

Review

Community Development Journal Special issue: *Practising Solidarity: Challenges for Community Development and Social Movements in the 21st Century* Vol. 52 No. 3 July 2017

The Community Development Journal (CDJ) is celebrating 50 years of publication with a special issue on *Practising solidarity: challenges for community development and social movements in the 21st century*. The anniversary publication certainly reflects the wide range of community development activities, contexts, issues, approaches and theoretical reflections, demonstrating that community development continues to be an intellectual and political force in the 21st century. Community development has always been a conflicted and conflicting practice and, for the past 50 years the CDJ has provided a platform for critical reflection, discernment and analysis. By focusing on solidarity and the interface between community development and social movement politics, the issue well reflects this variation. The health of analysis is such that none of the papers was disappointing, although many of them left me with the promise of further questions, wanting to push the analysis further. Indeed, the diversity is such that I would almost have wanted some critical interaction between the articles in order to take the analysis to a deeper level.

For example, Pushpesh Kumar's piece *Radicalising community development: the changing face of the Queer Movement in Hyderabad City* provides an intriguing account of how LGBT politics has shifted away from the concerns of elite gay men through 'the entry of a vocal and enlightened transleadership', the "privileging of trans-sex-workers' issues" and through building alliances with subaltern class and caste movements including Dalits (the lowest sector of the caste system – formerly known as 'untouchables') and Adivasis (Indian indigenous tribal communities). The 'transleadership', it turns out, constitutes hijras and kothis (indigenous oppressed sexual minority communities who are often forced into prostitution through poverty), rather than transgender in the western sense. Moreover, the privileging of trans-sex-workers' issues involves a critique of the NGOs' practice of employing hijras and kothis to

remain in sex work in order to promote HIV prevention. The movement seems to be rightly challenging the corporate-NGO collusion in the structures of exploitation and oppression which prostitute hajis and kothis (and, disproportionately, women). What Kumar refers to as the western LGBT 'identitarian politics ... under global governance and benevolence' may have provided space for these indigenous oppressed groups to achieve a platform for a radical pan-subaltern politics. However, the article's radicalism could have gone even further to critique western queer politics and the currently fashionable notion of 'sex work' as a chosen identity, rather than as an intersection of oppressions.

A more reflective consideration of radicalism was addressed in Lydia Sapouna and Anne O'Donnell's dialogue on *'Madness' and Activism in Ireland and Scotland*, drawing on the model of the 'powercube' to discuss the relationships between 'invited' and 'claimed spaces' for participation, to enhance recognition and representation of people with experience of mental health distress, but so far making limited inroads into redistributing power in mental health systems. At the same time, they recognise the limitations of the service users', survivors' and mad identity movements, in as much as they limit their critique to the psychiatric industry rather than extending to the wider political relations of power. This latter insight could have been further elaborated in this short article, and the dialogical format would be well placed to develop the critical analysis.

Lena Meari's *Colonial dispossession, developmental discourses, and humanitarian solidarity in Area C: the case of the Palestinian Yanun Village* provides a very strong and robust analysis of the Zionist settler-colonial project, especially in the 'Oslo Peace Process'-designated 'Area C' of the occupied West Bank, and how the humanitarian developmentalist discourse, the colonial exploitation of community development and emphasis on nonviolence tend to marginalise the voice of Palestinians, and collude with an agenda which normalises the occupation. It is hard to disagree with this, although I wanted a little more than the critique of solidarity in the form of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), and of the emphasis on nonviolence. There are many proponents of nonviolence as a dialectical antithesis to

the violence of occupation, not as an alternative strategy to armed struggle. Whilst there are certainly narratives which serve unhelpfully to polarise nonviolence and violence, there are many Palestinian activists who actively promulgate nonviolent confrontation with the colonising forces (often at great risk) in opposition to collusion, not to violence (eg Qumsiyeh 2010, Zwahre 2014). EAPPI's unwillingness to be more forthright in its condemnation of Zionist settler colonialism (or its inability to do so without being shut down by Israel) is well made (and indeed is made by many EAPPI returning volunteers). However, this is not the only form of solidarity, and it was surprising that there was no mention of the International Solidarity Movement or Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, both Palestinian-led movements which use international nonviolent solidarity actions to oppose the colonial occupation and resist the normalising humanitarian developmentalist discourse.

