

## Organizations in Movement: An Ethnographer in the Spanish Campaign *Poverty Zero*

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**Abstract** During the year 2005 many organizations took part in *Poverty Zero*, a campaign that aims to reach the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals for 2015. Based on participant observation and open ended interviews, this paper describes the origins, development, and evaluation of *Poverty Zero* in Andalusia (Spain). It examines, by means of ethnography, how DNGOs (Development Non-governmental Organizations) create social movement networks, and explores the limits and possibilities of their advocacy activities. The paper concludes that DNGOs tend to generate centralized social movements with reduced questioning of the global system. Nevertheless, as shown in the case of the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty, the more decentralized a movement, the deeper its transformational potential.

**Résumé** Lors de l'année 2005 de nombreuses organisations ont pris part à la *Pauvreté zéro*, une campagne qui vise à réaliser les objectifs de développement du Millénaire des Nations Unies pour 2005. En se basant sur l'observation des participants et des interviews ouvertes, cet article décrit les origines, le développement et l'évaluation de la *Pauvreté zéro* en Andalousie (Espagne). Il examine, au moyen de l'ethnographie, comment les organisations non gouvernementales de développement (ONGD) créent des réseaux de mouvements sociaux, et explorent les limites et les possibilités de leurs activités de plaidoirie. Cet article en arrive à la conclusion que les ONGD tendent à générer des mouvements sociaux centralisés avec une remise en question réduite du système global. Néanmoins, comme le montre le cas de l'alliance andalousienne contre la pauvreté, plus un mouvement est décentralisé, plus son potentiel de transformation est profond.

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**Zusammenfassung** Im Jahr 2005 nahmen viele Organisationen an *Poverty Zero* teil, einer Kampagne zur gänzlichen Beseitigung der Armut im Rahmen der Millenniums-Entwicklungsziele der Vereinten Nationen, die bis zum Jahr 2015 erreicht werden sollen. Basierend auf Teilnehmerbeobachtung und offenen Interviews geht diese Abhandlung auf die Entstehung, Entwicklung und Bewertung der *Poverty-Zero*-Kampagne in Adalusien (Spanien) ein. Der Beitrag untersucht mittels Ethnographie, wie die nichtstaatlichen Entwicklungsorganisationen Netzwerke sozialer Bewegungen schaffen, und analysiert die Grenzen und Möglichkeiten ihrer Lobby-Aktivitäten. Man kommt zu der Schlussfolgerung, dass die nichtstaatlichen Entwicklungsorganisationen oftmals zentralisierte soziale Bewegungen erzeugen, die das globale System weniger hinterfragen. Dennoch zeigt das Beispiel der andalusischen Allianz gegen Armut, dass, je dezentralisierter eine Bewegung ist, desto größer ist ihr transformatives Potential.

**Resumen** Durante el año 2005, muchas organizaciones participaron en el proyecto *Pobreza cero*, una campaña orientada a alcanzar los Objetivos de desarrollo del milenio de las Naciones Unidas para el año 2015. Basado en la observación de los participantes y en entrevistas abiertas, este trabajo describe los orígenes, el desarrollo y la evaluación del proyecto *Pobreza cero* en Andalucía (España). Examina, a través de la etnografía, la forma en la que las Organizaciones no Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo (ONGD) crean redes de movimiento social y analiza los límites y las posibilidades de sus actividades de apoyo. El trabajo concluye afirmando que las ONGD tienden a generar movimientos sociales centralizados, cuestionando cada vez menos el sistema global. Sin embargo, tal y como demostró el caso de la Alianza Andaluza Contra la Pobreza, cuanto más descentralizado sea un movimiento, más significativo será su poder de transformación.

**Keywords** Spain · Poverty · Development · Nongovernmental organizations · Millennium Development Goals · Social movements · Ethnography

## Introduction

Every day that world leaders delay significant action on aid, trade, and debt, 30,000 people die from extreme poverty. (Global Call to Action against Poverty)

At the beginning of the year 2005, I decided to take part in the organization of the campaign *Poverty Zero*, a huge worldwide social mobilization promoted by Development Nongovernmental Organizations (DNGOs) that aims to influence governments in order to take measures to eradicate poverty and encourage the “development” of Southern countries. Initially, the main intention was to seek interaction with volunteers and professionals of DNGOs in order to carry out my doctoral research on these organizations. What I did not foresee in my first research design was that DNGOs’ political participation was a fruitful and exciting line of research itself.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) occupy the shadowy and complex space between informally organized social movements and the bureaucratized public and for-profit fields. Since their re-emergence in the 1980s, NGOs have been valued for their economic relevance as a part of the so-called “third sector,” which is defined by its distance from the public and private for-profit sectors (Salamon, 1996). Several studies point out, however, that an increasing number of NGOs are currently rejecting charity and assistance to enhance new ideas of “empowerment,” and to complement their humanitarian aid and development projects with awareness raising and advocacy activities (Korten, 1990; Lewis & Wallace, 2000; Ortega, 1994; Polo, 2004).

