

Introduction

Rethinking the Role of NGOs in Struggles for Social Justice

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Few would dispute the assertion that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have come to play a very prominent role on the African continent. Statistics suggest that the NGO sector has grown phenomenally over the last few decades, both in Africa and globally. For example, Kaldor et al. (2012: 19) report that the number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) has more than doubled between 1989 and 2000. After 2000, this phenomenal growth slowed down somewhat; however, even in recent years the number of INGOs continues to reflect ‘a stable, consolidated growth pattern’ (Kaldor et al. 2012: 19). Similarly, Keane (2003: 5) reports that there are around 50 000 INGOs operating at the global level and that 90 per cent of them have been formed since 1970. A further indication of the growth of the influence of NGOs is the fact that donor support to INGOs from member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹ grew by 384 per cent between 1994 and 2004 (Kaldor et al. 2007: 328). These INGOs now disburse more money than the United Nations (excluding the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), and more than two-thirds of European Union aid is disbursed through these INGOs (Keane 2003: 5).

Although these statistics relate to INGOs (which are arguably more visible and easier to count than NGOs), there is every indication that the phenomenal growth of INGOs has been accompanied by a similar proliferation of NGOs within various countries throughout the world, including on the African continent. Statistics on the growth of NGOs in Africa are hard to come by as not all countries collect reliable statistics on this phenomenon, but indications are that the growth in the number of NGOs over the last few decades has been very pronounced. For example, a Kenyan study reports that in Kenya the number of NGOs grew by 400 per cent between 1997 and 2006 (Kanyinga et al. 2007: 15), and South Africa’s NGO Pulse reports that South Africa has more than 100 000 registered

non-profit organisations, as well as an estimated 50 000 unregistered ones (Stuart 2013). Furthermore, several commentators refer to the way in which the number of NGOs has increased in Africa. For example, Matanga (2010: 115) talks about the ‘proliferation of development NGOs in Africa’, and Manji and O’Coill (2002: 568) refer to the ‘explosive growth’ in the number of Western and local NGOs in Africa.

While it is evident that the number and influence of NGOs in Africa has grown over the last few decades, it is important to note that there are some concerns around declining funding for NGOs generally and for South African NGOs in particular. The global financial crisis of 2007–08 inevitably had knock-on effects for aid flows and thus for NGOs. Zealand and Howes (2012) note that the financial crisis did not initially appear to have dented official development assistance (ODA) flows, with such flows showing continuous growth from 2000 all the way to 2010. However, their analysis highlights significant declines in ODA flows in 2011 and 2012, which they attribute to low economic growth in donor countries and pressure from austerity measures. They also note, however, that these declining aid flows are likely to be offset, at least to some extent, by a rise in donor aid from ‘emerging donors’ (such as countries like China, India and Brazil) and private philanthropy. Teka and Magezi (2008) argue that expectations of declining funding as a result of the financial crisis resulted in many NGOs embracing cost-cutting measures such as laying off staff or not starting new programmes. They also note that, in times of decreased funding, NGOs adopt the strategy of ‘cultivating’ donors, which might involve very careful proposal writing aimed at attracting the interests of particular donors.

South African NGOs faced particular challenges that differ from those faced by NGOs in other parts of Africa. This is because the transition to democracy in 1994 resulted in changes in donor funding. Kihato (2001: 1) notes that after 1994 many donors who had previously supported South African civil society organisations began channelling money towards the new government. Furthermore, she notes that overall aid flows to South Africa declined after 1997 because of growing confidence in the government and the reduced threat of violent upheaval (Kihato 2001: 12).

