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# **Relocating participation within a radical politics of development <sup>1</sup>**

**Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan**

## **Abstract**

In response to (and in sympathy with) many of the critical points that have been lodged against participatory approaches to development and governance within international development, this article seeks to relocate participation within a radical politics of development. We argue that participation needs to be theoretically and strategically informed by a notion of 'citizenship', and be located within the 'critical modernist' approach to development. Using empirical evidence drawn from a wide range of contemporary approaches to participation, the paper shows that participatory approaches are most likely to succeed where (i) they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project; (ii) where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups; and (iii) when they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions. However, we do not use these findings to argue against using participatory methods where these conditions are not met. Finally, the paper considers the implications of this relocation for participation in both theoretical and strategic terms

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## **Introduction**

Over the past thirty years participation has become one of the shibboleths of contemporary development theory and practice, often directly linked to claims of ‘empowerment’ and ‘transformation’. Initially a marginal concern within development, most development agencies now agree that some form of participation by the beneficiaries is necessary for development to be relevant, sustainable and empowering. However, the past decade has witnessed a growing backlash against participation (e.g. Cooke and Kothari, 2001), on the basis that participatory approaches have often failed to achieve meaningful social change, largely due to a failure to engage with issues of power and politics. Despite the veracity of this critique, particularly in relation to particular forms of participation, it has notably failed to halt the spread of participation as a development concept and strategy. Apparently undeterred, and increasingly underwritten by policy and funding support from virtually all major development agencies, the participatory turn has actually become expressed more deeply and diversely within development theory and practice over recent years.

It is not our intention to review this contested trajectory per se, but to examine the extent to which participatory reforms and approaches necessarily fail to generate transformations to existing social, political and economic structures and relations in ways that empower the previously excluded or exploited. Our empirical review suggests that certain participatory approaches and agents appear to transcend this critique and have resulted in genuine forms of transformation. Moreover, a series of common threads underpins the transformatory potential of these interventions, and these threads, including the pursuit of participation as citizenship, can provide the basis for a conceptual relocation of participation within a radical politics of development. This leads us to argue for relocating participation as an overtly political approach to development, which requires a re-engagement with ‘the political’ linked to an expanded and radicalised understanding of citizenship. Crucially, we argue that for such a politics to have purchase it cannot be attached to a free-floating set of values, but must be rooted in a normative and theoretical approach to development. This is in contrast to mainstream participatory approaches, which are overly voluntaristic in seeing any form of participation as necessarily an improvement on past practices (Chambers, 1997), and which, lacking a strong theoretical basis, have been easily co-opted within disempowering agendas (Rahman, 1995). We argue that the critical modernist approach

within development theory offers the best theoretical home for an understanding of participation that is at once political and radical.

### **Problematizing participation**

A common problem across both the uncritical promotion of ‘participatory’ approaches to development and the more recent critical backlash against participation is a failure to locate such contributions within broader theoretical debates on development. Table One provides an overview of the different approaches within development theory and practice over the past century that have taken participation as a key element of their overall project, and reveals that participation has been mobilised on behalf of a variety of different ideological and institutional perspectives on development. This table focuses in particular on drawing out the points of comparison in terms of citizenship and development theory, each of which we argue are at the heart of any attempt to reconstitute participation as a legitimate and transformative approach to development. Initially, it is instructive to frame the current disputes over participation within the context of wider debates concerning the distinction and links between ‘immanent’ and ‘imminent’ development.

Observers distinguish between ‘imminent’ and ‘immanent’ development, whereby the former is concerned with ‘willed’ development policy and action and the latter is concerned with underlying processes of development (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Imminent development emerged over the past two centuries largely as a means of managing those ‘surplus populations’ that have either been excluded from or ‘adversely incorporated’ into processes of immanent capitalist development. For much of this time the “development doctrine purported to put this relative surplus population to work within the integument of the nation” (Cowen and Shenton, 1996: 153). Hence, the state provided development studies with its key agent of development, while the rationality that underpinned the modern project of development justified the top-down, expert-led character of its associated interventions. However, although the past three decades have seen this statist approach give way to a broader focus on how civic and market actors can contribute to development interventions, there has been an increasing tendency within contemporary development studies to focus on imminent rather than immanent processes of development, in ways that often obscure the underlying politics of development. The assertion that emancipatory forms of development can be wilfully

'managed' through 'the right mixture' of institutional responses (e.g. Brett, 2000) has effectively 'depoliticised' the notion and practice of development in poor countries (Ferguson, 1994), rather than seeing it as negotiated with and contested by its subjects. The underlying politics of underdevelopment and exclusion, and of development interventions themselves, are thus obscured from view.

**Table 1 Participation in development theory and practice: a selective history**

<b>Era</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Institutional and intellectual influences</b>	<b>Development theory: approach to immanent processes and imminent interventions</b>	<b>Approach to citizenship</b>	<b>Locus/level of engagement</b>
1940s-1950s	Community Development (colonial)	United Kingdom Colonial Office  1944 Report on Mass Education in Africa	<b>Immanent</b> (Re)produce stable rural communities to counteract processes of urbanisation and socio-political change, including radical nationalist and leftist movements <b>Imminent</b> Development requires participation and self-reliance; cost-sharing. <u>Animation rurale</u> , adult literacy and extension education, institution building, leadership training, local development projects	Participation as an obligation of citizenship; citizenship formed in homogenous communities	Community
1960s-1970s	Community Development (post-colonial)	Post-colonial governments (Social Welfare or specialised departments)	<b>Immanent</b> As above; also development of state hegemony, moral economy of state penetration <b>Imminent</b> As above; also health, education		
1960s	Political participation	North American political science	<b>Immanent</b> Political development dimension of modernisation theory. Participation as securing stability, legitimacy for new states and strengthening the political system <b>Imminent</b> Voter education; support for political parties	Participation (e.g. voting, campaigning, political party membership) as a right and an obligation of citizenship	Political system and constituent parts; citizens
1960s-1970s	Emancipatory participation  Liberation theology	Radical 'southern' researchers / educationalists. Friere, Fals Borda, Rahman  2 <sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, Latin American Catholic priests. Guittierez, Sobrino	<b>Immanent</b> Analyse and confront 'structures of oppression' within existing forms of economic development, state formation, political rule and social differentiation <b>Imminent</b> EP: Participatory action research (PAR), conscientisation, popular education, support for popular organisations LT: Form base Christian communities, training for transformation, popular education	Participation as a right of citizenship; participatory citizenship as a means of challenging subordination and marginalisation	Economic and civic spheres; communities; citizens
1970s-	'Alternative	Dag Hammarskjold	<b>Immanent</b>	Participation as a right of	Initially focused

