



## DEMOCRATISING DEMOCRACY

How far does community organising offer a new means of negotiating different worldviews to increase the quality of democracy within a predominantly capitalist paradigm?

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Democratising Democracy  
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# ABSTRACT

Since the rise of the neoliberal agenda in the 1980's, democracy and development in the UK have co-evolved. This paper argues that each has developed a narrow narrative where democracy supports and legitimises the neoliberal development agenda. Democracy does little to incorporate the breadth of values, experiences and beliefs of an increasingly complex civil society. Orientalism provides a necessary lens of analysis through which one can observe the increasing segregation of civil society. In order to redress this, a new narrative is required which re-writes the democratic process. This paper argues that community organising is the most creative response to this growing problem because it provides a vehicle through which diverse members of society can come together to participate in active citizenship which effectively holds the government to account. However, reflecting upon the challenges to community organising with diaspora groups (as raised in a supporting background paper), it is necessary to unpack the cultural assumptions which lie beneath the community organising model. This paper proposes a new hypothesis for research: Seeking to understand the cultures from which migrants come would greatly enhance not only the ability of migrants to engage in the organising process (which would have benefits both locally and structurally), it would also be greatly beneficial for civil society as a whole. The paper argues that the process of organising should fully reflect its advocacy of 'relational' politics. The community organising process should be shaped by the cultural norms and beliefs of the diverse individuals which makeup its membership.

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# INTRODUCTION

In response to a previous paper which makes the case for community organising with diaspora groups, this secondary paper steps back to consider the nature of civil society more broadly in order to assess the possible implications of a more detailed research process to understand how civil society is structured in the countries from which migrants come. The research would have a particular focus on the role of religion and faith in defining the values and motivations of the majority of migrants entering the UK. Recognising that the author's experience of community organising with a Congolese diaspora group is limited, the paper raises an important agenda for further interrogation, asking what is the role of culture in defining civic space? This is significant because community organising seeks to bring people of varying beliefs, backgrounds and opinions to work together.

The discussion shall proceed by exploring the development of democracy in the UK since the 1980's to the present day. Within this analysis of the current parameters of democratic opportunity, the discussion shall consider civic space as it is currently organised. Once this framework for analysis has been established, the discussion shall interrogate to what extent community organising closes this gap between civic space and the technologies of a supposedly democratic government, as well as highlighting the ways that research into civic space in the countries from where migrants have come would further the achievement of the community organisers objective.

## Development and Democracy

'Economic development is anti-democratic' (Lummis, 1996; 45). For Leftwich there is an institutional incompatibility between development and democracy. According to a neoliberal view of economic development, which is understood by David Harvey to increase global inequality through a process of 'accumulation by dispossession', democracy is an obstacle to development because it challenges the assumption that a fully thriving economy is driven by completely free markets and a global open trade policy. At its most extreme, it can be argued that neoliberalism is an antidemocratic concept which perceives state involvement in the economy as a hindrance to development. This paper seeks to argue that the process through which democracy and development have co-evolved in the UK since the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980's reflects an ongoing battle for a market monopoly. The

consequence is that democracy currently exists in a narrow form, and does little to engage with the diversity of civic space.

As highlighted by Huber, this current form of democracy is flawed in two ways. Not only does it fail to reflect the opinions of civil society in the broadest sense, the means through which one can engage in democratic practices are limited. At the same time, the diverse make up of civic space is increasingly complex. As people of differing world views, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds increasingly live side by side, this paper argues that there is a need for a new democratic narrative; one which recognises this change. Only with this deepened understanding of civic space will it be possible to create a democracy which reflects the real needs, experiences and beliefs of all of civil society in order to inform the way that the state makes decisions.

This paper will redress the assumption that development and democracy are incompatible, acknowledging a Keynesian economic model where the state should be a responsible voice which dictates the economic processing of markets by community the real opinions of civil society. However, in order for this view of development to be achieved, we need to better understand the dynamism and lack of integration that exists within civic space, in order to generate a new paradigm within this Keynesian economic model. The new paradigm should re-democratise democracy and ensure that state led policy reflects the actual experiences of civil society, in order to work towards reducing inequality. Furthermore, looking beyond this theoretical challenge to consider a practical response, the paper shall argue that community organising is the most creative current attempt to 'reweave the fabric of civil society' in order to hold the state to account and achieve a stronger democracy. However, as identified in the previous paper in this series, in its current format community organising can only go so far in achieving this end goal. This paper shall identify ways in which further research into the diverse range of cultural and faith based dynamics with which community organising engages would both enhance the effectiveness of community organising, as well as making a case for funding more organising capacity.

