

The image is a complex, abstract graphic design. It features a central figure, possibly a man in a suit, rendered in a style that combines sketching with bold, flat colors. The figure is primarily in shades of purple and black, with some areas in blue and green. The background is a mix of these colors, with heavy black lines and scribbles that create a sense of movement and depth. The overall aesthetic is modern and expressive, with a focus on strong contrasts and vibrant hues.

STATE OF POWER

2018 EDITION



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This State of Power is dedicated to the life and work of Ambalavaner Sivanandan – Siva – who died on January 3, 2018. Siva was Director of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), founder of the *Race and Class* journal and a former fellow of TNI. His stature as a leading black activist-intellectual is universally acknowledged as well as his work on the nexus of neo-colonialism, globalisation, racism and Islamophobia. He was also an outstanding strategist and his direct engagement with migrant and refugee peoples and anti-racist organisations has inspired several decades of struggle not only in Britain but in Europe and internationally. SIVA Presente! You have inspired us to continue to build our counter-power to injustice everywhere.

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MARCHING FORWARD

***Women, resistance and
counter-power***

An interview with Bertha Zúñiga Cáceres,
Medha Patkar and Nonhle Mbuthuma

If we learnt anything in 2017 from the shock of Trump's election, it was that the face of resistance to today's autocrats would be that of a woman. Women were the first to take to the streets the day after Trump was inaugurated in the largest street march in US history and have since been at the forefront of resistance to his toxic politics of racist fear-mongering and corporate cronyism. Women have similarly changed the entire conversation on sexual abuse, not just in the US but also in Asia and in Latin America, most recently through the #niunamenos (not one woman less) campaign. Women everywhere are leading struggles against corporate crimes and defending their communities and the dignity of all people, risking their lives in the process.

To introduce TNI's State of Power 2018 report on counter-power, we interviewed three women activists who have displayed incredible courage, determination and creativity to confront corporate power and state violence.



Bertha Zúñiga Cáceres was only 25 years old when her mother, Berta, a world-renowned environmental activist who had led community struggles against the construction of the Agua Zarca dam, was assassinated in 2016. Bertha has taken up her mother's mantle, becoming coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) and continuing the struggle against extractivist projects on indigenous land and an end to corruption, greed, violence and impunity that has marked the Honduran regime, exemplified by the coup in 2010.



Nonhle Mbuthuma's close friend was also killed for leading the struggle against a planned huge titanium mine on the beautiful Wild Coast of South Africa's Eastern Cape, but rather than frightening her, it added 'fuel to her fire' of passion and determination to stop the destruction of her community.



Medha Patkar's life in India shows the dogged power of commitment and her deep belief in the power of people to change history despite the odds. She first toured the site of the proposed Narmada Dam in 1985. More than 30 years later, in July 2017, she started an indefinite fast as women across the valley

stood in a *Jal Satyagraha* up to their necks in the rising waters of the sacred river to demand proper rehabilitation for all those affected by the dam.

Their words speak for themselves but the interviews attest to the instrumental role women have played in their respective struggles, the ways communities have refused to be cowed by the politics of terror, and the importance of movements to remain autonomous, rooted in communities and intelligent and holistic in their strategies and tactics.

How did you become involved in the struggle for social and environmental justice?

BERTHA: Well, my involvement started when I was a child, because I went with my mother to all the COPINH activities and took part in all the struggles. My mother taught me how important it is to get involved in communities, to stand up to those who wield political and economic power, and to learn from the struggle itself. My people – the Lenca people – taught me from a very young age that you can't remain indifferent to the unjust situation in our communities and the country as a whole.

MEDHA: My father was a freedom fighter, a trade union leader, so I was always accompanying him to meetings and becoming immersed in its politics. Later as I studied, I developed the same ideology of democratic socialism. In 1985 I was invited to visit Narmada valley and the many villages that would be affected by the proposed dam, the world's second largest. The friend who had invited me wanted to take legal action to stop the dam, but I realized that it would also require mass resistance as laws were being broken by the government, so I became involved in building a mass campaign.

NONHLE: Honestly, sometimes I don't know how I got involved. But I know I was influenced by my ancestors and elders. My grandfather was part of the MPondo revolt (the first major uprising against apartheid in 1960-1962) and he always told me stories about how they managed to protect the land before there was any democracy. He and other elders taught me the importance of the land, that it is the only thing we have, that it is the only thing we have to share with future generations and that once it's gone no compensation will be enough. So as soon as I heard about

the mining project, I thought of my grandfather's stories. That's how I got involved, but I also know it's not about fighting for myself, it's about my community and the next generations.

From your experience, what do you consider the key ingredients for building movements that can challenge established power and build just alternatives to predatory capitalism?

BERTHA: First, movements need to be anchored in grassroots organizations, and let the victims of injustice take the lead as protagonists of the struggle for the control and use of our natural resources, like land and water.

Second, you always have to think about the interconnectedness of these struggles: you can't separate one issue – such as land – from the others, because it's a struggle against the whole system. For example, when you're campaigning for access to school, you're also fighting for health and healthy food.

Third, we need to build movements that are consistent with our values, and what goes on inside our movements needs to reflect that. It means confronting violence against women in our own movements, because repression can also happen there.

Fourth, it's important to be internationalist. COPINH is the result of a process specific to Honduras, but it also came out of various uprisings in the Americas, such as the struggles of the many indigenous peoples who have protested against the economic and social system that dominates our continent.

NONHLE: I think the key is to be honest and transparent and mobilized – believing that we are fighting not just for ourselves but also for future generations. It is also critical to put women at the forefront of the struggle. If you look at our struggle, it is mainly led by women – we don't change our minds so easily. We also know the community cannot be dependent on anyone else, except itself. We know that the government is working hand in hand with companies to oppress our communities, so we have to make it impossible for them to work.

We are demanding the right to say no – what we need is Free Prior and Informed Consent and we are fighting for this. This year in April 2018, we will have a court case, the first in South Africa, to claim this right. If we win the case, it will help other communities. But even if we lose the case or the government proceeds, we will keep fighting regardless to defend our land.

It has also been important for our campaign to get the message out and build solidarity with others. It is difficult in a rural area for people to know what is happening so we need help to pass the message to the media, and build solidarity with other NGOs. If we are just talking here and others don't know, the struggle will never reach the whole world. We believe you build your house because of other people so this interdependence is crucial.

MEDHA: First and foremost, you need a broader ideological framework which you then operationalize into specific objectives, linking the micro with the macro. It is not necessary that everyone who participates in a movement shares the full vision – we will all approach issues from different angles and points of view – but key activists in the movement must share a common approach. Besides ideological clarity, activists also must have a deep understanding of people, what they need; the vision and tools that will inspire people and get them emotionally involved.

The goal is to move towards what I call a mass-roots organization (not a grassroots organization as grass can be plucked at any time). In other words, an organization that has many roots, where there is local leadership, where activists are motivating and mobilizing people and building a united force.

Out of this movement comes its articulation, which must happen on various fronts – inside communities but also internationally. For the Sardar Sarovar dams, we had to take on the World Bank and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) that were funding the project. And this required getting support from international quarters and working with international movements.

We also need to work on different fronts because of our understanding of power and human rights. While engaging on human rights relates to the state, and we must use the institutions of law and judiciary to challenge the state, we also believe ultimately in people power, that it is the first

pillar of democracy and the foundation of our work. We need constantly to show the power of people and our right to make decisions, otherwise you do not bring people along with you and you are no longer a movement. So we constantly use legal actions and mass actions.

And this isn't just about tactics either, it is also about values and creativity. In India for example, we are fond of *Satyagraha* (politics of non-violence) both because it is an effective tactic but also because it demonstrates our values and vision.

We also believe that it is important to educate and also demonstrate alternatives to oppression. So in the National Alliance of People's Movements, we run schools including real-life schools and projects in areas of health, education and water management. People can't just spend their whole time fighting, fighting, fighting; we also must demonstrate that there are alternatives.

How do you remain mobilized when faced with so much repression?

BERTHA: This has always been part of COPINH's history. When we were engaged in the struggle for our territory, the response was always very repressive, especially since the coup in 2010. But at the root of our struggle is precisely this deeply-held conviction that we can't give in to this situation, and that's what leads us to mobilize and take action. The need for justice means we have to struggle, because we can't live like this.

We're also a rebellious people who have fought for our rights for centuries – against the Spanish colonial powers to begin with, and now today against other types of colonialism. We draw strength from our ancestors, who liberated the country and defended our identity as indigenous people. It's part of our worldview: our ancestors are still walking with us, accompanying us. Our spirituality helps us to cope with these difficult situations.

My mother was never silent in the face of injustice; she was steadfastly committed to the fight against impunity and injustice, and she taught us that we have to face up to the elites who are undermining our future. She always said we have the right to live in a country that respects our rights and a state that serves the people rather than a corrupt oligarchy.

We also understand that we're not alone in this struggle. We're part of movements in many communities and groups in Honduras, the continent and the world. This was my mother's experience. Her strength and her energy came from knowing that she was supported, from the fact that this wasn't a struggle by one individual, but part of a much longer and wider history.

NONHLE: For us, when we saw the bloodshed, it was like putting petrol on the fire. It mobilized us rather than making us afraid. We became more angry, realizing that if we turned back, we would be selling out those who had died defending the same land. We say that this won't work, they will have to kill all of us. We cannot compromise with those who shed blood. They made a huge mistake.

MEDHA: It is an ongoing struggle. The World Bank withdrew because it said the dam could only be completed by unacceptable means and with terrible social and environmental losses. And this has come to be true. The dam may be completed, but there are still 35,000 to 40,000 people – 44 villages and one township – in the submerged area. Yet we continue to struggle. In July 2017, there were 21 sites in the valley where women held fasts, stood barefoot in the water refusing to leave, and stood up to the police to demand promised compensation.

It's this collective action and spirit that gives hope and keeps people mobilized and motivated. That's why I am optimistic, because without it as well as courage and determination you cannot carry on.

How do we ensure our movements of counter-power are not co-opted or – worse – replicate oppressive structures of power?

BERTHA: Every case is different. But when say we need our movements to be consistent, we're talking about not repeating those corrupt practices. We need to build movements on moral foundations. COPINH, for example, has established people's courts where cases of violence against women in our movement can be denounced. We're not afraid of naming the corporations that commit abuses and oppress us. And we maintain our autonomy as a movement, defending our territory and denouncing repressive practices, no matter what party is responsible for them.

MEDHA: It is important to be clear that peoples' movements must always be mobilized, and organizing people even when there are supportive parties challenging governments or even in power. Parties compromise because they want to win power, so movements must remain out of core power structures and play the role of the real opposition. Social movements must be a non-compromising force.

To remain true to their values, popular movements need to be rooted in their mass base and firm and committed to their goals. Being transparent is key; communicating, regularly evaluating the ways you work. Criticism is important because it is a way to clarify and rethink. It takes time, and many times we fall short, but we must try our best.

NONHLE: When I think back of those who fought for democracy, I have tears in my eyes, because those same people instead of protecting us are oppressing us and making our lives so difficult. Honestly, we just hope that what is happening with the ANC is a big lesson. It is not what our ancestors fought for. I hope one day the ANC will understand that as rural areas we fought for this democracy. Yet when we oppose destructive money they call us 'anti-development' and treat us as enemies. They should talk to us. The lessons are that we need to sustain our movements and keep them away from money. If movements become about making money, then it will end your struggle, you will lose your focus and forget what you fight for.

Why have women played a key role in your movement? Do you see the rise of #metoo, #niunamenos as turning points in the struggle against patriarchy?

NONHLE: I think women have led this movement, because they will be most affected if mining takes place. They won't work there, they will need to feed their children, to find clean water – they know what the consequences of mining will look like. Women are also not afraid to stand up; they stick to their beliefs and are not easily bought off. In the anti-apartheid struggle, it was women who led the struggles against the 'pass laws' and they are now leading the struggle against this mine. It's not easy having to think about children, cook, care for the family at the same time as struggling. But women can do that.

MEDHA: We know from our movements that women are a huge force and therefore social transformation is not possible without women. Women have faith in life, because they give life, because they share values and knowledge with the next generation, are closely connected to nature, and more conscious of our human connections. They undertake most of the labour in this country, whether in the countryside or slums. We also know from experience that without women, our movements wouldn't sustain long-term actions. Whenever we have challenged the World Bank, government, police and deploy non-violent militant actions, women have played the key role. In the 2017 protests against the dam, women showed massive strength against police.

Women therefore must be at the forefront of challenging established power. We also must put women's perspectives at the forefront. A feminist vision is key to an alternative view of development. It emphasizes love and compassion, humanity rather than alienation. It has a different relationship to resources too as most of women's caring actions (feeding children, supporting life) are not based on cash. You can see these values expressed in how we refer to rivers and land as mothers, and therefore resources that must be protected. By contrast, unsustainable and exploitative development is based on a system of patriarchal violence.

BERTHA: Patriarchal power is maybe the system of domination most difficult to break, and that's why it's so important to build movements dedicated to the principles of gender equity. I have the hope that the clarity with which this issue is coming to light all over the world can be reflected in our own movements and society. But in Honduras there are high levels of violence against women's bodies, with increasingly brutal state violence against the movements and often against women leaders.

I think the assassination of Berta and other women from the movement reflects an inability to accept the leadership of women who dare to denounce the owners of dams, banks and corporations. It's hard to know whether this situation is going to improve in Honduras, because we're very far from building a system of justice and equality for women, but we must continue to be clear about our path and our conviction to defend life and put a stop to violence.

CONCLUDING WORDS

THE PARTING WORDS GO TO BERTHA:

I think all of us are involved in struggles that seek to make our society – and ourselves – more human. There are no set formulas for counter-power because we are all different, but we share the unity of moving forward together, in a consistent and interconnected way, for humanity. We can pass on what we have learned to each other, knowing we stand together in a struggle for life, and that our struggles can bring us closer and make us stronger.

These interviews have been edited for length. The full interviews can be read on www.tni.org



'BENEATH THE PAVEMENTS, THE BEACH' – OR THE WHIRLPOOL?

*Lessons of 1968 for
building counter-power today*

Hilary Wainwright

1968 was a historic year, but not in the sense of a unique moment in a linear march of history. The experiences of that year – and significantly, the years that preceded and followed – shaped a generation but produced ways of thinking that, in retrospect, have turned out to be both ambivalent and complex.

They shaped both Richard Branson – capitalist adventurer and self-publicist – and Tariq Ali – cultural and political rebel of notable flair and self-confidence. The international rebellions of these years laid the conditions for the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s, politicized grassroots workers’ organizations and converged ‘single issue’ campaigns to address systemic issues – such as military power, capitalism, imperialism and the nature of the state. But it also prepared the way for a renewal for capitalism – creating a new spirit of capitalism as flexible, innovative, decentralized and unregulated.

In this essay, I take a critical account of these ambiguities and their implications for different directions for a contested transition beyond the post-war settlement, while focusing on the specific possible legacies for a democratic, egalitarian dynamic of change. This must build on but go beyond social-democratic capitalism.

BEYOND A CHANGE OF PERSONNEL TO A POTENTIAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The political legacies of generational changes usually take the form of a circulation of elites a renewal of the personnel, the young coming to the rescue of the exhausted old. But once in a while, when it is the institutions that are exhausted or have become dysfunctional for the majority of the population, generational change can produce competing cultures – sometimes leading to competing strategies – for modernization of an institutional or even a whole political and economic system. These are circumstances in which the old institutions have lost credibility with a whole generation, who draw, in different ways, on the cultural innovations of the era to fashion their own alternatives.

By the late 1960s, the institutions of US-dominated but nation-state-based finance was beginning to crack. In workplaces across Europe, employers faced increasingly uncontainable pressures due to policies of full

employment and with them enhanced bargaining power and a collective, self-confident workforce that was already restless with the Fordist deal of total obedience in exchange for high wages. This began to affect profits and consequently to lead employers to build up political pressure for wage restraint and laws to curb the power of organized labour. In the UK, it was a Labour government that tried to implement these policies in 1967, in the face of strong resistance. At the same time the expansion of higher education had led to growing demands for expanded services, more diversity and greater power for students and teachers.

The demand for increased wages or investment clashed directly with the government imperatives to curb public spending, beyond the military.

But these movements challenged not just constraints on public spending or the levels of profit, but went much deeper too. The women's liberation movement, for example, which emerged in 1969 and the early 1970s, upset fundamental social relations, challenging important cultural and material pillars of the established order. Notably, the women's liberation movement upset the idealized framework of the nuclear family, dominated by the male breadwinner and serviced by the dependent woman, bringing up children in the isolation of her home.

This women's movement did not come from nowhere or from some essential moral female force. Feminist historian, Sheila Rowbotham, is very clear that, 'many of the ideas and underlying assumptions which were taken for granted in the early days of Women's Liberation derived from the left movements and culture of the time'. She continues, more specifically, that 'while we knew feminists might have wanted to distance ourselves from the r-r-revolutionary bombast which wafted around 1968, nevertheless we carried bits of that extraordinary year with us including its heady utopianism'¹.

It was its sense of possibility, determination and confidence that was the source of the distinctive, palpable, embodied and inextinguishable energy of '68

It was its sense of possibility, and the strength of a shared determination and confidence to realize these aspirations that was the source of the distinctive, palpable, embodied and inextinguishable energy of '68 – summed up in the famous graffiti on the walls of Paris and later on posters: 'beneath the pavements, the beach' and 'Be realistic: demand the impossible'.

This sense of possibility infused many movements. Sheila Rowbotham describes how 'we accommodated without difficulty to the emphasis on human agency characteristic of the sixties libertarian left and duly transported it into the Women's Liberation groups which began to form during 1969'.²

On the international front, movements for anti-colonial liberation and, as in Mexico, against authoritarian governments, spread like wildfire, making the legitimacy of old and not-so-old imperial and dictatorial orders to distinctly shaky. It inspired the would-be citizens of Czechoslovakia and Poland to revolt, further defining the revolts of 1968 as opening the search for a truly democratic alternative to both Soviet bureaucracy and capitalism. This meant politically *and* economically democratic; not just 'the command economy plus parliament', as former Labour Minister Jack Straw once described his vision of socialism in 1968.

This combination of revolt from below and crises in the institutions of domination produced competing visions and different strategies for modernization. On the one hand, there were the rebellions of a self-confident youth who rejected the paternalism of the welfare state and state-defined socialism. They advocated and initiated directly participatory alternatives, including university courses, squats, communes and cooperative housing, centres for battered women, women-centred health care in the National Health Service (NHS) (well-woman clinics), community-controlled nurseries and a variety of forms of alternative media. These alternatives were more in practice than in theory – hence their unfinished, experimental character. At the risk of making it sound more systematic and complete than it in fact was, I would argue that in retrospect, these were the scattered seeds of what had the potential to become a *democracy-driven process of change* in, against, and beyond the post-war settlement.

On the other hand, 1968 also prompted an alternative strategy, led by political parties and governments, advocating from the mid-1970s for an explicitly '*market-led*' modernization. Margaret Thatcher and her entourage of free-market think-tanks had, for example, already begun their rise to power in the Conservative Party by the mid-70s following the defeat of Edward Heath and the growing power of the left in the Labour Party.

COMPETING VISIONS OF A TRANSITION

'Modernization' from the early 1960s, that is, change to overcome the evident limits of the post-war welfare state and Keynesian macro-economic management, is often discussed, particularly by academics and journalists close to New Labour and especially³ in relation to public institutions, as a matter of technical, neutral necessity. By the 1980s, its dominant form advocated for marketization and privatization of public institutions, understood as, almost by definition, inherently 'old', as if internally unreformable. In the hands of Margaret Thatcher, the vanguard politician of marketization, it also involved the release of 'the entrepreneurial spirit' – closely associated with individual freedom as *the* vital force for change.

The idea of market-led politics as the only way – indeed, almost a synonym for modernization – became the dominant orthodoxy. It came on the back of the defeat, marginalization and at times straightforward repression of an alternative, nascent democracy-driven process of change. This proposed renewal of institutions, not through profit-based incentives, but through the collaborative creativity of previously subordinate people – frontline public-sector workers, service users, manual workers, precarious presently isolated workers, ethnic minorities, single-parent families and so on.

We would replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity. As a social system we seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.

– Port Huron statement

Where market-led change meant privatization, democracy-driven change meant various forms of popular participation in public administration – here the key idea was participatory democracy – a central slogan in 1968 and clearly advocated for in, for example, the Port Huron statement of the US students' movement, the SDS – Students for a Democratic Society. Participation of frontline workers and service users – those with the practical knowledge to guide services to be efficient in terms of maximising public value rather than profit – would be essential to this process.

To understand why these alternative directions of systemic change emerged, we need to explore the features of 1968 – and the years building up to it – that contain these ambivalent possibilities.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF '68'S TRANSFORMATIVE LEGACY

The rebellions of '68 and the following decade were about a lot more than protest and exercising counter-power to the established order. For while counter-power implies an exercise of power within a given set of power relations – another way of describing militant bargaining power – the movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s challenged the very bases of dominant forms of power. They sort to transform and even eliminate power inequalities altogether.

Through their organized practice and their reflections on it, they overturned the fundamental assumptions of social democratic and liberal public policy. Specifically: first, understandings of knowledge (as primarily codified, scientific laws that can be centralized and through neutral experts become the basis of more or less benevolent state intervention and administration, based on the presumption to know people's needs and to deliver social provisions in a standardized hierarchical manner). The opening challenge came from students questioning their experiences of an increasingly standardized education. Angelo Quattrochi, an Italian activist journalist observing the events of Paris in May '68, describes how 'their minds are policed by discipline, patrolled by examinations. Their hearts frozen by authority. Their university mimes society, mimes the factory. And yet, they do not own and they do not belong'. He goes on to summarize their attempts to overthrow the disciplines of the university (some refused to take exams, for example), and to question what kinds of knowledge were considered valid. In the late 1960s higher education encouraged the expectation that opportunities would increase for everyone to live a fuller life.

The reality proved contradictory. And here women experienced further reality shocks beyond the limits of the Fordist job market. As Rowbotham observes: 'The shock of motherhood in weary isolation would dash many hopes, while the apparent sexual freedom enjoyed by women who belonged to the in-between strata of the educated middle class would turn out to be complicated by under-tows of double moral standards, fear and contempt'.

Women's refusal to accept their isolation and simultaneously of their shared subordination inspired a further challenge to the dominant mentalities of the time, frozen as they were in the ideology and institutions of the Cold War. I'm thinking here of the dominant understandings of the individual, as atomized and separated from each other, and the collective as above the individual, solid and thing-like, as if social relations between individuals were of no significance. This approach contributed to a way of thinking about society shaped by both a reaction to the bureaucratic collectivism of Labour and the Soviet Union, and at the same time a revulsion at the hyped-up individualism of the consumer boom. Its implicit 'relational' view of society assumed relatively enduring but transformable relations between individuals, rather than either as the sum of individual action (the dogmatic individualism of free-market capitalism) or as supra-individual wholes (the bureaucratic collectivism of actually existing socialism).

The final challenge was to the definitions of universal rights as based on the male white paradigm and presumed to be universal. Here a decisive influence were movements like the Civil Rights – and later the Black Power movements – in the USA, which contributed to a new political language which defied cultural subordination. This was symbolized by the raised black-gloved fists of gold and bronze medallists Tommy Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics, as they stood on the podium to face the flag through the US national anthem. In his autobiography, *Silent Gesture*, Smith stated that the gesture was not a 'Black power' but a 'human rights salute'. Certainly, that was how it was interpreted by oppressed and subordinated people across the world.

In general, on the 'new' left influenced by the social movements, these foundations underpinned a move away from the market–state binaries of the Cold War, in which the central strategic goal was to 'seize' state power or 'win' governmental power and take the reins of state to drive towards changing society, towards direct involvement in creating exemplary and feasible alternatives in civil society and the civil economy, facilitated or protected by a new kind of state. (Or, in terms that I explain in the 2016 *State of Power* book <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/democracy-is-dead-long-live-democracies>, a move from strategies based on 'power as domination' to those based on building power as transformative capacity for which power as domination can be a resource.)

This thinking, taking diverse forms according to specific historical contexts, influenced a rich and varied practice throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, mixed in its outcome, but nonetheless important in its success and failure. Sometimes it involved a government dimension, combined with a partial vision of transforming the state, for example, the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone in the 1980s, briefly Allende's Chile in the late 1970s and the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) throughout the 1980s. This sometimes took the form of a double track of building popular power at the same time as campaigning for electoral victory, but lacking a vision of transforming the state on the basis of popular power. Here the PT would be a good example with its stress on participatory democracy – a key theme of the student movement in '68 that influenced PT activists, many of whom were in exile in Paris in the late 1960s and 1970s. Also important was the PT's understanding and valuing of the capacities of oppressed (articulated famously by PT member, Paulo Freire).

It also took the form of civil society organizations creating alternatives that exemplify participatory ways of organizing public services and campaign for privately owned workplaces to produce for social use, on the basis of social need and democratic control. Across Europe throughout the 1970s, radical campaigns developed around housing, education, health, the needs of women and of people with disabilities that went way beyond protest and even counter-power but contributed to the creation of a counter-hegemony by showing that an alternative is possible and inspiring the confidence to work for it to be politically supported. (See the essay on page 49 by Luciana Castellina for insights into the PCI and wider Italian experience.)

Crucial to these practices were close and innovative alliances with the organized labour movement and workers more generally. These were inspired initially by the French worker–student alliances, and some were more symbolic than strategic. For example, at the University of Oxford, as students from the Sorbonne were joining Renault workers just outside Paris, we were going on our bikes and motor scooters, in our jumble-sale gaiety, to give out leaflets to car factory workers as they trudged to work in the dark at 6am. We were acting in solidarity with a political group whose members were being threatened with expulsion from the university for giving out leaflets to these same factory workers – who were facing pressures to increase productivity with no increase in wages.

In 1968, work and community came together when the wives of trawler men in Hull protested against the unsafe ships, which had resulted in the death of fishermen. At the time, such connections were rarely made, though 1968 was to open up new possibilities and also new platforms that enabled these grassroots initiatives to spread (the Hull women told their story to a packed gathering of the Institute for Workers' Control, itself a convergence of radical students, artists and militant shop stewards). As Rowbotham comments, 'This protest from women who had previously had no public voice was profoundly inspirational'.

Such experiences of the problems facing manual workers and the student radicalization this generated influenced more sustained and materially significant collaborations throughout the 1970s. Indeed, a frequent – though not by any means general – feature of the radical grassroots trade unionism of the period was the involvement of committed academics in helping to research employers' strategies and facilitate workers' development of alternatives. Moreover, specific movements, notably the women's movement and the more radical parts of the environmental movement, made organizing with appropriate groups of workers a priority. For example, students at Oxford supported the organization of college cleaners, following the example of feminists who played a sustained role during the early 1970s in the difficult night-to-night work of organizing night-shift cleaners in the offices of the City of London. Radical environmentalists worked closely with engineers and designers for the military company, Lucas Aerospace, on an inspiring trade union-led campaign to convert military production to socially useful products, including energy preservation and energy-friendly transport. These relationships had an autonomous political dynamic.

THE YEARS OF DEFEAT

As relationships with working-class struggles was so important to 1968 movements – either in practice or in aspiration – the impact of the class war waged by neoliberal governments against both trade unions and the left-leaning governments, national and local, was devastating. Without the material, class alliances and base that these movements built up in the 1970s, the cultural break made by the rebellions of 1968 increasingly facilitated a shift towards the individualism of the market.

In the absence of these material sources of what I call 'transformative power', new understandings of knowledge could – and often did – underpin a turn to what has been called a 'post-modern' perspective which has tended to focus only on the cultural dimension of social movements as if, in its most extreme forms, an extra-discursive reality had no existence.

