



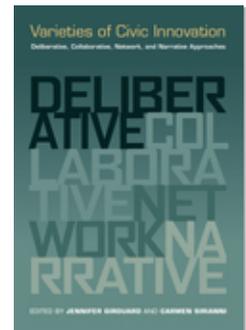
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Networks and Narratives in the Making of Civic Practice

Lessons from Iberia

ROBERT M. FISHMAN

■ Early in 2006 a group of poor immigrants, mostly of African origins, were evicted from their formally illegal houses in Amadora, a large municipality just outside Portugal's capital city, Lisbon, and their dwellings were demolished. That event marked not just a personal tragedy for those who lost their homes but also the beginning of an important example of civic practice. Television newscasters reported the events live from Amadora and carried the voices and perspectives of those affected to television viewers throughout the country. The immigrants and their advocates organized a march on the parliament several weeks later and spoke with representatives of all the political parties represented in Portugal's Assembly of the Republic. These actions by the immigrants, and the interest the news media had manifested in their plight, provided much of the basis for subsequent public efforts to address their concerns.¹

Two years later, in 2008, in the larger country situated alongside Portugal, a group of immigrants dwelling in formally illegal houses just outside Spain's capital, Madrid, were also evicted and their homes demolished, but the political and public ramifications of their plight were remarkably different. Advocates of the Madrid-area immigrants lamented their inability to establish useful channels of conversation with public authorities.² Given the absence of adequate public attention to their plight, many of those evicted spent more than a month living inside the church ministered to by the activist priest Javier Baeza in southern Madrid. The problems faced by the Madrid immigrants were left largely outside Spain's officially recognized civic arena of discussions with—or within—elective institutions. Yet during that same year, 2008, immigrants in Amadora were invited to participate in comprehensive policy conversations with Portugal's leading housing official, João Ferrão, with the aim of regularizing many dwellings while providing in other ways for those residing in housing not to be regularized. Similar people facing similar challenges—and residing in the neighboring

countries which share the Iberian Peninsula at the western end of continental Europe—experienced vastly different encounters with political authorities. This fundamental contrast afforded the immigrants dwelling just outside the capital cities of Portugal and Spain thoroughly dissimilar opportunities to seek attention and assistance through civic action. For some reason the Portuguese political system proved far more open to meaningful civic action by poor immigrants than did the Spanish system. In this chapter I offer an explanation for this and other instances of divergence in the capacities of people to forge creative avenues of civic action.

One decade earlier, miners in the Asturias region of northern Spain were threatened with the loss of their jobs and way of life. HUNOSA, a large state-owned coal company, drew up plans to permanently close mines employing thousands of workers in the Nalón and Caudal valleys of that northern region. The two Asturian coal valleys, separated by only twelve kilometers of winding mountain highway, were remarkably alike in most respects, yet valley residents responded to this threat in fundamentally different ways in the two cases. In the Caudal valley miners and their supporters organized large campaigns focused entirely around the goal of keeping open existing mines such as the Barredo pit in Mieres, the Santa Bárbara mine in Turón, and others. Through mine occupations, demonstrations, and other forms of mobilization, they defended their direct local interests. Their plea, as a banner hung on one of these mines in the mid-1990s put the matter, was quite simple: “For our future, Don’t close it.”³ But a few kilometers away, in the Nalon valley, leaders and activists largely rejected the defensive localism underpinning the exclusive focus on efforts to keep existing mines open. Instead, both their diagnosis of the problems they faced and their proposals for the future were *global* in scale—extending well beyond the confines of their valley and its mines. Their civic discourse looked well beyond their locality, addressing processes and engaging actors situated far away. Once again similar people facing similar challenges responded in vastly different ways. The Asturian miners working in the region’s neighboring coal valleys made thoroughly dissimilar claims on the civic space of mobilization, debate, and political action.

