DEMOCRACY, IDEOLOGY, AND CONGENITAL INEQUALITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

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Leaders are crucial to social movement mobilization and maintenance. They often experience conflict between an (implicit or explicit) value for inclusive engagement that “draw on the concerns and energies of all” as a sense that they are moving efficiently toward their organizations’ end goals. This study draws on a multi-site ethnography to illustrate how leaders may resolve this conflict by appearing democratic while still exercising explicit or implicit undemocratic control over organizational processes and outcomes. Resolving tension in this way has the unintended effect of stifling the actual process of democratic participation, effectively excluding new and potentially valuable resources and mobilizing strategies. It is additionally proposed that democracy is an intransigent institution and value; that efficiency may not be some groups’ core motivation’ and that power and ideology are neither anomalous nor eradicable, but lay at the heart of democracy and are constitutive of its practice. The congenitally undemocratic nature of social movement groups, and the strategies deployed to cover the subsequent democratic deficit deserve further investigation.
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*The strong do what they will, the weak suffer what they must.*  
- Thucydides

*Democracy is only a form of organization and that when it ceases to be possible to harmonize democracy with organization, it is better to abandon the former than the latter.*  
- Michels

*Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires bringing them to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation.*  
- Chantel Mouffe
1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars and activists in the progressive social movement community have increasingly emphasized the importance of inclusion and consensus in open and participatory spaces within the public sphere (Habermas 1974, 1989; Ferree and Martin 1995). This value has been reified within social movement organizations and the literature on progressive social movements (de Sousa Santos 2005). Groups preferring these strategies often lack political and economic resources and must rely almost exclusively on the strengths of their claims and the validity of their organizational processes to establish and maintain legitimacy. While the nature of broadly-accepted claims and processes are constantly evolving, some general trends can be discerned. Social movement actors over the last forty years can generally be described as validating principles of inclusive engagement in their organizational forms (Polletta 2005). While this commitment can be seen most clearly in prefigurative groups (Polletta 1999; Quilley 2000), more mainstream members of civil society such as advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations have also demonstrated an increased commitment to more democratic decision-making. By “democratic decision-making” and “inclusive engagement” I mean an explicit value for organizational forms and functions that, in the words of an organizational leader: “draw(s) on the concerns and energies of all”.

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3 I follow here Eliasoph’s definition of the public sphere as “an instance of open-ended and public-spirited communication, something that ‘comes into being when people speak public-spiritedly’” (1998).
However, as scholars and practitioners of social movement efforts understand all too well, sustained commitment to this process may result in a decreased ability (or fear of decreased ability) to reach critical movement goals (see Staggenborg 1995). While this tension could be directly resolved by putting explicit limits on inclusive engagement—or modifying movement goals to account for the additional complexity represented by more inclusive and engaging processes—this research suggests the existence of an indirect solution. Movement and organization leaders may use presentation techniques that affect the appearance of inclusion and engagement in order to mask those undemocratic actions that allow leaders to meet organizational goals and objectives. In so doing they reproduce inequality.

This thesis draws on ethnographic fieldwork to argue that movement and organization leaders lend themselves particularly well to a dramaturgical analysis using the ideas developed by Erving Goffman in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959). According to Goffman, a veneer of consensus is achieved when "each participant conceal(s) his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service" (8). It is clear to me that each of the two groups in this project value deliberative and inclusive processes. This openness to input from all participants for the purpose of giving space to members' voice as well as meeting organizational goals and maintaining organizational legitimacy. It is this process, I argue, which obliges homage and demands commitment in these, and similar, groups and more generally in the social movement field. Under the right conditions the idea of—and references to—principles of democracy may cover non-inclusive leadership and preclude member engagement. A perception of commitment to this value is sustained

2 Admittedly, this work selectively highlights Goffman's contributions. Where his work, especially in Presentation of Self, highlights the role of actors and teams in performative action, this study focuses on the performative space between leaders and group members. This approach focuses particular attention on the leader's role rather than highlighting, in a more traditionally Goffmanian approach, their individual roles as actors or the group's collective role as a team.
through the use of staging and scripting, strategies that serve to reinforce *rhetoric* while undermining *action*.

I propose these staging and scripting efforts emerge at the intersection of the following constraints and concerns, specifically, when an organization has:

1) Specific goals that are external to the organization
2) Limited resources (thus increasing the importance of legitimacy)
3) Commitment to inclusive engagement (democratic, consensus, deliberation, etc)
4) Need for efficiency (at both the meeting and project/organizational level)

When each of these four conditions has been met, leaders may use staging and scripting strategies to generate the appearance of inclusive engagement. It can be easily seen that removing (or significantly modifying) any one of these three variables produces considerably different results. For a first example: organizations which have sufficient resources are likely to use these resources to hire professional staff (issue 2). As Michels and others have shown, this bureaucratization has the effect of reducing internal democracy (issue 3) in the interest of survival (rather than inclusion or efficiency—issue 4). Another path can also be imagined: if efficiency is not valued by a group—as Polletta (2003) argues was the case with survival and solidarity-focused pacifist groups in the First World War—then there simply won’t be enough tension between inclusive engagement and efficiency to require the staging and scripting strategies detailed here. Similarly, Clemens (1993) has shown that society-specific commitments (issue 3) can mitigate Michels iron law of oligarchy as well. Staging and scripting strategies would most likely not be considered useful in cases which don’t match on each of these four criteria.
The existence and use of these strategies suggest several contributions to social movement scholarship. First, it suggests democratic values are widespread and not as easily dismissed as suggested by Michels. Secondly, it draws on Clemens’ (1993) work on organizational repertoires to suggest motives other than efficiency (legitimacy, in this case).

This thesis explores the use of staging and scripting in two community groups operating in the American Mid-West. First, I review the relevant literature on leadership and participation within social movement groups. This overview is followed by an introduction to the methods and fieldsite. Second, I discuss in detail: a) the creation and reinforcement of democratic-appearing activity; b) the minimizing of democratic expression; c) the reconstruction of such appearances when efforts to minimize expression fail; and d) the implications of these staging and scripting efforts. Third, I suggest these preceding findings may be out of interest to social movement scholars and practitioners. Furthermore, I highlight an opportunity to reconnect with the Gramscian literature on the relationship between power and democracy. I conclude with recommendations for further research.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the complex nature of leadership within social movement groups has been addressed from a number of direction (Baiocchi 2003; Bourdieu 1991; Michels 1915). This thesis adds complexity to Michels’ iron law of oligarchy (1915; Lipset 1997). Michels famously observed that even the most democratic organizational structures eventually succumb to oligarchy due to a need for leadership (and leaders’ subsequent consolidation of power), as well as gratitude and passivity by those being led. Michels’ argument is clear, and, for the most part, remains unchallenged. Setting out to explain how radical groups eventually adopt the status quo he posited that: 1) hierarchical and centralized bureaucracy is the most effective organizational form; 2) parities and institutions will recognize this and adopt the form regardless of existing ideologies; and 3) after some time both the incumbent and the opposition resemble one another. Thus the iron law of oligarchy states organizational forms tend toward organizational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Importantly for this study, Michels determines that “democracy is only a form of organization and that where it ceases to be possible to harmonize democracy with organization, it is better to abandon the former than the latter” (1915: 35). Democratic forms of organization are actually more difficult to eschew than Michels suggests here. It has been pointed out that democratic and inclusive practices of engagement cannot simply be abandoned in the face of organization (i.e., systems of efficiency).
The sense that organizational forms can simply be discarded is challenged in recent work by both Elisabeth Clemens (1993) and Francesca Polletta (2002). Both argue that the idea of the valid organizational form is situated in broader contexts, and necessary for legitimacy. Arguing that democratic organizational forms are drawn from a broader repertoire, Clemens writes: “models of organization comprise both templates for arranging relationships within an organization and sets of scripts for action culturally associated with that type of action” (758). Organization form cannot mutate around more political and structural demands as easily as Michels might suggest. Hierarchy may be the most efficient form of organization, but it is not always the most socially accepted. Care must be taken to maintain appearances as the value for democracy lies not just within the organization, but more broadly in movements, politics and culture (Polletta 2002: 213, 217). Thus, models of organization are drawn from a cultural repertoire which has a good deal to say about which of which forms are “culturally or experimentally available” in both relative and absolute terms (Clemens 758). Getting the model right involves more than ensuring organizational success through the adoption of increasingly efficient processes, it also “signals identity and delimits alliances” (Clemens 771) and plays a significant role in determining whether an organization will be considered legitimate in its claims, both within the social movement field and in larger political and cultural spheres. The process of “getting it right”, Clemens argues, involves a tremendous amount of cultural work as “models of organization are not only conventions for coordinating action but also statements of what it means for certain people to organize in certain ways for certain purposes” (775). Michels’ approach additionally assumes efficiency is the prime organizational motive, an assumption challenged by the possibility that some leaders may “champion participatory democracy precisely because it spares them the hard work of having to make choices among possible goals” (214). To use the concepts detailed in this thesis, Polletta effectively argues
staging and scripting can be used to avoid leadership and efficiency in times of uncertainty. As both Clemens and Polletta show, efforts to increase organizational efficacy must resonate with broader, culturally, accepted repertoires, and in some cases leaders pursue goals other than efficacy.

The organizational repertoire for many new social movements involves normative commitment to ensuring broad representation and voice for traditionally-marginalized individuals and groups (Bordt 1997). This value for participation and inclusion can be seen in recent literature on both organizational form (Polletta and Lee 2006, Fishman 2004) and styles of leadership (Aminzade et al 2001, Diani 2003). Arguing that participatory discourse is the foundation of democratic—and, presumably organizational—legitimacy, Polletta and Lee highlight a widespread interest in democratic organizational forms and processes in both social movement organizations and among social movement scholars (see also the analogous macro perspective in Held 2006).

Yet this emphasis on inclusive engagement also highlights numerous complications (Giugni, McAdam and Tilly 1999; Ferree and Martin 1995; Freeman 1970). The 1960s and 70s saw not only an efflorescence of participatory democratic efforts (Polletta 2002) but also “hybrid” efforts to balance formalism and collectivism and thus remain both effective and inclusive (Bordt 1997). These efforts have met with various levels of success (Ganz 2000) and have been the subject of sometimes contradictory studies. In the 1990s some saw in a newly-reinvigorated labor movement an example of young leaders in an old movement industry working to overcome bureaucratic conservatism (Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman 2000; see also Rucht 1999). A more sober reflection of labor’s efforts at renewal in this same time period can be seen in Kim Voss’ later work with Ruth Milkman (2004). This more measured appraisal of
those years casts doubt on their earlier findings while a steady stream empirical and theoretical work has served to bolster the bureaucratization hypotheses put forward in various forms by Michels, Bourdieu, and Gramsci.