To give but one example, it could lead to an assumption that the treatment of women as sex objects was about culture alone – and therefore could be challenged without also resisting the economic super-exploitation

Post-modernists who consider the symbolic or discursive to constitute reality cannot express [the centrality of] social movements' purposeful collective effort aimed at transforming structures that exist independently of their activities.

and the social organization of reproduction through the nuclear family. A more materialist approach would explore the ways that these economic forms of oppression underpinned and enabled a contempt for women as human beings, without denying the importance of cultural representation – and its material consequences.) While it echoed and theorized the social

movements' concern with language in creating our social and cultural life rather than simply reflecting a reality 'out there' – those post-modernists who consider the symbolic or discursive to constitute reality cannot express what is central to social movements as political actors: their purposeful collective effort aimed at transforming structures that exist independently of their activities.

Post-modernism became much more influential with the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s. It proved attractive to a 1968 generation loyal to the culture of these movements but disillusioned with the frustrating efforts to bring about social change. It exercised its most significant influence, in France and in the UK, for example, where the early social movements had been strongest (in 1968 in France and early 1970s in the UK) and yet had suffered their severest defeat. For a short but decisive period, it weakened the social movement left in the face of the neoliberal onslaught. It did so by a misleading polarization between so-called 'new social movements' and working-class organization, just at a time when these collaborations needed all the support they could muster, to be capable of developing any kind of counter-hegemonic challenge to the influence of free-market politics that was becoming increasingly influential from the late 1970 – the overthrow of Allende and the victory of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1981.

TRANSFORMATION BLOCKED, THE MARKET UNLEASHED

A decisive factor in the appropriation of the spirit of '68 by the right and insufficiency of the cultural break it had made, has been the blunt – and sometimes plain hostile – responses of mainstream parties of the left (and, in some cases, even trade unions) to the radical movements of the period. This occurred across Europe – in France, Germany and Italy it was especially notable in the response of Communist Parties France and Italy, as well as social democracy.

In the UK it was exemplified by the Labour leadership's sustained hostility towards the radical left influenced by '68 – from the new politics of Tony Benn, who was explicitly responding to the new ideas of the late 1960s and trying to persuade the Labour Party to absorb these ideas into its political bloodstream (see his 1970s Fabian essay, *A New Politics; Socialist Renaissance*) through to an equally strong hostility to Ken Livingstone's GLC, which could be described as '68ers in office' in the early 1980s and simultaneously to the 1984–85 miners' strike, with its strong resonance among feminist, gay and black movements across the country, using the horizontal, non-hierarchical organizing principles associated with 'new social movements', in its campaigning for twinning arrangements between local communities, usually led by women and the various groups that made up the urban left. This hostility from the Labour Party was reinforced by the sometimes fierce repression by parties of the right and vicious attacks from the mainstream media. In general, this meant that these cultural breaks rarely found institutional expression, let alone drive institutional change.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF '68

Given this marginalization of the influence of 1968, it is in some ways surprising that like mountain streams, this radical thinking, vivid in its exemplary practice and with its powerful critique of fundamentally flawed institutions, bubbles to the surface, aided by memories, whenever these institutions hit crisis point again. In particular, I'm thinking here of the wave of rebellions known as the 'alter-globalization movement', challenging the institutions of the corporate and neoliberal-led world order in the late 1990s. In their forms of organization, their anti-authoritarian culture and their anti-corporate, pro-participatory democracy attitudes they echoed

the themes of 1968. And again, in the revolts of 2011, in the *Indignados* of Spain and the extraordinary surge of support for the reluctant leadership of Jeremy Corbyn in today's Labour Party, we see it again. This time there is an echo of some of the more strategic understandings generated in 1968: Bertie Russell, an activist-academic involved in radical urban politics, born in 1985, makes the point: In terms of a direct legacy of 1968, there's a sense of history that I ought to feel but it isn't necessarily there. But it remains an incredibly important reference point, not just for me but also for a lot of people I associate with. The story I tell myself – or some of us tell ourselves – is that this was a moving away from a workerist politics, organised around the site of liberation – or of struggle, or the place of opportunity for progressive politics – being defined by, on the one hand, the workplace, and, on the other hand, by the state.

Focusing on Corbyn, for example, there's been a break from the dominant, somewhat closed culture of the Labour Party's recent past, including the traditional electorally focused nature of Party discussions. An opening up to a participatory culture, redolent of 1968, is most evident in the wide-ranging discussions at the festivals of The World Transformed (theworldtransformed.org), which for the last two years have been organized parallel to but in close interaction with the Labour Party Conference, with delegates moving freely between the two. It is supported by Momentum, the movement organized to consolidate and extend support for Corbyn's leadership and a transformation of the Labour Party, but autonomous from it.

'There's now a space', says Bertie Russell, 'How do we fill it? What is the opportunity to fill this space? This is when, suddenly, 1968 becomes relevant again, how do we think about new forms of community, where we organise society differently? Or new ways of thinking about economy.' 68 showed us there is an option other than focusing on the trade union as the place where anticapitalist struggle has to happen; or the state will be the thing that delivers change for you. Both of those things are upset by the spirit of 1968.'

This raises the question of how this bubbling up of participatory, direct-action politics, with a sense of feasible utopia, was possible.

Of course, the disappearance and re-appearance of mountain streams is the subject of many a scientific, geological study. Similarly, the re-appearance of several features of the democratic, collaborative organizational culture

of '68 requires us to study how a culture of a new politics been kept alive and even renewed itself.

A DECENTRALIZED INFRASTRUCTURE SUSTAINING MEMORY AND CONTINUITY BENEATH THE RADAR

In one sense 1968 is not wholly unique. There have been moments in the past that, while they were generated by previous developments, define a generation and produce tectonic shifts. The defeat of the left at the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 would be one example and the consequent consolidation of Communist parties across most of Western Europe. 1945 would be another: in the UK, the people's defeat of Nazi Germany on the frontline and on the home front produced a determination to defeat the enemies of pre-war peacetime – unemployment and poverty. And this in turn led both to the election of Labour's modest Clem Attlee over heroic war leader Winston Churchill, and to laying the foundations of full (male) employment and levels of education and health care that shaped the self-confidence and optimism of the generation born as the war ended. The radicalization shaped by these earlier moments led to the growth of political parties which then acted as a collective memory of the moment and at least some of its ideas: in 1936, it was the Communist Parties, especially of Southern Europe, and in the UK in 1945 was the Labour Party. After 1968, with the exceptional experience of Norway, it was unusual for a party of the left social movements emerge.

In all moments of radicalization, people still keep alive their own particular beliefs in ways that go beyond formal institutions: sometimes simply through the strength of their conviction, through passing ideas on in their own families, through personal friendship networks and more or less organized friendship groups (for example, a group of Communist or ex-Communist Party members met in 1956 to try to understand what was going on in the world, especially the Communist world, and they've been meeting every month ever since until at least well into the life of the magazine that I co-founded in 1996, calling themselves the Anjou Club after the restaurant in which they first met, and inviting speakers from younger generations to help them keep up to date).

As the movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s faced dispersion and decline, relationships and informal networks, in the absence of

significant political parties that opened themselves to the political generation of '68, were of even greater importance, especially since the everyday working-class organizations (most significantly the unions but also tenants organisations) were so dramatically weakened as neoliberal ideas evolved into policies aimed at destroying all material evidence of collectivism, let alone socialism.

What was distinctive in this regard about the aftermath of '68 was that the culture of this moment of radicalization was one that valued and facilitated this recurring informal and personal process of building a shared memory and political consciousness. The result was consciously created initiatives for sharing ideas, cross-fertilizing across social groups and localities, communicating with a wider constituency and debating and clarifying ideas as well as creating means of cultural nourishment and mutual solidarity.

At least in the UK, throughout the 1970s most towns would have a local left bookshop; study, research and reading groups sprouted everywhere, in universities and independently; numerous radical theatre groups would tour

pubs and clubs across the land, bringing activists from different generations together; alternative publications would come and go, leaving newly skilled communicators who would then start up or support new initiatives; sometimes young activists would engage with

What was distinctive about the aftermath of '68 was that the culture of this moment of radicalization valued and facilitated building a shared memory.

older institutions, for example, the city-wide Trade Union Councils, and encourage them to make new links, with women's, campaigning tenants' and community groups.

Sometimes local institutions would coalesce to bring these various initiatives together in a way that strengthened all and did not undermine the autonomy of any of them. Tyneside Socialist Centre and Islington Socialist Centre were two examples that had, for a few years, relatively stable structures; but in many localities, a disparate left converged periodically both to debate and discuss, and to pool their strengths in the face of the cuts or the factory closures that gathered pace as Keynesian counter-cyclical spending gave way to monetarism, an 'acceptable level of unemployment', a cutting back of state spending and a 'managed process' of de-industrialization.

The distinctive character of the '68 movements' break from the centralized political models of the past in a sense meant that these movements were culturally prepared to make the most of these decentralized, plural means of achieving political continuity, reproducing a shared memory, learning lessons and interconnecting the parts.

The value the movements placed on practical knowledge, not against theoretical knowledge, but with its own distinct validity, tended to legitimize the idea of autonomous initiatives with their own viability; not dependent on the centre for their life blood. On the other hand, the break from the authority of 'expert' knowledge was not – unlike the Lutheran break from religious authority – in favour of the individual conscience, but rather of collaborative autonomy. Thus the favoured model was decentralized but coordinated, which enabled ideas to spread and be reproduced without a nationally organized party. Despite formal defeat then, a lot of initiative and capacity maintained itself beneath the conventional political radar. It was this that would revive itself and break through the radar when there was an opportunity for a collective effort to make a difference.

THE AMBIVALENT POTENTIAL OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY – AND ITS ROOTS IN THE COUNTER-CULTURE OF '68

This combination of decentralized initiative with networked coordination is exactly what describes the social relations enabled by the web, the internet and the new digital technologies generally. One could argue that the counter-culture of '68 prepared the way for the cyber-culture of the 21st century. There is, indeed, a direct historical continuity with the rebellions of the 1960s. The use of the internet and associated technologies as tools to fulfil a dream of harmonious living (with each other and with the environment) has roots, interestingly, in the Californian counter-culture of the late 1960s⁴.

The continuity is not so much with the ideologically committed New Left politics of that era as with the more diffuse desire to change the world found in the 'back to the land' commune movement known as the 'new communalism'. This was characterized by a holistic vision of personal and social development, and commitment to an ethic of sharing and spreading information and innovation – epitomized and propagated by the

Whole Earth Catalog associated with the supreme counter-cultural networker and entrepreneur, Stewart Brand.

Although some of the specific technologies go back to collaboration among technologists working on defence, the development of the internet was made possible by the miniaturization of computers that enabled individual users to have complete control over their machines. At the same time the *Whole Earth Catalog* and the cultural logic of the new communalism provided the computer scientists – most of whom emerged out of the intellectual and organizational legacy of Cold War research – with the uses, and therefore marketing frames, for the new personal machines. Stewart Brand worked hard to bring these two groups together, along with radical geeks and the alternative lifestyle scene, although he later moved towards Ecomodernism, which rather contradicts his earlier enthusiasm for grassroots creativity and collaboration.

The open, sharing ethic underlying the use of these new tools was immeasurably strengthened by the creation of the World Wide Web by Tim Berners-Lee and his colleagues at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (known by its French acronym, CERN). He was quite explicit about its importance as an open resource for a changing society – since when we have also seen the increasing monopolization led by digital giants such as Facebook and Google.

Whatever the exact history of the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, we can see that it exhibits the same ambivalence as all the streams flowing in some way from '68: driven by a culture that favoured both collaboration and autonomy and which could be a tool either for renewing the private market or for spreading the cooperative economy.

A TURNING POINT AS THE UNREGULATED MARKET FACES CRISIS

Ten years after the collapse of Lehmann Brothers in the USA (which precipitated the Great Recession) and in the year of the collapse of Carillion in the UK, and probably several other major private contractors (very often involved in private finance initiatives (PFIs), or the so-called public-private partnerships, PPPs), we seem to be at a point where what is at stake is not just corporate greed and irresponsible lending, not just

outsourcing, not just PFIs, but the whole doctrine of 'the market knows best', of the downsized state, of allowing only corporations to plan, of abandoning the boundary between the civil service and the private sector.

'We are at a turning point', comments Bertie Russell, continuing his reflections on 'whatever the hell the spirit of 1968 is', saying that 'the bit that got taken was individual freedom, and that got stitched into the narrative of neoliberal management, but the demand was for a collective freedom. Now that is the point we're at. The myth is busted, the individual freedom of neoliberalism is done – we have to re-stitch this story of us as collectives and us as communities. The idea is to self-define a collective freedom. It's taken a long time to recover'.

Bertie's right that Thatcher wrenched the desire for individual freedom from its context of social emancipation, and turned it into its emaciated, atomistic form to justify the unregulated market. But now, 50 years on since the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, one of the iconic direct actions of 1968, here is a new generation which is taking it back and acting on the belief of one of this movement's leaders, the late Mario Savo, who stressed individual responsibility in the context of a social movement for freedom. He said:

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

This, after all, is what young people were doing when they travelled to Seattle in 1998 to close down the World Trade Organization (WTO); when, in 2011, they occupied Zucotti Park, Wall Street, and St Paul's churchyard bordering the City of London; when in the same year they organized alternative communities of resistance in the squares of Spain and of Greece. And when they left home, abandoned jobs – if they had one – to volunteer for Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn and to build new political movements like Momentum in the UK and Our Revolution in the US that have already disrupted the political machines in both countries.

We are probably not on the verge of new 1968, whatever that would mean (though you never can tell!) and the energies of these movements have only a tangential connection to their predecessor. But it's always a source of strength to know that there have been precedents from which lessons can be learnt. It also helps to work with leaders who have themselves been part of those earlier movements and who therefore grasp the potential of the new generation and are responsive to its needs and aspirations.

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ENDNOTES

1. Rowbotham, Sheila '1968: Spring-board for Women's Liberation.' (In eds. Karen Dubinsky et al *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness. Between the Lines*, Toronto, 2009.)
2. Rowbotham, Sheila *Ibid*
3. See Leys (2003). *Colin Market Driven Politics*. Verso London
4. For a good history of this movement, including Stewart Brand and the *Whole Earth Catalog*, see Fred Turner (2006) *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.



THINKING FREEDOM:

***Achieving the impossible
collectively***

Interview with Michael Neocosmos

How would you define counter-power? How does it relate to emancipatory politics?

I don't think we should make power the starting point for thinking emancipation, particularly a binary notion of power. Whether you are talking about power or counter-power, you are starting from an idea of people's interests and identities rather than from an idea of universal emancipation. And you end up talking about states and how we relate to them rather than defining human universality in our own terms. Of course, power is always involved in the arenas and sites where politics takes place. I am concerned, however, that once we use categories of power, even if it is to think about a different way of addressing power, we end up using words and thinking through categories that are not helpful because they are categories through which the state itself thinks. Given that an egalitarian state is an oxymoron, a clear impossibility, any thought of universal equality must attempt to think outside hegemonic (i.e. state) categories.

Our starting point should be that people think, and that collective thought can begin to propose an emancipatory future. Drawing on the work of

Our starting point should be that people think, and that collective thought can begin to propose an emancipatory future.

Alain Badiou, Sylvain Lazarus, Jacques Rancière and others, if we start from the assumption that anyone can think, what do we mean? We can't simply assume that people's thoughts are simply a reflection of their social conditions. We can't assume, for example, that workers

are only interested in levels of pay or working conditions, or that women are only interested in families, households or gender relations. Yet this is the overwhelming focus of thinking from within the social sciences, whether on the left or the right. It is assumed that people do not think outside or beyond the limits structured by their social location or place.

What's more interesting is that in particular conditions of struggle, people sometimes collectively think beyond their interests, beyond place. They think and act a certain kind of equality, a certain kind of universality.

That is what emancipatory political thought consists of, this is where it is located – otherwise politics is just reacting to interests and identities. It's fundamental today that we think beyond identities, otherwise we will end up killing each other. Wars, particularly nuclear, ones are a distinct possibility today.

What does emancipatory politics look like?

I think that such a politics is always founded on some idea of universal humanity, of equality, of justice, of dignity – these are the requirements for human emancipation. People don't necessarily think in those terms, but they have the capacity to do so, and if we don't recognize this we won't even see it when it happens. We will not see it because we expect people's thinking to conform to our pre-existing theoretical categories. If it does not then we assume that people are simply wrong. We must stop thinking along these lines.

Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Durban-based shack-dwellers' movement, express this best when they say: 'A person is a person wherever they may come from'. They base their politics on this idea when they confront xenophobia in South Africa. Emancipatory thought amplifies what people have in common rather than what differentiates us. It embraces universal justice where everyone must be treated in the same way, treated with dignity, equality. This includes directly addressing the social hierarchies made possible by a social division of labour. There is no excuse for paying me – a university professor – that much more than street cleaner.

This is very different to state thinking – even though the western liberal state adheres to some idea of universal 'Man'. We all know that this idea of the universal is a false one because it applies only to certain people, while the majority of men, women, children and particularly those of darker skin are excluded, colonized and oppressed. Colonialism, with its attendant racism, exterminations and genocides, was founded on such a flawed universalism. This is now well known.

How is this emancipatory politics manifested?

It must be understood that the idea of universal humanity is rarely placed at the centre of politics. This happens only at particular times. It is not a universal feature of popular rebellions, but the fact remains that there is always a certain pressure towards equality when people themselves decide to rebel collectively against their systematic exclusion from a social system, which today is unfettered neoliberal capitalism. Whether we look at the African slaves' fight for freedom in 1791 in what is now Haiti, whether we look at national liberation struggles in many African countries from the 1950s onwards, or when we look at more recent struggles such as in South Africa in the 1980s and even more recently, we can observe elements of universalism, of ideas of universality combined to various extents with particularistic ideas which defend interests.

In Haiti, Toussaint Louverture – perhaps the most well-known figure associated with that revolution – did not fight in order to replace white racism by black domination. The idea was to fight against the ownership of people as such because this practice was inhuman. When Frantz Fanon talks about the emancipatory content of 'national consciousness' during the liberation struggle in Algeria in the 1950s, he is not talking nationalism, he is stressing the fact that there cannot be freedom for humanity if some peoples are colonized and subjugated by others. It is as simple as that. When people in South Africa fought for 'People's Power' in the 1980s, they did not exclude foreigners as is often the case today.

The idea of political exclusion is one which is foundational to capitalism, as Marx clearly noted. It is sometimes asserted that politics is concerned with identifying an enemy. Although this is clearly the case, politics also involves creating or forming a political community, a unity of the politically excluded, hence of necessity it must involve some idea of working together under conditions where all, without exception, are entitled to speak and think. As a result, it broaches the idea of universality. In any case, without achieving unity the enemy cannot be adequately confronted anyway!

What can we learn from Africa?

I would prefer to talk of Africans rather than of Africa as such. 'Africa' like 'Europe' is implicitly identified with its representatives, with power. Africans must obviously be considered as human beings like everyone else, capable of thought and, as Amilcar Cabral argued, people capable of making history. One of the most important revolutions of the 18th century, the Haitian revolution (which is effaced in the history books in favour of the American and French revolutions), was led by Africans (people born in Africa) and went further in its thinking of the human than the French revolution, because it recognized the universal idea that no-one should own anyone else as property. The French revolutionaries vacillated on this issue while the American 'founding fathers' were directly involved in slavery.

It is critical that we break out of the notion of seeing Africans as victims, rather than as agents, of history. During the colonial period, Africans such as Lumumba were definitely seen as agents of history, but by the late 1970s, they were more often seen as its victims. Africa was portrayed as a continent of famines, crises, poverty and underdevelopment in which non-government organizations (NGOs) and state interventions were needed as saviours. What could be more neo-colonial than this perspective?

It is critical that we break out of the notion of seeing Africans as victims, rather than as agents, of history.

You can see this reflected in South Africa in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While it was very important for reconciling opposing elites, it ended up turning those who had been fighting for freedom into victims and supplicants of the state. This view can also be seen on the left, where it is believed to be sufficient to account for continental problems as a consequence of Africa having been colonized. It ends up reinforcing a narrative that Africans are incapable of making history.

How is an emancipatory politics developed and by whom?

If we start from idea that everyone is capable of thought, we must listen to what people are saying when they organize collectively. We need to

hear what people are saying, how they are making decisions, what is happening, are some people being excluded, and so forth. People may not be using the language we use. They may not be using the language of class or ethnicity, for example, or even terms like neoliberalism. Here in South Africa, for example, the concept of neoliberalism is bandied about all over the place (as 'globalization' used to be in the 1990s), but for most people the main issue isn't necessarily the economy, it's rather their relationship with state and power (the police, local thugs, local politicians, chiefs, and so on).

If what people are saying is that they want our interests recognized the same as others, there may be no emancipatory content. If they are arguing, however, that they want their interests to be recognized because everyone has to be treated in the same manner, that all human beings must be treated the same, then they are saying something else. Those expressions are the possible seeds of alternative emancipatory thinking.

In popular politics, there is a distinction between ideas that reflect interests and social place (we want to be included, we want houses, jobs) and ideas of universality and humanity. Both emerge in combination in particular contexts of mass struggles and exist as a dialectic. You can see the contradictions, for example, in the Haitian revolution. It is clear that the reality of white oppression led rebels to kill whites, but it is also clear that Toussaint Louverture doesn't think simply as a black man but as a bearer of universal enlightenment thought and is happy to enlist Polish soldiers to fight against slaveholders and the French. Fanon also stressed the involvement of whites in the Algerian revolution. The struggle for freedom is never a narrow identitarian struggle. It may end up like that, of course, but then this means that the emancipatory content of the struggle has been lost and state identitarian politics have become dominant.

Can civil society and social movements develop emancipatory politics?

It's important to remember when the idea of civil society became widespread. It was in the 1980s, following on from popular democratization efforts in Poland and South Africa. It was based on a neoliberal idea of

politics which argued that civil society is the domain of freedom, where different interests can organize themselves. Civil society is treated as a domain of contestation between interests. I do not think that in itself it can be a source of emancipatory politics because interests cannot be (in themselves) a source of emancipation. Emancipatory politics have to distance themselves from the idea of interests and identities, as I have already stressed.

In the book,¹ I talk about 'civil society' and 'uncivil society', as well as 'traditional society', as domains of state politics. States in Africa rule in civil society by giving people the right to have rights. Put simply, in South Africa, for example, if police come to the door to search your house, they are supposed to have a court order. *In civil society, you have the right to privacy and to freedom from random arrest.* But the reality for most people is that the police kick the door down because those people, the poor, the majority of blacks, the unemployed, don't have the right to rights. They are not ruled within civil society but within uncivil society. In their communities, the police and the state more broadly can act against their rights with impunity. In the Global South, there is a distinction, as Partha Chatterjee has noted, between rights and entitlement. Rights are very much a *middle-class* phenomenon. So, civil society ends up being a middle-class domain where the state rules through the right to rights, while the majority are ruled by the state within a domain of uncivil society where the state rules frequently (but not always) through the deployment of violence. And in uncivil society, people respond with violence too. This is what leads to xenophobic violence, because violence is seen as a legitimate way of resolving political issues and problems. People ruled by neo-colonial violence react violently.

Therefore, if we talk about civil society, we are talking about the democratic states' view of what it considers democracy to be about, about state politics for the powerful, professionals and so on. The state only recognizes civil society organizations (CSOs), including social movements, if they are concerned with defending interests, not with defending universal humanity. For the state sees itself as possessing a monopoly of the idea of the universal. States cannot tolerate organizations which talk of universality because this challenges state monopoly. States will emphasize that trade unions represent workers, women's organizations represent women, and so on, in order to divide people and distract them from political systems of domination such as liberal capitalism.

Civil society is frequently seen as composed of NGOs, which are ostensibly concerned with empowering people, but are doing precisely the opposite. They are run by professionals who see themselves as speaking for, as representing, the disempowered. Interestingly, in South Africa during the 1980s, people had empowered themselves long before the arrival of NGOs without any help. After 1990, the NGOs no longer acted as supports to independently organized popular movements. They came with their own 'empowerment' agendas. Empowerment programmes are really disempowerment programmes.

Even social movements which are more universally embraced by the left can be problematic precisely because they are social, in other words they are seen as restricted to particular interests and identities. So, you have a movement of indigenous people, but are these organizations thinking beyond their identity/social interest? And if they are thinking

Social movements are here, but what's important is the extent to which they think of questions of universality and move in their thinking beyond ideas of identities, interests, parties and states.

more universally, then they are strictly speaking no longer a 'social' movement but instead may be in the process of becoming a mass or popular movement. If you remain at the level of thinking in terms of 'social' movements, then that usually leads to starting to think about the need for a political party to unite

this group of social movements. This is supposed to be a 'higher stage' but ends up depoliticizing movements in favour of their 'representatives' in political parties. The recent cases of Bolivia, Greece and Spain come particularly to mind. We need to think beyond that. These terms of course represent something real. Social movements are here, but what's important is the extent to which they think of questions of universality and move in their thinking beyond ideas of identities, interests, parties and states.

What about class?

Popularly organized classes, such as trade unions for workers, equally represent their own interests. What Marx argued made an egalitarian future possible was that through its own organization, the proletariat could represent the interests of all humanity, of the people as a whole.

The idea was that the working class was the agent of history and acted in the interests of the whole of humanity. Today we must think differently because there is no given social class which will deliver humanity from the barbarism and wars inherent in capitalism. Of course, people organize as classes, and are located in classes, but certainly don't always act as a class. It's an old argument in social science, that it takes a specific politics to bring workers together politically and to form them into a class. The bourgeoisie coheres politically around its control of the state, but the working people cannot do so for reasons already stated.

In truth, the working class worldwide has not had a political existence anywhere since the collapse of communist parties, which tried to create a working class as a political agent. Workers still exist but are very divided, and many people are not even working or only exist in precarious conditions, giving rise to the term 'precariat'. So, what unifies them? For Marx, unity was brought about by working in production together, and through discipline and learning the capacity for and power of collective action, organizing collectively. But if there is no place for working together, where is the political potential for a unified working class? Politics has to be created in and through practice. We can't assume that just because workers are being smashed, that they are going to rise up, appealing to a universal freedom from oppression.

You write in your book about your experiences in South Africa's movements guiding your thinking on this.

I come from and my thinking is firmly grounded within the Marxist tradition. I was involved in supporting the underground ANC struggle against apartheid. In the 1980s, South Africa experienced a mass popular movement that attempted to enable people to gain some control over their daily lives. During this period, roughly 1984 to 1986, politics was thought in a particular way. It wasn't party politics because all popular parties were banned; these movements were quite spontaneous and took over or attempted to transform many state functions in urban townships: transport, cleaning campaigns, schooling, popular justice, self-defence and so on. These should not be idealized, as violent excesses did take place, yet at the same time people acquired the capacity to control their lives collectively and open vigorous debates could take place free from state

control. Popular inventiveness was enabled and crime virtually banned from many townships. This was known as the movement for 'people's power' – the term originating in the Philippines and the struggles against the Marcos regime.

From 1987 onwards, however, the state locked up many militant activists and removed the leadership from any ability to organize. As a result, nationalist politics became gradually more coercive, less democratically based. The ANC had no organizational presence in the country to speak of although its prestige was enormous and its brand of nationalism was dominant. It was uniquely an organization in exile, hierarchically organized as a political party and thinking in militaristic terms. It engaged in various

After 1986, there was a distinct move away from bottom-up to top-down politics, from popular politics to state politics.

diplomatic initiatives and in organizing a largely ineffective guerrilla campaign. From the late 1980s various popular organizations began to regularly visit the ANC headquarters in the Zambian capital, Lusaka. Gradually, rather than

being self-empowered and self-organized under their own forms of decision-making, there was a shift to listening to instructions from the ANC in exile. In other words, there was a distinct move away from bottom-up to top-down politics, from popular politics to state politics. This came at the same time as the arrival of NGOs and foreign aid organizations that further encouraged this process. People started thinking politics in terms of power: how to fill posts, how to have majority support, how to dominate committees and eventually government.