These paired instances of *similar* people making *dissimilar* uses of civic channels and mechanisms to address important difficulties that they face speak to two dimensions of civic life, which I argue to be extraordinarily important in the contemporary world. These two great contemporary challenges for civic life can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) engaging the increasing *global scale* of economic and political phenomena, and (2) enabling the poor and disadvantaged to become meaningful political actors. In a world scenario increasingly characterized by the global nature of processes shaping local experience and by the growth of inequalities, the capacity of civic life to engage the global arena’s distant horizons and to incorporate the poor assumes growing, indeed inescapable, significance. Yet the ability and commitment of political forces—and ordinary citizens—to meet these contemporary civic challenges rests on their capacities, innovative potential, and a variety of factors shaping the contexts in

which they dwell. In this chapter I identify ways in which two factors located *outside* the specialized political terrain of elections and official institutions can powerfully contribute to enhancing or discouraging opportunities for civic action of the sort here emphasized.

I draw both on work by fellow sociologists (as well as sociologically minded political scientists) and on my own research to specify various ways in which *networks* and *narratives* can help to invigorate civic endeavors, thus providing ordinary citizens with crucial tools for enlivening public life without fully committing themselves to fulltime or officially political activity. I focus heavily on my extensive research in the Iberian Peninsula neighbors of Portugal and Spain, pioneers in both the late twentieth-century worldwide expansion of democratic rule (Fishman 1990; Linz and Stepan 1996) and centuries earlier in the European colonization of the world. The civic initiatives to be found in the recent history of the Iberian Peninsula include some that generated extraordinary success along with others culminating in “dead ends” or other disappointments. I will examine various examples, some of them rooted in collective protest and in the unfolding of negotiation or *conversation* between institutional office holders and actors lacking any institutional source of power.

Strategies and initiatives intended to foster civic creativity and inclusion often focus on what can be done *inside*, or through governmental structures and other political institutions. That emphasis has yielded many important results (Fung 2004; Baiocchi 2005; Sirianni 2009), but in this chapter I examine other venues and mechanisms for enriching citizenship practice. Indeed, I argue that much of the energy generating civic innovation and inclusion, and many of the settings in which creative citizenship practices *show up* in the world, are to be found *outside* formal political institutions. A large body of work by sociologists, and sociologically minded political scientists, specifies how processes and mechanisms located outside the most overtly political realm end up facilitating—or blocking—robust and satisfying forms of civic activity. This perspective is not intended to question the importance of the more conventional focus on formal political institutions but rather to complement it: My argument does not attribute *priority* to societal sources of citizenship action, but I do focus analytically on such factors, seeking to identify crucial mechanisms underpinning the interplay between broadly *social* underpinnings of civic initiative and those strategies and institutional designs that take their form in unmistakably, and often proudly, political endeavors. The experiences I relate in this chapter are rooted in important episodes of collective action in Portugal and Spain, but they—and their implications for how we understand civic life—can only be fully understood by framing these experiences in the conceptual and theoretical debates of social scientists concerned with networks, narratives, and civic life. The episodes I examine carry global significance.

This chapter’s dual focus on networks and narratives—on both the broad structure of social ties connecting individuals and the stories that are told about a nation and its history—may strike some readers as an odd combination of two dissimilar

phenomena, despite their shared location *outside* the self-consciously political arena of parties and elective or governance institutions, but in fact a growing body of scholarly work has sketched out various ways in which the cultural sphere of discourse, narratives, meanings, and practices is tightly interconnected with structures of acquaintance and social interaction among individuals (Bearman 1993; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Somers 1994; Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Fishman 2004; Lizardo 2006; Perrin 2006; Polletta 2006; Mische 2007). From this perspective, and for reasons that I develop below, social networks and culture can be understood, in the recent formulation of Pachucki and Breiger, as “mutually constitutive” (2010, 209). Culturally rooted understandings, meanings, and practices do shape the emergence and significance of social network ties, but those networks, in turn, strongly influence the extent to which cultural innovations and assumptions can spread. As this chapter elaborates, social ties and *stories* are woven together in the social fabric in ways that enrich, but render quite complex, the societal underpinnings of lively civic endeavors.

