Critical Community Psychology Praxis for the 21st Centtury

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Introduction
When invited to sum up the nature of community psychology, a group of our students
described it as 'a practice for liberation with responsibilities' (Duggan et al., 2000).
This is an interesting phrase, suggestive of important underlying values, social
analyses and community psychological practices. We are going to suggest that the 21st
Century opens the possibility for community psychology to contribute to a radical,
responsible and responsive practice for liberation. To date, community – psychology
has not lived up to its liberatory promise.

Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) note that community psychology literature
(interesting that it is the literature, not the practice!)

> "… has paid very little attention to issues such as social action, advocacy and
> social change movements, poverty and anti-poverty organisations, grass roots
> community organising, human rights, sustainable community economic
> development and social policy … (and) … much greater attention is paid to
> research methodology than to our work's political dimensions and dynamics"
> Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997) p.178

It is the work's political dimensions and dynamics we want to highlight.

Liberatory practice cannot be achieved by community psychology alone, and a crucial
feature of our analysis will be that for liberation, alliances within and outside the
discipline must be formed. Only then is there likely to be any chance of a challenge to
the prevailing ideological hegemony (Burton and Kagan, 1996), or indeed for the
realisation of the process of empowerment, embedded in principle within community
psychology (Rappaport, 1981). Only then, too, will community psychology itself
reflect features of, and contribute to, wider social movements and be able to claim
some kind of a progressive impact (see, for example, Foweraker, 1995; Byrne, 1997;
Stephen, 1997).

We will be suggesting a move towards a radical praxis (Freire 1972 a,b; Lather, 1986)
wherein action, research[3] and theory are inseparable and intertwined in complex
ways, and immersed in the lives of people who are marginalised, oppressed and
dispossessed. We will reiterate the need for a reflexive and historical practice that
learns from its past and that challenges not only the social status quo, but also the
status quo within psychology. Martín Baró, The pre-eminent liberation psychologist
of the last century, summed the task up thus:

> …a psychology of liberation requires a prior liberation of psychology, and that
> liberation can only come from a praxis committed to the sufferings and hopes
> of the people …" Martín Baró, p.32

We will suggest a useful model for looking at radical community psychological praxis
is what we call a model of 'pre-figurative praxis'. Elsewhere we have used the model
as a way of conceptualising praxis as action research (Burton, 1983; Kagan and

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[3] We do not generally find the distinction between action and research a useful one. However, we are
moving towards the view that whilst not all action is research, all research could and should be action.

Burton, 2000). Broadening the definition to refer to praxis more generally, prefigurative praxis

> "… emphasises the relationship between action research [… and practice…] and the creation of alternatives to the existing social order. This combined process of social reform and […reflection…] enables learning about both the freedom of movement to create progressive social forms and about the constraints the present order imposes. It also creates disseminated 'images of possibility' for a different way of ordering social life." Kagan and Burton, 2000 p. 73

What we are suggesting is a framework for self-aware social change, with an emphasis on value based, participatory work: one that is pragmatic and reflexive, whilst not wedded to any particular orthodoxy of method.

In developing the model, we will outline key aspects of the social context at the turn of the Century; elements of a radical community psychological praxis; strategies for intervention; and some of the tensions of working within and against the discipline of psychology.

Context: Social issues and trends
As we turn the Century, new challenges come into focus which frame not only our practice but also the lived experiences of those we work with. Some of the old, deep societal schisms remain, between for example, rich and poor, North and South, men and women, minorities and majorities, included and excluded and so on. However, there are additional social trends, which will have new bearings on the type of work we do.

Neo-liberalism has tightened its grip (see for example, Shutt, 1998; Galeano, 1998; Gowan, 1999; International People's Tribunal, 1994; New Internationalist, 1997; Marcos, 1997; Pilger, 1998). From a neo-liberalist perspective, the world is treated as one large and many smaller markets. Everything is costed and commodified, including time, commitment and human relations themselves (Kagan et al., 2000b). In the First World, in Britain certainly, the primary leisure activity (for those with the resources) is shopping. Electronic communications offer possibilities for new forms of association as well as highlighting talk between people as a commodity, which can be bought, stored and retrieved.

The promotion of participative democracy and the strengthening of civil (or civic society with all its responsibilities and in all its different manifestations, can be seen as a contrast to the threat of both neo-liberalism, and the authoritarian state (Montero, 1998).

A new harshness toward minorities has developed in Britain and elsewhere, reflecting a rupture from the liberal consensus of the late 20th Century. Displaced people (refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants), offenders, child offenders, people with mental health difficulties that challenge current understanding are no longer being treated as exceptions and people with dignity, but rather as group entities to be processed and dealt with as such, and forced to live with each other away from the rest of us. (See Fals Borda (1998) for discussion of this and other turn-of-the Century

challenges to an emancipatory project.) Furthermore, the social injustices, indignities and abuses that follow such repression are, themselves, individualised, kept private and hidden from view (Kidder and Fine, 1986)

The public promotion of civil and human rights, advocacy, social action and inclusive forms of association can be seen as a contrast to the threat of repression.

Along with these trends goes the commodification and privatisation of public and community space. Elderly people in North Manchester, for example, remember the Queen's Park 'Parliament', where every Sunday a multitude of people would gather to make and to hear social and political speeches. No more: political understanding for the majority come from the television, radio or newspaper 'sound-bite'. This is linked to what Habermas (1987, 1989) has identified as the erosion of the public sphere, (or colonisation of the lifeworld) leading to a degeneration of public debate. Political debate has moved into the media and the technological sphere, giving rise to a blunting of creativity and understanding, and greater invisibility of the ideological forces constraining our lives.

Simultaneously, collective social safeguards, such as trades unionism or the regulation of the market by the state, have been successively eroded under the neoliberal onslaught.

Emancipatory education, new forms of association and participation in civic life can be seen as a contrast to this threat of deregulation and privatisation.

