Reclaiming Development? NGOs and the Challenge of Alternatives

DIANA MITLIN, SAM HICKEY and ANTHONY BEBBINGTON *
University of Manchester, UK

Summary. — In 1987, *World Development* published a supplement entitled "Development Alternatives: the Challenge of NGOs." Although this challenge now seems far more complicated, this paper suggests one way of giving meaning (and possibility) back to the juxtaposition of "development alternative" and NGOs. NGOs might benefit from rethinking the notion of development alternatives in terms of the politics and political economy of social change, of adopting a Gramscian reading of civil society and their role therein, and from reflecting that their role in realizing genuine alternatives has usually been in conjunction with political programs of social movements and/or developmentalist states. Such a rethinking will help define the contours of a theory for NGO action.© 2007 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1987, *World Development* published a supplement entitled "Development Alternatives: the Challenge of NGOs" (Drabek, 1987). Twenty years of development studies later, everything seems more complicated: it has become defensible to claim that "there is no alternative," that the term NGOs has no analytical or even descriptive value, that development is a form of governmentality rather than a project of emancipation, and that it is far more important to ask how the term "development" is used to serve particular (increasingly global) interests rather than to ask what it means. The supplement's title, once eye catching, now seems to fall apart under the weight of the apparent meaninglessness or impossibility of its terms. This paper attempts to restate this reflection on the relationship between NGOs and development alternatives. It does so through four steps: First, it begins with a reflection on the concept of "development," one that stakes out a terrain on which the term can be defended as having both analytical and normative force. This then lays the base for discussing possible meanings of "alternative" development. Second, it suggests a conceptualization of nongovernmental organization that gives the term more analytical traction at the same time as linking it to the concept of development through a reflection on the meaning of civil society. Third, it places a discussion of NGOs and development in terms of relationships and flows that are as much global as local in their reach, and links processes and actors at different sites across space and time. Fourth, it offers a review of experiences of the roles of NGOs in development and the pursuit of something called "alternatives."

Integral to reflections on NGOs for two decades, thinking about NGOs as alternatives has gone somewhat missing of late. The NGO literature has been voluminous since the 1980s, termed by some the "NGO decade" (Bratton, 1989), with these "new" actors frequently lauded as the institutional "alternative" to existing development approaches (Hirschman, 1984; Korten, 1989). Critical voices at this point were largely muted, confined to expressing concern that NGOs might be an externally imposed phenomenon that, far from being alternative, actually heralded a new wave of imperialism (Tandon, 1991). Apparently inclined to offer the benefit of the doubt, much of the literature focused on locating the importance of NGOs as a key plank within the emerging "New Policy Agenda," including a new role at the vanguard of donor agendas on civil society and democratization (Robinson, 1995). However, as the 1980s and 1990s proceeded, NGOs came under a closer and more critical scrutiny, both from supporters and skeptics alike. [1] "Internal" debates looked both ways. On the one hand were discussions of how to scale up NGO activities (Edwards & Hulme, 1992), how to run NGOs more successfully and ensure their sustainability as organizations (e.g., Fowler, 1997, 2000a; Lewis, 2001) and how NGOs might better manage their relationships (Groves & Hinton, 2004; Robinson, Hewitt, & Harriss, 2000). On the other hand, commentators feared that closeness to the "mainstream" undermined their "comparative advantage" as agents of alternative development, with particular attention falling on problems of standardization and upward accountability (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Wallace, Crowther, & Shepherd, 1997), on the effectiveness of NGOs in reaching the poorest (Edwards & Hulme, 1995; Riddell & Robinson, 1995; Vivian, 1994), and an apparent increased tendency to employ "radical" methods of empowerment such as participation as technical means rather than political ends (Lane, 1995). The apparently limited success of NGOs as agents of democratization came under critique from within (e.g., Fowler, 1993) and without (e.g., Harvey, 2004; Marcussen, 1996; Mercer, 2002; Stewart, 1997), while the simmering debate over NGOs as an externally driven phenomenon that threatened the development of "indigenous civil society" and distracted from more political organizations re-emerged (e.g., Hashemi, 1995; Mamdani, 1993). Such concerns culminated in a period of millennial angst

within the sector, with growing calls for "northern" NGOs in particular to devise new roles and rationales for themselves (Lewis & Wallace, 2000) or risk becoming obsolete (van Rooy, 2000). NGOs were advised to reach beyond the aid system for alternative forms of funding (Aldaba, Antezana, Valderrama, & Fowler, 2000; Fowler, 2000b), while also lobbying for a fundamental restructuring of the international aid system itself (Edwards, 1999).

However, and while the academic (and institutional) output on NGOs remains more diverse than has been fully reviewed here, what has perhaps been most remarkable of late is the extent to which these critical concerns have been allowed to pass by in the academic literature with very little evidence that they have been seriously addressed. We are arguably no clearer now concerning questions of effectiveness, accountability, and successful routes to scaling-up than we were when these questions were raised over a decade ago, let alone concerning the wider challenge of what being "alternative" means at this juncture (Tandon, 2001). And while some Northern NGOs have undergone profound institutional changes (e.g., ActionAid's relocation to South Africa), a sense of complacency concerning these and other key challenges appears to have replaced the earlier sense of angst within Northern NGOs about their future role. In countries in democratic transition such as South Africa or Chile, the NGO sector has been seeking to find a new role to enable survival, and does not appear to be concerning itself with higher order questions. It is perhaps a frustration with this as much as anything that encourages us to ask again whether and how NGOs might re-engage with their founding project of offering genuine "alternatives."

With this background and the above four steps in mind, this paper elaborates a framework for discussing the links between development and NGOs. It then uses a framework to review NGO modern history focusing particularly on the period since 1987, but drawing on relevant trajectories from the 1960s. In the light of that review, the final section suggests possible futures in the relationships between NGOs and alternatives. In this sense, the paper is both analytical and normative for, as will become clear, we are specially interested in particular alternatives—those reworking state–society relationships toward more radical, socially inclusive forms of citizenship (Hickey & Mohan, 2005), and reworking economic relation-

168 ships such that markets have more potential to
169 support rather than undermine societal objec-
170 tives toward social justice. [2]

2. A FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES

174 It is important to think about the role of
175 NGOs in development in relation to at least
176 three dimensions: the first concerns examining Q15
177 development both as an underlying process of
178 social change and as a targeted intervention;
179 the second concerns the tripartite division be-
180 tween the three key institutional arenas of state,
181 civil society, and market; and the third relates
182 to localizing and globalizing tendencies in
183 defining what NGOs do and are.

(a) D(d)evelopment/A(a)lternative(s)

185 In their history of "doctrines of develop-
186 ment," Cowen and Shenton (1996, 1998) distin-
187 guish between two meanings of the term
188 "development" that have been consistently
189 confused: "development as an immanent and
190 unintentional process as in, for example, the
191 "development of capitalism" and development
192 as an intentional activity" (1998, p. 50). Others
193 have used this distinction to frame thinking
194 about development theory and practices (Bebb-
195 ington, 2000; Hart, 2001; Hickey & Mohan,
196 Q4 2005; Thomas, 2000), though Hart (2001)
197 amends it slightly to talk of "little d" and
198 "big D" d/Development. The former involves
199 the "geographically uneven, profoundly con-
200 tradictory" set of processes underlying capital-
201 ist developments, while the latter refers to the
202 "project of intervention in the "third world"
203 that emerged in a context of decolonization
204 and the cold war" (Hart, 2001, p. 650). While
205 these frameworks differ slightly in their details
206 they each insist on distinguishing between the
207 notions of intervention and of political eco-
208 nomic, structural change when thinking about
209 development, without losing the sense that
210 there are clear, if nondeterministic, relation-
211 ships between these two faces of development
212 (Bebbington, 2003). We can locate NGOs in
213 this simple framework, in the sense that they
214 are—whether as project implementers, knowl-
215 edge generators, or political activists—all in-
216 volved in intervention, but are also *part of* the
217 societies and political economies in which they
218 operate: they are part of the little *d* develop-

