Poverty, Solidarity, and Poor-Led Social Movements
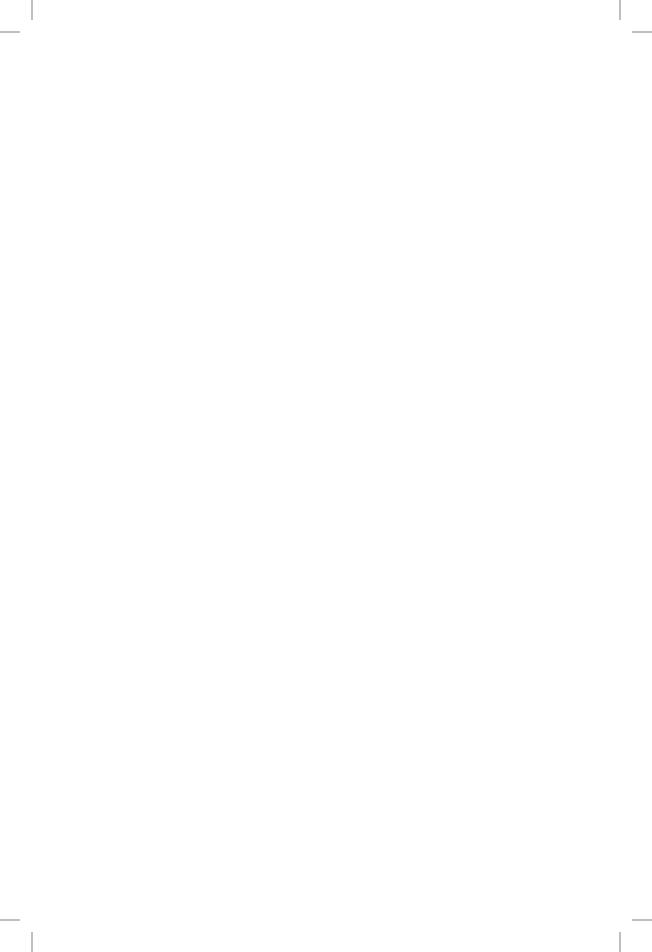
Poverty, Solidarity, and Poor-Led Social Movements

MONIQUE DEVEAUX

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Acknowledgments

This book project emerged out of a sense of frustration that philosophical discussions of poverty and global injustice rarely see poor people as agents of social change and justice. Learning about critical poverty approaches and the paradigm-shifting work of poor-led organizations and social movements in the global South, I was inspired to say more. While the struggles of anti-poverty groups are at the heart of this project, it nevertheless remains a work in normative political theory. I did not conduct my own fieldwork, but instead drew on the extensive literature on poor-led organizations and social movements; this includes research by social scientists and development practitioner-researchers (sometimes coauthored with activists), as well as poor movements' statements and publications. I am grateful that the knowledge of anti-poverty activists is accessible to researchers like me, and that there is an abundance of excellent ethnographic and comparative studies of antipoverty social movements.

Many of the arguments in this book were developed in public talks that I gave between 2010 and 2020. For their incisive questions and challenges, I am indebted to audiences at Western University, Carleton University, University of Groningen, Ohio State, CUNY Graduate Center, Free University of Berlin, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, Dalhousie University, Laurentian University, McMaster University, University of Guelph, University of Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University, and the University of Ottawa. The feedback provided by reviewers and editors for articles that I published in *The Journal of Moral Philosophy* ("The Global Poor as Agents of Justice"), *Ethics and Social Welfare* ("Re-evaluating Sufficientarianism in Light of Evidence of Inequality's Harms"), and *Political Theory* ("Poor-Led Social Movements and Global Justice") improved the arguments I make in these pages. Parts of the book draw very loosely on these articles—as well as on a chapter I wrote for in an edited volume, "Beyond the Redistributive Paradigm: What Philosophers Can Learn from Poor-led Politics," in *Ethical Issues in Poverty Alleviation*—but none of the chapters reproduces these earlier pieces.

Abbreviations

BF	Bolsa Família
CA	capability approach
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EA	effective altruism
FpV	Front for Victory
FTV	Federación de Trabajadores por la Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat,
GNT	grounded normative theory
HDI	Human Development Index
HPA	Homeless People's Alliance (South Africa)
IFAS	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INGO	international NGO
LSF	Liberté sans Frontières
MDGs	Millennsium Development Goals
MPI	multidimensional poverty index
MST	Landless Rural Worker's Movement (Brazil)/ *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NK	Nijera Kori (Bangladesh)
NSDF	National Slum Dwellers' Federation (India)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPA	participatory poverty assessment
PT	Pamoja Trust (Kenya)
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
RCT	randomized controlled trials
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association (India)
SPARC	Society for the Protection of Area Resources Centers (India)
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UPFI	Urban Poor Fund International
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
WSF	World Social Forum

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The Missing Agents of Global Justice

In October 2017, the government of the Indian state of Odisha passed leg-
islation granting land title to residents of an estimated 250,000 households
in 2,500 slums across the state, as well as guaranteeing essential services like
sanitation and access to finance for dwelling construction.[1] The Odisha Land
Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, impacting some 1.2 million people, also man-
dated that existing and newly created slum dweller associations would have
standing in processes of community-led urban planning and development,
working alongside local government and nongovernmental organizations
(NGOs). This land titling and slum upgrading intervention, reputedly the
world's largest, would not have happened were it not for the activism of slum
dweller movements in Odisha and across India. These groups have been orga-
nizing residents of informal settlements for decades, empowering them to
demand their social entitlements as well as greater inclusion in development
and social planning. Yet despite their success in Odisha elsewhere around the
world, the justice struggles of these and other poor-led movements have not
figured prominently in normative discussions of how best to reduce poverty
and global injustice.

I argue in this book that if moral and political philosophy is to contribute
to efforts to end severe poverty,[2] it must put poor peoples' organized struggles
at the center of normative discussions about poverty and its alleviation.
Since the publication of Peter Singer's classic essay on famine,[3] philosophical

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[1] Under the Act, the land titles granted to households (in the name of both spouses) can be used
as collateral for credit purposes, and are heritable, but are otherwise non-transferable (i.e., cannot be
privately sold). Dwellers also have access to affordable finance for home construction and upgrading.
See Shyla Singh, "Odisha's Land Titling Attempt: A Step in the Right Direction," August 14, 2018,
Observer Research Foundation: https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/43291-odishas-land-titling-
attempt-a-step-in-the-right-direction/.

[2] As David Hulme explains, whether we choose to speak of *reducing*, *alleviating*, or *eradicating* pov-
erty implies somewhat different policy approaches. See his *Global Poverty: How Global Governance
Is Failing the Poor* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010), 10–12. I generally prefer to use the terms "pov-
erty reduction" and "poverty eradication," reflecting the compromise terminology struck during
the United Nations' processes for determining the Millenium Development Goals and Sustainable
Development Goals.

[3] Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972): 229–43.

analysis of global poverty and inequality has centered on the moral claims and duties that arise in response to severe and chronic needs deprivation. Ethicists and political theorists have debated whether states, institutions, and affluent citizens in the global North have moral responsibilities to assist the distant poor; if so, what these are; what grounds them; which circumstances or competing obligations may limit them; and how designated agents might be motivated to take up their duties. These questions have yielded a range of normative approaches to poverty, from beneficence-grounded arguments for increased development aid and charity, to human rights- and capabilities-focused remedies, and proposals for institutional change. Yet almost invariably, it is the individuals, governments, financial institutions, and NGOs of rich countries that are assumed to be the "agents of justice,"[4] on grounds of either culpability or capability (or both). The justice claims, goals, and practical contributions of poor-led social movements are not seen as relevant to moral analysis of poverty's harms, or of what a just approach to eradicating poverty demands.

My book rejects this familiar ethical framing of problems of poverty and inequality, and argues that *normative thinking about antipoverty remedies and responsibilities needs to engage closely with the aims, insights, and actions of poor-led organizations and social movements.* Chronic poverty is partly about the subordination and dispossession of the poor; to exclude them from shaping antipoverty solutions, therefore, is to perpetuate their social-political domination and epistemic oppression. Poor-led organizations and social movements, moreover, resist status quo approaches to poverty reduction insofar as they identify and consistently target the social relations, institutions, and processes that disadvantage and oppress poor people. As the Covid-19 global pandemic made plain, racialized, precariously employed, working-class, and migrant groups suffer from massive disparities in health outcomes and income that are a direct result of unjust structural inequalities—in healthcare, housing, employment, and access to social protections—at multiple geopolitical scales. Indeed, the consequences of the pandemic tragically illustrate

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[4] See Onora O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," *Metaphilosophy* 32, no. 1–2 (2001): 180–95. In an essay on O'Neill's work, Simon Caney argues that "victims of injustice may also act as agents of justice" amidst conditions of "poverty and coercion"; see Caney, "Agents of Global Justice," in *Reading Onora O'Neill*, ed. David Archard, Monique Deveaux, Neil Manson, and Daniel Weinstock (London: Routledge, 2013), 144. Caney also discusses the question of the poor's agency in his "Responding to Global Injustice: On the Right of Resistance," *Journal of Social Philosophy and Policy* 32, no. 1 (2015): 51–73. I discuss O'Neill's view of the agents of justice in Monique Deveaux, "The Global Poor as Agents of Justice," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2015): 125–50; as my article first appeared advance online in 2013, it does not engage with Caney's 2013 or 2015 essays.

the key claims of antipoverty activists everywhere: namely, that poverty is ultimately driven by vast inequalities of power and resources,[5] and that justice requires structural— transformative—social change. From land occupations by displaced and landless workers in Latin America to slum dwellers' struggles to secure a voice for the poor and lay claim to their "right to the city,"[6] poor-led organizations and movements seek to transform the relations and structures that exploit and subordinate poor people.

By studying and engaging with poor-led social movements, theorists can help to rethink normative conceptions of responsibility vis à vis poverty in ways that acknowledge the central importance of poor people as agents of justice. The processes through which poverty responses are decided upon and implemented, and the voices that shape antipoverty strategies, matter. As political theorist Brooke Ackerly argues, this means "*What should we do?* [in response to global injustices] is the wrong question, or at least an incomplete version of the question"; instead, "we should be asking . . . *How should we take responsibility for injustice?*," where this is understood as "a political question about the impact that we want our way of taking responsibility to have on injustice, our political community, and our relationships with those in struggle."[7] One of the most important ways one can take responsibility for injustice is to support the social movements of justice-seeking people. But while the belief that those most affected ought to direct the path of change—best encapsulated by the slogan, "nothing for us without us"—has gained acceptance in connection with LGBTQ struggles, the disability rights movement, and campaigns against racist oppression, it is not yet established in philosophical discussions of poverty alleviation. This is perhaps due to a concern that people living in poverty are too concerned with daily survival to advocate for reform, or that any implication that they should do so is somehow perverse. Yet far from shifting an unwanted burden onto the

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[5] Poor-led movements' demands for structural change are reinforced by evidence that middle-income countries that have seen some economic development and growth yet unevenly distributed gains have rising numbers of people living in poverty. Sabina Alkire et al., *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019: Illuminating Inequalities* (United Nations Development Programme Report and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2019), 1.

[6] This phrase, attributed to French sociologist Henri Lefebre, is widely used by urban social movements around the world. David Harvey, in his essay "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (2008), explains that the right to the city concerns not merely claims for urban resources, but the right to collectively shape all of the social scaffolding of urban life; as he notes, "it is a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization" (23).

[7] Brooke Ackerly, *Just Responsibility: A Human Rights Theory of Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), xii.

shoulders of those least able to bear it, self-organizing poor communities and movements in both the global South and North have long demanded—as a matter of justice—that they be accorded a central role in envisioning and implementing anti-poverty strategies. Typical in this regard is this statement by the *Muungano Alliance*, a movement of Kenyan slum dweller community groups (and its support organizations) representing over 100,000 people living in informal settlements:

> We believe that slum communities should be at the centre of city and national development. Slums and slum residents are not an anomaly or problem, they are a vital part of the city and how it functions. Muungano [members] volunteer to improve their settlements—challenging the idea that slum residents are only passive beneficiaries of city plans and development projects. . . . Muungano federates around and supports groups on issues that *affect their entire settlements*—such as securing rights to the lands they occupy, or improving housing and delivery of services like water, sanitation and electricity. In doing this, groups are not a proxy for their communities, but a catalyst for residents' collective action.[8]

The aims and actions of poor-led social movements like Muungano have not been central to philosophers' discussions of global poverty, nor have they asked whether the duties and remedies they defend align with the priorities and methods of organized poor communities. Indeed, the belief that normative theorizing about poverty need not even consider concrete antipoverty policies remains prevalent.[9] But there are encouraging signs that this is beginning to change, as the idea that people subjected to structural injustices have a right to shape the remedies for social change gains ground in political theory.[10] Scholarship on epistemic oppression and epistemic resistance has

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[8] See https://www.muungano.net/about. The alliance consists in the social movement Muungano wa Wanavijiji (a federation of Kenyan slum dweller groups); the Akiba Mashinani Trust (a Kenyan urban poor fund); and Slum Dwellers' International (SDI) Kenya, "an NGO providing professional and technical support to the federation."

[9] For example, Christian Barry and Gerhard Øverland state in the opening pages of *Responding to Global Poverty: Harm, Responsibility, and Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) that "our book is concerned with a pressing practical problem, but we do not tie our normative conclusions about these issues directly to proposals for institutional reform or policy change" (6).

[10] See for example Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*; Robin Dunford, *The Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle: Resistance, Rights and Democracy* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016); Gwilym David Blunt, *Global Poverty, Injustice, and Resistance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Paul Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time: Migrant Day Laborers and the Politics of Precarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

drawn attention to the wrongs of excluding the perspectives and knowledge of subordinated communities and their movements.[11] Work by postcolonial, critical, and postliberal theorists connecting the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and slavery to present-day global injustices has also contributed to a more political analysis of poverty and development. I join these thinkers in arguing that global poverty and its sequelae need to be *reframed as structural and political injustices*,[12] with the voices and agenda of people who organize against these placed front and center.

Thinkers with more political analyses of global poverty generally reject idealized and decontextualized ways of theorizing about justice. This is not a coincidence: shifting from ideal to "nonideal theorizing" is a precondition for seeing the structural character of poverty as well as how the actions of poor communities impact unjust structures and circumstances.[13] Yet some thinkers have a too-narrow view of what recognizing the agency of impoverished people entails. Political theorist David Miller, for instance, argues that treating "people as agents" in the context of global poverty is best achieved by taking seriously sovereign national boundaries, and holding the governments of impoverished people accountable for implementing poverty-reducing structural change (where they are found to be responsible).[14] Others assign a strictly remedial role to people living in poverty; for example, philosophers Christian Barry and Gerhard Øverland insist that "the poor are agents, not merely patients," yet consider only remedial actions they

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[11] See, for example, Shari Stone-Mediatore, "Global Ethics, Epistemic Colonialism, and Paths to More Democratic Knowledges," *Radical Philosophy Review* 21, no. 2 (2018): 299–324; and José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[12] See, for example, Charles W. Mills, "Race and Global Justice," in *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Margaret Kohn, "Postcolonialism and Global Justice," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 2 (2013): 187–200; Inés Valdez, "Associations, Reciprocity, and Emancipation: A Transnational Account of the Politics of Global Justice," in *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Blunt, *Global Poverty*; Michael Goodhart, *Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Rainer Forst, "A Critical Theory of Transnational (In-)Justice: Realistic in the Right Way," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Justice*, ed. Thom Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[13] This point draws on Charles Mills's argument in "Race and Global Justice" that racial injustice cannot be conceptualized within ideal theory insofar as it denies the very existence of racialized groups.

[14] For Miller, this is appropriate provided that the government, or a "subgroup within the society in question," is found to be responsible for their citizens' poverty. David Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 263, 257. What is required by the idea of treating the poor as agents of justice arises chiefly in consideration of humanitarian poverty duties, according to Miller; however, poor countries are owed "fair terms of [global economic] cooperation" and the lack of this, Miller suggests, undercuts the collective agency of poor countries.

may justifiably take to enforce the "contribution-based [poverty] responsi-bilities" *that the affluent have failed to fulfill*.[15]

Theorists who frame action by the poor as justified retaliation for, or else resistance to, impoverishment and injustice offer a more robust view of what their agency could rightly consist in. Proponents of just war theory like Cécile Fabre conceive of the agency of the severely needs-deprived in terms of *retributive* actions, defending their right to wage "wars of subsistence."[16] Simon Caney and Gwilym David Blunt analyze the poor's responses within the framework of a *right of resistance* that foregrounds the reactive and insurgent aspects of organizing by the poor. But while they are both careful to conceive of resistance broadly—including not only activities necessary for one's own survival, but also actions directed at opposing and transforming unjust structures—the resistance framing reveals only *some* of what poor social movements claim and do. For Blunt, civil resistance is "confrontational and non-institutional," eliciting the threat (and use) of violence by the "beneficiaries of injustice";[17] for Caney, a "right of resistance against global injustice" entitles the poor to act contrary to "existing domestic law" or "international law."[18] Yet as I shall argue, this is not quite a wide enough frame: grassroots poor-led social movements also aim to raise the political consciousness of subordinated communities, develop the capabilities of poor people, and construct alternative, cooperative social and economic structures to support the livelihoods and well-being of people in poverty.[19] As a leading researcher working with informal settlers' organizations in the global South, Diana Mitlin, notes, "*theory has emphasized contention*, ignoring other strategies deployed by social movements."[20]

In the same way that the resistance lens is overly narrow, so too is the related view that the agency of the poor is best recognized by affirming and

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[15] Barry and Øverland, *Responding to Global Poverty*, 3, 5–6. My italics.

[16] Cécile Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Alenjandra Mancilla, *The Right of Necessity* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

[17] Blunt, *Global Poverty*, 125.

[18] Simon Caney, "The Right to Resist Global Injustice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Injustice*, ed. Thom Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 511 and passim.

[19] These activities may be inflected by an ethos of resistance, of course; poor-led movement leaders sometimes see their struggles as "oppositional projects" that challenge exclusionary political processes and try to replace them with "more participatory forms of politics either in or through their activism—for example, by enabling subaltern communities to take control of local political arenas, whether through urban neighbourhood assemblies or participating in local electoral processes—or by championing various forms of devolution of political power." The Zapatista movement that began in Chiapas, Mexico, is a leading example of this. Alf Nilsen, "Postcolonial Social Movements," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4–5.

[20] Diana Mitlin, "Beyond Contention: Urban Social Movements and Their Multiple Approaches to Secure Transformation," *Environment & Urbanization* 30, no. 2 (2018): 557. My italics.

realizing their "moral right to justification."[21] According to critical theorists like Rainer Forst, Nancy Fraser, James Bohman, and Darrel Moellendorf, the right to justification grounds the principle of legitimating power for marginalized people within democratic political structures: "respect for human dignity . . . requires a justification of the institutional principles that can be reasonably accepted by those who live under them."[22] But while these thinkers rightly draw attention to the global poor's political exclusion from the conceptual and political frameworks of global justice, they hinge their prospective inclusion on the future development of global democratic political processes—with little mention of the agency that poor communities already exercise.[23] Organizing and mobilizing by poor people *outside* of formal political institutions is also, I argue, of pivotal importance for shaping progressive antipoverty policy—and for politically empowering poor communities.

The claims that marginalized and impoverished people are *morally entitled* to play a legitimating role in the political institutions that shape their lives, and to break laws when resisting unjust structures (or to meet their basic needs), are a good starting point. But we also need a more expansive vision of what a poor-led approach to poverty eradication (and global justice more generally) could look like—and to better understand why poor-led movements are *vital* for transforming the social structures and relations that underpin poverty.

1.1. Grounded Normative Theorizing

Taking seriously the moral and political agency of people who live in poverty requires thinking critically, and politically, about what poverty is; studying and learning from the contributions of poor-led social movements; and asking what expectations and political responsibilities emerge (for different

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[21] Forst, "A Critical Theory of Transnational (In-)Justice," 464.

[22] See Darrel Moellendorf, "Absolute Poverty and Global Inequality," in *Absolute Poverty and Global Justice*, ed. Elke Mack, Michael Schramm, Stephan Klasen, and Thomas Pogge (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 128.

[23] James Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Problem of Silent Citizenship: Toward a Republican Theory of Global Justice," *Citizenship Studies* 19, no. 5 (2015): 520–34; James Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Priority of Injustice," in Buckinx et al., eds., *Domination and Global Political Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Nancy Fraser, "Injustice at Intersecting Scales: On 'Social Exclusion' and the 'Global Poor,'" *European Journal of Social Theory* 13 (2010): 363–71, and Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, esp. ch. 2.

agents) from a poor-centered, poor-led approach to poverty reduction.[24] These discussions ought to be informed by the insights and experiences of those who struggle against poverty, rather than being conducted as exercises in ideal theory using hypothetical and constructivist reasoning. The normative approach within nonideal theory that best reflects this idea is that of "grounded normative theory" (GNT), which loosely informs my analysis in this book. As described by its practitioners, GNT is an emerging approach to doing social and political theory that foregrounds direct engagement "with empirical contexts, including with the views and contextually specific knowledge of those engaged in political contestation."[25] Although I do not claim to adhere to all of the core commitments of GNT—especially the rigorous ones of "epistemic inclusion" and "epistemic accountability," which GNT theorists generally see as requiring fieldwork—I do consider a wide range of poor-led social movements that I believe represent some of the main examples of antipoverty activism the global South. I also try to develop my normative arguments recursively insofar as my theoretical claims are grounded in an analysis of studies of poor-led organizing and community-led development.

GNT also orients us differently to the question of political responsibility: as Ackerly writes, "what is to be done is maximally informed by what those in struggle are actually doing."[26] In the context of normative thinking about poverty, a grounded approach seeks not only to make visible the power structures, norms, and relations of oppression that underpin chronic poverty, but to engage with the ideas, aims, and interventions of poor and marginalized communities. A GNT approach thus treats the perspectives, knowledge, and practices of marginalized communities as being of central importance to public policy, including poverty policy. James Tully calls this orientation to political theorizing a "practical, critical, and historical approach" to the "languages and practices in which . . . struggles

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[24] I make these arguments in brief form in Monique Deveaux, "Poor-Led Social Movements and Global Justice," *Political Theory* 46, no. 5 (2018): 698–725.

[25] Brooke Ackerly, Luis Cabrera, Fonna Forman, Genevieve Fuji Johnson, Chris Tenove, and Antje Wiener, "Unearthing Grounded Normative Theory: Practices and Commitments of Empirical Research in Political Theory," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, advance online (2021): DOI: 10.1080/13698230.2021.1894020: p. 5. Unlike more minimalist nonideal theory approaches, like Amartya Sen's contextual and comparative approach to the "enhancement of justice," grounded normative theorists writing about matters of in/justice often center their analyses on anti-oppression struggles. See Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 410.

[26] Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*, 24.

arise."[27] Applied to problems of global injustice, GNT commitments reflects the view, advanced by thinkers and activists associated with the World Social Forum, for example, that "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice."[28]

Like democratic and grassroots approaches to realizing human rights, the poor-led approach to global justice for which I argue posits that waiting for legal and political institutions to enact social and economic rights is insufficient; these rights also need to be claimed, actualized, and defended through popular mobilization. Following those who argue for "human rights from below"[29] and "development from below," I am advocating, in a sense, for "global justice from below." This idea is at odds with institutional, top-down approaches to poverty reduction that overlook the role of incremental institutional change,[30] as well as the ways in which poor communities and poor-led organizations impact their members' livelihoods through collective action. [31] We have much to learn from radical community development and

[27] James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 534.

[28] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014), viii and passim. Many of the groups I discuss in this book have participated in the World Social Forum (WSF), but I do not discuss in any depth this enormously complex and shifting network/forum. While the WSF absolutely politicizes poverty and builds up the political consciousness of marginalized groups, it is also prone to ideological conflict and in recent years has come to be driven more by activists from high-income countries (esp. Europe). See Janet Conway, *Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and Its "Others"* (London: Routledge, 2013).

[29] See, for example, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and César Rodríguez-Garavito, "Law, Politics, and the Subaltern in Counter-Hegemonic Globalization," in *Law and Globalization from Below: Towards a Cosmopolitan Legality*, ed. de Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mark Goodale and Sally Engel Merry, eds., *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law between the Global and the Local* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Jim Ife, *Human Rights from Below: Achieving Rights through Community Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[30] This point is well put by Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo in *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs [Perseus], 2011), who argue that "institutions at a very high level . . . institutions in capital letters" do not make or break good poverty reduction programs; rather, "every INSTITUTION at this level is realized, on the ground, through many specific local institutions. . . . To really understand the effects of institutions on the lives of the poor, what is needed is a shift in perspective from INSTITUTIONS in capital letters to institutions in lower case—the 'view from below' " (238 and 243, their caps).

[31] Noting the increase (since the late 1980s) in social policies targeting inequality and poverty in many developing countries, leading development economist Frances Stewart credits the efforts of local movements by peasants, unions, and Indigenous peoples opposing neoliberal economic policies. Not only were these movements essential to efforts to elect leaders who would later introduce democratic political reforms (in Bolivia, Venezuela, Brazil, and Ecuador), but they were also instrumental in getting governments to introduce pro-poor social policies, such as the Bolsa Família in Brazil. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India—a government program guaranteeing poor households 100 days of work annually, at minimum wage—is another example; according to Stewart, this Act "potentially revolutionizes opportunities for work and income in rural India." See Stewart, "Power and Progress: The Swing of the Pendulum," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 11, no. 3 (2010): 385.

"postdevelopment" perspectives that view grassroots, poor-led organizing and social movement mobilization as critical for devising just and effective strategies to fight poverty and the oppressive social structures that underpin it.[32]

Philosophers and political theorists can help to advance a more transformative antipoverty agenda by providing incisive accounts—grounded in the knowledge, insights, and struggles of justice-seeking groups and communities—of the harms and wrongs that result from relations and structures that subordinate, exploit, and impoverish people. Using the concepts of (collective) agency and empowerment, theorists can also help to justify the rights of poor communities to mobilize, resist, and advance democratic, "pro-poor" solutions to poverty.[33] And we can assist in developing an account of poverty responsibilities that fully acknowledges the agency and moral authority of poor people—and so better aligns with the interests and aims of organized poor communities facing chronic and structural poverty. But these contributions will require shifts in the ways theorists think about the nature and drivers of poverty, and about who has, and can exercise, practical agency.

1.2. Three Proposed Shifts

To acknowledge the practical and political agency of people living in conditions of structural poverty, normative theorists will need to make several shifts.

(a) A first shift concerns the way that philosophers understand and explain severe poverty. Rather than reducing poverty to needs scarcity, soluble chiefly through a redistribution of resources, we need to

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[32] Examples include Neil Webster and Lars Engberg-Pedersen, eds., *In the Name of the Poor: Contesting Political Space for Poverty Reduction* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Anthony Bebbington, Samuel Hickey, and Diana Mitlin, eds., *Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives* (London: Zed Books, 2008); Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite, eds., *Reducing Urban Poverty in the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2014).

[33] The term "pro-poor" is used in development economics to refer to policies and programs that purport to benefit poor populations, usually by increasing their assets and incomes ("pro-poor growth"). By contrast, many poor activists—as well as critical poverty, social movement, and development researchers—use "pro-poor" to denote agendas and policies that seek to augment the collective capabilities and political power of poor communities, and which align with the dominant values and aims of poor-led organizations and social movements. I use the term pro-poor exclusively in this latter sense. For a more detailed explanation, see Chapter 4.

understand chronic poverty in terms of social relations and structures of power and powerlessness. Specifically, the "relational approach to poverty,"[34] which I discuss in Chapter 3, defines poverty as subjection to social processes and relations of social exclusion, subordination, powerlessness, exploitation, dispossession, and destitution.[35] This approach incorporates some of the insights of the capability approach (CA) to poverty and well-being—including Sen's idea that poverty is a deprivation of capabilities caused by a lack of access to social entitlements.[36] But importantly, the relational poverty approach goes further insofar as it puts the spotlight on social power structures and relations that drive people's capability deprivations. In contrast to the CA, a relational poverty perspective sees poor-led social movements and poor-led development as important for eradicating chronic deprivation.

(b) A second shift I urge is to acknowledge that poor individuals and communities are moral and political *agents of justice*.[37] Against the usual tendency to treat those living in poverty as unable to effect meaningful change,[38] I argue that grassroots poor organizations and social movements seek to empower poor communities to change

[34] David Mosse, "A Relational Approach to Durable Poverty, Inequality and Power," *Journal of Development Studies* 46, no. 7 (2010): 1156–78.

[35] This view of poverty is shared by critical development and poverty researchers. In addition to Mosse, see for example, Maia Green and David Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes: Thinking about Poverty from a Chronic Poverty Perspective," *World Development* 33, no. 6 (2005): 205–24; and Sam Hickey and Sarah Bracking, "Exploring the Politics of Chronic Poverty: From Representation to a Politics of Justice?," *World Development* 33, no. 6 (2005): 851–65.

[36] Amartya Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking," *Oxford Economic Papers*, New Series, 35, no. 2 (1983): 153–69.

[37] O'Neill, "Agents of Justice."

[38] Philosophers who write on poverty are not immune to the attitudes that characterized early development theory and practice: racist, neocolonial, and imperialist beliefs about poor populations in the global South as non-modern peoples whose agentic capabilities are constrained by backward and inefficient social and religious traditions. For a discussion, see Katrin Flikschuh, "The Idea of Philosophical Fieldwork: Global Justice, Moral Ignorance, and Intellectual Attitudes," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 22, no.1 (2012): 1–26. While the worst examples of these attitudes seem easy to dismiss, it is worth noting that they have been published (in the current millennium) in serious philosophy journals. Jan Narveson, for example, claims that "the needy may have tribal practices the side effect of which is, perhaps, low life expectancy . . . we should be very hesitant to barge in with Western calories, medicines, and especially schooling, with such people"; see Narveson, "Is World Poverty a Moral Problem for the Wealthy?," *The Journal of Ethics* 8 (2004): 401–2. Elsewhere he chalks poverty up to differences in the technological tools and inclinations of people in wealthy versus poor countries; see Narveson, "We Don't Owe Them a Thing! A Tough-Minded but Soft-Hearted View of Aid to the Faraway Needy," *The Monist* 86, no. 3 (2003): 431–32. Narveson's characterizations of people living in poverty calls to mind Frantz Fanon's argument in *Black Skin, White Masks* that oppressors' explanations of the material poverty of politically subordinated and racialized people often center on a denial of their moral personhood.

the structures that perpetuate their constituents' subordination and deprivation. In so doing, they also advocate for recognition of poor people's rights and entitlements as human beings and citizens, and for poor communities to be centrally involved in the process of "development." It is through forming grassroots organizations and movements that people living in poverty develop the political capabilities needed to engage in effective collective action; in some ways, then, "the discussion of poverty reduction . . . becomes one of mobilization, organization, representation and empowerment."[39]

(c) A third shift is to unbundle the matter of who or what entities broadly hold *responsibility* for causing severe poverty from the questions of *which agents can best contribute* to transforming the structures and circumstances that perpetuate severe poverty, and *who is entitled to shape the norms and content of social and global justice*. Foregrounding the question of who or what entities have moral obligations to help eliminate or reduce poverty, and conflating this question with others, has had the effect of prematurely circumscribing both the remedies and agents of justice. Whether they are anchored in the role of affluent individuals and institutions in *contributing* to poverty-related harms ("contribution-based responsibilities"), in agents' *capacity* to reduce poverty ("assistance-based responsibilities"),[40] or in the fact of *benefiting* from unjust poverty-perpetuating arrangements, poverty duties are consistently ascribed to actors in the global North in ways that obscure the agency of those who live in poverty.

1.3. Poor-Led Organizations and Social Movements

Poor-led organizations, associations, cooperatives, and groups—terms that I use largely interchangeably—are entities formed by people living in poverty with the intention of engaging in collective action of some kind. Their aims can range widely—from improving livelihoods and upgrading

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[39] Neil Webster and Lars Engberg-Pederson, "Political Agencies and Spaces," in Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, *In the Name of the Poor*, 7. In the same way that "alternative development" perspectives sees development as "a process that seeks [people's] . . . empowerment . . . through their involvement in socially and politically relevant actions", so too does poor-led, pro-poor poverty reduction aim to empower structurally impoverished and subordinated communities. See John Friedmann, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 33.

[40] I take these terms from Barry and Øverland, *Responding to Global Poverty*.

community infrastructure, to mitigating environmental harms, and empowering members to engage in advocacy. What are poor-led social movements, and what is it about them that makes them so critical for transformative poverty alleviation? I generally use the term "movement" to describe poor-led activism on a larger scale which is more focused on effecting social change than on discrete livelihood goals (like improving wages). The line between poor-led organizations (and similar terms) and movements is fluid, insofar as many movements—notably national and global slum dwellers' movements—are composed of smaller, local associations. Regardless of whether they take this network form or not, an important feature of all social movements is that they "lack regular access to political institutions and the elites operating within those institutions."[41] And as a type of what political scientist Sidney Tarrow and sociologist Charles Tilly call "contentious politics"—or "collective political struggle"—social movements pose "a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of those power holders by means of public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment."[42]

Importantly, unlike interest groups—which seek to secure power without changing the prevailing structures—social movements "pursue more 'transformational' goals that alter power relations in society."[43] By challenging the status quo and taking aim at exclusionary and oppressive norms, ideologies, and unjust social structures, they can help to set in motion processes of far-reaching change. In high-income countries with established democratic institutions, as political theorist Laurel Weldon argues, social movements may offer the most important pathway to representation and democratic inclusion for some marginalized social groups; as a consequence, sometimes "the best chance we have to extract major social, political, and policy changes that confront oppression and disadvantage head-on is through civil society, through social movements."[44]

[41] Jackie Smith, *Social Movements for Global Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 109.

[42] Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, "Contentious Politics and Social Movements," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 443.

[43] Smith, *Social Movements*, 109.

[44] S. Laurel Weldon, "Some Complexities of Solidarity: A Commentary on Shirin Rai's 'The Good Life and the Bad: Dialectics of Solidarity,'" *Social Politics* 25, no. 1 (2018): 36. Social movements, Weldon writes elsewhere, "create counterpublics where marginalized groups interact to articulate their distinctive perspectives . . . [and] in doing so, they often alter the government agenda, inserting the issues of importance to marginalized groups into a list of issues from which they would otherwise

Studying poor-led social movements can help us to enlarge the normative framing of global poverty, such that we come to see overcoming structural injustices as vital to reducing needs deprivation. The ways in which movements can effect large shifts in political norms, especially around human rights claims and institutions, has been well documented.[45] Less well recognized is the way that social movements in low- and middle-income countries hasten shifts in social norms as well as significant policy change. There is a growing body of research on urban and rural poor-led social movements in the global South that shows how people living in poverty frequently organize collectively not only to increase their livelihoods but also to politicize, and protest, the reasons for their deprivation. This literature tracks social movements' efforts to build up the collective political capabilities of people who live in poverty and to advocate for pro-poor solutions, including social protection programs and community-led development practices such as solidarity-based provisioning and cooperative models of housing and production.

The recognition that wider inclusion of poor communities in social planning can help to bring about transformative poverty reduction—for example, by improving the effectiveness of development interventions—is increasingly recognized by mainstream development economists.[46] The climate crisis has further made plain the importance of social organizing by poor communities, for they are (out of necessity) developing and implementing local adaptation solutions—such as floating gardens and farms in flood-lands,[47] climate-resilient housing,[48] and diversified agriculture to withstand drought. Because environmental degradation and large structural injustices threaten poor communities' livelihoods and well-being, their collective action is rarely limited to securing a single resource. Beyond improving livelihoods, then, self-organized poor communities and their social movements work to politicize the causes of poverty and advance

be excluded." Weldon, *When Protest Makes Policy: How Social Movements Represent Disadvantaged Groups* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 28.

[45] See, especially, Kathryn Sikkink and Margaret E. Keck, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1988): 887–917.

[46] See for example Banerjee and Duflo, *Poor Economics*, 247–49.

[47] See https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/photo-feature/2019/10/03/Bangladesh-floating-gardens-flood-disasters-farmers-adapt-climate-change and https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/business/energy-environment/bangladesh-farming-on-water-to-prevent-effect-of-rising-waters.html.

[48] https://www.urbanet.info/climate-resilient-housing-mozambiques-coastal-cities/.

transformational, pro-poor change. By protesting structural injustices like concentrated land and wealth ownership, exploitative labor arrangements, the poor's lack of social protections and entitlements, discriminatory public policies in housing, land tenancy, employment, and social services, and political exclusion, movement participants put a spotlight on structures and processes that impoverish and disempower their communities. Activism by marginalized groups can help to shift social norms in consequential ways,[49] contributing to the emergence of new norms and attendant rights, such as the idea of social rights and the expanded labor rights of previously excluded groups like domestic workers. [50] Organizing by poor social movements has also contributed to norm shifts in development practice, including hastening ideas of participatory urban planning and community-led development. Relatedly, poor activism has shifted thinking about poverty alleviation (as I shall argue in greater detail in Chapter 4), bringing the ideas of poor-centered, inclusive poverty reduction and community provisioning to the fore. Where poor-led social movements and organizations have had some success in politicizing poverty within broader public discourse, governments have responded by introducing pro-poor programs, like Brazil's *Bolsa Família* (the conditional cash transfer introduced in 2003) and India's 2005 *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act*. Movements of the poor have also been instrumental in triggering processes of democratization and regime change, as illustrated by the election of Ecuador's and Bolivia's populist, left-wing governments.[51]

[49] For a good discussion of how poor groups change social norms, see Duncan Green, "Shifts in Social Norms Often Underpin Change," in *How Change Happens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 2016), ch. 3.

[50] One of the best examples of how social movements can have a lasting impact on unjust structures is that of domestic workers' organizations and movements, whose organizing and advocacy contributed to the adoption (in 2011) of the International Labor Organization's Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 and Domestic Workers Recommendation (No. 201). In her book, *Everyday Transgressions: Domestic Workers' Transnational Challenge to International Labor Law* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), law scholar Adelle Blackett—who was the ILO's lead expert in the process leading up to the adoption of these standards—argues that domestic workers's global activism helped to precipitate the norm shifts and legal-political process that culminated in these groundbreaking changes to international labor law.

[51] Admittedly, such movements do not necessarily bring permanent, progressive political change. In Ecuador, the democratic socialist government of President Rafael Correa (2007–2017) that grassroots social—especially Indigenous peoples'—movements ushered to power did not fulfill the promises of their platform. Correa's successor, Lenin Moreno (president from 2017–) has even further alienated Indigenous peoples' and labor movements from his ruling party, the PAIS Alliance, triggering national strikes: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/09/ecuador-strike-lenin-moreno-latest.

Although they vary widely in their makeup, specific aims, and methods, poor-led social movements in low- and middle-income countries seek to transform the conditions and structures of poverty by challenging the social and political marginalization of the poor.[52] They are typically grass-roots, place-based (rural and urban, or spanning both), and democratic in structure. Noting that global South movements of the poor "rarely emerge around poverty per se," Bebbington et al. distinguish between three types of movements (which often overlap).[53] The first, exemplified by landless movements, arises "in response to dynamics of accumulation," especially wage exploitation and land (or natural resource) dispossession. But, as Nilsen notes, such movements do not seek necessarily seek state-directed solutions: "social movements [that resist dispossession] have increasingly turned towards developing alternative forms of community-based collective ownership," as exemplified by agricultural and workers' production and ownership cooperatives.[54] A second type of movement, represented by urban slum dwellers' struggles, "emerges around the distribution and provision of services and assets that are collectively consumed and provided by the state."[55] Third are movements that respond to the poverty-inducing injustices faced by identity groups—such as Indigenous people's struggles in Latin America. In general, all three kinds of poor-led social movements target capitalist forms of production and wealth accumulation, which they associate with pernicious power hierarchies as well as abuse of the rights of workers and the poor.[56]

Poor-led struggles often lean on social movement organizations to assist them in accessing the resources and expertise that they need advance their collective capabilities and agenda; thus, "social movements are never only movements 'of the poor,'" but comprise multiple actors (especially social movement organizations and NGOs).[57] The poor movements and

[52] My focus in this book is on poor-led social movements (and poor organizations), as opposed to mere "everyday resistance" or more subtle forms of subversion of rules and norms as theorized by James Scott and John Gaventa.

[53] Anthony Bebbington, Diana Mitlin, Jan Mogaladi, Martin Scurrah, and Claudia Bielich, "Decentering Poverty, Reworking Government: Social Movements and States in the Government of Poverty," *Journal of Development Studies* 46, no. 7 (2010): 1306.

[54] Nilsen, "Postcolonial Social Movements," 5.

[55] Bebbington et al., "Decentering Poverty," 1306.

[56] As Nilsen explains, the opposition to capitalism by movements of the poor and unemployed in the global South is most evident "in the way that the politics of these social movements link the exigencies of localised struggles to the dynamics of global power structures and mobilise to achieve progressive changes across spatial scales"; transnational agrarian movements are a prime example. See Nilsen, "Postcolonial Social Movements," 5.

[57] Bebbington et al., "Decentering Poverty," 1320.

collectives on which I focus in the coming chapters are thus best defined as "politicised collective activities of and for the poor," which include both "formal organisations . . . [and] the more nebulous, uncoordinated cyclical forms of collective action, popular protest and networks that serve to link both organised and dispersed actors in processes of social mobilization."[58] As we shall see, however, poor groups often resist (non-poor-led) NGOs' attempts to shift their movement's radical and politically emancipatory aims toward the goal of mere service delivery.[59]

Development researchers who study the impact of social movements on poverty reduction argue that mobilized poor communities can and do help to challenge and transform poverty discourse, including assumptions and false narratives about the poor.[60] These movements also take aim at the proximate structures and relations that subordinate the poor, such as discriminatory land and employment policies, forced evictions, and other unjust practices which are increasingly targeted by many development interventions. By organizing, mobilizing, and demanding justice, poor communities work to disrupt the status quo of social power relations and defy their own sociopolitical marginalization.[61] In so doing, they help to create political subjects engaged in "new forms of sociability based on solidarity,"[62] sometimes building upon existing networks and practices of organizing, such as trade unionism,

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[58] Diana Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities: What Urban Social Movements Offer to Poverty Reduction," *European Journal of Development Research* 25, no. 1 (2013): 47.

[59] See Nigel Gibson, "A New Politics of the Poor Emerges from South Africa's Shantytowns," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2008): 5–17; and Naila Kabeer and Munshi Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization: Nijera Kori and the Construction of Collective Capabilities in Rural Bangladesh," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 16, no. 1 (2015): 47–68.

[60] Anthony Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," *Development and Change* 38, no. 5 (2007): 793–818; Anthony Bebbington, "Social Movements and Poverty in Developing Countries," *Programme Paper, Civil Society and Social Movements*—paper no. 32 (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2010); Bebbington et al., "Decentering Poverty"; Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities"; Sara Motta and Alf Nilsen, eds., *Social Movements in the Global South: Dispossession, Development and Resistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Richard Pithouse, "A Politics of the Poor: Shack Dwellers' Struggles in Durban," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (2008): 63–94.

[61] A meta-analysis of eighty poor groups in developing countries—including women's groups, credit groups, producer associations, and scavenger groups—concluded that such groups "can be important vehicles for representing and promoting the interests of their members both directly and indirectly" and that "those suffering from chronic poverty may benefit at least as much from political and social initiatives as from economic ones." Rosemary Thorp, Frances Stewart, and Amrik Heyer, "When and How Far Is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?," *World Development* 33, no. 6 (2005): 907, 917.

[62] Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, "Autonomy in Latin America: Between Resistance and Integration—Echoes from the *Piqueteros* Experience," *Community Development Journal* 45, no. 3 (2010): 362.

and at other times evolving novel collective political practices. The solida-ristic organizing, capacity-building, and collective action of poor commu-nities can also play a powerful role in restoring the self-respect, dignity, and sense of agency of those who live in conditions of structural poverty. As the leader of one of South Africa's largest and most militant shack settlers' move-ment, *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, remarked at its founding, "For us the most im-portant struggle is to be recognised as human beings."[63]

Poor-led groups thus politicize poverty, both in the eyes of poor constituents and within public discourse, by engaging disenfranchised people in processes of advocacy and movement-building. As I shall dis-cuss in Chapter 4, Slum Dwellers International's (SDI) widely studied model of organizing and mobilizing the urban poor consists in a variety of initiatives that build up their collective capabilities, such as community savings schemes to build infrastructure for informal settlements, and slum "mapping" and profiling undertaken by group members. These capability-building activities help to create the basis for solidarity among similarly situated poor populations—such as rural landless workers in Brazil; urban shack dwellers in South Africa; and unemployed workers, pensioners, and others impoverished by neoliberal economic policies in Argentina. The highly participatory and democratic character of poor organizations and movements sets them apart from even the most well-meaning NGOs and international NGOs (or INGOs) that advocate *on behalf* of poor people, but which are led by individuals lacking personal experiences of poverty. That poor-led groups and movements are self-organizing also makes them less susceptible to concerns about legitimacy and representativeness, as I shall argue shortly. This is not to say that *all* forms of poor-led politics are necessarily emancipatory, democratic, or "progressive." There exist grassroots social movements that use pro-poor rhetoric to advance deeply exclusionary ideologies—notably the xenophobic and militaristic RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), affiliated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu Nationalist party in India. Such groups are very much in the minority of poor-led politics, however, and my discussion of the challenges and limitations of poor movements in bringing about socially progressive antipoverty policies and reforms will not focus on these outlier examples.

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[63] Zikode, "We Are the Third Force," *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (blog), October 19, 2006, http://abahlali.org/node/17/.

Poor-led organizations and movements do not always agree on which solutions and strategies to endorse, given their diverse contexts, but this does not lessen the normative or practical significance of their activism. Nor does it invalidate the moral claim of people living in poverty that they have a right to determine the structures and relations that directly affect them. Relatedly, the fact that nonpoor outsiders sometimes propose pro-poor solutions does not negate the distinct importance of poor-led organizing. My claim is not that *only* poor-led organizations and movements can produce progressive, pro-poor proposals, but that *they are both morally entitled to do so*, and that they are usually better able to envision the radical transformations needed to deliver lasting and socially just poverty reduction. When genuinely progressive proposals for poverty reduction are advanced by nonpoor actors, moreover, it is often the case that poor activists have played a supporting role. In Namibia, for example, a Basic Income Grant—successfully implemented as a pilot project for two years in Otjivero-Omitara—was officially proposed by the Namibian Tax Consortium, a government commission, not a grassroots or poor-led initiative.[64] Yet the success of this pro-poor program depended upon the activism of civil society groups, which formed a cross-sectoral national coalition that advocated for a basic income—and later helped to form a regional basic income campaign led by civil society groups from the ten countries of the Southern African Development Community.

Which theoretical frameworks can best help us to understand the importance of poor-led movements? Social movement theories seem an obvious candidate, but poor-led organizations and social movements in the global South are not always well illuminated by this literature's main paradigms (which focus on developed countries). Tilly's "resource mobilization theory" and Tarrow's "political opportunity structure" theory focus on movements' relationship to social systems, especially their impact on formal or institutionalized politics, and do not always allow us to see more informal and sporadic expressions of individual and collective political agency.[65] These theories, moreover, generally assume the presence of a developed democratic state that can respond to demands, like trade union movements' calls for particular concessions; as such, they are less helpful for studying poor

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[64] See Basic Income Grant Coalition (Namibia), *Making the Difference!: the BIG in Namibia* (Basic Income Pilot Project Assessment Report, 2009): http://www.bignam.org/Publications/BIG_Assessment_report_08b.pdf

[65] See James Jasper, "Social Movement Theory Today: Toward a Theory of Action?," *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 11 (2010): 965–76.

organizing that combines advocacy with communal or solidarity provi-
sioning and production, and which may not target the state.[66] While elem-
ents of these theories are helpful in discussing poor-led social movements in
general—political opportunity analysis is relevant to the movement of un-
employed workers in Argentina, for example—I do not use them to frame
my discussion of justice-focused poor-led activism in the global South.

To capture a wide range of poor-led collective action, my book draws on
critical poverty and development approaches in examining the distinctive
contributions and aims of a diverse range of local, national, and global poor-
led organizations, movements, and networks. In particular, I focus on: (i) orga-
nizing in urban informal settlements or slums (examples drawn from India,
South Africa, and Kenya); (ii) landless empowerment and mobilization
movements (Nijera Kori in Bangladesh and the Landless Worker's Movement
[MST] in Brazil); and (iii) organizations formed by unemployed workers and
antipoverty activists (the *piqueteros*, or unemployed workers/recovered fac-
tories/businesses movements in Argentina); and (iv) poor-led, pro-poor
global networks (in particular, SDI and the global peasant movement La Vía
Campesina) that link local and regional poor-led groups across borders.

1.4. Situating My Argument in the Literature

Activism by people living in poverty is by no means confined to the global
South, so why do I not also discuss antipoverty movements in high-income
countries with considerable poverty and inequality? The main reason is
that I am chiefly concerned to intervene in debates in global justice theory
about how best to reduce severe and chronic poverty—and in these debates,
the background context typically assumed is that of poor (low- and lower-
middle-income) countries. The generic developing-world backdrop taken
for granted in much moral theorizing about poverty stands in contrast with
normative analyses of political organizing by poor and working-class com-
munities in the United States facing structural subordination, racism, and
other injustices.[67] The connections and synergies between grassroots anti-
poverty organizing in high-income countries and poor-led social movements

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[66] See, for example, Kim Voss and Michelle Williams, "The Local in the Global: Rethinking Social
Movements in the New Millenium," *Democratization* 19, no. 2 (2012): 352–77.

[67] Examples include Christopher J. Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter: A Brief History of
An Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Apostolidis, *The Fight for Time*; Romand Coles,
"Moving Democracy: Industrial Areas Foundation Social Movements and the Political Arts of

in low- and middle-income countries is a relatively new area of inquiry. Critical poverty researchers working in this area show that there are important connections between poor-led and alter-globalization social movements in low- and middle-income countries, on the one hand, and antipoverty/welfare rights struggles and antiglobalization movements in rich countries, on the other.[68] Comparative studies that eschew the global North/South binary can better illuminate shared strategies in solidarity-building in the face of social and structural processes that exclude, subordinate, and oppress particular social groups—including those whose struggles traverse borders, like Indigenous peoples and people with disabilities.[69]

While the poor-led organizations and movements I discuss are limited to those in poor and middle-income countries (in particular, India, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, and Bangladesh), many of the normative arguments about poverty politics I advance in this book could just as readily have been developed through case studies of antipoverty movements in the global North.[70] And certainly the central claim I make—that poor-led social movements are vital for transformative poverty reduction—is made by global South and global North poverty activists alike, for they know that pro-poor social change depends upon effective advocacy movements intent on dismantling policies (especially those impacting work, housing, health, and social welfare) that disempower and oppress poor people.[71]

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Listening, Traveling, and Tabling," *Political Theory* 32, no. 5 (2004): 678–705; Margaret Kohn, "Privatization and Protest: Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Toronto, and the Occupation of Public Space in a Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 1 (2013): 99–110; and J. K. Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[68] Among those who argue for theorizing poverty and poverty movements across seemingly disparate geographies, see especially Ananya Roy and Emma Shaw Crane, eds., *Territories of Poverty: Rethinking North and South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), and Victoria Lawson and Sarah Elwood, eds., *Relational Poverty Politics: Forms, Struggles, and Possibilities* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018).

[69] Valdez, in "Associations, Reciprocity, and Emancipation," argues compellingly that global justice theorizing could benefit from examining the intersecting struggles of racialized and oppressed groups in the global North and South.

[70] Important anti-poverty movements in high-income countries include the Settlement Movement, the Industrial Areas Foundation, ACORN, the Campaign for a Living Wage, the Peoples' Social Forum, the European Anti-Poverty Network, and Occupy.

[71] Prominent studies of antipoverty movements in the U.S. include Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, and How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Stephanie Luce, *Fighting for a Living Wage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Alyosha Goldstein, *Poverty in Common: The Politics of Community Action during the American Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

The view that successful social policy change requires the input of those most affected echoes the demand that development practitioners and researchers treat the subjects of development "as active agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of dispensed benefits."[72] Community-led and participatory forms of development, which emphasize collective capacity building and empowerment, are by now reasonably well established.[73] Civil society groups are increasingly recognized as necessary for achieving, and improving the effectiveness of, pro-poor social policies like Bolivia's *Law of Popular Participation* (1994) and India's *National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (2005).[74] The ideas animating participatory antipoverty interventions and community-driven development initiatives both align with, and are often a response to, the kinds of antipoverty initiatives urged by organized poor communities—as illustrated by the Odisha Land Rights example with which I began this chapter.

The growing focus within critical poverty and development research[75] on community-driven, participatory forms of development, and on the importance of poor people's social movements, has not yet triggered a corresponding shift in philosophical discussions of poverty and global injustice. The main exception here is work by development ethicists who, while typically not focused on social movements as such, have argued that development thinking and practice must be reconceived around the agency and prospective empowerment of those people who are the "subjects" of development.[76] Yet surprisingly, work by development ethicists has remained somewhat on the margins of mainstream philosophical discussions of global

[72] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), xiii.

[73] See, for example, Nici Nelson and Susan Wright, eds., *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995).

[74] See Anne Marie Ejdesgaard Jeppesen, "Reading the Bolivian Landscape of Exclusion and Inclusion: The Law of Popular Participation," in Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, eds., *In the Name of the Poor*, 30–51.

[75] For a good overview of this shift in development studies, see Sam Hickey, "The Return of Politics in Development Studies II: Capturing the Political?," *Progress in Development Studies* 9, no. 2 (2009): 141–52. Within poverty research, the new emphasis on the agency of the poor is well outlined in Ruth Lister, *Poverty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

[76] See David Crocker, *The Ethics of Global Development: Agency, Capability, and Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and his "Development and Global Ethics: Five Foci for the Future," *Journal of Global Ethics* 10, no. 3 (2014): 245–53; Jay Drydyk, "Empowerment, Agency, and Power," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9 (2013): 249–62, Drydyk, "Durable Empowerment," *Journal of Global Ethics* 4 (2008): 231–45, and Drydyk, "Accountability in Development: From Aid Effectiveness to Development Ethics," *Journal of Global Ethics* 15, no. 2 (2019): 138–54; Peter Penz, Jay Drydyk, and Pablo Bose, *Displacement by Development: Ethics, Rights, and Responsibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), and Goulet, *Development Ethics at Work: Explorations 1960–2000* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006); Serene Khader, *Adaptive*

poverty, which at best see the empowerment of poor communities as a desir-able *outcome* of institutional reforms and redistributive actions by powerful agents.[77]

The omission of people living in poverty as central agents of justice puts philosophers out of step with progressive, pro-poor approaches to poverty and development.[78] The ethical and political significance of organized poor movements for global justice is not adequately acknowledged by claiming that the aim of one's normative proposals *is precisely to empower the poor*.[79] As noted earlier, poor-led social movements do more than protest and resist injustices: grassroots poor organizations also develop cooperative processes of agriculture and production; forge radically democratic, community-based forms of urban development planning and improvement; and work to build the political consciousness and collective capabilities of poor communities.[80] So while recent analyses by philosophers of the moral agency rights of oppressed and needs-deprived people are a welcome shift away from a recipience-based, "moral patient" paradigm for alleviating poverty,[81] in my view they stop short

Preferences and Women's Empowerment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Khader, "Empowerment through Self-Subordination? Microcredit and Women's Agency," in *Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christine Koggel, "A Critical Analysis of Recent Work on Empowerment: Implications for Gender," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 3 (2013); Koggel, "Is the Capability Approach a Sufficient Challenge to Distributive Accounts of Global Justice?," *Journal of Global Ethics* 9, no. 2 (2013): 145–57; and Koggel, "Agency and Empowerment: Embodied Realities in a Globalized World," in *Agency and Embodiment*, ed. Letitia Maynell, Sue Campbell, and Susan Sherwin (College Park: Penn State University Press, 2009).

[77] For example, Gillian Brock argues that strengthening the rights of workers in poorer countries, including their efforts to unionize, can help "reduce poverty and vulnerability"; yet she notes that while "empowerment can be highly effective in overcoming deprivation . . . whether it is always *necessary* seems unclear." Brock, "Global Poverty, Decent Work, and Remedial Responsibilities: What the Developed World Owes to the Developing World and Why," in *Poverty, Agency, and Human Rights*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 128, 124. Elsewhere, Brock urges the poor's inclusion in implementing poverty-reduction strategies in order to ensure community "buy-in" and to reduce corruption. See Brock, "Some Future Directions for Global Justice," *Journal of Global Ethics* 10 (2014): 257.

[78] For a similar criticism, see David Ingram, *World Crisis and Underdevelopment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), especially chapter 2. My criticism of the failure of philosophers to consider poor-led activism intersects to some extent with "political realist" critiques of constructivist, ideal theories of justice. See Michael Goodhart, "Constructing Global Justice: A Critique," *Ethics and Global Politics* 5, no. 1 (2012): 1–26; and Goodhart, *Injustice*.

[79] Thomas Pogge makes this claim in his essay "Responses to the Critics," in *Thomas Pogge and His Critics*, ed. Alison Jaggar (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 209; however, his institutional-reform approach to global poverty omits discussion of poor-led organizing and social movements.

[80] For a good overview of economic initiatives by poor communities not reducible to resistance, see Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*.

[81] For Amartya Sen, approaching poverty solely in terms of needs and living standards treats people as "patients" rather than as "'agents' whose freedom to decide what to value and how to pursue what we value can extend far beyond our own interests and needs." See *Idea of Justice*, 252.

of recognizing all that mobilized poor communities and social movements do —and so why they are so essential for transformative social change.[82]

The rights of subordinated and impoverished people to engage in resistance and other forms of collective action ought not (in my view) be made *conditional* on some demonstrated failure or injustice on the part of the state that results in needs deprivation, loss of entitlements, or an unjust basic structure; to do so is to place people living in poverty in a secondary and remedial role. The claim that only in the event that the affluent *fail* to dispatch their poverty-alleviating duties can their "responsibilities can be enforced by the poor (or a third party acting on their behalf) through the proportionate use of force"[83] denies a key demand of poor social movements: namely, that people living in poverty have a right to be centrally included in envisioning and deciding how best transform the structures that perpetuate their chronic poverty. To make sense of this core claim by poor activists, we need to understand the distinct forms of collective agency—from contestation to collaboration—exercised by poor-led social movements, by means of a fine-grained analysis of the activities they engage in and the functions they serve. Beyond establishing the moral rights of impoverished people, therefore, it is important to credit and learn from the distinct contributions of *actual* poor-led social movements and their organizations—to understand their unique role in efforts to transform oppressive, poverty-perpetuating relations and structures. The poor are not mere alternates—second-best actors—for more powerful entities that shirk their duties.

There are, as noted earlier, promising signs that normative thinking about global injustice is beginning to take seriously the moral and political agency of poor and subjugated people. [84] Over the next several chapters, I seek to

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[82] Fabre, Mancilla, and others have argued that where people's subsistence rights have been violated and they lack basic necessities, they may be justified in waging war or other actions in order to secure resources essential for self-preservation. Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*; and Mancilla, *Right of Necessity*. More expansively, Caney refers to poor movements that engage in land occupations, sabotage, riots, rebellion, and debt refusal, in "Right to Resist Global Injustice." And Tommie Shelby argues that the ghetto poor in the United States are morally justified in breaking laws, committing property crimes, and engaging in "spontaneous rebellion" or urban riots insofar as they endure structural racial discrimination in housing, education, and employment; see his "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2007): 126–60.

[83] Barry and Øverland, *Responding to Global Poverty*, 6. Caney also writes that "the right of resistance is a *remedial* right. That is to say it comes into operation when others—the duty-bearers in question—have not properly discharged their responsibilities (or perhaps when it is overwhelmingly clear that they won't discharge their responsibility)." See also Caney, "Right to Resist Global Injustice," 518.

