“SOCIAL POETS” AND “SOWERS OF CHANGE”: THE ROLE OF POPULAR MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the contemporary debate on “popular practices” in the light of the dialogue between Pope Francis and the representatives of popular movements during three different world meetings organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Popular movements are grassroots organizations and social movements. They represent increasingly excluded social actors as landless farmers, homeless and persons living in communities without adequate infrastructure. Popular movements are collective subjects or groups coming together and recognizing themselves neither in a national identity nor in the same social class. The purpose of the author is to establish a connection between the creativity of the popular movements and Michel de Certeau’s semiotic of everyday life.

Keywords: Pope Francis, popular movements, work, creativity, social practices, Michel de Certeau

1. The reasons for a dialogue

For several years Pope Francis has had an original and interesting dialogue with popular movements. He met their representatives during three different world meetings organized by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Pope’s speeches constitute a specific itinerary characterized by kindness towards specific forms of social groupings.

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2 The main purpose of the World Meeting of Popular Movements is to create an encounter between Church leadership and grassroots organizations working to address the economy of exclusion by working for structural changes that promote social and economic justice. Popular movements are grassroots organizations and social movements established around the world by people whose inalienable rights to decent work, decent housing, and fertile land and food are undermined, threatened or denied outright. These movements represent increasingly excluded social sectors: landless farmers, family farmers, indigenous people and those at risk of being driven off the land by large agribusiness corporations and violence, workers who are at risk or lack job security, persons who are homeless and persons living in communities without adequate infrastructure.

Popular movements are, first of all, collective subjects. They are popular groups coming together and recognizing themselves neither in a national identity nor in the same social class. The creation of these movements can be determined by occasional challenges or individual projects of cooperation. The sense of belonging to an ethnic or professional group is an important element of social gathering. However, popular movements are dynamic and inventive associations whose aim is to provide immediate answers to people’s new needs. Popular movements operate locally by initiating global transformation processes. Among them there are, for instance, groups of farmers who protect common use of specific natural and energetic resources. There are also several groups of “recyclers”: men and women capable of initiating genuine economic systems of recovery. They invent, for example, some procedures to collect and process urban waste. Among popular movements there are also groups of agricultural traders and craftsmen, who produce artifacts which they shape with their own hands, thus leaving the sign of a savant fingerprint.

«Despite this throw-away culture, this culture of leftovers, so many of you who are excluded workers, the discards of this system, have been inventing your own work with materials that seemed to be devoid of further productive value... But with the craftsmanship God gave you, with your inventiveness, your solidarity, your community work, your popular economy, you have managed to succeed, you are succeeding... And let me tell you, besides work, this is poetry. I thank you. From now on every worker, within the formal system of salaried employment or outside it, should have the right to decent remuneration, to social security and to a pension. Among you here are waste-collectors, recyclers, peddlers, seamstresses or tailors, artisans, fishermen, farmworkers, builders, miners, workers in previously abandoned enterprises, members of all kinds of cooperatives and workers in grassroots jobs who are excluded from labour rights, who are denied the possibility of unionizing, whose income is neither adequate nor stable. Today I want to join my voice to yours and support you in your struggle»

Popular movements are not specific to a certain economic class, they are not only associations of producers and exporters, but also carriers of practical knowledge in need of recognition and protection. First of all, they promote new ways of interaction and social exchange. For this reason, the dialogue Pope Francis has held with popular movements is not just a gesture of consideration and proximity to some underprivileged workers. In fact, the work of popular movements is hard but creative, marginal but at the same time essential, discarded but


surprisingly vital. By dialoguing with them, the Pope puts apparently minor or irrelevant jobs at the centre of global attention. Thus, the work of popular movements serves the purpose of criticizing all those jobs officially approved by the economic system of profit and productivity.

We are witnessing a real turning point in the social magisterium of the Catholic Church concerning the meaning and the importance of human labour: the voice of the poor is not a subversive request for the global production system, but a qualified and credible contribution to the reform of economic systems both at a local and global level. Popular movements are active carriers of professional knowledge and social proposals, they are authoritative players involved in education and evangelization: «Welfare programs geared to certain emergencies can only be considered temporary and incidental responses. They could never replace true inclusion, an inclusion which provides worthy, free, creative, participatory and solidarity work. Along this path, popular movements play an essential role, not only by making demands and lodging protests, but even more basically by being creative. You are social poets: creators of work, builders of housing, producers of food, above all for people left behind by the world market».

