

## Anti-globalization: The Global Fight for Local Autonomy

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**Abstract** *This paper examines one of the less-discussed modes of anti-globalization, relocalization or local autonomy. It describes a range of autonomous movements, summarizes their political economic ideas, and discusses some common social critiques raised in regard to local autonomy.*

Apologists for the costly side effects of the globalization process argue that integration into the global economy brings certain hardships but ultimately will alleviate poverty and bring jobs, choice, and democratization to every corner of the world. Opponents of globalization often fail to disagree sufficiently. Many sympathetic commentators and sometime spokespeople of the anti-globalization movement insist that the movement “isn’t really *anti*-globalization, we just want a *different* globalization.” This claim ignores the well-known movements whose prominent participation takes the form of a resonant “no” to the forces of modernization, development, and “free trade.” The most resolute of these are the now-famous indigenous movements, such as the U’wa and the Ogoni, who expel “development” from their lands. Defending the “anti” in “anti-globalization” defends the right of such communities to say “no.” This paper introduces those movements within the movement which, although they often have more or less internationalist sentiments, see the solutions to their problems in local economy, politics, and culture rather than in new global formations.

### Overview of Anti-globalization

Three distinct political economic approaches are being articulated by anti-globalization movements.<sup>1</sup> The three modes are archetypes, as few movements practice

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<sup>1</sup> In 1997 John Cavanagh named three forms of anti-globalization: restrained globalization, democratized globalization, and localization. (International Forum on Globalization, “Teach-In 3: The Social, Ecological, Cultural, and Political Costs of Economic Globalization,” April 11–13, 1997, Berkeley, CA.) Several months before, Starr had completed independent analysis of 30 anti-globalization and anti-corporate movements, finding the same three distinctions, which she called contestation and reform (here “radical reform”), “globalization from below,” and relocalization/“delinking” (here “autonomy”). “Naming the Enemy: The Emergence of an International Anti-corporate Social Movement,”

exclusively one mode and many are rapidly converging to confront corporate globalization and militarism with solidarity around the movements' significant diversity. All of the movements struggle to discover a way of doing what Karl Polanyi called "re-embedding"<sup>2</sup> the market into community structures and governing it within a framework of social and cultural principles.

*Radical reform movements* aim to subordinate corporations to established frameworks of democracy. Although these movements are radical in their rejection of growth, prioritization of non-economic concerns, and critiques of dependency and consumption, they assume that states can be held accountable to regulate rather than facilitate corporate operations or, alternately, that civil society can hold corporations accountable. They are critiqued for being vulnerable to nationalism<sup>3</sup> and for being limited by the ameliorative effects of reform.

*People's globalization*, or what Richard Falk named "*globalization from below*,"<sup>4</sup> is the development of internationalist populism along class lines but in a wider framework of dispossession. This approach goes beyond nation-states and the flaccid United Nations, surpassing existing political orders to establish new, highly participatory, democratic international structures which would forcefully embed the economy. Its most recent form is the World Social Forum which invites all of "civil society" to assert that "Another World Is Possible" and to develop visions for it.<sup>5</sup> But the universalist humanitarian goals of "globalization from below" seem to require centralization. Centralization makes the new system vulnerable to many of the problems of corporate globalization. It's a setup for logics of comparative advantage which would, again, subordinate localities and minorities to priorities set at the center, denying them control over their own resources. Surely some of the worst brutality would be abated by functioning democracy, but, just as surely, some "tradeoffs" would still be acceptable to a distant global government, however democratic. Centralization also reproduces dependency for basic needs on a distant and massive system and requires an objective and universal operationalization of the public good.

The third mode, *autonomy*, articulates the pleasures, productivities, and rights of communities. These movements assert the legitimacy of autonomous community authority in diverse local political systems. Like movements in the other

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dissertation, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1998. *Naming the Enemy: Anti-corporate Movements Confront Globalization* (London: Zed Books, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

<sup>3</sup> Gord Laxer responds that the civic nationalist tradition has always been anti-essentialist and internationalist. "The Movement that Dare Not Speak its Name: The Return of Left Nationalism/Internationalism," *Alternatives Global, Local, Political* 26 (2001), pp. 1–32.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Falk, "The Making of Global Citizenship," in J. Brecher, J. B. Childs and J. Cutler (eds), *Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> The first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil, simultaneous with the meetings of the World Economic Forum in late January 2001. Approximately 20,000 people participated, including 4702 delegates representing 117 countries, 2000 participants in the Youth Camp, and 700 participants in the Indigenous Nations Camp. The second World Social Forum, held again in Porto Alegre in early February 2002, attracted over 50,000 participants, 10,000 in the youth camp, 12,274 delegates representing 123 countries, 4909 organizations from 87 countries, 3356 journalists from 1066 media agencies, nearly half of which were internationals (see < [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/home.asp](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/home.asp) > ). Its theme, "Another World Is Possible," has since been taken up in a variety of fora. In 2003, regional fora were held in Asia and Europe and 100,000 people attended the Porto Alegre forum.

modes, they are democratic, but theirs is deep democracy, the practice of local sovereignty and the refusal of distant authority. They affirm the possibility and necessity of collaboration among autonomous communities when necessary. These movements don't just want "another world" but "a world in which many worlds fit" (a phrase of the Zapatistas).

While the first two modes' proposals have been fully debated and defended by scholars under the rubrics of reform and socialism, autonomy has been largely ignored by scholars as a viable (and, unlike "globalization from below," existing) approach to political economy. The most popular existing literature on localization explores the cultural/identity relationships between the global and the local. This inquiry ranges from John Tomlinson's attention to a totalizing *Cultural Imperialism* to Benjamin Barber's paranoid dichotomization of *Jihad vs. McWorld* to Roland Robertson's application of the business term "glocalization" to the realm of culture.<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman mobilizes the imagery of tourists and vagabonds to link empowerment and powerlessness, choice and choicelessness, and the construction of identity through consumption.<sup>7</sup>

A more materially oriented literature documents specific cases of local reactions to global forces. These studies may emphasize economic sectors, political subcultures, transportation policy, information technology, or transborder regionalism.<sup>8</sup> Such studies take globalization for granted, valorizing entrepreneurial or cultural projects that make globalization seem less totalizing.

Another set of localization literature counterposes local economic institutions with the global economy, arguing that local economies fulfill social functions better. Samir Amin's 1985 use of the phrase "delinking" referred to third world

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<sup>6</sup> John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991). Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995). Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time—Space and Homogeneity—Heterogeneity," in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "On Glocalization: Or Globalization for Some, Localization for Some Others," *Thesis Eleven* 54 (1998), pp. 37–49. Also see Rob Wilson, "Imagining 'Asia-Pacific': Forgetting Politics and Colonialism in the Magical Waters of the Pacific," *Cultural Studies* 14:3–4 (1998), pp. 562–592. M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Constructing Identity in 'Glocal' Politics," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 15 (1998), pp. 81–106.

<sup>8</sup> Economic sectors: T. C. Chang, "Renaissance Revisited: Singapore as a 'Global City for the Arts'," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24:4 (2000), pp. 818–831. Yuee-Man Yeung and Xiaojian Li, "Bargaining with Transnational Corporations: The Case of Shanghai," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23 (1999), pp. 513–533. Political subcultures: Erica Antonini, "Rethinking the Public Sphere beyond the Nation-State: The Case of the European Union," *Studi di Sociologia* 39 (2001), pp. 135–143. Jill Blackmore, "Localization/Globalization and the Midwife State: Strategic Dilemmas for State Feminism in Education?" *Journal of Education Policy* 14 (1999), pp. 33–54. Transportation policy: Peter Nijkamp Hadewijch Van Delft, Harry Geerlings and Danielle Van Veen-Groot, "Transportation between Globalization and Localization," *Innovation* 13 (2000), pp. 11–25. Information technology: Peter Sy, "Barangays if IT: Filipinizing Mediated Communication and Digital Power," *New Media & Society* 3 (2001), pp. 296–312. Mamoun Fandy, "CyberResistance: Saudi Opposition between Globalization and Localization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999), pp. 124–147. Transborder regionalism: Yu Zhou and Yen-Fen Tseng, "Regrounding the 'Ungrounded Empires': Localization as the Geographical Catalyst for Transformation," *Global Networks* 1 (2001), pp. 131–153.

regional alliances as a solution to dependent development.<sup>9</sup> Drawing on Rousseau, Gandhian development, anarchism, indigenous culture, and village anthropology, a diverse range of scholars emphasize the benefits of “decentralized political institutions” which would protect people from exploitation, alleviate unemployment through “complementary small-scale industry,” prioritize “solving the problems of poverty” rather than “compatibility with the world market,”<sup>10</sup> and “protect the local globally.”<sup>11</sup>

Arguments for local autonomy are often dismissed as “romantic,” or, in Robertson’s terms, as “the pitting of subaltern ‘universals’ against the ‘hegemonic universal’ of dominant cultures and/or classes.” Such criticisms neither show familiarity with the impressive material accomplishments of local experiments in reducing inequality and immiseration while protecting the ecological base, nor attempt a serious comparison between the proposed social technologies and those of modern Western society. This paper provides some data to stimulate more serious discussion of these matters and the beginnings of the attentive analytic and comparative work that this approach deserves.

