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Organizational practices of social movements and popular struggles: understanding the power of organizing from below

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Organizational practices of social movements and popular struggles: understanding the power of organizing from below

This special issue call for papers departed from the recognition that the study of social movements (SMs) in the field of organization studies (OS) has been largely influenced by theories constructed to analyze business organizations and their interactions with formal and informal SM organizations (SMOs). It was also informed by our own trajectories, represented by our individual and shared academic work and activism as well as by the learning process we have undertaken together with the participants of a series of conference streams we have organized over the past few years[1].

The hegemonic OS approach has been to construct a theoretical model and then apply it to a largely passive object (SMs). As a consequence, OS has remained relatively blind to the multiple and contested processes of organizing and the knowledge produced in the organizational practices from below. Nilsen and Cox (2013, p. 73) define SMs from below as “collective projects developed and pursued by subaltern groups, organizing a range of locally-generated skilled activities around a rationality that seeks to either challenge the constraints that a dominant structure of needs and capacities impose upon the development of new needs and capacities, or to defend aspects of an existing, negotiated structure which accommodate their specific needs and capacities.”

The notion of organizational practices from below is inspired by the work of Rauber (2003), who coined this expression[2] in her discussion of the relationship between SMs and political representation in the Latin American context. According to her, no organizational instance can substitute the protagonists of transformations, i.e. the organizations that are being built in popular social struggles are not the subjects of political change, but mere political and social instruments. For the organization not to superimpose itself on the subjects of the transformative action, it is necessary to break with the hierarchical practices of command and control (Sutherland *et al.*, 2014) and produce plural collectives, in which practices that confront and overcome alienation are formed and established:

Building and developing horizontal practices and relationships at the organisational level, in thought and in action, is a component of the utmost importance, especially if we consider that the process of organic-political construction also includes the formation of a new mystique, which is strengthened and fruits when there is no difference of principles between the form of organisation, the functioning and the driving practices between the leaders and the bases. [...] With elitist and authoritarian vertical practices it is impossible to build organisations based on the democratic criteria of participation from below (Rauber, 2004, p. 12).

Building organization from below means having a conception and formulating a course of action that articulates all those involved in the process. The expression “from below” does not allude to a geometric location, although it does indicate a political-social position from which the construction of power occurs, putting the participation of those below in a central, protagonist position (Rauber, 2002).

It is necessary to say that the academy’s blindness mentioned above is not a privilege of OS. According to Cox and Fominaya (2013, pp. 7-8), “anyone researching social movements (SMs) will find themselves hearing or reading a near-identical account, often repeated word-for-word, of how the discipline came to be.” They continue: “it is a tale of the bad old days of collective behaviour theory, followed by the rise of resource mobilization theory, the addition of political opportunity structure, the encounter with (‘European’) ‘new social movement’ theory



(NSMT) and the arrival of framing theory.” This “origin myth,” as the authors name this account, represents the “uncritical translation of US exceptionalism (the historical weakness of the political left and labour movements).”

The specificity of our field, which makes it even more susceptible to the influence of this dominant account, is explained by the critical account of the origins of social movements theories (SMTs) provided by Misoczky *et al.* (2008). They demonstrate the strong influence of approaches constructed to analyze business organizations; and that theories identified with North American SMTs orthodoxies share common ground with OS orthodoxies. In the following paragraph, we briefly present some of the evidences presented by Misoczky *et al.* (2008).