Regardless of the likely effects of these recent funding downturns, it is evident that NGOs today play a very important role on the African continent. However, it is not all that clear exactly which organisations are considered to fall under the umbrella term ‘NGO’. Broadly, the term ‘NGO’ is used to refer to any non-profit

organisation that is independent from government and can be understood to be a values-based organisation. The term encompasses a wide range of organisations that differ in size, geographical location and function (Riddell and Robinson 1995: 26). While many NGOs are dependent on charitable donations and voluntary service, in recent years they have become increasingly professionalised (Clarke 1995; Lehmann 2007). Although various forms of NGOs exist, each with its distinctive focus, NGOs tend to be involved in one way or another with development initiatives that are concerned with service delivery, capacity building or policy influencing. Some researchers (for example, Mercer 2002) distinguish between NGOs and smaller, more community-based or ‘grassroots’ organisations, regarding NGOs as fairly well-resourced organisations with paid staff members, but others use the term more loosely in a way that includes smaller, less well-resourced organisations that might be dependent to a significant extent on volunteers. Some authors have attempted to provide typologies of NGOs in a quest to differentiate between the very different organisations that could all conceivably fall into the NGO category. For example, Gotz (2008: 232) rather sarcastically runs through a long list of related acronyms existing in the literature, such as the GONGO (a government-organised NGO), the QUANGO (a quasi-NGO) and the DONGO (a donor-organised NGO). These terms all point to the way in which NGOs may not actually be what they appear to be – in other words, they might actually be affiliated to the government or strongly influenced by outside donors while purporting to be local, non-governmental actors. Other typologies focus on the differences between the intended beneficiaries and/or the activities of various NGOs. For example, Yaziji and Doh (2009: 5–7) differentiate between self-benefiting NGOs (such as groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or trade unions) and other-benefiting NGOs (such as Doctors Without Borders). They also note that NGOs can be differentiated in terms of whether they focus on advocacy (such as Amnesty International) or service (such as Red Cross), although many organisations (such as Oxfam) combine aspects of both advocacy and service. A further common way of differentiating NGOs is to look at their level of operation and therefore to distinguish between those that operate at a local, national or international level (see, for example, Ball and Dunn 1995: 29).²

In this book, the term ‘NGO’ is applied in a fairly broad way, although most contributors use it to refer particularly to larger, better-funded organisations, and most understand it to refer most saliently to organisations that are involved in efforts to use funding from Western countries and organisations to promote ‘development’

in Africa. In terms of the classifications discussed above, this book is particularly concerned with the activities of NGOs that operate at national and international level, although more locally based NGOs also enter into the discussion (see, for example, chapters 5 and 6, by Westaway and Nqaba respectively). The focus of the book is on NGOs that aim to benefit others rather than the members themselves, so self-help organisations and trade unions are excluded, as are organisations such as burial organisations and *stokvels*. In terms of the activities of NGOs, both advocacy and service NGOs are included in the discussion.

It is worth also briefly commenting on the difference between an NGO and a social movement, as this is also relevant to the discussion. Some contributors to the book (notably Madlingozi and Kota) discuss the differences and overlaps between NGOs and social movements, but generally the approach of this book is that social movements are more organic, less formal, member-based organisations that protect the interests of their own members, while NGOs tend to have more formal structures and paid professional staff, and aim to provide services to or advocacy on behalf of a particular constituency.

The history of NGOs in Africa

It is not possible to understand the current role of NGOs in struggles for social justice without understanding the history of their role in Africa. The roots of NGOs in Africa are found in the arrival of missionaries on the continent, who dispensed charity and were involved in the provision of education and health services (Amutabi 2006; Manji and O’Coill 2002; Shivji 2007). The missionaries and other voluntary organisations were considered to be key weapons in the ideological warfare that helped sustain colonialism, as they provided support for the idea that colonialism was in the interests of Africans through the discourse of colonialism as a ‘civilising mission’. Voluntary welfare provision was a good vehicle through which the agenda of social control could be pushed because it was apparently apolitical and therefore not subject to much interrogation and critique. However, the approach of the missionaries and other charitable organisations was often one that obscured the causes of the poverty that charitable initiatives sought to address, and which understood poverty and deprivation as being a consequence of the failings of Africans themselves as opposed to being a result of the colonial societal structures.

After the end of colonialism, the discourse favoured by voluntary organisations shifted from one that spoke about ‘civilising’ Africans to one that promoted the

idea of ‘development’. However, despite this shift, Manji and O’Coill (2002) point to many continuities between the ideologies and practices of colonial missionary organisations and those of the development NGOs that emerged after the end of colonialism. In particular, both sets of organisations approached questions of poverty and suffering in African countries through the lens of charity and paternalism, rather than the lens of emancipation and justice. Both the idea of a civilising mission and the idea of development suggest that Africans are in need of guidance and assistance from the West, which is portrayed as benevolent and generous.