219 ment at the same time as they try, through
220 big *D* Development, to intervene in and modify
221 the nature and/or effects of the broader pro-
222 cesses of this little *d* development. NGOs are,
223 then, both endogenous to development (under-
224 stood in its systemic sense) while often being
225 viewed (and viewing themselves) as exogenous
226 to it when they engage in their interventions.
227 Alternatives can also be thought of in rela-
228 tion to this distinction. Much discussion of
229 alternatives has been in relation to big *D* Devel-
230 opment—NGOs have been regarded as sources
231 of alternative ways of arranging microfinance,
232 project planning, service delivery, and so on,
233 that is, alternative ways of intervening. These
234 are reformist notions of alternatives—ways of
235 aligning big *D* Development to existing NGO
236 goals. However, alternatives can also be con-
237 ceived in relation to the underlying processes
238 of capitalist development, or little *d* develop-
239 ment. Here the emphasis is on alternative ways
240 of organizing the economy, politics, and social
241 relationships in a society. When an Evo Mor-
242 ales in Bolivia speaks of a commitment (real
243 or not) to finding distinct, non-neoliberal ways
244 of organizing the economy, or when Ecuador's
245 indigenous movement demands different ways
246 of organizing and legislating around ethnic
247 relationships and state formation, this is the
248 type of alternative invoked. In some sense, the
249 distinction here is similar to that made by Esco-
250 bar (1995) between "development alternatives"
251 and "alternatives to development"—the former
252 seen as exercises in reform having little effect on
253 the underlying role of development in ordering
254 and governing society, the latter as exercises
255 more likely to transform society and enhance
256 human fulfillment. The distinction, then, is be-
257 tween a partial, reformist, intervention-specific
258 alternative, and a structure changing, radical,
259 systemic alternative.

(b) Civil society as an alternative to the state and market

262 The second element of our framework links
263 these distinctions to a reflection on state, mar-
264 ket, and civil society. The tripartite division be-
265 tween these spheres is often used to understand
266 and locate NGOs as civil society actors (Bebb-
267 ington, 1997; Fisher, 1998; Fowler, 2000b; Hy-
268 den, 1997). Yet many of these renderings are
269 problematic. First, the treatment of civil society
270 is often excessively normative rather than ana-
271 lytical: it is seen as a source of "good," distinct
272 from a "bad" imputed to the state and market.

The roots of this approach run deep: for some, the essential role for civil society has long been to preserve a central place for a social logic to define the life spaces of citizens in the face of the hegemonic advances of the state (e.g., Habermas), while for others it plays much the same role *vis-à-vis* unfettered market forces (e.g., Polanyi). [3] Such approaches understate the potential role of the state in fostering progressive change, while also downplaying the extent to which civil society is also a realm of activity for racist organizations, neoliberal research NGOs, or other organizations that most of these authors would not consider benign (Hearn, 2001; Lewis, 2002; Stone, 2000).

Second, even if the need to understand the three spheres in relation to each other is often recognized, the relative fluidity of sphere boundaries in developing countries and the growing tendency for people to move back and forth between NGOs, government, and occasionally business, has received less attention. Such movements have further problematized the understanding of NGOs as being an integral part of civil society, something already called into question by those who argue that NGOs can be more accurately seen as corporate entities acting according to the logic of the market place, albeit a market place in service provision (Stewart, 1997; Uphoff, 1995). Perhaps more important, though, is that the "civil society" in which NGOs have been located in these discussions has rarely been considered with much historical depth, some exceptions notwithstanding (see Lewis, 2005). Yet, NGOs are a relatively recent organizational form whose emergence can only be understood in terms of their relationships to far more deeply seated social arrangements linked, for instance, to religious institutions, political movements, and government and transnational networks of various kinds (Bebbington, 2004). That is, NGOs—why they exist, what they do, what they say, who they relate to—can only be understood in terms of their relationship to these more constitutive actors in society, as well as in terms of the relationships among these constitutive actors, and between them, state and market. [4] This does *not* mean that NGOs are merely instruments of these actors (though they may be)—it *does* mean that they are not constitutive, and are certainly not the most important actor in civil society.

Civil society—and the place of NGOs within it—must therefore be treated carefully, histori-cally, conceptually, and above all relationally. It can be argued that within development studies civil society has been predominantly understood in two main ways, at each of two main levels (Bebbington & Hickey, 2006). At the level of ideology and theory, the notion of civil society has flourished most fruitfully within either the neoliberal school of thought that advocates a reduced role for the state or a post-Marxist/post-structural approach that emphasizes the transformative potential of social movements within civil society. At the conceptual level, civil society is usually treated in terms of associations (the so-called civil society organizations), or as an arena within which ideas about the ordering of social life are debated and contested. Proponents of both approaches often present civil society as offering a critical path toward what Aristotle described as "the good society" (Edwards, 2004).

In this paper, we work from a broadly Gramscian understanding of civil society as constituting an arena in which hegemonic ideas concerning the organization of economic and social life are both established and contested. Gramsci (1971) perceived state and civil society to be mutually constitutive rather than separate, autonomous entities, with both formed in relation to historical and structural forces akin to our processes of little *d* development. He was centrally concerned with explaining the failures of both liberalism and socialism, and of the role that counter-hegemonic movements within civil society might play in promoting social and also revolutionary change. The resulting contestations, and the hegemonies which emerge and the roles (if any) that distinct NGOs play in this, must in turn be understood in terms of the relationships and struggles for power among the constitutive actors of society.

These contestations over hegemony can also be related to our framing of "alternatives." Thus, one can imagine certain alternatives in the domain of big *D* Development that challenge ideas that are dominant, but not foundational. For instance, dominant ideas about how health care or financial service provision ought to be organized, might be contested and challenged by actors proposing and promoting distinct models of provision. Such alternatives, important though they may be in welfare terms, do not challenge the more basic arrangements that order society. Conversely, one can also imagine hegemonic ideas that are far more foundational—for instance, in the present moment, neoliberal ideas regarding how society

and market ought to be governed, or ideas about property rights. These ideas can be contested with alternatives in the domain of little "*d* development."

(c) *Global NGOs*

While concepts of global civil society may have their difficulties, there can be little doubt that, as the most potent force within late modernity, globalization has (re)shaped NGOs and ideas about NGOs. One effect has been that (at least some) NGOs have increasingly become a transnational community, itself overlapping with other transnational networks and institutions (Townsend, 1999). These linkages and networks disperse new forms of development discourse and modes of governance as well as resources throughout the global South; and some Southern NGOs have (albeit to a lesser extent) begun to gain their own footholds in the North with their outposts in Brussels, Washington, and elsewhere (see, e.g., the Grameen Foundation, Breadline Africa, or the Asociación Latinoaméricana de Organizaciones de Promoción, ALOP). Yet, these transnationalizing tendencies especially in the context of global advocacy may have also excluded certain actors and groups for whom engagement in such processes is harder (Chiriboga, 2001). Thus, these moves to scale have simultaneously increased the distance between constituent parts of the sector and led to the emergence of international civil society elites who come to dominate the discourses and flows that are channeled through this transnational community. This raises serious questions as to *whose alternatives* gain greater visibility in these processes. [5]

The transnationalizing of big *D* interventions (e.g., structural adjustment and the subsequent poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) phenomenon) reflects structural transformations in the workings of national and international capitalisms and the nature of organizations in capitalist society. These changes make it important for any alternative project (in a Gramscian sense) to work simultaneously at different points within these chains of intervention. The specific forms of intervention have also involved the increased channeling of (national and multilateral) state controlled resources through NGOs—a channeling in which resources become bundled with particular rules and ideas regarding how they must be governed and contribute to the governing of others. This bundling has meant that NGOs become increasingly faced with opportunities related to the dominant ideas and rules that travel with development finance—in particular in the current context, ideas related to neoliberalism and security. Acceptance of such opportunities has made life difficult for many northern NGOs, who in turn pass on these difficulties to their partners.