The professionalization of leadership that accompanies bureaucratization has several consequences for social movement organizations (Staggenborg 1995). While professionalization is required as movement groups grow (McCarthy and Zald 1973), leading to a decline in innovative practices among institutionalized social movement leaders (Staggenborg 1988), it also facilitates coalition work and for sustaining movements through seasons of dormancy (Reger and Staggenborg 2006: 298; Taylor 1989; Disney and Gelb 2000). This increased emphasis on leadership and strategy, both internally and externally, helps attract participants and achieve movement goals (Gamson 1975 and 1990; Piven and Cloward 1977) while reducing a sense of grassroots involvement (Jasper 2004; Tait 2005: 198). These studies belie more recent findings that the rejection of authoritative figures and roles is simply a matter of principle among contemporary politically-left organizations (Diani 2003).

Nearly absent from the literature, however, are descriptions of how movement leaders strike this balance (between incipient hegemonic tendencies, and a concomitant focus on organizational efficacy and a value for participation) in a way that is convincing to members of the sorts of associational groups emphasized in this project.

2.1 **Goffman’s Staging and Scripting and Hirschman’s Exit, Loyalty and Voice**

While an ever-growing social movements literature has adapted and incorporated Erving Goffman’s (1959) work on framing (see especially Snow et al 1986), few studies have applied the dramaturgical elements found in *Presentation of Self* (1959) to the consideration of social movement actors. Notable exceptions include Jasper’s (2004: 6) attention to the cultural
and psychological interpretation of strategic action by *audiences*. This follows Jasper’s identification of words and actions intended to produce effects for an audience (Jasper 2001). Similarly, Goffman has been invoked in the concept of “identity work” (Snow and Anderson 1987; Snow and McAdam 2000) in the process of creating collective identity within movement groups (Gamson 1996; Hunt and Benford 1994; Hunt *et al.* 1994; Lichterman 1999; Reger 2002; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Whittier 1995). Yet, as Einwohner (2006) has shown, the identity work literature assumes movement actors can safely and easily select and reveal identities. In her study, Einwohner notes the significant risks involved in identity work among human rights activists in high risk environments as well as gay and lesbian activists.

In *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman presents society as an unfolding drama in which consensus is achieved when individuals present versions of themselves which adhere to widely-held values and norms. In this thesis I have very loosely adopted two terms from Goffman: staging and scripting. I argue that the use of power can be masked through these two types of action. By staging I mean the composition of organizational form and the manner in which meetings themselves are conducted. Here the idea of staging is used to describe agenda setting as well as organizational structure (asking *where does decision-making happen?*). This study suggests that the nature, meaning, and impact of a staging effort depend on whether it has the effect of avoiding input or silencing voice. Staging may be the first—and less noticeable—step toward an appearance of inclusion at the expense of engagement. For example individuals are frequently invited to contribute their perspectives in venues where decisions are not made and where mechanisms for instituting their opinion do not exist. In some situations staging is a *last* resort, as when a meeting is closed down, or someone is removed from the agenda. Indeed, the staging of an inclusive-seeming effort is often regarded as *fundamentally inclusive* as it provides a space where feedback, ideas and discussion are
welcome. The act of transferring decisions about the “will of the people” from a larger, more inclusive-seeming space to a smaller less inclusive decision-making space represents a more-noticeable staging effort.

Where staging represents the technical apparatus and structure of an organization, it may be complemented by efforts to script the appearance of inclusion and engagement. The term scripting is used to describe the ways in which language (and other symbolic communication, such as votes) may be constrained such that it either pays lip service to the idea of democratic participation or sanctions the process by restricting participation outright. This study finds scripting can be deployed in order to reinforce staging efforts, sanction inconvenient input, end conversations and transform issues from scripting issues into staging issues.³

When faced with the staging and scripting of an appearance of democracy, group members have few responses at their disposal. This study suggests these options are functionally limited to loyalty (not leaving the group), exit (leaving the group), and voice (engaging democratically). As will be shown, each option may ultimately lead to homeostasis within the group in question. The term homeostasis suggests a process of self-sustaining, self-regulating, and automatic stability maintenance (Cannon 1932)⁴. Clearly the use of these terms suggests a debt to Hirshman’s (1971) seminal work. As with Goffman, these terms have been loosely adopted.

In choosing either loyalty or exit when confronted with democracy-evading staging and scripting strategies, a group member ensures little (in the case of most exits) to no (in the case of loyalty) disruption will follow their decision. Wittingly or not, members who choose the third

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³ I.e., moving a decision or discussion from an open community forum to a closed organizational forum if the topic does not support strategic organizational goals.
⁴ While a deeper overview of Cannon’s work is not possible in this context, it is interesting to note his argument that homeostasis represents an organism’s effort to defend life against the second law of thermodynamics, and in so doing organisms retain “the power of choice over what goes and what stays” (Walter Cannon, as quoted in Mukerjee 1966).
option, voice, may temporarily throw off the group’s equilibrium and require extensive scripting (and possibly also staging) efforts on the leader’s part to restore a democratic-seeming, but efficacy-maximizing homeostasis.

This use of voice creates what Goffman refers to as “a scene”. Scenes, in Goffman’s parlance, are situations “in which an individual acts in such a way as to destroy or seriously threaten the polite appearance of consensus” (210). Evidence suggests that scenes can be addressed through less innocuous scripting efforts (verbally dismissing input). Should scripting efforts be insufficient to reinforce the polite appearance of consensus—that is to say, should the group, or particular members once again choose voice over loyalty—a staging efforts may also be deployed (e.g., simply ending an overly-democratic meeting). It is at this point that most group members choose either exit (silently, after a meeting) or loyalty (silently, during a meeting). As Hirschman has argued, voice is ineffective when exit is not possible. Leaders may thus try to “block the exits” so voice will be ineffective and power dynamics then can produce loyalty. But in the groups discussed in this thesis, the exits are impossible to block. This is why, I argue, leaders may choose to manage participant voice through staging and scripting. Of course we can easily imagine instances where voice results in organizational change as this happens regularly. Clearly the argument here is not that organizational change is impossible, or that all organizations have identical values for (or mechanisms for implementing) inclusive and participatory organizational forms. But these values, and practical challenges to these values, are sufficiently widespread. So widespread, I argue, that staging and scripting strategies are useful for all but the most prefigurative groups.

5 Although exit remains an option at each of these levels, and is briefly discussed herein, it is lies beyond the purview of this ethnography.
6 I am indebted to Rory McVeigh for this observation.
The relationship between staging and scripting can thus be seen to vary, depending on their use. In the final analysis, staging and scripting—whether used to maintain the appearance of democracy or repair fissures in this appearance—ultimately serve to reduce (or constrain) avenues for democratic participation while also maintaining organizational equilibrium. This is true whether a member chooses loyalty, exit or voice. The member is then faced, in practical terms, with two, rather than three, real options: loyalty (immediate or deferred) and exit. Deferred loyalty being the result of voice after staging and scripting have repaired the scene and restored equilibrium. In thinking about the implications of this fact for the small group, Goffman comes in handy yet again. If a team is to sustain the line it has taken,” Goffman argues dramaturgical loyalty must be exercised and, “the teammates must act as if they have accepted certain moral obligations” (212).

When those opting for loyalty return to subsequent meetings and events, their role has changed, however imperceptibly. They are now part of a larger dramaturgical event, with more actors, each collaborating in the presentation of democratic processes. Incorporating Goffman’s concept of group loyalty further supports the corporal/systemic nature of Cannon’s analysis, placing leaders within a fresh context: member of an ecosystem, rather than conductors of a train.

7 In the basic creation and maintenance of the appearance of democracy Staging lays the crucial groundwork while Scripting fills in any necessary details. Staging is the preferred first step because it represents a series of props that need only be constructed once. As such it represents the primary, and foundational, signal that democratic processes are valued. A successful stage will require only the faintest scripting efforts. If the organizational structure, meeting format, and marginalia appear democratic, talking about the group’s democratic values might not be necessary. Should a scene emerge, however, this talk—of democratic values and apparati—is deployed immediately. Should this effort to smooth over dissent and secure loyalty fail, Staging fills in where necessary.

Staging is avoided as a last step in talking over a disruptively democratic voice for the same reason it was preferred earlier: it is primary and foundational. ‘Talking over’ is far easier than physically disrupting a meeting. In fact, scripting is preferred, and staging avoided, for two primary reasons. A shift to staging strategy is more disruptive as it is more concrete (possibly even physical), involves the entire group, requires a heavier hand, and has a “stickier inertia”, that is to say, it’s consequences are more likely to ripple beyond the meeting itself. The second reason staging is avoided is its effect on the leader. More obvious and disruptive efforts call attention to the leader’s homeostasis-maintaining behavior, may drain the leader of energy, momentum or enthusiasm for the task at hand, and may remove control of the moment and the members (who physically leave a building should a meeting be ended and members dismissed). While this system tends toward democratic-seeming homeostasis in the final analysis, leaders may seek to staging’s adverse impact by deploying last-minute scripting efforts in the hopes of re-establishing a modicum of immediate equilibrium.
The process generating the appearance of inclusive while mitigating input is particularly important to understanding social movements insofar as this rhetoric is widespread (Baiocchi 2001 and 2003; Fishman 2004; Gamson 1992; Lichterman 1996). Although the ideal is clearly crucial to important emerging movements, such as the World Social Forum, the extent of its influence remains an empirical question. It is also important to understand the effects of these actions. When social movement leaders sustain the perception of democratic process it serves to *mask leadership and to mask a decision-making processes* at one (or each) of two levels: through performances by either an individual, usually a leader, (Goffman: 8-10) or a team (Goffman: 80). Ironically, the act of affecting the appearance of democracy while cloaking power is an act of leadership\(^8\) in itself (Freeman 1970). This thesis proposes that “doing democracy”\(^9\) (a la West and Zimmerman 1987) may entail staging and scripting techniques to strike a balance between democratic process and (perceived) organizational efficacy. Understanding this staging and scripting process in certain types of organizations expands our appreciation for the complexity involved in fostering the sort of open and democratic discussions highlighted in recent literature.