While the history of NGOs in Africa can thus be traced back to the colonial period, it was in the 1980s that they were increasingly recognised as important institutions in the broader development and aid sectors in Africa as well as elsewhere (see Brodhead 1987: 2; Doh and Teegan 2003: 2; Srinivas 2009: 614; Welch 2001: 1). The ‘magic bullet phase’, as it has been referred to by Lewis and Kanji (2009), came as a result of NGOs attracting greater recognition and increasingly forming part of mainstream development policy all over the world. During the Cold War, many powerful states favoured channelling aid through the state, as this allowed them to use aid for leverage. With the end of the Cold War, the need to use aid as leverage was somewhat reduced. Thus, bilateral and multilateral donors who had previously channelled funds through states shifted towards a new policy agenda that looked towards providing aid through private organisations. Furthermore, the 1980s saw increasing global support for neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism, in brief, is an approach that opposes state intervention in the economy in favour of self-regulating markets (Thorsen and Lie 2007). The adoption of neoliberal policies led to a decrease in state provision of social services, which left a gap in society that has increasingly been occupied by private social agents, such as NGOs. In the case of Africa, the indebtedness of African states gave international organisations the leverage they needed to push for the adoption of neoliberal policies (Manji and O’Coill 2002: 578). International financial institutions adopted the view that Africa’s lack of ‘development’ was best addressed through the introduction of so-called structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that were subsequently imposed on several African countries. SAPs encouraged a reduced role for the state. As a result of this ‘rolling back’ of the state, the influence of NGOs grew tremendously, and many countries became increasingly dependent on these organisations for the provision of goods that had previously been provided by the state (Heinrich 2001: 10; Manji and O’Coill 2002: 578; Matanga 2010: 115; Shivji 2007: viii).

By the 1990s, the NGO sector had grown considerably and NGO-led development was increasingly considered the main alternative to state-led development. As a result of this, NGOs continued to grow in capacity and influence (Drabek 1987: x; Lancaster 1999: 228). However, there is evidence, as discussed above, that the recent financial crisis has slowed the growth of NGOs somewhat. Furthermore, this financial crisis has called into question the neoliberal orthodoxy that led to the shift away from funding the state towards a preference for aiding NGOs and other non-state actors, and this could potentially slow the growth of NGOs both on the continent and worldwide. Another recent challenge to NGOs is seen in the increased influence of alternative forms of organisation evident in both the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring. While NGOs have long portrayed themselves as being the mouthpieces of the excluded and marginalised, the Arab Spring and the various Occupy protests were driven by what Bayet (2013: 588–9) calls ‘non-movements’, with NGOs playing little, if any, role. Similarly, Veneklasen (2011) speaks of the role of ‘Facebook revolutions’ and ‘leaderless movements’, highlighting how different these forms of organisation are to the operation of NGOs, which she derides as entailing a ‘handful of sharp professionals and policy talking points, a wonkish celebrity and clever slogans’ rather than solid organising, mobilising and consciousness raising. It is clear that many question the idea that NGOs are capable of advancing the interests of those neglected or oppressed by the state.

While the relevance of NGOs has thus been rightfully questioned and challenged (and will be further questioned and challenged in this book), their ubiquity and influence throughout Africa and beyond cannot be denied. NGOs are undeniably powerful actors with access to large sums of donor money and with a prominent voice in continental and international discussions about development, economic growth, human rights and other issues related to social justice.