It is a short step to move from such observations to suggest that NGOs are becoming vehicles of neoliberal governmentality (e.g., Manji & O'Coill, 2002; Townsend, Porter, & Mawdesley, 2002), disciplining local organizations and populations in much the same way as development programs have done in the past (Escobar, 1995; see Duffield, 2001 for hints of such a conclusion). Such a reading, however, understates the extent to which such pressures are being resisted by some NGOs (Edwards & Gaventa, 2001; Townsend, Porter, & Mawdesley, 2004), and the extent to which an NGO's ability to sustain a broader funding base can be a tool that helps it negotiate and rework some of these pressures. It also understates the potential ability of NGOs to mobilize the broader networks and institutions within which they are embedded as a means of muting such disciplining effects. These networks, whose contribution to NGO activities is exemplified by the studies of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Jubilee 2000 (Edwards & Gaventa, 2001), can provide other resources and relationships of power on which the organization can draw—be these based in the Jesuit community, transnational corporate actors (who appear on a number of NGO boards), or underlying networks of power within the movements for Social Democracy, to name a few. The pessimistic reading also fails to take account of increased scale and effectiveness of some NGOs, in part as a result of their greater longevity resulting in both a greater scale of activities and greater experience and analytical understanding of what is effective (cf. Orangi Pilot Project, Hasan, 2006 and the development of Oxfam in Black, 1992). Nor are transnational NGO networks necessarily characterized by uneven North–South relations. As the more horizontal experience of Shack/Slum Dwellers International shows, the spatial reworking of development has increased opportunities for socially excluded groups themselves to speak and some NGOs are working with such groups to increase the representativity of these voices (Patel & Mitlin, 2002). Equally, the reconstruction of ActionAid, from a Northern NGO with

a UK headquarters to one based in Johannesburg with all country programs being equally involved in determining the direction of the organization, reveals the extent to which a Northern NGO can be prepared to go in an effort to retain relevance and realize a progressive mission. Finally, the simple governmentalizing reading perhaps also overstates the extent to which it is possible to talk of neoliberalism in coherent and singular ways, as opposed to neoliberalisms (in the plural) that exhibit at best some "family resemblances" (Peck, 2004).

Nonetheless, even if such resistances, reworkings, and slippages might occur, they do so for conjunctural as much as necessary reasons, and so it remains essential to understand NGOs—as well as states, markets, and civil societies—in the context of these transnational relations and flows. As noted earlier, NGOs are *part of* while trying to be *apart from* the political economy—and the workings of this political economy are transnational in nature and global in reach. As such, we re-iterate the point that, for NGOs to regain a sense of being and offering alternatives, it is critical that they (re)consider themselves in relation to struggles over little *d* development as a foundational, underlying, and increasingly globalized form of social change—and not simply in relation to the state or market, or to doing big *D* development differently.

3. NGOS AS DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES/THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED: AN ABRIDGED HISTORY

While the growth of NGOs has been well reviewed (Clark, 1991; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Fisher, 1998, 1993; Hulme, 1994), Lewis (2005) argues that much of this analysis has lacked theoretical acuity. This section therefore approaches this modern history of NGOs through the lens of our organizing framework and in a way that helps speak to our overall concern for the place of NGOs in fashioning alternative forms of development. We divide this abridged history into four main phases, and, in keeping with our historical starting point and our concern for alternatives, we have placed particular emphasis on the last 20 years. [6]

(a) *The first period*

Our *first period* (up to the mid to the late 1960s) is characterized by the long history of a limited number of small agencies seeking to respond to the needs of groups of people perceived as poor and who received little external professional support. These largely issue based organizations combined both philanthropic action and advocacy—as for instance in the case of the abolition of slavery and promotion of peace (Charnovitz, 1997; cited in Lewis, 2005). Most were northern based, but some had a southern presence, and they were generally embedded both in broader movements (e.g., against slavery) and networks that mobilized voluntary contributions. They were often linked to other organizations providing them with an institutional base and funding, and frequently linked to wider religious institutions and philanthropists; see, for example, the history of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (Crouch, 1993; NCC, n/d). There were also clear interactions with the state around legal reform as well as with the market, which generated most of the resources then transferred through foundations (a model that of course continues through to today, on a far more massive scale). [7] From the North, at least some such interventions were linked into conceptions that were a legacy of colonialism such as volunteer programs sending experts to "under-capacitated" countries or organizations that derived from missionary interventions (Cooper, 1997). While some interventions were of organizations whose mission and/or staff recognized the need for structural reform (Desco, 1996; Hirschman, 1967), only rarely was such work alternative in any systemic sense, or in the sense that it sought to change the balance of hegemonic ideas, be these about the organization of society or the provision of services. For example, Black (1992) highlights the exclusively humanitarian ethos of Oxfam's work during this period.

(b) *The second period*

Such organizations continued their work (some also closed down, while others were created) during what we broadly term here our *second phase*, from the mid to late 1960s to the 1980s. Although they remained relatively small scale, in some countries and some sectors, this period marked early stages in NGO growth. Critically, this period seems to be catalyzed by the consolidation of NGO "co-financing" programs, [8] whose creation reflected a willingness of Northern states and societies to institutionalize NGO projects within their na-

tional aid portfolios. Reflecting the geopolitical moment, the sector became increasingly critical, engaging more fully with the notion that it was imperative that NGOs elaborate and contribute to alternative arrangements among state, market, and civil society (generally on a national rather than a transnational scale), and alternatives both within, and to, capitalism. In this period, little *d* development was increasingly scrutinized, reflecting the intersection between these NGOs and political struggles around national independence and various socialisms, as well as between these political projects and intellectual debates on dependency, structuralist and broadly Marxian interpretations of the development process (Lehmann, 1990; Watts, 2001). The notion of ''Alternative development'' itself emerged most strongly in this era (e.g., Nerfin, 1977), albeit in the form that tended to simply invert mainstream forms of big *D* Development rather than offering alternative forms of little *d* development. However, the publication of books such as *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1973) and the related establishment of the Intermediate Technology Development Group in 1966 are each illustrative of this battle of ideas.

The sector, though small, was increasingly conscious of itself and of the need to build **Q8** collaborations with other nongovernmental actors, particularly across North–South boundaries. Numerous influences—awareness of the need for local institutional development, reduction in the formal colonial presence, and the contradictions inherent in the Northern NGO model—resulted in a steady shift in this period from operational to funding roles for Northern NGOs and the growth of a Southern NGO sec **Q17** **Q11** tor (Smillie & Hemlich, 1999). [9]

In the South, this was a period in which a growing number of NGOs, in particular those embedded in institutions and networks of political and religious lefts, consciously sought to shift state–market–civil society arrangements through government policy. This can be illustrated by two examples from the urban sector—the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) and the Centro Operacional de Vivienda y Poblamiento AC (COPEVI). OPP works in Karachi (Pakistan) and seeks to improve levels of infrastructure and services in low-income settlements. Over time, their strategy has changed, but from the early 1980s, they deliberately set out to demonstrate alternative development strategies to the state. COPEVI is a Mexican NGO whose ideas for improving low-income urban settlements were later taken up in the government program FONHAPO (Connolly, 2004). This was also a period in which very many existing and newly formed NGOs negotiated space within and alongside other political and social movements. This process was one of the collaborations among actors who recognized the benefits of the joint existence of movements, supportive institutions, *and* NGOs within the struggle against hegemonic and repressive structures manifested through the state (e.g., Philippines, South Africa, El Salvador). On the part of such NGOs, there was a recognized need for political change, while on the part of (some of) the political movements, the NGO contribution was recognized as important—as a means of accessing a range of resources. Often, the relationships between these actors ran far more deeply with NGO staff being simultaneously active in political parties and movements (such as, e.g., PlanAct—established in 1985—and the ANC in South Africa).

