

Defining a Social Movement for Emancipatory Development

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I would like to take this brief opportunity to summarize tactical and philosophical lessons drawn from our seven-week study of social movement organizations (SMO)s. It is vital to me as a Development Practitioner who views Universal Human Rights as a *mere baseline* and holds the desire for real change coupled with full emancipation in my heart that I help dispel some mythologies and embrace a program fully in line with “emancipatory development”.

Emancipatory Development is the collective tactical blueprint by which the masses render the sources of their dependency obsolete, the violence of their oppressors is neutralized, and they emerge with full human capacity and agency to uplift their fellow humans.

The most nefarious victory of the global elites over the human masses was to remove the legitimacy of our vocabulary to *speak of change*. To keep billions on the precipice of survival requires a vast campaign of de-legitimization and historical revisionism as well as vile and periodic atrocity. Neo-liberalism and globalization itself are an exploitative construct to force an intellectual and tactical break between those fighting for freedom and those attending to the immediate Maslowian needs of billions of our poor. As if to disconnect acceptable from unacceptable change and sanitize the strategic action field of actors with a means to provide as they engage to resist. **The poor are poor because of overt political decisions made to pre-determine their non-development.** Hiding behind the veil of Human Rights is their open and acknowledged widespread violation. And behind the wool, the smoke screen of development is but a complex, vaguely sanitized version of colonialism.

The world’s 3 billion poor are victims of an organized structural violence perpetrated by the economic elites of the traditional hegemon powers. As we prepare to wage *peacefare*; as we prepare to organize and train for our total liberation, we must attempt to articulate a Social Movement ideology that incorporates the best of the historic freedom struggle with the most cutting-edge arsenal of anti-poverty development capabilities.

“Emancipatory Development” is both an ideology and a tactical framework in the service of the liberation of the poor. Those of us who are fighting for baseline Universal Human Rights and speak of *real* socio-political freedom must now embrace the tools of development cautiously as a supplemental mechanism to the tactics of non-violent resistance.

Development means nothing unless it is emancipatory, egalitarian, and led by the people it serves. It must also rely on and invest in the capacity of the masses to be their own agents of delivery, progress, and victory over oppression. We must fully break from neo-colonialist controls, “poverty entrepreneurship”, and measure all our work by its value in national struggles for human liberation. The poor are so poor because they are victims of a global economic system. A system which breeds technocratic dependency on “aid”, whose structural adjustments gut social systems and place control of national resources in the hands of multinational corporations. It is easy to identify our primary targets. There is not a government on earth without some culpability. “Development” means absolutely nothing unless it is completely

rooted in tangible victories of the poor over the sources of their poverty. We stake our legitimacy as a social movement on our ability to wed resistance fully with development.

In this overview of social movements, we began with theory. Why they form and theories on their success or failure. Drawing from this I bring attention to the “**Resource Mobilization Theory**” which states that **movements take preexisting organizations able to marshal resources of various types, and their synergy yields movement success.** *Charles Tilly* said that Social Movements are “sustained campaigns that make collective claims aimed at authorities.” *Sidney Tarrow* called them: “collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities.”

What is clear from the recent mobilizations of *Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Brazil, Bulgaria, Thailand, and Ukraine* is that mass mobilizations are most successful at resisting government repression when they can a) clearly articulate demands and b) mobilize the resources of pre-organized associations to sustain the movement's operations. That failure of all of these movements so far, even ones that have brought down repressive governments in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, is to have incorporated any development component that makes their confederation of SMOs, viable alternatives to the states they dismantle or assail.

In *Theory of Fields* we read that “**defection of economic elites is one of the most critical aspects to the success or failure of a social movement to seize power**” They cite the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1986 and the Somoza Regime in Nicaragua in 1979. There is a correlation between expanded social movement activity and expansion of state strategic action fields. Modern states are stronger by separating from economic and social bases, then forming alliances with the vital players of the major non-state fields. “Development” via the third (NGO) Sector and government aid is itself a strategic field to conquer. Social Movements for Emancipatory Development must in fact, make mastery of development and delivery of services more of priority than resistance to regimes they oppose.

In our case studies we learn the obvious strength of non-violent resistance, economic boycott, and mobilization out of intuitions of cultural relevance. In both the cases of the *American Civil Rights Movement* and the *Indian Independence Movement* we see the moral superiority and tactical relevance of non-violence. We read in these cases the **necessity of harnessing economic buying power away from assets owned by your oppressors.** We see that militarily it would have been disastrous for the Indian people to take up arms against England or the American Negro to fight the Federal government with arms (as the Black Panthers learned in 1968). Instead, both movements achieved considerable constitutional victory without arms. In modern-day Syria we can see just how quickly a non-violent pro-democracy movement can devolve into a protracted war with over 100,000 dead.

In our studies of Liberation Theology we examined the power of subverting traditional mechanisms of reaction and repression into new social gospels for change. We identify the power seen in Latin America via the Church and in Political Islam in the recent 2011 uprisings across the Middle East. Clearly Zionism is a profound example of utilizing a religious framework for geo-political ends. As is the Islamic Revolution in Tehran in 1979. It was used to topple the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti. I fully advocate that **the Movement continue to embrace the universal messages of justice found in the world's religions as long as no aspect of the movement will seek to impose a singular religious norm over communities not of that**

religion. Liberation Theology is so subversive because it conquers one of the elites' traditional pillars of control.