Considering the extent to which inclusive and participatory democratic processes, as have been established as *the* legitimate organizational form, this research takes as its starting point the possibility that organizational inclusion and representation has become a “*[value] to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service*” (Goffman 1959: 8). Particular aspects of

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8 By leadership I simply mean the fulfillment of the role of leader, i.e., where an individual is widely recognized as having institutional authority. In an interview with Gretchen, the leader of the Taskforce, she expressed ambivalence about her role as leader, explaining that "The problem is there aren't clear power relationships ... it's not even an election, it's just an assumption of power" (Author interview with Taskforce leader, Gretchen, 5/27/2008).

9 The phrase “doing democracy” clearly, and self-consciously, echoes West and Zimmerman’s work on “doing gender” (1987). Whereas they understood Gender as recurring accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction (125), this thesis suggests democracy can be seen as a recurring accomplishment (or at least the expectation of an accomplishment) embedded in SMO interaction. The analogy is further developed in the idea that gender is performed by members of society who are “hostage to its production” (126). As this thesis shows, the actions of SMO actors are similarly constricted by the expectation of democracy, and their actions in-turn constrict democracy. One final parallel with West and Zimmerman is the possibility that “participants in interaction organize their various and manifold activities to reflect or express gender” (127). The analogous behavior in the groups under consideration hardly needs repeating.
Goffman’s dramaturgical repertoire, specifically staging and scripting, illustrates how this lip service can be paid in contemporary hybrid organizations, thus adding a layer of complexity—and additional explanatory power—to the literature on these hegemonic tendencies. This thesis also suggests that—in addition to the hegemonic tendencies inherent in movement bureaucratization and oligarchy—the democratic ideal is a principle obligating lip service.
3. THE SETTING AND THE STUDY

3.1 The Rustbelt in Global Perspective

Before continuing these organizations should be situated within their “extralocal and historical context” (Burawoy 1993: 1; see also Mathers and Novelli), highlighting “how far-reaching global changes are articulated locally” (Savage et al 2005: 1). Respected organizations and popular movements working to protect human rights tend to focus on the impact globalization is having on people in areas where the market-driven logic of globalization is just beginning to take hold. While global capital and attention is increasingly turned to India, Brazil, China and elsewhere in the Global South, this study highlights the organizing strategies of advocates and activists working in communities left behind when global capital moves on. This “long-tail of the global economy” encompasses an ever growing list of communities who have outlived their usefulness to global capital. In these regions post-Fordism and deindustrialization have resulted in the loss of social benefits and blue-collar jobs, a decline in real wages and subsequent decline in purchasing power and local tax revenue, and an increase in unemployment, casualized labor, poverty, and crime (Cohen and Kennedy 2000: 74).

Situated squarely in the Rust Belt region of the post-industrial North American Midwest this study’s fieldsite is an excellent example of a region where conditions are worse than ideal. Symbolic of an industrial America that no longer exists, the region has been in transition since

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10 “Community organizing in the long tail of modernity represents the struggle of a people who remember being middle class, who remember being workers, who remember an America that existed in time and space, rather than in a civic memory that seems to hover like a nursery rhyme over the our heads: O beautiful forspacious skies and amber waves of grain.”

11 “It is when conditions are worse than ideal,” writes Sable (2001), “that the extraordinary politics of organizing must create the preconditions for normal politics to work well.”
the late 1980s (Lopez 2004). The departure of major manufacturers from the American Rust Belt to the American south or the southwest “Sun Belt”, or the Global South, has triggered a domino effect in which individuals lose income, retail businesses lose customers, local governments lose tax revenue, and communities may lose hope (Fletcher and Gapasin 2008; Safford 2004; Tait 2005).

The resulting economic insecurity, social dislocation, and outward migration are punctuated by “a dilapidated mix of industrial-culture detritus” (Collins 2001, 251). Twenty years of job loss to Mexico, South Korea and Brazil has been replaced by those countries’ loss of work to China, which is now losing investment to Vietnam. The relentless churn of the neoliberal global economy consistently emptied manufacturing centers, factories houses and, perhaps, people themselves. What then, this study begins by asking, is civil society’s response? The discussion which follows is best viewed in light of these social, historical, geographic and economic contexts.

3.2 Community Economic Taskforce

The organization highlighted herein, the community economic taskforce (Taskforce), has a homegrown and volunteerist feel. Meetings occur in community spaces donated by a local non-profit and by a private university where several of the members have ties. Meetings are predominantly attended by middle-class Anglo community members who take time from their personal schedules to participate. The organization’s objectives are modest and geared toward improving and reforming (rather than challenging and abolishing) the existing political order. The organization sees itself as one of the only organizations holding elected leaders accountable for policy changes which benefit workers and the poor. During this fieldwork the majority of
their energy was focused on holding local elected officials accountable for the expenditure of tax revenues.

Although it is not a stated goal, the community-based economic taskforce provides members a chance to socialize, exchange ideas and engage in solidarity-building efforts to change public policy. Many, if not all, of the participants seem focused on recapturing the essence of the city as it was (or as they remember it): younger, economically-thriving and confidence-inspiring.

Thus, discussions of how to attract new businesses to the region are a regular feature, with the discussions quickly turning to the need for tax-funded infrastructure to attract new businesses and investments in the first place. In one meeting a participant observed that the pursuit of amenities without a tax base is a “race to the bottom.” Another participant was quick in her reply: “that’s why [this city] is like a beaten dog.” This concern with both economic well-being and social vitality emerges in conversations about to preventing the outflow of young people from the region. When a local intellectual publically declared that a one-way ticket out of town was the best thing the city could do for its youth, Taskforce members expressed outrage and admiration and generated a democratic ruckus, as discussed in greater detail later in this study.

The group’s meetings take two forms: monthly, community-wide meetings of fifty to sixty people (Community Meeting) and bi-weekly steering committee meetings of the group’s leadership (Steering Committee). The steering committee is comprised of eight to ten members. The following discussions draw on fieldnotes from both sets of meetings. The Taskforce’s leadership is provided by Gretchen, an outspoken community activist in her sixties. Gretchen came of age as a working class Anglo in the Rustbelt of the 1960s and her political memory is marked by her involvement in the Civil Rights movement and local labor initiatives. By all
accounts she has been politically active ever since. Gretchen’s shares group leadership with her husband Tom, a professor at a nearby university and outspoken advocate of government transparency and a “democratic process that draws on concerns and energies of all.”

3.3 Faith Based Coalition

The second group under consideration is a Civil Rights and Immigration issue group working within a faith-based community organizing Coalition. Drawing on the organizing strategies pioneered by Saul Alinsky, the Coalition addresses issues which are said to arise from within its membership. Economic and human resources have been drawn from local places of worship while strategic input is provided by the organization’s headquarters. These efforts have resulted in a congregation-oriented organizing campaign whose strategy draws on the support of pastors and priests as individual congregations are organized into voting blocks. As with other community organizing groups, a first phase of mobilization solicited input from congregants. This feedback is then aggregated and narrowed to a specific number of policy demands that are then placed on local political leaders. In this way ultimate success appears to be measurable movement by policy-makers and local bureaucrats. The second phase, observed in this fieldwork, entails sustaining member’s attention to the issues and applying constant pressure on public officials.

The Coalition has four fora of note. The Coalition’s steering committee is comprised of local pastors, priests and organizers and holds closed meetings on a regular basis. The second forum is a delegate’s meeting, comprised of African American and Anglo leadership from within the Coalition churches as well as the steering committee and other fora. Issue committees comprise the Coalition’s third forum. These committees represent the Coalition’s core

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12 Tom, plenary speech at Taskforce conference, April 26, 2008.
13 As indicated in the ethnographic analysis which follows, this process is less than transparent.
community issues and provide an opportunity for congregants to get more involved in the group’s work. The issues of concern originally addressed by these four issue committees were: Education, Civil Rights and Immigration (CRI), Youth and Violence, and Community Revitalization. Over the year covered in this research, however, both the Community Revitalization and Youth and Violence issue committees faded from prominence within the organization. The Education issue committee, as well as the Civil Rights and Immigration issue committee, persisted.

The CRI issue committee was comprised of a more or less equal number of Latinos and Anglos and was led by Helen, an Anglo woman in her sixties. Unlike Gretchen, the CRI’s leader, Helen lacked a background in advocacy or activism. From time to time Latino attendance would surge as news of immigration raids or drivers’ license legislation swept through the community.

The final, and largest, forum is the plenary meetings held semi-annually and attended by the Coalition’s general membership. The inaugural plenary meeting was attended by over 1,000 community members—Anglos, Latinos and African Americans from diverse economic backgrounds. This research draws on participant observation within the delegate’s meeting, the Coalition’s Civil Rights and Immigration issue group, and the organization’s inaugural plenary meeting, although the majority of this analysis draws on experience in the latter two spaces (the issue group and the inaugural plenary meeting).

3.4 Organizational context

Recent literature highlights the associational space that lays between Porto Alegre’s participatory democracy (Baiocchi 2005) and Tocquevillian associations (Fishman 2004), especially in light of Robert Putnam’s recent work (1994 and 2000). This dialogue has opened the field for new conversations about both actors and actions (Minkoff and McCarthy 2005; Fine
Robert Sampson et al (2005: 681) seek to conceptualize those groups seeking to “marry the metaphorical bowling league to civic action”. Sampson and his co-authors describe the subsequent action as “hybrid collective events” which “typically combine protest-like ‘claims’ for change with civil society ‘forms’.” This approach resonates with Zald’s recent (2000) call for an enlarged agenda for social movement research. This move to emphasize “ideologically structured action” allows for the examination of a broader range of social, political and cultural actors, including political parties, bureaucracies, governmental offices, families, schools and associations. McAdam et al modifies, and Zald provides an alternative to, the “contentious politics” framework authored (1984) and sustained (2004) by Charles Tilly.