These were also the periods when European co-financing resources were (often deliberately) given without many questions being asked, in order to channel resources to oppositional movements via NGOs without any explicit, traceable government knowledge. Biekart (1995, p. 65), for instance, notes such practices in European policy toward Central America— ''It was a public secret the funds for development projects were often diverted to political and military struggles''—while Riddell, Bebbington, and Peck (1995) encountered similar patterns in the Swedish aid to civil society. These were also the years where other governments and conservative forces—most notably the United States—used a not dissimilar tactic to support elements of the hegemonic forces and ideas against which these NGOs and political movements were struggling. Some of these conservative resources were (and continue to be) similarly channeled through (quite distinct) NGOs. Indeed, both in this phase as well as in later arguments over neoliberalism, the role of NGOs in strategies of contesting hegemony as well as in other strategies aimed at consolidating it, was more than apparent. Such phenomena led to many manifestations in both North and South—such as the co-existence of competing NGO networks, some conservatively funded, others more radically funded—that symptomized the extent to which the nongovernmental sector was one of the more important terrains in which dominance of civil society was being contested (cf. Howell &

Pearce, 2001; MacDonald, 1996) and in which the alternatives at stake were systemic as much as sectoral. However, it is perhaps also true that the bulk of this contestation revolved around political rather than economic structures of little *d* development.

(c) *The third period*

Our *third phase* is defined by the growth in recognition for NGOs and their work and the increasing interest in funding such activities, often in relationships with the state and development agencies. This phase broadly encompasses the 1980s, reflecting the link between this changing place of NGOs and more profound systemic shifts that also date from this period. This is the period of the NGO "boom," a boom that can only be understood in terms of its own relationship to transformations in the structures of capitalisms North, South, and globally in this period—a reminder that NGOs have to be understood in terms of the political economies in which they exist. We would draw attention to three particular shifts in the broader relationships among state, market, and civil society as being important in this regard: macro-economic instability and crisis in a significant number of countries; political democratization, from both dictatorships and "enlightened authoritarian" regimes toward more formally liberal democracies; and a shift in dominant development discourse, with concepts and practices such as "civil society" and participation assuming great (discursive) centrality.

The 1980s were dominated by structural adjustment programs, the attendant increase in poverty, and the reduction in the role of governments in (their already weak capacity for) managing markets and public services. Adjustment led to a series of demands—across the political spectrum—for NGO intervention as program implementers, knowledge generators, and activists, depending somewhat on the political origins of these demands. These interests generally supportive of structural adjustment needed NGOs to help deal with the limitations of a strategy that was generating political protest that challenged the very viability of the reform process (Graham, 1992; Jorgensen, Grosh, & Schacter, 1992). The family of social emergency, investment, and other compensation and social protection funds that were created in order to deal with these inadequacies were (consistent with the model) increasingly implemented by nonstate agencies including NGOs. This demand—and the increased opportunities—for NGO intervention derived from a particular vision in which the place of the state in both little and large *d/D* development had been reduced, while that of market and civil society had grown. Yet the viability of these larger reforms required reformist alternatives at the margin of the model that would build in a measure of social protection to market-based policies and so help sustain reform during (what was perceived as) a transitional period in which the negative effects of adjustment were an internal contradiction. The model itself was not in question, and certainly this source of support for NGOs did not help them contest it, even if they wished to. [10] However, it is notable that this theme of protection and redistribution at the margins of growth was recognized beyond the donor agencies. Thailand, for instance, launched a government program, the Urban Community Development Office offering special help to the urban poor who were considered to have fallen behind others (Boonyabancha, 2004), and used NGOs to help support community development processes.

Those who opposed structural adjustment looked to NGOs to document the scale of suffering caused and to demonstrate the feasibility of coherent alternatives that also took account of the previous failure of government to deliver to the poor. Arguably NGOs were far more effective at the documentation of failure than the elaboration of alternatives—though it can be reasonably argued that the very context of adjustment made it that much more difficult to identify alternatives. Much was expected of NGOs in this period, but in reality, expectations were unfair and unrealistic. While there was some "discourse space" and there were financial resources for collaborative projects, there was little to no space to pursue large-scale or system-questioning alternative projects. Again the broader context of little *d* development constrained the possibility that big *D* interventions—through research, activism, advocacy, or experimentation—would achieve very much. Indeed, it remains one of the central contradictions concerning NGO alternatives that the huge increase in NGO activity during the 1980s was driven to a significant extent by the unfolding neoliberal agenda—the very agenda that development alternatives have sought to critically engage.

Yet the 1980s were not entirely lost to systemic alternatives. Some countries witnessed a

resurgence of new social movements (Alvarez, Dagnino, & Escobar, 1998; Ballard, Habib, Valodia, & Zuern, 2005; Slater, 1985). Even if such patterns of resurgence might be viewed by skeptics as exceptions that proved the rule, they suggested other pathways through which alternatives might be built, more slowly and systematically, around concepts of citizenship, identity, and organization (cf. Escobar, 2001, 1995). These alternatives, in some countries, challenged dominant thinking on the social and political order, if not the economic. These were, though, processes led by social movements, and if NGOs contributed, it was as part of these movements (as social movement organizations: McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In other cases, NGOs emerged to support defensive actions against the expansion of market-led development. In Asia, widespread evictions resulted in the establishment of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights in 1988 and explicit attempts to create alliances between professionals and grassroots organization to address processes of exclusionary development.

Adjustment was also accompanied by political democratization, partly as the political correlate of neoliberalism, [11] but also as a response to long years of organizing within civil society in which NGOs had played a role along with other actors. Ironically, this democratization brought further complications to NGOs (e.g., Bratton, 1989 on Africa; Bebbington, 1997 on Latin America; Clarke, 1998 on South Asia). The task of shifting from a position of contesting authoritarian governments to engaging with and promoting new, and often partial democracies while still arguing for "alternatives," has been a defining challenge for NGOs since the mid-late 1980s in parts of Latin America and South East Asia, and from the early-mid 1990s in sub-Saharan Africa. Once newly democratic state institutions took up alternatives for which NGOs had pushed, NGOs were left with the uncertainty of what to do next other than help the state make a success of these new orthodoxies. Indeed, many NGO staff and movement activists have moved into government precisely to try and help foster such success (Dagnino, Olvera, & Panfichi, 2006; Racelis, 2005)—a process sometimes viewed as co-optation rather than success. Examples here range from NGO leaders gaining seats in national cabinets (e.g., the Philippines) and ministries (e.g., Chile: Dagnino et al., 2006), the women's movement moving into parliament in South Africa and Uganda (Geisler, 2000; Goetz, 2003), and pervasive and important shifts of NGO activists into local government in many countries.

If democratization marked a success in delivering a systemic alternative in which NGOs could claim some role, the alternative was incomplete and complex in two senses. First, while relationships between state and civil society were (at least partly) transformed, those between state and market were largely unaffected, while those between market and civil society appeared to further commodify social relations. Second, the growing closeness of NGOs to the big *D* interventions molded by national and multilateral organizations led to the concern that NGOs had become, in Edwards and Hulme's (1996) term, "too close for comfort" to a range of other actors in a way that compromised their innovativeness, autonomy, legitimacy, accountability, and ability to continue elaborating alternatives. Others noted the narrowing field of interventions considered by NGOs and the adoption of ways of working that restricted their effectiveness (Wallace et al., 1997), while Tandon (2001) worried that the political economy of aid restricted the building of horizontal relationships with other actors in civil and political society. Many authors and practitioners worried that becoming public service contractors (Robinson, 1997) was tying NGOs into mainstream approaches more than ever before. This role was, if anything, stronger in the South than the North where the move of NGO professionals into government was often accompanied by programs (partly crafted by these same professionals) in which the NGOs became subcontracted service providers. This trend, also reinforced by donor demands and changing perceptions of the comparative advantages at the state, potentially put NGOs more radical role at risk.

