Issue one editorial:
"Civil society" versus social movements

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As we write this editorial, ANC-backed thugs have installed what can best be described as paramilitary law in townships whose population has dared to organise outside of local clientelist structures – with the support of much of the institutional left and international NGO community. In Thailand, "civil society" activists are in alliance with the military junta in opposition to the movements of the poor (Ungpakorn, this issue). In Ireland, a Green Party minister justifies the dismissal of cases taken against police officers involved in the brutal policing of marginal communities opposing a gas pipeline. In India, Communist parties send police, military and paramilitary groups against tribal groups opposing similar dispossession by multinationals.

These are extreme examples of a phenomenon which is all too familiar; the move into the state of particular types of activist, movement organisation or political party, and their involvement in repressing popular struggles. In recent decades, this process has taken particular forms, as new kinds of NGO and "civil society actors" have enabled the long-term sustainability of professional activists who are beholden to organisational funding from states, foundations or well-off members. This is a change from previous periods when such sustainability was ensured as paid organisers in mass-membership socialist, peasant and nationalist movements or (as most activists still are today) by supporting their own activism from their "day job", personal wealth or living from hand to mouth.

As activists see those who were once their comrades find stable jobs, public recognition and a measure of power in NGOs, in large measure *because* of their joint struggles to push particular issues onto the public agenda, while they are marginalised and criminalised as part of the same process, they feel betrayal, confusion and disappointment. The power of the NGO industry has also created NGO workers who have no linkage or experience with activism and are professionally-trained or self-taught NGO organisers, who in effect have no other trade. As with any bureaucracy they seek to justify their continued practice irrespective of its actual impact upon poor communities. It is also a way to compensate for a relative *lack* of power, wealth and security vis-à-vis most of those they spend their working lives engaging with – politicians, civil servants, private foundations, journalists and academics.

This is of course only one particular kind of history, and others can be told: of movement activists whose micro-organisations have kept particular issues alive when there has been no mass interest in them; of individuals whose personal integrity has come at a huge price as they have poured everything into a cause; of savvy actors "inside the system" who have kept good channels of communication to "outsider" actors and operated a "good cop – bad cop" game with the powerful; of organisations born out of movements which have had to

convert themselves into service delivery organisations or private companies as the movements that gave birth to them collapsed; and of organisations who have been able to maintain their relationship with the movements which gave birth to them and become non-compliant NGOs. If there is a distinction between the most painful experiences and the actual range of developments, so that theory cannot simply focus on the former, it is nevertheless true that nothing is understood by self-congratulatory accounts by those who have now "made it" if the experience of those other activists is not also seen — and recognised as by far the larger numerically.

Purpose of the current issue

The topic for this special issue, " 'civil society' versus social movements", comes out of two related histories: the increase in the NGO sector from the 1980s on and the rebirth of social movements in the late 1980s.

The first trend has witnessed the increasing institutionalisation of (some kinds of) social movements, between the later 1980s and now, as in effect an indirect part of the state (or, in much of the majority world, an indirect part of the global neoliberal system). They become dependent upon funding from the very institutions whose policies they once challenged, their discourse re-shaped so that it converges with that of international financial institutions (IFIs) and therefore become increasingly indistinguishable from these official institutions.

However there has also been a shift in the state system towards the global acceptance of liberal democracy (albeit often in a purely formalistic way). In this context, states which up until the late 1970s actively and openly opposed the inclusion of popular class formations other than specific interest groups (trade unions, farmers' bodies, churches etc.) in policy-making (and often not even these) have been forced to concede a far greater space to other issues and groups. Such states and governments have of course attempted to domesticate this popular inclusion, and herein lies the crux.

When, as at times in opposition to international financial institutions or around environmental issues, non-compliant NGOs have been able and willing to cooperate with popular movements organised on a democratic basis, or with those willing to confront the state and break the law (often in practice the same), this has sometimes led to spectacular successes, forced policy changes and advanced their respective issues.

When, as more frequently, "civil society" has seen its privileged access to policy-making and funding threatened by implicit association with such undeferential, poorly-dressed, and system-critical groups, it has often colluded with the state and corporations in delegitimising or denouncing them, which in turn can easily mean cooperating in their criminalisation and justifying the deployment of force. Along with a broader shift to disorganised capitalism and the progressive discrediting of orthodox Stalinist and social democratic strategies, this division — which cuts across multiple movements and societies — has been a major factor in the return of "bottom-up left" strategies, be they anarchist, Trotskyist,

autonomist, "bassista" or whatever.

This brings us to the second historical strand to which this edition responds: the worldwide spread of neoliberal governance since the defeat of the movements of 1968 — with neo-liberalism's characteristic problem of securing popular consent while being opposed to redistributionary strategies. This situation has led to an increasing tension between, on one hand, officially-approved versions of popular participation in politics geared towards the mobilization of consent for neo-liberalism through institutional channels — the world of "consultation", NGOs and civil society - and, on the other hand, the less polite and polished world of people's attempts to participate in politics on their own terms, in their own forms and for their own purposes — social movements, popular protest, direct action, and so on — what Sen (2005), and Piotrowski in this issue, distinguish as civil and incivil society.