The last great challenge we want to outline is the ecological, environmental, planetary challenge. In the First World we have no excuse for not knowing about the threats to a sustainable environment and some of the things that contribute to this (see for example, Monbiot 2000; Shiva, 2000). We also have no excuse for not taking action at different levels to resist the destruction. However, not everyone has access to information with which they can take responsible decisions. The development of meaningful, informed participation in civil life is a major challenge and calls have been made for a move towards deliberative democracy (Fong and Wright, 1999; Koh and Slye, 1999) as one way of exercising local power in the face of large-scale powerlessness.

Emancipatory education, social action, deliberative democracy, new forms of association and participation all offer contrasts to the threat of environmental destruction.

The social trends, challenges and possibilities for resistance (and radical community psychological praxis) in the context of local actions and wider struggles are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Social Trends, Challenges and Possibilities for Radical Community Psychological Praxis

Social Trend	Challenge	Possibilities for resistance	Local Action	Wider Struggle
Inequality	Widening societal schisms	Focus energies with those with least power	Dialogical relationships with marginalised people	Struggles for social justice and equity
Neo-liberalism	Commodification of people, communication and human relations	Promotion of participation in civil society; networking	Group conscientization	Resistance to global capital; solidarity with social movements in North and South contexts
Repression	Increased harshness toward minorities	The promotion of civil and human rights; advocacy; association	Form alliances and create new social settings	Struggle and lobby against repressive laws; solidarity action
Deregulation and privatisation	Privatisation of public and community space and withdrawal from politics	Education and association	Conscientization and de-ideologisation; development counter system	Anti-privatisation struggles
Environmental destruction	Domination of global capital and threats to sustainability	Decision making	Information, education and both individual and collective action	Ecological lobbying; direct actions; development of alternatives

In our work, we as community psychologists must side with resistance to these destructive social forces. However, we must use opportunities when and as they arise, working both in and against the system at different levels. But what might a radical Community Psychology that was up to the challenges posed above, look like in terms of its tasks and its tools? We will begin to sketch these out, reiterating past calls and re-emphasising some. Certainly, we can begin to establish some criteria for adequacy when we try to see the extent to which our work furthers the themes of resistance outlined above.

Radical Praxis of Community Psychology

There is perhaps a surprising amount of agreement amongst radical practitioners about the components of a radical praxis (for example, Leonard, 1995; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997; Freire, 1972 b; Martín Baró, 1986; McLaren and Lankshear ,1994; Montero, 1995, 1998; Ohir, et al., 1982; Lather, 1986; Heather, 1976). There are, however, some preliminaries to get over, namely the nature of the Just Society we are working towards and underlying values for the next century.

A Just Society and the process of social justice

In our model of community psychological praxis, we think it is important to have a vision: a vision, that is, of the kind of society we are working towards, but that we

know we will never achieve, for as we get near it, it seems, like a rainbow, to move out of reach – not because it has actually receded, but because our understanding of it has become more detailed, less abstract. Our vision must similarly keep pace (Pearpoint et al., 1993; Ringland, 1998; Schwartz (D), 1992; Schwartz (P) 1991). We, and the people we work with have to have a vision- even a dream- of what might be, to guide our actions and frame our reflections. This vision unleashes our creativity, hopes and desires and builds on our fundamental values. However, insofar as it will ever only be a guide to action, we think it is more a process of increasing social justice whilst at the same time decreasing social injustice.

What are the values underpinning a Just Society and on which our praxis is based?

Values are a way of stating, measuring or assessing the worth of something – in this case our community psychological intentions, actions and reflections, whether these are connected to teaching, social action and/or researching. In our discussion of values we are drawing on Habermas' (1979) domains of knowledge interests, as well as the distinctions drawn by Tyne (e.g. 2000), between the core values of 'justice', 'stewardship' and 'community' (as an abstract not a concrete noun).

Justice as a value leads to the articulation of the following rights:
- right to have more equal and equitable distribution of resources
- right to live in peace and in freedom from constraints
- right to equality and fair treatment
- right to self-determination

Each of these rights can be pursued in our praxis, underpinned by the value of justice.

Stewardship as a value leads to the articulation of the following duties and responsibilities:
- duty to look after our world and the people in it
- duty to enable people to make a contribution and gain a sense of belonging duty not to waste things, people's lives or time
- duty to think long term make things last longer than us and to do things as right as we can

Each of these duties can be reflected in our praxis, underpinned by the value of stewardship.

Community as a value leads to the articulation of the following hopes and desires:
- hope for companionship, love, acceptance and tolerance;
- hope to be included and for diversity to be welcomed and celebrated;
- hope that our individual and collective flaws will not hide our potential and that we will be accepted for who we are;

Each of these hopes can guide our praxis, underpinned by the value of community.

Thus we can see that a Just Society is one that is underpinned by shared values of justice, stewardship and community, and that these same values should underpin our community psychological practice (see Figure 1).

Figure1: Interconnected values underpinning radical community psychological praxis

JUSTICE

STEWARDSHIP   COMMUNITY
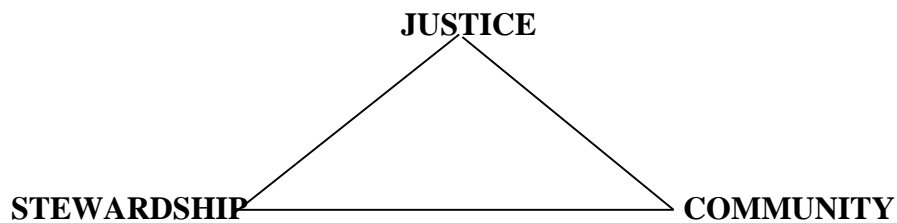
Conceptual Basis of Community Psychological Praxis

A clear vision of greater social justice, and explicitly stated values, could lead us to develop an academic critique of psychology and go no further. However, Lather (1986) for example, argues that a radical praxis must **push** for the possibilities of an explicitly value-based social science with emancipatory goals, rather than settle for arguments **against** the possibilities of an objective science. She makes the case for radical praxis to form an 'epistemological break' (Hesse, 1980), meaning a rupture in the established way of conceptualising an issue It could be argued that this is what Community Psychology has always tried to do – but it is worth re-stating the case.