[84] See for example aforementioned works by Ackerly, Ackerly et al., Blunt, Goodhart, Caney, Dunford, Kohn, Valdez, and Luis Cabrera, *The Practice of Global Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

contribute to this conceptual shift by making the case that a just and trans-formative normative approach to eradicating poverty and related injustices *must* treat the agency of poor people as central to efforts to end structural, chronic needs deprivation. My intention, however, is not to supply a comprehensive, rival theory of what global justice consists in and requires from the perspective of poor-led movements, nor to defend a new list of moral duties that we might assign to affluent people and states. To do so would be to replicate the mistake that, I argue, marks much philosophical work on poverty and global justice: namely, the failure to center normative responses to poverty on the insights and practices of poor, justice-seeking communities and their social movements.[85] Instead, drawing loosely on the "grounded normative theorizing" approach discussed earlier, my discussion builds on the work of alternative- and postdevelopment scholars who defend the necessity of community-driven and grassroots-activist forms of development.[86] It also borrows from the rich analyses of development ethicists who have written about empowerment, mutual dialogue, participation, and agency in the context of development and antipoverty interventions.[87]

I seek to show in this book that grassroots poor-led collectives and social movements are *uniquely* placed—epistemically, ethically, and politically—to identify and challenge poverty-perpetuating social relations and structures. While excluded from formal institutions and channels of power, poor-led social movements politicize the underlying causes of needs deprivation and put more radical, pro-poor prescriptions onto the public agenda. Critically, they also expand the consciousness

[85] For a similar analysis, see Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey, "Resisting 'Global Justice': Disrupting the Colonial 'Emancipatory' Logic of the West," *Third World Quarterly* 30, no. 8 (2009): 1395–1409.

[86] See, for example, Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticisation and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Friedmann, *Empowerment*; John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Denis Goulet, *Cruel Choice*; Goulet, *Development Ethics at Work*; and Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities* (London: Verso, 1994).

[87] In addition to aforementioned works by Ackerly, Crocker, Drydyk, Khader, and Koggel, see Srilatha Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors: Implications for Global Civil Society," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 13, no. 4 (2002), and Batliwala, "The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action," in *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights*, ed. Gita Sen, Adrienne Germaine, and Lincoln Chen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the Last First* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 1997); and Ingram, *World Crisis and Underdevelopment*.

and build the collective political capabilities of people living in poverty in ways that empower them not only to challenge oppressive structures but to envision and enact alternatives.

1.5. Reconceiving Poverty

> Political philosophy as a critical activity starts from the practices and problems of political life, but it begins by questioning whether the inherited languages of description and reflection are adequate to the task.
>
> —James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity"

How one defines poverty affects not only which solutions one envisages, but also *which* agents are deemed the appropriate ones to implement them. While moral and political thinkers increasingly acknowledge the structural causes of severe poverty, many still treat the fact of poverty as synonymous with absolute deprivation of material needs. Poverty's nonmaterial dimensions—powerlessness, subordination, humiliation, social exclusion, and vulnerability to exploitation—thus tend to recede from view. A focus on absolute poverty is associated with a "poverty lines" approach to measurement, centering on income and consumption data to the exclusion of more poor-centered poverty measurement tools, like participatory poverty assessments and social exclusion analyses. By contrast, Sen has urged that we think of poverty as a lack of freedom owing to capability failures whose proximate cause is needs deprivation; accordingly, CA researchers have developed a multidimensional poverty index (MPI) that tracks and measures the multiple forms of disadvantage that poverty comprises, allowing comparisons within and across societies. Yet while the shortcomings of income-focused metrics have been widely exposed by Sen and CA researchers, low income and food scarcity remain at the heart of many philosophers' discussions of poverty.[88] I argue in Chapter 3 that we need to shift to a relational view of poverty, which spotlights social processes of social exclusion, dispossession, subordination, and exploitation. The relational poverty approach has affinities with the CA, but does a better job of showing the nonmaterial aspects of

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[88] Sen defends the focus on absolute deprivation where capabilities are concerned, but argues that inequalities in entitlements and endowment bundles are what gives rise to these. See his "Poor, Relatively Speaking."

poverty, as well as the social power relations that make people vulnerable to deprivation.

Philosophical discussions of poverty that treat social power relations as external or tangential to deprivation, I argue, yield solutions that ignore the structural causes of needs scarcity. As such, they "are unlikely to generate development policies and mobilize public action that can adequately tackle the underlying causes of poverty."[89] Ackerly and Goodhart rightly note that by emphasizing resource inequalities and their sequelae (like hunger), proponents of global distributive justice "focus on the symptom of injustice . . . rather than on the underlying disease"—namely, "the *exploitation* of power inequalities"[90] in the context of oppressive economic, social, and political structures. Nor are these criticisms obviated by noting that ethicists are simply more interested in the question of whether and which moral duties attach to deprivation than they are with the causes of poverty or policy questions: an anachronistic view of poverty can hardly ground sound moral theorizing about poverty duties (or the lack thereof).[91] Apolitical conceptions of poverty, whether in moral theory or in public policy, prevent the consideration of far-reaching alternatives to globalized capitalism, including those championed by poor-led social movements—such as worker cooperatives, the transformation of property rights and regimes, and the expansion of social and economic entitlements. This lack of engagement with poor populations' political responses to dispossession and impoverishment is made worse by the relative echo chamber within which normative academic debates about global poverty and injustice have taken place—with little or no engagement with non-Western philosophers' writings on poverty or intellectual traditions relevant to questions of global justice, like *buen vivir* and Indigenous resurgence.[92]

The recognition that the definition and framing of poverty shapes policy and politics is, by now, axiomatic within development and poverty research. As Hulme explains, "if you see poverty simply as a lack of income . . . then you are likely . . . to look for . . . market-based solutions. . . . If you see poverty as

[89] Green and Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes," 876.

[90] Goodhart, *Injustice*, 74, and Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*, 9.

[91] To give just one example, Narveson's claim that there are no duties of justice to aid the "distant poor" is propped up by his eccentric view of poverty as needs scarcity caused by the poor's lack of technological means and economic liberties to produce what they need. Narveson, "Is World Poverty a Moral Problem for the Wealthy?".

[92] See also Jonathan O. Chimakonam, "Is the Debate on Poverty Research a Global One? A Consideration of the Exclusion of Odera Oruka's 'Human Minimum' as a Case of Epistemic Injustice," in *Dimensions of Poverty: Measurement, Epistemic Injustices, Activism*, eds. Valentin Beck et al. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020); and Flikschuh, "The Idea of Philosophical Fieldwork".

caused by inequality or the abrogation of human rights, then you are likely to look for more radical action: the redistribution of economic assets and/or social and political power."[93] The role prescribed for government in reducing deprivation, the extent to which socioeconomic inequalities are targeted, and whether the social empowerment and inclusion of poor people are viewed as a central goal partly depend on the conception of poverty one holds. Leading poverty researcher Ruth Lister puts it this way: "the issue of [poverty] definitions cannot be divorced from the political uses to which they are put . . . implicit in definitions are explanations of poverty and its distribution. . . . Together, explanations, definitions (and their translation into measurements) and broader conceptualizations combine to shape policy responses to the phenomenon called 'poverty.' "[94]

Critical poverty and postdevelopment thinkers offer the crucial insight that needs scarcity cannot be grasped in abstraction from the social relations and structures of power that underpin poverty.[95] This view has had some impact on philosophical discussions of poverty and development—particularly writing by development ethicists and work by GNT proponents. And certainly many philosophers writing on poverty draw attention to the structural causes of underdevelopment in the global South. Yet this has not sufficed to displace the picture of the poor as merely needy, would-be recipients of aid —or to prompt philosophers to see the poor's emancipation as vital to poverty reduction. Judith Lichtenberg, for example, observes that "terms like aid, assistance, and help suggest certain contestable assumptions," including that "the would be aider is a mere bystander";[96] but while fully recognizing the structural causes of global poverty and the rights of the poor, she does not ask whether impoverished, oppressed populations may have a moral claim to shape the

[93] David Hulme, *Should Rich Nations Help the Poor?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 23.

[94] Lister, *Poverty*, 35.

[95] Influential postdevelopment thinkers who see poverty in terms of relations of structural subordination include Escobar, *Encountering Development*; Ferguson, *Anti-Politics Machine*; and Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith,* 3rd ed., trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Zed Books, 2008). Key critical poverty texts include Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the* Poor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Green and Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes"; John Harriss, "Bringing Poverty Back into Poverty Analysis: Why Understanding of Social Relations Matters More for Policy on Chronic Poverty than Measurement," in *Poverty Dynamics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Tony Addison, David Hulme, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford Univerity Press, 2012); Sam Hickey and Sarah Bracking, "Exploring the Politics of Chronic Poverty: From Representation to a Politics of Justice?," *World Development* 33, no. 6 (2005): 851–65; Naila Kabeer, "Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Discrimination: Towards an Analytical Framework," *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 31 (2000); and Mosse, "A Relational Approach to Durable Poverty, Inequality and Power."

[96] Judith Lichtenberg, *Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology, and Global Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11.

policies and reforms needed to alleviate severe needs deprivation. Noting that "nothing in what I say contradicts the idea that those who have been deprived of their rights should take charge of their own destiny," Lichtenberg nonetheless concludes that her argument for how to respond to poverty should not center on the projects of the poor because this would represent an imposition of her views as an outsider.[97] Thomas Pogge similarly punts when defending himself against the criticism that he fails to treat the poor as agents: "if I mostly address the world's affluent, it is not because I see the poor as passive subjects rather than agents, but because I don't take myself to have any standing *to advise them*."[98] His (counterfactual) assumption seems to be that poor people *have not yet spoken (or acted)*—that there is nothing to listen *to*.

Readers may wonder why the capability approach is not the obvious antidote to these various conceptual failings of philosophical writing on poverty. The short answer is that while capability theorists value the expansion of the agency of impoverished *individuals* via capability-supporting policies, they have not seen this as necessitating the collective emancipation of poor communities.[99] Instead, CA theorists generally see formal, democratic political institutions and policymaking —not grassroots, poor-led social mobilization—as the means for achieving capability-fostering change.[100] By contrast, thinkers (myself included) who view relations of social exclusion, subordination, and exploitation as constitutive of poverty consider the struggles and democratic empowerment of subjugated and impoverished people as critical not only for poverty reduction but also for remedying global injustices more generally.[101] While the CA contributes in important

[97] Lichtenberg writes: "insofar as *I* am not *you* or *he* or *she* and *we* are not *they*, it is appropriate for *me* and for *us* to ask what, if anything, *I* and *we* should do" (13).

[98] Pogge, "Responses to the Critics," 209. My italics.

[99] Capability theorists' relative lack of interest in collective mobilization by poor communities is odd given that it is known to hasten vital changes in critical consciousness, public discourse, and even political institutions and regimes—all of which can in turn lead to capability-supporting development policies and social reforms. Frances Stewart makes this observation in her "Power and Progress". The limitations of the CA—its lack of a theory of social power, and its focus on individuals rather than collectives—have recently been challenged by capability theorists, and I discuss these interventions in Chapters 4 and 5.

[100] Julian Culp, for example, defends a people-centered, emancipatory form of development, yet argues that only "properly democratic socio-political institutions . . . [can] determine what justice requires," and therefore that "fundamental justice demands solely the securing of those capabilities that are necessary to facilitate the proper functioning of a democracy." Julian Culp, *Global Justice and Development* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 146.

[101] See especially Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*; Blunt, *Global Poverty, Injustice, and Resistance;* Cabrera, *Practice of Global Citizenship*; Fraser, *Scales of Justice*; Goodhart, *Injustice*; Ingram, *World Crisis and Underdevelopment*; James Tully, "Democracy and Globalization: A Defeasible Sketch," in *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman

ways to reconceptualizing poverty in relational terms, it fails to call attention to the social class and group-based power relations and structures that undergird chronic poverty—and so stops short of advancing the radical changes needed to dismantle them. I aim to re-center normative thinking about poverty around the politically transformative ideas and practices that have emerged from poor-led social movements, and to show why these, and the agency of the poor more generally, matter to normative theorizing about poverty and global justice.

1.6.   Capability and Culpability, versus the Right of the Poor to Shape Antipoverty Policy

It is important to delink the issue of responsibility for poverty from the questions of *which* agents or entities are morally entitled to determine and direct the different dimensions of poverty reduction, and which are best placed (epistemically and politically) to do so. Arguments "from capability" ascribe poverty duties to institutions and individuals of affluent states on the grounds that they are the only, or the most, *capable* agents of poverty reduction in virtue of their economic and political power. For Singer, the mere fact of having excess wealth gives rise to such duties. According to Onora O'Neill, agents of justice are capable insofar as they normally possess institutional capacities and coercive powers.[102] The failure to address separately the question of whose agenda should shape poverty-reduction efforts is also seen in arguments from historical and/or present-day "culpability," which assign duties ("contribution-based responsibilities")[103] to actors in the global North that are believed to have caused, and benefited from, poverty-perpetuating processes. Those responsible for harm are thought to be the right agents to remediate the harm. Thinkers who argue from capability

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36–62; and Tully, "Two Ways of Realizing Justice and Democracy: Linking Amartya Sen and Elinor Ostrom," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2013): 220–32. Some thinkers who take a more institutional approach to fostering global justice nevertheless view citizens' political activism, including social movements, as mainly bolstering support for needed institutional reforms; examples include Pablo Gilabert, *From Global Poverty to Global Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Richard Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Lea Ypi, *Global Justice and Avant-Garde Political Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[102]   O'Neill, "Agents of Justice."

[103]   Barry and Øverland, *Responding to Global Poverty*.

and culpability thus often overlook the poor as agents of justice, and instead treat the poor's empowerment as a desirable *outcome* of institutional reforms and policies that agents in the global North can undertake. They do not see such empowerment as a necessary *means* for transforming unjust, poverty-perpetuating processes and structures. By contrast, poor-led organizations and movements insist that to change the power relations that underpin the local, national, and transnational processes and policies that marginalize and impoverish people, it is essential that poor communities self-organize and empower their members to act collectively.[104]

The view that collective empowerment is not just a distant goal but a necessary means for reducing poverty has deep roots in community development and critical development theory and practice. Researchers and practitioners in alternative and critical development traditions have made a compelling case for reconceiving development as a process of reversing structures and processes of disempowerment and dispossession. Nor is this merely reactive, for as some ethicists argue, development is perhaps best conceived broadly as a set of practices in which people work cooperatively to secure the capabilities, and futures, they value.[105] The norm shifts that critical development theorists have urged may also be relevant for a poor-centered, poor-led approach to poverty reduction (as I shall argue in later chapters). Where development can benefit from the assistance of outsiders, it is imperative, critical development proponents argue, that relationships be based on mutual respect, reciprocity, and cooperation.[106] While the macro-level reforms of global financial and political processes that contribute to global poverty are not strictly analogous to micro-development interventions, the cautions that development critics issue seem nonetheless apt. Development ethicist Denis Goulet, for example, proposes

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[104] This conviction in the need to recognize and foster the agency of poor people is also reflected in arguments (in advanced industrialized states) for "'[a] new paradigm of welfare' . . . [which emphasizes] 'the capacity of people to be creative, reflexive human beings, that is, to be active agents in shaping their lives, experiencing, acting upon and reconstituting the outcomes of welfare policies in various ways.'" Lister, *Poverty*, 127. (In the second quotation, Lister is quoting F. Williams et al., 1999.) It is further echoed in criticisms of development models that reinforce power and knowledge hierarchies between the helper and helped—criticisms that have led some, like Arturo Escobar, to reject the development paradigm altogether.

[105] As Goulet writes in *Cruel Choice*, 155, "development is not a cluster of benefits 'given' to people in need, but rather a process by which a populace acquires greater mastery over its own destiny."

[106] Goulet writes, "the 'developed' partner can never accurately observe underdevelopment in the detached mode of a spectator. Nor can he properly treat it as a mere problem, since he himself is a part of the problem . . . a reciprocal relationship [needs] to be established. Only after reciprocity is established can helpees cease being beggars and donors manipulators. Recipients are already vulnerable, but donors must in turn become vulnerable" (52–53).

several ways in which outsiders—development "experts," educators, and administrators—can learn to adopt an attitude of humility about their own knowledge and skills. Political scientist Sally Matthews similarly observes that transforming structural poverty requires a deep shift in thinking on the part of the affluent: "if we are to change the relations between the more and less privileged, we need to change the privileged too: we need to change the way in which the more privileged regard their own privilege and the poverty of others."[107] Reconceptualizing poverty in relational terms, and engaging with the contributions and perspectives of poor-led movements and their organizations, will help us to do this.

1.7. Why the Poor Are Rarely Seen as Capable Agents

Some thinkers hesitate to recognize the moral and political agency of poor people because they doubt that the poor have the requisite characteristics and powers to function as "agents of global justice."[108] According to O'Neill's influential definition, primary agents of justice in the global context possess "capacities to determine how principles of justice are to be institutionalized within a certain domain" and "typically have some means of coercion." Because they must have "*effectively resourced capacities which they can deploy in actual circumstances*,"[109] primary agents, according to O'Neill, will most often be states—though states can and do fail in this role. She readily allows that, especially in developing and weak states, "various nonstate actors may also contribute significantly to the construction of justice," depending upon their specific powers. O'Neill identifies INGOs and transnational corporations as "examples of nonstate actors" that "may acquire capabilities that make them significant agents of justice," but importantly, "cannot themselves become *primary* agents of justice." [110] Given her emphasis on *adequate capabilities for agency*, however, it seems important to ask about the role of

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[107] Sally Matthews, "The Role of the Privileged in Responding to Poverty: Perspectives from the Post-Development Debate," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 6 (2008): 1045.

[108] On this matter, see Caney, "Agents of Global Justice," and Deveaux, "Global Poor as Agents of Justice."

[109] O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," 181, 189. Her emphasis.

[110] O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," 191, 188, 191–2. O'Neill mentions "social, political and epistemic movements that operate across borders" alongside international NGOs and transnational or multinational corporations in her account of "non-state actors" that can be agents of justice, but does not give examples nor say what their significance is (189).

noninstitutional actors—including social movements that seek to transform structures of local and global injustice.

The agency of the poor is recognized in important ways by the aforementioned critical theorists (Fraser, Forst, and Bohman), all of whom urge the democratic inclusion of poor and marginalized populations in (future) transnational democratic institutions.[111] These thinkers all advance explanations of global injustices that foreground social-structural inequalities and political *domination*,[112] and reject apolitical remedies that center merely on a global redistribution of resources. Forst, for example, insists that "justice is not only a matter of which goods, for which reasons, and in what amounts should legitimately be allocated to whom, but . . . *how* these goods come into the world . . . *who* decides on their allocation, and *how* this allocation is made." Bohman likens "severe poverty . . . [to] a form of silent citizenship"; Fraser claims that there can be "no redistribution or recognition without representation"; and Dryzek concludes that there is "no justice without agents of justice, no effective agents of justice without democracy . . . no global justice without global democracy."[113] While I sympathize with these claims, my concern is that their proposals for overcoming this condition of global domination depend on the development of transnational democratic processes and institutions. Although they rightly reject *token* inclusion of the global poor—or the "transnational precariat"[114]—in existing institutions on the grounds that this cannot dismantle the unjust structures that perpetuate their exploitation and domination, these thinkers nonetheless insist that marginalized populations need first to acquire *real* (formal) power to help define what justice requires and how to achieve it. Their view is shaped by a certain pessimism about the ability of the poor to mobilize effectively *in advance* of some measure of redistribution. Bohman, for example, contends that

[111] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*; Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Problem of Silent Citizenship"; Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Priority of Injustice"; Rainer Forst, "Transnational Justice and Non-Domination," in Buckinx et al., eds, *Domination and Global Political Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2015). For similar arguments from within deliberative democratic theory, see John Dryzek, "Democratic Agents of Justice," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2015): 361–84.

[112] See also Kai Nielsen, "Global Justice, Power, and the Logic of Capitalism," in his book *Globalization and Justice* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003), and Goodhart, "Constructing Global Justice." Certain Kantian constructivist perspectives, such as that of Onora O'Neill, also emphasize the ways in which extreme global resource and power inequalities undercut the autonomy and agency of vulnerable, needs-deprived people; I discuss her work further in Chapter 2.

[113] Forst, "Transnational Justice," 92; Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Problem of Silent Citizenship," 529; Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 27; Dryzek, "Democratic Agents," 382.

[114] Fraser, "Injustice at Intersecting Scales," 370.

"current global economic arrangements promote domination in the form of capability failure; that is, the lack of opportunity to develop basic powers and capabilities necessary for non-domination . . . [including] the political capability to participate in political life."[115] Dryzek is similarly dubious about the prospect that impoverished people can impact their circumstances, asserting the poor "often lack the capacity to exercise agency, which would require more in the way of linguistic skills, free time, education, and places where their voice might be expressed and heard."[116]

It is not surprising that these democratic theorists pin their hopes for reducing global injustice on the development of new norms and formal structures for transnational democracy. There are very real micro and macro constraints that poor communities, organizations, and movements face in their attempts to organize; these have been the subject of much discussion by social movement theorists and development ethicists, as I discuss in later in the book.[117] Yet these adversities can and do engender resistance: dispossession from land and essential services often propels poor communities to mobilize, for example.[118] This will become clearer in Chapters 4 and 5, where I discuss the ways in which poor-led groups politicize poverty within public discourse—and in the eyes of their constituents—and build the collective capabilities of poor communities.

Looping back to O'Neill's pathbreaking work, we can see how her account of the agents of justice may contribute to the reluctance of certain democratic theorists to acknowledge the agency of existing poor movements. In particular, Dryzek, building on O'Neill's definition, writes that "given obstacles to their exercise of primary and secondary agency, recognition of the moral agency of the poor is only warranted to the degree that they exercise "formative agency"—that is, "determining what conception of justice should be adopted in particular contexts."[119] Poor individuals who aspire to act as agents of justice face a dilemma, according to Dryzek. To act as formative agents that represent the will of the poor, their actions must "take [a] democratic form." Yet, lacking access to political institutions and the resources they

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[115] Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Priority of Injustice," 81.

[116] Dryzek, "Democratic Agents," 372.

[117] See, for example, Goulet, *Development Ethics at Work*, 118–19.

[118] As an activist-scholar reflects in connection with the South African slum dwellers' movement, "the intensity of the shack settlement as a site of contestation . . . is clearly linked to the pressing and at times life-threatening material realities in the settlement . . . and to the contestation over whether or not the market and the state . . . should have a monopoly over the allocation of urban land." Richard Pithouse, "Conjunctural Remarks on the Significance of 'the Local,'" *Thesis Eleven* 115, no. 1 (2013): 100.

[119] Dryzek, "Democratic Agents," 366.

need to organize effectively, the poor may need to be provided "with the material conditions . . . that would enable their agency"; however, "such material redistribution means that the poor revert to being recipients of justice that will render them no longer poor, and so their lack of agency is confirmed." Alternatively, the poor can accept the assistance of more capable advocacy groups, but as these "are unelected and often self-appointed," he claims, their claims to represent the poor are suspect. Dryzek's twofold solution to this predicament is to design "democratic forums . . . to give more effective voice to [the poor's] concerns," and/or to use "the theory of democratic representation . . . to scrutinize the potentially problematic claims of advocacy groups and activists acting as formative agents of justice."[120] But crucially, Dryzek overlooks the scope and legitimacy of *existing* poor-led activism by supposing that the agency of the poor is fraught with contradictions and limited to the remedies he outlines. Focusing on organizations that advocate *on behalf of* the poor, he misses the many movements and organizations that are composed of and led by the poor; poor collectives and movements, which he does not discuss, are among the most democratic entities to be found anywhere.[121] As Batliwala observes, self-organizing poor groups are composed of "direct stakeholders," and so "enjoy high levels of legitimacy and [the] right to representation. These are not movements that need to establish their credentials or mass base. As organizations, they did not mobilize a constituency, their constituents created them."[122] Self-organizing, self-reliant poor collectives and movements, as noted earlier, differ enormously from INGO-type advocacy groups.

The dilemma that Dryzek sketches leads him to suppose that the poor do not *presently* exercise democratic formative agency in the sense of shaping "the normative principles of justice that should be adopted in a particular situation." I argue against this assessment and show that poor collectives and social movements do contribute to shaping norms of justice by protesting the subordination of poor communities and claiming rights and social entitlements. Dryzek's claim that the value of advocacy groups depends on their ability "to influence primary agents of justice such as the state and

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[120] Dryzek, "Democratic Agents," 380, 374, 372.

[121] One researcher calls South Africa's shack-settler movement "neurotically democratic"; see Patrick Kingsley, "South Africa's Shack-Dwellers Fight Back," *Guardian*, September 24, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/24/south-africa-shack-bahlali-basejondolo.

[122] Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 404. She focuses on the transnational poor-advocacy networks, SDI and Women in Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

international organizations to good effect"[123]—and that poor groups *need* the assistance of nongrassroots advocacy groups or special democratic forums in order to exercise effective agency—ignores the ways in which poor-led social movements develop and use their members' collective capabilities to protest oppressive structures and impact policy and governance at the local, national, and transnational levels.[124]

1.8.   Overview of Chapters to Come

The normative arguments developed in this book align with poverty approaches and policies that are "poor-centered"—that is, which see the perspectives and contributions of poor communities as necessary to the development of progressive and transformative antipoverty social policies and reforms.[125] It is also informed by Iris Young's social connection model of responsibility, which inspires my argument for solidarity-based political responsibilities vis-à-vis poverty.[126] The influence of the CA—as developed by Sen, Nussbaum, and others—is also evident throughout, as it has deeply informed arguments for more empowering and recipient-driven forms of development and poverty reduction.

To better understand why the social and political empowerment of the poor is so critical to lasting and transformative poverty reduction, and global justice generally, we will need to change many of the familiar, ways of thinking about poverty. According to the relational view of poverty I defend in the book, eradicating poverty requires challenging, reforming, and/or dismantling the relations and structures that underpin poverty. Transformative development and antipoverty policy thus require solutions that are poor-centered in the sense of foregrounding poor people's own understandings of what makes them vulnerable to deprivation and subordination, and what

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[123] Dryzek, "Democratic Agents," 366, 381.

[124] One example is the efforts of the global peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, to produce the Draft United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Peasants, see United Nations, General Assembly, "Declaration on the Rights of peasants and Other People in Rural Areas, A/HRC/WG.15/1/2," June 20, 2013, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGPleasants/A-HRC-WG-15-1-2_En.pdf.

[125] For examples of this approach applied to problems of housing and public health, see Matthew Desmond, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (New York: Crown, 2016), and Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*.

[126] Iris Young, *Global Challenges* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), and Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

they think they need to change their predicament. These remedies must also be pro-poor in the sense of aiming to empower poor communities and increase their social and civic entitlements.

In Chapter 2, I show how viewing poverty as, in essence, needs scarcity caused by a maldistribution of resources, has led many philosophers to ignore critical aspects of poverty and its underlying structural causes—or else to treat such causes as morally irrelevant.[127] The depoliticized and decontextualized view of acute deprivation held by philosophers focused on the "moral demands of affluence"[128] turns out to be shared by some proponents of global redistributive justice, including sufficientarians who downplay the significance of inequality.[129] "Effective altruism," a popular movement promoting an evidenced-based approach to improving the world through philanthropy, has a similarly apolitical view of poverty alleviation that treats it as reducible to needs deprivation, measurable in terms of income and consumption.[130] I argue that if the nonmaterial dimensions of poverty—like social exclusion, discrimination, exploitation, and subordination—are not recognized as central to poverty, we easily overlook the vital role of organized poor communities.

In Chapter 3, I lay out a relational approach to poverty, drawing on research in critical poverty research, capability theory, development ethics, and postcolonial critiques of development. While Sen's account of poverty as severe and sustained capability deprivation laid the groundwork for a relational conception of poverty that has since been adopted by many chronic poverty and development researchers, it does not provide sufficient insights into the structural power inequalities that underpin poverty and disempower vulnerable populations—as sympathetic critics of the CA, such as Koggel and Khader, have observed.[131] As a corrective to these deficiencies,

[127] Rüdiger Bittner, "Morality and World Hunger," *Metaphilosophy* 32, no. 1/2 (2001): 25–33; Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"; Singer, "Poverty, Facts, and Political Philosophies: Response to 'More than Charity,'" *Ethics & International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2002): 121–24; Singer, "Achieving the Best Outcome: Final Rejoinder," *Ethics & International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2002): 127–28; and Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty* (New York: Random House, 2010).
[128] Garret Cullity, *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality"; Singer, *Life You Can Save*; and Larry Temkin, "Thinking about the Needy, Justice, and International Organizations," *The Journal of Ethics* 8 (2004): 349–95.
[129] Debra Satz, "Ideals of Egalitarianism and Sufficiency in Global Justice," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, Suppl. 1 (2010): 53–71.
[130] William MacAskill, *Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make a Difference* (New York: Avery, 2015), and Peter Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).
[131] Serene Khader, "Beyond Inadvertent Ventriloquism: Caring Virtues for Anti-paternalist Development Practice," *Hypatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 742–68; Khader, "Empowerment through

I propose that we look to the relational approach to poverty that has emerged from within chronic poverty research and development studies.

The relational approach, which aligns with how poor-led organizations frame deprivation, sees social, economic, and political inequalities as both drivers and dimensions of poverty. It takes a more radical view of the politics of redistribution than do arguments about the "moral demands of affluence," for it is based on the notion of social entitlement—or the right to a fair share of social and global resources and wealth. This more relational, and political, view of chronic poverty, I argue, is both reflected in and illuminated by the perspectives, insights, and strategies of many poor communities and their social movements in the global South. Chapter 4 shows how poor-led political activists politicize poverty and its causes—promoting poor-centered policy approaches and development interventions—and engage in critical, political consciousness-raising among people living in poverty. I draw on the extensive literature on urban slum dweller political mobilizations in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, especially SDI and some of its founding member-groups; the *piqueteros* workers' movement in Argentina; and the rural landless movements in Latin America, particularly the MST in Brazil, its global spinoff, La Vía Campesina, and the rural empowerment group, Nijera Kori, in Bangladesh. These examples serve to show how poor groups politicize poverty, both in public debates and in the eyes of members of poor communities.

Chapter 5 explores how poor organizations and movements build the collective capabilities of the poor in ways that enable them to challenge the discriminatory practices and relations of subordination that perpetuate their needs deprivation. Building the collective political capabilities of poor communities, in particular, is a key part of the work undertaken by pro-poor organizations and movements—and indispensable to the larger goal of dismantling and reforming policies that disadvantage or oppress poor communities.

If the perspectives and agency of those who live in poverty should drive the antipoverty agenda, what role, if any, is left for outsiders? In Chapter 6, I argue that a poor-led approach to poverty reduction and social change alters the political responsibilities of diverse agents—especially those with means, power, and privilege. A more political and pro-poor approach to poverty,

Self-Subordination?"; and Koggel, "Is the Capability Approach a Sufficient Challenge to Distributive Accounts of Global Justice?"

I contend, gives rise to *different responsibilities* for the nonpoor than those usually highlighted in global justice theory. A poor-driven approach to poverty reduction can best be advanced by taking up a political responsibility for solidarity with poor-led organizations and social movements: those with resources and political freedoms can and should help to support, defend, and amplify the agendas of these groups.[132] Poor movements' campaigns, for example, can be assisted by outsiders' efforts to remove obstacles to national programs for education, health, housing, social welfare, and environmental protections that align with the goals of many poor-led movements.[133] Philosophers and political theorists can help to conceptualize such solidarity-based responsibilities, and provide normative justifications for reforms that support the social rights and protections, and structural reforms, that poor-led movements demand.[134]

1.9. Skeptical Concerns about, and Objections to, Poor-Led Poverty Eradication
1.9.1. Downshifting Responsibility onto the Poor?

Before proceeding, it is worth heading off a few skeptical objections to the idea of the poor as moral and political agents. Chief among these is the worry that positioning the poor as vital agents of justice wrongly or unfairly downshifts responsibility onto the shoulders of those least capable of, and least responsible for, transforming poverty and injustice. Although I address this concern most fully in the concluding chapter, for present purposes I will note that I am careful to distinguish between the responsibility for transforming poverty (which certainly ought not to be assigned to those living in poverty) and the justice-based claim that poor organizations and movements have a moral right to shape institutional and policy responses to

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[132] See also Carol C. Gould, *Interactive Democracy: The Social Roots of Global Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Ackerly, Just Responsibility.

[133] Key obstacles include tied and conditional aid, unfair trade agreements, and crippling sovereign debt. An end to tied aid, debt eradication for the least developed countries (LDCs), and a global trade round on development would help to enable poor countries to establish social protection programs; see Hulme, *Should Rich Nations Help the Poor?* Of note, pro-poor reforms to education and social pensions were attempted by the governments of Uganda and Lesotho, yet opposed (or undercut by unfeasible conditions) by large donors; see Hickey, "Return of Politics in Development Studies I," 349–58.

[134] Political theorist Margaret Kohn's defense of right to shelter on solidaristic grounds, for example, provides additional grounding for Indian slum dwellers' legal and political struggles. See her *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 3.

poverty. It is also important to recognize that this latter claim is made by poor organizations and movements, which believe that poor-led poverty eradication best respects the agency, dignity, and demands for recognition and inclusion of people who live in poverty.

1.9.2. The Problem of Scale

Another likely source of skepticism concerns poor movements' prospects for success, given the level and scale at which they operate. Although some of the groups I discuss in this book have managed to become effective national movements—notably the MST and the *piqueteros*—and even transnational, like SDI and Vía Campesina—others operate and have influence mainly at the municipal or village level. Consequently, they may seem an unlikely force for poverty reduction, let alone greater global justice. While there is no question that poor-led organizations and movements cannot effect transformative and lasting social change without the support of key civil society actors (trade unions, political parties, civic associations, etc.), I argue that they occupy an epistemically and political privileged position within anti-poverty efforts. Nor is this role negated by the limited or local scale of much poor-led activism; indeed, the fact that so much poor-led social movement activity takes place at a local level is arguably a strength from the point of view of concerns about accountability and legitimacy.

It is important to recognize why movements of the poor begin as place-based, local struggles, and often remain so. Poor individuals with minimal education, resources, political access, and little or no experience with formal labor or union structures connect through their shared occupation of space—the city slum, the village, the valley. Informal sector workers, for example, have come together to face common experiences of wage exploitation, mistreatment, and poverty, seeking strength and reforms in numbers.[135] Organizers within poor movements often draw members from existing community hubs or networks, or what Pithouse calls "situated modes of sociality," such as "local churches, undertakers, the local clinic . . . [even] local projects like crèches."[136] This shared occupation of land and space occasions common experiences of adversity that can motivate collective organizing

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[135] A good example of this is India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which represents 2 million women informal workers.

[136] Pithouse, "Conjunctural Remarks on the Significance of 'the Local,'" 105.

and action. People living in the same informal settlements face the prospect of eviction and the destruction of their shacks, and they are often subject to eviction-related violence by police or developers. Communities dependent upon natural resources like forests, fisheries, or arable land experience common dispossession or displacement by dam development, deforestation, or mining—or what has come to be known as "displacement by develop-ment."[137] Landless workers in particular agricultural areas with concentrated land ownership have formed countless landless peasant movements in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America.

These place-based movements seeking to effect change at the national level are important for transformative social change, not least because the kinds of reforms most likely to empower and improve the lives of the poor still fall under the purvey of national states; as Duncan Green writes, "real change happens at the national level."[138] Reflecting on how three place-based poor social movements—Brazil's MST, the Indian branch of the People's Health Movement, and the South African Treatment Action Campaign—"have managed to get powerful politicians to listen to their demands," Campbell et al. note the unique ability of local struggles to empower and build the po-litical capabilities of their members:

> While larger social movements are most likely to get widespread atten-tion . . . smaller, local social movements could develop similar, contextually-specific strategies for promoting receptive social environments in the local context. Gains in human freedoms are not only achieved nationally, but also may be achieved through struggles that never move beyond the local arena.[139]

While local and even national poor-led movements resist and even trans-form structures and relations of subordination in important ways, increas-ingly it is transnational solidarity networks that receive the most attention in discussion of the role of activists in hastening global social justice. Especially for political scientists, political sociologists, and the handful of philosophers interested in the impact of activism on international institutions, "it is the

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[137] See, for example, Penz et al., *Displacement by Development*, and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *Dispossession and Resistance in India: The River and the Rage* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[138] Green, *How Change Happens*, 222.

[139] Catherine Campbell, Flora Cornish, Andrew Gibbs, and Kerry Scott, "Heeding the Push from Below: How Do Social Movements Persuade the Rich to Listen to the Poor?," *Journal of Health Psychology* 15, no. 7 (2010): 970.

global-ness that is new, and the massiveness that seems to hold out the greatest possibility of political impact."[140] These agents are not only thought to be more capable and better resourced, but more importantly, to have wider reach and impact on national and transnational institutions.[141] Even critical International Relations theorists who write on global civil society eschew discussion of local activism in favor of a focus on transnational activist networks that take aim at international institutions.[142] Yet grassroots, place-based movements, both local and national, play a unique role in developing the political capabilities of poor communities. Local movements are powerful incubators, enabling subaltern groups to develop their members' collective capabilities and increase their influence and standing as stakeholders. Poor and marginalized people are more readily able to enter, and to create, political and institutional spaces at a local level. They are also more able to identify and protest their social exclusion within everyday structures and systems that determine their access to social entitlements; as Holston and Appadurai write, "place remains fundamental to the problems of membership in society, and . . . cities . . . are especially privileged sites for considering the current renegotiations of citizenship."[143] While national and global political and economic processes and structures are deeply implicated in the issues and interests that call poor communities into action—resource scarcity, needs deprivation, acute inequality and exploitation—groups that organize locally can achieve solutions to some of their most pressing problems while building the organizational and political capacities needed to press for deeper social reforms.

As I shall argue in the coming chapters, developing the collective capabilities of the poor augments their power as stakeholders, primarily at the local level, and occasionally at the national level. Some of the poor-led movements discussed in this book have successfully scaled up to the global level (e.g., SDI and La Vía Campesina). Herein lies a conundrum for poor movements, then: if the gains won by poor movements are not to be quickly lost, it is vital

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[140] Kim Voss and Michelle Williams, "The Local in the Global: Rethinking Social Movements in the New Millenium," *Democratization* 19, no. 2 (2012): 353.

[141] See, for example, Fraser, *Scales of Justice*; Gould, *Interactive Democracy*; Ypi, *Global Justice and Avant-Garde Political Agency*.

[142] For an analysis of this tendency, see Jean Grugel and Anders Uhlin "Renewing Global Governance: Demanding Rights and Justice in the Global South," *Third World Quarterly 33*, no. 9 (2012): 1703–1718.

[143] James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture* 8, no. 2 (1996): 189.

to keep these movements strong and relevant well past the point at which particular concessions are gained or reforms introduced. Does the longevity and success of poor-led movements therefore depend upon their capacity to grow beyond the local or national level? This is a difficult question that depends very much on the nature of the movement, its aims (which may of course evolve over time), where its strengths and power base lie, and whether there exist viable coalition partners at the regional, national, or international levels. But in considering what kind of impact poor social movements can potentially have, it is important not to sideline local and national groups or to treat them as mere building blocks for transnational networks. The distinctive value of local and national struggles notwithstanding, poor-led collectives and movements usually find that they need to scale up in order to transform relations or structures that systematically disadvantage and subordinate their members. In the case of the Indian Alliance, this has been accomplished through entering into co-production initiatives with municipal governments, for "the local state is needed to provide linking infrastructure, legal permissions, and capital funds to enable the scaling up of local initiatives."[144] When poor organizations, including grassroots ones, seek to effect change or reform at the level of policy, they often discover that this necessitates joining forces with groups in other cities or countries in order to mount a more effective advocacy campaign against processes or institutions that are unjust and which disadvantage the poor. A common method of scaling up in these instances is that of building alliances or coalitions with other organizations in civil society that are working toward similar goals.

1.9.3. Problems of Accountability and Legitimacy

When transnational movements do form, as in the case of SDI and the global peasant network La Vía Campesina, it is by no means true that they cease to be grassroots—despite the common belief that they do. The Zapatista movement, for example, is "a now classic example of a place-based movement, rooted in its own life ways and cosmovisions, seeking both solidarity and

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[144] Gordon McGranahan and Diana Mitlin, "Learning from Sustained Success: How Community-Driven Initiatives to Improve Urban Sanitation Can Meet the Challenges," *World Development* 87 (2016): 312.

wide-ranging political conversation grounded in a shared No to neoliberalism."[145] Escobar describes antiglobalization struggles in the global South as a hybrid type, "place-based, yet transnationalised."[146] Kabeer, describing Nijera Kori's decision to "build strategic coalitions with other sections of civil society," notes that "its activism at these higher levels remains rooted in its activism at the grassroots level."[147] SDI's summary of its mandate expresses its belief that working at both the local and international levels is essential to the network's effectiveness: it seeks to "create a global voice of the urban poor, engaging international agencies and operating on the international stage in order to support and advance local struggles. Nevertheless, the principal theatre of practice for SDI's constituent organizations is the local level: the informal settlements where the urban poor of the developing world struggle to build more inclusive cities, economies, and politics."[148]

The place-based, grassroots nature of poor-led groups means that they are usually representative of local communities and undertake action that is in the interests of their members. As such, poor groups generally enjoy a high level of legitimacy among their constituents. As noted earlier, there is a crucial difference between genuinely grassroots poor movements and organizations formed by, and operating as, NGOs. The concerns raised by Dryzek regarding the representativeness and legitimacy of advocacy groups that speak "on behalf of the poor" and "are unelected and often self-appointed" simply do not apply here.[149] This legitimacy endures even when local, place-based groups form coalitions or networks.[150] The typical leadership structure of poor organizations reinforces this: typically, leaders (if there are formal leaders) emerge or are elected from the communities from which the movement draws its members, and receive training in organizing, practical skills connected with the activities of the group, as well as education on rights and social entitlements. Accountability is shored up by having leaders elected

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[145] Janet Conway and Jakeet Singh, "Radical Democracy in Global Perspective: Notes from the Pluriverse," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2011): 703.

[146] Arturo Escobar, "Beyond the Third World: Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-Globalisation Social Movements," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 223.

[147] Naila Kabeer, "Making Rights Work for the Poor: Nijera Kori and the Construction of 'Collective Capabilities' in Rural Bangladesh," *IDS Working Paper 200* (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2003), 31.

[148] http://knowyourcity.info/who-is-sdi/about-us/.

[149] Dryzek, "Democratic Agents of Justice," 374.

[150] As Batliwala argues, "When SDI or WIEGO leaders represent their movement in any forum, it is clear to all concerned that hundreds of thousands of their members are standing behind them. This has enormous impact, particularly in their capacity to engage and negotiate with formal institutions." Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 404–5.

on a revolving basis in local poor organizations, in a power and leadership structure that movements like the MST call "horizontal."

Working closely with an NGO, as the SDI model necessitates, does not make a shack/slum dweller group any less authentic or legitimate. As one of the founders of SDI explains, "SDI has been driven by the rationalities and interests of organizations *of the urban poor* to work with professionals. This is fundamentally different from many other alliances between NGOs and grassroots organizations where the motivation for the partnership derives from the interests *of the professionals*."[151] Yet issues of legitimacy and, especially, accountability are admittedly more complicated where transnational global organizations and movements are concerned. Might global peasant networks such as La Vía Campesina, which calls itself "the international peasant's voice," lack robust legitimacy when its leaders claim to represent the vision and demands of 2 million peasants worldwide—due to the sheer scale of the movement? I would argue no.[152] The grassroots transnational movement structure is a distinctive political entity within global civil society, and its authority and effectiveness is a direct result of the democratic mandate movements with this structure hold vis-à-vis their grassroots (place-based) constituency.

Finally, where transnational poor networks accept external funding or participate in more institutional initiatives, is their accountability to their members diminished? SDI, for example, became (in 2007) an organizational member of an INGO called "Cities Alliance," which describes itself as "the global partnership supporting cities to deliver sustainable development"; WIEGO (Women in Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing), an NGO, also joined as a member in 2015. This relationship to a global network makes considerable sense given that slum upgrading is a central component of the programming of Cities Alliance; however, the INGO has received much of its funding from the World Bank and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and as such is accountable to them (at least in a reporting capacity). While external funding does not change many of the fundamentals

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[151] Joel Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform: Paths Travelled by Slum/Shack Dwellers International," in Bebbington et al., *Can NGOs Make a Difference?*, 324.

[152] Like other global networks of grassroots groups, Vía Campesina is highly decentralized in structure, with most decision-making about policies being debated and decided at the regional level (peasant farmer groups are grouped regionally). The international conferences, held every four years, draw representatives from peasant organizations and movements around the world; at the 2017 conference in Spain, there were over 700 participants from local and national farmers' groups in four continents. See https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/.

of a grassroots organizations—certainly, SDI affiliates and member organizations still adhere to the grassroots, participatory model that is the network's signature style—it can potentially influence the agenda or direction of the network as a whole. Insofar as a global network of urban poor, or landless peasants, becomes dependent upon external funding, there is a real risk that it will view its accountability to its donor as trumping that to its members.[153] I will return to these important issues in the last chapter of the book, where I discuss the responsibilities that individuals and institutions in the global North have in helping to remove obstacles to organizing by poor-led movements and in assisting them in solidaristic ways.

1.9.4. Can Poor-Led Organizations and Social Movements Effect Much Change?

When asking about the "effectiveness" of mobilized poor groups, we need to be careful not to invoke a false expectation that they can single-handedly overcome chronic poverty. If the effectiveness question relates to whether poor-led movements can and have enabled some poor communities to articulate their needs and vision for change, to become more socially empowered and recognized as political agents and stakeholders, and to engage in collection action directed at reducing their poverty and powerlessness, then the answer is surely yes. They could become still *more* effective if given the opportunity to shape national policies on housing for the urban poor, land reform and redistribution, social protection programs and healthcare,[154] and labor laws; and to have a say in international policies governing agricultural trades and tariffs, sovereign debt and loan repayment, and reforms to transnational institutions like the WTO. Or, as Carol Gould argues, "global justice presupposes . . . solidarity."[155]

It is a truism that those suffering from the effects of structural injustices cannot depend on affluent people and their institutions to take up their

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[153] For example, funding agencies and foundations risk "projectising their activities and creating an adherence to a specific project cycle that is at odds with the more fluid processes that movements engage in and the pressure to achieve 'targets' that is an inevitable condition of donor assistance." Priyanthi Fernando, "Working with Social Movements," in *Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: The Role of Empowerment* (Paris: OECD, 2012), 259.

[154] See, for example, Leila Patel and Marianne Ulriksen, eds., *Development, Social Policy, and Community Action: Lessons from Below* (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2018).

[155] Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 127.

responsibilities—not least because, as Young argues, "for every structural in-justice there is an alignment of powerful entities whose interests are served by those structures."[156] As activists and thinkers associated with subaltern social and political movements have long insisted, the contributions of those most excluded, exploited, and subordinated by social processes and structures are critical to transforming these injustices. To theorize about global justice without considering the wider political and historical con-text and contributions of emancipatory, justice-seeking social struggles by marginalized (including poor) peoples is, in a very real sense, to reinforce their erasure as agents.[157] The slogan of so many social justice movements— "nothing for us without us"[158]—speaks to their struggles against disempow-erment and exclusion, and for recognition of their human and social rights. If philosophers are to contribute to transformative, pro-poor approaches to poverty, we will need to heed this claim and consider how it might inform our normative theorizing about poverty and global in/justice.

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[156] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 148.

[157] On this point, see my "Poor-Led Social Movements and Global Justice"; Kohn, "Postcolonialism and Global Justice"; Kohn, "Globalizing Global Justice," in Bell, *Empire, Race, and Global Justice*; Stone-Mediatore, "Global Ethics, Epistemic Colonialism"; and Valdez, "Associations, Reciprocity, and Emancipation."

[158] This is the slogan of many informal settlement movements in South Africa: https://www.sasdialliance.org.za/building-inclusive-cities/.

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Philosophical Misframings of Poverty

The world I live in is so evil, so blood-thirsty, that it can take my life away from one moment to the next. So the only road open to me is our struggle. . . . I am convinced that the people, the masses are the only ones capable of transforming society. It's not just another *theory*.[1]

> —Rigoberta Menchú, indigenous rights activist who
> exposed the human rights abuses of the Guatemalan
> army and state against the Quiche (Mayan) peasantry;
> winner of 1992 Nobel Peace Prize

In comparing charity, development, and social justice approaches, it is important to note that only the latter encourages privileged actors such as physicians and academics to adopt a moral stance that would seek to expose and prevent pathologies of power.

> —Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power:*
> *Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*

Dominant ethical approaches to problems of poverty have failed to recognize organized poor communities' and movements' claim that they ought to be centrally included in decision-making about how best to eradicate poverty. Ignoring the poor's actual and prospective agency, these approaches assign duties to more powerful actors, grounding their poverty duties in one of three ways: the sheer fact of suffering (beneficence-based arguments); agents' presumed capability to assist ("assistance-based" duties); or responsibility for structures and arrangements that cause poverty ("contribution-based responsibilities"[2]). Ironically, arguments asserting that we have a moral obligation to avoid actions that coerce or undermine *the agency* of vulnerable

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[1] Menchú, as quoted in Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, trans. Eduardo Mendieta et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 293. Original source of quotation by Menchú is in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú así me nació la consciencia* (1984), as dictated by Rigoberta Menchú to Elisabeth Burgos (Siglo Veintiuno Editores).

[2] I borrow these terms from Barry and Overland, *Responding to Global Poverty*.

and impoverished people, or to uphold the human rights of the poor *to be free from agency-undercutting deprivations*, generally ignore the actual social movements of poor people. In none of these approaches do the poor figure as central agents of justice in the sense of being thought capable of envisioning the changes needed to alleviate structural poverty. Yet as we shall see in later chapters, poor-led social movements and community organizations in the global South advance a pro-poor and poor-led vision of social and political change in which people living in poverty are centrally involved in decision-making about development, social programs and social protections, urban planning (including design and delivery), and institutional reforms. As the South African Alliance, a network of informal settlement residents' groups, states:

> The motivation for . . . [our] work is rooted deep in the grassroots. By this we mean the issues that emerge most profoundly from the daily experience of poverty, landlessness, and homelessness. Our strategy is a version of that old rallying cry: "*Nothing for us without us.*" For the kind of upgrading we speak of is not about land and services alone. This is about realizing real citizenship and equality in our cities.[3]

The present chapter looks at how problematic ways of understanding poverty—what it is, and what causes it—shape normative arguments that discount the perspectives and agency of the poor. From the perspective of poor-led organizations and movements, the idea that chronic poverty could be eradicated by large increases in charity and development assistance from rich to poor countries, or top-down institutional change, is not only false, but antithetical to poor peoples' broader social aims.[4] When moral and political responsibilities are assigned in abstraction from analysis of poverty's relational and multidimensional (including nonmaterial) harms and "the social and political-economic relationships that bring about the effect of poverty,"

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[3] SDI South African Alliance, "Building Inclusive Cities," https://www.sasdialliance.org.za/building-inclusive-cities/.

[4] According to Slum Dwellers International, "increased incomes are only a partial help if families cannot access affordable adequate housing (or even tenure security) and basic services. In most towns and cities across the global south informal services for water, electricity and transport are much more expensive than legal provision. . . . Securing better access requires . . . citizens to be involved with the implementation of policy and negotiate changes in programmes and practices." Diana Mitlin and Sheela Patel, "The Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," in *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*, ed. D. Mitlin, S. Patel, S. Parnel, and S. Oldfield (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014), 305.

the prescriptions that emerge are ineffective and unlikely to secure justice for poor communities.[5] Many of the familiar poverty remedies attached to these proposed duties ignore the role of power relations in perpetuating needs deprivation, and so miss the vital need for political action that challenges the social structures that subordinate and dominate poor people.[6]

Why have philosophers overlooked poor-led social movements as agents of justice for so long? I argue in the following that treating poverty as re-ducible to needs deprivation (measurable by income and consumption), and focusing on absolute poverty to the exclusion of relative poverty (which spotlights inequalities and social exclusion), are a large part of the problem. An insufficiently political understanding of poverty shifts attention away from the unjust processes, structures, and relations of power that drive, and are partly constitutive of, poverty. Whether poverty duties are framed in terms of obligations (of affluent agents) or rights (of the poor), the usual remedies proposed—increased development assistance, humanitarian aid, philanthropy, and the reform of transnational financial institutions—do not adequately address the multilevel structural relations of subordination and social exclusion that keep people poor. To redress this, I argue, we will need to make a fundamental shift toward seeing poverty as "a socio-political rela-tionship rather than as a condition of assetless-ness."[7] My analysis of flawed conceptions of poverty within philosophical debates draws on criticisms that have been made by others, such as critiques of the shallow pond analogy and rescue-paradigm thinking.[8] It also intersects with the insights of poverty researchers and "recognition" theorists who have raised impor-tant concerns about the poverty harms that are overlooked when we focus exclusively on absolute poverty and material needs deprivation. Discussions about the limits of the "distributive paradigm" of justice for addressing

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[5] Harriss, "Bringing Politics Back into Poverty Analysis," 221.

[6] As Goodhart argues, "the politics of injustice is necessarily counterhegemonic politics . . . it must be a politics that recognizes and acts on the realization that struggles over injustice are in large part struggles over values, ideas, and interpretations. It must . . . be a transformative politics as well, a politics that aims to change prevailing thinking about (in)justice by challenging existing social arrangements and the ideology that informs them." Goodhart, *Injustice*, 181.

[7] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 813.

[8] Scott Wisor, "Against Shallow Ponds: An Argument against Singer's Approach to Global Poverty," *Journal of Global Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2011): 19–32; Paul Gomberg, "The Fallacy of Philanthropy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2002): 29–66; and Leif Wenar, "Poverty Is No Pond: Challenges for the Affluent," in *Giving Well: The Ethics of Philanthropy*, ed. Patricia Illingsworth, Thomas Pogge, and Leif Wenar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For critiques of the de-politicalization of poverty within Utilitarian writing, see Andrew Kuper, "More than Charity: Cosmopolitan Alternatives to the 'Singer Solution,'" *Ethics & International Affairs* 16 (2002): 107–20, and Kuper, "Facts, Theories, and Hard Choices: Reply to Peter Singer," *Ethics & International Affairs* 12, no. 1 (2002): 125–26.

problems of global poverty and injustice are also pertinent to the analysis I develop in this chapter.

Central to my critique of common philosophical misframings of poverty is my claim that they prevent us from developing a normative poverty approach that *recognizes poor people*—especially poor social movements and organizations—*as agents of transformative, "pro-poor political and social change."*[9] This claim directly echoes the views of poor-led movements. Transformative, durable poverty alleviation, I shall argue, requires politicizing poverty within public discourse and developing impoverished peoples' collective capabilities for social and political mobilization. Because chronic deprivation is in large part a condition of social exclusion and subordination, the political emancipation of poor populations is not a dispensable goal, but rather, a crucial component of transformative "development" and poverty eradication.[10] As poor activists well know, emancipation is not something that can be bestowed by affluent outsiders, but instead requires that poor communities challenge oppressive social structures, and claim (and defend) their social rights.[11]

In section 2.1, I show how beneficence-centered arguments, like those of Singer and "effective altruists," wrongly reduce poverty to low income/consumption and needs deprivation alone, rather than taking a broader view of poverty as also consisting in social exclusion, exploitation, and disempowerment. This framing of poverty is best represented by the shallow pond "rescue" paradigm, wherein poverty's victims are random individuals needing saving, rather than structurally oppressed social groups. The truncated and apolitical view of poverty at the core of beneficence-based arguments for poverty reduction is fueled by the doctrine of sufficientarianism, which similarly denies (or downplays) the salience of structural inequalities to poverty.

Section 2.2 explains how "sufficiency" thinking in political philosophy, which sharply bifurcates poverty and socioeconomic inequality—and denies

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[9] Anthony Bebbington et al., "Decentring Poverty, Reworking Government: Social Movements and States in the Government of Poverty," *Journal of Development Studies* 46, no. 7 (2010): 1304.

[10] Friedmann writes that development must be "a process that originates both from below and within specific territory-based social formations, such as a village or barrio neighborhood . . . an alternative development cannot be 'guided' by governing elites . . . [but] must be . . . a process that seeks the empowerment of households and their individual members through their involvement in socially and politically relevant actions." Friedmann, *Empowerment*, 33.

[11] As development thinker John Friedmann writes, "none of this . . . will happen of its own accord, nor can a system of citizen rights be imposed by administrative fiat. The disempowered must seize the initiative themselves, bringing political pressure to bear on the state to recognize their claims." Friedmann, "Rethinking Poverty: Empowerment and Citizen Rights," *International Social Science Journal* 48, no. 14 (1996): 170–71.

the significance of inequalities "as such"—contributes to this truncated view of poverty and its causes. While embracing a principle of sufficiency (versus some version of equality) does not necessarily preclude the acknowledgment of the moral relevance of relational inequalities, I argue that even revised sufficiency approaches fail to see that structural-relational inequalities are partly constitutive—not just drivers—of poverty.

Section 2.3 examines influential rights-centered and obligation-centered arguments about poverty alleviation. Seeing poverty as a violation of human rights (like Pogge), or alternatively as a state of unacceptable structural dependency and vulnerability to coercion (like O'Neill), correctly identifies the poor's lack of agency under conditions of need deprivation; however, these characterizations fail to recognize the vital role of organized poor movements in asserting the social rights of the poor and challenging the social and economic structures that underpin their poverty.

In section 2.4, I turn to the work of critical theorists, deliberative democrats, and neorepublicans (briefly discussed in Chapter 1) who see global poverty and injustice as bound up with the subordination and political domination of the poor. I argue that while they give compelling arguments for why marginalized, impoverished populations ought to be democratically enfranchised within (newly created) transnational political institutions, they overlook the importance of popular, place-based struggles as a critical vehicle for achieving this inclusion.

2.1. Beneficence, Effective Altruism, and Shallow Ponds

Political philosophers and normative ethicists of diverse moral orientations often resist defining poverty or devoting attention to the causes and drivers of severe poverty. Larry Temkin, for example, begins his essay on global poverty by noting that he "shall sidestep questions about how best to understand, define, or measure poverty, and likewise ignore questions about the relative importance of addressing absolute versus relative property, or low levels of welfare. . . . It will suffice for my purposes to employ a rough, intuitive, notion of the 'needy' . . . ."[12] Yet thinkers who, like Temkin, signal their intention to set aside the complexities of poverty definition and measurement nonetheless make assumptions about poverty that are ideologically significant.

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[12] Temkin, "Thinking about the Needy," 351.

In particular, they are usually concerned only with absolute, as opposed to relative, poverty—which has the effect of obscuring structural inequalities and thus depoliticizing needs deprivation. Singer is a prime example: he has long maintained that whereas relative poverty is relevant in rich countries, it is only absolute poverty that should concern us in poor ones.[13] Importantly, this leads him to set aside the issue of inequality, which, as I argue shortly, guts his definition of poverty of its many nonmaterial and structural dimensions and drivers (like racial gaps in wealth/assets, socioeconomic exclusion, and exploitative labor relations).

Philosophers who focus strictly on absolute poverty also often assume a monetary approach as their default method for measuring poverty and determining who is poor. This approach, which "identifies poverty with a shortfall in consumption (or income) from some poverty line"[14] has been widely criticized for ignoring numerous important aspects of poverty irreducible to income or consumption-expenditure data—especially social exclusion, economic marginalization, and powerlessness. The poverty line most often cited by Singer and proponents of effective altruism, among others, is the World Bank poverty line which (since 2016) identifies as severely poor those people living on less than $1.90 a day (using 2011 purchasing power parity dollars). The "poverty lines" approach to determining who is poor in absolute terms correlates with Temkin's "rough, intuitive notion of the 'needy' ": that is, a person who suffers a deprivation of their basic needs, thereby causing misery, high morbidity rates (especially from infectious diseases), and premature death.[15] Singer similarly describes extreme poverty as consisting in hunger, malnutrition, death from preventable diseases, inability to afford education, and low life expectancy caused by needs scarcity.[16]

The focus on absolute poverty by thinkers like Singer and Temkin is understandable given that they seek to establish that those suffering from severe needs deprivation are owed assistance by comparatively well-off individuals and states. A definition of poverty that is self-evident and measurable through

[13] Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 84, and Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 8.

[14] Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi, Ruhi Saith, and Frances Stewart, "Does It Matter That We Do Not Agree on the Definition of Poverty? A Comparison of Four Approaches," *Oxford Development Studies* 31, no. 3 (2003): 247.

[15] This is the description of poverty that Temkin subsequently provides in "Thinking about the Needy." His emphasis on absolute poverty in the context of developing countries contrasts sharply with his argument for the moral significance of relative and comparative inequalities in non-poor countries, in his book *Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[16] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 8–9.

stark indicators like hunger and daily consumption expenditure makes for a brisker start to an argument concerned with "the moral demands of affluence."[17] Framing poverty mainly in terms of material needs deprivations and illness from preventable diseases more readily supports the kinds of solutions preferred by effective altruists: namely, expanded philanthropy and greater aid and development assistance by governments and institutions in the global North so that people living in poverty have sufficient means to avoid poverty-related illness, death, and suffering.

