19: “I’m really stunned there is no sense of urgency here,” pointing out that what’s needed is leadership, courage, innovative thinking, engaged people, and difficult choices ([Leahy 2013](#)). And who’s providing all this at the moment? The question hung pregnant in a room filled with seasoned climate justice advocates.

### **Riding the Climate Train**

Some of the people who do possess these virtues were on the “Climate Train” that was organized by European activists to bring undelegated reinforcements into Warsaw overnight on Friday, November 15 for the big global day of action march the next day. Chris Williams, a U.S. eco-socialist who rode the train, provided my group with a lively personal account of the heady atmosphere as people debated and shared stories all night, celebrating (with beer) their movement’s vitality, decorating themselves with face paint and making placards for the march:

Over the course of the 18-hour train ride, a glimpse was offered of the kind of positive alternative that exists, if people can build the movement for climate justice more widely.

Each carriage was organized by different environmental and left-wing groups, with two stewards appointed to each. While organizers had hoped for 500 passengers, more than 750 rode the climate justice train to Warsaw. Each carriage was adorned with banners, flags and posters proclaiming the politics of different groups; even the toilet doors had polite multilingual handmade signs detailing appropriate and considerate usage. Nutritious food was provided and served from a food car taken over and run by dedicated activists; drinks and food were served throughout by Oxfam and a local organic brewery. All train announcements were made in three languages, and a train carriage was set aside as a “debate car.”



He continued:

This proved entirely superfluous, because debates and discussions raged the length and breadth of the train, long into the early hours of the morning: about how to build the movement, what position to take on different issues, what could be expected from the climate talks in Warsaw and how the demonstrations might affect them. The hopeful, energetic and tremendously inspiring atmosphere couldn't have been more different to the pall of futility enveloping the official COP19 talks at the stadium in Warsaw. The train ambience was multinational and multicultural in the best sense of those terms, comradely and with a vivacious spirit and energy that was infectious as people shared thoughts, food and stories ([Williams 2013](#)).



*French research chemist, after face painting, contemplates the journey ahead. Photo and caption by Chris Williams.*

### **Movements: Climate Justice Youth Continue to Step Up**

The mood of the next day's march, though held under a gloomy November sky, was anything but somber. Several thousand activists from all continents paraded down one of Warsaw's main boulevards from the Soviet-era Palace of Culture over the Vistula River to the National Stadium, where the COP was being held. They chanted, sang, and testified in support of real system change to solve the climate crisis. A clown brigade tailed the heavily-armored police who lined the route and accompanied the march, disarming them with their antics, hugs, and kisses. The march ended in the dark at a nearby amphitheatre where speeches were made pledging mutual solidarity between the global labor and climate justice movements (there are some hopeful recent developments in this respect discussed at the end of this essay). Then we melted into the night, some to attend the traditional wild NGO party in downtown Warsaw, others,

such as myself, left to process the depressing news that Nasheed's bid for president in the Maldives had fallen short by less than two percent of the vote that very afternoon.

The people we talked with offered some amazing stories. There was Hamzat Lawal from Nigeria, who arrived at the COP to find that his country's most experienced negotiators were inexplicably absent in the first week. This prompted him to write an open letter to the country's president, and to our (and his) surprise, the negotiators suddenly arrived for week two.

We met Silje Lundberg, chair of Young Friends of the Earth Norway, an organization with 6,500 members, who has been a climate activist since the age of twelve. Literally a force of nature, Silje seemed to be everywhere, speaking at press conferences (including the one we organized with young climate activists, [IICAT 2013](#)), side events, and after actions.

We also listened to the life story of Surya Karkat, a student at the College of the Atlantic in Maine and member of the dynamic and creative Earth in Brackets organization (<http://www.earthinbrackets.org/>), who told us how he and five friends had started first one, then three schools in Nepal, his home country, dedicated to the holistic education of their students that fosters an appreciation of their environment and the threat posed to it by climate change. Earth in Brackets, it was explained to me, chose their name to reflect on the fact that the most promising proposals for treaty text at the COPs are put in brackets while they are being negotiated, and at the end of the day, most are dropped when there is no consensus in their favor.

David Gawith, a New Zealand youth activist, told us how he helped start up Connected Voices (<http://connected-voices.org/our-history/>), a project that brings into the COP the words of young people on the front lines of climate change who don't have the resources to be there in person, especially those from island states like Kiribati, Palau, Tonga, Samoa, Tokelau, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and the Marshall Islands. From a small class project, in two years, the organization has grown into a flourishing global group engaged in this valuable justice work.

One of the more spectacular "actions" of COP19 took place on the UNFCCC-designated "Gender Day" when a group of young Latin American women (and one North American, Natasha Weidner of our iicat team) danced their way through the corridors in an attempt to "Sexify" the COP by drawing attention to the rigid formality of the negotiations, their dull maleness, and jaded delegates, making a joyful comment on the lack of any serious consideration of gender inside the negotiations (the same can be said for youth and for communities marginalized by poverty, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and excluded voices in general). The action was videotaped, and ended with the statement "Equity is Hotter than Climate Change," leaving viewers to ponder for themselves this provocative and controversial intervention.

Emily Williams, a recent graduate of UC Santa Barbara and another member of our team, became very involved with the UNFCCC youth constituency

YOUNGO. One of the working groups was trying to foreground the issue of “Intergenerational Equity” or “Inteq” – the heartbreaking realization that these negotiations must take note of a fundamental constituency, the world’s young people, and the billions who will come after most of the negotiators have passed from the scene. Emily recounted a meeting the group had scheduled with the U.S. State Department envoy Trigg Tally, whom they caught coming out a meeting on his way to another meeting. They made him stop for the time it took him to eat a sandwich and explained the importance of the concept, asking that he at least not block its inclusion in a final text. When delegates from the global South in fact did broach the idea in the next meeting, the U.S. was able to say they knew about it and found it “interesting.” Indeed, one of the final documents approved in Warsaw made reference to “future generations,” the first mention ([Hopkins 2013](#)) of the concept since the creation of the Convention did so under Article 3.1 back in 1992. Of such (well-planned) chance encounters the seeds of the unforeseeable may sometimes grow.

Each COP is preceded by a COY, a Conference of Youth, at which youth attending the COP, along with young activists who are not delegated to enter the COP, spend three days getting to know each other in workshops, trainings, and pre-COP organizing work. Many of the connections made will be taken forward in the two weeks of the COP, and later as activists return home, now friends with like-minded people in different parts of the world, able to stay in touch through social media to strengthen their ties and build stronger global movements. Another member of our team, Ben Liddie, put on a workshop that showed people how to make colorful cloth patches with political message [see one at <http://www.climatejusticeproject.com>].

But there were also points of tension in the youth movement over such issues as whether to work for climate justice within the COP or protest its inability to deliver a fair and ambitious treaty – no surprise when people from so many places and viewpoints gather together, most of them for the first time. Overlaid on these competing perspectives are tensions between activists and organizations from the global North and global South (though even groups from the same country or region can have very different analyses and aims). These tensions mirror the inequalities found in the U.N. negotiations themselves, yet tend to be dealt with markedly better by the movements than the countries. One angle of thinking about these divides is between the more privileged groups from the global North who have access to resources to attend the COP, and those from the global South, who may not, inevitably leading to less diversity inside YOUNGO (one imagines that this playing field will be somewhat more level this December at COP20 in Lima, Peru). Luke Kemp, a researcher with the Australian National University and Coordinator of the Inteq Group, told me that another key debate surrounds the question, “What is the aim and function of YOUNGO? Are we supposed to be simply a meeting place for diverse youth groups to meet, share ideas and discuss (a kind of mini-UNFCCC of sorts), or are we supposed to be something greater, an integrated body for youth that can effectively participate in and influence the international political process?”

The divisions inside the movement between “radicals” and “reformers” constitute a debate between those who believe that the climate crisis can be addressed within capitalism and those who conclude that managing the crisis will require societies to go beyond capitalism into something else. Another important debate focuses on critical tactics for dealing with the climate crisis. Some young activists are eager to dialogue directly (when this is possible) with their own country delegations to influence negotiating positions, while others hope to move delegates through actions designed to point out their biases and limitations. Still others show up primarily to build a radical, even anti-capitalist, oppositional global movement that sees no avenue for change through the COP process. The Canadian Youth Delegation, for example, who were very active at the Durban and Doha COPs in 2011 and 2012, opted not to sink precious time and resources into attending COP19 and instead to stay focused on pressing climate justice work in Canada.

Our film shows how much better the movement is than the Parties to the Convention at working together, making progress, foregrounding the science, representing civil society and future generations, fighting for a just treaty, and so forth. (filmed by Summer Gray and viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbtdXFeEUXk>).

These differences can come into play in YOUNGO, which operates by consensus, and which requires the agreement of all for its actions and statements at the COP. Lots of energy can be expended trying to navigate the dilemmas that arise, as both moderates and radicals see their initiatives watered down in order to achieve consensus, with proposals blocked by one group as too radical or by another for not being radical enough (“radical” in this context, or in any context, for that matter, has diverse and nuanced meanings, and though I consider myself a radical when it comes to climate and social justice, I feel it is important to work constructively with everyone and to be equally critical of oneself as well). Relations between the youth climate justice movement and the “elders” of the more established climate justice movement are another point of division for analysis. These tensions played out to some degree in the walkout by civil society delegates that was the political culmination of the Warsaw talks, and are complicated by the more general question of what happens to these activists after they are no longer “youth.” How does their gradual entry, year by year, into the larger movement, shape that movement?

As these tensions came to a head in the first week of the COP, an extraordinary meeting was organized for the middle Sunday, when the COP itself is not in session, for people to air their differences. As a 58 year-old college professor, I was not in attendance, but I know that the discussion went on for more than seven hours, and I note that the youth movement’s willingness and desire to confront such differences and come out stronger is vastly superior to that of their elders in the national delegations. For this movement to actually advance, it is crucial that these barriers be overcome, yet I am left with little doubt that almost everyone in the movement is aware of this and willing to try.

## **The walkout and the convergence space**

Youth activists engaged in many creative, hard-hitting symbolic actions in Warsaw. There was an auctioning off of the climate to well-dressed corporate and financial bidders. There was a passing the hat skit where activists dressed up as negotiators came up with small change for the Green Climate Fund, and where one iicat team member tore up a dollar bill to give half of it to the fund. There was the Red Dot campaign of those fasting in solidarity with Yeb Saño, who said he would maintain his fast until something meaningful was accomplished on the issue of Loss and Damage from climate-driven extreme weather events.

A humorous button-driven campaign called “WTF – Where’s the Finance?” that gave out colorful buttons that summed up the feelings of many toward this COP. And there was the tug-of-war staged between civil society delegates and corporate lobbies, as Earth in Brackets’ Nathan Thanki (2013) explains in his excellent assessment of the COP19 actions, “Designing for Activism,” with the rope representing “the climate (what this fight is about).”

There was also a major protest on Monday, November 18 outside the meetings of the World Coal Association where the crowd loudly expressed their outrage at the bald-faced hypocrisy of the Polish government’s energy policies (although large numbers of the Polish people – as much as 80 percent – want action on climate change, Brockley 2013) and the presence of UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres as keynote speaker. Figueres told the summit: “Let me be clear from the outset that my joining you today is neither a tacit approval of coal use, nor a call for the immediate disappearance of coal. But I am here to say that coal must change rapidly and dramatically for everyone’s sake.” A group of scientists held a press conference to debunk the notions of “clean coal,” carbon capture and storage, or a sustainable future based on fossil fuels: “Avoiding dangerous climate change requires that the majority of fossil fuel reserves need to stay underground.... Current trends in coal use are harbouring catastrophic climate change” (Davidson et al. 2013)

The movement also had messages for the coal summit. The German green group Urgewald, along with the Polish Green Network, BankTrack and CEE Bankwatch Network (2013) released a report, *Banking on Coal*, that documents how “American, Chinese and British banks are currently the biggest investors in coal, and if all the investments pay off then there is no hope of saving the planet from the ravages of global warming. ‘It is mind-boggling to see that less than two dozen banks from a handful of countries are putting us on a highway to hell when it comes to climate change,’ said Heffa Schücking, one of the report’s authors. ‘Big banks already showed that they can mess up the real economy. Now we’re seeing that they can also push our climate over the brink’” (Brown 2013).





*Protest at the World Coal Summit, held in Warsaw the same week as the COP. Here, a healthy lung and doctors triumph over coal lobbyists. Photo and caption: Corrie Ellis*

The climax of COP19, and not just from the standpoint of civil society, but of the whole two-week long summit, was the walkout on Thursday, November 21, the day before the negotiations were scheduled to finish. Seeing no meaningful progress in the talks, finding themselves excluded from the process on many levels, and witnessing the blatant corporate presence – even sponsorship – at the COP, hundreds of activists staged a walkout from the National Stadium, most of them vowing not to set foot in it again. Estimates of the crowd's size ranged from 300 (undoubtedly an underestimate, as 300 white t-shirts were distributed before the action and hundreds of those who walked out didn't have them) to a high estimate of 800. By any reckoning, a significant portion of all civil society delegates to COP19 simply walked out. There were about 8,300 participants at COP19, and of these approximately 1,500 were representatives of civil society NGOs and organizations.

