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ÁFRICA E OS ODS: OBJETIVOS COM FUTURO?

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Centro de Estudos Africanos
Universidade do Porto

Entrevista

MARIO NOVELLI

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Mario Novelli

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Entrevista[1] conduzida por **Rui da Silva e Miguel Filipe Silva**
Via Zoom, june 2022

Mario Novelli is Professor in the Political Economy of Education at the University of Sussex. He previously worked at the University of Amsterdam, and the University of Bristol, working across the disciplines of Education, International development, Geography and Politics. Drawing on the tools of critical political economy, his work explores the relationship between education systems and armed conflict; the relationship between education and processes of globalization and learning and knowledge production in trade unions, social movements and civil society organizations. His recent work has focussed on issues related to the role of education in peacebuilding processes, with a strong interest in critical political economy approaches to researching issues in conflict affected context. Prior to becoming an academic he lived and worked in Egypt, Palestine and Colombia and has carried out research in a wide range of conflict affected contexts. He is the co-Editor of the journal of Globalisation, Societies & Education, President of the British Association of Comparative Education (2021-2022), a member of the board of trustees of War on Want[2] and an active trade union and international solidarity activist.

Rui da Silva (RS): Thank you very much Mario for making room for this conversation.

Mario Novelli (MN): Thank you. My pleasure.

RS: What do you think about the *SDGs* and what is the main ideology present in this agenda?

MN: It's hard to disagree with the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* in the abstract, there are 17 goals and they all sound like things that everybody would agree with. No poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, and so on.

I guess trying to understand, or to develop a critique of the *SDGs*, is to try to understand how these kinds of goals get produced and by whom, for what purpose and with what effects?

RS: Very interesting. Could you elaborate?

MN: Of course. I think it's locating this within a story of the evolution of major global governance institutions like the United Nations. So, some questions are important: what is the United Nations and how did it emerge? It emerges as both an idealistic project, but also a realist project. A reflection of the optimism on the post Second World War new global compact. But

[1] Our interview with Mario Novelli was recorded on the 8th of June 2022 via Zoom and focus on a critical reflection on the Sustainable Development Goals. We would like to thank him for being so generous with his time and so open with his responses.

[2] [Online]. Available at: https://waronwant.org/.

also, a recognition of the power relations in the world at that time. So, you have the General Assembly, open and democratic with one nation, one vote; and then you have the Security Council and the Bretton Woods Institutions that clearly reflect the balance of power and finance in the world at that time, with some voices/nations have more votes, more power to make decisions that others. When I think of the *SDGs* I think in a similar way. What lies beneath the *SDGs* is probably a political compromise around what the nature of those goals are. On the one hand there is a genuine interest and commitment to the SDGS from all of those participants. If you're a leader of a powerful country you don't want the global system to collapse, you care about the environment, and you care about a range of things because it's good for you. But at the same time you don't want it to encroach on your core interests, and your core necessities, so there is this balance and tension. The world we live in is incredibly unequal and then the *SDGs* comes in as a kind of way trying to address some of these challenges like hunger, war, conflict, all of those things, but within the structures of power, within the limitations of the possible. I think that's where you start to get under the skin of it.

RS: Did you experience those tensions in any of your jobs or tasks?

MN: Yes. I had my own experience of working with international organizations. I worked with UNICEF for several years and if I think about that, and my own experience within that, it was a similar process. You meet a lot of very committed people who are working in these different organs of the UN. We share many ideas, and many hopes, many aspirations, but we work within a structure that creates the conditions for the possible. And the possible is often determined by actors who have particular interests, and I think these are driving the problems. Actually, when I look at the *SDGs* I asked myself and others about some of the big drivers of the challenges and the absence of questions about these drivers. For example, Where is the critique of capitalism? Where is the critique of history? Where is the critique of power?

RS: That was precisely our intention, to ask you about the SDG´s and ideology...