Democratic decision-making processes had frequently used a system of delegates whereby people were delegated to represent organizations and then come back to report; this system was particularly common in trade unions. This system gradually fell by the wayside as 'report backs' were less frequently used and delegates were replaced by representatives. It amounted to a process of depoliticization, represented at its height by Nelson Mandela, who addressed protesters with words such as: 'Please be patient, give us time to act on your behalf'. This kind of politics had the effect of systematically demobilizing people, and led politicians to think they represented people, speaking on their behalf and replacing what the people were actually saying with their own ideas. As Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Durban shack-dwellers' movement, eventually learnt

to say, 'Don't speak for us. Speak with us'. This idea must be at the core of all relations between popular movements and those in power.

The process South Africa has gone through to where we are today has never been explained except as betrayal. That's a simple descriptive statement of what happened; it does not constitute an explanation.

In my work, I wanted to understand how we can construct and sustain a politics that is democratic, popular and which can appeal to everyone. The work of French theorists such as Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, for example, attempts to think politics in its own terms, not by reducing it to society, to the economy to the development of history or whatever. Through the use of their theoretical insights, and through my study of African movements, this led to the ideas in the book, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*.

Tell us about some of the emancipatory struggles that inspired you and from which we can learn.

Well, one I have mentioned is Abahlali baseMjondolo. This movement emerged in 2005 as an organization of shack-dwellers to defend poor people against evictions in Durban, fighting the municipal government and local state to remain on what turns out to be prime real-estate land. They had aspects of the law on their side – that prevented them from being forcibly removed – and they used that effectively. But they also moved from fighting for access to housing to getting involved in struggles against xenophobia, organizing solidarity with refugees from the Congo, for example. Perhaps because they are a multicultural community, they understand problems of ethnic/identity politics, which in South Africa, is frequently represented by institutions such as the chieftaincy that are also established in urban and peri-urban areas. Having to struggle against the ethnic politics of division, they have developed their own unique ideas of universality based on popular African traditions.

They are also unique in how they are structured. They don't have branches in the typical sense that respond to a central organization. They have been so far able to withstand the most severe forms of repression, including assassination and murder. Each branch acts independently and adheres

to Abahlali's general positions such as political independence, fighting to defend land occupations, communal access to resources and so on. Most branches are in the Durban area but they have also begun to have branches in different parts of the country. The central organization, as far as it exists, is there to support struggles of each branch. They have a very sophisticated website that reflects this. Apart from a short hiatus, in 2012, they have consistently argued that political parties do not represent the interests of the poor, using them only as voting fodder. They have strongly maintained their independence from academics, NGOs and civil society more generally. They have been reasonably successful in maintaining their independence and now have around 30,000 members.

Interestingly, I have been struck by how closely the statement by Abahlali against xenophobic violence in South Africa resembles prior African historical formulations of universal humanity during periods of struggle within completely different contexts.

The idea that 'every person is a person' or 'every life is a life' expresses in simple terms the universality of humanity and can be drawn upon during emancipatory struggles

For example, as early as 1222, the Mandinka Hunters' guild from that part of Africa known as the Manden (basically covering parts of today's Guinea, Mali and Senegal) affirmed that 'Every human life is a life'. This statement was initially

developed in response to the instituting of slavery in the country. It was followed by the statement that 'the essence of slavery is today extinguished from [...] one border to the other of the Manden'. In other words, during the same period as English barons adopted the 'Magna Carta' to restrain the powers of King John, Africans were making statements against slavery which emphasized the universality of the human.

Moreover, during the struggle against slavery in Saint Domingue – in other words from 1791 to 1804 and beyond – the African slaves who rebelled against the French and defeated British, Spanish as well as French armies, developed a famous saying which went (in Creole) *Tout moun se moun men si pas memn moun* meaning 'every person is a person even though they are not the same person'. The idea that 'every person is a person' or 'every life is a life' expresses in simple terms the universality of humanity and can be drawn upon during emancipatory struggles. This specific idea of the universal is a unique contribution of African peoples to humanity.

How today do you express the universal in structures other than the state?

The real question of politics is how you sustain the egalitarian content of mass movements beyond their historical limitations. What I mean here is that all emancipatory political subjectivities are limited in time; they are 'sequential' – they arise and then they fade away, usually reverting to state identitarian politics. This happens because all emancipatory politics combine, in a dialectic, features of the defence of interests and identities (state thinking) with the politics of universal humanity (emancipatory thinking). That dialectic is always unstable and therefore is limited in time, its 'sequence'. In order to extend the sequence, the dialectic itself must be extended. This is not at all easy. An emancipatory politics regularly reaches a point where it finds it difficult to address the political questions it wishes to address, without sacrificing ideas of universality, so most typically the dialectic of thought disappears and politics become state subjectivities. Most typically this occurs as a result of a process of representation; the people no longer speak for themselves through delegates but alienate their will (as Rousseau put it) to representatives who speak for them. This is what happened in South Africa; it's also what happened in Tahrir square in Cairo. Rojava, in the Kurdish region of Syria – where people are seeking to establish a self-governed territory based on principles of democratic socialism, gender equality and ecological sustainability – might show a different way of doing things, but it is having to do so under conditions of military siege.

The point is that all thought is limited and limiting because it operates through specific categories and concepts. If we continue to think in old categories to address new questions we will not be able to progress to overcome capitalism or even to sustain life. That is a lesson of history.

People in their own circumstances have to develop their own thinking about this question, but what is central is to be able to listen to what people say when they struggle collectively, when they become agents of their own history. We know, for example, that political organization is crucially important, but it doesn't have to take the shape of a party, nor does it have to be directed at taking state power. It should be clear

that we cannot achieve a different world based on what people have in common (call it whatever you will – it used to be called ‘communism’) via the control of state power. What is critical is that the dialectic of people thinking politics has to be sustained, it can’t be collapsed into questions of representation. An organization outside the state has to be maintained, one which refuses to enter the state and play its representational game, while it is able to express politically and to coordinate movements politically. I believe that the United Democratic Front (UDF) in South Africa between 1984 and 1986 was such an organization from which we can learn, and my book talks about this experience at some length. The UDF provided a political ‘umbrella’ for a multitude of popular movements that it guided,

organized and united politically, thereby ensuring that they operated in unison. At the same time, it did not wish to achieve state power for itself.

An organization outside the state has to be maintained, one which refuses to enter the state and play its representational game, while it is able to express politically and to coordinate movements politically

In terms of relationships with the state, one has to ask what kind of state we want. I am in agreement with Raquel Gutiérrez, who has noted that the

Bolivian state under Morales found it difficult if not impossible to be a ‘state of social movements’. A ‘socialist state’ has to be a state which is also not a state. This was something Marx understood a long time ago. The state has to ‘wither away’ he said (although the formulation is very problematic), there has to be a way that power develops from popular initiatives and creativity, that doesn’t monopolize all politics to itself. The difficulty is that while states are not transformed, popular organizations have to find a way to function independently of the state and not be controlled by state interests. This is what I have tried to suggest in my book.

What would be your message to those involved in struggles for social and environmental justice. How can we think freedom?

There is no formula and I wouldn't wish to prescribe one. Whatever political attitude one develops towards the state depends entirely on specific conjunctural circumstances. What is imperative is for intellectuals and activists not to substitute themselves for the struggling people. Leadership concerns (among other things) guidance, not control or representation. Freedom is that dialectical process where we all overcome our limitations and restrictions and we realize collectively that we are able to achieve what we previously thought to be impossible.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

1. Neocosmos, Michael (2016) *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Toward a Theory of Emancipatory Politics*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.



FROM PROTEST MOVEMENTS TO TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

Luciana Castellina

Movements are important because they move. Political parties, like other so-called 'intermediate' bodies (for example, trade unions and even more so the institutions that, taken as a whole, constitute the democratic political context) tend to become sclerotic if not completely immobile pachyderms, weighed down by their organizational obesity. This is why every historical passage is marked by an insurgent movement, and why movements appeal to those who want the world to change and not remain locked in the present.

Movements move because they have the antennae to pick up on the social mood, a tool that structured organizations do not, precisely because these structures tend to separate them from the people. Fifty years ago, a man as commanding and powerful as Mao Tse Tung, head of the vast Chinese communist party, called on the movement to bring about a drastic correction in the very party of which he was indisputably president: being unable himself to halt the growing bureaucratization of power, he launched the famous slogan 'bombard the headquarters'. It is no coincidence that outside China this call was taken up by social movements around the world which were at the time in foment across factories and universities. This was not just because they shared the shape and content of the cultural revolution in China, about which they knew little or nothing, but because they interpreted the slogan as the need to destroy the paralyzing bureaucracies in their own political parties. It was '68 and so the 'M' of Mao became the third in the trio of Marx and Marcuse on the placards carried in street demonstrations. And that date entered history.

Here, I have a few comments to make about 'movementism' – seeing movements as sacred cows, the only valid political agents – which often becomes an excuse for laziness. Because if the aim is truly to change the world, it is not enough to comprehend emerging needs, call for these to be met, go out on street protests against those who want to thwart people's aspirations. This is not to deny their validity, but to call for a more realistic and less triumphalist analysis, in order to identify their shortcomings.

A NEW WAVE OF GLOBAL MOVEMENTS

Straddling the dawn of the new millennium a new wave of global movements saw that in revolutionizing the world the real new 'Winter Palaces' to storm

were the institutions at the helm of globalization, namely the World Trade Organization (WTO), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the G-7 and G-8, – until then largely invisible to political parties, the media and parliaments, and therefore to public opinion.

The first institution they had the foresight to storm as from the 1990s was then then little-known OECD, which had proposed the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (the infamous MAI). The protests that were unleashed – the first of a truly international character – were described as ‘the first online guerrilla war’. In fact, it was the first experience of meeting up via the internet, and of achieving at least a provisional victory, in that the MAI ended up being shipwrecked for the time being. And this same approach was used in successive attempts to reach multilateral accords, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), with which we are still grappling.

Nevertheless, while the huge *no-global* mobilizations – in Seattle against the WTO in 1999, in Genova against the G8 in 2001 and so forth until the most recent events in Hamburg last July – did not succeed in disrupting the power of their adversaries, these mobilizations did have a healthy political effect: they exposed to the world where the true sanctuaries of power lay.

Even the smaller, more local – and more numerous – movements against environmental destruction have played an important role in raising and developing awareness of the environmental risks we now face, another issue that is, if not ignored, certainly largely marginalized by political parties.

That said, while it is important, simply denouncing is not enough to change things. And the lack of risk-taking eventually becomes a weakness in these very same movements which, discouraged by their helplessness, see their numbers drop and become increasingly fractured.

This is why I think it is necessary to address this issue with less triumphalism and to examine the causes of their inadequacy in order to address them.

The mobilizations of Seattle and Genoa did have a healthy political effect: they exposed to the world where the true sanctuaries of power lay, revealing the new real Winter Palaces

Here are a few considerations:

1. All left-wing parties were born – and this was their initial strength – from the womb of the labour movement. It could be said that every ‘real’ party, legitimized by a history that bears witness to the capacity of real social representation, is born from a movement. Only ‘fake’ parties emerge from vertical decisions, which are therefore void of any historical and social roots. Unfortunately, in recent times, many of the latter parties have emerged but, naturally enough, did not last.

We must also bear in mind, however, that social representation today is far less linear than in the past – and thus, in many ways, more difficult. First of all, on the left, there is no longer a ‘good old’ working class; a community that is geographically concentrated, socially homogeneous and shares the same economic and cultural conditions. Nowadays, labour (the market) has changed profoundly and we are now in an arena that is still exploited by capital, but is crushed by fragmentation and the spread of deceptively autonomous work, usually concealing a lack of clear contracts. The most symbolic case is of course Uber, which has itself led to the ‘Uberization’ of a significant part of the labour market – think of the ‘couriers’ and other delivery professionals, for example. The workers are isolated and crushed, making it increasingly difficult to apply the same collective agreements unions were once able to negotiate.

2. To the conflict between capital and labour have been added new intersecting contradictions, which have only gained general awareness in recent decades. Here, I wish to highlight the gender and ecology contradictions, although these are by no means the only ones: increased mobility has heightened the racial, ethnic and religious contradictions that globalization has forced us to live together. Before these were ‘foreign’, now we are face to face with them at the supermarket.

All this means that, unlike how it used to be in the past, the social agent of change is far less homogeneous and increasingly unable to be the immediate subject of necessary transformation that Marxism and all its variants attributed to the working class. Capitalist development does not unify but differentiates and dismantles different subjects.

I would also take issue with what Negri and Hardt affirm in their popular book, *Multitude*,¹ regarding *'general intellect'*, whereby the diffusion of work with a very high intellectual content which, in producing social relations rather than material goods, would almost naturally lead to the emancipation of labour. The spread of intellectual work does not *in itself* have a progressive function, however, because it simultaneously produces depoliticization: its contents are 'cleansed' of their connections with politics, shaped by the dominant hegemony and thus condemned to subordination.

So, the *'Aufhebung'* (sublation) defined by Marx as the social engine of change in the here and now, is less and less spontaneously created. Today, this change can only be achieved by an anti-capitalist bloc that could unite what is currently divided. In turn, this rebuilding can only take place as a high-level project in which the various alternative subjects can join together and overcome their immediate conditions. It is no coincidence that while the exploited are the 99% and the exploiters the 1%, as we like to repeat, this overwhelming majority can and will never win: united in protest, it falls apart when it has to become proactive.

A movement is not enough. There is a need for the mediation of an organized subjectivity; able to overcome the particularities, to rebuild the connective tissue that binds society and politics.

Because a movement is not enough, there is a need for the mediation of an organized subjectivity; able to overcome the particularities, to rebuild the connective tissue that binds society and politics. An alternative subjectivity can exist only with free human beings, and we can only be free if we are aware and therefore released from the social determinants produced by the specific context that gives rise to them. This is precisely why today more than ever we need a party – by which I mean an organism that can concentrate theory, experience and discipline as well as strategic vision.

3. The richness of diversity must certainly be safeguarded, and it was undoubtedly right to challenge the arrogant claim of the dominant culture to be *'universal'*, denying status to all the others. I think, however, that the 'Rainbow' image to which movements often resort

is at risk of being derailed. I therefore believe in the need for a critical revisiting of a particular interpretation of UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity. Cultures are not seeds or fauna that must be preserved in immutable diversity. Cultures lose their anthropological purpose if they do not change and if they do not interact with one another; if they do not reject the confines of a small garden in which to cultivate their own diversity for the purpose of self-consumption; if they do not become – as they should – active elements in a dialogue that should aspire to build a common universal, both replacing the vision unilaterally imposed by the West as well as overcoming the narrowness of their own respective views.

In this sense, we can understand that the immediacy which characterizes movements must be superseded by a subjective effort to avoid its subjugation and strive against the perpetuation of cultural ghettos. To construct a real universality implies a long and difficult dialogue-based approach and achieving the conditions that would allow all cultures to truly participate in the process. (By way of illustration, 85% of the information we consume comes from Western sources.)

We need to understand what we mean by political party, not only because of the moral and cultural impoverishment of the parties we have inherited makes this difficult to discern. The mistrust and rejection of existing parties is now rampant as they are seen as mere instruments with which to win power. And yet without parties – that is, organisms capable of spurring individual action, of consolidating a collective will around a global project, of opening a channel of communication between society and institutions – democracy is reduced to very little. So, we can understand the growing disenchantment. To vote every five years or so simply to say 'I like it' or 'I don't like it' has nothing to do with democracy; the executive branch of government now faces a very dangerous crisis as it is increasingly detached from its social fabric and purpose.

Democracy cannot be understood only in terms of individual rights and guarantees either, almost as if it were a sort of compensation – I am referring here to the example to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, now incorporated in the EU's Treaty of Lisbon, which weakened one of the most important collective rights: the power to contribute to political debate.

DEMOCRACY AND MASS ACTION

By party I refer to Gramsci's conception of it: not a vanguard party separated from society and whose consciousness comes from outside, but a party as a vector for mass action, from people who are fully aware (as opposed to populism, which seeks to render it passive, enticing it to defer to a leader). A party as a 'collective intellectual' would thus bridge as far as possible the gap between its leaders and its members, and also reduce the separation between the different roles of the leadership and the various functions of the militant body; a party that would therefore be able to rebuild the connective tissue that binds society and politics.

Gramsci clearly saw the risks of self-referential politics, be it of parties, of governments, or of any potential future government. This is all the more evident when we observe the immense arbitrariness in states where the market has been eliminated or seriously weakened. Hence, Gramsci took Lenin's 'libertarian' intuition of 'State and Revolution', in which the Bolshevik leader spoke of the 'extinction of the state', whereby the management functions historically expropriated by the state bureaucracy are re-appropriated by society. And in this regard, he pointed to the role of the Soviets, not the 'October' insurrectional ones, but the organisms of direct democracy that were supposed to guarantee social self-management. A hypothesis completely abandoned – as we know – by Soviet power after the hard years of the civil war, or rather imperialist aggression, and the dramatic regression it induced.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci notes the need for the *soviets* – Councils – as tools capable of engaging in the essential dialectic to constrain arbitrary government actions, an efficient network that allows forms of direct democracy to interweave with those of delegated democracy. This hypothesis presupposes a shift from the statist conception and its obsession with winning central power – which are typical of both the social-democrat and communist traditions – both of which tend to emphasize the role of the state by conquering it either through parliamentary channels in the former or through insurrection in the latter. This obsession has led to modelling the very structure of these parties on the centrality of state

Gramsci notes need for network of councils that constrain arbitrary government actions that allows forms of direct democracy to interweave with those of delegated democracy.

power (almost exclusively electoral commitments and promises to do this or that ‘when the party gets into government’). They thus prioritized institutions and ignored society whose conquest is decisive, at least if the revolution is to aim for less catastrophic results than those History has to offer.

Of course, to go beyond a statist culture does not mean agreeing with anti-statism, which is unfortunately the failing of many movements. The control of the central political power still remains necessary, especially in an advanced capitalist society – because the transformation necessary to create an alternative society (in which work is freed from alienation and the market is no longer the instrument that defines our lives) needs political power. It was considerably easier for the French Revolution to take place because the bourgeoisie had already developed social and economic relations that were no longer feudal but capitalist in nature, and lacked only political adjustment. Conditions that today appear impossible.

WINNING POWER: ESSENTIAL BUT NOT SUFFICIENT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

This is why it is important to free ourselves from the illusion preached by Holloway² that it is possible to ‘change the world without taking power’. When I say that the parties of the left must correct their statist culture I mean that winning central power must be viewed as an essential but not exclusive condition for the transition. It is only a moment within a

Winning central power must be viewed as an essential but not exclusive condition for the transition

social process and anyway requires a strong hegemony, the ability to build a relationship among the proletariat, past history, and legacies and to interpret an intricate historical context – all of

which are the conditions to build a common new meaning or vision. In short, political power does not dissolve as some on the fringes of movements have come to believe. Rather, it must be expropriated, which is possible only to the extent that organized forms of direct expression of the collective will are rebuilt.

What Gramsci sought to do with writing from his prison cell in the 1930s, and what Togliatti – the Italian Communist Party’s (PCI) Secretary – tried to outline for Italy’s communist culture in the aftermath of WWII – quite

different from that of all the other communist parties of the West – was precisely what we call the ‘Gramsci Genome’. Indeed, the PCI achieved great strength because it was inside the institutions while also being – in particular – a decisive agent in stimulating social conflicts thanks to being rooted in society. And indeed, in Italy, everything we have gained in terms of rights has been won by opposition forces, achievements that were then ratified thanks to the new balance of power at an institutional level.

This political heritage disintegrated in the 1970s and 1980s up to the PCI’s own dissolution. It would take too long to explain how we arrived at this point. Suffice to say that what led the PCI to its sad demise was precisely its growing identification with the institutions and with the local powers it managed in a large part of the country despite being – thanks to the unspoken iron rule of the Cold War – excluded from the national government. It is this progressive disengagement with society that left the PCI deaf to the movement of 1968 – which unveiled new struggles and contestations of an advanced capitalist society, a movement that was no less anti-capitalist but in fact far more radically so – and therefore wasted an extraordinary opportunity.

This moment in Italian history, when for a few decades a party very much like the one Gramsci had hypothesized was thriving, we must remember how important it is to avoid the sirens of self-sufficiency. It is therefore crucial that the construction of forms of organized democracy in society be sufficiently robust and widespread to influence its actions. It should not be the mere expression of a disorganized civil society (which would then inevitably be marked by the values of the dominant power), nor only intermittent movements that are therefore unable to become self-managing social structures, torn from the competencies of state bureaucracy. These forms – the re-appropriation of state power – are steps towards the gradual extinction of state that Gramsci refers to in his reinterpretation of Lenin’s work.

BUILDING DEMOCRATIC POWER FROM BELOW

Today, this may seem like a strange utopian hypothesis but it isn’t if we look at the events that opened a path in that direction. In Italy in the early 1970s, when the working-class and student movements were particularly strong, and new political practices were invented, similar to the organisms

imagined by Gramsci: the *Consigli di Fabbrica*, the Factory Councils, were not just union structures bargaining for the workers' wages, they were fully political and therefore committed to renegotiating the organization of labour and production. They were made up of delegates, directly elected by all the workers and independent of the trade unions that were so often bureaucratized.

Thanks to the strength they gained in many factories, they were able to extend their activities beyond the workplace – which led to the creation of *Consigli di Zona*, Local Councils, in many areas. These councils sought to defend the rights and improve the quality of life of working people, not only determined by their conditions of work but also by the quality of housing, health services, education, the environment and so forth. Various organisms of collective control and innovative proposals regarding health structures, services, housing, schools and even police were then created (as result of which groups started to emerge such as the 'Democratic Police', 'Democratic Medicine', 'Democratic Psychiatry'...). These were more than movements because they went a step further: they were movements of struggle that then became instruments to exercise power from below; not intermittent but permanent forms of winning the spaces of power.

I would not define these forms as 'counter-powers' because I find the term ambiguous; it suggests a minority and subaltern resistance whereas the hypothesis here was to give life to alternative forms, to the prefiguration of a different way of managing society and of conceiving democracy.

However, this experiment is over as well, having fallen victim to the neoliberal counter-offensive that began in the 1980s. The struggle-based movements had indeed created the conditions for its creation but they failed to fully endorse the role of the Councils. To give a concrete example in the Italian context; the movement against the privatization of water was influential a few years ago, to the point of actually calling for – and winning – a referendum. But this movement simply evaporated and, with a few exceptions, was never able to form a 'Council', sufficiently territorially rooted to tackle all the issues and responsibilities that arose from the referendum victory (such as the question of who should invest in pipeline maintenance, the criteria for developing the water distribution network, etc.), eventually overturning the very substance of that important conquest.

SOCIALIZING COMMON GOODS: COOPERATIVES AND MARKETS

Fortunately, there is today a thriving discussion in movements on issues concerning common goods, that is to say on the idea of a socialization – rather than the state nationalization – of public assets. It is clear, however, that this idea needs more than the capacity to protest and instead requires its permanent structuring.

This is not all. Cooperatives, experiences with a long tradition in many European countries, originated from similar conditions: to create companies that manage services or produce assets owned by the very workers employed in those companies. In Italy, the League of Cooperatives has existed for well over a century, and this goes for the UK and other countries too. As Hilary Wainwright develops in her latest book, *A New Politics from the Left*,³ Tony Benn relaunched the idea of cooperatives in order to save factories otherwise condemned to closure. In Argentina, for example, it is precisely this model of the cooperative company that was adopted to manage the many factories in distress during the financial crisis, often with great success.

Nevertheless, one cannot but reflect on how most of these experiences of cooperative companies has developed: in Italy, the League of Cooperatives is now one of the most powerful business groups in the country, it manages supermarkets, insurance, construction and so forth, but its methods are no different from any other private enterprise. Its employees have no voice in their branches, no dividend and are instead exposed to the same – if not worse – conditions of exploitation of their labour. As long as this type of business has to compete in the market, they often end up accepting its imperatives, the most important one being the maximization of profit. The self-management model that characterized Yugoslav socialism, a good example at first, came into crisis when the initial phase of accumulation led to the next step in which once the proceeds had been distributed among the partners, it was necessary to decide how to invest the remaining profit. Here again, the self-managed businesses had to conform to the laws of the financial market, with all of its consequences.

This does not mean that we cannot or should not try, as long as we bear in mind that it is not as easy as it might appear and that it is not enough

to create a cooperative to satisfy what Raymond Williams defined in 1961 as ‘the rising determination that people should govern themselves’. On this issue, Hilary Wainwright writes that it is necessary to shift from ‘governmental power’ to ‘transformative power’, thus indicating the possibility to bring about change even before entering government by taking action within civil society. While I agree with this, I think it is also essential to remember that while it is possible to realize what Gramsci coined ‘alternative foreshadowings’, these are always instances of struggle, of ‘liberated zones’ in a territory that is still in the enemy’s hands in an ongoing war. There should therefore be no illusions that some form of organic growth of painless experiences that spreads and modifies reality as easily as a virus, is possible.

The complexity of the of the problems we face today serves to remind us of the urgency with which movements need to step up to the next level. Achieving a society that represents an alternative to the barbarism to which late capitalism is subjecting us is made more difficult not only because our adversaries have become more powerful, but also because the revolution required goes far deeper and needs to be more complete than what was hypothesized a century ago. It is no longer enough to call for a fairer redistribution of the same things. Rather, there is a need to produce different goods in a different way and consume different things, that is to live in a different way, according to different values and priorities than we had in the past. This is why we need to change the subjects themselves, the protagonists, of possible change.

If it is true that the new paradoxes of our age offer for the first time the objective bases for giving that critique of capitalism a practical impact, to the qualitative overthrow of the social structure and the values that regulate it, to which Marx had only been able allude due to historical immaturity, it is also true that to leverage them, we need to review our political practice and our strategy.

A CONVINCING ALTERNATIVE TO IRRATIONAL CONSUMPTION

If we want to propose a convincing alternative, we must be able to respond to the search for meaning that arises from the present unease. This is what we have not been able to do except in words. We have not

produced – as would be necessary – social practices that allow society to mobilize in forms that are more than just sporadic. And to do this even though people increasingly feel the irrationality of a system that relies on the choices of a market so short-sighted that it cannot see beyond its nose. A market that can identify individual and short-term profitability, rather than one that can support community and have a long-term impact. Suffice it to think about the environmental question, for which we need to act upstream and not downstream; this is why it is necessary to aim for deferred productivity and profitability, since it is only in the long term that the investments necessary for research, innovation and infrastructural transformation can be profitable. It is only in the long term that the investment that may have been profitable in the immediate future will reveal its failings: the loss and cost for which the victims – the community – will have to pay, not the company or person that created the damage.

Similarly, most of us realize the irrationality between the ever-increasing supply of individual consumer goods that largely exceed our basic needs, while the demand for essential collective consumption such as schools, health, care for the elderly and children, transport, territorial organization and so on, remain widely unmet. At the supermarket, a family can find every possible and useless (when not unhealthy) ‘snack’, yet if the grandfather falls ill it is a tragedy because there is no one to take care of him.

All of us (or almost all) are now convinced that the revolution does not consist in a single insurrectional act, but that the necessary rupture can be the fruit only of a long historical process. It is no longer a matter of occupation, as it was the case for the Winter Palace in Saint-Petersburg in October 1917, especially since the real power is no longer there, nor is it to be found in national or supra-national parliaments. Today, the decisions that really matter derive from private commercial or financial agreements in global markets rather than political deliberations. (Actually, in recent decades not some once-public services that have been privatized, but it is legislative power itself that has been privatized: Bayer’s recent purchase of Monsanto, for example, will have more consequences for our lives than will any decisions made by our own parliaments!) If this is the case,

We must equip ourselves for a long journey and conquer what Gramsci called the ‘casematte’, the forts that guard the power of advanced capitalist societies, far more than the state itself and its armies.

we must equip ourselves for a long journey and conquer what Gramsci called the '*casematte*', the forts that guard the power of advanced capitalist societies, far more than the state itself and its armies. This is why it is necessary for movements, and parties, which strive to achieve a different society, make a qualitative leap and not limit themselves to demonstrating at G7 summits or to winning elections.