1990s	development'	Conference 1974. Development Dialogue, IFAD Dossier Nerfin, Friedmann	Critique of 'mainstream' development as exclusionary, impoverishing and homogenising; proposal of alternatives based around territorialism, cultural pluralism and sustainability <b>Imminent</b> Popular education; strengthen social movements & self-help groups	citizenship; citizenship as a key objective of alternative development, to be realised in multi-levelled political communities	on communities and civic society, latterly the state through 'inclusive governance'
1980s-present	Populist / Participation in development	Development professionals, NGOs (e.g. MYRADA, IIED) World Bank Participation Learning Group, NGOs, UN agencies Chambers	<b>Immanent</b> Little direct engagement; implicit critique of modernisation <b>Imminent</b> Failure of top-down projects and planning; participation required to empower people, capture indigenous people's knowledge, ensure sustainability and efficiency of interventions Participatory: rural/urban appraisal, learning and action, monitoring and evaluation; NGO projects.	Focus on participation in projects rather than in broader political communities	Development professionals and agencies; local participants
Mid-1990s-present	Social capital	World Bank Social Capital and Civil Society Working Group Putnam, Bourdieu, Narayan	<b>Immanent</b> Social capital promoted as a basis for economic growth <b>Imminent</b> Local institution building, support participation in networks & associations	Participation as a right and obligation of citizenship	Civic associations
Late 1990s-present	Participatory governance and citizenship participation	Participatory Research and Action (Delhi), Institute for Development Studies, Brighton (Participation Group).	<b>Immanent</b> Development requires liberal or social democracy, with a responsive state and strong civil society. Some focus on social justice <b>Imminent</b> Convergence of 'social' and 'political' participation, scaling-up of participatory methods, state-civic partnerships, decentralisation, participatory budgeting, citizens hearings, participatory poverty assessments, PRSP consultations	Participation as primarily a right of citizenship	Citizens, civil society, state agencies and institutions

One of the challenges to this form of imminent development over the past two decades has come from the ‘participatory development’ approach. In its current, mainstreamed and ‘populist’ form (see Table One), the ‘participation in development’ approach asserts the importance of placing local realities at the heart of development interventions, and of the need to transform agents of development from being directive ‘experts’ to ‘facilitators’ of local knowledge and capabilities (e.g. Chambers, 1983). The ‘power’ transformations required between ‘uppers’ and ‘lowers’, it is argued, can be achieved through according participatory roles to the subjects of development at each stage of development interventions.

However, this mission has faced a series of critiques, particularly regarding the apparent failure of participatory approaches to engage with the issues of power and politics raised by its language of ‘empowerment’. The key arguments against participatory development include an obsession with the ‘local’ as opposed to wider structures of injustice and oppression (Mohan, 2001; Mohan and Stokke, 2000); an insufficiently sophisticated understanding of how power operates and is constituted and thus of how empowerment may occur (e.g. Mosse, 1994; Kothari, 2001); an inadequate understanding of the role of structure and agency in social change (Cleaver, 1999); and, partly as a result of the mainstreaming of participation, a tendency for certain agents of participatory development to treat participation as a technical method of project work rather than as a political methodology of empowerment (Carmen, 1996; Cleaver, 1999; Rahman, 1995).<sup>2</sup> In particular, this approach tends towards a methodological individualism (Francis, 2001) that obscures the analysis of what makes participation difficult for marginal groups in the first place, particularly in relation to processes of state formation, social stratification and political economy.

As already noted, the intensification of this critique has not significantly affected the continued ubiquity of participation across development policy and practice. For us, this raises a key question: to what extent can current approaches to participation be directly associated with the transformations promised by the language of



empowerment, and thus constitute an adequate response to the critique that participatory approaches fail to deal with issues of power and politics?

### **Transformative participation: a review of contemporary development policy and practice**

This section reviews those fields of development policy and practice wherein participation constitutes a definitive element. Following Mohan and Stokke (2000), these are participatory governance and decentralisation; NGOs and participatory development; and social movements. We argue that initiatives within each arena have either gone or have the potential to go beyond the criticisms of participation and address broader issues of politics in ways that make change more embedded and thoroughgoing, thus retaining the potential of participation to be ‘transformative’ (White, 1996). In identifying the factors that have contributed to the relative successes of the approaches identified here, this section lays the foundation for reassembling these positive political lessons into a theoretical and analytical framework wherein participation as transformation can be located.