In fact, DNGOs are currently creating social movements in order to lobby governments and supranational organizations. In this paper I study this trend in DNGOs. I attempt to analyse through an ethnographic description of *Poverty Zero* in Andalusia, the nature of the relationship between State and civil society, which DNGOs are favouring by establishing social movements and taking part in advocacy activities.<sup>1</sup> I conclude that, in general terms, DNGOs, by limiting their critique, by focusing on the “minimal and possible,” and by depending excessively on funds from the State and other questionable sources, are becoming part of the new global structures of domination. They fit perfectly with the neoliberal agenda. When they mobilize, they compete with—and partially neutralize—genuine social movements. Nonetheless, as the case of *Poverty Zero* in Andalusia demonstrates, NGOs’ movements are arenas where multiple voices can be heard and, sometimes, power structures can be challenged. It depends largely on the extent to which movements are centralized.

### **Towards a “humanized” capitalism: Social movements, NGOs, and the Millennium Development Goals**

Karl Polanyi describes the origins of capitalism as a process in which society becomes completely subordinated to the economy. Contrary to liberal theorists, he argues that in ancient and feudal regimes, labour, land, and capital were subjected to laws, rules, and moral norms. Self-regulating markets destroy society itself by separating economy from society. Even so, since its origins, capitalism has encountered many forms of resistance. The birth of unionism and socialism is a part of these struggles. In this sense, we can view, following Manuel Castells, contemporary social movements as forms of resistance to capitalist globalization. Social movements—Castells claims—can be conservative, revolutionary, both of the two, or neither of them. There are neither “good” movements nor “bad” movements (Castells, 2000, p. 93). From this point of view, Luis Enrique Alonso’s (1993) distinction between “movements”—progressive—and “anti-movements”—reactionary—lacks validity.

Manuel Castells’s methodological criteria, inspired by Alain Touraine’s work, may be of interest. He points out that every social movement can be defined by three principles: its identity—that is to say, who they say they are or represent; its

<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of my ongoing PhD dissertation on development nongovernmental organizations in Spain. The data that have been used are based on participant observation, 40 ethnographic interviews, and the analysis of DNGOs’ documents.

opponent—its explicit enemy; and its social goal—the kind of society they would like to reach in the long term (Castells, 2000, pp. 93–94). In this case, the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty presents itself as representative of “civil society,” its opponents are mainly governments, transnational corporations, and supranational organizations, and its social goal is poverty alleviation.<sup>2</sup>

Organizations and movements are frequently two confused realities. Social movements arise from organizations’ capacity to produce and articulate collective forms of action (Alcázar, Camacho, & Trabada, 1993, p. 116). Using a physical science analogy, the confusion between organization and movement can be explained by Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, according to which it is impossible to know the quantity of movement—the lineal moment—and the position of a particle at the same time. In other words: we are unable to establish the movement and the state of repose of a body at the same time (Montañés, 1993, p. 131).

On the other hand, DNGOs, between social movements and the bureaucratic field, are currently the most popular organizational form for those who aspire to lessen capitalism’s excesses. I have documented in other papers (Roca, 2006a, b) the strong forces that are driving Spanish DNGOs towards what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) termed in their seminal work “structural isomorphism.” Several factors—mainly their fundraising system and their institutional framework—lead DNGOs to have a professionalized and bureaucratized (centralized) structure. Here, the questions that arise are: To what extent do DNGOs tend to reproduce such structures when generating social movements? And what political consequences can be inferred from this? Is there a relation between the degree of centralization of a network and the content of its demands?

*Poverty Zero* is located within the Global Call to Action against Poverty, a wide-range international coalition made up of people from more than a hundred countries and hundreds of grassroots organizations, trade unions, human rights lawyers, international civil society, religious groups, and different kinds of NGOs, whose goal is to organize the biggest mobilization against poverty in history. In January 2005, the campaign was inaugurated at Porto Alegre’s World Social Forum, and landed in Spain through the initiative of the Spanish Federation of DNGOs (CONGDE, in Spanish) with financial support from the governmental agency specializing in international cooperation (AECI, in Spanish).

The Global Call to Action against Poverty aims to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) approved at the General Assembly of United Nations in 2000 for the next 15 years.<sup>3</sup> In Spain, the “2015 Platform”, integrated by various

<sup>2</sup> According to Roitter (2004), nonprofit organizations attempt to keep a metonymic relation with civil society, that is, being one of the parts that represents the whole. It is what he calls a “topographic representation of the civil society,” where what is discernible is neoliberal discourse, its ideas of society, and its way of understanding human actions.

<sup>3</sup> The Millennium Development Goals and targets come from the Millennium Declaration signed by the 191 member countries of the United Nations in September 2000. The eight goals are: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development. For purposes of monitoring the process, these goals have been demarcated in terms of 18 targets and 48 indicators—all of which should be achieved before 2015.

Spanish “lay” and “progressive” DNGOs, that is, those organizations so called “political-unionist” in Maria Luz Ortega’s (1994) classic typology, and the official campaign of United Nations, explicitly supported the DNGOs’ initiative.

*Poverty Zero* brings to the campaign a list of requests that its defenders consider “minimal and possible.” Official Development Aid (ODA) must be increased in quantity—to 0.7% of the GDP—and in its quality—it must be separated from commercial and geopolitical interests, giving priority to the poorest regions. In addition, they demand that Northern countries, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund cancel the external debt of developing countries. The resources obtained from the cancellation of the debt should be used to fulfil the MDGs. The rules of international trade must be revised in order to promote equality between rich and poor countries. *Poverty Zero* finds especially important the elimination of agrarian product export subsidies because current European Union and United States policies generate dumping, that is, the invasion of international markets with products under the production price which therefore impedes the development of the poorest countries.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the campaign attempts to preserve public services in opposition to liberalization and privatization policies, and to encourage Southern countries in the development of new technologies, that is, to get rid of the so-called “digital breach.”