Ecological Metaphor

In community psychological practice the major epistemological break with other forms of psychology is, perhaps, in efforts to look outside the individual for explanations of social experience and sometimes for solutions, whilst at the same time viewing people as agentic, purposeful beings who have the potential to influence and change their situations. Taking an ecological perspective, wherein the 'person-in-context' (where context is seen as being multi-level) is the unit of analysis and change, has become a guiding principle of community psychology. Pursuance of the ecological metaphor enables us to develop new progressive insights (e.g. edge effects (Burton and Kagan, 2000; see Levine and Perkins, 1997 for expansion of the metaphor) but can also lead us into the dangerous and conservative territory of evolutionary psychology, wherein 'survival of the fittest' and the maintenance of 'homeostatic equilibrium' become both social goals and social explanators. These are concepts that are not underpinned by explicit values (other than those of the mythical and ever-elusive positivist science) and are not employed explicitly in the service of moving towards a Just Society.

Whole Systems Perspectives

Following the ecological metaphor, community psychologists are widely agreed that systems analyses are required, both as a catalyst to understanding but also as a guide to action. Systems interventions are implied by an ecological perspective on change. Systems are not to be seen as static, concrete entities, but rather as social environments that can be both oppressive and supportive and that change over time. Any particular part of a social system can be, at the same time, oppressive and

supportive. For example, families, health and welfare agencies, hospitals, neighbourhood regeneration policies and institutions, schools, all provide support to enable people to maintain identity, secure material resources and at times resist the consequences of oppression.

However, as Leonard (1975, p. 56) reminds us, they also

> "carry to greater or lesser degree the marks of economic exploitation and the cultural hegemony of the ruling class"

The bureaucratic and dehumanising effects of health and welfare processes, the socialisation of children for the demands of the labour market, the apathy following the failures in influence local decision making, for example, are all features of oppression.

Community psychology, so long as it recognises the contradictions inherent in systems perspectives has the potential for enhancing the supportive features of some (elements) of the systems in the interests of the people. (See Ulrich, 1994, Midgley, 2000, for critical reconstructions of the system idea.)

The Necessity to be Interdisciplinary

Systems analyses allow us to work with different parts of the system, or with the interconnections between different parts of the system (see for example Seidman's (1988) convincing arguments for a focus on meso-level parts of a system, which by definition require a focus on the interconnection between other parts of the system), or with the system as a whole. Whilst much of the community psychological literature celebrates the advantages of systems perspectives, in practice, Seidman, argues, most community psychology interventions have remained at individual or collection of individuals levels (albeit, as he says, under the rubric of prevention).

A further epistemological break is required if community psychologists are to incorporate whole systems analyses and interventions into their work. To move towards a whole systems praxis will require forays into the environmental, management, operational research and social development fields (e.g. Bell, 1992; Flood and Jackson, 1991; Franscescato, 1992; Fukuoka, 1985; Midgley, 2000; Nelson and Wright 1995; Ritchie et al., 1994; Slocum et al., 1995; Taket and Whyte, 2000; Weisbord and Janoff, 1995; Wilby, 1996). Interdisciplinary perspectives and ways of working are required.

As we disseminate the value of systems perspectives, it is worth reminding ourselves that many systems approaches are founded on conservative consensus-oriented ideologies, with an emphasis placed on the interdependence of parts of the system and energy directed to maintaining the status quo (see for example, approaches stemming from Parsons (1951); Pincus and Minahan 1973). Whole systems thinking permeates evolutionary psychology and we must be on guard, again, not to succumb to this type of value-void systems thinking. The discipline of Psychology offers little in the way of understanding systems praxis, and this deficit highlights the need for community psychology praxis to become truly interdisciplinary. (It is not only the systems work that requires interdisciplinary understanding: most community psychological praxis is

enhanced by blurring the boundary between psychology, anthropology, economics, sociology, history, cultural studies and so on (see the case made in Himmelweit and Gaskell, 1992).

A radical (Marxist) approach to systems (for example, Leonard, 1975; Burton and Kagan, 1996) acknowledges the interconnectedness of social systems. However, instead of seeing all elements within and between systems, as mutually interactive, we use

> " a multi-level analysis … to identify the most important power relations and to decide where to intervene" (Burton and Kagan, 1996 p. 206)

Thus a radical community psychology praxis would seek interdisciplinary understanding about how oppression is caused and maintained, and use this understanding as a guide to appropriate action.

Dialectic of people and system

It is the dialectical relationship between people and systems, that Seidman (1985, p.8) suggests offers community psychology its niche.

> "reciprocal relationships and interdependencies between individuals and social systems that represent a unique and emergent synthesis of community and psychology."

Leonard (1975), drawing on Freire reminds us that this dialectical relationship is constructed by the creativity of people. Freire (1972a) puts it thus (cf: Bhaskar 1989, p.36)

> "It is as transforming and creative beings that men, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods – tangible objects- but also social institutions, ideas and concepts. Through their continuing praxis, men simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings"
>
> Freire (1972a, p.73)

Thus, community psychological praxis may provide opportunities for enhancing the creative, determining potential of people.

People's Consciousness

Knowing about the ways in which people make sense of their social worlds – social settings and social situations – is necessary if we are to work with people for change. This requires a certain degree of humility and can only be achieved by spending time with people and listening to their stories about their past, current circumstances and hopes for the future. It is only by hearing about people lived experience, in the context of their past and future aspirations, that we will be able to begin to understand their consciousness, intentions, and behaviours. More than this, though, we need to understand our own position in relation to those we are working with.

Community psychological praxis must be immersed in the lived experiences of people who are marginalised, oppressed and dispossessed. Without this,

> Academic knowledge is partial. It can only be indirect knowledge, informative and explanatory. It lacks that firm footing in raw reality that turns knowledge into a mobilising force capable of leading to action … Moral and political responsibility as well as scientific rigour, demand that the academic world turn its attention to people living in poverty, not in the first instance to teach, but to engage in a dialogue and to learn from it … (Wresinski, 1980 (in ATD Fourth World, 1999, p.3)

It is not only to understand people and their connections with their social contexts, that we need to become 'experience near' (Geertz, 1983). It is also to underpin our praxis, in terms of how problems are defined, solutions sought and methods implemented. Community psychological praxis supports a further 'epistemological break' with other forms of psychological practice, by advocating participatory approaches, in which the psychologist's 'expert knowledge' is combined with the people's 'popular knowledge' in every aspect of their work. This is a view shared by feminists (for example, Gatenby and Humphries, 2000; Reinharz, 1992;) and disability researchers (for example, Moore et al. 1998).