The identification of ways in which networks and narratives can enhance civic practice—in complementarity with institutional innovations and explicitly political initiatives—has the effect of broadening the playing field for those committed to enhancing the practical meaning of citizenship. This chapter’s exploration of this theme takes us beyond civic strategies that are explicitly or consciously political and into the micro-level realm of personal biographies as well as the macro-level sphere of national history and large collective movements. It takes us into the terrain of friendships and cultural expression. The phenomena that shape the possibilities for civic engagement and innovation among ordinary citizens extend well beyond those deployed by political “specialists,” be they professional politicians or extraordinarily dedicated activists. Partly thanks to the major contributions of Robert Putnam (1993, 2000), the social underpinnings of democracy’s energy and successes have attracted growing interest among social scientists and the general public, but specifying *how* social ties and culturally embedded stories can activate civic life and enhance its quality is a far greater challenge than simply demonstrating that some sort of effect exists. This chapter takes up that challenge.

I argue below that one of the keys to the large impact of social ties and narratives—or related cultural phenomena—on civic vitality lies precisely in the development of synergies between these two elements and their positive engagement with the sphere of formal political institutions. Students of social ties and networks place a great deal of emphasis on the overall structure of connections in a population (White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976; Degenne and Forse 1999; Wasserman and Faust 1994), and on the important differences in the nature and effect of different types of ties (Granovetter 1974; Burt 2005; Wellman 1992; Centola and Macy 2007). I build on that work but, drawing from the scholarship on culture and social networks (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Mische 2011) and my own research findings, I also elaborate how

the impact of social connections on civic practice is strongly shaped by the cultural or *subcultural* meaning placed on those ties.

Some important scholarship argues that the structural form of network connections is strongly related to the actual content of social ties and that dense ties within communities are likely to be treated by those involved as strong connections of intrinsic meaning, while less common “cross-boundary” connections among individuals embedded in different collectivities are more likely to be weak and instrumental (Baldassari and Diani 2007). I instead contend that structurally quite *similar* social connections can actually be given very *different* meanings by their participants for reasons rooted in the actors’ subcultural understandings. How we think about our connections to others, and their broader placement in extensive complex networks, is powerfully shaped by our cultural assumptions. From this perspective, the impact of ties on civic practice and their ability to encourage important types of innovation in public life is partly rooted in the subcultural moorings of actors that lead them to develop (or leave largely untapped) the potential carried by their connections to others. My argument places considerable weight not only on networks but also on the ideas and understandings actors hold about their social ties. In what follows, I turn first to a discussion of national narratives and the politics of inclusion before proceeding to an examination of network ties and globalizing civic action.

Narratives of Freedom and Political Inclusion: Evidence from Portugal

Portugal’s 1974 Carnation Revolution dramatically brought to a sudden end nearly five decades of right-wing authoritarian rule and initiated a period of mass mobilization in the streets, wide-ranging social upheaval, and democratic institution building. On April 25 of that year, rebellious army captains, and others organized in the clandestine Armed Forces Movement, marched on Lisbon, where to the delight of growing crowds in the streets, they managed to quickly overcome resistance from defenders of the authoritarian Estado Novo (Maxwell 1995). It is crucial to note that the leadership role middle-level officers collectively assumed in the democratizing coup required the captains to act in direct disobedience to commands issued by their erstwhile hierarchical “superiors.” This overturning of institutional discipline ushered in a period characterized by the *partial inversion of hierarchies* inside numerous social and political institutions as well as the emergence of new forms of cultural expression and practice (Fishman 2010, 2011). Portugal’s unsuccessful colonial wars in Africa and the fundamental challenge to discipline within the armed forces that took shape in April 1974 together produced a growing crisis of the state, making possible not only democratization but also social revolution (Bermeo 1986; Fishman 1990; Durán Muñoz 2000; Palacios Cerezales 2003). Crucially, an important feature of Portugal’s revolution was the political empowerment of workers and the poor, who became important

actors in their places of work and residence during the country's turbulent passage from dictatorship to democracy (Hammond 1988). I argue that such events established a historical and cultural foundation for the emergence of a distinctive form of democratic practice, rooted in Portugal's social revolutionary pathway to democracy (Fishman 2011). The story of April 1974 and its relevance for contemporary democracy form the subject of a great deal of discourse—and narration—in the new political system, with important consequences for the shape of the civic arena and its ability to incorporate relatively poor and powerless actors.

