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Recommended Citation

Weston, A., Imas, J.M. and Donnelly, P.F. (2014) Mirrors: 'Bleeding' the Creation of Alternative Organisation through Transformative Humanism. *5th Latin American European Meeting on Organizational Studies. Havana, Cuba* (April 2014).

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Mirrors: 'Bleeding' the Creation of Alternative Organization through a Liberating Ideology of Transformative Humanism

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“Mirrors are filled with People.

The invisible see us.

The forgotten recall us.

When we see ourselves, we see them.

When we turn away, do they?”

(Eduardo Galeano's *Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone*)

Abstract

In this paper, we propose a new way of explaining the everyday practices of communities who socially organize to create sustainable grass-roots engagement. We discuss how this collective engagement is based on principles and values of socio-economic engagement that are fundamentally different to those associated with capitalism. We theorise that these community engagements are sustained by an organizational ideology of 'transformative humanism' that is founded on an ongoing struggle for emancipation. Our perspective is constructed through a combination of Frantz Fanon's ideas on humanism, Manfred Max-Neef's barefoot economics, and Paulo Freire's pedagogies of hope and transformation. We suggest that movements such as this embody alternative ways for disenfranchised individuals to shape grass-roots social transformation from within because they are based on an alternative system of beliefs. We present examples of grass-roots engagement in Argentina and South Africa to demonstrate how disenfranchised communities organize together through transformative humanism.

Introduction

The following anonymous story reflects on the events that, since the crisis of the banking system, have been sprouting everywhere around the world:

"If it bleeds, it leads". For 39 days the world media didn't give a crap about our peaceful protests (neither did our joke of a government). Well, I just got back from the Parliament square, where after hours of standoffs and barricades and dozens of peaceful protesters beaten by the police, we now have blood. I open up the BBC and there we are, front page. WaPo, WSJ, Reuters, all suddenly feature articles and commentaries. Why now? Why did we have to come to this? Why does it always have to come to this? How does blood legitimize a new story? Do you know we are the only country actually protesting (among other things) against TAKING a loan that will be spent on same populist social entitlements?!? We shed blood for fiscal discipline! We shed blood against corruption! How is that not the real story?"
(Anonymous protester in the street of Bucharest, Bulgaria).

Indeed, the expression of discontent and dissatisfaction with current economic and political systems is something that preoccupies many communities. These communities who feel disenfranchised and unrepresented in the global crisis of capitalism (Wolff, 2013) are primarily at the receiving end of economic and political reform emanating from global institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank, as well as governments that align themselves with neoliberal policies; hitherto, the same ones that have destroyed community and ecological life. The expression of discontent represented in the above quote clearly illustrates the way in which forms of social movement have brought new forms of organizing in a post-capitalist economy. But, as our quote suggests, less is known about the more everyday practices that communities are performing to overcome the problems and difficulties with which they are faced (Barber et al., 2012; Narotzky, 2012). For us, this raises an important and relevant question: how do we construct alternative economic, social and organizational discourses that can transform our way of innovating and creating sustainable wealth for our communities?

This demands from us to look and explore areas which grand discourses cannot explain. In particular, to look at how communities go about creating alternative practices, which reflect innovative and creative solutions, that our neoliberal system and academic theories so far

have ignored. As Galeano (2009) and Max-Neef (1991, 1992, 1995, 2007) in Latin America have expressed, this requires us to look, to think, to visualise a different language to account for these alternative, creative, organizing activities – alternatives upon which we can contribute to create a more sustainable and plurivocal representation of organization and, more importantly, one that we can share with the rest of the communities around the world.

In this paper, we propose a new way of explaining the everyday practices of communities who socially organize and create more sustainable grass-roots engagement. We theorise that that they are sustained by an ideology of 'transformative humanism' that is founded on an ongoing struggle for emancipation against a system of wealth creation that does not provide equally sustainable benefit. Our perspective on organization is constructed through a combination of Frantz Fanon's ideas on humanism, Manfred Max-Neef's barefoot economics, and Paulo Freire's pedagogies of hope and transformation. We suggest that movements such as this embody alternative ways for disenfranchised individuals to shape grass-roots social transformation from within because they are based on an alternative system of beliefs. We believe, there is an important parallel here from which different theoretical constructs can emanate to address what we think organization and management theories lack presently. That is discourses that can address practices not accounted for in major academic debates in the western dominant world.

We explored our concept by engaging with stories of grass-roots communal engagement Latin America and Africa, in a manner which emulated the visual sensibility and storytelling practice conveyed by documentary artists such as Salgado (1997, 2000) and Bendiksen (2008). We worked to bring our own sensibility and imagination to explain how social transformation is achieved through humanistic engagements. Following Boal (2000) and Shotter (1998), we believe that, in this way, we can work to recover an empathy lost in organization/management studies. In our analyses we explore the grass-roots organizing initiatives of disenfranchised communities in Argentina and South Africa to illustrate the concept of transformative humanism. In particular, we show how people creatively organize together to actualise social transformation from within their own communities. They do so in a manner which is based on an alternative system of socio-economic relationships and conveys the potential of education as a relational and intersubjective process of social transformation.