#### Participatory governance and democratic decentralisation

Democratic decentralisation is a key aspect of the participatory governance agenda, and is associated with the institutionalisation of participation through regular elections, council hearings and, more recently, participatory budgeting (e.g. Blair, 2000). The devolution of power to local authorities is also alleged to create incentives for increased civil society activity. However, despite being lauded by development agencies and theorists across the political spectrum as the key to state reform, popular empowerment and, more recently, poverty reduction (e.g. World Bank, 2000), the track record of decentralisation in developing countries has come under increasing criticism (e.g. Crook and Sverrisson, 2001). Key problems observed so far include the failure of decentralisation to overcome socio-economic disparities within local authority regions and the likelihood of elite capture; the tendency for the forms of participation introduced by decentralisation to be subsumed either within more informal modes of patronage in ways that nullify its transformative potential (Francis and James, 2003), or to be negated by over-riding socio-cultural norms, as with the

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<sup>2</sup> Postdevelopment critics (e.g. Rahnema, 1992) go further and argue that the very language of ‘participation in development’ implies a form of imperialist intervention and the illegitimate

quota representation for minority groups (e.g. Kapoor, 2000; Tripp 2000). More broadly, and to the extent that such reforms constitute part of the ‘good governance’ agenda, decentralisation has been promoted as a technocratic means of ‘reducing’ or ‘smartening’ the central state (Campbell, 2001), rather than as a political project aimed at transforming state legitimacy and forging a new contract between citizens and the local state.

However, there is also growing evidence that the transformative potential of participatory governance reforms remain (Gaventa, 2004). Fung and Wright (2001) review examples from ‘north’ and ‘south’ of what they term ‘Empowered Deliberative Democracy’, each with the potential to be “...radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people” (ibid: 7) and tying of discussion to action. For example, certain cases of democratic decentralisation stand out as having achieved both greater participation of and social justice for marginal groups and localities, as with the Indian states of West Bengal and Kerala. In both cases, decentralisation has been credited with ensuring the participation of subordinate groups – such as women, landless groups, sharecroppers and small peasants – and being directly linked to the pursuit of redistributive policies that have had pro-poor outcomes (Harriss, 2000: 15; Heller, 2001: 142). The reforms helped reduce the (ab)use of political power by landed elites (Crook and Sverrisson, 2001: 14-5), while increasing the ‘political space’ within which poor groups could participate, both within and beyond the formal institutions of state power (Webster, 2002). Crucially, these projects of democratic decentralisation in certain states in India were located within wider political programmes of state reform. The ‘reinvention’ of leftist politics in light of the failures of centralised rule and planned economies, and the need for parties of the left to maintain and increase their electoral constituency, provided the context within which participatory forms of governance became integrated within wider projects of redistributive politics and social justice.

Similar findings also emerge from reviews of participatory budgeting in Brazil, with findings of increased popular participation (e.g. over 10 per cent of the electorate in the state of Rio Grande do Sul participate in budgeting); changed investment patterns

in favour of progressive social sectors such as housing, education, sanitation and health; excluded slums and populations drawn into the political process; and also increased efficiency in terms of planning and implementation (Santos 1998, Schneider and Goldfrank, 2002; Souza, 2001). Patronage relations have been challenged (Heller, 2001: 140), with people now able to make claims according to their status as citizens rather than as clients (Abers, 1998; Souza, 2001).

Once again, the agency for the success of participatory budgeting can be located within a wider radical political project. The most successful cases of participatory budgeting have been in areas where the Worker's Party (PT) has been in power, with higher levels of participation correlated most closely with membership of the PT rather than other factors such as literacy (Schneider and Goldfrank, 2002: 9). Similarly, Heller (2001: 139) argues that the defining feature of both democratic decentralisation in India and participatory budgeting in Brazil is that of "a political project in which an organised political force – and specifically non-Leninist left-of-center political parties that have strong social movement characteristics – champions decentralisation". Hence, such successful democratic projects of local governance reform are closely linked to their adoption of a development paradigm that directly challenges structural inequalities.

#### NGOs and participatory development: a radical rediscovery and moving beyond the local

The forms of participation promoted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through discrete project interventions have been subject to particularly vigorous critique. The key problems identified include, first, their confused status between civic, public and private institutional spheres, which may mean that they interact with people only as clients (Uphoff, 1996), or are complicit in the weakening of the 'social contract' between state and citizen. Second, that the 'transnational community of development NGOs' transmits what is essentially a neo-imperialist and disempowering project through concepts and strategies of how the 'third world' should be managed (Townsend et al, 2002). Moreover, the NGOs that tend to receive support under the 'civil society' agenda tend to accord with the tenets of the neoliberal development project (Howell and Pearce, 2001). Third, relationships that are forged within this transnational community – both between 'northern' and

‘southern’ NGOs (e.g. Fowler, 1998) and between NGOs and local communities (e.g. Hickey, 2002; MirafTAB, 1997) – often disempower the ‘lower’ partner through establishing patron-client relationships. The fourth and related problem is the tendency amongst NGOs to eschew partnerships with more political elements within civil society in favour of capacity-building professionalised NGOs in their image. Fifth, the increasing dependency of NGOs on official sources of funding raise the dangers that the demands of upwards accountability effectively short-circuit the participatory mechanisms required to secure downward accountability (Edwards and Hulme, 1996).

To a large extent, this paper would concur that NGOs face severe limitations in seeking to be genuine agents of transformative development through participatory approaches. However, the vast range and diversity of agencies and activities within the transnational community of NGOs not only precludes sweeping judgements, but has also produced initiatives capable of promoting participatory development in ways that do involve transformation. From a wide field, two such examples can be expanded on here, namely the ‘REFLECT’ approach to literacy generation and the increasing role of NGOs in advocacy work. While acknowledging the brevity of this exposition we argue that the transformative potential of each is distinguished by multi-levelled engagements with issues of citizenship and political change.