According to McAdam and Scott (2005), in the mid-1960s, a group of young scholars (including Gamson, 1968; Tilly and Rule, 1965; Zald and Ash, 1966) began to formulate arguments to account for social unrest, converting the earlier focus on collective behavior to one on collective action, SMs and SMOs. Most of this work employed an institutional perspective and reframed the view of protests and demands for reform from one of reactive individual behavior (Smelser, 1962) to one involving instrumental action, mainly focusing on the political process and specifically two mechanisms: resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) and political opportunities (Tilly, 1978). In the 1980s, the NSMT emerged in the European context to analyze movements that, in a period defined as post-industrial society, organized around issues such as ethnicity, sexuality, environmentalism, pacifism and human rights. The main concerns were related to identity, culture and meaning (Touraine, 1985; Melucci, 1989). The decades that followed witnessed theoretical developments that attempted to approximate these two branches, such as the influential work of Tarrow (1998). For him, SMs emerge and spread in response to political opportunities and, in the sequence of events, create new opportunities and possibilities for the conformation of new identities (McAdam *et al.*, 2001). Complementing that work, McAdam *et al.* (1996) introduced the cognitive mechanisms-based approach, known as the “framing process”, to analyze the importance of socially constructed and shared ideas (Zald, 1996). In these approaches, it is easy to recognize the importance given to environmental factors and institutions to the organization and success of SMs. Misoczky *et al.* (2008, p. 12) also argue that a “theory abstracted from capitalist organizations within the North American context in last the century is being used to explain contemporary social movements, many of them anti-capitalist and in different contexts”. The authors go even further, showing the process of appropriation of SMTs by business-oriented scholars, using SMs’ practices to propose models and instruments of management, homogenizing SMs and business enterprises under the label of “organizations” (Clemens, 2005).

In addition, in agreement with Goodwin and Jasper (1999, p. 34), we may recognize the capitalist liberal ideology as a key background for the hegemonic approaches to understanding SMs; much of the theorization was produced through an empirical focus on “movements pursuing political participation or rights, notably the labor and civil rights movements” in the USA. In turn, the NSMT approach originated mainly in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of movements that brought issues such as ethnicity, ecology, gender, etc. to the political agenda. As a consequence, the values and world vision informing these theoretical models are largely Eurocentric (Quijano, 2000), preventing fruitful dialogues with movements that struggle to transcend established social orders, world views and values.

As we have already mentioned, the study of SMs in the field of OS has been largely influenced by this hegemonic theoretical account. The implications of this include the predominant adoption of the reified definition of organization (present, for example in the term SMOs), which constitutes an obstacle to accepting the study of the organizational practices of movements as genuinely belonging to the field of OS; the adoption of analytical criteria such as success, performance, leadership and influence; emphasis on structural and

environmental aspects; and a tendency to value the reproduction or creation of new orders following institutional logics (Sutherland *et al.*, 2014; Spicer and Böhm, 2007).

Perhaps the best-known critique of SMTs is related to its “structural bias” (Sullivan *et al.*, 2011), i.e., the adaptation of SMs to structural constraints given by its social, economic or institutional environment, operationalized by the analyst using the main categories: political opportunities, mobilization of resources and framing. Critical theoretical and epistemological discussions on these models usually emphasize the imposition of structure over agency and the impossibility of the conceptual models to address different dimensions in the objects under scrutiny. According to Duayer (2015), this scientific practice is characterized by a tautological movement in which the researcher comprehends social processes through his own system of beliefs, ideological coordinates and ontological schema, looking for regularities and behavior patterns that fit his own presuppositions.