Alternatives to Capitalism: Collective Organizing, Social Movements

When we consider the notion of 'capitalism' we acknowledge that this is a vast concept with many possible interpretations and varieties including free-market (and its extreme form as neo-liberalism), social democratic, and state-led capitalism (e.g. see Hall and Soskice, 2001). When we refer to capitalism in this paper, we are essentially referring to a particular system of socio-economic relationships in which people are engaging in a private labour market and where relationships are based on monetary exchange. This system has both positive and negative impacts on society (Martin, 2009). Whatever the impacts may be, the societal dissatisfaction with the negative impacts have, increasingly, generated calls to construct alternative ways of thinking and engaging which do not reflect the socio-economic relationships associated with capitalism (e.g. Polanyi, 1944/1968; Barber et al., 2012; Santos, 2006; Gibson-Graham and Cameron, 2007; Martin, 2009; Wolff, 2013). These alternative approaches have consequently formed the basis of collective engagement and an array of social movements around the world (Santos, 2006; Santos and Rodríguez-Garavit, 2006).

Martin (2009) proposes three approaches for challenging capitalism which can be broadly associated with different types of social/organizational engagement. These are, challenging the foundations of capitalism; creating alternatives to capitalist practices; and promoting alternative belief systems. The first approach, challenging the foundations of capitalism, can be associated with collective social engagement attempts to highlight discontent and create momentum towards changing government policy. Webster (2004) refers to different types of collective action that seeks to challenge and change particular socio-economic systems. He distinguishes between 'social movement' and 'social mobilisation'. Social movement connotes a radical attempt to overthrow a socio-economic system and its associated political order. On the other hand, 'social mobilisation' signifies a more subtle attempt to work with the socio-economic system and initiate reform from the inside. These approaches are emphasised in the opening quote which highlights the most recent challenges to the perceived negative foundations of the capitalist system following the global banking crises. Challenges such as these often emerge in the form of (sometimes violent) mass movements bringing large numbers of protestors together who seek to confront the negative effects of dominant economic policies (Martin, 2009).

The second approach focuses on creating alternative collective engagement at a local community level. What these approaches do is provide an alternative system of social relationships which are separate from the social relationships in a capitalist system and therefore subvert the system (Martin, 2009; Barber et al., 2012). Approaches in this category include practices which are already employed in society but are not the dominant form of engagement. Examples are co-operative exchange schemes; local money systems; workers' control of production; community control of social services; and the free distribution of goods/services to the neediest (Martin, 2009). In other contexts, particularly the third world, there are many people who engage in alternative, informal work practices because they cannot afford to engage in the formal economic system (e.g. Hart, 1973). Teruelle, (2012) points out that it may seem impossible to live outside of capitalism system of social relationships. However there are a number of successful social movement which illustrate otherwise. Examples include the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the Brazilian Landless Peasants Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra*), the Occupy Movement, the San Francisco based Retort group, and the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (Teruelle, 2012).

The third approach is creating alternative belief systems. The communal practices in this category are based on principles and values of socio-economic engagement that are conceptualised in a fundamentally different way from those associated with capitalism (Narotzky, 2012). This approach is emphasised by the work of theorists who offer alternative ways of conceptualising economic and social engagement, for example, the concept of 'barefoot economics' in Latin America (Max-Neef, 1991, 1992, 1995, 2007) and 'barefoot entrepreneur' in the South (Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012). To Narotzky (2012), this third part forms part of an intellectual tradition that conceptualises creative processes of social innovation. There may be overlaps between approaches two and three where, for example, informal workers engage communally in ways which are based on alternative belief systems. However the categories do have different emphases and it is the third category that we extend in the current paper. It is not our intention to debate the purity of what is (or is not) an alternative belief system (Gibson-Graham and Cameron, 2007). Our aim is, instead, to offer a way of explaining the everyday engagements of communities that are based on an alternative system of beliefs.

Communal Organizing Through Transformative Humanism

In this paper, we move away from debating whether collective action is successful or not and instead focus on the alternative values and principles that motivate disenfranchised communities to initiate and sustain them. We propose a new way of explaining the everyday practices of communities who socially organize and create more sustainable grass-roots engagement. We suggest that they are sustained by an ideology of 'transformative humanism' that is founded on an ongoing struggle for emancipation against a system of wealth creation that does not provide equally sustainable benefit. We suggest that movements such as this embody alternative ways for disenfranchised communities to organize and shape grass-roots social transformation from within. As we have already pointed out, our approach to transformative humanism draws together three concepts: Manfred Max-Neef's barefoot economics; Frantz Fanon's ideas on transformative humanism; and Paulo Freire's ideas of pedagogy. Our aim is to performatively illustrate a new way of thinking about the grass-roots organizing of socio-economic systems, which accounts for the actual engagements of those who are disenfranchised.

Barefoot Economics

As we have explored elsewhere (Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012), Max-Neef provides a way of explaining economic engagements of disenfranchised individuals (living in poverty) which do not fit with the dominant (capitalist) system of relationships. According to Max-Neef, dominant theories of economic engagement simply do not account for individuals engaging at the margins of society (Max-Neef, 1991). This is the case because they only report engagements that can be quantified. Barefoot economics is a metaphor used to explain a different set of socio-economic values and principles of people living in poverty which is rooted in their everyday experiences. Max-Neef theorises that although people are poor, self-sufficiency is possible and effective through grass-roots mobilisation (Max-Neef, 1982/1992). Barefoot economics gives us a base to theorise an alternative system of socio-economic relationships, that are not tied to a capitalist system of relationships, and which illustrates self-sufficient grass-roots mobilisation. Although Max-Neef refers to individuals living in poverty, we use this to explain the socio-economic relationships of disenfranchised people more widely.