### Adult education, citizenship and radical politics: the case of REFLECT<sup>3</sup>

The capacity of adult literacy to transform power relations has become an increasing focus, with “...the themes of participation, empowerment and popular organisation very prominent within the theory and practice of adult education for development” (Youngman, 2000: 79). Of the many associated approaches (Mayo, 1999), the REFLECT approach to literacy generation offers one way forward here. Originally piloted by ActionAid in the mid-1990s, REFLECT is currently employed by 350 governmental and non-governmental agencies in 60 countries (ActionAid, 2003).

The key idea behind REFLECT is to merge the pedagogical and political philosophy of Paulo Freire (1972) with the techniques of participatory rural appraisal, thus re-

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<sup>3</sup> Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques.

engaging the technocratic expression of participation with one of its more theoretical, political and radical antecedents (see Table One). It is also theoretically informed by ‘gender and development’ thinking, and seeks to develop women’s capacity to take on participatory roles at community level and beyond (Archer and Cottingham, 1996). REFLECT proceeds by engaging participants in dialogical discussions of their socio-economic problems, and uses visual graphics to structure and depict the discussion (ibid.). ‘Keywords’ emerge from these discussions, which then form the basis for literacy development. Participants are encouraged to devise means of solving the problems, beginning with ‘action-points’ to be addressed either by REFLECT groups or higher-level organisations. The results of REFLECT in many cases to date have been impressive, with genuine transformation taking place with regards to gender relations, community-state relations, and between age groups within communities. Participants report self-realisation, increased participation in community organisations (Waddington and Mohan, 2004), and increased community-level actions (Archer and Cottingham, 1997: 200-1); female participants and REFLECT facilitators in particular have become key resource people for the communities (Kanyesigye, 1998: 51-53).

REFLECT is inextricably linked to citizenship formation, in that it focuses on “people’s ability to participate in civil society, enabling them to effectively assert their rights and assume their responsibilities” (Archer, 1998: 101). It thus emphasises that participation needs to be practised in the broader spaces of the political community beyond the project level, and recognises the need to ‘reconnect’ populist methods of participation with more politicised understandings of social change. However, while REFLECT was constructed, and is currently promoted by northern NGOs, there is evidence that, “radical adult education initiatives are unlikely to prove effective when carried out on their own. They must operate in relation to a social movement” (Mayo, 1999: 133), a challenge we return to below.<sup>4</sup>

### NGO Advocacy

One of the key weaknesses of the project-based work traditionally favoured by NGOs is the inability to challenge wider structures of marginalisation. As Nyamugasira (1998: 297) observes NGOs “have come to the sad realization that although they have

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<sup>4</sup> For studies of the links between popular education and social movements, see Ghanem (1998) and Patel (1998).

achieved many micro-level successes, the systems and structures that determine power and resource allocations – locally, nationally, and globally – remain largely intact”. Increasingly NGOs and other development actors are realising that a useful contribution is not to take an atomistic view of local organisations, but to address political processes that shape and constrain the local. As such advocacy contains greater potential for transformation than project based work, in engaging with making claims for excluded people in ways that (should) increase their capacity to demand their rights of citizenship and help them participate in wider arenas of decision-making. Significantly, it can be seen as one of the mechanisms by which the links between participatory development and participatory governance might be forged (e.g. PLA Notes, 2002). For example, Harper (2001) argues for a participatory form of advocacy that both involves the grassroots in agenda setting through genuine partnerships and participatory methods, and opens up policy processes to a wider range of voices and stakeholders.

NGO advocacy, then, involves the alignment of participatory approaches with a rights-based agenda, and brings together the key elements of a citizenship-based approach that stresses political engagement at local, national and international levels. In global campaigns, the transmission of both progressive discourses and resources across these levels has offered rewards to the agency of local people in ways that were previously unattainable within local and national political communities. However, important dangers remain apparent. For example, much global citizen action bypasses national governments in favour of applying direct pressure to global institutions, and may thus undermine national citizenship in favour of a form of ‘global citizenship’ that remains unattainable to most people in poor countries (Edwards, 2001). Furthermore, some advocacy campaigns reflect the current inequalities between northern and southern NGOs within the ‘transnational community of NGOs’ (Townsend, 1999), and are particularly open to growing charges concerning the problems of representation and legitimacy. One potential solution to this problem is to focus on those examples of ‘horizontal solidarity’, whereby south-south relationships form the basis of empowering advances in both livelihood strategies and policy change (Patel and Mitlin, 2002).

This section has argued that some participatory approaches promoted by NGOs can enhance citizenship, but they must be embedded within more political forms of participatory thought and action than has been the case until recently. Much of this activity increasingly requires moving beyond the locality with empowerment involving multi-scaled strategies and networks. Clearly, engaging with a more politicised project will often entail heightened conflict with vested interests at multiple levels (e.g. Rafi and Chowdhury, 2000). Indeed, one observer argues that the role of ‘participation’ within successful advocacy campaigns is often as a form of popular protest rather than as a set of methods, and that NGOs who prioritise advocacy should become classified as social movements (Dechalert, 1999). Problems of representation – whether of ‘universalist’ ideals within different cultural contexts or of ‘southern’ NGOs by ‘northern’ NGOs in various policy arenas – still abound (e.g. Hudson, 2000). However, it might be that a focus on the political is once again the way forward here, with a shift in focus from issues of ‘representation’ and ‘legitimacy’ to one on ‘political responsibility’ (Jordan and van Tuijl, 2000). The key is for NGOs to conduct their work and relationships “with democratic principles foremost in the process” (ibid: 2053), with all actors having to respond to the demands of ‘political responsibility’ at each stage and at all levels. This involves dividing different political arenas between different actors and empowering them to act therein, while monitoring the (potentially negative) impact that actions in one political arena might have in another (ibid: 2063).