Wolfgang Streeck's last book, *How Will Capitalism End?*,⁴ offers a dramatic hypothesis: there will be a phase when the capitalist system will eventually disintegrate and produce bloody and irrational conflicts and terrible exclusions, and yet no other system can prevail. Again, Gramsci comes to mind: 'the old is dead but the new has yet to be born'. If Streeck is right, and he may well be, it is fundamental to increasingly assume the responsibility of directly managing society and gaining self-organization skills. It is a very difficult project, but we should not say we did not try because it was too hard.

TALKING ABOUT POLITICS TOGETHER: LEARNING FROM OUR DIFFERENCES

I realize after writing these notes how difficult it is for us to talk about politics together. This because History has produced experiences, structures and cultures that differ greatly not only across continents but also between European nations. Nations that are all fully embedded within the capitalist system, but very different in many ways in their respective superstructures. I really came to this realization as I was reading the latest book by Hilary Wainwright, whom I have known for many years. When Hilary discusses parties, for example, she refers the Labour Party model – a parliamentary party *par excellence*. I, however, refer to the Italian Communist Party, whose parliamentary action was only one aspect, and not its most important, within a much broader scope of activity. We only started to make a clear distinction between parties and movements after 1968. Before that watershed, the two were virtually indistinguishable.

The respective movements of '68, despite sharing a strong common core, developed very differently from one another. Italy from this perspective was an anomaly: just as in France, the movement was born in the universities but it immediately spread among the factories, where it initially faced strong opposition from the trade unions. However, the unions eventually

opened themselves up to new forms and content of struggle that was at least partially disseminated through its powerful networks and ended up spreading throughout society. The same problems of schools and education also became the problems of the factory workers, an issue addressed not only by students but also by those who never went to school because they were excluded. It is also for this reason that in the 1970s one of the most significant – though very partial – victories was obtained: the 150 hours, that is to say workers' right to 150 hours of study per year – not to be better trained in order to perform the tasks their employers demanded, but to acquire culture. The answer one worker gave when his boss wanted to force him use his 150 hours to improve his professional qualifications remains famously emblematic: 'No, I wanted to use my 150 hours to learn how to play the violin!' Italy's '68 was different because even if the background was widely shared throughout society, it was deeply for and by the working class and did not disappear in a seasonal explosion: it lasted for ten years.

The rich accumulation of experiences we enjoyed in Italy up to the end of the 1970s, and led to debates on the 'Italian case', which attracted widespread interest, did not immunize us against a harsh defeat. And today we find ourselves perhaps in a worse situation than other countries. We should reflect together on how things went, in Italy and elsewhere. But this would require another time, and another article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luciana Castellina is a journalist, writer and activist. She joined the Italian Communist Party in 1947, founded the paper *Il Manifesto* in 1970, and was a Member of the European Parliament from 1976 to 1999, where she served as president of the cultural committee, than of the External Economic Relation Committee. She is currently serving on the presidency of the Party "Sinistra Italiana" and is honorary president of ARCI (Associazione ricreativa culturale italiana). She is the author of many books including, *Discovery of the world: Political awakening in the shadow of Mussolini* (2011), winner of the Premio Strega, the main literary prize in Italy.

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MAKING COUNTER-POWER OUT OF MADNESS

Laura Flanders

On 4 April 1967, Dr Martin Luther King Jr took to the pulpit at New York's Riverside Church, and warned that 'a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death'.

To turn things around, he said, 'We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values'.

We must rapidly begin to shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'people-oriented' society. When machines and computers profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.¹

'Somehow, this madness must cease', he said.

Fifty years on, the US is arguably closer to a 'revolution in values' today than at any time since King's assassination. At the very least, the scale of the problem is widely grasped. What we face is not a glitch in the system of US politics and economics, but a systemic problem – a *madness*.

And not just because of who's in the White House.

THE US SICKNESS

To be clear. It isn't the *war* part of King's 'evil triplets' speech that especially resonates in this moment. In 2017, US troops were on the ground and US drones and bombs were killing people not in one nation, but in several: Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen. US special forces were in a total of 76 countries at a cost of some \$5.6 trillion² and the terrifying US-led 'war on terror' involved 39% of the countries on the planet. And yet, while Black Lives Matter and the Movement for Black Lives managed to draw some attention to the militarization of the nation's police and private security firms, the cost and impact of the US war economy receives very little attention from US politicians or even from social movements. (The 2017 Women's Convention in Chicago, for example, added a session on militarism only as an afterthought.) The first Pentagon budget of the Trump era, which passed with bipartisan unanimity in Congress, pushed an already staggering military budget up to \$700 billion.³

No, it's not the militarism, it's *the madness* that resonates today. Since 1968, the number of US citizens living in poverty has increased by 60%. On average, men in the highest income bracket live 15 years longer than men in the lowest.⁴ Donald Trump's signature achievement, the 2017 Republican tax law, will make inequality exponentially worse, but when as OXFAM reports eight people are worth more than 3.8 billion people on the planet, ¹no tweak of the US tax code – or even a new president – will help much.

To add to King's picture of impending spiritual death, environmentalists warn of literal demise. The Ecological Footprint Network reports that human beings collectively consume at a rate 1.7 times what the Earth's regenerative capacity can sustain.⁵ Along with armed conflict (and accelerated by it), drought, floods, fires and rising tides are already displacing waves of desperate refugees. And US citizens felt the impact where they live in 2017, when storms and fires ravaged communities across the continent, and threw Puerto Rico into extended darkness.

When indigenous people drew the line at the prospect of a leak-prone energy pipeline passing through precious native lands, they sounded very much like King. What they were concerned about, they said, was not one nation, or one region, or group, but rather the survival of the world.

The unprecedented level of unity across indigenous nations, when they came together at Standing Rock, was rooted in 'our moral right and responsibility to protect Mother Earth on behalf of humanity', said indigenous organizer Judith LeBlanc.

It seems to have come as a shock to the well-paid TV pundits, but the election of a madman in 2016 didn't reveal that US democracy was malfunctioning. It is widely understood that Donald Trump's election was the logical consequence of the way the nation's systems *function* to diminish public decision-making and perpetuate too-big-to-control corporate influence.

Donald Trump's election didn't reveal US democracy was malfunctioning. It [showed rather that] the nation's systems function to diminish public decision-making and perpetuate too-big-to-control corporate influence.

The systemic nature of the problem (if you're a poor person, not a bank) is not limited to one ethnicity or region. The disappearance of

living-wage work, the sudden spike in incarceration even as crime rates dropped, precarious pay, soaring debt, increasing bankruptcies, high rent, homelessness, hunger and ill health; –the Civil Rights Act notwithstanding, these issues were dominating the lives of many African Americans in the 1990s, as the effects of Reaganite neoliberalism kicked in. The same crisis hit middle-class, white Americans, in 2008.

AWARENESS OF SYSTEMIC CRISIS

For those contemplating counter-power, the ten-year anniversary of the global financial crisis, or Great Recession, is perhaps even more immediately significant than the uprisings of '68. In the US, the decade since 2008 has not seen the emergence of the sort of counter-power represented by Syriza or Podemos. Resistance movements haven't morphed into political parties and won national power, not yet. But we did see millions of US citizens vote for self-described socialist, Bernie Sanders, and from his campaign has emerged a campaigning organization that talks about socialism, called Our Revolution.

All this is at least in part because we have seen a decade of mass consciousness-raising about capitalism, courtesy of the 2008 crisis and sustained by phenomena like Occupy Wall Street, Strike Debt (and before that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank protests, which centred on a critique of global capitalism). Not just economic problems, but economic *systems*, long a taboo in the US, are up for debate. It's hard to overstate how important this is, in a country that only 50 years ago was raised on red-baiting.

In 2016, 51% of US citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 told Harvard University researchers that they opposed capitalism. Only 42% expressed support. In October 2017, pollsters found that 44% of US millennials would pick a socialist rather than a capitalist country in which to live.

In November 2017, tickets to 'Capitalism: A Debate' sold out in a day and speakers from socialist *Jacobin* and libertarian *Reason* magazines had to move to a larger venue. The event sold out once again, this time in eight hours.

The mainly young, overwhelmingly white, young people who packed Cooper Union's 960-capacity Great Hall for that debate were not yet out

of high school when the 2008 crash happened. They saw what it did to their families and friends, as loyal workers lost pensions, savings and mortgages; and while banks were bailed out, the state refused to relieve students of voluminous college debts. The seductions of the status quo don't work as well for this generation because they came of age seeing it crash. They're not wedded to the promise of the capitalist 'American Dream' that was proffered to their parents, because it shows no signs of being wedded to them, or even having a place for them in it.

The people whom 30-year-old Nelini Stamp knows place little faith in the traditional economy or in government, turning instead to decentralized, self-organized networks to get things done – everything from making a living to getting help to people after Hurricane Sandy. 'I thought Occupy Wall Street was big but bottom-up organizing's really taken off since', says Stamp, now an organizer with the Working Families Party.

BUILDING COLLECTIVE COUNTER-POWER

Turning new consciousness into political power is not an easy challenge. Labour organizer and author, Jane McAlevey, argues that one of the impacts of attacks on trade unions is that it led them to shift 'away from deep organizing, toward shallow mobilizing', which has built very little on-the-ground operating capacity. ⁶

'In place of collective progress, we've come up with individual rights, and worked to enforce those', she says. 'We win a race and go home without a deeper understanding of governance because we've done so little of it.'

From that perspective, even talking about *counter-power*, as more people on the left are doing, inspired by movement gains in Europe or informed by immigrant experience in Latin America and Asia – is an advance. As McAlevey puts it,

It's too long since we actually talked about power. How it works, how to build it, what power we're up against and what we already have collectively.

Over the past 50 years, US liberalism has tended to be fairly narrowly defined. Driven by the need to produce data and 'wins' for philanthropic funders, progressive non-profit organizations have poured oceans of sweat

and money into meeting ever-increasing unmet social needs, seeking discrete policy changes or defending one-time achievements.

All these years on, it's clear that while communications work, advocacy and legal defence are important, no amount of any of those will stop systemic *madness*. US citizens know this, because they have proof, and not just in the White House but in their lives.

The year kicked off with more citizens following women of colour and queer and trans women into more streets than the country had ever seen, to protest the inauguration of the man many call the 'predator in chief'. The massive women's marches (which also took place in dozens of other countries) were followed almost immediately by citizens standing by non-citizens to resist deportations and an anti-Muslim and racist travel ban. People with disabilities literally threw their bodies in the way of legislators who were considering the repeal of President Obama's (not-very) Affordable Health Care Act, the so-called ObamaCare. In off-season elections, progressive Democrats and Socialists defeated bigots and blowhards, including long-time incumbents of local, state and national office.

The revelation, just days before a 'white power' riot in Charlottesville, Virginia, that Trump's FBI was monitoring not white, but 'Black identity extremists' came as a chilling reminder of way the state has sought to criminalize and disrupt civil rights activists from the Black Panthers to Black Lives Matter.⁷ But that hasn't stopped either the Movement for Black Lives or groups like COSECHA, *which fights for* the humane and permanent protection of immigrants.

In 2017, Repairers of the Breach, founded by Reverend William J. Barber and Dr Liz Theoharis, launched a new poor people's campaign modelled directly on King's, which will conduct 40 days of direct action including civil disobedience across 25 states in 2018. Expectations are great, although it is not clear if their ecumenical but Southern church-based vision will resonate in the world of Northern-dominated liberalism, or if enough progressive infrastructure exists around the country to support it.

Decentralized networks turn people out to mass rallies against Trump, but it has proved harder to agree on a platform. 'I lust for a manifesto', says Working Families organizer, Stamp.

After the Sanders campaign, the electoral group gaining the most new visibility seems to be the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) (which shares many activists who are also members of Our Revolution.) The DSA was founded in 1982. Between November 2016 and February 2017 membership of this dues-paying organization rose by 10,000, to 32,000, and the median age dropped from 68 (in 2013) to 33. According to one recent account, its membership is still 90% white and 75% male. As for just what's meant by socialism, it describes itself as 'multi-tendency'.

DSA members did well in November's elections, boosting the number of their elected office-holders to 35 from 20. The most striking win was in Virginia where DSA member Lee Carter received a resounding 54% of the vote, routing one of the state's most powerful Republicans, the GOP (Grand Old Party) whip of the Virginia House of delegates.

Carter, a red-haired, 30-year-old former Marine, didn't know much about socialism when he entered the race. (He says he started reading up on it a year ago, inspired by Bernie Sanders.) But he learned a lot about the Democratic Party during the process. He says that confidential information on his campaign was leaked, the party cut him off when he refused corporate money, and state political reporter Patrick Wilson *tweeted* the day after the election that '[p]eople within the Democratic Party would have preferred I not write about him. The party, like Republicans in Virginia, is closely tied to the big energy monopoly and Carter stood against that'.

Candidates like Carter, who stood out by standing up with authenticity, were helped by an unusually riled-up election season fuelled less by ideology than identity. The progressive 'identities' mostly won: three months after Charlottesville, Virginians elected an African American lieutenant governor. A transgender woman who focused on local highway routes won over a reactionary who focused on regulating public toilets, and similar phenomena played out across the nation.

In Alabama, populist Randall Woodfin defeated the incumbent Birmingham mayor, and at the age of 36 is the city's youngest mayor since 1893. African American Woodfin was helped by hundreds of canvassers and tens of thousands of get-out-the-vote messages from Our Revolution volunteers and the Working Families Party. It's unclear how big a part ideology played in these contests, as opposed to outrage and determination to stop terrifying Trumpism. Upon taking office, Woodfin said he had no specific wants in the current year budget, but just doesn't want any 'waste'.⁸

It's important, though, with the excitement over Trump, and the new moment, or the new groups on the scene, or new technology, not to lose sight of the long view. Democrats and progressives of all stripes celebrated the defeat of Republican Roy Moore and the election of a Democrat, Doug Jones, as governor of Alabama for the first time in 35 years in November 2017. But securing Black voting rights in Alabama has been the work of generations. Roy Moore was defeated in part thanks to 15 years of work by Pastor Kenneth Glasgow, director of The Ordinary People's Society (TOPS), to pass legislation re-enfranchising felons and people convicted of misdemeanours. Moore, an alleged paedophile who said positive things about slavery, lost by just 22,000 votes. Of the 10,000 ex-convicts whom TOPS tracked when they voted, Doug Jones needed every last one of them.

COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS: DE FACTO COUNTER-POWER

At another less well-reported level, a different sort of counter-power has been gaining momentum. Less ideological and sometimes explicitly non-political, communities are responding to the 'madness' of their defunct city centres and derelict democracy by experimenting with a broad range of new institutions. Among the many forms are new cooperative, small businesses, neighbourhood-owned and operated gardens and corporations, land trusts, municipalized energy and broadband systems, and hybrid forms of self-governance.

What these communities are creating, without mostly ever using the word, is a sort of de facto counter-power, which is directly unpicking the fraying straitjacket of the top-down, profits-first economy. Moreover, in the act of experimenting, rather than waiting for legislators to listen or lead, people are experiencing what is to work, live and lead themselves, together, differently.

Dozens of cities and towns, including New York, Madison, Oakland and Rochester, now invest public money in incubating worker-owned cooperatives. Co-ops are hard to pull off but they have a good record of reducing poverty and staying local. With a low barrier to entry, worker-owners can pool risks and rewards and make decisions on a one-member, one-vote basis. Co-ops also pledge to help one another. In 2017, the US

Federation of Worker Owned Co-ops launched a group dental insurance plan for its members. Co-op hubs in Baltimore, Los Angeles and other cities are creating a nationwide network of worker-cooperative loan funds to help finance enterprises to which the big banks are reluctant extend credit.

In one of the good-news stories of election night, well over a dozen municipalities in Colorado voted yes on measures that will allow their local officials to pursue city-funded telecommunications and broadband services, over vigorous and well-resourced opposition from the mega cable-provider Comcast.

From place to place the styles and aspirations of these experiments differ (as do their rates of success). What they have in common with each other (and with the socialists running for office) is a determination not to tackle single issues but the systems that concentrate power, hollow out democracy, and erode the quality of life for most Americans.

At times, these experiments bridge unusual political divides. New York's Sullivan County, where Trump received a majority, home to a bitter debate over whether to accept fracked gas, residents came together over solar energy. For exactly one year, Heather Brown has been the Sustainability Coordinator in the county's newly-created Office of Sustainability. By mid-2018, Sullivan County will be buying its power from a local, clean solar array and be on track to becoming its own power generator.

'It stems back to 2008', says Brown. 'Energy bills that people hadn't thought much about were suddenly out of control and people began to look at their options.' It wasn't a left-wing or right-wing thing she says. People saw a chance to save some money, stop paying big bills to big polluters, and do something for their environment, which they see as the key to the region's future development. The county's sustainability plan, which includes a total switch to solar and radically reduced emissions, received unanimous support from the county's nine-member board under both Democratic and Republican majorities. Dick Riseling, the leading activist on the issue, chuckles. 'To generate our own power is as revolutionary as the lightbulb!'

At almost every level, technological innovation is moving in the opposite direction from monopoly. Riseling couldn't put a coal mine in his back garden, but he did erect a windmill. Brown couldn't put gas pumps in

the county's parking garage, but she can install electric vehicle charging stations and she is.

The democratizing potential of new technology appears to be on a collision course with immensely entrenched power. Consider the internet. Three quarters of traffic on the world wide web, which once held the promise of delivering free, diverse, decentralized communication, now travels through just two portals – Google search and Facebook.² In the last decade, the number of US airlines dropped by half. Four airlines, five health insurance giants, three pharmacy chains and four beef companies control the market. One company, Comcast, serves over half the internet and cable subscribers in the country.

Counter-power's not a word Stacy Mitchell uses every day, but as director of the Institute for Local Self Reliance, she's seeing struggles shaping up everywhere. 'When people ask me where is today's anti-trust movement, I say there is one, at the local level', she says. Ever more people want their own power, energy-wise and in terms of decision-making. 'They can build alternatives at small scale', says Mitchell, 'but sooner or later they hit a wall; barriers that have to do with policies'.

Lilian Salerno is one of a handful of Democrats who will be running on an explicitly anti-monopoly platform in 2019. She spent years developing a syringe needle that didn't risk accidentally injuring nurses, but when she tried to sell it to hospitals she found they were contractually bound to a massive national monopoly. She recently announced her candidacy for Texas's 32nd Congressional District, which Republican Pete Sessions has represented for 11 terms. In suburban Dallas, it's one of the many long-shot districts in which Clinton beat Trump, but that the Democrats didn't contest at the Congressional level. You can't win if you don't run, argue candidates like Salerno.

Taking local initiatives national will be an uphill struggle. There's little evidence that the Democratic Party establishment has much appetite for promoting counter-power initiatives at the next level. Taking on monopolies and busting up vertically integrated markets received more attention from the party in 2016 (thanks mostly to Democrat Senator Elizabeth Warren) than in 2017. At least 16 Democratic senators, including most of the party's potential 2020 presidential candidates, endorsed a single-payer health care bill proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders in September

2017. On the other hand, a month later, the new Clinton-backed chair of the Democratic National Committee removed key Sanders delegates from the party's important executive and new rules committees, sparking worries about a purge.

All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression and out of the wombs of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born', – Martin Luther King 'Beyond Vietnam', in Riverside Church

LINKING LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO ANTI-SYSTEMIC COUNTER-POWER

The most hopeful examples of counter-power in the US today are trying to do several things at once: anchor political power in independent, progressive infrastructure and use elected office to educate people about their options while simultaneously democratizing the economy.

Across the Bay from San Francisco, Richmond sits in the shadow of an enormous Chevron plant, politically and atmospherically. For years, the city council was in the hands of Chevron lackeys. In 2003, Gayle McLaughlin was part of founding the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA), a convening of local progressive service providers and advocacy groups all interested in running corporate-free candidates. A long-time activist but never a politician, McLaughlin says she was asked to run and won a seat on the city council the following year. In 2006 she was elected mayor, and re-elected. By the time she ended her term, the city had reduced homicide rates by 75%, increased minimum wages twice, and forced Chevron to pay higher local taxes and huge fines for a massive plant fire that spewed poisonous emissions over neighbourhoods in the city.

The mortgage crisis brought McLaughlin national attention when she publicly threatened to use the city's eminent domain power to buy (at pennies on the dollar) the inflated mortgages big banks held on foreclosed properties in her area. It was the sort of audacious threat that only a mayor with a secure base could dare to make. McLaughlin had that base, in the Alliance.

Indicating how seriously they took the threat, in 2014, Chevron squandered \$3 million on candidates running against the RPA – and lost. While the

nation's first personal corporation – Trump – was elected president, Richmond came out of November 2016 with five corporate-free members on the seven-member city council. A supermajority. 'In 15 years, we've completely changed the nature of the council', says McLaughlin.

The key to their success she says, lies in open community meetings to set the agenda, volunteers, (unpaid) campaign workers, face-to-face organizing, accountability and policies that make a difference. 'We talk about democracy in our elections, but we also need democracy in the workplace', McLaughlin says.

In 2018, she's running for Lieutenant Governor of California, in which position she imagines she will be able to continue to advocate for public banking, worker co-ops, land trusts and single-payer health care as she always has. What gets her more excited, though, is the opportunity to campaign, and tell people across the state about Richmond's model of inside–outside counter-power. California's non-partisan election system means she can be endorsed by people of all political tendencies – Democrats, Greens, Our Revolution, the DSA. McLaughlin aims to visit every one of them. 'Having that national voice [of the Bernie Sanders campaign] helped open up space', she says, 'but having the national without the local, or the local without the movement is not democracy'.

Across the country, in Jackson, Mississippi, Kali Akuno also talks about elected office as a platform for organizing. Rooted in the movement for Black self-determination, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Akuno was the chief of staff of the radical lawyer, Chokwe Lumumba, when he was elected mayor of Jackson in 2013. Today he serves Lumumba's son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, who was elected soon after his father died after a challenging few months in office. 'We looked very closely at what happened in Greece, how a radical social movement was contained by the Troika. I think Jackson closely parallels, with the neo-confederates punishing us for electing Chokwe', Akuno says.

Lumumba, father and son, owe their elections to the People's Assembly, a public education and decision-making forum, that draws on African American organizing traditions, infused with contemporary urgency. Local and regional Assemblies took off in response to the government's failure to respond to Hurricane Katrina. This spring, the Assemblies are educating Jacksonians about 'human rights budgets' in preparation for

participatory budgeting. The first Mayor Lumumba already pushed the city to commit to contracting within city limits, which is to say, with Black-owned businesses. To support more of those, the Jackson Plan calls for investment in cooperative incubators and solidarity economics.

Akuno recognizes that Mayor Lumumba lacks the entrenched political power or economic power that is vested in the inheritors of centuries of plantation capitalism, but he does have movement power in a densely African American population. The extreme poverty, dispossession and lack of attention paid to Jackson's Black residents (not to mention the violence that's been visited upon them), leaves them un-invested in the status quo and open to radical innovation.

Akuno knows that Lumumba cannot rewrite the Constitution, as the ANC did after apartheid. 'We have to make all the critical decisions mass decisions, with public forums in the Council Chamber, public assemblies, public media.'

There is nothing, except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood', – Martin Luther King, 'Beyond Vietnam' speech at Riverside church.

MOVING FROM COUNTER-POWER TO TRANSFORMING POWER

These are early days in a brave new moment and progressives could get very distracted. King's 'bruised hands' are likely to come in for a lot more bruising. At just the time that more US citizens are falling into the precarious working class, labour unions are losing numbers and density, and the ability they once had to engage members in political education. As ever more people express an interest in socialism, or municipalized energy, or peer-to-peer decision-making, monopoly power is massive and tightly held and its beneficiaries are exorbitantly well-armed – politically as well as literally.

Still, the very fact that so much is up for grabs, from the economy to security to our democracy, makes a re-ordering inevitable.

Visionary leaders, like Akuno and McLaughlin, don't fetishize the local. Akuno doesn't want to 'counter' power, he wants to transform it. For now, Mayor Lumumba is set on making Jackson the 'most radical city in the nation'. An in-the-belly-of-the-beast experiment, to the degree that Jackson can succeed in raising incomes or lifting spirits, its municipal example can serve as a radical 'city on a hill'. Ronald Reagan used the old Biblical metaphor to great effect to usher in neoliberalism. US revolutionaries have every right to take their turn with it.

Ten years after the 2008 Great Recession, the question of vision remains. Many manifestos are out there. So are many contradictions. As Mayor of Burlington, Vermont, Bernie Sanders' administration put in place many of the innovative structures now associated with the 'new economy'. Buying locally, preserving 'common' land, investing in land trusts, worker and minority and women-owned local businesses, Sanders did all those things and yet he barely mentioned them on the national campaign trail. Instead, he focused on federal government regulation to rein in corporate interests. In the socialist vision of the future, are too-big-to-fail banks and businesses broken up and power dispersed, as Stacy Mitchell would prefer, or nationally regulated or nationalized, as Our Revolution or DSA's members might favour?

How does US counter-power relate to US military power? And what does today's resistance movement, such as it is, being deeply focused on the local, have in mind for the US role in a future world and how it might achieve that?

At the very start of 2018, well-known women actors invited community activists to join them at the highly publicized Golden Globes ceremony. In so doing the Hollywood-based Times Up campaign signalled its intent to work with women across different socio-economic classes to tackle sexism and sexual violence in the workplace. A real, high-profile multi-racial, cross-class counter-patriarchy movement could build power to shift the culture. But as one of the participating activists, Rosa Clemente, Puerto Rican former vice-presidential candidate for the US Green Party, pointed out, most Puerto Ricans were unable to watch the show because, months after Hurricane Maria, most Puerto Ricans on the US territory still lack electricity.

In 1967, King described his speech at Riverside as a call simply for people to love one another: ‘...for world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation’.

King had no clearly defined manual for how to end *the madness*, hence his use of the wobble word ‘somehow’. After ’68, the US Right made alliance with the neo-confederate, neoliberal, evangelical white patriarchy, and wed them to a picture of the nation in which the interests of corporations and the rich were the interests of ALL. Democrats offered only a tweaked alternative. Ten years after the Great Recession and one year into the Trump administration, it’s clear that King was right. It’s just not possible to serve the wealthy and the secure so well without making life hell for the poor. Especially not while waging costly wars on ideas and other nations. The seductive benefits of white identity in post-Jim Crow America are still real, but given the demographic shifts taking place, their time is limited.

The field lies open for US progressives and the left to lay out their values as a vision for the nation, and to get beyond ‘counter-power’ to re-embodiment power – which they are doing. The defining elements of that new vision of power are already emerging at the level of systems-focussed social movements and shared decision-making, solidarity economics and community-based approaches to prosperity and security. New cities on new hills are trying to grow. With every bit of organizing around such things as shared energy ‘commons’ and cooperation, secular leftists move closer than they have in decades not only to grappling with governing but towards King’s language of – yikes – love and ‘brotherhood’. One contribution of the intervening years would be to put people of all genders in tomorrow’s picture of worldwide fellowship.

The defining elements of a new vision of power are already emerging at the level of systems-focussed social movements and shared decision-making, solidarity economics and community-based approaches to prosperity and security.

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WITHOUT TRANSLATION, NO HAY REVOLUCIÓN!

*The importance of interpretation,
translation and language justice
in building global counter-power*

Eline Müller and Alice Froidevaux

International resistance means coming together from different struggles. Making a collective voice heard on the global political stage requires crossing borders and cultures, and therefore coordinating and communicating across different languages.