Our camera team of Summer Gray and Corrie Ellis made a video ([Gray 2013](#)) that captures the elevated mood of the participants as they turned their backs on the Warsaw COP. We had witnessed some of the preparations for this the day before in the Convergence Space, an old two story building across town with rooms provided by Polish climate activists for the movement to use during the COP. The walkout was conceived and planned by the more radical of the young activists and youth organizations, but it came to enjoy broad appeal (it had a

predecessor in the mass walkout of civil society at the Rio+20 meetings in Brazil in June 2013). In addition, veteran organizers from Friends of the Earth, Oxfam, ActionAid, the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance, the Bolivian Platform on Climate Change, LDC Watch, the International Trade Union Confederation, the Philippines Movement on Climate Change, and the World Wildlife Fund – normally not mistaken for a radical climate justice group – among others, lent the names of their organizations to the action, and Kumi Naidoo, the executive director of Greenpeace, turned up to deliver the principal remarks at the press conference that preceded the walkout.

At 2 p.m. precisely, groups of activists who had met up in many corners of the cavernous National Stadium started to walk out, converging on the ground level of the building which led to the exits. We filmed as they streamed by, in their hundreds, happy with their decision. The mood was defiant; the white shirts said “Polluters talk, we walk!” and on their backs, “Volveremos!” (“We will be back”). The messages were clear, passing judgment on the complete inability of the UNFCCC to advance the treaty process at COP19, and signaling that this walkout was tactical, that the movement would return, with renewed force, to the 2014 COP20 in Lima, Peru, where Latin American civil society and the governments of Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba, and others might make their more radical demands for climate justice heard and felt inside the COP.



*Demonstrating outside the COP after the walkout. Photo: John Foran*

At the Convergence Space afterwards, a strange and truncated debriefing occurred, facilitated by senior figures in the major climate justice organizations, and one couldn't help but feel that the energy and work of the youthful activists who had made it happen was not fully acknowledged. Yes, there was gratitude to Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace for attracting the media to the press conference before the walkout, but the conception and execution of the walkout belonged to the youth. The number of people who had a chance to speak about the walkout was limited to just a few, and the opportunity for the group of 100 or so activists to plan ahead dissipated. I was reminded of Anne Petermann's bracing critique (2011) of the "Big Green" male leadership at the Occupy action on the very last day of Durban's COP17 in 2011, when the same leadership encouraged those who had been sitting down for several hours and making lots of noise just outside the entrance to the big plenary room where delegates were making their final proposals, to leave the hallways peacefully at the request of the UN security forces so as not to be de-badged and prevented from returning to future COPs. And yet, the great civil society walkout at Warsaw must still be seen for what it was: a major event and statement laid down by a movement that is still too small to do what it needs and wants to do. For now, as Hugo Chávez once said.

The convergence space itself was used throughout the two weeks to host talks and meetings, make posters and plan actions. The perimeter of the largest room was graced with floor to ceiling posters of the history of the COP, one poster for each meeting, its name drawn from film history to capture the spirit of that particular COP. The whole exhibit, called "Climate Talkies" was the work of Chandra Bhushan (2013), Deputy Director General of India's Center for Science and Environment. Thus the first COP in Berlin, in 1992, was represented by *Great Expectations*; Kyoto 1997 featured Al Gore as James Bond in *Live and Let Die*; the 2007 COP13 in Bali was captioned "The End is Near" from *Apocalypse Now*; Copenhagen in 2009 starred Obama, Angela Merkl, Gordon Brown, and the leaders of India and China in *The Full Monty* ("No Plan, No Money, No Underwear"). COP17 in Durban was immortalized by *Waiting For Godot*: "Nothing Happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful." And Warsaw? It was well summed up (even before it started) as *Dumb and Dumber*, a place where "Dumb happens," and a chilling illustration of Voltaire's epigram about the Lisbon earthquake of 1755: "Men argue. Nature acts."

### **Decisions, post-mortems, and encomia: what was agreed and what was not at COP19**

In the UNFCCC's concluding press release, Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres expressed cautious optimism about the outcome of COP19: "We have seen essential progress. But let us again be clear that we are witnessing ever more frequent, extreme weather events, and the poor and vulnerable are already paying the price.... Now governments, and especially developed nations, must



go back to do their homework so they can put their plans on the table ahead of the Paris conference. A groundswell of action is happening at all levels of society. All major players came to COP19 to show not only what they have done but to think what more they can do. Next year is also the time for them to turn ideas into further concrete action” ([United Nations Climate Change Secretariat 2013](#)).

The UNFCCC was particularly proud of progress on the reforestation project known as REDD+, and maybe there is something to this. A group of observers from the Vermont School of Law offered this assessment:

One of the more significant outcomes of this week was the package of decisions, known as the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries), that the COP approved to provide a formal framework, safeguards, and funding in hopes of cutting deforestation in half by 2020 and halting it by 2030. Every schoolchild knows that the forests are the world’s lungs: this is the UNFCCC’s smoking cessation program.

REDD+ has been implemented on the ground by various development organizations, including the World Bank, USAID, and the World Wildlife Fund, in a somewhat haphazard and experimental fashion since its conception in Montreal in 2005 and development in Bali in 2007. It was met with serious criticism by indigenous peoples around the world as another form of colonialism, with Bolivia in particular championing to keep market mechanisms out of this mitigation activity. This new version of REDD+ hopes to address those concerns. The safeguards included for biodiversity, ecosystems, and indigenous peoples’ territories, livelihoods, and rights are commendable. It may even serve as a mechanism for governments to more formally recognize indigenous land rights. Hopeful thinking? Perhaps. We will have to watch carefully how the new REDD+ decisions improve its implementation on the ground ([Jervey 2013](#)).

Hopes, indeed. One wonders how many forests will remain after taking seven more years to cut the rate of deforestation by 50 percent and then 30 more to stop deforestation altogether. “And yet,” as John Holloway likes to say. And yet...

“Warsaw has set a pathway for governments to work on a draft text of a new universal climate agreement so it appears on the table at the next UN climate change conference in Peru. This is an essential step to reach a final agreement in Paris, in 2015,” concluded COP19 host President Marcin Korolec, who was embarrassingly dismissed as Poland’s Minister of the Environment *during* the COP, apparently for comments he made about a new shale gas project that were not deemed sufficiently enthusiastic by his government. Beata Jacewska, Poland’s head negotiator, has said that “coal has to be part of the solution.”

As in Doha at COP18, though a modest amount of new text was generated, COP19 did not advance the treaty process to any degree remotely likely to achieve what is needed by 2015 (or 2020, or...). Loss and Damage made it into

the text as an area where substantial funding should be made available in the aftermath of climate-induced extreme weather disasters, and was applauded by some, including Yeb Saño and the Third World Network, as a major accomplishment. The latter hailed it as a “landmark” decision that “lifted the general gloom that had been prevalent during most of the two-week negotiations,” noting that estimated damages from natural disasters worldwide have doubled from about \$200 billion a year ten years ago to \$300-400 billion a year now. Yet efforts to establish loss and damage as the third pillar of fighting climate change, alongside mitigation and adaptation, fell short of this objective, as it was placed “under” the adaptation working group’s charter, after hours of negotiation were spent debating the word “under,” which the global South had to accept in exchange for only a pledge to review its final institutional location in 2016 ([Third World Network 2013](#)). And, of course, no funds have yet been allocated to the new “Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage Associated with Climate Change Impacts.”

Hard battles were fought within and between the global North and South that hinged on such nuances of wording. The negotiations on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action that are supposed to lead to the new global treaty saw jousting over whether the two groups continued to have “common but differentiated responsibilities” as in the foundational documents of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, with its binding emissions reductions on the North only, or whether, as the Durban Platform itself indicated, all countries would have to make such commitments, most importantly, the major Southern emitters of India, China, and Brazil, among others.

U.S. negotiator Todd Stern was pleased with the outcome (always a bad sign): “I think we had a good outcome in the end. It was quite a tough negotiation” ([Ritter 2013](#)). But the so-called “path” to a climate deal is well behind schedule. The global North had the word “commitments” for emissions reductions watered down, in a move seconded by India and China, to “intended nationally determined contributions,” substantially weaker legal language which leaves a fair amount of room for evasion. Furthermore, countries agreed to announce their commitments only in the first quarter of 2015. There were no pledges made by the North to the Green Climate Fund for the next seven years, postponing the day of reckoning to 2020, by which they had agreed in Copenhagen to come up with \$100 billion annually for adaptation, a figure that is clearly ambitious only for them, and not for what the world needs now or will need by then, when the real costs of inaction will be in the trillions of dollars annually (compare the inability of the wealthy countries to fund the GCF with the estimated \$500-700 billion they provide annually to fossil fuel corporations by subsidizing their operations). As the Third World Network’s assessment of the outcome concluded, all of these issues will be “the subject of very intense talks [in 2014], with meetings of the ADP track scheduled for March, June, and December.

Movement figures saw the outcome as the latest in a string of bad COPs. The Philippine human rights group IBON International titled its press release:

“Commitments lost, ambitions damaged,” and concluded, “Despite the tremendous pressure to come up with positive results, the Warsaw climate talks delivered no substantive outcome and instead allowed dirty energy industries to undermine the fundamental objectives of the UNFCCC itself” ([IBON International 2013](#)). Climate Justice Now! campaigner Alex Rafalowicz briefed activists in an e-mail that the take-away point for Warsaw was: “The difference between this ‘outcome’ in Warsaw and ‘no outcome’ in Warsaw is ‘virtually nothing.’” Alden Meyer, the director of strategy and policy for the Union of Concerned Scientists who has missed only one of the 19 COPs, said, “Loss and damages is big but we have the bare minimum in the rest to keep going” ([Leahy 2013](#)).

It’s hard to see anything else of much substance in the final decisions, even though the main press release is titled “UN Climate Change Conference in Warsaw keeps governments on a track towards 2015 climate agreement” ([2013](#)). If this is true, the agreement is going to lock in planetary ecocide. As *The Guardian*’s Graham Readfearn notes:

There’s a gap that’s getting wider in the global climate talks taking place in Warsaw between the near unanimous pledge to keep global warming below 2C and the ability of current policies to achieve the goal.

When I say gap, I really mean a chasm. And when I say chasm, I mean a huge, gaping, canyon-like hole big enough to either eat a planet or at least lose an Earth or a carbon dioxide swamped Venus down there for a while.

## **Futures**

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is convening world leaders “along with business, finance, civil society and local leaders” to a special “Climate Summit 2014: Catalyzing Action” on September 23 in New York, with the words: “I challenge you to bring to the Summit bold pledges. Innovate, scale-up, cooperate and deliver concrete action that will close the emissions gap and put us on track for an ambitious legal agreement through the UNFCCC process.” He went on:

My big idea is not new. Nor is it, in the larger sense, mine. But it is an idea that will be one major focus of my work next year, and one in which I believe deeply. In 2014, we must turn the greatest collective challenge facing humankind today – climate change – into the greatest opportunity for common progress towards a sustainable future. Next year is the year for climate action....

Countries have agreed to finalize an ambitious global legal agreement on climate change by 2015. But there is a steep climb ahead and 2014 is a pivotal year for generating the action and momentum that will propel us forward....

The science is clear. Human activities are the dominant cause of climate change. We cannot blame nature....

We now know it is possible to close the emissions gap. We must build on this momentum.

This Summit is meant to be a solutions summit, not a negotiating session. I have invited all Heads of State and Government, along with leaders from business and finance, local government and civil society.

I am asking all who come to bring bold and new announcements and action. I am asking them to bring their big ideas.

Until then, I will continue to put every effort into mobilizing political will, moving financial investors, influencing business leaders and motivating people everywhere to do all they can....

Future generations will judge our action on this issue. In 2014, we have the chance to step over to the right side of history. Let's take it ([Ban Ki-moon 2013](#)).

The Secretary-General's bold invitation is of course welcome, but his telling placement of business and finance ahead of civil society and local leaders suggests that the hoped-for breakthrough into progress on the treaty is rather unlikely. The summit might be better titled "Climate Depression 2014: Paralyzing Action." On a promising note, there is ongoing planning in radical U.S. climate justice circles for a "People's Summit" to take place in New York at the same time, where rather than a conventional protest and demonstration against the UNFCCC governments' lack of seriousness on the issues, the movement will craft and offer "bold and new announcements and action" and "big ideas" of its own.

Then there is the Venezuelan proposal to host a series of encounters for global civil society under the rubric of a "Social Pre-COP" in the course of 2014. As Claudia Salerno, Venezuela's lead negotiator (who had hit her hand on the table so hard in Copenhagen that it began to bleed, "to show how developing countries are bleeding"), said at a meeting which I attended: "A situation of madness requires a little craziness," adding, "We are not afraid to fail.... [There is] nothing to lose, and maybe a lot to gain."