Authors from different regions argued that it had become increasingly difficult for NGOs to offer little *d* development alternatives (Aldaba et al., 2000), though these general concerns were mirrored in regionally specific reflections. The new geopolitical economy of nongovernmental aid left Latin American NGOs financially strapped, leading many to engage in these dominant projects in order to access resources, even knowing that this would compromise their mission and coherence as organizations (Bebbington, 1997; Foweraker, 2001). In several parts of Africa, NGOs were mobiliz-

ing to fight against legislation from governments that often viewed the sector with suspicion (Gariyo, 1995; Gary, 1996; Ndegwa, 1996), often without significant others in "civil society" to draw strength from. Indeed, many local NGOs, particularly in Africa, simply lacked the "power" to define either their own futures or development paths for poor people (Michael, 2004), alternative or otherwise. Again, though, it is important not to overstate the case. In Kenya, for instance, parts of the NGO sector have participated in the political changes that have occurred during the last 10 years (often at considerable personal and institutional risk, Kameri-Mbote, 2002). [12] In Bangladesh, politically radical NGOs, such as Proshika and GSS, shifted the balance of their work, reducing conscientization and popular mobilization activities and increasing large-scale microcredit. Arguably the shift from being an NGO to being a microfinance agency represented a significant diminution in ambition by at least some NGOs (Dichter, 1996). As Dichter (1997, p. 138) somewhat plaintively requested: "One can hope that the INGOs will eventually gain courage to come to terms yet again with the issue of development itself."

(d) Recent and contemporary alternatives

Not all shared the sense of pending institutional doom that was suggested by some of this literature—some NGO leaders questioned the tendency of Northern commentators to impute crises where they did not exist. Indeed, a decade later it seems that stories of their "coming" demise had been greatly exaggerated. Yet, NGOs have hardly become more robust, and pressures over the last decade—our *fourth period*—present an additional set of health threats, some more obvious, others less intuitive. This fourth period we date from the mid to the late 1990s until the present, with a persistent and public set of concerns about practice, direction, and focus of NGOs. It is a period in which NGOs have had to come to terms with their entry, at scale, into the reform agenda, as well as increasing diversification within the NGO sector. We draw attention to three apparent trends in this period that impinge directly on NGOs and the scope for building either systemic or reformist alternatives: the continued deepening of the democratization-cum-neoliberalization agenda; the increasingly dominant poverty agenda in international aid; and the relatively more recent, hugely pernicious, security agen-

da, itself coupled in strange ways with the poverty agenda.

(i) The current neoliberal order

With the creation of the WTO, the neoliberalization of social democracy, the end to global Communism, and the increasing tendency toward military enforcement of liberal democratic process, the joint project of liberal democracy and free trade seems to have become increasingly clear and consolidated in this latter period making it ever more difficult for NGOs or other actors to think or act outside of this neoliberal box. [13] This is particularly so because the box has incorporated much core NGO terminology around democracy, rights, empowerment, participation, poverty and livelihoods (Craig & Porter, 2006). At the same time, there are incentives to engage with—indeed, become *part of*—hegemonic forms of little *d* development, as these begin to look more attractive, or (perhaps more often) all that is possible. For example, positions on the microfinance debate now range from the claim that microfinance proves the potential of the market to be inclusive and to create opportunities for the poor, to those who recognize its weaknesses and seek to devise ways of "reaching the poorest," as with BRAC's approach. What is perhaps missing here is a more structural position, which would argue that microfinance tends to re-enforce and even exacerbate existing inequalities (e.g., Copestake, 2002).

The shift toward democratization and building the role of civil society has likewise brought many NGOs closer to the operations of mainstream Development. Accompanied by the scaling up of the participatory turn, this shift has offered some NGOs' unprecedented levels of access to at least part of the policy process, as for instance in relation to PRSP processes. But it also brings challenges, particularly concerning the capacity and legitimacy of NGOs to act as pseudo-democratic representatives of "the poor," and the risks of being associated with processes that may in themselves undermine broader democratic norms. There are real dangers that the participatory turn can and does obscure more legitimate and effective forms of democratic representation (Brown, 2004; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Bracking, 2005). Some NGOs, keen to secure their seat at the new range of tables open to them within "inclusive" policy processes, have been perhaps too keen to grasp and extend these channels, without thinking through the longer

term problems what this raises for public accountability in developing country contexts (Gould, 2005).

(ii) *The poverty reduction agenda and related shifts in NGO financing*

Closely related has been the new-found hegemony for "poverty reduction" within international development. The (very considerable) resources flowing from bilateral and some multilateral agencies to NGOs are increasingly bundled with this poverty reduction agenda, placing increasing demands on these NGOs to deliver measurable achievements in poverty reduction. While it is hard to contest the worthiness of such goals, this emphasis—especially with increased insistence on measurement and indicators—has the potential not only to rein in but also depoliticize the range of strategies open to NGOs in promoting development (Hickey & Bracking, 2005, pp. 855–856). There is at least some evidence to suggest that as aid becomes far more oriented to measurable poverty reduction, it has led NGOs away from relations with social movements, and toward more narrowly drawn specific targeted development improvements (Bebbington, 2005). In a similar vein, Jellinek's (2003) study of an anonymous Indonesian NGO shows the vulnerability of young agencies with relatively inexperienced staff to donor agency agendas (in this case on governance) despite attempts to realize progressive development strategies strongly rooted in local communities. Equally relevant is the emphasis of NGOs on service provision, rather than more innovative and/or radical work. The recent study of Lee (2005) on NGOs in Hong Kong highlights the tension for the NGO sector which on the one hand has been offered financial support from the state for poverty reduction and development strategies, and on the other has (in accepting this support) reduced the extent to which they exert pressure for more substantive change. She concludes:

> "In sum, under the limits of state funding regime and state constructed district administration, the activism of NPOs [nonprofit organizations] did not become a catalyst for a proliferation of neighborhood-based organizations, which would have been the basis for neighborhood democracy, and a strong sense of community ownership" (Lee, 2005, p. 63).

These changing donor priorities are also evident in South Africa where urban sector NGOs have seen significant closure and contraction—despite rising inequality and a growing housing backlog. Since 1994, international funding has been orientated to the state, and state funding to charitable activities rather than social justice organizations with the effect that NGOs have increasingly turned to contract work and fees for service (Planact, 2006). [14]

These trends—the deepening of both democratization and the neoliberal economic agenda in developing countries, and the onset of the poverty agenda—have thus begun to shift the political economy of development funding in ways that strengthen some roles and create new dilemmas for NGOs. Both the desire by donors to have more of international development work focused on large scale poverty reduction, and the advance of national government funding of poverty reduction programs in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, have led to a clear shift back toward the state. Here, NGOs become framed as public service contractors, with donor interest in funding more innovative activities—including those oriented toward systemic alternatives and challenging hegemonic ideas—concomitantly reduced. Thus, even as foreign aid flows have risen, the scope for alternatives has narrowed.