Transformative Humanism

For the second part of our concept we draw on Fanon's concept of transformative humanism to explain how people creatively organize together to change their circumstances for the ultimate benefit of their communities. In his work, Fanon argues for a 'new humanism' (Fanon, 1963:9; 1967/2008:246) which emerges out of a struggle for liberation. Fanon's humanism can be seen as a 'revolutionary' form of humanism that positions people - including those that are marginalised - as having the potential to freely use their creativity to engage with and change the world (Gibson, 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2001; Pithouse, 2003). He does not promote humanism as a militant form of engagement, but an opportunity to start a movement that works to transform deep seated traditions. He accepts that this is not easy but every person has the potential to engage in productive self-actualisation (Pithouse, 2003).

Humanism as a theoretical concept is a highly contested. Despite support for the concept by key radical thinkers (e.g. see Marx, 1983; Sartre, 1987) the anti-humanistic critiques (e.g. see Heidegger, 2001; Foucault, 1973) still position it as an unfashionable concept because it has been presented as a key aspect of modernity and colonialism (Pithouse, 2003)¹. This may be one reason why Fanon has been referred to so little in organization studies research (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). However, despite the links with colonialism, Fanon did not oppose humanism as a concept and instead remained committed to it as a way of conveying the (post-colonial) lived experiences of humanity (Pithouse, 2003). In African contexts, the concept of *Ubuntu* (and associated terms such as *Unhu*) has been described as 'African humanism' because it encompasses the way that people place a great importance on social/communal relationships, concern for others, and meaningful cooperation in society (Mabovula, 2011; Letseka, 2000). Madlingozi (2007) refers to human-centred engagement and stresses that fundamental change is possible through sustained collective action. A related concept is 'revolutionary *Ubuntu*' which defends the rights of all people no matter their background and acknowledges the importance of the communal engagements. This resonates with Fanon's humanism because it reflects the way that marginalised individuals come together to communally engage in a struggle for social transformation (Alkimat, 2009; Gibson, 2011). We take these ideas presented on transformative humanism to explain how marginalised people are able to creatively actualise social transformation by working together in their communities.

¹ We acknowledge the continued debate on 'humanism'. For an extended discussion see Pithouse (2003).

Pedagogy of Hope and Transformation

For the final element of transformative humanism, we look towards Paulo Freire's ideas on pedagogy. Pedagogy is an important element because we view collective engagements based on transformative humanism include as also including an educational potential. Gaining inspiration from Fanon (Gibson, 2011), Freire conveys education as a relational and intersubjective process of transformation (O'Shea, 2011). Through his pedagogical ideas he stresses the power of education as a subversive force which can raise critical awareness of self-hood and social circumstances of any person; and in particular, promotes those in suffering as able to individually and collectively take the initiative to transform their society. In particular he stressed the importance of dialogue as a social process of knowing (Freire, 1970/2005). His later ideas which focus on pedagogy of hope build on this in a more constructive manner to explain how educational engagements of the dispossessed are rooted in practice. He emphasises that through hope change is achievable regardless of the obstacles that are faced (Freire, 1992/1999). He argued that hope was a basis from which to counter the negative impacts of neo-liberalism (Webb, 2010). In this way, for the third element of our conceptual perspective, we draw on Freire's pedagogy of hope to convey the potential of educational as a relational and intersubjective process of social transformation.

Examples from the Literature

Communal organizing based on transformative humanism can be interpreted in a number of social movements in the South. These include the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra* (MST) in Brazil (MST, 2014; Issa, 2007) and the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* movement in South Africa (e.g. Gibson, 2008, 2011; Imas and Weston, 2012). The MST is an example of a mass social movement that has been formed by landless communities with the aim of fighting against social inequality and realising their rights. The movement was formed in 1984 and has grown to encompass more than 150,000 landless families in Brazil. Through various organizing and co-operative activities they strive to promote education, healthcare and agricultural production (MST, 2014). The MST is referred to as a *mística* in the Brazilian social science literature. The notion of *Mística* stems from Latin American liberation theology which emerged in the 1960s. It represents a collective grass-roots struggle and solidarity that is based on humility, courage and inspirational self-sacrifice, which seeks to liberate the

oppressed (Issa, 2007). In this way the MST can be seen to engage in transformative humanism because its members are collectively working together for mutual benefit.

Another example of this kind of movement is the *Abahlali baseMjondolo* in Durban, South Africa. Since Apartheid, South Africa has inherited substantial economic inequality and poverty. Those living in poverty suffer from a lack of basic social services such as healthcare and the provision of adequate housing, water and electricity which has been worsened by economic practices such as neo-liberalism. In reaction to the adverse impacts of neo-liberalist policies, communities have joined together to challenge their circumstances. Community organizations have organized organically to address issues for themselves and provide alternatives to (neo-liberal) capitalism (Madlingozi, 2007). *Abahlali baseMjondolo* is an example of such as grass-roots social movement which has risen as a challenge to government policies but does not follow the dominant economic and political systems (Gibson, 2008, 2011; Imas and Weston, 2012). This is a social movement and organizing initiative of the poor and dispossessed which was initiated by the poor and based on the needs of the poor. The movement has gained substantial momentum and is the largest, self-sustaining grassroots movement of the poor in in South Africa. It has emerged through a liberating ideology that exemplifies transformative humanism because all of the actions of the movement are aimed at transforming the circumstances of the community. The movement has been self-described as a form of revolutionary *Ubuntu* (Alkimat, 2009), that incorporates a pedagogical mission to address the inequalities in society and promote socio-economic transformation of the poor.

Both of these examples illustrate ways in which people construct, from another language, a representation of their collective organizational and work activities that subvert the current status quo and are focused on transforming the socio-economic circumstances of marginalised individuals. Although these examples are highlighted in the South, initiatives such as this are not only happening in the South. Communities in Europe and the USA are similarly attempting to visualise organization from alternative perspectives, in a manner which is intended to subvert the dominant economic and political systems, and transformatively benefit the common good (Narotzky, 2012).