In this light, both organizations fit Zald’s conceptualization of “ideologically structured action” as well as Sampson et al’s more generous conceptualization of social movement actors. Neither is registered as a non-profit, yet each possess organizational infrastructure in keeping with most small non-profits. Neither engage in protests as such yet the Coalition has focused, near-confrontational meetings with political leaders while the Taskforce has participated in picket lines and other forms of action. Highlighting the hybrid nature of these organizations is in keeping with an emerging line of scholarship examining those groups falling between Porto Alegre and Tocqueville. Table 1 briefly sketches each organization’s key features.
TABLE 1

ORGANIZATIONAL DETAILS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Sub-group</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Purpose, issue, perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Economic Taskforce (“Taskforce”)</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
<td>Middle and working class, predominantly Anglo</td>
<td>Gretchen (Experienced Anglo Woman)</td>
<td>Organizational planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Meeting</td>
<td>Working and middle class, Anglo and some African American</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional economic systems and how they affect local workers and growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Based Community Organizing Coalition (“Coalition”)</td>
<td>Steering Committee</td>
<td>Local pastors, priests and organizers</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>Organizational planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delegate’s Meeting</td>
<td>Working and middle class, African American and Anglo</td>
<td>Multiple (African American and Anglo)</td>
<td>Organizational planning, generation of enthusiasm and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRI Issue Group</td>
<td>Working and middle class, Anglo and Latino</td>
<td>Helen (Inexperienced Anglo Woman)</td>
<td>Secure local ordinance against police discrimination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plenary Meeting</td>
<td>Working and middle class, African American, Anglo and Latino</td>
<td>Multiple (African American and Anglo)</td>
<td>Generate enthusiasm and support for organizational mission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Methods

This ethnographic undertaking uses a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to illuminate the role of democratic organizational forms in two groups in the Midwest. These organizations were identified through personal and institutional networks and were chosen for their explicit commitment to social change in an economically-depressed region of the United States. My fieldwork began in autumn of 2007 and continued through summer of 2008. During this period participant observation provided data on planning meetings, public gatherings and political actions. This involved attending between two and five events per month. My involvement was intentionally limited to simply introducing myself and responding to questions asked of the whole group. In some meetings notetaking was a simple affair, as the majority of participants took notes or the group was large enough for this activity to not be a
distraction. In meetings where notetaking would have been more invasive and obvious I jotted notes in shorthand on found objects, such as meeting agenda and handouts. These were followed by more detailed notes constructed afterwards. In addition, multiple interviews were conducted with the leaders of both the Taskforce and the Coalition, as well as a handful of interviews with select group members. Early interviews established rapport and gave me an initial sense of how these groups described their organizational history and framed their current efforts. Subsequent interviews followed up on hunches developed during my participant observation, in particular regarding the complex interplay between inclusion and efficiency. Interviews with leaders complemented and clarified data gleaned from participant observation while interviews with ethnic-minority members provided complemented those voiced in the meetings themselves. Interviews with Spanish-speaking members of the Coalition required the use of a translator. This translator also served as a key informant, connecting the researcher with members of the African American and Latino communities who were no longer connected with the Coalition. Interviews at each stage of the project were recorded using a digital audio recorder and with the permission of the interviewee. These interviews were later transcribed by research assistants. Quotes drawn from these interviews have been used herein without modification of any sort. Quotes drawn from my fieldnotes are based on written notes, although every effort has been made to preserve both the content and the context of the talk reported.

The amount of time I spent in with these groups allowed me to get at data that would not have been amenable to the process of establishing claims to inclusive participation and representation and defending challenges to both claims and to participation and representation. Baiocchi (2003) has pointed out that “questions of meaning, intent, purpose, and implicit rules” cannot easily be determined through other research methods (59). He goes on to say that
“knowing the unspoken rules of these social contexts also becomes important to apprehending the possible drawbacks of participatory democracy” (59).

Here a word about motives is in order. This analysis makes the claim that leaders have an explicit and public value for inclusion and representation. I propose confidence in this assertion can be drawn from qualitative data which suggests that a desire for efficiency (whether actual or perceived) is leader’s core motive in curbing debate or closing conversations. Similarly, a commitment to inclusion (whether actual or perceived) is leader’s core motive for staging and scripting efforts. This first motive is confirmed through interview data, while the second is inferred through the consistency of its application over time and across groups. This assertion is put forward despite the fact that meetings in either group do not consistently begin with a statement of the ground rules, an explicit verbal affirmation of a particular process (democratic, consensus) or an explanation of any formal hierarchy.

This study responds to a recent call for social movement scholars to focus on organizations comprised of actors and events—as social spaces—rather than as actors within particular events (Clemens 1993; Polletta 2002: 225; Voss and Sherman 2000). Voss and Sherman suggest this tact provides analysis focused beyond contentious events and political opportunities. In keeping with this challenge, this study adopts participant observation and interview methods to investigate similar phenomena across two sufficiently similar groups working on social change. The intention throughout is not to highlight significant differences between these groups, but to point to areas where, despite their differences, their commitment to a particular organizational approach and rhetoric is consistent. Certainly some detail is lost in the process, but I feel this is a small cost, certainly when one considers the increased ability to triangulate through the use of multiple sources of data (i.e. groups), multiple methods (interviews and participant observation) to verify both hunches and conclusions (Merriam 1993;
Denzin 1970; Mathison 1988). Subsequent findings should be generalizable as I believe they point to what Erickson (1986) has called a *concrete universal*. Concrete universals, according to Erickson, “are based on the notion that particular situations convey insights that transcend the situation from which they emerge. The general lies in the particular.” Stolte, Fine and Cook 2001 take a similar approach, arguing that "processes linked to particular situations can be generalized beyond those local settings to other social settings sharing relevant characteristics (210). As shown throughout this thesis, the relevant characteristics are the basic building blocks of most social movement organizations: limited resources, a commitment to inclusion, and a desire to get something done. It is at the intersection of these three factors that inequality is unintentionally reproduced.
4. MANAGING DEMOCRACY

This general description of the two organizations sets the stage, so to speak, for two sequenced discussions. The first illustrates and elucidates the commitment to creating and maintaining the appearance of inclusion and representation. The second section provides insight into the creation and resolution of those scenes which occur when the appearance of this commitment is jeopardized. Specifically highlighted are the conditions under which leaders in progressive social movement organizations affect democracy participation and eschew the appearance of strong leadership while striking a balance between a democratic process and (perceived) organizational efficacy. These examples suggest a democratic ideal has been reified within new social movement networks/groups, effectively pressuring these organizations to develop strategies for maintaining homeostasis vis-a-vis democracy (or its appearance) and organizational efficacy. Fieldwork suggests this equilibrium can be maintained or regained through the use of one or both of the following approaches: particular organizational form (‘staging’) and talk (‘ scripting’). As discussed previously, appearance is best maintained through the establishment of a democratic-seeming stage and subsequently supported through scripting efforts.

Failure to successfully avoid democratic input may also result in a scene, which, in turn, may be repaired through staging and scripting. Efforts to recover from scenes are more likely to draw first on democratic talk, and, if this fails, to turn to more invasive staging responses. As will be seen, the side-effect of this strategy is three-fold. Firstly, it negates, elides or ignores
democratic voice. Secondly, it maintains homeostasis and, consequentially, the status quo. Thirdly, it re-incorporates non-exiting members into loyal group performance.

4.1 Creating and reinforcing impressions of inclusive engagement

At first blush the use of staging and scripting strategies are so common-sense as they might be dismissed out of hand but, in fact, each may reinforce the impression of participatory inclusion. Setting the stage so as to create and reinforce the impression of broad representation and voice is a matter of organizational structure, meeting composition and agenda usage, and is often complemented by democratic talk, as can be seen in both the Taskforce and the Coalition. At the most fundamental level, the organizational form of each—especially the steering committee and community group—privileged certain fora with decision-making capabilities. While this is understandable, this division was not always explained to participants, leading to situations where voices were raised and votes tallied, despite a fundamental (and constructed) disconnect between these voices and actual decision-making capabilities. What follows are examples of how a series of commonplace structures and ordinary acts may be used to both create and reinforce the impression of inclusion and voice and to reduce member input. These divisions can be seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational composition</td>
<td>References to group’s democratic nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting composition</td>
<td>References to other’s violations democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.1 Creating and reinforcing the impression of inclusive engagement in the Coalition

A quintessential staging moment (with supporting scripts) can be seen in the Coalition’s inaugural meeting which I attended near the beginning of my fieldwork. Like the group’s issue committee meetings (where participants are allowed one-worded feedback) the stage was set for appearance. The event was held in the auditorium of a local high school. The space had been organized by congregation—perhaps not surprising considering the group draws from member congregations but certainly unusual for attendees lacking affiliation with a sponsoring church. Attendees, then, were forced to either sit with an unknown congregation or dismantle a modest barrier across a row of seats, thus creating one’s own ‘section’, so to speak.

These congregational blocks filled the bleachers, religious leaders stood on stage and the civic leaders—the authorities at the receiving end of the coalition’s demands—sat between the two. There they sat—sandwiched between the people and the priests—as religious leaders reached over the heads of the elected officials in a call and response with their parishioners. The denominations served their role well, amening when a pastor prayed to “Open officials’ eyes to discrimination” and cheering as another, African American, pastor demanded of the leaders: “Are you ready to poke holes in the darkness?” The cheering seemed to represent less political participation than it represented the projection of power, over one thousand people from many social strata and different backgrounds The stage was set for religious leaders (mostly men) to gesture symbolically with their constituencies to political leaders (mostly men). The stage was not set for individual involvement or participation.

This staging was both physical and symbolic. Both this plenary meeting and smaller community meetings had the composition and appearance of a carefully-planned event. As such they bore a greater similarity to a performance than to open and participatory spaces for civic engagement. In this inaugural event participants did not appear as individual political agents but
as congregation-based voting blocks, wielded and flexed by religious leaders. In this way the entire Coalition could be seen as a stage from which one cluster of (predominantly male, religious) leaders signal grievances to one another cluster of (predominantly male, political) leaders. Indeed there was neither space in the room nor time on the agenda for participants to directly communicate to their representatives.

Furthermore, this fieldwork suggests participants played only a bit part in the selection of the four key issues presented by the religious leaders. As Helen, a leader of the committee on Civil and Immigrant Rights told me in an interview, selecting issues “is not a neat and tidy process, it’s a lot of back and forth and flailing around the issues that people come up with.”