In his speeches on popular movements, Pope Francis has addressed an important issue for contemporary social philosophy, recovering and representing the image of each worker as creator and poet.

Poetic and creative aspects of work cannot be removed in the name of profit. Financial capitalism goes hand in hand with global neoliberalism. In the light of this covenant, human work is perceived as a permanent state of emergency. In the global economic crisis the risk of the trivialization of work can arise. The indi-

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5 «Yet we desire even more than this; our dream soars higher. We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a “dignified sustenance” for all people, but also their “general temporal welfare and prosperity”. This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labour that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use» Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, No. 192, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 29.08.2017).

6 «Just as the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a “throw away” culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outpost, the “leftovers”» Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, No. 53.


individual is represented as a person who demands and claims a permanent job and not as a potential creator or a radical innovator. The voice of popular movements is heard throughout the economic world as it not only claims greater guarantees for workers, but it also shows collective actions and shared knowledge. The “poetry” of popular movements is not in the production of unique and original handmade objects, but in their ability to connect individual craftsmanship skills to a much broader cultural and social heritage. The innovative contribution of popular movements consists in their fostering a vital communication between individual companies and their specific social frames. The craftsmen’s knowledge is achieved not only by marketing handmade products. In fact craftsmen’s creations contain also history and popular traditions of collective groups.

«And then that same day, Jesus did something “worse”, something that irritated even more the hypocrites and the prideful who were watching him, looking for some excuse to trap him. He cured a man’s withered hand. The hand, that powerful symbol of work, of labour. Jesus restored that man’s ability to work, and thereby restored his dignity. How many withered hands are there, how many persons deprived of the dignity of work, because the hypocrites, in order to defend unjust systems, are opposed to their being healed. Sometimes I think that when you, the organized poor, create your own work – establishing a cooperative, restoring a ruined factory, recycling the refuse of the consumer society, braving the elements in order to sell your wares in a public square, reclaiming a parcel of farmland to feed the hungry – whenever you do these things, you are imitating Jesus, because you are trying to heal, even if minimally and provisionally, that atrophy of the dominant socio-economic system, which is unemployment. I am not surprised that at times you find yourselves being watched or persecuted, nor am I surprised that the proud have no interest in what you are saying. That Sabbath, Jesus put his life on the line, because after he healed that hand, the Pharisees and the Herodians (Mk 3:6), two rival parties who feared the people and the Roman Empire, began to scheme and plot to kill him. I know that many of you lay your own lives on the line. I know – and I want to say this – that some are not here today because they did lay down their lives… But there is no greater love than to give one’s life. That is what Jesus teaches us».

Movements are considered popular not because of their exotic or minority features compared to cultural homogenisation but because every shared work that is able to initiate or achieve the collective creativity of a group may be considered popular. For them, practical sense is constantly at work. Popular practices risk falling victim to “folklorization”. Michel De Certeau said something about the process of “folklorization” of social and Christian meanings. The social magiste-

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10 See De Certeau Michel – Domenach Jean-Marie, Le Christianisme éclaté, Le Seuil, Paris, 1974, pp. 39-43; Rosito Vincenzo, Dare un
rium of Pope Francis by focusing on popular movements criticizes the distortions of an economic system which humiliates the cultural creativity and credibility of popular dimension: «The scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilize the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity or being negated; or worse still, we find hidden personal agendas or commercial interests. “Hypocrites” is what Jesus would say to those responsible. How marvellous it is, by contrast, when we see peoples moving forward, especially their young and their poorest members. Then one feels a promising breeze that revives hope for a better world. May this breeze become a cyclone of hope. This is my wish».11

The Pope will encourage, for example, all popular practices that manage natural resources collectively, rediscovering ancient common habits and sharing both material and immaterial goods. The various forms of sharing human knowledge can, therefore, also be considered “popular”. Intellectual work or scientific research that does not pursue a person’s own benefit as well as jobs that produce or manage intangible goods are “popular” in the literal meaning of the word. The social magisterium of the Catholic Church hasn’t looked yet into the wide scope of common goods. “Common”, here, meaning natural or social goods that open progressive socialization processes, creating and institutionalising new collective identities12.