### **Identifying the flaws of liberal representative democracy**

'In Foucault's account, government is inevitably a technical matter. Practices of government rely on an array of more or less formalised and more or less specialised technical devices' (Barry, 2001; 5). In accordance with this Foucauldian analysis, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which we do engage with government. At a basic level, the ballot box is the



means by which a UK citizen exercises his or her voice in the public sphere. There are three dominant understandings of democracy; Schumpeterian, Dahl's polyarchal democracy, and finally liberal democracy. Tracking the progression of democracy in accordance with the progression of a free market economy helps us to understand how these two practices (democracy and development) have emerged symbiotically. Huntington (1993) uses the term 'third wave of democratisation', to describe the rise of democratisation since 1974. 'Between 1974 and 1990, at least 30 countries made transitions to democracy, just about doubling the number of democratic institutions in the world' (Huntington, 1993; 3). Adhering to the Schumpeterian concept of democracy, Huntington identifies this form of democracy to be 'minimalist. Democracies are states where ruling elites compete for votes in the market place of the election' (Huntington, 1993; 3). For Huntington, this practise of democracy only represents an expansion of the market into the political arena, as opposed to a system through which the voices of civil society are fully heard and used to construct policy.

For Diamond (1996), the processes through which democracies develop into full liberal democracies are important in terms of understanding whether democracy has actually reached its goal of guaranteeing a better standard of living for citizens. If we understand the capitalist system to produce social inequality, then a minimalist democratic system can only endorse this structure, as opposed to challenge it. The combination of electoral democracy and free market economics has led to a wider gap between countries and classes. This has undermined social stability and in consequence prevented development. According to Denning (2001), the modern democratic system can be understood to have led to an increased 'electorate area' which can be equated with a decline in socio-economic democracy. Well substantiated critiques of this liberal representative form of democracy question the quality of democracy. Politics has become de-radicalised because despite the fact that more and more people are able to participate in this representative system by voting, this also has increasingly become the only way of participating. For McNally, 'democracy has been emptied of its original content' (McNally, 2006; 273). Perhaps an even more extreme consequence of this reduction of democracy to a series of technological processes is that the Euro-centric liberal democratic model actually, 'eradicates and stifles the emergence of a new vision of democracy' (Koelbe & Lipuma, 2008).

### Opening space for a new form of democracy

Having identified the way in which the development of a free-market economy has led to the legitimisation of a form of democracy which has been hollowed out, it is important to challenge Koelbe and Lipuma's statement that there is no space for a vision of a new democracy. For many, the answer to redressing the fact that narrow democratic processes only substantiate a flawed capitalist system lies in whether or not a more participatory and socio-economic democracy is pursued (Huber, Rueschermeyer and Stephens 1997). This paper seeks to go beyond this narrative to propose that in order to democratise democracy, before changing the technologies of democratic participation, it is necessary to better understand the state of civil society in its current form.

# UNDERSTANDING CIVIC SPACE. THE PROBLEM

## Increasing Segregation

Into this framework it is important to place an understanding of civic space in London in its current form. 'Stereotypes play an important role in the configuration of social space because of the importance of distancing in the behaviour of social groups, that is, distancing from others who are represented negatively, and because of the way in which group images and place images combine to create landscapes of exclusion' (Sibley, 1995; 14). Sibley's theory of psychologically distancing sheds some light on the geographic ordering of space. According to the GLA Intelligence survey, in London ethnic minority groups are concentrated geographically (GLA, 2013).

Analysis of the 2001 census by the Greater London Authority<sup>i</sup> reveals that in general, since 1991, the size of an ethnic community has become a larger proportion of the population of a given area. The ethnic communities in London have grown by 51% between 1991 and 2001. A number of reasons including natural growth and net migration are suggested; ethnic minority groups largely have a younger population structure and are therefore more likely to be in the reproductive age bracket, migration in and out of London is also considered to have played a significant role. It is also notable that those places with the larger established ethnic communities are also places which were the point of first settlement for those ethnic groups. There is a common assumption that this process of organization of ethnic communities across space takes place largely because of family networks, familiarity or a fear of integration. However, the report notes that 'notions of segregation assume that individuals have a choice in their area of settlement; this has not always been the case for populations that are deprived or experiencing poverty' (GLA, 2005; 10).

In fact, a recent study by Dr Gemma Catney (2011) reveals that social segregation in districts across the UK has decreased in recent decades, and a study by Munoz (2011) reveals that religious affiliation needs to be increasingly considered when analysing ethnic geographies. 'Overall, by providing an analysis that incorporates religion, and analysing the existence of

ethnic faith geographies, the (research) points towards new ways of understanding ethnic geographies that recognise the role of religious affiliation in spatial patterning and social segregation' (Munoz, 2011; 129). By mapping the residential distribution of different Indian faith groups Munoz outlined the extent to which faith plays a greater role than ethnic affiliation in how communities form.

Burgess<sup>ii</sup> notes how 'an underlying issue (resulting from segregation) is the degree to which members of various ethnic groups operate separately from each other and from their host society in their day to day lives'. One of the constraints is the extent to which members of the various groups are separated from each other-particularly in their residential milieux' (Burgess, 2001). Burgess confirms the GLA conclusion that this residential composition does not necessarily take place out of choice. 'This comes about because of a combination of (residual) discrimination in labour and housing markets; low incomes, restricting group members to certain areas within the housing market; plus their own desire to live among members of their own communities, both to sustain (and sometimes promote) their cultural identity and to insulate them from (perceived or real) threats from others' (Burgess, 2001; 1).