However, when we pay attention to what is happening in the real world, we find a plethora of organizational practices that cannot be properly understood unless we articulate the knowledge that is theoretically elaborated and the knowledge that emerges from below and remains, most of the time, restrained to the practices and spaces of struggle (Rauber, 2004; Böhm *et al.*, 2010). Misoczky and Moraes (2011) provide an overview of some of these practices: assembly-based decision-making practices; the constitution of deliberative bodies; delegation in order to implement decisions taken by the collective; collective decisions to establish rules of conduct; decision making through consensus; ensuring everyone has the right to speak; individual and collective responsibility, since decisions involve everybody and their consequences whether positive or negative affect everybody alike; responsibility for conducting one’s own activities without the need for control; the definition of a new cartography of organizational power through the dynamics of collective action and the construction of power from below. Sitrin (2005), writing in the Argentinean context – in which the term horizontality emerged from the organization of grassroots autonomous movements – defined it as a mode of political organizing characterized by non-hierarchical relations, decentralized coordination, direct democracy and the striving for consensus. Di Marco *et al.* (2003) summarize the principles of horizontality: direct participation, collective construction, tolerance for others and creation instead of reproduction of the routine and the previously learned. Misoczky and Moraes (2011) defined horizontal organizational practices as having the following characteristics: lead by obeying (*mandar obedeciendo* – a principle that originated in the Mexican *Zapatista* movement); direct participation; collective deliberation; authorized delegation; co-responsibility. Maeckelbergh (2014, p. 350) provided a softer definition, accepting some degree of hierarchy. For her, horizontality is “a term used by movement actors to refer to less hierarchical, networked relationships of decision-making and the creation of organizing structures that actively attempt to limit power inequalities.”

Fernandez (2006, p. 34) suggests that we should not forget to pay attention to experiences that do not correspond fully to the idea and that present numerous limitations. In the words of the author, “this simply means not assuming that these realities that *others* bravely try to build, must fulfil *our* most beautiful dreams.” As Dri (2006, p. 77) suggests, popular power from below, “is built every day, in meetings, in discussions, in community actions, in a word, in the new relations through which subjects are formed.” Horizontality, in turn, must be present “as a mobilizing utopia, as a beckoning horizon, as a requirement of achievement.” Even though it “can never be fully achieved,” having it as a requirement corrects the temptations towards domination that insist on reappearing. It also ensures the enhancement of the project and of the means found to make it feasible, as outlined by Dussel’s (2004) critical-strategic reasoning. It requires recognizing, unabashedly and without preconceptions, that “utopia and design, horizontality and verticality, direct democracy and representation, are dialectical moments of the totality that is the subject, be it individual or collective” (Dri, 2006, p. 129).

In another work, Moraes and Misoczky (2010) used an approach based on Freire's theory of antidialogical and dialogical action to analyze the organizational practices of a *piquetero* organization in Argentina, developing the concepts of antidialogical and dialogical organization. Freire (2005) often addressed the need for the conscious self-organization of the oppressed as a means for achieving their liberation. In his theory of oppressive action, he discussed the characteristics of antidialogical action: conquest – necessity for conquering the other in order to impose objectives; divide and rule – the oppressor minority must divide the majority in order to remain in power and halt, by any means (including violence), any action that could awaken the oppressed to the need for unity, organization, and struggle; manipulation – the dominant try to conform the masses to their objectives; cultural invasion – the cultural context of another group is disrespected by the imposition of world views, inhibiting the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. In contraposition, Freire (2005) developed a theory of dialogical action, which also has four characteristics: cooperation – social subjects meet in order to transform the world; unity for liberation – the leaders must dedicate themselves to an untiring effort to achieve unity among the oppressed and unity of the leaders with the oppressed; organization – it is not only directly linked to unity, but is a natural development of that unity, it is also the antagonist opposite of manipulation; cultural synthesis – cultural action, like historical action, is an instrument for overcoming the dominant alienated and alienating culture.

Needless to say that the study of SMs and popular struggles from below requires qualitative methods that are, first of all, respectful of the ethical and political liberating purposes. In the words of Cox (2017, p. 8), “it places the emphasis on the creative and reflective activity of ordinary people in their everyday struggle, and support strategies that proceed from this and take it further, rather than to place the emphasis on the writers vision.”

This implies the possibility of producing knowledge through research processes that articulate theory and praxis, that take the concrete reality as the starting point, that move from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, that share the aim of creating a theoretical content that is relevant and meaningful because it is attached to activists' everyday life and provides a co-constructed meaning of organizing processes (Malo, 2004).