I will discuss the controversies surrounding poverty definitions and measurements at greater length in the next chapter, but for present purposes, it is important to note two things. First, "the definition of poverty does matter for poverty eradication strategies"[18] insofar as policy prescriptions can only attempt to ameliorate those aspects of poverty that are identified as needing redress—just as poverty remedies can only target those who are identified *as poor* by a particular poverty definition or measurement tool. It is not a coincidence that much Utilitarian writing on poverty promotes technocratic interventions thought to alleviate hunger and disease most expediently. Effective altruists, for instance, propose that we support charities with "proven" track records in reducing disease and needs deprivation—rather than activist organizations that target the structural causes of poverty, like racism and class-based oppression, or which seek to socially empower marginalized communities. But their perfunctory dismissal of structural, pro-poor solutions is far from satisfying: as Singer, speaking for effective altruists, writes: "We believe there have been many efforts to find and address the root causes of poverty, and that they haven't generated strong conclusions or successful programs. Root-causes-based approaches are, in our view, the kind of speculative and long-term undertakings that are best suited to highly engaged donors."[19] Because effective altruists decline to target structural drivers of deprivation, it is hard to see how the antipoverty interventions they endorse could do much to redress them.

The second important consequence of an exclusive focus on absolute poverty—as determined by a monetary/"poverty lines" approach—is that it ignores aspects of poverty irreducible to needs deprivation alone, such as social exclusion, subordination, and exploitation. If these dimensions are not identified as salient dimensions of poverty, then the usual solutions, which aim to reduce hunger and privation, are unlikely to impact them. To sharpen the contrast

[17] Cullity, *Moral Demands of Affluence.*
[18] Laderchi et al., "Does It Matter That We Do Not Agree on the Definition of Poverty?," 243.
[19] https://www.givewell.org/how-we-work/criteria.

that I am seeking to draw between the familiar solutions proposed by normative ethicists and those advanced by poor movements, consider the way that the SDI-affiliated Pamoja Trust (PT), a grassroots Kenyan NGO that organizes residents of informal settlement communities, views the plight of the urban poor:

> Inadequate housing and slums are the consequences of the combined effects of failed policies, bad governance, inappropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, dysfunctional markets, unresponsive financial systems, the lack of political will, and the absence of effective public or private housing delivery organizations. [PT] also sees the condition of slums and the in-dignity that accompany it as a manifestation of both power asymmetry be-tween the governed and the governors as well as systematic exclusion of a majority of the urban poor.[20]

As this statement illustrates, slum dweller organizations see the housing crisis of poor people as the outcome of structures and processes that protect those with resources and systematically disadvantage the powerless.

Viewing poverty as reducible to material needs scarcity not only obscures its social and structural dimensions, but makes it easy to remain agnostic about the underlying causes of deprivation—as evinced by Singer's comment about the futility of funding initiatives that seek to address the "root causes" of poverty. Such agnosticism contrasts sharply with the perspectives of poverty and development researchers, for whom uncovering processes underlying poverty and identifying key drivers are seen as essential to sound poverty-reduction strategies. Though there is much debate among them regarding both the defi-nition of poverty and the relative importance of its different causes, they agree that antipoverty strategies that fail to address the structural drivers of needs deprivation are ineffective and likely paternalistic; as Hulme, a leading scholar of global chronic poverty, writes,

> Encouraging better-off people to feel morally indignant about extreme pov-erty is probably the easiest part of an attempt to assist extremely poor people.

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[20] http://www.pamojatrust.org/index.php/admissions. The passage continues: "PT is therefore convinced that the most appropriate response to this situation lies in working with the Urban Poor with a strong constituency from below that has a deep material and symbolic interest in reform in improving livelihood. In this endeavor, PT works with the Urban Poor's innovation, solidarity and networks to foster engagement that shall compel the state and market to better respond to Urban Poor related challenges and develop inclusive policies and practices for urban citizenship." Pamoja Trust collaborates with Muungano wa Wanavijiji, the social movement of the Kenyan Federation of Slum Dwellers.

However, for well-meaning people to take effective action to support the efforts of poor people to improve their lives and the prospects for their children, the concerned (development professionals, social activists, students and "ordinary citizens") need to have an understanding of why people remain poor in an affluent world.[21]

Those who make use of "shallow-pond" thinking or a rescue paradigm, like Singer, Peter Unger, and effective altruists generally, are apt to deny that we need to understand severe poverty's underlying causes in order to develop remedies and moral duties to alleviate it. Critics have noted that the pond analogy—in which a passerby is faced with dilemma of whether to rescue a drowning child, thereby ruining his new expensive shoes[22]—eliminates many morally and politically salient aspects of the context and drivers of poverty in the global South. Philosopher Scott Wisor notes that it presents a wholly inaccurate and "depoliticized" conception of poverty in which "there is no context: no geography . . . no ethnicity, no religion, no gender, no power, or no race. There are simply two people, one deciding whether to save the other."[23] Nor are there institutions in the shallow pond scenario; when Singer has included institutions in his analysis, he leaves out all consideration of how "merely pushing for more aid dollars might deliberately undermine poor people's own efforts to reform institutions."[24] Importantly, the structural power relations that underpin poverty—the "political institutions, from the state to the family, that create and sustain unjust distribution of resources"[25]—are rendered invisible by shallow pond thinking. Nor can the contributing role that global income inequality and inequalities *within* states play in sustaining unacceptably high levels of absolute poverty be modeled by the pond analogy (still less by the "Bob and the Bugatti" example that Singer also employs).[26]

The "norm of rescue" at the heart of the shallow pond analogy, as Paul Gomberg has argued, also denies the extent to which systems that perpetuate poverty, such as those relating to global food production and property rights,

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[21] Hulme, *Global Poverty*, 7.

[22] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 3.

[23] Wisor, "Against Shallow Ponds: An Argument against Singer's Approach to Global Poverty," 21.

[24] Wisor, "Against Shallow Ponds," 23.

[25] Wisor, "Against Shallow Ponds," 27.

[26] Singer uses the example of Bob and the Bugatti in *Life You Can Save* as well as "The Singer Solution to World Poverty," *New York Times Magazine*, September 5, 1999.

are both hugely profitable and reinforced by deeply unequal social relations that make some, but not others, vulnerable to poverty.[27] In my view, when the structural inequalities and subordination faced by the poor do not figure centrally in poverty explanations and remedies, we cannot see why grass-roots poor organizations and movements seeking transformative, not merely palliative, antipoverty policy responses, are so vital. Shallow pond thinking sees no role for those living in poverty to contribute to antipoverty strategies or remedies, not only because of how it views poverty (material needs deprivation) but because it sees them as random victims needing rescue, not as members of systematically disadvantaged or oppressed groups. That some forms of aid can actively undermine grassroots efforts to bring about transformative social change by diverting resources and short-circuiting community-led development processes is therefore not a matter of concern for shallow pond proponents.[28] Indeed, rescue/shallow pond paradigm fails to grapple with the most basic risks of adverse "unintended effects" that can result from well-meaning but poorly designed development and human-itarian aid interventions: the creation of black markets, the disruption of labor markets, and the undermining of certain local institutions.[29]

The shallow pond/rescue analogy thus seems an especially unhelpful way of conceptualizing how best to eradicate chronic poverty. Yet its defenders argue that, for all its shortcomings, the shallow pond device poignantly and starkly spotlights the moral duties of those who are in a position to help alleviate poverty. Elizabeth Ashford, for instance, has argued that the individual duties of beneficence that attach to the emergency situation of the shallow pond are even "more demanding" and applicable to contexts of chronic poverty, properly considered—and that the shallow pond analogy is helpful in getting us to understand this moral urgency. Those who live in chronic poverty endure conditions of deprivation that "present an ongoing threat to the basic interests of members of a particular group" and violate their "human

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[27] Gomberg, "Fallacy of Philanthropy," 48.

[28] Development or antipoverty interventions that ostensibly aim to empower women through mi-crocredit financing, as Serene Khader has argued, may leave untouched patriarchal relations and norms that reduce aspects of their agency. Micro-finance development projects may expand women's "welfare agency" but reduce their "feminist agency" by not challenging patriarchal norms. Micro-credit sometimes increases women's overall workload, since their domestic duties do not decrease with these new income-generating opportunities outside the home. See Khader, "Empowerment through Self-Subordination?"

[29] Wenar, "Poverty Is No Pond," 125.

right to subsistence"; chronic poverty thus reflects an institutional failure on multiple levels—a "systemic injustice."[30] While Ashford's account of severe chronic poverty rightly foregrounds the relations and structures of inequality and subordination that give rise to needs scarcity and extreme vulnerability, she nevertheless tasks affluent individuals and institutions in rich states with dismantling these structures. Ashford sees it as "a strength of Singer's argument that it focuses on a simple and urgent moral relation that obtains between an individual relatively affluent agent" and the chronic poor, showing how "we as individual agents are in a position to save or transform the lives of particular individuals at a small personal cost."[31] Yet the pond scenario ill-serves Ashford here, for it both discounts the prospective agency of people living in poverty and instead inexplicably entrusts affluent individuals to change the systems and structures that perpetuate the needs deprivation of subordinated social groups.

Beyond these problems with shallow pond thinking, beneficence-based and Utilitarian (including effective altruist) discussions of poverty often reduce poverty to mere resource scarcity. Conflating the "what" and "why" of poverty, resource scarcity is treated as *both* a description and explanation of poverty. As Wisor observes, however, it is important to distinguish the constituent features of poverty from its causes and consequences, while recognizing that some factors may be relevant in more than one category.[32] Singer is the first in a long line of ethicists who see poverty *as both consisting in, and as caused by*, a deprivation of basic needs. Singer's seminal 1972 article[33] centered on famine, not chronic poverty, and therefore not unreasonably focuses on urgent deprivation and the moral imperative to respond to it. Yet even in later work, it is clear that Singer views poverty as a condition in which one lacks sufficient material goods needed to live a life free from preventable suffering, the proximate cause of which is lack of said resources.[34] His description of poverty does not seem especially controversial insofar as he merely follows the World Bank in defining "extreme poverty as not having enough income to meet the most basic human needs for adequate food,

[30] Elizabeth Ashford, "Obligations of Justice and Beneficence to Aid the Severely Poor," in Illingworth et al., eds., *Giving Well*, 27, 41, 43, 40.

[31] Ashford, "Obligations of Justice and Beneficence to Aid the Severely Poor," 37.

[32] Scott Wisor, *Measuring Global Poverty: Toward a Pro-Poor Approach* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 16.

[33] Singer, "Famine, Affluence and Morality."

[34] Singer, *Life You Can Save*.

water, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care, and education."[35] But upon closer inspection, we can see that Singer's definition of what poverty *is*, and what its proximate causes are, are fused in a way that even the World Bank's definition is not: for Singer, poverty simply *is* a condition of needs deprivation, *caused by* insufficient food or other necessities.[36]

Singer's oversimple and apolitical conception of poverty as material scarcity informs his views that our goal should be alleviating needs scarcity, not inequality as such, and that even tremendous wealth is not problematic provided everyone's needs are met:

> Some people imagine that the wealth of the world is a static quantity, like a pie that must be divided among a lot of people. . . . But the world's wealth is not fixed in size. The world is vastly richer now than it was, say, a thousand years ago. By finding better ways to create what people want, entrepreneurs make themselves rich, but they don't necessarily make others poorer. . . . in absolute terms, entrepreneurs increase the world's wealth. So the unequal distribution of the world's wealth . . . is not sufficient to show that the rich have harmed the poor.[37]

Singer's apparent naïveté about the drivers of global structural inequalities— such as the sovereign debt of nonindustrialized countries, trade and tariff policies disadvantageous to poor countries, and pervasive, impoverishing practices of labor exploitation—supports a neoliberal, growth-driven approach to reducing poverty. Widely discredited by development economists and practitioners concerned with sustainability and human rights, this approach, as political economist John Harris notes, "does not usually address the processes of accumulation in contemporary capitalism and evades

[35] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 6.

[36] Singer also justifies his material-needs-focused approach by claiming that it is difficult or impossible to know poverty's underlying causes: "If the objection to effective altruism is that it often takes a Band-Aid approach to poverty, treating its symptoms rather than its root causes, then we should not forget that sometimes we don't know what the root causes of poverty are, and even should we come to know what some of them are, we may still be unable to change them. In those circumstances, treating the symptoms of poverty will be the best we can do—and we should not forget that this will mean saving lives, alleviating hunger or chronic malnutrition, eliminating parasites, providing education, helping women to control their fertility, and preserving sight. Not bad for Band-Aids." See Peter Singer, "The Logic of Effective Altruism: Reply," *Boston Review*, July 2015, http://bostonreview.net/forum/logic-effective-altruism/peter-singer-reply-effective-altruism-responses.

[37] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 29.

the problems of the distribution of economic resources and of political power, apparently offering technical solutions to the problem in a way that is not threatening to the elites who benefit from existing structures and relationships."[38]

Singer avoids discussing the nonmaterial aspects of poverty, such as social subordination, marginalization, humiliation, and shame, except for a brief reference to "a degrading state of powerlessness" frequently accompanying poverty.[39] These power- and recognition-related harms only come into relief, however, when we view poverty through a relational lens, asking about the social power relations and structures that perpetuate conditions of exclusion and deprivation. To approach poverty in this way would likely complicate the objective that defines so much of Singer's work in this area: namely, that of getting affluent persons to recognize their moral obligations to help relieve poverty-related suffering by increasing their individual and collective giving. Treating poverty as synonymous with needs scarcity and focusing on its proximate causes (lack of food, clean water, shelter, housing, healthcare, education) serve this singular goal and its accompanying moral justification well. By contrast, a more political and structural conception of poverty and its causes would seem to open up the specter of undermining the affluent's responsibilities vis-à-vis the poor. While Singer does not explicitly cite this concern as motivating his reluctance to engage the question of poverty's underlying causes, he seems to acknowledge it when he writes:

> Giving to Oxfam is doing something that helps relieve desperate poverty. Maybe it won't change the structure of things. But until I'm shown how to do that, I'll settle for making some people better off. . . . When we can't make deep structural changes, it is still better to help some people than to help none.[40]

Although Singer says he is "open-minded about the best way to combat poverty," he characterizes more political solutions as "advocacy work for a fairer global economic order" that his intended readership (affluent individuals) could opt to pursue if they judge it warranted. Notably, he does not discuss or seem to recognize the existence of poor-led movements or grassroots poor

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[38] Harriss, "Bringing Politics Back into Poverty Analysis," 216.
[39] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 6.
[40] Peter Singer, "Achieving the Best Outcome: Final Rejoinder," *Ethics & International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2002): 128.

organizations. Singer also dismisses the question of whether the affluent *should* engage in such advocacy as a mere "practical question," warning that "if there is little chance of achieving the kind of revolution you are seeking, then you need to look around for a strategy with better prospects of actually helping some poor people."[41]

In recent years, Singer has become closely associated with effective altruism (EA) and its main meta-charity, GiveWell—a "philosophy and a social movement that aims to revolutionalise the way we do philanthropy."[42] Advocates of EA (and GiveWell) similarly treat poverty as synonymous with needs deprivation, arguably collapsing such deprivation with poverty's proximate cause (i.e., scarcity of necessary goods). The raison d'être of this approach, and of GiveWell, is the claim that it is possible to determine with considerable precision the effectiveness of aid; accordingly, its proponents judge the effectiveness of poverty reduction and development organizations' effectiveness in terms of readily quantifiable gains in the areas of health or disease, food security, and access to water.[43] These are obviously of central importance to any definition of poverty, as well as target areas for a comprehensive poverty alleviation program. But it is significant that many aspects and drivers of poverty—social and political subordination and exclusion, and discrimination based on class, caste, gender, and ethnicity—figure neither in effective altruists' explanation of poverty nor in that of the charitable causes it encourages us to support.[44]

Importantly, EA's analyses of charities' effectiveness do not address their impact on structural processes (e.g., discrimination, exploitation, and social marginalization) that systematically disadvantage and impoverish members of social groups, such as people who are racialized, disabled, ethnic minorities, Indigenous, or gender nonconforming. In the case of GiveWell, this bias is compounded by their focus on identifying charities for which there is externally verifiable evidence of dramatic gains in reducing harms associated with absolute poverty. Unsurprisingly, EA's preference for methods of assessment of charity effectiveness have been

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[41] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 36.

[42] Iason Gabriel, "Effective Altruism and Its Critics," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 34, no. 4 (2017): 457.

[43] https://concepts.effectivealtruism.org/concepts/economic-poverty/.

[44] As of July 2015, seven out of GiveWell's top nine charities are health-focused (malaria, eyesight/vision, and deworming). Others dispense cash to poor individuals in Uganda and Kenya to support basic needs, and provide loans to "incentivize migration" for seasonal work by poor Bangladeshis: https://www.givewell.org/charities/top-charities.

widely criticized as reflecting a quantification bias. GiveWell has long fo-
cused on randomized controlled trials (RTCs) to ascertain the efficacy of
aid groups; they also now commission their own RCTs in the areas of di-
sease prevention and health.[45] Qualitative data methods that could give a
broader picture of poverty dynamics and poverty traps arising from so-
cial subordination, formal and informal systems of discrimination, and
so forth, are rejected by the foundation. Participatory poverty assessment
(PPA) measures, which are now prominently used in many pro-poor, poor-
empowerment-focused development interventions, are also curiously ne-
glected (or rejected) by GiveWell.

   What these criticisms of EA make clear is that the question of how best to
define poverty is intricately tied up with the contentious matter of how best
to *measure* poverty. And these in turn impact which poverty prescriptions
can be imagined and advanced. Reflecting their adherence to monetary
and "poverty lines" approaches to defining deprivation, effective altruists
require that charities' effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) be quan-
tifiable. That is, the outputs and successes of organizations that aim to im-
prove human (as well as nonhuman animal and environmental) welfare
must be measurable, and comparable, in relation to specific and easily iden-
tifiable deprivation-alleviating objectives. Helping donors to "accomplish as
much good as possible, on a per-dollar basis"—using a "cost per life saved"
formula[46]—means that movements or organizations focused on removing
structures that disempower the poor—such as informal settlement or slum
dwellers' groups—would not meet GiveWell's funding criteria. Organizations
that have succeeded in improving livelihoods by overturning discrimina-
tory social norms and practices that prevent members of a subjected caste or
ethnic group from holding or cultivating land, or widows from inheriting or
holding onto land or housing, would likely fail to meet GiveWell's assessment
criteria.

   I have focused in this section on beneficence-based arguments—chiefly
Utilitarian and consequentialist approaches, of which Singer and EA are
leading examples—but other moral frameworks are not immune to shallow
pond/rescue paradigm thinking. Yet even those who advance a more po-
litical view of poverty typically overlook the poor as agents and assign

   [45] Gabriel, "Effective Altruism and Its Critics," 464.
   [46] https://blog.givewell.org/2012/12/19/cost-effectiveness-of-nets-vs-deworming-vs-cash-
transfers/.

poverty-reduction duties exclusively to affluent, powerful agents. Garrett Cullity's inquiry into "the moral demands of affluence" is a case in point. Grounded in a morally pluralist framework, he offers a more political view of poverty insofar as he considers important objections to development and humanitarian aid, and the possibility that only institutional and political change (rather than NGOs) can effectively remedy poverty.[47] There is a disconnect, however, between Cullity's recognition that severe needs deprivation has underlying structural and social causes, and the apolitical poverty duties and prescriptions that he ultimately endorses, which foreground sacrifices on the part of the affluent to help the poor. Pro-poor, poor-led solutions to deprivation are precluded here in part because Cullity is committed to vindicating the "life-saving analogy" whereby well-off people have duties to make substantial material sacrifices to help those in need:

> Suppose that private aid agencies are powerless to contribute towards systemic reform. That still leaves the possibility of giving personal help to people who desperately need it. Giving that help may not address the root causes of poverty. But to see why that is not a sensible objection to it, we need only return to the life-saving analogy. . . . Once this life is saved, questions will then arise about averting the future threats that would be likely without further action. . . . Confronted by other people's need, there are two questions to ask: "What can we do to stop this from happening again?" and "What can we do to help these people now?" Recognizing that humanitarian aid will not answer the first question does not detract from its importance in addressing the second.[48]

Like proponents of EA and Utilitarian approaches to poverty generally, Cullity's beneficence-based approach to poverty alleviation ultimately rests upon a materialist, "poverty lines" definition of deprivation and arguments about "the cost of saving a life."[49] The impact of Cullity's acknowledgment of poverty's complex underpinnings and drivers is thus undermined by framing his project around the singular question of *what the affluent ought to do to help the poor*.

[47] Cullity, *Moral Demands of Affluence*, ch. 3.
[48] Cullity, *Moral Demands of Affluence*, 43.
[49] Cullity, *Moral Demands of Affluence*, appendix 2.

In the next section, I show how "sufficiency" thinking in moral theory has helped to fuel these apolitical ways of conceptualizing poverty by oversimplifying needs deprivation and sharply bifurcating inequality and poverty. In so doing, sufficientarianism obscures the structural and group-based character of much poverty. While some revised conceptions of sufficiency can acknowledge the moral significance of certain relational inequalities, they continue to ignore the constitutive role of inequalities in producing and sustaining poverty—from (measurable) intercountry and within-country inequalities in income and assets to (harder-to-measure) structures of subordination in social and economic life, like precarious work.

2.2. Sufficiency Thinking about Global Poverty

When poverty is understood strictly as a lack of resources to meet material needs, the social power relations and structures that perpetuate poverty—such as exploitative labor arrangements, vast intergenerational inequalities in land holdings and wealth, and political processes that disempower and exclude racialized groups—are not targeted for reform. Reduced to mere low-welfare, the moral salience of power and resource inequalities recedes from view; Singer therefore thinks it is uncontroversial to observe that "inequality is not significant in itself. It matters because of the impact it has on welfare."[50] Within development practice, resource-focused apolitical views of poverty are associated with problematic development interventions that echo the shallow-pond/rescue paradigm thinking discussed earlier. As economist William Easterly explains: the "conventional approach to economic development" is fueled by a "technocratic illusion: the belief that poverty is a purely technical problem amenable to such technical solutions as fertilizers, antibiotics, or nutritional supplements. . . . The technocratic approach ignores . . . the real cause of poverty—the unchecked power of the state against poor people without rights."[51]

The reductionist view of poverty and its attendant rescue paradigm reflect a bifurcation of absolute and relative poverty that poverty researchers increasingly reject as oversimple and misleading. But in philosophy, this bifurcated view is still very much alive, and is closely associated with "sufficiency

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[50] Singer, *One World*, 84.
[51] William Easterly, *The Tyranny of Experts* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 6.

thinking." First advanced by Harry Frankfurt,[52] sufficientarianism asserts that we should care morally about absolute deprivation or low levels of welfare—and about people who fall below the threshold required for a good life—but *not* about relative inequalities, which are, by themselves, innocuous.[53] While Frankfurt and his defenders insist the distinction is strictly a conceptual one, sufficiency reasoning nonetheless depends upon a troubling and apolitical conception of poverty that continues to distort normative responses to poverty. The "strictly conceptual" disclaimer is also disingenuous: Frankfurt insists that his argument sharply distinguishing between poverty and inequality is an important antidote to the increasing emphasis on rising income and wealth inequalities—for in his view, it "may actually be harmful to regard economic equality as . . . a morally important goal."[54]

Frankfurt's continued insistence that public policy should recognize "the inherent moral innocence of economic inequality"[55] is rather astonishing. His confidence that poverty and inequality can be sharply demarcated directly conflicts the more sophisticated conception of poverty that has emerged among poverty researchers—namely, that it is a manifestation of deep structural inequalities, social exclusion, and/or adverse incorporation (e.g., exploitation) of poor groups. Overlooking power, the sufficiency perspective also ignores proximate processes that contribute to global inequalities—such as structural racism,[56] social exclusion, and discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, and caste.[57]

Unsurprisingly, philosophers and political theorists who defend the sufficientarian approach to poverty reduction, which sharply distinguishes low welfare/absolute poverty from relative poverty, use it to defend very different kinds of poverty-related responsibilities to fellow citizens as opposed

[52] Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal," *Ethics* 98 (1987): 21–43 .Frankfurt, *On Inequality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[53] Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal."

[54] Frankfurt, *On Inequality*, xi. Frankfurt also challenged President Obama's statements expressing concern about rising inequality, writing that "our most fundamental challenge is not the fact that the incomes of Americans are widely unequal. It is, rather, that fact that too many of our people are poor" (1).

[55] Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal," xi.

[56] Mills, "Race and Global Justice."

[57] David Hulme and Andrew Shepherd, "Conceptualizing Chronic Poverty," *World Development* 31, no. 3 (2003): 403–23; David Hulme, "Thinking 'Small' and the Understanding of Poverty: Maymana and Mofizul's Story," *Journal of Human Development* 5, no. 2 (2004): 161–76; and Kabeer, "Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Discrimination."

to noncitizens. Philosopher Michael Blake, for example, asserts that "liberalism can concern itself with absolute deprivation abroad, and reserve a concern for relative deprivation for the local arena. . . . Shared citizenship . . . gives rise to a concern with relative deprivation that is absent in the international realm."[58] Blake's view that citizens of states in the global North have duties toward the distant poor as regards absolute, but not relative, poverty, is grounded in statist and nationalist arguments about the moral significance of shared political institutions and special duties to compatriots—which I will not assess here. But his proposal for two tracks of global justice duties is founded upon a mistaken belief, made possible by sufficiency reasoning: that absolute poverty is fundamentally separate from structures that perpetuate social and economic inequalities (or "relative deprivation"). Not only does this view obscure the harmful dimensions of poverty irreducible to material scarcity—like social exclusion—but it denies the impact of global economic processes (like exploitative labor policies) and rising global income inequality on absolute poverty levels.[59]

Do the more nuanced versions of the sufficiency thesis that have arisen in response to criticisms of Frankfurt's classic sufficientarianism avoid these pitfalls?[60] Some sufficientarians now concede that determining levels of sufficiency may require comparative assessments, and so relative inequalities might therefore need to be redressed (through resource distribution and social policy) where they clearly undercut sufficiency thresholds.[61]

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[58] Michael Blake, "Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30, no. 3 (2001): 259–60. Matthias Risse, who has a more complex view of poverty as entailing the violation of human rights, nonetheless argues that "a just world could plainly be as unequal as ours (across countries, that is, not within countries). . . . Ours is not a just world—though not in virtue of inequality . . . [but] in virtue of the state of the worst-off falling below a minimum threshold." See Risse, *On Global Justice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 281.

[59] François Bourguignon, Francisco Ferreira, Branko Milanovic, and Martin Ravallion, "Global Income Inequality," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of the World Economy*, ed. Kenneth Reinert, Ramkishen Rajan, Amy Jocelyn Glass, and Lewis Davis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 542–50.

[60] See especially Yitzhak Benbaji, "The Doctrine of Sufficiency: A Defense," *Utilitas* 17 (2005): 310–32; Paula Casal, "Why Sufficiency Is Not Enough," *Ethics* 117, no. 2 (2007): 296–326; Robert Huseby, "Sufficiency: Restated and Defended," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 18 (2010): 178–97; David Axelsen and Lasse Nielsen, "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2014): 406–26; and Axelsen and Nielsen, "Capabilitarian Sufficiency: Capabilities and Social Justice," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 18, no. 1 (2016): 46–59.

[61] Axelsen and Nielsen, "Sufficiency as Freedom from Duress"; Liam Shields, "The Prospects for Sufficientarianism," *Utilitas* 24, no. 1 (2012): 101–17; Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); and Christian Schemmel, "Why Relational Egalitarians Should Care about Distributions," *Social Theory and Practice* 37, no. 3 (2011): 365–90.

But even sophisticated sufficiency arguments like these hold fast to two intertwined—and problematic—assumptions, namely: (1) the view that poverty is essentially comprised of material lack and unmet needs; and (2) the belief that such deprivations can best be redressed through judicious redistributive measures to reduce absolute low-welfare, and do not require more far-reaching reforms that target structural power inequalities. These assumptions ignore the growing consensus among critical development and poverty researchers that in developing countries, both chronic and episodic material poverty are driven and sustained by both relative and absolute inequalities in income and assets. Moreover, they are very much at odds with the multidimensional and relational approach to poverty that has emerged in policy and development studies, which sees structural inequalities, social exclusion, and relations of subordination and disempowerment as partially constitutive of poverty.

Revised versions of sufficientarianism can concede the *instrumental* value of reducing inequalities as a means to redress absolute low welfare within states, but what of global asymmetries in social power and vulnerability that constitute and drive so much chronic poverty?[62] Global sufficientarians Gillian Brock and Debra Satz argue that relative inequalities across national boundaries—not *only* absolute poverty—*can* matter morally in some circumstances. Drawing on Elizabeth Anderson's conception of democratic equality between citizens (within states), Satz reasons that large resource inequalities may hamper efforts to achieve an adequate level of needs fulfillment for all. Applied to the global context, a sufficiency approach would likely require that we reduce stark inequalities between states insofar as they prevent those states from securing a threshold level of sufficiency for their citizens.[63] Inequalities between individuals in different countries may also matter to the extent that they concern "competitive positional goods," like education: in a global economy, "it is important to have the abilities needed to enter into competitive interactions with distant others. If the gap with others

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[62] Charles Beitz is an important exception here, for his broadly sufficientarian approach acknowledges that "large inequalities of resources" frequently undermine people's agency. See his "Does Global Inequality Matter?," *Metaphilosophy* 32, no. 1–2 (2001): 106.

[63] Satz's position echoes Martha Nussbaum's view that states are responsible for bringing their citizens up to a threshold level in each of the core capabilities, but that rich states have additional (global justice) responsibilities to help poor countries reach this sufficiency line. Nussbaum, *Frontiers*; see also Ingrid Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined* (Cambridge: Open Book, 2017), 95–96.

is too large one may fail to have what is needed for avoiding exploitation and oppression."[64] Satz is surely right to conclude that global justice requires some wealth redistribution in order to rectify inter-state and individual relative inequalities; however, the sufficiency threshold that she stipulates—i.e., adequate resources and opportunities needed to avoid "exploitation and oppression"—could arguably be met whilst leaving intact highly unjust structural social and economic inequalities at multiple geopolitical levels.

In my view, sufficientarian thinking both in its original and revised versions fundamentally misconceives the relationship between structural inequality and poverty, and as such, offers poverty prescriptions that would leave currently impoverished and subordinated groups vulnerable to episodic, chronic poverty.[65] Ethical altruists appeal to sufficientarian reasons to argue for direct cash transfer schemes for the poor, for example; but while such transfers might (temporarily at least) end absolute poverty in the targeted population, it will have no effect on the social relations and structures that subordinate them. As development researcher Andrew Fischer notes, cash transfers may reduce poverty "by lifting the lower tail-end of an income distribution but without necessarily effecting [sic] the distribution above this tail-end. . . . [Therefore, targeted cash transfer schemes] can . . . leave the broader structure of inequality untouched, or even reinforce it by the manner in which the cash transfers and related policies are institutionally organized. This is important because much of the social dynamics related to inequality, such as stratification, subordination or exclusion, occur above this tail-end or above the thresholds usually used for poverty evaluation . . . "[66] Nor would even more nuanced sufficientarian positions have much reason to criticize the large economic and power inequalities between states that make it possible for financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank to block the efforts of low- and middle-income countries to implement pro-poor social policies. Poor countries are often prevented from pursuing pro-poor policies—such as universal primary education (in

[64] Satz, "Ideals of Egalitarianism and Sufficiency in Global Justice," 68–69.

[65] Versions of sufficientarianism that take a wider view of which inequalities are relevant to poverty, and what poverty's harms consist in, are somewhat less susceptible to this criticism. For example, according to Brock, inequalities in many different kinds of resources and opportunities can "have a profound impact on our abilities to be self-determining." Gillian Brock, *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 313.

[66] Andrew Martin Fischer, *Poverty as Ideology: Rescuing Social Justice from Global Development Agendas* (London: Zed Books, 2018), p. 269.

Uganda) and social pensions (in Lesotho)—because of restrictive conditions on donor aid and development assistance.[67] Where they manage to implement pro-poor reforms, governments of poor countries are sometimes forced to adopt regressive policies that undermine them—such as user fees to access healthcare and education in Tanzania in response to structural adjustment pressures.[68] The point is this: sufficiency thinking makes it hard to attend to these *structural and relational* drivers of poverty—both national and transnational—because it sharply dissociates poverty from inequality and denies the relevance of economic and social-structural power inequalities as such. [69]

In sum, sufficientarianism perpetuates a faulty conception of poverty, one that obscures how relations of social subordination and structural disadvantage make severe and chronic poverty possible.[70] Sufficiency thinking exceptionalizes poverty, treating it as "the product of abnormal and pathological processes," rather than "as arising from the operation of social relations and the adverse terms of inclusion in the socio-economic systems."[71] Definitions of poverty that acknowledge the relevance of relative social inequalities and structures of subordination—showing how these manifest in social exclusion and marginalization—give us a much fuller picture of poverty, as I discuss in the next chapter. And unlike sufficientarian perspectives, critical poverty approaches see value in poor-led development and activism that target impoverishing social relations and structures.

In the next two sections, I consider more "political" poverty analyses by moral and political philosophers, asking how these affect the duties they assign and the remedies they propose. Can poverty approaches that center on obligations or rights recognize the central importance of the poor—in their communities and social movements—as agents of justice?

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[67] These examples are discussed by Hickey, "Return of Politics in Development Studies I," 355.

[68] Hickey, "Return of Politics in Development Studies I."

[69] Philosophers who endorse sufficiency as a relevant principle in the international domain may nevertheless be staunch critics of inequality within states. Thomas Nagel, for example, argues that "humanitarian duties hold in virtue of the absolute rather than relative level of need of the people we are in a position to help. Justice, by contrast, is concerned with the relations between the conditions of different classes of people, and the causes of inequality between them." Nagel, "On Global Justice," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2005): 119.

[70] I discuss this in more depth in Deveaux, "Re-evaluating Sufficiency in Light of Evidence of Inequality's Harms," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 12, no. 2 (2018): 97–116.

[71] David Mosse, "Power and the Durability of Poverty: A Critical Exploration of the Links between Culture, Marginality and Chronic Poverty," *Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper* 107 (2007): 5–6.

2.3. Obligation-Centered and Rights-Centered Approaches to Poverty Alleviation

Rights-based approaches to poverty are political insofar as they see people as having entitlements to the basic goods and services (food, housing, clean water) needed for well-being, and assert the injustice of national or global structures that prevent them from attaining these. Thomas Pogge's analysis of global poverty is political in this sense, for he points to the injustices embedded in global trade regimes, and the lending and investment practices of transnational financial institutions, as the chief causes of entrenched poverty in poor countries. What is needed, according to his rights-based view, are coordinated efforts on the part of governments and global economic institutions to implement modest structural changes to these arrangements.

Pogge's argument centers on his claim that international financial institutions and governments (and by extension, citizens) and institutions in affluent states are at present failing to uphold their negative duty not to violate the human rights of the global poor. These duties are generated by the coercive context put into place by the trade, lending, and financial policies of Western states and transnational institutions, which prevent poor populations in the global South from accessing the resources they need to meet their basic needs. He thus holds actors in the global North responsible for dismantling these coercive, human rights–violating arrangements.[72] Yet the power relations and unjust social structures within low- and middle-income states that make it possible for some social groups to be systematically marginalized—and which poor-led movements directly target—are of little concern to Pogge. Keen to debunk what he dismisses as the "fallacy of explanatory nationalism,"[73] he downplays distributive inequalities and poverty-producing structures within states—and overlooks oppressed groups' struggles against local and global injustices. Indeed, the empowerment of poor people is, on Pogge's account, a *goal* of global institutional change and redistribution, *but not a means to it*.

[72] Thomas Pogge, "Real World Justice," *The Journal of Ethics* 9 (2005): 29–53; Pogge, "Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation," in *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right*, ed. Thomas Pogge (Oxford: Oxford University Press/UNESCO, 2007); and Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

[73] Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 17 and passim.

What a close look at Pogge's approach to poverty makes clear is that a political account of deprivation that focuses on the wrongs of transnational institutions and arrangements can nevertheless overlook the poor as agents of justice. While he identifies global and national structures and processes that create and perpetuate needs deprivation, and the powerlessness that results, he sees no role for poor communities or movements in poverty reduction. For Pogge, it is agents in the global North—governments, institutions, multinational corporations, and citizens—that are the proper duty-bearers of moral obligations to reduce poverty and chronic unmet needs.[74] His "institutional view" especially implicates transnational financial institutions like the World Trade Organization as they have created and continue to coercively uphold trade and finance systems and arrangements that perpetuate North-South inequality and poverty;[75] citizens of affluent states bear indirect responsibility insofar as they help to uphold these institutions through their elected governments.[76] Pogge also assigns these actors the greatest share of moral responsibility for poverty alleviation because he assumes they have greater capacities vis à vis the tasks at hand—in particular, reforming "rules governing transnational trade, lending, investment, resource use . . . [and] intellectual property."[77]

Were Pogge to also acknowledge the systemic inequalities and subordinating structures that exist at more proximate (local, regional, national) levels, and which also drive chronic poverty, he might see why the transformative changes urged by poor-led social movements—as opposed to the "modest" changes to the international financial system that he urges—are so important. As Sen has shown, distributional inequalities within states are key to understanding why economic growth alone frequently fails to reduce a country's overall poverty rates (or the rates of a subgroup, such as women),

[74] The designation of institutional entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) as duty bearers might strike some as odd, but for Pogge, these are indeed moral agents (in a non-Kantian sense): like groups or collectivities of persons, which are generally thought to possess moral agency, they can act in ways that promote the welfare of persons or, contrarily, inflict harm for which they can be said to be responsible. See Vinit Haksar, "Moral Agents," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig (London: Routledge Press, 1998).

[75] They do so by means of the "international resource and borrowing privilege, which contributes to the high incidence of oppressive and corrupt rules in the less developed countries"; the "international treaty privilege"; and the "international arms privilege." Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 49. See also Pogge, "Human Rights and Human Responsibilities," in *Global Justice and Transnational Politics*, ed. Pablo De Grieff and Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 164–85, 169.

[76] See Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, 70, and Pogge, *Politics as Usual: What Lies behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 29–30.

[77] Pogge, *Politics as Usual*, 53.

and why development interventions may fail to improve the livelihoods of some.[78] Although organized poor movements certainly view many global economic processes and political structures as contributing to their poverty, they identify local and national institutions and policies, and the social relations that uphold these, as fundamental to their deprivation and exclusion—for it is these that most directly determine their access to social goods, income, assets, and property. Pro-poor activists often target these more proximate relations and structures of inequality and discrimination in their efforts to empower and secure entitlements for poor citizens. Theorists cannot readily apprehend the importance of poor communities as agents in poverty-alleviation efforts if their gaze is turned away from the structural causes of impoverishment that antipoverty activists target.

Overlooking these multiple levels of unjust, subordinating relations thus has the effect of obscuring the poor's role (and rights) in shaping poverty reduction policies. Pogge reasons that "the capacity [of the global poor] is severely diminished by the harms inflicted upon them: '*This is why I have been working on a number of institutional reforms which could empower them*.'"[79] In response to political philosopher Neera Chandhoke's concern that he overlooks the (human rights–related) duties and agency of people in developing countries, Pogge writes that his proposals will "ideally [make it possible for them] . . . to speak for themselves"—implying that they have hitherto not done so. In a telling misreading of Chandhoke's criticism, Pogge sees her as admonishing him for failing to speak *to, and for*, the poor; he replies that "I don't take myself to have any standing to advise them. . . . Chandhoke may feel more comfortable speaking for them than I do."[80] What Chandhoke is actually suggesting, however, is that Pogge and other global justice philosophers should *listen* to (and learn from) the organized poor—to treat them as agents within the framework of human rights, and recognize the work of membership-based poor organizations and solidarity networks. Drawing attention to this extensive grassroots advocacy, Chandhoke ends her essay by aptly remarking that "if philosophical reflection on global justice should be informing civil society, the practices of global civil society should, perhaps, also be informing philosophical arguments." [81]

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[78] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, and Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).
[79] Pogge, "Responses to the Critics," in Jaggar, *Thomas Pogge and His Critics*, 209. Italics mine.
[80] Pogge, "Responses to the Critics," 209.
[81] Neera Chandhoke, "How Much Will Ever Be Enough, Mr. Thomas? How Much Will Ever Be Enough?," in Jaggar, *Thomas Pogge and His Critics*, 81.

Might poverty approaches that center on *obligations* rather than *rights* do a better job of recognizing the agency of the poor? Here I consider Onora O'Neill's proposal that we focus squarely on the obligations and duty-bearers of poverty alleviation, instead of rights. To live in a state of chronic unmet needs is to be vulnerable to structural dependency, deception, and coercion at the hands of others, O'Neill argues.[82] In the face of such unacceptable conditions, we can and should ascribe concrete duties to specific primary and secondary agents of justice to change this state of affairs. Like Pogge, O'Neill believes that poverty-related duties to alleviate unmet social and economic needs arise from within particular institutional contexts and must be articulated through existing legal, economic, and political relationships and responsibilities. Accordingly, she thinks that the most appropriate institutional agents are ones that have the greatest capabilities and scope for meeting basic human needs, provided they can do so in noncoercive, nondeceptive ways.[83] In well-functioning states, governments will therefore usually be the primary duty-bearers;[84] in weak and failed states, nonstate actors, such as transnational corporations (TNCs) and INGOs, may also figure centrally in poverty reduction—depending upon their actual capabilities, legitimacy, and the particular tasks at hand.[85] Yet as with Pogge, nowhere do the poor figure as agents of justice.

O'Neill's Kantian approach to poverty duties is nevertheless better at identifying the nonmaterial harms of deprivation than is Pogge's rights-based approach: chronic unmet needs and underdevelopment, she argues, render people vulnerable to coercion and violence, and so undermine their capacities for autonomy.[86] O'Neill's agent- and duty/obligation-centered approach is also concerned with securing the capabilities of the poor in ways that Utilitarian and beneficence-based perspectives on poverty—which focus on alleviating suffering and saving lives—are not. In contrast to their one-dimensional portrayal of the poor, O'Neill warns against treating the needy as mere supplicants; one of her key criticisms of the rights-based view is that it centers on the "passive perspective of recipience" in such a way as to appeal to (and so reinforce) the power of those who can fulfill, or else deny, those

[82] Onora O'Neill, *Justice across Boundaries: Whose Obligations?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), especially ch. 2.
[83] Onora O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 141.
[84] O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," 189.
[85] O'Neill, "Agents of Justice," 196–99.
[86] Onora O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger: An Essay on Poverty, Justice, and Development*, Studies in Applied Philosophy (Unwin Hyman, 1986), 140–41.

claims.[87] However, for O'Neill, effective poverty approaches require that we allocate *specific* duties[88] to *concrete* rather than general agents. Claiming subsistence rights in the absence of specific, identifiable duty-bearers and supporting institutional arrangements is therefore a futile exercise.[89] But this picture is arguably too pessimistic, and unwittingly serves to reinforce the denial of impoverished people's agency: as we shall see in the coming chapters, poor-led movements have developed precisely around such rights claims, demanding the fulfillment of their social entitlements as well as human rights.

Although O'Neill is concerned with the way that poverty consists in deep relational inequalities and vulnerabilities that enable coercion, then, she does not foresee much of a role for the poor themselves in processes of poverty reduction. Engaging with both duties of justice and duties of beneficence, she urges that we ask which institutional arrangements and which actions are needed to support the capacities of vulnerable persons.[90] The question of who or what are the appropriate agents of justice will thus depend not only on an analysis of the existing institutional context and relationships, but also on a frank assessment of the actual powers of specific agents and whether they can be trusted to discharge their duties competently and justly. From O'Neill's perspective, an informal settlement whose residents are struggling to mobilize around claims for social and economic rights and entitlements is thus an thus an unlikely candidate for the role of "agent of justice."

In my view, poor-led social movements could be recognized as *prospective* agents of justice within O'Neill's approach if she did not stipulate that poverty-alleviating obligations must be assigned to *presently capable* agents. O'Neill emphasizes the need to develop institutions that reduce constraints on the poor's agency, so her perspective is arguably compatible with the implementation of strategies that aim specifically to empower poor communities in social and political terms. As she writes,

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[87] O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger*, 117.

[88] These do not all have to be perfect duties; O'Neill hastens to add that "a theory of obligation, unlike a theory of rights, can allow for 'imperfect' obligations, which are not allocated to specified recipients so cannot be claimed," but may nonetheless "require specific and arduous action." O'Neill, *Justice across Boundaries*, 41 and 40.

[89] O'Neill makes this point in several places: see O'Neill, *Justice across Boundaries*, ch. 2; O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice*, ch. 7; O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and O'Neill, "The Dark Side of Human Rights," *International Affairs* 81, no. 2 (2005): 427–39.

[90] O'Neill, *Faces of Hunger*, 149, 160–61; O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, 142.

Since the basis of these obligations to help is the claim that principles of action must be shareable by all, the pursuit of development must not itself reduce or damage others' capacities for agency. It must not fail to respect those who are helped. Their desires and views must be sought, and their participation respected. Agency is not fostered if the poor experience "donor" agencies as new oppressors. Others' autonomy is not sustained if they are left feeling that they have been the victims of good works.[91]

While she does not discuss empowerment as such—preferring to speak of agency and autonomy—O'Neill offers important insights into the myriad ways in which poor people's agency is undercut; as such, her analysis is an important bridge between obligation-centered normative poverty arguments and the solidarity-focused argument I develop later in the book. But to fully acknowledge the value of grassroots and noninstitutionalized forms of politics—as well as recognize the capacities of people living in chronic poverty to engage in transformative social action—requires that we take a less restrictive view of *who* can be agents of justice.

2.4. Poverty as Nondomination?

Might framing poverty as needs deprivation arising from global processes and structures of *political domination* allow us to better acknowledge the poor as agents of justice? As discussed in Chapter 1, some critical theorists, deliberative democrats, and neorepublicans understand severe poverty as a condition of political subjection in which poor populations have no democratic say over the economic and political arrangements and institutions that shape their lives. This emphasis on the political disenfranchisement of poor populations is captured, as noted earlier, by James Bohman's characterization of "severe poverty . . . as a form of silent citizenship."[92] These "domination" thinkers criticize the distributive justice paradigm as insufficiently attentive to undemocratic and coercive economic and political structures

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[91] O'Neill, *Justice across Boundaries*, 41.
[92] Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Problem of Silent Citizenship," 529. Fraser, "Injustice at Intersecting Scales," 370.

that make severe poverty and social subordination possible. Fraser, as we saw, rejects "reductive distributivism" as an ethical response to this state of affairs, urging us to ask "meta-political" questions about "the 'what' of justice," *who* gets to press justice claims, and *how* those claims are articulated and adjudicated.[93] A volume on neorepublican theory applied to global issues argues that "domination and global *political* justice," rather than issues of distribution, should be the focal point of discussions of (in)justice across borders.[94] Among its contributors, Forst rejects "theories of a predominantly allocative kind . . . [as] "oblivious to power" insofar as they conceive of justice only from the "recipient side," without raising the political question of how the structures of production and allocation of goods are determined."[95] The constructive normative remedies that domination theorists propose are neither rights-based nor obligation-centered, but can best be characterized as democratic-institutional.

Seeing poverty as emerging from political domination certainly puts the matter of the poor's agency front and center. But, as noted in the last chapter, this framing does not necessarily position people living in poverty as key agents of justice. Indeed, some proponents of the domination view of global injustice doubt that people in poverty can have any impact on unjust structures without some prior redistribution of resources; others, like Dryzek, seem to consider the very idea of poor agency as highly fraught and perhaps inherently contradictory. Nor do the broad solutions to the poor's domination advanced by these thinkers seem designed to build on the efforts and aims of organized, poor-led social movements. Focused on *global* processes of inequality and domination, they propose to remedy the poor's domination through the development of political institutions that can enable genuinely shared democratic rule.[96] Bohman, Forst, and Dryzek stipulate that these must be formal institutions, chiefly transnational in scope, in order to ensure democratic legitimacy and accountability. Poor-led social movements, and the local community-based empowerment and poverty-reduction initiatives that poor communities have developed, do not figure in the radical transnational democracy envisioned by these thinkers. Bohman

[93] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 71–70.
[94] Barbara Buckinx, Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, and Timothy Waligore, "Domination across Borders: An Introduction," in Buckinx et al., *Domination and Global Political Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 1.
[95] Forst, "Transnational Justice and Non-Domination," 92.
[96] For Fraser in particular, it is important that deliberative democratic decision-making forums be established at multiple geopolitical levels.

locates global injustices in both institutional and informal processes of social and political domination, such as those that exploit and exclude economic migrants. But he sees their condition of domination—defined as a lack of normative status and communicative-political power—as redressable only by the democratic state.[97] For Bohman, the antidote to these dominating arrangements and structures is a transnational "constitutional legal order" that could create "conditions of nondomination in the form of transnationally recognized claims to human rights."[98] While he acknowledges the agency of "participants in transnational public spheres and associations," Bohman here has in mind activists whose aims align with a vision of formal, transnational (deliberative) democracy—and who *already* possess "the capability to initiate deliberation and thus participate in democratic decision-making processes."[99]

Forst similarly holds out innovations in transnational democracy as the broad solution to the domination of the global poor. According to him, reducing global poverty and inequality requires the development of genuinely democratic political institutions that can instantiate cross-border reciprocity, recognition, and the "right to justification." While Forst recognizes that, conceptually at least, a transnational *demos* of dominated persons emerges through global activism, he insists that the domination of the dispossessed can only be "overcome by establishing appropriately robust structures of justification that can curb . . . power asymmetries and realize basic forms of justice." Only formal political institutions have the power to subject "non-legitimized rule, be it political, legal, or economic . . . to the justificatory authority of those affected." Poor-led activism and poor-led poverty reduction is further erased by Forst's insistence that the all-important "relations of justification" are ones that *only affluent states* ("political communities with corresponding means at their disposal") *can establish*.[100]

Among these thinkers, only Fraser credits the significance of poor social movements in challenging structures of exploitation and powerlessness (she cites the Zapatistas and the World Social Forum as examples). Yet she too sees the solution to this state of domination as lying in the development of more formal democratic processes (albeit at multiple political

[97] Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Problem of Silent Citizenship."
[98] Bohman, "Domination, Global Harms, and the Priority of Injustice," 73, 86.
[99] James Bohman, "The Democratic Minimum: Is Democracy a Means to Global Justice?," *Ethics and International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2005): 102.
[100] Forst, "Transnational Justice," 108, 106, 104.

levels). Appealing to what she calls the "all-subjected principle"—according to which "all those who are subject to a given governance structure have moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it . . . [in virtue of] their joint subjection to a structure of governance that sets the ground rules that govern their interaction"—Fraser urges the creation of "new global representative institutions where meta-political claims can be submitted to deliberative-democratic procedures."[101] Yet it remains unclear how poor-led "contestation" links up with what Fraser deems the cornerstone of global justice: "formal-institutional channels of democratic transnational politics."[102] As for Bohman and Forst, so for Fraser, the antidote to domination is not poor-led social movements and poor-led alternative economic interventions, but rather, formalized—albeit genuinely robust and legitimate—democratic processes.

While the lens of global political domination aligns with the critique of unjust transnational economic and governance structures by poor-led networks like La Vía Campesina and SDI, the remedies proposed to end this domination do not. Specifically, these networks see their *own* role in fomenting social and political change as of pivotal importance. Moreover, as political as Forst's, Fraser's, and Bohman's analyses of global domination are, they do not address poverty-producing structures and processes at the *local and national* levels, which poor-led movements often identify as key sources of domination for them. The neglect of these sources of oppression, and the grassroots poor-led organizations and movements that oppose them, represents a missed opportunity for these democratic theorists. Specifically, it causes them to overlook the crucial linkages between the development of radical political consciousness, collective resistance to social exclusion and domination, and the extension of citizenship rights and social entitlements to marginalized populations.

2.5. Conclusion

If ethicists and political philosophers are to contribute usefully to efforts to reduce global poverty, they will need to do more than defend moral duties to eradicate needs deprivation; they will need to show how relations and

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[101] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 65, 70.
[102] Fraser, "Injustice at Intersecting Scales," 368–69.

structures of subordination, social exclusion, and powerlessness are constitutive of poverty, and how they can best be dismantled. The philosophical analyses of poverty surveyed here do not necessarily agree on what poverty is or what the key drivers of needs deprivation are, but they share in common a failure to treat poor populations as actual and prospective agents of justice who have a moral and political right to shape to the solutions to their social exclusion and impoverishment. In the next chapter, I show why the importance of poor-led organizations and movements for transformative, pro-poor social change only becomes apparent when we take a relational approach to poverty—one that reveals poverty to be the outcome of relations and structures of subordination, exploitation, and social exclusion.

3
Toward a Relational Approach to Poverty

> We rebel because we are oppressed. We are oppressed because we are
> excluded and exploited. We are excluded and exploited because the
> war waged on our ancestors forced them into tiny pieces of land only
> big enough to raise workers for the factories and the mines and the
> farms and kitchens. Our parents' wages were not enough to escape
> poverty. We came to the cities searching for a way out.[1]
>
> —*The Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers') Manifesto*
> *for a Politics of the Poor*, South Africa

Deprivation is widely considered the defining feature of poverty, but it is best understood not simply as a lack of resources to meet one's biological needs, but more broadly as a *lack of entitlement* to the necessities needed to avoid deprivation. This insight lies at the heart of Amartya Sen's "entitlement" approach to poverty, as well as the capability approach (CA) to human development and well-being more generally.[2] The entitlement framing of poverty directs our attention to the processes, norms, and structures that determine who is able to meet their basic needs. I argue in this chapter, however, that we need to deepen the CA analysis to make plain how a lack of social entitlements causing deprivation follows from social relations of power that exploit, subordinate, and dispossess particular social groups over time. These relations determine where groups are located within processes of capitalist accumulation, whether and which resources and social safety nets they have access to, and whether their voices are heard in the institutions and processes that shape their lives. The framework that best helps us to investigate these

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[1] "The Abhalali baseMjondolo Manifesto for a Politics of the Poor," December 27, 2008, https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2008/12/27/18556529.php.

[2] According to Sen, the kinds of entitlement (and "exchange entitlement") within a market economy that shape people's "commodity bundles" include trade, production, labor, and ownership/inheritance/transfer. Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, 2.

unjust processes and structures, in my view, is the relational approach to poverty. Advanced by political geographers and anthropologists critical of mainstream development economics and development practice, the relational approach directly challenges the common view of poverty as "a lack of resources rather than an absence of entitlements, as an 'economic' rather than a political problem";[3] it thus puts the "entitlement relations" of one's society at the center of our analysis of deprivation and dispossession, and insists on "understanding impoverishment as always already an exercise of power."[4] In so doing, the relational poverty approach illuminates the ways that multiple forms and systems of social and economic discrimination, exclusion, and exploitation intersect and combine to disempower and impoverish structurally subordinated groups.[5]

The relations and structures of power[6] that shape one's entitlements are easily obscured when we treat poverty as synonymous with biological needs alone: lack of income to feed oneself and one's family cannot capture the dispossession that is equally constitutive of chronic poverty. As explained last chapter, reducing poverty to mere hunger is associated with a monetary, "poverty lines" approach to conceptualizing and measuring *absolute poverty*, which in turn downplays the significance of social and economic inequalities to deprivation. Absolute poverty as determined by income and expenditure thresholds is still widely used in poverty-reduction strategies (including the MDGs and SDGs), but the truncated picture it presents works against more transformative, pro-poor poverty reduction. A tunnel-vision focus on absolute poverty treats insufficient income (to meet biological needs) as both the indicator and proximate cause of poverty, instead of identifying *a lack of social entitlements* as the framing context for too-low income. An important ideological consequence of this is to treat poverty as an *exception* to the normal state of affairs rather than the predictable outcome of longstanding social relations and structures of inequality and subordination (as evinced, for example,

[3] Green and Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes," 869.

[4] Austin Crane, Sarah Elwood, and Victoria Lawson, "Re-Politicising Poverty: Relational Reconceptualisations of Impoverishment," *Antipode* 52, no. 2 (2020): 342.

[5] See, for example, the definition of chronic poverty in Andrew Shepherd et al., *The Chronic Poverty Report 2014–15: The Road to Zero Extreme Poverty* (Chronic Poverty Research Advisory Network, Overseas Development Institute, 2014), 44.

[6] Iris Young describes social structures as consisting "in determinate social positions that people occupy which condition their opportunities and life chances. These life chances are constituted by the ways the positions are related to one another to create systemic constraints or opportunities that reinforce one another like wires in a cage." See Young, "Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2001): 12.

by well-established data on the intergenerational transmission of poverty).[7] This exceptionalization of poverty also skews policy debates toward *economic growth* as the broad solution to poverty—rather than more radical structural reforms to the economy and social welfare systems. As Andrew Fischer observes, a focus on reducing absolute poverty, measured in monetary terms, subtly but persistently precludes more social justice–based poverty remedies, like rights to universal social protections; at most, it may allow (limited and temporary) "targeted safety nets . . . for those who fall through the cracks, provided they are deemed deserving."[8]

In contrast to the monetary and related approaches that use absolute poverty as the core concept, a relational poverty analysis focuses on the social power relations and structures that give rise to deprivation and dispossession. As the editors of a recent volume on relational poverty explain,

> Relational theorizations of poverty . . . treat poverty as mutually constituted, examining poverty not as a category or material position, but as a relationship and a site of conflict, crisis and contestation. . . . [They] conceptualize impoverishment as produced through multidimensional economic, political, and cultural processes, and through social relations. Scholars trace, for example, how land dispossession or adverse incorporation into capitalist economies intersects with racialization, gendering, and other processes of social categorization and exclusion, sustaining and amplifying the marginalization of impoverished people and places.[9]

A key corollary of this more political framing of poverty is the view that poverty reduction requires transformational changes to the social relations and political structures that perpetuate deprivation. As the authors of a report on chronic poverty observe, this means centering antipoverty measures on the kinds of reforms that poor activists have long demanded:

> Any poverty eradication strategy needs to be underpinned by a pro-poorest political settlement that puts the poorest people at the heart of

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[7] See also Mosse, "A Relational Approach to Durable Poverty, Inequality and Power," 1158–59, where he writes that a relational understanding of poverty challenges this "habit of exteriorising or exceptionalising poverty, which makes it the product of abnormal or pathological, rather than every day, social processes."

[8] Fischer, *Poverty as Ideology*, 42.

[9] Sarah Elwood and Victoria Lawson, "Introduction: (Un)Thinkable Poverty Politics," in Lawson and Elwood, *Relational Poverty Politics*, 6–7.

the national development compact. Generating such a "pro-poorest" po-
litical settlement is partly about political change. . . . Tackling the most
intractable, identity-based injustices . . . require[s] a combination of po-
litical and constitutional change that lead[s] to universal policies and
affirmative action, accompanied by social mobilisation and political
participation.[10]

On the relational poverty view, poor-led organizations and social movements
not only play an indispensable role in identifying and advocating for genu-
inely pro-poor reforms, but their emancipation from relations and structures
of exclusion, exploitation, and subordination is a *necessary* condition of pov-
erty eradication insofar as their disempowerment vis à vis these structures is
partially constitutive of what it is to be poor.

As an approach to poverty analysis, the relational view draws much
from the CA, including its emphasis on entitlements and the idea of pov-
erty as a deprivation of capability along multiple dimensions. But the rela-
tional perspective also draws elements from critical poverty analyses that
focus on concepts like social exclusion and (mis)recognition, as I explain
later. The relational poverty view, furthermore, incorporates critiques of
the depoliticization of poverty and "underdevelopment" by postcolonial
thinkers and alternative development theorists[11] that highlight the struc-
tural reasons why, since decolonization, poor and middle-income coun-
tries have been unable to develop adequate social welfare systems. As such,
it has affinities with "postdevelopment" critiques, such as those of Enrique
Dussel and Arturo Escobar, but does not reject development outright. The
relational poverty approach is also broadly informed by postcolonial anal-
yses of global poverty, such as that advanced by Frantz Fanon. In partic-
ular, it embraces Fanon's insight that extreme global inequalities of wealth
and power are rooted in colonial conquest and slavery, and perpetuated
by both ongoing practices of capitalist exploitation and colonial powers'
refusal to respect the values and sovereignty of newly autonomous, former
colonies.[12]

[10] Shepherd et al., *Chronic Poverty Report 2014–2015*, 12.
[11] See aforementioned works by Frantz Fanon, Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, and Gilber Ris.
See also Ferguson, *Anti-Politics Machine*; Harriss, "Bringing Politics Back into Poverty Analysis"; and
Hickey, "Return of Politics in Development Studies I."
[12] Frantz Fanon, "On Violence," chapter 1 of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961; repr.,
New York: Grove, 2004).