### **Autonomous Movements**

For utilitarian purposes we have organized autonomous movements into movements focused on local production and movements focused on local politics. The division is neither a theoretical statement nor an analytic finding. In reality most of these movements feature common nodes of activity that defy such categorization. This section presents data on the movements, whose economic and social characteristics are analyzed at the end of the paper.

#### *Local Production: Markets, Sustainability, Livelihood, and Land*

A variety of movements respond to globalization by defending or rebuilding local economic institutions. Although these movements rarely conceptualize themselves as “autonomous,” they establish a basis for community autonomy.

<sup>9</sup> Samir Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*, trans. Michael Wolfers (London: Zed Books, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> J. Ann Tickner, “Local Self-Reliance versus Power Politics: Conflicting Priorities of National Development,” *Alternatives* XI (1986), pp. 461–483.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Lang and Colin Hines, *The New Protectionism: Protecting the Future Against Free Trade* (New York: New Press, 1993). Colin Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan Publications, 2000). Also trace: E. F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, “Report on Development and International Co-operation ‘What Now,’” *Development Dialogue*, special issue (1975). Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977). Duane Elgin, *Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich* (New York: Morrow, 1981). Peter Berg, “Bioregion and Human Location,” *All Area* #2, Spring 1983. David L. Imbroscio, “An Alternative Approach to Urban Economic Development: Exploring the Dimensions and Prospects of a Self-Reliance Strategy,” *Urban Affairs Review* 30 (1995), pp. 840–867. Karl Birkhölzer, “Promoting Community Self-reliance in Europe,” *Development* 3 (1996), pp. 60–63. Kirkpatrick Sale, “Principles of Bioregionalism,” in Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith (eds), *The Case Against the Global Economy and for a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996). Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1991). David Morris, *Self-Reliant Cities* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1997).

In the face of corporate globalization, local producers and retailers find their established local markets invaded by international competitors with massive advertising budgets, economies of scale, brand recognition, capital, and expensive product research and development. In North America, politicized business organizations decry corporate crony contracting, predatory pricing, the vampiric behavior of corporate retailers, and the crushing effects of vertical and horizontal integration, dichotomizing local-based enterprises and footloose corporations. Two well-known examples of this approach are the attempts to bar Wal-Mart store openings and the challenges to integration in beef and pork processing in the US.<sup>12</sup>

In parallel with this process, as globalization distorts all kinds of markets and destroys livelihoods without necessarily providing living-wage jobs in the process, workers are under new pressure to innovate by becoming micro-entrepreneurs. A variety of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working to support the development of small businesses and micro-enterprises, also without opposing globalization. Perhaps the best known of these efforts is "micro-lending" to the very poor, a model which the World Bank has embraced and which is now even being applied in first world nations. A second sector of official support for small businesses is the Fair Trade movement, which seeks to build direct markets to bring higher returns to small enterprises certified as meeting a set of social and environmental standards. Similarly, but without the standards, are organizations like Aid to Artisans, which assists craftspeople in designing products appropriate for international markets, managing business development, and building successful relationships with corporate retailers like Pier One.<sup>13</sup> Such projects suffer the same problems as Fair Trade—while providing a slightly better return to producers and a framework of economic education for first world consumers, they still emphasize monocultural production for export (at the cost of diversity in production) and foster dependent development in which third world producers are whipped by the whims of first world colonial-style luxury consumption.

Other movements of small enterprises explicitly challenge globalization and corporations. Fisherfolk movements are among many defending the right to livelihood in the face of ongoing enclosure of commons by commercial fishing and aquaculture, which have destroyed coastal farming and fishing ecosystems while also driving down prices. Fisherfolk are seeking restrictions on commercial fishing and industrial shrimp farms<sup>14</sup> in order to protect their way of life. Forest gatherers are driven out of their subsistence commons when forest preserves are established. Studies consistently show that the total value of

<sup>12</sup> "62 Ag Associations Submit Letter Calling for Immediate Senate Investigation into the U.S. Cattle Market," July 2002, < [www.rcalf.com](http://www.rcalf.com) > . Also see Patty Cantrell, Rhonda Perry and Paul Sturtz, *Hog Wars: The Corporate Grab for Control of the Hog Industry and How Citizens are Fighting Back* (Columbia, MO: Missouri Rural Crisis Center, n.d.), available online at: < [www.nobull.net/legal/](http://www.nobull.net/legal/) > , < [www.agriculture.com/livestock/hogcrisis.html](http://www.agriculture.com/livestock/hogcrisis.html) > , < [www.nppc.org/PROD/marketsituation.html](http://www.nppc.org/PROD/marketsituation.html) > .

<sup>13</sup> Fair Trade: < [www.transfairusa.org/](http://www.transfairusa.org/) , < [www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com) > . Josée Johnston, "Consuming Social Justice: Shopping for Fair Trade Chic," *Arena Magazine* 51 (2001), pp. 42–47. < [www.aidtoartisans.org](http://www.aidtoartisans.org) > .

<sup>14</sup> On aquaculture, see Mangrove Action Project at < [www.earthisland.org/map/aq-clt.htm](http://www.earthisland.org/map/aq-clt.htm) > . Shrimp farming is affecting coastal communities in Africa, Thailand, India, Bangladesh, and Latin America.

ongoing small-scale sustainable forest extraction is higher than either the timber value or the value of conversion to agricultural use.<sup>15</sup> Other artisanal livelihoods like weaving and soapmaking are finding their markets undermined by corporate incursions. At a meeting of Indian women's *panchayat* (neighborhood) groups, a paper was presented which argued that "the World Bank's prescription ignores the fact that globalisation policies are rendering unsustainable the self-employment activities that its micro-credit programmes promote."<sup>16</sup>

Advocates of local-scale economies document thousands of examples of self-provisioning and small-scale trading which provide security and joy for their users. They encourage consumers to support local producers. Such choices are facilitated by the emergence of ethical buying coops, like the Seikatsu Clubs in Japan and by other economic institutions designed to facilitate local trading. The simplest of these, and the most widespread, is the resurgence and popularization of open-air and public markets which explicitly favor small entrepreneurs and bar large retailers.<sup>17</sup> Public markets allow small entrepreneurs to bring their goods to market with little capital, to experiment with products, and to draw on the market's visibility. They foster empathic knowledge among market actors, reintegrating social values into economic life. The markets also engage entrepreneurs in collective management. Finally, they facilitate bartering and non-monetary exchanges, both at the market and outside of it. Paris provides an annual \$4 million subsidy to support public markets. While public markets are being formalized in the first world, informal markets and street vending are still subject to police harassment and sweeps in honor of international visitors. In the Zocalo of Mexico City and the downtown section of San Cristóbal de las Casas, vendors have organized into informal networks to defend themselves from attacks by riot police. The forbidding of street vending in São Paulo, Brazil, provoked a huge march in July 1997. In Lima, Peru, "the street vendors' struggle" has become a social movement and is embraced by other movements. Women street vendors in Durban, South Africa, have organized the Self-Employed Women's Union.

Another rapidly growing alternative to the global market is community currency. There are a number of different community currency systems,<sup>18</sup> extensive economic theory about their use,<sup>19</sup> and growing experience and analysis.<sup>20</sup> Popular in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the US, these systems have also been developed in many third world countries.<sup>21</sup> In

<sup>15</sup> Camille Bann, "Logs or Local Livelihood? The Case for Legalizing Community Control of Forest Lands in Ratanakiri, Cambodia," International Development Research Center, Ottawa, 1997; Lucy Emerton, "Valuing Forest Resources for Conservation Services," Forestry Environmental Accounting Services, African Wildlife Services, n.d.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Isaac, Michelle Williams, Pinaki Chakraborty and Binitha V. Thampi, "Women Neighbourhood Groups: Towards a New Perspective," presented at Decentralisation, Sustainable Development and Social Security, St. Michael's College, Chertala, India, May 11, 2002, available online at: < [www.infochangeindia.org](http://www.infochangeindia.org) > .