Not only has there been a failure in the ongoing 'integration' discussion to consider the depth of experience embodied in the make up of civic space, recent research by Catney emphasises the significant 'missing' narrative of the role religion plays in determining multicultural geography. 'Debates about integration are often made with reference to social cohesion, ethnic concentration, migration and multiculturalism' (Catney, 2011). They go on to highlight that the debate thus far has failed to even consider dimension of space and place, ordinariness, religion and language.

#### Being a migrant in a multicultural state

Analysis of how the UK government has responded to growing diversity and residential segregation is identified by Sarah Spencer (2010) who highlights that there is a 'serious vacuum in public debate...With low public and political awareness of the barriers migrants face, it is open to detractors simply to blame migrants for 'failing to integrate' (Spencer, 2010; 1). Tracing the development of a government led integration narrative in the UK, Spencer highlights how the government has done little to suppress this narrative, in fact, evidence suggests the contrary. In the 1960's, notably before the introduction of a global

free market economy, 'the government defined integration as not a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (Spencer, 2010; 1). The patterns of integration which developed beyond this statement were predominantly around suspicion of race relations rather than equality. This suspicion of how 'differences' might promote tension have manifested in a government led strategy advocating assimilation not integration. In a speech delivered in 2006, Blair argued that it is 'not that we need to dispense with multicultural Britain...but to stress that 'no distinctive culture or religion supercedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom...We need, in the fact of the challenge to our values, to re-assert also the duty to integrate, to stress that we hold in common' (Blair, 2006). Responding to suspicion about racial tensions by making integration a 'duty' consolidated in a homogenous national narrative fails to engage with the complex ways in which different ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural groups interact. In asserting a commitment to a nationalist narrative, Blair sought to temper the reality of diversity, rather than seeking to understand it. This process neatly facilitates the advancement of the neoliberal project.

The current government has done little to deepen this 'integration' narrative, although Miliband's most recent rejection of Blairite assimilation advocacy shows some degree of engagement with the reality of social disintegration.

We 'need to reject the idea that people can live side by side in their own communities, respecting each other but living separate lives, protected from hatred but never building a common bond, **never learning to appreciate one another**' (Ed Milliband, 2012).

Milliband's re-visioning of civil society in the UK presents a promising step towards a deeper engagement with how civic space is actually composed, acknowledging that we need to move beyond an assimilation narrative which denies difference, towards a narrative which recognises different groups and their individual histories, beliefs and values. However, the strategy that Milliband posed immediately after declaring his One Nation vision does little to instil confidence that he is committed to the agenda he has set. *English language training for newcomers will be prioritised above funding for written translation resources.* While the strategy seeks to address an appropriately identified need, as research amongst the Congolese community has identified, the process does nothing to challenge the predominant paradigm. Funding language training increases the chances migrant

communities have of joining in with civil society in Britain. However, this does nothing to address the multiple reasons why language is a barrier for migrants in the UK. Language training will significantly increase the capacity of migrant communities to use local shops, access the job market and negotiate with immigration solicitors. However, the clear assumption is that it is the duty of migrant communities to adapt to the Western institutional system as soon as possible. There is no attempt to consider the complex backgrounds from which migrants come. Neither is there a cultural underpinning of western civil society values and how they might be different to those of other countries, an idea that will be explored later on in this discussion by considering the work of Amartya Sen.

The most recent government statement (May 2013) regarding integration is that asylum seekers should not be encouraged to integrate into the UK until they have gained their official asylum status as refugees. One way this is being demonstrated is by placing the system of legal aid into jeopardy. If asylum seekers lose their right to legal aid this will put a significant burden upon the time it takes to process the system, potentially putting greater stress on migrant families who are often forced to house these individuals through their own networks. There is little evidence that the government desires to encourage integration as a means of 'welcoming' migrants along the lines of 'wholly living'. Integration appears to be pursued as a means of tempering political tensions and therefore advancing the government agenda.

In order to move beyond these so called 'sticking mechanisms', it is necessary to step back and assess how civic space is experienced by migrant groups in order to reconceive of space. In order to do this it is necessary to consider how and why different groups establish these 'side by side' structures, as referred to earlier by Milliband. Said's theory of Orientalism enables one to understand, to some extent, the reasons why groups do or do not interact.

As geographer Gregory explains; 'In his discussion of Orientalism, Edward Said introduces the idea of imagined geographies. These are constructions which fold distance into difference by multiplying partitions and enclosures that serve to demarcate 'the same' from 'the other', at once constructing and calibrating a gap between the two by 'designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space which is beyond 'ours' and 'theirs'" (Gregory, 2004; 17). For Gregory (2004), 'their space is often seen as the inverse of our space' and therefore can often be understood in terms of a fabricated notion of what

is 'other'. Taking this notion of difference to a further extreme, James Der Derian argues, 'people go to war because of how they see, perceive, imagine and speak of others: that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representation' (Gregory, 2004). This paper argues that Said's theory of Orientalism well explains Miliband's description of Britain today. The following case study helps to place this theory in practise.