Such approach to qualitative research includes a perspective on knowledge production in which the fixed roles of academic and activist are blurred. Following the proposition of Enrique Dussel (1974) for a methodology of liberation, we can name this approach as “analectics,” an attitude that requires the openness to think, to listen, to see, to feel, to taste the world from the perspective of the other (Misoczky and Dornelas Camara, 2015, p. 292); it is conditioned by humbleness and solidarity. Analectics allows one to recognize the existence of a politics of totality and the other. The “politics of the Other is an anti-politics, it is a politics of subversion and contestation,” since it challenges established hierarchies and legal truths. It proclaims the injustice and illegitimacy of the actual system in the name of a new legitimacy (Mendieta, 2001, p. 21). Alcoff (2011, p. 67) defines analectics as “an epistemology for the new revolution”: a decolonized epistemology that puts “at the centre not simply the objective conditions of global impoverishment and oppression, but the systematic disauthorization of the interpretive perspective of the oppressed in the global South”. The idea of analectics is driven “to get to a larger, more comprehensive, and more adequate understanding of all that is true concerning the experience of those whose experiences are most often ignored” (Alcoff, 2011, p. 71).

Having gone through the process of reviewing and selecting papers, we are very glad to present the four articles that constitute this special issue. Even though not all explicitly articulate the theme of organization, they bring to light the power of organizing from below and organizational practices as a means for transforming social reality.

When addressing the matter of organization, Dussel (2004) relates it immediately to reason and practice. One principle of his ethics of liberation is that of feasibility, the necessary

organizational praxis which comes from consciousness: “a deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as a historical reality susceptible to transformation;” “the awakening of critical consciousness leads to the expression of social discontent precisely because such discontent is a real component of an oppressive situation” (Freire, 2005, p. 85). Therefore, the emergence of consciousness demands critical intervention in reality; and the critical intervention demands organization. This is the moment Dussel (2004, p. 353) calls “critical-instrumental reason”. For him, the instrumental-strategic reason has a place in the ethical praxis of liberation: “we cannot fall into fetishisms; we cannot ignore the subaltern function of instrumental reason”. The problem resides when the feasibility criterion becomes an absolute principle. Dussel (2004, p. 353) provides a description of the principle of the ethical feasibility:

An action, an institutional or systemic norm, is ethically operational and concretely feasible if it complies (a) with the logical, empirical, technical, economic, etc., conditions, the possibility of which is judged by the following (b) [deontic] requirements: (b.1) ethical-material practical truth, and (b.2) formal-moral validity; within a range that goes from (b.a) actions ethically allowed (which are merely possible because they do not contradict ethical and moral principles), until (b.b) mandatory actions, which are “necessary” for the actualization of basic human needs (materially – the reproduction and development of life; formally – the participation of the affected by the decision-making).

This principle is ethical because it defines as necessary that all human action intending to be human and feasible must have a dutiful bond with the life of each subject. At the same time, it ensures the recognition of each subject as equal and free. In this process of recognition, however, it is also necessary to organize the praxis of liberation, taking into consideration the natural-physical and technical possibilities available at any historical moment.

Let us now introduce the articles in some detail, providing an overview of what is to come. The first observation is that they represent different approaches and are very interdisciplinary in nature. We have two papers more explicitly located in the field of OS, one from SMs and another from geography. They address the themes of organization, but sometimes more in an implicit manner, but all of them deal with qualitative research as a means for re-connecting action and theory and the knowledge produced from below. In the following paragraphs, we will present the articles in a dialogical fashion.

In “From state fetish to community fetish: a spatial analysis of 15M and Podemos in Spain,” Ibán Díaz-Parra and Beltrán Roca Martínez address the dialectics between state and community fetishism and have as main theoretical concept the notion of spatial projects, based on Henri Lefebvre and Neil Brenner. They focus on the transformation of spatial projects and strategies in three different moments: the consolidation of autonomist and new social movements (NSMs) in Spain after the 1980s; the development by the 15M movement of ephemeral territorialities, spatial practices, institutions and scales; the view of politics as being independent of the political arena of the state (community fetishism); and finally, the emergence of Podemos and multiple initiatives after 2014 that turned social unrest into the participation of activists in the state spatial project, responding to the limitations of community fetishism and the alternative spatial project in the context of social and political tensions of the Spanish crisis.