In July 2017, over 450 peasant farmers from nearly 70 countries from all over the world met in Derio in the Basque country, for the 7th International Conference of the International Peasant Movement *La Via Campesina* (LVC). The conference was made possible by about 50 volunteer translators and interpreters across some 17 languages, depending on the session: Arabic, Bahasa, Basque, Bimbi, Chinese, English, French, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese.

Language – and thus translation and interpretation – is about access, about participation, about power.

Translation and interpretation are essential for transnational grassroots

movements. This is far more than a technical question. As one Korean peasant activist highlighted: 'Interpretation is a political matter. It is directly connected to the matter of how well one can communicate and share his/her opinion in the global field'. In other words, language – and thus translation and interpretation – is about access, about participation, *about power*.

This essay explores the language challenges facing transnational grassroots movements, and their strategies for meeting them. What initiatives might make social movements more linguistically diverse and inclusive? And what are the major obstacles to achieving more 'language justice' in transnational activism? The paper is based on online sources about the movements and organizations discussed, a series of Skype, email and face-to-face conversations with LVC members, regional staff and volunteer interpreters/technicians from different world regions, and a small online survey with solidarity interpreters.¹

THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS

From the 1990s, an array of new *transnational* social movements, networks, and organizations has emerged, aiming to promote a more

just and equitable global world order. There were three main catalysts for this. First, the influence of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank – as well as the power of transnational corporations (TNCs) – on specific national policies expanded largely as a result of financial globalization. Thus, to form a global counter-power, social movements needed to develop worldwide coalitions too.²

Second, other IGOs and their political arenas, such as the United Nations (UN) with its different forums and mechanisms, provide new opportunities and spaces for citizen and grassroots involvement at the international level. And third, the same rapidly advancing technologies that fostered the expansion of a global economy have also facilitated cross-border mobilization and activities. Relatively cheap travel, more widely available telephone and internet access, a globalized mass media, and social media platforms enable people from more diverse geographic and class origins to share information and to cultivate relationships across huge distances.³

Of particular interest in this context is the empowerment of transnational *grassroots* movements – movements of those most directly affected by global policies and economic shifts. They are increasingly challenging the hierarchies within the so-called ‘global civil society’, which has implied questioning both the domination of North American and European NGOs in transnational advocacy networks and the right of non-grassroots actors to lead and represent them. With the clear message of ‘we are here and we can speak for ourselves’ they are (re-)claiming their voice and a place in world politics.⁴

LVC is a paradigmatic example of such a transnational grassroots movement. Its driving force was the conviction of peasant organization leaders worldwide that the peasant movement had been absent in international debates on agrarian politics for too long. Peasant farmers *themselves* should be at the heart of developing rural and food-related policies, which directly affect rural communities. Hence, the *raison d’être* of LVC is to be the ‘real voice’ of the peasantry in global debates on agrarian and food politics.⁵

La Via Campesina (LVC) brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world.

Built on a strong sense of unity and solidarity, it defends peasant agriculture for food sovereignty as a way to promote social justice and dignity and strongly opposes corporate-driven agriculture that destroys social relations and nature. Women play a crucial role in LVC, for example as the principal preservers of traditional seeds, and LVC defends women's rights and gender equality. Young farmers are also an inspirational force.

Today, LVC comprises 182 local and national organizations in 81 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas, representing over 200 million farmers.⁶

Claiming to be the 'real voice' of a social group implies a great responsibility regarding representativeness. Consequently, LVC strives to keep its structures horizontal and decentralized and emphasizes direct participation in decision-making. However, for a transnational grassroots movement with a vast membership that is culturally and linguistically heterogeneous, the processes of deliberation and consensus are highly complex and challenging – and require overcoming communication barriers.

LANGUAGE AS POWER IN TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

Despite the opportunities offered by new communication technologies and relatively cheap transport, the coordination and communication problems facing transnational movements remain formidable. This is particularly the case for grassroots movements, which are usually run by non-professionals and have very limited financial resources. One key challenge for grassroots movements is *language* and the related participation barriers and power dimensions.

International politics is dominated by a few colonial languages, most importantly English, French, and Spanish. Delegates of transnational movements therefore need certain language skills in order to fully

participate in international political arenas. Those who do not speak one of the dominant languages face immense participation barriers. Although, for example, the UN provides interpretation to and from Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish in plenary sessions, smaller meetings and negotiations often take place only in English. Grassroots movements cannot afford to bring their own interpreters, which means that voices from the Global South remain partially excluded from international political debates.

A related question is how transnational grassroots movements can overcome such language–power dynamics internally. In order to respect their own commitment to democratic principles (deliberation and consensus) transnational movements need to hear the diverse voices of their membership. ‘So, one of the goals of the founders of LVC was to give voice to the voiceless. This can just be achieved, when people can express themselves. In a bottom–up and horizontal movement like LVC, it is extremely important that every single person can express themselves’, said a member of LVC’s International Coordination Committee (ICC).

For financial and pragmatic reasons, LVC has made English, French and Spanish its ‘working languages’, and for meetings offers interpretation to and from these languages, plus the local language – if the meeting is held in Turkey, Turkish is added, or Portuguese if it is in Mozambique. Other languages are seen as ‘regional’ and it is each region’s responsibility to organize interpretation if their delegates do not speak one of the three ‘working languages’. As a result, events are often dominated, albeit unintentionally, by native speakers of one of these languages. In the words of a Korean peasant leader it is ‘because of the colonial history, [that] people from some countries tend to find it easier to lead the discourse than others’. Similarly, an experienced interpreter observed: ‘Some peasant leaders are incredible speakers in their mother tongue [...] but then they come to the international LVC meetings and have to intervene in English... and they are very handicapped in how to express themselves... so it really makes an impact on the message they get across [...] and even on how seriously they are taken.’

In order to respect their own commitment to democratic principles (deliberation and consensus) transnational movements need to hear the diverse voices of their membership

The 7th International LVC Conference was a milestone in giving more space to 'non-dominant', 'non-colonial' languages. According to one coordinator of the interpretation team: 'When the delegations realized that interpretation was working for so many languages, they started to change their speakers and like this suddenly new and different voices have been heard.' This shows that increasing the number of languages interpreted can change the political balance – a message reinforced by a European LVC staff member who felt that 'everyone can now feel the difference it creates within the movement!'

A MOVEMENT WITHIN THE MOVEMENT: SOLIDARITY INTERPRETERS AND ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION TECHNOLOGIES

Besides political will, two elements have been indispensable in advancing language justice in transnational activism in general, and LVC in particular: the commitment of voluntary interpreters and the support of technical collectives who design and provide affordable interpreting technologies for grassroots movements.

Transnational grassroots movements rely on interpretation. Interpreters are essential facilitators in building and maintaining those movements. Without interpretation, the construction of a global counter-power would come to a halt, just as the Tower of Babel did. Given the costs of professional interpretation services, the dedication of voluntary interpreters and a network of activist-interpreters who share their beliefs and convictions have therefore become crucial to transnational grassroots movements.

An experienced interpreter commented on his motivation to volunteer for LVC: 'Representativity is the key element of the movement. You are not gonna get paid but with your four days' salary they are gonna bring two farmers from Mali to the meeting, they are gonna be empowered, and when they go back home they are gonna have a strong positive impact on their organizations, on their communities. Or they will be able to make better lobby with their governments.'

Babels and the History of Solidarity Interpretation

The main impetus for a transnational network of solidarity interpreters was the emergence of the World Social Forum (WSF). This global space for civil society organizations (CSOs) to address neoliberal globalization was developed as a follow-up to the 1999 Seattle WTO protests. It was soon clear that the process of building another world could not be done only in English. According to the Social Forum's principles of inclusiveness and diversity, it simply could not exist without translation and interpretation. Hence, as counter-hegemonic activists from around the world organized, so did like-minded often professional interpreters and translators. The network was consolidated as Babels, which was supposed to be as bottom-up and as inclusive as the organizations they were working with. A key idea behind Babels was to reflect on the political aspect of language.⁷ Babels' most visible actions now belong to the past, since their coordinated activities stopped when Social Forums became institutionalized and failed in their initial principle of inclusiveness. However, the ex-Babelistas Facebook group,⁸ still has over 3,000 members, with many interpreters organizing around their own fields of interest.

The fact that transnational social movements now have a pool of activist-volunteer interpreters risks the interpreters' services being taken for granted, to some extent neglecting the difficulties of their work. Interpreting is very hard and requires a high degree of concentration and stamina. Interpreters have to receive, understand, manage, and reproduce information at extreme speed. They also need to be able to memorize and use a large and accurate vocabulary. Unlike a translator, an interpreter has no time to refer to written documents, making preparation before each assignment all the more essential.

In order to perform their best, interpreters need a proper working environment – not always provided at big gatherings of international grassroots movements. In a survey, volunteer interpreters mentioned a range of problems they often face at international activist meetings: the lack of breaks, bad sleeping arrangements, limited access to food and

water, and the lack of preparation (not getting enough written materials in advance).

Another dimension to good interpretation work is for the speakers and audience to be disciplined. Interpreters need to see the speakers' faces, as well as the screen if there are PowerPoint or similar presentations. Organizers may have to reiterate that people must speak slowly and clearly, use the microphone, and not interrupt. Noise pollution created by an overcrowded room or an undisciplined audience can be stressful for interpreters, who need to be able to focus.⁹

Our interview and survey respondents highlighted that bad working conditions and organization are usually because 'not one interpreter was involved [during the preparations of the event]'. However, they also recognized that organizers are 'always thankful to have you there', that 'everyone is doing his/her best', and that everything usually works fine 'as long as the participants are at least a little bit aware of the huge part the interpreters are playing to keep the program going.'

If listening to the interpreters' observations is already a big step, involving them in organizing the event would be a giant one. One interpreter from France wrote: 'I have been involved in projects where the organizers really listened to us, our advice, where they were very understanding of our needs and it went well. But it's not always the case. So, I guess I would recommend the organizers to really take into account the interpreters and make sure they coordinate in advance, get them involved in the process, etc.'

Professional interpreters and others with language skills who are willing to work on a voluntary basis are only one side of the coin of creating more equal communication in international meetings. The other side of the coin, often neglected, is technology. Multi-language, simultaneous interpreting cannot happen without it.

Since the 1950s, technologies to facilitate simultaneous interpreting have developed alongside international organizations such as the UN and the European Union (EU). Today, they are very advanced but extremely expensive and thus beyond the reach of most activist spaces and grassroots movements. The alternative is to 'do it yourself', that is, to invest in equipment and people in order to increase the movements' autonomy and

sustainability. The first experiments in alternative interpreting technology, based on computers and low-tech analogue solutions through cables and via FM radio, were developed during the first European and WSF. A direct outcome of this process was the Collective for Autonomy in Interpreting Technology (COATI).¹⁰

The Birth of the Colectivo para la autogestión de tecnologías para la interpretación

‘COATI was formed in 2009, bringing together people who had participated in anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements. We had supported the peasant farmers of LVC in the creation of the movement for Food Sovereignty, and had volunteered as interpreters (sometimes in very precarious conditions) and seen the value of good alternative technology; we had learnt to organise horizontally and by consensus in the Do-It-Yourself culture of anarchist and anti-capitalist social centres all over Europe; we had built an understanding of technology in the squatted hacklabs and free software communities; we had learnt about sound systems running festivals, community-based radio stations; and it was those experiences, and values that inspired the project’.¹¹

The founding members of COATI were committed to increasing linguistic diversity in international grassroots movements and their plan was to acquire and manage the equipment, so that each event did not have to solve its technology problems from scratch. COATI’s vision is for social movements to reach real technological sovereignty, not reliant on ‘experts’. Consequently, COATI promotes simple, low-cost, easy-to-use, open-source designs, and has run a number of e-workshops to train people to create their own tools.¹²

One COATI co-founder was a solidarity interpreter at Nyéléni 2007, the First International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Mali,¹³ where she recalled that ‘the interpretation was working but the technology was not’. Keen to change this situation for future major events, they also drew positive inspirations from Nyéléni. When the organizers, the Malian LVC member

organization *Coordinación Nacional de Organizaciones Paysannes* (CNOP), budgeted for accommodation, food, conference rooms, interpretation, etc. for 500–600 participants, they realized that with that money they could build a whole new village – and they did. ‘That was a very good example of what we aimed to do with the collective... because every time you organize a big conference you spend all this money... and to try to spend it on investments *in* the social movements to create resources that then remain available to these social movements’, the COATI co-founder concluded.

What followed has been a twofold commitment: COATI makes constant efforts to improve the quality of the equipment and to design flexible technological solutions to meet the requirements of more inclusive and participative meeting dynamics, like group discussions, which often demand a creative approach. One noteworthy achievement is low-tech, low-cost technology for simultaneous interpretation for smaller groups called ‘Spider’.¹⁴ At the same time, COATI is also engaged in political work, raising awareness of the importance of technology as an integral part of the political struggle. COATI has repeatedly emphasized that for alternative interpreting technology to work, there needs to be a conscious and respectful political and organizing culture. Language is political. And interpreters are – and should be – aware of their power, as seen in this volunteer’s reflection: ‘We are important persons in the movement because we are the ones making one of the core values of La Via Campesina’s work, which is connecting different communities and people from different continents’. At the same time, there is an awareness ‘that [the interpreters] are in a very powerful position because people who cannot speak a particular language, do it through you’, as a COATI trainer explained.

In the political work, those working towards technological sovereignty are often teaming up with activist-interpreters, and also seeking to make social movements aware that smooth-running interpretation alone does not eradicate the power dynamics of language and that it is everybody’s responsibility to create space for more minority languages. ‘We encourage people to actively think about the language they use, for example, asking them not to speaking a majority language in a meeting even if they can’, explained a founding member of COATI. The goal is that participants who do not speak English, French or Spanish feel less marginalized and uncultured and more emboldened to take the floor. Simultaneously,

those who seldom require interpretation should experience the need to do so – as confirmed by an interpreter in the survey: 'Impress upon speakers to talk in their native language, if offered at the conference [...] make sure they do not just use English because they think that they can get by without the interpreters. It is very frustrating interpreting from stilted English back to the speaker's mother tongue!'

TOWARDS LANGUAGE JUSTICE IN TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM: THE CASE OF LVC

LVC, as one of the world's largest grassroots social movements, is also considered to be one of the most inclusive and participatory, making a special effort to achieve language justice through interpretation and translation. LVC appreciates that interpretation can be very complex and demanding work, even if it is often seen as 'menial' and usually relatively invisible. A staff member of LVC emphasized: 'Before or during the meetings, we always remind the basics of activist-interpretation and we try to share the basic guidelines'. Consequently, ever more peasant leaders acknowledge the importance of language and so increasingly appreciate the commitment of volunteer interpreters.

Responding to Different Linguistic Landscapes

In order to be more effective, LVC has a decentralized structure, with 10 relatively autonomous regions.¹⁵ Since every region has its own linguistic landscape, each has developed its own tactics to improve communication and to address language justice. The regions have uneven 'starting points' due to their historical, social and economic contexts as well as their experience and engagement in the peasant movement. This will be illustrated by examples from Europe and South Asia.

It might be assumed that there are no real language issues in Europe as most people, including farmers, have basic notions of one of the three official LVC languages. This is not true of the entire continent however. The fact that countries from Eastern Europe are still under-represented in LVC can partly be explained by language barriers, despite great efforts to include European members who may not speak any of the official languages. As a leader from a Turkish LVC member organization explained: 'At ECVC meetings we always speak Turkish, our native language. Otherwise we

could not be able to attend those, as none of our leaders speak any other language than its mother tongue.'

(Western) Europe plays a central role at the international level of LVC because of both its historical role in the movement and the concentration of power in the area, manifested in its relative wealth and the presence of many IGOs and NGOs. This concentration has long created fertile ground for a real 'culture of interpretation', and thus to many public and private courses in interpretation and translation. Furthermore, decades of unequal distribution of wealth and imperialist agendas have obliged – and still do – many people from the 'Global South' to try their luck in the 'old world'. These two aspects are constantly feeding a wide, diverse and priceless pool of potential activist-interpreters. From the global LVC perspective, the European region therefore has a responsibility towards other regions in terms of solidarity and language justice. This is both an extra burden on the shoulders of ECVC's leaders and an opportunity.

In comparison, in South Asia – as in much of the 'Global South' – there is still a weak capacity for professional interpretation, in which there is no real tradition. In India, for example, there are very few training schools. Hence, most of the movement interpreters are multilingual activists, who can indeed speak up to seven languages, but are rarely trained as interpreters. Moreover, the lack of access to interpretation of local languages at the international level means that the LVC South Asia sends mostly English speakers to international events. This situation impedes wider and more equal participation, preventing non-English speakers (particularly indigenous language speakers) from attending international forums. Furthermore, it obliges multilingual people to travel extensively, and to wear too many political hats and roles.

In recent years, the regional staff launched various initiatives to change this situation. A former staff member of LVC South Asia recalled her first steps in confronting language issues in the region on the occasion of an international Agroecology workshop, where members of Brazil's *Movimento dos Sem Terra* came to share their experiences:

The presentation was in Hindi, and interpretation was done consecutively into Kannada, on stage. Then typed by someone

else into English, and notes were projected on a screen. Then the English was being read and interpreted into Bahasa, Spanish/Portugu ol, Bangla and Sinhalese, using spiders. So, we first needed a crash course to explain all the volunteers (most of them being basically multilingual activists) to cope with the setup, the spiders, the projector, etcetera, plus for the usual rules. Budget was really limited. And the preparation! It was so hard to find interpreters, I was going on Couchsurfing just to find Spanish speakers in the city. We were desperate.

After this experience, she got in touch with her colleagues in East and South-East Asia, wrote a proposal on promoting Asian languages in LVC, and started to network with NGO staff, activists and interpreters in the area. Together they began to build up interpretation training sessions for multilingual activists – an approach that can be seen in the wider context of LVC’s tradition of internal workshops, based on the concepts of popular and horizontal education, to train and empower their members.

Building up an activist-interpretation training program in South Asia is an ongoing ‘learning-by-doing’ or ‘designing-by-doing’ process. Three dynamics have been crucial. First, the inclusion of important peasant leaders in the process, so that the trainees can practise on ‘real’ content and the leaders get a better understanding of the importance of interpretation and will ideally advocate for it at the international level. Second, the commitment of European and/or Europe-trained coaches to share their experiences and to develop curriculums in a participatory and culturally sensitive way, constantly receiving inputs from participants, evaluating and making adjustments. And third, the cross-movement work between LVS and South Asian movements from other sectors such as fishing communities or the LGBTQ movements. ‘It is actually this network of language justice enthusiasts from all different movements that has made the progress in the region possible’, concluded a former LVC staff member. As reported on the LVC South Asia Blogspot [<http://lvcsouthasia.blogspot.ch/>] the benefits of the interpretation workshops lie also in fostering cultural exchanges, an awareness of and commitment to language justice as well as reflections on identity, in a context where the links between language and power remain very tangible and where the vast majority of peasant farmers cannot have their voices heard at the international level.¹⁶

EMPOWERING THE MOVEMENT THROUGH EMPOWERING INTERPRETERS

To our survey question 'What could movements/organizers do to improve your working conditions?' one interpreter replied: 'This is a POLITICAL ISSUE – if the Social movements agrees that MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE FROM THE NON-EDUCATED COMMUNITIES TO MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD (people who don't speak colonial languages or don't speak them well) is a VITAL aspect of the functioning of their movement then the social movement needs to PUT ITS MONEY WHERE ITS MOUTH IS AND COMMIT to this' (capital letters in original response). The financial challenges should not be downplayed, but what it is most important to highlight is that, precisely because the resources are very limited, decisions about how the money is spend are, first and foremost, political. Most often, in social movements, discussions about money or organizational issues, as well as structural problems, are seen only as practical matters. However, they are highly political, as the 'shouting' interpreter asserted. Structure and money can play a positive role if we broaden the picture to include a geopolitics of counter-power. If it is agreed that interpretation is a cornerstone for strengthening transnational grassroots movements and 'that spending 1000 euros flying an interpreter is vital. Even if that money could bring hundreds of farmers from the countryside on a bus to a meeting', as another interpreter explained, the next steps are: 1) to see where to get that money from; 2) to advocate for external recognition of this cornerstone; and 3) to empower those with the skills to consolidate language justice within the movement.

In the case of LVC, the regular budget is very limited and funding fluctuates in volume as well as purpose at the different levels and regions. This makes it difficult to establish the percentage of the budget spent on translation and interpretation. However, there are some clear trends. While previously, guided by the budget, only one Korean interpreter, or Thai, or Indonesian was brought in for internal international LVC meetings, they are now trying to always have at least two interpreters, since according to a member of the finance team of the International Operating Secretariat 'there is now a real awareness of what it means to be an interpreter for these people, who in fact do the translation not only during the meetings but also in all the informal moments, since generally the participants they're accompanying do not speak any other language.'

But even if the movement's head is becoming increasingly aware of 'where its mouth is', the budget for interpretation is still limited and fragile. The main persisting barriers are the fear of professionalization and the small number of donors making grants for running costs.

There is, however, a huge potential for untapped funding, mostly in Western Europe. Movements should insist on European institutions, the UN and major NGOs supporting and funding multilingual empowerment projects. They should also make better use of the people who know less widely spoken languages. In our survey, the three interpreters who mentioned having a less common language combination, like Russian-French, expressed wanting to be more involved.

One experienced activist-interpreter was also convinced that there is still much potential for social movements in collaborating with educational institutions: 'I personally think LVC should have a stronger communication work, especially with European language universities. Many of them also teach translation and interpretation, and the students have to gain experience, sometimes through internships. They are also relatively free of family responsibilities, and likely to be involved in ideological questioning. This makes them perfect to match the movement's needs.

FROM WHISPERING GRASSROOTS TO A POLYPHONIC COUNTER-POWER

Translating and interpreting more languages can help to re-balance power inside transnational grassroots movements. The more voices heard, the more representative the movement. As we have seen, simultaneous interpretation requires a high degree of discipline on the part of participants, which 'can raise resistance within groups which are often based on relatively informal organizing', as a long-time observer from COATI explains. However, with improving such discipline, a group may also reinforce its practice of direct democracy and consensual decision-making, as 'the main effect of multilingualism is to make everything go more slowly, which is important, because then it gets politically more balanced'.¹⁷

Empowerment of the movement also includes acknowledging interpreters not only as conduits, but also as voices. Voices deserving to be listened to, since there is little chance that transnational social movements can

reach the critical mass needed for global horizontality without them. At the same time the interpreter plays a passive facilitating role for a common understanding of language issues through the speaker's self-reflection. Questions like 'How do I speak? How do they hear me? How is the interpreter translating me?' may seem basic but are critical for the awareness of each voice in order to build up a global and truly representative counter-power.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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BUILDING FEMINIST COUNTER-POWER:

In for the long haul

Nina Power

The older I get, the more I wonder how it is that in a world filled with compassionate, intelligent people, we nevertheless end up with the most venal, corrupt, soul-dead men and women in charge. Is it that most of us are too nice, too socialized into politeness to stand up to the bullies and sadists? How was it, in particular, not possible to stop Donald Trump? Even those Republicans who thought he might have defended their political interests could surely see what a terrible idea it would be to have him in charge of anything, be it his Twitter account or the nuclear codes. Why did they not organize in secret and make it impossible for him to win the nomination, let alone the election?

In this short essay, I want to address the issue of ‘socialization’ – among other things, how we are instructed, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, to accept our own oppression, and to not ‘make a fuss’. It is feminism that teaches us best how to analyse this, because historically it is women who have been taught to play this mediating role, to smooth over disagreement, to flatter and to acquiesce. There are many women who do not follow the script, and they are often punished for it. How best can we think about this most secret and insidious form of education?

WOMEN’S LIBERATION, AN UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

In 1966, Juliet Mitchell, on the cusp of the feminist second wave in the UK, wrote ‘Women: The Longest Revolution’, in which she argued that ‘the liberation of women can only be achieved if *all four* structures in which they [women] are integrated are transformed – Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and Socialization’.¹ It is only, Mitchell suggests, by looking at women’s economic, social, sexual and political circumstances together that emancipation from both exploitation and oppression could be achieved. How do production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization overlap and intertwine? How are they lived similarly and differently by women of different economic and ethnic backgrounds?

We must be able to think through how women have been brought into the workforce, often for less money and on worse contracts than men, and how capitalism depends both on women’s waged labour (production) but also on the reproduction of the social (everything from the birth of new human beings to looking after and caring for others, to feeding, clothing, educating and ensuring that the workforce is able to sell its labour

power). Sexuality has perhaps been a social success story in many ways since the mid-1960s, particularly the widespread acceptance of same-sex relationships, yet male desire and entitlement continues to dominate female lives in extremely damaging ways. None of Mitchell's structures has been fully transformed: feminist counter-power still has a long way to go – it is indeed the 'longest' revolution.

The category of care, in particular, must become a central feature of our politics. As we debate the possibilities and future of automation, we cannot forget, as the 2011 ILO 'Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers', put it, that

...domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls, many of whom are migrants or members of disadvantaged communities and who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in respect of conditions of employment and of work, and to other abuses of human rights...²

Alongside discussions of automation, we must recognize the gendered and racialized history of care work, and work to revalue (both socially and economically) all the work (paid and unpaid) that goes into keeping human life going.

A NEW FEMINIST MILITANCY IN THE AIR

I want to suggest that feminism, not uniquely so among perspectives we might adopt, but in important and specific ways, gives us multiple ways of understanding the reality of the world. What the past few years has shown us, precisely *because* things are so bad, so monopolized by abusive men – for whom domination over women is part and parcel of cultural, social and political life – is that women will stand and fight when their rights are under siege.

In Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and other Latin American countries, the #NiUnoMenos ('not one less') movement against femicide, which began in 2015, following decades of feminist organizing against sex-based violence against women, took to the streets over and over again. The global Women's March in January 2017, comprising almost 700 protests worldwide, drew inspiration from

this movement, as well as from the horror inspired by the election of the US president of a self-confessed sexual abuser and the legitimate fear of the rollback of women's reproductive rights. Various women's strikes, particularly on International Women's Day (8 March) sought to draw up the economic and social dimensions of both women's oppression as well as their exploited role as paid and unpaid workers.

There is a new feminist militancy on the streets, across the globe and in the air. The #metoo movement has started to state openly what was always known, and there is no doubt that things will shift and continue to shift (though it should be noted that it originally started in 2006, when US activist Tarana Burke used the phrase to discuss sexual assault and abuse). Historically, feminism has of course had to interrogate its *own* starting points and assumptions – what about the relationship between class and sexism? How do the different 'waves' of feminism developed in the west map, and *not* map, onto women's struggles in other parts of the world? How does socialism relate to women's emancipation? How are women of colour oppressed not only by social racism but also by racism within the feminist movement? As Claire Heuchan, who blogs at Sister Outrider [link: <https://sisteroutrider.wordpress.com/>], recently put the relationship between racism and feminism:

Being stuck between men of colour and white women is like being trapped between a rock and a hard place – women of colour are encouraged to accept misogyny or racism as our lot in life and liberation politics, depending upon which group we're aligned with. Men of colour are quick to assure us that whatever misogyny they subject us to is small fry in comparison to the harms white supremacy acts upon women of colour. White women fall over themselves in the rush to claim that racism is a minor issue compared to the real threat of patriarchy.³

'Intersectionality' has become a popular way, particularly online, of attempting to analyse the way in which multiple oppressions overlap – taken up from the work of US lawyer and university professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, who pointed out, as Heuchan does too, that racism and sexism must be understood as intertwined and simultaneous, if they are to be understood at all:

Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling.⁴

The internet has proved an increasingly interesting tool in the development of feminist consciousness, not only for popularizing terms such as ‘intersectionality’, but also for organizing feminist activism. It can also, as many people will have experienced, be a place of fierce disagreement, hostility and disingenuousness. Recognizing aggression in ourselves and others is an endless task, offline or on. The work of thinking through the ways in which racist violence, of the kinds identified by Black Lives Matter, relates to sexist violence in all its complexity, is increasingly taking place. But nothing will change unless white people recognize their role in perpetuating racism in all aspects of life: socially, economically, politically.