Methodology

We collected our data using two methodological approaches. In Argentina, we conducted ethnographic research about the *fábricas recuperadas* (or *empresas recuperadas*) in Argentina (Meyer and Chaves, 2008; Nartozky, 2012). In South Africa we engaged with community stories highlighted in the media to continue the debate about transformative humanism in South African. We have drawn on an interview by Ashraf Cassiem (Community Audio, 2009) who was, in 2009, the Chairperson of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC). In both cases, we worked in a manner which emphasises the importance of grass-roots engagement and emulates visual sensibility and uncommon storytelling skills. In this way, we bring our own sensibility and imagination to discuss how social transformation is achieved through transformative humanism. Following Boal (2000) and Shotter (1998), we believe that we can recover an empathy lost in organization/management studies and reconnect with wider audiences that our research is meant to support and help – i.e., we have worked to act, to feel and to think in relation to and with others. By working in this way, we have also incorporated philosophical and ethical dimensions of African humanism/*Ubuntu* in our research. This involves the responsibility to demonstrate solidarity with others in a way that uses local judgement rather than objective reason for example, by participating with others in a ways that incorporates traditional practices (Metz, 2007; Metz and Gaie, 2010).

Our methodological approach resonates with the extended work of the theorists who we have drawn on in our conceptual perspective. For Max-Neef (1982), immersion in the context is essential. The complexity of poverty and the invisible parts of society can only be appreciated through grass-roots engagement with poor communities. He referred to this as 'stepping into the mud' (1982: 22). Fanon took a different approach to engaging with the disenfranchised which emphasised dialogue. He worked to highlight 'voices [...] from unexpected spaces' (Gibson, 2011: 7) and deliberately incorporated a poetic style into his work which was intended to undermine objectification (Pithouse, 2003). His approach was shaped by the Caribbean poeticist movement that worked to encourage a different kind of sensibility (Henry, 2000). Freire, similar to Fanon, also engaged with dialogue and stressed that pedagogy is developed through critical dialogue with the oppressed (Freire, 1970/2007). The following examples illustrate how communities are engaging in transformative humanism in Argentina and South Africa.

Performing Transformative Humanism

The Fábrica: A Community at Work

Every Wednesday morning the multitude congregates at the *Congreso Plaza* in the centre of Buenos Aires. Diverse collections of students, unemployed, workers, miners, women, children, middle class ladies, professionals, *Malvinas* (Falklands) war veterans, natives of Latin America and others line up under different banners and social associations to begin their regular Wednesday march towards the symbol of political power in the country, *La Casa Rosada*. Primarily, they protest against the social injustice and poor working conditions endured under the so called “economic development plan” sponsored by global institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF (the International Monetary Fund) and the WTO (World Trade Organization). Many camped at the *Plaza de Mayo*, they blow whistles; they chant; they scream; and, there, speaker after speaker read to the crowd his/her claim:

“Dejennos trabajar para comer”; “Ya Basta”; “Son unos corruptos capitalistas”; Devuelvannos nuestra dignidad en el trabajo”; Devuelvannos el control de nuestras vidas”; plata para trabajo y salario no para pagar la deuda”

which reads: *“Let us work to feed ourselves”; “It’s enough”; “corrupted capitalists”; “Give us back our work dignity”; Give us back the control over our lives”; money for jobs and salaries not for paying foreign debt.”*

This was the chanting when one of us arrived to document and ethnographically engage at the protests against the IMF and the collapse of the economy in Argentina. The echo of their voices and the sound of their drums resonate with others around the world grouped under new social movements and forums, curiously acknowledged as anti-globalisation movements (e.g., *On Fire*, 2001). Like their Argentinean counterparts, these multitudes, characterised as rhizomic and nomadic (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003) networks of individuals, call for alternative solutions; alternative beliefs to the ones sold by the global corporate elites (Bauman, 2000) of the new so-called ‘Empire’ (Hardt and Negri, 2001; Negri, 2003).

Yet in the business district at the fringes of this newly conceived borderless and atemporal world, the chanting does not have any echo. Political, economic and business institutions that had advanced the new Empire in Argentina are unperturbed and unmoved behind the walls that they have built to keep the multitude from their doors. Private security guards, the new

police forces of the Empire, guard these well-protected entrances while the official police patrolled the multitude and controlled protesters' behaviours in the streets of Buenos Aires. Removed from the 'masses', the global elites continue to dictate and manage the lives of all these individuals, imposing their liquid principles that have polluted the biosphere, their 'hearts and minds' and above all, dominate their existence. A mixture of spontaneous carnival, anger and subversion is generated every Wednesday in Buenos Aires. It was the cold response from the global elites of Empire moved us to write and explore this social and organizational phenomenon. In the following, we will discuss what (potentially) could be achieved from the creation of these spontaneous movements aiming to transform the 'Empire' in which we live.

Walking the streets of Buenos Aires and the streets of other cities has made us reflect upon our own responsibilities and alliances as organizational theorists (see e.g., Graeber, 2002) and educators of the global elites (read MBA students). It might be, as the poster below at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Buenos Aires suggests, that we will be able to call a 'July the 9th Global Independence Day' when we achieved re-organizing our lives in a different fashion and putting narratives of emancipation as the priority over those of exploitation.



Image 1: J.M. Imas

Fabricas: The organizing of transformative humanism

Similar to Europe alternative ideas were put forward by workers who were losing their jobs. One of these was to ‘*recuperar la fábrica*’, i.e. to re-claim the power of the business as it was abandoned by owners and management.