<sup>17</sup> See < [www.openair.org](http://www.openair.org) > .

<sup>18</sup> For overview of different systems, see < [www.transaction.net/money/](http://www.transaction.net/money/) > .

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lietaer (designer of the Euro common currency), *The Future of Money* (Century, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> See *International Journal of Community Currency Research* (founded 1997) at < [www.geog.le.ac.uk/ijccr/](http://www.geog.le.ac.uk/ijccr/) > .

<sup>21</sup> See Community Exchange Systems in the Global South ([ccdev.lets.net/](http://ccdev.lets.net/)).

Argentina, a community currency originally created in one neighborhood by sustainable development activists has blossomed into 500 federated exchange systems in 15 of the 23 provinces, enabling people to barter goods and services outside of the failed national economy. The cutting edge issue in the community currency movement (proposed as federal law in Argentina) is the implementation of demurrage, a devaluation of unspent money which discourages hoarding and speculation and encourages maximum circulation.

Local enterprise movements assert a wide range of social values and create an oppositional space in which critiques of globalization and corporations find fertile ground for cross-pollination by movements against free trade, biotech, and privatization. New economic institutions such as community currencies and public markets are a means of popular economic education, in which modernized people learn old techniques of local production and trade and become empowered to make decisions about relationships between the economy and social issues. One of the principles of the Argentinean community currency systems states: "We assume that our actions, products and services may respond to ethical and ecological standards more than to the will of the market, the consumerism and short term profit."

The most significant area in which local production is being defended and developed is the food system. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was developed in the late 1960s in Japan under the name "Farming with a Face on it." It created an economic institution which provides secure income to farmers while educationally linking urban families to the changing fate of the farm, to seasonal food cycles, and to farm production experiences. Families purchase in advance a share of the harvest and receive a weekly basket of whatever is ripe, sharing with the farmer both the bounties and losses of the harvest.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Bremen Self-Supply Co-op (founded 1977) determined to "reduce the anonymity of relations between producer and consumer" by creating "mutual knowledge" and "mutual reliance" and also embraced seasonal supply and consumption.<sup>23</sup> These values have become now become common.

Nouvelle Cuisine, developed by Chef Paul Bocuse and others during the 1970s and officially founded in 1976, brought chefs' attention back to ingredients whose flavors were allowed to stand on their own through simplification and reductions. Starting in 1972, Chefs Jeremiah Tower and Alice Waters at Chez Panisse in California began to use the freshest vegetables, a version of Nouvelle Cuisine eventually known as "California Cuisine." Chefs' new passion brought them to farms and farmers' markets.<sup>24</sup> In Europe the Slow Food movement (founded 1986) started to defend "the right to taste."<sup>25</sup> At first, Slow Food

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<sup>22</sup> Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden, *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms—Farm Supported Communities* (San Francisco: Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 1998). Daniel Imhoff, "Community Supported Agriculture: Farming with a Face on it," in J. Mander and E. Goldsmith (eds), *The Case Against the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> In Maria Mies and Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> Sean Elder, "Christmas Star: Jeremiah Tower," *Food & Wine* (December 2001), pp. 155–159.

<sup>25</sup> John-Thor Dahlburg, "Cooking Up a Reply to Big Mac: The Slow Food Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1998, pp. A1, A24.

facilitated food education with schoolchildren to “improve knowledge about production processes and establish direct contacts with farmers and artisans.” Then it began to “defend food heritage” by acting on behalf of disappearing varieties and artisanal products. “At first sight, such products may appear to be no more than the results of microeconomies, but in actual fact they represent a safety net for the entire European agricultural sector.”<sup>26</sup> The US organization Chefs Collaborative (founded 1993) promotes “sustainable cuisine,” which not only “celebrates the pleasures and aesthetics of food” but also “recogniz[es] the impact of food choices on our health, environment, and the preservation of cultural diversity.”

During the 1980s, third world food programs were dismantled or restricted under the command of Structural Adjustment Programs. While public food programs withered, the global market did not necessarily take their place. The hungriest populations lack buying power and can scarcely attract the attention of the international food market. While the invisible hand failed, rooftop and balcony gardening exploded across the third world. Fourteen percent of the food produced in the world is produced in cities.<sup>27</sup> Sixty percent of the land of Bangkok is under cultivation. Zimbabwe’s capital, Harare, doubled urban farm acreage between 1990 and 1994.<sup>28</sup> In Northern cities, urban gardeners responded to decay and poverty by adopting empty lots, employing youth, and entertaining children with vegetable gardens. Jar Smit, President of the Urban Agriculture Network, encourages us to imagine an “edible urban landscape.” The Canadian Office of Urban Agriculture was founded in 1978 and began printing *City Farmer*.<sup>29</sup>

As issues of sustainability, food culture, and community-based economics have converged, the possibility of local food systems has become interesting to diverse actors. Urban economic policy experiments have included attempts to “shorten the food links,” by bringing farmers and consumers closer together to begin redeveloping the local economy.<sup>30</sup> Urban programs, such as the Rainbow Plan in Nagai, Japan, have worked with other parts of the food system, such as recycling food wastes onto local farmers.<sup>31</sup> “Food circles” aim to develop decentralized and sustainable food systems by linking up consumers, farmers, retailers, and environmentalists.<sup>32</sup>

The US Community Food Security movement (founded 1995) works to build “a more democratic food system” by reconceptualizing the food economy

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Petrini in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, n.d. See <www.slowfood.com>.

<sup>27</sup> Jac Smit, Jac., Annu Ratta and Joe Nasr, *Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities* UNDP, Publications Series for Habitat II, Vol. 1 (New York: UNDP, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> <www.cityfarmer.org/uabrochure.html>.

<sup>29</sup> See <www.cityfarmer.org> and the magazine *Urban Agriculture & Food Security*.

<sup>30</sup> Helena Norberg Hodge at IFG 1997, *ibid.* Dave Campbell, “Community Controlled Economic Development as a Strategic Vision for the Sustainable Agriculture Movement,” *American Journal of Alternatives* 12:1 (1997), pp. 37–44.

<sup>31</sup> Muto Ichiyo, “Ecological Perspectives on Alternative Development: The Rainbow Plan,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 9:1 (1993), pp. 3–24.

<sup>32</sup> Mary K. Hendrickson, “The Kansas City Food Circle: Challenging the Global Food System,” dissertation, University of Missouri—Columbia, 1997.

around “community need.”<sup>33</sup> Activists have challenged the charity approach to hunger, developing new linkages between food banks, family farm networks, anti-poverty organizations, community development organizations, farmers markets, and the sustainable agriculture movement, seeking to organize them around “the notion that all people should have access to a nutritious diet from ecologically sound, local, non-emergency sources.” New technologies have been developed, such as CSAs redesigned for low-income communities which cannot invest up-front in the harvest, farmer’s markets for low-income neighborhoods, urban gardens, community kitchens, incubators for processed food micro-enterprises, baby food making and other cooking classes, shuttle services to facilitate access to higher quality and lower priced grocery stores outside the neighborhood, and “food policy councils” (local bodies which analyze and design interventions into the foodscape).<sup>34</sup>

World historically, “sustainable” production is omnipresent, but unnamed. Fairly recently it has become a social movement, with ideology, activists, and practices. And despite the best efforts of elites to co-opt the concept beyond recognition, grassroots practitioners all over the world have experimented with and mastered sustainable technologies for agriculture, economies, water and waste management, energy, education, healthcare, and political life. In the third world, the movement often takes the form of ongoing critique of modernization, particularly in agriculture. Gandhian development is an example of the politicization of this dialogue, emphasizing “‘the *khadi* mentality’, meaning the decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessities of life.”<sup>35</sup> Swadeshi (home economy) is a vision of “self-governing, self-reliant, self-employed people” living in “village republics” which have “maximum economic and political power—including the power to decide what could be imported into or exported from the village.”<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1970s, while examining forests, Bill Mollison hypothesized that it must be possible to design agricultural systems modeled on the dense functional interdependency of ecosystems. The resulting permanent, low-maintenance “food forests” might then produce the level of *abundance* visible in nature. In developing what he calls the only “design system” for sustainability, Mollison draws on practices used by indigenous people all over the world.<sup>37</sup> A

<sup>33</sup> Andy Fisher, co-founder of the Community Food Security Coalition and author of the policy paper that led to the development of the 1996 Congressional Food Security Act. See <www.foodsecurity.org> .