MN: For sure and a very important one. So, you know, within these discussions around the *SDGs*, you look at them in the present and you say *oh this all looks good, right*, but then ... *How did we get here? How did we get to a world that is so unequal and so full of poverty?*
In this moment you start to understand that there is an avoidance of dealing with some important questions around capitalism, around slavery, the limits of the planet to grow and the reasons why the planet is in this crisis. Somewhere in there is also the avoidance of the issue of private capital and transnational corporations, just to give you some examples.
Thinking about the previous agendas like the *MDGs* (Millennium Development Goals), and from the 1990 *Education for All objectives*, up to the present, it seems that as we've moved through that period consultation with broader constituencies has got better. The *SDGs* got better in the sense that there was a much larger participation from civil society. Nevertheless, participation in the construction of the *SDGs* doesn't equal voice and power. Truly, for me, we can't get away from the fact that there are some challenges with them. In the end, this is at best a kind of form of global left Keynesianism, a kind of a soft attempt to stabilize a system that is clearly malfunctioning. But, from time to time it feels a little like corporate spin, you know, *we're doing this but we're also doing that, but we don't want you to see "that"*.

RS: It would be clearer for everyone, more transparent if this ideological framework was more visible. Is this what you are suggesting?

MN: It is not so simple, but I guess I'm more comfortable if it's left Keynesianism. At least you can see that and know it, but if you're caught up in corporate spin that's problematic. Finally, I don't know whether there's an ideology underneath the *SDGs* and I think that a lot of very rich and very powerful people recognize that we're on a very, very dangerous road and if they want to contain and maintain their wealth that may be the need for some social reforms. But at the same time whenever they have an obstacle, they're happy to cut reforms short, so let's look underneath the *SDGs*, the targets and the financing and the money and see how things can change. Let's think about COVID, for instance, the war now and how suddenly, things like coal production might be okay, *let's bring back nuclear power, it might be a good idea*. My country the United Kingdom is not the best example of a progressive state at the moment, so it's maybe an extreme case, but those extreme cases are actually all around the world. We also have now Bolsonaro in Brazil, Erdogan in Turkey, Putin in Russia, and we could go on and on, so, in a sense I do think that even the idealism of the *SDGs*, if you give that side, is being eroded as we speak, by the geopolitics and the reality of what's going on underneath, but it doesn't mean that it's not a good experiment.

Let's say the same about the UN. If there wasn't a UN, we would want to recreate it, but if we recreated it we would want to give a bit more power to the General Assembly, a bit more power to one nation one vote, and maybe to social movements and other things and think about reimagining what constitutes participation in global debates and a little less influence to the great powers and try to balance that. I don't think that's a reason to reject either the UN and the *SDGs* but to realize a little bit around the underlying logic of the production, circulation, and execution of the goals as we've gone through this period.

Miguel Filipe Silva (MFS): Picking up your idea of more power for, let´s call it, civil society, what is the space that the *SDGs* have for social movements and trade unions considering the partnership model that they promote?

MN: I guess again the *SDGs* is a legitimate space within which we can operate. It's a social space and it gives us the chance to talk about all of those important things to trade unionists, social movement activists, we can talk about poverty about hunger about wellbeing, about war, about peace, all of those things, right. So, I think the *SDGs* is something a bit similar to *Human Rights*. It's not enough, but it's something that we can open up in order to try to extend the limits of the possible within that discussion. For example, with the *Human Rights* agenda, which you know, is a longer one and we can go back and look at that, we can look at the evolution I think of a range of attempts to open-up human rights from a very narrow bourgeois civil and political rights to really serious discussions around economic rights, social rights, cultural rights. Even to the extent that in the 70s and the glory days of the anticolonial movements, the right of peoples to resist. *Human Rights* discourse has allowed trade unions and social movements to enter into spaces that maybe we wouldn't get into and open-up and reveal some of the contradictions of the discourse around *Human Rights*. We can draw a similarity similar with *SDGs.* Participation is something that we should engage with, that our organized and collective presence can allow us to talk a bit more about the strategy to change for instance that corporate spin, but we should never be naive to think that we cannot also be caught up in their agendas...

MFS: What you mean by being caught in there agendas?

MN: I´m talking about the risk of this participatory process and the space it opens, leading to co-option. This is very dangerous within these mainstream kind of processes.