### Social movements

Development theory and practice has generally been wary of engaging directly with social movements as sites of popular participation and political projects, preferring the more orderly and ‘makeable’ world of NGOs.<sup>5</sup> However, a number of theorists are realising the potential of the former for radical change. So, our discussion concerns ‘progressive’ social movements since it is clear that many social movements are *not* seeking the sorts of social transformations examined here. Rather they aim to protect *privilege* rather than promote *rights*, and at worst, are harbingers of discrimination,

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<sup>5</sup> Although we would agree with Howell and Pearce (2001) that this constitutes a worrying ideological bias within international development thinking and practice around civil society, there are dangers in calling for a closer engagement between official development agencies and social movements. Such movements can easily be disrupted by such engagements (particularly financial), and some might also be constituted in ways that legitimately deter development agencies seeking probity and democratic forms of governance in their partners.

intolerance and injustice. This move towards social movements was initially premised on a thoroughgoing critique of the dominant 'left' position on civil society (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) but has more recently been influenced by post-modern interpretations of such developments (e.g. Escobar, 1995). This has tended to leave the debate around social movements polarised between cultural and political readings of their meaning and potential. In the developing world, social movements are frequently characterised as standing in resistance to development (e.g. Routledge, 2001), or depicted by postmodern theorists as bailing out of the "limping vessel of development (and) striking out for new horizons in smaller craft" (Esteva and Prakash, 1992: 51). The destination as yet has no name other than 'cultural autonomy' and an escape from 'mainstream' development.

However, we would argue that the importance of social movements in relation to participation and development cannot be captured in such terms, particularly in relation to the oppositions between 'culture'/'politics', and 'development'/'resistance'. Rather, the historical and contemporary role of social movements in using identity-based forms of participatory politics to extend the boundaries of citizenship to marginal groups (Scott, 1990; Foweraker and Landman, 1997), suggests that the cultural and the political are closely entwined (Castells, 1997). Furthermore, we would argue that some movements are better understood as being located within a critical position vis-à-vis the ongoing project of modernity rather than being 'postmodern' alternatives to development.

The starting point for many contemporary social movements is a critical resistance to the forms of exclusion and exploitation that have resulted from broad processes of neoliberal capitalist penetration and historical and contemporary forms of state formation, and more specific forms of statist and corporate development. Anti-dam movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) in India have opposed both the material project of development undertaken by the Indian state and the ideological representation of 'development' that underpins it, through action at multiple scales (Routledge, 2003). The movement's opposition, in both material (e.g. developing alternative energy projects, threatening to drown themselves if the dam goes ahead) and discursive (e.g. peasant testimonials) forms, thus challenges the moral legitimacy of the state regarding its contract to protect and develop its citizens (ibid: 259).



In Mexico, the Zapatista's have raged against free trade agreements and the patronage-mode of politics, as well as the State's relegation of Indians to "a very inferior category of 'citizens in formation'", forced to occupy "the basement of the Mexican nation" (Marcos, 1994). As the most powerful of many peasant movements to (re)emerge in Latin America over the past two decades, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra/Landless Rural Worker's Movement (MST) argues that "democratic transition has not led to democratic transformation; that is, it has not led to the emergence of substantive forms of citizenship" (Robles, 2001: 147). As a movement, it advocates for and works towards not simply the gain of its share of both land and political power within Brazilian society, but "the fundamental transformation of the structures of power" within Brazil (op cit.). Each movement has impacted significantly on their respective terrain of struggle, as with the MST's attainment of land for more than 400,000 landless workers.

The forms of participatory citizenship advocated and (in some cases) practiced by the movements noted here, resonate beyond the narrower concerns of regional and ethnic identity that limit some movements to a position of narrow defence rather than progress (Castells, 1997). For example, the Zapatistas have campaigned actively since 1994 to not only attain full citizenship for the Indians of the Chiapas region of Mexico, but also for wider political reforms, particularly to the patronage mode of politics. In demanding that the government amend the constitution so as to "recognise the indigenous as indigenous and as Mexicans" (Marcos, 2001), there is no renouncement of the notion of Mexican citizenship, but of the exclusive way in which it has been forged. Movements in Ecuador have similarly sought to make claims for both 'ethnic' and 'national' citizenship (Bebbington, 1996), and frequently link to broad global campaigns and networks regarding the environment and human rights. As such, they appear to have found a way of "relating the universal and the particular in the drive to define social justice from the standpoint of the oppressed" (Harvey, 1993: 116). In so doing, they have articulated a mode of political action capable of imagining and generating alternative development futures not only for its immediate

constituency, but also for a broader community of dispossessed and marginalised peoples.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of development more broadly, what is arguably most significant about such movements is the ways in which their claims are woven within a broader discourse of what are the familiar demands of modernity. This notion of social movements being transformative and radical within rather than in opposition to the modern is further supported by research with popular organisations in Andean regions of Latin America (Bebbington and Bebbington, 2001). Land, democracy, citizenship and development – all totems of the modern project – remain the key concerns of a number of ‘new’ social movements (Robles, 2001; Veltmeyer, 1997). This suggests that the participatory politics of cultural identity, material redistribution and social justice are not alternatives, but can be part of a single political project, a possibility we return to below.

### **Identifying the politics of participation as transformation**

This (selective) sampling of political and policy arenas demonstrates that participatory approaches to development and governance have – to some extent and in some ways – gone beyond the critique mounted against them, particularly regarding the failure to engage with issues of politics and power. Although we cannot claim that these developments are conclusive or will go on to fully achieve their ends, they have transcended the search for simple technical fixes and are demonstrably moving towards the more structural transformations suggested by the language of ‘participation for empowerment’. Moreover, we argue that there are at least four threads of continuity that run throughout these initiatives, which can be drawn out as the key dimensions that underlie successful approaches to participation as transformation.