Community psychology must work as near to the people as possible, and in participation with them, in order to challenge the status quo and achieve social change.

These elements of a radical community psychological praxis are summarised in Table 2.

Strategies for radical community psychological praxis

Given the elements outlined above, it may now be possible to clarify the aims of a radical community psychological praxis. These aims, in turn can frame intervention strategies.

As we have argued, the overall aim is to move towards a Just Society, one that is characterised by shared concern for justice, stewardship and community. This would be a society that was more gentle and equitable; had greater functional democracy; in which people were empowered and quality of life improved; and in which violence was reduced (Veno and Thomas, 1992). To achieve this, structural change is required, not just fine tuning which will only serve to maintain the status quo (Seidman, 1988).

Four major strategies of intervention (each of which could incorporate different methods) suggest themselves: (1) furtherance of critical consciousness; (2) creation of new forms of social relations (new social settings); (3) development of alliances and counter systems; and (4) giving away psychology. These strategies are summarised in Table 3.

Table 2: Elements of a radical community psychological praxis

Element	Implication for community psychological praxis
A Just Society and its Underpinning Values?	A Just Society is one that is underpinned by shared values of justice, stewardship and community, and these same values should underpin our community psychological practice
Ecological Metaphor	Community psychology looks outside the individual for explanations of social experience and sometimes for solutions, whilst at the same time viewing people as agentic, purposeful beings
Whole Systems Perspectives	Community psychology, so long as it recognises the contradictions inherent in systems perspectives has the potential for enhancing the supportive features of some (elements) of the systems in the interests of the people and for identifying the causes of oppression.
Interdisciplinary	a radical community psychology practice would seek interdisciplinary understanding about how oppression is caused and maintained, and use this understanding as a guide to appropriate action
Dialectical relationship between people and systems	community psychological praxis may provide opportunities for enhancing the creative, determining potential of people.
People's Consciousness	Community psychology must work as near to the people as possible, and in participation with them in order to challenge the status quo and achieve social change.

A key task of community psychological praxis is an educational one. Not educational in the traditional way of imparting information along a one way channel (what Freire refers to as the 'banking' approaches to education). Instead, the educational task requires a process that is characterised by dialogue between people, leading to greater 'conscientization' (Freire and Faundez, 1989 demonstrate the process whilst discussing the process in a 'talking book'). It is by sharing our perceptions of the world that we can begin to have dialogue. Francescato (2000) argued for interventions that encourage pluralistic interpretations, and that unite different kinds of knowledge: different types of knowledge, that is, that emanates from different people, different workers and different social discourses. It is through the sharing of information and perspectives on the world that we all become more aware of our place in it and the possibilities for constraint and change.

Table 3: Strategies for intervention and implications for community psychological praxis

Strategy for intervention	Community psychological praxis
Furtherance of critical consciousness: education	Community psychologists can work to develop dialogical relationships, which enable group conscientization, and possibilities for change. They must be prepared to share their 'expert' voice and remain open to learning.
Creation of new forms of social relations (new social settings)	Community psychologists can facilitate the bringing together of people with common interests, and their allies, and help them connect with others for greater power to change.
Development of alliances and counter systems	Community psychologists can work to develop alliances that will challenge the status quo, build a counter system and form part of wider emancipatory social movements
Giving psychology away	Community psychologists have opportunities to use psychological knowledge and expertise in liberatory ways: to make concepts and practices accessible and to develop participatory working relationships.

This process is known as a dialogic process, and assumes that "radical change can only come from consciousness developed as a result of exchange rather than imposition" (Leonard, 1975, p. 59). Through dialogic practice, the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator, so reality is demythologised: those who had been 'submerged' in oppressive social relations begin to understand these relations and the ideology that hides them, so recasting their social role with critical awareness. (Freire articulates this approach against the 'culture of silence' wherein oppressed people are prevented from what Doyal and Gough (1991) called 'critical autonomy' – the opportunity for participation in the political process. See Burton and Kagan (1996) for elaboration of this point.) It is through this process that learning takes place, and it is with greater conscientization that action for change is possible.

Humility and openness to learning ourselves, again, is required. Through the development of dialogical relationships, we will learn as much as any one else, and need to be prepared for our 'expert' knowledge to be challenged and seen to be incomplete. Nevertheless, our 'expert' voice can be used to speak with others, negotiate a common understanding and also to authenticate the voices of others.

> "Social scientists as 'outsiders' imbued with objectivity have a responsibility to voice social criticism, seek contradictions between the perspectives of those in power and those victimized by oppressive structures, and validate the voices of those unheard" (Kidder and Fine, 1986, p.59)

A radical community psychological praxis would emerge through the formation of dialogic relationships with oppressed people, the contribution of our 'expert voice' and continued openness to learning.

Creation of new forms of social relations (new social settings)

As an intervention for change, conscientization will be relatively weak unless it is group conscientization. Leonard (1975, p.60) summarises the advantages of group education thus:

> "The development of a critical consciousness, by which the demystification of political structures and economic relations takes place, enables a group and the individuals within it to assert their own humanity and to confront dehumanization systems"

By linking people together with others who share their experiences, or who are allies in wanting to fight to eliminate sources of oppression, radical community psychologists can work to develop dialogical relationships, within new social settings, which enable group conscientization, and possibilities for change.

Conscientization is one means by which people can begin to take power and use it for change – become empowered. Story telling within dialogic relationships has long been a tradition wherein people develop and retain a strong sense of culture and identity. Rappaport (1995) proposed a link between story telling, empowerment and the creation of settings. He suggests that empowerment[4] combined with narrative approaches is a way of pursuing a community psychological agenda.