2. Property and use

We commonly think that creativity concerns exclusively the production of goods and not their use. The separation between esthetical and practical dimension is the worst effect of consumer society. The things that we consider creative are often useless and unusable. All that is genuinely popular is able to practice an art: the “popular” creates “ways of doing”, not only ordinary and functional objects. In a popular culture the social practices are real artistic works.

Pope Francis invites to join two different and apparently opposing areas: the

corpo alle pratiche. Michel de Certeau, precuratore e critico del paradigma postsecolare, Humanitas, Vol. 68, No. 2/17, Brescia, 2017, pp. 277-284. Michel de Certeau’s thought plays a key role in this essay. His reflections on social practices and everyday culture are very important for a correct interpretation of the speeches of Pope Francis to the popular movements.

11 Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the world meeting of popular movements, Vatican City, 28 October 2014.

12 «Grassroots movements express the urgent need to revitalize our democracies, so often hijacked by innumerable factors. It is impossible to imagine a future for society without the active participation of great majorities as protagonists, and such proactive participation overflows the logical procedures of formal democracy. Moving towards a world of lasting peace and justice calls us to go beyond paternalistic forms of assistance; it calls us to create new forms of participation that include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny. And all this with a constructive spirit, without resentment, with love» Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the world meeting of popular movements, Vatican City, 28 October 2014. See Bergoglio Jorge Mario - Pope Francis, Nel cuore di ogni padre. Alle radici della mia spiritualità, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, pp. 7-12; Rosito Vincenzo, Il mondo riguardato. Movimenti e modelli di conversione ecologica, San Paolo, Milano, 2017, pp. 149-160.
work and the poetry. This combination has got a great capacity for economic and social transformation. Founding the common roots of human works and poetic creativity is an example of social criticism and an authentic radical act. We commonly connect human work, rationalized production and endless growth. “Working to produce” is the economical imperative in our age. All this damages the creative and formative aspect of human work, by separating it from habit, instruments and goods of everyday life. Production is not exactly a work, it is not an act of transformation of the subjects by creating useful and relevant objects. A man who works only for produce will not create something creative. For this reason, the “social poetry” is able to save contemporary workers from alienation.

Poetry is an art that concerns the “ways of doing”. It is not a mysterious capacity to feel and observe the world. At the same time, the creativity of poets is not an “invention” of new words, but a combinations of words and ideas that “are not together” in everyday language. The poet opens new lines of thought connecting words and meanings that, for normal men, are “distant” and opposing. In this way, the poet is able to generate new thinks, saving and redeeming old and tired words, regenerating hidden and rejected meanings. He is not pleased with the creation of a new configuration of words. The poet revels in a “composition” that is an act of during and operative creation. He does all that in defined and limited space of his own language. In this way the poet uses his cunning, refusing to produce alienating objects.

The popular-poetic creativity is based on the capacity to use and re-use a limited, minor and unviable “material”. People who work using the instruments of the poet have a revolutionary perspective: they move their point of view from the property of the goods to their use. All goods died in the hands of an holder, and reborn through the fingers of a poet-craftsman who re-use them in everyday life. «This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a mo-ment by a transient. Renters make comparable changes in an apartment they furnish with their acts and memories; as do speakers, in the language into which they insert both the messages of their native tongue and, through their accent, through their own “turns of phrase”, etc., their own history; as do pedestrians, in the streets.