First, the successes of participation within contemporary development policy and practice have depended upon them being part of a broader project that is at once political and radical. By this we mean a project that seeks to directly challenge

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<sup>6</sup> Citizenship’ has formed the basis of demands made by movements of subordinate classes and excluded groups across time and space (e.g. from workers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain to the youth in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazil), offering them a vocabulary that both demands rights and binds classes and groups

existing power relations rather than simply work around them for more technically efficient service delivery. The roots of this political radicalism varies. In the case of decentralisation, the stage has recently been set in some contexts by a convergence between the growth of populist approaches to governance and development, and the need for leftist political organisations to find a means of both institutionalising a politics of social justice in the post-welfarist, post centralist era of governance and (re)connect with an electoral base. With NGOs, it has formed around a rediscovery of the radical within participatory development history (REFLECT) and/or efforts to transform the policy process and development discourse itself through advocacy work. What is key here is that there is an explicit articulation of a radical project that focuses primarily on issues of power and politics.

Second, each approach that has achieved transformations has sought to direct participatory approaches towards a close engagement with underlying processes of development, rather than remain constrained within the frame of specific policy processes or interventions. In terms of NGOs, the REFLECT approach addresses itself to the patterns of domination and subordination within developing countries, rather than those between development professionals and project participants. The political parties that have attained the greatest success with participatory governance reforms have directly sought to alter patterns of inequality created by uneven processes of development. New social movements form the clearest example of a close and critical engagement with efforts to reshape development – and the project of modernity itself.

Third, each approach is characterised by an explicit focus on and pursuit of participation as citizenship. Each of the initiatives reviewed here seek in different ways not only to bring people into the political process, but also to transform and democratise the political process in ways that progressively alter the ‘immanent’ processes of inclusion and exclusion that operate within particular political communities, and which govern the opportunities for individuals and groups to claim their rights to participation and resources. This approach can be distinguished from earlier approaches to participation, such as the colonial project of community

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to the state (Tilly, 1995), that can overcome divisions within heterogeneous movements and offers a basis of resistance accessible to all marginal groups.

development, which promoted a narrow form of citizenship designed to reduce claims on the centre (see Table One). Amongst the key exemplars here are the Zapatista's campaign for constitutional change in Mexico and the success of some participatory governance reforms in securing citizenship participation as an alternative form of inclusion to patron-client relations. In such instances, citizenship here is often not being requested from a proscribed menu of rights and obligations, but actively defined and claimed 'from below'.

The fourth commonality appears to be that, for participatory approaches to be successful in achieving transformation, a precondition is that the modes of accumulating political and economic power in the given context are (to a significant degree) structurally disentwined from each other. For example, the success of decentralisation in the Indian states of West Bengal and Kerala relied on the capacity of the new political elite being able to protect state resources and decision-making from the economic (landed) elite. To the extent that we focus on participation as a political project here, then, there is a need to examine the political economy of participation, particularly in contexts where the accumulation of political power and economic wealth are entwined, and where a focus on 'participation' may simply be a means of concealing ongoing patronage. However, new forms of citizenship participation can arguably play a key role in challenging and reforming such 'dysfunctional' forms of rule (Mamdani, 1996).

However, our argument that participation can only be considered transformative if these rigorous criteria are met needs to be qualified. We do not imply that there is little point in using participatory methods by agents and in contexts where these criteria are not met. It would be misleading to dismiss all 'formal' participation as disempowering simply because they are touched by the 'development machine'. To see them as inevitably disempowering denies the less powerful any agency and treats political spaces as discrete when, in fact, a form of political learning can take place where experiences from one space are transported and transformed consciously or unconsciously in different and new spaces. What is required is a more realistic set of claims and criteria by which to characterise and evaluate those forms of participation

that seek merely to transform practice of development agencies and professionals rather than transformations to underlying forms of exclusion (Kumar and Corbridge, 2002; Williams, 2004 forthcoming). Such 'imminent' forms of participation can then be properly judged on their own merits, rather than being conflated with broader projects of transformation.<sup>7</sup>

However, having identified the forms of politics that underlie transformative approaches to participation, the key challenge is to try and relate these findings to broader conceptual and theoretical trends within development studies. As has been noted, '...thinking about participation (in development)...has lacked the analytical tools...and an adequate theoretical framework' (Shepherd, 1998: 179), a failing that we argued has helped lead to its mainstream co-option and depoliticisation. In the following section we draw on two of the key findings here – concerning citizenship and a radical form of political project – to develop a more systematic conceptual and theoretical framework within which debates on transformative forms of participation can be located.

### **Relocating participation within a radical politics of development**

'...much of the theory construction in development studies has been introduced with no explicit considerations concerning basic ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions...Further, it is required of a theory that the normative premises and political priorities it embodies are thoroughly exposed' (Martinussen, 1997: 345-6).

The notion of 'citizenship participation' has recently emerged as a means by which the convergence of people's agency and their participation in specific interventions might be understood, while also capturing the broadening of the participation agenda whereby the social and political agendas of 'participation' and 'good governance'

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<sup>7</sup> See White (1996) for a typology of participation, ranging from the 'nominal' through to the 'transformative'.

have increasingly converged (Gaventa, 2002).<sup>8</sup> The links between ‘citizenship’ and ‘participatory development’ can be conceptualised in terms of the interaction between a series of institutional norms and agency-led practices, whereby,

‘Citizenship can be defined as that set of practices (juridical, political, economic or cultural) which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups’ (Turner, 1993: 2).