The campaign includes among its requests two “historic” petitions: advocating 0.7% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) for development aid; and for the cancellation of developing countries’ external debt. To some extent, it is heir to those historic mobilizations in which thousands of citizens have participated in such actions as demonstrations, occupations of symbolic buildings, and hunger strikes. Some DNGOs’ members have taken part in these mobilizations. Therefore they hold a sort of capital: a valuable resource that has developed from working together among organizations, networks, gaining experience in advocacy campaigns and direct action. Nevertheless, despite the important consequences that these mobilizations have had for DNGOs their commitment to them was marginal compared to other grassroots, religious, or union organizations. For some DNGOs’ participants, this new campaign was an opportunity for their DNGOs to become involved in advocacy activities.

There are, however, important criticisms to the content of the demands. As Amin (2006) has argued, the MDGs, despite seeming unobjectionable, were not the result of an initiative from the South but were promoted by the “triad” (of the United States, Europe, and Japan) and co-sponsored by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Indeed, Ted Gordon, a CIA consultant designed them. All these objectives are very vaguely defined and do not implicate

<sup>4</sup> More than eliminating all kinds of subsidy, the campaign demands a reorientation of them so that the most fragile social sectors of Northern societies do not go unprotected. A report of the State Federation of DNGOs advocates that: “developed countries establish an immediate time-limit to eradicate export-oriented subsidies and any other internal subvention that generates dumping, directing internal grants towards a solid and durable rural development at a local level” (CONGDE, 2005, p. 6). As an economist expounded during this campaign: “The main beneficiary of European subsidies for Spanish agriculture has been the Alba Duchess [a well-known Spanish landlady]. Can you tell me what need does this woman have of those millions of Euros?”

neoliberal policies of privatization, land dispossession, and *laissez faire* that generate poverty. Amin concludes that the MDGs are an ideological discourse used to legitimate transnational corporations' aims of exploiting and dominating the South. These objections are shared by some of the campaigners. *Poverty Zero* turned, this way, into an interesting arena of protest.

### First steps

We can trace the origins of *Poverty Zero* in Andalusia to a workshop organized between the CAONGD (the Andalusian federation of DNGOs) and the CONGDE with the objective of strengthening autonomous federations. This seminar took place March 18 and 19, 2005 in the centre of the citizen participation area of Seville's City Council. Only representatives from a small number of DNGOs, eight of the 45 organizations that comprise the Andalusian federation, attended the seminar.<sup>5</sup> The spokeswoman explained, by means of a participative methodology, the *Poverty Zero* campaign, its context, the United Nation system, the functioning of the WTO (World Trade Organization), and the Millennium Development Goals. At the end of the seminar, the speaker made a dynamic statement, which became a metaphor for the activities that we developed in future stages of the campaign:

We stand up making a circle and share a rope bobbin taking hold of an end of each one. The effect of that is a network between us formed by the relationships represented by the rope. If we make an effort and pull on it, the network remains strained, so that if one of us fails, the network keeps consistent and is able to resist the weight of any object we put on it. Instead, if we stop hauling, the web hardly can hold a lightweight. Then, the spokeswoman starts to pick up the bobbin and concludes as send-off: "the construction of alliances is crucial for generating political changes." (Field notes, March 19, 2005)

From this seminar the technical group of the CAONGD took over campaign coordination. A few DNGO representatives and I joined them. We decided that Margaret, the professional in charge of the communication activities of the CAONGD, would be the main person responsible for the coordination of the campaign.

Campaign planning was set up in three different stages: from May to June public presentations, construction of networks, and the first demonstration—coinciding with the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland—would take place. In September, after summer break, the campaign would have to be taken on board. At this time the second mobilization, coinciding with a United Nations World Summit in which advances and failings in MDGs would be analysed, would take place. Last, between October and December actions would be focused on trying to commit political institutions and organize a demonstration corresponding with the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong.

<sup>5</sup> The majority of these organizations are all over Spain; some are only Andalusian and local NGOs. Most of them, but not all, have offices in Seville.

The presentation and disclosure stage of *Poverty Zero* started within the alliance's organization. It consisted in exposing the significance of the campaign to the participants of each nongovernmental organization in order to persuade them to participate. This task was especially sensitive for those DNGOs less predisposed to advocacy actions. Afterwards, the disclosure was circulated through DNGOs external networks. We decided to constitute the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty, which would join together the maximum number of organizations as possible, making use of previously existing webs. At an organizing meeting at the beginnings of May, George, an experienced campaigner from Intermón-Oxfam, took the initiative:

George distributes a sheet of paper that shows different social sectors: religious, sanitary, educative, unionist, social movements, solidarity movements, and mass media. The piece of paper includes some blank cells next to each sector that we should fill with the name of the person responsible of getting in touch with the corresponding organizations, a catalogue of those organizations, and a list of issues which we are going to ask them for. George says that the message that we are going to give to each sector will vary in function with its characteristics. For instance, when displaying the campaign to unions, we will have to highlight that at the state level they are already inscribed to the campaign, and that labor rights are part of our demands. (Field notes)

We decided that individuals entrusted with the duty of coordinating the relationships with a sector should belong to a DNGO connected with that sector. For example: a member of Doctors Without Borders should be responsible for the health care sector; a member of Engineers Without Borders should coordinate the university sector; a member of Peace and Solidarity—a development aid foundation belonging to the Spanish union Comisiones Obreras—should get in touch with the union sector. Little by little we weaved a broad web alliance integrated with about 50 Andalusian organizations. Each organization became involved to different degrees: some only signed the adhesion form (especially political parties on the left), while others attended the periodic coordination meetings regularly and encouraged their grassroots members to participate in public actions.