It's easy to get seduced by being invited to a meeting in New York or in Cape Town. You're being paid by NGOs that are funded by certain organizations that it's easy to get swept up, isn't it? Thus, we could have the kind of left critique of this NGO world that underpins some of these processes and say that they may be also complicit in the neoliberal era. I mean, in a sense while neoliberalism stripped away lots of state social guarantees, NGOs often stepped in to fill the gaps. In this process social rights became a kind of a philanthropic activity rather than a right.

I'm kind of conscious that with the whole *SDGs* there's a danger that we have a door to get into the "room", and by doing that we can be providing legitimacy for the process, but it doesn't necessarily change the content of the discussions and decisions. It's a word of caution, to be aware of the dangers of these processes, as well as the possibilities.

MFS: So, for you there is definitely an "assimilation" danger within the process. Is there anything to mitigate that risk?

MN: I think it requires political education, above all amongst those operating in that space to realize what they're doing and try to play a stronger game as possible.

I remember, I think it was in the late 1990s, Robert Cox, an international relations theorist, wrote a paper called "Civil Society at the Turn of the Millenium" and in this paper he uses a Gramscian framework to talk about top-down processes and bottom-up processes. At the bottom and the top, it's very clear to see where things are, who are the actors, but in the middle there is a battle for contestation. So, it's this idea of Gramsci's civil society and you can kind of see all of those actors within the *SDGs* potentially being pushed and pulled depending on the balance of social forces. I don't know, but maybe if we had, for instance, the majority of Latin America shifting to the left with a radical agenda, maybe, again, we could see a different power in the negotiations over *SDGs* and vice versa. As you know, we have now a rise of authoritarianism and quite a lot of reactionary governments and the danger is that they get much more influence. But social movements, trade unions, transnational coalition's, the way that movements operate both in the nation, but also across nations can develop counter power to try to pull organizations like Save the Children, Oxfam, that I feel at moments can actually get captured by a progressive agenda, but often get taken away. So, I think that some NGOs these days have really got caught-up in the whole public private partnership discussions and almost seem to be kind of midwives of capitalism for poor people. Promoting the private sector across all of that but, equally, in the 1980s, many of these NGOs were supporting, for example, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the struggles and the struggles against dictatorships in different parts of the world. Therefore, they can move as well, so I guess it's a question of how you engage with these and maximize people's power in its different manifestations, which requires also technical knowledge, as well as mobilization power.

RS: You talked about political education. Were you engaged in the production of the education parts of the *SDGs*? And, if yes, can you tell us something about it?

MN: I haven't been involved with the production of the education *SDGs* but I had two friends that were closely linked to it. Jordan Naidoo, who was at UNESCO and was leading the whole education side, and Yusuf Sayed who was involved in the consultation process. For them, the "story", and often the battle, is around how words get thrown in, changed, added: public free education or education for all, but education that could be delivered by the private sector. The devil is in the detail, so it's a question of being alert to these discursive shifts in the documents and then being able to mobilize enough power to change the language and to push for more ambitious targets.

I remember in the late 90s when we were probably at the height of the anti-globalization movement, that transnationalism felt quite strong and felt like there was a possibility to mobilize across broad geographies. Since 9/11 in the USA, it's become a bit more complicated. Maybe around the environmental areas things are picking up again and we are seeing more advances, but that's hard labour. We are living in an incredibly unequal world. I have faith that we can turn it around, but I would have more faith with the re-emergence of some radical states that could push an alternative agenda – the kind of Bandung era of internationalism of the anti-colonial. But that seems to me less likely, these days, although we have some elections in Colombia in the next couple of weeks, which may be a trigger to start to change a little bit in some parts of the world.[1]

MFS: Do you think that less structured social movements, more spontaneous social movements, can be a source of pressure in contrast with more structured social movement like NGOs? Or I'm being too much idealistic.