"Civil society" in its various forms has now become a powerful force in the contemporary world. In much of the majority world it has become a key part of "governance", to use the jargon of neoliberalism, delivering services, acting as a substitute for democracy, and representing a crucial international link, while elsewhere it has become a safe means of simulating participation in states whose democratic legitimacy is threatened by citizens' "voting with their feet". In academia and politics, finally, it has become a central funding mechanism which cannot be questioned by those who wish to secure jobs, sustain their organisations, or push their own issues.

As the language of "civil society" has become increasingly central, so "social movements" have become increasingly defined by their acting outside this consensus — as acts of protest or direct action, with the unforeseen result that those who once described themselves as "the women's movement", "the ecology movement", "community activism" and so on now routinely talk about themselves in the language of "civil society". This is not, of course, the only reason why such organisations — and the academics who are involved with and research them — have moved to this language, into debates on policy procedures and away from the discussion of conflict, but it is part of the picture.

It is not that social movements are inherently an expression of popular democracy or that civil society always represents a cooptation of dissent. As we shall see, there are enormous regional variations in the social realities and political histories described by these phrases and the intellectual frameworks and political contexts within which they are deployed. Civil society and social movements often have complex and contradictory practices and relationships which do not always fit within easily definable categories. In "pink tide" Latin America, for example, NGOs often appear as a response to demands for technical and political assistance from social movements, or in parallel with processes of a renewed organisation of popular democratic subjects from below which create particular demands from below to which NGOs are forced to recognise if not concede.

This issue sets out to disentangle some of the complexities of these histories and interrelationships, setting them firmly within the viewpoint of movement

practice and in particular within a comparative perspective.

Definitions and the history of democracy

From the preceding discussion it should already be clear that phrases such as "civil society", "social movements", "non-governmental organisations" and so on do not have any single, simple meaning: they are massively inflected by their national and regional context, as well as by the academic discipline or theoretical perspective they are spoken within.

Probably most writers in the field are aware of this point at some level, although the habit of deferring to authority is so ingrained in much of the policy world - among academics as well as NGO policy workers – that it is still common to find simple statements of the kind "civil society means this". In one ("applied") version of this, categories such as civil society or NGO are treated as being almost called into existence (or called into political relevance) by particular decisions of, say, the UN, the EU or other international bodies, or at a particular summit – conveniently ignoring the obvious fact that what is actually being discussed is a forced, and partial, recognition of large-scale popular forces which policy-makers would much have preferred not to have to deal with.

In another ("theoretical") version of this, authors such as Hegel or the long-suffering Gramsci are treated as the founders of an apparently self-contained and universal "literature" – which usually means reproducing an Anglophone textbook perspective as though the usage and referents were the same in post-Blairite Britain, in pink tide Latin America, in post-1989 Eastern Europe or in those parts of the majority world where NGOs have in effect become part of the machinery of government at local or provincial levels. Much supposedly academic writing, in other words, is linguistically, theoretically and empirically naïve in ways which have no justification since (in the English-speaking world) the publication of Raymond Williams' *Keywords* (1977).

What needs to be said against this is that popular self-organisation has normally, throughout world history, been anathema to ruling elites (as is obvious if one reflects on the nature of monarchy, empire and dictatorship). It is only in the 20th century that "democracy" has become a positive rather than a pejorative term in polite discourse, and only in the second half of that century that most states have even claimed to be democratic (Canfora 2006).

The processes of arriving at formal democracy – and, for most of the world, formal independence from imperialism – themselves involved immensely varied combinations of mass popular organisation and more restricted kinds of elite organising. Unsurprisingly, the states and political parties which emerged from these processes were (and often still are) highly resistant to challenges to their status as representatives of popular will, hostile to alternative forms of popular organisation and – often – able to draw on substantial reserves of what can perhaps be termed reluctant legitimacy.

In Ireland, for example, despite an independence struggle as far back as the 1920s, many movement and NGO activists share with radical strains in popular culture a radical nationalist mythology, a nostalgia for the developmentalist project and a populist celebration of the institutions of cultural nationalism which is at once a recognition of a genuine past history and a carefully fostered myth on the part of post-colonial elites. Meanwhile, the impacts of the specific role played by mass popular organisations and elite activism in democratic transitions in regions such as Eastern Europe or Latin America are of course even more recent than those cast by the resistance to fascism in Europe or anti-imperialist movements in Asia and Africa.

Until 1968 most such states either resisted any popular input which was not grounded in the ballot box and political parties, or restricted legitimate popular involvement in decision-making to approved interest groups (the specific mix of which defined the particular character of the state in question — in Europe, as social-democratic, Catholic-corporatist, liberal-capitalist, or state-socialist).

It took the global popular uprisings of 1968 for western European and north American states to see "social movements" as (at least in theory) legitimate political actors rather than deploying the rhetoric of "pathology" or "totalitarianism" — although the "negotiated management" of protest varied, to put it mildly, often with sharp divisions between those movements which were met with bullets and dirty tricks and those which could be trusted to police themselves.

Another long-term result of 1968, and of the neo-liberal turn from developmentalism, was the legitimation of NGOs and civil society in the post-colonial world as (among other things) a structure which held out the possibility of alliances between western liberals and local critics of power around significant issues. However, as this editorial, and this issue, highlights, these articulations have been constantly subject to change — as the 2001 attack on New York led to blanket criminalisations of social movements as "terrorist", or as the growing power of international financial institutions in the majority world led to a transformation in the status of many dissidents and NGOs from enemies of the old regime to semi-official parts of the new order.