# WHAT DOES CIVIC SPACE LOOK LIKE?

## **CASE STUDY:** Congolese Diaspora Community in London

For Sylvie Okoko, the reality for the Congolese community in London is one where Congolese people live their day-to-day existence alongside other Congolese, rarely interacting with the rest of British society. Reflecting on the reasons behind this phenomenon, Sylvie would argue there are psychological and physical barriers to the integration of the Congolese diaspora into London. Although the psychological barriers to integration for her cultural community are intimately tied to experiences and notions of home, the physical challenges experienced living in the UK create further psychological complexity. Sibley's exploration of 'psychoanalytical theory' will be used to develop some understanding of these phenomena. In order to analyse the causes of this experience, it is important to consider the differences between how civil society is structured in the UK and how civil society is constructed in the DRC, at local, national and international scales.

### **Inferiority**

It is Sylvie's belief that for many in the Congolese diaspora in London, race is a major causal factor in why people choose to interact predominantly with other Congolese people. This was re-affirmed in conversations with 20 other members of the Congolese Catholic Chaplaincy. Sylvie sees the isolation of many in her community to be a major barrier to integration and the development of individuals within the diaspora. Sibley identified how preconceived ideas can be accentuated in 'new' circumstances whether real or just perceived. 'Stereotypes play an important part in the configuration in social space because of the importance of distancing in the behaviour of social groups, that is distancing from others who are represented negatively, and because of the way in which group images and place images combine to create landscapes of exclusion' (Sibley, 1995; 14).

According to Sylvie, the concept of racial hierarchy has a strong influence in determining how members of the community perceive they are viewed by those who they deem to be 'other', in this case non-Congolese groups. At a local scale, 'many Congolese people choose to live in clusters in Tottenham and Hackney...There is a deep rooted inferiority complex...People feel they are both intellectually and racially inferior' (Interview with Belange, 2012). Evelyn Mpama identified how psychological fears are perpetuated because of physical racial abuse. Evelyn has had eggs thrown at her and been told that she has 'come



to steal our country'. Inevitably the experience of physical and racial abuse amplifies fear across small communities like the Congolese diaspora groups which have well-established networks.

To understand these preconceived perceptions, it is necessary to consider the international relationships developed over time between the West and the developing world. Post development theory would identify this phenomenon to have root in the cultural hierarchical discourse established across years of colonialism and most recently reproduced in global aid relationships through which power is vested with the dominant west and exerted through the provision of resources. By supplying help in the form of constrained resource provision, for example structural adjustment programmes, poverty reduction strategy papers, and most recently the Paris Declaration, the cultural hierarchies established across colonial history are reproduced in new ways. With such a prevalent understanding of us and them as defined along racial boundaries, it is not perhaps surprising that this notion of us and them is reproduced at a local scale in London. For Belange, the reality of this experience is significant and influential.

### Loss of Cultural Identity

Research has also shown that the Congolese community fears a loss of cultural identity for two reasons; firstly, fear of losing the strong values which they feel to be upheld in the DRC and not in the UK, and secondly, fear of becoming disconnected from families, history and heritage in the DRC. The latter manifests itself as an inter generational tension. Yvette Ngoma fears for her children who speak English and interact with British young people at school. Yvette identified problems both in terms of the negative attitude many Congolese young people have towards church, and also the values to which young people are exposed. For many young people, including Yvette's daughter Julie, attending the Congolese catholic chaplaincy is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the services are 3 hours long and led in Lingala, the national language spoken in the DRC. Unable to understand Lingala, for many young people the routine of attending services becomes incredibly difficult. Secondly, for many young people, the actual process of worship during a service can feel very detached from their day to day experience. For many of the older generation who do not speak English and have little interaction with people outside of their community, Yvette states it can be very difficult to understand why young people do not take their faith as they would consider 'serious enough'. The role of faith within culture is clearly incredibly important, and

something this paper will discuss further when considering how mutual relationships between host and migrant communities might be convened.

### Cultural Barriers

Mimi identifies how the fear of losing one's affiliation and ownership of Congolese culture was a major barrier to her desire to integrate. This argument was endorsed by Mama Mpampa who felt that the expression of community in Britain is weak, unlike in the Congo where people within villages act with a greater degree of responsibility for one another. This idea was furthered in an interview with Evelyn Ogongo in which she went to great lengths to articulate the differences in notions of family in the UK and in the DRC. 'The culture of friendship for us is very significant'.

Belange expanded this argument stressing both the potential positive and negative outcomes of this view of how civil society is constructed in the DRC, emphasising the relationship between local and national spheres. Describing what he understands to be the Congolese view of the relationship between community and political action, Belange identifies that for many in his church (Peniel Congolese Church), community in the UK does not exist. People form community amongst very small groups, often on the basis of work, school or small family units. On the contrary, in the DRC, at local level people would consider their whole village to be family, and therefore you act for one another accordingly, 'in a remote village, you have to make everything happen for yourself'. In consequence many Congolese have little experience of how a relationship between local and national political spheres might look. 'Shouting for things at home doesn't work, violence and bloodshed works...For example, last year the Congolese elections were rigged, marching like you do here will do nothing' (Belange, 2012). Belange argues that the concept of sacrifice is much more significant in understanding the politics of his home country. 'Will you risk your life is a much more serious question to be asking than anyone would here' (Belange, 2012). Belange described how his parents frequently discuss violence, abductions and murders that they witnessed at home. For Belange, the manner of civic political engagement with the state, and he specifies the political assemblies of London Citizens, are perceived to be ineffectual and redundant in the light of these extreme experiences of violence.