MN: I think they are, and I mean, in the recent climate summit you saw a lot of action on the streets, that was pushing for change. The momentum for that is precisely coming from these organizations, and they forced the others, the more mainstream ones to balance their discourses and not get too seduced. So, I definitely think that there is a need for these movements, but the question of whether there is enough space for them in a very selective understanding of civil society by mainstream organizations, is the challenge. For example, the acceptable face of opposition in my country [United Kingdom] at the moment seems to be, you know, the same side of the conservative coin. We had the left opposition of Jeremy Corbyn, we now have a left opposition of Keir Starmer who sounds very much the same as the Conservative right wingers. So, that's become the acceptable face of opposition, slightly right now, a softer appearance, basically not challenging any of the fundamentals of the system and that's why they get invited inside the room and others get to shout from the outside.

MFS: Do you think that social movements are talking in a transnational way, or they are confined to the old idea of the nation state?

MN: I think this is a complicated question because, as I said, I was very active in the late 90s early 2000s in this whole transnational social movement processes working a lot in Latin America, in Colombia and working on a range of transnational issues. I remember at that time there was a critique of the emergence of a kind of international activists' tourism. People moving around the planet for protests in different parts, but not building enough in the local. This should lead us to the recognition that we have to do both. That we do have to build inside the nation because if you build movements in the nation that can eventually create the conditions under which state control or electoral power comes, as is the case with Gustavo Petro and Francia Márquez in Colombia, they concentrate the power of hundreds, and hundreds of movements across the country with a range of political projects. In that sense its good to concentrate on that national space, but also recognise that the international space is also important. Because most of these big issues and challenges are beyond the control of the nation state now and we need to also operate across borders.

When I was doing my early research and doctoral studies in the late 90s early 2000s, it was all around globalization, and this idea that there were lots of things that one

[1] In fact, after this interview, for the first time Colombia elected a left wing President, Gustavo Petro. Also for the first time Colombia have an Afro-American women as vice-President, Francia Márquez.

couldn't understand within context of the nation state and we need to go beyond that if we wanted to deal with AIDS, climate change, and so on. Global solutions were required. Now for social movements it's a similar issue, but we need to be able to advocate and build power, both in the nation, but also across and build that solidarity. I think that people to people solidarity when harnessed can be incredibly powerful. The heyday, again, was that late 90s early 2000s and then it's somewhat fragmented after the Iraq war, the war on terror. These events did lots of damage to movements in a various range of ways. I'm hoping that we're going to develop a new period of transnational solidarity and then, you know, I think there are a range of activist's older generation activists now who have experience of that earlier period and can perhaps give some advice on how to not fall down the same gaps and mistakes that happened, the last time, and hopefully move that process forward. Nevertheless, if we look at the whole world social forum process, they are still there, but they've lost a lot of steam.

MFS: I was going to ask you about World Social Forum from Porto Alegre, Brazil. I have a feeling that they were almost erased from the discussion nowadays, they are not moving. What do you think?

MN: I think that you are right and that was my point about the kind of phasing out of this kind of period of the Justice Now, Global Justice Movement or Anti-Globalization Movement. It's quite ironic actually that Vijay Prashad, whom I like a lot, an Indian communist and analyst, talking on *Democracy Now*, a USA radio chat show, talked about how the West was trying now to de-globalize or extricate itself from Russian financial capital that "they" spent the last 20 years trying to integrate. And it's a funny thing that we grew up on this diet that two countries will never go to war if there is a McDonald's in each one of them, and Vijay is calling for the maintenance of that global integration. So an anti-globalization activist, is calling for the maintenance of the integration, and the old globalization activists are now talking about drawing a wall between Russia and, probably, China and extricating capital, I mean, this is the world turned upside down. It's a crazy situation that we're in. That you have a communist arguing for the maintenance of the integration of capitalism... it's a post-Communist paradox.

RS: Now, trying to relate the *SDGs* with the development sector, do you consider the SDGS relevant for this sector – taking in consideration the previews agendas like the MDGs? Is this agenda so broad that sending migrants to Rwanda fits in?