The Portuguese experience speaks to the significance of themes and processes that have been extensively theorized in recent work. The contribution of stories and storytelling for politics of all sorts—including protest movements as well as more institutionally anchored forms of political activity—has attracted a great deal of attention from prominent social scientists (Tilly 2002; Polletta 2006) as well as contemporary political actors and commentators. Much of that work is focused on the narration of either micro-level individual experiences thought to hold political significance, or the meso-level endeavors and experiences of larger groups such as immigrants and farm workers. I examine instead the way in which narratives about a collective *national* experience (Spillman and Faeges 2005), such as Portugal's political passage to democratic freedoms, hold important consequences for contemporary civic practice, thus making use of an approach that has yielded important results in the comparative analysis of culture and politics (Berezin 2009).

In contemporary practice, the Portuguese devote enormous energies to telling the story of their revolutionary liberation from dictatorship in the captains' coup of April 25, 1974, and the period of social mobilization and cultural renewal that followed. Narratives of the Carnation Revolution, as the events beginning in April 1974 came to be known, and reflections on its significance are articulated in books, poems, movies, concerts, demonstrations, and an annual commemorative session of the parliament. The anniversary itself is a national holiday and the occasion for an extraordinary array of commemorative activities organized by civil society and political associations as well as government institutions. The most widely viewed telling of the story of April, Maria de Medeiros's film *Captains of April*, has been shown repeatedly on Portuguese television, in movie theaters, and in many schools in the years following its initial release in 2000. The publicity trailer for the movie shows Maia, one of the rebellious captains—and the film's hero—refusing the orders of a superior officer and initiating the uprising in the base where he was stationed. In the words captured by the trailer, Maia dismisses the call to obedience, insisting that sometimes it is necessary to *disobey*. This celebration of disobedience stands as only one of many politically potent messages carried by the narrations and commemorations of April 25th. A common theme in this large cultural enterprise has been the commitment to tell the revolution's story to children too young to have experienced it directly. Various books, such as the text written by a team under the direction of theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004), attempt to tell the

story to schoolchildren in easily accessible ways. On the revolution's thirtieth anniversary in 2004, one of countless commemorative activities—a gathering of immigrants on Lisbon's Largo do Carmo, where the rebellious captains won the surrender of dictator Marcelo Caetano in 1974—culminated in an extraordinary celebratory spectacle. A large birthday cake was brought onto the stage that presided over the gathering, and the young children of immigrants were called forward to lead those assembled in singing happy birthday to April 25th—and the democracy it brought into being.⁴

That Portugal's democracy has devoted great cultural energy to celebrating and telling the socially empowering story of April is undeniable, but what is the broader civic significance of those endeavors? What structural or institutional factors have acted in consonance with narration in helping to build the basis for the country's distinctive civic life? Those questions are of considerable relevance not only for scholars, but also for political actors and ordinary citizens in Portugal. Although the revolution's most ardent enthusiasts are for the most part located somewhere on the political left, the embrace of April 25th and its presumed message has been broad-based. In 2007 in a large town north of Oporto, a local leader of the country's largest center-right party offered telling words on the significance of the Carnation Revolution: "To exercise citizenship is to fulfill April. . . . Democracy only really exists when it assures everyone, without exception, the possibility to exercise in absolute fullness their rights and duties." He directly linked this perspective to the memory of the revolution: "For me, the best way to commemorate and respect the spirit of April 25th is creating mechanisms to consolidate a truly participatory democracy."⁵ Numerous statements by other political leaders, as well as the broader character of ongoing practice, underscore the tendency of Portuguese political actors to understand democracy in ways that emphasize both inclusion and a certain openness to initiatives that challenge authority. I argue that remembrances of April 25th, and the collective experiences of the revolutionary period itself, contribute to making possible a form of *democratic practice* more open to the voices of the poor and the relatively powerless than that of many other contemporary democracies (Fishman 2011).