### Supressing aspirations. Living out the American Dream

An important theme which was raised in each interview conducted is that of how notions of inferiority, cultural identity and cultural barriers work together to construct aspirations to live in the UK. Belange referred to the mindset of those coming to the UK in terms of The American Dream. 'People I know still talk about England being the land of opportunity....the highest goal for many back in the DRC is to get to the UK....if you do this then you have made it' (Belange, 2012). Sylvie identifies how this has had a significant impact on whether or not people choose to work hard or not.

For Sylvie the isolated experience of London's Congolese diaspora can have an impact upon whether or not people have aspirations to achieve more than simply existence. David and Anderson's (Sibley, 1995) theory of high and low density social networks helps us to understand this phenomenon. In a high density network like the Congolese diaspora, 'most links are strong and one is likely to know and have direct ties to most people affected by the misbehaviour (sic) of a member of one's network' (Sibley, 1995; 29). In a low density network, 'difference is less obvious because there is less shared knowledge of individuals within the community' (Sibley, 1995; 29). This theory helps us to understand Sylvie's observation of the space. Members of her community who interact within high-density Congolese networks, whether right or wrong, shared ideas which they then adopt within a small group. 'Coming to England is enough, then you can live on support and benefits...The government tells you nothing, so you learn everything from your own networks...If you are told you have no right to study, you will not study...but it is not true...there are opportunities available, but no-one makes the effort to inform you' (Sylvie Okoko, 2012). High density local networks clearly play a role in defining how much the Congolese community in London interacts with the state.

### Unfamiliar institutions

The previous four themes have reflected predominantly upon some of the social and psychological challenges for people who are new to this country. However, in order to adequately understand these social dynamics, it is necessary to understand the physical systems with which UK migrants engage. There are large gaps in institutional knowledge for migrants to the UK. Sylvie's experience of arriving to the UK was difficult. Her introduction was one of recognition, not of welcome; 'the home office says we recognise that you are here, now go' (Sylvie, 2012). Sylvie goes on to describe how it took her two years before she

understood how to benefit from the opportunities available to her. 'Many don't know how to fill in an application form, how to use a bank account or the benefits system...you just have to learn by listening to people'. Sylvie learnt how to negotiate the system, but she describes her own experience, and her desire to succeed to be unusual amongst her Congolese community. While Sylvie perceives the opportunities she has received in the UK to be have been hugely beneficial for her, the lack of effort on the part of the UK Border Agency to enable people to integrate suggests there is a lack of willingness to understand the complex challenges experienced by those coming to partake in this new culture and system.

# REDRESSING THE IMBALANCE BETWEEN STATE LED DEMOCRACY AND LIVED MULTICULTURALISM

## Active Citizenship and Reconfiguring Space

For Kabeer, citizenship is important because it reflects more about the 'collective associations' people ascribe to than 'apparent membership of a nation state (which) often means little to its members' (Kabeer, 2005; 21).

Rooted in the ideology of French social theorists Lefebvre, Foucault and Arendt, Cornwall offers a progressive understanding of how a notion of citizenship can be influential for development outcomes (2002). Deconstructing the neoliberal notion of citizenship to incorporate the idea of 'space (as ) a social product' (Lefebvre, 1991; 24), Cornwall argues that 'enhancing citizen participation requires more than inviting or inducing people to participate' (Cornwall, 2002; 28).

For Foucault, 'architecture and the organisation of physical space can serve as a means of domination and control' (Foucault, in Cornwall, 2002; 7). Lefebvre applies more specificity to this understanding of space by exposing how spaces are not separable; what happens in one impinges on what happens in others, as relations of power within and across them are constantly reconfigured' (Lefebvre, in Cornwall, 2002; 7). Redressing the binary assumptions made within a neoliberal framework, these social theorists broaden the scope of citizen participation within wider society, beyond the realms of deliberative democracy. In accordance with Arendt's understanding of citizens as 'active', it is necessary to move beyond the classical liberal understanding of citizenship as something which is inherent, in order to open space for the engagement of those who are excluded from conventional forms of exercising citizenship, in the case of Brazil, deliberative democracy.

## Is Community Organising the answer?

Having identified how the narrow democratic systems in place in the UK reflect the predominant 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalist paradigm, this discussion has also observed that the

concurrent dominant economic agenda since the late 1980's has been the advancement of unbridled capitalism. While a new institutional approach to economics would have a stronger belief in the ability of the state to adapt and change the nature of capitalist pursuit, evidence suggests that in its current form, as articulated through an analysis of how civil society can engage in the democratic process, the state in the UK serves the neoliberal project rather than acting as a regulator. There is no space within which people of diverse backgrounds can bring themselves for the fulfilment of 'wholly living' alongside 'other' (Theos, 2011).