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth A. Dahlberg, “Food Policy Councils: The Experience of Five Cities and One County,” paper presented to the Joint Meeting of the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society and the Society for the Study of Food and Society, Tucson, AZ, June 1994. Kenneth A. Dahlberg, Kate Clancy, Robert L. Wilson and Jan O’Donnell, “Strategies, Policy Approaches, and Resources for Local Food System Planning and Organizing,” Local Food System Project, February 1997, available online at: <unix.cc.wmich.edu/~dahlberg/F1.pdf> .

<sup>35</sup> Kamla Chowdhry, “Poverty, Environment, Development,” *Daedalus* 118 (1989), pp. 141–154.

<sup>36</sup> Satish Kumar, “Gandhi’s Swadeshi: The Economics of Permanence,” in J. Mander and E. Goldsmith (eds), *The Case Against the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), pp. 418–424.

<sup>37</sup> Care must be taken as first world people recognize the value of third world knowledge resources. Without working to ensure self-determination for third and fourth world peoples,

sustainable system is one which in its lifetime will produce the energy required for its construction and maintenance. Mollison refers to Permaculture practitioners worldwide as “our own nation,” indicating his vision of separation from, rather than collaboration with, existing political economic systems.<sup>38</sup>

In the early 1990s Cuba transformed agricultural production to essentially organic techniques to survive the loss of imported inputs, resurrected a traditional diet (heavier in *viandas*), and created new economic institutions to manage local production decisions and to distribute fresh produce quickly. The resulting decentralization, urban markets, and semi-privatization of control over farming affirmed the importance of small-scale ownership in farm efficiency<sup>39</sup> and proved that organic methods could feed a nation.

To achieve international equity, first world sustainability movements focus on taking responsibility for having underdeveloped the third world and figuring out how to make the first world sustainable—Weinberg calls this “scaling back overdevelopment.”<sup>40</sup> By 1987, first world environmentalists had begun to recognize that “to be more effective at saving tropical Rain Forests ... what we need is to get our foot off the throat of the Rain Forests.”<sup>41</sup> Internationally, a large number of governmental and non-governmental organizations promote sustainable technologies while demonstrating the viability of totally sustainable communities, many of which have communal governance systems. Urban sustainability movements insist that cities can use resources responsibly and maintain high quality of life. A host of enthusiastic inventors create designs while consumption reduction movements try to get individuals to take responsibility for the externalized costs of their consumption. The Enough! Campaign (founded 1992) emphasizes the drawbacks of unsustainable consumption, the pleasures of neighborhood-based economies, and the impacts of anti-consumption on jobs.

Traditional peoples have been refining their self-sufficient agricultural and social systems for upwards of 10,000 years, providing full employment and avoiding poverty. In the Global South, the most urgent aspect of food and agriculture is land reform, which would enable peasants to produce for them-

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(Footnote continued)

harvesting their knowledge is just more theft. M. L. Vellinga, “On Academic Colonialism: The Case of US—Latin American Studies,” *Sociologische Gids* (July—August 1971), pp. 338–353.

<sup>38</sup> Bill Mollison *et al.*, *Permaculture: A Designers’ Manual* (Tyalgum, Australia: Tagari, 1998); *Introduction to Permaculture* (Tyalgum, Australia: Tagari, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Small farms are actually 200–1000% more productive than larger ones. This holds true across the world; the peak productivity is well under 10 hectares and frequently under 3 hectares. In the US, farms under 27 acres have more than 10 times greater dollar output than larger farms. Peter M. Rosset, “The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture in the Context of Global Trade Negotiations,” *Food First Policy Brief No 4* (Oakland, CA: Food First, 1999). Also see Marty Strange, *Family Farming: A New Economic Vision* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). Berry, *op. cit.* Peter Rosset, *The Greening of the Revolution: Cuba’s Experiment with Organic Agriculture* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1994). A. V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy* (Homewood, IL: American Economics Association, 1966).

<sup>40</sup> Bill Weinberg, *War on the Land: Ecology and Politics in Central America* (London: Zed Books, 1991), p. 159.

<sup>41</sup> Environmentalist Randy Hayes at the Tropical Rainforest Conference, October 18, 1987, New York City, in Weinberg (1991), p. 158.

selves rather than for export markets. Sustainability is essentially an extension of this logic as an alternative to globalization.

*Local Politics: Agrarismo, Autonomia, and Assemblies*

Accompanying the movements for local economic production are the political strategies of delinking and self-determination, referred to in varying contexts as agrarismo movements, separatist movements, anarchist movements, or by explicitly calling themselves "autonomous movements." These terms denote the importance of putting action before ideology as well as an outright rejection of reformed versions of capitalism, the state, ideology, or any other intermediaries separating social problems from direct action in the space of everyday life. Further, and perhaps most importantly, autonomous movements assert that communities can find the solutions to their problems within their own cultural traditions and collective talents. Unlike the New Left, contemporary autonomous movements reject the seizure of power as a strategy just as surely as they reject the elusive politics of mass struggle; instead they work towards a "revolution of everyday life."<sup>42</sup>

As George Katsiaficas documents, these movements appeared first in an autonomous version of the traditional class struggle movement of *Autonomia* in the late 1970s in Italy. Then, as *Autonomia* began to decline in the 1980s, the far more diverse form of the *Autonomen* first arose in the metropolises of Germany. Similar movements have since emerged in other areas of Europe, South America, North America, Asia and other parts of the world. The best-known and most influential of these newer autonomous movements is undoubtedly the Zapatista movement, based in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas.

The Zapatistas have staked out a unique political space that goes beyond that of the autonomous movements that preceded them, while maintaining their strongest features. Like *Autonomia* and the *Autonomen*, the Zapatistas directly challenge neoliberal capitalism and defend the autonomy of local communities. The primary tactic they have employed has been the *municipio libre* (autonomous municipality) in which a majority of the residents vote to declare it autonomous from the state, which is promptly denounced as illegitimate. The Zapatistas have initiated a widely flung network of 38 core municipalities which control over a third of the political territory of Chiapas.<sup>43</sup> The tactical logic at work here is nothing new; as one Zapatista remarked, "Zapata championed and fought for Indigenous ownership of land (which at that time, as now, meant removing the mestizo capitalist owners), and autonomous local political control."<sup>44</sup>

But in taking up this old struggle, they also go far beyond it, effectively tearing open a new social and political space which encourages local, national, regional, and global networks of autonomous local groupings—not only *municipio libres*, but also affinity groups, subsistence cooperatives, collectivized clinics, autonomous schools, independent media groups, and other directly

<sup>42</sup> George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> Mariana Mora, "The EZLN and Indigenous Autonomous Municipalities," 1998, <flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/comment/auto\_munc.html> .

<sup>44</sup> Todd Prane and Elizabeth Bright, "An Anarchist Assessment of the EZLN," *Love and Rage* 5:1 (1994).

democratic community structures. This is the space from which a “triangular agrarista alliance began to evolve ... between a periodically active village mass, the local militants, and ... anarchist urban intellectuals and workers.”<sup>45</sup>

Now, eight years after the initial uprising, the Zapatistas are but one of many such autonomous movements in Mexico. Employing the *municipio libre* tactics, dozens of communities have declared themselves autonomous since 1995; while communities in neighboring states of Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Morelos, Michoacan, Mexico D.F., Tabasco, and Guerrero are laying the groundwork for such activity.<sup>46</sup> In Zapata’s home state of Morelos, for instance, inspired women of the new United Community of Tepotzlan (CUT) near Mexico City declared their town autonomous and defended it for over three years from attempted police incursions. In Tabasco, over 100 indigenous Chontales went to prison for seizing government buildings and declaring their region autonomous from both the state and the clutches of PEMEX Oil. In the state of Mexico, D.F., the 800,000 strong suburb of Nezahualcoyotl declared itself autonomous in 1998, as did the smaller community of San Nicolas Ecatepec. And in early 2002 the city of San Salvador Atenco was declared autonomous and defended in pitched battles following a victory against the building of a new international airport that would have appropriated 5000 hectares of farmland and displaced 4375 families.<sup>47</sup>

A similar struggle involving a network of grassroots community groups, indigenous people, sympathetic academics, and urban anarchists emerged in 2000 in Cochabamba, Bolivia to successfully block privatization of the water supply by US corporation Bechtel and pressure of the World Bank. Under the slogan “*el agua es nuestra y las decisiones también!*” (“The water is ours, and the decisions too!”) the Cochabamba Declaration of December 8, 2000, asserted that in this instance community autonomy would take precedence over the desires of international capital. A general strike, widespread street fighting, road blockades, mass arrests and the shooting deaths of six protesters ensued. Within this and similar events in Bolivia, anarchists have played an important role, but not in the ideological sense. Julieta Paredes of Mujeres Creando, an anarcho-feminist group in La Paz explains, “we’re not anarchists by Bakunin or the CNT, but rather by our grandmothers, and that’s a beautiful school of anarchism ... To be a feminist in our society means to fight against neoliberalism and its ideology.”<sup>48</sup> These “autonomous feminists,” as they refer to themselves (indicating their autonomy from mainstream NGOs, capitalism, and the state), had been working with the debtors movement to form a cartel with which to challenge and ultimately to renounce their usurious debts to the micro-lenders. Two months before the Cochabamba uprising, in July 2001, the debtors movement had occupied the Banking Supervisory Agency in La Paz, taking hostage 94 functionaries of the micro-lenders, demanding that debts be immediately dropped. Mujeres Creandos’ role was a negotiating force, which succeeded in winning a

<sup>45</sup> Prane, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> John Ross, “Zapatista Peace Agreement Not a Good Idea,” 2001, <[flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/reports/ross.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/mexico/reports/ross.html)>.