> "for many people, particularly those who lack social, political or economic power, the community, neighbourhood or cultural narratives that are available are either negative, narrow, 'written' by others for them, or all of the above. People who seek either personal or community change often find that it is very difficult to sustain change without the support of a collectivity that provides a new community narrative around which they can sustain changes in their own personal story … the goals of empowerment are enhanced when people discover, or create and give voice to, a collective narrative that sustains their own personal life story in positive ways. This process is reciprocal, such that many individuals, in turn, create, change and sustain the group narrative." (p.796)

Once more, the power of the group over the individual is stressed. Radical community psychological praxis might find ways of enabling people to come together

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[4] Empowerment is one of those concepts that is suffused with alternative meanings. Scuftan (1996, p. 260) suggests "Empowerment is not an outcome of a single event; it is a continuous process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacity to better control and gain power over their lives". We have argued elsewhere for a more political approach to empowerment (Burton and Kagan, 1996). Empowerment is a multi-layered concept, implying individual, interpersonal, group, social and structural change. It is also a concept that once was progressive and now is becoming incorporated by the establishment, with rafts of punitive social policies being introduced in the name of empowerment (for example the cutting of income support benefits for single mothers so they could be 'empowered' to go to work). For the time being, and not withstanding the notion, implicit in the term, of empowerment being something that is done to passive recipients, we will continue to use the term.

in new ways to share experiences and stories about their lives and their dreams. (Indeed one of our recent student projects was about just this: finding ways for inner city teenagers to share and use their own storytelling as a means of confidence building and securing some social validation that would otherwise be missing from their lives – see www.prettyboyinc.com for some insights into this work.).

In empowerment work, enabling an individual to have a voice is a relatively weak strategy (although not to be underestimated in its impact on that person). Of greater impact is work that discovers ways of promoting ties amongst people who share a particular problem or life experience, and with their allies. Meluish and Bulmer (2000) give a good example of the importance of finding ways to bring together men living on the margins, and the impact this can have for their subsequent collective action and psychological well-being, as well as for the development of bonding social capital (Gittell and Vidal, 1998).

Community psychologists can, then, facilitate the bringing of people together, and help them connect with others for greater power to change. Together they will be able to critically reflect upon they way that dominant narratives legitimise the status quo, and be better able to give space for existing minority narratives and hopes, leading to action for change.

Development of alliances and counter systems

Whilst the development of trust between people, and collective action might harness individual energies, they may burn themselves out if they are not connected to the wider system in which they are living. This might be to link with other like groups, bringing in greater resources and greater strength in solidarity It may also be the linking with other parts of the system that can supply resources or expertise and thus strengthen the group (i.e. growing the bridging capital (see Kagan et al., 2000 for a discussion of how failure to acquire bridging capital contributed to the demise of a tenants group on an estate; and Kagan, (1993b, 1997) for large scale projects across a geographical region which used, in part, this method of empowerment). Finally it may be the creation of what is known as an 'ecological edge' (see Kagan and Choudury, 2000; Burton and Kagan, 2000 for discussions of this concept), wherein the common interests of both groups are found and energy and resources are maximised.

These are examples of how community psychologists might strategically use alliances between those with a stake in the change process. Facilitation of the development of 'critical alliances' (Ledwith and Asgill, 2000), can unite those with common interests who would traditionally organise separately. The development of a critical mass for change, by harnessing disparate interests, leads to greater strength in the change task – and the more diverse the interests in the alliance, the better (Gilchrist and Taylor, 97; Gilchrist, 2000). The development of alliances, requires, as Gilchrist (1995) points out, a high level of skill. New forms of communication can facilitate the formation of alliances (e.g. Pigg, 2000).

Not only do alliances increase strength for change, they also increase the likelihood that change will be sustainable. They are better able to challenge the status quo (even, as we have argued elsewhere (Burton and Kagan, 1996; Kagan and Burton, 1995), contribute to what amounts to a counter hegemonic bloc, challenging the prevailing

dominant ideology). These kinds of alliances are what Leonard (1975) suggests be required to build a counter system: that is, a power base from which some change in the existing system can take place.

The formation of alliances can be seen, again as the formation of new social settings. Burton (2000) argues that

> "It is simplistic to talk of new social settings in isolation from the people that create them, live part or all of their lives in them, and defend them. It may also be useful to consider this human dimension in terms of social movements. Most social settings will be connected in some way to some kind of social movement …. When creating settings we can and must pay attention to the social movement dimension" (p. 21.22)

There is no unitary approach to the conception of, and study of social movements (Burton, 2000; Foweraker, 1995). For our purposes here we can think of social movements as the combination of interests of different groups who for various reasons challenge the status quo and act for positive change towards a Just Society. So, for example, a community psychologist, working with a group of women in Colombia on the development of small scale, local enterprise (Estrada, 2000) is part of a global movement for women's emancipation and self-determination, as well as part of a global movement for the eradication of poverty. Each of these movements combines the interests of political, religious, interest and identity groups, all working in quite different ways in the same direction. Similarly, a community psychologist supporting a self advocacy group of people using mental health services, is part of a wider 'user movement', challenging the dominance of professionalism, that combines the interests of human rights, religious, professional and lay groups, be they concerned for example, with mental health, social inclusion, penal reform, elders' rights, emancipation of disabled people, persecution and torture, service user voices. Each group has its own area of interest, passion and commitment, but together they form the movement.

Community psychologists, might then be able to work to develop alliances between groups and organisations, that will challenge the status quo, begin to build a counter system and form part of wider emancipatory social movements.

Giving away Psychology
Empowerment and movement towards a Just Society, will involve both individual and structural change, and community psychologists have few alternatives to work both within and against the social structures and the organisations in which we work. Whilst we might have to acknowledge that our activities are, at best ameliorative interventions which tacitly support existing structures, our main ideological justification must be the extent to which we are able to further the critical consciousness of those we work with, and help them to build power bases from which to achieve change themselves (Leonard, 1975).