MAKING THE LINKS: FEMINISM, SOCIALIZATION AND LOSS

What I want to focus on here, bearing in mind the importance of not separating feminism from anti-racist and other anti-oppression struggles, is one aspect (socialization) of Mitchell’s four-part structure and plan for a women’s liberation movement worthy of the name (recall: production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization). Although Mitchell’s article was published more than half a century ago, it remains an utterly clear account of the themes and challenges that confront feminism in the twenty-first century.

So, what is socialization today? How does it relate to feminism and what we might call a ‘feminist counter-power’ recognizable in the global marches, strikes and protests? The socialization of girls and boys is a matter of great anxiety for parents and teachers alike, and it is made all the more difficult in the face of the all-pervasive presence of advertising,

gender stereotypes, images of 'beautiful' people, and the social pressure to conform to particular roles and norms on the basis of sex. It strikes me, as someone who grew up in the 1980s and was a teenager in the 1990s, that the pressure to conform to gender roles and stereotypes has grown exponentially. I remember very few 'pink' objects in my childhood, although there were of course dolls and kitchen sets, but refusing them in favour of much more interesting toys and books was much more of an option than it seems to be now. Cynically, we might say that 'gender' is merely a symptom of the market, which can profit by promoting gender stereotypes. Certainly, this has to be part of it. But I also think something has been lost, and what we lost, or are losing, was actually a feminist victory, and one of the great successes of the 'second wave'.

By analysing the way in which gender was imposed on those bodies sexed as male and female, second-wave feminism made it possible to break with the idea that sex determined gender. In other words, that, while biology is a fact, the expectations and impositions placed on bodies called 'male' and 'female' were wholly social, and, as such, could be changed. Girls and boys could and should like whatever they like, wear whatever they want, play however they want. This idea is very clearly revolutionary, as it suggests that girls can refuse to be decorative, submissive and so on, and boys can refuse to be aggressive and domineering. It means, in principle, that boys and girls can grow up to work in whichever job they like, have whatever hobbies they like, be whoever they like. The fact that this feminist idea had so filtered down to become something of a common thought and practice makes it a key example of feminist counter-power and a genuine shift towards the liberation from gender stereotypes.

Socialization is a very hard thing to shift, however, and for every feminist victory there is an extreme pushback, as we have witnessed in recent years, for example, where gender stereotypes seem to be pushed on us at every turn. Upsetting as it is to realise, the way girls and women are still socialized into making sure men's feelings aren't hurt, and into trying to smooth over difficult social situations, surely contributed to the very slow process of exposing male abuse under the #metoo movement. Not wanting to be seen as 'difficult' makes it harder for girls and women to stand up against harassment. Similarly, boys and men being encouraged to feel entitled to women's time and affection, even where it is clearly unwanted, is still a more-or-less ubiquitous dimension of masculinity.

Those men and women who break with these gendered norms are often punished for it with ostracism, threats and violence. But we should stand up for 'masculine' women and 'feminine' men, with a view to eventually de-gendering likes, hobbies and employment.

So, how do we collectively organize against the harm done to women? Although men are also often very violent to each other, feminism's focus must primarily be on the rights and protection of girls and women. And, lest we believe that straight abusive men don't know who they're targeting, they do not, as many have pointed out, attempt the same things with men. They know very well what it is to target women on the basis of sex, and will often use physical and social intimidation (threats) to coerce and manipulate women into compliance.

I think it is important to note that feminism does not see women as victims, but precisely the opposite, despite cries in some quarters that #metoo is an attempt to reduce women to passive, desire-less beings. On the contrary, it is feminism that sees an end to the sex-based victimization of girls and women, so that they may live more freely, and be sexual beings on their own terms. What #metoo has done is to make explicit the global ubiquity of men's sexual harassment and abuse of women. There is a sense of enormous solidarity in the campaign, a collective undermining of the shame women are taught to internalize whenever something unwanted happens to them. Where men were shocked, perhaps some of them will remain awake to the reality of many men's attitudes to and treatment of women. Perhaps some of them will intervene to stop it in their lives and when they see it happening (though, of course, much harassment is deliberately done precisely where no-one else is there to see it). It could change workplaces as much as anti-sexual harassment legislation ever did. The sheer scale of abuse, and the attempts to blackmail, sue and manipulate women into keeping quiet explain a great deal of female silence and acquiescence – you will be crushed if you reveal it. But no more. Everything that damages women, that restricts their freedom, can be stopped with feminist counter-power – and all the many different forms this takes. Female foeticide, forced marriage, rape, sexual assault and everyday sexism can all be stopped. If we can imagine an end to something, we can also imagine how it is we might get there.

PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS: AN ENDLESS STRUGGLE

Protecting rights is a perpetual project. Those in charge, those who like and are the status quo, will never shift without an endless struggle. When women's refuges are being closed, groups such as Sisters Uncut are there to fight for women's rights. But we can never rely on others to do what we could also do ourselves. I think that feminism was long seen as outdated, a completed project. I think various subtle (and not-so-subtle) campaigns were waged to get young women to identify as non- or anti-feminists. But feminism is on the ascendency again, and women and girls can see through the positions that adopt 'feminism' as their slogan but whose politics are war-mongering (the type of right-wing liberal 'feminism' that claims to desire to liberate women overseas), consumerist (the 'feminism' that sees buying things as emancipation, and that market 'choice' is paramount), or corporate (the 'feminism' that suggests women must 'lean in' to be taken seriously by capitalism).

DRAWING POWER FROM A 'NEGATIVE' UNITY

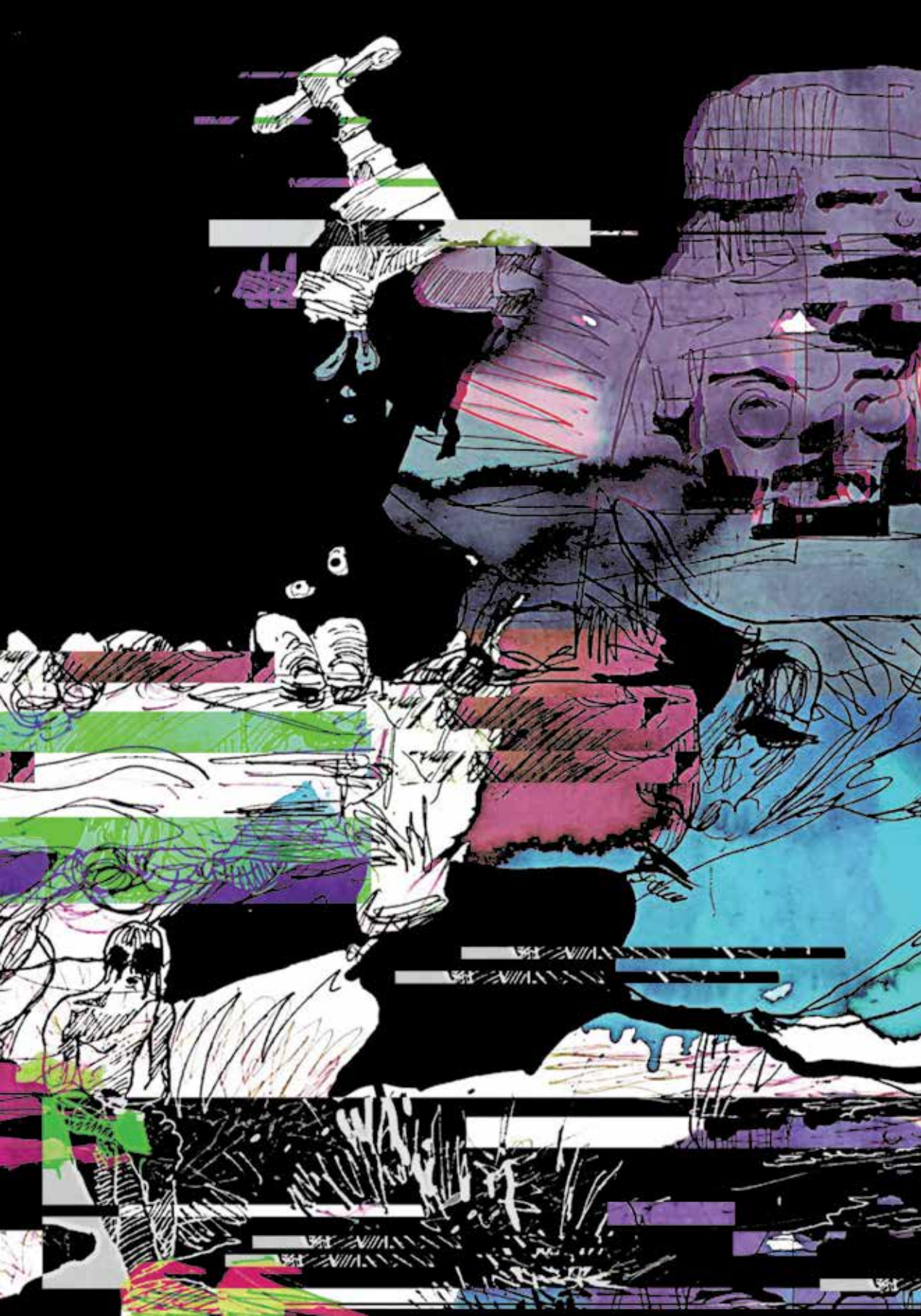
Feminist counter-power can build upon the quality of the public discussion regarding #metoo. While girls and women have different experiences of life in terms of class and ethnicity (though there are, of course, intense patterns there too), virtually every woman has had an experience of sexism, whether being treated as less important than men, shouted at, sexualized, harassed, or worse. There is something that unites women, and even though it is a 'negative' unity – in that what links women is their poor treatment and hierarchical placement as the 'second sex' – it can nevertheless become a source of great unity and power, once it is recognized. So much harmful treatment depends upon the inculcation of shame in the person being mistreated. Feminist counter-power can turn this shame around and force confrontation. The better we get at standing up against bullying and harassment in our personal life, the less we will tolerate it in political life. It should have been impossible for Trump to be elected after his admission of sexual harassment, and after many women came forward to speak out against his offensive behaviour. We must make it impossible in future for those who do such things ever to be in charge of everyone else. Not through violence and coercion, which are the techniques our opponents use, but with reserves of strength and wisdom that come from being kept back and treated badly. We know our enemies better than they know us, and that is just one of our many strengths.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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'FLOWING MOVEMENT'

***Building alternative water
governance in Mexico***

Gerardo Alatorre Frenk

The social, political and environmental conflicts regarding the management of water in today's world are a clear indication of the tensions at this point in history, when capitalist greed for what it sees as 'energy, water and mineral resources' knows no bounds. This neoliberal model of capital accumulation has serious consequences for the social fabric, for people's access to water, and for watersheds and territories. Many parts of the world – including Mexico – are battlegrounds, and what is at stake is the very life of communities and ecosystems.

We live in a transnational world. A global corporate elite runs financial and trade flows, geopolitics and the mass media, and most Latin American governments are cogs in that machine. This has a direct impact on water-management policies: as well as promoting the privatization of water supply and sanitation services, they are pursuing structural reforms whose aim is to ensure that water is available for open-cast mining and energy projects (hydroelectric power plants, fracking and biofuels).

Nevertheless, governments can and are being obliged to open up political space for other ways of approaching and organizing the management of watersheds and water.

Here we will look at the case of *Agua para Tod@s Agua para la Vida* (Water for All, Water for Life), an example of how people are developing a future different to what the hegemonic system tells us is the only one possible. It may be that alternative futures – rooted in the community, solidarity-based and sustainable – are now emerging all over the world; if it sometimes seems difficult to see them, this is probably because they are so new that we as yet have not words for them.

THE TIME TO DEFEND WATER AND TERRITORY IS NOW

As the corporate project to control water as a source of capital accumulation takes shape, and as its social and environmental effects become visible, other projects are also emerging. In these, water is seen as a common good that is vital for human and other living beings, an element that sustains health, food and various basic social needs. Against the attempts to centralize decision-making so that it serves the accumulation of wealth and power, political actors are seeking to introduce democratic, decentralized forms of government so that communities at different levels can take control of

the management of water and watersheds. In this way, what is gaining substance is an alternative power, an emerging power, a counter-power that is taking hold in organizations, institutions, networks, programmes, policy manifestos, and so on, from the local to the global scale.

Water has become a battleground, but it is also a powerful political glue. When water is at stake, it brings together social and political actors with very different interests, including high-level diplomats. In 2010, a spark lit by the Bolivian government ignited a conflagration of international pressure, leading to the signing of a UN General Assembly resolution that establishes the human right to water and sanitation.

Water has become a battleground, but it is also a powerful political glue.

The Mexican government signed that resolution, and two years later the human right to water was enshrined in the Mexican Constitution. This meant there was a need for new legislation on water to ensure that people were able to exercise that right; the new law was to be called the General Water Law (Ley General de Aguas – LGA). Article 4 of the constitution states that ‘Everyone has the right to access clean, good quality water in sufficient quantities and at affordable rates for their personal and domestic use, together with sanitation services for its disposal. [...] The state will guarantee this right and the law will define the basis, support systems and arrangements for access to water resources and their fair, sustainable use, stipulating the participation of federal government agencies and municipalities, as well as the *participation of citizens* for the achievement of such purposes’ (emphasis added).

As a result of this constitutional reform, something very unusual took place in Mexico: civil society got organized, without going through the political parties, and drew up a citizens’ initiative for the law. A group of politically active professionals from around the country brought together various civil society organizations (CSOs), community water committees and researchers who had already been mobilizing for years at the local, regional or watershed level, to build counter-power on issues linked to water management. We believed it was the right time to move towards a more consistent coordination of our efforts, with a view to influencing national-level policy as well as to boost, strengthen and protect regional campaigns.

The first National Congress, held in December 2012 and attended by about 400 people, led to the setting up of the Water for All, Water for Life National Coordinating Committee (see www.aguaparatodos.org.mx), in which the author has been participating. The proposal was not only to draft a Citizens' Initiative for the General Water Law (IC-LGA); what

What ultimately brought us together was the aim of building what we call good governance of water

ultimately brought us together was the aim of building what we call *good governance of water*, meaning the democratic, participatory, decentralized and sustainable management of water

and watersheds. Those currently involved in Water for All include some trade unions and rural organizations, grassroots church communities, journalists and lawyers, as well as several community water committees, CSOs and academics.

How can synergies be developed between such diverse actors? How can links be made between the different timescales and spaces where counter-power is built? How do the different knowledge bases, ways of working and powers that come together in Agua para Tod@s engage in dialogue and complement each other? These are some of the questions we will address here. But first, let's look at what is at stake.

THE MANAGEMENT OF WATER IN MEXICO

Mexico is a country of huge social, cultural and climate contrasts. More than half the population lives in poverty, while a few families are among the richest in the world. There is significant ethnic diversity, as reflected for example in the 7.4 million speakers of indigenous languages, of which there are more than 70; Náhuatl is the mother tongue of nearly two million people, while for more than 860,000 it is one of the Mayan languages. As far as climate and water diversity is concerned, the entire north of the country experiences drought, while in the south there are areas that flood during the rainy season. Three million people have no access to safe drinking water, and 40 million suffer the consequences of the over-exploitation of aquifers.

Ways of organizing the water supply are also very diverse. In rural and semi-urban areas of Mexico, communities usually have water committees in charge of maintaining the springs or wells where families draw water and of organizing community work to build water-storage and distribution

infrastructure. At the other extreme are the gigantic works of infrastructure with which the megacities seek to meet their water supply and wastewater drainage needs.

Mexico's water policy has tended to be centralized. The federal government, through the National Water Commission (CONAGUA), has the power to award concessions. Although there have been processes of decentralization since 2004, they have not led to more social and community participation but rather to increased private-sector involvement.

At the local level, municipal governments are responsible for water and sanitation services. Their management procedures usually rule out participation by local residents and instead foster clientelism and corruption. In many cases, funds are used in a discretionary way to benefit party-political or private interests.

The ineffectiveness of municipal service operators has been used as an argument in favour of privatizing the services. At the same time, as we mentioned earlier, water is becoming a key factor in mining and energy projects. These policies infringe 10% of the Mexican population's right to water,¹ and the effects are aggravated by the above-mentioned climate extremes, which could be exacerbated as a result of global climate change.

DIFFERENT VISIONS OF THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE, DIFFERENT PROPOSALS FOR THE LGA

In 2015, the Mexican federal government submitted its LGA bill to parliament. It was not approved, partly because of the regulatory infringements involved in the government's attempt to fast-track the bill, and partly because citizens and some politicians were strongly opposed to it. The government's proposed law favoured privatization and the use of water by different types of megaprojects. It also perpetuated the 'linear' and 'pipe-heavy' features of the previous law: linear, because it continues to suggest that water management should be based on the extraction → transport → use → pollution → waste sequence rather than a cyclical arrangement; and 'pipe-heavy' because it proposes to build transport, pumping and drainage infrastructure, bringing water over great distances in order to supply homes and industries, with adverse, sometimes irreversible, effects on watersheds and the expropriated communities.

The Citizens' Initiative for the General Water Law (IC-LGA), in contrast, is aimed at building water governance based on the ethical-political principles of sustainability, equity and participation.² The first states that we are responsible for guaranteeing access to water both for human communities and for all other species and ecosystems. The principle of equity obliges the state to guarantee that people can obtain the minimum quantity of water necessary to meet their day-to-day needs, regardless of their purchasing power, age, sex and place of residence. The principle of participation affirms that it is at the local level, in the management of springs, streams, wells and water intakes in each community or neighbourhood, where it is possible to reinforce people's knowledge, their forms of organization and the mechanisms they use to plan, run and supervise water management. The commitment here is to decentralize knowledge and power.

People from very different sectors participated in drafting the IC-LGA: professionals from various organizations and civil society networks, and teams of academics who work with rural and urban communities on territorial management issues. In 2012 and 2013 the work was entrusted to commissions, which developed policy proposals for different thematic areas, including municipal water and sanitation systems, watershed management, aquifer protection, concession systems, water justice, the prevention of pollution, and water for food sovereignty. A team of lawyers translated these proposals into legal language and a final draft was agreed in 2014.

Over the course of 2013 and 2014, 99 public forums were organized in different regions of the country, involving grassroots organizations, citizen groups, academic institutions and some government officials and members of parliament. These forums made suggestions that enabled the proposed law to be firmed up. In February 2015 the Citizens' Initiative for the LGA was presented to deputies and senators at a public event and that same month it was published in the Senate Gazette, endorsed by the signatures of 22 senators from four political parties.

The process of drafting the IC-LGA and developing a national movement for good governance of water has involved dialogues between very different types of knowledge and discourses. One illustrative example concerns the different ways of thinking about and organizing the territory: the

watershed approach, which tends to be used by hydrologists, geographers and green activists, can be very different to the ancestral mythical idea of the territory, the logic of production management and the agrarian control on which community territorial management is usually based. But the dialogue between them gives rise to some very useful learning for both sides, and any potential contradictions are turned into complementarities. We witnessed a 'cross-pollination' between scientific knowledge and the deeply rooted practical knowledge of people working in the territories. In the area of rights, there is mutual feedback between the immediate requirements of communities and the demands of activists campaigning at the national and international level for greater transparency and against impunity for transnational corporations (TNCs).³

The IC-LGA sets priorities for how water is to be used and allocated, with ecosystems at the top of the list, followed by personal domestic use and in third place food sovereignty. Concessions for other uses would be awarded only if there is water available once the priorities have been met. In the planning of water and watershed management, the key documents would be the Stewardship Plans, which would be drawn up at the local level and agreed by consensus.

The proposal is well grounded in technical, social, political, financial and legal terms. In acknowledgement of this, it was adopted by the Water Resources Commission in the Chamber of Deputies over the course of 18 months (2013–2014).

For water management (planning, implementation, oversight and sanctions) the IC-LGA proposes an institutional structure made up of citizen-run bodies at different levels, respecting communities' uses and customs, especially their forms of organization. The aim is to ensure that people can have access to water as a result of integrated watershed management, and a precautionary principle is applied: any activity or project that could pose a risk to communities, their territory and their water will need to be submitted for their prior free and informed consent.

Water for All is strengthening and linking the different strands of counter-power to which those involved in them at the local, regional or institutional level were already contributing. The IC-LGA has helped to bring them together, as it complements strategies to build good governance of water in the here and now. (We perfectly know that law and law enforcement

may be very distant one from another; numerous Mexican laws, which could promote participatory and sustainable territorial management, are dead letter when the correlation of forces in real life is unfavourable to them.) But let's look at what the legislative strategy involved.

LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES TO BUILD COUNTER-POWER

Mexican law provides for two ways in which citizens can present policy proposals: the Citizens' Initiative (which requires the support of nearly 110,000 citizens) and the People's Consultation (which, when signed by 1.6 million citizens, makes it obligatory for parliament to study a proposed law).

Enough signatures – with the respective official identity card numbers – have now been collected to present the Citizens' Initiative, thanks to the active participation in the campaign to gather signatures by a large number of community water systems, indigenous peoples, students, researchers, trade unions and rural organizations.

Water for All has continued to open up discussion spaces, both to add support and to make the adjustments that the draft law requires. In 2015 and 2016, the National Consensus for Water was convened by five university rectors to analyse and make proposals based on national and international perspectives. Twenty-three events and discussion forums were held, generating proposals to strengthen the IC-LGA, and new organizations became involved in promoting it and building good governance of water.

Water for All has reflected on the prospects for the different LGA proposals in the current pre-election political scenario (federal elections will be held in 2018). The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) currently controls the executive branch of government and Congress, but its electoral prospects are gloomy and the ruling party itself is divided with regard to the LGA: the PRI has not accepted the federal government's proposal. There is high political tension around legislation on water. On the one hand, energy and mining corporations want Mexican law to guarantee them the possibility of lodging a claim against the Mexican state at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID); on the other hand a strong current, both from CSOs, in public opinion and in some parts of the government, opposes the idea of privatizing the management of water and authorizing its use in megaprojects.

This is a delicate political matter. The authorities know from experience that it is risky to try to fast-track the bill: the attempts to date have turned into opportunities for Water for All to make its counter-proposal widely known, taking advantage of the press coverage and the public reaction.¹ The federal government is unlikely to want to incur the political cost of a possible rejection of its General Water Law, and we can therefore assume that it will be in the 2018–2024 government term that we will see the two proposals clash, in both the parliamentary and the socio-political arena.

In the meantime, the Water for All strategy has two key elements. First, it seeks to draft and lobby for state-level water laws that take their inspiration from the IC-LGA; since 2016, organizations in 12 of the country's states have been involved in this effort, and talks have been held with local deputies from various parties to build consensus. Second, as we will see, Water for All is attempting to build good governance of water here and now. To put this in context, it is worth taking a brief look at recent history.

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND CONTROL OF WATER AND TERRITORY IN MEXICO

The Mexican Revolution led to the 1917 Constitution that promoted land reform. During the twentieth-century agrarian reform, 100 million hectares – equivalent to half of the country's territory and nearly two thirds of all its rural land – were transferred to small-scale peasants. About 30,000 *ejidos* (collectively owned lands) and *comunidades agrarias* (based on the recognition of indigenous ancestral territories) were registered. Article 27 of the constitution states that water, including underground water, belongs to the nation; it can only be used when the federal government awards a concession. But in the early 1990s, the 'Chicago boys' took power and the government negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the US and Canada, which meant that it had to make changes to the mining law, the forestry law and the National Water Law. Historical rights to water were put aside and replaced by a single concessions system that includes ways to buy and sell it. Article 27 was also modified to establish a land market and dismantle collective ownership of the *ejidos*. When NAFTA entered into force, the Zapatista communities in Chiapas rose up in arms.

A quarter of a century later, the 'regularization' of the land owned by *ejidos* and its transformation into private property has undoubtedly moved ahead. But there have also been mobilizations all over the country by communities seeking to keep control of their land and water and defend it against a

range of threats, including energy and open-cast mining megaprojects.

There have been mobilizations all over the country by communities seeking to keep control of their land and water

Combining legal actions with physical control of the land and various other strategies, campaigns to defend water

and territory have sprung up throughout Mexico. To support their campaigns, rural and indigenous communities have been making use of legal defence tools such as the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which ruled: '1) before taking the decision to implement a project, the state must provide peoples and communities with complete information, which must include studies of the project's social, cultural and environmental impact, and 2) before issuing any authorization and/or permit, the state must organize a consultation to obtain the community's consent, and it must take place in the community's language, abide by its usages and customs, and last as long as may be necessary'.⁴

The international legitimacy of community control over territories and water derives from General Comment No. 15 on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and ILO Convention 169, which foregrounds indigenous peoples but also begins to support comparable peoples. In the case of Mexico, these would be rural or urban communities with Mesoamerican cultural roots.

In the states of Chiapas, Michoacán, Oaxaca and the Sierra Norte de Puebla there are important experiences of community control of territory. One notable example is the municipality of Cuetzalan in Puebla. In 2009, after the water supply had been seriously affected by tourism projects, a series of situation assessment workshops were held with widespread community participation and the support of a team of university students. In 2010, this team presented the results of the assessment to the communities and consulted them on a territorial organization proposal that would divide the municipality into zones and establish what could and could not be done in each zone. After 14 months' work, an Ecological Territorial Organization Plan was approved at an official session of the local council,

thus acquiring the status of a law. Since then, it has enabled the communities to protect themselves against energy and mining projects promoted by the government and various companies.

Building good governance of water in civil society

The work of Water for All and the regional organizations and communities linked to it is aimed at building democratic, participatory and sustainable management of water, starting with day-to-day practice in micro-level spaces, covering the meso level whenever possible, and keeping up efforts – such as the campaign to collect signatures – to bring about changes at the macro level.

Key strategies include strengthening community water systems, creating citizen oversight bodies, resistance against privatization processes, joint management of watersheds with citizen participation, developing lobbying capacities based on public opinion, and building wider national and international networks. We discuss each of these areas of work below, in the hope of providing pointers to other movements in Mexico and elsewhere in the Americas and beyond.

Making community water systems more professional

We have already mentioned the water committees – types of organization that survive, as ‘use and custom’, in numerous communities in Mexico, enabling them to protect and maintain their water sources (wells, springs and streams). There are currently political tensions regarding these systems, and not just because of the attempts to privatize water supply services. ‘Municipalization’, a term that in other contexts implies bringing privatized water supply services back under public control, can mean the opposite in these communities: the loss of community control, as these services become the responsibility of municipal authorities that are unaccountable, tend to be corrupt, and manage water in a clientelist way.²

Direct territorial control by local communities depends on the correlation of forces between different parties with an interest in water management and on how organized the communities are.

Is there political space today for direct territorial control by local communities? That depends both on the correlation of forces (tensions and negotiations between different parties with an interest in water management) and on

how organized the communities are. Water for All connects several regional experiences in watersheds in the central part of the country: Mexico City and the State of Mexico. It has forged links between the community water systems and certain universities that are assisting with assessments, the monitoring of water quality, the design of water-purification systems, and the mapping and protection of groundwater recharge and discharge areas.

Starting in 2015 the Tecámac Water System (in the State of Mexico) invited members of community water organizations, researchers and university students to discuss the situation and these organizations' needs. In one event that year, several organizations decided to prioritize making the water committees more professional. They were inspired by a video on the 2000 water war in Cochabamba, Bolivia, which encourages people to 'restore trust, joy, transparency, reciprocity and the ongoing struggle in working collectively as a group, as well as the capacity to manage and live alongside water as a living being and not as a resource'.⁵

In 2016 Tecámac launched the 'Water School', which runs training and shared learning courses and workshops so that the members of water committees from different regions can develop organizational and technical skills (on tariff policies, distribution, financial sustainability and infrastructure management). They have achieved successes with democratic control by users' assemblies and accountability on the part of elected management committees.³

Citizen oversight

Citizens are being trained and acquiring capacities to oversee the performance of the authorities and denounce cases of failure to fulfil their responsibilities. Water for All's member organizations are involved in cases in Tabasco, Puebla, Saltillo (Coahuila) and Mexico City, among others. In some Mexico City districts, such as Xochimilco and Iztapalapa, citizen oversight is aimed at preventing the excessive pumping of underground water, which has already caused serious subsidence.