<sup>47</sup> Ramor Ryan, “One, Two, Many Chiapeses,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, August 1, 2002, <[www.irlnet.com/aprn/archive/2002/August01/01mexi.html](http://www.irlnet.com/aprn/archive/2002/August01/01mexi.html)>.

<sup>48</sup> <[blackbridge.freehosting.net/mujeres-eng.html](http://blackbridge.freehosting.net/mujeres-eng.html)>.

temporary end to property seizures and debt revisions, as well as securing many debt cancellations.<sup>49</sup>

Then, in June 2002, angry residents seized the Peruvian cities of Arequipa and Tacna in order to prevent the privatization of state-run gas and electric utilities by the neoliberal administration. Pouring into the streets, thousands attacked dozens of banks and government buildings before finally sealing off the downtown core with barricades made of torn-up street pavement. Others headed to the airport where they smashed landing equipment, forcing the airport to cancel all flights. All of this quickly led president Alejandro Toledo to declare a state of emergency and call in federal troops.<sup>50</sup>

And of course throughout the past year, the focus of Latin American autonomous movements has turned to the Southern Cone countries of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina. In Brazil, the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) is the aggressive Brazilian Landless Workers Movement, which has won land for 250,000 families in 1600 encampments totaling 15 million acres and is working to legalize another 70,000 families in occupation. In 1999 alone, 25,000 families made occupations. The MST has also established 400 production associations, 96 small and medium food processing enterprises, 60 food cooperatives, and claims to sell the only organic seeds produced in Latin America.<sup>51</sup> The MST maintains their autonomy on all levels, flatly rejecting attempts by political parties to fold the largest social movement in the Western Hemisphere under their wing.

Throughout the country, widespread disillusionment with both neoliberal capitalism and *socialismo real* (reality socialism) has brought local anarchists their largest constituency since the early 20th century. It also seems to have brought the country its first "true" socialist leader, Lula, though the extent to which his electoral victory is also a victory over these two political programs will have to be clarified in the coming years. The record is not particularly hopeful; the former president Fernando Cardoso was, in fact, the founder of Dependency Theory. And he too focused his campaign doctrine largely on the plight of the marginalized majority, whom he rightly characterized as suffering under US corporate domination. But once elected into office on this ideological ticket, he immediately imposed a program of classic neoliberalism. The popular result has been suddenly increased support for movements that willfully stay clear of the state, corporate projects, and political parties altogether. While some of these movements state plainly that they are anarchist, often they deliberately choose not to operate at all times under that title.

Porto Alegre-based Federação Anarquista Gaucha (FAG), for instance, spends much of their time working with the radical left wing of the mainstream squatting movement, turning marginal, utilitarian squatted buildings (which are extremely common) into political, public Social Centers similar to those found throughout Italy. In this project they have worked specifically in a coalition with members of the MST and the MNLM (homeless movement) focusing on squatting a large building that had formerly been a bank in the interior city of

<sup>49</sup> Sophie Styles, "Mujeres Creando: An Interview With Julieta Ojeda of Women Creating," *Z Magazine*, June 2002.

<sup>50</sup> BBC, "Peru Clamps Down as Riots Spread," June 17, 2002, <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/> .

<sup>51</sup> See <www.mstbrazil.org> .

Alegrete. Through this work they also helped to organize networks of marginalized litter collectors and dumpster divers in order to make it possible for them defend their rights to the only livelihood available to them.

When the massive opening march of 60,000 at the 2002 World Social Forum (WSF) embarked on a pre-planned route directly away from the banks and multinational corporations, over 600 anarchists and autonomists broke off, attacking and disrupting the oppressive tranquility of the business districts. Later that day they broke into and squatted several buildings, building barricades in the streets to draw attention to the fact that the tight-gripped host of the WSF, the Worker's Party (PT), was not creating the social democratic paradise of their rhetoric.

The discontent in the Southern Cone has been even more notable in the social insurrections taking place in Buenos Aires and other cities throughout Argentina; these have been so powerful at times that they ousted several presidents in a row, as they did in December 2001 and January 2002. The insurrections emerged after a deep economic crisis created by IMF/WB structural adjustments led the government to immediately halt all bank account withdrawals, default on billions of dollars in loans, and devalue the national currency. The Argentinean population refused to accept what they considered to be illegitimately imposed neoliberal solutions and quickly moved to refuse all state-administered solutions to their problems. As a result, the mainstream became radicalized to the point where a new consensus bloomed; the new slogan became "*que se vayan todos*" (translated as "they all must go").<sup>52</sup>

From the ashes of state legitimacy and corporate dominance have emerged new autonomous productive and distributive structures; supplementary subsistence production of over 450,000 *huertas* (community gardens),<sup>53</sup> collectivization of over 100 abandoned factories, and sprawling, multilinked bartering networks.<sup>54</sup> Another result of has been the emergence of what are widely understood to be autonomous, anarchistic "popular assemblies" organized from the ground up at the neighborhood level.<sup>55</sup> The many points of self-organization for subsistence in emerging Argentinean society are coordinated by these assemblies

<sup>52</sup> An October 2002 poll found 95% disapproval of all political parties and 90% dissatisfaction with the Congress, the markets, the banks and the judicial system. Peter Grete, BBC, "Democracy Has Failed Say Argentines," October 3, 2002, <news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2296621.stm> .

<sup>53</sup> Federal PRO-HUERTA program was founded in 1990. See Jac Smit, "Urban Agriculture, Progress and Prospect: 1975–2005," *The Urban Agriculture Network (TUAN)* Report 18, Cities Feeding People Series (March 1996) IDRC, Canada.

<sup>54</sup> "As part of an ecological movement active since the eighties in the state of Buenos Aires, members of the P.A.R. (Programa de Autosuficiencia Regional, Regional Self-Sufficiency Program) found it relevant to make a shift in the traditional ecological activities and relate them quite directly to the critical issue of unemployment and growing urban poverty. This accounts for the creation of the first Barter Club, which started in May, 1st. 1995 with a group of twenty neighbors and turned in three years to more than 150 Clubs all over the country, involving about 80,000–100,000 persons." Presented at Enhancing People's Space in a Globalizing Economy, Espoo Finland, September 5–9, 1998, available online at: <www.cdev.lets.net/latin/argentina/redglobal.html> . Also see Ben Backwell, "Grow Your Own Diversity," *The Ecologist*, October 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Cindy Milstein "Another World Is Possible; But What Kind, and Shaped by Whom?" *Social Anarchism* 32 (2002). John Jordan and Jennifer Whitney, *Que Se Vayan Todos: Argentina's Popular Uprising* (self-published, 2002).

to discuss and plan strategies for dealing with emergency health and food issues brought about by the economic crisis.