However, our commitment to social justice, the furtherance of critical consciousness, the creation of new forms of social relations (new social settings), empowerment, and the development of alliances and counter systems all suggest ways of working that differ from other forms of psychological practice.

There has long been a commitment within community psychology to 'giving psychology away' (see, for example the unlikely case made by Miller, 1969). This involves sharing our understanding, analyses, technical knowledge and resources with those with whom we work. To do this will require different relationships with those with whom we work. It also involves a commitment to continual reflection upon our own involvement, both in terms of our actions and our learning.

In part, the giving away of psychology is implicit in efforts to de-mystify and engage in dialogic processes. We should not, however, underplay the value of our technical theoretical and practical psychological knowledge (fashionable as it is in critical circles to talk ourselves out of any expertise, with the arguments that all psychological insights have been gained through the erroneous application of positivist experimentation, the abuse of power and the colonisation of others' distress).

When we work to help people develop their capacity to work co-operatively in groups, to be more assertive, to understand and use the concepts, for example, of 'psychological sense of community', or 'social capital' we are giving away psychology.

When we link students of psychology with community groups to work with them on their change projects (Duggan, et.al., 2000), we are giving away psychology. When we facilitate the development of self advocacy groups, helping people to understand the ideological and policy contexts of their oppression (for example, Goodley, 1998; Skelton and Moore, 1999) we are giving away psychology. When we journey alongside community groups helping them to manage conflict, be more assertive and gain more links with others who can help them in order to develop a counter system (e.g. Sanchez et al., 1988) we are giving away psychology.

Whilst we would argue that methodological pluralism and creativity[5] should be hallmarks of community psychological praxis, there is wide agreement that we should work in participative ways. It is working with people, on issues of their concern that require us to be agile in our choice of methods, and open to new forms of relationships with those with whom we are working participatively. And it is the goal of a Just Society that guides the questions we ask and the strategies we employ.

As radical community psychologists we have the opportunities to use our psychological knowledge and expertise in liberatory ways: to make concepts and practices accessible and to develop participatory working relationships.

The pre-figurative nature of critical community psychological praxis

We have described, above, some strategies for critical community psychological praxis. What makes these pre-figurative? We have taken the term from Gramsci (1968), who pointed to the importance in struggle of exploring, defining and anticipating the new social forms to which the struggle itself aspires. So, as we work in ways that develop innovations, anticipating a Just Society we will not be creating

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[5] See Midgley (1997, 2000) for detailed discussion of the creative design of methods

this society: instead we experimenting with change and learning from the process in a systematic way. We have argued elsewhere that in any radical intervention and change there will be two opposing processes.

> "The pre-figurative, creative, explorative, radical processes and achievements will be pitted against 'recuperative', retrogressive, traditionalist, unimaginative, conservative tendencies. The sources for the reactionary tendencies are likely to be multiple – in the external environment, and its impact on the setting itself, but also in the ideological and psychological baggage that the participants inevitably bring with them. There is never a clean break with the past." (Kagan and Burton, 2000 p. 75/76)

Pre-figurative praxis, then, explores the possibilities of prefiguring a just society, while at the same time identifying the limits of reform and hence the need for transformation. We assume that through this action learning about social change, resources for more fundamental social change will be developed. This understanding and learning, itself, forms part of a higher order change project that goes beyond merely interpreting the world.

Once more, we stress that pre-figurative praxis is not a methodology in itself, but rather an organizing orientation that guides our roles as collaborator and co-learners within complex social environments. A pre-figurative orientation includes learning about constraints, society, social power; the change process and capacities for change. It includes learning how to innovate, and what it takes to develop strategic interventions. It includes learning by people in professional and non-professional roles; and participants and those peripheral to the intervention. It includes learning that is both manifest and latent (see Kagan and Burton, 2000 for elaboration).

Whilst our pre-figurative stance has its origins in Gramsci's writings, a similar stance was taken by the pragmatists.

> "The very foundation of the democratic procedure is dependence upon experimental production of social change: and experimentation directed by working principles that are tested and developed in the very process of being tried out in action" Dewey (1946) p.157

The learning from critical praxis can always be used. Burton, in discussing how social innovations in the form of the creation of new social settings, argues there are a number of ways in which the learning from pre-figurative work is used or stored. Sometimes the new learning about social relations is released into the wider society in a variety of ways, including through the lived experiences of those that participated, were challenged, grew or benefited in some way. Sometimes the new learning is stabilised in new social institutions, and sometimes not. Sometimes the new learning will be stored amongst people and accessed later in ways that cannot be predicted. Even apparently failed social settings, can, he argues, contribute to a more informed and reflexive civil society[6].

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[6] The argument is similar to Weil's (1998) concept of 'critically reflexive action research', wherein organizational learning about change includes constant reflection on the ends that are established at the outset, as well as the means of achieving them.

Participatory Community Psychological Praxis

We have seen above some of the elements of a pre-figurative radical community psychological praxis. It is worth spending a little time considering the participatory nature of radical work, in the context of participatory action research, considered by Montero (2000) for example, to be the strength of a radical community psychological praxis. As she says:

> "Participation needs to be regarded as a fundamental methodological tool not only for researching purposes, but also as an emancipatory means. Its emancipatory character derives from the fact that it gives the people wanting to introduce social changes, control of the research as an instrument to obtain their goals…. For participatory research to honour its name, it has to reject old practices of excluding and silencing the people affected." Montero, 2000, p. 141

Fals Borda (1988), is widely attributed with the development of participatory action research practice, also talks of the moral obligation to work differently with our participants. He goes beyond method, to highlight legitimate ownership of later parts of a process – dissemination and publication.

> "There is an obligation to return this knowledge systematically to the communities and workers' organisations because they continue to be its owners. They may determine the priorities concerning its use and authorise and establish the conditions for its publication, dissemination or use…" Fals Borda, 1988 p. 96

These requirements raise interesting challenges for us, as articulated by Rappaport and Stewart (1997).