NGOs and social justice in Africa

As NGOs have experienced growth in influence, their role has come under greater scrutiny. While NGOs have found much favour with the donor community, this increased favour has had the effect of increasing suspicion of NGOs on the part of many advocates of radical change in the direction of greater equality and social justice. In the wake of their increased influence, we must ask whether or not NGOs are able to contribute meaningfully to struggles for social justice. However, this question becomes hard to answer as it is difficult to pin down

what is meant both by the term ‘NGO’ and the term ‘social justice’. Some of the problems relating to how to define NGOs have been mentioned above, but it is important to stress that the term ‘social justice’ is no easier to define. According to Barry (2005: 4–5), the term emerged in the heady period of early industrialisation in Europe and came about in order to advance a concept of justice considered to be a virtue not only of individuals but also of societies. The term ‘social justice’ became associated with broader struggles of socialist and social-democratic movements; it was used primarily as part of an attempt to highlight the shortcomings of capitalism, to argue for the need to create mechanisms to ensure a more equal distribution of income and, more broadly, to build a fairer, egalitarian society. While the term is used in a variety of ways, Miller provides a neat summary of what ‘social justice’ usually points to: it typically refers to the way in which ‘good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society’ (Miller 1999: 1). When we regard a particular policy or practice as socially unjust, we typically mean that ‘a person, or more usually a category of persons, enjoys fewer advantages than that person or category of persons should enjoy’ (Miller 1999: 1). However, as Miller acknowledges, on further investigation several difficulties relating to the term become apparent. What are the ‘good and bad things in life’ that should come under the scope of social justice? Can we properly understand social justice as something that relates principally to the *distribution* of particular goods? What do we mean by ‘human society’, particularly in a globalising world where questions of global inequalities and global justice have come to attract more attention? These questions preoccupy those concerned with social justice globally, but there are also particular ways in which the term ‘social justice’ is used in African contexts. In South Africa, for example, it is often used in relation to concerns around continuing racial and other inequalities stemming from the apartheid and colonial past. While most authors in this book do not spend much time discussing exactly how to define social justice, the term is critically interrogated by Neocosmos and Tselapedi (in chapters 2 and 3 respectively), both of whom object to the way in which many of those working in the NGO sector use the term.

Ultimately, we as contributors to this volume do not think the best way to respond to the lack of clear meanings of terms like ‘NGO’ and ‘social justice’ is to try to pin down unequivocal definitions that can be used to make easy distinctions between NGOs and other organisations, and that can assist us in deciding whether or not NGOs play a positive role in struggles for social justice. Rather, our point

of view is that the question of what NGOs are and what is meant by ‘social justice’ needs to be part of broader discussion about emancipation and justice. What is clear from much of the literature is that while NGOs have long portrayed themselves (and have been portrayed by others) as acting out of legitimate moral concern for the well-being of those they serve, and as playing an important role in furthering development and bringing prosperity to Africa and other relatively poor regions, there are good reasons to be sceptical about many of these claims. It is not self-evident that NGOs do indeed play a positive role in struggles for social justice, and therefore we need to think carefully about whether and how NGOs can help bring about a more just and equitable world. It is thus important to be attentive to the many criticisms of NGOs that have emerged over the last couple of decades.

Critics argue that NGOs typically make use of a technocratic approach to poverty and development that leaves unchallenged the power relations that exist in the societies where they operate (Shivji 2007; Wallace 2003: 216). Poverty is treated as though it is a technical rather than political problem and therefore can be solved with political technologies that are based on mechanisms and procedures devised by NGO workers who are deemed as being experts in the field. By understanding the problem in this way, NGOs participate in the depoliticisation of poverty by stabilising and institutionalising power relations and thereby preserving the status quo (Gorden 2004: 2; Manji 1998: 25; Nancy and Yontcheva 2006: 5–6). Through this process, the poor are inevitably blamed for their poverty. In contrast with technocratic approaches that empower development ‘experts’, critics argue that political struggles are necessary in order to allow for a space where human agency can be asserted and where all members of society can freely participate (Manji 1998).

When NGOs adopt technocratic approaches, people who lack technical knowledge of the kind certified by universities and other educational institutions are sidelined. NGOs favour employing those with technical skills rather than those who are most affected by the problems the NGOs purport to be addressing. Furthermore, knowledge about NGO work tends to be produced by those with the requisite academic skills, meaning that the ways in which those with less formal education experience the work of NGOs lack visibility. We know what educated elites think about the work of NGOs because they are the authors of books and reports on the subject, but we have less of a sense of how NGOs are experienced by those who supposedly benefit from their work.