The authors provide empirical evidence for a key theoretical debate, defending that community fetishism (and autonomism) and state fetishism are two sides of the same reductionism, splitting politics from the broader social context and limiting the transformative potential of SMs. The limits of propositions such as Melucci’s (1999) autonomy of NSMs in relation to the political systems, Souza Santos’ (2011) view of NSMs as vital activities that create a new political culture and transcend the state through the effective participation of all citizens in the civil society space, and Holloway’s (2002) disseminated argument for changing the world without taking power, has been already

pointed out by many. In dialogue with some of these authors (Harvey, 2012; Dean, 2013; Swingedouw, 2013), Díaz-Parra and Roca Martínez include a key theoretical concept (spatial project) and concrete political events from the Spanish case in such a way that they contribute to go beyond the critiques already made.

The concepts of spatial practices and scales of action support the argument on the dialectics between community and state fetishism in the Spanish context. Lefebvre (1991, p. 49) defines spatial practices as the projection onto a spatial field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice. They express spatialized social relations that are always subjected to political practice, including the control and manipulation by the state: “the dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates [...], and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there”. However, despite – “or rather because of – “the management of space by the state, it carries within it the seeds of a new space, a “differential space” that “cannot be born unless it accentuates differences” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 52). Also drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) argument that all social relations are, at the same time, spatial relations, Hesketh (2013, p. 230) addresses the defence of the rights to land and territory through the creation of a differential form of space in Oaxaca and Chiapas (México). According to him, the “politicisation of space by subaltern actors and the demand to have the right to control and shape one’s lived environment is a profoundly democratic issue”.

We added these quotes because they help us to stress the relevance of Díaz-Parra and Roca Martínez’s theoretical options. At the same time, they support the understanding of the practices undertaken under the influence of autonomism – a spatial project based on radical democracy, self-management and the production of an alternative local scale where specific movement instructions (such as the local community, the social center, or the sovereign neighborhood assembly) operate, resulting in an extremely fragmented political space; and the fostering of a new political party (Podemos), an electoral expression of the forces unleashed by the 15M that expresses a radical change toward state institution and conventional politics. As part of this process, the authors tell us that a growing number of former 15M activists and the activists from other political groups who were disappointed with their organizations, joined the numerous *Círculos* (circles – local branches) of the new party, expressing great identification between the neighborhood assemblies of the 15M. However, there were important changes in the organizational practices, which became more formalized and centralized.

The authors provide a theoretical-empirical discussion of this process, presenting at the end of the article, the challenge of struggling against the state fetish without falling into the community fetish, as a key element to overcome the current situation of stagnation or even regression of transformative and antagonistic politics worldwide.

Regarding the contribution of the paper to the field of OS, we recognize an implicit definition of organization, similar (and partially[4] based on the same references – Lefebvre and Mançano Fernandes) to the one explicitly elaborated by Misoczky (2010, p. 50): “organization is the means to carry out liberating praxis through territorialized processes guided by the strategic-critical reason”. Regarding qualitative research, one of the contributions is the demonstration of the relevance of a militant and participatory methodology in the generation of knowledge on SMs from below.

Remaining in the Spanish context, but firmly located in the field of OS, Ruth Simsa and Marion Totter analyze, in “Social movement organizations in Spain – being partial as the prefigurative enactment of social change,” some organizations[5] founded or strengthened following the emergence of the 15M movement movement. The authors’ main concept is SMO and the theoretical contribution includes the appropriation of the propositions of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) on complete and partial organizations, showing a positive interpretation of partial organizations that can illuminate the analysis of organizational

practices that reject hierarchy and aim the political participation through self-organization and egalitarian structures. This is one of the contributions of the article: taking an established theory that defends the need of complete organizations, which includes all elements of formal organization such as membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions, the authors, based on the knowledge produced from below, that the denial of these aspects is precisely what defines the SMOs practices they studied.