During 2005 many of the alliance's organizations agreed to arrange countless activities in order to popularize the Millennium Goals and campaign demands: presentations for the mass-media; and information stands at large public events such as popular fairs, cinema festivals, local parties, solidarity fairs, conferences, and concerts. The campaigners from the CAONGD also made a travelling exhibition that circulated throughout Andalusia. The awareness-raising actions were to culminate in three social mobilizations at three key dates to take place in several cities around the world at the same time. The first key date was June 26, coinciding with the G8 meeting in Gleneagles (Scotland). The second date was September 10, when the United Nations World Summit was expected to make public the failure of the MDGs. The third key date was December 16, that marked the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong where we mainly promoted the adoption of a trade policy based on three principles: coherence—between trade policy and cooperation for development in order for Southern countries to export their products; transparency—reporting



information to citizens; and participation—from civil society agents in these negotiations.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, we planned other specific actions in order to obtain the support and commitment of Andalusian political institutions—such as city councils, province administrations, and the Andalusian government.

Below I depict, ethnographically, a coordination meeting of the campaign and its last demonstration of the year in Seville in order to enlighten the functioning of this “web of webs” (internal discussions, power relationships, informal leaderships, synergies, contradictions and confluences) and, at the same time, contribute to the debate about DNGOs limits and opportunities to carry out political pressure activities.

### **Ethnography of a coordination meeting**

One of the Alliance’s coordination meetings took place on the fourth of September. As usual, we were called to be there at six o’clock in the evening. The decided meeting place was the Centre of Faith and Culture “Father Arrupe,” a Jesuit building located in central Seville in which many religious and nongovernmental organizations carry out activities, such as meetings, speeches, and assemblies.

I came to the meeting as a member of Madre Coraje, the DNGO which I was participating in as a volunteer. Participants came from each of the following organizations: Caritas Diocesana, Caravana por la Paz, Acción Alternativa, Ecologistas en Acción, Ingeniería Sin Fronteras, APDHA (Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos-Andalucía), La Ortiga, MAVID-A, CAONGD, Intermón-Oxfam, Unión Romani, and FACUA (Federación de Asociaciones de Consumidores y Usuarios de Andalucía). The diversity of the organizations highlights that the campaign is considerably successful. Throughout the year the number, variety, and commitment of the campaigners involved in the network has been increasing gradually. There are representatives from five DNGOs, the Andalusian federation of DNGOs, an ecologist group, a cooperative of organic products, a gypsy association, a consumer’s federation, a human rights association, and other grassroots organizations.

I arrived promptly and entered the arrival hall. There were quite a lot of people. I greeted those I knew. George, who is an Intermón-Oxfam volunteer at the Department of Social Mobilization, Studies, and Campaigns, and works as a caretaker in this centre, came out of his office and welcomed us. We followed him up to a spacious room on the first floor where there were several big tables placed together. We took a seat. Although the tables formed the shape of a rectangle, and rectangles are an acephalous shape, George was sitting in the most central spot. There was a television and a blackboard to his back, so all eyes were directed towards him. It seemed to me that he was situated exactly at the “centre of gravity” of the room. George started the meeting explaining the three main objectives of the day: to design a calendar of actions for the last three months of the year; to move forward in the tasks of the “political committee;” and to begin to organize speeches

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<sup>6</sup> Report from the CONGDE: Por primera vez un representante de las ONGD participará en la delegación oficial española que viaja a la cumbre de la OMC. December 2005. Available online: [www.congde.org](http://www.congde.org)



and seminars at the University. He gave us more details about the “political committee:” last week, the Alliance created a committee whose target was to lead the actions towards the public authorities and political parties. It was constituted by Mike (from *Ecologistas en Acción* and the Social Forum of Seville), George (from *Intermón-Oxfam*), and Margaret (one of the three professionals of the technical team of the CAONGD).

George explained that the political committee should adapt the paper entitled “Twenty Measures,” written by the campaigners from Madrid to pressure the central government, to the Andalusian authorities. In the last meeting they decided that two federations of town halls, the FAMSI, and the FAMP, would be the best channels to achieve support.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this committee should submit a proposition to the Parliament of Andalusia both to receive its support towards the central government and to obtain concrete engagement within its effective competences, especially in relation to development aid.