Conversely, the worldwide "movement of movements" against capitalist globalisation has been successful in this past decade in putting deeper structural issues on the table, in ways that push NGOs and "civil society" organisations in particular to decide between allegiance to neo-liberal structures and institutions and principled resistance.

Civil society and the contradictions of NGOs

The early development of NGOs as we now know them, between the 1960s and the 1980s, took place in a context of the politicisation of development, existence of structural alternatives and widespread popular movements. They were heavily influenced by notions of emancipatory participation developed by radical scholars, researchers and educationalists such as Freire, Fals Borda and

Rahman, and by the development of strands of religious thought such as liberation theology. They played a supporting role to popular politicisation. Their work was embedded in an analysis and critique of existing structures of oppression with the aim of confronting such economic, political and social structures in order to change and transform social reality. The types of practices that were dominant were influenced by participatory action research, consciousness-raising and support for popular organisations. The methods developed revolved around training for transformation and popular education. (Hickey and Mohan 2007).

 The decline of the developmentalist state, the end of structural alternatives to the liberal market, and the disintegration of popular politics in the crisis of developmentalism and the advent of neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s set the stage for the rise to prominence of NGOs as a *replacement* for radical social movements. Within this context, NGO practice and discourse became increasing professionalized and depoliticised, distancing them and their participants from their identity, discourse and practice during the previous decades. Parallel to this process, many community leaders became transformed into NGO workers and managers and their language, culture, objectives and practices accordingly were transformed in line with the new dominance of neoliberalism.

The prominence of NGOs reached its height in the discourse of the "post-Washington consensus" in which some theorists associated with the World Bank and other IFIs recognised the failures of the Washington Consensus that authored the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. The post-Washington consensus sought to bring politics back into development. Thus, as well as arguing for the importance of institutions for the success of neoliberal reforms, these theorists spoke of the necessity for "ownership" of these reforms. This ownership, it was argued, could be guaranteed via the participation and involvement of the population in local development projects. The best implementers of such projects, due to their non-governmental status, closeness to impoverished communities and particular expertise, would be NGOs.

The growing importance of NGOs in the practise, discourse and policy of IFIs was mirrored in the growth of studies, books, conferences and courses dedicated to understanding NGOs and NGO management. This was mirrored by a tremendous expansion of NGO numbers as funding proliferated from governments and international organisations. The *language* of NGO practice borrowed heavily from the language of grassroots organising in the 1970s and 1980s, which called for participation, popular education and community empowerment.

However, the meaning of these terms was substantially altered from that originally imagined by community organisers and radical academics such as Boff, Freire etc. who had been involved in a politics that sought to go beyond the confines and distortions of capitalism and understood participation as the exercise of popular agency in relation to development (Hickey and Mohan 2007:

3). For the World Bank, the development of project-based methodologies such as participatory rural appraisal confines popular participation to making the liberal market and liberal polity function better, thus extending the reach of the IFIs into the realm of community participation and popular subjectivity and substituting for the disappointed hopes of genuine popular involvement in politics after the period of "democratic transition" in many countries.

This arguably extended and deepened the nature of neoliberalism so as to depoliticise development and disempower the poor. As Petras argued in 1997, at the height of NGO growth and apparent reflux in social movement activity in the Global South,

> *NGOs emphasize projects, not movements; they "mobilize" people to produce at the margins but not to struggle to control the basic means of production and wealth; they focus on technical financial assistance of projects, not on structural conditions that shape the everyday lives of people. The NGOs co-opt the language of the left: "popular power," "empowerment," "gender equality," "sustainable development," "bottom-up leadership." The problem is that this language is linked to a framework of collaboration with donors and government agencies that subordinate practical activity to non-confrontational politics. The local nature of NGO activity means that "empowerment" never goes beyond influencing small areas of social life, with limited resources, and within the conditions permitted by the neoliberal state and macro-economy.*

Critics of NGO practice argued that the increasing dominance of donor finance and agendas in the practice of northern NGOs working in the South and indigenous NGOs resulted in new forms of colonialism and dependency. Under the guise of technocratic neutrality and popular participation, neoliberalism was becoming hegemonic. This encroachment into the lives of poor communities limited their possibilities for resistance to neoliberalism, sought to replace the role of the state in the provision of universal public services and fractured those sections of communities that were organised via the competition endemic to the limited amount of funding available for community projects. Such dynamics furthered the decomposition of socio-political subjectivities created by the consequences of neoliberal reform, which had witnessed the growing peripheralisation of large sections of previously organised communities in the North and South. (Petras et al. 2005). As Petras argued, where NGOs grew in prominence, this went together with a decline in the power, influence and presence of social movements. A particularly sharp example of this developed in Haiti, as Peter Hallward has noted (Pithouse 2008).

However, the assumption that NGOs were necessarily always and only a mechanism of neoliberal hegemony, or (in the global South) a new form of imperialism, has been questioned by some scholars and activists. Critics such as Petras, while on the one hand developing insightful critiques of NGO's depoliticising practices and discourse, also and more problematically assumed that popular communities were simply passive recipients of NGO intervention. Arguably this reproduced an assumption of the depoliticisation and lack of

agency of the poor within their analysis.