Another criticism of NGOs relates to concerns that they are ultimately more accountable to their donors than to the communities they supposedly serve. As discussed above, the end of the Cold War and disillusionment with the role of the state in advancing development led to a rapid increase in the amount of development aid directed towards NGOs. Part of the appeal of NGOs was their supposed closeness to the ‘grassroots’ and their responsiveness to the communities within which they work, but as larger amounts of development aid began to be channelled through NGOs, they have become increasingly responsive and accountable to their donors. Consequently, the work of local NGOs has ‘to mesh with strategic plans . . . written thousands of miles away [and] be designed according to non-translatable project concepts and be subject to distant and unchallengeable funding decisions by the funders of the funders’ (Powell and Seddon 1997: 8).

The above criticisms all suggest that while NGOs may be able to provide certain useful products and services that might address certain particular needs, they are less likely to be able to play a role in advancing social justice, regardless of how we choose to define it. However, outside of the activist and academic circles where the above-mentioned critiques of NGOs are generated, NGOs are often seen to be very important and praiseworthy organisations that play an important role in improving people’s lives. It is not at all evident that NGOs are generally considered to be agents of disempowerment and social control. As Zeleza (2006: xiii) points out, NGOs are seen by many to represent ‘Africa’s vigorous and reawakened civil society’ and as ‘popular instruments for more accountable and transparent participatory development’. Furthermore, at scenes of great suffering, NGOs and other humanitarian actors are often present to assist people and alleviate their pain, for which many are profoundly grateful. In contexts where states have been unable or unwilling to provide adequate welfare services, NGOs have stepped in to provide education, health care and other very important services. Furthermore, despite the criticisms of their generally apolitical stance, there are countless NGOs that are involved in advocacy and activism work aimed at getting governments and international institutions to attend to the needs of the marginalised and vulnerable. Are condemnations of NGOs thus undeserved?

Content overview

This book does not attempt to provide a final and conclusive answer to the question of whether and how NGOs can be involved in struggles for social justice. Rather, each contributor takes up the question of the role of NGOs in struggles for social

justice in his or her own way, resulting in a rich and varied conversation about the role of NGOs in Africa. The book originated at a colloquium entitled ‘NGOs and Social Justice in Africa’ held at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, in September 2014. At this colloquium, academics, NGO workers, social movement activists, students and other interested members of the public hotly debated the role of NGOs in advancing social justice. No firm conclusions were reached, but many thought-provoking ideas were put forward. These ideas have now been consolidated into the contributions that make up this volume and which are intended to encourage further discussion and reflection on how best we can respond to the varied and persisting injustices that characterise the contemporary African (and indeed global) scene. While the focus of most chapters is on South African NGOs, the book also includes chapters that take a broader view of the role of NGOs in other African countries. Furthermore, the commentary on NGOs provided here is relevant beyond the continent, as NGOs play a similar role in other countries and face similar criticisms relating to their ability to promote social justice.

Part I of the book contains three chapters that explore conceptual questions related to the general topic of NGOs and social justice. Chapter 1, by Firoze Manji, reflects on what we mean by emancipation and introduces a very useful distinction between what he calls ‘licensed freedoms’ and ‘emancipatory freedoms’. Licensed freedoms are freedoms that occur within constraints imposed by others and are delimited by those in power, while emancipatory freedoms are those that are seized through people’s collective power and which transcend the constraints of any given historical period. NGOs, Manji suggests, have been far more successful at achieving licensed freedoms. By this he means that at the very best it might be argued that NGOs have contributed to the improvement of the lives of Africans, but in ways that do not entail the emancipation of African people and their ability to determine their own destiny. In practice, NGOs effectively depoliticise the processes that lead to impoverishment of the vast majority.