At the national level, the introduction of an Anticorruption System in 2016 provided the formal institutional space required for the social auditing of water.

Alternatives to the privatization of municipal or metropolitan systems

The CONAGUA budget for drinking water, drainage and sanitation infrastructure has been severely cut. The 2016 budget was slashed by 72% for 2017. We assume that the aim of these cuts is to put the service operators under pressure and force them to accept private-sector involvement.

The privatization of water service operators has already taken place in some communities in the states of Aguascalientes, Chiapas, Coahuila, Puebla, Quintana Roo and Veracruz. The failure to fulfil contracts and achieve the established targets (with the exception of efficiency in collecting payment, for which companies resort to cutting off the water when users fall behind with their bills), the inconsistent information presented by the concession-holder companies, the lack of transparency and the authorities' failure to respond to users' complaints, together with the surreptitious arrangements between the authorities and private-sector partners, can only lead to the assumption of corruption.

Mobilization by water users' organizations has already achieved the re-municipalization of two privatized utilities (one in Navojoa in the state of Sonora, and the other in Ramos Arizpe in Coahuila)⁴. Where this has not been possible, they are taking forward important campaigns.

Formal spaces for citizen participation in watershed management

Various Mexican laws stipulate that mechanisms must be in place for citizens to participate in public policy. Unfortunately, their impact is limited, both because of their lack of financial autonomy and because their pronouncements are not binding: they can only make recommendations. The Watershed Councils are a case in point. They do not give a vote but they do – sometimes – provide a voice to different types of water users (urban public, farmers, industrial users, etc.) as well as to other interested groups (including academics).

Several members of Water for All participate in the Watershed Councils, or have done in the past, and they have managed to raise awareness in some of the councils. This became evident in 2016, when the National Water Commission (CONAGUA) organized a 'consultation' process on the LGA: several Watershed Councils insisted on the importance of including proposals from the IC-LGA.

Some regions have organizations that promote arrangements for the joint management of watersheds, whereby agreements are reached between rural communities and urban municipalities. One example is the Pixquiac river basin in Xalapa, Veracruz. Urban users are taking shared responsibility for looking after the watershed where the water comes from: the water bill includes a contribution that is paid into a trust fund. This is used to finance community programmes that seek to ensure the sustainable management of the watershed, including, for example, setting up tree nurseries for reforestation and the restoration of degraded areas, the diversification of farming systems, community ecotourism and the production of firewood-efficient stoves.

Presence and visibility in the public space

Maintaining an active presence in public spaces for discussion and the widespread dissemination of information, both directly and through the mass media, has made it possible to inform public opinion that is in turn exerting political pressure. For example, publicizing the 72% cut in the federal budget allocated to the National Water Commission in 2017 (compared to the 2016 budget) made it possible to reveal the federal government's plans to promote the 'induced privatization' of water and sanitation services.

The public has been informed about the problems, campaigns and viable alternatives. Cyber-activism has also been used, as in the case of the campaign on Change.org against the 'Guidelines' that would legalize the use of water for fracking.

There have been mass rallies in streets and squares, and marches such as the National Caravan in Defence of Water, Territory, Work and Life (organized by the Yaqui tribe in 2015). Following three routes, this caravan travelled the country for 10 days and converged in Mexico City; more than 100 organizations, indigenous peoples and social movements participated in it, travelling through 85 rural and urban communities, and achieving widespread media coverage (more than 5,000 items in the press, on TV and in social media). These mass public events allow us all to learn from everyone else and they also boost our hopes, as they remind us that we are not alone. Although counter-power is built in the public space, one of its cornerstones is the subjective dimension, where the motivation to participate is developed and reproduced.

National and international networks

The positioning of Water for All's proposals and actions on the political agenda was achieved thanks to the links (solidarity, mutual support and coming together at key moments) developed with various rural organizations at the national level, universities, important trade unions such as the telephone workers' union, and social-environmental networks (the Mexican Anti-Fracking Alliance, the movement of communities affected by dams and in defence of rivers, etc.). The relationship with the Mexican Centre for Environmental Law has also been fruitful.

Ties have also been forged at the international level: with RedVIDA (the Inter-American Network for the Defence of the Human Right to Water), the Reclaiming Public Water network, and European organizations such as Agua de Todos (Portugal), K136 (Thessaloniki, Greece) and Acqua Benne Comune (Italy).

Gradually, with the help of 'connecting agents' (people or organizations familiar with different cultural, linguistic and organizational codes), different campaigning arenas are coming together.

TO SUM UP

The experience of Water for All shows the scope and the limitations of organizing by citizens to build counter-power. One day we might have the satisfaction of seeing a mining or hydroelectric power project suspended (even if only temporarily); and the very next day we might be frustrated and angry to find out about the approval (with no consultation or debate) of laws that act directly against the human right to water. A growing number of people are aware, and organizational capacity is being strengthened at the local and regional level, but the structures that enable government institutions to exercise power in a top-down manner are still in place.

What have we learned about emerging power, and about building counter-power? First, we have seen the importance of combining different strategies: to unite legislative initiatives with direct action on territories, and to bring together a diversity of actors, cultures, epistemes and spatial and temporal scales in dialogue and complementarity. At the same time, we need to build cross-disciplinary knowledge from dialogue between academic and non-academic knowledge bases.⁶ Gradually, we also need

to make links on different scales, to ensure that local struggles rooted in specific territories can provide and receive feedback to and from the work done by CSOs and university activists at the regional, national and international scale. There is a need to develop synergies with campaigns on human rights, for the right to food and health, for the right to information and consultation, for the right to a healthy environment and for the right to cultural diversity. What might appear as different struggles turn out to be, ultimately, the same and only one.

At this time of neoliberal policies and mafia states, the main lesson may be about the importance of keeping up our hopes of building a fairer, more sustainable future, where we can all exercise our right to water and many other fundamental rights.

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MADRID'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

***Where neighbourhood
counter-powers put down roots***

José Luis Fernández Casadevante *Kois*,
Nerea Morán and Nuria del Viso

BETWEEN THE BARRICADE AND THE NEW WORLD: HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND COUNTER-POWER?

We are the key to a door that does not yet exist.

– Subcomandante Marcos

The main feature of power is that it inevitably creates resistance, a process Foucault studied in detail. There are no harmonious societies. Conflicts of interest between different social groups have been a constant throughout history, and are probably the main driver of social change. Counter-power emerged as a means of collective action whereby the injustices suffered by subordinate or oppressed social groups become politicized, either in the form of silent rebellions that remain latent in everyday life¹ or through challenges that are publicly and openly declared. The forms this collective action takes have varied over time, due to factors such as technological developments, cultural changes or socio-institutional processes. The idea of counter-power has always been ambivalent: on the one hand, it is defined negatively by its capacity to say NO and prevent the hegemonic elites from carrying out their agenda; on the other, it transmits an assertive strength, a capacity to say YES and deploy new sensibilities, desires, ways of organizing and alternative lifestyles. Destituent and constituent power are two sides of the same coin.

Our cognitive reflexes tend to associate social struggles with images of revolts, mass mobilizations and epic insurrections, where conflict is dramatized. In the urban context, its mythological architecture would be the barricade – an ephemeral construction that symbolizes two worlds in conflict, made of the *magic cobblestones that rise up to form fortresses* described by Baudelaire. But what if, rather than the barricade, we were to think of counter-power in terms of a space such as a community garden (CG)? We would speak

But what if, rather than the barricade, we were to think of counter-power in terms of a space such as a community garden?

of defending the existence of spaces where the lives of local communities and plants are cared for, food is grown and social relationships are harvested, of neighbourhood and environmental ecosystems threatened by the market

and urban policies. Emmanuel Lizcano² used to say that metaphors and images unconsciously shape our thought patterns. In our case, this could lead us to think of social conflict in an excessively mechanical way.

Counter-power would be reduced to a lengthy process of building hegemony and the accumulation of forces capable of successfully confronting established power, until Gramsci's 'catastrophic equilibrium' is broken and counter-power becomes the new legitimate power.³

Let's think of the workers' movement with its unions and parties, consumer and worker cooperatives, mutual societies, newspapers and magazines, folk schools, cultural centres and libraries, people's houses, choirs, bands, excursion clubs, theatre groups, women's associations, mutual support networks in neighbourhoods... We will find a whole world run according to its own principles and rules – a constellation of community institutions where people could socialize, practise solidarity, and reproduce a culture and lifestyles that operate independently of power. Does it not seem reductionist to think that this complex multiplicity, overflowing with life, was a mere exercise in the accumulation of forces awaiting the day of the revolution?

Counter-power interests us because it refers to inhabiting a conflict without being obsessed with confrontation, and acknowledges that building new social relations can be a gesture of radical defiance. This connects with historical socialist and anarchist tendencies whose efforts were aimed at developing initiatives and projects that foresaw what a non-capitalist society would look like. Long ago, the Labour Party activist G. D. H. Cole wisely stated that the revolution should look as little like a civil war as possible and as similar as possible to a record of events and a culmination of existing trends.

This is why we will emphasize the positive, constituent dimension of counter-power and track experiences that are able to transform our cities and people's lives, bringing about small-scale radical changes at the same time. We will follow the trail of the *real utopias* studied all over the world by Erik Olin Wright,⁴ where what is pragmatically possible depends on our imagination and takes shape based on our visions of reality and our ways of inhabiting it differently.

Just as the escaped slaves in Brazil founded settlements hidden in the jungle, known as *quilombos*, in our concrete jungles today there is a wide range of modest counter-powers that are hidden, undervalued and kept out of sight. We will mention a few of them and then focus on one example: community gardens, specifically in Madrid.

RESISTING AUSTERITY URBANISM

The financial crash that began in 2008 put an end to the illusion of a model of economic growth increasingly disconnected from meeting social needs. Cities have borne the brunt of the dramatic social and economic impacts of the crash (household debt, evictions, high unemployment, energy poverty, inability to afford food, deterioration and privatization of public service, etc.), which have given rise to a serious loss of social cohesion.

A city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time. – P. Geddes

This process was aggravated by the application of an *austerity urbanism*⁵ that opened the door to the private sector in service provision and management, giving it an ever more important role in the definition of strategic guidelines for urban transformation. This restructuring of urban policies is based on processes such as the promotion of megaprojects and mega-events, public-private partnerships (PPPs), opening up the most interesting sectors to foreign investment, unequal public service provision depending on the purchasing power of different neighbourhoods, gentrification, and the commodification of sectors such as environmental management, green areas or even the public space itself.⁶

Investors, property developers and large corporations have driven the creeping commodification of the city, with the result that markets – disconnected from social needs and free from political oversight – determine the direction taken by urban governments. And citizens have suffered the dramatic

Investors, property developers and large corporations have driven the creeping commodification of the city, with the result that markets determine the direction taken by urban governments.

consequences: market authoritarianism and the erosion of local democracies, booming corruption, an increase in environmentally unsustainable processes and an exponential growth in inequality. This cyclical movement throughout history has provoked the activation of society's self-protection mechanisms, in what Polanyi defined in *The Great Transformation*⁷ as a 'double movement'. The threat of a free-market utopia generates antibodies capable of repoliticizing everyday life and deploying multiple alternative projects aimed at subordinating the economy to politics.

The official narrative of the crisis began to be questioned publicly in Spain with the emergence of the 15M movement in 2011, which launched the

most intense cycle of collective action in the country's recent history. The protest camps and assemblies formed micro-cities at the heart of a larger city in a sort of project proposal for other cities, generating an atmosphere more favourable to social change.⁸ Against austerity urbanism, what emerged from civil society was cooperative urbanism, intensive in its capacity to innovate to solve problems, citizen leadership and more democratic ways of understanding the public sphere. In Spain, responses to the crisis have taken different forms: campaigns to stop evictions and recover homes, led by the Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (Plataforma de Afectados por las Hipotecas, PAH);⁹ citizen tides in defence of public services such as health and education, bringing together users, professionals and trade unions; the restoration of buildings to set up community centres; the organization of food banks for vulnerable families; neighbourhood support and solidarity networks against the exclusion of migrants from health services; or the takeover of abandoned properties to plant community gardens.

The greatest successes of this plurality of counter-powers have been to discredit the story about the crisis; to put a stop to the most aggressive policies to privatize health, education or water; to popularize acts of civil disobedience (stopping evictions, occupations, refusing to pay higher taxes on medicines, medical care for undocumented people); to present popular legislative initiatives aimed at changing the legal framework, the outstanding example being the PAH proposal on the right to housing; and to develop a non-hegemonic use of international law, leading to several condemnations of the Spanish state for human rights violations. This is not just defensive action against the loss of rights and the lack of resources and basic services, but a recovery of collective thinking and proposal-making.

The plurality of resistance is not just defensive action against the loss of rights and the lack of resources and basic services, but a recovery of collective thinking and proposal-making.

This cycle of mobilization has consolidated a modest, imperceptible geography of resistance that takes the form of different ways of thinking about, imagining and inhabiting the territory. Whether intentionally or unconsciously, in solving problems counter-powers tend to promote alternative urban models where different lifestyles can develop. They do this by re-signifying and politicizing concepts such as the neighbourhood or

the public space, and by producing places where new social and practical relationships can be (re)built: community centres, community gardens, community-run equipment, the reinvention of empty or under-used public spaces. Living in a different way implies the material construction of arenas where – albeit on a small, fragmented scale – it is possible to reproduce other patterns of relationships among people and between people and their surroundings.

PLANTING CHANGE IN THE CITY SQUARE

This citizen counter-power was enacted in the protest camps that from 2010 onwards spread to large cities all over the world, from Tahrir Square to Madrid's Puerta del Sol, from Occupy Wall Street to Gezi Park, as people demanded more democracy and rose up against 'austericidal' policies.

With thousands of people living side by side in the protest camps, the public space was seen as a collective, political site. The occupation of this space was 'potentially permanent and self-managed',¹⁰ making it a metaphor of another way of inhabiting the city, reinventing the public space as a common space, 'a performative representation of justice and equality', where people could protest in common, think in common, live in common and explore alternative values in common.¹¹ The protest camps

were structured as temporary cities, with different spaces for different activities and needs: children's areas, libraries, communication and information centres, dining areas, solar panels.

***They can cut all the flowers, but they
can't stop the coming of spring.
– Pablo Neruda.***

In many of these camps, between the tarpaulins and the assemblies, community gardens somehow also found a space that was sometimes symbolic or evocative. Spaces where the community living in the camp imagined itself and made plans for the future, such as in the Huerta del Sol in Madrid, where there was a sign saying 'if we last 40 days we will eat lettuces'. A new community is invoked around the idea of the garden, rethinking relations and symbols in places affected by conflict. Thus, Greek and Turkish Cypriot activists from *Occupy the Buffer Zone* in Nicosia set up camp on the disputed land. One of the ways they took ownership of this space, left a mark on it and gave it a new meaning was the *Greening up the Green Line* action, which involved building a small

vegetable patch and 'seed bomb' workshops. These actions sought to give a new meaning to the green of the so-called green line (the demilitarized zone that separates the island), turning it into a cultivated landscape. These were temporary, shifting spaces, designed to highlight political demands and make links with other movements and spaces that were already there. Thus, in *Occupy Rome*, the city's guerrilla gardening groups and community garden (CG) collectives, organized their first joint action with the design and construction of the *Orto Errante*, based on movable vegetable patches;¹² Occupy Wall Street organized workshops and guided visits to the community gardens in the Lower East Side;¹³ in Barcelona, the agroecology movement attended various protests with a nomadic garden, which ended up being seized by the police; and *Occupy San Francisco* planted an organic garden opposite the headquarters of Monsanto. Elsewhere, the protest camps led to starting up projects that aimed to be permanent, such as *Occupy the Farm*,¹⁴ an urban farm on an occupied site in the University of California, Berkeley, or the *People's Peas Garden* located in a public park and run by *Occupy Gardens Toronto*, which was active for five months until it was dismantled.¹⁵ After the camps were taken down, the seeds of ideas planted by these gardens germinated elsewhere, as illustrated by the Puerta del Sol camp, which was dismantled to shouts of '*We're not leaving, we're moving to your conscience*'. So, when neighbourhood assemblies in Spain start to work on their local environments, they often develop community garden projects. This has happened from Madrid and Barcelona to Burgos or Málaga, where the very name of the gardens reflects those origins: Horts Indignats in Barcelona, Huerta Dignidad in Málaga (in reference to the 2014 Marches for Dignity).

Community gardens emerged as one of many forms of protest against the malaise caused by the neoliberal global city and its *urbanicidal dynamics* (too many institutions and not enough government, exclusion and the dual labour market, the politics of fear, deteriorating public services, unsustainability and so forth).¹⁶ Urban agriculture has become a means to denounce speculation and demand a new culture of the territory. It has also enabled the creation of social and economic alternatives linking a wide range of social actors and collectives, from green activist groups to unemployed people's assemblies, from neighbourhood associations to popular solidarity networks.

COMMUNITY GARDENS OR COUNTER-POWERS WITH THEIR FEET ON THE GROUND

In common with other critical social movements, the CG presented their demands under the umbrella of *the right to the city*,^{17, 18} understood not as a legal claim, but as citizens' right to intervene in the city, to build it and transform it. This symbolic framework can be used to connect with other essential demands (against neighbourhood segregation and stigmatization, forced displacements, evictions, the criminalization of poverty) for imagining a socially just city, into which experiences like the CG incorporate issues such as urban ecology and food sovereignty. The urban agriculture movement reveals and poses questions that go beyond the

The gardens symbolised the opposition to what was happening. The possibility of building a better city based on the interests of local communities, an expression of people working together. The opposite of racial segregation, individualism and the urban renewal strategies that benefit only the rich and powerful.
– C. Khan

gardens themselves, calling on people to participate and share responsibility for our lifestyles and how we manage resources that are located beyond the city limits but are essential for the city's subsistence in a context of social and ecological crisis, exemplified by climate collapse and the energy crisis.

Together with the right to the city, another central pillar in the ideas and practices of the urban agriculture movement is the notion of the commons. Indeed, the CG defined

themselves as the urban commons from the outset. Thus, for Karl Linn¹⁹ they are *neighbourhood commons*, meeting spaces built and managed by people living in degraded areas of deprived neighbourhoods. The urban commons revive traditional practices of community management of natural, strategic resources the community needs to reproduce, and adapt them to the urban setting.²⁰

One of the strengths that give the CG their radical nature and transformative capacity is their goal of creating a community in the broad sense, around sharing and collectively managing a space, resources (soil, seeds, water, tools), certain benefits (harvests, social recognition), and a group of people who define their own rules and organization. This has led to the CG also being defined as *green urban commons*: 'green spaces located in urban

settings, with diverse forms of ownership and a wide range of rights, including the right to create their own management arrangements and to decide who they want to include in that system of management'.²¹

The CG are self-organized, non-hierarchical experiences that combine a critique of the dominant model of the city with the mobilization of emancipatory practices and ideas. Against the ideology of *homo economicus*, the idea of the community refers to the way in which people create their own community intentionally, reflexively and by engaging in dialogue, generating groups that see themselves as inclusive, open, flexible, porous and rooted in the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is that sphere between the productive and the reproductive, between the private, known, domestic space and the public space, comprising the larger, more abstract city that cannot be encompassed in its totality. In the CG, the sense of belonging to the neighbourhood is defined culturally rather than geographically, seeking to involve and appeal to neighbours whose definition as a group is likewise flexible, as it refers to people who work collectively in the neighbourhood and not so much to their place of residence.

This sense of community belonging that characterizes the urban gardens is underlined by a gardener from Madrid, an unemployed architect: 'It's not a question of each person having their own plot, or each person managing, working and harvesting a separate, fenced-off area. That's something people find very unsettling – they're surprised that you'd go and put in the work without knowing what you're going to get out of it'. Because what is grown is not for commercial purposes, the gardens promote a sort of gift economy,²² where what each person contributes and what they receive is not quantified. Another gardener from the same garden explains it like this: 'This spade is not mine, neither is this plant. Because all of it is everyone's, I have more of a sense of belonging. It feels more important to me, I have to look after it and defend it more than if it was mine or someone else's. It's everyone's space and no-one's space – a common good that we can all enjoy but that doesn't belong to us'. For another gardener, 'Being a community means working more on the basis of questions than answers. Things get decided through consultation, nobody imposes their views'.

For a gardener in one of Madrid's oldest gardens, Adelfas, the CG is 'a place where we can go back to what a neighbourhood used to be, talk to the

neighbours in a space that's not commercial or defined by consumerism'. Another adds: 'It's a place where we do things collectively and connect with the earth, a place to be with people who have something in common, a part of the neighbourhood that's really ours, unlike the park that's cold and impersonal'.

Agroecology, self-management and social ties are the three features that define their work at the local level, where people grow food and harvest social relationships. Because they are in the public space, the CG are highly visible, attractive experiences, and very active in making connections with other initiatives (community centres, neighbourhood associations, consumer groups, cyclists' collectives, education associations

and schools, for instance), which means that they reweave the local social fabric.

As time goes by, the meeting space and relationships with other people become key to the group's cohesion and competes in attractiveness with the gardening dimension, which was initially more relevant. As one gardener

The community gardens are self-organized, non-hierarchical experiences that combine a critique of the dominant model of the city with the mobilization of emancipatory practices and ideas.

says, 'When we didn't know each other so well, we mostly talked about plants. Now we know each other we talk more about what's going on in our lives'. Another gardener, the treasurer of one of the largest gardens in Madrid, Huerto Batán, expresses her motivation in similar terms: 'Now, rather than the tomatoes, the important thing is relating to other people'.

As well as the immediate activity, the CG prefigure what people would like their city to look like in the future, expressing the need for neighbourhoods that are more participatory, shared spaces, together with the introduction of more eco-urbanism (sustainable transport, proximity, renewable energies, composting, closing cycles).

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY GARDENS IN MADRID

The CG were born in local communities that organized to regenerate degraded urban spaces on a small scale by occupying abandoned properties, spaces between buildings or underused green areas. These empty spaces once again became inhabited, combining a modest reconstruction of

the site, emphasizing the use value of the urban space, with a relational rehabilitation that seeks to restore the quality of the space by intensifying social relations (organizing activities such as street parties, community meals or cultural initiatives). The protest side of the gardens was there from the start, revealing how far urban development policies and expert knowledge have diverged from the needs and aspirations of the city's inhabitants. The action of occupying the space reflects the absence of ways to engage in a fruitful dialogue with local institutions, and reclaims the right of communities and citizens to take ownership of the public space and apply 'collaborative planning and management practices to recreate it and think about what it should look like in the future'.²³

The movement began at the start of the twenty-first century with a few isolated initiatives taken forward by neighbourhood associations and ecologists, who by 2010 had set up coordination networks such as the Red de Huertos Urbanos Comunitarios de Madrid (RED). Since the 15M movement in 2011 many neighbourhood assemblies have been setting up gardens in different areas of Madrid, definitively locating this issue in the public sphere and putting it on the political agenda. The RED serves to raise the profile of all the initiatives, encourage the exchange of experiences (visits, meeting), share resources (seed nursery, seed exchange, buying manure collectively), create mutual support mechanisms and promote training events (learning days, courses), as well as offering a resource space that can provide advice and support to people and groups interested in taking forward new initiatives.

Right from the start, the instability inherent in the occupation of land and the scarcity of resources led the RED to seek dialogue with the Madrid City Council, in order to regularize the status of the gardens and push for the launch of a municipal programme that would enable them to form part of the city's green infrastructure on a permanent basis. Between internal tensions and lengthy assembly meetings, sites being dismantled and occupied, protests and photo exhibitions, support from universities and international recognition (UN-HABITAT's Good Practice Award for Urban Sustainability), the RED gained legitimacy as an interlocutor in negotiations. Following a lengthy hard bargaining with one of Spain's most neoliberal municipal governments, the status of the first 17 CG was regularized in 2014. The gardens are located on sites categorized as green areas, and the right to use them is awarded in a public bidding process. In the list

of terms and conditions a balance has been struck between respect for the uniqueness of citizen initiatives and their autonomy, while offering legal security to the City Council, in an innovative procedure that could be replicated in other cities.

This major victory was won after exploring the shifting sands of dialogue with the city government, without dying in the attempt, proposing new forms of engaging with state institutions from positions of conflict and not just confrontation, eventually progressing towards dialogue and even cooperation. This giant step has enabled the community agriculture initiatives in the capital to consolidate and in just a few years to increase to nearly 60 regularized projects today.

The CG map is the opposite of a tourist map, which shows only the city centre, because the low-income neighbourhoods predominate, especially those on the outskirts where most initiatives are concentrated. In the city centre, where urban development is denser, it is much more difficult to find a physical space. Even so, the decisive variable is the thick social and neighbourhood fabric that the gardens require, which is more likely to be found in outlying neighbourhoods.

The institutionalization process is in the early stages and is gradually becoming consolidated, respecting the autonomy and non-party-political nature of the initiatives. In addition, since a municipalist coalition took over the City Council in 2015²⁴ further steps have been taken, advancing the joint development of public policies aimed at recognizing and maximizing the creativity and collective intelligence in our cities, involving citizens and the social fabric in designing and implementing policies that concern them.²⁵ This has led to the regularization of more gardens, including those located on non-residential land on a temporary basis, the building of the Municipal Urban Gardening School, consolidating a training plan to support community gardens jointly managed by the RED, and the launch of a pilot project for community agro-composting. In addition, they have also arranged fun activities to visibilize these city experiences and to encourage participation in urban agriculture social movements, including for example a festival of multimedia short films on community agricultural, the Hummus Film Festival,²⁶ and a community garden bike tour connecting the different gardens that has helped build relationships between the city's different geographic zones.

Municipalism is a walking paradox – discomfoting to central government powers and business interests, but also to local counter-powers, who are obliged to leave their comfort zone, abandon the logic of resistance and accept a change in their identity that will enable them to play a leading role in a scenario where securing new rights becomes feasible. Counter-powers seen from above, powers seen from below. The ‘city councils for change’ find themselves in an unusual and paradoxical position between the pragmatism of the moment and the utopian impulse to bring about change. They are giving life to a space where it is possible to create more suitable ecosystems and environments for the experiments that are autonomously prefiguring another society. These are local governments that facilitate, support, and strengthen new forms of social institutionality.

Municipalism is a walking paradox – discomfoting to central government powers and business interests, but also to local counter-powers, who are obliged to leave their comfort zone, abandon the logic of resistance and play a leading role in securing new rights

HOW DO THESE GREEN ISLANDS OPERATE?

The CG are organized as an assembly, where proposals are made and important decisions are taken. They also operate with working groups that are set up to coordinate specific tasks. Alongside these, are informal mechanisms based on thematic leadership – the person who knows about the specific topic and can take the initiative decides how to do it – and decision-making by those who are most often present in the space. The work draws on the knowledge and experience of all the members, creating a climate of knowledge-sharing and ongoing, collective knowledge-production in response to the problems that arise.

Tasks tend to be organized depending on each person’s preferences and knowledge, although there are mechanisms to ensure that people take turns to do the most unpleasant ones – such as sweeping or stirring the compost. A gardener from Adelfas, remarks how ‘there comes a time in this process when you have to do things you wouldn’t necessarily choose to. You might like the idea of spending the day with this person who’s a specialist in something and learn first-hand how they do their work, but you take responsibility and do whatever it’s your turn to do that day’. The harvest – a motivation more symbolic than material – is divided among

everyone present and is seldom a source of conflict. However, care is taken to ensure that it is shared out fairly. On one occasion, an older man broke a bone in his foot while working in the garden and was unable to go back for some time, but his share of each harvest was set aside for him and someone would take it to his house since his work had helped to grow the vegetables.