Such generalising analyses of NGO intervention in the Global South also missed the complexities and nuances that could be found through concrete situated political analysis of NGOs practices. As Townsend et al (2004: 1) argue, "although the majority of NGOs have been co-opted to serve hegemonic development agendas, they nevertheless present a fluid, contradictory web of relations, within which a significant minority seeks to make spaces of resistance". Whether this minority is successful in that attempt is of course another question.

However by the early 1990s the crisis of neoliberal restructuring set the stage for a proliferation of social movements often in opposition to dominant development thinking that paralleled this "official" NGO structuring of popular agency. As social movements returned to visibility and governments of the Left were elected in Latin America, the declining ability of NGOs and IFIs to successfully depoliticise development and passify the poor undermined the structuralist analysis which predicted the increasing pervasiveness of neoliberal hegemony as somehow an inevitable result of pressure from above. As social movements and poor communities have begun to fight back, the relationship between NGOs and poor communities has become increasingly contradictory.

This has led to a different kind of analytical tension, between once-radical analyses which were *a priori* divorced from popular agency and assumed that the agenda of the powerful was unstoppable, and on the other hand analyses linked with social movement practice. These latter analyses have not always been as impressive as those of high-status critical theory and have frequently reproduced many of the ambiguities and contradictions of attempts at organising popular practice against the agendas of the powerful. However, and perhaps more importantly, they have represented serious attempts at articulating and thinking through the implications of popular self-organising and resistance in ways which an increasingly commodified high theory, itself trapped within the organisational logic of neo-liberal academia and intellectual celebrity, no longer offers or indeed seeks to offer.

Social movements and popular power in neoliberalism

The global popular uprisings associated with the year 1968 (though by no means restricted to that period) marked a permanent rupture with the relative consensus of "organised capitalism" in the West, post-Stalinist socialism in the East, and developmentalism of both nationalist and socialist forms in the South. As Wainwright (1994) and others have remarked, the popular challenge to this consensus led to a cancelling of the social contract from above, and a shift to neoliberalism which accelerated across the 1970s, leading to defeat after defeat for popular politics in all its forms — people's organisations in the global South, trade unions in the North — despite occasional and dramatic successes.

This long defeat was nevertheless bitterly fought, as Southern populations resisted neoliberal restructuring, with the rise of 1980s "IMF riots" or "El

Caracazo" in Venezuela in 1989. Such defensive struggles (Nilsen and Motta 2010) were an attempt to maintain and/or re-capture the popular gains which had been granted as part of the cross class alliance characteristic of developmentalism. These defensive struggles became increasingly offensive as movements began to experiment and develop with new political, social and economic practices that sought to re-invent development outside of both the limits of developmentalism and destructions of neoliberalism.

Social movements, in Latin America in particular, are now involved in the re-creating of alternatives to neoliberalism that often are in, against and seek to move beyond the liberal state and market. They are as Hickey and Mohan argue "continually devising new and innovative strategies for expressing their agency in development." Their practices involve the development of new forms of political engagement, economic development and knowledge construction. Such movements are actively engaged in a struggle to recapture political space.

Deliberation and active involvement in policy-making represent a strand of this renewed popular politicisation of development (Sousa Santos and Avritzer 2005: xxxiv–1). Such processes can be found in experiments of the Workers' Party governing coalitions in Porto Alegre (Avritzer 2005: 377–405), Colombian communities of peace (Uribe de H 2005: 279–307) and the new institutions of popular participation and popular economy in Venezuela (Harnecker 2003). These experiences challenge the hegemony of liberal representative democracy by the creation of new social and cultural 'grammars' articulated with institutional innovation. This results in a new democratic institutionality, which remakes the institutions of the state by reshaping and transforming traditional hierarchies of power.

In many social movements such as sections of the Piquetero movement in Argentina (Dinnerstein 2003), the Zapatistas in Mexico (Navarro 1998: 155–65) and the MST in Brazil (Wolford 2003: 500–20), the hegemony of liberal representative democracy is challenged in a slightly different way, via a rejection of political parties as the main agent of structural change and political power, and the construction of communities in which deliberative and direct democracy structures their decision-making. This recreation of democratic structures and practices within society is another means by which the hegemony of liberal democracy is challenged.

These experiences and struggles have been followed with great interest in much of the rest of the world where such possibilities are far from being on the order of the day: in India or China, for example, where the state's alliance with multinational capitalism, abandonment of welfare policies and brutal methods vis-à-vis ethnic minorities in particular have brought about an increasing similarity of what were once understood as two very different paths to development.

Elsewhere, in Africa, popular movements are often massively weakened to the point where NGOs and their sponsors can exert a generalised hegemony – or, as in South Africa, where fifteen years of neo-liberal government by what was once a national liberation movement have pushed the social movements of the poor

to the margins (Zikode / Pithouse, this volume), while NGOs have become so "embedded" within a self-congratulatory and established left that most grassroots organisations refuse to work with them.

The challenge to the liberal market is marked by a highly differentiated terrain and discussion within the lefts who attempt to oppose the Washington consensus and recreate utopias based on new forms of production and consumption. Within the Movement for Socialism (MAS) of Bolivia, the Workers' Party (PT) of Brazil and the Venezuelan state (Castañeda 2004), for example, there is discussion of the need to respect and recreate relations of production based upon the demands and practices of local communities, be they indigenous, peasant or Latin American (Petras and Veltmeyer 2005: 1–20).