MN: That's a very good question. On Friday, we had this Queens Jubilee in the UK, and there was this video clip with Paddington bear having tea with the Queen. Notably the story of Paddington bear was an allegory about migration. Paddington came from Peru, and he was welcomed into the UK, but Paddington today would not be having tea with the Queen but would be deported to Rwanda. The case about Rwanda deportations also highlights another concern, even in the liberal mode of global governance that is collapsing now. There was a general unofficial agreement after the post-Soviet collapse of trying to break tied development assistance, to break conditionalities and to try to pool resources to target the worlds poorest, largely focused on sub-Saharan Africa. We are now seeing the almost complete breakdown of these ideas. Every country is prioritizing benefits to its own trade sector. The UK, you see, is bargaining now for its post-Brexit trade deals. So, aid for trade, aid for taking our unwanted migrants, aid for aligning with us. The Rwanda deportation scandal is wrapped up with education aid to be given to Rwanda, along with other things, in exchange for taking 'unwanted' asylum seekers. Then you

need to start to thinking about relationships and responsibility here.

I've been reading this book by an American professor of Holocaust Studies, Michael Rothberg, who wrote a book called "The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators" and basically, he's trying to understand the way that each of us is implicated in human rights atrocities in range of different ways. He gives the example of the fact that the train controller during the Holocaust, may not have consciously known that he was organizing the transportation of all of the Jews and trade unionists and Roma people that were being sent off to concentration camps, but if he had not been there, doing his job then the Holocaust would not have been able to take place in the same way, so he tries to explain and talk a little bit about the way that maybe sometimes we're not conscious, but we are implicated in decisions in the present, but also beneficiaries of things in the past. Slavery, for example, we don't see that we are the beneficiary of it directly. Indirectly, you can see how these things have benefited some and, you know, it makes me think now around the whole deal with Rwanda, if you get involved in education delivery, if you're an NGO working in Rwanda, then you are implicated in the human rights violations and extrication of vulnerable communities, migrants, refugees who have been physically deported to Rwanda. More generally, I think that discussion around implication is very important. For similar reasons I never got involved in anything to do with education after the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, because for me the soft side and the dark side, the hard side, the military side and the social side all work together in these processes you can't separate them out. So, by being involved in the social side you're often supporting the military side. Maybe you remember, in the early 2000s, Colombia became the biggest recipient of US military aid and the Americans said: *We will supply the arms, but you, the EU, you can do some social development with the Colombians*. They started sending money to Colombia for social projects. The Colombians that I was working with they were in a meeting where this money was offered and they said: *look, this is very clear, you send the Americans to kill us, and then the EU to pick up the bodies*. I think that with development, more generally, we have to understand this relationship. Particularly now because in a sense, in many countries the mask is off. I mean in the UK they don't try to hide the tied aid. Actually, they justify their aid by saying that they'll use every single penny of our international development assistance to support our trade, to support our prosperity. It is not about your prosperity, is about our prosperity and how we can get it. And this can be linked with the *SDGs*, those whole things are interconnected. I guess, there are some things that are most starkly clear and some things, maybe you need to negotiate at the edges and others to fight inside. In my opinion military occupation is a bottom line, but maybe in other areas you have to fight from inside.

I don't fully know what the strategy is but certainly aid seems to me to be going back now to the dark days of the Cold War, where everything was about geopolitical strategy, we fund some and we don't fund others for geopolitical reasons. Maybe that was also going on for the last 30 years, but it was a little bit more marketing, bit sleeker and well organized in its presentation, but definitely the mask seems to be falling now.

MFS: I was also remembering something that happened in Denmark in 2018 when they send some migrants to an isolated island. It was during the Liberal Party Government. Nevertheless, after the 2019 elections the winning party, the social democrats continued this kind of policies. For me this is more than an odd situation...

MN: Yes, and I can add that the British model is taken from the Australians, and the Israelis we're also sending people to Rwanda directly. Sometimes these extreme cases help us to see the reality of the broader

world. They push into your face the reality of the inhumanity to others that is often obscured.

MFS: As a Professor of political economy of education, how do you see the role of *SDGs* in the education sector, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, because our journal is about the African continent.