Chapter 2, by Michael Neocosmos, provides a further, related distinction – that between ‘representation’ and ‘presentation’. Neocosmos argues that NGOs and other civil society actors supposedly ‘represent’ interests or identities, but that emancipation is not achieved through such ‘representation’. Rather, argues Neocosmos, ‘an emancipatory politics can exist only when a collective subjectivity is self-created and exceeds the interests of that particular group by orienting its practice to principles of universal equality’. Those who participate in emancipatory

politics are engaged in ‘presentation’: they become a subject by presenting themselves on the scene of history. According to Neocosmos, NGOs are unlikely to help create emancipatory political agency as they do not involve a collective self-affirmation that goes beyond – or ‘exceeds’ – the expression of interests and identities.

Chapter 3, by Thapelo Tselapedi, turns a critical eye on the concept of social justice and the way in which it has been understood by those he describes as the ‘metropolitan left’. His focus is on the intellectual orientation of those who dominate the NGO sector in South Africa and elsewhere. Contrasting this orientation with that of the black radical tradition, Tselapedi argues that the metropolitan left’s blindness to issues relating to race has made it unable to understand ‘the black grammar of suffering’ and, more generally, unable to respond adequately to the challenges it purports to address.

Part II consists of five chapters from contributors who have worked or are currently working within the NGO sector. These chapters reflect carefully and (self-)critically on the nature of NGO work in Africa in a way that reveals some of the shortcomings of NGOs in terms of their ability to contribute to struggles for social justice. Chapter 4, by Kirk Helliker, looks critically at the role of Zimbabwean NGOs in advocacy around land reform. Helliker shows that these NGOs were disconnected from rural people and did not understand their realities. This disconnection and the NGOs’ focus on struggles for civil and political rights resulted in them being unprepared for the radical land reform programme that began in Zimbabwe around 2000, and thus unable to respond meaningfully to it. Helliker’s discussion of these Zimbabwean NGOs points to some broader questions around the ability of NGOs anywhere to understand properly the realities of those they purport to assist.

Chapters 5 and 6, by Ashley Westaway and Patronella Nqaba respectively, should be read together, as Nqaba relates some of Westaway’s insights to broader discussions of the role of NGOs. Westaway uses the experiences of the organisation he runs (GADRA Education) to reflect on the tensions between a welfarist approach and an approach that prioritises advocacy. NGOs have often been accused of being welfarist in that they provide specific services to address particular problems while not addressing the underlying causes of these problems. Through a discussion of the different ways in which GADRA Education has combined the provision-of-services approach with that of advocacy for structural change, Westaway suggests that these might be complementary rather than opposing strategies. In GADRA’s

case, the effective provision of service delivery has provided the organisation with the credibility required in order to play a role in advocating for structural change. Building on Westaway's discussion, Nqaba highlights what the experiences of GADRA Education tell us about the question of whether or not NGOs depoliticise development.

These two chapters are followed by a contribution by Injairu Kulundu, who, in Chapter 7, reflects on her experiences as a young black woman working in the NGO sector. Kulundu teases out some of the contradictions that plague the NGO sector in order to show that, despite these contradictions, it is possible both for NGO workers and for the people they work with to shift and subvert the values of NGOs and their funders. While Kulundu's critical stance towards NGOs is clear – indeed, she argues that many NGOs are little more than brokers who mediate the effects of a profoundly unjust social order – she also emphasises that those who interact with NGOs in various ways are not just passive victims. Rather, they are able to shrewdly and adeptly navigate the NGO world to bring about at least some advantages for themselves. Kulundu concludes that NGO spaces are not simply and only debilitating, and that one can work subversively in them for positive ends.

Chapter 8, the final chapter in this section, is by Koketso Moeti, who draws on her own varied experiences in the NGO sector to argue that the white leftists who dominate much discussion on the left in South Africa are insulated from the effects of their critiques, which work themselves out on black bodies. She points to a continuing problematic division of labour among the South African left, where white people are disproportionately represented among those who produce knowledge about leftist struggles, while black people are called upon to mobilise people to the causes decided upon by white leftists. Moeti concludes that more self-reflection and self-interrogation is required.