The logic that determines work and production in such visions is one of human need as opposed to the demands of the market, and the determinations as to government priorities and social reproduction depend more upon the deliberation of communities than on the 'scientific' facts of technocrats. The collective as opposed to the individual is the central structure of production; thus institutions are not created to support the market, but rather as a means of shaping community relations in ways that produce in order to satisfy community needs sustainably and socially. Social movements such as the MST (Wolford, 2003), the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) (Situaciones Colectivo, 2001) and the indigenous movements of Bolivia (Sieder, 2005, pp. 301–7) struggle to create economic practices and relations based upon community needs as opposed to the logic of the market and profit seeking. Their objectives involve the creation of dignity and human development in conjunction with the creation of a 'solidarity economy'.

Again, these Latin American sparks of hope stand in stark contrast to the relationships involved in production issues elsewhere, be they South African shanty-towns struggling against the privatisation of basic needs by a government supposedly of the left; North American and West European situations where alternative economics has often become a site of retreat from struggle and, more recently, a form of alternative small business strategy parasitical on movement solidarity and goodwill; or African and Asian situations where fair trade, cooperatives and so on are often used by NGOs as the basis for apparently grassroots-oriented policies whose key purpose is to avoid direct confrontation with the key questions of multinational corporate power and the distributional role of the state. Nevertheless, as McKeon's article highlights, for peasants and indigenous peoples in particular questions of production and popular power are inseparable, as both are pushed to the wall by global capitalism.

It is this highly complex and contested terrain of struggle for political definition and popular power that this edition of *Interface* explores.

Civil society, NGOs and social movements around the world

This issue begins with Richard Pithouse's interview with S'bu Zikode, a leading

activist in the South African shack-dweller's movement and "University of the Poor" Abahlali baseMjondolo. As we go to press, Zikode is in hiding and facing death threats, while other Abahlali activists are dead, arrested, in hiding or displaced following the attack on the Kennedy Road settlement by pro-government thugs backed up by the police. This experience is sharpened by the fact that the government in question is the local ANC, once a national liberation movement grounded in comparable poor black neighbourhoods: thinking about the implications and effects of different kinds of self-organisation is not a pointless exercise but one enforced by bitter historical experience, in South Africa as elsewhere. In his interview, Zikode talks about his own coming to political consciousness, how poor communities in recent years have come to find themselves in opposition to the ANC as the local ruling party, and the way in which NGOs and "luminaries of the left" have distanced themselves from poor people's movements. He argues for a "living communism" grounded in everyday needs and the struggles of the poor.

Nora McKeon's article "Who speaks for peasants?" is a fascinating insider look at the double struggle by NGOs and people's movements on the one hand to exercise an effect on the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and on the other hand between these two over the right to represent (NGOs) or to be present (people's movements) in this forum. The article discusses the UN's "opening up" to civil society and the question of who actually constituted civil society – international NGOs, de facto mostly Western-based and acting on behalf of (in this case) the world's peasants, or people's organisations established at a national or regional scale by majority world peasants. It gives a close reading of the shifting politics of the peasant presence at various food summits, the difficulties faced by the FAO in engaging with and responding to these different kinds of pressure from below, and the development of the International Civil Society Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, which focusses on networking the struggles of rural people's organisations in the global South. While firmly supporting the centrality of people's organisations rather than NGOs as the true representatives of "civil society", McKeon's article also notes the complexities of attempting to coordinate between such a diverse, and widely dispersed, range of organisations and movements.

Michael Punch's argument, by contrast, looks at the experience of popular self-organisation in the urban setting of working-class Dublin, and the changing relationship between community-based action and the local state over the past few decades. Drawing on a dozen years of critical engaged research in these communities, he historicises the changing nature of such action, from top-down charitable or religious forms of mobilisation via the grassroots struggles of the 1970s and 1980s to the development of "social partnership" models from the 1990s on. Exploring the contradictory experience of engagement in such models, Punch argues for a clear-headed awareness of the limits of this engagement and its combination with "outsider" strategies both of mobilisation and of strategic reflection.

Beppe De Sario's "You do realise that nobody will get out of the eighties alive?",

equally grounded in activist work, analyses the experience of local urban struggles in transition in the Turin of the late 1970s and early 1980s. During this period, direct confrontation with the state was paralleled by an increasing diffusion of movement culture (particularly feminism and youth movements) throughout wider society. Exploring the life histories of militants socialised in the radical youth movement of 1977 who subsequently became involved in grassroots voluntary groups organising around local needs, De Sario argues that rather than crude categories of the ebb and flow of movements, or a sharp separation between different kinds of people in different movements, we should pay closer attention to how the same activists pursue different strategies for change in different periods – and to the gendered aspects of these strategies, which appear here particularly in differing relationships to the forms of training and employment that these activists eventually pursued.