In our *Paulo Freire* readings, we examined humanization/ dehumanization; internalization of oppression; and understanding of the elite as divided, uncompleted human beings. Isolation of the mind, disempowerment, and mental slavery was his diagnosis of the oppressed. He spoke of the "false generosity" of philanthropy. And of how the poor live in an "ahistorical world"; a completely deterministic world that they cannot escape or total resignation about their plight. He states that "liberation is painful like childbirth" and that only via the direct empowerment of the people can we achieve political rights or social freedom. In agreement with this philosophy and that of Amartya Sen in "Development as Freedom," **Mass Capacity** is different from "State Capacity".

The most vital tool of a movement for Emancipatory Development is direct investment in the education and technical training of the masses to develop their own communities as they collectively determine. The concept of mass capacity is vital to the success of our movement because only by achieving self-determination can a people enjoy rights, development, or freedom.

In our readings on the anti-caste movement, we see the emancipatory power of abandoning imposed identity. We read about mass conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism. Forced to "act out one's oppression" via the caste rituals, millions are enslaved. Stopping the belief that you are inherently a slave goes back to *Paulo Freire*. Breaking one's "psychological isolation in an ahistorical world." It would not be a strategic social movement position to oppose Hinduism, which is the foundation of the Indian State. The conversion of millions to Buddhism is a profound example to the rejection of outsider-imposed identities that allow class and ethnic exploitations.

There is no cultural relativism to be respect to universal human rights, simply cultural paradigms that either can be understood and adopted (liberation theology) or rejected out of hand as the invention of an oppressor (Hutu/Tutsi).

In our cases on land reform of course, we go back to the most fundamental question of movement: what is your turf? What is your territory? What is *yours* as people? To what extent do 206 governments built nearly all by historic rapes and expropriations have legitimacy to declare some land yours?

I would argue that not one nation-state on earth has a legitimacy the masses should respect.

This movement cannot be defeated if it is universal in demands and universal in expectations. It cannot regard one last repressive regime standing to be acceptable. It cannot abide one single person living in starvation as an acceptable norm. It cannot have national aims. The reality of the nation-state experiment is that, in the guise of security, it usurped control and it built a global system where most of the species would be subjugated to the minority.

In our cases on resistance to apartheid, we see that just because a social movement can take state power does not in any way make it able to wield political power to the end of economic empowerment for its poor. I think it should be clear to us that violent revolutions and

non-violent revolutions do not improve the economic situation of countries' poorest citizens; in fact widespread violence almost certainly comes after every violent revolution. The aim is not to improve the existing state system. I would argue **that the primary aim of emancipatory development is to completely circumvent the state system and place tools directly in the hands of the people.**

It is historically clear that taking control of an instrument of mass coercion, i.e., the state, is not a successful means to use its power on behalf of its citizens. It has historically only fostered a new predatory elite.

We are often confronted with the apolitical generation raised post-Cold War that do not have an “ideological” paradigm to view world events. It is quite likely that due to historical revisionism and the previously discussed sanitization of political vocabulary for change, many young people in the West may actually believe that globalization is the face of progress. I would say frankly that little has changed since the days of colonialism except that direct rule has been replaced with proxy rule. I would go so far as to say that 3 billion poor and extreme poor also means 3 or 4 million more pliable workers that can be utilized in the global supply chain. Except right now it is not necessary to mobilize 6 or 7 billion workers; half will suffice, and the other may hover on the brink of ruin as a reserve. This is not about economics as much as it is about control because even in the hegemon and metropol nations percentages are starving, percentages working nearly cradle to grave, and a tiny controlling elite. The fallacy of our entire “Development Enterprise” thus so far is to pretend, to trick ourselves, that the governments were acting in good faith. If Development is not an instrument of political power, then it is simple charity. The poor do not need our manipulative carrots and their governments’ sticks. They are not empowered via your charity. We reject that dichotomy that aid is either politics or charity. It’s always politics. It’s got to stop being charity. We have to divest our development from states and put it squarely into people.

The slogan of our entire movement is simply to “teach a person to fish.” With one arm of the movement we strike back at the violators of human rights and with the other we build up the global capacity, the mass capacity of the people to secure their universal rights and more. This will not come from mobs in streets, from civil disobedience or rifles. We will bring our oppressors to their knees by illustrating their irrelevance. A free people can teach their children to read, tend to their people’s health, and operate the means of development needed by a community. Let it be clear. The liberation of a people comes not from the barrel of a gun but in via control of the means of development; the schools, the hospitals, the civil service, sanitation, and all other trades that by their nature promote self-determination and the public good. And any development practitioner who is not working to build that mass capacity; they are poverty profiteer, a bright-eyed idiot, or worse, **a dirty collaborator** perpetuating the system that keeps so many destitute.

I did not come here to plant trees or play with kids in orphanages, though these are important tasks. I came here to join a movement. And if one does not exist in true coordination, then it is my goal to open the lines of communication.