The Pre-COP idea was designed to consist of a convention of youth in March and of indigenous activists in May, followed by a conference on the economics of Buen Vivir (Living Well) in July, and the Social Pre-COP itself in mid-October – all with the aim of strengthening the capacity of civil society to make an impact in Lima. This is a bold initiative, and a risk no doubt worth running as long as the post-Chávez Venezuelan government, revolutionary as its legacy may be, does not impose itself onto the process ([Escalante and Jauregui 2013](#)). In fact, the February-March opposition street protests against the Maduro government appear to have moved the process onto the back burner, and its ultimate fate looks up in the air (in a manner of speaking) ([Edwards, Murphy, and Eisner 2014](#)). The latest information announces two pre-COP events, now set for July 15-18 and November 4-7 in Caracas.

Another major new initiative is the Global Climate Convergence (<http://globalclimateconvergence.org/>), which proclaims "People, Planet, Peace

over Profits” and is seeking to build “collaboration across national borders and fronts of struggle to harness the transformative power we already possess as a thousand separate movements springing up across the planet,” and whose first big campaign was a “Mother Earth Day to May Day” 2014 call for simultaneous education and direct action events across the United States. The basic idea is to create a lasting collaboration between climate activism and other forms of social justice, including progressive labor, indigenous organizing, and the fledgling ecosocialist movement in the United States, and ultimately, no doubt, beyond. Convened by chair of the Green Party of the United States, Jill Stein, in the fall of 2013, this call resonates with the formation of the new U.S. ecosocialist organization System Change Not Climate Change (<http://systemchangenotclimatechange.org/>), which aims at shifting the momentum of the climate justice movement in an anti-capitalist direction by starting “a far-ranging discussion within society: can stopping climate change be compatible with an economic system that is flooded with fossil fuel profits? Can we create a safe and healthy planet for all human beings while simultaneously allowing ever-expanding resource extraction, endless growth, and the massive inequalities that come along with it?”

The most important events of 2014 may well be the unglamorous, under the radar organizing that will take place at all points of the compass as the global justice movement does the hard work of building itself into a force to be reckoned with. There are innumerable networks of world citizens already involved in this movement building. Our task is to entwine these networks around a re-imagined vision of climate justice, big enough to include everyone from the young radicals to the long-standing and slower moving NGOs, institutions from local governments to schools and universities, communities of faith, labor organizations whether unionized or not, indigenous movements, and intergenerational activism. Our demands must be made with an unyielding insistence on a binding plan for radical emissions reductions, generous and unconditional technology and financial contributions to adaptation efforts, and solidarity in the face of the inevitable climate chaos to come.

We have no option other than to take up the challenge of building the current global climate justice movement into a social movement strong enough to confront the biggest threat the global community has ever faced, and into a force strong enough to defeat governments backed by the largest corporations in the history of capitalism, in the process countering the massive disinformation campaign and cultural inertia that these state and economic elites rely upon to control us even as their own scientists are increasingly blunt about the risks.

Now more than ever, the cry for “System change, not climate change!” must echo forcefully in the halls of the COP, and far beyond. ¡Volveremos!

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## **Betrayal or realistic expectations? Egyptian women revolting**

**Reem Wael**

### **Abstract**

*In the last two years, we have witnessed chain of uprisings in the Arab world, widely recognized as the Arab Spring. This paper will focus on the Egyptian revolution, particularly assessing the chances of women's emancipation as a result of the newly founded 'freedom' and democracy. The gender cause is a threat to national revolutions because it leads about half the population to explore and relate to a major aspect of their identity, gender, which is detrimental to the national cause. This paper argues that, according to the foundation of the nationalism and the technicality of revolutions, there is little chance for women's liberation to occur amidst national struggle, which dismisses and even demonizes any cause distracting people from the national one. National revolutions are inherently male, recognizing male efforts and contributions and reflecting male aspirations. Women are expected to contribute to the national struggle by abiding by the rule of men. This can be seen in many examples in history and also in events taking place in Egypt since the ousting of President Mubarak.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Arab Spring, national revolutions

### **Introduction**

A revolution reflects a general rejection of the status quo. Reasons for the discontent and goals of the revolution vary a great deal. In the last three years, we have witnessed a surge of uprisings across the Arab world, commonly referred to as the 'Arab Spring' calling for the overthrow of dictatorships that had ruled for decades. The goals of those movements centred on democracy, dignity and decent living standards. Even though the fruits of the 'Arab Spring' are yet to be seen, this transitional stage sets the stage for the future division of power among different interest groups. This paper is concerned with the women's share of such power post-revolution, focusing on law, politics and society, which are all somewhat interdependent. The uprisings of the Arab Spring reflected a nationalist stance, calling for the overthrow of tyrants for 'national liberation.' The paper will therefore investigate the gendered component in the nationalist movement, taking Egypt as a demonstrative example.

Nationalism is generally a masculine project which adopts masculine notions and masculine hopes (Enloe, 1990). This means that women are allowed participate in nationalist movements whether political, military or non-violent struggles, as citizens and human beings, but not as interest or pressure groups.

This paper argues that the masculine nature of national movements (adopting men's hopes, desires and dreams) is contrary to a gender revolution and therefore does not lead to women's emancipation. The Egyptian revolution adopted a 'national' agenda characterized by patriotism and called for a set of mainstream goals; bread, freedom and human dignity. Women wholeheartedly participated in the uprising but they were betrayed as soon as the movement left the streets and went into formal politics. Therefore, the Egyptian revolution, which originated from Tahrir Square (Freedom Square) in Cairo, can by no means considered to be the tipping point for the emancipation of Egyptian women.

Considering the novelty of the events, data in this paper was gathered by four interviews with female activists about their experiences in the revolution. All interviewees have been working or volunteering in women's organizations for years and have been familiar with the women's movement long before the revolution. I have selected the interviewees from within the women's movement in order to get a comprehensive overview of the events especially in relation to the status of women prior to the revolution. Sara is the first interviewee, who is the head of a feminist organization. Mona and Hannah also work in women's rights NGOs. The last interviewee is an artist and activist; Miriam. Upon the request of the interviewees, their names have been kept anonymous.

The paper will start with a theoretical review of 'nationalism' and 'revolution,' showing the masculine character of both. The paper will proceed with Egypt as a case study, highlighting the exclusion of women from public and political life and analysing the implication of such relegation on the meaningful recognition and contributions of Egyptian women.

## **Theoretical considerations**

### **A. Revolution and nationalism**

Nationalism is based on one or more aspects of a common identity. Smith explains the different scenarios by which nations arose: all national projects start with a conflict of identities based on cultures and ethnicities that manage to find harmony, whether by closing the gap between individual and community differences or by abandoning one or more set of norms (1994: 148). Similarly, Hutchinson identifies two schools of nationalism; the political and the cultural. While the former is primarily concerned with geographic borders and political structures, the latter recognizes the 'distinctive civilization, which is the product of nation's unique history, culture and geographic profile' (Hutchinson, 1994: 122). With the variety of theories and conceptualizations of the term, the main component of nationalism is a common identity, based on shared history or culture as well as a 'common destiny' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 19).

Social orders are always at risk of disruption when the socio-political or economic problems become unbearable; collective movements based on a renewed national surge aim to change or redefine such social orders. Samuel Huntington defines revolution as a 'rapid, fundamental and violent domestic

change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leaderships and government activity and policies' (1968: 246). Stone explains the technicality noting that revolutions involve the use of violence that results in a change in government, regime or society (1966: 159). Revolutions are triggered by a variety of factors and as such, numerous theories attempt to capture the tipping point where dissatisfaction of a community turns to a collective movement against a system, with a set of goals and demands.

Huntington follows a functionalist approach to the study of revolution, where he explains that stability is maintained as long as there is congruence between economic, social and political institutions. Once the links that tie people together are broken (because of progress in the social order, which the operating system is not keeping up with), chaos and disruption occur (Huntington, 1968: 4). Johnson identifies 'disequilibrium' in society as the main cause to revolutionary movements; revolutions take place when a 'severe disorganization of a socio-cultural system' occurs and pushes society beyond its level of equilibrium (Johnson, 1966: 61). The common factor in all successful revolutions is the dismantling of the operating system and the development of a new one that sees a redistribution of power, economically, politically and socio-culturally. This change should ideally affect the balance of power and the rights of groups that were previously subordinated (Moghadam, 1997: 138).

## **B. Women and the nation-state**

To understand the influence of women in nationalist movements we must first define their relationship with the nation-state. Anthias and Yuval-Davis disqualify the notion of citizenship in the definition of the relationship between women and states because it fails to address the ways in which the state 'forms its political project' and therefore 'does not encapsulate adequately the relations of control and negotiation' occurring between the two (1994: 312). They therefore define the relationship from multiple angles and identifying five areas in which women contribute to nations: women biologically reproduce members of ethnic collectives; women reproduce 'boundaries of ethnic/national groups'; women participate in the reproduction of the collective identity and in the transmission of its culture; women are symbols in the 'ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories'; and finally, women participate in 'national, economic, political and military struggles' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1994: 313).

The last aspect of the abovementioned relationship is the main concern in this paper, highlighting the role of women as supportive and nurturing 'to men even where they (women) have taken most risks' (ibid: 315). Thus, women as an interest group can strongly influence popular movements whether or not they participate actively. This is because of their size and perceived femininity. Ivekovic and Mostov (2002) state that

Gender identities and women's bodies become symbolic and spatial boundaries of the nation. Women's bodies serve as symbols of the fecundity of the nation and vessels for its reproduction, as well as territorial markers. Mothers, wives and daughters designate the space of the nation and are, at the same time the property of the nation. As markers and as property, mothers, daughters and wives require the defence and protection of patriotic sons... border fantasies develop with this gendering of boundaries and spaces.... With the collectivizing of "our women" and "their women" (Ivekovic and Mostov, 2002: 10)

### **C. Women in national movements**

Women are perceived as 'passive' contributors in a nationalist movement as their participation is based on male terms. Femininity is therefore constructed in relation to men's interests and desires (Mayer, 2000: 17). It is commonly argued within nationalist doctrine that women's emancipation automatically follows national liberation as colonialism, capitalism and other ideologies are blamed for gender inequalities (Suneri, 2000: 145). Historical accounts reflect this commonly-held belief, yet also show that these sequential events are unlikely to happen. This is because gender inequalities are rooted in unequal gendered powers that are embedded in most political and social ideologies that remain untouched with a regime change. Suneri demonstrates this argument with reference to colonialism. 'More often than not, failing to combine a gender analysis with an anti-colonial one can only increase the chances that colonized women's lives will not be improved, as the new male leaders will be reluctant to give up any power they have recently gained' (Suneri, 2000: 145). Similarly, McClintock warns that

To ask women to wait until after the revolution serves merely as a strategic tactic to defer women's demands. Not only does it conceal the fact that nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but, as the lessons of international history portend, women who are not empowered to organize during the struggle will not be empowered to organize after the struggle. If nationalism is not deeply informed, and transformed, by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations, and male privilege (McClintock, 1991: 122)

This can be witnessed in the behaviour and speeches of male leaders and politicians as they translate the national project into collective action. For instance, 'nationalism' is commonly used to trigger collective action by emphasizing the 'need to make a sacrifice for the nation' (Guibernau, 1996: 63). In the Indian struggle against colonialism, Nehru urged women to participate in the national struggle by abandoning their gender cause, where in 1931 he stated, 'in a national war, there is no question of either sex or community. Whoever is born in this country ought to be a soldier' (Jayawardena, 1986: 98). Nehru commended women who took part in the nationalist movement, acknowledging that they were fighting against imperialism and oppression by men at the same

time. He believed that those oppressions were interlinked and through several statements made in 1960s, he urged women to dedicate their efforts to the national struggle so as to rid themselves from all kinds of oppressions; imperialist and gender (Jayawardena, 1986: 89). Similarly, Ghandi urged women to use their coping strategies against discrimination in the passive resistance movement. He argued that this method is 'familiar' to women, since they face oppression in their personal lives that they have to silently endure it and subtly resist it (Jayawardena, 1986: 97). Because of the strong emphasis on the national identity, 'a revolutionary feminist consciousness' was never developed to recognize the common suffering of women within the national liberation movement and therefore gender issues were not prioritized as part of the political agenda (Jayawardena, 1986: 97). The Indian example demonstrates the restrictions of women's participation in a national movement that were dictated by men. As such, it seems that a woman's gender and national identities are in conflict. They can either direct their efforts to the male dominated national movement, or invest it in women's interests, because 'the double blind situation makes one necessarily a traitor to one half of her double identity' (Ivekovic and Mostov, 2002: 10).

Nationalist movements do not only fail to recognize women's interests, but they deny women's efforts. After achieving their primary goals (usually a regime change), women's contributions are only considered in relation to the success accrued by men. Using the example of slavery, Mcfadden argues that although women were always at the forefront of national struggles and resistance to forms of oppression for decades, they are absent from the written history of these events. In such movements, 'women are seen as either holding the fort for men when they are not in the limelight, or simply being mothers and wives and extensions of leaders' (1991: 4). Similarly, during the Cuban independence movement, Jaquette notes that the three most important women in Cuban history are significant because they are 'closely linked to important male leaders' (1973: 346).