Prado, Machado and Carmona's article on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movement in Brazil argues that the relationship between organized civil society and the state is inherently complex. They situate the emergence of the movement in Brazil in the context of feminist critiques of traditional left-wing activism during the democratic transition of the late 1970's and early 1980's, which saw issues other than class ones as inherently bourgeois. This foundational resistance to traditional modes of mass resistance combined with the HIV / AIDS epidemic to push the movement towards an increased focus on service delivery and health campaigning, developments which led the movement to bureaucratise and move closer to the state. If this development increased the movement's visibility and enabled it to further develop its identitarian role, it also led to a factionalism centred around the agendas of celebrity protest leaders on the one hand and NGO activists managing public policies on the other. The authors argue that despite successes, this process has led to fragmentation and cooptation, and call for a rethinking based on strategic alliances rather than on the institutional pressures of particular organisational situations.

Grzegorz Piotrowski's article on civil and "uncivil" society shows how different regional experiences can be. In Eastern Europe, as in Latin America, "civil society" was a key rallying cry for popular opposition to authoritarian and dictatorial governments in the 1970s and 1980s. Piotrowski details the different meanings of "civil society" in the thinking of different dissidents – from Adam Michnik's call for a parallel unofficial society to Vaclav Havel's thinking, defining intellectuals as the alternative to power. After 1989, these different traditions remained but were conditioned by the processes where dissidents became the new establishment with western support. Piotrowski discusses the way in which the new movements of the later 1980s and 1990s were forced into a "third space" between communists and the organisational world of the dissidents, particularly as the latter found themselves in power, supported by western governments and foundations, and in societies experiencing mass retreats into the private sphere. Drawing on interviews with anti-globalisation activists, Piotrowski details the difficulties faced by their organisations, and highlights some of the practical and ideological tensions between "social

movement" and "NGO" organising strategies in this particularly stony soil for movement activism of any kind.

Political refugee Giles Ji Ungpakorn delivers a harsh critique of the way in which Thai and international NGOs have actively supported and participated in the 2006 coup, backed by the monarchy and against the organisations of the poor. Along with personal links, access to policy-making and funding were key deciding factors for many organisations, as Ungpakorn documents here. The turn to single-issue campaigning and transformation of a supposedly bottom-up, community-oriented anti-statism into a refusal of systemic analysis and hence an openness to working with whoever happened to hold power within the state and was willing to engage with NGOs has incorporated NGO into the ruling apparatus against the poor..

Angolan activist and NOW UNDP project manager Carlos Figueiredo notes that divisions within governing elites enable social movements to find political opportunities by building alliances with particular governmental, parliamentary or bureaucratic factions. At the same time, the low level of overall movement activity in post-war Angola, coupled with a strongly clientelist polity, means that policy-oriented mobilisation has tended to fall on deaf ears, as the population recognises the distance between the actual ways in which the state interacts with its citizens and the official description of reality. Figueiredo argues that popular mobilisation in this context has to be simultaneously a popular education process around a critical understanding of politics and collective action.

Peter Waterman's call for a global labour charter movement argues that union activists, and working people generally, need to let go of the nostalgic hope of reconstructing the supposed paradise of post-WWII social partnership in western Europe - with the support of neo-liberal states and organisations which have spent the last thirty years dismantling that project. Its call for a rethinking of "the emancipation of life from work", in an alliance between labour struggles, women's movements and peasants' movements, outlines some ideas for how a genuinely open-ended and inclusive process could work, based on a lifetime's involvement in these struggles.

Michael Neocosmos' systematic consideration of popular struggles in Africa explores one of the most challenging fields for social movements in today's world. Arguing that "civil society" is not a field of the self-organisation of society but rather a domain structured by a hegemonic liberal and state-oriented mode of politics, it notes that "active citizenship" as an antidote to the political passivity generated by neo-liberalism does not necessarily lead to a politics of emancipation but simply makes it possible to imagine alternatives. The national liberation struggles of the 1940s to 1970s are analysed as a mode of politics which has now run its course; in South Africa at least, a new mode was born between 1984 and 1986, seeing its goal not as the seizure of power but as "the transformation of the lived experience of power". The report concludes by contrasting two different ways of "doing social movement": one restricted to state-defined civil society and the other willing to move beyond those limits and so beyond a state-centred mode of politics. The detailed reflections here will be

important to movement activists in many parts of the world.

Theresa O'Keefe's review of Incite! Women of color against violence's remarkable collection *The revolution will not be funded: beyond the nonprofit industrial complex* draws out both the specificities of the US context, with the massive involvement of private foundations in the funding and hence direction of activist organisations of all kinds, as well as its broader relevance for other countries and contexts.

Finally, in her review of Heidi Swarts' *Organising urban America: secular and faith-based progressive movements* Maite Tapia highlights the complexity of community organizing strategies in poor communities in the US while also raising the key question of the background conditions for such strategies, and the extent to which they can be generalised, within the US or beyond – returning to the questions raised in Punch's paper.

If we can make no claim to exhaustiveness with these various pieces, we do nonetheless feel that as a collection they highlight something of the characteristic differences between the meaning of the civil society / social movements distinction in different regional or national contexts, and that they are all in their different ways successful at untangling the complex politics of these struggles from an engaged standpoint.

Questions for theory and practice

Calls for rethinking the boundaries between the state, social movements and the NGO sector implies a return to politics that, as Richard Pithouse (2008) has suggested, should highlight the fundamental difference between "the expert left", meaning "forms of left politics that propose alternative policy arrangements or ways of being without developing any capacity to force the realisation of their goals", being "dependent on state or donor funding, to require certification from bourgeois institutions as a condition of entry, to be located on the side of the razor wire where the police offer protection" and "the popular left", which relies on "grassroots intellectuals" and "grassroots political militants" develops "popular power and alternative modes of community and are willing and able to confront domination collectively and directly".