The result is impressive; the *huertas* have produced an average yield of 80,000 tons of food per year, helping to feed some 2.5 million daily. The factories that have been collectivized nationwide since December 2001 employ over 10,000 people; a single collectivized ceramics factory in Zanon provided sustenance for over 300 families. Demonstrating the level to which such autonomous activity has risen, an owner of a blockaded wool factory lamented, "nowadays the mob can appropriate goods and the authorities are afraid to do anything; we're heading back to the days after the Russian Revolution."<sup>56</sup>

While autonomous movements are at the moment most prevalent in Latin America, they are also found more and more often in other parts of the world as well. In West Africa, after a long struggle, indigenous Nigerians organized around the Sovereign National Conference (SNC) have recently won a change in the national constitution recognizing the autonomy and right to self-determination of over 170 tribal communities. In the cities, anarchists associated with the Awareness League have organized pirate radio stations as an independent source of politics, news, music and culture. And this past summer over 600 Nigerian women in the Niger Delta region occupied and shut down the half-million barrel a day Chevron–Texaco Escravos facility, threatening to take their clothes off if their demands were not met. (Taking off their clothes is the traditional way to shame those in power.) Their demands included that the oil company redirect some of its profits to help to build schools, clinics and other public facilities and that they provide employment for local workers. After 10 days of intense negotiation, the standoff came to an end when the demands were met in total.<sup>57</sup>

In North Africa, on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt, thousands have attempted to build their own future in the squatted City of the Dead shantytown, which is built amongst and sometimes even inside the tombs there. The community features shanty barbershops, schools and other institutions, all outside the official system. Similar illegally squatted communities form rings of poverty and protest around most of South Africa's cities; they are routinely subject to brutal evictions, though people have defended and retaken their homes repeatedly. A savvy and aggressive insurrection has taken the form of "reconnections" in direct action against water and electricity privatization.<sup>58</sup> In the cultural sphere, anarchists associated with the Bikisha Media Collective produce news coverage for the region and help to run the South Africa Indymedia website in addition to distributing pamphlets on alternative histories of the region.

In South Asia, as in other parts of the world, indigenous people form an important section of the autonomous movements. Tribal areas make up some 7% of the geographical space of India; recently, their councils released a joint

<sup>56</sup> Helen Murphy, "In Argentina, Workers Seize Factories to Eke Out a Living," *Miami Herald*, September 26, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Peel, "Peacefully, Nigerian Women Win Changes From Big Oil," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 12, 2002, <[www.csmonitor.com/2002/0812/p07s02-woaf.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0812/p07s02-woaf.html)>.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Bond, "Power to the People in South Africa: Operation Khanyisa! and the Fight Against Electricity Privatization," *Multinational Monitor* 23:1/2 (2002); see the Anti-Privatization Forum at <[www.apf.org.za](http://www.apf.org.za)>, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, and Operation Khanyisa.

declaration stating that the village is the highest form of government they are willing to recognize. One movement active in precisely this spirit is that of the Chipko terrace-farming women who defend forests by "tree-hugging" as well as physically blocking strip-mining of mountains and the polluting of watersheds. In the words of one Chipko activist, "we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. That is why it is 'primitive' and 'backward' women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce for themselves, who are leading Chipko. Our power is nature's power."<sup>59</sup> In cities such as Bombay, "pavement dwellers" organize with grassroots groups like the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (founded 1984) to assert their ability to fully participate in developing and managing housing and their own communities.

In East Asia, people marginalized into homelessness by the recent burst of Japan's "bubble economy" have formed autonomous organizations such as INOKEN and NOJIREN, which are active in most cities. The group employs park and subway occupation tactics such as the "barrack concept" which refers to building easily assembled and disassembled wood and pipe houses right on public lands. In turn, they then use direct action strategies to stop evictions by an increasingly brutal police force that usually arrives in full riot gear. In Hong Kong, the half-century old autonomous community of Diamond Hill still supports over 200,000 squatters, down from its peak of 750,000 in the mid-1980s despite ongoing gentrification and evictions.<sup>60</sup> In Seoul, South Korea, a grassroots organization by the name of Seochulhyup, or the Council of the Evicted, physically defends squats and street vendors from police evictions in over 50 districts. In addition, anarchists in the city associated with the Anti-Military Support Service organize "free markets" in parks where people barter goods without the interference of money as well as resistance to military conscription.

In Europe, countries such as Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands have been host to the most well-known autonomous movements, ranging from lone squatted buildings to highly interconnected squatted neighborhoods, militant highway blockades, and massive Black Bloc actions. The first of the current wave of first world anti-globalization protests occurred in 1988 when 75,000 protested the IMF/WB meetings in Berlin. What Katsiaficas refers to as "the militant cutting edge" there was a Black Bloc of several thousand Autonomen from all over Europe and North America. Although the militants were somewhat of a minority, their initiative created "a context in which other forms of participation (signing petitions, attending programs and rallies, publishing informational leaflets and so forth) had meaning." Autonomen were also active in squatted neighborhoods such as sections of Hamburg's Haffenstrasse and Berlin's Mainzerstrasse. This movement has formed the core of the *antifa* (anti-fascist) movement in Europe, protecting Turks and other immigrants from racist attacks, occupying and closing the Organization of Migration building in Berlin, as well

<sup>59</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, London, 1989). *Ecofeminism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publications, 1993).

<sup>60</sup> Wanda Baxter, "Squatters in Hong Kong: Revisiting Squatting Settlements in a Booming Economy," *Research & Scholarship Archives*, June 26, 2000, < [www.ucalgary.ca/unicomm/Research/smart.htm](http://www.ucalgary.ca/unicomm/Research/smart.htm) > .

as fomenting the International No Border Action Days (the first of which was held in October of 2001).

In Italy, the network of over 100 squatted Centros Sociales have served as centers of political organizing, autonomous social services and radical culture for decades. During the Genoa G8 protests, for example, the Centros provided meeting space, infoshops and free meals. Perhaps inspired by this example, Sydney Australia's Homebush district now features a squatted Social Center dubbed "Midnight Star" that has been active since January 2002. As in Genoa, the building has served as a central space to organize demonstrations against international financial meetings, to serve free meals, and to host weekly video nights. In the past year, Social Centers have opened in cities throughout the UK including Manchester, Nottingham, Brighton and London.

In North America autonomous movements are currently strongest in Canada. The anti-poverty movement there, represented by groups such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) in Toronto, the Comité Populaire Saint-Jean-Baptiste (CPSJB) in Québec City and the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC) in Vancouver, represent its most visible face. Spurred into action in response to NAFTA-related neoliberal policies enacted by the Liberal Party (which reigns in several provinces) several large buildings have been squatted by hundreds of homeless people and their allies in just the past year in Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Halifax, Montréal and Québec City. And in October 2002, OCAP and its allies announced a new coordinated squatting campaign called "Give It Or Guard It" that threatened to take over any unoccupied building not regularly guarded by police.

One of the most notable occupations during this time period has been that of the massive Woodward's building in Vancouver, which was violently attacked and evicted two weeks later. Though this led to one of the largest mass arrests in Vancouver history (58), the squatters stubbornly returned in even greater numbers after being released from jail to set up a tent city under the building's awnings. In Québec City, the CPSJB issued a call in May that led to the largest and longest lasting housing occupation in provincial history, involving over 1000 occupants.<sup>61</sup> Twelve buildings were squatted simultaneously in cities throughout the province. The other major Canadian example of autonomy are the numerous struggles for indigenous autonomy represented by the Native Youth Movement (NYM). One of their most well-known fights is that against Delta Hotels' Sun Peaks resort, which illegally purchased and began to develop on unceded Secwepemc (Shuswap) land in the interior of British Columbia. In response, NYM members blockaded one of the main roads leading to the site, locked themselves to construction machinery, and built long-term housing for themselves there to sustain what they knew would be a long fight.

The tactics of the squatting movement in Canada can be partially traced to the Seattle WTO protests in November 1999 when anarchists squatted an abandoned building in the downtown area, demanding that it be transformed into social housing. The other major squatting trend in North America is represented by those who attempt to "drop out" of modern capitalism; the Trumbullplex Anarchist Collective in Detroit, for instance, consists of two massive squatted mansions in the heart of the city's nearly deserted urban core.

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<sup>61</sup> Nicolas Phebus, "Québec City: A Short Squat Story," *Barricada* 18, October 2002.

Another is the radical squatters living in 11 large buildings on Manhattan's Lower East Side who recently won official ownership of their housing. Perhaps the most provocative of all such movements in the US is that of Dreamtime Village, an entire functioning town located in rural Wisconsin that prides itself on its lack of government and police and a relatively autonomous existence from mainstream American life. Dreamtime is allied with anarchist theorist Hakim Bey, whose book *Temporary Autonomous Zone* inspired much of this activity for North Americans.<sup>62</sup>

In the years since the current wave of autonomous movements began, informal decentralized networks have developed to coordinate joint activities. The Zapatistas, for instance, hosted *encuentros* of global civil society<sup>63</sup> out of which emerged Peoples' Global Action (PGA), a decentralized "non-organization."<sup>64</sup> PGA's five hallmarks include "A call to direct action and civil disobedience, support for social movements' struggles, advocating forms of resistance which maximize respect for life and oppressed peoples' rights, as well as the construction of local alternatives to global capitalism."<sup>65</sup> The network has been instrumental in recent "Global Days of Action" such as J18, N30 and many others and has popularized anarchist and other autonomous movements. This fact has led some to describe the Zapatistas as "the armed matchmakers of a new international movement against globalization."<sup>66</sup> Providing decentralized coordination similarly to the PGA networks are the international Independent Media Centers, whose unmoderated structure enables autonomous participation locally and worldwide simultaneously.<sup>67</sup>

## Analysis

While autonomous movements show depth of political economic analysis, they make only rare reference to Marxism. Their radical political economic analyses are of growth, dependency, and colonialism.<sup>68</sup> These analyses provide discursive and analytical flexibility which may explain the movements' broad appeal to diverse social sectors. Of the three, colonial analysis has become particularly important to the autonomous perspective due to its versatility. It can handle the many forms of domination (multiple oppressions) effected by corporate hegemony (economic, political, cultural, ideological, alienation of land) and clarifies how dependency is produced and reproduced. It proposes a vision of how to address the problem (decolonization and sovereignty) with the understanding that decolonization is an intimate, complex, ideological process, not just a

<sup>62</sup> Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1985).