Also on the theme of nonviolence, Diprose et al's *The violence of (in)action: communities, climate and business-as-usual* is an account of a direct action by climate activists against Aotearoa New Zealand's ANZ bank's investment in the fossil fuel industry, the subsequent violence experienced from police and public, and the (mis)portrayal of the action in the media. It was an interesting but unsurprising account by academic-activists involved in what was described as an 'explicitly non-violent kaupapa' (a principled strategy in Maori). Nonviolence is designed to provoke and expose inherent violence in a system – in this case complicity in financing of climate change. By drawing out the violence, it succeeded. However, the level of violence they experienced would hardly be recognised as such by the activists of Yanun, who are daily facing a hostile occupying military with lethal riot control weapons including live ammunition (or indeed by Gandhi's nonviolent salt marchers or Martin Luther King's student activists riding Greyhound buses into Ku Klux Klan areas). I was left looking for more self-critical analysis of their tactics, preparation, communication strategy and objectives. Since their stated aim was to 'highlight and inform customers ..., to encourage ethical choices; and ultimately to divest from fossil fuels', perhaps there are lessons to be learned from using a tactic which inconveniences customers and could so easily be manipulated by the banks and the media.

Several articles are motivated by anarchist politics. Melissa García-Lamarca's *Creating political subjects: collective knowledge and action to enact housing rights in Spain* describes the movement of 'Mortgage affected people' – those evicted and made homeless by debt-induced bank repossessions. The piece describes their advisory assemblies, where people share their problems, solutions, victories and tactics, and through which their political subjectivity is transformed from 'assistentialism' to active self-determination. Through tactics such as eviction blocking, squatting, bank negotiations and bank blocking, they seek to halt evictions, change Spain's pro-lender Mortgage laws, and turn empty property held by financial institutions into social housing.

García-Lamarca argues that this approach constitutes a rupture with the dominant political subjectivity in achieving a new, egalitarian political subjectivity. She is critical of the incomplete process of political subjectivisation, and argues that another step is needed, to collectivise skills and capabilities and share power. On this last point, I was intrigued as to why there could not be a position in between assistentialism and an absolute equality of skills and capabilities; for example, combining interdependence, division of labour and accountability - abolishing the power of experts without abolishing expertise. 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' was a phrase documented by Marx but also widely used by anarchists of the time.

Also drawing on Anarchist philosophy is, Marcelo Lopes de Souza's *What is 'autonomy', and how can we make it possible? Reflecting on concrete experiences from Latin America*, based on the writings of Cornelius Castoriadis (and to a lesser extent on Murray Bookchin). An insightful investigation of both individual and collective autonomy, the article is dismissive of "both liberalism and Marxism or, in more practical terms, capitalism and 'bureaucratic socialism'". Is capitalism merely the practical implementation of philosophical liberalism? Does Marxism inevitably result in bureaucratic socialism? de Souza's commitment to Left-Libertarianism is clearly asserted, but there could be more justification. He acknowledges that "a relatively *critical* planning model can be implemented by the state under rare, particularly favourable conjunctures ..., a truly *insurgent* planning cannot be expected from the capitalist state." I would have valued some critique of where this has occurred, such as

Kerala's people's plan or in Porto Alegre in de Souza's own Brazil, where social movements have essentially captured the state in order to implement people's plans in spite of the continuation of capitalism. From some of these 'concrete experiences' we might learn how the state might work for autonomy. However, the article raises some important and challenging questions of individual and collective autonomy which are addressed in practice by social movements.

Rejecting anarchist dismissals of the state, Robert Fisher and Eric Shragge's *Resourcing Community Organising: examples from England and Quebec* is a nuanced analysis of the state and an interesting account of how civil society/community organisations/social movements interact with the state to challenge, negotiate concessions and use resources for activities for which it is not intended, even in a neoliberal context. This includes resourcing community organisations from public sources whilst avoiding incorporation into the corporate state and maintaining connections to social movements.

In Giuliano Martiniello's *Agrarian politics and land struggles in Northern Uganda*, Community development is viewed as an integration of socio-ecological connection to land, moral economy of peasant reproduction, collective memories of anti-colonial struggle and ongoing innovations in resistance to neoliberal land-grabbing. The relative success of the struggle has caused state and corporate developers to shift tactics, although not retreat; advancing incorporation of local leaders in order to transfer land to market relations.

McCrea, Meade and Shaw, in their editorial and introductory essay *Solidarity, organising and tactics of resistance in the 21st Century: social movements and community development praxis in dialogue*, hold this diversity together through a theoretical argument of solidarity, linking community development to social movements. Given the theoretical contestation in all these areas of intellectual analysis, their article is somewhat discursive and speculative. Whilst there is a wealth of literature analysing both community development and social movements (many from the back catalogue of 50 years of CDJ) the interaction between these remain somewhat

under-theorised, a task which is all the more essential in the unfolding neoliberal 21st century. It is clear that there is a need for at least another 50 years of the CDJ!

References

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Zwahre, M. 2014 Community Development as Resistance and Resilience: An interview with Mahmoud Zwahre. *Concept* Vol. 5 No. 2

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