In this chapter, I make the case for why normative thinking on poverty and global justice should adopt this critical, relational approach to poverty. I begin by explaining why and how a relational poverty approach is more compelling than analyses that treat inequalities within and between societies as somehow external to the problem of poverty. We saw in the last chapter how sufficientarian perspectives fail to see inequalities as both drivers of, and partially constitutive of, poverty. Yet institutions-focused responses to poverty—as exemplified, for example, by the work of political theorist Matthias Risse—also bifurcate inequality and poverty in problematic ways. After discussing this issue in connection with Risse's institutional approach to global justice, I explain how the relational poverty view differs. Situating the relational poverty lens with respect to other critical poverty approaches (the multidimensional poverty index, the social exclusion view, the CA, and recognition theory), I show how it can better illuminate the power relations that underpin lack of entitlements and thus needs deprivation. Not only does the relational approach foreground important nonmaterial aspects of poverty (like social exclusion or marginalization, disempowerment, and exploitation), but it shows why poor-led social change is so necessary for transformative poverty reduction.

3.1. Why We Need a Wider Lens to Understand Chronic Poverty

As the target date of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) drew near and attention turned to the post-2015 development framework, the failure to meet the first goal—halving extreme poverty and hunger, defined as living on less than $1.25 a day—was widely noted. Relational poverty critics said that this MDG goal was fundamentally misconceived insofar as it conceptualized poverty in monetary (income) terms, and ignored other important markers of chronic deprivation (like lack of assets). Poverty and hunger were also misleadingly delinked from problems identified by separate MDGs, such as malnutrition, lack of access to healthcare and primary education, and gender inequality. Only a more multidimensional picture of poverty that considers these factors in combination, critics said, could make plain the social and structural drivers of chronic deprivation.

Criticisms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) later similarly underscored the utter inadequacy of the poverty line–approach to

gauging poverty. Continued use of the World Bank's international poverty line ($1.90 in 2011 PPP per day), despite wide consensus regarding its flaws, means that many people who fall below their own country's poverty line are not counted as poor (by SDG assessments).[13] The tunnel-vision focus on a fixed poverty line makes it easy to downplay the impact of socioeconomic inequalities—national as well as global—on poverty rates. As the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, explains in his final report,

> The annual SDG report treats inequality as just another box to tick. . . . The targets and indicators set for realizing SDG 10 ["reduced inequalities"] are weak by design. They set an agenda of "shared prosperity," focusing on inclusive growth rather than actual reduction of inequalities. . . . This conveniently sidesteps necessary questions around wealth redistribution, elite capture of economic gains, growth achieved through carbon emissions, and inequitable fiscal policies. It treats inequality reduction as a problem to be solved through overall income growth, which flies in the face of recent history and is even more deeply problematic in light of the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change.[14]

As Alston's analysis suggests, reducing poverty to a static (and artificially low) income line all but guarantees that structural inequalities between social groups within countries—and the true extent of social exclusion and dispossession—will be invisible. Those "missing" from the data include "migrant workers, refugees and displaced persons, people affected by armed conflict, people residing in households but not considered members (such as domestic workers), and those in informal settlements."[15] The SDGs do not problematize large distributional inequalities as such; instead, they ignore the top tranche of earners and urge income growth for the bottom 40%. As Jason Hickel notes, the SDG's failure to specify a "target rate of income growth for the poor," combined with the lack of any suggestion that wealth redistribution is needed, therefore makes it highly unlikely that "the income gap will shrink."[16] The SDG's approach to inequality is thus a version of the

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[13] See Philip Alston, "The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication," *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, Human Rights Council 44th session, July 2, 2020: 4.

[14] Alston, "The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication," 11.

[15] Alston, "The Parlous State of Poverty Eradication," 6–7.

[16] Jason Hickel, "The Contradiction of the Sustainable Development Goals: Growth versus Ecology on a Finite Planet," *Sustainable Development* 27 (2019): 881. For an account of the disingenuous

"growth floats all boats" fallacy, and cannot help us to conceptualize the structural dispossession and deprivation that are well-evidenced sequelae of extreme socioeconomic inequality.

From the point of view of a relational approach to chronic poverty, these flaws with the MDGs and SDGs confirm that poverty is not well conceptualized in static terms—as mere low income or consumption—but rather needs to be understood in terms of multidimensional and dynamic social processes that cause some groups to lack social entitlements. Without entitlements to secure housing, education, fair employment, assets, and social protections, people experience (or are made vulnerable to) food insecurity, malnutrition, poor health, lack of sanitation and shelter, and increased susceptibility to violence, land dispossession, labor exploitation, and the harms of environmental degradation. Shifting to this larger framing context has numerous ramifications for the way poverty is studied. For example, to better understand poverty-producing structures and processes, researchers of poverty in poor countries have begun to study *relative* levels of poverty and inequality— a concept previously thought to be relevant only to high-income countries— using a wide range of data points (e.g., income, assets, consumption, health, and educational access). And the "social exclusion" lens, centering on the social and nonmaterial harms bound up with needs deprivation, has also begun to be applied to a developing world context. Poor-centered research methods like "participatory poverty assessments" (PPA), which solicit poor people's accounts of their experiences of disempowerment, disrespect, and daily struggles, have also become widely used in empirical poverty research.[17] PPA and participatory development interventions may be, but are not *necessarily*, poor-centered; although these solicit the perspectives of the poor and seek to include them in development or poverty-reduction initiatives, they may also fail to call into question the social, cultural, and political structures that underpin deprivation.[18]

process of redefinition and recalculation behind the World Bank's claim that great strides have been made in reducing global poverty, see Jason Hickel, Ch. 2, "The End of Poverty . . . Has Been Postponed", in *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and Its Solution* (London: Windmill Books/Penguin Random House, 2018).

[17] See, for example, volumes 1 and 2 of Deepa Narayan, Robert Chambers, Meera K. Shah, and Patti Petesch, *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/World Bank, 2002), and *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty: International Participatory Research*, ATD Fourth World and University of Oxford, May 2019.

[18] PPA and development practices that are "participatory" may, however, help to redress what Schweiger has called the "epistemic injustice" inflicted on the global poor. See Schweiger, "Epistemic

The relational approach to poverty rejects "the reduction of poverty to biological effects which can be calculated and improved,"[19] and instead sees chronic deprivation as resulting from processes in which people are *differently* situated within economic and social structures that benefit some and disadvantage, exclude, and exploit others. Importantly, then, the relational poverty approach reveals how poverty-perpetuating social structures and relations affect diverse groups in divergent ways, and why different policies and reforms may therefore be needed to redress their structural vulnerability to needs deprivation. For example, where there no social safety nets, disabled and elderly people are highly vulnerable to deprivation; where there are socially discriminatory land tenure laws and arrangements, women and certain racialized and ethno-cultural minority groups fill the ranks of the poor and landless; and where migrants are excluded from legal work, housing, and social benefits, their poverty is all but guaranteed. In contrast to this variegated picture of structural deprivation and disempowerment, monetary approaches to poverty "encourage[s] the conceptualization of the poor as a single homogeneous group whose prime problem is low monetary income . . . [which] has led policymakers and their advisors to search for 'the policy' that increases the income of 'the poor.' "[20]

As noted earlier, the relational poverty approach spotlights more than the CA does the social power relations and structures that disadvantage, subordinate, and exploit particular social groups, viewing these as key drivers of capability deprivations. These relations and structures perpetuate practices of disadvantage and discrimination that cause some groups to lack social entitlements and social protections, and to suffer from extreme, intergenerational inequalities in property and wealth. The relational poverty approach also views nonmaterial harms related to these power relations, such as humiliation and disempowerment, as partially constitutive of what it means to be poor. In significant ways, then, this approach is more explicitly normative than the CA, many of whose proponents see it as best limited to conceptualizing and measuring poverty. Instead of limiting its analysis to interpersonal differences in "commodity bundles" that in turn explain capability

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Injustice and Powerlessness in the Context of Global Justice: An Argument for 'Thick' and 'Small' Knowledge," *Wagadu* 15 (2016): 104–15.

[19] Green and Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes," 869.

[20] Hulme and Shepherd, "Conceptualizing Chronic Poverty," 403.

failures—as Sen and CA proponents propose—the relational approach asks about the background structures and relations that render some groups vulnerable to these failures. While the CA also spotlights the failures of social and institutional structures to support the capabilities of certain groups, its ultimate focus is on expanding *individuals' freedoms and capabilities*—not on reversing the collective social and political disempowerment of the poor. By contrast, the relational approach insists that durable poverty reduction requires real emancipation for subordinated, impoverished social groups. For example, homelessness and housing insecurity, on the relational poverty approach, are partly the consequence of discriminatory social and legal norms and practices that determine who can own land and enjoy secure housing tenancy; it is also made possible by practices of social/political exclusion that leave some groups vulnerable to housing insecurity and state repression (resulting in the demolition and forceful removal of residents of informal settlements, etc.). These relations of subordination are in turn sustained partly by large inequalities in income and assets and elite capture of political institutions. From a relational poverty perspective, then, addressing housing insecurity requires not only adequate housing, but social rights to housing and essential services, as well legal reforms to tenancy, land titling, and home-financing laws. Housing insecure people and their advocates will also need to be able to contribute meaningfully to ongoing social policy-making around housing and urban development if pro-poor changes are to be defended.

Importantly, the relational approach to poverty more closely tracks *how organized poor communities and poor-led movements view their deprivation*: namely, as an effect of structures that variously exploit, exclude, discriminate against, and oppress poor people. Like critics of the MDGs—who see extreme poverty reduction as requiring "transformative social change . . . [including] the empowerment of disadvantaged groups and individuals and the mitigation of intersecting inequalities"[21]—poor movements and their social organizations set their sights on transforming the structures and relations that occasion their members' needs deprivation. That is, poor-led social movements "rarely work directly on poverty," but rather, "challenge existing social and political economic arrangements, one of whose effects

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[21] Shepherd et al., *Chronic Poverty Report 2014–15*, 44.

is to produce and sustain poverty. Their terrain of action is therefore political: challenging ideas, assumptions, dominant practice and stereotypes."[22]

* * *

In megacities like Mumbai and Lagos, the life of slum dwellers is one of deprivation, disenfranchisement, disempowerment, and daily struggle. But biological indicators—such as malnutrition due to food insecurity, and illness and early mortality due to lack of healthcare and sanitation—cannot capture all of these dimensions of lived poverty. Nor can data on income, consumption, or economic growth adequately explain the dynamics of the slum dweller's dispossession. Unable to secure sufficient and reliable income, and with few or no assets, slum dwellers build makeshift shelters and attempt to survive the daily privations of life at the margins of society. Yet subject to evictions from their meager housing by state police or developers' private security forces, and lacking access to health, sanitation, education, credit, and adequate employment, there is no clear route out of poverty for these destitute residents of urban informal settlements. Slum demolitions are fueled by myriad social practices, like graft and corruption, legal structures that permit the (legal and illegal) demolition of informal housing and the violent removal of its residents, and political processes that deny impoverished people the social entitlements that nonpoor citizens enjoy.

This broader framing of poverty brings into the foreground the oppressive social structures and practices that dispossess poor populations. Thinking about poverty *relationally* and *politically* directs our focus to the power asymmetries (at the local, national, and global levels) that characterize oppressive and exploitative social and economic arrangements. As Ackerly observes, on a relational view, exploitable "power inequalities, and not specific harms per se, are the substance of injustice."[23] Seeing chronic and severe poverty as the consequence of social processes and structures of disadvantage and subordination, moreover, changes the *moral framing* of debates about poverty in at least three ways. First, it makes visible the ways that impoverishing structures affect *subordinated groups*—tracking racialized status, social class, indigeneity, disability, ethnicity, religion, caste, and gender. In so doing, it brings much-needed moral attention to the ways that livelihood deprivations are sustained by practices of group discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and subordination across many

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[22] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 813.
[23] Cf. Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*, 38.

social institutions. Many philosophers writing on poverty fail to notice its group-based character; and as, I argued in the previous chapter, focusing attention on resource disparities and institutional failures at the transnational level leads them to overlook how social and economic structures within states work to impoverish particular social groups. Many also persist in drawing an over-sharp moral line between poverty (defined as low welfare) and inequality.[24] Second, understanding poverty as the outcome of social structures—rather than as (decontextualized) mere needs deprivation—makes plain the critical importance of efforts to transform the disempowerment of poor individuals and communities. And lastly, the more political framing that follows from a relational approach to poverty *shifts the discussion about the moral and political responsibilities* of the nonpoor vis-à-vis structural poverty. Rather than seeing such responsibilities as dispatched merely by charity and aid, those who are able to do so ought to assist in transforming the structures and relations of inequality that cause poor people to lack social entitlements.

Ultimately, a relational understanding of poverty enables a more radical, poor-centered approach to eradicating deprivation, for it shows why transforming the conditions that disempower and marginalize poor and marginalized communities is so crucial. With this shift, the knowledge and experience of people living in poverty becomes central to the study of poverty, through participatory and collaborative research; and the struggles, contributions, and initiatives of poor communities and their movements are revealed as crucial to antipoverty debates and policy change.[25] On the relational poverty view, justice requires that poor communities' valid demands for livelihood-related social and human rights and entitlements be heeded, and that unjust and discriminatory social and economic policies and structures that perpetuate structural poverty be dismantled.

3.2. Institutional Approaches to Global Justice

From a relational poverty perspective, transatlantic chattel slavery and colonial exploitation have had a lasting impact on the economic and political development paths of "third world" countries. Even within high-income countries, higher poverty rates among African Americans and many other

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[24] I discuss this misconception in connection with work by sufficiency theorists in Deveaux, "Reevaluating Sufficiency in Light of Evidence of Inequality's Harms."

[25] See *Hidden Dimensions of Poverty*.

racialized minority groups are attributable to processes that have their roots in these historical systems of exploitation and oppression, including discrimination (made possible by norms and legal structures) in key sectors like housing, education, and employment; and the lower asset base, and therefore lower intergenerational wealth transmission, of descendants of enslaved peoples. Many philosophers writing on poverty today acknowledge these historical systems but deny that the global inequalities in wealth and power they created remain key causes of severe poverty in developing countries. Singer, for example, claims that glaring global inequalities of wealth and power cannot provide evidence that "the rich have harmed the poor" nor vindicate calls for a radical redistribution of the world's resources as a solution to poverty: "the world's wealth is not fixed in size," he writes.[26] Accordingly, instead of seeking to transform the social and financial structures that perpetuate global inequalities, Singer and effective altruists advocate for expanded philanthropy and development aid, fueled by capitalist economic growth.

Similar to Singer, Risse doubts that the legacies of colonialism and slavery contribute significantly to present-day global poverty. While Risse acknowledges that "presumably *some* share of the advantages in which the world's rich indulge would be unavailable to them were in not for past injustice . . . [and] to *some* extent the misery of the poor has been caused by pernicious interactions with people from other parts of the world," he thinks it is a mischaracterization to describe the relationship of developed to developing countries as chiefly one of harm.[27] Rather, using a "historical benchmark" for evaluating the relationship between rich and poor countries (including former colonies and colonial powers), he estimates that "the global order has brought tremendous advances . . . [and] *as far as we can tell*, the global order has benefited the poor."[28] Risse's rejection of the global harm thesis pivots on his view that "past injustice per se hardly makes the existing order unjust. We need to show how past injustice leads to an ongoing injustice."[29] While it is fair to submit to careful scrutiny conceptual and empirical assertions about the legacy and present-day harms of processes originating in the global North, it is important to see that Risse discounts the ongoing harms caused by transnational economic structures that render the populations of poor,

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[26] Singer, *Life You Can Save*, 29.

[27] Risse, *On Global Justice*, 301; his italics. On the harm point, see 299.

[28] Mathias Risse, "Do We Owe the Poor Assistance or Rectification?," *Ethics & International Affairs* 19 (2005): 14. His italics.

[29] Mathias Risse, "How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33, no. 4 (2005): 354.

debt-ridden countries vulnerable to chronic poverty and labor exploitation. It is precisely these structural harms, as we shall see, that poor-led organizations and social movements protest and seek to change. Limiting his evidence to data on trade, GNP, and per capita incomes to assess the economic health of former colonies, Risse is unable to assess the wider context of global inequality—a context that includes sovereign third world debt; the impact of structural adjustment policies on health and education; global supply chains that depend upon labor exploitation; and global migration compelled by poverty.

While Risse sees institutional reforms as key to reducing global harms, his analysis of these prospective reforms is curiously delinked from popular movements for social justice. He urges reinforced human rights in response to global injustices,[30] but assumes these will emerge from legal reforms and renewed commitments from states and transnational institutions—not from grassroots struggles that claim and help to realize poor people's social entitlements and human rights. The social power asymmetries and the nonmaterial dimensions of poverty (like social exclusion and exploitation) that poor-led movements target are thus not visible within Risse's institutional approach to global justice. Chiefly concerned to dispute arguments for duties of global redistribution, Risse approaches global poverty as a problem that is measurable and soluble by technical means.[31] Far from requiring extensive restructuring of the global economic order, then, Risse thinks that "the human race has never been better off, and it has never been better armed with the technical prowess, medical knowledge, and intellectual tools to fight poverty."[32] From the perspective of radical development theorists and practitioners, Risse's description suggests an uncritical acceptance of the fallacy of technocratic solutions to poverty and underdevelopment.[33] While Risse's institutional

[30] Risse, *On Global Justice*.

[31] Tania Li discusses the tendency (within development practice) of "rendering [problems of underdevelopment and poverty] technical," and shows how this allows "experts tasked with improvement [to] exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions." See her *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 7.

[32] Risse, "How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?," 370.

[33] As James Ferguson (*Anti-Politics Machine*, 256), reflecting on development interventions in Lesotho, writes, "'development' projects. . . may end up working to expand the power of the state, . . . [but] while they claim to address the problems of poverty and deprivation, in neither guise does the 'development' industry allow its role to be formulated as a political one. By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of 'development' is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today."

reform view certainly does not reduce to technical policy prescriptions per se, it does depend upon the belief that deprivation is best addressed through the institution-building efforts of affluent *outsiders*—not a global redistribution of wealth and power through means like debt forgiveness, reparations for slavery and colonialism, and an end to unjust trade and tariff policies.[34]

To help us imagine what a more political account of global poverty's constituent features and causes might look like, it is helpful to consider Charles Mills's analysis of the racialized and structural nature of global injustice. In his essay, "Race and Global Justice," Mills observes that global justice theorizing generally has not acknowledged "global white supremacy" or its legacy, including the continued dominant status of whites and ongoing structural discrimination against Black and Indigenous peoples in colonial-settler states. Mills shows how the "[West's] white-out [of] the multiple ways race and racial ideology underpinned its global domination"[35] is reflected in philosophers' erasure of racial exploitation and white imperialism from their analyses of global injustice. This striking omission, as Mills explains, belies the extent to which racial beliefs and racialized practices permeate structures of global injustice:

> Though whites the world over are divided by national membership, citizens of countries sometimes in conflict with each other, and internally divided by class and gender, there are nonetheless binding transoceanic and transsocietal links. Racial ideologies circulate globally, assumptions of non-white inferiority and the legitimacy of white rule are taken for granted, a shared colonial history of pacts, treaties, international jurisprudence, and a racial-religious self-conception of being the bearers and preservers of civilization provide common norms and reference points. Across the world, whites coordinate and share information on particular racial issues and follow prescriptions of international law predicated on differential white entitlements. . . . So the "whiteness" of Europeans in Europe and their

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[34] Risse's view that capable states should do more "to discharge the duty to assistance in institution building," is reminiscent of John Rawls's argument in *The Law of Peoples* that liberal constitutional states have a duty to help "decent" yet "burdened" countries so that they may join the global society of "well ordered Peoples." Like Rawls, Risse proposes nondistributive remedies that center on Western countries' institution-building capacities and purported respect for human rights. Just as Rawls emphasizes that the duty of assistance is not a principle of global redistributive justice, so too does Risse stress that "there are no further-reaching redistributive duties once that duty has been discharged." See Risse, "How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?," 376, 358, and John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 11, 106.

[35] Mills, "Race and Global Justice," 105.

Euro-created world is not at all causally irrelevant, but shapes their concep-
tion of themselves and others, their view of their group interests, their col-
lective and individual identities, the political and moral framework within
which they understand the world.[36]

Like Mills, I argue that normative approaches to poverty and global injus-
tice that invoke concepts like human dignity, human rights, and respect for
human agency need to critically examine the ideology and practices of racial
domination that are also part of the European intellectual traditions that lay
claim to these ideas.[37] Even philosophers that urge a global redistribution
of resources would do well to look to radical postcolonial theorizing that
powerfully criticizes the idea that Western overseas development aid is su-
pererogatory rather than owed as compensation for the legacy of colonial
resource extraction and chattel slavery.[38] As Frantz Fanon writes,

> Moral reparation for national independence does not fool us and it doesn't
> feed us. The wealth of the imperialist nations is also our wealth. . . . So we
> will not accept aid for the underdeveloped countries as "charity." Such aid
> must be considered the final stage of a dual consciousness—the conscious-
> ness of the colonized that *it is their due* and the consciousness of the capi-
> talist powers that effectively *they must pay up*.[39]

Unlike postcolonial analyses of global poverty and inequality, institutional
approaches like that of Risse do not consider interstate inequalities—set
in motion by colonization and the transatlantic slave trade—as problem-
atic. Concluding that "there is no injustice in the relative situations of [rich
and poor] countries,"[40] Risse defends a reformed international state system
and strengthened human rights framework that omit recognition of the
legacy of white colonial domination and the structural inequalities faced by
racialized peoples in low- and high-income countries alike. Singer and effec-
tive altruists, as noted in the previous chapter, similarly deny the significance

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[36] Mills, "Race and Global Justice," 103–104.

[37] Mills notes, for example, that "the six 'Ango-Saxon' nations" vetoed the proposal for a " 'racial
equality' clause" to be included in the League of Nations (103–104).

[38] The political thinking that motivated the Non-Aligned Movement in its early years may also
provide a road map to a more radical distributive politics, one that acknowledges that the people
of poorer states have a right to democratically determine the trajectory of their own societies'
development.

[39] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 58–59.

[40] Risse, *On Global Justice*, 282.

of global economic inequalities as such—and instead locate the wrong of poverty in absolute low welfare (especially hunger and poverty-related disease). Singer falsely assumes that economic growth (unlike limited natural resources) is open-ended, thus warranting an "economic growth floats all boats" approach. Revealingly, however, where global climate pollution and climate change are concerned, Singer has expressed a preference for an egalitarian approach to "equitable distribution," but he rejects this principle when it comes to poverty.[41]

Given the persistence of philosophers' denial of equality's insignificance (to poverty), it is worth reflecting on the origins of this position within development economics and policy. Political theorist Jessica Whyte describes the imperialist underpinnings of the shift by some humanitarian NGOs, starting in the mid-1980s, toward neoliberal economic beliefs about poverty. In particular, she recounts how Liberté sans Frontières (LSF), founded by leaders of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), emphatically denied that Western economic (and political) domination and inequalities were in any way responsible for creating or perpetuating poverty in the developing world. Neoliberal development economists rejected the arguments of "*tiers-mondiste*" intellectuals who *did* see these connections, and today the former's view is echoed by philosophers who deny the relevance of inequality to global poverty. In particular, arguments by sufficientarians (like Blake) and institutionalists (like Risse and Rawls) reflect the views of a key neoliberal development economist, Peter Bauer, who

> [rejected] the premise of discussions about Third World poverty: "There is no problem in the Third World," he argued; "there are only differences of income"—differences which are "neither surprising nor reprehensible." . . . Differences between countries, Bauer argued, do not stem from the "pillaging of one by another." Repeatedly, Bauer took aim at the contention articulated most succinctly by Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere: "In one world, as in one state, when I am rich because you are poor, and I am poor because you are rich, the transfer of wealth from rich to poor is a matter of right; it is not an appropriate matter for charity." All Bauer's writings aimed to demolish the premise that the wealth of the colonial powers was a consequence of the poverty of the colonized—and vice versa.[42]

[41] Singer, *Life You Can Save*.
[42] Jessica Whyte, "Powerless Companions or Fellow Travellers? Human Rights and the Neoliberal Assault on Postcolonial Economic Justice," *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2018), 18.

In rejecting linkages between colonization, global inequality, and poverty, neoliberal economists like Bauer (and the LSF) sought to dismiss the "anti-colonial economic agenda" of the "New International Economic Order" advocated by the Non-Aligned Movement. Philosophers who, in their breezy rejection of moral concerns about global inequalities of power and wealth, embrace technical and institutional solutions to poverty "from above," would do well to remember this history.

3.3.   A Multidimensional Approach to Poverty as Needs Deprivation?

Philosophers who see expanded philanthropy and development aid as the best remedy for poverty—like Singer and effective altruists—and those who believe that institutional reforms and human rights commitments are key—like Risse—tend to reduce poverty to needs deprivation. This move obscures the nonmaterial dimensions of poverty, like social marginalization, subordination, and exploitation, as well as the constitutive role of deep structural power inequalities in producing material needs scarcity. By contrast, the more political, relational approach to poverty that I defend does not treat poverty as synonymous with needs deprivation, but rather, sees it as a nonstatic condition of social subordination and impoverishment made possible by relations and structures of disadvantage, discrimination, and exclusion. As this definition suggestions, the relational view has strong affinities with both the social exclusion and capability approaches to poverty. Before turning to those approaches, it is worth looking at the idea of a "multidimensional poverty" approach, which has recently become dominant in poverty and development research and policy. As the name suggests, a multidimensional approach incorporates a variety of indicators of poverty, rather than a single measure like income or consumption; the CA is thus, in a broad sense, an example of such an approach insofar as it sees poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities across several areas of human functioning. In this section, however, I will discuss a more specific instantiation of a multidimensional poverty analysis: the global multidimensional poverty index (MPI). My question is: can the MPI reveal the nonmaterial aspects of poverty that track deep power inequalities, like social marginalization?

Since 2010, an index known as the global MPI—produced by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the United Nations'

Development Program—has "operationalized" multidimensional poverty measurement, incorporating many of the principles of the CA. The index evolved as part of the UNDP's efforts to improve the Human Development Reports' tracking of the lived reality of poverty in developing countries (including Least Developed Countries and Middle-Income Countries). Drawing data from the ICF Macro Demographic and Health Survey (incorporating surveys from 80 countries), UNICEF's Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, and national household surveys, the MPI identifies several key areas of deprivation, including overlapping ones. Focusing on the three broad categories in the Human Development Index (HDI)—health, education, and living standards—the MPI aggregates data on ten additional indicators in order to assess poverty: nutrition; child mortality; years of schooling; school attendance; cooking fuel; sanitation; drinking water; electricity; housing; and assets.[43] The MPI deems as "multidimensionally poor" those households that are deprived on at least a third of the HDI's weighted indicators; when deprived according to half of the indicators, they are considered "severely multidimensionally poor."[44] In this way, the MPI is able to recognize the importance of both the "incidence" and "intensity" of deprivation—clearly a testament to the influence of the CA.

Beyond giving us a fine-grained picture of needs deprivation and disadvantage, we need to ask whether the MPI can capture important nonmaterial dimensions of poverty, such as social exclusion, vulnerability to homelessness, exploitation, dispossession, violence, and structural environmental harms. And can it enable us to see how structural subordination gives rise to different deprivations? In my view, the MPI, despite its use of multidimensional metrics, cannot adequately reveal structurally-produced social powerlessness; like the CA from which it draws inspiration, the MPI remains an approach to *measuring* poverty, understood as needs deprivation. As such, it does not ask about the nonmaterial aspects of poverty (for which there are fewer reliable metrics) nor inquire about the underlying causes and dynamics of deprivation. The limits of the MPI are therefore contiguous with its sources of data; revealingly, the MPI does not include empowerment indicators due to constraints on data.[45] There are similar

[43] See the Global MPI 2019 report *Illuminating Inequalities*, from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the United Nations Development Program: https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/G-MPI_Report_2019_PDF.pdf.

[44] *Illuminating Inequalities*, 21.

[45] Specifically, the DHS (Demographic and Health Survey) data on women's empowerment, which the MPI requires, are simply not available (because not tracked) for some countries.

deficits when it comes to the MPI's usefulness in tracking socioeconomic inequality. While certain inequalities are now addressed in the global MPI report—such as intrahousehold inequalities in deprivation (e.g., in nutrition)—the index itself provides little insight into oppressive social relations and structures.

3.4. Poverty as Social Exclusion?

The MPI focuses on measurable capability deficits in education, health, food, and so forth. By contrast, a relational approach to poverty puts the spotlight on the social norms, structures, and relations that produce social and economic exclusion, powerlessness, unfreedom, and needs deprivation. It provides a "relational" view in the sense that it focuses "on the processes and dynamics that allow deprivation to arise and persist"[46] rather than seeing and measuring poverty as a static condition marked by low income/consumption alone. Criticizing development practitioners' excessive reliance on economic measures of poverty and underdevelopment, development thinker Robert Chambers cautions that "the realities of poor people are local, complex, diverse and dynamic. Income-poverty, though important, is only one aspect of deprivation. . . . [There are also] social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonal deprivation, powerlessness and humiliation.[47] As Chambers's account of poverty's many constitutive harms suggests, the social and psychological aspects of persistent privation are many, and measuring these presents clear challenges.

One compelling way to approach the problem of how to measure the nonmaterial aspects of poverty is to consider how these track and perpetuate *social exclusion*. First developed to illuminate the processes through which low-income individuals in high-income societies are " 'set apart' or 'locked out' of participation in social life," social exclusion analysis has in recent years been used to explain certain poverty-perpetuating processes and structures in developing countries.[48] Just as this approach makes visible the dynamics, relative inequalities, and agency exclusions that characterize poverty in high-income states, so too can it reveal the relational inequalities and processes of

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[46] Laderchi et al., "Does It Matter That We Do Not Agree on the Definition of Poverty?," 260.

[47] Robert Chambers, *Poverty and Livelihoods: Whose Reality Counts?* Discussion Paper 347 (Sussex, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 1995), iv.

[48] Kabeer, "Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Discrimination," 84.

subordination that underpin chronic poverty in poor societies.[49] According to Wisor, social exclusion frames poverty as a "dynamic process rather than a static state of affairs," in which the poor suffer from "active exclusion from public services and private markets [and] passive exclusion from social and public participation."[50] Or, as development ethicist Naila Kabeer puts it, "a focus on processes of exclusion is a useful way to think about social policy because it draws attention to the production of disadvantage through the active dynamics of social interaction, rather than through anonymous processes of impoverishment and marginalisation."[51]

The social exclusion lens powerfully illuminates the processes by which individuals and groups are disenfranchised and so come to lack social entitlements. Like the CA, a social exclusion perspective directs our attention to the social impact of distributional inequalities in ways that monetary approaches measuring absolute poverty cannot. According to the social exclusion approach, "it is unlikely that growth alone can ever eliminate social exclusion . . . redistributive policies and structural policies [thus] get priority";[52] by comparison, monetary definitions and measures of poverty are typically unconcerned with inequalities as such (whether of resources or power). Seeing social exclusion *as partly constitutive of poverty* in poor countries, through processes of discrimination, exploitation, and social and political marginalization, also aligns with the way that poor-led movements view deprivation—as I shall show in more detail in the next chapter.

Social exclusion, and many of the participatory poverty assessment (PPA) tools used to assess it, can also render visible the group-based character of much chronic deprivation. By contrast, monetary approaches, and even the CA, address poverty at the level of individuals, and so cannot easily show poverty patterns afflicting particular groups, classes, and castes; the lack of a group focus is often seen as contributing to poverty's depoliticization.[53] On a social exclusion approach to poverty, as Laderchi et al. note, "policies such as correcting racial discrimination, or class barriers, or citizenship restrictions, are likely to play a central role in defining policy priorities."[54] Understanding

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[49] Some also see a social exclusion lens as an apt way to characterize the marginalizing and exclusionary processes of globalization more generally. Wisor ascribes this view to Ronaldo Munck, *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformational Perspective* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005). See Wisor, *Measuring Global Poverty*, 113.

[50] Wisor, *Measuring Global Poverty*, 117.

[51] Kabeer, "Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Discrimination," 84.

[52] Laderchi et al., "Does It Matter That We Do Not Agree on the Definition of Poverty?," 263.

[53] See, for example, Harriss, "Bringing Politics Back into Poverty Analysis," 215.

[54] Laderchi et al., "Does It Matter That We Do Not Agree on the Definition of Poverty?," 263.

the vulnerability to poverty of certain groups or subgroups (like women) requires a fine-grained analysis of social relations, family dynamics, norms, and local political institutions and structures—as CA proponents have of course long argued.[55]

The social exclusion lens allows us to see structures that marginalize social groups in structural ways, and in so doing, captures features of the lived experience of people in poverty that merely monetary metrics cannot reveal. For example, it can show why lack of access to public and social services is such a central component of poverty in low-income countries (and not coincidentally, the focal point of much pro-poor activism). It can also give insights into the social marginalization of residents of informal urban settlements (or slums). While the average daily income at the slum dwellers' disposal tells us something about their deprivation, it leaves out the framing social context in which their housing precarity arises. Social exclusion allows us to see more here: informal settlement residents' experience of being continually barred (by police or private security agents hired by developers) from establishing or keeping their dwelling nearer to the city and sources of informal labor, as is common in many cities in the global South, is not visible through income metrics. Nor is their exclusion from accessing essential municipal services like sanitation and electricity apparent. A social exclusion perspective can capture the sense of marginalization and injustice expressed by shack dwellers and their movements—the belief that in forcing them out of the city, the state is failing to respect their place-based communities, citizenship rights, and social entitlements as poor urban residents. As Wisor notes, "the social exclusion approach is explicitly political," allowing us to see "the political processes by which people become and are kept poor."[56]

The social exclusion perspective is not without limitations, however. Some poverty researchers say that analyzing *unemployment* in poor countries in terms of social exclusion may not be advisable, for example, given that the informal sector eclipses the formal workforce in these places. In such contexts, a social exclusion approach may fail "to capture how poverty can flow not only from exclusion but also from processes of integration into broader economic and social networks . . . [which] are better captured by the notion of 'adverse incorporation.'"[57] Moreover, one of the key strengths of the social

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[55] Sen, *Development as Freedom*.

[56] Wisor, *Measuring Global Poverty*.

[57] Andries Du Toit, "'Social Exclusion' Discourse and Chronic Poverty: A South African Case Study," *Development and Change* 35, no. 5 (2004): 987.

exclusion approach—its multidimensionality, or use of multiple metrics to assess the marginalization and exclusion of impoverished people—is also the source of significant challenges: how can social exclusion be measured across so many dimensions? Innovative—and specifically, participatory—methods of assessing and measuring poverty are certainly needed if a social exclusion analysis is to be implemented. The qualitative tool known as PPA—defined as "an instrument for including poor people's views in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to reduce it through public policy"[58]—is closely associated with the social exclusion approach to poverty in developing world contexts. Participatory assessments and measurements of poverty are designed to incorporate and validate the expressed views of the poor regarding poverty's harms, their needs, and sometimes, possible remedies. Poverty research using these tools has revealed that for those living in poverty, a constant sense of vulnerability and lack of voice are central harms—as grave, or even more so, than the experience of hunger. One of the first, and still the largest, PPA was the World Bank's three-volume study entitled *Voices of the Poor*, based on interviews with 60,000 poor individuals in over fifty countries. This study found that "again and again, powerlessness seems to be at the core of a bad life. . . . Powerlessness is described as the inability to control what happens, the inability to plan for the future, and the imperative of focusing on the present."[59]

3.5.   Extending the Capability Approach

Sen's (and Drèze's) argument that we should conceptualize poverty multidimensionally, and in terms of capability deprivations driven by a lack of access to entitlements, is central to the relational poverty approach that I defend in this book. But as noted earlier, the CA has some limitations that the relational poverty view makes plain. One of these is a reluctance to fully recognize the group-based character of chronic poverty, in the sense of acknowledging that particular structures and processes disadvantage and disempower (and so impoverish) particular social groups. Recall that the CA designates *the individual* as the unit of analysis for assessing or measuring freedoms and capabilities;

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[58] Andy Norton et al., *A Rough Guide to PPAs—Participatory Poverty Assessment: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2001), 6.

[59] Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor*, vol. 2, 36.

according to Sen, were we to focus instead on the family, village, or religious or ethnic group, we would not be able to capture critical interpersonal differences, including inequalities in individuals' access to the primary goods and resources they need for well-being. People's differing abilities to convert these resources into capabilities or meaningful freedoms are profoundly affected by such things as "personal heterogeneities, environmental diversities, variations in social climate, differences in relational perspectives and distribution within the family."[60] These discrepancies go unnoticed, Sen argues, by conventional poverty and wealth metrics that take the individual as the basic unit, like average per capita income. The CA thus stipulates that the building blocks for a person's capability along a particular dimension (such as health) are the "alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve";[61] importantly, these combinations are specific to the individual, although they are shaped by social structures and processes that often culminate in comparable capability sets for similarly situated persons (e.g., low-caste women).

Like Sen, Martha Nussbaum believes that we should focus on the individual when establishing the threshold levels of the Central Capabilities critical to human well-being, and especially in determining whether these have been achieved:

> Capabilities belong first and foremost to individual persons, and only derivatively to groups. The approach espouses a principle of each person as an end. It stipulates that the goal is to produce capabilities for each and every person, and not to use some people as a means to the capabilities of others or of the whole. This focus on the person makes a huge difference for policy, since many nations have thought of the family, for example, as a homogenous unit to be supported by policy, rather than examining and promoting the separate capabilities of each of its members.[62]

Both Sen and Nussbaum hold, then, that capabilities relate to individual functionings, and that capability deficits should be measured accordingly. Yet this focus on the individual's capabilities, and capability deprivations, has the disadvantage of inadvertently diverting attention away from some important social structures and relations of disadvantage and social subordination.

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[60] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 74, 73.
[61] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 75.
[62] Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 35.

Although the CA can powerfully illuminate *some* social sources of relative deprivations—such as the role of individual disadvantages and disabilities, gender, and cultural norms—it cannot easily help us to see the ways in which certain social groups as a whole are socially and economically subordinated. The CA has few tools at its disposal for analyzing exploitative corporate capitalist economic practices, for example, including group-based exploitation (e.g., indentured labor arrangements that involve particular ethnic and racial groups). The problem here is not only Sen's insistence that individual capabilities must be the focus, but also his view that markets and freedoms, broadly speaking, are the keys to remedying poverty. As I shall argue in Chapter 5, the lack of analysis within the CA of group-based subordination leads its proponents to overlook the vital role that organized poor communities can play in resisting and transforming structures of disempowerment, subordination, and exploitation.

Given the huge impact of the CA on development and poverty policy, these omissions and blind spots—inattention to the group-based structures and relations of subordination and disempowerment—are no small matter. The enormous influence of the CA is reflected in the fact that the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP's) *Human Development Reports* have made use of this approach since 2010, endorsing the idea that the capabilities are the relevant "space" in which to assess and measure poverty. While Sen's perspective of "development as freedom" is not incompatible with a poor-led and pro-poor approach to poverty reduction, it would need to be expanded so as to acknowledge the collective or group-based character of unfreedom—that is, how relations and structures of social power perpetuate processes through which marginalized groups are economically exploited, excluded from social entitlements, and politically disempowered. The CA will therefore need to look more closely at group-based capability deprivations and disempowerment, rather than focusing strictly on individual capability failures. This in turn will require stepping back from (Sen's) focus on markets and freedoms—that is, on factors that hamper *individuals* (as opposed to social groups) in their pursuit of "*ends . . .* [they] have reason to pursue, and . . . the *freedoms* to be able to satisfy these ends."[63] Once the analytic aperture is opened in these ways, we can see more clearly the pivotal importance of grassroots social mobilization in empowering poor communities, and demanding more far-reaching, radical social change. I return to

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[63] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 90.

these points in Chapter 5, where I argue that the CA needs to embrace a more developed account of collective capabilities if it is to grasp the essential role and functions of poor-led organizations and social movements.

The CA's lack of attention to structures and relations that disempower social groups qua groups means that it does not consistently point toward the kinds of transformative remedies needed to reduce the myriad forms of structural subordination driving chronic poverty. An unmodified version of the CA cannot grasp the need for poor-led activism and social change largely because it does not follow through with the implications (*for social groups*) of its own insight that a lack of social entitlements drives poverty. When I return to a discussion of the CA in Chapter 5, I make the case for amending the theory so as to deepen its insights regarding why and how groups come to lack social entitlements—and why this also means building on the knowledge and collective capabilities of organized, poor-led social movements.

3.6. Recognition Theory

How does the relational poverty approach intersect with "recognition theory," which frames the harms of poverty in terms of the non- or misrecognition of people living in poverty? Participants in the aforementioned *Voices of the Poor* study, as we saw, emphasize the shame and humiliation that follow from suffering social and economic exclusion.[64] These dimensions of poverty, which social exclusion analyses also emphasize, are seen as inextricably bound up with gross deficiencies in material needs—lack of food, assets, and work in particular.[65] Within political philosophy, recognition theory best helps to conceptualize these relational harms of poverty—disrespect, humiliation, shame, and lack of recognition[66]—which are routinely overlooked by monetary approaches. As philosopher Gottfried Schweiger writes,

> Misrecognition, as well as recognition, is an umbrella term, and neither focuses on a single feature of human life in the way that much poverty

[64] Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor*, vol. 1.
[65] Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 1:25.
[66] Gottfried Schweiger, "Recognition Theory and Global Poverty," *Journal of Global Ethics* 10 (2014): 267–73; Gunter Graf and Gottfried Schweiger, "Capabilities, Recognition and the Philosophical Evaluation of Poverty: A Discussion of Issues of Justification and the Role of Subjective Experiences," *International Critical Thought* 3 (2013): 282–96; and Graf and Schweiger, "Poverty and Freedom," *Human Affairs* 24 (2014): 258–68.

research does in its focus on money and material assets. Recognition theory, rather, argues that injustices such as poverty have to be understood in their multidimensionality. . . . It focuses on the increased vulnerability of poor people to forms of misrecognition and on how poverty disrupts families, communities, and other relations of care and love, and how it affects the self and identity of the poor.[67]

As with the social exclusion approach, the "mis/recognition" lens requires inclusive, participatory forms of qualitative research on poverty that can get at the subjectively experienced and relational aspects of disadvantage and scarcity. Many of the material and social-relational aspects of poverty are also deeply contextual—that is, sensitive to the particular structures, norms, and expectations of particular societies. As a result, we cannot know fully or precisely what set of factors or conditions makes a person (or a group) vulnerable to disrespect, shame, or to a sense of powerlessness without hearing their perspectives.[68] Any analysis of the mis/recognition of poor people must therefore centrally include the voices of the poor themselves; failure to do so is, according to recognition theorists, itself a form of misrecognition and exclusion. This insight is shared by proponents of relational poverty, who rightly insist on "the importance of taking account of the perceptions and understandings of poor people themselves" in order to understand the dynamics of social subordination and vulnerability that underpin poverty in different contexts.[69]

Prescriptively, a recognition-based approach, like the social exclusion analysis, emphasizes the need to reverse the excluded, denigrated status of poor people—starting with the way that anti-poverty interventions are conceived and implemented. Xavier Godinot, director of ATD 4th World, a poor-centered/poor-participatory INGO, explains that repairing the misrecognition harms that attach to poverty requires a radical shift in the terms of engagement between nonpoor antipoverty and development workers, on the one hand, and poor individuals, on the other: "Because extreme poverty has stripped these people of their self-esteem, giving them a negative identity, the non-poor must show them the recognition they need

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[67] Schweiger, "Recognition Theory and Global Poverty," 269–79.

[68] Graf and Schweiger, "Capabilities, Recognition and the Philosophical Evaluation of Poverty."

[69] Harriss, "Bringing Poverty Back into Poverty Analysis," 205.

if they are to become subjects and actors."[70] For recognition theorists, this means rethinking development and antipoverty practices so as to center them on the voices and participation of poor people, in both poor and rich countries.[71]

Theorists who use a recognition lens to address poverty stress the importance of advancing the social and political inclusion of poor populations within their societies' main institutions. Recognizing and validating the political agency of those living in poverty are part of what it means to acknowledge their equal civic status as fellow citizens (in the national context), and to treat them as persons with human rights (in the global context), including rights of democratic participation. Fraser's "all-subjected" principle, requiring participatory parity in (newly constructed) global political institutions of all those affected by the harms of globalization and economic policies originating in the global North, expresses this recognition-based ideal of global justice. For Fraser and other recognition theorists, the reform of existing global (economic and political) institutions and the construction of new, democratic ones will thus be critical vehicles for alleviating political injustices and its consequences (like poverty). However, as I explained in Chapter 2, in my view critical theorists and "domination theorists"—for whom misrecognition is also a central harm—place too much hope in the reform of formal political institutions, at the cost of overlooking the important role of grassroots, poor-led organizing and social movements in hastening transformative social change. Those recognition theorists that address poverty similarly see political recognition within formal political institutions as the main remedy for the poor's misrecognition, but their analysis of the harms of misrecognition is arguably sympathetic to the value of poor-led social struggles.

3.7. Conclusion

From a relational poverty perspective, poverty results from social structures and relations of inequality and subordination that are pervasive and normalized within a given society, and across states. Durably reducing structural deprivation and powerlessness, on the relational view, demands a

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[70] Xavier Godinot, ed., *Eradicating Extreme Poverty: Democracy, Globalisation, and Human Rights* (New York: Pluto Press, 2012), 185–86, 215.

[71] See also Ingram, *World Crisis and Underdevelopment*.

transformative, pro-poor, and poor-centered approach in the sense of putting the perspectives, needs, and priorities of the poor first. Insofar as chronic poverty makes people systematically vulnerable to capability deprivations through structures and processes marked by discrimination, exclusion, exploitation, and disadvantage, it *will matter* very much whether poor communities have a central role in determining their own needs and— priorities and in helping to devise reforms.

Grassroots poor collectives and movements, as I argue in the next two chapters, *do* put the interests of the poor first. They may not always favor all subgroups of the poor equally, and some, over time, may fall into clientelist patterns that compromise their ability to represent all their members. But poor-led organizations and social movements consistently aim to represent the perspectives and needs of poor people, and to forge far-reaching social change. Poor-led groups are not the *only* entities that can put forward a poor-centered agenda, of course; municipal, state/provincial, and federal governments could potentially advance antipoverty approaches that are poor-centered and pro-poor, as could international institutions and NGOs. But on the relational poverty view, it is not enough to merely include token representatives from poor communities in occasional consultations: those living in chronic poverty do not just lack resources, but are also socially and politically marginalized and subordinated in ways that can only be transformed through praxis. A relational poverty approach thus sees the perspectives and power of organized poor communities as key to the processes of deciding what is needed to challenge and transform social relations and structures of inequality and subordination.

4

Politicizing Poverty

> The MST [Brazil's Landless Workers Movement] holds that know-
> ledge is power. Its ideology is clear that this is a movement to change
> the system. Domination occurs by keeping people in ignorance.[1]
>
> —Amory Starr, María Elena Martínez-Torres,
> and Peter Rosset

> Justice has to be *realised*, even wrested from, imperfectly just states
> through forms of collective action.[2]
>
> —Neera Chandhoke

When we understand poverty as the outcome of relations of inequality and
subordination, the importance of self-organizing poor collectives and so-
cial movements as agents of transformative, "pro-poor political and social
change"[3] begins to come into clearer view. Subordinating social and eco-
nomic structures perpetuate, and are also partly constitutive of, poverty; it
follows that these will need to be transformed in order for significant and
durable poverty alleviation to be achieved. The relational approach therefore
sees durable poverty reduction as a process of exposing, dismantling, and
reforming the relations and structures of inequality and subordination that
underpin dispossession and deprivation. It also recognizes that, given en-
trenched resistance to redistributing wealth and power, these changes will
require that organized poor communities be centrally included in decision-
making about poverty reduction and social reform.

This more political understanding of what drives poverty and what is re-
quired to eradicate it aligns with a "pro-poor" vision of social change. The

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[1] Amory Starr, María Martinez-Torres, and Peter Rosset, "Participatory Democracy in
Action: Practices of the Zapatistas and the Movimento Sem Terra," *Latin American Perspectives* 38,
no. 1 (2011): 110.

[2] Neera Chandhoke, "Realising Justice," *Third World Quarterly* 34 (2013): 312.

[3] Bebbington et al., "Decentring Poverty," 1304.

term pro-poor has been widely used to denote policy approaches that support universal *social rights*, as well as development processes that are genuinely inclusive of the needs and aims of dispossessed, poor communities. Progressive antipoverty policies are sometimes rightly described as pro-poor; social protection programs that provide universal benefits like wage income supports and basic income grants are pro-poor, for example, if they are designed in such a way as to counter poor people's vulnerability and social exclusion. Urban planning and development processes that include previously marginalized people as stakeholders whose views matter are also rightly described as pro-poor. But as explained in Chapter 1, I use the term to refer to reforms (and policymaking processes) that align with organized poor-led organizations' and movements' broader vision of full social and political inclusion for poor people. According to this vision, a process or policy that is pro-poor entails accountability by the state and private sector to poor communities, and gives poor communities real say (and in some domains, autonomy) in decision-making about the institutions and processes that most affect them. Their vision of pro-poor social change is one in which poor people's social rights and entitlements are acknowledged, and they are treated as social equals and stakeholders.

Poor-led organizations and social movements create pressure for pro-poor policies—from universal social protection programs to meaningful inclusion in urban and social planning processes—and, to the extent that they can, demand that injustices faced by poor people be acknowledged and redressed. With this in mind, the present chapter examines how organized poor-led groups work to *politicize poverty*—both in the eyes of poor people and within broader public discourse—and so also to generate transformative, pro-poor solutions. Poor-led groups draw attention to processes of exclusion, subordination, discrimination, and dispossession that keep people poor; they also identify structural remedies (to sedimented injustices) that directly challenge the status quo. In many contexts, local and national social and economic structures that systematically benefit some groups and impoverish others are unlikely to be reformed unless significant pressures can be brought to bear against the governments, state bureaucracies, corporations, and powerful individuals (wealthy landowners, etc.) that uphold them.

How do poor communities begin to exercise collective agency in a context of poverty and powerlessness? One of the first steps taken by movement-builders is to develop practices of critical, political consciousness-raising.

Place-based, grassroots organizations and movements in particular engage in activities that raise awareness of the structural and political character of their members' poverty; it is for this reason that we must pay particular attention to *poor-led organizing at the local level*, as I explain in section 4.1. I illustrate this by exploring, in section 4.2, the extensive practices of critical consciousness-raising practices of one of the most important poor-led social movements of recent decades, Brazil's rural landless peasant movement—the MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*). The political awareness that movements seek to cultivate is developed partly through direct engagement in collective action—as illustrated by the MST peasant activists' encampments, and the anti-eviction struggles of informal settlers (often referred to as "slum dwellers" or "shack dwellers") in post-apartheid South Africa and elsewhere.[4] The MST, along with other poor movements, have also developed distinctive models of popular education tailored to the needs and circumstances of their members. Some groups, such as landless peasant groups in Latin America—again, most notably, the MST—consider such consciousness-raising education as a *precondition for participating in direct political action*. Whether critical awareness about poverty is developed through political activism or is treated a precursor to it, the aim is the same: for poor communities to increase their capacity to contest the unjust structures that give rise to their chronic needs deprivation, and to build a social movement that can undertake to transform the practices and policies that permit discrimination, exploitation, dispossession, and social exclusion.

Through these practices of critical consciousness-raising, members of poor-led social movements gain a fuller understanding of how it is that particular social relations and structures combine to keep them poor. This knowledge is an imperative building block for the task of becoming empowered to *change* these power relationships and structures. In section 4.3, I explain how the broader political consciousness developed through movements' critical education practices are ultimately in the service of *empowering poor people to resist injustice and demand (and develop) alternatives*. The kind of collective social and political empowerment that poor movements strive for contrasts sharply with narrower notions of (individual) empowerment, however, and I discuss why this matters.

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[4] See Ashwin Desai, *We Are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).

In section 4.4, I discuss how poor-led movements deploy critical consciousness about poverty, and their newly empowered sense of their collective as deserving of justice and capable of action, to *politicize poverty at the
level of public debate and discourse*. This politicizing function of struggles
from below is urgently needed, for it helps to shift the way that needs deprivation and its underlying causes are construed by politicians, popular media,
and others.[5] Politicizing poverty within society as a whole helps to generate
broader support for their aims, including among the nonpoor; by challenging ideologies that normalize extreme inequalities and poverty, and directly "targeting. . . relationships of exclusion and [adverse] incorporation,"[6]
poor movements can precipitate pro-poor policies and social reforms—even
if these fall short of what movements seek. Key examples that I discuss include the Bolsa Família program of cash transfers to poor families in Brazil,
which the MST was instrumental in bringing about; and the *piqueteros*
movement in Argentina, which began as a series of struggles by unemployed
workers to repossess the country's defunct factories and grew into a broad
movement of those dispossessed by the neoliberal economic policies of the
1980s and 1990s.

What is required to mount *effective* challenges to poverty-perpetuating
structures and relations will of course depend on myriad factors in the legal,
social, economic, and political contexts in which these exist. In section 4.5,
I discuss some of the most important factors exogenous to social movements
that can affect their ability to extract concessions for the poor as well as to
generate wider public support for a pro-poor settlement. Social movement
theories can shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of some kinds of
social movements by focusing on variables relating to the political systems
and economies within which movements emerge; patterns of development
interventions; and the character of civil society (e.g., the landscape of NGOs,
the role trade unions, patterns of clientelism, etc.). But while the contexts and
factors conducive to poor movements' emergence, trajectories, and successes
or failures are important, they are not my main focus here. Instead, I aim to
make the case that *poor-led movements are ethically and normatively crucial*

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[5] As Haarstad et al. write, "there is a need to politicize the engrained structures of inequality and
poverty [in Latin America]. . . this politicization has to go beyond the narrow confines of income
distribution, and question deep structures of cultural, social, and political dispossession. . . . Social
movements have a critical role to play in this politicization." Havard Haarstad, Mark Amen, and Asun
Lera St. Clair, "Conclusion," *Globalizations* 9, no. 6 (2012): 887-88 (special issue: Social Movements,
the Poor and the New Politics of the Americas).

[6] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 813.

to the development of a transformative, pro-poor approach to poverty eradication. Consequently, while social scientists' analyses of social movements inform my discussion, my argument for why the struggles of poor communities matter does not depend upon them.

4.1. Local, Place-Based Activism versus Transnational Struggles

From a certain vantage point, the most recognizable protests "from below" against deprivation and dispossession appear to be *global* ones—such as the civil society struggles that join under the banner of the World Social Forum (WSF), and the mass demonstrations that routinely mark the World Trade Organization ministerial conferences and meetings of the G-7. These antiglobalization and environmental struggles, as I discussed in Chapter 1, are much-studied examples of subaltern social movements that traverse national borders and link activists with shared opposition to what Escobar has called "US-based forms of imperial globality."[7] But there has also been a dramatic rise in *local struggles* against destructive aspects of globalization, like development processes that displace communities through intensive resource extraction, mega-dam projects, industrialized agriculture, and expansion associated with megacities; and against neoliberal economic restructuring and policies causing joblessness, exploitation, and scarcity of basic goods.

These local, place-based struggles of marginalized communities in the global South arguably give us the best glimpse into the critical consciousness-raising efforts of self-organizing poor communities, and their capacity to politicize poverty within (national) public discourse. The importance of these local struggles is due in part to a broader trend toward a "localisation of politics"[8] in developing countries owing to institutional processes of democratization and decentralization. Shifts in governance practices and within the development sector that have mandated greater participation by civil society groups have also given momentum and sometimes funding opportunities for local and grassroots associations. But while UN agencies and INGOs have

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[7] Escobar, "Beyond the Third World," 207.

[8] Marianne Millstein, Sophie Oldfield, and Kristian Stokke, in "uTshani BuyaKhuluma—The Grass Speaks: The Political Space and Capacity of the South African Homeless People's Federation," *GeoForum* 34 (2003): 457.

supplied some of the language (emphasizing democratization, participation, and social rights) embraced by many local struggles, the aims and strategies of these groups are not confined to the controlled, bureaucratic forms of inclusion prescribed by official development discourses. Indeed, place-based poor-led social movements often seek to disrupt the political status quo of development agencies, triggering subtle but important norm shifts in development practices. As Bebbington argues, in "challeng[ing] ideologies surrounding poverty debates," poor-led social movements "destabilize" the social norms and frames that have hitherto foreclosed genuinely pro-poor policies.[9]

It is also not a coincidence that it is place-based poor movements and collectives (as opposed to transnational social movement networks) that tend to generate alternative, nondominating models of production, ownership, and distribution.[10] To lay the groundwork for mass mobilization and activism, movements need to shift to a broader social justice frame. Coming to see certain injustices as shared—as afflicting others who are similarly situated to oneself—is critical for motivating sustained collective action. This in turn requires framing antipoverty struggles as struggles for liberation, and for rights and social entitlements for even the poorest citizens—rather than merely about meeting material needs. Both critical consciousness-raising (among movement members) and the politicization of poverty within wider public discourse help to achieve these shifts in how poverty is perceived and publicly discussed.

4.2. Poor-Led Social Movements and the Vital Task of Critical Consciousness-Raising

Recall that poor-led social movements in the global South are best described as "politicised collective activities of and for the poor," encompassing not only organized groups but also more informal social mobilization and popular protest.[11] Bebbington et al.'s observation that poor-led social movements "rarely emerge around poverty per se," but rather, form around particular

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[9] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 806.

[10] It should be noted that critical consciousness-raising appears to be more central to the work of grassroots, place-based, poor *social movements*, as opposed to poor collectives with highly specific livelihood aims, like securing cooperative credit. This is because of the role of political consciousness in mobilizing collective action.

[11] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 47.

experiences of subordination and injustice, such as dispossession, exploitation, or systemic discrimination, is also important to bear in mind.[12] But these experiences, and the injustices they represent, do not instantly translate into movement-building narratives; rather, they are analyzed and interpreted within processes of collective meaning-making. Brazil's landless peasant movement, the MST, has developed a particularly well-developed set of practices around political consciousness-raising that have been critical to its success, and for that reason provide the focus for my discussion in this section. Some brief background to the movement is in order. Formed in 1984 by members of rural trade unions, squatter camps, and the Catholic Church, this movement of landless peasants has since its inception sought to expose the injustice of Brazil's massive land and wealth inequalities. Although classified as an upper-middle-income country, Brazil has greater income inequality and wealth inequality (income/consumption Gini of 0.59) and land inequality (land tenure Gini 0.800) than many high- and lower-middle-income countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, Columbia, India, and many others.[13] That 47% of all farmland was, in 2003, owned by a mere 1.6% of landowners[14] is a result not only of the country's particular pattern of settler colonialism—with its forced displacement of poor and Indigenous peoples—but also a variety of long-standing land fraud practices.[15] The MST also shines a spotlight on oppressive property and agricultural labor relations, as well as the ownership of certain industries and land by wealthy foreign nationals.[16] Additionally, the MST has decried practices of "indiscriminate market competition" and unsustainable growth fostered by neoliberal economic institutions and ideology.[17]

The MST's efforts at politicizing poverty within public discourse are intertwined with its signature strategy of seizing land for the landless. In particular, the movement's most successful and widely known tactic is to bring together local landless people (*sem-terra*) to occupy unused and private

[12] Bebbington al., "Decentring Poverty," 1306.

[13] Miguel Carter, "Social Inequality, Agrarian Reform, and Democracy in Brazil," in *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, ed. Miguel Carter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 20 (Table 1.4).

[14] Miguel Carter, "The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Democracy in Brazil," *Latin American Research Review* (2010): 189.

[15] Angus Wright and Wendy Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2003), 19–24.

[16] Wendy Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 47.