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14 «Our investigation is concerned with this difference. It can use as its theoretical model the construction of individual sentences with an established vocabulary and syntax. In linguistics, “performance” and “competence” are different: the act of speaking (with all the enunciative strategies that implies) is not reducible to a knowledge of the language. By adopting the point of view of enunciation — which is the subject of our study — we privilege the act of speaking; according to that point of view, speaking operates within the field of a linguistic system; it effects an appropriation, or reappropriation, of language by its speakers; it establishes a present relative to a time and place; and it posits a contract with “the other” (the interlocutor) in a network of places and relations. These four characteristics of the speech acts can be found in many other practices (walking, cooking, etc.). An objective is at least adumbrated by this parallel, which is, as we shall see, only partly valid. Such an objective assumes that (like the Indians mentioned above) users make (bricolent). Innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules. We must determine the procedures, bases, effects, and possibilities of this collective activity» De Certeau Michel, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, p. 12.
they fill with the forests of their desires and goals. In the same way the users of social codes turn them into metaphors and ellipses of their own quests. The ruling order serves as a support for innumerable productive activities, while at the same time blinding its proprietors to this creativity (like those “bosses” who simply can’t see what is being created within their own enterprises). Carried to its limit, this order would be the equivalent of the rules of meter and rhyme for poets of earlier times: a body of constraints stimulating new discoveries, a set of rules with which improvisation plays.15

Creative processes are open where the use prevails over the property. In this way, the limited languages of historical present became a space of transformation and negotiation: «You are sowers of change. Here in Bolivia I have heard a phrase which I like: “process of change”. Change seen not as something which will one day result from any one political decision or change in social structure. We know from painful experience that changes of structure which are not accompanied by a sincere conversion of mind and heart sooner or later end up in bureaucratization, corruption and failure. That is why I like the image of a “process”, where the drive to sow, to water seeds which others will see sprout, replaces the ambition to occupy every available position of power and to see immediate results. Each of us is just one part of a complex and differentiated whole, interacting in time: peoples who struggle to find meaning, a destiny, and to live with dignity, to “live well”»16.

3. Work and practices

The “social poetry” don’t need to inventors of new words. The social poet is not a man who flies over the world by observing it from another point of view.

16 Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the second world meeting of popular movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 9 July 2015. The idea of “process” is very important for a precise understanding of pope Francis’s pastoral Magisterium. If we want to unlock the reform that is the mind of pope Francis, at some point we have to wrap our own minds around the phrase “time is greater than space” . In Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis gives us his most detailed thinking on what he means by this pastoral principle: «A constant tension exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. Broadly speaking, “time” has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of enclosure. People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself. Here we see a first principle for progress in building a people: time is greater than space. This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. It invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time. One of the faults which we occasionally observe in sociopolitical activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. Giving priority to space means madly attempting to keep everything together in the present, trying to possess all the spaces of power and of self-assertion; it is to crystallize processes and presume to hold them back. Giving priority to time means being concerned about initiating processes rather than possessing spaces. Time governs spaces, illumines them and makes them links in a constantly expanding chain, with no possibility of return. What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events. Without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity» Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, Nos. 222-223.
Pope Francis, talking about social poetry, proposes the image of social actors who create and upset historical reasons, by resecting the rules of their own language. The social poet does not ignore the limitations and the restriction of his specific historical and social condition. Nevertheless, he is able to start regenerative processes of social order, creating new possibilities where are only systemic limits, obvious solutions and ineffective measures. «The scandal of poverty cannot be addressed by promoting strategies of containment that only tranquilize the poor and render them tame and inoffensive. How sad it is when we find, behind allegedly altruistic works, the other being reduced to passivity or being negated; or worse still, we find hidden personal agendas or commercial interests. “Hypocrites” is what Jesus would say to those responsible. How marvellous it is, by contrast, when we see peoples moving forward, especially their young and their poorest members. Then one feels a promising breeze that revives hope for a better world. May this breeze become a cyclone of hope. This is my wish. This meeting of ours responds to a very concrete desire, something that any father and mother would want for their children – a desire for what should be within everyone’s reach, namely land, housing and work. However, nowadays, it is sad to see that land, housing and work are ever more distant for the majority. It is strange but, if I talk about this, some say that the Pope is communist. They do not understand that love for the poor is at the centre of the Gospel. Land, housing and work, what you struggle for, are sacred rights. To make this claim is nothing unusual; it is the social teaching of the Church. I am going to dwell on each of these briefly since you have chosen them as the core issues for this meeting».