Angelica, the group’s Latina translator, suggested that while some “back and forth” may have occurred within the community, the issue committee’s specific issue, a city ordinance on racial profiling, had been chosen by four people: the group leaders and an organizational representative from a larger city in the region. Indeed the nature and importance of the committee’s primary issue is explained to the predominantly Latino participants in each and every meeting, suggesting participants are not providing the core energy around this issue but instead fill some other role. The Coalition (and one of its committees, discussed below) can be seen as the least sophisticated use of the stage: a simple holding pattern for participants. From the stage Coalition leaders made good faith efforts to reinforce the democratic script, from the statement that “God blessed us with democracy” to the injunction “the question is what to do about [these issues] and you are the answer to that question!”

Despite this rhetoric, some conclude this lack of critical engagement results in a level of dissatisfaction with the process. In other words, expectations for democracy are not met. In Helen’s perspective, many Latinos left the inaugural event confused and frustrated, as the event...
had not been clearly explained to them. Subsequent interviews within the Latino community confirmed this sense, as interviewees pointed out that the issue of driver’s licenses—one of the core issues facing the community—was not on the group’s agenda. When asked about this Helen explained that she had been counseled by the Coalition’s parent entity that there wasn’t anything the issue group could do since licenses were handled at the federal level. While this is perfectly understandable, the fact that community members were asked to participate in events they didn’t understand, undermines claims regarding the group’s ability to speak to participants’ interests and needs.

These trends could also be seen in the Coalition’s smaller civil rights and immigration issue committee, where Anglo leadership and participants conducted the majority of the group’s business. The majority (of Latinos) looked on silently. While a subsequent examples drawn from the Taskforce shows a staging strategy that resulted in a decision making its way into, and then back out of, democratic debate relatively unscathed, in the Coalition these decisions were never brought to the committee in the first place. Instead decisions were made in advance by leadership, in doing so a scene was avoided, the organization’s agenda was advanced and opposition for participant engagement was reduced. Yet this lack of participant power was met at every turn by efforts to encourage and reassure Latinos of the importance of their participation. These staging structures were complemented by leaders’ use of reinforcing scripts. Most meetings began with an explanation, translated into Spanish, of the group’s raison d’être, explaining that the group’s focus on anti-discrimination legislation benefited “all of us.” Once again participants were asked to imagine they played a role in the democratic process that they did not actually possess. This staging was reinforced by scripting.

16 Interview with Gretchen, February 20, 2008
In her reflections on a separate, yet similar, event a co-researcher shared her “sense that there is a desire for liberation among these [Latino] people. It would be interesting if they had their own meeting and then you [English speakers] had a translator.” This observation raises an interesting question regarding whose space these meetings occur in (see also Juris 2008). A number of the Coalition’s events raise significant questions regarding spatial politics (staging)—does the majority group have a right to meetings in their language with the minority (whoever that may be) receiving translation? Since translation interrupts speaker momentum perhaps it is fair for each group to be inconvenienced in turn. While these speculations occurred in a conversation with the translator, this researcher has observed that since the group has an organizational head, “there is a sense that there is a mass of people and that voice is dangerous.”

And how to handle these voices? After a particularly democratic and open discussion in the issue group Helen shared her assessment of the energy in the room. She explained, somewhat apologetically, that the meeting was a “disaster” and explained that “at every meeting now we start with introductions and the very next thing is review of how we’re going to conduct the meeting and acceptance of that and the agenda.” Securing this acceptance (and submission) ahead of time is a staging strategy par excellence: “Another method is to prepare in advance for all possible expressive contingencies. One application of this strategy is to settle on a complete agenda before the event” (Goffman 1959: 227).

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17 Interview with Jennifer Kang, June 9, 2008
4.1.2 Staging strategies for creating and reinforcing the impression of inclusive engagement in both groups

In the examples that follow it becomes clear that organizational composition matters. Decisions are possible in some spaces and not in others, and the process of guiding decision-making from one to another, as appropriate, speaks volumes about the complex, and unspoken, role of organizational form. Likewise, a critical examination of the staging of meetings and setting of agendas in each group reveals a clear commitment to appearing inclusive and representative. In the Taskforce a preliminary agenda is circulated to the group one week in advance, with an open invitation to contribute. While Helen, the Coalition’s facilitator, does not open the agenda-setting process to general membership, it is consistently translated into both English and Spanish.

The process of vote-taking straddles the space between staging and scripting, as it is a procedural detail (staging) that expresses participant’s will and voice (script). The vote’s complex role in efforts to balance input and efficacy was suggested by Janet, a Taskforce member who told me that “in [the Taskforce leader’s] hearts they really want democracy—so we take votes. But I know which issues won’t get taken up regardless.”\textsuperscript{18} This concept—voiceless votes—is explored in greater detail below and bears testimony to the complexity of this hallmark component of the democratic process. Similarly, at the end of Coalition meetings Helen would ask each member to sum up in one word how they felt. “Anxious”, “hopeful”, “expectant” participants would answer, giving Helen an opportunity to ask follow-up questions of select participants: “Why do you feel hopeful?” In both cases the stage—a strategically-sanctioned space—was set for the incorporation of participants’ voices. Yet this process remained separate from decision-making.

\textsuperscript{18} Interview with Janet, June 16, 2008
This stage-setting was complimented in both groups by the use of talk, which was deployed to reiterate a commitment to a democratic ideal. At the Taskforce’s annual conference the group’s co-leader, Tom, told those assembled that the community “needs democracy. Of course when I say democracy I mean not just going to the polls every 4 years ... I mean the active participation of citizens in their government and in the making of their society.” While this call is clearly to participatory engagement outside the Taskforce, he went on to highlight the use of “the democratic process within the [Taskforce] to develop questions for the candidates on issues of economic development.” This value for the use of democratic processes in both spheres was underscored by his definition of the democratic process, namely, one that “draws on concerns and energies of all.”

4.1.3 Scripting strategies for creating and reinforcing the impression of inclusive engagement in both groups

This commitment to democratic ideals and processes is modeled within the organization and underscored by the frequent use of the term “consensus” and frequent efforts by Gretchen, Tom’s wife and the leader of the group’s Steering Committee, to “open the table up to everyone’s perspective”. Invariably such invitations are met with uncomfortably-long periods of silence, followed by Gretchen’s playful chiding. In this, and most other interactions, the message is clear: democratic participation matter. This was communicated implicitly when Gretchen would stop a meeting to ask if anyone had feedback. If no-one spoke up, Gretchen would wait for a longer-than usual period of time, as if to underscore her willingness to prioritize democratic input over organizational efficacy (i.e., moving the meeting along in a timely manner). At other times this commitment was communicated more explicitly. When a member

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19 Tom, plenary speech at Taskforce conference, April 26, 2008
of the community asked the group to promote a particular event, Gretchen referred to a section of his request as “that thing that violates democracy”, signaling the request’s inability to reach a specific standard: that of democracy, however undefined. Interestingly, this inverse reinforcement of democratic norms of inclusion and engagement also preemptively closed the space around the comment, sealing it off from further discussion.

Within the Coalition similar efforts were made—in the Plenary meeting as well as in the Civil Rights and Immigration issue group—to highlight the importance of democratic engagement. Leaders emphasized that “democracy doesn’t end at elections” while Helen gathered volunteers for a “listening initiative” to bring the community’s voices to their elected officials. This value for broad representation extended to the group’s significant Spanish-speaking membership as participants were reminded that “[this city] and our democracy has multiple languages.”

In conclusion, this section set out to show how ordinary organizational composition and everyday social movement talk serves to reinforce an implicit and an explicit commitment to the democratic process. These examples—whether small scripting moves in both groups or the large staging efforts within the Coalition—underscore the ways in which organizational composition, meeting arrangement and democratic talk can reduce input and preclude scenes while maintaining the appearance of democracy and the sort of organizational homeostasis necessary for efficacy. What follows is a discussion about how these same strategies may be used to silence democratic input.

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20 Deemed request inappropriate, thereby removing it from the conversation; relegating it to an unmentionable. Democracy as Shibboleth.
21 Unidentified Coalition speaker, December 13, 2007
22 Unidentified speaker at Coalition Inaugural event, October 8, 2007
4.2 Making a democratic scene

Scenes result when staging and scripting efforts fail to maintain the appearance of inclusive engagement. As illustrated in the examples which follow, the first effort in restoring equilibrium is scripting, as it is less-invasive. Should this fail, staging strategies may be deployed. In the event of significant disequilibrium, leaders, and indeed groups, may deploy a combination of both approaches. The following five examples detail each possible variation, as illustrated in Table 3. In each case voice was ultimately silenced, whether through exit (and out of this ethnography) or eventual loyalty (i.e., silence). Thus homeostasis can be recovered, despite notable side-effects, as discussed at the conclusion of this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene no.</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Strategy 1</th>
<th>Strategy 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Gaffe</td>
<td>Script</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Taskforce</td>
<td>Dissent</td>
<td>Script</td>
<td>Stage: vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Dissent</td>
<td>Script</td>
<td>Stage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taskforce</td>
<td>Dissent</td>
<td>Script</td>
<td>Stage: not vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>Dissent</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Stage: prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Scene One: “Two-hundred nobodies” in the Coalition

Efforts to appear democratic are sometimes marred by unintentional gaffes. These blunders can be thought of as “near scenes” or gaffes, momentary lapses in which the appearance of consensus is more damaged than destroyed. As suggested in the description the Coalition, the majority of the agenda setting, meeting management and group discussion was instigated and conducted by Anglo participants. This clear imbalance between body and voice
created a space where Anglo participants spoke “undemocratically” and needed to cover for their error. In one meeting Janet, a local Anglo participant, asked whether the group wanted a meeting with a local representative to be attended by “200 anybodies or actual influential people?” Realizing her gaffe she covered by saying that “of course everyone is important.” In another situation Helen, the Anglo leader, emphasized the importance of an upcoming meeting, emphasizing through the translator that “important people are coming.” Again, realizing the way this could be taken she quickly covered as well, saying that, of course, “everyone is important”.

In this near-scene both the problem (“200 anybodies”, “important people”) and the solution (“everybody is a somebody”, everybody is important) took the form of words, i.e., homeostasis was easily re-established. This scripting strategy is simple and effective. In other cases, where a simple scripting approach does not work (i.e., cannot simply be explained or argued away), it seems possible to deploy a staging approach (tabling the discussion, deferring to the agenda, or deflecting the discussion to another forum) instead. Recourse to these strategies indicates a fully disruptive scene, of the type discussed throughout the rest of this section.