“We’re in a daring situation. You know, these people were taken their money, closing the factory and walking away. There was nothing for us there. No compensation, no support, no prospects.... Our bank accounts were not allowing us to get our money out. There was nothing. So, what were we to do? How were we to feed our families? It was a real joke! But we were not laughing!” (Jose,).

The *fábricas recuperadas* in Argentina (Meyer and Chaves, 2008; Nartozky, 2012) emerged after the economic collapse of Argentina in 2000. It became a symbol of alternative resistance to the neoliberal economic system. It was an initiative constructed by disenfranchised people in order to affect the performativity of an economic system which primarily destroyed their lives. The movement involved factory workers co-opting their former places of employment in order to continue their use both socially and as a form of gainful employ. This resulted in radically transformed relationships of socio-economic engagement which emerged on the edge of the market system (Nartozky, 2012).

“When patrones (owners) left, we did not know how to run the business. All of us didn’t have a proper business education. We were machine operators. Even the older one here, Pedro, he didn’t know how or what to do. How were we going to sell our products? We didn’t have clients as everything was collapsing. We didn’t have the government here to support us as we were bankrupt and what we were doing was illegal. But, you know, we had to do something”... (Arturo)

Several organizations which went bankrupt began to group and organize themselves, supporting one another and establishing alternative ways to the capitalist system that relies primarily in borrowing money as a way of supporting and creating ‘business’.

“here, there was nothing, we didn’t have the money. From where? But companeros (comrades) from other businesses began to let us tools if necessary. We exchange parts of our machinery with other factories in order to keep printing. We shared transport. Activist students joined us to give us advice on how to re-posit our work.

What was unbelievable was that everyone cooperated. At least, everyone,, lower and middle class felt we had to do something together as help from the state or abroad was not going to materialise.” (Jacinto).

What the capitalist system equally lacked at that stage was the involvement of the community to support businesses. In the traditional sense, it is the costumers who keep a market or a business afloat. In this case, as the fábricas did not have the legality to sell their products, the community gave them a hand in order to put products out, risking their own lives with potential jail sentences as they were helping people who were regarded as illegal.

“Look, it was really, really tense. The police came to throw us out of here. They arrived one evening with a van to take us out and lock the fábrica. Our neighbours came to tell us so we could barricade ourselves and keep the gates fully crossed. Our families arrived and what was so beautiful was to see the community standing out, outside blocking the police access to the gates.... We did have a problem, companeros were getting us orders, but we could not take our prints out as the police was there. Then, our next door neighbour suggested us to take the prints through his home. What? So, the hole there above our heads there, is from where we started to move our work we have been paid to produce so we could keep going.... It was beautiful an now we invite the community here, children, old people to come and share with us the fabrica” (Roque).



Image 2: J.M. Imas

The fabrica became to represent a symbol of resistance, of community, of participation. The boundaries between the factory and community became blurred as pouring integration flow between both.

“Look, we have an art room, we have a space for theatre, for music, we have the local schools visiting us to learn about our old machines (hehehe); about what it takes to print a book, a comic, or else... We are here to learn and grow together as a community not as a business alone” (Rogelio).

This example illustrates our concept of transformative humanism because these disenfranchised workers collectively engaged in alternative socio-economic relationships which involved re-educating and re-constructing their livelihoods. Together the factory workers were able to transform their working conditions and livelihoods for mutual benefit.

Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC)

South Africa’s townships, ghettos and shack settlements are erupting over evictions and electricity and water cut-offs. It’s October 16th, 2000, and the City of Cape Town’s bailiff, along with some 20 casual labourers, has arrived to Tafelsig, a section of Mitchells Plain, one of the city’s (and country’s) largest townships, to evict a pensioner and his family, which includes a two-month-old baby:

“[T]hat is when the community that I come from, Tafelsig, where they responded by getting together. They responded by resisting, particularly eviction. But, it didn’t go without incident. At this particular eviction, there were six people arrested. The family was reinstated. But, when the army, the police, there were about three or four different units of the police present, as well as the dog unit. And I was one of the persons that was assaulted. Actually, my teeth was kicked in by the police. Dogs bit my back and my arms and my thigh. So, that very day, when this pensioner and his family were evicted, the community, who is made up of different poor people. ... So, when we were arrested on the day, the community, about 7,500 of them, marched to the police station that we were being held, demanded our release, occupied the police station for about two hours and at about half past eleven in the evening of that very day we were released into the custody of our own community.

We went back home and we reinstated everybody that was evicted. And, we decided on that day that nobody, but nobody, will be evicted in our community. That was the day that initiated, we didn't have a name, we didn't have an identity, but our action gave us the identity. Our action proved to us that we can do things without permission. It proved that if you want to keep your house, you need to do something about it yourself." (Ashraf Cassiem)

So it was that the Tafelsig community came together and started to organise in the face of the country's encroaching neoliberalism, which was seeing poor people, already struggling to eek out a living, rendered even poorer. A few months later, the community engaged in what they called the "water wars" with the City of Cape Town. Because they couldn't afford to pay for water, the city started disconnections. Deciding that this should not be happening, the community reconnected homes as soon as the authorities had left: *"we would remove the meter, put in a nine inch pipe, throw some stones and some sand and some cement, and then they'll never, ever disconnect that particular family again"* (Ashraf Cassiem).