[17] Wilder Robles, "The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 28, no. 2 (2001): 156–57.

lands, forming an "MST encampment." The occupiers must first struggle to resist eviction, then negotiate with local or state government to transfer title to the land to local landless families; following this, the movement usually organizes these farms into "settlements" with cooperative forms of production and trade, and other collectivized aspects of life. Between 1987 and 2006, the MST and other peasant groups undertook a total of 7,078 land occupations across Brazil.[18] These occupations and related protests had by 2006 directly triggered the distribution of "41.3 million hectares, a territory as large as Sweden," to peasants and rural workers, with 825,000 families receiving titles to land.[19] Although it is estimated that only about a quarter of the (post–land occupation) settlements were organized by the MST, it was certainly the catalyst and model for other peasant struggles and has been the most prominent movement at the national level.[20]

The MST has also led nationwide protests that have dramatized, and generated widespread sympathy for, the plight of the landless. In a mass march that received extensive international media coverage, the MST organized 12,000 peasants to undertake a seventeen-day, 125-mile march from the countryside to Brasília in May 2005. As Miguel Carter, a political scientist who has conducted extensive research on the MST, explains,

> An impressive logistical apparatus supported the seventeen-day mobilization: several massive circus tents to lodge all campers; 65 transport vehicles; a roving child-care center; 325 health workers; and a cooking staff of 415 people. . . . The event even featured a mobile radio station that broadcast programs to the marchers through ten thousand small radio receivers borrowed from the World Social Forum.[21]

This march, like other public protests organized by the MST over the past three decades, was not merely a symbolic gesture; rather, the peasants marched to Brasília in order to demand that the President (Lula) increase social spending and fulfill his promises of land resettlement for landless families. They framed these demands as issues of justice, not charity. Upon meeting with Lula, movement leaders received the assurances they sought, making clear to him that they would step up land occupations and withdraw

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[18] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers Movement," 191.
[19] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers Movement," 191.
[20] Carter, "Social Inequality, Agrarian Reform, and Democracy in Brazil," 9.
[21] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers Movement," 198.

their support of him if he failed to meet the target number (430,000 families) of resettlement by 2006.[22]

While the MST occupations and encampments are intended to achieve land redistribution and agrarian reform on a massive scale, the movement has also pressed for new social protection programs to address severe poverty and inequality. Both of these goals require that the MST vivify the injustice of Brazil's extreme land and wealth inequalities and develop their power base so as to be capable of influencing state and national governments. To this end, the MST from the start sought to coordinate local peasant struggles and squatting activity, eventually organizing them into a national movement. While the movement has not yet achieved the far-reaching transformations it seeks, its achievements are nonetheless remarkable: the MST has successfully established itself as "a sophisticated grassroots organization, with a nationwide presence, an estimated 1.14 million members, over 2,000 agricultural settlements a network of 1,800 primary and secondary schools, a national university, various news outlets, 161 rural cooperatives, including 4 credit unions and 140 food processing plants."[23] It is a mass-based, and yet institutionalized, movement, and for the most part also nonpartisan. In a review of seven monographs on the MST, a historian of Brazil, Clifford Welsh, writes that despite their authors' varying analyses of the movement, there is a consensus that "after twenty years, the MST has become part of the Brazilian socio-political landscape. Opposition to it remains great but its resilience has proven stronger. Few doubt that the organization is here to stay. That it has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Brazilians, empowering them . . . is unquestionable."[24]

The MST is representative not only of other agrarian justice struggles, but more generally, of movements that organize and mobilize dispossessed, impoverished communities (urban and rural). All such movements seek to raise awareness of the poor's (citizenship-based) social entitlements, human rights, and dignity more generally.[25] Through their social movements—like

[22] Andrew Hay and Tiago Pariz, "Brazil's Poor Are Cut Down after a 150-mile Protest March," *Independent*, May 18, 2005, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/brazils-poor-are-cut-down-after-a-150-mile-protest-march-491213.html.

[23] Carter, "Social Inequality, Agrarian Reform, and Democracy in Brazil," 8–9.

[24] Cliff Welch, "Movement Histories: A Preliminary Historiography of the MST," *Latin American Research Review* 41, no. 1 (2006): 209–10.

[25] As Martínez-Torres and Rossett observe of the global peasant movement, La Vía Campesina, "the Campaign helped create a deep project of constructing new collective identities and unity along the axis of the peoples' right to self-determination and strengthened oppressed peoples' trust in their own intellectual, moral, and political capacity to fight for and exercised this right." María

MST—poor communities demand a more inclusive and progressive "distributive politics . . . [by making] distributive claims grounded in ideas not of need or charity but of a 'rightful share.'"[26] This rightful share can be realized not only through arable land and/or urban land and tenancy rights, but also through universal social protection programs, public investment in health, education, and housing, and more radical forms of wealth redistribution.[27] Demands for social rights and entitlements are therefore central to the social movements that residents of informal settlements have built, and these are embedded within a political analysis of poverty as structural deprivation and dispossession that permeates all of their collective activities. For example, the shack dwellers' movement in South Africa has worked to build political awareness through direct action—chiefly land occupation and protests—and the activities attached to these actions. These include frequent open group meetings; the writing of (often group-authored) press releases, movement pamphlets, and open letters to politicians; and even through composing lyrics for, and singing, movement protest songs. That the purpose of these materials and activities is political education and consciousness-raising is made plain by the fact that its members refer to it as the "University of Abahlali baseMjondolo."[28]

The political consciousness-raising that rural landless and urban slum movements engage in through occupations, encampments, and informal settlements is often complemented by more traditional or formal education linked to movement needs. The popular education programs of landless peasant movements in Latin America, for example, have long combined basic literacy and numeracy instruction with lessons in social history and politics:

> The MST runs its own schools on a Freirean model. . . . The teachers and students in the schools participate in the MST governance structure by electing one male and one female to represent each base nucleus

Martínez-Torres and Peter M. Rosset, "La Vía Campesina: The Birth and Evolution of a Transnational Social Movement," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 155.

[26] James Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 24.

[27] Pablo Gilabert makes a similar argument about the role of social protest in foregrounding poor people's demands, and possibly leading to the introduction of progressive and egalitarian social policies. See his *From Global Poverty to Global Equality* (especially ch. 6 and 7).

[28] See http://abahlali.org/university-of-abahlali-basemjondolo/.

(10 students or 10 teachers). In addition to the schools, members of the MST are obligated to continue learning. Each member spends two months a year studying. . . . The base nucleus meets regularly for ideological study and criticism/self-criticism.[29]

Practical education is thus not confined to primary and secondary instruction; at the postsecondary level, MST has paired with over sixty Brazilian universities in order to provide secondary and postsecondary education for its members in both general studies as well as professional and technical training, such as teacher and medical training. To support the movement's commitment to cooperative and sustainable agriculture, it makes education in agricultural techniques widely available to members of the movement, through arrangements with local and technical colleges and by operating ITERRA (the Technical Institute for Training and Research in Agrarian Reform). This cooperative-run institute provides apprenticeships for students, who are expected to return to their own settlements (i.e., occupied land) after a two-month intensive course of study in agriculture as well as other relevant skills (health, communications, co-op management, etc.).[30]

For the MST, the process of members becoming more politically aware through meetings, direct action, and popular education is closely connected with the development of members' capacities to participate in different facets of the land occupations and cooperatively organized settlements. But technical instruction in agriculture, cooperative management, and other practical matters does not suffice; political and intellectual training is needed in order to foster a collective commitment to common ideals and principles. As Robin Dunford observes in his study of peasant struggles, "the camps in particular and the settlements that follow promote the politicisation and mobilisation of members. 'Previously isolated individuals' come together in 'a new form of collective social organization' in order to collectively learn about the broader structures that work to oppress them. The claiming of rights to food and land is thus tied to the development of a broader project of transforming structural injustices."[31] It is this broader vision of social justice, Dunford

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29 Starr et al., "Participatory Democracy in Action," 110.
30 Sebastian Betancourt, "The Brazilian Landless Peoples' Movement and Education," *Dialogues, Proposals, Stories for Global Citizenship* (2008–2009), http://base.d-p-h.info/en/fiches/dph/fiche-dph-8389.html.
31 Dunford, *The Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*, 94–95 (quoted phrase is from Rosset [2011]).

argues, that helps to account for the MST's low attrition rate and remarkable longevity.

Like peasant-based struggles generally, the MST views political awareness as a precondition for building an empowered movement of landless peasants who have the understanding, commitment, skills, and sense of solidarity needed to engage in sustained political action as well as cooperative production and living. From its earliest stages, the MST wove consciousness-raising into nearly all phases of members' training, work, and communal lives:

> For the landless men and women, young people, and children of the MST, the learning process begins in the collective ways of working and living in the *acampamentos* (pre-land occupation encampments); flourishes with massive and continuous land occupations and settlements; is strengthened through the educational activities developed and carried out in the MST schools; and expands in the collective construction of an alternative proposal, or "project," for all of Brazilian society.[32]

The MST's popular education practices in literacy and social/political history take place not only in the temporary *acampamentos* but in the long-standing land occupation encampments and subsequent MST settlements that have gained formal land title (and which operate as autonomous cooperatives). Through these horizontal, popular education practices—taught by fellow landless peasants—poverty is put into historical and political context, with members becoming aware of the class-based nature of land inequalities in Brazil and the nature (and injustice) of peasants' exploitation as workers on *latafúndios*. As geographer Wendy Wolford explains,

> The movement argues that as small farmers in rural Brazil, the settlers are exploited by a capitalist system whose chief engineers are large landowners, politicians and corporations. The *sem terra* are landless because others (capitalists, bankers, politicians, etc.) stole, misused and abused property that should belong to society as a whole. . . . Through documents and rituals, MST leaders carefully embed the class nature of the movement's

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[32] Monica Días Martins, "Learning to Participate: The MST Experience in Brazil," in *Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform*, ed. Peter Rosset, Raj Patel, and Michael Courville (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2006), 266.

imagined community in historical structures and experiences. The historical tradition that the MST draws upon goes back 500 years to injustices that are depicted as a direct consequence of the way in which Brazil was colonized.[33]

Popular education and political consciousness-raising by the MST thus combines class analysis with a trenchant critique of other disempowering practices, such as the cultural subordination and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and patriarchal subjection of women. It is no surprise that the notion of liberation from colonial and élite domination has figured prominently in the MST's vision from its inception. But it is not Frantz Fanon's prescription for decolonization—requiring cathartic violence in order to fully overcome the internalized forms of colonization—to which the movement appeals. Rather, the MST draws inspiration from the work of Brazilian pedagogy theorist Paulo Freire, as well as the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez;[34] the democratic, grassroots praxis-oriented approach of these thinkers, and of the Latin American tradition of liberation theology generally, continues to inform the movement.[35] What the MST takes from Freire in particular is his notion of conscientization (*conscientização*)—"the development of the awakening of critical awareness"—through which those in poverty become critically conscious of the relationships of domination that perpetuate their poverty.[36] Through critical popular pedagogy, Freire argued, the most marginalized segments of society would come to understand the social and political causes of their impoverishment and subordination. (Freire famously taught poor farmers and workers in Brazil to read, using as his "texts" the documents that most oppressed them, such as exploitative, quasi-legal land tenancy agreements.) This process of acquiring critical awareness of the underlying causes of one's poverty, and of the injustice of those arrangements, is rightly perceived by elites as a threat to their hegemony, according to Freire: "if the people were to become critical,

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[33] Wendy Wolford, "Producing Community: The MST and Land Reform Settlements in Brazil," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 3, no. 4 (2003): 507.

[34] Robles, "Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil," 148.

[35] Unlike for Fanon, "for Freire . . . true liberation does not necessarily require violence. What the colonized need are networks of explicitly antiauthoritarian education and political resistance in which they can learn, through dialogue among themselves and with progressive-minded members of the privileged dominating class, how to reconceive their worlds as liberatory spaces in which their desire to live fully human, self-actualized lives becomes possible." Tracey Nicholls, "Colonialism," in *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, ed. Dean K. Chatterjee (Berlin: Springer, 2011), 164.

[36] Paolo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Continuum, 2005), 15.

enter reality, increase their capacity to make choices (and therefore their capacity to reject the prescriptions of others), the threat to privilege would increase . . . the humanization of the Brazilian people loomed . . . as [a] subversive action."[37]

The MST's approach to fighting poverty and dispossession is grounded in Freire's insight that becoming critically aware of social subordination is part of the process of become authentic "subjects" with full human dignity, as well as equal citizens. The MST thus frames its struggle as one that goes "beyond just conquering the rural space, to involve a process of personal transformation that occurs through consciously informed strategic action challenging traditional power relations in the countryside that are based on land possession."[38] And indeed, extensive ethnographic research on MST encampments and settlements backs up the claim that the movement has had a transformative impact on its activists:

> Association members within the settlement pointed out that they were more politically active than they had ever been before joining the settlement. . . . As each settlement member learned in the encampment and political education process, the MST's Freirian educational model seeks to engage each individual in a form of political awakening that allows each person to recognize the historical foundations of the obstacles that have prevented previous political participation. This education is then used as a method of understanding how to overcome those obstacles. . . . For [encampment] settlers . . . opportunities for this kind of informed transformation are continual: the daily opportunities to participate in settlement activities around agricultural production and negotiation of credit, the collective protection of environmental reserve areas, adult education and literacy are simultaneously opportunities to engage in political action.[39]

As part of the process of building critical political consciousness, movements of the poor typically seek to foster a collective identity based on shared social circumstances. This sense of identification, as well as the community it fosters, helps movements like the MST to expand their membership

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[37] Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 16.

[38] Hannah Wittman, "Mobilizing Agrarian Citizenship: A New Rural Paradigm for Brazil," in *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change*, ed. Philip McMichael (New York: Routledge, 2010), 172.

[39] Hannah Wittman, "Reframing Agrarian Citizenship: Land, Life and Power in Brazil," *Journal of Rural Studies* 25 (2009): 127.

base as well as to motivate collective action.[40] The importance of collective identity is not a novel feature of poor-led social movements; as scholarship on "contentious politics" emphasizes, it is characteristic of grassroots social movements in general:

> In the formation of a social movement, more than a "pull" towards particular forms of collective action and targets is needed; the "push" of solidarity and collective identity is also required. Solidarity has much to do with interest, but it produces a sustained social movement only when consensus can be built around common meanings and identities. These meanings and identities are partly inherited and partly constructed in the act of confronting opponents. They are also constituted by the interactions within movements.[41]

As this analysis by Sidney Tarrow suggests, building a collective identity is critical to establishing solidarity among social movement members. Engaging in direct action is one of the main ways this solidaristic identity is solidified; in the case of poor-led movements, actions to disrupt business as usual (such as staging roadblocks) or to secure needed resources (like engaging in urban and rural land occupations) are also identity-building exercises. The importance of face-to-face interactions with others engaged in direct action is one of the reasons that successful poor movements are so often place-based: the real-world experience of collective struggle with similarly situated others, in tandem with "the thick bonds of situated modes of sociality,"[42] grounds a sense of shared purpose that effective movements require.

The shared identity that poor-led social movements strive to construct is not usually an identity of the poor *qua* poor, however, but centers "on having been denied, excluded or treated unjustly and inequitably"[43] as

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[40] As Wolford explains, "the movement 'works' to produce a coherent movement identity—its 'imagined community' of landless people. This community is an important part of the movement's ability to 'scale up' the struggle for land, turning it into a well-known transnational movement that stands for more than just access to land." Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*, 222.

[41] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 266.

[42] Pithouse, "Conjunctural Remarks," 105.

[43] Pithouse, "Conjunctural Remarks," 1304.

landless peasants, unemployed factory workers, Indigenous peoples dispossessed by extractive industries, or shack/slum dwellers dispossessed by urban development. This identity also serves as a lens through which group members more clearly see the structural and ideological aspects of their subordination, which in turn impacts the group's activist agenda. Writing on grassroots poor organizations in Bangladesh and India, development scholar Naila Kabeer observes that "recognition of the shared aspects of subordination points to its collectively enforced, and hence collectively changeable, character and forms the basis of strategies for change."[44] The Bangladeshi poor-empowerment group Nijera Kori (NK) that Kabeer and her co-researchers studied sees consciousness-raising as vital to its mission of mobilizing poor communities and enacting development-from-below, having "from the outset . . . defined the problems of poverty and inequality in terms of structurally-generated deficits in the critical consciousness and collective capabilities of poor and landless groups." The organization's "training" process is a discussion-based, participant-focused, and highly "prolonged and interactive process" of critical consciousness-raising based on Freirean pedagogical principles. Specifically, as Kabeer and Sulaiman explain, "training provides group members with information about their rights and entitlements, with the opportunity to reflect on, and analyse, the injustices in their own lives and with the exposure to critical theories that located the roots of these problems in the deeper structures of class and patriarchy in their society."[45]

It is typical of poor-led social movements that they seek to validate and even privilege members' firsthand knowledge of poverty in a variety of popular education/consciousness-raising practices—both as a way to foster community and solidarity, and to affirm their right to participate in struggle.[46] Placing greater weight on the lived experience of poverty in their pedagogical practices, political materials, and cultural artifacts[47] also encourages the extensive cooperative decision-making that is characteristic

[44] Kabeer, "Empowerment from Below: Learning from the Grassroots," in *Reversed Realities*, 253.

[45] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 50, 56, 50.

[46] Arjun Appadurai, "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 28. My italics.

[47] The principles of Abahlali baseMjondolo, for example, state that "people's politics is a living politics. . . . We start our discussions from the lives of the people and go from there." See "The Abahlali baseMjondolo Manifesto for a Politics of the Poor."

of these movements. In the reclaimed factory movement in Argentina that began after the 2001 economic collapse, for example, the cooperatively run factories explicitly adopted a model of "horizontal decision-making" that functions through workers' democratic assemblies.[48]

While the experience of shared dispossession, subordination, or exclusion are movement-building identifications, simply the fact of being poor does not usually suffice to ground solidarity.[49] As philosopher Sally Scholz argues, what is important is that a collective or solidarity group "value a [shared] interpretation of the past and the present and share a vision for the future, regardless of whether each individual actually experienced the relevant history."[50] There are exceptions, however: for example, South Africa's tradition of radical politics makes it feasible for the shack dwellers' movement to organize around a shared identity of "the poor." Sometimes poor-led groups appeal to narrower identities, such as being a woman or having a particular livelihood source. For instance, India's Self-Employed Women's Association [SEWA] organizes poor women home-workers (such as garment "piece" workers) and encourages a sense of mutual identity based on this precarious, gendered, means of earning income. Yet as founder Ela Bhatt explains, in the early days of the organization, this shared identification was by no means automatic:

> We noted that the women, who were all from the dalit community, still maintained a hierarchy within their own ranks—weavers considered themselves superior to cobblers, and they both felt superior to the *bhangi*—the cleaners. Despite great efforts to break down and commingle the various subcastes, in the end, the women preferred the company of their own community. In the early stages of organizing, this kind of insularity is fairly common, but eventually, as women become aware of the failures and successes of other cooperatives, barriers begin to break down and they begin to see other women as co-workers and sisters to sympathize and empathize with. This transformation cannot be forced; it has to undergo an internal process of realization—slow, but essential.[51]

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[48] Augusta Dwyer, *Broke but Unbroken: Grassroots Social Movements and Their Radical Solutions to Poverty* (Halifax, NS: Fernwood, 2011), 7.

[49] Leaders generally "view the label of 'poor' as demeaning, and some also see it to be a vehicle through which movements and their bases can be converted into objects of state programmes that divert attention from the issues of real concern to them." Bebbington et al., "Decentring Poverty," 1320.

[50] Sally J. Scholz, *Political Solidarity* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2008), 34.

[51] Ela R. Bhatt, *We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 53.

As Bhatt's comments suggest, the trust and sense of common purpose needed to forge a shared, critical consciousness and strong solidaristic bonds are not always available to poor groups in the early stages, but instead need to be built gradually, through extensive interactions, and with the help of skillful organizers.

At other times, poor groups' identity centers on particular place or land from which members have been displaced, such as a specific urban informal settlement, or one's ancestral territory. Poor movements' collective identity may also focus on a combination of place-and-work-based identities, as in the case of landless peasants, or unemployed industrial workers like the *piqueteros*. These latter movements often seek to cultivate *cross-class solidarity* and a broader shared identity in order to achieve their goal of changing their society's widely held negative perceptions of poverty, unemployment, or homelessness. The *piquetero* movement is a case in point: from late 2000, the movement was able to engage a wide cross-section of Argentine society in direct protests (especially in Patagonia), incorporating not only recently unemployed workers and their unions, but also fishermen, teachers, students, textile workers, hospital workers, and others.[52] They were able to garner wide endorsement from the middle classes in part because "the collective experience of massive (and successful) protests and the participatory solidarity work in the respective local settings helped to transform the negatively defined self-identification into a positive identity: the *piquetero*."[53] In this way, classes and subgroups that might not previously have worked together may join forces in oppositional protests against the state or symbols of private wealth.

For the members of the MST, collective identity is mainly grounded in the shared experience (among landless farmers and workers) of dispossession and exploitation. But the movement has also worked to develop an alternative vision of rural citizenship—foregrounding the social rights and capabilities of peasants—that has wide appeal among the landless and serves as a "pull" factor in the sense described earlier, by Tarrow. Sociologist Hannah Wittman, drawing on her interviews with members

[52] Gonzalo Pérez Álvarez, "Continuity and Rupture in the Labor and Piquitero Movements in Argentine Patagonia, 1990–2011," trans. Rachel Newman, *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 2 (2015): 42–59. See also Dinerstein, "Autonomy in Latin America," 358.

[53] Jonas Wolff, "(De) Mobilising the Marginalised: A Comparison of the Argentine Piqueteros and Ecuador's Indigenous Movement," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007): 7.

of the MST settlement known as *Antonio Conselheiro*, notes that "the process of personal transformation expressed by settlers gave rise to the development of a demonstrated collective consciousness, despite political differences, that is key in the new reformulation of agrarian citizenship."[54] Transformative experiences are not confined to direct actions (land occupations, factory takeovers, etc.) but also include members' participation in cooperative work and living. Based on his interviews with members of MST encampments and settlements, social movement and development researcher Leandro Vergara-Camus describes "the encampment period . . . [as] a period of ultrapoliticization of everyday life, because almost all aspects of residents' lives are dealt with through participation in various types of small committees"; as he explains,

> The negotiations, discussions, decisions, and actions undertaken during the period of encampment make up a concrete and practical process of politicization and empowerment. . . . Through their various political experiences either within or outside the encampment and later in their settlement, MST members, by solving problems and planning actions, learn to mobilize and organize. As they become aware of their rights and pressure, negotiate with, or confront state authorities from the various levels of government, they learn to question the state, demystifying it. . . .[55]

These movement-acquired capacities for deliberation and cooperative decision-making are framed by movement leaders as a form of "power from below" that taps into members' shared, lived experiences of poverty. Movements that foster the political awareness and capacities of their members meet subsequent confrontations and negotiations with government with "a new level of consciousness and experience"[56] and often continue to use a range of protest mechanisms within their established "repertoire of strategies" for contention.[57]

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[54] Wittman, "Reframing Agrarian Citizenship," 128.

[55] Leandro Vergara-Camus, "The Politics of the MST: Autonomous Rural Communities, the State, and Electoral Politics," *Latin America Perspectives* 36, no. 4 (2009): 182.

[56] Pérez Álvarez, "Continuity and Rupture in the Labor and Piquitero Movements in Argentine Patagonia," 53.

[57] Federico Rossi, *The Poor's Struggle for Incorporation: The Piquetero Movement in Argentina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 6 and passim.

4.3. Politicizing Poverty as a Means
to Social Empowerment

Poor people must be collectively empowered in order to assert their moral right to shape the priorities and strategies for poverty eradication and development. The kind of empowerment that poor social movements seek to develop depends upon critical consciousness-raising, as well as on collective capability-building (the focus of the next chapter).[58] Poor-led organizations and movements share the fundamental belief that the poor's social exclusion must be challenged and the political voices of the poor augmented if significant poverty reduction is to be achieved. This is not only because the wealthy and the political élite consistently block deeper structural changes that threaten their power and vested interests but because it is organized poor communities and movements that generate genuinely transformative, pro-poor ideas for social transformation. As the authors of a study on the South African Homeless People's Federation—a precursor to the (SDI-affiliated) South African Alliance—argue:

> To achieve lasting poverty reduction, poor people must be organized, confident and determined. They need to develop solutions that work for them, drawing on a knowledge and experience beyond their immediate boundaries . . . identifying and adopting new solutions is the indispensable starting point for organizing communities and creating situations in which they can recognize and tap into their capacity to take control of development. . . . The fundamental reason why poor communities must set priorities is not that they are always correct. It is, rather, that the poor are much more committed to solutions if they see that change is possible using their own strategies and processes, aimed at priorities that they have set themselves.[59]

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[58] As Sidney Tarrow writes, "Movement participation is not only politicizing; it is empowering, not only in the psychological sense of increasing people's willingness to take risks, but in affording them new skills and broadened perspectives." Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 221.

[59] Ted Baumann, Joel Bolnick, and Diana Mitlin, "The Age of Cities and Organizations of the Urban Poor: The Work of the South African Homeless People's Federation," in *Empowering Squatter Citizen: Local Government, Civil Society, and Urban Poverty Reduction*, ed. Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite (London: Earthscan, 2004), 193–215.

The kind of empowerment that poor social organizations and movements seek differs from the ideal of individual economic empowerment advanced by institutions such as the World Bank and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of their poverty-reduction and development agendas. Unlike this latter ideal, poor empowerment is necessarily collective, and it pertains to *social and political* structures, relations, and capacities—not narrowly economic ones. As development thinker and social activist Srilatha Batliwala explains of grassroots women's collectives' struggles in particular, empowerment in this context refers both to "the process of challenging existing power relations, and gaining greater control over the sources of power," as well as to its outcome—namely, "a redistribution of power."[60] Echoing the insights of feminist intersectional theory, Batliwala argues that "the process of empowerment must address all relevant structures and sources of power" given that the socioeconomic subordination of poor women in the global South is grounded in multiple axes and sources of disempowerment (in both the private and public spheres).[61] Building collective and cooperative structures once a movement has taken root can continue this process of transformation. The MST, for example, establishes economically self-sufficient settlements following successful private land occupations (*festas*); these have significant cooperative arrangements, with many of them collectivizing agricultural production, equipment purchasing and credit practices, childcare, housing, and so forth, depending on the decisions made by settlement members.[62] Consumption-oriented poor social movements, such as slum dweller groups (discussed in the next chapter), also empower their members by forming community savings collectives and co-production ventures to provide access to housing, services, and utilities.

The ideal of empowerment common to poor movements and grassroots collectives across the global South thus cannot be reduced to the notion of individual economic empowerment. This is because movement members have come to see their poverty as rooted in relations of subordination and disempowerment that cannot be reversed by either charity or state transfers, but instead require that social rights and entitlements of poor citizens be recognized. Nor is the kind of self-empowerment needed for the collective mobilization of poor communities achievable merely through

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[60]   Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment," 130.
[61]   Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment," 130.
[62]   Días Martins, "Learning to Participate," 268, 270, 276.

"participatory" development interventions or poverty reduction initiatives led by nongrassroots INGOs alone. While these are often admirably poor-centered in their vision, and may even enhance the ability of poor individuals to later organize into grassroots collectives or social movements, they are nonetheless led by nonpoor development professionals who enjoy secure standing and voice.[63]

The distinction between these different conceptions of empowerment (merely economic versus social/political) is not always easy to discern, for global economic institutions have also begun to refer to poor social empowerment as a facet of pro-poor poverty reduction. Unlike poor movements, however, these institutions typically situate poor-empowerment goals within a capitalistic economic paradigm, in which assets and economic opportunities are the gauge; "for them, development is ultimately about individual or community integration into the market."[64] This is evidenced by the OECD's report on *Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: The Role of Empowerment*, which considers the "causal relationship between empowerment and pro-poor growth . . . [and] how inequity and power imbalances lead to both *market failures and political, social and legal inequities that prevent poor people from investing in raising their productivity and production*."[65] While the report acknowledges the importance of transforming relationships of power that sustain poverty—and even ventures some suggestions for how donors can help to "facilitate the 'enabling environment' for social movements"—it avoids confronting the undeniable conflicts between the growth-oriented agenda of global financial institutions and the redistribution- and sustainability-oriented agenda of grassroots poor social movements.[66]

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[63] John Gaventa, in his research on participation in development practices, found that a host of factors regularly undermine the effectiveness of INGO- and donor-led participatory development. Specifically, such initiatives typically fail to include poor and marginalized individuals, leaving elites to fill the space. What is needed to increase the inclusion of the disenfranchised are "legal frameworks [that] give participants *an explicit right* to participate," as well as "organized groups of citizens that can help articulate the collective voice and help monitor the process." See Gaventa, *Participation Makes a Difference—but Not Always How and Where We Might Expect*, IDS Special paper (April 2011), 73.

[64] Leandro Vergara-Camus, *Land and Freedom: The MST, the Zapatistas and Peasant Alternatives to Neoliberalism* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 16.

[65] *Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth: The Role of Empowerment* (Paris: OECD, 2012), 5.

[66] Priyanthi Fernando, "Working with Social Movements," in *Poverty Reduction and Pro-Poor Growth*, 262. Some development researchers have suggested that the funding of community-based organizing by World Bank programs, especially those targeting Indigenous groups, "might depoliticize social movement action and perform as a new form of 'contention' of grassroots resistance by 'domesticating participation' and 'disciplining the poor.'" See Dinerstein, "Autonomy in Latin America," 357.

Part of what it means to politicize poverty for the purposes of collective social empowerment is to confront and challenge the false beliefs about poverty and the naturalness of existing hierarchies that mask the subordination of particular social groups. Poor activists must necessarily engage with both the outward and inward effects of these ideologies. For this reason, emancipation, rather than empowerment, is perhaps a more apt description of what poor-led social movements see as the antidote to their collective disempowerment. And indeed, the conviction that it is only through active struggle that people who are excluded or even dehumanized by others can come to feel that they are truly human has long been a feature of discourses by revolutionary and antislavery movements.[67] Yet while highly political groups of informal settlements, and certain peasant movements, do sometimes invoke the ideal of emancipation, in the self-organizing poor collectives that I have surveyed, empowerment is normally the term of choice. But crucially, both ideals—empowerment and emancipation—are understood by poor organizations and movements as processes enacted by poor people themselves, not seen as achievable through the actions of others. In its popular education practices, for example, the MST has had to target dominant beliefs about the naturalness of landed wealth and class distinctions; in tandem with the country's authoritarian political culture and the "strong tradition of paternalism and clientelism" characteristic of "Brazilian plantation culture," these beliefs reinforced the domination and passivity of tenant peasants and landless workers.[68]

For poor-led organizations that are wholly or mainly devoted to organizing women, challenging social ideology that reinforces their subordination is crucial, but it pertains to many more areas of their members' lives. Poor women's empowerment, Batliwala argues, cannot develop without "an altered consciousness and an awareness that the existing social order is unjust" as well as a different "self-image and . . . beliefs about their rights and capabilities" and an understanding of "the true value of their labor and contributions to the family, society, and economy."[69] As her comments

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[67] Simon Caney, discussing the ideas of antislavery thinkers like Frederick Douglass and C. L. R. James, notes that "self-emancipation has a value that is absent from cases where some liberate others," in part because, at times, "resistance engenders a sense of self-respect and self-worth." Caney, "Right to Resist Global Injustice," 529.

[68] Wright and Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth*, 60.

[69] Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment," 131–32. The social strictures and oppressive norms that women face make communal or collective processes of empowerment especially vital for organizing poor women, Batliwala argues: "The empowerment process must organize women into collectives, breaking out from individual isolation and creating a united forum

suggest, collective processes for empowering marginalized groups have been extensively discussed and theorized in connection with poor women's organizing in developing countries. Among the most important insights that have emerged from these analyses and studies are that "empowerment is fundamentally about changing power relations. It is not just about improving women's capacities to cope with situations in which they experience oppression or injustice. It is about enabling women to question what they might previously have considered 'normal' . . ." and developing the "ability to make strategic life choices."[70] This change in worldview is not a substitute for real change, of course, but it is a necessary condition for the kind of poverty alleviation that identifies and truly transforms poverty-perpetuating and subordinating social relations.

The critical consciousness forged through grassroots popular education and direct action can be profoundly transformative and empowering for people in poverty, building awareness of the causes and injustice of their deprivation as well as a sense of common purpose. As Dunford observes of the MST, the movement's endurance can be credited in large part to "the way in which they combine land occupations with practices that help transform peasants from victims of accumulation via dispossession into activist citizens able to enact and demand rights for themselves."[71] Movement-based consciousness-raising ultimately aims to motivate collective action that will increase the social power and influence of poor communities—thus strengthening their demands for recognition of their social rights and entitlements, and pro-poor policies and reforms. The greater sense of empowerment that is usually fostered as part of awareness-raising processes also enables movements to build cooperative structures for production or service delivery, and undertake community-improving initiatives (e.g., slum upgrading) or co-production ventures with local governments and NGOs (as I shall discuss in the next chapter).

through which women can challenge their subordination. . . . Armed with a new consciousness and growing collective strength, women begin to assert their right to control resources (including their own bodies) and to participate equally in decisions within the family, community, and village" (132).

[70] Andrea Cornwall and Althea-Maria Rivas, "From Gender Equality and 'Women's Empowerment' to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda for Gender and Development," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2015): 405.

[71] Dunford, *Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*, 94 (quoted phrase is from Rosset; see ff. 76).

4.4. Politicizing Poverty within Public Discourse

> The very fact that movements emerge around issues that are drivers,
> rather than symptoms or immediate sources, of poverty, and that
> they address these issues through protest and political action, means
> that they have the effect of politicizing poverty, placing it within a
> broader demand for alternative, more socially just ways of orga-
> nizing society.
>
> —Anthony Bebbington, "Social Movements and
> the Politicization of Poverty"[72]

Integral to, but still distinct from, the process of critical consciousness-
raising is the vital task of politicizing poverty at the level of public discourse.
Poor social movements, as well as some grassroots collectives, politicize
poverty through a variety of means—from engaging in direct actions and
protests to highlight the injustices they face, to conveying their message
through mass media coverage of their cause. Movement activists under-
stand that poverty and extreme inequalities need to be reframed, and to the
extent possible, denormalized. For pro-poor social and legal protections to
even become "thinkable," false public narratives about poverty and the poor
need to be consistently challenged, Green and Hulme explain: "the attitudes
of political elites help inscribe the limits of social responsibility for poverty,
perpetuating the representation of poverty as a problem of the poor, and en-
couraging punitive regimes for the reduction of the risks poverty is seen to
carry for the better off."[73]

Against this dominant framing of poverty, poor-led social movements
wage a "counter-hegemonic politics" by engaging in "struggles over values,
ideas, and interpretations."[74] Some movements seek to expose specific
patterns of maltreatment and rights violations inflicted on the poor—such
as forced evictions from land and informal housing, the criminalization of
destitution, the erosion of workers' rights and wages, or the withholding of
basic municipal services. Others, however, pursue the broader goal of rec-
ognition of poor communities' right, and capacity, to shape the conditions

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[72] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 799–800.
[73] Green and Hulme, "From Correlates and Characteristics to Causes," 876.
[74] Goodhart, *Injustice*, 181.

of their lives: "Social movements seek not only to build the voice of the poor to make forceful and articulate demands, but also to create social settings in which powerful people—locally, nationally, and globally—are open to hearing what the poor have to say and to supporting them in achieving the movement's goals."[75] Poor social movements thus aim to discredit dominant public (including elite-generated) assumptions about poverty, inequality, and the poor; as Bebbington observes, they aim "to politicize the use of the 'language of poverty,' classifications of certain groups defined as poor, and unexamined aspects of social organization that are taken for granted (such as access to opportunities in society)."[76]

Politicizing poverty in public discourse often depends on exposing and denouncing massive, unjust inequalities in land and wealth—as we saw in the case of the the MST and other peasant movements in Brazil. Global networks like Vía Campesina and SDI also aim to show how poverty across borders is connected by common processes like displacement- and dispossession-by-development, labor exploitation, big agribusiness, and neoliberal trade policies. In the context of a newly politicized public discourse about poverty, redistributive demands, both welfare-oriented and structural, can gain a footing. As one study of the MST notes, the movement was consistently successful at conveying the justness of its cause, often appealing to the Brazilian constitution in framing its struggle as one of delivering on the rights promised to its citizens:

> MST gained recognition in the Brazilian public sphere through favourable media coverage emphasizing peaceful activism, and the legality, economic logic, and moral correctness of its actions. Mass marches in cities gained it the support of urban groups and elites. It reached "the pinnacle of recognition by Brazilian popular culture" . . . by being portrayed favourably in a popular national *telenovela*.[77]

As the MST's national political influence increased (1990–1999) and it began to look to the international realm, the movement was able to undertake "massification," as Wolford explains—"expanding the

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[75] Campbell et al., "Heeding the Push from Below," 964.
[76] Bebbington, "Social Movements and Poverty in Developing Countries," 3.
[77] Campbell et al., "Heeding the Push from Below," 965.

movement's reach among the masses . . . [to encompass] a broader circle of social actors including the urban poor, politicians, academics." This was facilitated by the movement's shift to a stance of "universalization": "the MST increasingly expressed the struggle for land in universal terms: access to land became less a matter of simple material acquisition and more a matter of the 'right to have rights' and a dignified, culturally appropriate living."[78]

Politicizing poverty is inextricably linked to demands for greater democratic inclusion and the expansion (or else realization) of poor citizens' rights in most of the countries in which significant social movements of the poor, unemployed, and dispossessed have emerged—such as Brazil, India, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Bangladesh, and South Africa. This intersects with, but is not identical to, the demand for the creation of, or inclusion in, *formal* democratic political institutions, which may fail to challenge the structures and relations underpinning poverty. As Robles notes in the case of Brazil, "democratic transition has not led to the emergence of substantive forms . . . of democratic citizenship. . . . It has not changed the basic structures of power that benefit the affluent and powerful. Indeed, democratic transition has strengthened, not weakened, the control exercised by the political elites, as they have maintained their hold on power through their ownership and command over the mass media and finance."[79] As we saw, the MST has tried to evolve a new conception of (agrarian) citizenship—to change the understanding "of land as a *condition* of citizenship to land as a *right* of an expanded citizenry."[80] Where social and economic rights and entitlements are formally recognized, as in South Africa, expanding the power of poor populations is bound up with struggles to actualize and fulfill these newly established rights (especially to land and housing). Poor communities' demand for meaningful democratic inclusion also often takes the form of insisting that they ought to have a direct say in social planning and policy.[81]

[78] Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*, 95.
[79] Robles, "Landless Rural Workers Movement," 147.
[80] Wittman, "Reframing Agrarian Citizenship," 123.
[81] As Kabeer writes in connection with poor collectives and NGOs in Bangladesh, the real challenge "lies in creating the capacity of poorer and more vulnerable sections of society to exercise some degree of influence over those who make policies in the country and to hold them to some degree of accountability." See Kabeer, "Snakes, Ladders and Traps: Changing Lives and Livelihoods in Rural Bangladesh (1994–2001)," *Chronic Poverty Research Center Working Paper 50*, published in association with the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK, 2004.

4.4.1. Case Study 1: Politicizing Poverty in Argentina: The *Piqueteros*

Greater political inclusion is the most difficult, yet critical, of all the aims articulated by poor movements and organizations—whether it is framed as a demand for the extension of the full rights of citizenship to impoverished citizens, or as a demand to recognize the poor's right to shape the social policies directly impacting them. Argentina's movement of the unemployed and poor exemplifies the extent to which antipoverty movements are often simultaneously calls for social inclusion and the extension of citizenship rights. This struggle of the unemployed and others living in poverty corresponds to the type of social movement that Bebbington et al. characterize as emerging "in response to dynamics of capital accumulation," although it also had elements of movements that arise "around the distribution and provision of services and assets that are collectively consumed and provided by the state."[82] Starting in the mid-1990s, unemployed workers began to put up roadblocks (*piquetes*) to protest job losses and factory closures, and to force the government to introduce unemployment income support and work programs. While the government responded to this pressure by implementing a limited cash transfer program known as *planes sociales*, the severe economic crisis that began in early 2000 led to an exponential increase in roadblocks and, by 2001, to mass public demonstrations. Both the road-blocking *piqueteros* and the public-protesting *cacerolazos* (pot-bangers) who became the public face of Argentina's economic collapse dramatically politicized the situation of the unemployed and poor. Their messaging directly blamed the government's neoliberal economic policies and the greed of the wealthy elite for the precipitous rise in unemployment and needs scarcity; by 2002, one in two Argentines fell below the poverty line, and tragically, hundreds of deaths from hunger and malnutrition, including children, were widely reported in the domestic and international media.[83]

In response to these worsening conditions, the *piquetero* organizations succeeded in framing the rapid growth of unemployment and poverty as a direct outcome of the actions of the political and wealthy elite. They did so

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[82] Bebbington et al., "Decentring Poverty," 1306.

[83] Media coverage focused on the fact that Argentina was not short of food, but that widespread poverty and hunger were the failures of government policies causing hyperinflation and very high unemployment. See "Child Hunger Deaths Shock Argentina," November 24, 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/25/famine.argentina.

in part by harnessing the growing outrage and sympathy for the movement by using the strategy of "witnessing"—defined as "a way of putting on display the oppression of the political system" and the suffering of the poor and unemployed:

> [The *piquetero* organization] MIJD has made use of symbolically disruptive tools, such as setting up a popular soup kitchen in the richest neighborhood of Buenos Aires . . . and protesting in front of McDonald's branches for the supply of 1000 Happy Meals for the children of MIJD members. . . . The purpose [was] to repeatedly access the media in the face of a lack of economic resources to . . . increase the number of sympathizers and gain empathy for their organizations and their message by partially relying on the mass media as a vehicle for disseminating their ideas and recruiting activists.[84]

The movement thus came to enjoy wide support not only among the unemployed and underemployed, but also among much of the middle class (though support from this class began to abate by 2003).[85] Revealingly, the slogan of both the *piqueteros* organizations and the popular uprising that came to a head in December 2001 with massive public protests in Buenos Aires was ¡*que se vayan todos!* ("Away with them all!"). By 2002, the new slogan was "Picketing and saucepan-banging, there is but one struggle!," reflecting "the multi-sectoral strategy promoted by the *piquetero* movement."[86] Of course, the economic context of the Argentine crisis was obviously conducive to fomenting a broadly held feeling of outrage: there had been a steep decline in the standard of living of millions of Argentines, many of whom became unemployed and even destitute as a result of processes triggered by radical neoliberal economic policies. Nor is it a coincidence that the *piquetero* movement was strongest in Greater Buenos Aires, for as the most industrialized area, it had a large number of unionized workers hard hit by the collapse. Together with "the incomparably dense network of left-wing activists . . . present in peri-urban Buenos Aires" and the highly factionalized character of the leading Peronist party, *Partido Justicialist* (Justicialist Party), the capital region presented the unemployed with "a dynamic context of

[84] Rossi, *Poor's Struggle for Incorporation*, 58–59.
[85] Edward Epstein, "Perpetuating Social Movements and Declining Opportunity: The Survival Strategies of Two Argentine Piquetero Groups," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 86 (2009): 4.
[86] Rossi, *Poor's Struggle for Incorporation*, 118.

political opportunities and shifts for political organization."[87] The movement seized these opportunities, working to develop a set of common strategies to link the many different organizations and a collective identity pivoting on the conviction that the country's politicians, economic policies, and social structures had utterly failed the working class. *Piquetero* organizations both encouraged and used this anger in strategic ways in order to create a sense of solidarity and common purpose among otherwise diverse groups of people (unemployed workers from different trade unions, retirees, and the working and nonworking poor).[88] The various different *piqueteros* organizations continued to engage in roadblocks, and cooperated with one another to mount large public demonstrations and an ever-increasing number of strikes (including national strikes).

By 1999, it became imperative for state and national governments, and even mayors of major cities, to confront the "*piquetero* social question" and to negotiate with movement leaders in order to end even temporary blockades.[89] Significant social programs to help the unemployed and poor were introduced, and the many cooperatives that had sprung up across the country were given autonomy and some government support. The movement lasted well into the early 2000s and continued to mount significant strikes and roadblocks that forced the government to the negotiating table. However, successive administrations employed what were ultimately effective strategies of co-optation, offering material concessions to some *piquetero* organizations but not others. Additionally, while the unemployment subsidies and cash transfer programs introduced were intended to be available to all, the government left particular *piquetero* groups in charge of administering these (including determining eligibility), thereby setting up the movement— which consisted of seventeen different organizations—for further splintering. Given that many of the moderate *piquetero* organizations primarily sought to regain lost jobs or secure income assistance for jobless members, it is no surprise that the government's clientelist pattern of social welfare disbursement and overall corporatist strategy were so effective. When, in late 2005, one of the largest *piqueteros* organizations—the FTV (*Federación de Trabajadores por la Tierra, Vivienda y Hábitat*, or the Workers' Federation for Land, Housing and Habitat)—joined Kirchner's Peronist center-left

[87] Rossi, *Poor's Struggle for Incorporation*, 171.
[88] Pérez Álvarez, "Continuity and Rupture in the Labor and Piquitero Movements," 55.
[89] Rossi, *Poor's Struggle for Incorporation*, 118–19.

electoral Alliance government (the Front for Victory [FpV]), the ground was laid for co-opting this wing of the movement. Leaders from the FTV received posts in his cabinet, and two other *piquetero* organizations, Barrios de Pie and Movimiento Evita, soon began to ally themselves with the FpV. All told, as Rossi notes, "almost half of the *piquetero* movement either joined or supported the government. The remainder did not accept the government's invitation and continued to pursue contentious strategies." This effectively divided the movement and "transformed the *piquerteros* [into] . . . secondary actors with a reduced capacity to influence the public policy process."[90] Yet while the *piquetero* phenomenon, in its unified form, began to demobilize not long after, remarkably, most of the movement's organizations have continued—albeit in a less contentious form.[91] Organized struggles by the unemployed remain a political force to contend with in Argentina, albeit less so today than in the heyday of the *piqueteros* (2000–2002).

Some scholars argue that the *piquetero* movement never intended to achieve "structural changes in the Argentine government" and did not demand these;[92] yet while this seems true of the moderate organizations within the movement, it mischaracterizes the programs of the leftist *piquetero* groups. In certain ways the movement was, as Rossi describes it, a "struggle for reincorporation" or reintegration into society and the state by unemployed, mainly industrial, workers, in response to their de-incorporation (as triggered by economic collapse). The fact that movement members directed their protests and demands at the state—urging the implementation of economic reforms and social protection programs—did not preclude a more radical agenda, but certainly made it much less likely. In this regard, the *piqueteros* are not unusual; as Bebbington notes, "livelihood crises triggered by neoliberalism have led movements that initially emerged demanding justice and citizenship to ask for specific hand-outs and programmes to help the poor cope with crisis." Movements such as these, he continues, "end up doing reasonably well in facilitating access to benefits, but they fail to influence institutions and structures."[93] As for the decision by some moderate

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[90] Rossi, *Poor's Struggle for Incorporation*, 192, 202.

[91] Fynn Kaese and Jonas Wolff, "Piqueteros after the Hype: Unemployed Movements in Argentina, 2008–2015," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 102 (2016): 60.

[92] Aldo Fernando Ponce, "Unemployment and Clientelism: The Piqueteros of Argentina," MPRA Paper No. 23 (2006), 3, https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/23/.

[93] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 810.

piquetero organizations to support and eventually join Kirchner's government, this too is par for the course; after all, "movements are political agents and will align with political parties when they believe it serves their interests."[94] Sadly, this alliance ultimately splintered the movement and caused the more radical demands of the autonomous wing of the *piquetero* struggle to lose traction.

This summary does not capture the full legacy of the *piqueteros*, however, which lies not so much in the material concessions and social programs they extracted from the state but in two other accomplishments. One of these is that poverty and extreme socioeconomic inequality remain, to this day, *highly politicized in the country*, as a direct result of the popular struggles waged by the *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos*. The second is that the unemployed worker's movement, as well as the recovered factory collectives that some *piquetero* groups established (also discussed in the next chapter), spawned a "new era" of "alternative forms of worker organization."[95] Many organizations were able to win the right to administer the newly introduced social programs for the unemployed and poor, funded through new government subsidies precipitated by mass demonstrations. They subsequently used this autonomy to establish and fund what local people needed most: cooperatively run public works, construction or repair of housing, employment programs, primary schools, community farms and soup kitchens, and other initiatives that give poor communities direct control over the changes they want.[96] The solidarity and sense of common purpose generated by these autonomous *piquetero* ventures was remarkable, as was the alternative vision of production and/or service provision that they advanced. Their legacy has inspired similar initiatives elsewhere.

[94] Diana Mitlin and Anthony Bebbingon, "Social Movements and Chronic Poverty across the Urban-Rural Divide: Concepts and Experiences," *Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper* 65 (2006): 17.

[95] Pérez Álvarez, "Continuity and Rupture in the Labor and Piquitero Movements," 53.

[96] The significance of these initiatives should not be underestimated; in her study of the Unemployed Workers' Union (*Union de Trabajadores Desocupados*) in the province of Salta (municipality of General Mosconi), Dinerstein writes that "[the *piqueteros*'] strategy of leveraging state resources through a combination of protests and social projects in the community not only challenged the common view of the unemployed as excluded and redundant but also influenced the institutional framework within which social demands could be made." Dinerstein, "Autonomy in Latin America," 358.

4.4.2. Case Study 2: The MST in Brazil

The MST provides another compelling case study of how poor-led organizations and movements politicize poverty within public discourse. Like other landless movements, the MST has worked to challenge ideological beliefs about the poor and the natural social order, and to develop alternative norms and concepts for development, property relations and ownership, and poverty reduction.[97] The movement has been steadfast in advocating for a broader vision of social justice for Brazilians—as encapsulated by its slogan of "land, democracy, and social justice"—that includes a trenchant critique of sexist and racist discrimination, especially against Indigenous peoples.[98] While the MST also specifically seeks to empower the poor and unemployed socially and politically, the broad character of its critique of Brazilian society and government has made it difficult for detractors and opponents of the MST to portray its leaders as merely seeking political power. As Robles notes,

> It is important to note that the MST is not just a rural political group struggling to gain its share of political power in the New Brazilian Republic via the *jogo electoral*, or electoral game. Rather, the MST is a rural political movement advocating the fundamental transformation of the structures of power via grassroots collective mobilization. The genuine democratization of Brazilian society is, in short, the MST's *raison d'être,* and the democratization of land ownership is the starting point in this process.[99]

How have the MST's activities over the years contributed to the politicization of poverty in public discourse in Brazil? As noted earlier, the movement put a spotlight on the extreme inequalities in land and wealth in the country, and used this picture of a radically unjust society to demand land redistribution and social reforms. MST activists successfully demanded "downward redistribution policies" by the state and "the extension of basic citizenship rights," especially with respect to "the most vulnerable strata of the population."[100] Most notably, the movement is widely acknowledged to have been instrumental in bringing about the cash transfer program known as the *Bolsa Família* (the Family Allowance Program, or BF). Introduced by President

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[97] Bebbington, "Social Movements and Poverty in Developing Countries."
[98] Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now*.
[99] Robles, "Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil," 147.
[100] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers," 188–89.

Lula da Silva in October 2003 as part of the *Fome Zero* (Zero Poverty) initiative, poor families receive regular, small cash disbursements, provided they agree to keep their children in school and ensure that they are vaccinated and given medical attention. By 2013, the program was reaching 14 million households, totaling 50 million people; the World Bank estimates that the BF effectively halved extreme poverty (dropping to 4.3% of the population from 9.7%) during its first decade—though other estimates are as high as 65%—and credits it with reducing inequality by 15%.[101] In tandem with economic growth, rising income, and expanded employment, the BF and other social protection programs are credited with reducing the percentage of (all) poor Brazilians from 35.8% of the population to 15.9% by 2012; this represents a reduction of all poverty by 55% since 2003, or a total of "31.5 million Brazilians . . . lifted out of poverty, and of that number, over 16 million lifted out of extreme poverty."[102]

Despite these impressive achievements, agrarian reform and land distribution have fallen far short of the movement's loftiest goals. The reasons for this have much to do with the structure of national Brazilian political institutions, which have buffered the country's elite against the MST's attempts at far-reaching reforms.[103] The MST's association with the Worker's Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, or PT), which held power from 2003–2016, has not led to the implementation of the more radical agrarian reforms that the movement seeks.[104] Disappointingly, fewer Brazilians benefited from land reforms during Lula's first term than the previous center-right coalition government—and much of the land redistributed under the latter administration was in remote, un-arable land (especially in the Amazonian region).[105] Although the PT has blamed its failure to follow through with

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[101] World Bank's assessment of the Bolsa Familia, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2013/11/04/bolsa-familia-Brazil-quiet-revolution. The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) notes that extreme poverty fell by 65% between 2003 (when the Worker's Party, under Lula, came to power) and 2014. See CEPR, "The Brazilian Economy in Transition: Macroeconomic Policy, Labor and Inequality," 1, http://cepr.net/documents/brazil-2014-09.pdf.

[102] CEPR, "Brazilian Economy in Transition," 1.

[103] According to Miguel Carter, a scholar of MST, "the overrepresentation of conservative rural interests in Congress given the malapportionment of legislative seats have assured the agrarian elite and close conservative allies control of more than a third of the seats in the lower chamber." This has resulted in the domination in Congress of the voting bloc represented by the multiparty coalition, "*bancada ruralista*," which represents wealthy landowners; in effect, the discrepancy in the distribution of deputies has meant that "the political representation of landlords was therefore 2587 times greater than that of landless peasants." Carter, "Landless Rural Workers," 191.

[104] Carter writes that successive governments in Brazil have treated "agrarian reform as an isolated problem" and refused to challenge the landowning status quo, with the effect that reforms have "had a largely negligible effects on the nation's land-tenure pattern" ("Landless Rural Workers," 192).

[105] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers," 197.

promised, radical agrarian reforms while in power on its need to form coalitions with less progressive parties,[106] it is also clear that agribusiness and other powerful interests are formidable opponents to significant change.[107]

The MST's legacy is a complicated one, but there is no denying that a lasting effect of this movement has been the politicization of extreme inequalities and landed wealth in the country, and lasting support for universal social programs like the Bolsa Família. Ultimately, Brazil's tumultuous political context and highly stratified institutions, along with the MST's own increasingly fragmented character, have limited the movement's ability to achieve its goals of radical agrarian reform, dramatically reduced inequality, and social justice for all Brazilians.[108] Notwithstanding these limits, the movement has advanced a more radical vision of poverty's (structural) remedies—centering on the redistribution of land, wealth, and political power, and the extension of social rights—that continues to impact public debates about poverty in Brazil, and beyond.[109]

4.5. Why Politicizing Poverty Is So Vital to Political Struggles

Poor-led social movements have an interest in shifting public perceptions and discourse about poverty so as to make plain that it is driven by social structures that can and must be changed. This assists their efforts to bring about pro-poor, "political" solutions to extreme inequalities, dispossession,

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[106] Dwyer, *Broke but Unbroken*, 40.

[107] Carter, "Landless Rural Workers," 197. These constraints are of course ones faced by other struggles from below in the region, where "there tend to be stronger social forces (resistant bureaucracies, capital interests) that prevail." Haarstad et al., "Conclusion," 888. Compounding these difficulties, a highly politicized judiciary beholden to the interests of Brazil's wealthy classes charged the former President Lula da Silva with corruption in mid-2017, in a move widely seen as an attempt to unseat the PT and prevent Lula—the most popular president in Brazil's civilian government history—from running in the 2018 election. See Mark Weisbrot, "Brazil's Democracy Pushed into the Abyss," *New York Times*, January 23, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/opinion/brazil-lula-democracy-corruption.html. After his appeal was rejected by the Supreme Federal Court, Lula began serving a twelve-year sentence on April 7, 2018, and was later released in November 2019.

[108] As Robles notes, while it "has demonstrated a great capacity to effectively contest the power of the "old" and "new" landholding class . . . [and] developed new visions and practices of political and economic democracy in the countryside . . . the MST does not have the political clout to overcome the well-entrenched resistance to agrarian reform deeply rooted in Brazil's power structures." Wilder Robles, "Revisiting Agrarian Reform in Brazil," *Journal of Developing Societies* 34, vol. 1 (2018): 28–29.

[109] Jeff Garmany and Flávia Bessa Maia, "Considering Space, Politics, and Social Movements," *Antipode* 40, no. 2 (2008): 190.

and deprivation—such as fulfillment of their social rights and entitlements, and inclusion of poor communities in urban and social planning processes. As part of their messaging, poor movements seek to convey that the state, corporations, and the wealthy or political elite have directly caused or worsened poverty through patterns of ownership and production that disadvantage the poor, as well as through fiscal policies that have led to high inflation and unemployment, land concentration, and the exploitation of informal workers. Politicizing poverty within public discourse supports poor movements' push for subsidies and programs to help the poor, homeless, and unemployed—in particular, agrarian reform and land redistribution; construction of social housing; secure or extended access to basic municipal services like sanitation and electricity; and labor laws to protect informal workers and reduce exploitation. Demands for such remedies are more likely to gain traction if they are seen as fitting responses to poverty's structural causes, and if they enjoy broad support—including from the working poor, middle classes, academics, and key institutions in civil society (trade unions, the church, etc.).

With few exceptions, the long-term goal of poor-led organizations and movements remains that of reducing the subordination and dispossession of poor communities. The MST, for example, has consistently called for agrarian reforms, land distribution, and social protection programs while making it clear that these are not a replacement for greater social and political power for landless workers and peasants. This position is echoed by La Vía Campesina, the world's largest peasant's movement with 182 local and national member groups in 81 countries (across four continents), and representing about 200 million farmers. Founded with the help of the MST in 1993, the network seeks land redistribution (and reform) and food self-sufficiency for landless workers and peasants, and to that end has led the offensive against a system of globalized, industrial agriculture that has led to so much dispossession and subordination for peasant farmers.[110] Like the MST, Vía Campesina works on multiple fronts, targeting more resources—so, developing sustainable local food production alternatives and peasants' access to land and vital resources—but also demanding structural agrarian reform and recognition (and fulfillment) of peasants' collective rights. In this sense, the global organization not only politicizes peasants' poverty, attributing it to land inequalities and governments' protection of agribusiness and wealthy

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[110] Dunford, *Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*, 95.

landowners; it also politicizes the remedies to these problems (government distribution of land and food sovereignty).[111] Vía Campesina therefore supports peasant movements worldwide that engage in direct actions against élites' land grabbing and also facilitates their solidarity through South-South knowledge exchanges. The organization was also the key driver behind the Draft UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, which includes rights to land, seeds, and food sovereignty, as well as proposed social, legal and political rights needed to counter the domination of the rural poor.[112] But the movement sees the Declaration, and human rights instruments generally, as one tool among many, and not a replacement for the local social and political empowerment of peasants worldwide.[113]

Whether poor organizations and movements develop enough capacity and influence to achieve their goals is dependent on a wide range of factors. While the conditions that conduce to the emergence, success, or failure of contentious movements in diverse national settings is not my focus here, it is still worth noting the kinds of variables that can influence whether such entities become significant and effective. Factors exogenous to movements that can play a pivotal role include the nature of the national political (including electoral) institutions, as we saw in the case of Argentina. The degree to which the legal system protects rights and freedoms relating to speech and assembly are protected in practice and the propensity of the government, military, and police to use violence to repress protesters and movement members (or leaders) are also hugely important. And as we saw in Brazil, deeply embedded hierarchical and subordinating social relations and structures around land ownership and work are also pertinent—as is the extent to which political leaders will defend them. These are just a few of the variables that shape the scope of possibilities for movement activity, and which figure in leaders' estimation of the costs of different forms of protest.

The strength or viability of the regime or government in power partly determines its susceptibility to political pressure from poor-led movements:

[111] Dunford, *Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*, 103.

[112] http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/WGPleasants/A-HRC-WG-15–1-2_En.pdf.