Later, George explained in a general way some points of the document “Twenty Measures.” Last week, the committee resolved to demand the Andalusian government to increase the official development aid to 0.35% by 2008 and to 0.7% by 2010. He clarified that the Andalusian government currently allocates only 0.17% of its budget to development aid. The committee also decided to ask this institution to participate in the United Nations Global Funds against AIDS and for Education. He added that they should give geographic priority to Southern Africa since this huge territory is one of the poorest areas of the world, yet only receives 5% of Andalusian aid. In his opinion, we should request to give 20% of our gross income to southern countries. In addition, we should promote the design of structures by which official aid becomes public and transparent. Today neither DNGOs nor their federations have clear information about official development assistance. In relation to external debt, regional governments do not have competences. With regard to public service privatizations, the committee decided to request that city councils join to pronounce against the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services, which aims to liberalize and deregulate public services. After George’s intervention, Josh, a representative of the FACUA, spoke. In his opinion, the campaign’s manifestos and demands are “quite soft.” For example, he says, transnational pharmaceutical corporations are responsible for the death of millions of human beings, yet they are not mentioned.

Roderick made use of Josh’s comments to emphasize some objections his organization has made to the campaign. He clarified that he stands for an association of sub-Saharan immigrants. They came from African countries, which have been smothered because of their external debt. But they do not plan to cancel the external debt to their countries of origin. People in the room looked surprised, but he quickly offered a convincing explanation. There are many dictatorial governments in Africa that have spent the credits on armaments to curb their own people; cancelling the debt to those governments would be a way of supporting these kinds of practices.

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<sup>7</sup> The Fondo Andaluz de Municipios por la Solidaridad Internacional and the Federación Andaluza de Municipios y Provincias are federations of local public administrations among whose ends are the coordination and promotion of development aid activities.

Margaret replied that what the campaign reclaims for these countries is an interchange between debt and development so that the military and the corrupt governments would be obliged to earmark public funds for citizen welfare. Roderick seemed content, and clarified that they do not fully understand all the points of the campaign because they have just joined the Alliance.

Once this issue was concluded, George, who was currently on duty and had just returned from greeting some visitors to the centre, attempted to continue the meeting: “Let’s design a schedule of activities for the rest of the year!” People agreed. The third key moment of the campaign was expected to take place on December 10 all around the world, a few days before the WTO summit. We established the demonstration route along some central streets. George reminded us that we had to schedule the seminars and speeches at the University between December 10 and 16. Albert, from Engineering Without Borders, a university DNGO mainly comprised of engineering students and professors, added that they were going to prepare two lectures: one focused on the first millennium goal—poverty reduction—and the other focused on two of their current development projects on drinkable water. Suddenly, Mike added that we should focus on criticisms to the WTO. Jeremy, from the Human Rights organization, in agreement with Mike, proposed a speech about the WTO given by Manuel Delgado, Professor of Applied Economics. Everyone agreed. Mike started to propose more radical criticisms to the WTO. He represents the Social Forum of Seville, a network that connects individuals and organizations from a wide spectrum of the left—such as Marxists, Trotskyites, Andalusian nationalists, and libertarians—that share more radical ideas than the other participants of the Alliance, especially most DNGOs. Mike’s role is rather embarrassing: he is the nodule between two different webs: the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty, lead by DNGO professionals and volunteers; and the Social Forum of Seville. He stressed the importance of an ideological debate within the Alliance:

Mike: In the posters and the leaflets we should explain correctly what the WTO is and include the slogan “No to the WTO.” Thereby, we would join together the anti-globalization movement and the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty.

Martha: Well... that thing about the elimination of the WTO has to be discussed. I don’t think that everybody agrees with the slogan “No to the WTO.”

Mike: [He looks angry] Let’s see! I think that everyone here wants to eradicate poverty. Right? So if we want to eradicate poverty we are against these institutions that generated poverty. So I don’t know what the hell we are doing here if we are not against the WTO.

The climate in the room began to become uncomfortable. Presently the other participants tried to avoid confrontation by suggesting that the slogan of the demonstration and the rest of the activities should be the same as those used in Madrid and other Spanish cities. Most of the participants expressed agreement and Mike remained silent. The problem seemed to be resolved.

Finally, Margaret informed us of the campaign's state of finances: there were no funds left. However, she was negotiating the funding of part of the campaign with two banks. Showing her management abilities, she summarized the ideas and decisions made throughout the evening. Then we got up and walked to the exit. Everyone looked satisfied; the campaign was coming along quite successfully.

## Demonstration

At last! It was the final event of the year. It was December 16, 2005 and people were expected to come at 20:00 to the doors of the City Council, in the centre of Seville. I was running a few minutes late. As I got close to the crowd I recognized the faces of several people: Mike, some from Intermón-Oxfam, others from the Andalusian human rights association, Sam from Caravana por la Paz, Kate from Acción Alternativa, Joan from RCADE (Red Ciudadana por la Abolición de la Deuda Externa), a few professionals from Solidaridad Internacional, and some friends of Madre Coraje.

At 20:20 we started to walk. At the head of the crowd there were two motorized local police agents turning aside the traffic and a few meters beyond there were two patrol cars diverting buses and other vehicles. At the rear of the crowd there was an armoured van from the national police with its blue siren shining. On both sides there was only one surveillance riot agent. I was impressed because I am used to seeing many more cops carrying riot shields at equally crowded demonstrations. I looked around and tried to estimate the number of participants: just about 1,000. The number of participants has huge symbolic importance, especially at demonstrations. Not only because a larger number of people creates more visibility, but also because it portrays greater social support and legitimates people's demands and denunciations of current policies. In most demonstrations there are two versions used for estimating attendance, both of which are equally manipulated: on one hand, there is the public authorities' version, and on the other hand, the estimation of organizers.