Reinforcing the idea that organizations are a means to change society and in dialogue with anarchist approaches, they highlight the relation of these partial organizations with prefigurative practices. The reference to the term “prefiguration” is Boggs (1977), who refers to “the embodiment, with the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal”. Regarding this theme, we find it we find it important to remind ourselves that that the notion of prefigurative politics was very present in the context of class struggles early in the twentieth century. Rosa Luxemburg (1970) and Antonio Gramsci (1981), among others, confronted centralization and bureaucracy and defended the constitution of councils as organizations in the process of struggle and indications for organizational practices in the liberated future. In the context of the organizations studied, the prefigurative aspect would include non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian structures and radically participative decision-making practices, with relatively open membership and personal identity relationships.

The adoption of the concept of SMO by Ruth Simsa and Marion Totter is not in contraction with the critique we outlined above in this editorial for two main reasons. The first one is that our critique is directed at the use of this notion to address SMs as such, while the authors are studying formally organized processes from below closely related to SMs. The second reason is that, implicitly, the authors seem to indicate a prefigurative argument, moving from organizations to organizational practices. These two concepts are present throughout the paper. However, in our interpretation, the emphasis is on practices, in the process of organization, rather than on organizations as an entity. We regard this aspect as another contribution of the paper, showing the need of the continuous discussion of these inter-related concepts in the field of OS if we want to strengthen our contribution to the study of SMs.

Another important contribution of this article regards methodological aspects. Coherently with the idea of knowledge production from below, the authors choose grounded theory as an approach to generate theory from data, especially in the consideration of the activists’ view on organizational practices and societal goals. They used narrative interviews, because it allows for openness but also to use key questions. They performed 82 interviews and the analysis focused on the activists’ rationale and motivations for specific forms or organizing. They also had 30 incidents of passive participant observation in meetings and other activities and considered documents like resolutions, minutes, self-descriptions and articles in social media.

The next article is a theoretical one, written by researchers from the field of SM studies. In “Repertoires of knowledge practices: social movements in times of crisis,” Donatella della Porta and Elena Pavan claim that SMs contribute to produce social and political change through the elaboration and the experimentation of alternative epistemologies, that is, systems of ideas, theories and strategies about the status quo and how to change it to achieve movements’ aspirations. Their aim is to contribute to the discussion on the implications of movements in terms of challenging existing conceptions of democracy by further elaborating on how contemporary progressive SMs function as laboratories of democratic innovation. As some authors have outlined, these movements form collective spaces of knowledge production and contribute to produce social and political change. They not only impact activists’ biographies and/or generate policy or cultural change, the activists who produce them also elaborate and experiment alternative epistemologies.

The key concept of the article is “repertoires of knowledge practices.” Donatella della Porta and Elena Pavan provide further elaborations going beyond Tilly’s (1986) definition of repertoires of contention while articulating an epistemological approach based mainly on Sousa Santos (2003). Repertoires of knowledge practices are then defined as a set of organizational practices that result from and, at the same time, foster the coordination of disconnected, local and highly personal experiences and rationalities within a shared cognitive system able to provide movements and their supporters with a common orientation for making claims and acting collectively to produce social, political and cultural changes. From this standpoint, the repertoires of knowledge production are presented as a necessary complement to current cultural approaches. To advance their argument, the authors provide a few examples of how repertoires of knowledge production and transmission have been translated within recent progressive SMs fighting for global justice, against austerity measures, in solidarity with refugees as well as with feminist networks against online gender based-violence.