This, incidentally, is the practical meaning of Gramsci's distinction between traditional and organic intellectuals: his traditional intellectuals, by which he meant not only academics but also priests, doctors and lawyers, organise the social world (including, for example, the policy process) in terms of what they present as an expert analysis of reality based on an inherited tradition of texts and knowledge presented as separate from interests. Organic intellectual activity – by which he meant the work of, for example, peasant leaders, trade union activists, and underground left activists such as himself, but also the theory of the new Fordist managers and engineers – is visibly part of a social process, be that process one of managerial and technical development within a multinational, geared to increasing profits, or one of organising a social movement alliance, geared to developing popular power.

Organic theorising, then, does not focus on theology and concepts but on their practical political meaning. It involves, for example, recognising that, in some Latin American "pink tide" states, we see alternative elites coming to power on the back of popular movements, recognizing the need for continuing popular mobilization, and engaging in processes of trying to nurture and strengthen a popular civil society; processes which themselves are highly contradictory. Accordingly this results in the development of a complex and contradictory political terrain of conflict and partnership between compliant NGOs and social movements, and non-compliant NGOs and the compliant majority. Or, that in core states a certain degree of popular involvement is institutionalized, as pluralist interest group politics or as corporatism, and so "social movements" are restricted to a different kind of space (either informal political activity or extra-parliamentary, even extra-legal) — and asking what these situations mean in terms of promotion of popular power and the development of alternative forms of community.

In other words, the key question is not what civil society (etc.) "is" inherently, but rather how power is organised differently in different kinds of states, historically or comparatively (core - periphery, pink tide — New Right, organized capitalist - neoliberal etc.). To let a particular theorist or theorists — even apparently critical or radical ones — define what "the" debate is, in abstraction from history, world-systemic relationships or politics, is to miss the point.

In western Europe and north America, for example, the debate on "civil society" — whose primary meaning is to celebrate an *avoidance* of direct confrontation with the state, an acceptance of the governing system, and the attempt to achieve something nevertheless - cannot be understood outside of the experience of 1968.

Prior to the 1930s, in a situation where states did not readily engage with social movements or citizens' organisations other than economic and religious interest groups, social movement as we now think of it was also understood as a challenge to state legitimacy and state power, and liable to violent (not always lethal) repression at little or no notice. Post-1945, most European states at least (east as well as west) drew some legitimacy from popular self-organization in the struggle against fascism, and many new popular organizations were constructed to bolster such states (Christian Democracy, "people's democracies" etc.) which left a strange tension between the reality of violence (against Civil Rights protesters, the East German and Hungarian uprisings, pro-Algerian protests in France, etc. etc.) and the legitimacy in principle of popular movements.

This came to the fore in 1968, where in all cases there was a management of violence on both sides (in Paris, there was actually a hotline installed between the Prefect of Police and the education unions to keep things under control). A key factor here was that the state made it clear that it was prepared to use lethal force if need be. The Prague revolutionaries knew this from the Hungarian experience, just as much as Chicago protestors knew it from what was happening to the Black Panthers. Tanks actually went into Prague, the British

military went into Northern Ireland and hundreds of people were killed in Mexico. In France, de Gaulle withdrew to visit the French Army on the Rhine at the height of the "events". In all the core states except Italy, the vast bulk of the movement saw the tanks (or the threat of them) and backed down. In Northern Ireland, and much of the periphery, movements didn't back down, and the threat of military intervention became a reality.

The net result of this is that the celebration of "civil society" by the theorists of the 1980s was a celebration of defeat; or more exactly a tacit recognition of the fact that states, and their bottom-line willingness to use lethal force in the context of the Cold War, set severe limits to what movements could actually *do*, and that movements for the most part adjusted themselves to conform to those limits and work creatively within them. This may have been a necessary response in some cases, but it is not obvious (to put it mildly) that it represents a step forward for movements, and it is clearly a theoretical mistake to naturalise this experience as somehow universal, or as being primarily a step forward in *theory* rather than an attempt to keep going in an extraordinarily difficult context.

The "deal" started to come unstuck in the late 80s, when Gorbachev made it publicly clear that Warsaw Pact tanks were no longer available to put down uprisings in Eastern Europe (and movements took full advantage within a short space of time), and as US support for mass murder in Latin America became less politically tenable in the 90s. To bring "civil society" down to earth as a concept means locating its celebration within this *historical* context and thinking about why it now works within neo-liberalism, or more exactly why it works for neo-liberalism in the places where it does work (e.g. most core societies) and not in others (e.g. some of Latin America).

Assessing NGOs and social movements

Those who defend NGOs per se point, rightly, to the fact that there are often people within NGOs who are genuinely motivated to make structural changes and to help people mobilize themselves to do so. In other words, social movements and the NGO sector are two different forms that popular organization can take. Under some circumstances, in some kinds of society, they are sharply, even violently, opposed to the state such as in Haiti and Thailand. Under other circumstances, there is apparently scope for more collaboration, or civil society organizations can take up a more radical role (e.g. Eastern Europe pre-1989, where direct popular organization was often seen as too risky, or contemporary Latin America).