[113] Given the failure of national governments and international financial institutions to undertake pro-poor reforms, Vía Campesina's members' "strategies are increasingly focused on carrying out an agrarian reform that is driven by social movements . . . [including] direct actions . . . occupying land, marches and protests and other forms of civil disobedience; the praxis for change . . . solidarity trade relations . . . the democratization of knowledge and social relations free of oppression." See *Struggles of La Via Campesina for Agrarian Reform and the Defense of Life, Land and Territories* (Harare: La Vía Campesina, 2017).

can it be pressured, or even destabilized, by mass demonstrations and strikes, land occupations, and roadblocks? Further, whether a political system is centralized or decentralized can determine how responsive it is to movements' demands for antipoverty measures, as well as how new social programs are structured and administered. The economic climate in which movements arise also affects whether they decide to seek structural change or focus more on short-term material concessions, or a combination of both. In particular, how the members and leaders of poor struggles, and citizens generally, respond to an economic recovery and/or to material concessions from the government can powerfully shape the trajectory of movements. In Argentina, an upswing in the economy starting around 2003, combined with the introduction of social welfare subsidies intended to placate the *piqueteros*, were decisive factors in the co-optation and subsequent demobilization of some parts of the *piquetero* movement[114]—as well as in the rapid decline of the mass protesters by the *cacerolazos* (pot-bangers) toward the end of 2002. The *piqueteros* therefore stand out as an important example of a movement of poor workers that was at least partly dissipated by redistributive material concessions.

At the national level, the influence of other actors in countries where poor movements and groups emerge can have a profound effect on the form, membership, and strength of a movement. In particular, religious institutions, labor and trade unions, NGOs, and especially political parties can undercut, or bolster, a grassroots poor-led struggle. While the robust history of trade unionism in Argentina was instrumental in getting the *piqueteros* movement off the ground, the fact that the movement had numerous factions tracking union membership contributed to their inability to undertake unified, mass mobilization.[115] Whether a poor movement forms (formal or informal) alliances with political parties that they perceive to advance their interests is also crucial. Many grassroots organizations forgo such links so as to preserve their ability to negotiate and work with subsequent municipal, state, and national governments; the Indian Alliance, for example, has endeavored to stave off clientelist overtures from various political parties. Others, however, see alliances as a vehicle for increasing their movement's influence (as in the example of the MST's association with the PT). Unfortunately, these

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[114] Wolff, "(De) Mobilising the Marginalised," 27; Epstein, "Perpetuating Social Movements and Declining Opportunity," 4; and Pérez Álvarez, "Continuity and Rupture in the Labor and Piquitero Movements," 3.

[115] Wolff, "(De) Mobilising the Marginalised," 12.

alliances may also reflect deliberate attempts by the state or parties to co-opt movements, especially within clientelist political systems, by offering moderate material concessions that cause them to abandon a more radical or oppositional stance (as with the *piqueteros*).[116]

Poor organizations can of course become *more* politically influential by forming alliances with other groups at the national or transnational levels. With the goal of expanding the democratic power of the poor in mind, many place-based organizations and movements elect to join forces, even when they do not share the same (short-term) practical aims. The South Africa's Poor People's Alliance formed in 2008, bringing together Abahlali base Mjondolo, the Western Cape-Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement, and the Rural Network of KwaZulu-Natal; thereafter, despite some ideological differences between its member groups, it was able to achieve greater national prominence and inclusion in high-level housing policy talks. Many poor-led movements have embraced what is known as the "federating" model, which a slum dwellers' organization, the Indian Alliance, is credited with developing (as discussed in more detail in the next chapter). The Alliance evolved out of the cooperation of three grassroots poor groups—the National Slum Dwellers Federation, SPARC, and the women's savings groups comprising *Mahila Milan*—and their federating model became the template for SDI, a powerful transnational network of national shack/slum dweller organizations and groups in thirty-three countries.[117] As I'll discuss more in the next chapter, this federating model augments the power of poor organizations by linking them together and creating a national—or transnational—pro-poor solidarity network pushing for political inclusion and progressive antipoverty policies.

4.6. Conclusion

As the examples of poor-led social movements discussed in this chapter suggest, major changes are unlikely to emerge—or last—if marginalized poor communities do not have social standing and political voice in their own societies. Movements seeking land redistribution through agrarian reform, social safety net programs for the poor and unemployed, or state support for

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[116] Aldo Fernando Ponce, "Unemployment and Clientelism: The Piqueteros of Argentina," MPRA Paper No. 23 (2006), https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/23/.

[117] See http://sdinet.org/.

autonomous, worker-owned production and agricultural cooperatives, share the aim of transforming societal structures that disempower and impoverish poor populations. A heightened awareness on the part of the poor of the relations and structures that subordinate them, and the politicization of poverty within public discourse and debate more generally, are preconditions for the kinds of changes that can augment the power and influence of poor communities. Because of this, both critical consciousness-raising among the poor and politicizing poverty within the broader society can help hasten the articulation of more just alternatives to key social and economic practices—in land ownership, food production, housing tenancy, and gender relations—and to bolster poor citizens' claims to social inclusion and social entitlements.

The politicization of poverty in the eyes of members of poor-led movements and within broader public discourse is, I have argued, one of the most distinctive and valuable functions of grassroots poor groups and movements. And it is also critical for understanding how such movements foster the collective capabilities of people living in poverty. Organized movements of the poor like MST and the *piqueteros* help to give impoverished communities a vantage point from which to collectively expose, criticize, and begin to resist injustices against them. Through grassroots movements and their organizations, poor communities have exerted pressure on institutions and governments to adopt pro-poor policies and reforms—at times, with considerable success. Admittedly, there are many questions left unanswered by my discussion, including whether certain forms of popular, poor-led resistance—or particular strategies and discourses that they employ, such as some rights-based struggles—may unwittingly *depoliticize* poverty.[118]

Beyond individual consciousness-raising and a more politicized public understanding of poverty, however, organized poor groups and movements also need to develop *political capabilities*—for organizing, mobilizing, negotiating, strategizing, and enacting alternatives—in order to advance their pro-poor agenda. Without these collective capabilities, there can be no effective poor-led and pro-poor social transformation. In the next chapter, I discuss the ways that both social movements and grassroots collectives and organizations seek to develop the capabilities of poor individuals through a variety of initiatives and practices. As I shall explain in the next chapter, these capabilities, which are primarily *collective capabilities*, enable poor movements

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[118] See, for example, Lara Montesinos Coleman, "The Making of Docile Dissent: Neoliberalization and Resistance in Columbia and Beyond," *International Political Sociology* 7 (2013): 170–87.

to use their newfound political voice to articulate and demand (or develop) more systemic alternatives to practices that impoverish and disenfranchise vulnerable populations. I do not claim that achieving pro-poor transformations does (or should) lie wholly in the hands of poor-led movements, but rather argue that such change will not happen—indeed, cannot even be fully envisioned—without their central, and ongoing, involvement in antipoverty strategy. As the example of the MST shows, pro-poor reform processes can be halted and even repealed by reactionary forces; moreover, the gradual de-mobilization of movements may follow from economic stabilization, reduced unemployment, and the national government's introduction of social protections (as in the case of the *piqueteros*). A movement's susceptibility to decline is one of the reasons why, as I shall argue in the concluding chapter, it may be important for capable poor-led organizations to create links with similar movements globally, and to seek sustaining support and solidarity from better resourced "agents of justice" that share their commitment to poor-led social change.

The matter of political allies is all the more important given the backlash that typically greets organized poor movements' attempts to politicize poverty in public discourse. Ruling political parties, as well as the business sector, often see this politicization as a threat—even in countries in which the national government is committed (in rhetoric or in law) to securing the social rights of all, poor included. In post-apartheid South Africa, which has constitutional guarantees for housing and other entitlements, government and police repression of the shack dwellers' movement active in the shack settlements around Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and other cities is ongoing. In addition to the violence of forced evictions from their informal housing that shack dwellers face with some regularity, numerous movement activists have died or suffered beatings by police. The activities that precipitate this violence include land occupations, illegal utility connections to shack communities, road blockades, and frequent protest marches; these actions are regularly portrayed in the media, and by politicians, as criminal and antisocial, and poor organizations bear the burden of defending themselves against these characterizations.

Politicizing poverty in the eyes of the poor and at the level of broader societal discourses about deprivation is in one sense a precondition for organizing poor individuals and developing their collective capabilities related to political advocacy and livelihood-building. In the next chapter, we will see how grassroots poor social movements and self-organizing groups catalyze

poor communities to action by developing their collective capabilities. This process of capability-building depends upon, and also further extends, the critical political consciousness of organized poor communities. Why is the development of the collective capabilities of those living in poverty so crucial for poor-led movements? While the next chapter will provide a more complete answer to this question, the brief reason is that these capabilities are necessary (but not sufficient) to enable poor populations to directly shape the poverty prescriptions that their communities and society pursue. Just as the social and political empowerment of chronically impoverished communities requires that mobilized poor groups contest relations of subordination and domination—and the ideologies and structures that underpin them—so too do effective solutions to relational poverty necessitate the central involvement of those who struggle daily with the realities of deprivation. Members of poor movements understand the imperative of their inclusion in progressive antipoverty action very well, and, as I argue in the next chapter, seek to enable this through political advocacy and the painstaking work of building up the collective capabilities of marginalized communities.

5

How Poor-Led Movements Build Collective Capabilities

Whether linked by place—like residents of urban slums—or work—like the waste/recycle pickers—poor-led groups mobilize and engage in collective action to protest injustices and demand their social rights and entitlements. They recognize that protecting poor people's social rights and entitlements means fundamentally changing the relations and structures that disempower and impoverish them. Even groups representing the poorest of informal economy workers, such as garbage pickers/recyclers, do not aim merely to increase their members' incomes but to improve their working and living conditions through political, and sometimes legal, activism.[1] Like members of many labor unions and movements, poor activists see improvements in wages or livelihoods as only one part of the larger struggle to reduce their members' structural vulnerability to exploitation and needs scarcity.[2]

Proponents of social movement–based approaches to poverty reduction, and development approaches focused on social empowerment, have paid close attention to the activism of poor-led groups and movements. While they do not suggest activism alone can eradicate poverty, these approaches rightly identify "a [grassroots] politics of claiming by the disempowered" as vital to durable poverty alleviation and inclusive development.[3] By contrast, as we have seen, very few philosophical responses to global poverty recognize poor-led organizing as a significant phenomenon; to the extent that they

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[1] The strong movement of informal recyclers in Columbia, for example, has successfully sought legal protections for their members by bringing several (successful) challenges to the country's Constitutional Court. See Manuel Rosaldo, "Revolution in the Garbage Dump: The Political and Economic Foundations of the Columbian Recycler Movement, 1986–2011," *Social Problems* 63, no. 3 (2016): 351–372.

[2] Webster and Engberg-Pederson draw a similar distinction, categorizing "the two main groups of strategies through which the poor can achieve a change in their conditions of poverty" in terms of "coping strategies" focused on resources and assets, and strategies aimed at "effecting change in the policies and practices of others in order to bring about change," especially redistribution. See Neil Webster and Lars Engberg-Pedersen, "Political Agencies and Spaces," in Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, *In the Name of the Poor*, 7.

[3] Friedmann, *Empowerment*, viii.

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consider poor empowerment at all, it is usually as one of the intended *goals* of antipoverty initiatives and measures that they urge more powerful global North actors to implement. I have argued that this is not a mere oversight, but rather, reflects a more systematic erasure of the actual and prospective agency of poor individuals and communities, as well a failure to recognize their right to develop and shape poverty remedies.

The capability approach (CA) recognizes that expanding people's capabilities for development and well-being is partly about increasingly their *individual empowerment* in key domains; as such, it offers a useful conceptual springboard from which to think about the collective capabilities of people living in poverty. From a CA perspective, the capabilities related to food security and health refer to whether people are individually empowered/entitled to claim the social goods necessary to support the related capabilities. Thus, the goal is "not so much to provide a particular amount of food" or "entitlements, which [are] concerned with the command over commodities,"[4] but rather, as Drèze and Sen write, "to make it possible for all *to have the capability* to avoid undernourishment and escape deprivations associated with hunger."[5] As we saw earlier, according to the CA, chronic poverty is best described as a lack of social entitlements giving rise to multiple "capability deprivations" over a period of at least five years[6] across multiple dimensions (e.g., nutrition, health, and housing).

The CA view also acknowledges that forms of collective social action may be needed in order to change social processes and structures that deprive people of their entitlement. Although CA theorists have focused on the state as the locus of (social policy) change, some acknowledge that social movements can also play a role—such as where capability agency is systematically undercut by discriminatory or oppressive structures that have become normalized or which the state tacitly supports.[7] Despite these important insights, the CA cannot fully explain or credit the vital importance of poor-led social movements in developing the full range of *collective capabilities* of poor communities for *social* empowerment. This is in part because leading

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[4] Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 15, 13. Asking what kinds of social protection programs and infrastructure (especially in public health and education) best support people's capabilities for well-being also requires that we look at what control people have over vital resources and whether they enjoy security in their capabilities.

[5] Drèze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, 13.

[6] Hulme and Shepherd, "Conceptualizing Chronic Poverty," 404–5.

[7] Robeyns gives the examples of suffrage for women and civil rights for Black Americans, which could not have been achieved without social movements. See her *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, 117.

exponents of the CA such as Sen have resisted the very idea of collective capa-bilities. But it is also because the CA has not seen *collective empowerment or social movements* as crucially important for securing capability entitlements. As CA thinker Frances Stewart writes of the human development and capa-bilities approach, "For the most part . . . [it] has tended to neglect the political struggles underlying much progress . . . [yet] we cannot understand what determines the change in policy regimes in a way that favours (or disfavours) HD (human development) and CA without understanding the role played by political movements, or 'voice' and 'power.'" [8]

Sen's view of development as a process of reducing "substantial unfreedoms" and expanding people's capabilities for well-being and agency certainly recognizes that many capabilities—for example, political capa-bilities like participating in democratic elections—depend upon public ac-tion to secure collective (political) freedoms. But Sen, and his collaborator Jean Drèze, have in mind "public participation"—i.e., public action, in both "collaborative" and "adversarial" forms—that prompts the state to support the public programs needed to develop and support people's capabilities.[9] Ultimately, it is public action undertaken by formal democratic institutions (according to Drèze and Sen) that will strengthen capability entitlements, chiefly by establishing national social programs and infrastructure to sup-port a wide range of capabilities (for literacy and numeracy, health, food security, family planning, etc.). Similarly, according to Nussbaum, public ac-tion within formal democratic institutions is needed in order to build trans-national institutions and agreements that can push for redistribution from the governments of rich countries to poor ones.[10]

Against this narrower view that locates effective collective action in formal political institutions, I have argued that grassroots, poor-led organizations and movements play a crucial role in bringing about transformative, pro-poor social policies. In the previous chapter, we saw how they do so by polit-icizing poverty within public discourse and developing the critical political consciousness of those who participate in poor-led activism. In the present chapter, I explain how these organizations and movements also work to de-velop a range of "collective capabilities" that poor people need to challenge

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[8] See Stewart, "Power and Progress," 386.
[9] Drèze and Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, 259.
[10] Nussbaum also notes the role to be played by other institutional agents, such as "multinational corporations, international agencies and agreements, non governmental organizations." See *Creating Capabilities*, 117.

and transform impoverishing structures. Collective capabilities, according to CA researcher Solava Ibrahim, are ones that benefit "the collectivity at large" and emerge through forms of collective action.[11] I understand these collective capabilities to include not only activities directly related to livelihood, but also to critical consciousness-building, social empowerment, and politicizing poverty within public discourse—all of which play a role in helping poor communities to secure their "capability entitlements" (to use Sen's term). My particular focus in this chapter is on the strategic, action-focused *collective political capabilities* that enable poor communities to assert their status as rights-bearers, claim their social entitlements, and to advocate for—and sometimes build—poor-centered models for social service delivery, housing, agricultural production, and food security.

In what follows, I discuss two valuable, interconnected, kinds of *collective political capabilities* that poor groups and movements develop among their members. (i) First, *they build the skills and capacities needed to engage in oppositional activism and effective claim-making*, with the aim of protesting arrangements that disadvantage or oppress the poor, and influencing public policy. (ii) And second, *they develop capabilities for cooperative and productive activity* in an effort to gain access to resources and services that will increase the livelihoods, and sometimes the collective power, of their communities. Capabilities related to establishing and managing collective savings (used to increase group assets), engaging in co-production ventures, and undertaking joint service-delivery initiatives with municipal governments are a few examples of these. While I discuss these two categories of collective capabilities separately for conceptual clarity, in practice they are frequently pursued simultaneously. For example, by cultivating their constituents' political capabilities to claim "rights to the city," urban poor organizations also increase their access to housing, sanitation, or other goods and services. The intertwining of the strategic and livelihood-oriented goals of poor movements—or as Fraser would put it, the aims of both recognition and redistribution—is especially well illustrated by informal settlement (shack/slum dweller) movements and landless peoples' organizations.

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[11] Solava S. Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities: The Capability Approach as a Conceptual Framework for Self-Help," *Journal of Human Development* 7, no. 3 (2006): 404. I am indebted to Marie-Pier Lemay for introducing me to Ibrahim's work, and for her insights on collective capabilities more generally.

I first take up the idea of collective capabilities as it has been developed by critical CA scholars, and show how it relates to (individual-focused) capability theory as developed by Sen and Nussbaum. Following this, I discuss the kinds of collective political capabilities that poor organizations develop, drawing on the examples of movements discussed in earlier chapters: the MST, Nijera Kori, the *piqueteros*, La Vía Campesina, and urban informal settlement (slum) dwellers movements. I have deliberately included accounts of groups that work and negotiate with government to achieve pro-poor development and reforms, as well as those that are more militant in their tactics and aims. In the final section, I summarize the political and normative significance of poor movements' collective capability building, explaining why the actions that these capabilities underwrite show the radical potential of "global justice from below."

5.1. What Are Collective, as Opposed to Individual, Capabilities?

As noted earlier, the CA contains important resources for conceptualizing the value of collective capabilities, despite controversies over whether these are merely aggregate forms of individual capabilities or not. Capability theory readily recognizes that membership in a social group "may be instrumentally important for enlarging individual capabilities";[12] such membership may enable individuals to make claims on the state for important entitlements.[13] There is ample evidence, for example, that belonging to a poor affinity group—such as producers' cooperatives, credit and savings groups, and empowerment-focused "claims groups" that seek resources like housing and land—generally improves individuals' well-being and expands their capabilities.[14] The benefits of such membership may explain why people living in severe poverty still form groups despite formidable obstacles like lack of time, education, assets, information, and political capital.[15] Credit and savings groups and cooperatives typically contribute directly to the livelihoods of impoverished individuals, either by improving efficiency ("overcoming

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[12] Frances Stewart, "Groups and Capabilities," *Journal of Human Development* 6, no. 2 (2005): 186.

[13] Drèze and Sen define entitlements as "the set of alternative bundles of commodities over which a person can establish . . . command" in *Hunger and Public Action*, 10.

[14] See, for example, Stewart, "Groups and Capabilities," and Thorp et al., "When and How Far Is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?"

[15] Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities," 408.

market failures"), providing direct benefits, or bolstering individuals' capacity to make demands of local officials.[16]

The CA conception of (individual) agency as the ability and freedom to pursue goals one deems valuable[17] also illuminates another important function of poor movements and organizations: namely, they can help their constituents identify and pursue collective goals that they *collectively* value. As Drèze and Sen note in one of their few references to social movements, people need agency to make judgments and decisions, either individually and cooperatively, about matters central to their livelihood and well-being:

> Participation also has intrinsic value for the quality of life. Indeed being able to do something not only for oneself but also for other members of the society is one of the elementary freedoms which people have reason to value. The popular appeal of many social movements in India confirms that this basic capability is highly valued even among people who lead very deprived lives in material terms.[18]

For people drawn to poor movements, the benefits of participation, which are irreducible to livelihood improvement, are bound up with social empowerment. Sen seems to recognize this in his discussion of women's capabilities: he writes that we need to focus on women's agency because "such agency can play [an important] role in removing the iniquities that depress the well-being of women."[19] Yet as Koggel has argued, Sen stops short of providing an account of "how political, economic, and social institutions embed norms, structures, and practices that stand in the way of removing . . . inequalities."[20] For Sen, expanding women's capabilities in developing states demands a dual focus on their well-being and agency—which he notes may not always coincide, especially in conventional, nonparticipatory development approaches.[21] He thus signals his recognition that women need not only economic independence but "social emancipation" in order to secure entitlements. Yet crucially, the key "variables" Sen cites—formal education, property rights and ownership,

[16] Stewart, "Groups and Capabilities."

[17] Sen defines an agent as "someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives." Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 19.

[18] Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press), 106. [As quoted in Sabina Alkire, *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131.]

[19] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 191.

[20] Koggel, "A Critical Analysis of Recent Work on Empowerment," 266.

[21] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 190.

employment outside the home, and "women's earning power"—reinforce a view of agency that *privileges women's individual economic freedoms and opportunities*[22]—*not their collective social empowerment as women.* This conception of women's well-being and expanded agency as centrally about their economic independence in turn points toward institutional solutions—more microcredit for poor women, greater funding for girls' and women's education and health, and legal reforms relating to women's ownership rights—but not grassroots self-organizing, as the key driver for change.

Developing women's collective capability for social empowerment will require far more extensive social change than the kinds of liberal institutional reforms Sen seems to have in mind: it requires transforming the underlying relations that undercut women's well-being. And to properly grasp not only the instrumental, but intrinsic, value of the capability for empowerment, we must have recourse to a concept that Sen rejects—that of collective capabilities. For members of subordinated groups, and for many who live in chronic poverty, collective agency is central to their agentic capabilities, allowing them to collectively resist aspects of their lives that undercut their well-being and individual agency.[23] Their well-being is very much tied up with the well-being of others in their group; as Ibrahim notes, "the generation of collective capabilities . . . demonstrates how individuals can act together as agents of change, rather than each one of them pursuing his/her choices alone."[24] The notion of collective capabilities thus arguably provides a compelling account of how and why the work of poor-led social movements and organizations is critical both for their social and political empowerment, and potentially, for expanding their capabilities for well-being. Yet despite Sen's affirmation of the importance of participation and agency, he "still rejects the concept of 'collective capabilities' . . . [and argues that] capabilities resulting from collective action still remain 'socially dependent individual capabilities.'"[25] Sen's

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[22] For an incisive analysis of some of the unforeseen ramifications of development approaches that emphasize women's economic empowerment, see Serene Khader, "Global Gender Justice and the Feminization of Responsibility," *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2019): 1–21.

[23] See Solava Ibrahim, "Collective Capabilities: What Are They and Why Are They Important?," *Maitreyee: E-Bulletin of the Human Development and Capability Association*, no. 22 (2013), 5.

[24] Ibrahim, "Collective Capabilities," 26.

[25] Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities," 403. As Ibrahim notes in "Collective Capabilities," Sabina Alkire also cautions against evaluating certain of people's capabilities based on perceived collective expressions; her concern is chiefly with the way that the notion of collective capabilities ignores the heterogeneity of groups. See Alkire, "Using the Capability Approach: Prospective and Evaluative Analyses," in *The Capability Approach: Concepts, Measures and Application*, ed. Sabina Alkire, F. Comim, and M. Qizilbash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

view is echoed by leading CA thinker Robeyns, who cautions that we should understand collective capabilities not as different *in kind* from individual capabilities, but rather as "a subset of personal capabilities, namely those personal capabilities that require for their realization action by a group or a collectivity."[26]

Collective capabilities are not simply collectivized forms of individual capabilities (like health), but rather, according to Solava Ibrahim, are "newly generated functioning bundles a person obtains by virtue of his/her engagement in a collectivity that help her/him achieve the life he/she has reason to value."[27] Drawing on her study of self-organizing poor groups in Egypt, Ibrahim suggests that developing and exercising capabilities within self-help groups has "allowed the poor to collectively expand their capabilities in various ways."[28] Such capabilities are collective in the sense that they are exercised within groups and are "only present through a process of collective action"; they also benefit "the collectivity at large . . . not simply a single individual." Accordingly, Ibrahim writes, "the expansion and exercise of human capabilities can be a communal rather than only an individual process."[29]

Why is it important to conceptualize certain capabilities as collective in this fuller sense? Recall that chronic poverty researchers argue that disempowerment and subordination are processes that afflict individuals *qua* members of particular social groups; relational poverty, accordingly, cannot be redressed without changing the oppressive structures and arrangements that disadvantage and oppress particular social groups (such as those deemed of low caste, certain racial, religious and ethnic minorities, Indigenous peoples, and women). But these far-reaching changes cannot be simply bestowed "from above" through policy reform (though this can certainly help); rather, it requires processes of collective social and political empowerment. For example, women's lesser access to the resources and opportunities needed to support expanded capabilities—such as capabilities for nutrition, education, employment, freedom from violence and abuse, and political freedom—is a consequence of their weaker claim to entitlements, stemming from their

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[26] Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice*, 117. Robeyns is right, of course, that even a capability that is *exercised* collectively (like engaging in mass political protest, or attaining voting rights) still attaches to individuals. Yet her definition may miss the sense in which some capabilities do not just require group action in order *to come about*, but only really exist, and have value, in a collective form.

[27] Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities," 398.

[28] Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities," 412.

[29] Ibrahim, "From Individual to Collective Capabilities," 398, 397, 398.

subordinated status. The CA certainly recognizes this; what it doesn't ac-
knowledge, however, is that poor social movements, including women's
grassroots groups, are critical for initiating a shift in critical consciousness
and to motivate collective action that is socially and politically empowering
for their members. These peer groups make possible the necessary critical re-
flection on social norms, roles, and expectations, as well as on what changes
are needed to give them access to that which they value. As Kabeer writes,

> Strategies of "empowerment from within" provide women with . . . other
> perspectives. They entail reflection, analysis and assessment of what has
> hitherto been taken for granted so as to uncover the socially constructed
> and socially shared basis of apparently individual problems. New forms of
> consciousness arise out of women's newly acquired access to the intangible
> resources of analytical skills, organizational strength, solidarity and sense
> of not being alone.[30]

Sen grants that participation in collective processes may support valuable
forms of agency, but his examples refer to the formal democratic institutions
of one's society—not to grassroots, often oppositional, organizing by social
movements. In *Development as Freedom* he stresses that his concern is "with
the agency role of the individual as a member of the public *and as a partic-
ipant in economic, social and political actions* (varying from taking part in
the market to being involved, directly or indirectly, in individual *or joint ac-
tivities in political and other spheres*)."[31] But despite these references to so-
cial and political action, it is participation as an individual—especially in the
market—that he emphasizes. Yet economic empowerment, as explained ear-
lier, does not necessarily challenge underlying social relations of subordina-
tion; poor women can meet the benchmarks for economic empowerment (as
stipulated by entities like the World Bank) without any significant changes
in their social disempowerment or political powerlessness.[32] And in many
contexts women's higher relative economic status does not correlate with ex-
panded capabilities in other key areas, due to restrictions on their freedom,
and inequalities in resource distribution at the household level.

Women's collective capabilities for social empowerment are thus irre-
ducible to any of the individual capabilities, including individual economic

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[30] Kabeer, *Reversed Realities*, 245–46.
[31] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 19. My italics.
[32] See Khader, "Empowerment through Self-Subordination?"

empowerment. Rather, poor women's organization aim to develop collective capabilities for recognizing and challenging oppressive power dynamics and unjust arrangements; envisioning and demanding reforms; and making claims to social entitlements. In contrast to Sen's view (and that of mainstream institutions like the World Bank) of why women's agency and empowerment are important, then, women's empowerment is "fundamentally about changing power relations"; this is very much "a process, not an endpoint, let alone a measurable outcome to which targets can be attached."[33] As Srilatha Batliwala writes,

> In the final analysis, to transform society, women's empowerment must become a political force . . . an organized mass movement that challenges and transforms existing power structures. Empowerment should ultimately lead to the formation of mass organizations of poor women, at the regional, national, and international levels. Only then can . . . poor women . . . hope to bring about the fulfillment of their practical and strategic needs, and change both the "condition" and the "position" of women.[34]

The social and political empowerment of poor women, thus conceived, is a process not only of developing a critical awareness of the structural character of their disadvantage and subordination, but also of engaging in collective action. If we see empowerment "as both a process and the result of that process,"[35] then developing group capabilities that enable poor communities or collectives to criticize, resist, and refuse unjust practices or policies, as well as engage in collective action that advances their interests and rights claims, is essential. Grassroots movements of subordinated groups, with the help of organizers who hail from those communities, share insights from their lived experiences of poverty and build capabilities for collective empowerment.[36]

The view that agency capabilities have both intrinsic and instrumental value, which is central to capability theory, equally applies to collective capabilities, in my view. Instrumental benefits are easier to identify because they pertain to poor organizations' capacities to successfully mobilize, negotiate with the state, achieve policy reforms, and acquire access to needed

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[33] Cornwall and Rivas, "From 'Gender Equality' and 'Women's Empowerment' to Global Justice," 405. Cornwall and Rivas provide an incisive critique of how powerful transnational financial and development institutions conceive of women's empowerment as requiring only economic solutions.

[34] Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment," 134.

[35] Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment," 130.

[36] See Batliwala, "Meaning of Women's Empowerment."

resources and services for poor communities. But intrinsic benefits, which include reduced isolation among poor individuals and families, greater security through savings cooperatives and other ventures, and a heightened sense of self-respect and political efficacy, are also important aspects of individual and collective agency (in Sen's sense). Thus, as Mitlin explains, the collective capabilities fostered by poor groups are *not* reducible to instrumental ends, even when a group aims to secure needs:

> Movements are concerned both to improve the entitlement set that is available, and *to build the individual and collective capabilities of members to challenge and extend entitlements. . . .* Social movements also seek to improve their social endowment, and particularly the norms and values that influence the opportunities open to movement organisations and activists, and the attitudes of political elites. Looked at another way, they see both improvements to entitlements and endowments as critical components of improved functionings. Movements do more than address the lack of material resources, they also seek to address social and political inequalities, and specifically the ways in which exclusions are manifest. Their approach is systemic, with simultaneous efforts across several aspects of deprivation to address their members' interests . . . the demonstration of improved functionings that emerges from collective contributions help to advance systemic pro-poor change.[37]

It should by now be clear why certain capabilities—like the capability for social and political empowerment and solidarity—require collective action in order to emerge, and are (mainly) exercised in groups. Developing collective *political* capabilities can benefit poor communities in material ways insofar as they deploy them in advocating for social protections and land and housing reforms, as well as use them to engage in co-production activities with the state (e.g., to build housing for homeless urban residents). But by building and exercising political capabilities, poor-led social movements also effect a less tangible, albeit no less important, change, which is that of establishing the poor as knowers, rights bearers, and agents of justice. Slum dweller movements, my focus in this chapter, exemplify the way that poor-led activists assert the right of people living in poverty to transform the social policies and structures—from urban planning and land reform to

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[37] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 56. Italics mine.

development and social protections—that perpetuate their marginalization and structural inequality.

5.2. Building the Collective Political Capabilities of the Poor

Grassroots poor organizations and social movements resist and attempt to transform the structures that perpetuate their constituents' powerlessness and needs deprivation. One way they do so is to press for recognition for poor peoples' rights and entitlements as human beings and as citizens. Many poor-led groups also seek inclusion of poor communities in processes of development and social planning/reform, from urban planning and land reform to social protections.

Critical consciousness-raising and the politicization of poverty, as we saw in the previous chapter, are the framing context within which poor organizations make these demands. In Argentina, recently unemployed workers were able to show publicly how the government's neoliberal inflationary and debt-producing economic policies were responsible for factory closures, job losses (due to privatization), and acute shortages of food and basic goods. This critical awareness about the political reasons for surging unemployment and widespread poverty extended even to the country's middle classes, thus contributing to the emergence of a mass movement of protesters—the *piqueteros* and *cacerolazos* (pot-bangers). Equally critical, however, was the government's shift to a decentralized system of social protections (*planes sociales*), which effectively gave *piquetero* organizations significant resources and autonomous local power.[38] By moving the funding and administration of revamped social programs to the local level, unemployed and underemployed workers were able to *develop their collective capabilities* for local development planning (including founding worker's cooperatives), administering social subsidies, and engaging in concerted forms of political mobilization and action.

It is in cultivating and exercising collective—especially political—capabilities, I argue, that people living in poverty become agents of social

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[38] See Isabella Alcañiz and Melissa Scheier, "New Social Movements with Old Party Politics: The MTL Piqueteros and the Communist Party in Argentina," *Latin American Perspectives* Issue 153, 34, no. 2 (2007): 157–71, and Wolff, "(De) Mobilising the Marginalised," 1–29.

Bebbington et al., "Decentring Poverty."

and global justice. Poor-led movements like that of the *piqueteros* require action on the part of individuals who stand to gain from disrupting the status quo, and who are capable of organizing, protesting, imagining, advocating, and, at times, creating alternatives. It is of course a truism that the poor face many more obstacles to collective organizing than do the nonpoor; they typically lack the "education, capital, labor, social status, and other assets . . . [that make] important contributions to group formation and organization."[39] Despite this, poor communities manage to form groups in even the most constrained circumstances, and to deny this by emphasizing their putative incapacity is a failure of recognition. Grassroots associations formed by informal settlement dwellers have rehoused and secured formal tenure (and services) for hundreds of thousands of urban poor living in informal settlements, hastened the introduction of pro-poor national social programs, and triggered significant land redistribution to landless peasants. Even when there are no discernable, immediate improvements in livelihood or living standards, political organizing by poor communities can trigger important shifts in the status quo. There is evidence, for example, that poor mobilization and "claims groups" increase the political representation of their constituency and advance pro-poor social change better than poor groups focused only on economic ends, such as poor microcredit collectives and producer associations, as well as nongovernmental organizations focused on service delivery (e.g., health, microfinance).[40] These observations, and research on poor empowerment and mobilization movements like Nijera Kori and MST, support my claim that poor-led activism plays a critical role in confronting the exploitation and subordination of poor populations.

Many poor movements also develop collective capabilities and organizational capacities aimed at securing needed resources and services—like improved housing and sanitation services, secure land/housing tenure, and food security. But as the example of the slum and shack dweller movements shows, even when focused on these more material goals, poor organizations simultaneously work to empower poor communities to resist structures of

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[39] Thorp et al., "When and How Far Is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?," 913.

[40] Research shows that even small, local poor identity groups—or claims groups—can be instrumental in shifting norms and improving the political representation of the chronically poor: a meta-analysis of eighty poor groups in developing countries (including women's organizations, credit cooperatives, producer associations, and scavenger groups) concluded that such groups "can be important vehicles for representing and promoting the interests of their members both directly and indirectly" and that "those suffering from chronic poverty may benefit at least as much from political and social initiatives as from economic ones." See Thorp et al., "When and How Far Is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?," 907, 917.

social subordination. They also seek ways for their members to enter (and create) political spaces in which they assert, "the primacy of the poor in driving their own politics."[41] As Appadurai, writing about the slum/shack/pavement dweller organizations that make up the Indian Alliance, observes,

> The Alliance has evolved a style of pro-poor activism that consciously departs from earlier models of social work, welfarism, and community organization. . . . Instead of relying on the model of an outside organizer who teaches local communities how to hold the state to its normative obligations to the poor, the Alliance is committed to methods of organization, mobilization, teaching, and learning that build on what poor persons know and understand. The first principle of this approach is that no one knows more about how to survive poverty than the poor themselves.[42]

Instructively, some poor mobilization and empowerment groups report that membership in their movement or organization often improves the livelihoods of members, despite the fact that this is not among the group's aims. Nijera Kori (NK), the social mobilization group in Bangladesh that organizes landless poor, provides a good example of this.[43] Unlike the vast majority of NGOs in the country, NK aims neither at service delivery nor microfinance but rather embraces a "radical capability approach: strengthening the individual human capabilities of poor women and men—their knowledge, critical awareness and analytical skills—so as to build their collective political capabilities to think and act like citizens. . . . NK's approach can be seen as building capabilities in order to claim basic human rights."[44] Similar to some of the slum dweller associations discussed later in the chapter, NK helps to form groups of landless poor at the village level, teaches them to generate and manage collective savings (for investing in assets for the group), then federates these into a larger national organization (*Bhumiheen Samity*, or the Organization of the Landless). Through a process of political training, members come to understand their rights and entitlements as

[41] Arjun Appadurai, "Deep Democracy Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics," Public Culture 14 (2002):," 33.

[42] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 28.

[43] As Naila Kabeer explains, the organization emerged in 1979 as an NGO focused on the issues of poor women in rural areas, with the help of CUSO staff (Canadian University Services Organization); but it only took its present form in 1980, with the distancing of NK organizers from a key group (the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) which had shifted from a poor-empowerment agenda to mere service delivery. See her "Making Rights Work for the Poor," 2.

[44] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 48.

citizens, as well as the underlying causes for their denial; this critical education, in tandem with concrete instruction in "the practicalities of collective action: organizing meetings and campaigns, keeping records, collective petitions, public speaking, registering complaints, framing demands as well as more direct forms of collective action such as demonstrations, marches and sit-ins," enables them to engage as effective, claims-making group agents.[45] This training and exposure makes NK members vastly more likely than nonmembers to participate in collective political action, to vote and campaign at the local and national levels, to be engaged with and consulted by local government, to be invited to serve as arbitrators in villages' traditional councils (*shalish*), and to work with rural committees.[46] Equally interesting from a capabilities perspective, however, is that despite her initial impression that there were "no obvious material benefits from NK membership"[47] (aside from group savings), Kabeer later found that membership in the organization was associated with "a greater number of economic impacts"—improved food security, more paid work, and land ownership, as well as productive and consumer assets—"than [was] membership of other organizations, including those specializing in microfinance."[48]

The concept of collective capabilities thus provides a compelling explanation for why membership in a poor mobilization/empowerment group can improve livelihoods even when it supplies no direct resources or services (like microfinancing).[49] Mitlin, a leading researcher of social movement–driven poverty reduction, explains how the synergy and interaction of individual and group capabilities and endowments in empowerment-focused poor organizations has this effect: "individual endowments are enhanced by improved social endowments, and collective capabilities support individual capabilities and functionings"—a dynamic she aptly describes as "positive feedback loops."[50] To achieve strategic goals like greater political empowerment, as well as to secure access to needed resources, assets, or services, grassroots poor collectives and movements must develop a range of collective

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[45] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 50.

[46] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 54–55, 58–59.

[47] Kabeer, "Making Rights Work for the Poor," 21.

[48] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 52.

[49] Kabeer writes that NK sees itself "as an agent of social change, challenging deep-rooted inequalities within the wider society. It carries out this role through the provision of intangible resources, such as information, ideas and knowledge in order to build the 'collective capabilities' of the poor, their ability to mobilise as rights-bearing citizens on their own behalf." See her "Making Rights Work for the Poor," 38–39.

[50] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 56, 55.

political capabilities among their members.[51] Skills related to political strat-
egizing are particularly important, explains Mitlin: "when to protest and
when to negotiate, the specific forms of entitlements that are most likely to
address their needs, which skills and expertise are needed for co-production,
and how underlying structural constraints might be addressed."[52]

Poor movements and groups differ with respect to the collective capabilities
they seek to develop: which they deem most valuable, and also feasible, depends
on numerous contextual factors in addition to broader movement goals. The
degree to which a movement wants or intends to interact with government—
to make social entitlement claims, or to press for reforms to policies on land,
housing, employment, etc.—is a key consideration. Also important is the state's
degree of democratization and decentralization, which partly determines which
political spaces and "institutional channels" already exist for participation by
the poor.[53] As well, what political resources are available to poor movements
can affect decisions about which political capabilities are worthwhile and prac-
ticable. In particular, whether there are local NGOs that can support or assist,
whether the poor movement even agrees to work with NGOs or prefers to re-
main autonomous, and what stance is taken by INGOs active in the region may
all affect which political capabilities a movement pursues.

Whether to focus on developing capabilities for advocacy or instead for
more confrontational direct action depends on such considerations as how
well civil and political freedoms are protected, what prior interactions with
the state the movement's members have had, and whether their needs are even
amenable to policy reform. The local and national history of labor and social
justice movements also shapes the landscape of expectations and possibilities
for poor-led struggles. Where there is a tradition of popular activism—e.g.,
Indigenous peoples' movements, labor or trade unionism, peasant protests,
or the anti-apartheid movement—poor movements often build upon this ex-
perience, and are also more likely to introduce confrontational tactics. For
example, in Argentina, *piquetero*-led national strikes, blockades, and mass
public protests were concentrated in regions and cities with the highest rate
of trade union membership. In South Africa, the legacy of the anti-apartheid
movement and labor unionism has decisively shaped the tactics of newer

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[51] This idea is consistent with Sen's argument that people's enhanced political or "participatory
capabilities" can "influence the direction of public policy." Sen, *Development as Freedom*, xii, 18.

[52] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 54.

[53] My summary in this section draws on Webster and Engberg-Pederson, "Political Agencies and
Spaces."

popular struggles, especially that of shack dwellers. When groups like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, formed in 2000, sought to mobilize residents of informal settlements, they focused on leading frequent vocal (and often illegal) mass marches on government offices.[54] Now organized by the regional movements that comprise the national Poor People's Alliance,[55] these marches resemble the mass protests against apartheid-era laws like Group Areas Act and Pass Laws which caused mass evictions of residents racialized as black, "coloured," or Indian, and the destruction of vibrant communities like Cape Town's District Six and Sophiatown (near Johannesburg). Shack resident organizations are more likely to pursue legal remedies today than they were under apartheid,[56] but they combine these with direct forms of popular protest reminiscent of the earlier liberation struggle—such as road blockades with burning tires.[57]

If a decision is made to engage in oppositional activities, such as public protests, blockades, and occupations of land or housing settlements, then movement leaders will target skills and training related to these political capabilities. Collective capabilities for *direct mobilization* are typically characteristic of landless peasant and worker movements, such as the MST. As we saw in the previous chapter, through processes of political "conscientization" the movement develops its members' capacities for political organizing, mobilizing, collective decision-making, and cooperative problem-solving, as well as practical skills related to engaging in land occupations, protests, and establishing encampments. These skills all contribute to the rural poor's collective capability for political agency outside of formal political institutions. Dunford offers a useful conceptual framework for understanding the oppositional-political skills that peasant movements like the MST and La Vía Campesina have developed:

> Through these practices of resistance, peasant actors have developed what might be called "left arts of government" that incite, spread, organize

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[54] Desai, *We Are the Poors*, 94–99.

[55] The Poor People's Alliance is mainly composed of groups critical of the governing African National Congress: Abahlali baseMojondolo (in the provinces of Kwazulu-Natal and Western Cape), the Landless People's Movement (in Gauteng province), and the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. By contrast, the non-partisan South African Alliance (http://sasdialliance.org.za/) is a federation of grassroots community organizations (especially of the homeless and informal settlers) and poor women's savings groups. Closely modeled on the Indian Alliance, it is the SA federation within SDI and as such is at least formally committed to political neutrality.

[56] See, for example, Kwanele Sosibo, "Eviction Ruling Spurs on Shack Dwellers," *Main & Guardian*, August 28, 2015, https://mg.co.za/article/2015-08–27-eviction-ruling-spurs-on-shack-dwellers.

[57] Pithouse, "A Politics of the Poor."

and strengthen resistance. Left arts of government are understood here
as progressive ways of exercising power over others, as ways of inciting,
organising and extending resistance without reintroducing oppressive and
hierarchical forms of rule . . . [these arts] map on to . . . strategies . . . of, first,
inciting and facilitating resistance, second, extending resistance, and, third,
engaging with institutions. These arts of government have made it possible
for peasant activists to construct a counter-hegemonic global movement
from multiple place-based struggles.[58]

As Dunford's analysis suggests, peasant activists become agents of social
change when they act collectively to seize land, build encampments, and
establish cooperative arrangements for living and working. The kind of
political power they are building through their movements is nonhierar-
chical and is focused on politically empowering the collective. The MST, like
other peasant movements, has a horizontal, egalitarian model of leadership
and governance, with decision-making forums that include the grassroots
constituency (slum dwellers, landless peasants, etc.). The view of power
represented by movement structures is thus reflective of what we might call
"power-with" rather than "power-over."

Poor-led organizations and movements may reject confrontational strat-
egies if they perceive them to be ineffective in building their membership
base,[59] or else ill-suited to the group's particular goals and social-political
context. Unlike the political capabilities needed for direct mobilization and
direct action, *collective capabilities related to negotiation and policy advocacy*
are needed if an urban movement identifies *interaction or collaboration with
government* as a central strategy. I discuss these specific political capabilities
later, in connection with slum dweller movements in India and South Africa.
It is important to recognize, however, that when a poor-led organization or
movement chooses to work with established political institutions, this does
not reduce to state bureaucracies. In places where alternative, poor-inclusive
political forums exist, such as the *samaj* in Bangladesh (community-based
decision-making councils) and traditional or customary chiefs' councils in
southern Africa, local movements may decide to work within these spaces
in order to secure resources like land. This choice has implications for which

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[58] Dunford, *Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle*, 44.
[59] In India, for example, "contentious confrontational politics failed to engage large numbers of
women." Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," 303.

collective political capabilities may be needed, for the practices of deliber-
ation, negotiation, and decision-making in these alternative forums may
differ sharply from those of the state.

Why might poor-led organizations that care about structural change
choose to work with government or other political institutions? Militant tac-
tics like blockades and land occupations are often effective in the short term
for forcing government to make concessions or enter negotiations, and can
be especially effective when organized labor (including unemployed workers
with union experience) participates or lends support.[60] But, as Mitlin
explains,

> confrontational tactics may risk placing the movement into either one (or
> both) of two difficult categories, one being the disruptive revolutionary and
> the second the mindless rabble or mob. Movements recognise that they
> need to extend their area of "legitimacy". . . . The goals to secure entitle-
> ments may be advanced by a willingness to be antagonistic but the objective
> to change public (or elite) perceptions of the urban poor as equal and re-
> sponsible citizens may regress.[61]

Particularly if a movement has identified specific resources or reforms that it
deems within its reach—like housing subsidies or upgraded services to poor
urban communities—the movement may opt instead to work with munic-
ipal (and sometimes provincial/state) governments. Given the vicissitudes
of development planning, these movements need members to develop skills
for ongoing advocacy and negotiation, as "success requires a consistent ac-
tive engagement in politics at multiple levels."[62] Establishing legitimacy,
which can be critical to a poor organization's ability to achieve reforms and
resources, requires that (often internally diverse) poor community groups
and coalitions demonstrate longevity and stability; as a consequence, as
Appardurai notes regarding the Indian Alliance, "their politics awards a cen-
tral place to negotiation and consensus-building."[63]

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[60] Trade and industrial unions were crucial to the success of the *piquetero* road blockades and mass
strikes in Argentina; and in South Africa, workers' strikes in support of urban township dwellers'
uprisings against lack of services have sometimes been a decisive factor.

[61] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 57.

[62] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 45.

[63] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 27.

Before proceeding to discuss these nonmilitant groups, a clarification is in order: the observation that poor movements seek to build collective capabilities that enable them to work toward securing livelihood needs may seem at odds with my earlier description of poor-led movements as *not targeting poverty as such*, but rather, seeking to politicize poverty and emancipate poor communities more generally. Specifically, recall that Mitlin and Bebbington argue that "movements [of the poor] are about contention. They exist because of inequalities and felt injustices and in order to change society. *They do not emerge with a primary concern to 'reduce' poverty or even to 'attack' it*—they emerge to attack systems, and the outcomes that they produce, particularly outcomes in respect of the distribution of resources."[64] As this passage suggests, many poor-led movements seek to transform structures of subordination and increase the poor's representation and social power, which they view as necessary to secure greater access (for the poor) to vital resources and services.

The capability to engage collectively with government in processes of decision-making, policy reform, and co-production is a crucial one for many poor-led groups, particularly for those that focus on housing, land, and municipal services (e.g., sanitation and electricity). Engaging with the state is necessary not only because of the capital investment in infrastructure that is needed,[65] but because the resources or services in question are public goods requiring regulation and governance. Interaction with government over the provision of these goods can also serve movements' goals of greater political inclusion and redistribution, in part because it throws much-needed critical light on the failures of local and national governments to provide these entitlements to citizens in the first place. In addition to exposing ineptitude and corruption, poor-led social movements and their organizations seek to challenge discriminatory practices and other obstacles that prevent particular social groups (such as low-caste individuals, ethnic minorities, and the urban chronic poor) from accessing housing, land, municipal services, and other needed resources.

Irrespective of whether they use confrontational direct action tactics, or negotiation and advocacy, all poor-led mobilization movements or organizations must develop the political capability of *solidarity*. As we saw in the

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[64] Mitlin and Bebbington, "Social Movements and Chronic Poverty across the Urban-Rural Divide," 18–19. My italics.

[65] Mitlin, "Endowments, Entitlements and Capabilities," 44.

previous chapter, place-based poor movements, like those of landless peas-
ants and dwellers of informal settlements, work to connect similarly situated
poor individuals and families in order to foster a sense of shared identity
and common purpose (or solidarity) among them. Importantly, it is often
the case that national poor organizations or movements grow out of existing
solidarity networks.[66] For example, in South Africa, the People's Dialogue
on Land and Shelter (formed in 1991) was able to form savings collectives
within informal settlements where people were already connected by prox-
imity and shared concerns. By 1994, this network had grown into the South
African Homeless People's Federation, and later became part of a still-larger
slum dwellers' movement, the South African Alliance (affiliated with Slum
Dwellers International).[67] In the case of slum dwellers' groups in South
Africa, then, the capability for mobilizing and engendering solidarity among
the poor was greatly facilitated by existing informal networks within shack
settlements across the country.[68]

   Solidarity-building in contexts wherein poor communities already con-
tain the seeds of solidarity from prior organizing is of course easier than
organizing where there is no such history. The processes of social exclusion,
discrimination, and stigmatization so characteristic of poverty can isolate
poor individuals, and prevailing social structures sometimes pit certain indi-
viduals or social groups against one another. What are the prospects for soli-
darity given these obstacles? Research on poor group formation suggests that
mobilization in such circumstances can be successful provided the group
effectively identifies common causes and/or fosters a common social iden-
tity. Poor-led organizing with a social empowerment focus, for example, can
help to reduce members' "alienation and exploitation,"[69] according to Ela

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[66] Support from organized labor and political parties has also played a role in strengthening the
informal settlers movement, but there have been no formal alliances. On the connection between
South Africa's shack settlement movements and workers/organized labor, see Peter Alexander
and Peter Pfaffe, "Social Relationships to the Means and Ends of Protest in South Africa's Ongoing
Rebellion of the Poor: The Balfour Insurrections," *Social Movement Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 204–21.

[67] The Federation's "primary goal . . . [is] to develop its members' capacity to conceive, control and
implement their own poverty alleviation strategies via the development of their own communities."

[68] As Richard Pithouse observes, "In South Africa an effective activist will often have solid
connections to local churches, undertakers, the local clinic and to a local police station, as well as
links to wider networks including lawyers and journalists. Indeed, a striking number of activists
come out of local projects like crèches. . . . This is why . . . if an individual approaches *Abahlali
baseMjondolo* seeking membership of the movement, she will be asked to return to her community
in order to mobilize her family and then others, preferably in families, and to return when she has 50
people with her." See his "Conjunctural Remarks," 105.

[69] Bhatt, *We Are Poor but So Many*, 217.

Bhatt, founder of the 2-million-member group SEWA (as discussed in the previous chapter). Development economist Frances Stewart similarly notes that "a fragmented and competitive set of individuals can become an effective claims group," citing the example of Calcutta sex workers who formed a claims-group that "improved members' health and their treatment by pimps" and "create(d) a positive identity" despite their extreme stigmatization and social exclusion.[70]

5.3. Seeking Both Improved Livelihood and Social Empowerment: Slum/Shack Dweller Movements

The aims of poor-led organizations and social movements, I have argued, are not limited to their members' material needs. Yet even where improving livelihoods is a central mandate—which it certainly is for many poor groups—it is often seen as closely tied to goals like social empowerment and increased political power or representation. To better explain how material and political goals come to be seen as intertwined and pursued simultaneously, I discuss examples from the homeless or shack/slum dweller movements—in particular, those affiliated with SDI, the main global slum dwellers' network.

To recap from Chapter 1, SDI, founded in 1996, is dedicated to forging poor-led, pro-poor social change by building local organizational capacity and leadership within poor communities. The network is made up of national (and some regional) federations consisting in local, grassroots slum/shack dweller groups that engage in community-based savings and activism; it currently has affiliate federations in thirty-three countries (488 cities), comprising over 16,000 local shack/slum dweller savings groups. By 2008, these groups comprised over 2 million members; as a result of their activism, "over 250,000 families have secured formal tenure with services, and about half of these have also been able to improve their housing through their own savings and a range of loan and subsidy finance. Many more families have been assisted as groups have negotiated alternatives to eviction and/or secured other services."[71] SDI federations, urban poor groups, and NGO

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[70] Stewart, "Groups and Capabilities," 198. Stewart is referring to social historian Nandini Goopta's research on Calcutta sex workers.

[71] These figures are drawn from Mitlin and Satterthwaite, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 169; Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 320; and SDI's website: https://sdinet.org/.

support organizations (discussed later) work to enable residents of informal settlements to build "local processes able to engage effectively with local government to secure resources and amend legislation that compounded the difficulties faced by those living and/or working informally . . . [and] to influence the policies and practices of international agencies such that they are more supportive of the local agendas of the urban poor."[72] They organize people living in informal settlements, who in turn decide on common priorities and projects (e.g., improving sanitation services for residents), and strategies for getting these funded and approved.

Far from simply engaging in protest, national SDI federations and local slum dweller groups work to develop several collective capabilities related to improving their members' livelihoods and changing their condition of political subordination. Most broadly, they develop the capability of poor communities to work with willing municipal governments to address the needs of housing-insecure people. Groups that have succeeded in forming partnerships with municipal governments sometimes become involved in designing prototype housing and sanitation facilities, and even in constructing new housing and services in co-production initiatives. As d'Cruz and Mitlin explain, "SDI groups are involved in developing new relationships between the urban poor and the city authorities and politicians . . . [and] work strategically to generate political support and bureaucratic confidence";[73] they use their newfound political status not only to seek improvements to conditions for slum residents but to "build political support for a pro-poor urban agenda and [avoid] the marginalization of . . . groups and their development needs."[74]

Building up settlements' or communities' capabiliies to design and implement improvements to their infrastructure also enables them to better weather periods of economic crisis. Key to this is the practice of communal savings. Although the slum/squatter federations that make up SDI vary dramatically in size (the largest, in India, has hundreds of thousands of members), they all engage in community savings to increase their community's resilience and capacity (e.g., to finance slum upgrade projects).[75] Typically, federations or associations retain the support of a small local NGO support

[72] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 165.

[73] Celine d'Cruz and Diana Mitlin, "Shack/Slum Dwellers International," in *Membership-Based Organizations of the Poor*, ed. Martha Chen, Renana Jhabvala, Ravi Kanbur, and Carol Richards (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 234.

[74] Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," 302.

[75] SDI has more recently established the "Urban Poor Fund International," which assists member federations with funds needed to implement urban upgrade projects—especially in times of

organization to help with this and certain other aspects of their work. But importantly, the NGO serves *only* in a support role: according to SDI cofounder Joel Bolnick, it assists with fundraising and managing community development funds; provides "technical assistance for housing projects"; helps with "lobbying and brokering deals" with local government; facilitates the knowledge exchanges between homeless groups and federations (discussed later); and handles "research and documentation."[76] Keeping the NGO in a supportive and ancillary role is crucial to ensuring that the slum dweller group or movement remains "accountable to the poor," according to researchers Patel, Burra, and d'Cruz: "the organizational choice of a community based organization and NGO configuration reflected the belief that the voices of the urban poor should be heard directly rather than through intermediary institutions such as NGOs. Who was better qualified and equipped to speak for the poor than the poor themselves?"[77]

The political capability-building strategies employed by the different national federations affiliated with SDI evolved out of the innovations of two of the founding members of the network,[78] the Indian Alliance and the South African Alliance; the former has been the subject of extensive research by development and social movement researchers and I focus on it here. Formed in 1987, the Indian Alliance is composed of three Mumbai-based organizations: the National Slum Dwellers Federation of India (NSDF), founded in 1974; the Society for the Protection of Area Resources Centres (SPARC), a grassroots NGO founded in 1984 to help primarily women pavement dwellers in Mumbai to organize; and *Mahila Milan* ("Women Together" in Hindi), a women's organization organized by SPARC in 1986 to support the formation of women pavement dwellers' cooperative savings societies (and later women's savings groups in informal settlements). Within the Alliance, the NSDF has mainly focused on providing concrete support to communities of urban poor fighting evictions from informal settlements, including supplying them with legal and tactical support against shack demolition.

transition, when there is a lag in arrival of funds that the government has committed to urban informal settlement projects. See http://upfi.info/home/.

[76] Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 327.

[77] Sheela Patel, Sundar Burra, and Celine d'Cruz, "Slum/Shack Dwellers (SDI)—Foundations to Treetrops," *Environment and Urbanization* 13, no. 2 (2001): 48.

[78] The other founding members were national federations representing homeless groups in Namibia, Cambodia, Nepal, and Thailand; however, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), already in existence since the 1980s, was also instrumental. See Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," 299.

Mahila Milan was founded to link together hundreds of women's collectives which help women pavement and slum dwellers to create income and savings so as to better weather the crises that punctuate their precarious living situations;[79] by 2011, the organization consisted in over 750,000 savers in sixty-five cities in India.[80] And SPARC, an NGO with a radical pro-poor approach, functions as the social movement organization for the Alliance.

All three members of the Alliance aim to empower the urban poor by developing their collective capabilities, broadly speaking. In their antihierarchical model of learning, members are engaged in ongoing efforts to teach one another the skills of analyzing collective problems and devising strategic, community-empowering solutions to them. In particular, the Alliance has emphasized several practical skills in its training and collective action which have been critical to the success of the movement as a whole, and which are now employed by other national federations within SDI. In the following, I discuss each of these in turn.

5.3.1. Enumerations and Mapping

The practices of conducting door-to-door community "enumerations" to document the existence of residents of informal settlements, and of mapping the spaces occupied by them, began with a census of pavement dwellers undertaken by SPARC prior to the Alliance's founding. The published results of this census (*We the Invisible*) provided evidence of the long-term nature of these settlements and the myriad structural obstacles residents face in finding permanent housing. Local women's savings collectives (soon to form as *Mahila Milan*) saw the potential of enumeration and mapping and asked SPARC members to teach them how to conduct them on their own. The data gathered by these enumerations attest to continuous residency by slum and pavement dwellers—previously undercounted by government censuses—and provide detailed information about the lack of services. The findings began a continuous dialogue among community members about the central needs of residents and likely solutions.[81] The information gathered by these

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[79] Sheela Patel and Diana Mitlin, "Grassroots-driven Development: The Alliance of SPARC, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and *Mahila Milan*," in Mitlin and Satterthwaite, *Empowering Squatter Citizens*, 216–25.

[80] Mitlin and Satterthwaite, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 140.

[81] Patel and Mitlin, "Grassroots-driven Development."

enumerations and maps also helps to "build the skills and knowledge to represent themselves and their needs to government. . . . They develop a critical collective identity that helps form the political basis for their engagement with government."[82]

The enumerations and mappings undertaken by SDI affiliates are central to the network's organizing model: "the entire methodology of the SDI alliance relies on community-generated spatial knowledge," which "can be both descriptive, as in in the enumerations, or normative and visionary, through community development plans."[83] On their face, enumerations are merely a kind of census; but in reality, they are part of a political "mobilizing strategy, drawing in residents who want to participate in a locally managed identification and verification of their shacks and plot boundaries," and bringing residents together to decide their needs, goals, and strategies.[84] Patel (a cofounder of SPARC) et al. explain that the enumeration process eventually expanded to include settlement profiles and individual household surveys, and mapping to indicate "vacant land that might be available for use."[85] Although the women's group *Mahila Milan* has taken the lead on census-taking and household surveys,[86] settlement profiles are carried out mainly by the federation (NSDF); this form of enumeration is also widely used among other national federations within SDI. Consolidating the data from settlement censuses and household surveys makes it possible for the federations to negotiate with local government authorities (and other landowners) from an informed position, thus aiding their efforts to secure more public housing and upgraded municipal services for informal settlements.

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[82] Sheela Patel, Carrie Baptist, and Celine d'Cruz, "Knowledge Is Power: Informal Communities Assert Their Right to the City through SDI and Community-Led Enumerations," *Environment and Urbanization* 24, no. 1 (2012): 14.

[83] David Jordhus-Lier, "The 'SDI Model' and the Mumbai Experience," in *The Politics of Slums in the Global South: Urban Informality in Brazil, India, South Africa and Peru*, ed. Véronique Dupont, David Jordhus-Lier, Catherine Sutherland, and Einar Braathen (London: Routledge, 2016), 127.