4.2.2 Scene Two: Debate without consensus in the Taskforce

In one of the Taskforce’s monthly community-wide meeting, held immediately prior to a local election, Gretchen announced to the group that together we would choose five questions for the candidates. The answers would be chosen, Gretchen indicated, “by consensus.” With this she divided the room into smaller groups so each could select several questions for the candidates. I watched with interest as each group finally reported back and, after some
discussion, their feedback was tallied. All participants then gathered around this aggregated feedback as Gretchen initiated a second round of decision-making to narrow the selection.

Most items met with broad-based agreement in the form of physical and verbal feedback and a natural cycle of affirming comments, questions and answers, all followed by a lull in conversation—a lull which I have here interpreted as a broad and significant satisfaction with the process and the conclusion. Not every point generated such satisfaction, however. Tax incentives, the Taskforce’s central issue, inspired much broader, and more fervent and varied, discussion. It soon became clear to me that participants were not satisfied with the issue as presented. The apparent desire to continue the vibrant democratic discussion was met with Gretchen’s apparently even-handed and level-headed suggestion that the group “not debate this, let's come to an agreement,” and proceeded to take a vote. The vote only served to illustrate, in somewhat starker terms, what the truncated discussion had already suggested, that there were many varied perspectives in the room and reaching Gretchen’s impromptu benchmark (consensus) would require additional discussion. Yet the vote was taken as a concluding matter and Gretchen recommended the group “move on to the other issues” on the agenda. Having clearly stated a value for the trappings of a democratic process (consensus, agreement, soliciting input, votes, etc), Gretchen established and reinforced the appearance of a commitment to widely-accepted democratic forms of inclusion and engagement. In this way she “engineered a convincing impression” that the will of the people was being realized in the process and used a prominent component of the democratic process—the vote—to close debate.

Yet this conclusion to the discussion was met with an apparent lack of democratic satisfaction, where satisfaction with the democratic process is suggested by a conversational arc, concluded with a general lull in conversation. Gretchen had emphasized the importance of a
democratic process through her stated hope that the group could "do this by consensus." Yet when it appeared the group wouldn't reach consensus on an issue she (and the steering committee) felt to be of importance, she simply took a vote, ignored the input and moved on. In other words, when it became clear that *scripting strategies had not worked*, Gretchen promptly recommended the group "move on to the other issues". This recommendation indicates a shift from the failed scripting strategy to a more stable (but less respectable\(^23\)) staging strategy. My observation of this situation left me feeling that time would be made to continue discussion of the topic. Yet the issue never re-emerged. I did note, however, at the next community meeting, and indeed at the steering committee meetings between, that the tax issues remained intact, as originally conceived, unaffected by the flurry of discussion solicited from the group.

This staging strategy effectively laundered discussion from the Taskforce’s general membership, as the issue was brought to—and taken from—the table by the steering committee. This is not to say the steering committee made a poor decision, but instead to highlight the significant scripting and staging required to secure both a decision and a democratic-appearing performance. In subsequent conversations Gretchen expressed a certain ambivalence about this event, and others like it, musing: “It seems like we always have lots to do, but what that does is to limit certain people.”\(^24\) This concern is underscored by a candid recognition of the scripting and staging strategies identified in this analysis: “You have to have structure. I believe in structure, I’m not an anarchist. ... there have been times when people start ... [talking] ... and they’re single issue, they have blinders, so sometimes you have to cut them off a little bit.”\(^25\) This frank assessment suggests Gretchen, as a performer in the Goffmanian sense, was perhaps focused on “engineering a convincing impression” that the

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\(^{23}\) I say "less respectable" since the compositional, spatial and temporal shifts required by most staging strategies (meetings are held with fewer people at a separate place and a different time can be seen by observers as a move away from more open and inclusive forms of the democratic process.

\(^{24}\) Interview with Gretchen, May 5, 2008.

\(^{25}\) Interview with Gretchen, May 5, 2008.
standards of democratic involvement were being realized, rather than on “the moral issue of realizing these standards” (251). Clearly aware of, and concerned by, this role, Gretchen has avoided more open forms of democracy in favor of actions that would more effectively accomplish strategic organizational goals. As Janet pointed out in a later conversation with me:

“There are lots of topics that we don’t get to dwell on because they’re not on somebody’s agenda, and that’s too bad. It’s not that they’re not as important but [Gretchen] tends to talk quite a bit and this often means there are times we don’t get to give everything the attention it deserves.” She continued, pointing out that Gretchen and Tom “are all about democracy and everyone having a voice. But if you raise an issue that they don’t like, it won’t go anywhere. They will take a vote and everything, but nothing will happen.” Insightful and loyal, Janet represents the quintessential member’s voice. Having chosen loyalty over exit, one can conclude her acknowledgement that “nothing will happen”, 1) affects her participation (indeed this hypothesis is in keeping with project fieldnotes), and 2) reintroduces her as a team player in the group’s performance of democracy. In her case, as in others, loyalty results in silence and stability.

4.2.3 Scene Three: Questioning and reconstructing organizational narratives in the Coalition

After several months of quiet participant-observation in the civil rights and immigration issue committee I observed an interaction which posed an ideal opportunity to explore several significant tensions. The issue committee was planning a major event during which they would present their case to local officials. The talk was of details and strategy until a new member, a middle-age, and apparently middle-class woman named Beth spoke up, saying that the group needed to “be sure we’re approaching this in a way that is educational and not adversarial with the police.” The Anglos around the table voiced their agreement while one of the emerging
Latino leaders (Estella) raised her voice, pointing out that part of the problem was that the police don’t understand Latino culture. The conversation continued in this vein until Beth spoke up again, emphasizing her belief that “it is particularly important to be nice and respectful to everyone.”

Having attended these meetings for quite some time I was struck by this unprecedented insistence on deference to elected officials. How many others, I wondered, shared a perspective that diverged so wildly from the group’s roots in Saul Alinsky’s aggressive approach to community organizing? When another participant asked the new member “Why?” this deference and respect was so important, the room seemed to contract. She answered that it was important because “honey attracts more flies than vinegar.” I could almost feel a collective energy gather itself within the room before surging forward to repair any damage to the “polite appearance of consensus.” In keeping with this study’s hypothesis, a scripting strategy was used first, only this time it was deployed by the group, rather than Helen. Numerous voices spoke in affirmation of this approach, assuring the newcomer that the group was not confrontational and that honey was indeed preferable to vinegar. Within a minute the entire episode was neatly bundled, every voice had spoken out in affirmation. And every voice had spoken in English. The scene had not been translated into Spanish.

More dramatic than most, this scene involved the sudden and forceful replacement of the current order with what Goffman refers to as a “new drama” (210). The new drama involved a challenge to a claim that had been made about the organization’s operational style. It should be emphasized that as a new member, Beth’s perspective could be explained as a newcomer’s misunderstanding. Yet the new scene generated a rapid, and perhaps subconscious staging of ethnicity-specific solidarity—a “sudden reshuffling and reapportioning of the previous team members into two new teams”—in support of this perspective (210).
The risk of additional damage to the appearance of unanimity was obviated by Helen. In a staging move that would not have been a problem had she not just aligned herself in the new drama, she began to end the meeting. Looking out at the group she asked “so what else do you want to talk about?” Nobody answered. “Do we want to go home?” she asked. She was met with a chorus of yeses. Affirmative. “It’s cold and rainy,” one member pointed out, and the group concluded with the standard evaluation: “How do we feel?” (“Encouraged”, “Bien”, “All right, I guess”, “Emotional”, “Thinking”). And with that the meeting concluded in song. I left wondering why the last community-organizing round of questions hadn’t been asked: “Did you feel tension in today’s meeting?” This was a standard question in previous meetings, but was inexplicably left out. Perhaps this agenda shift was a final homeostasis-securing staging effort.

This event generated as much engagement as I had ever witnessed in this group, yet it only involved English-speakers, as the exchange was not translated into Spanish. It also ran the risk of validating a new narrative about the organization’s core strategies in order to cover for a violation of the careful staging and scripting. When I asked Maria, who has more experience in the Coalition than Helen, about this situation she replied that Helen should be “sent to national training [since] it is not our job to be nice to city council, it is their job to serve the people that elected them, and those people who didn’t elect them.26

Indeed, in a later meeting a group member in a position of authority said that she felt like relationships with local elected officials were “really going somewhere”, mentioning that “one of them hugged me.” While this garnered laughter and a few lighthearted comments about propriety, there was no immediate commentary on this interaction terms of the organization’s approach. Maria returned to the topic, however, stating in the same meeting, “we’re not looking for hugs, for private meetings. We go to these events in groups to build

26 Interview with Maria, January 8, 2008.
power for [our group]—it’s not private buddy, buddy, it’s our public face.” This staging and scripting solutions to this scene served to silence voices (both that of the question asker and that of the Spanish-speaking participants), avoid a complex question, and reframed, however temporarily, the group’s self-conception with regard to the state.

4.2.4 Scene Four: Voiceless and Voteless in the Taskforce

During one of the group’s bimonthly meetings Janet, a long-time but often overlooked member of the group, suggested a particular speaker for an upcoming conference the group was planning. The speaker was both respected and reviled for his statement that the best thing one could do for Rust Belt youth was to give them a bus ticket out of town. Gretchen passed over this comment in much the same way she had others in the community gathering, simply eliding the recommendation and continuing the work at hand. Yet the idea received subsequent support from another, more prominent member of the group. This support was dismissed as well, this time by Gretchen’s husband. Thus it became clear that Gretchen would have to engage the issue, effectively shifting her strategy from scripting efforts (either ignoring or cursorily dismissing the suggestions) to a scripting effort.

This first scripting effort—to talk the group out of their position on this issue and route the consensus, so to speak—failed as well, as evidence by ongoing and energetic conversation. It was apparent to me that neither scripting effort had left the participants democratically satisfied. At this point that Gretchen routed the conversation with a decisive staging move, declaring that the group would have to “take a vote, for the first time in our history!” This declaration, and a reference to the amount of work remaining on the agenda, was enough to settle the issue. No vote was taken, the issue was not revisited, and a core staging component—
and marquee component of the democratic process—was used to stifle the process itself. Calling for an unprecedented vote added a layer of formality that placed the topic, and all conversation surrounding it, beyond the pale. Thinking again in terms of participants’ expectations, it is difficult to imagine this exchange left participants satisfied with the democratic process—confident that their voices had been heard and the issue had been sufficiently discussed.