The abovementioned examples illustrate the critique of nationalist movements in feminist scholarship (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000; Moghadam, 1997). The masculinity of the public sphere means that men control both international and domestic politics. This means that states' formal norms recapitulate the male point of view' (Makinnon 1991: 162). The maleness extends to the 'national project' that takes place in the public sphere from which women have been sidelined (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 2).

This trend can be seen in the Arab Spring where women are commonly referred to in their positions as mothers, daughters, wives and sisters. Men are therefore urged to respect and protect women because of their association to a man. The national project is therefore clearly a masculine one. Women's emancipation is never prioritized and consequently, national liberation does not lead to women's emancipation. The next section will demonstrate with the example of Egypt.

## **Egypt: a case study**

The Arab Spring was not the first occasion in which women in the region took to the streets. Al-Ali lists some instances of women's activism: 'the Egyptian anti-colonial and independence movement at the turn of the twentieth century that gave rise to the Egyptian women's movement; the Algerian war of independence in the time of French colonialism; and the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation' (Al-Ali, 2012: 28). Since these movements were based on nationalist ideologies which failed to prioritize women's emancipation, the result was that gender issues were ignored and women were denied basic rights in the reformed political and legal systems. For example, in Egypt, the women's movement at the turn of the twentieth century 'helped widen the base of support throughout the country and rendered vital services. Nevertheless, the electoral law restricted the right to vote for men despite the equality provision in the 1923 Constitution (Al-Ali, 2012: 28).

2011 witnessed a wave of nationalist movements across the Arab world starting with Tunisia, followed by Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. The Egyptian uprising was inspired by Tunisia's movement and triggered by the Facebook group that was dedicated to the memory of 28 year old Khaled Saeed who died as a result of torture by the police. The group called for the demonstrations to take place on January 25 2011 calling on an end to police brutality that had persisted for decades and a change in the regime. The movement was popular online and it significantly grew bigger when it was joined by the 'offline' community. The initiative became the largest uprising in Egypt's modern history. Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo hosted 18 days of pressure on the regime to step down. Hosni Mubarak, who had been president for 30 years was ousted on 11 February 2011, after mounting pressure from the people, and appointed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to temporarily take control of the country.

### **A. Egyptian women in the uprising**

Women from different social, political and religious backgrounds actively participated in the 2011 revolution (see generally Sholkamy, 2012). Such fervent activism in the public space, albeit for a short while, refuted a common stereotype that Middle Eastern women are passive and submissive (Jamal, 2011). Therefore, a sense of optimism about women's future in Egyptian politics and society briefly prevailed. Subsequently, the transitional phase triggered questions about women's involvement in the public and political sphere as a result of their contribution in the popular movement, which will be discussed in this section.

Tahrir Square provided safe space for women in which they could participate in public life free from fear of sexual harassment, which is an endemic problem in Egypt. Women were present alongside men in remarkably volatile and crowded areas without being prey for harassment (Ali, 2012: 27). Therefore, Tahrir Square became a utopia where respect and unity prevail. Miriam, one of the interviewees stated that Tahrir 'felt like a place where you can be yourself and

engage with others.' Moreover, women felt safe enough to take their children and sleep in Tahrir (Sholkamy, 2012: 95). At this point, with a patriotic ambiance, women joined the uprising to demand bread, freedom and human dignity, led by the slogan of the revolution. However, they were not organized as an interest group and did not have specific demands.

Accounts from the street however show that Tahrir was not the utopia it was perceived to be. Mona traced the presence of women in public space prior to the revolution. She explained that women are free to mingle in public as long as they maintain a specific code that she identified as 'passive'; women should not have a loud voice, specific demands and they should abide by men's rules. She related these conditions to women's presence in Tahrir; women played by men's rules. Koning similarly reflects on the rules by which women can be present in public space: women can stay indoors, but the streets are 'largely characterized by male entitlement... where they could spend time, observe and interact with passers-by, comment and flirt' (2009: 547). In fact, claiming (partial) ownership in public space is a hurdle that women across the world had to overcome. Hickey wrote about the presence of women in the public sphere in the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of the United States of America. She reviewed the guidelines by which women were expected to behave so as to have a 'pleasant and respectable' experience (Hickey, 2011: 79). Etiquette manuals promised women a 'significant range of rights and privileges' if they followed rules such as 'not to walk arm in arm, laugh too loudly, snack, spit, or smoke when in public' (Hickey, 2011: 80). Similarly, women were always present in the public sphere in Egypt under certain rules.

Critically looking at Tahrir days, one finds the dark side of the revolutionary story: the presence of women in Tahrir Square was conditional. They were criticized if they did not abide by the social code of conduct, which was imposed by men. The first rule was to have a gender neutral agenda, which echoes the statements made by Ghandi and Nehru in the Indian liberation struggle decades ago. This conditionality prevailed even after the 18 day sit-in in Tahrir Square. Over one year after the Egyptian revolution, the Altrus (football fans) of Al-Ahly (a major football team in Egypt) had camped to protest outside the hall in which the committee assigned to draft the Constitution convened. Sarah explained that the organizers of the demonstration were mostly males and therefore they imposed rules regarding female participation. Most importantly; girls were not allowed to smoke or stay in the area past 1am, nor were they provided with an explanation for this.

## **B. Exclusion**

When people put aside their differences and unite for a single cause in nationalist movements – the ousting of a person or a regime – this unity is not necessarily genuine and is therefore jeopardized as soon as the main goal is accomplished. At this moment, national movements which call for freedom turn into a political struggle (Guibernau, 1996: 63) in which different groups are



hungry for power. When the movement reaches this stage, the unity of women as an interest group is extremely challenging to maintain. This is because gender is only one part of a woman's identity; one that patriarchal societies try to repress. This means that women may prefer to prioritize other issues based on political or economic ideologies rather than gender; this is more likely to happen in the absence of an organized women's movement. Women are therefore welcomed in the national movement as long as their participation is needed; however, they are 'discarded or pushed to the margins during later periods of state consolidation' when their services are no longer needed (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault, 2000: 4).

The exclusion of women in the transitional political process in Egypt illustrates the feminist critique of national movements and confirms male control over such movements. Women were needed during the 18 days of Tahrir; the bigger the number of participants, the more the pressure was created by the movement; also, women's participation reflected national unity and validated the popular movement particularly to the international community. When Mubarak stepped down, public pressure was no longer deemed necessary and the battle turned into a political one. Women were therefore ordered to 'go back home.' This is indicated in both, the public attitude towards women, and the exclusion from the political transition process.

### **1. Exclusion in public space**

The 'women friendly' atmosphere in Tahrir started to change on the day that Mubarak stepped down. This is demonstrated with a sexual attack against Dutch journalist Lara Logan in Tahrir Square<sup>1</sup> on 11 February 2011. Violence against women in venues of protests gradually escalated, perpetrated by both the civilians and state agents. A participant in the uprising, interviewed by *BBC News* confirmed that peace and harmony that was prevalent during the 18 day sit-in was no longer felt. This is because the harmony during the uprising reflected the common goals of protesters: 'now we are back to our differences, you are a man, you are a woman, we are told we should not be mingling, and not talk about everything as before.'<sup>1</sup> On the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011, several hundred women joined by some men marched in downtown Cairo to commemorate International Women's Day, calling for equality and the end to gender discrimination. Crowds of men and women followed them with a counter demonstration chanting Islamic slogans indicating that Egyptian women should abide by Islam.<sup>2</sup> Women present at the scene reported that they were grabbed,

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Law (14 April 2011) 'Egypt's revolution through the eyes of five women' BBC World News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-13056685> (accessed 12 December 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Ekram Ibrahim (8 March 2011) 'Egyptian million woman march ends with a gunshot' Al-Ahram Online <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/7292/Egypt/Politics-/Egyptian-million-woman-march-ends-with-a-gunshot.aspx> (accessed 12 December 2012)

intimidated, assaulted and even molested by a group of men.<sup>3</sup> Miriam, who participated in the International Women's Day march, explained that they were a small group of men and women mostly foreign or 'westernized' Egyptian women with minuscule support from the public, which made the group an easy prey. The women 'were attacked and hounded out of the square that was supposed to be the 'labour ward' in which democracy had been reborn in Egypt' (Sholkamy, 2012: 95).

Expressions of dissatisfaction with women's presence in demonstration venues were commonly reported. People started asking, 'what are women and girls doing in the street anyway?' particularly as a response to the growing incidents of sexual harassment. However, the real question is '*why are women in the street when they were told to stay home.*' Women's presence was not questioned during the 18 days because it was needed. However, the women's day march was the first occasion in which women were united as an interest group having gender specific demands: freedom and equality. Miriam explained, 'it felt like I was pushed out of Tahrir square for being a woman.' Sarah recalls a field doctor in Tahrir Square who repeatedly wondered why her family allowed her to participate in politics. This indicates the gender power dynamic with which men control women's presence in both private and public spheres; men enforce rules for female family members on leaving the house; once women leave the house, they are subject to rules of men in society. It also reflects and reinstates the relationship between women's behaviour and family honour, which restricts women's movement globally. To demonstrate, Miriam reported that she was never bothered in Tahrir Square in the company of males, out of respect for the friend and not for her. Similarly, when women engage in protests, whether through demonstrations or organized marches, they are surrounded by literally man-made chains of men for protection. This was the case in the demonstration for the International Women's Day, as Mona confirmed. The chains aimed to fend off harassers by labelling women as 'protected.' This echoes Tetreault's depiction of the gender roles in which women are supposed to serve men's interest for the national cause in return for protection (1994: 4).

Women were also driven out of the square by violence on part of state agents, including the police and the military. 'Egyptian female protesters have been strip-searched; pictures have been taken while they were without clothes; they have been accused of prostitution and in some cases forced to undergo virginity testing' (Al-Ali, 2012: 29). This violence escalated until the blue bra incident<sup>4</sup> during rallies in November 2011. One can therefore see how all forces, civilians

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<sup>3</sup> Jumanah Younis, (9 March 2011) 'Egypt's revolution means nothing if its women are not free' The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/09/egypt-revolution-women> (accessed 30 November 2012)

<sup>4</sup> Michael Higgins (Dec 20, 2011) 'Police beating of 'girl in the blue bra' becomes new rallying call for Egyptians' National Post <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/12/20/beating-of-blue-bra-woman-reignites-egyptian-protests/> (accessed 25 November 2012)

and officials were telling women 'this is enough, you need to go home.' When women challenged this order, they were subjected to violence.

## **2. Exclusion from law and politics**

Women were similarly excluded from the political decision-making process that followed the uprising. In March 2011 Tariq el Bishry, an Egyptian Judge, was appointed by SCAF to head a committee to draft constitutional amendments to regulate the first elections post-revolution. El Bishry appointed experts in law and politics including members of minority groups such as a Coptic Christian and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, but did not appoint a single woman. Additionally, women were not part of the political negotiations between different parties and the SCAF. The first ministerial cabinet formed following the ousting of Mubarak included one woman and the parliamentary quotas for women were scratched (Al-Ali, 2012: 28). The first parliamentary elections put 8 women in the people's assembly, both as independent candidates and on party lists. As part of the women's movement, Mona explained that this exclusion was aimed at silencing women who have gender-specific demands. Such demands were met with: 'this is not the time for women's issues because priority is for the national interest.' As Mona pointed out, the only representation that women have in both the ruling party and the opposition is in the 'women's committee' in some political parties. The creation of such committees confirms that women's issues are not perceived as social issues, but as group-specific.

The absence of women's voices was accompanied by a curb on women's rights which were gained in the last few decades. Citizens of the Mubarak era has witnessed the enactment of progressive laws for the protection and promotion of women's rights, strongly supported by the National Council for Women (NCW), which was led by Suzanne Mubarak, the former first lady. The association between such rights and the ousted regime has a negative impact on women's gains during this period as they were considered part of the corrupt regime who wanted to impose western principles on Egyptian women. This argument is commonly used in the 'South' as a political means of curbing women's rights, as Jayawardena (1986) argues. There tends to be resistance to women's rights particularly feminist principles that are viewed as western ideas, not only alienating women from their cultures and families, but also distracting women from the 'revolutionary struggles for national liberation' (Jayawardena, 1986: 2). Consequently, the revolution may result in a reduction of legal rights that were previously gained. This is exacerbated by the limited political participation which makes women passive recipients of rights and freedoms that men decide to grant. One of the most common repercussions of the absence of women's voices is their rights under family law (Moghadam, 1997: 139); this is evidently demonstrated in the case of Egypt as discussed below.

Members of the first elected parliament (predominantly political Islamists) proposed the repeal of rights such as 'the rights to mobility, political representation as a fixed quota, unilateral divorce, and the criminalisation of

female genital mutilation' (Sholkamy, 2012: 95). Other issues discussed in parliamentary sessions included lowering marital age for women, the repeal of the right to unilateral divorce and the return 'beit el Ta'a' provision, with which a husband can legally force his wife to live with him (ibid: 96). Some parliament members deemed these rights to be unnecessary and imposed by the corrupt western ideologies. At this point, the new regime was seen as rebalancing the corrupted and western influenced gender power that was promoted by the Mubarak regime. Jayawerdena criticizes this view and argues that the assumption that feminism is a western influence is utterly wrong. Throughout her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, she investigates movements of national liberation, highlighting activism for women's rights by local women free from Western Imperialism. Similarly, Davis and Anthias argue that women are active agents in the modification and reproduction of their image in society (1989: 11). This was demonstrated in the 18-day Tahrir sit-in when women took to the streets.