In what follows, I show that the story of this country's revolutionary passage to democracy helps to generate both a distinctive form of civic practice and a series of societal or policy outcomes shaped by that practice. Yet in making this argument I do not intend to privilege the causal weight of the revolutionary narrative itself, or any other cultural phenomena. Instead, my aim is to show that the cultural efforts that have gone into elaborating and conveying the story of April 25th form part of a broader ensemble of factors—many of them institutional or structural in nature—which together shape political and social outcomes in Portugal. The story and its message do not act alone in producing the revolution's distinctive legacy in contemporary democracy, but at the same time the broader macro-historical pattern cannot be understood without attributing a significant role to the cultural efforts involved in telling the story of April 25th.

The most distinctive feature of Portugal's postrevolutionary democratic practice is the relative openness of institutional office holders, and the broader democratic political sphere, to the voices of poor and relatively powerless actors including demonstrators protesting one or another element of official policy (Fishman 2011). The experience of residents of formally illegal housing in Amadora, just outside Lisbon, described in this chapter's introduction, offers a telling instance of this pattern. This episode of social protest, with its ultimate focus on the republic's center of institutional power, appears to have influenced political debate and policy making on housing issues; leaders of the immigrant movement insist that they succeeded in reorienting the country's broader political agenda on housing issues.⁶ The country's leading housing official at the time subsequently engaged in negotiations with residents of informal housing in Amadora, searching for a solution that would regularize their status and offer them acceptable conditions.⁷ To a remarkable degree, poor immigrants who sought the attention of elected parliamentarians and policy makers—and the general public—succeeded.

The incorporation of economically disadvantaged actors, such as the immigrants of Amadora, into political processes that set the public agenda and make policy is of broad theoretical relevance. Despite the normative arguments in favor of such broad democratic inclusion, it is not a common occurrence. Theorists such as Robert Dahl (1998) insist on the principle of full political equality among citizens as fundamental to democracy, while recognizing the extraordinary difficulty of attaining that end, especially in the terrains of agenda setting and policy making. Indeed, genuine political equality has proved difficult to attain *even* in democracy's institutional core, namely the act of voting itself, given the relative disinclination of many low-income citizens to participate in elections in a variety of historical and contemporary contexts as well as the obstacles placed in the way of their participation in some settings (Mansbridge 1980). At the conceptual level, political equality among citizens is central to the idea of democracy, and it continues to be emphasized in theories of citizenship (Somers 2008) as well as in the literature on the deepening of democracy (Roberts 1998; Heller 2000; Fung and Wright 2003), but in empirical reality it is very difficult to fully attain. Herein lies the special significance of Portugal's narrative of the April 25th delivery from dictatorship: it has encouraged the poor and powerless to see themselves as potentially relevant political actors while also providing institutional office holders with a powerful argument in favor of inclusion. At both ends of the dimension differentiating between the politically powerful and powerless, the story of April has encouraged practices that promote broad inclusion.

The principles of political inclusion and of resistance to domination are frequently articulated in contemporary Portugal in ways that explicitly link those commitments to the underlying message of the Carnation Revolution. The words of a municipal leader of the center-right in a town north of Oporto, quoted above, stand as just one instance of that broader pattern. In the 2008 commemorative session of the parliament held on April 25th, it was a deputy of the left-socialist Bloco de Esquerda,

José Soeiro, who remarked, “Democracy is the strongest answer against all forms of domination—in the space of enterprises, schools, families, sexuality. . . . If there is one thing that April 25th teaches us it is that it is always possible to change everything.”⁸ This insistence on the possibility of change, and of success in resisting domination, is echoed—or anticipated—in the practice of *Solidariedade Imigrante*, the association that helped to mobilize the residents of informal dwellings in Amadora. Timóteo Macedo, leader of the association, enjoys leading members and supporters in chanting “change *is* possible” and he makes explicit reference to the story of April in conveying that message.⁹ Other urban protesters, such as the residents of the Lisbon neighborhood of Amendoiras, have also drawn explicitly on memories and narratives of the Carnation Revolution to provide their initiatives with encouragement and legitimacy.¹⁰ The Amendoiras protesters won official recognition—indeed restoration—of their control over houses initially seized during the revolution.