All of the demonstrators, especially those belonging to the Alliance, were preoccupied with the question of the number of participants. Many people looked around: the ones at the head of the march looked back to examine how big the crowd was; the ones at the rear looked forward; those in the middle looked to both sides. The conversations amongst demonstrators centred on the number of participants. Along the route, some organizers told me: "It has been fitting. I thought it was going to be less crowded." We walked with slow steps and periodically took short stops, because the route was quite short and we did not want to complete it in just a few minutes. The objective of the demonstration was to achieve social visibility of the demands, so moving forwards slowly was the best way of improving our visibility. The people at the head of the demonstration marked our rhythm.

When we rounded our first curve, I got close to the head of the march. There was George, from Intermón-Oxfam and current president of the CAONGD. I also recognized some members of the Human Rights Association and the Social Forum

of Seville. The placard said: “Poverty Zero Campaign: Toward the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals. The current international trade model generates poverty. No to the World Trade Organization”. One slogan read: “Organize: Andalusian Alliance against Poverty” (Photo 1).

The mass media stayed with us throughout the march. The flashes of the cameras interrupted the darkness of the night. Journalists interviewed several leaders. Some reporters from the program *Solidarios*, from a regional television channel, recorded us with a video camera. The Alliance had succeeded in attracting great publicity. Besides propaganda, another crucial element of urban marches is noise—or, in specific cases, the absence of noise, that is, silence. At the head of the march some campaigners held placards with slogans saying: “Poverty zero, poverty zero!” “Famine no, poverty zero!” “We are going to make poverty history!” and “External debt abolition!” However, everybody did not follow the slogans shouted at the heading. This demonstration, because of its size, and especially because of the multiplicity of member organizations, did not have a unique and coherent voice. Instead of one unified voice, it had a polyphonic voice because of the acephalous—or polycephalous—and decentralized nature of this reticular form. Among the crowd one could distinguish four or five different slogans at the same time. One of the noisiest groups was the Friends of the Saharai People Association, a group that consisted of about 20 people, located just behind the leaders. Some of them had a distinct African look that made the group detachable. They carried a placard that said: “Freedom for Saharai prisoners,” as well as their national flag and portraits of their comrades jailed in Morocco’s prisons. They shouted slogans about their own struggles: “Sahara Free, Sahara Free!” instead of joining the collective group effort of *Poverty Zero*. The rest of campaigners did not welcome their attitude. One of them told me: “Here everyone goes for his own interest.” Some people seem to be disturbed by those organizations that make use of collective demonstrations to



**Photo. 1** Start of the demonstration



**Photo. 2** Demonstrators close to the City Hall

pursue their own particular goals. I think of the demonstration as an archipelago of connected groups, a network of networks, joined temporarily to accomplish their common goals. I realize that these demonstrations are used to integrate various subgroups constituted on the basis of their ideological affinities, organizations, and friendship relationships, which is made possible by negotiation and communication.

Behind the Saharais there was another large and noisy group of volunteers from another DNGO: Caravan for the Peace. In contrast of the average age of campaigners, most of the volunteers of this group were very young. One of them carried a megaphone and a piece of paper with Christmas songs, their lyrics modified to correspond well with the Christmas season. Their placard read: “This school-year get a zero on poverty.” Then, I found a small group of partners from Madre Coraje and I joined them for a while.

We kept on walking through the central streets of Seville, starting at the City Hall and continuing to the destination at Muelle de la Sal. A stage was set up there where a communiqué was to be read, followed by a rock concert. As we were walking, other campaigners continued publicizing by giving leaflets to the spectators, some about *Poverty Zero* and others not (Photo 2).

The march was scheduled to pass through the meaningful sights of the city.<sup>8</sup> A march is a collective use and appropriation of urban space, and in order to make it as visible as possible, demonstrators often utilize the most meaningful and symbolic places. Most important sights of downtown Seville were included on the route for this demonstration: the City Hall, the Spanish Bank, the Cathedral, the Archivo de Indias, the Alcázar, Torre del Oro, and finally, the Muelle de la Sal.

We arrived to Muelle de la Sal at approximately 21:20. The crowd moved slowly down the ramp toward the stage and the bar. The stage was rather wide and the light

<sup>8</sup> The exact route was as follows: Plaza Nueva (meeting point), Avenida de la Constitución, Puerta Jerez, Avenida Sanjurjo, Paseo de Cristóbal Colón y Muelle de la sal (destination and place of the concert).

and sound equipment, which was funded by Citizen Participation Area of the City Council at the costly price of €6,000, looked great. A woman came on stage and announced into the microphone that she is going to read the communiqué. She encourages us to come closer to the stage. George told me that she is Belén Torres, from the TV program “Solidarios.” Primarily, she thanked us for coming and thanked the City Council for their financial aid. Then, she read the manifesto about the MDGs followed by some heartbreaking current data about world poverty. Afterwards, she explained the origins of the campaign *Poverty Zero* and reminded us that we have to continue pressuring our governments to accomplish the goals of the campaign. Finally, she quoted the main demands of the campaign and introduced the rock bands. She then vanished from the stage and the artists began to tune their instruments and check the sound equipment.