MN: I guess, reiterating what we were talking before that there's a lot of good people working to produce, within the limits of the possible, a framing to try to measure educational inequality around the world. For me you have to be in that discussion and pushing it as far as it can go, as much as possible. That said, it seems to me that the history of education policy, or the history of the global education agenda, as we call it, over the last 40 years has not changed that much. In the early 2000s we talked about the educational 'Washington Consensus'. After the World Bank realized that privatizing primary education wasn't the best idea, they said Okay, we make lower basic education free and we will try to find ways for cover cost recovery from different sectors and encouraged privatization of education, decentralizing school management, high stakes assessment, there's a range of policies and those policies seem to be pretty intact. I don't see huge amounts of movement or change in the global education agenda. Of course, that was a period of structural adjustment, where the social sectors were de-prioritized and paying off the national debt was re-prioritize and that led to huge reductions in education sector and the destruction of the university sector across Africa, for example. I think that is still the core logics. Nowadays for instance we can take the consultation processes as an example. They've become more subtle, and we talk now about the post-Washington Consensus. The post-Washington Consensus brought in social stabilization funds to protect somewhat the education and health sectors. We have those periods where there was a recognition that public education was important, but also those innovations. Innovations which is interesting to talk about, the low fee private school and Africa has become a laboratory for that in a range of ways. This at the same time that the *SDGs* was being talked about. This process of private solutions to public problems was being pushed for the most vulnerable marginalized communities on the planet.

MFS: In a sense, it's almost like two realities going on there?

MN: That´s it. One is the idea that private capital is better than public capital and the other, if we want the world to be a much fairer place we've got the *SDGs*, we've got the educational objectives now, and there is a mismatch I think between these two processes. Now there is a good news story I think about low fee private schools and it's precisely around the topic of our conversation because through intellectual labour, political pressure, social movement organization, that model of the low fee private school is cracking. The World Bank said it's no longer going to invest in these low fee private schools. Some of these chains of private schools that have emerged are under great pressure. So, there is pushed back and that push back emanates from a combination of social movement organizations, global trade unions, education international movements. I think they played an important role in this process. Good academic research and colleagues that have worked on that process to reveal some of the corporate spin around the success of those schools and the selective nature of their recruitment and a whole range of other thing. What I'm guessing is that there are different things going on there, but the mainstream system still thinks that neoliberalism, in its multiple incarnations can still result, that the market is better, that private capital is benign. But increasingly there is pressure to make these corporations realize that people are just not accepting those arguments anymore. And I think that

tells you something about the crisis that we're in but also the value that people place on public goods. Education and health matter to people. These are the basics of life for many of us, and education is the basis of hope for the future, and we don't feel like it's safe in private hands. But we also probably think that it's not safe in public hands either. So we need to fight both against private capital, but also for better and improved public services.

MFS: What can be done to make us believe more in the State ability to be the main drive for the education sector?

MN: We need to transform the state and the seriousness of which it takes education, because it's not just the question of eliminating private solutions, but it's also about improving public goods. I lived in the Netherlands for a while in the mid-2000s, and in Amsterdam they have a public library next to the train station, right next to the water, an amazing building, seven or eight floors beautiful space, for kindergarten children on the lower levels, all the way up, amazing libraries and that to me is what public should be about. Yes, it should be good products for people. Not a second-class system for those that can't afford to enter into the private. But in order to do that, the *SDGs* and others have to address the question that it's not just about poverty, or poor people, it's about rich people and rich countries consuming too much, earning too much, having too much. The inequality that we're faced with in most societies requires taxation, serious taxation of transnational corporations, it demands reparation for past historical injustices, and these things are not on the agenda of the mainstream. The good news is that I think increasingly they're on the agenda of opposition groups, thinkers within the field and particularly within education. There's been a big push from *Action Aid*, and a range of organizations around the global coalition for education and around national taxation models. And that's definitely one that has to be done transnationally, as well as nationally, because these corporations need to be taxed and there needs to be no escapes, and that is a challenge.

Thinking about the research that I've done over the years in education, I think that you also have to talk about conflict as a challenge. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack recently released their global report and there is a massive increase in attacks on education in different parts of the world and a lot in Africa. We probably know more about Somalia and Nigeria. But that site of education is also a vulnerable site to attacks from a range of different forces, from military to armed insurgencies and terrorist organizations. I think that you know it's not just about quality education anymore, it's also about safety or maybe redefining what quality means in a context of massive insecurity.