> "consider how differently we would speak, what different priorities we might have, and how differently we might relate to our own (and mainstream psychology's) rhetoric if we spoke with 'the people' and 'oppressed communities' rather than to ourselves and other psychologists. … we might … begin to see that our own practices and promises are sometimes naïve, elitist, romantic, reifying and/or obfuscating … our struggle for legitimacy and impact would be different if instead of being aimed at journal editors, departmental heads, and colleagues it were directed at those people and communities we profess to champion" Rappaport and Stewart (1997) p. 313

Commitment and compromise

Emancipatory work requires us to have a different relationship with our participants and with our praxis. It is not so easy to 'do a two year research project' for example – it may take more than two years. This has implications for continuity of employment – it is not possible for radical community psychologists to change the loci of their work on a regular basis.

> "Becoming familiar with a community, understanding and collaborating on issues of importance with local people, may take years. It may require us to

> live alongside the projects with which we are concerned for a long time"
> Bostock, 1991 p.5

More than this, emancipatory work almost certainly requires us to have a different kind of contract with our participants, one that we do not walk away from when a project has ended, funding has run out or a period of time has passed. People may be able to use our expertise (and indeed we may have things still to learn from them) for many years and there is an ethical imperative for us to met these obligations should they arise. We are in the privileged position to be able to accumulate expertise and have an obligation, underpinned by the value of stewardship, to continue to make it available.

We have both been involved in projects that have gone quiet but re-surface after several years, maybe in different forms, but re-surfaced they have. Booth (1998) points to the long term consequences of working with people who know relatively few people and for whom a long term, participant focused research relationship takes on a different importance. Experience near, rather than experience distant ways of working will almost inevitably mean that some participants become friends over time, requiring some re-think about conventional role boundaries – this is an issue with which feminist researchers are familiar (for example, Gatenby and Humphries, 2000). However, in community psychology praxis the nature of our involvement with ordinary people is rarely clearly defined in terms of research topic, or time. There is a tension between meeting our obligations and duties towards the participants in our work, the co-owners of the knowledge produced, and our obligations to our professional communities (Montero, 2000). If time is at a premium, we would argue priority be given to the participants in our work. Rowan (1981) presents criteria for what he calls a 'dialectical paradigm for research' and which cover similar issues.

Whether we are paid practitioners or academics, it is not so easy to develop emancipatory praxis, aimed towards a just society. Fryer (1998, 2000) identifies some of the tensions arising from working from academic bases, including the requirements of the professional body for psychology as well as institutional pressures and requirements. For example, exhortations for academic psychologists to publish extensively (and as a priority) in erudite academic journals make it difficult to respond to people's issues as a priority. Working at the margins of the discipline, too can lead to isolation and professional marginalisation. If we are serious about giving ownership to knowledge where it belongs, there may be professional consequences in terms of promotion and peer-assessed esteem (the major vehicle for judgements about the quality of academic work).

There are different pressures for practitioners, but we have both found it somewhat easier to justify and undertake bottom up work in the professional or voluntary fields. Somewhat ironic, this, as academic freedom is much hailed as an asset we should fight to retain! Renner (1974) points out, in relation to emancipatory work in Universities, that when the work coincides with institutionalised power, it is acceptable; when it contradicts it is then seen as political and unacceptable. Those of us who have worked for social justice within and outside the universities will be familiar with the charge that what we do it political. It is a source of some further irony that what is considered political (and thereby unacceptable) in a psychology

context is standard practice in other disciplinary contexts. Renner calls for moves to create greater diversity amongst students and staff in order to create change within the discipline.

However, we would argue (from 25 years experience) that it takes more than this. Just as it is necessary to form coalitions and alliances in our work outside the universities, so we must form coalitions with other progressive movements within psychology and between psychology and other disciplines (Kagan, 2000; Duggan et al., 2000). We must also be prepared to take the personal consequences of marginalisation and develop the necessary support networks and alliances to withstand the resistance to a radical psychology praxis. In other words, we must use the same kinds of strategies we use in our community psychological praxis. We must be wary, however, of becoming incorporated into the mainstream. Over the years we have had battles to get experiential work recognised within psychology degree programmes (now almost essential as transferable skill development); develop the psychology of women (see Kagan and Lewis 1990a,b) (now well established); introduce qualitative methods and critical psychology (now both included in the proscribed psychology curriculum drafted by the Psychology benchmarking group[7], (draft statement, February 2000), and highlighted as a specialist areas for the Research Assessment Exercise.

Rapport warns
> "those that are interested in social change must never allow themselves the privilege of being in the majority … social change is not an end product but rather a process… (I) … immodestly suggest, only in part facetiously, Rappaport's Rule: *When most people agree with you, worry*" Rappaport, 1981. p.3

We tend to agree that once community psychology becomes incorporated into mainstream psychology it will lose its power to challenge the status quo within the discipline and in relation to sources of oppression. It does, we think potentially occupy a unique place wherein it is possible to develop a critical praxis that locates the sources of oppression in the social system and the solutions through a social movement building on group and collective action. We have a final warning:

> "Beware the twin traps of individualism and social determinism: power is both systemic in nature and exercised by people (see Bhaskar, 1989, p. 36), so while it can be challenged and won, and social relations transformed, this will never be done outside a broad alliance that can be mobilised for sustainable change."
> Burton and Kagan, 1996, p. 206

Community psychology is in a position to join just such a broad alliance. Whilst it can be seen, itself, as social movement (Rappaport, 1981), there is a huge potential for it, now, to participate in wider social movements.