The Tafelsig community visited other communities and they invited these other communities to participate with them in fighting against evictions and water cut-offs. On realising they were all experiencing common happenings, the various communities joined together to form what is now known as the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (WCAEC). Their struggle can be seen as encapsulated in the following:

"We may be poor, but we are not stupid! We may be poor, but we can still think! Nothing for us without us! Talk to us, not about us! We are fighting for democracy. The right to be heard and the right to be in control of our own communities and our own society. This means that government officials and political parties should stop telling us what we want. We know what we want. This means that NGOs and development 'experts' should stop workshopping us on 'world-renowned' solutions at the expense of our own homegrown knowledge. This means we refuse to be a 'stakeholder' and have our voices managed and diminished by those who count." (WCAEC, 2009)

Further, their day-to-day battles are grounded in attempting to develop a new kind of emancipatory politics that focuses on issues, over personality, one that *represents* “a new emancipatory structure where we are not stakeholders, but people ... and where resources are shared rather than fought over” (WCAEC, 2009).

WCAEC: Spontaneous, Amorphous Organising Building from Below

One of the first generation of social movements to emerge in South Africa following the ending of apartheid, the WCAEC is now an umbrella body of some 15 community organisations, crisis committees and concerned residents’ communities representing poor and oppressed people in Cape Town. But talk of what the WCAEC ‘is’ enters the realm of the amorphous:

"[O]ur movement, our campaign, our organisation, you can call it whatever you like. But what it is a spontaneous reaction, or a spontaneous response, to neo-liberal capital in South Africa." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"[I]n the beginning, we did things very spontaneous; it wasn't organised, it was organised. I think, when we're talking about this, it's because in South Africa, it has a rich history of struggle and I think people depended or were reminded of struggle when they were in this particular position and responded with spontaneous community action." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"[The WCAEC] is an idea. Ever changing. It is an organisation that is not an organisation. Something that listens to nobody, but listens to everybody." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"We started our own legal coordinating committee, which we called the Campaign for the Recognition of the Fundamental Right to a Home, which defended evictions, defended trespassing cases, defended intimidation cases, we defended different cases and we are not attorneys, we are not advocates, we are not lawyers. But, we were doing it from a layman's point of view. In the Constitution, there's a section, Section 38E, that says an association can represent its members and we did exactly that. The Campaign for the Recognition of the Fundamental Right to a Home, we established it as an association so as to effect that Section 38E of the Constitution. So, we were able to represent our membership. Just as a matter of interest, we do

not have a membership organisation. We are a spontaneous community organisation that is not membership based. But, you know, for the creativity of it, we had to just have the form, the application form, to show the court that this is actually the members." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"So, the Anti-Eviction Campaign was not a planned movement; it wasn't a planned organisation. It was a spontaneous response to the needs of, for the needs of poor people." (Ashraf Cassiem)

Indeed, spontaneity, creativity and a sense of amorphous organisation are common themes that permeate talk about the WCAEC, along with the transformative humanism of community empowerment. It is at once an organisation and not an organisation; it is at once organised and not organised; it is at once structured and non-structured. This sense of fluidity can also be found in the flux of what the WCAEC 'does':

"When we started out, it wasn't planned, and as we went along, or are going along, we're not only dealing with evictions, we're dealing with school fees, we're dealing with education, we're dealing with social services, we're dealing with, you know, an array of different social issues. And, you know, tomorrow there'll probably be a new one". (Ashraf Cassiem)

It seems as though all of this fluidity finds explanation in the WCAEC's efforts to remain a campaign of and for the people, while also being wary of becoming too knowable and predictable for opponents.

In remaining a campaign of and for the people, the WCAEC believes in building democratically from below "*because no one can lead without us*" (WCAEC, 2009). Given the value placed on communities controlling their own movement, the WCAEC coordinating committee (comprising a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer and three coordinators) and member group coordinators are elected by their communities based on their demonstrated commitment to advocate and defend their community's best interests. The coordinating committee and the coordinators are not seen as leaders in the traditional, authoritarian sense; rather they compare themselves to cutlery/utensils:

*"We are like a set of cutlery. We are the tools that are there to be used by poor communities fighting against the cruel and oppressive conditions of South African society. **Power to the poor people!**" (WCAEC Coordinator)*

"We believe that we are knives and forks and spoons, we are utensils to be used by our communities and that we will be used until, you know, there is no longer use for us." (Ashraf Cassiem)

The WCAEC works with communities to democratise their internal governance through establishing participatory platforms that allow community members challenge, and hold accountable, their elected representatives. Thus, being elected by their communities, the coordinators and, by extension, the WCAEC coordinating committee, are accountable to their communities. Citing the example of a coordinator who did not follow her community's mandate, which resulted in her being thrown off the "the non-structure that there is", Ashraf Cassiem elaborates:

"[W]e have what we call a code of conduct, you know, it's a code of conduct drawn up by your community, so you are always accountable to your community. ... So, accountability is always within your community, you know, whatever you do it goes back to the community. You know, so you're not accountable to the structures; you're accountable to ordinary people. ... [W]e have to stick to our mandate, you know, so, if we get an invitation to do anything, we have to report it to our community. Our community mandates you to participate or mandates you not to participate."