Two rock bands were expected to play that night. As the music began I realized that a lot of young people had arrived. I asked some of them how they heard about the concert and if they knew anything about the demonstration. Apparently, there were rumours of the concert, but no one had heard about the preceding demonstration. I calculated around 3,000 people at the concert—three times the number of participants on the demonstration. Some of them carried their own bottles of rum or whisky.

It was time to stop being an anthropologist and enjoy myself, so I found my way to the bar to get a beer. I had to wait for a while because there was a long queue to buy tickets. When my turn came at last, I asked the bar tender which organization was in charge of the bar because I had heard that the campaigners had been looking for weeks for an organization to manage the bar. The advantage of organizing the bar is that a small percentage of the benefits would go towards the campaign and the rest would go to the organization responsible. However, none of the Andalusian DNGOs, not even those of the Alliance, wanted to manage the bar. Through La Ortega, the cooperative of consumers of organic products, the campaigners got in touch with the three Occupied Social Centres of the city: “Casas Viejas,”<sup>9</sup> San Bernardo, and the Palace of el Pumarejo, who accepted the offer of running the bar. Accordingly, the bar area was decorated with posters with strong statements about class struggles: “Cómete a los ricos, están ricos” (Eat the rich, they are delicious). I found it very striking to see the more moderate DNGOs sharing space with more radical groups. The last march of the year had finished. We will continue.

## Conclusion

I mentioned in the introduction that various studies underline the growing concern of DNGOs with advocacy. *Poverty Zero* is an important case that can be used in order to verify to what extent such studies are right. I have identified several strengths and weaknesses in DNGOs’ social movements. First of all, there is a high dependence on public funds. Not only do DNGOs get most of their funds from

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<sup>9</sup> This social centre owes its name to the slaughter of several anarchist militants at a town in the province of Cádiz with the same name, in 1993, by the Second Republic’s government.

public administrations (Marcuello & Marcuello, 2000), but they also finance their mobilization with funds from State agencies. DNGOs, consequently, do not look for social polarization, a fight of opposites that is solved in a favourable way by only one side. On the contrary, they create extremely ambivalent campaigns with which a great majority would feel comfortable to identify. As Gutierrez has written:

It does not consist in facing two positions but in approximating them... in order to demonstrate through a new language. The more one is legitimized (the State), the more we deepen in the participant civil society. In this way, those authors who represented the separation between the state and the civil society will be certainly surpassed. Obviously, we are talking about Hegel, Marx and Gramsci. (Gutierrez, 1997, p. 45)

We are witnessing the consolidation of a new governmentality in which civil society is redefined from an object to a subject and object of government (Sending & Neumann, 2006). Nonstate actors are participants of a new exercise of power: a concentration without centralization of power. Most of the time, NGOs are deliberately accomplices of this process. But things get complicated when they use ambiguity as an art of resistance: sometimes they remain submissive and conciliating, while other times they choose to oppose governments and transnational corporations; rarely stating openly their intentions, using what James Scott (1990) terms a “hidden transcript.”<sup>10</sup>

Third, DNGOs’ tendency towards professionalization (Roca, 2006a) promotes delegation in a few individuals. According to the participants, their main failure was the lack of participation from most of the campaigners. The following conversation between George and I during the meeting, taken from my field notes, can enlighten the discomfort of these professionals because of their overload of work and the general apathy of many campaigners:

“Since they are wage-earners from the CAONGD they can devote themselves a little bit more to the campaign, but only a bit more. They became exhausted. Each one present here today should ask himself if he has the support of his organization. There are over 45 organizations in the CAONGD and only a few of them have committed to the campaign.” I make use of the silence to intervene: “You formulate the question, all right, it’s ok. But you don’t answer it [some people laugh]. I mean... Did your organization participate sufficiently? If you want I can answer. I agree. Ok, I think that Intermón-Oxfam has washed its hands of it a little bit. (Field notes)

Fourth, they create centralized movements. DNGOs tend to reproduce within their movements their own organizational structures. The propaganda of the Spanish Federation proves its high degree of monopolization of *Poverty Zero*. For example, in the report about the WTO Summit on November, 2005, the coordinating

<sup>10</sup> I am thinking, for instance, of the Spanish government’s decision under the term of the right wing party in 1996 of choosing in a unilateral way which DNGOs would be part of the Cooperation Council, an organ for civil society participation in development aid policies. The elected DNGOs were those most ideologically close to the conservative and ultra-liberal government. Amongst them, only Intermón-Oxfam refused to participate as a mark of protest.



committee referred to *Poverty Zero* as a campaign of the DNGO in the following manner: “Throughout this year, the Coordinator of NGO for Development of Spain, by means of *its* campaign “Poverty Zero,” has been mobilizing and recalling...” (CONGDE, 2005, p. 1, italics added).