In some cases, there is competition from the private sector for these funds although there is some awareness of mixed results (e.g., the experiences with subsidized housing and shelter improvements in Latin America: Ferguson, 2002; Stein & Castillo, 2005). [15] Many argue that voluntary sector organizations in the North and the South have suffered from greater emphasis on cost recovery, charging for services, professionalized staff relationships, the dominance of competition and the rise of tenders (Townsend & Townsend, 2004; Wallace, 1997). Under wider shifts toward solving social problems through "public–private partnerships," there has been an increasing tendency to link commercial enterprise (profit, efficiency) and not-for-profits (community mobilization) (Fowler, 2005, p. 19). While this blurring between civil and market logics holds the potential to inject a stronger sense of the social within the corporate logic of the private sector and to provide greater resources for social programs, there is perhaps greater potential for the reverse to predominate, such that the "pro-market diversification of (NGO) relationships...is an erosion of their potential as agents of systemic social and political change" (Fowler, 2005, p. 1).

A further contemporary trend in funding has been the switch to direct funding of NGOs in

the South. While larger South-based NGOs and local offices of Northern NGOs have been successful in raising funds from these sources, smaller NGOs have less capacity to deal with the bureaucracy of bilateral agencies, suggesting that over time there will be more concentration in both the Northern and Southern NGO sectors. At the same time, new conditionalities on bilateral funds offered to Northern NGOs have placed additional constraints even on these more traditional sources of money. Some Southern NGOs complain that Northern NGOs are becoming more like bilateral agencies than nongovernmental partners, and indeed some within these Northern NGOs feel the same (Bebbington, 2005). The same is also said by emerging NGOs in the South when they are funded through the capacity development programs of big Southern NGOs. NGOs have struggled to adapt to this funding climate. Many spend considerable time chasing money that is not very useful to them. NGOs need considerable financial skills to manipulate this situation to their advantage, pursue an alternative agenda, and still be seen as competent.

(iii) *The "new" security agenda*

The third trend marking the most recent years has been the rise of the security agenda—not human or livelihood security but Western geopolitical security (Duffield, 2001). NGOs have long operated in the context of global conflicts not only as humanitarian actors but also as active promoters of system change, often in ways related to the political and social justice movements onto which the NGOs mapped: think, for instance, of the conflicts in Central America. However, the issues raised by conflict have changed significantly since Edwards, Hulme, and Wallace's (1999) comments concerning the roles that NGOs can and should play within conflict zones. In particular, the shift from conflicts organized *very broadly* around left/right splits to conflicts that include those framed by key actors in terms of Islamic/non-Islamic divisions leave some Northern NGOs in far more ideologically complex positions in which their existence as western organizations funded by powers viewed by others as hostile to Islam can complicate their relationships with groups and movements with whom they might usually have presumed to identify. At least in cold war Central America NGOs knew that their enemies really were their enemies. Today—to go back to our introduction—precisely because NGOs *are* part of

little *d* development, and *are perceived to be* part of it, they can end up being more alone and apparently more politically if not ethically compromised.

What is perhaps most relevant here is the different positioning of Northern NGOs on this issue (Fowler, 2005; Lister, 2004). Where some have either refused to work in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, or to accept bilateral funding from aggressor states to work therein, others have either applied a peg to their nose and followed what they perceive to be their mission despite opposing the war on terror, or taken the view that their humanitarian aims are compatible with the new imperialism (Lister, 2004, p. 8). This range of positioning reveals not only the extent to which the political economy of aid, and NGO dependency on official flows, limits their room for maneuver, but also the immense differences among NGOs in how they understand and approach the notion of pursuing "alternatives." For those unable or unwilling to extract themselves from the vagaries of big D, the character of the latest nexus between security and development means that the result is complicity in a wider form of little *d* that has little discernible link to a project of equity, social justice, and political inclusion.

(iv) *Initial NGO responses and challenges*

In the very broadest sense, these trends fall under the rubric of modern neoliberal globalization. While economies and geo-politics were always global in reach and exercise, some authors suggest that in the more recent times the tendency toward globalizing governance of both national and everyday processes, and even of life and death, has become more marked—and that NGOs are both part of and complicit in these practices (Duffield, 2001; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). Simultaneously, these trends present NGOs with new challenges and opportunities.

One manifestation of this is the increased weight given to advocacy by some NGOs, both international Northern NGOs (e.g., Oxfam International, Anderson, 2000) and Southern NGOs (for instance the Associación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción, ALOP). This reflects a recognition that in the face of such powerful forces, local level project interventions cannot constitute alternatives of any significance or durability, and that changes to policy and wider norms are required if viable alternatives are to be built. Such NGO advocacy has often been transnational in character,

with pressure placed at various points along commodity, policy, and other chains—from the point of production, up to the arenas in which loans are agreed, shareholders meet annually, and products become international consumption goods. [16] In other instances, it is issue based—as in the more recent alliance among UK NGOs (the Working Group on Climate Change and Development) that seeks to build a multi-level lobby to increase pressure on states to address global warming with a developmental agenda. This shift to advocacy can be seen as being a way to "square the circle" between little *d* and big *D* with NGOs responding to program opportunities while also campaigning to address structural issues. Although an example of how NGOs read and engage with the globalized character of both big *D* and little *d* development, there still remains a risk here that the local and the tangible will become lost: as a Ugandan NGO leader warned when ActionAid shifted to a policy focus "…and when we ask villagers what ActionAid does they will tell us "oh, they just talk."

Furthermore, the move toward advocacy is bound up with another acute challenge for NGOs, that of representation (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2000). As international (or Northern) NGOs undertake activities at increasing distance from the "problem," there is a real possibility that they will advocate for solutions that are not those sought by more locally-based NGOs and community organizations. This dilemma is perhaps particularly pressing for Northern NGOs, but is also serious for those in the South facing social movements who question the right of NGOs to assume such positions and occupy such slots in political debate. Even those movements that have some claim to be legitimate as representatives of the poor, such as Shack/Slum Dwellers International, face a continual internal challenge and questions about how such participation can demonstrably add to tangible improvements on the ground, whether alternative or not. Finally, as Harper (2001) illustrates, NGO experiences have tended to identify the complexities of advocacy work and the difficulties of ensuring effectiveness, rather than identify simple strategies to achieve substantive progress. The Earth Summit of 1992 demonstrated to NGOs that it was possible to win arguments but still not further progressive agendas, and the same concern persists today. Indeed, advocacy still presents relatively few challenges to global systems through which power is exercised, and when challenges are made, they seem to receive little attention.

4. ON BEING ALTERNATIVE: NEW RELATIONSHIPS, TRANSFORMING IDEAS AND TARGETING LITTLE *d* DEVELOPMENT

In a chapter focused in part on the links between NGOs and ideas in development, Hulme (1994) noted that NGO staff working in the 1970–80s were well versed in the radical writings of Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky, both of whom tried to uncover underlying structures of oppression within the dominant order. [17] Today, bookshelves in NGO offices are perhaps as likely to display sector-specific, less politicized and more technocratic texts (e.g., Fowler, 1997, 2000b), reflecting the deep changes in both the character of NGOs and the intellectual world around them (Lewis, 2005). Some commentators even suggest that the range of available development alternatives has become circumscribed to a simple dichotomy between the economistic neoliberalism of the IMF and the UNDP's human development approach (Pieterse, 1998). However, this claim is problematic, both in terms of its reading of development alternatives [18] and of NGO engagements with such alternatives. In particular, it understates the nuanced ways in which some NGOs have tried to elaborate new ways of being an NGO while also arguing that the business of alternatives, too large and important a task for NGOs alone, must necessarily involve other institutional arenas, particularly the state. [19] Yet, a Gramscian reading of state–civil society relations would suggest that the agency required to underpin counter-hegemonic alternatives is highly likely to require actors from outside the state as well as within it.

In this final section then, we consider some of the critical implications for NGOs of revisiting the notion of alternative development, as discussed here in terms of a focus on development as an underlying historical process, and through understanding the role of civil society in Gramscian terms. Although necessarily selective, we focus on three areas as being particularly important, namely, the types of relationships through which NGOs might reclaim a role in promoting both reformist and radical alternatives; their role in forging counter-hegemonic alternatives through the struggle over

and for progressive ideas; and finally, on the little *d* focus of such efforts.