[84] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 163.

[85] Patel et al., "Knowledge Is Power," 15.

[86] Early on, the NSDF flagged women's particular disadvantages as key to understanding the entrenched vulnerability of slum and pavement dwellers, and identified the development of women's leadership as a central goal. This is what led to the formation of *Mahila Milan*: "with most savers and savings-groups managers being women, these savings groups help address the multiple forms of disadvantage, oppression and exploitation that they face. . . . This challenges and helps overturn discrimination and limited social expectations as women engage with each other as activists (rather than remaining subservient to male and/or older household members), public agents (rather than enclosed in the household) and strategic thinkers (rather than passive)." See Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 162.

The household survey process also puts decision-making around eligibility criteria for public housing into the hands of the community.[87]

5.3.2. Community-Based Knowledge Exchanges

The Indian Alliance has adopted knowledge-sharing practices—both at a community level and among homeless organizations working on common problems—as a central strategy of SDI. Through learning and knowledge sharing that they call "community exchanges"—and which were soon expanded to include international exchanges—informal settlement groups come together to share ideas and strategies for organizing, negotiating with government, upgrading their settlements, and forming policy proposals. When these groups return home—and several visits (and increasingly, virtual meetings) between the same communities are usually the norm—those involved in the exchange share knowledge with other members of their informal settlement movement. Through these exchanges, community groups or federations gain valuable "outsider perspectives on the specific positions that are being taken, and city federations in complex negotiations are offered regular support."[88] These community exchanges are also an important way to "legitimize community data" resulting from enumerations, and to establish and reinforce the political voice of residents of informal housing settlements.[89]

5.3.3. Precedent-Setting

The Alliance established a practice called "precedent-setting," which reflects its core belief that "there can be no social change that will benefit low-income communities if the poor do not participate in the designing, managing and realizing this process of change."[90] Through the process of precedent setting, which is now widely used by other federations and organizations with SDI,

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[87] Patel et al., "Knowledge Is Power," 16.
[88] Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," 303.
[89] Of the international version of these exchanges, Patel, Baptiste, and d'Cruz, who have studied SDI federations extensively, write that "in the course of these exchanges, government and city officials, NGOs and community members all meet with their counterparts and absorb how an enumeration process is initiated, designed and executed, and what its impacts are. This is an invaluable process for transmitting precedents across borders and facilitating new processes within a particular area." See their "Knowledge Is Power," 21.
[90] Patel and Mitlin, "Grassroots-driven Development," 233.

slum/shack dwellers become centrally involved in the design of local housing and sanitation services (often after submitting successful bids for local projects funded by the municipality). Sometimes it takes the form of "co-production" with local government, which may become involved at a later stage. Slum dweller groups can undertake these pilot projects for housing and toilet blocks because of their other core activities: savings and credit activities that provide seed funding, enumerations and household profiles that give information about communities' specific needs, and the knowledge exchanges that supply insights on redevelopment strategies and "build strong relationships between peers, adding to the effectiveness of local negotiations."[91]

The immediate benefit of groups' participation in planning is of course that the housing and infrastructure can be designed to better meet the needs of shack and slum dwellers. In the case of sanitation services, which have been an important area for poor-led urban planning, women informal residents have been the driving force. Since Mahila Milan, the women's savings group within the Alliance, already plays a central role in assessing the different needs of children, men, and women in slum communities through census-taking and household surveys, its members were eager and able to take on the design of neighborhood sanitation projects. Starting in Mumbai, then subsequently in Pune, Bangalore, and other cities, Mahila Milan took charge of organizing community members to plan and in many cases contribute to the building of toilet blocks—now numbering in the thousands—that are designed with their community's (including children's) needs in mind.[92]

The broader significance of the participation of shack/slum dwellers in designing the housing and sanitation they need is twofold. First, it demonstrates to government decision-makers that they are knowledgeable and capable stakeholders in the process of slum upgrading and development. In India, this led to the Alliance's participation in "numerous housing projects," including "partnerships with local and municipal authorities for in situ upgrading of houses and infrastructure."[93] This has been replicated in many if not most of the countries in which national federations of SDI are active, and has extended to road-building projects, sewage and drainage, playgrounds, community centers, and other infrastructure or services.[94]

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[91] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 163.
[92] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 141.
[93] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 141.
[94] For a detailed account of precedent-setting activity, including co-production, by shack/slum dweller organizations in various countries, see Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*.

Second, their participation has empowered poor communities to claim their "right to the city", including their right to make decisions about the matters that centrally concern them. Menon writes that whereas "the public toilet as conceived by the Municipality relegates the poor to the position of welfare recipients. . . . The community toilet [designed by organized urban poor] . . . calls forth a substantive and insurgent understanding of citizenship that empowers impoverished communities by creating the conditions for them to exercise a degree of local, democratic control over the conditions of their living, that is, to recover agency."[95] Appadurai's analysis of the Alliance's housing exhibitions illustrates this insurgent citizenship well:

> The idea of housing exhibitions by and for the poor goes back to 1986 in Mumbai and has since been replicated in many other cities in India and elsewhere in the world. . . . Not only have these exhibitions enabled the poor, especially poor women, to discuss and debate designs for housing that suit their own needs, they have also allowed the poor to enter into conversations with various professionals about housing materials, construction costs, and urban services. Through this process, slum dwellers' own ideas of the good life, of adequate space, and of realistic costs were foregrounded, and they began to see that professional housing construction was only a logical extension of their own area of greatest expertise—namely, building adequate housing out of the flimsiest of materials and in the most insecure of circumstances. . . . The exhibitions have been political events bringing together poor families and activists from different cities. . . . As with other key practices of the Alliance, housing exhibitions are deep exercises in subverting the existing class cultures of India. . . . At work here is a politics of visibility that inverts the harmful default condition of civic invisibility that characterizes the urban poor.[96]

Appadurai's account captures the way that the collective capability of precedent-setting, as developed by SDI, works to politically enfranchise slum residents—not only symbolically, but also concretely.

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[95] Gayatri Menon, "Citizens and 'Squatters': The Contested Subject of Public Policy in Neoliberal Mumbai," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 7, no. 2 (2013): 165.

[96] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 37–38.

5.3.4. Federating

> There is enough accumulated evidence to suggest that the Federation
> model that is championed by SDI may represent a developmental
> watershed . . . a pointer towards a future configuration that may one
> day have the effect of tipping power relations in the development
> world in favour of the urban poor.
>
> —SDI cofounder Joel Bolnick [97]

The strategy of "federating"—by which "preexisting collectives" of grass-
roots slum associations form a common political structure (i.e., a federa-
tion), "rather than simply uniting, joining, and lobbying"—has been pivotal
to the success of the slum and shack dweller movements.[98] Through the fed-
erating process, informal settlement groups and organizations join together
under a common national organization (e.g. India's National Slum Dwellers
Federation), yet retain autonomy over matters relating to their group. Part
of the power of the federating model, as Appadurai explains, is that it serves
"as a constant reminder that groups (even at the level of families) that have a
claim to political agency on their own have chosen to combine their political
and material power. . . . The image of the federation asserts the primacy of the
poor in driving their own politics, however much others may help them to do
so."[99] The national slum dweller federations, and the collectives and associ-
ations they represent, are in turn connected through their affiliation with the
global network, SDI. By linking with other homeless organizations in their
city and nationally, small homeless groups dramatically augment their po-
litical voice and organizational capacity. Federating not only increases the
political presence and leverage of local shack/slum dweller groups, but gives
them access to additional resources that in turn enable them to scale up their
initiatives beyond their immediate community. This structure has made pos-
sible the pooling of community resources among slum dweller organizations
as well as enabling them to tap into local government funds (and, less fre-
quently, NGOs) that they can use to implement precedent-setting projects
and meet the emergency needs of homeless organizations. Since 2008, the
national federations and their member groups also have access to funds and

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[97] Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 323.
[98] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 32.
[99] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 33.

loans for precedent-setting initiatives and emergencies through SDI's Urban Poor Fund International (an extension of the International Urban Poor Fund begun by the network in 2001).[100]

Among the "social movement capacities" that the federating process and structure supports are those of knowledge-sharing and solidaristic political cooperation. The local-to-national federating process and structure in particular demands that slum dweller organizations learn to work cooperatively with one another, discuss and resolve their differences, set collective priorities, and identify shared demands. The knowledge exchanges and support they provide one another, and the collective identity they form as urban poor residents of informal settlements, enable them to approach local governments as a common front. Slum dweller groups present proposals for housing and land reforms—oftentimes under the banner of their national federation—as well as specific co-production initiatives, to municipal and regional/national governments.[101] Group members also learn skills of negotiation, as there is an ongoing process of negotiation between national federations of shack/slum dwellers and local, provincial, and sometimes national governments around slum upgrades and social policy reforms.

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I have argued that the organizational capacity of slum dweller organizations in negotiations with government is greatly enabled by the federation structure, which also preserves the autonomy of local groups (and their accountability to their base). But the leverage of these groups is also amplified by the other processes developed by slum dweller movements—in particular, enumeration practices (which provide solid data on numbers of residents and homes), knowledge exchanges, community savings, and precedent-setting initiatives carried out by homeless federations. Exercising the collective political capabilities associated with these practices has brought about impressive successes for slum dweller groups. The Indian Alliance, for example, was responsible (in tandem with local authorities) for resettling 50,000 households in India by 2005.[102] In numerous countries, homeless

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[100] This reserve, which has received funding from major foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and national governments (Norway and Sweden), is in addition to the community savings in the Fund. Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 169.

[101] d'Cruz and Mitlin, "Shack/Slum Dwellers International," 229 and 233.

[102] d'Cruz and Mitlin, "Shack/Slum Dwellers International," 228.

organizations federated into SDI have secured funding to upgrade housing and services within existing settlements; new public housing; financing for shelters; tenure security; and the right to direct resettlement where necessary.[103] SDI homeless federations and member organizations also dramatically reduce the eviction rate of residents from informal settlements by forming relationships and agreements with government agencies and supplying data through the enumeration process.

One sign that these successes are not merely random or transient is the trend toward governments consulting with informal settlement organizations and federations. In a number of countries (e.g., Kenya) state officials have asked SDI for housing policy ideas and for their support in capacity-building among those in informal settlements.[104] And there exist many agreements between local, provincial, and even national governments and SDI-affiliated slum/shack dweller groups, in which the groups are recognized as stakeholders in urban planning.[105] In Namibia, the SDI-affiliated federation is invited to high-level housing policy conferences and has shaped national housing and land policy in important ways, even succeeding in getting the city of Windhoek to adopt specific proposals it developed for new public housing. In numerous instances, officials have asked SDI affiliates to undertake enumerations, because they recognize their expertise as uniquely valuable for urban planning. The Namibian slum dwellers' federation has carried out enumerations of all the country's shack settlements under an agreement with (and funding from) the national government.[106] In Mumbai in 1989, NSDF and SPARC were invited by the government to gather data on a squatter settlement adjacent to railway tracks, prior to commencing a major (World Bank–funded) transport project. The data and maps they produced established that 18,000 households lived there, and was used in implementing the project (with NSDF's participation).[107] When, in a later phase of the project, it was clear that the residents along the railway tracks (now numbering 32,000 households, and deemed "at high risk and without water and sanitation") would need to leave, local government officials asked the Railway Slum Dwellers' Federation to assist. After extensive consultations with these

[103] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 168.

[104] d'Cruz and Mitlin, "Shack/Slum Dwellers International," 228.

[105] Mitlin and Patel report (in a 2014 article) 102 agreements between slum/shack dweller groups or federations and city governments, 24 with provincial governments, and 15 with national governments. See Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-Poor Politics," 302.

[106] Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 321.

[107] Patel et al., "Knowledge Is Power," 20.

households, the Federation determined that "most families wanted to move if they could get a home with secure tenure in an appropriate location," and so developed a "relocation programme" in cooperation with local government and the Railway Authority. The result was a community-directed resettlement that eliminated forced evictions, and "reduced the number of people who had to move by cutting down the size of the spaced cleared" for the railway extension. According to Sattherthwaite and Mitlin, "people to be resettled were involved in designing, planning and implementing the program" at every stage.[108]

Some of the most important political achievements of SDI have been in South Africa, where the SDI-affiliated South African Alliance has been able to negotiate directly with officials at the city, state, and national levels, since the first decade of the 2000s. Many credit the active shack dweller associations affiliated with the federation for the introduction of the People's Housing Process by the government, which allowed poor urban communities to have greater say over the subsidies granted to low-income individuals for their house needs.[109] The president of SDI was even granted status equivalent to that of housing minister at the Slum Summit that the national government housing ministry held in 2006.[110] According to the authors of a study of the Homeless People's Alliance (HPA) of shack dwellers established in 1994 (now part of the South African Alliance),

> What is particularly fascinating about this movement . . . and its partners across the world, is that, despite its grassroots preoccupation and rejection of the official development horizon and outputs, *it ends up exercising a most profound influence over the state and its urban development ambitions and programmes.* Thus, in South Africa, by the late 1990s, the state adopted the substantial components of the community mobilisation methodologies of the HPA—the People's Housing Process (PHP)—and mainstreamed it into government policy. *This move opened the door for the HPA to become a key political actor in development policy debates about effective poverty reduction in urban areas.*[111]

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[108] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 35 (source given: Patel et al., 2002).
[109] Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 170–71.
[110] Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 321.
[111] Firoz Khan and Edgar Pieterse, "The Homeless People's Alliance: Purposive Creation and Ambiguated Realities." Case study for *Globalisation, Marginalisation and New Social Movements*, School of Development Studies and Centre for Civil Society, University of KaaZulu-Natal, 2004, 2. My italics.

Although their members largely remain among the urban poor, it is important to recognize that SDI federations and their member groups have helped many thousands of urban informal settlement dwellers to gain land and housing tenure. Sometimes this has come about as a result of government policy reforms (granting land tenure to squatters, for example). But SDI affiliates have also secured and built new housing for tens of thousands of families, as well as delivering infrastructure upgrades and municipal services for many urban poor: "the 15,000 to 30,000 housing units that they are annually constructing worldwide . . . places them in a league of their own among NGOs and social movements."[112] As noted at the outset of this chapter, however, poor organizations that aim to directly increase the housing and services resources available to poor communities simultaneously aim to transform the relations and structures that perpetuate their members' needs deprivation.[113] Whether they focus on claims-making to secure or extend access to resources, or embark on co-production ventures with the state for housing or municipal services, they are engaged in building poor communities' political capabilities for collective action.

5.4. The Broader Significance of Collective Political Capabilities: Democratic Interventions

The signature contribution of organized slum/shack dweller groups is that they have positioned urban poor activists as people whose insights and experience are vital for antipoverty social policy-making, and have asserted their right to be centrally included in those processes.[114] In urban areas, including megacities, across the global South, activists are claiming a "right to the city,"[115] demanding recognition of their communities' existence and their

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[112] Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 327.

[113] That poor movements sometimes aspire to deeper social change is evidenced by Argentina's movement of worker-recovered factories and businesses, which emerged after the country's 2001 economic crisis. While aiming chiefly to give workers back their jobs and livelihood, these cooperatives also sought to replace hierarchical profit-driven business and production models of production with democratic workplace organization and decision-making structures and an egalitarian pay scale.

[114] Of the eight approaches to poverty reduction in the global South identified by researchers, only two—the social movement approach, and that of self-help collectives—reject vertical forms of authority and organization in favor of horizontal forms. Satterthwaite and Mitlin, *Reducing Urban Poverty*, 67.

[115] This phrase is attributed to the sociologist Henri Lefèbre, whose 1968 work by the same title (*Le Droit à la ville*) sets out a vision in which urban residents control decision-making around the design and use of city spaces.

rights as residents of informal settlements, and at the same time asserting their entitlements to better urban spaces, housing, and services. This politics of "subaltern urbanism"[116] practiced by these urban activists is in large part a demand for the decentralization and democratization of urban governance[117] so as to enable marginalized and socially excluded citizens to be at the center of processes of decision-making, planning, and even delivery of urban services. Poor mobilization organizations and movements in rural areas (like the MST and Nijera Kori) are also bringing democratic norms into their negotiations with local and national governments through their grassroots and participatory forms of organizing and decision-making. At the most general level, we can describe these as struggles by marginalized peoples for greater democratic power, and for fulfillment of their social rights and entitlements as members of political communities.

Some global poor-led networks, like La Vía Campesina and SDI, are also demanding more democratic forms of globalization, in response to systems (such as those governing trade and tariffs) that disempower and exclude poor people all the while deeply shaping their livelihoods.[118] Indeed, some activists and thinkers view poor-led social movements as antiglobalization struggles aimed at resisting and undoing Western forms of development. As "postdevelopment" anthropologist Arturo Escobar notes, many environmental and Indigenous movements in the global South seek autonomy more so than integration: they "are interested not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development, that is, the rejection of the alternative paradigm altogether."[119] Yet the heterogeneity of these Southern struggles makes categorical generalizations about their goals and strategies imprudent, in my view. La Vía Campesina, for example, is more radical in its analysis and tactics than other transnational agrarian networks, but contains within it diverse positions: while its many national and sub-national member organizations stand together in supporting food sovereignty and opposing neoliberalism in land policy, they disagree on the specifics of land redistribution and the

[116] Ananya Roy, "Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 2 (2011): 223–38.

[117] See Einar Braathen, Véronique Dupont, David Jordhus-Lier, and Catherine Sutherland, "Introduction: Situation the Politics of Slums within the 'Urban Turn,'" in Dupont et al., *Politics of Slums in the Global South*, 6–7.

[118] For a good discussion of social movements within transnational activist networks, and the idea of democratic globalization, see Smith, *Social Movements*, esp. ch. 6, "Mobilizing a Transnational Network for Democratic Globalization."

[119] Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 215, 217.

question of which governmental and intergovernmental institutions and NGOs they should engage. And notably, even this most militant and anti-neoliberal of global peasant networks works with institutions like the FAO and the UN's IFAS (International Fund for Agricultural Development).[120]

Although Escobar's account of social movements as "antidevelopment" captures these groups' aspirations for decentralization and—at times—autonomy,[121] Escobar does not account for the plethora of urban and rural poor peoples' groups demanding inclusion *within* (revisioned and newly poor-centered) processes of development and democratized, decentralized spaces of governance. Indeed, these social movements and networks are also working to *create* new democratic spaces for grassroots political participation, by globally connecting organizations working on similar issues of land justice for peasants at the local and national levels.[122] They seek control over the decisions affecting their lives and communities—from plans for upgrading informal settlements, to the reform of property laws that permit egregious concentration of land and the expansion of social programs for the poor and unemployed. Poor movements' highly politicized views of poverty, in tandem with the horizontal, antihierarchical forms of knowledge exchange, decision-making, and mobilization they practice, undeniably pose challenges to mainstream development practices. Nor are poor-led movements fooled by the much lauded, and now much criticized, "participatory development" paradigm promoted (in an entirely de-politicized form) by institutions like the World Bank—but which doesn't challenge the fundamental social power relations at the heart of conventional development practice.[123]

Studying how poor-led organizations and movements build the collective political capabilities of poor populations reveals the democratic interventions they are making in poverty and development discourse and practice. But to recognize the valuable collective capability-building that poor groups undertake, we need to move beyond paradigms of ethical and

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[120] Saturnino M. Borras Jr., "The Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements," *Development and Change* 41, no. 5 (2010): 782.

[121] Escobar, "Beyond the Third World," 222–23. Interestingly, Escobar says "these struggles are place-based, yet transnationalised," which aptly describes SDI and La Vía Campesina (among other global networks) (223).

[122] For a good account of the creation of such spaces, see Borras, "Politics of Transnational Agrarian Movements," 780–81.

[123] For an immanent critique and overview of the main objections to the paradigm of participatory development, see Sam Hickey and Giles Mohan, "Relocating Participation within a Radical Politics of Development," *Development and Change* 36, no. 2 (2005): 237–62.

political agency that focus strictly on individuals. We need a conception of the agents of justice that can recognize and encompass the important work that grassroots poor collectives and movements do in contesting processes of dispossession and claiming the social rights of the poor.[124] I have tried to show here that poor movements that lack the resources and coercive capacities of the states or transnational financial institutions may nonetheless build the collective capabilities of their members, thus enabling them to undertake forms of purposive collective action that lays the groundwork for pro-poor social change.[125]

5.5. Conclusion

A transformative approach to reducing poverty recognizes that needs deprivation is underpinned by processes that disadvantage, exploit, exclude, and subordinate poor people. Reversing these processes will require nothing less than the social and political empowerment, and enfranchisement, of marginalized poor communities. Marginalized poor communities are unlikely to be invited to join in decision-making about development and social policies, but they can and do force their way in by asserting their place as political stakeholders and claiming their social entitlements. Grassroots poor-led organizations and movements are the primary vehicle for asserting these claims, but to be effective, they must work to develop their members' collective capabilities. External agents can assist in some aspects of this endeavor, but for reasons of accountability and legitimacy, poor movements must remain the authors of their own agendas.

Pro-poor social movements and their organizations, I have argued, seek to develop the collective political capacities of poor individuals and communities in order to ground forms of collective action, whether it be engaging in oppositional protests or negotiating and working with local government to deliver services to informal settlements. Such movements build the collective political capabilities of poor groups to claim their human

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[124] In so doing, they arguably act both as "primary agents of justice"—in Onora O'Neill's sense—and "formative agents"—in John Dryzek's sense—insofar as they impact norms, expectations, and practices relating to justice.

[125] Poor individuals and communities also contribute to poverty alleviation in ways not discussed here, such as by participating in community-focused development interventions and by forming highly local self-help groups (not connected to broader movements) strictly to access to essential resources and services. See Miltin and Satterthwaite, *Reducing Urban Poverty*.

rights and entitlements as citizens, and help them to secure access to social endowments. In so doing, poor activists arguably create new models of citizenship, including the insurgent, activist citizenship of urban residents of informal settlements and the "agrarian citizenship" of landless peasant movements.[126] Poor activists help to change the public discourse around poverty by revealing deprivation as thoroughly political and advocating the reform of practices and policies that discriminate against the poor. Poor-led organizations also sometimes succeed in securing greater political voice and representation for their members.[127]

From a capabilities approach, we can see how the collective capabilities that poor movements help to develop are both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable in Sen's sense.[128] Marginalized and impoverished individuals, such as slum dwellers and landless peasants, employ collective capabilities to protest myriad injustices and demand that their social and political rights be recognized; they also often undertake cooperative ventures (including with local governments) to ensure access to much-needed goods and services. I do not claim that grassroots poor organizations are always or even usually successful at procuring resources and services for their members, or that they have dramatically reduced poverty in certain regions. Rather, my argument has been that they help to lay the groundwork for a more poor-centered approach to poverty reduction by developing the capabilities that poor communities need to become—and to be recognized as— political stakeholders and agents of justice. They develop these collective capabilities in the context of creating a more politicized public discourse about poverty as well as fostering a heightened political consciousness among the poor about the structures of social subordination and inequality that drive their poverty. The poverty remedies that grassroots movements advance are pro-poor in the sense that they seek to emancipate (and empower) poor communities from structures that subordinate them—even when groups "shift away from radicalism and towards negotiated reform."[129]

Poor movements' central goals—solidarity and empowerment of the poor, and greater social and political voice to shape development planning and

[126] Hannah Wittman, "Mobilizing Agrarian Citizenship: A New Rural Paradigm for Brazil," in *Contesting Development: Critical Struggles for Social Change*, ed. P. McMichael (New York: Routledge, 2010), 164–81.

[127] Thorp et al., "When and How Far Is Group Formation a Route Out of Chronic Poverty?," 907, 917.

[128] Sen, *Development as Freedom*; see also Green, *From Poverty to Power*, 20.

[129] Mitlin and Patel, "Urban Poor and Strategies for a Pro-poor Politics," 305.

social policy—make building the collective agency of poor populations an essential task. The political capabilities that are constitutive of this agency enable poor communities to make effective entitlement claims against local and national governments; to advocate for social goods and programs to assist the poor and unemployed; to demand inclusion as central participants in the process of development; and to begin to enact the solutions they seek. As the South African (Shack Dwellers') Alliance puts it, "the kind of upgrading we speak of is not about land and services alone. This is about realizing real citizenship and equality in our cities."[130] The value of poor-led movements and organizations cannot be reduced to, or measured by, their tangible successes in increasing livelihoods in the short term. Rather, their significance lies instead in their capacity to politicize issues of poverty, develop the collective the collective (especially political) capabilities of poor communities, and in so doing, hasten the shift toward pro-poor social change.[131]

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[130] https://www.sasdialliance.org.za/building-inclusive-cities/.

[131] There is considerable evidence that deliberative democratic political processes like participatory budgeting can reduce poverty by increasing poor communities' access to public goods. See Leonardo Avritzer, "Living under a Democracy: Participation and Its Impact on the Living Conditions of the Poor," *Latin American Research Review*, special issue (2010): 166.

6

Conclusion

Political Solidarity and Poor-Led Social Movements

The state's role of intervening in support of the poor has declined. . . . Decision making is at such a global level that local trade unions or the people's organizations have no reach. International unionizing [has] become a necessity. For the poor to survive in a global economy, they need to join hands across all sorts of borders.[1]

—Ella Bhatt, founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), an international trade union network comprising over 2 million women informal workers

Grassroots movements—i.e., movements of, for, and by people most directly affected by the consequences of public policies—*are emerging as global movements* and forming structures to sustain their movements. They are challenging the rights of nongrassroots organizations to lead and represent them . . . in the public policy arena at both national and international levels.

—*Srilatha Batliwala*, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors"

Politically responsible action requires more than individual moral reflection and moral agreement. It calls for taking responsibility for injustice itself in ways that transform political inequalities, norms, and the social understanding of these.

—Brooke Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*

I have argued in this book is that the insights, aims, and practices of poor-led organizations and social movements are vital for transformative and lasting

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[1] Bhatt, *We Are Poor but So Many*, 212.

poverty reduction. Antipoverty activists recognize that chronic needs depri-vation is the outcome of socioeconomic relations and structures that exclude, exploit, and subordinate particular social groups, and that real poverty reduc-tion cannot be achieved without fundamentally changing these structures. The importance of the poor *as moral and political agents of justice* begins to come into clearer focus when we see poverty as relational and structural, and as centrally about power and privilege. Undoing the habits of epistemic and political domination that marginalize poor communities' claims and deny their status as agents of justice will require more than just reframing poverty, of course. But normative analysis can help to clarify the deep injustice of poor people's exclusion from the processes and structures within government, de-velopment, and other domains in which social and institutional responses to poverty are decided. Recognizing the insights, visions, and contributions of poor-led social movements is important not only for transformative poverty reduction, but as a corrective to what philosopher Kristie Dotson calls "epi-stemic oppression" — namely, practices of "epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production", not all of which are "reducible to social and political forms of oppression."[2] To take seriously the work and knowledge of poor-led movements is then to initiate the process of what post-colonial thinker Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a "historical process of on-tological restoration" consisting in "the identification, reconstruction, and validation of . . . knowledges emerging from or utilized in struggles against domination."[3]

As we have seen, poor-led social movements politicize poverty in crucial ways, exposing and protesting the unjust and exclusionary processes and structures that deny poor people's social and human rights, making them chronically vulnerable to needs deprivation. Through their cooperative orga-nizing and knowledge-sharing, poor-led social movements build the political consciousness and collective capabilities of marginalized communities, ena-bling them to assert their social entitlements to land, housing, food security, and work. Antipoverty activists not only demand greater social and political inclusion, but work to actively democratize structures of urban governance through their innovations in community-led development, participatory

[2] Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2 (2014): 115.

[3] Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 109, 108.

budgeting, co-production of housing and services, and the "communing" of resources like land.[4] At their best, these movements are thus engaged in a project of "deep democracy" in the face of extreme and rising inequalities of wealth and power, particularly in urban areas.[5] On a larger scale, poor-led activism and grassroots social movements of marginalized populations, especially Indigenous peoples in Latin America, have been instrumental in voting into power political parties committed to pro-poor policies like land reform and social protections.

In pursuit of their diverse justice-oriented ends, poor organizations and social movements, as we have seen, undertake a range of collective actions, sometimes working with similar and nearby groups, or in global solidarity networks (e.g., SDI and La Vía Campesina). They do not always engage in overtly political acts, narrowly conceived; some are focused more on improving members' livelihoods and communities' resilience in the face of multiple crises.[6] All poor-led activism, however, depends upon cooperation and forms of collective action, made possible by relationships of solidarity among movement members. The activism of poor-led social movements alone cannot transform the social relations and structures that underpin poverty, however, and to claim otherwise is to engage in wishful thinking. Even modest pro-poor programs and expanded social rights, achieved in part by antipoverty activism, are fragile achievements subject to reversals by governments of the day—as evidenced by cuts to successful pro-poor social protections in Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador.[7] To durably impact social

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[4] "Commoning" is a key concept and practice within what has come to be known as the "solidarity economy." In recent years, grassroots solidarity economy networks (national and international) have become linked under the auspices of the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS). Space prevents me from discussing the extensive research on solidarity economy theory and commoning, and the democratic interventions these represent, but see, for example, J. K. Gibson-Graham, *Take Back the Economy*, and Emily Kawano et al., *Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet* (Amherst, MA: Center for Popular Economics, 2009).

[5] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy."

[6] For a good discussion, see Diana Mitlin, "With and Beyond the State: Co-Production as a Route to Political Influence, Power and Transformation for Grassroots Organizations," *Environment & Urbanization* 20, no. 2 (2008): 339-60.

[7] Under President Bolsanaro, Brazil has seen massive cutbacks in education and health, and reforms to public pensions and labor rights that have deepened the poverty of workers and pensioners. In Bolivia, some of the social protection programs that dramatically reduced poverty under socialist president Evo Moreno were reduced or eliminated after his forced removal from office in late 2019 (though they may be reinstated following the electoral victory of MAS [Movement Towards Socialism] in October 2020). In Ecuador, the poverty rate was reduced by 38%, and extreme poverty cut by 47%, in the period between 2006 and 2016; however, subsequent reversals to the policies responsible for this reduction, such as the cash transfer program Bono de Desarollo Humano,

norms, achieve (and safeguard) social rights and social protections, scale up poor-led initiatives (e.g., in urban planning, development, and production), and transform unjust financial and political institutions, poor-led social movements need allies—both local and global.

I argue in this concluding chapter that a poor-led approach to poverty reduction can best be advanced when differently situated people recognize and take up a *political responsibility for solidarity* with poor-led organizations and social movements. My argument draws on the insights of other theorists who have written about collective responsibilities and solidarity in the face of structural injustice, and is informed by the norms and practices of a range of grassroots, poor-led social movements. While I offer a brief defense and moral grounding of the responsibility for solidarity, my focus is more on the *form* that such solidarity might take, what norms should guide it, and what might help to create and sustain it. I spend much less time justifying this responsibility than is usual in philosophical discussions, largely because I do not think moral arguments of this sort are likely to motivate people to act.[8] Developing justifications of moral duties conceived in abstraction from concrete struggles seems problematic on many counts, not least of which is that it risks repeating the epistemic exclusion of the very people they intended to address. As Ackerly argues,

> We should look not only at what *we who read about these injustices* understand to be the lack of justice in certain actions, but also at what *those who struggle against them* demonstrate are the basis of responsible action. That is, we should learn from what they do and how they do it. . . . From those who engage in this solidarity in ways that demonstrate consciousness of the complexity of the problem, we can learn important insights for thinking anew about political responsibility for injustices by those who are *incompletely* informed: most of us.[9]

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and social spending in health, education, and housing, have resulted in a return to previous poverty levels. See https://cepr.net/press-release/ecuador-after-ten-years-of-president-correa-new-paper-examines-key-indicators-reforms-and-policy-changes/.

[8] See also Goodhart, *Injustice*, esp. 181–82, for a discussion of how justice claims, including claims about moral responsibility, do not stand apart from social power relations or ideology. For an interesting analysis of the lack of evidence regarding "the motivational force of normative concepts," and what kind of empirical research might allow us to test the effectiveness of such concepts for, among other things, motivating action to reduce global poverty, see Matthew Lindauer, "Experimental Philosophy and the "Fruitfulness" of Normative Concepts," *Philosophical Studies* 177 (2020): 2129–52.

[9] Ackerly, *Just Reponsibility*, 65. Her italics.

Despite my misgivings about the usefulness of theory, it is nevertheless valuable to have a broad understanding of *why* there are political responsibilities vis à vis injustices like poverty. Like many other theorists, here I take my cue from Young's social connection model of responsibility, which helps to orient us to difficult questions concerning collective obligations to transform structural injustices. I do not think we have to agree on any single moral grounding for a responsibility for solidarity, however; we can be moral pluralists (within limits), allowing that a human rights–based justification will resonate with some, whereas others may see causal contributions to (and benefiting from) poverty as the most compelling grounding for one's responsibilities.[10] It is more important to provide a clear and compelling account of which practices of collective responsibility-taking can hasten just and progressive poverty eradication than it is to rehearse debates about what grounds moral duties to reduce poverty. Explaining *why solidarity*—as opposed to charity, aid, or institutional-change-from-above—needs to be at the center of our thinking about political responsibilities vis à vis poverty and other injustices is thus the first task. The second one is to show *how diverse agents can act on this responsibility*—or, as Ackerly puts it, how to "take responsibility [in a way] that is grounded in the connected activism of self-advocates and their allies."[11]

In the following, I first clarify why solidarity is the central organizing principle of poor-led organizations and movements, and review how it informs their practices. Following this, I discuss what could ground a political responsibility for solidarity with poor activists, and then discuss some key features and normative criteria of political solidarity. With this sketch in place, I then consider some possible tensions raised by my argument that outsiders—including individuals and organizations with comparative power and privilege—can learn to be effective allies, working in solidarity with poor activists. And finally, I discuss how a political responsibility to act in solidarity with poor-led organizations and social movements might be taken up by differently located (individual and collective) actors in the global North and South. I do not say much about the difficulties of building transnational solidarity networks and the challenges to constructing solidarity across borders of many kinds; a fuller account of how to sustain poor-driven, transnational organizing and social change would need to engage

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[10] See also Ackerly, *Just Reponsibility*, 25.
[11] Ackerly, *Just Reponsibility*, 24.

with these questions (and with the growing body of research that addresses them).[12] I do, however, address concerns about whether a poor-led approach to poverty reduction is compatible with solidaristic support from outsiders or "would-be allies," and offer thoughts on what allyship and solidarity with poor social movements could look like.

6.1. Solidarity as an Organizing Principle for Poor-Led Movements

> I think unity is the key, unity is the key for all people in the settlements. To be able to make a change you have to be united. Speak many, speak in one voice for it to be heard.
>
> —Nancy Njoki, member of the *Muungano wa Wanavijiji* slum dwellers movement of Kenya (Mathare settlement, Nairobi)[13]

Just as poverty is best understood as the outcome of social relations and structures of inequality, so too is grassroots poverty politics a relational phenomenon, for it depends upon building solidaristic ties and shared mobilization practices among poor people. From small self-organizing poor associations claiming social entitlements to housing and public services, to large-scale popular movements of landless workers protesting extreme land inequality and Indigenous groups rejecting unjust IMF-imposed austerity measures,[14] poor-led organizing models the value of "solidarity-with." Solidarity is also essential for groups that aim to improve their members' livelihood—through cooperative production ventures, solidarity-based

[12] See, for example, Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors"; Mitlin, "Making Sure the 'Voices of the Poor' are Heard"; Lawrence Wilde, *Global Solidarity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), ch. 7; Conway, *Edges of Global Justice*; and Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

[13] Quoted in Kate Lines and Jack Makau, "Taking the Long View: 20 Years of Muungano wa Wanavijiji, the Kenyan Federation of Slum Dwellers," *Environment & Urbanization* 30, no. 2 (2018): 407. The organization's name, *Muungano wa Wanavijiji*, means "united slum dwellers" in Kiswahili.

[14] In Ecuador in October 2019, for example, Indigenous groups, along with national student and trade unions, held a series of mass demonstrations to protest austerity measures introduced by President Lenín Moreno to satisfy IMF-imposed conditions on a credit package for the country. A state of emergency ensued, and ultimately the government was forced to repeal the austerity program (Decree 883). See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/03/ecuador-state-of-emergency-fuel-subsidies-protest and https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/13/world/americas/ecuador-protests-lenin-moreno.html.

provisioning, grassroots environmental conservation, and community-led design and delivery of housing and municipal services.

As we saw in chapter four, poor-led social organizations and movements cultivate solidarity in part by appealing to a shared interpretation of common experiences of oppression—as landless rural workers, disenfranchised residents of an urban slum, precarious workers in an exploitative industry, or precarious workers in the informal economy. Through organizing and mobilizing, these experiences, along with a shared location within social structures (of work, housing, production, etc.), give rise to collective political identities that serve as the basis for solidaristic action. As part of the process of building these identities, poor-led social movements seek to clarify members' shared values and why it is in their interest to try to change particular social structures and relations. We know that the sense of solidarity created by poor organizations can often be extended to the "poor and marginalized more generally," as Kabeer and Sulaiman note in connection with Bangladesh's Nijera Kori.[15] Transnational networks of the poor, such as SDI, La Vía Campesina, SEWA, and WIEGO, have also been successful at building solidarity *across* borders through innovative South-South knowledge exchanges and statements of political support with their distant counterparts.[16]

While poor-led organizations and social movements endeavor to develop an ethic and praxis of solidarity *among* their members and those similarly situated (within and beyond national borders), solidarity with outsiders brings formidable challenges. As Weldon observes, "solidarity is easier to build when there is a symmetry, a basis for connection. It is harder to see the mutuality and reciprocity that is so key to solidarity when we stand *for* the other."[17] The difficulty of constructing solidarity across social differences—without shared circumstances or shared identity—may seem to pose fatal obstacles to the construction of solidaristic relationships with nonpoor outsiders. The lack of a *narrow* shared identity, however, is not necessarily a barrier to *political solidarity*, in comparison with ethnic, national, or even civic forms of

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[15] Kabeer and Sulaiman, "Assessing the Impact of Social Mobilization," 57.

[16] Such statements of support are often offered to groups undergoing major struggles such as national strikes, or campaigns against regional free trade agreements. In 2019, La Vía Campesina helped to coordinate demonstrations against the proposed free trade agreement among Southeast Asian nations and China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand—RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). See https://viacampesina.org/en/peasants-and-small-scale-food-producers-in-india-intensify-their-protest-against-rcep/.

[17] Weldon, "Some Complexities of Solidarity," 39.

solidarity. Indeed, solidarity theorists and social movement activists alike caution against relying on identity (narrowly construed) as a central plank in political solidarity building due to the dangers of essentialism and divisiveness. Philosopher Tommie Shelby, for example, urges against grounding Black political solidarity in cultural or ethnic collective identity (much less naturalistic notions of race), and proposes as a better basis the recognition of shared oppression and the identification of collective aspirations.[18] Feminist theorists have similarly cautioned against appeals to a universal notion of womanhood or femaleness as a basis for constructing a transnational feminist movement on the grounds that it is incompatible with, as Chandra Mohanty writes, "building feminist solidarities across divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on."[19] While some poor-led groups—such as those of residents of informal urban settlements—do make claims that reference their status and identity as members of "the poor," they do not do so in such a way as to foreclose the possibility of working in solidarity with other poor organizations, or collaborating with would-be allies.

Poor activists typically invoke shared experiences of marginalization, exploitation, and oppression, as well as common adversaries (obstructive bureaucrats, ineffectual development workers, self-enriching politicians) in seeking to build solidaristic ties with similarly situated others outside their organization or movement. Transnational solidarity movements like SDI, as we saw, point to common experiences of disadvantage and adversity which their counterparts in other countries share.[20] The solidarity they construct across national borders is further cultivated through shared practices of mobilization, like claiming and occupying unused urban land, and community-led data collection. These common circumstances can of course create a shared political identity, but not an insular one that would prohibit allies; as philosopher Andrea Sangiovanni puts it, in solidarity, "the identity follows the action . . . rather than the other way around."[21] The identity constructed

[18] Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), especially ch. 6 and conclusion. Shelby argues that grounding (in-group) political solidarity in shared experiences of injustice makes more sense, and follows Du Bois in proposing to ground Black solidarity in "the common experience of racial injustice and the stigma of being racialized as 'black' " (244).

[19] Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 250.

[20] Blunt similarly notes that "oppression-centered solidarity amongst the global poor is a way of building bridges between otherwise disparate communities based on a common experience of poverty." See his *Poverty, Injustice and Resistance*, 136–37.

[21] Andrea Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (2015): 356.

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through active acknowledgment of shared circumstances of oppression can engender what Young calls "differentiated solidarity": groups working for housing justice, she argues, may associate based on "residential clustering and civic differentiation" but they also "dwell together, whether they like it or not, within a set of problems and relationships of structural interdependence that bring with them obligations of justice."[22] But because the shared circumstances and experiences that enable place-based poor-led groups to build internal solidarity are lacking in the case of solidarity with outsiders, it is important to reflect carefully on how would-be allies can best connect with and support them.

Shifting to a solidarity model of political engagement with poor people's movements requires breaking with older, dominant models of engagement, especially those associated with charity and (traditional) development paradigms.[23] This is no simple matter, however. Development ethicists and practitioners have been grappling with this challenge for a few decades.[24] One of the lessons of postdevelopment critiques, as Matthews notes, is that "addressing poverty and oppression involves not only intervening in the lives of those who are impoverished and oppressed, but also in our own lives, in our ways of seeing and living in the world, in what happens 'here at home.' "[25] As citizens and as academic researchers, we can publicly challenge false beliefs and discourses about poverty (and about poor people), as well as development narratives that treat states, NGOs and INGOs, and transnational financial institutions as benevolent agents of justice, thereby erasing the legacies of racism, colonialism, and slavery.[26] And we can put a spotlight on poor people's movements, and, acting in solidarity with them, help to defend their demands for distributive justice (including reparations and release from sovereign debt), political inclusion, and pro-poor social reforms.

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[22] Iris Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197.

[23] See also Coles, "Moving Democracy," and Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Primer* (New York: Random House, 1971).

[24] As development ethicist Robert Chambers writes, "while we [development workers] have been quick to grasp the potential of concepts such as 'participation,' 'ownership' and empowerment,' we have been slower to recognize the changes these concepts demand of *us*. We have failed to understand that participation by them means nonownership by us. Empowerment for them means disempowerment for us." Chambers, *Provocations for Development* (Rugby, UK: Practical Action, 2012), 45.

[25] Matthews, "Role of the Privileged," 1045. This view is also central to the work of Gibson-Graham, *Postcapitalist Politics*.

[26] See Ferguson, "Epilogue," in *Anti-Politics Machine*, and Matthews, "Role of the Privileged."

6.2. Moral Grounding for a Political Responsibility of Solidarity: Young's Social Connection Model

Iris Young's analysis of political responsibility[27] in the face of structural injustices orients us to the idea of a responsibility for solidarity with those who bear the brunt of the effects of structural injustices. Her social connection model of responsibility emphasizes the need for collective political action by diverse agents: "all those who contribute by their actions to structural processes with some unjust outcomes share responsibility for the injustice. . . . Being responsible in relation to structural injustice means that one has an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust."[28] Transforming injustices that are normalized and embedded in everyday structures—and so which come about through the actions of "many individuals and institutions acting . . . within given institutional rules and accepted norms"[29]—requires simultaneous action on multiple levels because they are held in place by multiple intersecting social processes. There is a shared responsibility to work to transform these injustices, according to Young, in part because no single perpetrator can be held responsible; many agents undertake decisions and actions that conduce to structural injustice merely "by virtue of their social roles or positions," and this is therefore the basis of their forward-looking responsibility.[30]

On Young's account, victims of structural injustice are also agents who have prudential reason and at least some capacity—albeit diminished in contexts of domination—to resist and work to change structures of oppression.[31]

[27] Why is solidarity a political responsibility, not a moral obligation? Young observes that "we lack good conceptual tools for thinking about individual responsibility in relation to structural social processes"; certainly, the notion of individual moral duty is not adequate to the task. The language of political responsibility, in my view, better reflects the relational character of poverty, and the need for collective political action to eradicate it. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 26–27. Both Young and Judith Lichtenberg—in *Distant Strangers: Ethics, Psychology, and Global Poverty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)—eschew the language of moral *duty* in favor of that of responsibility. I follow suit here.

[28] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 96–97.

[29] Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2006): 114.

[30] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 104.

[31] J. L. Schiff reads Young's conception of shared political responsibility differently: namely, as excluding victims of injustice on the grounds that they have no power. Were Young to view power in a less "commodified" and more constitutive way, Schiff argues, her social connection model could include victims of injustice as agents who share responsibility (based on their "capacity to respond"). See Schiff, "Power and Responsibility," in *Political Responsibility Refocused: Thinking Justice after Iris*

A worker in a factory in which wage and labor conditions are subject to negotiation or where collective action (such as unionization) is feasible is one such example. While, as I explain later, I think Young goes too far by arguing that members of oppressed groups have a special responsibility to fight for change if they can—she writes that "it is they who know the most about the harms they suffer, and thus it is up to them, though not them alone, to broadcast their situation and call it injustice"[32]—it remains a valuable feature of her social connection model that it avoids privileging affluent and powerful people as agents of justice.

Importantly, like the relational poverty approach, the social connection model recognizes that unjust structures impact certain social "groups"—such as lower socioeconomic classes, racialized and Indigenous people, women, sexual minorities, some ethnic or religious communities, and migrants. Social and economic processes that exclude, exploit, or oppress particular groups may be held in place by local or national structures, such as discriminatory laws or practices in housing, education, health, employment, and borrowing. Equally, they may be driven by transnational financial interests, as in the case of sweatshop labor in the garment and electronics industries, and communities dispossessed due to resource extraction, development, or massive dam projects. Our overarching political responsibility vis à vis structural injustice, according to Young, is therefore to try to reverse ongoing social, legal, and economic practices and structures that disadvantage, subordinate, and oppress social groups. Merely aiding needy individuals through charity cannot supplant this responsibility, because it leaves unjust structures fully intact—or, in Young's words, it fails to bring "background conditions under evaluation."[33]

A social connection model of responsibility lends support to a poor-led approach to poverty alleviation insofar as it stipulates that shared political responsibility can be "discharged only through collective action." Young rejects the institutionalist view that relies upon states and international institutions to initiate and motivate global justice; if and when these institutions do play

Marion Young, ed. Genevieve Fuji Johnson and Loralea Michaelis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) 44.

[32] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 146. See also Gould's concerns about this aspect of Young's argument, in "Varieties of Global Responsibility: Social Connection, Human Rights, and Transnational Solidarity," in *Dancing with Iris: The Philosophy of Iris Marion Young*, ed. Ann Ferguson and Mechthild Nagel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), at 202–3.

[33] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 105.

an important role in dismantling oppressive structures, it will be because of social movements' success in drawing wider attention to them and demanding institutional reforms and policy changes.[34] In Young's view, which I endorse, only sustained, collective political action by individuals working together in social movements can transform complex and pervasive systems of discrimination, subordination, and exploitation that prevent people from claiming their social entitlements. Although individuals have discretion in deciding what actions to take in discharging their political responsibility, these must not be limited to the merely tokenistic, like merely changing one's consumption pattern so as to align with one's values. Rather, what is key is to engage in actions that are (to the best of our knowledge) effective in producing just outcomes.[35]

Young's model of responsibility may seem somewhat at odds with a poor-led approach to social change insofar as it stipulates that "persons more privileged in and by the structures may have greater and more specific responsibilities to take responsibility for changing the structures."[36] In her view, this is both in recognition of the diminished collective capacities and power of victims of structural injustice, and because active participation in struggles for justice engenders awareness, thus potentially helping to shift privilege and power. Yet if privileged persons may have more extensive responsibilities vis à vis injustices, might this unwittingly displace the poor as agents of justice, landing us back where we started? Young's view that people who are beneficiaries of unjust structures have additional responsibilities to work to transform these is, in my view, consistent with a belief that oppressed groups have a moral right to determine the framing and trajectory of the justice struggle. Our global context of injustice gives rise to a "shared political responsibility to undermine injustice,"[37] but the social connection model rightly rejects the notion that people with means can best dispatch these duties or responsibilities *by acting for (poor) others*, thereby replacing or displacing them as agents of justice in their own right.[38]

[34] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 111, 151.
[35] Young, "Responsibility and Global Labor Justice," 111.
[36] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 186.
[37] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 113.
[38] See also Catherine Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and Caney, "The Right to Resist Global Injustice."

6.3. Political Solidarity: What It Consists in,
and What It Requires

In earlier chapters, I argued that solidarity is the central organizing principle of diverse poor-led groups and movements across the global South. While the definition of political solidarity is contested among theorists and activists, there is convergence on at least some features—and these are useful in illuminating how the poor-led organizations and movements discussed in this book develop and practice solidarity. Political solidarity groups form "in response to a situation of injustice or oppression" and have a unity "based on shared commitment to a cause" rather than "shared attributes"; as such, they typically have "an inherently oppositional nature."[39] When we work in political solidarity with others, the aim is to *transform the structures of injustice*, not merely to relieve the suffering caused by them.[40] Moreover, members of political solidarity groups or movements typically see themselves as collectively "*acting to overcome some significant adversity*."[41] These movements, poor-led ones included, are thus broadly oriented toward shared causes or goals relating to the injustice that group members face. The long-term goals and visions of social justice identified by poor movements—like secure land tenure, home ownership, food sovereignty, social safety nets, and inclusion in urban planning and development—are not always uppermost in the minds of members when crises arise. This larger vision is nevertheless important, for it anchors members' commitment and the political consciousness (and to some extent, the identity) of the solidarity group.

Additional characteristics of political solidarity that are relevant to my discussion of poor-led movements are those of broadly *shared interests*, and a *shared understanding of the oppression and injustice* that their group (slum dwellers, landless peasants, etc.) faces.[42] Acting on shared interests in a context of adversity is especially characteristic of grassroots movements for

[39] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 34–35. Scholz says that political solidarity collectives are *not* unified by "location, or even shared interests"; however, this seems wrong insofar as it would exclude solidarity movements that are place-based and at least partly focused on land or territorial justice, notably those of many Indigenous peoples, landless worker movements, and slum dweller struggles.

[40] Using the example of Haiti in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, Gould argues that a "weak" solidarity, concerned strictly with "the alleviation of suffering," would merely urge humanitarian aid without "concern . . . [for] eliminating oppression or positively achieving justice"; by contrast, transnational political solidarity would address "the various ways in which exploitation, colonialism, and the Haitian itself contributed to the wide-scale misery." Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 125.

[41] Sangiovanni identifies this feature as central to his idea of "solidarity as joint action." See his "Solidarity as Joint Action," 345.

[42] Gould's conception of political solidarity also highlights shared interests; see her "Motivating Solidarity with Distant Others: Empathic Politics, Responsibility, and the Problem of Global Justice,"

land justice (like the MST), housing (like slum dweller groups), food sover-
eignty (La Vía Campesina), and environmental justice (such as the *Narmada
Bachao Andolan* movement protesting the Narmada Dam Project in India),
whose members are similarly situated with respect to the structures that dis-
empower and impoverish them. A common account of the injustice faced
by those in the movement and what is needed to rectify it develops through
practices of grassroots popular education and political consciousness-
raising; as Scholz notes, it often takes a general form, such as the conviction
that what is needed is "liberation from oppression or equitable distribution
of rights and privileges".[43]

As this preliminary description suggests, political solidarity is more than
just a feeling or attitude, but requires *action*.[44] Carol Gould argues that
while solidarity necessarily "involves a form of social empathy, or an un-
derstanding of the distinctive situation and difficulties of other people or
groups," it needs to go "beyond empathic feelings and a commitment to jus-
tice, *to action in support of these others in ways that they judge helpful*."[45]
What counts as action is obviously controversial, particularly as the face of
political activism has changed dramatically with the advent of social media
platforms. Gould provides a more expansive definition of the relevant cri-
teria as "a readiness to take action in support of the others," guided by "the
requirement to allow the others to determine the forms of aid or support
most beneficial to them"; this account, in my view, is more inclusive of the
full range of solidaristic engagements that social movements (poor-led
ones included) invite allies to take up.[46] Importantly, while we usually make
commitments as individuals to engage in political solidarity with others, it
is in response to an understanding that transforming the injustice at hand
demands cooperation and collective action.[47] I will return to this point
in my discussion of Young's social connection model of responsibility, in
which solidarity features centrally.

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in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Justice*, ed. Thom Brooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2020), 135.

[43] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 34.

[44] Young is clear that acting in solidarity with groups that are suffering from the harms of structural
injustices, and who are working to resist and change those structures, means moving far beyond the
symbolic. See her *Responsibility for Justice*, 111.

[45] Gould, "Varieties of Global Responsibility," 209–10. My italics.

[46] Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 111.

[47] See also Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 34–35, and Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 111–13.

Political solidarity, as described so far, applies to many kinds of poor-led groups. Justice-seeking collectives with no (or few) outsiders/allies, practice political solidarity when they unite with individuals eking out a livelihood in similar ways (e.g., a small waste pickers' cooperative), or residing in particular place (e.g., residents of an urban informal settlement). Poor-led organizations and transnational social movements that welcome the participation of nonpoor allies, both nearby and geographically distant, are also engaged in political solidarity; the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and SDI, for example, are the global solidarity network counterparts of the local waste pickers' solidarity cooperative and local slum dwellers' association. Solidarity with those who are outsiders to the struggle can be complicated and potentially fraught, but many poor-led movements nevertheless seek allies of many kinds in order to assist them with specific tasks, or to amplify and scale up their work.

One of the most important clarifications to make in defining political solidarity is that it excludes situations in which a would-be ally acts *on behalf* of a group (or individuals) suffering injustice, instead of engaging cooperatively with the organization or social movement in question. Kolers rightly notes that this would not count as solidarity: "a supporter *s* is in solidarity . . . not when *s* acts on the best account of *G*'s interests, or when *s* does whatever is most likely to achieve *G*'s interests, or still less when *s* does what *s* *believes* to be in *G*'s interests, but when *s* manifests support for *G*'s action, or does what *G* asks supporters to do."[48] Acting "on behalf" of others—rather than acting *with* them, in support of them, or at their behest—lacks reciprocity, "receptivity," and the "empathetic or generous" kind of recognition needed to demonstrate respect for the other's agency.[49] In this way, a solidaristic stance expresses humility and mutuality, as Scholz explains: whereas "charity is usually one-sided . . . mutuality assumes participants in solidarity are 'working with' rather than 'working for' those who suffer injustice or oppression."[50] Genuine solidarity thus requires *treating with respect* those with whom one is in solidarity. Addressing political solidarity within national contexts, philosopher Meena Krishnamurthy argues that "an individual might, like her/his fellow citizens, be committed to ending injustice, believe that the injustice

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[48] Avery Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 33.
[49] Gould, "Varieties of Global Responsibility," 210, and Gould, "Motivating Solidarity," 130.
[50] Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 93.

can be overcome and, in turn, might act along with her/his fellow citizens to satisfy this commitment, but if she/he fails to treat them with respect . . . then this would not be a genuine instance of political solidarity."[51]

The call for would-be allies to listen deeply to those at the center of a solidarity movement, and to allow their participation to be guided by them, has long been expressed by anti-oppression struggles, notably those of Black, racialized, and Indigenous peoples, as well as disability justice groups. These movements have generated distinctive practices and models of solidarity, about which activists and intellectuals within these communities have written and spoken. For example, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, reflecting on the "Idle No More" movement of Indigenous peoples, writes of the idea of "constellations of coresistance" that gradually came together to form a broader, international Indigenous resurgence movement bound by norms of genuine communication, "accountability to each other, and shared decision-making practices."[52] For outsiders to a struggle, however, the stipulation that they listen and follow the lead of those who are oppressed is not only an expression of moral respect and mutuality; it is also an essential safeguard against outsiders doing harm in the course of attempting to act in solidaristic, possibly undercutting a movement's objectives (or even their authority). One practical way to guard against unwanted interference and to help ensure that a poor-led movement remains directed by its grassroots members is to insist that would-be allies adopt a stance of *deference*. Such an attitude also signals that the outsider recognizes that the lived experiences, insights, intentions, and aims of those at the center of a struggle should take priority in movement planning. As Gould notes, this "deference to their agency" requires that "those standing in solidarity [should] exhibit a deference to those that they are trying to help in their efforts, who are to take the lead in these processes."[53] Kolers similarly describes solidarity "as a principle of equity requiring that we side with the least well off," including "follow[ing] the lead of organised out-groups and defer[ing] to their judgement about collective actions to overcome injustice."[54] Although there are circumstances

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[51] Meena Krishnamurthy, "Political Solidarity, Justice and Public Health," *Public Health Ethics* 6, no. 2 (2013): 131.

[52] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. 218. Simpson argues that these "constellations are place-based relationships, and land-based relationships are the foundation of Indigenous thought" (213).

[53] Gould, "Motivating Solidarity," 131, 124.

[54] Avery Kolers, "The Priority of Solidarity to Justice," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (2014): 420.

where such deference would be counterproductive or wrong—e.g., when it would forseeably lead to oppression of others—it is, I argue, an important bulwark against the co-optation or control by nonpoor outsiders.

Deferring to solidarity groups' accounts of what they need is clearly critical, as those who suffer oppression directly, and who are engaged in struggle, "are usually best able to say what support they wish and expect to benefit from."[55] While it seems obvious that it should be up to the political solidarity group to say what specific forms of support and action it wants from allies, should this deference *also* apply to the matter of the movement's broader goals and strategies? That is, should the principle of deference require an individual "to put aside some range of his own judgments about aims, methods, facts, or values, in favor of someone else's or a group's," as Kolers argues?[56] While Kolers sees acting in solidarity in the face of disagreement as the paradigmatic example of genuine solidarity—or what he calls "political action on others' terms"[57]— this description seems less relevant to the poor-led movements I have discussed in this book. Successful collaborations between poor-led organizations and allies—who include development professionals, researchers, and "outside" activists—often depend upon allies contributing substantively to questions relating to organizational or movement strategy (and sometimes goals). Nevertheless, as a general rule of thumb, a stance of deference on these issues is arguably important given the potential for comparatively advantaged allies to transpose their own agenda onto a grassroots, justice-seeking group.[58]

There is one final feature—and normative criterion—of political solidarity relevant to my discussion of poor-led social movements, and that is that it *entails a sharing of the risks and burdens of political struggle*. This point is related to the requirements of action and deference, but not reducible to them. Some thinkers tie the idea of shared risks to that of shared fate: Sangiovanni, for example, argues that solidarity consists in being "disposed (a) to incur significant costs to realize our goal; and (b) to share one another's fates in

[55] Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 111.
[56] Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*, 39.
[57] Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*, 7.
[58] In defending a principle of deference, Kolers is especially concerned to show that solidarity demands a commitment to "particular others," not to "antedecently shared goals." Avery Kolers, "Solidarity as Environmental Justice in Brownfields Remediation," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 21, no. 5 (2018): 12 and 9. My view (which parallels those of Scholz and Gould) is that there is more fluidity between these commitments, and that sometimes political solidarity takes a form that is more goal-driven.

ways relevant to the shared goal."[59] Young's social connection model of responsibility also highlights the need for would-be allies to share the risks and burdens associated with the work of transforming unjust structures. The question of which kinds and degrees of burdens and risks, and what limiting factors or special circumstances may abridge allies' responsibility to share them, is a large one, and difficult to answer outside of particular contexts.[60] Ultimately, however, it requires sharing the labor of struggles to transform unjust social structures, and accepting that this work may alter important aspects of one's life. Sharing fate with those in struggles also arguably requires that allies take steps to divest of (or redirect) privileges they enjoy by virtue of their social location within manifestly unjust social structures, in contexts where others are denied them. As Young writes in the closing lines of *Responsibility for Justice*, people occupying a privileged position "can properly be called to a special moral and political responsibility . . . to act on an obligation to work on transforming the institutions that offer this privilege, even if this means worsening one's own conditions and opportunities compared to what they would have been."[61] What is clear is that sharing risks and burdens in a context of genuine political solidarity demands that one be willing take action in support of the other, despite the costs and hardships that this might entail.