All these factors cohere to inhibit confrontation with power structures. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Make Poverty History (that is the name for *Poverty Zero* there) received backing from many politicians, and refused the Stop the War Coalition from joining because it embarrassed some of their political backers. They did not mention the war in their demonstrations. Critics have written that the movement was co-opted by New Labour’s politicians (Hodkinson, 2005). During the protests in Gleneagles “against” the G8, one press-officer of Make Poverty History said that their march was “not a march in the sense of a demonstration, but more of a walk. The emphasis is on fun in the sun. The intention is to welcome the G8 leaders and ask them to deliver trade justice, debt cancellation and increased aid to developing countries” (Farrer, 2006, p. 151). There were two demonstrations coinciding with the summit: one of the NGOs and another of the alter-globalization movement. In Spain, on the contrary, the alter-globalization movement joined *Poverty Zero*. In Madrid, DGNOS’ swallowed all media attention. In Andalusia, by contrast, genuine social movements could raise their voice through their actions: there were speeches and slogans during the demonstration, clearly against the WTO.

As we have seen in the description of the meeting, the controversy about the “No to the WTO,” which could have divided and wrecked the Andalusian Alliance, was peacefully resolved. In order to explain this, Michael Hardt’s ideas are pertinent. Hardt suggests that in a “network-form” “none of the pair of nodes faces each other by means of contradiction; before that, they are triangulated by a third one, then a fourth one and later an undefined number of other nodes” (Hardt, 2002, p. 140). This triangulation makes it possible for apparently antagonistic groups to take part in the same network, which is exactly what occurred at the meeting. Nevertheless, not every reticular form necessarily has a decentralized structure. Clear examples of this are the patron-client networks traditionally studied by political science. To be more precise, we must refer to those structures as decentralized networks, or, as the libertarian anthropologist Barclay (1989) termed them some years ago: “segmental acephalous network systems.”

Similarly, the disagreement and annoyance with the Saharai organization during the demonstration has to do with the network form. There is always suspicion and distrust towards those organizations, which break the informal contract of the network, which are so focused on their particular goals that put the common goals aside. But the network has its own informal mechanisms to correct this and restore internal congruence.

One of the most valued resources by the Andalusian campaigners was the open and decentralized character of the network. In these kinds of webs the interests of the participants are diverse, and sometimes even contradictory. For instance, Mike explained in this way the motivations of the organizations and individuals from the Social Forum for getting involved in the Alliance:

At that very moment there was a profound debate among the collectives that were posing the fulfilment of the millennium goals. These millennium goals should be achieved by pressing public administrations... people in the Forum know it's impossible. It is more utopian than our demands. But what we were really interested in, was that there [in the Alliance] were a lot of collectives and that we could create a great debate in the general population because the Andalusian Alliance against Poverty could reach much more people than the Forum. We would engage a debate and could deepen the contradictions among diverse collectives. (Mike, interview)

Other activists, like the representative of La Ortiga, had a similar opinion:

I think that the Millennium Goals are Eurocentric... but I find important the existence of spaces for the encounter and communication of people who share a point of view. We don't know what joins us, but we do know what we want to fight against. At the time of asking we would see what to do. (Field notes)

Consequently, the functioning and continuity of a network depends on the ability of the participants to harmonize different interests by means of negotiations if they are part of a decentralized network, or to monopolize the strategic positions if they are in a centralized one. The Andalusian network had a decentralized structure: it included significant contributions and suggestions from the component organizations. Margaret, of the CAONGD, explained the acephalous character of the Andalusian alliance functioning this way:

It is really a campaign that each one assumes as he wants. We haven't controlled everything that the campaigners have done in Andalusia because there are a lot of people that have really done things on their own account. (Margaret, interview, January 2, 2006)

She added that the power of negotiation has been one of the clues to the campaign's relative success, and furthered her point of view by mentioning the inclusion of slogans against the WTO:

I think that we have always succeeded at reaching an agreement, although sometimes it was a minimal agreement. Even because what I told you about that the [Andalusian] Alliance got a bit deflected from the line of the Spanish Coordinating Committee. As we said, the placard said: "No to the WTO." It wasn't the nationwide message. We took in mind the proposals of going beyond, made by other organizations that don't belong to the CAONGD. (Margaret, interview, January 2, 2006)

In conclusion, there is a relationship between the degree of centralization of a movement and the radicalism of its demands. Decentralized movements enable radical groups to raise their voice within a multiplicity of messages. DNGOs social movements pursue very limited reformist goals, depend excessively on professionals and State funds, and do not significantly question the global order. When DNGOs enhance their decentralization, as I have shown in the case of *Poverty Zero*, they increase their scope and chance to challenge global power structures.

According to Gorz (1967) while “reformist reforms” leave untouched the overall relations of power, “nonreformist reforms” see achievements as preliminary steps towards further transformations in structural relations of power. I would add that one of the main distinctions between the two is the way reforms are achieved. As we have seen, when a movement is decentralized it is more probable for radical ideas to emerge. This idea is also related to David Graeber’s concept of “prefigurative politics:” the manner in which one is organized prefigures the world one attempts to make. In this sense, *Poverty Zero* has been less vertically organized in Andalusia than in Spain and other countries. The partially decentralized structure of the Andalusian Alliance made possible the rise of nonreformist messages and practices. We can make demands as far as our structures allow us. Here is the real challenge for DNGOs. They are increasingly carrying out advocacy activities, but they have to find the way to fulfil “nonreformist” reforms. This would imply, necessarily, a tough redefinition of their roles, organizational structures, fundraising system, and actions. The question is: Are they ready for such a change?

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