### **3. Gendering the revolution**

Women's activism is often resisted because it is a threat to the national cause. Stone (1966) shows that in the course of a revolution, the focus shifts from the dissatisfaction with the institutions, to the labelling of 'evil men' (1966: 175). In the case of Egypt, the 'evil man' was Mubarak. This label served the silencing of women as society failed to recognize the gendered institutions that contribute to women's oppression and instead focused on the despot. Therefore, welfare rights granted to women post the revolution do not promote agency or equality (Moghadam, 1997: 140) because the right and the institutions of the state remain gendered. This was the case in Egypt: the 2012 Constitution was generous with women's welfare rights and stingy with gender equality and women's empowerment. Article 10 stated that 'the State shall provide special care and protection to female breadwinners, divorced women and widows'. This provision enjoined the state to protect the women of deceased and absent men; otherwise, married women are protected by their husbands. These provisions were hailed as protective measures where in fact, they emphasized the gendered division of labour, restricting women's identities to mothers, daughters and wives.

### **4. Using nationalism for women's rights**

Even though national movements do not usually emancipate women, they can provide a platform for women's mobilization for the gender cause (Suneri 2000, 145). Suneri cites examples where women's movements were created simultaneously with national movements such as Algeria, South Africa, Palestine and some Latin American countries. In these examples, women became politically active and at the same time have succeeded to develop men's awareness of the oppressive gender relations (Suneri 2000, 145). Therefore, 'revolution' is a great opportunity for women to change their position in social

and political space (Al-Ali 2012, 28). This is because revolution creates a vacuum of power which could be pursued by women if they are well-organized. El Saadawi rightfully predicted that, 'women will not be emancipated without organizing politically' (Graham-Brown, 1981:24). Therefore, unless women are persistent, 'gender-specific needs, rights and problems... will be sidelined, ignored and swept under the carpet' (Al-Ali, 2012: 28).

Egyptian women were neither united as an interest group nor organized as a political one. They joined the national movement for a gender neutral cause. Mona explained that women's rights groups are torn between advocacy and outreach. However, the current situation of disunity and scattered efforts is very dangerous. She stated that 'rights groups are not nagging hard enough.' This disunity is reflected in several instances post the 18 days in which the women's movement did not mobilize. For example, during the parliamentary elections, women's organizations could have supported candidates or worked collectively on lobbying and organizing a voting bloc particularly because some organizations are strongly connected to women from different areas and classes across the country. Furthermore, in the drafting process of the 2012 Constitution, pressure from women's organizations was almost nonexistent, although the drafting committee made very worrisome suggestions regarding women's position in the Constitution. In addition, the meagre participation of women in the Constitution Committee - only six percent of this committee was female<sup>5</sup> - was addressed only by a few public figures. During presidential elections, Bothaina Rashwan, the only female candidate, wanted to run for elections to set a precedent, fully aware that she did not have a real chance of winning. She was not able to secure 30,000 signatures to register herself as a candidate. This is a number that would have been easily collected if she had the support of some women organizations that have access to the masses. Mona explained that women can have voting power because the number of women is big enough to force politicians to include their interests in agendas. They are simply not well organized.

## **Conclusion**

Revolutionary movements stimulate hope in society particularly among minority groups. As females and as citizens, women contribute full-heartedly to national revolutions, hoping to gather the fruits of the revolution. This paper showed why this is an unrealistic expectation; the national project is masculine, it speaks to men and serves their interests. Egyptian women did not learn from history; they did not seize the opportunity to mobilize for their specific goals and instead, they degendered their agendas and followed men's lead. On 30 June 2013, the Islamist-led government was overthrown by the Egyptian military, instituted a temporary government and provided a road map for a

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<sup>5</sup> Hussein, A (25 March 2012) 'The constituent assembly nominees dissected' *Egypt Independent* <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/constituent-assembly-nominees-dissected> (accessed 5 December 2012)

Constitution and elections, providing another opportunity for women to mobilize. Only time will show if Egyptian women will seize this opportunity.

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## **Book reviews: Interface volume 6 (1)**

**Reviews editor: Mandisi Majavu**

**Assistance with sub-editing: Jessica Dreistadt**

### **Books reviewed this issue:**

Brookfield, S. and Holst, J.D., 2011, *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Reviewed by Maeve O'Grady

Daza, Mar; Hoetmer, Raphael; and Vargas, Virginia (eds.), 2012, *Crisis y Movimientos Sociales en Nuestra América: Cuerpos, Territorios e Imaginarios en Disputa*. Lima: Programa Democracia y Transformación Global. 498 pp.

Reviewed by Edgar Guerra Blanco

Roy, Srila, 2012, *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*. London: Zed Books (208 pages; £19.99 | \$35.95)

Reviewed by Sara de Jong

Harvey, David, 2012, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.

Reviewed by Kristen A. Williams

Choudry, Aziz, Hanley, Jill, and Shragge, Eric (Eds.), 2012, *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Oakland: PM Press.

Reviewed by Markus Kip

Cox, Laurence, 2013, *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-Culture and Beyond*. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox.

Reviewed by Eilís Ward



**Brookfield, S. and Holst, J.D., 2011, *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.**

Reviewed by Maeve O'Grady

The title of this book indicates the nature of the radical learning to be done - to make the world more sustainable. To this effect, various chapters deal with different aspects of adult education whether we are working in and with social movements or are employed in academia but wish to provide a critique of neo-liberalism in a way that will help social and socialist change. The type of change that is sought is described by the authors as democratic socialism, which they define in different ways: one is a reclaiming of the use of the word 'socialist' in the context of the demonising of the term in the U.S.; another is educating for democracy in order to hold decision-making in economics and politics accountable; yet another is to maximise the participatory element in those fields and to extend ideals of participatory democracy into economics.

Radical educators (in the socialist rather than the far-right tradition) already critique neoliberalism. So what does this book offer them that they haven't known before? It identifies a real change in the conditions and mode of production that provide new conditions for challenging the common sense understanding of how the world should work. It argues that it may now be more possible for the working class to see that: the American dream is unattainable; the working class as the majority group in society can have a more unified sense that the way things were up until recent years will never be seen again; and the underlying trends that were visible for a long time have now become endemic in an era of globalization.

The work starts with a reconceptualising of adult learning and education. The writers are concerned with adult education's egalitarian mission of "encouraging learning about the creation of democracy in political, cultural, and economic spheres. Political and cultural democracy entails learning how to recognize and abolish privilege around race, gender, status and identity; economic democracy entails learning how to abolish material inequality and privilege around class" (Brookfield and Holst 2011 p.4). Such a project is socialist in nature, and in the early chapters a very optimistic view of socialism is implied, in that it provides the possibility of learning to make the world more sustainable. The transformation project is framed as educational in nature, because people need to learn how to view the world differently and overcome the failures of neoliberalism by seeing it as an ideology with weak explanatory power when it comes to the allocation of resources and opportunities.

The second chapter critiques common sense understandings of adult development, and calls for a broader approach that connects developmental work with a moral purpose. The ideology of capitalism is blamed consistently throughout the book, and all other critical factors of race, gender, ableism, and sexuality are attributed to the spread of capitalist ideology. The assumption is

that if we get rid of capitalism we will get rid of patriarchy, but feminists such as Starhawk (1990) attribute the foundation of patriarchy to the foundation of monotheism. However, there is no doubting the strength of the argument criticising capitalism that is presented in this work but perhaps only the converted will pick up such a book in the first place.

The role of the educator is considered throughout, especially in relation to the social or collective nature of educational activity for development and the modelling of democratic forms of being. Not only is reflection and action to be combined, but there is a differentiation in relation to reflection: objective reframing “involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others” and subjective reframing “involves critical self-reflection of one’s own assumptions” (Brookfield and Holst 2011 p.35). The democratic educator models this and facilitates a simple democratic idea: “that those affected by decisions should be the ones to make those decisions” (ibid p.41). Ways of doing this are identified in later chapters.

There is a welcome recognition of the increasing prominence of sociocultural models of development, but models informed by psychology are acknowledged to still be prominent. These latter models deflect attention away from the need to prepare people for collective and democratic means of association which sociocultural models incorporate and work with. Socialist or radical pedagogy does not deny individual needs, but when these are heard alongside the needs of others, then the structural nature of the problems can be understood. The personal can then be related to the political, and each person can see how their own needs are part of a wider class and societal need.

If the first task is to enable agency to be developed in and against structure, then the next task is to develop the ability to work collectively and to organize. This is dealing with the educational aspects of social movement activism, and different examples are given of support groups organized by feminists in the radical rather than the reformist tradition (hooks 2000), with “individual and collective identity” understood to be “intertwined” (Brookfield and Holst 2011 p.53). The space has to be sufficiently safe for developing an emerging identity. The next task can be to teach “for radical development,” using critical theory to enable people to think critically while developing common interests. A “pedagogy of ethical coercion” is needed so that educators can be sufficiently directive in keeping a focus on the critical thinking rather than common sense thinking (ibid p.59). Marcuse’s ideas around repressive tolerance and ethical coercion are dealt with in greater detail towards the end of the book.

Critical theory makes us aware of the damage caused by the capitalist ideology and its “invasion of the lifeworld” (ibid p.59). Habermas, Fromm, Foucault, Davis, hooks – all are referred to in the argument for a directive stance by the critical educator, and four particular ‘clusters’ are identified as to what kind of methodology is recommended.

The next chapter contradicts the common sense and dominant contemporary understanding of training by referring back to examples such as Che Guevara,

the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee training teachers to conduct Citizenship Schools, and the Civil Rights Movement amongst others. The radical tradition has a broad conception of training which incorporates democratic and participatory forms of education, and of course the context is by and with people rather than the contemporary co-option of the term for profit by business. This chapter identifies many resources for social movement educators as well as the hidden histories of such training. The goal of any training plan should be political independence of the participants, and ways to do this are described. A very useful set of criteria to aid evaluation of such programmes is provided, and this is a good checklist for participatory research activities as well as educational programmes.

The chapter on teaching adults considers the similarities between radical and other forms of educational practices. Practices differ in the way experience is used and in the desire to challenge capitalist forms of organizing the world. Marcuse's idea of repressive tolerance indicates that providing students with choices is not appropriate, even though it is often thought to be so in the humanist and progressive traditions. "Students' previous ideological conditioning will always predispose them to choose what for them are commonsense, socially sanctioned understandings" (ibid p.109). The educator must be responsible for providing ideas that would be avoided if presented as a choice in order to prevent the marginalisation of challenging ideas.

The next chapter compares and contrasts two narratives of globalization and examines them for their implications in radical education. The dominant understanding is critiqued, and it is claimed that what we are witnessing in contemporary society should be understood "as a historical process" (ibid p.137). The problem is not production, as we live in a time of surplus. It is a problem of distribution, of getting the goods and services to people who need them but cannot afford them.

Marcuse's aesthetic dimension of learning is then considered in Chapter Eight, with the role for the arts in disturbing and challenging "White culture's conception of Black life," along with a reminder that "the revolution will not be televised" (ibid p.150). Marcuse identifies the role of radical aesthetics in raising consciousness: a song can encapsulate argument and anger, build self-respect and the desire to challenge, teach history and subvert from within (ibid p.161-164).

The chapter on Researching Learning highlights the role of research in planning, and how this fact-finding can also be participatory and democratic, combining investigation with pedagogy. This chapter also provides an unexpected but valuable critique of Freirean literacy methodology, and how research and pedagogy were linked in order to identify generative themes for discussion and action. Participatory research precedes planning, and ensures not just relevant programme content but also an understanding of the best times of the year and the day for attendance. Again, a useful checklist is

provided from the description of the principles and key questions for participatory research to ensure the co-creation of knowledge for action.

The final chapter deals with the ways in which diversity is understood in adult education. Recognising diversity presents the danger of co-option: recognition does not mean resources. Greater detail is provided about Marcuse's idea of repressive tolerance and how treating alternative ideologies alongside neoliberalism will result in a tolerance of the alternatives, but the status quo is maintained. Marcuse recommends the educator to use 'coercive morality' in an ethical objective to "free people from prevailing indoctrination" (ibid p.197-199). Marcuse's analysis of how the Nazi movement grew stands as a warning to us all.

Privilege needs to be dismantled. Educators are well placed to challenge racist microaggressions in collective learning groups. Racism becomes more subtle in an era when overt racism is curtailed by legal means (ibid p.208). The hope for challenging White supremacy is more realistic now that "the objective basis for White privilege is weakening" (ibid p.215).