Relocating ‘participation’ within citizenship situates it in a broader range of sociopolitical practices, or expressions of agency, through which people extend their status and rights as members of particular political communities, thereby increasing their control over socioeconomic resources. The question for participatory interventions becomes how they can enhance the capabilities of participants to project their agency beyond specific interventions into broader arenas, thereby progressively altering the ‘immanent’ processes of inclusion and exclusion. However, we want to move beyond an exhortation that ‘citizenship matters’ for participation towards a more thorough analysis of the specific form/s of citizenship that are likely to underpin the transformative potential of participation, and of the theoretical underpinnings that this requires.

#### Towards a radical theory of citizenship

The links between participation and citizenship are most clearly expressed within ‘civic republican’ theories of citizenship. Civic republicanism is founded on ‘the collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community’ (Dietz, 1987: 13-15, in Lister, 1997: 24), whereby citizens as members of a political community are actively in ‘political debate and decision-making’ (Miller, 1995: 443). While liberal conceptions tend to rely on legal definitions concerning the formal status of citizens,<sup>9</sup> and focus on narrow forms of ‘political participation’ (e.g. voting), ‘membership in a community can be a broader,

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<sup>8</sup> Citizenship lies alongside other conceptual advances that have sought to confront both the critique ranged against participation and the broadening of the participation agenda. These include ‘political capital’ (e.g. Baumann, 2000), ‘political space’ (Webster and Engberg-Pedersen, 2002), and ‘political capabilities’ (Whitehead and Gray-Molina, 2003; Williams, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> This juridical focus tends to mask the fact that the ‘sociological realities are those of subjects, clients and consumers, not those of citizens of equal worth and decision-making capacity’ (Stewart, 1995: 74).

more inclusive category' (Silver, 1997: 79). Here, 'citizenship' constitutes not only a set of legal obligations and entitlements 'but also the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim new rights or struggle to expand and maintain existing rights' (Isin and Wood, 1999: 4). This participatory notion of citizenship is particularly 'attractive to women and other marginalised groups' (Lister, 1997: 28), as it offers the prospect that citizenship can be claimed 'from below' through their own efforts in organised struggles (e.g. the MST's notion of 'substantive' citizenship), rather than waiting for it to be conferred 'from above'. Moreover, the grounding of citizenship in actual political communities also helps avoid the risk of imputing a specifically Western conception of citizenship into different contexts (Tilly, 1995).

Two further moves are required for a notion of participatory citizenship linked to transformative forms of politics. The first is to overcome the 'public/private' problem whereby dominant forms of citizenship have tended to exclude 'many classes of potential citizens' (Werbner and Yuval Davis, 1999: 7), including women, minorities, colonial subjects and the working classes. This requires a broader concept of the 'public', and a recognition of those participatory arenas relied upon by subordinate or excluded social groups who are denied access to more public forms of participation (Lister, 1997: 24-9; Young, 1990: 118-120). In some cases, this marginality may 'allow those who have systematically been disprivileged a 'central space' of their own in which to organise the expression of their needs' (Fardon, 1988: 774), and lead to the development of alternative forms of citizenship. The second (and related) move is to recognise the political character of group-based citizenship claims as well as those tied directly to the nation state. As such, 'rather than regarding citizenship and identity as antinomic principles' it might be necessary to 'recognize the rise of new identities and claims for group rights as a challenge to the modern interpretation of universal citizenship' (Isin and Wood, 1999: 4). Here, the particularist claims of identity are gradually transformed into more universalist democratic gains through claim-making and pursuing the political process (Foweraker and Landman, 1997).

From this conception of citizenship, it is important to explore the extent to which this 'recognition politics' develops into what Iris Young termed an 'emancipatory politics of difference' (Young, 1990: 163), a project that requires engaging with questions of

difference, multiple standpoints, and a politics of justice. In terms of difference, Young (1993) sees groups as relational, meaning that “Groups should be understood not as entirely other, but as overlapping, as constituted in relation to one another and thus as shifting their attributes and needs in accordance with what relations are salient” (1993: 123-4). While differences exist this recognition of groups as relational means that each group must engage with the other, rather than simply dismiss it, since groups have a mutual stake in one another’s existence. This also opens up the possibility that alliances exist since only some differences are intractable.

The key to this politics of difference is that it ‘requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression’ (1990: 47, cited in Harvey, 1993: 105). If development is committed to a politics of social justice, how can it resolve the problem of which or whose difference claims are valid and which are not? For Harvey this epistemological task requires a renewed engagement with political economy; what we later develop as critical modernism. Understanding the political economy of the processes shifts the focus in two ways. First, political economy alerts us to the similarities as much as the differences, which then provides a basis for alliances and connections between different groups. Second, by understanding the relational formation of group identities we do not ignore claims by groups which we find oppressive, but look at how their presence shapes and is shaped by those groups seeking emancipation. Therefore, rather than get mired in an impasse over universalism and anti-universalism we locate our epistemology within a socialist political economy, which seeks social justice through a transformation away from capitalism as currently expressed.

#### Development from the left: critical modernism

In this section we elaborate on critical modernism as a socialist-inspired framework that seeks to balance a normative vision with a political praxis that is sensitive to different rationalities and modernities. Critical modernism emerged as a response to the failure of either populism, postmodernism or political economy approaches to adequately capture the complex positioning of structure and agency within contemporary development arenas. As an approach, it is primarily distinguishable from the postmodern/postdevelopment rejection of development, in part to stress that



most countries of the South have never been ‘modern’ in the sense understood by postmodernists (Schuurman, 1993; Peet, 1997). Rather, critical modernism begins from the premise that rather than reject development tout court we need to ‘rethink’ it (Peet and Hartwick, 1997). It retains a belief in the central tenets of modernism – democracy, emancipation, development and progress – but, theoretically rooted in Post-Marxism, feminism and post-structuralism – it begins from a critique of existing material power relations, particularly a critique of capitalism ‘as the social form taken by the modern world, rather than on a critique of modernism as an overgeneralized discursive phenomenon’ (Peet and Hartwick, 1997: 200). This faith in modernism is also ‘scientific’ in that it requires evidence for analysis and action, rather than faith. This avoids romanticising the capacity of the poor and treating all ‘local knowledge’ as pure and incontrovertible. As Peet and Watts (1996: 38) argue within critical modernism ‘rationality is contended rather than abandoned’.