The final chapter of this discussion will consider to what extent community organising can address this gap between the agenda of the state in the UK, and the complex dynamics of civic space. In order to understand to what extent community organising in practise begins to democratise democracy (Koelbe and Lipuma, 2008), it is necessary to consider first the theoretical framework, as first defined by Saul Alinsky, before discussing how the model translates to work with people of differing cultural and faith backgrounds. This paper argues that community organising is currently the most creative way of engaging the breadth of civil society in a fruitful and substantial relationship with the state. The process attempts to bring the voices of people from across a community to be heard and responded to at the national level. While the model is progressive and well sits within the narrative described throughout this paper, as civic space becomes increasingly complex and cosmopolitan in nature, it is imperative that a deeper understanding of the different groups is developed. Finally, this paper shall argue that in order for genuine democratic representation at a national level, it is necessary to consider the relationship between host and migrant communities as mutual, seeking to identify the ways in which each group could benefit the other, rather than reproducing the inequalities and hierarchical relationships constructed by the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

### Community Organising in Theory

The Institute for Public Policy Research recently published a paper (2012) arguing that the answer to the challenge of integration lies in looking for the spaces where individuals intersect on a daily basis, and using this as a basis for state-civil society interactions. It is encouraging that the argument is being made in an influential forum, but it cannot be ignored that the process of community organising in London has already made significant progress in this arena. Carina Crawford is a diaspora community organiser with Citizens UK.

Reflecting upon her experience in this role, Carina is committed to the idea that community organising is a way of enabling people of different backgrounds to take hold of their own futures and bring about real and constructive change for civil society. For Carina, community organising directly challenges the development paradigm of us and them; ‘us’ as service providers, and ‘them’ as recipients of a service.

We believe that people working together have the power to change their communities and their country for the better. Political and corporate leaders don’t often embrace change, unless they’re pressured by the people they serve. But too many people don’t realise they have the potential to join forces and create change in their neighbourhood and across the country. We work with people who want to transform the world—from what it is to what they believe it should be. We challenge people to imagine the change they can accomplish, connect individuals and organisations to multiply their power and mobilise people by the thousands to make their voices heard. We set audacious goals, create savvy strategies and take on the powerful interests that stand in the way.

(Citizens UK website, 2013)

Through processes of one to one conversations, community organising builds relationships between people and institutions in order to identify collective needs, and calling upon the government to bring about change through serving those needs. As previous paper (2013) indicates some of the practical challenges of conducting effective Citizen organising with diaspora groups.

There are numerous clear examples of how the process of organising constructively brings about necessary change. The Living Wage is a well-known example of a campaign organised and won by communities in London. Through a process of building relational power by identifying stories of people across institutions (churches, mosques, schools or other civic groups), the alliance was able to make a case for why a Living wage is not only morally right, but also makes good business sense.

Before, I had to work two jobs to put food on the table and pay the rent. I had no time for my family or my community. When The Living Wage was introduced I was able to prioritise the one job and that means I’ve been able to be there for my family and set up a youth group in my community

The campaign was supported by people from a wide range of civic institutions who had identified this as an issue for members of their own community. By working together as a wider alliance, the argument was strong, encouraging institutions such as businesses, local councils, schools and others, to make a proactive commitment to paying the living wage.

### **Diaspora Community Organising in Practise**

The community organising model is clearly effective, and strongly challenges the vertical structures of power that exist within the capitalist paradigm. Building relationships intentionally between people provides an excellent basis from which to articulate a common vision for change. Considering again the theory of high density networks that exist within diaspora communities, it is interesting to consider the ways in which the relational basis of organising best adheres to a society which has low density networks. Faithful Citizens, a work by Austin Ivereigh, directly speaks into this dichotomy. Ivereigh (2010) equates the weakening of democracy in modern European history with the diminishment of civil society. He argues that the French revolution provides a picture of democracy 'as an interaction between the state and atomised individuals, shorn of their loyalties to those mediating institutions, and depending greatly upon coercion and obligation-in short the triumph of 'contract' relationships over 'covenantal' ones' (Ivereigh, 2010; 34). He goes on to argue that this marked a shift from relationships based upon reciprocity and gratuity, to relationships which were replaced by those of obligation and coercion (Ivereigh, 2010; 34). For Ivereigh, the work of community organising reconstructs the social order so that it may be secure and audible amongst the constant forces of both state and market. If we then put this theory into an understanding of diaspora civic space which, as identified, is often densely clustered, it is interesting to consider how this affects the nature of the organising process. An Organiser identifies how the dense construction of civic diaspora networks actually creates a different starting point for organising.

If we are to truly redress the problem of sticking plasters over neoliberal wounds and redressing predominantly hierarchical paradigms, it is essential that the organising model does not assume that it is neutral. As identified in a previous paper (Burbridge, 2013), community organising with members of diaspora groups is challenging and raises some challenges to effective organising, notably because of how existing structures and networks



within diaspora groups have affiliations both within the UK and to home, the influence of faith upon communities both institutionally, spiritually and emotionally, diversity of cultural experience and affiliation, and finally a lack of UK institutional knowledge. If we acknowledge that community organising is an important and significant model in terms of bringing about a representative form of democracy which challenges the social norms constructed by neoliberalism, it is imperative that we apply the same level of rigour to considering how to build genuinely mutual relationships with people of diaspora groups who are living in the UK.

