

Mini-Position Paper for Critical Issues in Social Movement Research: Knowledge, Autonomy, and Alternatives. (SMWG Conference, March 24-25, 2006)

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1) Briefly introduce the work in which you are involved . . .

I'll list two:

**#1. Holland, D., D. Nonini, C. Lutz, L. Bartlett, M. Frederick, T. Guldbrandsen, and E. Murillo. (In press) *If This is Democracy: Public Interests and Private Politics in a Neoliberal Age*. New York University Press.**

This book is currently in production. It describes the shape of local democracy in North Carolina (and arguably in other similar “landscapes of power” across the country) following 30 years of market rule with its neoliberal globalization projects. Activist groups and associations captured a significant part of our research attention. We argue that the government restructuring of services in favor of outsourcing, privatization and public/private partnerships **has fundamentally shifted the ground of local activism**. The rise of public/private partnerships has attracted activist and social movement organizations and networks, many of whom now hold their 501©3s. Some members of the SMWG may remember Evelina Dagnino talking about similar trends in Brazil as a “perverse confluence” between the otherwise oppositional projects of expanded participatory governance on the one hand, and neoliberal governance on the other. And, on another point, we noted, in resonance with Sonia Alvarez’s analysis of feminist movements in Latin America, that networks have replaced hierarchically organized associations: contemporary movement networks, as studied from the vantage point of local places, are composed of loosely coupled, partially competing components, from advocacy associations to chapter-based membership federations, to small grassroots groups oriented to particular places.

There are some truly impressive not-for-profit community organizations and networks in North Carolina. They have strong local constituencies, clear visions of better futures, and years and years of experience, knowledge and experience gained in their efforts to promote social and economic justice. Some of them are linked to regional and larger social movements and sometimes important contributors/leaders of them. They should be recognized along with the networks engaged internationally with globalization conflicts as an important component of contemporary activism and social movements.

I also note that Gibson-Graham in their work draw attention to the importance of local activism. In *If this is Democracy*, we make the case that local activism especially that which is interlinked to translocal movements is one of the few hopes we have at this point for challenging the plutocratic forms that pass for democracy in this country.

**#2. CIRA (Center for Integrating Research and Action) Project: NC Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction**

Presently, CIRA (a group/network of faculty and graduate students) is undertaking a project in collaboration with three regional centers around the state, two of which are community organizations (Center for Community Action in Lumberton and the Concerned Citizens of Tillery). These are the types of community organizations that I referred to above that are fighting for positive social change under the new conditions for activism. The project is addressed to generating and circulating alternative models, projects and subjects of community economic development in 12 counties in North Carolina. It's inspired also by Gibson-Graham's project focusing on transforming local economies.

- 2) How are social movements rethinking the political? Do they offer any new articulations between the micro (cultural, everyday) and macro (politico-institutional, policy-oriented) political? For example: Do emphases on cultural and micro-political practices such as horizontality suggest a new understanding of political effect or effectiveness? Are experiments or struggles for autonomy that do not make demands on the state reconstituting "the political" or simply avoiding engaging in "real" politics?

One route would be to extend conceptualization of "the creation of new subjects". When is the creation of new subject positions significant? (It's common to talk about the generation of new subjects, but not very common to look at the differences the new subject positions make.) What projects are resulting in the formation not only of new discourses and practices with new subject positions but also in the formation of new personal and collective identities and new ways of relating to demands on the state as well as micro-political practices?

- 3) What questions do you want to raise or point to as possible avenues of further discussion and research?

#1 (repeated from the second question) When is the creation of new subject positions significant? (It's common to talk about the generation of new subjects, but not very common to look at the differences the new subject positions make.) What projects are resulting in the formation not only of new discourses and practices with new subject positions but also in the formation of new personal and collective identities and new ways of relating to demands on the state as well as micro-political practices?

#2 In relation to activism around globalization conflicts: what local/global relations are taking place? Are the "local effects" as important as the macro political?

#3 What sort of "timescales" are we theorizing when we talk about changes in social formations? Would it be productive to gain a better feel for the timescale of change processes? What sense do movement veterans have of timescales for change?