This case is a stark—but not uncommon—illustration of the ways leaders’ decision may balance organizational efficacy and appearance. Democratic rhetoric—deployed through scripting and staging strategies—can be used by leaders to successfully counter resistance to stated policies without sacrificing the appearance of democratic participation. Gretchen has even extended this strategy to include her and her husband’s role in the group. As Janet pointed out to me “Gretchen and Tom don’t consider themselves to be leaders but really they are. And they get results.” This appreciation for their efficacy underscores the implicit expectation that they not appear to consider themselves leaders. Indeed, in each of these situations the appearance of inclusive engagement was sustained through the specific use of staging and scripting strategies (possibly at the expense of participant’s “democratic satisfaction”). The Taskforce’s steering committee represented the most consistent, and loyal, group covered in this study. A majority of its quasi-democratically appointed members attend a majority of the committee meetings, rendering exit or sustained or repeated scene-making highly unlikely. This can be contrasted with the frequent and substantial turnover within and exit from the Coalition’s issue group.

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27 Interview with Janet, June 16, 2008.
4.2.5 Scene Five: Closing Conversations in Prayer in the Coalition

While decision-making conversation was curbed with a vote in the Taskforce, voices were similarly silenced by prayer in the Coalition’s issue group. In this striking example of scripting, Helen invoked prayer in much the same way Gretchen used the vote. On two separate occasions conversations in Spanish generated such excitement that the translator was no longer able to keep up. One of the only slivers that came out in English was one man’s observation that Latinos don’t get involved in the group (or soon exit), because “they don’t want to waste their time and they’ll get nothing out of it.” This potentially-useful bit of exit information was passed over. Rather than asking for translation of what would appear to be a significantly vibrant conversation that included the voices and insights of many, Helen’s physical energy shifted, her body language indicating that the meeting had now come to a close. It was clear to me that the energy in the room had spilled outside of the meeting’s format, off the stage, if you will. The appearance of consensus had been violated and the Latino members were now causing a scene in Spanish. Rather than engage this energy through an initial scripting effort, Helen adopted a more invasive blended approach, asking the participants to bow their heads (physically and perhaps also symbolically) so she could close the meeting in prayer.

This request struck me as representing not just the traditional religious gesture of physically bowing but as also resonating with the posture implicitly requested of the Latinos in the room through this and other meetings. Thus, the vibrant discussion that included many voices can be interpreted as the unbowing of the head, the unanticipated emergence of participants as political in this inclusive democratic space, an unequivocal scene. Since the space (or those leading the process) lacked the capacity for this involvement, prayer was deployed as a simultaneous staging and scripting strategy (invoking speech and schedule) with the effect of silencing these untranslated voices and ending the meeting. This wasn’t the first time Helen had
ended a discussion with prayer. An earlier meeting met a similar fate, despite the emergence of a vibrant and unprecedented conversation about race and ethnicity among the group’s few African American members and the Latino majority and engaged by the entire group.²⁸

The spontaneity and enthusiasm with which these conversations emerged suggest that a lack of engagement by this community was due not to reticence but instead to the staging and scripting strategies deployed by the group’s two Anglo leaders. This is borne out by committee meetings led by Maria, a higher status Latina organizer, late in my fieldwork. Her presence seemed to open the space as contributions from Spanish-speaking members were solicited and sustained with an unprecedented fluidity. The meeting itself seemed much more open, convivial and energetic and left me with an even clearer sense that each of the committee members, including the heretofore silent Latinos, had an opinion and a voice. As in each of the previous examples, democratically-damaging scenes were repaired by the group or leader’s deployment of a unique combination of scripting and staging. These efforts produce homeostasis and silence and encourage either exit or more compliant and loyal group performances in future meetings.

²⁸ Both voting and prayer appear to include everyone but are actually covert power moves by the leader. While both voting and prayer have staging elements (they are predictable organizational and religious mechanisms), this analysis treats them as scripting efforts because they do not involve a change of venue and because they involve the use of voice-raising in the silencing process.
5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Practical Implications

As suggested throughout this work, several notable implications follow from these staging and scripting efforts. Specifically, staging and scripting allow groups to maintain or regain homeostasis (whether through loyalty or exit) and increase efficacy. That this can be accomplished without appearing undemocratic does not mean there are not significant side-effects, especially when one considers the significance attributed to democratic voice among both democratic theorists and social movement scholars and practitioners. In both groups staging and scripting served to silence democracy’s voices.

5.1.1 The impact of staging and scripting in the Taskforce

Although the process of staging and scripting the appearance of inclusive engagement in the service of organizational efficacy may sound disingenuous but harmless, it does have significant impact. The most obvious consequence is the stifling of popular and substantive discussions. Concluding a vibrant discussion of tax incentives in the Taskforce precluded the sharing of diverse perspectives, the development of new ideas and the identification of common ground. In the steering committee, open discussion met a similar fate, again minimizing the amount of serious attention the organization’s leaders could pay to this issue. In both cases, the idea of democracy, or democratic form (the vote) were invoked as either reasons or as tools to curtail debate. The long-term impact of this approach is suggested by Janet, who pointed out
that as an African American attending the group’s meeting for the first time, “I looked around
and there were only ten African Americans there and they were talking about me and what they
could do for me, but I wasn’t even there.” This lack of personal representation also extends to
individual understandings of the group’s efforts since “the beneficiaries might not know [the
Taskforce’s] issues, social justice and democracy.”

5.1.2 The impact of staging and scripting in the Coalition

This act of staging and scripting inclusive engagement had a greater impact on the
Coalition than it did in the Taskforce. It is important to remember that the Coalition is one of the
few places in the region where the Latino community is able to find support, solace and a
connection to the political process. Nationwide a lack of information about the American
political process, and fear of contemporary immigration policies have kept many Latinos from
engaging the political participation (Martinez 2003 and 2008; Michelson 2005). Closing this
space to their participation—whether through staging or scripting—closed an avenue for both
solidarity and political participation. The fact that open and fruitful dialogue followed the one
instance in which a Latina led the meeting can be taken as an indication that leadership style
(and perhaps organizational culture) was significant in shaping the organizational dynamics. As it
stands, the Latino members’ issues were not represented, nor were an effective effort made to
explain the Coalition’s work to newcomers. As a result, few members understood the issue at
hand, and even fewer decide to attend meetings regularly.

This represents not only a loss to the Coalition but also to individual participants. Latino
interviewees where hard pressed to name one other place members of the Latino community
could go to experience solidarity. Perspectives differed with regard to why people chose not to
stay. Helen, the group’s monolingual Anglo leader, suggested that members of the community
are young, busy and the ordinance promoted by the group “might not be their issue.” Angelica,
the translator, found the reasons to be deeper, pointing out that while this wasn’t their issue, Latinos didn’t understand what was happening in meetings and “it’s not their space.” This last statement is odd considering the fact that the issue group’s meetings are held in a predominantly-Latino church within a predominantly Latino community. Presumably, one of the reasons Latino members don’t understand the group’s efforts is poor translation, which Helen admitted the group “runs out of time to do properly.”

Furthermore, an experience of the broader organizational context suggests the Latino community itself is not involved in agenda-setting or program implementation. It is not surprising that a marginalized and racialized minority would be reluctant to engage in formal political processes like those pursued by the Coalition (Bourdieu 1991). It is curious, however, that while the organization’s planning meetings are attended by Latinos and Anglos (and the occasional African American), the program and conversation is dominated by the group’s Anglo participant. So what would otherwise be an opportunity for camaraderie and socialization within the Latino community is instead a long, quiet meeting. At first blush it appears that the process doesn’t require the putative beneficiaries to actually be present (politically, intellectually, bureaucratically, philosophically) in order to participate, they just need to lend the idea of their political self to the process of representation.

5.2 Theoretical implications

5.2.1 Contributions to the social movement literature

This thesis has several implications that may be of interest to social movement scholars. First, it suggests values for democracy are more intransigent than suggested by Michels. Secondly, it suggests efficiency might not be the prime motive for some groups. The first implication is that democracy is intransigent this intransigence is rooted in the broad acceptance
this organizational form has garnered support from movement actors and the general public alike.

While the strength of Michels argument is undisputed, additional light can be shed on how leaders manage the process itself. It seems improbable that leaders in the formal process of adopting more centralized, bureaucratic and effective forms, or who in the informal process of managing multiple voices and perspectives in small, intentionally inclusive spaces, are simply indifferent to how such shifts may be perceived by their supporters and the general public. Yet this complexity is belied by Michels’ in his determination that “democracy is only a form of organization and that when it ceases to be possible to harmonize democracy with organization, it is better to abandon the former than the latter” (Michels 1915: 35).

Looking at the organizational level some of these changes take years. Decades in some organizations. But, as this study seeks to illustrate, these moves toward efficiency happen at the micro-level as well: in agenda-setting, in meeting-management, and in basic decision-making. An additional component deserves attention. The organizations engaged in this study are associational social movement groups (Samson, et al 2005) falling between Michels’ iron law of oligarchy and Jo Freeman’s tyranny of structurelessness (1970). In both groups the leaders were too committed to inclusion to become Michelsian oligarchs, and too committed to efficiency to cede power to structurelessness. They inhabit an underexplored sphere of leadership in which the appearance of inclusion is affected to cover power moves made in the interest of efficiency.

The second implication is that social movement organizations have motives other than efficiency (i.e., appearing inclusive). Michels’ approach assumes efficiency is the prime organizational motive, an assumption challenged by the possibility that some leaders may “champion participatory democracy precisely because it spares them the hard work of having to make choices among possible goals” (Polletta 214). Here Polletta can be seen echoing both
Clemens and C. Wright Mills (1940) as she observes that people choose strategies for many reasons (aptitude, instrumental rationality, ideology, prescience, availability, identity), an observation which, she argues, should push social movement scholars to “probe much more deeply the sources of the vocabularies of motives … that shape movement decisionmaking (Polletta 2002: 227).

This study suggests that the alternative—identifying goals—is just as complex. While Polletta presents a case where participatory democracy is chosen as a strategy to avoid tough goal setting, examples from my fieldwork indicate that in some cases well-managed democratic-appearing participation is chosen instead of outright leadership. Either way social movements may fear both inefficiency and overt leadership. In other words, Polletta show how staging and scripting can be used to avoid leadership in times of uncertainty while this study suggests how staging and scripting can be used to avoid the appearance of non-democratic leadership or leadership itself. But where Polletta suggests rules, relationship and rituals as solutions to both inefficiency and oligarchy (218), this research suggests an additional, pragmatic and decidedly lower brow solution: balancing inefficiency and oligarchy through staging and scripting strategies.