Of particular significance to this process must be faith. A recent commission by DFID has articulated the need for the development community to recognise faith as a highly influential player in development processes. Reflecting upon the influence of DFID as a donor to major development programmes internationally, contributing 7% of its budget, it is concerning that this is a new phase of work. Experience community organising has established clearly, that faith is a dominant driving force in less economically developed countries. While DFID is working with major charitable partners such as Christian Aid and Tearfund to think about what implications considering faith might have for the development processes, an idea which well supports Kabeer's notion of inclusive citizenship, it is all the more important for civil society in the UK to have developed a clear narrative which shows how faith groups are working together for the common good. Through developing understandings of how faith interacts with civic space in the countries where migrants come from, space would be created to understand the significance of faith when working with migrant groups in the UK. Analysis of the nuances of organising with different faith groups could not only feed into these international debates, but also ensure that national policy understands faith groups and responds to needs accordingly.

In order to enable diaspora groups to engage fully in public life in the UK, it is essential that research is conducted in order to understand the cultures from which these groups migrate. Study of the Congolese diaspora has identified challenges which are particular to the Congolese community. It is necessary therefore to consider the fact that there will be complex and subtle differences between the experiences and cultural practices of each migrant group engaging with organising, both within and between these groups. Both for the purposes of maximising the effectiveness of organising, and also in order to ensure that

the relationship between host and diaspora communities is genuinely mutual, further research, both in the UK and overseas, is essential.

There is a common assumption that, particularly in countries that are considered to have weak democracies such as the DRC, that civil society does not exist. Therefore countries such as the UK would assume responsibility to 'teach' civil society to migrants. However, having identified strong high density networks amongst Congolese migrants, this paper would argue that this assumption is fundamentally flawed. The question is not whether or not civil society exists in the countries which diaspora groups migrate from, the more important question that must be addressed, is how civil society functions in these countries of origin at both local and national levels, and therefore what can we learn.

### Mutual Development of Civic Space

'...this book is informed by a belief in the ability of different people from different cultures to share many common values and to agree on some common commitments' (Sen, 1999; 244). This analysis raised an important agenda for further research into how diaspora communities interact, and on the basis of what cultural norms and beliefs. The research also has significant implications for how other faith groups interact with migrant communities. Evidence from Father Adam Atkinson, an Anglican priest in Bethnal Green (East London), and Father Sean Connelly, a Catholic priest in Manor Park (East London), suggests that the integration of gathered churches is an important challenge. Father Connelly works in a deanery where the Catholic Church has decided that migrant communities are required to attend host churches in order to ensure the full integration of people and shared communion. Despite an official mandate, this has not taken place in reality. Similarly, in St Peter's Bethnal Green, gathered migrant congregations use the church buildings throughout the week, but do not participate in the worshipping life of the existing host congregation. As highlighted by Ritchie (2012), the benefit of Anglican and Catholic alliances is that, despite inevitable differences on the basis of experience, belief and cultural practise, churches are still united under one banner. Working from this basis, the evidence given here seems to be an important call to churches to look beyond their own walls to consider who and where local migrant congregations are gathered. If we are to move towards a society which is truly integrated, both for direct relational benefit, but then in consequence in order to achieve fully democratic change, it is essential that, as the IPPR report identifies, these relationships begin locally.

The second important challenge to draw out of this discussion is how a deeper understanding of the countries from which migrants come would change the way civil society functions in the UK. Sen raises an important challenge to consider the cultural basis of value systems. Sen argues, 'The world is invited to join the club of 'Western democracy' and to admire and endorse 'tradition values' (Sen,1999; 233) To identify how civil society functions in the DRC, for example, and then use that knowledge to find ways to teach migrants how to participate in public life in the UK, re-establishes the existing hierarchies rejected in post development theory. The former makes the assumption that civic practices elsewhere are wrong, and that western notions of civil society are in fact universal. Sen goes on to argue the assumption that the Western democratic value system is fundamentally flawed and underpinned by a western set of ideals. Sen argues that this assumption is not only detrimental for those migrants who have come to the West (an idea we can extrapolate to apply to his theory), it is having a damaging affect on value systems elsewhere. 'The contemporary world is dominated by the West, and even though the imperial authority of the erstwhile rules of the world has declined, the dominance of the West remains as strong as ever-in some ways stronger than before' (Sen, 1999; 240). In order to move beyond this thinking, it is essential, and exciting to consider how an understanding of the values and cultural practices of different places might inform, enhance and enrich the civic engagement of people living within the UK, as well as the lived experiences of UK nationals. One suggestion highlighted throughout this last year has been the importance of arts based practise, which have a particularly strong tradition, for example, in African cultures (Dagnino, 2005). Building upon the principle that relationships are formed naturally on the basis of play, (as can be developed further through arts based practices), as opposed to on the basis of a shared need, as is the traditional basis of community organising, has the potential to seriously transform and enhance the breadth of ways in which organising can build and strengthen relationships across civil society. Further research would clearly reap more ideas along this basis.