Global responsibility to Africa because of all those historical injustices, this is also the other thing. There's a problem with aid that it sounds like generosity but is a very selective generosity. Exactly for the same reason that we refuse it in nation states as a solution to problems and say no, we should have a National Health Service, we should have a public education system, so the same we should have a different system of international development which is more about reparations and obligation. Rather than this idea *oh I'm going to help those poor regions,* we should develop the idea *I'm going to give back some of those things that we took,* which is not about giving back the Benin bronzes, statues and things like that, but substantive reparations for the failure of development. Or the distorted nature of development in many parts of the world affected by colonialism. I know that's not the only historical brutality, but it's up there as a big issue that I think needs to reframe some of this discussion that we're having around development.

MFS: You put it in a very interesting way when you said that we have to go back

to history and ask ourselves why we are rich, why are we the rich ones. How we got here. And it's a very interesting and a very powerful question. Because, then we can prove that something we have to do as an obligation and not as generosity. We totally agree on that. I have one last question and that is how academia and universities can do more to change these situations and push the *SDGs*, and I'm going to use the word, to the left.

MN: Well, I mean we gave the example of the work that was done around low fee private schools privatization. You could have a similar historical example around the research that people like Joel Samoff [from Stanford University] and others did around structural adjustment period, we have that technical role and many of our friends and colleagues are doing that work. I think the second thing that we could do, and I'm much more interested in and committed to it at the present conjuncture in my career, is trying to bring movements into university and trying to work with movements around the world. So, I had this project for the last few years working with four movements from Colombia, Nepal, South Africa, and Turkey. It was around popular education, so more informal, it wasn't about the kind of formal education system, but it was more about thinking about the political role of education in movements to precisely build collective power. To develop the power of movements to try to address these huge challenges, to build opposition or power and to redress the inequalities that exist. I think that is important to engage with movements not only because they constitute political power, but also because I believe that they have incredible amounts of alternative ways of thinking and understanding the world. So, we haven't gone into this in the conversation today but there's also something epistemologically western and myopic about the *SDGs*, you know. Its very linear, very modernist and the way that it understands the world and where we should go. The West is there on the top, even if not as bad as that, its a kind of reproduction of modernization theory. I think that is what happens when you work with movements, is that you start to understand alternative ways of imagining and thinking. So, Arturo Escobar, in Colombia, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, your compatriot, talks about this *pluriverse*, many worlds in one. Whether it's *buen vivir*, *Ubuntu, etc*. There are other ways of imagining what it is to live in this world and ways of being in this world and that's an important study for us. I've kind of gone full circle in my career. I try to make sense of my career and not just say that it's based on chance, that I'm being swayed with whatever, whoever tells me to do what. I feel like I started out working with movements, and I did a PhD because I was a political activist. And then, as I went through my career inside the university, I started focusing on global power global governance, international actors these kinds of things and working with some of them and trying to push issues to the limits. I worked with UNICEF on peace building and education and now I have kind of turned full circle, I'm back working with social movements. What I kind of rationalize is that all this is about different points of entry for our career as academics, we can speak truth to power, that's good, but we also need to work with people and build common knowledge, collective power through these processes. And there is a balance too much towards the studying of power amongst our critical friends and colleagues. Too much of a serving of power amongst our non-critical friends and colleagues, with some selling themselves for whatever price to produce the research that people want. But there is not enough engagement with movements. I understand it's messier and you need context, and you need connections, but I do think that this academic relationship is an important one to work on. When we bring these movements into our universities, we educate a generation of young students about how these people are not the bottom

of society, these are the future of society, these are amazing political minds that are leading movements in different parts of the world, so we give inspiration and at the same time, we share our expertise and work together. Boaventura talks about the academic as a translator, and there are many dynamic processes, I think that we could be, we could do much more to engage with these activities. But it is of course more difficult because there are less resources around those processes, it's easier to get research grants to study power, and it's easy to work for big powerful organizations and do research for them. We all have to survive, and we have to manage our lives and stuff, but I do think that opening up those spaces, in the mixed economy of our academic life, for movements, is a very worthwhile endeavour.