<sup>63</sup> The First Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism was held July 1996 in Aguascalientes, Chiapas and the second in July 1997 in El Indiano, Spain.

<sup>64</sup> Midnight Notes, *Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles of the Fourth World War* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2001), p. 105.

<sup>65</sup> < [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org) > .

<sup>66</sup> Midnight Notes 2001, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> < [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) > .

<sup>68</sup> Richard Douthwaite, *The Growth Illusion* (Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books, 1993). The Ecologist, *Whose Common Future?: Reclaiming the Commons* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1993). Chakravarthi Raghavan, *Recolonization: GATT, the Uruguay Round & the Third World* (Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network, 1990).

change in political order. It acknowledges that colonized people use a variety of cultural systems to critique, reject, and confront that system.

There is a growing sense in the third world that modernization will *never* deliver, leading to creative articulation of alternative development paths which center indigenous knowledge, equitable attention to the perspectives of men and women, and the decommodification of nature. The movement for restitution and reparation of third world debt envisions post-debt development policy as "endogenous and autonomous."<sup>69</sup> Most radicals have not taken this liberatory vision seriously despite the assertions of "farmer's rights," "food sovereignty," and "multifunctional agriculture," by independent associations of peasants, fisherfolk, women, and indigenous people<sup>70</sup> and despite sheafs of philosophy, scientific analysis, and social data to support the possibility of local provisioning. In addition to gathering more data in hope of attracting the attention of the larger movements for liberation, it may be necessary to challenge some of the premises of hegemonic radical thought. Helena Norberg-Hodge argues that "communism and capitalism are both centralized, colonial, ruthless. Both exerted pressure on people to stop producing a range of products for local consumption and instead to monocrop for export." James Scott writes that what capitalism most wanted people to forget was their right to "an abundant, self-yielding nature"<sup>71</sup>—the remembrance of which is hardly the focus of anti-capitalist work.

Aware of the neocolonial relationship between postmodern consumption and third world immiseration, a few first world scholars have challenged the conflation of quality of life with standard of living and argued that smaller-scale economies could be more secure as well as more responsible to the third world. Perhaps the most challenging first world scholarship on this topic is ecofeminists' Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt Thomsen's 1999 book, *The Subsistence Perspective*. They argue, against most feminists and other modernist authorities of liberation, that subsistence lifestyles are more secure, independent, and self-determining than modern ones which are based on the "dead end" industrial system and the myth of "catch-up development."<sup>72</sup>

Despite the lack of careful consideration of autonomous movements, a number of criticisms have been laid at their door. Modernist liberation movements, within and without the anti-globalization movement, are bemused by what they invariably condemn as an impossible "return" to localism. A somewhat vulgar critique of localist movements insists that modernization, industri-

<sup>69</sup> Dakar Manifesto: Africa: From Resistance to Alternatives, December 14, 2000, < [www.50years.org/update/dakar1.html](http://www.50years.org/update/dakar1.html) > .

<sup>70</sup> Via Campesina founded 1993 (conceptualized "food sovereignty," presented "farmers rights" to UN-FAO in 1996). On multifunctional agriculture, see Brad DeVries, "Multifunctional Agriculture in International Context: A Review," October 2000, the Land Stewardship Project, < [www.landstewardshipproject.org/mba/MFARreview.pdf](http://www.landstewardshipproject.org/mba/MFARreview.pdf) > . World Forum on Food Sovereignty, September 2001, Havana Cuba. Indigenous Peoples' Seattle Declaration, November 1999. 3rd UN of the Peoples, Perugia Italy, September 1999. Diverse Women for Diversity statement to the Plenary of the Fourth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, May 4, 1998.

<sup>71</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 81.

<sup>72</sup> Douthwaite (1993), *op. cit.* Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999), *op. cit.* F. E. Trainer, "Reconstructing Radical Development Theory," *Alternatives* 14 (1989), pp. 481–515.

alization, high-tech, and global trade are simply inevitable. Small-scale economies are seen as romantic, undesirable, or absurd. When taken more seriously, the autonomous approach inspires concerns about inadequate provision (perhaps some localities cannot meet needs with available resources), the loss of economies of scale, the reduction of available goods (and thus standard of living) to what can be produced locally, and how self-sufficient localities would survive natural disasters which threaten subsistence resources. Autonomy frightens much of the Northern intelligentsia, who depend on anonymous urban life for their sense of freedom. Leftists, dependent on state enforcement of social justice, generally fear community autonomy. Some of this is fear of the potential for local fascist essentialism. Another aspect of the fear arises from simplified notions of the meaning of traditionalism. Even the concept of community raises fears among many leftists.

Local autonomy offers strong resources for addressing issues of economic and social security. While local production benefits less from economies of scale and will be vulnerable to natural crises of the resource base, in many ways it provides more security than an integrated global economy. Defenders argue that local technologies are far more efficient than standardized ones developed far away. Localities independent of global prices and transport are thereby independent of fads, planned obsolescence, production priorities, and technologies originating elsewhere. Economic priorities are determined by the affected community. Autonomous regions might prohibit all corporate operations or they might allow some limited projects; the collectively-run stores in the Zapatista *municipio libres* sell locally produced food and drink, but by their own choice they sell Coca-Cola and other corporate products, too. Many autonomous movements prohibit destructive extractive forays by outsiders.

Among those who agree that local production itself contributes to autonomy and community building there is some disagreement about whether small businesses can play an important part. While not anti-capitalist, the politicization of small businesses demonstrates a class conflict within the capitalist class which could be mobilized in blockading or disrupting globalization. But small enterprises, it is widely believed, will inevitably try to grow, externalize costs, and abuse the commons. Even if small businesses stay small, continue to generate lots of jobs and are unlikely to move production overseas, they are not committed to challenging capitalist social relations or environmental degradation. Anarchists and Marxists worry that exploitation and authoritarianism associated with private property and worker-owner relationships are unavoidable. Moreover, there is a concern that small businesspeople were easily recruited to fascism by the Third Reich, indicating that their "class consciousness" will always be reactionary. Insofar as small businesses see themselves among the prey of corporations, they are a constituency for recruitment to social justice concerns. Alliances with them should be conditional on the business in question embracing a code of social accountability with an explicit orientation toward supporting the local economy, culture, and community. Beyond this, enterprises that would be compatible with autonomy would be engaged in production for local consumption and would be worker-owned. Since now many small enterprises sell products off the global assembly line, civil society sectors can help entrepreneurs in transitioning to sustainable local production, to the benefit of all involved.

Autonomous economies by necessity recognize ecological limits. They also

protect diversity (biological, cultural, and social), increasingly understood as one of the most important aspects of production security. Production security would also require collective regulation so as not to undermine the resource base and for this purpose communities have re-established commons regimes. "Bioregionalism" could provide an appropriate scale for regional federations, since bioregions should include a diverse ecology and production base.<sup>73</sup> Federations of localities could respond to emergencies, share appropriate technology, and trade luxury goods once a critical mass of autonomous communities emerges.

Autonomous moves by countries, regions, and localities to repudiate external debt, ban corporate projects, refuse to implement neoliberal policies, or pursue independent development paths will surely be punished by cutoff from the global market and external capital. Surviving such sanctions will require reducing dependence on imports, export-based income, and taxes gained from foreign direct investment. Cuba's recent history offers examples of national independence in energy, food, agricultural inputs, and medicine. Decades of postcolonial alliances will be most important to short-term survival. Localities can depend on thousands of models of sustainable, viable technologies and economic institutions that meet human needs.<sup>74</sup> This knowledge is archived locally, so is both secure and held as commons. Wallerstein identifies anti-systemic movements as those which actually challenge the system's "metaphysical presuppositions;"<sup>75</sup> culturally-specific cosmologies provide thousands of alternatives to globalization and capitalism.