(a) *NGO pathways to reforming "D"evelopment: relationships beyond the sector*

That NGOs must develop close working relationships with a range of *other* actors is critical for both reformist alternatives, as well as more radical systemic alternatives. Thus, while one of the most noted examples of reformist "alternative development" success in recent years—participatory budgeting in Brazil—involved NGOs, most of the key actors have been leftist political parties, civil society activists, social movements and church-related organizations (Abers, 1998; Cabannes, 2004). The history of radical societal change also demonstrates that either developmental states and/or governments in alignment with broad based social movements have led transformative projects (whether toward greater equity, social justice, and political inclusion or toward [neo]liberalization and privatization) *far* more than have NGOs, think tanks or charities (Clark, 1991; Houtzager, 2003; Leftwich, 1995; Tilly, 2004). The participatory budgeting example illustrates the argument that one NGO route to large scale alternatives is through influencing the interventions of other actors, both through direct engagement and by providing alternative models of intervention. The work of BRAC on primary education in Bangladesh constitutes another example of NGOs offering genuine alternatives to the state in terms of public service provision (Nath, Sylva, & Grimes, 1999). The Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia also reflects a policy adoption of prior NGO led experiments in participatory developmental planning (Kohl, 2003), but one carried out by a leftist political party intent on transforming the basis of citizenship in a context of racially determined exclusion (Jeppesen, 2002). While such examples are relatively scarce, casting doubt both on NGOs ability to innovate as well as on many states' willingness to pursue significant reforms in the policy process (e.g., Fowler, 2000b), they point to ways in which NGOs have been embedded in larger social processes that ultimately take form in broad based policy and political change. Some NGOs have been the think tanks or laboratories of broader political movements—a form of ministries in waiting—whose products scale up (at least partially) once the movements ascend to formal government power.

Another route to reform is through working within mass movements with the understanding that politics responds to the (often electoral) effects of mobilization rather than to any professional reform competence. Indeed, there appears to be a growing interest in building alliances between mass movements and NGOs that can strategically influence candidates, politicians, their professionals, and bureaucrats (e.g., Shack/Slum Dwellers International). UK NGOs, for instance, have become increasingly aware of their need to reach out to new constituencies who do not necessarily equate NGO activity with the broader and fundamentally political goals of achieving global social justice (Lister, 2004). In these instances, NGOs tend to work with movements to secure their own spaces, rather than to occupy spaces opened by the state—a process which may be less prone to clientelistic practices (Appadurai, 2001; Delamaza, Villar, & Bebbington, 2006).

Other alliances engage actors beyond social movements. The basis of many NGOs in class, religious and party political institutions, and networks that do *not* derive primarily in the popular sectors further fosters such a tendency. Moreover, the shifting character of global capitalism and the increased involvement of corporate actors in big *D* development has increasingly presented NGOs with the tricky question of whether or not and how to engage with such actors. Can NGOs make the required critique concerning the injustices of different capitalisms, and then engage constructively with its authors to promote more just forms of both little *d* and big *D* development? A diverse range of NGOs are testing this ground, from IIED's decision to take up invitations to work with the corporate sector around issues of paper production, to NGOs in Peru who, having historically offered trenchant opposition to extractive industries, have now *also* begun to open links with both the mining sector as well as political parties with a view to finding a dialogical pathway to reform. Who reforms who in these processes remains far from clear. Another strategy has been to build relationships with consumers, with a view to shifting consumer ideas about the type of little *d* they aspire to—the hope being that changes in consumption will then lead profit making strategies to follow environmentally clean and developmentally respectable production processes. This has most clearly been the strategy of those NGOs working on fair and organic trade, and this returns to the role of NGOs as educators

and opinion formers, a theme we develop below.

The implication of much of the foregoing is that how far, and in what way, NGOs are able to contribute to the reclaiming of development as an alternative project will depend very much on their ability to build relationships with progressive actors operating in the state, in political parties, in social movements, and in other domains. This echoes Fowler's (2005, p. 7) suggestion that "the coming years are likely to see a greater focus on the complicated interface between civil society and political society, such as political parties and elective and legislative processes," and marks a somewhat belated realization within the NGO literature that more complex engagements with politics are required (Houtzager, 2003). This process will not be without difficult challenges and reversals, not least around issues of co-optation, the dilution of social energy and reconciling particularism with broader political projects (Hickey & Bracking, 2005, pp. 860–861). However, both civil and political society involve groups that accept they are in a long-term battle over hegemonic ideas against very powerful forces that will reorganize to ensure continued elite control of resources. Within this approach, NGOs may sometimes (often?) have to accept that they have little power except that which is generated by being a convenor. Here, NGOs build alliances with more powerful groups and seek to respond to opportunities that emerge within these relationships; this involves placing an emphasis on processes that draw in pro-poor individuals and groups, and being essentially responsive to that process.

(b) NGOs, hegemony, and public opinion: engaging the struggle over ideas

"The formation and organization of public opinion within civil society are central to the generation of both a prevailing hegemonic system and counterhegemonic groups and movements" (Fontana, 2006, p. 72).
"No matter how much additional foreign aid gets pumped through the international system, NGOs are unlikely to get very far unless they recognize that there are much bigger issues at stake. This is nothing less than a battle for the soul of world politics, and NGOs need to decide which side they want to take" (Edwards, 2005).

For Gramsci, "public opinion" formed the key point of connection between civil society and the state, in that it is through influencing public opinion that dominant groups are able to forge hegemony and legitimize particular political projects (Fontana, 2006). The relevant "instruments of hegemonic persuasion" will vary between contexts, and include the press, educative institutions, interest and pressure groups, traditional and religious leaders, and so on. A key question, then, concerns the extent to which NGOs are engaged with the public struggle for ideas and influence over the direction of public thinking on development or the "good society." Today, the struggle over development ideas is more than ever one that takes place at international and global levels, both in terms of struggles within "global" civil society, and struggles that are fought within the polities of the global North. For example, the project of interventionist big D Development is itself under attack from conservative NGOs, especially in the United States, who have proven to be very effective in getting their ideas into the public realm and onwards to policy influence, both domestic and foreign. Against this, initiatives such as the "Make Poverty History" perhaps reflect a strategy to engage alternatives at the level of foundational ideas rather than projects, and of making the critical point to a broad audience that poverty can be solved, rather than focusing all their efforts on trying to solve it themselves (Pearce, 1997).

Of course, many NGOs have long been involved in the production of development knowledge, and some have also engaged in its contestation in public spaces. Often, however, these public spaces have been relatively reduced in scope, limited to a particular project or plan-specific debate (despite increases in the capacity to distribute such information through the Internet). This reduces the likelihood that such contestation spill over into more broadly reaching changes in societal thinking on "d"evelopment. Also, there has always been the risk—encapsulated too often by the more recent role played by NGOs in PRSP consultations—that this knowledge brokering role ends up assuming a particularly controlled and instrumental form in which the NGO essentially arbitrates public opinion between civil society and the state. More seriously, perhaps, the capacity of the NGO sector to generate strategic, "evidence based" (to use current jargon) counter-hegemonic knowledge has become increasingly curtailed in recent years. Part of this is because many new democracies are still not democratic enough to accept the voicing of such strategic counter-hegemonic knowledge; and part is also because funding has moved away from

precisely these types of knowledge production in the race to support "one more" poverty reduction project. Meanwhile, certain hegemonic donors *have* proved adept at funding research organizations that re-enforce the dominant position on neoliberal economics and thin forms of procedural democracy (e.g., Hearn, 2001).