6.4. Why a Political Responsibility for Solidarity Is Compatible with Poor-Led Social Change

My claim that outsiders can and should act as allies with poor-led groups and movements, supporting their struggles in concrete ways, may seem to

[59] Sangiovanni, "Solidarity as Joint Action," 343.
[60] Caney argues that those who contribute the most to a given injustice, and who are deemed morally responsible, can readily be expected to "be disadvantaged through acts of resistance"—bearing the costs, for example, of "financial burdens or blockades." Moreover, "it can [also] be appropriate to impose burdens on some even if they are not imposing injustice on others if they nonetheless have more than their fair share." He gives the examples of a British farmer whose profits are augmented by unjust trade barriers, who can justifiably be expected to shoulder the financial loss associated with the illegal trade that "resistors" engage in. Moreover, an "illegal strike . . . may impose burdens on some who are neither contributors to, nor beneficiaries of, injustice. Nonetheless, if the harm to the third parties is sufficiently small when compared to the importance of the cause then such action can be justified." But neither the farmer nor the banker whose car is stuck in a blockade are seeking to act in solidarity with those engaged in the political action, so it holds little guidance for considering the question of what burdens would-be allies can be expected to shoulder. See Caney, "Responding to Global Injustice," 68–70.
[61] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 187.

stand in tension with my argument that organized poor communities and social movements ought to shape antipoverty strategies. It may also seem at odds with my emphasis on the importance of poor self-empowerment and self-emancipation for transformative poverty reduction.[62] In response, I would argue that when allies act in accordance with norms of mutuality, deference, deep listening, and a willingness to share the burdens and risks of collective action, they can contribute constructively to the causes of organized poor communities and movements.[63] There are additional reasons why we should not assume that the solidaristic support of outsiders will derail the vision or efforts of poor-led associations or movements—and indeed, reason to think that such support may be vital for larger successes (like impacting social policy). First and most obviously, where poor activists face seemingly insurmountable constraints and obstacles, the intervention of outsiders acting in solidarity may be needed to prevent gross human rights violations against activists.[64] In contexts of pervasive yet normalized injustice, where inequalities of power are stark, the expressed outrage and constructive engagement of outside allies may be critical in calling authorities to account for systemic inequalities and oppression, unjust distribution of resources, political exclusion, and so forth. Second, poor organizations and movements often deliberately solicit the solidaristic assistance of outsiders, seeking their support in drawing attention to injustices they suffer; helping to amplify their cause and demands; and even helping to build up the organizational capacity of the movement.[65] And third, as we saw in Chapter 5, new models of allyship have evolved within poor-led social movements that instantiate norms of mutuality, equal respect, and deference.

Many of the actions proposed by global justice theorists in aid of the global poor are, *prima facie*, compatible with a political responsibility for solidarity with poor-led movements—*provided allies undertake them in relation or dialogue with poor activists, and with greater accountability to them.* Indeed,

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[62] A similar charge is often made in connection with grassroots, community-led development.

[63] An example of a movement that instantiates these norms is provided by Luis Cabrera, in his discussion of the desert humanitarian movement along the Arizona stretch of the US-Mexico border (especially the group No More Deaths). Cabrera describes the solidarity work of volunteers (on the US side of the border) who provide assistance to desert crossers as evoking a "partnership frame": "all persons are seen as co-equal partners in shared efforts to secure core rights. All have both rights and corresponding duties, with duties distributed according to ability and, in the present system, willingness to discharge." Cabrera, *Practice of Global Citizenship*, 154.

[64] See also Gould, "Motivating Solidarity," 135.

[65] See also Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*, 53.

several are ones that such movements have long enjoined would-be allies—more privileged fellow citizens, global citizens, progressive politicians, NGOs, INGOs—to take up. Most obviously, allies can denounce and work to change the structures and processes that underpin an unjust global economic order,[66] by (for example) pushing for stricter labor regulations to protect exploited workers, or fairer trade agreements that do not disadvantage poor countries,[67] or poor farmers. They can also pressure multilateral lenders to release poor countries from sovereign debt, the weight of which prevents governments from increasing public spending on health, education, employment, social protection programs, and environmental mitigations. Relatedly, allies in rich countries can demand that their governments reject attempts to impose IMF-directed austerity programs on poor and middle-income countries, which also hamper pro-poor public spending. In solidarity with exploited workers and their social movements, allies can, and have, organized campaigns for divestment from exploitative industries and advocated for protections for workers in export-processing zones (and sanctions for countries that violate these).

Would-be allies can stand in solidarity with poor-led organizations and movements by exposing and opposing efforts by governments and corporations to discredit, weaken, sabotage, or repress such movements. They can demand that their own countries not support governments that direct their military and police to crack down on popular social struggles, and they can also work to counter disinformation campaigns against specific poor-led movements. As philosopher Gillian Brock notes, "developed world actors . . . undermine the empowerment of citizens [in developing states] by failing to support an international and domestic environment conducive to accountability, self-organization, and freedom of expression.[68] Transnational initiatives to defend the rights of workers and poor social movements to organize politically, free from repression by states and multinational corporations, are generally welcomed; such violence can also be exposed

[66] See also Alison Jaggar, "Transnational Cycles of Gendered Vulnerability," *Philosophical Topics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 33–52; Jaggar, "'Saving Amina': Global Justice for Women and Intercultural Dialogue," *Ethics & International Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2005): 55–75; Jaggar, "A Feminist Critique of the Alleged Southern Debt," *Hypatia* 17, no. 4 (2002): 119–42. Also see Serene Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), and her essay "Why Are Poor Women Poor?," *New York Times*, September 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/11/opinion/why-are-poor-women-poor.html.

[67] See also Nicole Hassoun, *Globalization and Global Justice: Shrinking Distance, Expanding Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 6, "Making Free Trade Fair."

[68] Brock, "Global Poverty, Decent Work," 128–29.

and denounced retrospectively.[69] For example, Mining Watch Canada tracks human rights violations against Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities facing pressures from mining companies (especially Canadian ones) and advocates for community-led negotiations around all matters related to mining development.

In broad support of poor-inclusive development and social planning, allies can also pressure their governments and international financial institutions to reverse the trend of defunding development NGOs that focus on social and political empowerment; and they can urge their own governments' development agencies to adopt a pro-poor, community-driven focus in their own international development programs. Moreover, they can advocate for INGOs like Oxfam to pursue pro-poor, poor-led development programs, and criticize private philanthropic agencies whose practices are incompatible with the approaches and goals of poor-led social movements.[70] Acting in these ways, allies can help to change the domestic and international political environments so as to make them more receptive to the demands and aims of poor-led social movements—without undercutting the work these movements do.[71] People with means and comparative privilege can actively advocate for the causes of economically marginalized and racialized communities in their own countries; grassroots poor movements in high-income states have a long history of engaging in solidarity projects with their counterpart movements abroad, and this cooperation benefits from political support.[72] The support of middle-class allies is especially critical in helping to create public pressure for the state to recognize poor citizens' social rights and entitlements by introducing social protection programs, land reform,

[69] For example, the brutal repression of poor people protesting the ousting (with US support) of socialist president Evo Morales and the *Movimiento al Socialismo* was denounced in an open letter, signed by over 800 academics, political leaders, and public intellectuals, published in *The Guardian* and elsewhere: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/24/bolivia-anez-regime-violence.

[70] See also Priyanthi Fernando, "Working with Social Movements," 251. See also, in the same report, the "Executive Summary," for how donors can work with and support social empowerment groups.

[71] The importance of allies in strengthening and especially expanding the reach of social movements is well established in social movement studies research. See Laurence Cox, *Why Social Movements Matter: An Introduction* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

[72] Some examples of transnational movements of economically marginalized people include ACORN International (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, operating in countries in the global North and South), as well as global union federations that encompass formal and informal economy workers in a particular sector (like transportation). For an account of the connections between Black civil rights movements in the United States and anti-colonial struggles globally, and why this is significant for global justice, see Valdez, "Associations, Reciprocity, and Emancipation."

labor legislation, and so on.[73] Argentina's unemployed workers movement, as we saw earlier, was greatly strengthened by active expressions of political solidarity from middle-class compatriots, who participated in large numbers in the mass strikes and demonstrations.

As these examples suggest, solidarity benefits from infrastructure as well as political and tactical support; mere interpersonal sentiments and symbolic gestures do little, if anything, to sustain solidarity. The work of poor-led social movements can be supported by solidaristic assistance from outside allies, provided their contributions are constructive, and they engage in ways that respect the moral authority of the movement members and heed their account of how best to support them. Accepting outsiders' support is not without risks; the harms of "shallow" and misconceived forms of solidarity are great and can seriously undercut the aims of social justice movements.[74] Yet neither is neglecting one's political responsibilities vis à vis the unjust global economic, political, and environmental processes that one is bound up with (and may benefit from) the right response.[75] The reality is that robust and reciprocal forms of solidarity have for some time been evolving through collaborations between grassroots poor-led groups and movements, progressive development NGOs, and activist-researchers, among others. Legal and financial assistance from progressive NGOs, INGOs, and allied movements (e.g., trade unions) has been crucial in strengthening the organizational capacity of movements of residents of slum/informal settlements and self-employed women workers, as the examples of SDI-affiliated groups and SEWA demonstrated.

To concretize how outsiders can act as allies in support of movements against poverty and subordination without undercutting the work or authority of those groups, it is useful to consider a specific case. Here I will develop a hard example, that of struggles by Indigenous peoples in Canada to eradicate their communities' crises in housing, education, and health—all caused by structural inequalities resulting from domestic colonialism and racialized oppression—at the same time as securing more far-reaching forms of self-government and reconciliation. Canada's racist legacy of domestic

[73] See also Ypi, *Global Justice and Avant-Garde Political Agency*, 170.
[74] Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Grounded Normativity/Place-Based Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 252.
[75] See also Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, and Matthews, "The Role of the Privileged in Responding to Poverty."

colonization and its ongoing structures, like the Indian Act, has resulted in one in four Indigenous people living in poverty (fully 53% of children living on reserves), as well as high rates of housing and food insecurity, unemployment, ill health, substance abuse, and suicide; there is also an alarmingly high percentage of children taken into child welfare custody in these communities/among these families.[76] There is an extensive list of inequities and intersecting injustices that contribute to what we might call "intersectional poverty": less wealth and fewer assets among Indigenous peoples due partly to loss of access to land and resources following colonization;[77] large, long-standing inequalities in funding for on-reserve child welfare services;[78] an acute housing shortage that has gone unaddressed by successive federal governments, resulting in high rates of homelessness among Indigenous peoples; the state's long-standing failure to ensure safe water and sanitation systems on reserves (a water pollution rate of 73%); unequal and woefully inadequate levels of education funding for schooling on reserves, resulting in 6 out of 10 of on-reserve children not completing high school;[79] inadequate health services, especially for mental health; systemic discrimination and racism in employment; and dramatically higher rates of violence against Indigenous peoples, including homicide.[80] No single institutional solution will suffice, nor will legal remedies alone reverse these structural injustices. Despite a 2016 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling that the federal government's underfunding of on-reserve child welfare services is discriminatory, for example, the gap persists, with the government continuing to fight the compensation order.[81]

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[76] See https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-half-of-indigenous-children-live-in-poverty-highest-rate-of-child/.

[77] First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities also have less access to capital for economic development, due in part to regulations around Indigenous land and resource use: https://nacca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NAEDB_ImprovingAccessToCapital.pdf.

[78] See for example: https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/child-welfare-on-reserve-compensation-1.5272667.

[79] https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-students-face-continued-funding-shortfalls-1.4267540.

[80] The social, economic, and psychological legacy of colonialization has been publicly acknowledged in recent years: by the federal commission on the abusive residential school system which has resulted in the sequelae of broken families, high rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, and suicide. See http://www.trc.ca/about-us.html. And it has been further affirmed by the National Inquiry Into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women: https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca.

[81] See https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/human-rights-tribunal-liberal-child-welfare-appeal-1.5308897; https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-federal-government-challenges-human-rights-tribunal-on-indigenous/; https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/child-welfare-on-reserve-compensation-1.5272667; and https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/fn-children-ottawa-1.5102627.

From the perspective of a social connection model of political responsi-
bility, the pervasiveness of structural injustices and the entrenched interests
that defend them demand a multilateral, multi-agent response: concerted,
collective action by an array of agents (individual and group) willing to
shame, pressure, and actively work to change the various social, legal, and po-
litical institutions that underpin the poverty of so many Indigenous people.
But while Young's model allows us to see the importance of taking collec-
tive responsibility for structural injustice, and rightly points to the need for
solidaristic collective action to effect real change, she says little about how
those with comparative power and privilege can act in solidarity without dis-
placing or eclipsing the activism of those who suffer injustice. Reflecting on
this gap, and addressing questions about solidarity with Indigenous peoples
in Canada, political theorist Melissa Williams cautions that one risk of a no-
tion of a responsibility as solidarity "is the possibility that it will too easily col-
lapse back onto a colonial relationship in which European understandings of
development and capability become the metric for the exercise of Indigenous
capacities. Paternalism is not solidarity."[82] In fleshing out what a political
responsibility to solidarity could entail, Williams proposes that we heed
Young's insight that structural injustices place subordinated social groups
(in Young's words) "under systematic threat of domination or deprivation
of the means to develop and exercise their capacities."[83] As such, Williams
argues that "within a project of Canadian decolonization," there exists a "re-
sponsibility to support Indigenous communities in their efforts to exercise
and develop the capacities that they regard as most relevant for recovering
and enhancing their agency both as individuals and as communities."[84]
Concretely, this means that allies seeking to work in support of goals identi-
fied by Indigenous communities and movements must do so on terms spec-
ified by those communities, and which align with the aims of Indigenous
organizations (such as land restitution, honoring of treaties, fulfilment of
Indigenous and human rights, and self-governance). As Williams further
notes, in supporting Indigenous peoples, it is "vital that non-Indigenous
support of Indigenous capacity building be led by Indigenous people's own
definition of the capabilities they seek to exercise and develop, and their
identification of the developmental resources."[85]

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[82] Melissa Williams, "Political Responsibility for Decolonization in Canada," in Johnson and
Michaelis, eds., *Political Responsibility Refocused*, 95.

[83] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 52.

[84] Williams, "Political Responsibility for Decolonization in Canada," 95.

[85] Williams, "Political Responsibility for Decolonization in Canada," 95.

Williams's discussion of settlers' responsibilities thus rightly holds settlers or nonIndigenous Canadians accountable for working on behalf of Indigenous peoples' causes and in support of the collective capacities they seek to develop. Applying Williams's analysis to the issue of global poverty, we could say that those with comparative privilege and capability have a responsibility to work in solidarity with poor activists, supporting *their efforts* to organize and advocate effectively for pro-poor social change. We have seen that while poor community groups and social movements are often able to develop considerable internal solidarity, their social marginalization and political exclusion frequently deprive them of the resources and opportunities needed to consolidate and scale up their collective struggles.[86] A core part of what poor-led social movements therefore do (as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5) is to build up the collective political capabilities of people who live in poverty, thus enabling them to protest injustices and develop alternative, pro-poor visions and practices. To the extent that it is possible (and welcomed), therefore, persons with means, knowledge, and comparative power could assist and support poor groups in developing their political capabilities and help to amplify their justice struggles.[87] Would-be allies need to take their lead from the poor activists that are waging these struggles, and ask them whether and how they can best assist. This does not always mean allies will play only an ancillary role; sometimes movements will call on them to step up and risk more so that those most vulnerable do not have to continue to do so. Those who wish to work in political solidarity with poor-led movements must be committed to helping to secure justice for those whose lives and futures are at the center of the justice struggle, and be prepared to take action that supports movement members' human rights and their capability to engage in collective political action.

6.5. Why Poor-Led Social Movements Seek Allies

When we think in terms of a political responsibility for solidarity, we open up a wider aperture for considering the concrete ways that diverse agents might

[86] See Sheilah Meikle, "The Urban Context and Poor People," in *Urban Livelihoods: A People-Centred Approach to Reducing Poverty*, ed. Carole Rakodi with Tony Lloyd Jones (London: Earthscan, 2002), 42.

[87] See also Jérôme Ballet, Jean-Luc Dubois, and François-Régis Mahieu, "Responsibility for Each Other's Freedom: Agency as the Source of Collective Capability," *Journal of Human Development* 8, no. 2 (2007): 185–201.

act in support of people struggling against structural injustices. While norms of mutuality, deference, and a willingness to share the burdens and risks of struggle do discourage certain familiar, yet inadequate, actions in support of others (e.g., donating to international charities that ignore the input of the communities they purport to help), they also open up new channels of engagement. The norms at the core of the ideal of political responsibility as solidarity are best supported and reinforced when solidarity is practiced within activist networks in which empathic and egalitarian relationships are cultivated and nurtured, as Gould, among others, has argued.[88] Within these relationships—which may be virtual or face-to-face—would-be allies may be asked to step aside so as to let the voices of oppressed individuals be heard loud and clear; at other times, they may be asked to put their own resources and safety on the line. Outsiders and allies may be irrelevant to some aspects of the work of a solidarity group—at least for a time—as in the case of some solidarity provisioning or cooperatives. While political solidarity can, for principled and pragmatic reasons, sometimes take a more closed and local form, the scope and nature of global injustices require the development of cross-border solidarity networks across a range of issues.

Understanding what kind of support poor-led social movements seek is fundamental to any sound discussion of the solidaristic political responsibilities of those with comparative means and privilege. Whether or not particular poor-led movements welcome the support of nonpoor individuals and agencies depends on many factors: the struggle's framing narratives, its stage of development (including whether the movement is seeking greater self-reliance), members' degree of trust in would-be allies, and the kinds of resources and political opportunities the group needs. The MST sought, and cultivated, a very broad base of public support in Brazil, for example, using this to increase its political credibility and influence. Yet the class-based framing of problems of poverty and exploitation that contributed to solidarity *among* movement members necessarily excluded wealthy landowners or capitalists as feasible allies.[89] Social movements, including those of the poor, are oftentimes concerned "to resist pressure from above . . . [especially] attempts at demobilization, co-optation, division, and repression."[90] And yet,

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[88] Specifically, I have in mind Gould's idea of "a network notion [of solidarity] made up of overlapping relationships among particular individuals and groups feeling empathy with each other and standing ready to give mutual aid to each other to counter oppression or relieve suffering." Gould, *Interactive Democracy*, 120.

[89] Wolford, "Producing Community," 518.

[90] Cox, *Why Social Movements Matter*, 71.

to grow and consolidate, grassroots, self-organizing poor groups and social movements do often seek out, and benefit from, the assistance and ally-ship of nonpoor outsiders, such as sympathetic NGOs, global solidarity networks, the help of national political parties, state development agencies, and occasionally, funding from global philanthropies that recognize the value of their movements.[91]

Effective social movements of poor people, like the grassroots antipoverty coalitions and global anti-sweatshop movement that Young discusses, do frequently include nonpoor allies—"outsiders" or comparatively privileged individuals who have stepped up to take shared responsibility for changing injustices. For example, SDI, in its statement of "our practices for change," asserts that

> SDI federations cannot address informal settlement challenges on their own, but they can catalyse change. The key to reaching community driven development at scale is *the inclusion of external partners*. SDI engages with governments, international organisations, academia and other institutions wherever possible to create relationships that benefit the urban poor. By opening space for slum dwellers to engage in international advocacy at the global level, and by drawing international partners into local processes through key local events, opportunities are created for key partnerships to develop that can impact at both the local and global level. Ultimately, the aim is to create situations in which the urban poor are able to play a central role in "co-producing" access to land, services, and housing.[92]

It is important to see that these alliances with what SDI calls "external partners" are driven more by the need to overcome *structural obstacles to poor-led organizing* than they are by internal deficiencies, however. The latter assumption is based on persistent, yet false, stereotypes; as longtime SDI activist-organizer Sheela Patel writes,

> [There] has been a general assumption that informality and poverty equal disorganization. From there it is a small step to a point of view that asserts

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[91] For example, Swedish International Development Agency funds cooperative urban slum housing organizations in Kenya and other countries, as part of its Sustainable Cities program. And the Skoll Foundation—a philanthropy founded by the first eBay president (Jeff Skoll) that funds "social entrepreneurs and innovators" whose work supports far-reaching change—has given financial support to SDI: http://skoll.org/organization/slum-dwellers-international/.

[92] See https://knowyourcity.info/our-practices-for-change/ (my italics).

that poor people create the problems and that educated professionals from the formal sector and Governments have to provide the solutions. In reality there are huge numbers of community organizations. Their leaders are often resentful that their needs get represented by others and that the ability to voice challenges and solutions themselves is never possible. In many ways SDI is a response to this challenge.[93]

The precise form of support that poor groups seek is highly context-dependent; thus, while I give examples in the following of concrete ways that nonpoor outsiders (including co-nationals) can assist, these will not apply in all cases and indeed may be counterproductive in some instances. The key idea is to support poor organizations building their political capabilities in the ways that they seek, and in ways that support the collective self-direction and leadership of poor people. As noted earlier, helping to shape the political environment or social climate to make it more receptive to poor communities' messages is something that privileged citizens and academic researchers can do. Local and global allies can work to combat false public narratives or beliefs about poverty (and about poor people), defend the rights of specific poor-led movements under attack, and expose repression of poor communities and activists. As Bebbington writes, "victories in these wars over ideas about poverty are only ever temporary. The inherent fragilities of social movements help explain why counterhegemonic ideas might rise, and then fall, ceding ground once again to old accepted notions. Counter-discourses need . . . actors to keep them present in public debates, and to continue giving them legitimacy. When movements enter into demise, the counter-discourses that they had fashioned and projected quickly follow."[94]

Social movement theory helps to explain why the political and institutional environment or context in which movements emerge is so crucial, and why and what kinds of resources affect movements' success.[95] In particular, "resource mobilization" and "political opportunities" theories are broadly relevant to the question of what poor-led movements need to succeed. Resource mobilization theory stresses "the importance of organizational structures

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[93] Sheela Patel, SDI website: https://knowyourcity.info/governance/.

[94] Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 813–14.

[95] I take a "toolkit" approach in my discussion of social movement theories, and do not provide a critical analysis or even an all-things-considered appraisal of them.

and resource accumulation for mobilization: social movements and movement organizations have to acquire resources in terms of money, personnel, organization, and external support."[96] Although adequate resources in these areas in no way ensure movements' success, they are necessary to sustain and scale up poor groups' organizing. Similarly, the idea of "political opportunity structure" refers to how particular "features of regimes and institutions"—such as whether there are decentralized "centers of power"; whether the political elite is cohesive or fractured; "the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making"; and whether there exists effective recourse to international human rights instruments—affect marginalized groups' prospects for collective mobilization.[97]

Poor-led organizations often look to build partnerships with NGOs, and less commonly to affiliate with political parties, as part of a long-term strategy to advance their causes. They may be prompted to do so because they lack resources or expertise, or face barriers that prevent them from being seen as legitimate stakeholders or included in decision-making about matters affecting their communities. As activist-researchers working with SDI observe, "communities of the poor are seldom seen as producers of solutions. It takes many kinds of capacity building from inside social movements for them to rise to the point of being able to demand a place at the decision-making table."[98] Aside from partnering with development NGOs and, more rarely, affiliating with political parties, poor-led groups and movements sometimes seek tactical assistance from seasoned activists in other social movements.[99] In the next section, I discuss the benefits and perils of partnerships between poor-led organizations or movements and NGOs, and of affiliating with political parties.

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[96] Bettina Engels, "Struggles against the High Cost of Living in Burkina Faso," in *Demanding Justice in the Global South: Claiming Rights*, ed. Jean Grugel, Jewellord Nem Singh, Lorenza B. Fontana, and Anders Uhlin (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature [Palgrave Macmillan], 2017), 24.

[97] Tarrow and Tilly, "Contentious Politics and Social Movements," 440.

[98] Patel et al., "Knowledge Is Power," 26. The concrete example that these SDI authors discuss is that of building up Indian slum/shack dweller groups' capacity to undertake community-led enumerations, mapping, and surveys—a capacity which they argue is, for these groups, "one of the most powerful ways of achieving [the] goal" of political inclusion (26).

[99] In recent years, several global activist consultancies have emerged that are dedicated to helping "grow" social movements of marginalized groups: "Culture Hack Labs," which has helped the Mexico City–area Indigenous rights and land group "#YoPrefieroElLago" to expand its political reach; and the activist network known as "/The Rules," now defunct, which worked directly with grassroots social movements seeking to change narratives about poverty and development. See https://www.culturehack.io/#Purpose and https://therules.org/.

6.6. Some Ways That Nonpoor Allies Can and Do Act in Solidarity with Poor-Led Movements

The partnerships that poor-led social movements build with NGOs are crucial for increasing their organizational capacity and scope of influence. Many, such as slum dweller movements, partner with NGOs once they have begun to grow as a movement and need outside expertise and support; other poor-led movements, however, arise in the first instance through the combined activism of poor communities working with activist-oriented NGOs. Nijera Kori, the landless poor empowerment group in Bangladesh, is an example of this, as is SEWA, the union of self-employed, informal women workers in India that has grown to over 2 million members. In Thailand, a national movement of the rural and urban poor—the Assembly of the Poor, founded in 1995—emerged through the organizing efforts of student activists working for domestic, chiefly environmental, NGOs.[100] In cases such as these, where grassroots, activist-oriented NGOs organize people living in poverty or form close alliances with poor collectives, there is no clear bright line between the NGO and the poor-led movement.[101]

When more established poor organizations seek out (in a more deliberate or formal manner) an NGO with which to partner, it is mainly because they need help building organizational capacity and assistance with accessing channels of power. Poor collectives often face constraints when attempting to secure funding, for example, and NGOs can assist with this.[102] Partnering with (typically domestic) NGOs can also help poor groups and their broader social movements (like SDI) to attain public credibility, presenting them as legitimate stakeholders and agents of justice.[103] SDI federations and the

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[100] Thak Chaloemtiarana, "The Assembly of the Poor in Thailand" (review), *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 3 (2005): 801.

[101] For example, one ethnographer describes the Assembly of the Poor as "a coalition of villagers' groups, urban slum dwellers and NGOs campaigning on environmental and local livelihood issues" which has unified "a large number of local struggles into a broader, unified and self-sustaining social movement able to campaign at the national level." See Bruce Missingham, "Forging Solidarity and Identity in the Assembly of the Poor: From Local Struggles to a National Social Movement in Thailand," *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 3 (2003): 317, 318.

[102] According to Bolnick, "donor agencies and financial institutions simply refuse to enter into direct financial relationships with very poor, generally illiterate slum dwellers—either individually or as collectives." Bolnick, "Development as Reform and Counter-reform," 325.

[103] We can see how a stance of deference, when practiced as part of political solidarity, can reinforce the process of credibility-building that characterizes the NGO–poor-led organization relationship. Recall that according to Kolers, to be in solidarity with a subordinated group demands that one defer to the judgment of the group waging a struggle: "structural deference to those who suffer inequity thus cuts through epistemic and other biases that give undue weight to the testimonies and interests of those who occupy positions of power" (Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*, 125).

slum associations that they comprise, for example, often partner with NGOs that can help them build relationships with local state officials and facilitate meetings with government officials to address problems faced by slum/shack and implement pro-poor solutions (like co-production of housing and sanitation services). They also partner with domestic NGOs that can help them with specific organizational tasks, like financial monitoring, technical design (e.g., of the slum profiling and enumeration processes), research, and data collecting.

Might collaborating with NGOs nevertheless impinge upon the autonomy of poor organizations, compromising their vision and grassroots character? Concerns that NGOs could co-opt and water down poor movements' radical agendas have led poor-led associations and movements to develop new models of alliance and collaboration that enable them to build their organizational capacities without losing their grassroots, poor-centered character. These new models are set in agreements in advance of working together. SDI is an instructive example: the national and regional federations of slum dweller associations that SDI comprises rely upon the support of small (regional or national) NGOs and various development professionals. But these relationships are conceived of as partnerships and alliances in which the NGOs provide advice and practical assistance in managing their finances, assisting with urban planning, liaising with local and national governments, connecting with media, and so on. The aim is to try to ensure that the slum/shack dweller federations and associations set the agenda and determine the terms of engagement with NGO staff professionals: the NGOs with which its federations partner may play only "a supportive rather than leadership role. . . . They are not allowed to represent grassroots federations at any public policy forum unless they have been authorized to do so alongside federation leaders."[104] As Mitlin explains (drawing on analysis by NSDF founder Jockin Arputham), SDI's approach is one in which

the NGO respects the autonomy of the community organizations and their ability to make decisions for themselves. The organizations collectively

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Slum dweller organizations, like poor-led groups generally, have to work hard to earn legitimacy and standing in the eyes of the state and development agencies. When development NGOs and development professionals defer to the judgment of poor organizations and their members, it not only signals respect, but helps to buoy the credibility and authority of the group.

[104]   Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 403.

agree on the strategy to pursue and on how the NGO can protect and support the people's space for experimentation and learning. The NGO staff link to professionals within the state, and where relevant in international development assistance agencies, protecting the federations from demands that threaten a community-led process. . . . The relationship is in permanent transition, as the capabilities of federation members evolve and as local government rules and regulations are renegotiated, leading to a more favourable context.[105]

As Mitlin's overview suggests, the partnership between informal settlement organizations and the NGO they invite to collaborate is based on norms of mutuality and respect, and very much focused on building the capabilities of the grassroots group.

We can also see something like a norm of deference at work in the partnerships between poor-organizations (or movements) and NGOs. Development professionals in the NGOs that partner with poor movements consciously resist expectations—and instincts reinforced by their own training—that they will develop solutions or even propose priorities to communities (or their organizations).[106] In the example of SPARC—the development NGO that National Slum Dwellers' Federation (NSDF) partnered with to form the Indian Alliance—professional staff do not set the agenda. Rather, it is the slum dweller groups and federations that NSDA comprises, together with the third partner of the Alliance—Mahila Milan, composed of savings collectives of women pavement dwellers—whose decisions and priorities shape the agenda of the movement as a whole. Similarly, India's grassroots Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), which functions essentially like a trade union for its members, and the solidarity/empowerment group HomeNet—also representing home-based women workers in South Asia—structured their partnership with a global NGO, Women in the Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), in such a

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[105] Diana Mitlin, "A Class Act: Professional Support to People's Organizations in Towns and Cities of the Global South," *Environment & Urbanization* 25 (2013): 488.

[106] Mitlin, "A Class Act," 489–90. In connection with this issue, Satterthwaite insightfully writes that "these [slum dweller] federations and Shack/Slum Dwellers International itself make life uncomfortable for professionals such as myself. They rightly question many of our conclusions. They raise issues in public discussions and debates which question the accuracy of our 'knowledge' and the relevance of our proposals. . . . They raise questions that we often find uncomfortable, including who has the legitimacy to speak about the needs and priorities of urban poor groups." David Satterthwaite, "From Professionally Driven to People-Driven Poverty Reduction: Reflections on the Role of Shack/Slum Dwellers International," *Environment & Urbanization* 13 (2001): 137.

way as to ensure that the priorities and agenda of the network directly reflect the views of poor women working in the informal economy. As Batliwala explains of this partnership with WIEGO, the alliance separates the "grass-roots organizing entity and the international advocacy entity," allowing it to "[privilege] the priorities and concerns of its grassroots members for whose benefit it exists"—despite partnering with enormously influential and well-resourced institutions such as Harvard University (for many years the site of the WIEGO Secretariat) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.[107]

As these examples illustrate, grassroots poor organizations can maintain their poor-centered character as they grow and partner with progressive NGOs. But doing so requires ongoing reinforcement, not only because their partners have greater social capital, but because there are disagreements within some poor-led movements about the form that allyship and partner-ship should take.[108] Indeed, there are tensions that cannot be resolved at a meta-political or meta-ethical level, but that need to be worked out continu-ally through practical politics.[109] Grassroots networks like SDI and WIEGO that operate at both a local and transnational level, and which remain driven by poor people and their agendas, represent an important "new" model of po-litical solidarity among oppressed groups and their allies. But it is important that "outsiders"—development professionals and outsider activist-allies—resist the temptation to generate solutions on poor communities' behalf or to frame the problems; as attempts at global feminist solidarity work shows, misperceiving which structures or relations are drivers of women's poverty is an obstacle to productive political collaboration.[110]

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[107] Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 401. WIEGO advocates for, and conducts research on, women informal workers.

[108] Appadurai discusses the tensions within the Indian Alliance regarding partnerships with NGOs in his "Deep Democracy," 30.

[109] As Mitlin explains of SDI's partnerships with non-poor development professionals and NGOs, "SDI continues to work the contradictions. If there remains a perspective that the ideas for change have to come from below, and only if they come from below will they be owned by the subaltern, developed by them, won and lost by them, and only then will the pressures for implementation be appropriately applied at the multiple levels across spatial and state levels as is required, then [SDI] federation relations with professionals must remain ambivalent, paradoxical and contested." Mitlin, "A Class Act," 497–98.

[110] As Jaggar notes in the case of global development agencies (and sometimes feminist organiza-tions) seeking to help poor women in developing countries, concerned "Westerners" should focus less on their "cultural traditions" and more on the global economic processes that impoverish their countries (and to which our own states directly contribute). Jaggar, "Saving Amina," 75. See also Khader, "Why Are Women Poor?"

Despite the success of these partnership models, there remains a significant risk that more visible NGOs claiming to be pro-poor and empowerment-focused—but whose leadership and staff are quite removed from the realities of poor communities—will squeeze out more radical and grassroots poor organizations with less political experience. For example, grassroots poor groups in developing countries are frequently passed over when state development agencies look for NGO input, as Batliwala explains:

> Advocacy spaces for influencing public policy are often occupied by more "elite" NGOs that may or may not have direct links with or accountability to the constituencies affected by such policy—and often have distinctly different perceptions of the nature of the problem. . . . Government authorities often collude and reinforce the exclusion of direct stakeholders by inviting the elite NGOs into policy-making processes, rather than the loud, militant, and difficult to control grassroots groups who do not speak the same bureaucratic language that elite social advocates have learned.[111]

If poor-led groups are to develop the collective capabilities they need in order to represent and advance the interests of their members in policy spaces, they require allies who do not seek to displace them or undercut their influence. This will require that sympathetic development professionals work to change the institutional culture and protocols of development funding agencies to insist on greater inclusion of poor organizations.[112] Allies can also help by norming the expectation that grassroots poor organizations be centrally included in policy discussions and planning related to poverty reduction, urban development and planning, and social welfare reforms.

A different set of issues arises when poor organizations form political ties with political parties. In practice, it is very often the case that poor organizations decide to remain politically unaligned as a matter of strategy and survival. The Indian Alliance has remained steadfastly nonpartisan, for example; as Appadurai writes,

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[111] Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 398.

[112] As Satterthwaite writes, "Most official agencies that work in urban development have made little or no provision to allow the organizations of the urban poor the influence that they should have. This is the case for most local NGOs and local government agencies, and for most larger NGOs, national agencies and international agencies. If these are able to change so they can work in partnership with urban poor groups and their organizations and federations, it will bring far greater possibilities for new approaches and new scales of impact for the most intractable and difficult urban problems." See his "From Professionally Driven to People-Driven Poverty Reduction," 137–38.

the strategy of the Alliance is that it will not deliver the poor as a vote bank to any political party or candidate. This is tricky business in Mumbai, where most grassroots organizations, notably unions, have a long history of direct affiliation with major political parties. . . . The Alliance deals with these difficulties by working with whoever is in power, at the federal and state level, within the municipality of Mumbai . . . or at the local level of particular wards.[113]

Some poor-led groups are so determined to prevent co-optation by political parties that they have worked to effect a wider normative shift: the grassroots poor collective NK (Bangladesh) has been instrumental in reducing clientelism, according to Kabeer.[114] But despite their reluctance to affiliate with and become beholden to political parties, it is also true that, as Mitlin and Bebbington note, "movements are political agents and will align with political parties when they believe it serves their interests."[115] Some poor-led social movements, notably the MST, do link forces (albeit unofficially) with progressive or leftist parties whose agenda appears to support their own. For organizations that seek social reforms around housing, land, and social protection programs, they must work to influence political parties in power (and sometimes opposition parties); however, the danger that they will become too closely associated with a particular party, and excessively influenced by their loyalties to the party's platform, is real. Some movements have learned through experience that alliances that are struck with seemingly progressive political parties will eventually disappoint, as parties routinely fail to deliver on the radical agenda of the movement.[116] This is why the alliances they occasionally strike are never permanent; as the slogan of the US-based, grassroots organization Industrial Areas Foundation goes, "no permanent allies, no permanent enemies."[117] Importantly, groups or collectives that are more grassroots in their structure, like shack/slum dweller community associations, are *less* susceptible to co-optation by political parties (whether in or out of power) because their structure and activities are, as Patel and Mitlin point out,

[113] Appadurai, "Deep Democracy," 28–29.
[114] Kabeer, "Making Rights Work for the Poor," 41.
[115] Mitlin and Bebbington, "Social Movements and Chronic Poverty," 17.
[116] As Robles notes, the MST's difficulty achieving transformative change was partly due to "its outsourcing of political representation" to the Workers' Party (PT). Robles, "Revisiting Agrarian Reform in Brazil," 13.
[117] My thanks to Stefan Dolgert for this.

wholly geared toward "practical activities to address members' poverty."[118] Transnational networks are even less likely than local organizations to be beholden to (provincial or national) political parties. These difficult questions around alliances cannot be resolved in the abstract, however; much will depend on what the goals of the poor organization or social movement in question are, and how it "reads" its allies and the political environment.[119]

Finally, although it would not count as political solidarity (in the sense defined earlier), private foundations sometimes help to financially support grassroots, poor-led groups and to connect them with the resources and opportunities they need; as such, valid concerns about their influence may arise. For example, the NoVo philanthropic foundation funds many grassroots social justice organizations that are led by marginalized people and are focused on transformational, structural change.[120] The Urban Poor Fund, set up by SDI, has also accepted funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for various community-led, informal settlement upgrading projects. Funding from INGOs is also increasingly important given the uncertain funding climate within which poor organizations operate.[121] Transnational, grassroots poor-led networks in particular face special difficulties on the funding front, for they are an emerging kind of civil society movement unfamiliar to state and INGO funding agencies.[122] Might receiving funding from affluent donors, governments, or government agencies

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[118] Patel and Mitlin, "Grassroots-driven Development," 239.

[119] Poor organizations or movements are also readily able to adapt their strategies in response to concerns about co-optation, as Bebbington explains: "When actors—ostensible allies or not—seek to domesticate movements, urging them to sit at tables for dialogue, the risk again is that their counter-discourses will lose weight. The moment movements are no longer feared, their ability to affect change in the terms of public debate is also reduced. It is perhaps in the face of this recognition of the risks of being incorporated and domesticated that some movements opt for autonomous strategies that involve sustained opposition to and criticism of the state, rather than direct engagement. Such strategies can take various forms, combining, to different degrees, activities that aim to address poverty directly through asset building with activities that are far more discursive in nature and which aim to challenge hegemonic ideas in society." Bebbington, "Social Movements and the Politicization of Chronic Poverty," 813–14.

[120] https://novofoundation.org/.

[121] See Naila Kabeer, Simeen Mahmud, and Jairo G. Isaza Castro, "NGOs and the Political Empowerment of Poor People in Bangladesh: Cultivating the Habits of Democracy?," *World Development* 40, no. 10 (2012): 2061.

[122] As Batliwala writes, "Transnational grassroots movements are struggling with several ironies: the resistance to resourcing them from funders who have pigeonholed them as 'local' and cannot see a role for them in the global arena; and the struggle to enter global advocacy spaces dominated by more elite representatives who have been speaking for them. . . . Their capacity to impact on public policy at the international level is growing, but not yet fully realized. These movements are also inventing new kinds of partnerships, institutional arrangements, and relationships with state and private sector actors to sharpen their engagement with public policy processes at both national and transnational levels." Batliwala, "Grassroots Movements as Transnational Actors," 400.

in the global North or South (or even NGOs and INGOs) unduly influence grassroots poor organizations, and therefore undermine the group's credibility?[123] I think this problem is overstated.[124] Poor-led organizations and movements rarely rely on external funding to this extent and are very careful about whom they enter into alliances with. Typically, they "partner" (accept funding from) and collaborate with several civil society organizations and foundations, all conditional on acceptance of the poor-led organization's or movement's vision for social change.

6.7. Do People Living in Poverty Have a Political Responsibility for Solidarity?

People living in poverty often have powerful *prudential* reasons to work to transform the structures that underpin their subordination and impoverishment, but do they have a responsibility to do so? It is not my place, as a nonpoor political philosopher, to decide this. But as many readers will want to see this question addressed, I will retrace some of the arguments for and against this claim.[125] As we saw earlier, Young asserts that victims of structural injustice often possess a "unique understanding of the nature of the problems and the likely effects of policies and actions proposed by others situated in more powerful and privileged positions," and their interests are most directly impacted by unjust structures; social justice

[123] Jennifer Rubenstein's discussion of legitimacy concerns with respect to INGOs in her book *Between Samaritans and States: The Political Ethics of Humanitarian INGOs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) is helpful here, although she is not talking about grassroots groups or movements (see especially 73–76).

[124] Some immanent critics of effective altruism have urged that philanthropists instead "turn to advocacy" in order to address the structural causes of poverty, but donors funding advocacy to pursue their own preferred structural or development solutions comes with its own risks. Lechterman rightly suggests that advocacy-oriented donors would not run afoul of the problem of wrongful interference, however, if they were instead to "focus on strengthening the *voices* of the persons they aim to assist, so that those who have most to gain and lose are able to advocate for themselves." Ted Lechterman, "The Effective Altruist's Political Problem," unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 2017, 33. Admittedly, there remains the problem of knowing which poor groups are fully inclusive—which, say, reflect democratic and gender-just values—and the danger of, as Matthews notes, "simply providing support to the most vocal and prominent groups in poor communities." See Matthews, "Role of the Privileged," 1045.

[125] It is also important to acknowledge that impoverished people see some of the survival and livelihood-enhancing actions they engage in as a response to their perceived moral duties to loved ones. The global practice of remittances, for example, is partly motivated by a sense of duty to family members (as well as care and concern). Largely overlooked in discussions of global justice, remittances are of tremendous significance to poor families worldwide: remittances by 200 million migrants to some 800 receivers worldwide reportedly topped $613 billion in 2017.

is therefore often better served when those "in less advantaged positions within structures . . . take the lead in organizing and proposing remedies for injustice."[126] While Young is surely right about this, she also claims, problematically in my view, that "victims of structural injustice also can be called to a responsibility they share with others to engage in actions directed at transforming those structures" on the grounds that "responsibility in relation to structural injustice is shared among all those who contribute to the processes that produce it."[127] As Gould observes, Young moves too quickly from the fact of our global interconnectedness in unjust structures and processes to the claim that nearly everyone has *responsibilities* (as opposed to prudential interests) vis à vis those injustices; she also arguably fails to assign sufficient responsibility to the key agents of injustice, in particular, transnational corporations.[128]

Young's suggestion that even victims share responsibility for transforming unjust structures seems less motivated by a concern that subordinated people do their fair share (which seems implausible) than by a concern to ensure that oppressed people's perspectives and contributions are included in solutions for social change. [129] Here, as elsewhere, Young eschews the language of binding moral obligations in favor of that of political responsibilities, and stipulates four "parameters" for reasoning about these: "power, privilege, interest, and collective ability."[130] While it is easy to see how power and privilege can give advantaged groups additional responsibilities, Young also urges us to see that differently situated groups or communities can have both an interest and special ability to engage in collective action. In my view, these parameters are useful not only in determining who has responsibilities to act (when it is important to do so), but also suggestive of the work that would-be allies need to do: recognizing and divesting of advantages they enjoy by virtue of structural injustices, acknowledging and trying to change insidious social power asymmetries, and questioning their own vested

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[126] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 113.

[127] Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice," 113.

[128] Gould's assessment seems to me the right one: "to the degree that groups or agents can be identified as exploiting others through the activities or institutions of which they are a part, or can be identified as dominating others through these systems, these groups ought to be held responsible and accountable to these others." Gould, "Varieties of Global Responsibility," 203, 204.

[129] As Young writes, "Unless the victims themselves are involved in ameliorative efforts, well-meaning outsiders may inadvertently harm them in a different way, or set reforms going in unproductive directions." *Responsibility for Justice*, 146.

[130] To illustrate, she develops the example of students targeting their own colleges to try to change global sweatshop labor practices, leveraging their status within their own institutions to pressure them to make changes to apparel suppliers (147).

interests in existing forms of privilege. These parameters may also help us to talk about what degree of risk-taking and burden sharing it is reasonable to expect of differently situated groups.

Given these parameters of interest and collective ability, including distinctive knowledge and the capacity for cooperative action, is it plausible to argue that victims of oppression have responsibilities to help other similarly situated victims of injustice? Ashwini Vasanthakumar presents a compelling version of this argument, grounded in the duty to assist:

in virtue of their experience of injustice, victims are epistemically privileged: they have knowledge *that* injustice is occurring and knowledge *of* the harms it inflicts. They are thus uniquely positioned to initiate and motivate resistance efforts—like the capable bystander who comes upon the needy stranger.[131]

Vasanthakumar is careful to qualify victims' duty to assist by noting that "by no means are victims the only or even primary bearers of duties; once they alert others, these others will arguably bear more demanding duties."[132] Moreover, it is no coincidence that much of her analysis focuses on persecution, where the testimony of a victim is *indispensable* for triggering any kind of reckoning or process of justice (she uses the example of a victim of torture). This is instructive: beyond Vasanthakumar's examples involving firsthand knowledge and testimony, it is hard to see how victims could have a duty to assist based on their distinctive experiences and perspectives. One reason this is so concerns the problem of "epistemic opacity" that can afflict people affected by many kinds of structural injustices (like those of systematic sexism and racism). As Ypi and Jugov argue, the "degree of epistemic awareness of structural injustice" is surely an important factor to consider in reasoning about the "responsibilities of the oppressed," given the "distorted epistemic environment" (including false and harmful beliefs) within which "the views of the oppressed tend to take shape."[133] While political consciousness-raising of the workings of exploitative and subordinating social relations and structures is one of the key functions of poor-led social movements (as discussed in Chapter 4), it is a process, not a one-time fix.

[131] Ashwini Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege and Victims' Duties to Resist Their Oppression," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (2018): 465–66. Her italics.

[132] Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege," 466.

[133] Tamara Jugov and Lea Ypi, "Structural Injustice, Epistemic Opacity, and the Responsibilities of the Oppressed," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 50, no. 1 (2019): 9, 11.

Awareness is achieved over time, through popular education (influenced by Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed), South-South knowledge exchanges, and active learning from fellow movement activists through direct protests (e.g., land occupation), cooperative production, etc. Where an individual has become fully aware of the ways that structures of oppression affect them, there is arguably more reason to expect them to step up to help "unveil and explicate unjust structural rules" so as to make possible the larger "task of correcting social rules shaping unjust patterns."[134]

The importance of exposing the workings of structural injustices make it tempting to accord special responsibilities to oppressed groups; indeed, Jugov and Ypi contend that even agents in "conditions of total epistemic opacity" can be expected to at least articulate "their dissatisfaction" for the benefit of helping to expose abuse.[135] But whereas assigning responsibilities in virtue of one's oppressed social location and vantage point seems problematic (for reasons discussed earlier), the parameters of interest and collective ability do suggest that members of oppressed social groups can have responsibilities to similarly situated others. Along these lines, Vasanthakumar argues that in situations of structural injustice, where there is a lack of clearly identifiable perpetrators of injustice, victims still have a prima facie moral duty to assist fellow victims. This assistance, however, is subject (as in the more transparent cases of persecution) to the condition that doing so does not jeopardize their basic interests.[136] Importantly, the uncertainty of many contexts of structural injustice, according to Vasanthakumar, contributes to a lack of "moral determinancy," with the consequences that victims will have "considerable discretion in deciding how to act and whether to act in the first place."[137]

It seems implausible that a political responsibility for solidarity could find grounding merely in the lived experience of chronic poverty, or in the

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[134] Jugov and Ypi, "Structural Injustice," 14.

[135] Jugov and Ypi, "Structural Injustice," 16. They acknowledge, however, that this will depend upon the costs to themselves and "other constraints on agency" (17).

[136] Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege," 467. Compare Bernard Boxill, for whom the oppressed cannot be charged with moral failure if their very capacity to resist their oppression has been eroded through the effects of "continued long-term oppression." See Boxill, "The Responsibility of the Oppressed to Resist Their Own Oppression," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 1 (2010): 1, 10. From a Kantian perspective, Carol Hay defends the claim that people "have an obligation to resist their own oppression and this obligation is rooted in an obligation to protect their rational nature." Since I am writing from a nonideal theory perspective and my discussion is focused on political responsibilities, I do not take up her position here. See Hay, "The Obligation to Resist Oppression," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 42, no. 1 (2011): 21.

[137] Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege," 469.

distinctive perspective (insights, knowledge, etc.) that this may afford people. Two additional reasons which Vasanthakumar gives in defending victims' duty to assist other victims that are linked to epistemic privilege are the authority or standing of victims of injustice, and the value of having victims directly represent their interests in public. Adapting these reasons to the context of poor-led social movements, we might say that the moral authority or standing that people living in poverty can command (in some contexts) contributes distinctively to exposing the harms of structures that impoverish people. Moreover, echoing Young, Vasanthakumar argues:

> Victims constitute a class of individuals with particular and grave interests at stake, and their views—on their experience of injustice and on what resistance might require—correspondingly have a particular, and unique, weight. . . . It is important that victims themselves assert these interests. Oppressive institutions and norms often are predicated on claims about victims' lack of moral agency and worth. Insofar as victims' resistance is an expression and exercise of self-respect and agency, it necessarily undermines oppression. . . . We do, and should, look askance at resistance movements that involve victims only as mute objects of rescue.[138]

As Vasanthakumar readily acknowledges, "victims confront limitations in both knowledge and standing," but this does not mean that they are wholly unable to assist fellow victims: they can, for example, "cultivate testimonial virtues, and to do so in community with others."[139] An example of this was seen in my earlier discussion of the development of slum surveys, mapping and enumeration strategies developed by founding members of the Indian Alliance and subsequently practiced by slum and shack dweller associations and federations globally. Against the state's attempts to erase their existence, activist slum dweller organizations assert their members' presence, enumerate and describe their households, and make their communities visible.

Beyond the duty to assist other victims by speaking up to expose injustices and name abusers or exploiters (when they can do so without risk to themselves), the political responsibilities of people living in poverty arguably include *acting in solidarity with those already engaged in activism on their mutual behalf*. The stakes are high, and transforming deep structural injustices

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[138] Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege," 471.
[139] Vasanthakumar, "Epistemic Privilege," 472.

depends upon collective social action. People living in poor communities are often well-placed to collaborate on solidaristic political action—relevant to the moral parameter of "collective ability"—and/or to assist one another in more quotidian ways. The wide range of solidaristic activities discussed in earlier chapters—co-production, South-South knowledge exchanges, participatory city planning, cooperative slum upgrading, slum mapping/enumeration surveys, and mass demonstrations and road blockades—are just a few examples of the ways in which socially marginalized communities enact this solidarity. Returning to the example of the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina, it seems reasonable to expect that unemployed and impoverished citizens who were direct victims of the structural injustices wrought by the neoliberal regime—sudden factory closures, dramatic inflation causing consumer goods to be unaffordable, etc.—could justifiably be expected to support fellow demonstrators and strikers in demanding an end to the intolerable injustices.

Those who live in places where poor-led social movements (or politically active poor associations) exist may thus have a *prima facie* responsibility to exercise political solidarity with those working toward change—where they can safely due so, without jeopardizing their own well-being or that of loved ones.[140] Workers in exploitative environments, for example, have a minimal responsibility not to report (to management) on fellow workers who are organizing to protest their conditions, for to do so would not only leave them open to retaliation but would be to undermine the cause of repairing a harmful structural injustice (i.e., an exploitative workplace). They may also be expected to join the cause if they can do so without jeopardizing their safety or family's survival. Similarly, residents of informal settlements ought to join in the resistance struggle and slum-upgrading efforts of viable community associations and networks insofar as these aim to protect and advance the rights of slum dwellers. These responsibilities are conditional on certain minimal capabilities for acting obtaining; those whose daily lives are a desperate struggle for survival, or whose extensive caregiving role prevents them from partaking in political activity, cannot be said to have such political responsibilities.[141] In the preceding example, this would mean that

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[140] In Vasanthakumar's view, victims' duty to assist fellow victims is conditional upon such assistance not "harm[ing] her basic interests or well-being" ("Epistemic Privilege," 468).

[141] Shelby argues in the case of "the ghetto poor" in the United States, even when political activism is too costly or dangerous for individuals to undertake, it is still "reasonable . . . to expect [them] to not take courses of action that would clearly exacerbate the injustices of the system or that would increase the burdens of injustice on those in ghetto communities or others similarly situated, at least

unemployed workers would have a responsibility to resist cynical offers from factory owners to hire just a few of them in return for reporting on their comrades, because to do otherwise would make things worse for the latter and further delay reforms to an unjust system.[142] Given the stakes, they may also have a political responsibility to take more proactive steps to help sustain the momentum of a rapidly growing social protest movement.

The *prima facie* political responsibility to act in solidarity with similarly situated people who are struggling against unjust processes or structures is dependent on the latter's actions being broadly directed at their mutual benefit. Useful here is Caney's "Revised Justice Constraint," which specifies that "a person may exercise the right of resistance only if it does not set back the cause of justice, where this (a) includes a particular emphasis on the impacts of their action on the least advantaged . . . [and] (d) *requires those exercising the right of resistance to share the benefits equitably and with a concern for all*." As he goes on to note, "without such a clause, a right of resistance would seem to reward the strongest among the least advantaged and to penalize the very weakest."[143] In my view, however, this "benefit" condition does not require that the actions in question be directed at bringing about structural change; for example, residents of informal settlements should (if they can) participate in grassroots slum mapping, enumerations, and surveys conducted by local activists, irrespective of whether the local slum association intends or expects for this to lead to structural change. Again, this putative responsibility is subject to limitations of capability and risk to one's well-being; we might also add (though I cannot defend this point here) that the actions that fellow victims of injustice are expected to participate in, in political solidarity, must not be incompatible with their deeply held values.

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not when these negative consequences could be avoided without too much self-sacrifice." Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto," 154. There is also the difficult matter of what responsibilities *former* victims of structural injustice may have to those still suffering from structural injustice—such as the responsibilities of those who are no longer poor to those who are still poor. Campbell et al. note that for formerly poor activists who remain part of MST, the solidaristic struggle continues: "At this advanced stage, most of MST's members are no longer landless. . . . However, landed workers have continued to support the movement, using their improved circumstances to donate resources and to express solidarity with continuing struggles." Campbell et al., *Heeding the Push from Below*, 965.

[142] There might of course be mitigating circumstances (e.g., inability to meet one's most basic needs, or a family member requiring costly medicine) that would excuse the nonfulfillment of this solidaristic responsibility.

[143] Caney, "Right to Resist Global Injustice," 524. My italics.

Nor is a political responsibility for solidarity only owed to those in one's immediate community, or to co-nationals. The global migrant crisis is a case in point. Cabrera describes "efforts by non-elites in Mexico to aid Central American train riders—themselves unauthorized immigrants in Mexico—passing through on their way to the United States" as an example of direct solidarity with these vulnerable migrants. These migrant train-riders band together and support one another during their arduous train journeys, sharing food and offering other mutual support; he argues that these "train riders can be seen as having—and discharging—duties to similarly situated others."[144] The actions undertaken by these ordinary Mexican citizens to assist Central American migrants fleeing poverty and violence illustrate how responsibilities of political solidarity may combine with humanitarian duties to disempowered people. As Cabrera rightly notes, the work of these volunteers, as well as those from the group No More Deaths (assisting stranded migrants at the Arizona-Mexico border), cannot replace the essential work of state and transnational institutions in eradicating injustices; but in the wake of their failure to take up their responsibilities, the solidaristic actions of these volunteers takes on even greater importance.

The suggestion that people living in poverty may, in some contexts, have a responsibility to act in solidarity with similarly situated others (especially those in their own communities), in no way obviates the responsibility of more privileged actors to challenge the relations and structures that subordinate, exploit, and disempower others. Facing up to what Aragon and Jaggar call one's "structural complicity" in unjust institutions and systems is not just an intellectual exercise, but one that requires political action.[145] It is perhaps a testament to the dearth of effective allies willing to undertake this work that poor-led social movements and networks generally stress the importance of solidarity *among* poor organizations, locally, nationally, and across borders. As we saw, SDI's organizational structure prioritizes such solidarity among slum dwellers worldwide, which it facilitates through its signature South-South knowledge exchanges and collective action of various kinds.[146] South-South solidarity HomeNet South Asia, cites "Strength in Solidarity"

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[144] Cabrera, *Practice of Global Citizenship*, 165, 167.
[145] Corwin Aragon and Alison M. Jaggar, "Agency, Complicity, and the Responsibility to Resist Structural Injustice," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 49, no. 3 (2018): 439.
[146] See, for example, Diana Mitlin's discussion of transnational exchanges by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and SDI, in her "Making Sure the 'Voices of the Poor' Are Heard: Why Forms of Transnational Activism Can Make a Difference," in *From Local Action to Global Networks: Housing the Urban Poor*, ed. Peter Herrle, Astrid Ley, and Josefine Fokdal (Ashgate, 2015).

as its "guiding principle," and "work[s] to strengthen their collective voice so that it is heard across regional, national, and international platforms."[147] Most notably, of course, the World Social Forums (WSF) have developed an approach and common platform that links together in solidarity thousands of social justice organizations around the world—chiefly the global South, but also with significant representation from the global North. The groups that come together under the WSF banner work to identify (at the global and now regional Forums) common interests and goals, then pledge to work in solidarity on key issues like social, economic, and cultural rights; inclusive and participatory democracy; and environmental protections.

While people living in poverty have prudential reasons to work to change unjust social structures—and may have a responsibility to act in solidarity with similarly situated others (under particular conditions)— I have argued that this in no way diminishes the responsibilities of better resourced would-be allies, including individuals and collective agents like NGOs, to work to end structural injustices. But conceiving of this as a responsibility for solidarity with poor-led activists can better advance the kinds of collaborations and forms of collective action needed to keep struggles focused on the needs, claims, insights, and visions of poor communities and their social movements.

6.8. Conclusion

Successfully challenging and changing the ideologies and structures that perpetuate extreme inequalities of wealth, power, and security across the globe will require sustained collective action by justice-seeking people and institutions on an unprecedented scale, in a time of converging crises. Within this, poor-led social movements play a unique and vital role in helping to advance radical social change. Through their organizing and mobilizing, they challenge the unjust social relations and structures that underpin their needs deprivation and subordination; develop poor-centered visions of development and poverty alleviation, grounded in social justice; and build the collective political capabilities of impoverished and marginalized individuals and communities. Philosophical inquiry into poverty has generally ignored the role of poor-led social movements, centering attention instead on the

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[147] https://hnsa.org.in/areas-of-work.

moral obligations of the nonpoor, rather than on the justice claims of poor people. I argued in this book that this framing has limited the usefulness of much philosophical writing on poverty.

Recognizing the importance of the poor as agents of justice in no way implies that individuals, organizations, and institutions in rich countries cannot or should not help to hasten transformative antipoverty reforms. Rather, individuals and collective agents with comparative means, power, and privilege can and should help to advance poor-centered, pro-poor social change by acting in solidarity with poor-led organizations and social movements in their justice-seeking struggles.
Drawing on Young's social connection model of responsibility and philosophical work on solidarity, I argued that the idea of a political responsibility for solidarity can help to clarify what differently situated agents can and should do to assist poor-led social movements. Where they are able to, people living in poverty can voice support for the work that poor organizations do, and contribute to their collective work and mobilization. Outsiders or would-be allies can help to amplify poor movements' calls for pro-poor social policies and reforms, and demand that poor-led organizations be treated as stakeholders at all levels of social and economic planning and decision-making. In seeking to work in solidarity with poor-led organizations or movements, outsiders—whether individuals, NGOs, or other entities—should demonstrate mutuality and deference, and be willing to share the risks and burdens that may accompany such struggles.

Normative theorizing can play a modest role in helping to advance transformative, pro-poor policy responses to poverty, by drawing attention to the structural injustices that perpetuate the subordination and needs deprivation of people living in poverty. It can, moreover, draw attention to the values and visions central to poor-led social movements, and identify some of the norms, nonpaternalistic roles, and actions appropriate for would-be allies. Theorizing a political responsibility for solidarity may also help to motivate those NGOs, foundations, and government development agencies that seek transformative poverty reduction to find concrete ways to support the work of poor-led organizations and social movements. Ultimately, however, the kind of theory that best advances social change is that which is grounded in shared practices of political struggle—for it is up to poor activists to say what kind of solidarity is needed, and from whom.

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