Part III brings together some contributions that do not fit the format and style of a typical academic book, but rather consist of conversations about the role of NGOs. While knowledge and understanding are arguably best advanced in dialogue, academic book chapters and journal articles do not always invite this dialogue. Furthermore, the traditional requirements of academic writing mean that those who prefer to express themselves in other ways (or who lack the credentials to secure space in academic books and journals) are excluded from written discussions on topics about which they have helpful insights. In order to include such insights, Part III presents edited transcripts of three conversations among people all concerned with thinking about whether and how NGOs can play

a role in struggles for social justice. These conversations highlight some of the key tensions that arise when NGOs seek to work alongside social movements and other community activists to advance struggles for social justice. All the conversations focus particularly on the experiences of South African social movement activists working with NGOs, but their insights are of relevance beyond the South African context.

The first conversation, in Chapter 9, brings out the ideas of Gladys Mpepho, who was chairperson of the Grahamstown-based Unemployed People's Movement (UPM) at the time she was interviewed by Them bani Onceya, a fellow UPM member and a student at Rhodes University. In conversation with Onceya, Mpepho argues that in her experience NGOs behave in ways that are very similar to the ways in which government and political parties behave: their contribution to the community comes with an agenda and evidently enriches them, while community members remain poor. Mpepho argues that if NGOs are to play a more positive role, they ought to trust community members' ability to decide how to use funding, and they ought to be willing to move out of their comfort zones to actually engage more practically in the daily struggles of the marginalised.

The second conversation, in Chapter 10, is between Ayanda Kota, a founding member of the UPM, and Sally Matthews, who interviewed him in relation to his experiences with NGOs. Like Mpepho, Kota argues that NGO workers often behave in ways that are indistinguishable from the behaviour of government and political party officials, and that they resist coming out of their comfort zones and actually doing the hard work of struggling on the ground for justice. Kota also points to the dangers of co-option of members of social movements by NGOs. NGOs sometimes weaken social movements by offering them funding with strings attached, or even by employing promising social movement leaders. The effect is to make leaders accountable to the NGO rather than to the social movement from which they come.

The arguments by these two members of the Unemployed People's Movement resonate with the ideas of Tshepo Madlingozi, who, in Chapter 11, talks with Sally Matthews about his experiences working with the Khulumani Support Group. Like Mpepho and Kota, Madlingozi argues that the mode of operation of NGOs is predominantly a statist one. Madlingozi's experience in using the law to try to bring about outcomes favourable to social movements leads him to argue that while social movements can and should use the law tactically to win particular victories, the use of the law and of human rights discourse is unlikely to bring about

the radical change that such social movements seek. Madlingozi asserts that social movements and the NGOs that assist them need to chart a very difficult course that eschews an ivory-tower purism that avoids the use of the law altogether while also recognising that the hegemonic legal system is one that, as a whole, works to oppress African ways of being-in-the-world and is thus incapable of being used to achieve radical change.

Given that the contributions to this book all arose from the colloquium ‘NGOs and Social Justice in Africa’ held at Rhodes University in 2014, it is apt that the conclusion to the book is an edited version of the concluding presentation at that colloquium. In his closing talk, Mazibuko Jara, who has years of experience in political party structures, the NGO sector, academia and social movement circles, uses this experience to distil some key points out of the colloquium discussions. Jara seeks to go beyond simply stating the shortcomings of NGOs and expressing moral outrage about their failings. He argues that whatever role NGOs might play, they are not up to the task of bringing about the radical change required if social justice is to be achieved; we therefore have to think beyond NGOs. However, as Jara makes clear, political parties and social movements in their current form are also not up to the task. This means that we need to think beyond existing structures when trying to build a radical emancipatory project. Drawing on his varied experiences in South African left organisations, Jara points to some of the more promising NGOs and other political platforms that provide pointers to how we can best organise in emancipatory ways. He concludes that we should not limit our imaginations by only asking what NGOs can do, but rather open up our minds to think more broadly about how we can build new practices and new ways of organising that can help open up possible paths to a more just future.

Notes

1. The OECD is a group of high-income countries that includes most of the big-donor countries. Members of the OECD cooperate to stimulate economic growth and trade and to promote liberal democracy and free-market economies.
2. Ball and Dunn (1995) also discuss a range of other possible ways of differentiating between NGOs, such as by looking at their activities or at the ways in which the organisations are governed.

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