There is scope here to build a number of alternative approaches. Social movements play a central role in challenging dominant views and expanding the discursive space for considering alternative ideas of little *d* development. Yet their success in doing so is clearly enhanced when they work with NGOs that have technical and intellectual capacities to help generate the knowledge to contest these spaces—a relationship in which the NGO can just as well be understood as a social movement organization (Mitlin & Bebbington, 2006). Moreover, it is this intellectual contribution that may enable NGOs to bring actors together with some legitimacy, in the convening sense noted above. NGOs can add real insight to local grassroots and political strategies by broadening horizons and helping people learn and see things differently. At other times, their capacity to make links to and synthesize other experiences means that they define the boundaries within which alternatives can be discussed (and it is for this reason that research-based NGOs in particular are able to take on a convening role). To undertake this role convincingly, however, NGOs will sometimes also need to implement big *D* Development—in the same sense that the best advocacy work done by NGOs often draws on their operational experience. However, they would not be doers in essence; the more successful alternative models avoid getting drawn into operational roles precisely because these increase administrative burdens for NGOs that divert them from thinking and acting strategically. [20]

(c) NGOs and alternative "d"evelopments

The wider goal of these proposed directions for NGO futures—of pushing to reform the big *D* Development interventions of other actors and devising strategies to transform the foundational ideas that underpin contemporary development—remains the task of realigning underlying processes of little *d* development toward forms of economies, societies, and polities capable of realizing fundamental goals of social justice. For example, the role that NGOs played in promoting democratization during the 1980s and 1990s as part of broader civil society movements constituted an effort to create a genuinely alternative form of politics. [21] Where NGOs engage with and support social movements and popular organizations that are demanding the extension of citizenship status and rights to marginal peoples—and doing so in ways that are broadly democratic as opposed to exclusive efforts to secure privileges for particular groups—they can claim to be deepening substantive forms of citizenship formation and democratization (Appadurai, 2001; Fox, 1994; Hickey, 2002). Social movements have also been critical to challenging various modes of economic accumulation within certain forms of capitalism—for example, offering direct alternatives in terms of property ownership regimes (e.g., landless movements in Latin America—with NGOs playing critical support roles as social movement organizations) (Mitlin & Bebbington, 2006).

To be successful, however, such moves require both an acute sense of timing and a depth of preparatory work that requires a continuity of both funding and commitment. Arguably the best NGO interventions, such as those referenced above, come from recognizing key moments within underlying development processes and framing interventions in supportive relation to the opportunities opened by such moments. Getting timing wrong can at best fulfill the prophecy of the Ugandan activist worrying about ActionAid's policy focus, and at worst risk disarticulation, persecution, and death of broader movements pushing for a more foundational change. All too often it seems unclear whether NGOs—or many academics within development—are capable of recognizing, reading, and engaging constructively with underlying processes of development. While the South African NGO activist Allan Kaplan lists "development knowledge" as the foremost NGO organizational capacity, he also notes that this capacity is rarely well developed (Kaplan, 2001). Indeed, while some of the foregoing might suggest that some NGOs are becoming more strategic and reflective in how they engage with little d development, they continue to be subject to great pressures pulling them in different directions.

These pressures notwithstanding, we have argued here that this struggle over little *d* development is central to any engagement with alternatives. A Gramscian notion of civil society is particularly helpful in this regard for it

emphasizes the centrality of hegemonic ideas in structuring the forms that d/Development takes at the same time as making explicit the notion that all actors are involved in fixing or challenging these hegemonic ideas. NGOs are then, by this definition, involved in hegemony and counter-hegemony, even when they are not even aware of this. More importantly, the implication is that when they are not so aware, they are most likely helping to further consolidate **Q1** broadly hegemonic ideas even when they think they are being different and making a difference.

5. UNCITED REFERENCES

Bates (2001), Korten (1990), Lavalle, Acharya, and Houtzager (2005), OECD (1988), Watts (2003).

NOTES

1. Hence, the first of the UK-based NGO conferences within the 1990s focused on the fairly noncontentious issue of scaling up, but the second was more of a challenge to the NGO community with a more critical look at relationships (linked to some scaling up strategies) and the issue of performance. For a review of these conferences, see Edwards (2005).

Q2 2. The risk is that the paper repeats the limitations of the more general normative turn that Lewis (2005) identifies as a source of much analytical weakness in writing about NGOs and development. We would argue, though, that all development studies is normative, and that what matters more is making one's normative position clear, and engaging it with a theoretical framework in such a way that avoids a normative commitment becoming a romanticized argument.

3. Polanyi (1957) actually talked of "active" rather than "civil" society.

Q5 4. As elaborated by Salamon and Anheier (1998) when they discuss the evidence for an against different explanation for the voluntary or nonprofit sector. They argue that the most persuasive theory is one which locates the development of any specific national sector within the broader political economy of that state.

5. For this problem in the environmental NGO sector, see Chapin (2004) and WorldWatch (2005).

6. This omits the deeper history to which Lewis refers. In addition, we do not specifically discuss the type of relief-oriented NGO that has historically evolved throughout each of our four stages, in direct relation to specific emergencies, as with the Sahelian drought of the 1970s, Hurricane Mitch, or the earthquakes in Gujarat.

7. Think for instance of the Gates Foundation, the Gordon Moore Foundation, and the Soros Foundation.

8. These are programs which offer to co-finance, often 50%, of Northern NGO project expenditures related to Southern activities. They self-evidently increased the funds available, and resulted in the closer monitoring of NGO perspectives, approaches, and experiences. The first took place in ADD.

9. Korten (1987, 1989) captures changing NGO perspectives within his four "generations" of NGOs and their evolving focus on relief and welfare, community development projects, sustaining communities linked to world systems, and NGO alliances with people's movements. This categorization, despite having widespread relevance, has a particular resonance with the Philippines in which he was working, and the efforts of the NGO sector to contribute to democratization.

10. As illustrated by Ndegwa (1996) in Kenya, NGOs tended to concentrate on social service provision rather than more overtly political strategies to secure pro-poor social change.

11. An argument that only helps explain so much—there are several experiences of adjustment under authoritarianism—for example, Chile.

12. As for instance in the bombing of Kituo cha Sheria's offices and the persecution of NCCK staff. Likewise in Peru, NGOs at the forefront of struggles around human rights and development have been the object of state pestering and persecution over the last two years.

13. Though note our earlier comments about difficulties in defining neoliberalism in the singular.

14. The parallel with what happened in parts of Latin America—and in particular Chile—is striking (Bebbington, 1997).

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15. Examples here include those housing programs that offer a subsidy and a role for intermediaries in using state finance for housing improvements and new build.

16. See for instance advocacy strategies around mining by Oxfam America.

17. By 2000, he found that none of the 40 plus participants on his NGO teaching module had heard of either Freire or Alinsky.

18. Pieterse positioned the World Bank as closer to the IMF on this continuum, but as moving toward UNDP, an adroit reading of the Bank's then incipient shift away from the Washington consensus in the aftermath of the Asian Crisis. However, one of several flaws with this approach is that it positioned social development as a genuine alternative to the mainstream neoliberal orthodoxy. However, as Midgeley's (2003) historical review of social development suggests, social development (as commonly conceived in the North) shares many of the same pre-suppositions as both the neoliberal agenda (e.g., individualism) and the interventionist development agenda (e.g., the belief in planning and social engineering), and so does little to challenge the basic tenets of mainstream agenda. A more worthy opponent here might be the neostructuralism and developmental statism of the ECLA/South Asian school, which can claim the most significant development transformations in the global south over the past 30 years (Gore, 2000). Importantly, this latter approach would seem to have little role for NGOs.

19. See Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2004) for some recent examples of such collaboration in addressing urban poverty.

20. This is a theme that has been particularly strong in our current work with research based NGOs in Central America and Mexico, an initiative support by the Ford Foundation and IDRC-Canada.

21. As did the role played by quasi-NGO social movement organizations within the US civil rights movement in the 1960s (Andrews, 2001; McAdam, 1988).

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