Indeed, the WCAEC's communities have held the members of the former WCAEC executive committee accountable and elected new members to what is now called the coordinating committee. The then executive committee was ousted at the Annual General Meeting organised in November 2010 because it

"had failed in its mandate and had refused to conduct AGMs each and every year. The result was that the leadership undermined the AEC membership and the democratic process to which the movement had committed. Many communities stopped attending WC-AEC meetings and the movement lost a lot of its members." (WCAEC, 2010)

When it comes to funding, the WCAEC operates on a shoestring budget. Run as a completely voluntary movement, its volunteers are not paid for the work they do. As a mark of its commitment to remaining a grassroots and autonomous movement, it does not accept funds from any government-aligned body or agency. It has also declared that

"The name of the WC-AEC is owned and will be from now on driven by the communities themselves and no individual or group of individuals can lay claim to the movement or its name. It cannot be copyrighted or patented by any individual, group of individuals or NGO." (WCAEC, 2010)

While the WCAEC accepts monetary support and works with "some well-meaning NGOs, academics and well-wishers", so long as "this will not compromise our strict independence as a movement" (WCAEC, 2010), the preference is for bodies:

"[I]n the Anti-Eviction Campaign, we say, bring your body, right, because that's what we need. We need your body. ... While you can support us, we do need the support, your body would be better. But, any way you can, any creative way you think you can support, you must support."

The WCAEC has reached out and formed alliances with other, similar groups. Initially a member of the Social Movements Indaba from its founding in 2002, the WCAEC, along with *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (AbM), "dislodged" themselves from SMI in 2006 because, as grassroots people's groups, they had enough of NGO-controlled coalitions pre-empting and watering down the demands of people. Finding themselves depending on each other, the WCAEC and AbM

"formed what we called the Action Alliance because we were in two different provinces. We couldn't meet regularly, but, we met in the actions that we had in our respective provinces. So, we would support each other by actions, not by words, but by actions. So, that's why we insisted on being called the Action Alliance." (Ashraf Cassiem)

Following talks with other, similar groups, the alliance expanded in 2008 to include the Landless People's Movement and the Rural Network, and became the Poor People's Alliance.

WCAEC: Organising with Community in Their Spaces

For the WCAEC, it is the State that has created the spaces in which they operate. In imposing its policies on poor people and their communities, the State has created fertile ground for mobilising communities and joining together to engage with the State on their terms. For the WCAEC, mobilising communities is a gradual process, which involves being invited into the community space, spreading information, empowering the people and their community, and supporting community actions:

"[W]here we do organising, we do not force ourselves into communities. Communities invite us into their spaces. ... [L]ike, in a new community, just a simple process that we would do is find one person with an issue that introduces us to another person with an issue that introduces us to another person with an issue and introduces to another person with an issue. And it can go on and on and on. And, then you can have a meeting with maybe 20 people that we then introduce another 20 people until we have a whole community out there. Because people are not willing to bring their problems into the community, you know, open it up unless there's others that can identify with them. Like, in instances in the Western Cape, where people were being forcibly removed, like they wouldn't want to experience that confrontation. So, what they would do is, they would move out at night, you know, the day before eviction they would rather move out rather than having that confrontation. So, with information, you know, people don't just move away. They realise the power that they have, and together with the community, and then they stand their ground because they know the community will be there for them because the rest of the community will be in the same, or similar situation that they find themselves in. There's different ways in which we mobilise communities. We try to do creative ways like, for instance, when there's an issue, we try to create the atmosphere that's conducive for speaking, you know, like, where people can just talk nonsense even, so that, you know, like, for instance, when we come up with a plan, the plan is usually a dead plan already, but we use the dead plan, we panel beat it, we cut it out, you know, we chop it up, and put it back together, so that the ordinary person that thinks he doesn't have power, his suggestion is actually being executed, you know. So, that means that ordinary people, with no voice, gets to have a voice within the spaces that we provide. And that is power within itself. That

spurs on other, weaker persons that is not willing to talk or testify of their issues. It shows that, it gives them courage, it gives them hope, you know. So, it's just the day-to-day, you know, like, we begin with you, with one person, and at least one other person and then we just work from there. You know, in the Anti-Eviction Campaign, there's no quick fix. We believe in hard work. We believe that the work you put in is the work you get out. So, we are prepared to do it the long way, not the quick way.(Ashraf Cassiem)

WCAEC: Organising through Creative Resistance

Once mobilised, the WCAEC supports communities in direct action activities, for example, directly challenging evictions as they happen through staging sit-ins and demonstrations targeted at dissuading government agents and private security forces from enforcing evictions. Where a family has already been evicted, the community's usual practice is to return the family and their belongings to their home. In cases where these tactics are not successful, the community has sometimes acted to render the property in question uninhabitable on the grounds that *"if the people cannot have the land, then no one will"* (WCAEC, n.d.). For the WCAEC,

"its inception was based on direct action, and we're trying to follow through on the power that that brings. We win all the time with direct action, it brings power to the person enacting out whatever is being acted and it also brings power to the community because it also brings collective action." (Ceasefire, 2011)

Cognisant of the country's history of struggle, the WCAEC and member communities try to be creative with their direct action activities because *"if you struggle in an ordinary way, they're prepared for you"* (Ashraf Cassiem). Thus, while they apply for protest permits, where they must indicate the route they will follow, on the day of the protest, they will go a different route. Basically, *"poor people will do what they must do and, believe me, poor people are more creative than big business"* (Ashraf Cassiem). Following are a few examples of the creative approaches they have taken and the outcomes they have achieved:

"[I]n 2002, we managed to get a moratorium on evictions in rental dwellings. ... And how we did that was by a day-long protest that included almost six different communities and it was spontaneous. Like, one community decided they would march to the local councillor, which was about three communities away, but in

order to get to that community, you have to go through about four or five different communities. And on the way, by doing this, the other communities joined in because they were having similar issues. So, we managed to bring together about four or five different communities just at one particular councillor's house, because we went to his house, not to his office, to his house, and that, actually, one o'clock the night, the next morning, the mayor at that time, Nomaindia Mfeketo, she declared a moratorium, not officially, but that moratorium still stands in council dwellings, not bank-owned and private developers or so on. But rental dwellings, there will be no evictions". (Ashraf Cassiem)