This assertion rests on the belief that modernity is not a singular entity that unfolds in a linear fashion. Rather, the ‘ideas and practices of modernity are themselves appropriated and re-embedded in locally situated practices, thus accelerating the fragmentation and dispersal of modernity into constantly proliferating modernities’ (Arce and Long, 2000: 1). These ‘multiple modernities’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993) destabilise and provincialise the notion of an ideal European modernity and replace it with one that seeks to understand ‘the encounters between multiple and divergent modernities’ (Arce and Long, 2000: 159) in societies containing a ‘multiplicity of rationalities’ (Arce and Long, 2000: 160). Seen thus development is a ‘resolutely dialectical process..(which is)..a sort of mixing, syncretism and cross-fertilization rather than a crude mimicry or replication’ (Watts, 2003: 23).

The pressing question in terms of realising the critical modernist project of development is what or who will be the key agents and in which institutional arenas? According to Heller’s review of participatory governance reforms, neither the state nor the party can be agents of ‘sustained transformative projects’; rather what is required is an ‘ecology of agents’ which blends ‘the institutional capacities of the state and the associational resources of civil society’ (2001: 152, 158). This is not in the sanitised and simplistic sense of state-civic synergies as promoted under the rubric of partnership (Evans, 1997), but in the more political sense of party-social movement

dynamics and within the context of a shared political project. What we get is a form of radical democracy that transcends the local and forges alliances with a range of regional, national and globalised movements. Alliances as we noted earlier can come from a revived political economy that, rather than posit endless differences (as with post-structuralism) or seek totalising sameness (as in some modernisms) finds similarities of experience around which to coalesce and campaign. Hence, coalitions around certain forms of exclusion and subordination emerge.

However, these strategic questions are difficult to answer unreservedly since it is neither possible nor proper to think of strategy in the abstract. The nature of strategy is such that it depends upon concrete openings and possibilities found in 'real' places so we cannot specify *a priori* by whom and in what ways such a politics will be realised. The examples of participatory transformation analysed in the earlier sections offer crucial clues to the types of agency, strategic approach and context that we would argue are associated with a broader project of critical modernism.

## **Conclusion**

The critical backlash against participatory approaches to development and governance has quite rightly raised a number of important concerns regarding problems within such approaches and of their uncritical promotion. However, there is a real danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and losing those elements of participation that retain the potential to catalyse and underpin genuine processes of transformation. This paper has argued that recent advances within and across the several fields of development and governance where participation plays a major role have re-affirmed the empowering potential of participation. However, the conditions within which participation can be transformative, and the forms of politics that underpins such approaches, need to be closely delineated and analysed. The corollary is that not all criteria for transformative participation need to be in place for participatory processes to be enacted since politics rarely unfolds in such programmatic ways. This work has been started here, but requires further elaboration from both empirical and theoretical perspectives.

The intention here has been to locate a radical home for the participatory project that secures its autonomy, room for innovation and links to a transformative project. We

develop the notion of citizenship as a meso-level concept linking popular agency with politics, culture and place. Citizenship analysis arguably has a significant contribution to make towards development theory and practice. As befits development theory, it is an inherently multidisciplinary concept, relating to socioeconomic, political, legal and cultural practices and spheres. Operating at the meso level of social theorising, citizenship represents the type of ‘conceptual innovation’ demanded by this post-impasse discipline (Booth, 1994), with its need to find a path between the failure of metanarratives and the methodological individualism of the more voluntaristic actor-oriented approaches, and also between the political and the cultural. Furthermore, the notion of citizenship maintains a ‘universalist’ normative appeal, while maintaining a capacity to be operationalised within particular contexts.

More specifically, citizenship represents a significant conceptual advance within understandings of participatory governance and development for several reasons. First, it offers a means of covering the convergence between participatory development and participatory governance (Gaventa, 2002). Second, citizenship links to rights-based approaches since it helps to establish participation as a political right that can be claimed by excluded or marginal peoples, and thus provides a stronger political, legal and moral imperative for focusing on people’s agency within development than is currently the case. Moreover, citizenship analysis may also provide a means of transcending the distinction between imminent and immanent forms of participatory development, particularly as it seeks to situate participation within a broader political, social and historical perspective that draws attention to the politics of inclusion and exclusion that shape popular agency beyond particular interventions. The notion of citizenship thus offers a useful political, social and historical form of analysis within which to situate understandings of participation, as located within the formation of a social contract between citizenry and authority in particular political communities. Importantly, and although used across ideological divides, citizenship has a radical political trajectory that can be read most clearly off the claims and programmes of both old and new social movements over the past two centuries (Tilly, 1995). More broadly, then, citizenship is an inherently political perspective on participation, arguably the chief requirement of transformative approaches to participation.

Finally, we argued that such a politics of citizenship must be tied to a project that is radical but which does not reject modernity tout court since modernity has never been a coherent and teleological process, but one fractured and multiply realised. This ontological reasoning allows for a view of development such that political communities can pursue their different experiences of and desires for modernity. Having said this, we would argue that capitalist modernity cannot easily be relativised away as one among many modernities, but must be critically engaged with as the pre-eminent force shaping contemporary and future development processes and the role of popular agency therein.

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