Some initiatives collect modest cash contributions from members, although people who cannot afford to pay are not excluded from joining the project. Others raise funds by making food or selling merchandise – badges, canvas bags, etc. – as well as by collecting voluntary individual contributions.

The practice of urban ecological agriculture is often the main initial attraction. Later, working and spending time with other people means that relationships tend to become more important than the vegetable-growing tasks as such. Gradually, a network of relationships is woven and encourages solidarity and mutual support.

Of course, as in any social setting, there are disagreements and disputes over how to manage the space or do the work, or because of misunderstandings. However, conflict is not usually seen as something to avoid, but rather an issue to be addressed. This is why some gardens in Madrid have developed their own regulations for dealing with conflict, and even make use of mediation processes through the RED.

FROM ISLANDS OF GREEN TO ARCHIPELAGO

The difference between a group of islands and an archipelago is the existence of connections between them. Thus, once the gardens had put down roots in the neighbourhoods and become part of the social ecosystem, they and the RED focused on building bridges, gaining more allies, linking up with other campaigns and coordinating with other actors on various scales. The advocacy work done by the CG goes beyond their own neighbourhoods and their influence extends to the city as a whole, where they are making their own specific contribution to changing the urban model.

These projects are involved in multiple mobilization networks both at the urban and the translocal scale, linked to citizen participation, food

sovereignty and agroecology. In 2015, the RED coordinated the First National Meeting of Urban Community Gardens. The ultimate aim is to transcend their own neighbourhood and become involved in a wider movement by connecting these islands to others, eventually consolidating ever-expanding archipelagos that break the bounds of established institutional structures and dominant practices.

MIGHT THE FRUITS BE SEEDS?

Madrid's gardens have gained significant symbolic power as metaphors for social creativity, for citizens' capacity to give abandoned spaces back their use value, for caring for nature in the city, and for the building of alternatives by autonomous citizens. As well as mobilizing alternative ideas and becoming a means of protest, the CG have been a valid practical way to bring the organizational dynamics and critical discourses developed by the 15-M movement to neighbourhoods and municipalities. They are also fostering connections between the various pre-existing group or neighbourhood processes, thus diversifying their participant profile thanks to their constructive and inclusive nature.

Locally, the CG bring together a range of feelings, demands and claims (environmental, neighbourhood, political, relational), while simultaneously stimulating processes of neighbourhood self-management that place emphasis on direct participation, taking ownership of the space, the rebuilding of identities and the shared responsibility of the community as a whole for the different issues that affect the people who live there. These exercises in micro-urbanism express people's disagreement with the dominant model of the city and the lifestyles it induces.

The CG are an expression of the emergence of a cooperative urbanism, intensive in citizen leadership and more democratic ways of understanding the public sphere.²⁷ The gardens imply processes of urban rehabilitation, both in the form of small-scale material changes and, especially, in the form of relational rehabilitation, in how links are developed among people and between people and their surroundings. The CG act on the production and transformation of the urban space through their impact on human relationships and lifestyles rather than via major works of physical refurbishment.

A garden doesn't change the world; it changes the people who are going to change the world

A habitable counter-power is one that allows people to experience in the here and now the major features of the future life to which we aspire, a process of immanent transformation that cannot be reduced to strategic calculations regarding the accumulation of forces and irreversible revolutions. The anarchist Paul Goodman used to say: 'Suppose you had the revolution you are talking and dreaming about. Suppose your side had won, and you had the kind of society that you wanted. How would you live, you personally, in that society? Start living that way now!' As a mural in one Madrid community garden says: 'A garden doesn't change the world; it changes the people who are going to change the world'. The challenge for these projects is to keep their more political contours without losing their capacity to bring about change.

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PEOPLE IN DEFENCE OF LIFE AND TERRITORY

*Counter-power and self-defence
in Latin America*

Raúl Zibechi

In much of Latin America, the state does not protect its citizens. This is particularly true for the popular sectors, indigenous peoples, people of colour and mestizos, who are exposed to the onslaught of drugs trafficking, criminal gangs, the private security guards of multinational corporations (MNCs) and, paradoxically, from state security forces, such as the police and the army.

There have been several massacres in Mexico, for instance – such as the killing of 43 students in Ayotzinapa in September 2014 – and they are no exception. There continues to be impunity for the 30,000 who have disappeared and 200,000 who have died since Mexico declared its ‘war on drugs’ in 2007.¹ Slight differences aside, the current situation in Mexico is replicated across the region. In Brazil, 60,000 people meet a violent death every year, 70% of them of African descent, and mostly youths from poor areas.²

Against this backdrop of violence that threatens the lives of the poorest, some of the most affected have created self-defence measures and counter-powers. Initially, these are defensive, but ultimately develop power structures in parallel to the state.

Since they are anchored in community practices, these self-defence groups are key to forming a form of power that differs from the hegemonic powers centred around state institutions. This essay examines them in more detail in order to understand this new trend in Latin American social movements.

The logics of the state and the community are opposed, since the former rests on its monopoly of the use of legitimate force within an established territory, and on its administration by means of a permanent, unelected, civil and military bureaucracy that reproduces and is answerable to itself. The bureaucracy brings stability to the state because it survives any change of government. Transformation from within is a very difficult, long-term process. Latin American countries face an additional challenge: state bureaucracies are colonial creations, made up principally of white, male, educated elites in countries where the population is mostly indigenous, mestizo and black.

By contrast, the community logic is based on rotating tasks and functions among all of its members and whose highest authority is the assembly.

In this sense, the assembly, as a space/time for decision-making, is a 'common good'. However, we cannot reduce 'common good' to the number of hectares of collective property, buildings, and authorities elected by an assembly that can be manipulated by caudillos or bureaucrats. We need to understand that there is the community as an institution and the community as social relations, a fundamental difference in dealing with questions of power. In my analysis, the heart of the community is not common property, although it remains important, but collective or communal labour – *minga, tequio, gauchada, guelaguetza* – which should not be reduced to institutionalized forms of cooperation in traditional communities.³

Collective labour underpins the commons, and is the true material base that produces and reproduces living communities, based on relations of reciprocity and mutual help rather than the hierarchical and individualized relations at the core of state institutions. The community lives not because of common property, but because of collective labour that is creative, and is re-created and affirmed in everyday life. This collective work is the means through which the *comuneros* and *comuneras* make a community, expressed in social relations that differ from the hegemonic ones.

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In her sociological work, the Guatemalan Mayan, Gladys Tzul, argues that in a society based on common labour, there is no separation between the domestic environment, which organizes reproduction, and political society, which organizes public life. In reality, both feed and nurture one another. In the communities, the two spheres are complementary, embodied in communal government. 'The communal indigenous government is the political organization that can guarantee the reproduction of life in communities. Communal labour is the fundamental basis underlying and producing those same communal government systems, and where the full participation of all men and women plays out.'⁴

Collective labour is part of all community activities. It enables both the reproduction of material goods and the community as such, from the

assembly and feasts to funerals and wakes, as well as alliances with other communities. Resistance struggles that ensure the reproduction of community life are also anchored in collective labour.

Emphasizing the multiple forms of collective labour allows us to see power and counter-power from a different perspective. First, collective labour is not an institution but social relations. Second, because they are social relations they can be produced by any collective subject in any space. As they are distinct from the community's property relations and authorities, they can reappear wherever the subjects or movements engage in community-inspired practices.

Third, highlighting social relations enables us to examine fluctuations and changes in power relations and, in the case of social movements, the cycles of birth, maturity and decline that are inherent in the collective logic. Thus, we avoid making the mistake of ascribing power to institutions that are effectively cogs in the state machinery, such as the case, for example, of the communal councils in Venezuela.

The Venezuelan communal councils depend on state funding and speak the language of bureaucracy; they form part of the organizational structure of the state and help to secure it rather than transcending it. Over time, they have become increasingly homogeneous and lost their independence. Although there is a strong egalitarian culture in the popular neighbourhoods in Venezuela, of horizontality and the absence of hierarchy, the contradiction between the base and the leadership has been resolved through directives that have set limits to and controlled egalitarian spaces.⁵

An important barrier to emancipation is that, to a greater or lesser degree, every culture has features of a hierarchical culture which feed on patriarchal and machista relations. This is equally true of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, where *caudillismo*, personalism and paternalism are reproduced almost 'naturally'. I therefore believe to put the emphasis on how social linkages are expressed in 'collective labours' more broadly, from assembly to feast. It is in this form of life and creative work that it becomes possible to modify cultures and ways of doing things, rather than within institutions whose inertia reproduces oppression.

Counter-power is, in fact, collective work that rural and urban communities establish to defend themselves from superior powers that jeopardize their survival. Below I list some examples of experiences where popular collectives or communities have exercised anti-state powers.

In cities, like Cherán and Mexico D.F., counter-powers are enmeshed in territorialized social movements that control and defend common spaces. They show that there are many similarities between what happens in a rural indigenous community and in a popular peri-urban area. In both cases, their collective life is challenged by extraction and capitalist accumulation through dispossession: in rural areas hydroelectric dams and open-pit mining in rural areas, and in the cities by real-estate speculation and gentrification.

THE DEFENCE OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY

The colourful mobilization of the Nasa people in the Colombian Cauca mountain region features a cordon of guards, both leading and flanking the mass of *comuneros* and *comuneras* to protect them. They are disciplined and 'armed' with their wooden sticks marked with ancestral symbols. The Indigenous Guard, the *Guardia Indígena*, says that its aim is to protect and defend the communities, as well as to be a body for education and political training.

Every year there is a graduation ceremony for hundreds of guards in the North Cauca. Men, women and young people from 12 to 50 years of age participate in the *Escuela de Formación Política y Organizativa* (School for Political and Organizational Training), and receive instruction in human rights and 'indigenous law' that they must apply in performing their duties. The graduation is a deeply mystical act that takes place in a harmonization centre, guided by wise community elders alongside university professors and human rights defenders (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTrb7zZX5lc>).

The structure of the Indigenous Guard is simple and shows its true purpose: each *vereda* or community chooses ten guards and a coordinator. A second coordinator is then chosen for each *resguardo* or indigenous territory, and a third for the entire region. The North Cauca region has 3,500 Indigenous Guards, corresponding to the 18 *cabildos* or authorities elected by the *resguardos*.

'We are not a police force at all, we build organization, we provide protection to the community and defend life without getting involved in the war', explains one of the coordinators.⁶ Participation is voluntary and unpaid, and the authorities and neighbours in each community help with the upkeep of the family plot of each guard and sometimes carry out sowing and harvest *mingas* (collective work).

Guards are evaluated annually, with members either continued or replaced as the organizational model is based on rotating among all its members. Community justice – the main task of the Indigenous Guard – seeks to restore internal balance and harmony, based on the Nasa cosmovision and culture, as opposed to state justice that separates and locks away convicted criminals. The Guard defends its territory from the military, paramilitaries and guerrilla forces that have murdered and kidnapped hundreds of *comuneros* since the war began. In recent years, they have also protected their territory from the multinational mining companies that pollute and displace populations.

As well as training and organising the communities, the guards encourage food sovereignty, and promote community plots and gatherings to reflect on *derecho propio*, as community justice is known. Every six months, they take part in harmonization rituals, guided by traditional healers, as a form of collective and individual 'cleansing'.

The Indigenous Guards are characterized by peaceful resistance. On several occasions, hundreds of them have convened, responding to the traditional whistle, to rescue someone kidnapped by the narco-paramilitary or the guerrilla forces. The sheer number of disciplined and determined guards free victims without recourse to violence. At times, they have also faced down the armed forces.⁷

In 2004, the Indigenous Guard received the National Peace Prize, awarded every year by a group of institutions, including the UN and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The Guard has become a point of reference for other peoples, such as Afro-descendants, peasants and the popular sectors that suffer state or non-state violence.

SELF-DEFENCE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Nasa's Indigenous Guard is not an exception, as many Latin American movements have established forms of self-defence to protect their communities and territories. The advance of extractive industries in recent years, whether mining companies, monocultures or infrastructure, is being met with popular resistance everywhere, sometimes taking the form of community-based territorial control.

To explore the forms self-defence takes and their relation to counter-powers, I will briefly describe four cases in addition to the Indigenous Guard: the *Rondas Campesinas* in Peru, the Community Police in the Mexican state of Guerrero and the *Cherán fogatas* in the state of Michoacán, and the Acapatzingo Housing Community Brigades in Mexico City.

Rondas Campesinas, Peru

In the 1970s, the state in practical terms did not exist in remote rural areas of Peru, which left peasants exposed to cattle rustlers. These were very poor and fragile cattle communities in the highlands, and any theft posed serious threats to their subsistence economy.

The communities therefore formed an assembly and decided to establish night watches or *Rondas Campesinas* to guard against cattle rustlers and protect the communities. At first they organised night watches by rotating responsibility among everyone in the community, but then they started carrying out public works, such building roads and schools. Later on, they even started to impart justice, acting like local authorities.⁸

The *Rondas* came back to life in Cajamarca in northern Peru, against the Conga gold-mining project. They sought to protect the water sources, on which family agriculture depends, from the pollution caused by the mine. They call themselves *Guardianes de las Lagunas* (Guardians of the Lagoons), and camp at an altitude of 4,000 m. in barren and almost uninhabited terrain, to watch over, witness and resist the presence of the multinationals (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spqhNSMFT7M>).

Guerrero Community Police, Mexico

The Regional Coordination of Community Authorities–Community Police (*Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias-Policía Comunitaria*,

CRAC-PC) was born in 1995, when indigenous communities sought to protect themselves from rising criminality. Twenty-eight communities were part of the initial effort, and managed to reduce delinquency by 90-95% (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjm0Xijo6lk>). Initially, they would hand over the offenders to the Public Prosecutor. But, after seeing them back on the streets after a few hours, in 1998 a regional assembly decided to create the Houses of Justice (*Casas de Justicia*). The accused can be defended in their own language, without the need for lawyers or the imposition of fines, since the aim of community justice is to 're-educate' those found guilty. During the trial, the main goal is to reach an agreement between the parties, involving family members and communal authorities.

This 're-education' is carried out mainly through community work rather than punitive justice, because the goal is the transformation of the person under community supervision and monitoring. The highest authority of the CRAC-PC is the open assembly in the towns that have Community Police. The assemblies 'appoint their coordinators and commanders, and can relieve them from their post if they are accused of failing to fulfil their duties. Also, decisions are made related to justice in difficult and sensitive cases, or if it is important business that involves the organization'.⁹ The CRAC-PC has never generated a vertical, centralized chain of command, showing that community authorities function as different kinds of powers than state authorities.

After 2011, Community Police spread throughout the state of Guerrero and the country as a whole, partly due to the growing levels of state and narco-trafficking violence, and the de-legitimation of the state apparatus. In 2013, self-defence groups emerged in 46 of the 81 municipalities in Guerrero, involving some 20,000 armed citizens.

There are considerable differences between community police and self-defence groups. The latter are citizens who take up arms to defend themselves from criminal activities, whose members are often neither appointed by nor accountable to the community; no regulations or basic principles are set out. Their rapid expansion came about because of the growth of the indigenous self-defence after the 1994 Zapatista uprising. This was recognized in the Ostula Manifesto of 2009, approved by indigenous peoples and communities in nine Mexican states during the 25th Assembly of the National Indigenous Congress (*Congreso Nacional Indígena*, CNI), that established the right to self-defence.¹⁰

Cheran fogatas, Mexico

Cherán is a city with a population of 15,000 in the Mexican state of Michoacán, most of whom are indigenous *purépecha*. On 15 April 2011, the population rose up against *talamontes*, loggers, in defence of the common use of the forests, their community life and to ensure their safety from the organized crime and the political powers that protect it. Since then, the population has set up a system of self-government through 179 braziers or community fires, the beating heart of indigenous counter-power, located in the city's four neighbourhoods (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqI9_kKBwws).

Based on their *usos y costumbres* (customs and traditions), the population elects a High Council, the highest municipal authority, which is also recognized by state institutions. There are no more elections by parties, but rather via assemblies that choose their authorities. The braziers are an extension of the communal kitchens among the barricades; a space for neighbourhood gatherings, exchange and discussion, where 'children, youth, women, men and the elderly, are actively included and where all decisions are made'.¹¹

Communal power in Cherán is best depicted as a set of concentric circles. On the outside are the four neighbourhoods, in the centre of which is the Community Assembly backed by the High Council of Communal Government, which includes three representatives from each neighbourhood. Then, there is the Operational Council and the Communal Treasury, which form the first circle around the centre/the assembly. Around it, there are six other councils: administration, communal goods, social, economic and cultural programmes, justice, civil issues, and the neighbourhood coordination council. As they say in Cherán, this is a government structure that is circular, horizontal and articulated.¹²

Acapatzingo, Mexico

The Housing Community of Acapatzingo includes 600 families in the south of Mexico City, with a population of 23 million. It belongs to the *Organización Popular Francisco Villa de la Izquierda Independiente* (Popular Movement Francisco Villa of the Independent Left). It is the most consolidated popular neighbourhood in urban Mexico, based on the criteria of autonomy and self-organization. Brigades, in which 25 families are represented, form the basis of the self-organization. Each brigade appoints representatives to committees, generally four: press, culture, public order and upkeep.

Participants rotate and they appoint representatives to the General Council for the settlement, where representatives from all brigades convene.

The brigade intervenes whenever there is conflict, even in family matters. Depending on the gravity of the issue, intervention can be requested from the public order committee and even the general council. Each brigade takes turns in protecting the area once a month. The brigade's security does not follow the traditional understanding of control, because it is based on self-protection by the community and has as its main function the education of the residents.¹³

The public order committee also has a role in determining the community's boundaries, deciding who can enter and who cannot. This is a central aspect of autonomy, perhaps the most important. When there is aggression in the home, the children go out into the street sounding their whistle, a device also used if there is an emergency. The atmosphere in the community is so peaceful that it is common to see children playing alone in absolute calm, in a safe space, protected by the community – something unthinkable in the otherwise violent Mexico City.

FROM GLOBAL SOUTH TO GLOBAL NORTH

This essay has focused on Latin America, although the experiences are not exclusive to the Global South. In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, there has been similar territorialization of resistance and collective projects, particularly in Greece, Italy and Spain.

Azienda Mondeggi, for example, close to Florence in Italy, has been taken over by scores of young people, whose produce includes wine, olive oil and honey. They live in collectives and have managed to recover several hectares as 'common goods'.¹⁴ Another notable collective territory experience is the resistance to the high-speed train in northern Italy, the No-TAV movement in the Susa Valley.¹⁵ In the Spanish city of Vitoria, the youth of popular movements have recovered an entire neighbourhood, Errekaleor,¹⁶ that they defend from real-estate speculation.

In the three European countries, there are also scores of recovered factories, hundreds of social and cultural centres and, in Spanish cities like Salamanca or Valencia, semi-urban farms where unemployed women and men work to provide a minimum income and some food

for themselves.¹⁷ As cities in the Global North are increasingly reshaped through real-estate speculation, young men and women with low-paid jobs have begun to open spaces, from city plots to cultural collectives and alternative communication, as a means to maintain solidarity and camaraderie in their social relations.

POWER, COUNTER-POWER AND NON-STATE POWER

As a general rule, social movements are counter-powers that seek to bring balance or present a counterweight to the large global powers, such as MNCs and the states that work with them. Often, these counter-powers act in a way that imitates state power, with similar hierarchies even if they are made up of individuals from different social sectors, ethnicities and skin colours, genders and generations.

Counter-power is usually defined as seeking to displace hegemonic power, but is often constituted in a similar manner to state power as we know and endure it, at least in western societies. This is not to enter the theoretical debate about power, counter-power or anti-power, as argued by Toni Negri and John Holloway respectively.¹⁸ However, I believe that the main problem is that these arguments ignore the Latin American reality, where families, rather than individuals, participate in social movements. (When you go to an indigenous community, a landless farmer settlement, or a camp of homeless and jobless, you will always be told 'we are so many families'). This takes us back to the community, not an essentialist understanding of the community as an institution, but rather one based on strong, direct, face-to-face relationships among people whose daily life is closely intertwined.

The proposals of the left for 'counter-power' are always marked by an underlying temptation to become a new power, constructed in the image of the state. The historical example would be the Russian soviets or the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) in Cuba, which gradually became a cog in the state apparatus, subordinated to the state and institutionalized.

There is a need to discuss concrete experiences because, in the reality of communities that resist, constructed power (whether a form of self-defence or ways to exercise power) comes from an entirely different source than those that dominate the great revolutions or within social movements.

In hegemonic political culture, the image of the pyramid inspired by the state and the Catholic church is constantly reproduced in political parties and unions, with amazing regularity. Controlling power happens at the apex of the pyramid, and all political action channels collective energy in that direction.

There are, however, distinct traditions in which communities channel all their energy into avoiding having powerful leaders, and that reject

In the reality of communities that resist, constructed power comes from an entirely different source than those that dominate the great revolutions or within social movements

state-types of power, as French anthropologist Pierre Clastres's work has shown.¹⁹ A community is certainly a form of power that includes power relations, but its character differs from that of state power. Elders' councils or appointed and rotating positions are transparent powers, under constant collective control. This means they are

not autonomous forms of power; they cannot exercise power over the community, which is a characteristic of the state with its non-electable community, separated from society and standing above it.

In discussing such types of power, we need to differentiate them from other forms of exercising power – which is why I refer to them as non-state-powers. Perhaps the best-known cases are the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (Councils of Good Government) in the five Zapatista regions or *caracoles*. Women and men are equally represented in the councils and are elected from among hundreds of members in the autonomous municipalities. The entire government team – up to 24 people in some *caracoles* – changes each week.

This rotating system, as the Zapatista community members explain, gradually enables everyone to learn how to govern. The rotation is carried out at the three levels of Zapatista self-government: within each community by those who live there, within each autonomous municipality through delegates who are elected, rotated and whose mandate can be revoked, and within each region at the level of the Council of Good Government. More than 1,000 communities, 29 autonomous municipalities and some 300,000 people are governed through this system.

Two things are worth noting on the experience of the Zapatista *Juntas de Buen Gobierno*. First, this is the only case in Latin America where autonomy and self-government are expressed at three different levels with the same logic of assembly and rotation as in the community. Of the 570 municipalities in the state of Oaxaca, 417 are governed by an internal democratic system, known as '*usos y costumbres*', or customs and traditions, by which Oaxacans can elect their authorities in a traditional manner, through an assembly and without political parties. But even this extensive case of self-government only got as far as the municipal level.

The second characteristic of the Zapatista autonomy is that it does not create bureaucracies, because the rotation system disperses them, avoiding the formation of a separate, specialized body. Something similar happens in Cherán, among the Guardia Indígena en Colombia and the Guardianes de las Lagunas in Peru. In the Colombian case, the *cabildos* govern a territory or *resguardo*, similar to the Zapatista regions. Nevertheless, state involvement through education and health projects, and, especially through state funding of the *cabildos*, has led them to become more bureaucratic, although there are counter-trends such as the Guardia Indígena, the heart of power for the Nasa people.

The importance of these non-state-powers, among which I include the different forms of self-defence mentioned above, stems from the double and complex dynamic at play in social movements throughout Latin America. On the one hand, they interact with the state and its institutions, as all other movements throughout history have done. This is a complex and changing relation that depends on each country and political reality. They resist the state and the large companies; they make demands, negotiate and often get their demands met. This is typical of unions and most other movements.

On the other hand, these movements are also creating their own spaces and territories, whether by recuperating lands that had been expropriated from them, or occupying idle land in private hands or official institutions, in the most diverse rural and urban areas. The second type of action is more recent and has gained strength in the last few decades, especially in Latin America.

Around 70% of Latin American cities, for example, have effectively been 'seized' as rural migrants set up their homes, neighbourhoods and social infrastructure such as schools and health and sports centres. Many of these illegally occupied spaces are legalized by the very institutions that offer them public services. Many others, however, are repressed. Many are made up members with different goals, such as creating different ways of living, or 'other worlds' as the Zapatistas put it. They become 'territories of resistance' that may even move towards 'territories of emancipation', in which women and youth play a large role.

It's clear that the economic system pushes millions to create their own spaces and territories in order to survive, because they have no housing or work, or are marginalized for whatever reason. In those spaces, people will seek to achieve the health and education that the system denies them, whether because the services are of poor quality, or because they are far away and difficult to access. In the 5,000 MST rural settlements in Brazil, for instance, there are 1,500 schools with teachers from those communities and trained in state teacher schools.

All these experiences need to be defended. They are not exceptional. One such experience emerged towards the end of last year in the Brazilian city of São Bernardo do Campo in São Paulo where 8,000 families or about 30,000 people have been camping in an urban area. This is the Pueblo Sin Miedo settlement, supported by the MST (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qBuPcOmKU4>). They need water, food and sanitation services every single day. But they also need to defend the space (several neighbours have tried to shoot them), they need to create forms of decision-making and of problem-solving for everyday issues. They have established internal regulations to guarantee safety and teamwork.²⁰ So, they have created an internal coordination system, to elect their members and support them every day for months at a time.

This is the seed of counter-power or of non-state power. There is no fixed path. Each concrete experience must take whatever path it can, or the path its members choose.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raúl Zibechi is a journalist and researcher linked to social movements in Latin America. As a popular educator he conducts workshops with social groups, particularly in urban peripheries and with peasants. He has published 18 books, almost all about concrete experiences of social movements. Three of his books have been translated into English: *Dispersing power*, *Territories in resistance* and *The New Brazil* (AK Press). He publishes regularly in *La Jornada* (Mexico), *Gara* (Spain) and other alternative media.

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DRAWING COUNTER-POWER

Reflections from State of Power
illustrator

Ammar Abo Bakr



Working on this project was incredibly interesting and a rare privilege to create art work for such a wide variety of important causes across the world.

In these times, the question of popular power or counter-power is riddled with uncertainty. This uncertainty sometimes comes from the lack of new ideas suitable for shaping these times, but more importantly, it derives from the unpredictable nature of the current crisis and tragedy.

In such times, revisiting the past becomes more of a primal necessity, going beyond the desire of ideological interests. We soon realise that these historic attempts of counter-power, unfinished visions, or unresolved memories reflect the unresolved and unfinished aspect of our own visions and memories, in particular for me those relating to the recent unrest in Egypt following 2011. We know that it is nearly impossible to predict what is to come. This ambiguity is fierce and true worldwide. In the Northern hemisphere, thought and culture have become the main victims. In the Southern hemisphere, entire cities, villages, streets and homes pay the real price. I believe that discussions that question the future of popular power must accept this ambiguity and not ignore its existence. This means viewing the past, recent and distant, with the same distortion we see of our present.

In all the report's art work, there is an obvious digital distortion (glitch) to the sketches that I have drawn to illustrate the many interesting topics. I believe that what brings many struggles together is not just the noble ideas and principles of solidarity, justice and freedom, but more concretely, our vulnerability to this ambiguity, our shared universal scars from facing the unknown future, the distortion, the glitch.

The artwork was done in collaboration with the graphic designer Adam Shaalan.

Ammar Abo Bakr is a well-known muralist and graffiti artist in Egypt and worldwide. His work has depicted the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, Egyptian history, and Islamic culture. Throughout the revolution, Ammar Abo Bakr painted despite police oppression, which would cover his art with white paint. His work often challenges government regimes or injustice and is most famously found on Mohamed Mahmoud Street in Cairo. However, it can also be seen in Alexandria, Beirut, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt. In an interview with *Jadaliyya* Abo Bakr said, "...While we [artists] strongly oppose the military and want to mark that stance, we love the people and would also like to present art to the people... I want to present something of beauty to people who can see it, see that their streets have beautiful murals and feel joy".

This book contains a selection of essays from
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