Sometimes the tone of the book is certain in that the socialist frame of reference could be seen as the solution to the problems of White supremacist and capitalist neoliberalism, ableism, homophobia, and patriarchy. The work does not address the dangers of certainty: uncertainty could avoid the danger of uncritically replacing one ideology with another. However, the value given to the combination of reflection and action is implicit throughout the work.

The book is written in such a way that the educator can deal with chapters discretely, with each chapter presenting a coherent argument. However, the entire work needs to be read to be more assured of its explanatory reach and power, as some chapters do not address the kinds of questions posed above. Its value is that the cases and writings used are part of a hidden history which gives the educator a sense of the global and interconnected nature of radical pedagogy. While this provides a sense of pride and identification with radical pedagogy and its role in social movements, it is also good to get practical information and checklists.

This book presents a convincing argument for the role of teaching and training in skills and knowledge for change. For the social movement activist who may not have given much consideration to the role of adult education, it explains the relationship between the function of change and the form it should take. Change is an educative process.

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### **About the review author**

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**Daza, Mar; Hoetmer Raphael; & Vargas, Virginia (eds.), 2012, Crisis y Movimientos Sociales en Nuestra América: Cuerpos, Territorios e Imaginarios en Disputa. Lima: Programa Democracia y Transformación Global. 498 pp.**

Reviewed by **Edgar Guerra Blanco**

One of the fundamental epistemological principles in scientific work is the striving towards objectivity in research. To be objective is to approach the object of study from outside, in possession only of the theoretical and methodological tools necessary for the observation and interpretation of the social fact. Of course it is necessary, in accordance with the rules, to support that process with the use of corresponding methods of data collection and analysis. The result of this process is an investigation of a scientific character based upon the certainty of total separation from value judgments and subjectivity. Hence, compared to this model, ‘activist research’ or that which “departs from a clear commitment to the processes of organization and social mobilisation” (Hoetmer 2012: 242) places itself at the opposite end of the field which, at least explicitly, gives distance to the case and its social and political implications.

On the one hand, such a dispensation of distance seems illusory, and yet on the other hand, it is the explicit stance towards an already old and innocuous debate in the social sciences (that of the objectivity of the researcher). But it is precisely that which allows one to build a rich debate on research results, with theoretical and methodological proposals, on the basis of the combination of activism and research. For this reason, in introducing the book “*Crisis and social movements in our America: Bodies, territories and imaginaries in dispute*”, one must not fail to inform the reader of the manuscript’s stance on the matter; rather than siding with immaculate objectivity, it poises itself on the threshold where object and subject -- or the social movements and the researchers involved -- are engaged in a determined manner without bias to science or to politics.

To begin with, it is necessary to note that the texts presented in the volume in question are based upon the “*Gathering of Knowledge and Social Movements: Between the crisis and the other possible worlds*” that took place in Lima, Peru, from May 26 to June 2 of 2010. Activists, journalists, critical artists and social researchers attended and took part in workshops, exhibitions, conferences,

photography exhibits, and poetry recitals. Hence, the volume also offers a visual testimony of the gathering by presenting an interesting graphic collection of the various meetings and activities. But first and foremost the book is an anthology of a wide range of texts, including theoretical essays, political analyses, case studies and research notes that together form a harmonious whole that invites the reader to reflect on the potential benefits of the partnership between research and informed activism. The editors are emphatic in stating that the goal of the meeting and what came out of it (which has now acquired book form) was to encourage the construction of concepts that, both in form and in content, give expression to the concrete praxis of the social actors and the concepts or imaginaries that feed them. In other words: the event incited a transformation in knowledge, powers, methods, theories and epistemologies, and with them, the social environment.

The book participates in an explicit challenge to the objectivist paradigm of 'normal science', which must be evaluated and taken as a basis for reflection on our own scientific tasks. Through the reading of the texts, the question arises: how useful is activist research for the production of knowledge? Where does the renunciation, dislocation, or open porosity between the old distinctions North/South, theory/praxis, subject/object and skills/knowledge lead? In challenging the objectivist science literature, the editors and authors of the collective volume place themselves in the centre of the 'epistemological struggles' that are being waged against the hegemonic positions within these binaries. That is to say, they face some of the classical postulations of social science around its procedures and objectives. In doing so, their approach is profusely and solidly documented: the literature cited and the arguments within the different chapters of the manuscript are evidence of a prior systematic study of the socio-historical processes that have led current social theory to its hegemonic position and have allowed the predominance of 'instrumental action' paradigms and 'uncritical' theorising. Hence, the editors and authors offer, on the one hand, a look at societal processes of organization and mobilization (social movements) from the perspective of what is called 'our America' and, on the other hand, interpretative and transformative conceptual frameworks that are built upon the very basis of the protest movements -- on both their concept as well as the concrete activity.

Although the compilation has a clear political agenda, it should be noted that its research plan and the theoretical framework that feeds it are presented in a timely manner and systematically on the basis of a series of observations of modern society. The activism does not burden or diminish (and claims to not weaken) the scientific research. On the one hand, the different texts of the manuscript utilise the framework of a pointed and critical diagnosis of contemporary global society, one that forms the origin and the purpose of the new global protest demonstrations. The main thesis of the editors and authors is that the current global situation is in a state of systemic crisis (which implies economic, political, ecological, epistemological crisis, etc.) and that even the western model of civilization is at stake. On the other hand, such a diagnosis of

the crisis has as its basis (among other theoretical developments) the theory of the colonialism of power, which is marked by the differentiation between the Global North and the South, and is built on the basis of binary power relations: science vs. practical skills; white vs. indigenous; subject vs. object - distinctions which, historically, have underpinned the political and scientific projects of western modernity, allowing the oppression and colonization of nature, of the indigenous, and of women through their objectification. Thus, the texts take a disappointing perspective, since the political and economic crisis (with its ecological, social etc. implications) is accompanied by the depletion or inability of the current explanatory models (the tradition of European and American thought, primarily) to provide adequate diagnostic and political solutions to global problems.

It is in this context, and even more so from the theoretical diagnosis and political position, that the volume offers texts that address the various facets of modern-day society. As it was in 'our America', for the publishers and authors of the texts, the Global North -- with its intellectualism and neo-liberal capitalism - - is where the contradictions and modern paradoxes are most obvious. The increase in expectations for social improvement collides against the daily experiences: dreams of progress and happiness are marred by nightmares of reason in the forms of exclusion, racism, domination, and violence. It is this "malaise in globalization" (Stiglitz 2003, cited in Daza, Hoetmer and Vargas 2012:35) that has resulted in a "new international cycle of struggle" (Hardt and Negri 2004, cited in Daza, Hoetmer and Vargas 2012: 35) that questions the neoliberal hegemony.

Hence, in order to present the multiple facets of the social struggles in America, the volume provides two sections that are notable for their inclusion of the voices of the activists. The irony of the confrontation between indigenous movements and progressive governments is revealed through various essays and articles: the struggles of the indigenous movement in Amazonian Peru; the efforts of the afro-Peruvian movement by "blackened feminism" (Muñoz 2012:251) or the ups and downs of Latin American feminism and the different conflicts and struggles of the TLGB movements. It is advisable to read the two sections of the book separately. The theoretical texts provide a general interpretation, introducing the topic and giving context to the general thesis of the volume (such as the one by Raphael Hoetmer on social movements in Peru, or reflections on the art of Jorge Miyagui), whereas the texts written by political party members and activists, while rich in first-hand information and interesting for the portrait that they paint of their struggles and activities, only treat the discussion topics with broad brushstrokes. However, the majority of them fulfil their commitment to illustrate the discussion points and the huge variety of internal paradoxes in social movements and contemporary political strife.

The current conflicts in 'our America' emerge from the crisis of modernity/capitalism, which is patriarchal-colonial-imperial in different geopolitical scales and geo-historic spaces. There are, however, three key areas

of dispute in the constitution of the inequality and the reproduction of the logic of the colonialism of power, knowledge and being: the dispute over control of the bodies; for the control of the territories; and for the control of the imaginaries. It is these large spaces of conflict that cut across academic theorising and the presentations of empirical cases throughout the text. And it is on the basis of this new matrix of conflict that the social movements appear as the social and political instrument of change towards an alternative to modernity.

The introductory text to the collective volume does not idealize (as is common in activist books) the notion of social movements; on the contrary, it recognizes its internal contradictions and the remnants of the hegemonic culture in its interior -- for example, the verticality, the presence of social relations of domination and violence. However, it does presume that, given the context out of which they arise, social movements are innovative and transformative, being more sensitive to violence and domination. It sees social movements as a fundamental factor of change. On the other hand, although a certain criticism is developed throughout the manuscript of vices that have proliferated in the social movements, at the theoretical level the book seems to present an incomplete picture of the classical theories and conceptions of social movements. In effect, its criticism of the hegemonic theories aims to dismantle three prevailing notions: 1) that the movements are characterized by an ironclad structuring and organization; 2) that there is a strict separation between the social and political dimensions; and, 3) that in general terms the social movements react only in relation to the State.

However, theories of contemporary social movements are far from providing such images of collective action. While the North American tradition, despite recent developments, continues to build upon mechanistic foundations, European traditions have stood out precisely for offering rich paradigms based on phenomenological and communicative conceptions of social movements. That does not, however, discredit the general criticism of the concept of social movements; on the contrary, it is enriched with the writer's idea of societal and prefigurative movements.

Finally, it is necessary to say a few words about section IV of the volume, which incites some reflections on art. Contrary to the reductionist views that prevail within the political parties and in social movements, which see art as an "instrument of struggle" (Miyagui 2012:285), Jorge Miyagui advocates for a comprehensive view in which art is appreciated "as a system." The author's proposal is very fruitful in terms of empirical research, because it goes beyond the aesthetic and political-ideological considerations with which artistic products that inundate public protests and rallies are commonly evaluated. According to the author, besides observing and evaluating the shape and the contents of the artistic products, one would have to look at the art circuit: the milieu in which it was produced and through which it travels; the places in which it opens a wide spectrum of possibilities for the construction of meanings and for the impact on subjectivities. Miyagui's proposal demands an analysis of the institutional and organizational framework behind the work of art. It implies



that such a framework contains and is governed by its own distinctions, interests and values (power, legitimacy and economic success) and becomes a factor of hierarchical differentiation and social exclusion between sectors and within their own forms of art (between art/crafts; language/dialect; music/folklore). That would necessitate the formation of the "artist-activist" that fully assumes responsibility for a political project, rather than organizing artistic events.

Upon finishing the book, one is faced with the question whether it is possible to dispense, in a radical way, with European social theory? To renounce the analytical categories founded upon perspectives of meaning that lie outside of the Latin American reality and that helped to perpetuate descriptions that legitimize domination, hegemony and exclusion? The book is an exercise in answering this question and provides a whole coherent and imaginative language that, in principle, would make a radical difference. However, sometimes one has the feeling, and even the certainty, that the categories and dimensions of analysis are not so far from those already proposed by Foucault, Bourdieu or even Luhmann. Or perhaps it remains just on the far side of the distinction, but ultimately forming part of the whole?

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**Roy, Srila, 2012, *New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*. London: Zed Books (208 pages; £19.99 | \$35.95)**

Reviewed by **Sara de Jong**

*New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities* maps recent developments as well as dilemmas in mobilisation around gendered issues in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the UK. The inclusion of the UK as a space for (diaspora) South Asian feminism already signals the book's problematisation of the label 'South Asian' as merely a geographical reference. In the introduction of the book, Editor Srila Roy explicitly regards South Asia as a complex category that is undercut by Indian power politics and other regional political power struggles. At the same time she understands it as marked by fragments of shared history. In all of these locations this is a gendered history in which nation-state building and cultural assertion became premised on gender norms.

Following the unpacking of the label 'South Asian' in "*New South Asian*

*Feminisms*”, Roy interrogates the other part of the title, ‘Feminisms’, as well. The use of the plural in the title of the book already signals the (by now standard) awareness of the heterogeneity within the movement(s). The term is further complicated by the negative (post-)colonial association of feminism with westernisation and elitism, which some of the book’s chapters also refer to (e.g. chapter 5 and chapter 7). At the same time, the introduction presents South Asian women’s movements as having a rich history, characterised by connections with other social struggles, starting with anti-colonial movements and extending to various post-independence issues.

In this line, the book convincingly addresses issues and concerns that transcend the South Asian region as well as the field of feminisms and will resonate with researchers and activists interested in social movements more broadly. This can already be gauged from Srila Roy’s contextualisation of the edited volume:

In showing how emergent feminist articulations are contending with key contemporary concerns (the neoliberal state, politicized religion and secularism, neoliberal government, political conflict, and new modes of governance and regulation in tandem with new assertions of rights and identities), the essays present ways of (re) thinking the feminist political for the predicaments of the present, globally. (p. 3-4)

Evidently, encounters with the neoliberal state, new modes of governance, and political conflict are not restricted to feminisms only and leave their imprint on other social movements as well. Also, the remaining three of the four broad themes (in addition to the already discussed theme of ‘South Asian’ feminisms), which the introduction presents as common threads of the different contributions, are relevant issues for various other social movements: 1) new modes of activism and new generations; 2) violence; and 3) institutionalisation and NGOisation, a topic that the book’s editor has also written about in her own work (Roy 2009; Roy 2011).