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[7] The nearest the benchmarking statement gets to community psychology is to anchor the social end of the discipline in "analyses of complex human relationships …concept of self … how (people) interact in groups …" (Section 3 N*ature and Extent of the Discipline)*. It may be a cause for optimism that "students should also be exposed to novel developments in the discipline, including those that at present do not command consensus" (Section 4.a.ii *Knowledge Domains*)

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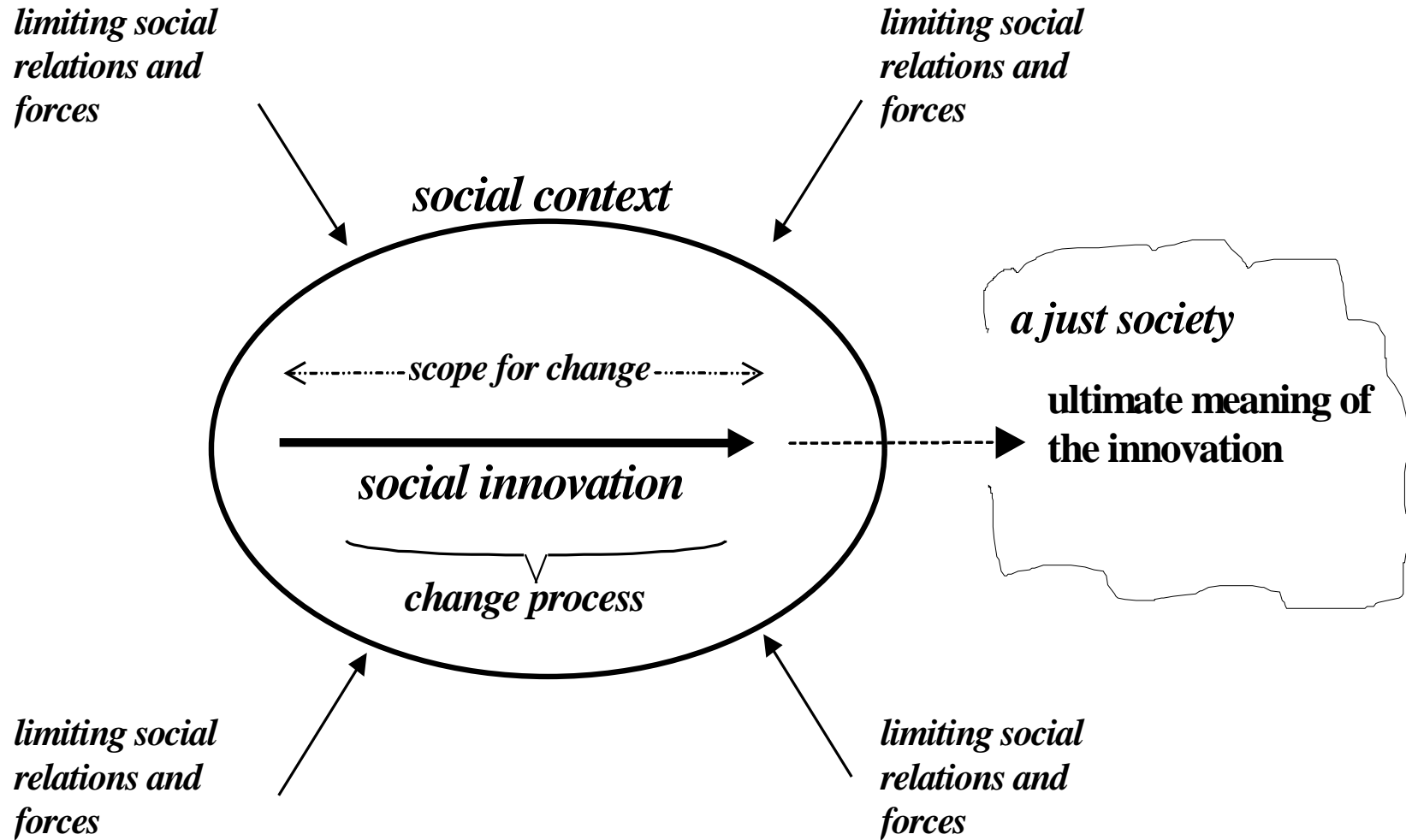
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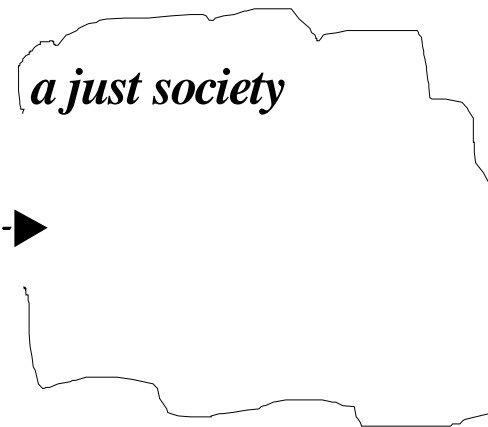# A schematic outline of prefigurative action research

limiting social relations and forces

limiting social relations and forces

social context

a just society

<-------scope for change------->

ultimate meaning of the innovation

social innovation

change process

limiting social relations and forces
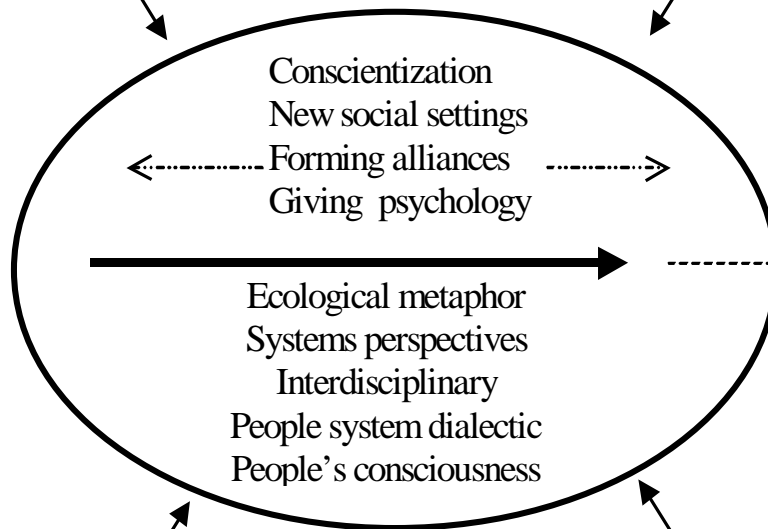
limiting social relations and forces

A schematic outline of prefigurative praxis

JUSTICE

limiting social relations and forces

limiting social relations and forces

social context

Conscientization
New social settings
Forming alliances
Giving psychology

Ecological metaphor
Systems perspectives
Interdisciplinary
People system dialectic
People's consciousness

a just society

limiting social relations and forces

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STEWARDSHIP

COMMUNITY