As a key contribution of this article, we should highlight the bridging of mainstream reflections on SMs and those developed within movements themselves. It is perhaps interesting that one of the main references of this article is Sousa Santos, which is also at the core of article by the Ibán Díaz-Parra and Beltran Roca Martínez’s mentioned above. We think that these differences regarding influential theories are very healthy and provide indications of much needed further debates. In the same direction, we would like to add another challenge for those of us interested in contributing to the study and organization of progressive SMs: to move beyond epistemology and to incorporate the ontological dimension. We agree with Cox’s (2017, p. 6) statement that “there is no safe place to stand within language or theory.” The distinct contribution of this materialist ontology to the study of SMs is that it demands that our academic critical practice be connected with the real world and concrete struggles. Some indications in this development could come from the early works of Roy Bhaskar (1970, 1986) and the late works of György Lukács (1978a, b, 2012, 2013).

Another contribution of Donatella della Porta and Elena Pavan is in the article’s conclusion, in which they remind us of the asymmetries of power between academics and professional researchers in their contact with activists. This is a concern shared by many of us, but it is worthy to mention it repeatedly, mainly in a special issue like this.

Finally, we have an article focusing specifically on qualitative research practices in the study of movements from below. Orestis Varkarolis and Daniel King develop the concept of responsive action research (RAR) in “Voicing researched activists with responsive action research.” Based on participatory action research, the research method they craft is designed for engaging with, and making the research produced of benefit to, those studied. This responsiveness has become an important feature of research from a critical perspective within NSM. RAR is more an ethos/attitude than a set of methodology offered to the engaged scholars who seek to offer ways of working that develop research which is both theoretically meaningful but done in a manner that is of benefit to practitioners.

The article is based on auto-ethnographic recollections of one of the authors (Orestis Varkarolis) following his long-standing involvement in alternative organizations in Greece and specifically in a horizontal worker cooperative that combines new forms of political struggle and employment as a response to the economic precariousness their members face. The reflections presented in this paper are very rich and provide insights into the experience of being researched and support for the crafting of the proposition of RAR, which emphasizes the importance for the researcher to listen and to be attentive to the needs and interests of the researched, to involve them as necessary, but to be mindful of the researched wider commitments and challenges as they perform their everyday tasks.

The authors situate themselves in the field of OS and specifically in critical management studies, but their contribution goes far beyond this field. As they state, by highlighting how researchers might forge more productive and mutually compatible relationships with research participants, they indicate the possibilities of fertile collaborations of mutual engagement and impact between researchers and research participants.

The articles in this special issue constitute a contribution both to the fields of OS and SMS, as well to the activists engaged in their everyday struggles. The papers engage with debates that are contemporary and very much needed today, addressing issues from the organizational and spatial practices of SMs to the relationship with the state apparatus and to epistemological and ontological dimensions. Methodologically, it is important to highlight that all papers address, even if indirectly, the way we research and interact with activists or activist researchers. We hope you, the reader, enjoy reading these texts and take this special issue as an invitation for further engagements with the organizational practices of SMs from below.

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Notes

1. Including: EGOS Colloquium 2016 stream on “Organizational Practices of Social Movements: The Power of Organizing from Below;” CMS 2015 “Towards a critical political economy of organization;” and LAEMOS 2014 “The Political Economy of Organization: Possibilities for Liberation and Alternatives”. We take this opportunity to thank all of those who participated in these working sessions, sharing their work, insights and contribution.
2. From the Spanish term “desde abajo”.
3. The name “15M” is derived from the mobilizations of May 15, 2011, which occurred in many major Spanish cities
4. A complementary reference is Dussel (2004).
5. The authors included nation-wide SMO, like “PAH”, the platform for mortgage victims; internationally-operating SMO like “Youth with No Future”, smaller SMO like “Protest-Grandparents”, soup kitchens, an advocate’s initiative, occupying hoses, a women’s center, a time bank.

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