True to publisher Zed books’ reputation, “*New South Asian Feminisms*” is very much a ‘movement book’ rather than a (mere) consideration of the theoretical developments in feminism in the South-Asian region. The dilemmas, paradoxes, and possibilities that are discussed in relation to these themes in the respective chapters are very much grounded in (analysis) of movement practices. For example, chapter 1 on ‘Sex Workers’ rights and women’s movements in India’ by Svati Shah addresses the history of negotiation around sex worker rights, while in the second chapter Sadaf Ahmad documents step by step the reflective lobbying strategies employed by the Pakistani Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA) with, among others, Pakistani government officials and bureaucrats, that culminated in a legal amendment that criminalised sexual harassment.

Chapter 3, ‘Family Law Organizations and the Mediation of Resources and

Violence in Kolkata' by Srimati Basu, discusses the paradoxes and possibilities that emerge in the daily practices and navigations of three organisations engaged in marriage mediation: one state-related, one 'non'-governmental organisation that in fact has very strong links with the governing political party and an autonomous feminist organisation. Through tracing the decisions and interventions of each of these organisations at the micro level of individual cases, the author convincingly demonstrates that despite their varying histories and ideologies, the contextual structures and constraints lead them to maneuver in similar ways. And while the reader is still left with the impression that the author would align herself with the autonomous feminist group, she effectively deconstructs clear-cut distinctions between radical and reformist politics present in much theoretical writing. Similarly, in chapter 2, Ahmad finishes her discussion on the work of AASHA in Pakistan with a section in which she successfully interrogates the dichotomies that would have framed AASHA's "cooperation with the state and private corporatized bodies [as] not being autonomous and of having 'sold themselves' to demonized structures" (p. 61) by arguing that such judgment would have failed to observe the dynamic and varied nature of mobilisations.

The fourth chapter, 'Contemporary feminist politics in Bangladesh: Taking the Bull by the Horns,' written by Sohela Nazneen and Maheen Sultan confronts the themes of NGOisation and generational divides head on. Interestingly, the chapter indirectly challenges the 'catching up' paradigm of 'the West versus the Rest' by highlighting that Bangladesh has been at the very forefront of NGOisation. Hence, Bangladesh is in the position to teach the lessons it has learned to the rest of the world. Drawing on interviews, document analysis and other qualitative data, the authors trace the developments that occurred in response to donor funding, concluding that this resulted in fundamental changes, especially for the smaller local and regional organisations. They also manage to connect the phenomenon of NGOisation with the intergenerational tensions experienced in the movement by, for example, describing varying attitudes to voluntarism which are rooted both in different ideological and material positions. Lacking from this more descriptive chapter is a more reflective stance of the authors on their own positionality in relation to the topic of their research. While the short biographical descriptions of the authors at the back of the book mention their affiliation to BRAC university (established by the large NGO BRAC), and one author presents herself as member of one of the organisations discussed in the chapter, there is no reference to these personal linkages in their chapter.

Personal involvement of the authors with the movement described also surfaced in chapter 8, the final chapter of the book, entitled 'Feminism in the Shadow of Multi-Faithism: Implications for South Asian women in the UK,' which is a co-written contribution of PhD graduate Sukhwant Dhaliwal from Goldsmiths, University of London and Pragna Patel, director of Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a UK based ethnic minority women's organisation. What makes it different from chapter 4 is that a footnote under the title immediately mentions the positions

of the authors and explains the fact that part of their contribution draws on Patel's long history of engagement with the organisation as well as a SBS report. Arguably, however, again a chance is missed here to more explicitly and productively take up the classic issue of the relation between academia and activism, and, to borrow, from the book's title, the 'paradoxes and possibilities' that the interconnection of activism and research raise. In their productive collaboration, the authors argue that in the UK a shift has occurred from a policy of multiculturalism to 'multi-faithism' in which the state increasingly facilitates space for religious groups. According to them, this has had an adverse effect on secular ethnic minority women's organisations, such as SBS. In their own bold formulation: "We take issue with the way in which a renewed focus on religious identities has been matched by a simultaneous deauthentication of secular feminist concerns by tainting these with allegations of racism and 'state co-optation'" (p. 173). Indirectly, this chapter thereby also underlines the relevance of an intersectional approach to understanding women's mobilisation, which can reflect on the cross-cutting of gender with categories such as religion, ethnicity, class, and caste.

Debarati Sen, in her chapter 'Illusive Justice: the Gendered Labour Politics of Subnationalism in Darjeeling Tea Plantations', which offers an ethnographic study of the Darjeeling Nepali women plantation workers' political positionalities in relation to sub nationalism, explicitly states that ethnicity and gender have to be analysed together. As she argues, without such intersectional frame capturing their "multiple marginalities" (p. 132) - as women, as workers, and as cultural minority community - their political activism and navigations in relation to hegemonic politics cannot be understood. On the other side of the spectrum, Trishima Mitra-Kahn's chapter 'Offline Issues, Online Lives? The Merging Cyberlife of Feminist Politics in Urban India', has to situate the activism she investigates as (predominantly) urban, young, educated, English-speaking and middle-class. In contrast to a positioning based on multiple marginalisation in the case of the female Nepali tea pluckers in India, Mitra-Kahn's research participants were compelled to reflect on "how their multiple markers of privilege shape their understanding of violence, the solutions they propose, [and] the politics they expose and the manner in which they do so" (p. 124). While this chapter's topic of online women-led campaigns might be seen to fit most obviously the tag of *new South Asian Feminism*, the author eloquently shows interesting parallels with the theatrical expressions of some early activism by the urban Indian Women's Movement and challenges assumptions about a clear-cut separation between online and offline activism.

While the cyber campaigns analysed in Mitra-Kahn's chapter, such as Stand up to Moral Policing, comfortably fit the label 'feminist', in chapter seven "Speak to the Women as the Men have All Gone": Women's Support Networks in Eastern Sri Lanka', author Rebecca Walker has to do some more work to argue that her study's focus on a Sri Lankan Tamil informal human rights group, constituted predominantly by women, can be understood under the frame of 'feminism(s)'. In her chapter, she explicitly takes up this challenge and suggests that this

group, named Valkai, “do not start from or solely identify with the ideals of feminism and activism but form and shape themselves according to risk and need and the configurations of ‘active living’” (p. 164-165). As such, the chapter effectively demonstrates again the relevance of the considerations of the book “New South Asian Feminisms” for researchers interested in social movements more broadly. Walker’s argument stretches, however, beyond merely integrating the Valkai group and similar informal networks into the frame of feminist activism, and productively extends to an explicit challenge of how the boundaries of what counts as such activism are drawn.

Debarati Sen’s analysis of the Nepali women plantation workers in Darjeeling would have benefitted from a similarly reflective discussion of what is particularly feminist about their political actions and how the concept of ‘feminist activism’ might need to be reframed based on analysis of their practices. Such conceptualisation, grounded in the rich empirical work that this chapter offers, could have shed further light on the relation between women’s groups and feminism as well as linking back to the consideration in the editor’s introduction on the shifting (understandings) of feminism(s). Sen’s is not the only contribution in which it appears a struggle to combine rich ethnographic description, grounded movement-relevant research, reflective research practice, (re-)conceptualising and theory development in the relatively limited framework of a book chapter. The book “*New South Asian Feminisms: Paradoxes and Possibilities*” emerges therefore as a whole both as an illustration of the challenges involved in presenting rich case studies and at the same time transcending the particular and the descriptive by offering a deeper analysis, and as a pivotal example of the fact that the synthesis of painstaking empirical reflective research with theoretical depth can render the richest conceptual insights.

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**Harvey, David, 2012, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso.**

Reviewed by **Kristen A. Williams**

In this most recent work, David Harvey makes another significant contribution to the field of geography as well as to interdisciplinary studies of globalization and its economic, political and cultural operations and manifestations. An expert on both classical Marxism and urbanism, Harvey has long been uniquely poised to critique the conclusions of Marx's *Capital*, and he continues to do so here. But Harvey goes beyond scholarly analysis and issues a reproof and a call to action to leftists who have sought to appropriate Marxist tenets as a means of revolutionizing the intersecting cultural, financial and political economies of urban areas throughout the world. Labelling many such movements as at best, inefficient and at worst, ineffective at achieving economic justice for the burgeoning population of urbanized global citizens, Harvey offers both an analysis and a playbook for social change, with the first part of this text exploring the intertwined origins of Marxism and the city and charting the development of urban citizenship, and the second, shorter, section offering case studies as examples of how leftists might more effectively achieve their goals for the city.

In the first section, entitled "The Right to the City," Harvey lays out a detailed theoretical framework, one which he has adapted in relation to Henri Lefebvre's 1967 essay of the same name inspired by the conditions of urban life Lefebvre observed in Paris. He also makes clear that he understands the circumstances that inspired Lefebvre's work. Disenfranchised city-dwellers were uttering, in various ways, "both a cry and a demand" for the powers that be to look more closely at the current living conditions in urban areas and to do something to ameliorate peoples' feelings of alienation and despair (x). Harvey argues that recent times have seen a "revival" in the sort of demands observed and evaluated by Lefebvre, but makes clear his belief that "it is not to the intellectual legacy of Lefebvre that we must turn for an explanation" of this current sociopolitical condition (xi). Instead, Harvey cites James Holston when he asserts that the model of "insurgent citizenship" emerging now among urban dwellers around the world has more to do with the struggles of everyday life.

But Lefebvre's work remains relevant in 2012, Harvey argues, because it represents one model of how an intellectual might respond, largely within academic discourse, to this state of emergency experienced by so many urban dwellers around the globe. Accordingly, Harvey is currently interested in figuring out how similar intellectuals should respond now and argues that Lefebvre connected the notion of revolutionary activism with urban areas explicitly, despite the fact that traditional Marxist thinking "had never accorded the urban much significance" in the past (xiii). It is the fact that Lefebvre insisted on the centrality of cities to the crisis of capital which marks his

primary contribution to the contemporary intellectual and political discussion about the right to the city. Accordingly, one of Harvey's significant interventions is the ways he reshapes both Marxist theory and Lefebvre's application thereof to better accommodate the increasingly urbanized global community of the twenty-first century.

Indeed, the problems associated with urban life and public space that existed in Lefebvre's time and place still exist now, though specific conditions and key players have changed slightly. While the laborers associated with Lefebvre's moment were described by Marx as the "proletariat," the new urban class of working poor are more accurately referred to as the "precariat": people facing "insecure, often part-time and disorganized low-paid labor" (xiv). Offering specific numbers from contemporary China, Harvey makes clear that more people are currently living in the city than ever before in human history, suggesting that the number of the class of "precariats" is correspondingly larger as well.

The trouble is, however, that traditional leftist responses to the urban economic crises faced by the majority of the world's population are inadequate. These responses traditionally valorize horizontal organizations of power over vertical, and public control of resources over private. These types of dichotomies, Harvey argues, are no longer adequate (if they ever were) to make sense of the complexities of modern urban life on a global scale. Instead, movements seeking to ameliorate the alienation of contemporary urban citizens need to be guided by three major precepts:

1. several popular forces must be united in struggle, not just workers, to make anti-capitalist resistance more effective;
2. ideas of work as separate from everyday life need to be revised to understand that work is actually a constitutive element of daily life; and finally,
3. sites of work need to be re-imagined to involve vernacular spaces such as homes—those places too need to be revitalized and revamped (138-140).

Harvey offers the successful case study of Bolivia, where there are: neighborhood associations at work; a variety of types of work and workers included; and more unions representing more different types of people and workers (148). But there is also another important element at work: shared culture and collective identity which bring the people together "in common citizenship" (149). According to Harvey, "...it is indeed possible to build a political city out of debilitating processes of neoliberal urbanization, and thereby reclaim the city for anti-capitalist struggle" and this can happen in large U.S. cities such as New York if the three conditions above are effectively met, though achieving these criteria may require embracing counter-intuitive models of the distribution of power and resources (150).

Accordingly, Harvey offers Section II, "Rebel Cities," which features one full-length chapter in which he advocates a more flexible application of the ideas

explored in Section I as well as several shorter chapters focusing on specific case studies of the types of leftist anti-capitalist interventions that do seem to effectively counter and/or resolve the financial, political and cultural injustices of contemporary urban life.

This book is every bit as comprehensive and intensely thoughtful as Harvey's previous work, and makes a significant contribution to the field of interdisciplinary global studies insofar as Harvey refuses to separate the political, cultural and financial origins and current manifestations of the urban crises articulated by contemporary scholars of globalization, advocates for social justice and everyday urban-dwellers. Instead, Harvey insists on accounting for the complicated relationship between these elements, and the result is a more far-reaching and holistic analysis of the forces of globalization than is often presented by scholars whose allegiance is to one primary discipline.