Turning to the social concerns, the dangers of community and autonomy must be considered in the context of the dangers of corporate globalization and its essentializing hegemony and practices. Corporations need predictable, manipulable consumers. This requires reduction of human diversity and undermining aspects of society which might disrupt commodification and marketing. Humanitarians are dependent on centralized structures for their projects.<sup>76</sup> Social welfare programs have never been safe within capitalist states and world system, but now nation-state policies are subordinate to corporate jurisdiction at the WTO and are being rolled back through structural adjustment policies. This shift raises difficult and important questions about how well the liberal state has ever done in protecting human rights and how well positioned it is to defend them now.

Without federal enforcement, setting limits on local elites' behavior would be the responsibility of the community. Clearly, local elites' locality makes them vulnerable to political dialogue with neighbors and to their local markets. Richard Douthwaite, searching for models to *Short Circuit* the global economy, found that guild workshops were open to community inspection, enabling

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<sup>73</sup> Berg (1983), *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> An Appropriate Technology Library has been gathered containing 1050 of the best books on all areas of village-level and do-it-yourself technologies; see <[www.villageearth.org/ATLibrary](http://www.villageearth.org/ATLibrary)>.

<sup>75</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Oxford: Polity, 1991).

<sup>76</sup> Stanley Aronowitz points out that liberals are trapped in a model of the welfare state and social contract which elites abandoned long ago. *The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

public knowledge of working conditions and environmental processes.<sup>77</sup> It would be useful to compare the success rate of social justice struggles against local elites with those struggles against multinational corporations.

Fearful concerns about autonomy presume a reference point for "local community." In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels wrote "Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible ... In a real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association."<sup>78</sup> Sadly, the concern with community which drove Marx's work is rarely part of radical analysis. Marx himself began to question aspects of his earlier work when he started to study indigenous peoples' economies. In his last and unfinished work, a set of ethnological notebooks,<sup>79</sup> he questioned his assumptions about industrialization, scale, and historical stages, echoing indigenous peoples' responses to Marxism and other self-congratulatory universalizing discourses.<sup>80</sup>

For those of us who cannot imagine any other community than a "global village" made up of commodity chains bringing high-tech goods and new fashion every six weeks, the idea of community is a dowdy consumer choice.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, traditional indigenous people claim that their societies allow for much more complex individualism than modern or postmodern Western identity. Gender definitions were more complex and many forms of sexuality and marriage were condoned.<sup>82</sup> Women were *not*, as popularly held, universally subordinated.<sup>83</sup> More importantly, as Daniel Kemmis argues, necessary communal collaboration requires community members to accept diversity.<sup>84</sup> Vandana Shiva argues that when most members of the community are interdependently providing for subsistence and other community needs, community is an "integrating context" of plurality, not dualism.<sup>85</sup> Scholars are documenting that most cases of "ancient tribal conflict" and "ethnic strife" today were simply

<sup>77</sup> Richard Douthwaite, *Short Circuit: Strengthening Local Economies for Security in an Unstable World* (Foxhole: Green Books, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, C. J. Arthur (ed.), trans. Lawrence and Wishart (1970) (New York: International Publishers, [1846] 1993).

<sup>79</sup> Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, trans. Lawrence Krader (ed.) (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972).

<sup>80</sup> Rex Weyler, *The Fourth World* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society, 1992).

<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, some alienated consumer moderns are desperately trying to relearn community. Robert N. Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Community in American Life* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1985).

<sup>82</sup> Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

<sup>83</sup> M. Annette Jaimes with Theresa Halsey, *American Indian Women: At the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). Eleanor Burke Leacock, "Introduction," in Frederick Engels (ed.), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, [1942] 1972), pp. 7–67, especially pp. 29–46. Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981).

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics* (London: Zed Books, 1991), pp. 189–190.

political manipulation by elites trying to gain control in a suddenly undermined political economy.<sup>86</sup> Autonomous movements are often explicitly committed to multiculturalism, seeing it, along with biological diversity, as the basis of security, social technology, and pleasure.

To protect diversity, to enable “all cultures to survive and thrive,”<sup>87</sup> communities must control their own resources and institutions. Rousseau proposed economic autonomy as a precondition of pluralist democracy, a concept on which Western multiculturalism depends. Supporting communities in their demands for sovereignty and autonomy defends spaces ruled by alternative epistemologies, values, and economic systems. Through a federalist system, autonomous communities could engage in dialogue about common concerns, drawing on the strengths of many knowledge and social systems. Positioning the (large) secular nation-state as the only political unit limits our ability to solve problems.<sup>88</sup> In local autonomous zones, people could establish justice around issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality without waiting for laws, rulings, and enforcement funding from either the liberal state or the bought-and-paid-for international institutions.

In facing the fear of autonomous, potentially homogenizing, communities, it's important to keep in mind the long history of democratic autonomy and multiculturalism. The oldest and richest Western tradition is anarchism. We can also examine European local democratic systems, the most famous of which is the Swiss canton system. Experimental alternative institutions, which include a wide variety of organizations—from production and consumer cooperatives to social service organizations—have worked to develop models within modern society. Political movements also have extensive experience with various internal democratic structures. Rather than delegating decision-making to bureaucrats and “experts,” traditional political technologies include democratic practices like consensus, permitting every member of the community to speak on the matter at hand, delaying decision until everyone is satisfied with the discussion, or delegating to a set of decision-makers whose power was precisely delimited. These technologies prioritized collective participation in decision-making and the time that necessitated. The luxurious lifestyle of a subsistence economy (in which only a few hours a day are spent on production) allows time for such intensive processes.<sup>89</sup>

A strategic method of organizational fluidity and openness to changing circumstances comes out of the tradition of *specificismo*, developed by the Federación Anarquista Uruguay (FAU) in the 1950s.<sup>90</sup> The concept of *specificismo* proposes that people organize themselves based on their actual position in society,

<sup>86</sup> Ashis Nandy, “Experiencing Ethnic Violence,” lecture at UC Santa Barbara, May 7, 1997. Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

<sup>88</sup> Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

<sup>89</sup> Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (New York: Zone Books, 1987).

<sup>90</sup> Jason Adams, “Jornadas Anarquistas: Anarchist Convergence in Porto Alegre, Brazil,” *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 34 (2002); “WSF2002: Hopes for a True International?” *Social Anarchism* 32 (2002).

because the working class is an artificial category which ill-represents people's experiences. *Specificismo* creates a framework for managing diversity within the movement and building solidarity between movement sectors organized around intersecting oppressions. One of the most important aspects of *specificismo* is that it calls for anarchists to organize not merely *as anarchists*, but to actively engage and participate in the broader popular movements as equal participants. Rather than relegating themselves to the kind of ideological sectarianism that has repeatedly shattered the possibility for authentic autonomous movements to arise, these movements are trying something altogether new.

What is different about the autonomous movements' response to globalization? They propose a better quality of life, a different kind of security, a new way of exercising responsible citizenship, a practical method of supporting diversity, more participatory forms of decision-making, and appropriate tactics for halting modern exploitation. The autonomous movements, in drawing from indigenous and peasant struggles, from farmers' knowledge, from third world postcolonial experiences, from long-marginalized and well-developed movements like anarchism, from an unpopular historicism, from sustainable and local producers' movements, engage in a highly adaptable framework of insurrectionary experimentation.

What the empirical record of the autonomous movements shows is the central role that grassroots social movements are set to play in the contemporary political economic terrain. Though this terrain is certainly hostile, it is also emboldening in that it raises the stakes by deliberately rearranging the rules of engagement, forcing people to seek solutions in the present tense, outside the system. What the contemporary insurrections of Buenos Aires, Seoul, San Salvador Atenco, and numerous other localities show is that recurring instances of revolt against established authority can often be more powerful and infectious than the more finalistic ideology of change embodied in traditional notions of revolution. While we have undoubtedly learned a lot from the reformist and revolutionary movements of the past we probably have a lot more to learn from the autonomous movements and insurrectionary moments of the present. Rejecting the false dichotomy of reformist or revolutionary notions of social change, these movements guide us to begin looking beyond centralized power (whether that means seizing the state or a top-down military-style revolution) as an important agent of change and to begin looking to each other as sources of power. As Pablo, a jubilant insurrectionary marching with an Argentine *cacero-lazo*, teaches, "security used to be in the bank, and insecurity was in the streets. Now insecurity is in the bank. The robber who used to be outside the bank is now in it. And security is in the streets, with our neighbors."