5.2.2 Congenital inequality and democratic deficit

In addition to these more modest contributions to the social movement literature, I would also like to highlight a number of insights which may be of interest to democratic theorists as well. Specifically, a Gramscian analysis of the phenomena detailed herein highlights the significant gap between democracy’s ideological and normative functions. These cases could simply be dismissed if it lacked originality (merely observing undemocratic action in putatively democratic spaces) or accuracy (pointing out once again that leaders tend toward oligarchy). Instead, they suggest this inequality is more than a low level irony; in fact it lies at the very core
of efforts to engage in inclusive and participatory democratic practice. The essential nature of this inequality reveals the congenitally undemocratic nature of leader’s involvement in deliberative practice and democratic spaces. The term congenital reflects an absence of explicit or instrumental deliberation on the part of leaders, most of whom would rather not be seen as leaders (witness Gretchen’s insistence that she “is not a leader”).

The congenitally undemocratic nature of social movement (and indeed all) groups, and the strategies deployed to cover the subsequent democratic deficit\(^\text{29}\) are realities democratic theorists are sometimes reluctant to acknowledge. This study raises a number of questions. What is the relationship between democracy and the tools maintaining its appearance? This thesis has shown how staging/scripting works, but why does it work, especially in a democracy? From where does the staging/scripting strategy gain legitimacy? Who initiates and reinforces this legitimacy? A Gramscian analysis provides analytical leverage in answering these questions. Specifically, the nature and function of the *idea* of inclusion and representation recommend an analysis of democracy as ideology. The role of ideology in the creation and maintenance of inclusive-seeming spaces and processes has been hinted at through this work but deserves explication.

I follow Gramsci’s usage of ideology as that “intermediate phase between philosophy and day-to-day practice” (1986: 427) which has the effect of facilitating societal change through normative thought processes. Thus, ideology is not simply the beliefs people have (an analytical and descriptive claim), but is more explicitly normative (which is not to say *purposeful*). To be sure, the ideological commitment to democracy exists at a cultural and political level beyond the leader and, as such, is a process that emerges without any single agent (Mouffe 1979: 171 states this in slightly stronger, Althusserian terms: “Social agents are not the constitutive principles of

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\(^{29}\) “A democratic deficit occurs when ostensibly democratic organizations or institutions in fact fall short of fulfilling what are believed to be the principles of democracy” (Levinson 2007).
their acts, but supports of the structures”). This study follows Hall et al.’s conceptualization of ideology as “not simply ‘ideas’ but is embodied in structures which are produced, reproduced and transformed in the practice of small groups” (1979). Readers should note that the concept of ideology is used in a non-marxist, non-determinist, non-economistic way and as such departs from earlier work on the topic (see Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1979 and Mouffe 1979).

While the groups assessed in this study combine proceduralist democracy—with its emphasis on norms, rules, and procedures in service of a democratic outcome—with a value for inclusivity and voice, the introduction of gramscian ideology undermines this value for democratic practice, showing how a democratic deficit is produced regardless of the democratic form. Chantal Mouffe has made a similar point in her call for “radical and plural democracy” as an improvement on more Rawlsian, procedural democratic forms and their emphasis on voting and representation, noting the ways ideology produces, reproduces and transforms small group practices. In this way Hall et al resonate with Chantal Mouffe (and Ernesto Laclau’s) decades-long effort to “acknowledge the existence of relations of power and the need to transform them, while renouncing the illusion that we could free ourselves completely from power” (1996: 248; also Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Calling such a state “radical and plural democracy” Mouffe calls to task Schumpeterian liberals and their assessment of democracy as a values-free “procedural form … a mere method for making public decisions” (252), insisting instead on a conceptualization of democracy which allows for the “antagonism, violence, power, and repression” others (notably Rawls) have obviated or ignored. As a result of this focus on procedural form “the frontiers between what is legitimate and what is not legitimate appear as independent of power relations” (253). In the final analysis rational proceduralism “eliminates its adversaries while remaining neutral” (ibid)
and denies the fact that democracy “constitutes a system of relations of power” (254) and renders “the democratic challenging of those forms of power illegitimate” (ibid). In light of this thesis’s findings we can safely extend this analysis by arguing that what’s needed is not more democracy—better norms, rules, procedures of argumentation, etc—but instead a recognition that power and ideology are constitutive of democratic practice. This flaw is congenital to the body politic, rather than democratic theory.

Introducing the category of ideology in this way explains why leaders in the Taskforce and Coalition use democracy as a covering term that masks contradictions and undemocratic events (witness Gretchen’s dismissal of input: the thing that violates democracy). The term democracy thus works ideologically as it masks power disparities, voicelessness and a lack of inclusivity. In the Taskforce Gretchen insists she is not a leader but instead serves as a facilitator. In the Coalition Helen is able to mind the gap by invoking language of participation, asking group-members if they have anything else to say.30

Thus, while the idea of democracy inspires citizens, theorists, and activists, its ideological function deploys aspirational talk to cover the gap between what is desired and what is—between inclusion and efficacy—and prevents exit while minimizing scenes. Inspiration drawn in this manner rests on a weak foundation as democratic (and even organizational) legitimacy has been grounded in rhetoric, rather than in a more pragmatic consideration of leaders’ roles. In fact a group’s legitimacy may be based on an ability to meet member’s expectations for democracy.

Since leaders cannot dismiss input outright, or ask individuals to stop speaking, staging and scripting techniques must be drawn from within the canon of democratic discourse (as seen

30 “Obviously the fact of hegemony presupposes that one takes into account the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony will be exercised, and it also presupposes a certain equilibrium, that is to say, that the hegemonic groups will make some sacrifices of a corporate nature” (Gramsci 1971: 180).
in the use of votes and calls for consensus within the Taskforce). These familiar, sanctioned, and legitimated actions are the concrete representations of democracy’s ideological function. This explains why staging and scripting efforts are not directly challenged: They are considered legitimate (democratic) responses. Responses instead take the form of scenes, or exit, both of which contribute to organizational homeostasis but democratic deficit.

Doubtless many theorists of social movement and democratic theory will have a hard time with this finding: that power and ideology lay at the heart of democracy and are constitutive of its practice. While earnest, such research would benefit from a more empirically rigorous analysis of the form, function and consequence of small groups in the process of “doing democracy” (West and Zimmerman 1987). Indeed, it suggests empirically-rich theorizing as an antidote to the formal, abstract theorizing that comprises much of contemporary democratic theory. Hopefully these findings provide an opportunity to consider further the complex relationship between power and democracy, especially within small groups organizing for social change.

5.2.3 The Goffmanian Bridge

Finally, I would like to highlight a third, smaller, contribution. The incorporation of Erving Goffman suggests further opportunities to bridge the gap between small group processes and the larger-scale phenomena described by structural theorists (as the preceding discussion, however brief, attempted to do). This thesis both describes the ways in which power and ideology articulate at the grassroots and suggests opportunities to further develop micro and meso-level tools for such analysis.

The use of Goffman helps focus attention to the articulation of ideology/power dynamics at the grassroots and at the level of the small group. This suggests a scope-condition
for any attempt to apply the work of critical (macro) theorists (e.g. Gramsci) to the sites of most social movement activity (the small group) as well as the need for increased empirical and theoretical bridge-building between macro theories of dominance and micro experiences of groups struggling for social change. In other words, caution must be exercised in the direct importation of critical theoretical analyses onto group processes. What is needed, and this research suggests, is an analysis of the congenital difficulties inherent in democratic processes at the small group level, rather than at the level of a class, party or entire society so clearly articulated by Marx, Michels, Gramsci and Habermas.

Clearly the inverse is also true. The theory of democracy management adumbrated here is unable to scale up to the level of analysis necessary to describe the uses and fate of democratic forms among more sophisticated movement actors and spaces, such as the World Social Forum. Rather than mounting a macro-level theoretical challenge to these theorists, this study should be seen as an empirical and theoretical complement at the micro/meso level, contributing to this larger effort to better understand inequality and social change. It also suggests opportunities for social movement scholars to develop more thorough conceptual and theoretical tools for the analysis of democratic participation.
6. CONCLUSION

This thesis draws from extensive observation of small group interactions to make several related points. Many small, social movement-style organizations fit the profile sketched for the organizations included in this study:

1) Specific goals that are external to the organization
2) Limited resources (thus increasing the importance of legitimacy)
3) Commitment to inclusive engagement (民主决策, consensus, deliberation, etc)
4) Need for efficiency (at both the meeting and project/organizational level)

This thesis has argued that when these conditions are met, leaders may resort to the sorts of staging and scripting efforts emerge described herein. Leaders of such organizations, it is argued, experience significant (internal and external, implicit and explicit) pressure to produce results while also maintaining an open and inclusive forum for members. These two objectives—efficacy and inclusion—have the potential to clash, while group members’ expectations for a groups’ ability to meet these objectives remain constant. This situation increases leader’s incentive to find a solution which maximizes organizational efficacy while maintaining a democratic appearance. Fieldwork suggests this balance may be struck through the use of dramaturgical devices first identified by Erving Goffman: staging (by which I mean meeting and organizational composition) and scripting (by which I simply mean talk).

Inclusive-appearing structures, and representative-sounding talk may thus be utilized in small social movement organizations to maintain the appearance of democracy while avoiding its more notable benefit: voice. A second consequence is the maintenance of organizational
homeostasis, as disruptively democratic voices either exit or submit when faced with a leader (or group’s) staging and scripting efforts. Thus homeostasis-maintaining staging and scripting strategies positively impact organizational continuity and long-term stability, while negatively impacting the very democratic dynamism so valued by social movement organizations. This thesis also implies that democratic organizational forms may be more durable than Michels originally envisioned. It also suggests a number of organizational motivations other than efficiency, notably a desire for the legitimacy that comes with the appearance of inclusion.

Finally, these findings suggest small groups are congenitally undemocratic since power and ideology lay at the heart of democracy (or any political enterprise) and are thus constitutive of its practice. This congenital inequality and the strategies used to cover the subsequent democratic deficit are realities a number of democratic and social movement theorists are reluctant (or unwilling) to acknowledge. This complex relationship between power and democracy at the micro and meso levels deserves a fresh round of empirically-rich theorizing, thereby complementing the more formal efforts that have dominated the literature to date.
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