*Rebel Cities*, while providing extraordinary philosophical and historical context for contemporary global iterations of the classic economic and social problems attendant to capitalism, nevertheless seems less politically relevant than Harvey's earlier work, however. Harvey's suggestions for effective anti-capitalist struggle are well-reasoned but require such revolutionary strategies that it seems unlikely they will ever be adopted widely enough among reformers to effect real change. Indeed, Harvey himself observes that these strategies are not currently embraced (or perhaps even understood) by the majority of the far-left who will, for all the good reasons Harvey outlines in Section I of the text, be chary about appropriating neoliberal organizational strategies, even for their own ends.

### **About the review author**

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**Book review: Choudry, Aziz, Hanley, Jill, and Shragge, Eric (Eds.), 2012, *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Oakland: PM Press.**

Reviewed by **Markus Kip**

In 1897, Eduard Bernstein made a controversial announcement to his comrades. “I openly admit it, I have very little interest or feeling for what is commonly understood as the 'final goal' of socialism. The goal, whatever it may be, is nothing at all to me, the movement is everything” (Bernstein 1897, quoted in Weikart 1999:202). Bernstein intervened within Marxist debates at the time in order to come to grips politically with the fact that broad segments of the working class were more concerned about resolving everyday concerns, rather than revolution. Instead of succumbing to a quasi-religious hope of impending socialism, Bernstein sought to prepare his comrades for the long haul. Rosa Luxemburg, who emerged to become his main counterpart in the “Revisionism” debate, rejected such stance in the strongest of words in the following year. “It is the final goal alone which constitutes the spirit and the content of our socialist struggle, which turns it into a class struggle. And by final goal we must [...] mean [...] the conquest of political power” (Luxemburg 1971:28). Luxemburg claimed that without maintaining a clear focus on revolution, disparate endeavors for reform would soon become obstacles for socialist transformation.

Times have changed, but the polemic of reform versus revolution remains vibrant. A recent attempt to rethink this problem and to go beyond this dichotomy has been offered by the collection “*Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*” edited by Aziz Choudry, Jill Hanley, and Eric Shragge. Summarizing their concern, they write: “[r]adical organizing is a balance between the struggle for short-term gains and the longer-term objective of social transformation. For us, the links between the two are crucial” (p. 10). The book is a welcome contribution to the literature on organizing, offering honest and self-reflective accounts from organizing practice, mostly in Canada, but also in the US and Aotearoa New Zealand. The overall character of the book ostensibly is to raise questions rather than offering definitive answers. Instead of professing a “holier-than-thou” attitude, the appeal of the chapters lies in the candor of the analyses. Its perspective aims at enriching practice rather than remaining caught within what the editors describe as a self-referentiality in contemporary social movement studies. One of the great achievements of the collection is that it encouraged organizers to document their struggles and reflect on them in the bigger picture of movements. The chapters are written in concise and accessible language and, in fact, have the potential to reach an audience of “students, activists, organizers, and the wider public” as the book cover promises.

In the introduction, organizing is conceived as a “process of continually building a base of people from the wider community, supporting a process of building

organizations or movements of people to challenge, control, or influence power in their daily lives” (p. 3). The editors distinguish this approach from “activism” which “is more about people who already share the same viewpoint, often not directly affected by the issues, taking action to demand social change” (p. 3). Most chapters present analyses of organizing experiences and argue that in spite of highly vulnerable positions, people do not necessarily walk in the direction of least resistance. Although the results of organizing may be mixed, these accounts are testimonies to the way in which people can organize and develop motivations beyond short-term successes.

The contributions cover a broad range of topics and cast spotlights on the variety of struggles, including Indigenous sovereignty, migrant and racial justice, women's and LGBTQ liberation. They set up a landscape of diversity in which the collection's quest for “global justice” is to be achieved. These contributions suggest that pursuing liberation in one particular instance requires addressing others as well. Robert Fisher argues that seeking justice in a local community is more effective when connected to a national strategy. But even a national strategy would not seem to be sufficient, as Joey Calugay links the struggle for migrants' justice in Canada to the political struggle in the Philippines. Dave Bleakney and Abdi Hagi Yusef also show that a struggle for workplace justice is not just about class but raises questions of race and gender relations. Any struggle short of such perspective on the complexity of power dynamics risks becoming undermined by the divisive character of inequality.

Organizing practice should not be reduced to spectacular battles and outcomes. Several contributions start from the experience of internalized oppression such that it inhibits the articulation of grievances. Edward Ou Jin Lee's organizing with queer people of color in Montreal grappled with “feelings of solitude, internalized oppression, and mental health struggles [...] linked to the colonial and imperial legacies of white supremacy” (p. 88). Underscoring the need to develop self-expression, Dolores Chew asserts with respect to her experience of organizing women in a South Asian community: “Strength and courage are required to articulate subject positions that remain unrecognized and unvalidated by the mainstream. To claim space and assert identity is a struggle. It gets compounded when those who, because of gender or class should be allies, are not” (p. 175). Besides racialized and gendered divisions, organizing also needs to confront the persistent promise of capitalism. Commenting on Maori struggles in Aotearoa New Zealand, Maria Bargh notes: “one of the dangers of the dominant entrepreneurialism rhetoric is that it portrays itself as optimistic and suggests that it is more capable of supporting happy and healthy Maori families than a noncapitalist agenda” (p. 129).

In view of such challenges, the selection also provides several useful considerations on the potentials of employing a variety of skills and methods for organizing including fundraising, local community organizing, legal strategies, research, poetry, music, and gardening. Significant attention is paid to the perils of demobilization and cooptation. In this respect, the chapter by Alex Law and Jared Will is particularly insightful in analyzing the double-edged sword of

pursuing a legal strategy in organizing. While “discovering” rights can facilitate the organizing process by animating people to claim “their right” and step up mobilization by cashing in on the symbolic value of legal cases, the discourse and dynamic of the legal system may also demobilize a movement eager for fast victory. Rather than revealing the collective character of a case, it may just as well individualize the issue.

In her illuminating chapter “Rights, Action, Change: Organize for What?” Radha D'Souza grapples with one of the challenges facing activists in Western democracies. “The leaders of national liberation struggles had a 'final end' toward which oppositions to particular laws or policies were a step. In Western democracies today, there is no 'final end,' nothing for which activists plan or act; there is no conception of the future toward which their opposition is a step” (p. 77). Clearly, the reason for the lack of a “final end” is the predominant stance to reject grand narratives for veiling hegemonic intentions behind a universalist stance. Seeking to replace this absence, social movements have increasingly put emphasis on process and prefigurative practices. Harsha Walia's contribution exemplifies this in her insistence on the “ethic of responsibility” (p. 246) as the crucial framework in non-Indigenous organizing for decolonization in British Columbia. Devising a proper ethics as a way forward is also embraced by the Research Group on Collective Autonomy analyzing the anarchist organizing of (pro-)feminist and queer groups in Quebec: “The more people who are exposed to these ideas and practices, who get to experiment with them and feel empowered in their experience, the greater the chances that a mass movement will emerge—and is perhaps already emerging—from the grassroots” (p. 171).

Are ethical procedures thus the decisive feature of radical organizing? If we adopt the editors' conception of organizing, the answer must be no. Organizing may produce a radical ethics, but should not presuppose it. Thus, if we are not to presuppose a radical ethics for organizing, but conceive of it as an outcome of organizing, we need to think about the “final goal.” Radha D'Souza writes: “Often scholars are afraid to articulate the need for a higher principle because of fears that the authority for such principles will need to draw on religion or parochial ideologies. Drawing on ideologies, religious or secular, is not the same as reaffirming ontological awareness that [...] the social domain is a condition precedent for life to exist” (p. 80-81). Criticizing the predominant fixation on rights in organizing and the implicit submission to liberal politics, she urges us instead to “start to worry about what kind of society is conducive to human well-being” (p. 81). Can we devise a strategy for such a society in which the realization of our different desires is dependent on each other—rather than in competition? Although the book raises this question, it fails to engage it, leaving the issues presented in the chapters somewhat disparate.

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## About the review author

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## **Cox, Laurence, 2013, *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-Culture and Beyond*. Sheffield and Bristol: Equinox.**

Reviewed by **Eilís Ward**

This book sets itself an enormous and impressive goal: to track and render coherent the history of Buddhism and Ireland from, as the title suggests, the 'Celts' right up to today. Author Laurence Cox posits an overarching theoretical framework: that this history can be understood through transnational flows involving circulation and receptivity of ideas and relationships mediated by historical variants of capitalist systems. Specifically, the author is interested in exploring western Marxism and western Buddhism not, as traditionally supposed, in oppositional terms, but as speaking to liberatory collective agency. The emphasis, however, is not on Marxism but on Buddhism, located firmly within and mediated by the capitalist world system.

Hence, although the focus is on Ireland, the author could not be accused of methodological nationalism. One strength of the book is that it challenges ideas about the 'national' in terms of both culture and identity. Thus while little perhaps can be said about Buddhism and 'Ireland,' there is something to say about Buddhism and Ireland within the 'broader world system,' from the early processes of trade and missionary endeavors between Europe and Asia, to the

colonial system and finally to cultural movements of the 20th and 21st century, all of which created circuits of ideas and people related to Buddhism between Ireland and Asia. As is clear from the opening pages, this book's argument could not be contained by any particular discipline (e.g. sociology, history) but draws from many without losing coherence. It is a rich, magisterial book, lively and surprising in its many twists and turns as Cox brings to life --often wrestling information from scraps of archaeological and archival sources -- a transnational story of Buddhism and 'Ireland'.

And what was that story? Or, can we talk about a single story? And, for readers of this journal, what might this story tell us about Buddhism and its relationship to social movements?

Cox tells us the story in three distinct parts. Part One, treating mediaeval and early modern Ireland, presents evidence of transmission of Buddhist images, icons and ideas largely through texts and experienced differently by two circuits: one Protestant, 'English' and imperial, the other, Catholic, diasporic and 'Irish.' In turn, this theme, viz that two competing hegemonies dialectically structured both the reception and transmission of Buddhism to Ireland, suffuses the entire book. Part Two treats the late 19th and early 20th Century from which period more substantive evidence of contact emerges. Here, there is evidence from Irish people as participants in the colonial and imperial exercise in Asia, as Christian missionaries, and from the theosophical strain of Celtic revivalism. Throughout this time, the numbers of individuals involved were not significant and knowledge was indeed largely scrappy. Nonetheless, Buddhism served a dissonant, provocative role: allowing people to step outside cultural constraints, find personal relief and express resistance -- a set of roles embodied in the emergence of the first (known?) Irish Buddhists, including some very remarkable and colorful individuals.

Part Three treats the recent decades from the counter cultural years to the possibility of Buddhism's cultivation in Ireland today and here, too, Cox posits Buddhism as offering an alternative to religious and cultural sectarianism. It is this last section that is perhaps of greatest interest to readers of this Journal. In 1960's Ireland, knowledge about Buddhism was still fragmentary and marginal but by the 1990's, it had begun to creolise or hybridize and, moreover, inward migration brought Asians with their own native Buddhist practices. Within the decade, all three major school of Buddhism and many of the lineages were present in Ireland. Some were constituted in small, mobile groups; others were rooted in retreat centers or permanent homes. Census data for 2011 showed 3,500 Buddhists living in Ireland. And what of their Buddhism? For the author it had, by this time, cast off its exotic sheen and become 'respectable': a badge of gentle, upward mobility even, congenial to the myriad new age and holistic values, and mostly to do with individual life style choices and desires for a simple life.

Thus, Cox argues, while Ireland had not brought forth 'prosperity Buddhism,' neither had it produced the kind of social engagement that he, in the final pages

of the book, advocates and that indeed is characteristic of American Buddhism. This is sticky and endlessly debated ground. Buddhism is without *substantive* ideas that constitute political or social prescription to speak to the modern world and yet it is, as scholar Peter Hershock argues, both seamlessly political and engaged by virtue of its concern for human suffering. It may be that the most politically radical Buddhist idea is the least tangible and the most maddeningly difficult to translate into the kinds of manifestos that direct political activism. That is its fundamental repudiation of the 'I' of modernity: the autonomous, distinct, ontologically separate human being. The manner in which adherents manifest that radical thought in their lives cannot be anticipated or predicted or, indeed, necessarily shepherded. Sometimes it is not at all evident, at least not in accordance with any conventional measures.

All that aside, this is an enjoyable book and a rewarding read. There are details with which to quibble -- especially, for me, when the author's conclusions are deduced from the logic of his overarching theoretical framework rather than induced from evidence. For instance, from my own experience as a long time practitioner of Buddhism in Ireland, I'm not convinced that those who have adopted a Buddhist practice are, as he suggests, motivated by a "shapeless discontent with religious orthodoxy" (p 11), and, that in this motivation they share the same process with working class or feminist activists who consciously seek radical, alternative forms of being and resistance. Or in other words, I am not convinced that Buddhism can be seen *a priori* as constituting a social movement and when it doesn't can be justifiably criticised as failing. But in fairness to Cox, he does accept that much more research needs to be done - most especially ethnographic work that would allow deeper digging into the lived experiences of the many and diverse forms of Buddhism in Ireland today. The author acknowledges the tentativeness of our current knowledge and this masterful book may be the beginning of a very fascinating dialogue.

### **About the review author**

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