## RAISING AN AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

Analysis of conversations with members of the UK's Congolese diaspora over the past year has raised a number of important questions which require further research. Clearly the challenges for migrants entering the UK are complex, and they are reproduced at local, national and international scales. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the complex issues related to the motivations of the UK border agency, this paper seeks to argue that while it is within the law to grant legal status to migrants, we have a duty and a responsibility towards them. It is a huge failure of the current institutional state system that while the UK acknowledges and grants refuge to people escaping violence in the form of practical provision (e.g. immigration status and language training), little effort is made on behalf of the state to explore the depth of challenge faced on entering the UK. This is indicative of a system, which uses such acts as a tool to further the neoliberal project. The state in the UK fulfils its legal obligation to grant status to those seeking refuge, however, it's failure to address the cultural and institutional challenges faced by most as they enter the country supports the narrative of the state as an institution which controls civic space in order to allow for unbridled capitalist development, rather than to inform and shape the nature of responsible capitalist development.

The evidence in this study has three significant implications for state and civil society relations. Firstly, a lack of engagement with the cultural, and religious beliefs of multiple migrant groups has a huge impact on how individuals interact within civic space. Secondly, the institutional technologies of governance prevent the voices and experiences of civil society as a whole from being fully represented in democratic processes. Finally, there are significant implications for how the state conceives of integration as a whole. A failure to engage with the complex dynamics at play in a world of increasing cosmopolitanism can only be dangerous and unsustainable. Using the lens of 'Orientalism', evidence suggests that a lack of integration within increasingly diverse spaces constructs and reproduces a mindset of fear. If we are to ensure that we develop communities which function relationally, the culture of fear must be redressed. This paper argues that the most important way to redress this imbalance, which is characterised by increasingly segregated civic space, it is imperative that we begin to move beyond recognition, towards understanding of the nature, values, beliefs and motivations of those who increasingly live side by side. Applying this deepened understanding of the civil societies from which migrants come to the practise of community

organising could contribute to the shaping of a new democratic model which is deeply progressive and wholly owned by its immersed members.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that community organising provides one of the most creative practised means of working with diaspora groups in the UK. The process provides a direct challenge to the dominant structures of power which exist within our society. The development of neoliberalism since the 1980's has brought with it a form of democracy which supports rather than challenges the production of inequality both within and between countries. Democratic processes in the UK are increasingly narrow, relying on a series of 'technologies' through which people can engage with the state. The consequence of this hollowing out of democracy is not only a deepening of social inequality constructed through policies which don't reflect real need, it is also a deeply disintegrated civic space which has little opportunity, or understanding of how, to engage with the state.

Community organising provides an essential challenge to this narrative, re-building power along relational and horizontal lines, and enabling a platform from which the state can be held to account for issues of real need. However, the process of organising with diaspora groups puts into sharp focus the cultural paradigm of the organising model, applying its one narrative to an increasingly international membership. In order to advance the project of community organising and achieve a fully thriving UK democracy, it is essential that further research is conducted. Firstly, it is necessary to understand what civil society in the UK looks like; interrogating civic space along lines of geographical space, faith and the cultures of diaspora. Secondly, it is a common assumption that the presence of a democracy in a country (for example in the DRC) can be equated with the presence of a 'universal' civil society in that country. This leads to the further assumption that a country with a weak democracy has no civil society. Encouraging diaspora groups to participate in the organising model in its present form without interrogation supports this assumption. In order to redress this assumption and find ways to enable diaspora groups to integrate into, and contribute to, the UK democracy, it is imperative that one understands how civil society functions in these countries of origin. This understanding must influence not only how we enable diaspora groups to participate in public life in the UK, but also how civil society functions here, recognising that we can also benefit from this cross cultural exchange.

The potential benefits of placing this research through a community organising lens are significant, having an impact at local, national and international levels. Not only could an

increased understanding of complex and diverse cultural dynamics enable better relationship building between people in geographically rooted communities, this could significantly challenge the ability of the government to ignore the needs and demands of civil society. With strong emotional and economic attachments to 'home' on the part of many migrants, the potential for knowledge sharing and capacity building internationally would also inevitably be great. In a city which is both increasingly cosmopolitan, and in consequence increasingly segregated, it is becoming all the more important to understand the civic spaces from which people are migrating, in order to enable the full democratisation of democracy. Community organising has begun the process with significant success. It is necessary to build upon those successes through research, and increased participation of people from all backgrounds so that London can begin to develop a culture of strong relationship and shared vision despite difference. Only then can the inequalities which are built into the economic system be challenged. In the words of Julia Kristeva;

**Living with the other, with the foreigner confronts us with the possibility, or not, of being an 'other'. It is not simply-humanistically-a matter of being able to accept the other but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for one self.**

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## PRIMARY SOURCES

Interviews were conducted over a year spent community organising with London's Congolese diaspora. Evidence collected from Congolese migrants, community organisers and interviews with academic researchers. This was a participatory research process informed by methodologies established by Davis. Further information available on request.

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