The social poetry proposes and supports a new ethical paradigm of human work. The rhetoric of resilience does not encourage authentic innovative processes, but it is often a means of global market’s reproduction. The social value of popular movements reveals itself in several situation of social injustice: «I have seen first hand a variety of experiences where workers united in cooperatives and other forms of community organization were able to create work where there were only crumbs of an idolatrous economy. I have seen some of you here. Recuperated businesses, local fairs and cooperatives of paper collectors are examples of that popular economy which is born of exclusion and which, slowly, patiently and resolutely adopts solidary forms which dignify it. How different this is than the situation which results when those left behind by the formal market are exploited like slaves! Governments which make it their responsibility to put the economy at the service of peoples must promote the strengthening, improvement, coordination and expansion of these forms of popular economy and communitarian production. This entails bettering the processes of work, providing adequate infrastructures and guaranteeing workers their full rights in this alternative sector. When the state and social organizations join in working for the

17 Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the world meeting of popular movements, Vatican City, 28 October 2014.
three “L’s”, the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity come into play; and these allow the common good to be achieved in a full and participatory democracy.”

Popular movements does not just promoting fairer conditions for the human work, but they support the creative potential of everyday life’s practices. Indeed, Michel de Certeau said anything about “everyday life’s creativity”, by identifying acts that change the horizon of possibilities. However, these acts while remaining within a specific social and economic system.

The language we use and the work we do are not abstract actions, but they are differ contexts of everyday life practices. Every wording or “speech act” is a way to change the language. The linguistic turn was a crucial moment for the contemporary philosophy and epistemology. It has focused the scientific interest on linguistic-discursive practices and on individual speech acts. «Enunciation furnishes a model of these characteristics, but they can also be discovered in the relation that other practices (walking, residing, etc.) entertain with nonlinguistic systems. Enunciation presupposes: (1) a realization of the linguistic system through a speech act that actualizes some of its potential (language is real only in the act of speaking); (2) an appropriation of language by the speaker who uses it; (3) the postulation of an interlocutor (real or fictive) and thus the constitution of a relational contract or allocation (one speaks to someone); (4) the establishment of a present through the act of the “I” who speaks, and conjointly, since “the present is properly the source of time,” the organization of a temporality (the present creates a before and an after) and the existence of a “now” which is the presence to the world.

These elements (realizing, appropriating, being inscribed in relations, being situated in time) make of enunciation, and secondarily of use, a nexus of circumstances, a nexus adherent to the “context” from which it can be distinguished only by abstraction. Indissociable from the present instant, from particular circumstances and from a faire (a peculiar way of doing things, of producing language and of modifying the dynamics of a relation), the speech act is at the same time a use of language and an operation performed on it. We can attempt to apply this model to many non-linguistic operations by taking as our hypothesis that all these uses concern consumption.

In the light of these considerations, the everyday life’s languages occupies a central place in the contemporary context of sciences. The properties of speech acts can be applied to others spheres of life as the work and the town planning.

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18 Pope Francis, Address to the participants in the second world meeting of popular movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 9 July 2015.


21 "A comparison with the speech act will allow us to go further" and not limit ourselves to the critique of graphic representations alone, looking from the shores of legibility toward an inaccessible beyond. The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple “enunciative” function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language);
Michel de Certeau’s semiotic of everyday life is essential to understand the social proposal of Pope Francis to the popular movements\textsuperscript{22}.

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Винћенцо Росито

„ДРУШТВЕНИ ПЕСНИЦИ“ И „СЕЈАЧИ ПРОМЕНА“: УЛОГА ПОПУЛАРНИХ ПОКРЕТА УНУТАР ЦРКВЕ И ДРУШТВА

Сажетак

Циљ овог чланка јесте анализа савремене дебате о „популарним праксама“ у светлу дијалога између папе Фрање и представника популарних покрета за време три различита састанка које је организовало Одељење за промоцију интегралног људског развоја. Популарни покрети су народне организације и друштвени покрети. Они представљају све већи број искључених актера, као што су фармери без земље, бескућници или особе које живе у заједницама у којима нема адекватне инфраструктуре. Популарни покрети су заједница индивидуа или група који се удружују и које не препознају себе нити као национални идентитет или социјалну класу. Циљ аутора јесте да успостави везу између креативности популарних покрета и семиотике свакодневног живота Мишел де Серт.

Кључне речи: папа Фрања, популарни покрети, рад, креативност, друштвене праксе, Мишел де Серт

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