"[W]e do sit-ins at people's houses, like, you know, officials and so on. Like, for instance, there was a, you know, there was a minister for housing about, you know, before elections, there was another minister, and we used to have weekly protests to his house. He lived close to the township so it was easy to walk there. And we would walk there, you know, in Cape Town, in South Africa, we still use the bucket system. Now, the bucket system is a, I don't know what, a toilet with a bucket inside and when you use the toilet there's no flush system, right. It's just a bucket inside a small box that looks like a toilet. ... We call it the bucket system. So, we would take the buckets from the system and march to this official's house and dump them there. So, so, by this action, it gets immediate response, usually by the police first, but it gets us a meeting or so, you know. It gets us identified." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"[A]s another tactic, we try not to meet in official offices; we always invite these officials to our communities so that we are always dealing with our issues with our community present. Yeah, and that brings power. I can refer to a particular case, you know, a few years ago in a place called Mandela Park, which is in Khayelitsha. It used to be one of our very strongest communities. We invited the finance person of the state, not of the national state, but of our provincial state, to a meeting to discuss why pensioners were being evicted. And when he arrived he was very nice and, you know, he said, no, I'm coming to listen, I'm coming to help, I'm coming to talk to this issue. So, what we did is, the ladies in the meeting, they brought a 20 litre bucket and they put it next to our table where we were talking and whenever he wanted to use the toilet, we would get a blanket or so to cover it up and he would go to the toilet right there. We said that he will not leave until we have a resolution.

And what we got from that, after about almost 17 hours of negotiations, and about five trips to the toilet, which was right next to him, we managed to get him to sign an agreement that said that all pensioners' arrears will be scrapped, which then saved a whole lot of houses from being evicted." (Ashraf Cassiem)

"[A]t one particular march, which was not too long ago, we marched to the MEC for, member for the executive committee, MEC, it's called MEC, it's the provincial parliament, so, we marched to the MEC for local government and housing and, when we got there, we had three coffins, one with his name on it, one with the private property developer on it, and one with a ... property agent, this property agent has also been charged, responsible for collecting rent in low income areas. So, we made three coffins. We marched to the provincial parliament. We put down the coffins. We invited them to come out, the MEC, we invited Thubelisha the private property developer to come out, and we invited the property agent to come out. And, when they arrived, what we do is we have a burial procedure. So, we have a play almost, you know, where people's crying and people is, you know, oh why did you not give water, why didn't you give the people houses, and now you're dead, you know, and all this kind of thing. So, we actually buried our representation. We said, we do not want to be represented by you anymore; we want to represent ourselves. So, how we do that is, each person present at that particular march will get a piece of paper and a pencil and they'll write down all the issues they have and they'll put it into the coffin, which will be taken away by the MEC that we marched on. So, yeah, why we do these creative things is we get good results because three days later, he was replaced with another MEC for his department and his department was divided into a local government department and a department of housing. So, now that one department that used to be local government and housing is now two different departments with two different people heading them".(Ashraf Cassiem)

WCAEC: Organising through Educating

The WCAEC uses targeted activist workshops as part of its mobilisation campaign to interest communities in becoming involved. The workshops serve as fora for educating people about issues relating to evictions and water and electricity cut-offs, linking these concrete experiences with the government's neoliberal macroeconomic and privatisation policies.

Organisation capacity building revolves around developing the skills of members from WCAEC communities in areas such as the law (to help in dealing with legal documents and procedures specific to evictions and cut-offs) and research (to study the socio-economic effects of evictions and cut-offs to generate counter arguments and develop concrete alternatives to the dominant socio-economic policies and relationships).

The WCAEC believes in the community learning from one another and building its own school of thought. The popular education it practices aligns with that of Paulo Freire, where participants engage with a reading and “*try to workshop it, understand it and implement it*” (Ceasefire, 2011):

"Like instead of having Marxism or something, we have a lesson about our community. So that is what we call 'Living Politics', real life politics. Not the politics of anybody, but the politics of our community. And that is what we're saying is the kind of education that we need ... because it's our own education, our own understanding of things that we want to have implemented. And that's more powerful because usually policies and procedures are for the powers that be, and people like us don't want to have these policies and programmes but we are forced to. So now we're saying that we don't want to worry about that, we want to talk about our politics. So we're talking about living politics. Living and learning real things. Not abstract, but real things."(Ceasefire, 2011)

Interestingly, one community school ended up closing, not for lack of interest, but because the government intervened. Those who attended the school did so because they could not afford the fees of other schools, while unemployed teachers did the teaching. But, the school ended up closing

"because the government then employed all those teachers and they placed all the students into different schools in the area. So in one way we did achieve education for the youth, and a job opportunity for an unemployed teacher but now the popular education is not there."(Ceasefire, 2011)

Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have focussed on theorising the everyday practices of communities who socially organize and create more sustainable grass-roots engagement as an alternative to capitalism. We suggest that these engagements are based on an alternative set of values and principles and express an ideology of 'transformative humanism'. Communal practices are initiated by disenfranchised communities and sustained by an ongoing struggle for emancipation against a system of wealth creation that does not provide equally sustainable benefit.

Our conceptual perspective accounts for a system of socio-economic relationships which embody self-sufficient grass-roots mobilisation of disenfranchised individuals. By working together, marginalised people are able to creatively actualise social transformation by organizing together in their communities. Our perspective encompasses a pedagogical aspect which explains the potential of education in this relational and intersubjective process of social transformation.

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