Given this, it becomes possible to ask about the degree of NGO commitment to popular organisation and look at the extent to which, in different times and places, NGOs represent a *substitution* for social movements (Angola, Eastern Europe), an *indirect effect* of their existence (the new Latin American kinds of civil society structures), or a top-down form of popular *demobilization* (Western Europe), etc. — none of which can be understood without locating NGOs as they

now are within the longer history of the last few decades.

Above we have discussed at least some aspects of the Latin American, Western and Eastern European, African and SE Asian experiences. The relationship between civil society and social movements in Canada and the US is different again. In the US - a virtual two-party system, and the need for "interest group" politics has resulted in an enormous non-profit industrial complex. This NPIC has been increasingly criticized by grassroots movements in the US, as evidenced in O'Keefe's review. For example, the October lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights march in Washington DC was organised on a grassroots basis because none of the well-established NGOs of the LGBT movement (such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and Equality Federation) supports it. The Human Rights Campaign similarly opposed it initially, because it was seen as a "distraction" from other objectives, but was eventually forced to endorse it. More generally, the widespread reliance of both civil society and social movements on funding from private foundations means that criticism is often blunted, and movements coopted.

In Canada, there is a long history of government funding and co-optation of social movements, social service agencies and "civil society" actors. When this changed with neoliberal cut-backs, many movements died, and those that remain and found a way to remain autonomous are often hostile to those who obtain government funding. This tension is clear in the immigrant rights movement, antipoverty movements - and in indigenous struggles - which is riven between movement organizations and groups that are dependent on government funding and those who are membership funded.

For SE Asia, Ungpakorn highlights pithily three mistakes which NGOs have made – mistakes which are not inherent in NGOs or civil society as such (as some Latin American experiences show), but which are easily made by activists who do not have a historical or political perspective for their activities. The first of these is becoming GONGOs (government-funded NGOs), dependent on the local state or international financial institutions such as the World Bank and hence structurally unable to oppose elites; the second, a single-issue lobby politics leading to a willingness to work even with military juntas (and hence legitimise them); the third, a rejection of politics which disables them from being able to "choose the side of the poor".

As noted, individuals who get involved in NGOs are often good and well-meaning people who are committed to the construction of a more just and equal society. We often know that such people nevertheless sometimes find that the ways in which they organize do not actually bring about the results they intend, and that the reasons for this are often to do with the structure of their organizations, such as in circumstances in which they are beholden to donors and states rather than to their grassroots. Or the results are not achieved due to reasons such as not having a grassroots in the first place to be responsible to, as in the case of organizations struggling for popular mobilization around constitutional reform in Angola.

Another way of putting this, which applies to Ireland as much as Thailand, is

that in much of civil society activists wind up identifying with an organisation (often through their jobs). Hence they depend on that organisation's ability to attract funding from elites and gain the kind of access to policy makers which will justify continued funding; simultaneously, becoming professional experts not simply on their issue but on "selling" it to elites and policy-makers. In effect they have invested in *not* listening to grassroots pressures which may push in a different direction.

 The alternative, which is defining in this sense of "social movement", is to find ways of being employed – whether in movement / NGO contexts or as "day jobs" – which do not involve this kind of dependency. NGO workers often pride themselves on their "realism", while missing the historical point that most organisations of the poor throughout history – often in bitterly oppressed and exploited communities – have been able to support their own organisers, albeit not always with security or to live service-class lifestyles. There is no shame in seeking to dedicate one's life to politics and in finding a way to be able to do so, particularly when children, health issues or old age arise. However, if this is achieved *at the expense* of the politics which ultimately justifies the choice, it would perhaps have been better to invest initially in a mainstream career rather than relying on the goodwill and solidarity of those who can little afford to have their hopes of a better world betrayed.

Therefore, one should not consider social movements and NGOs as two totally distinct spheres. Instead, they are different modes of popular organization, the later typically with input from states and donors or run by the local middle classes, the former typically with only self-generated resources. Thus their abilities to ally with one another, to play each other's roles (as when things that look like movements act like NGOs or vice versa), to push each other out of the way or to play a good-cop, bad-cop routine can be analysed within a single frame of reference – and assessed in terms of their effectiveness as strategies and their ultimate outcomes.

The Latin American situation, where states are governed by parties which either depend on popular movements or seek to build lasting relationships with them, creates a unique situation which is far removed from much of the rest of the world, where neo-liberal states, multinational corporations and international financial institutions are programmatically committed to expert-led strategies which revolve around the exclusion of majority needs from the policy-making process. In these other contexts, very different relationships between movements oriented towards those needs and NGOs oriented towards acceptance by elites – at any cost – often exist.

We can perhaps conclude with Ursula Le Guin's comment that a liberal is someone for whom the means justifies the end. This is an apt analysis of the kind of strategy for which the achievement of any results is completely secondary to the question of being invited to go to second-order meetings with policy-makers – the only point of principle left for many activists whose jobs, and self-image, depend on being taken seriously by the powerful – rather than on being able to say something that speaks to the needs and struggles of the

oppressed and exploited. This is ultimately not a question of "civil society" vs social movements, but a question of what strategies activists and organisations within each of these are pursuing, who their most important allies are, how they are organised and whether these practices strengthen or weaken counter-hegemonic popular struggles.

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