The inclusionary tendencies in Portuguese democratic practice are manifested in numerous ways, including in the behavior of institutional power holders and the news media. When the Portuguese parliament commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the country’s democratic constitution in 2006, the exhibit assembled for the occasion gave considerable prominence not only to the constitutional text but also to numerous demonstrations, protesting decisions made by the parliament itself. In this and numerous other ways Portuguese office holders have conveyed their sense that demonstrations—many of them led by relatively poor actors such as the immigrants of Amadora—play a recognized and legitimate role in democratic politics. The approach of the press is captured well by the declarations of journalist Estrela Serrano, who wrote in 2006 that “on the balance and variety of voices expressed in the media depends also the quality of democracy” (Serrano 2006, 193). My fieldwork in Portugal confirms the predominance of an inclusionary approach to news coverage that is congruent with Serrano’s remarks, but what is the connection between narratives of revolution and the practice of inclusion on the part of both the press and elected politicians? If—as I argue—the voices of relatively poor and powerless actors, including demonstrators, are incorporated within the space acknowledged as legitimate by institutional office holders and reported in the news media, what role does the story of revolution play in generating that effect? Central to the revolution was the active participation of crowds in the streets, first simply cheering on the insurgent movement led by the captains and later carrying numerous social demands, old and new, into the public arena. Economist Mário Murteira, a government minister during the revolutionary period, captured this component of the Portuguese story when he remarked, “Several times when I was engaged in important conversations with [prime minister] Vasco Gonçalves, in his office, we would go to the window to see those who were passing by in demonstrations. In the end and to a great extent we were more spectators in a grand popular movement than actors” (Silva et al. 2006, 105). The political significance of crowds and protesters in the streets is captured not only in narrative histories

and social science analyses of the revolution (Maxwell 1995; Palacios Cerezales 2003), but also in pictorial and poetic representations of the period as was reflected by two widely disseminated posters that proclaimed, “A Poesia está na Rua” (The Poetry Is in the Streets).¹¹ The Portuguese have not only recognized, but also celebrated, the contributions to democracy made by popular voices in the streets.

The Portuguese democratic culture was forged in the context of a pervasive challenge to hierarchies inside both state and social institutions. A wave of purges swept the country in the year and half following the country’s liberation by revolution in 1974. Loyalists of the old regime were removed from government ministries, private firms, and even schools, where students themselves led this effort in large assemblies (Costa Pinto 2001, 2006). Farm workers, industrial workers, and urban residents all joined in challenging existing hierarchies—whether in their workplaces or their neighborhoods—thus reshaping various facets of the country’s collective life (Bermeo 1986; Hammond 1988; Durán Muñoz 2000). Portugal’s political transformation was socially inclusive, incorporating the poor and other relatively disadvantaged actors into the mainstream of democratization. The demonstrations, which the Portuguese understood as a major part of the process that brought democracy to their country, included protests of actors who would have been seen as marginal to political life in many other societies. The evocations of participatory inclusion and of the challenge to domination in commemorations of April 25th—and on other occasions during the year—thus resonate with widely recognized elements of the revolution’s story.

But without organizational or institutional support, the narrative of April 1974 would not be capable of generating the effects identified here, namely the fostering of a type of democratic civic practice which is highly inclusionary, recognizing the legitimacy of the voices of poor and relatively powerless actors. Organizations such as *Solidariedade Imigrante*, political parties that organize the institutional life of the Assembly of the Republic, and various official endeavors and policies, such as the annual program of commemorations of April 25th, all play a crucial role in providing opportunities, substance, and weight to the story of the Carnation Revolution. The cultural efforts involved in telling the story of liberation by revolution are central to contemporary Portugal’s sense of democratic politics and civic life, but those efforts gain their strength and impact through their thorough interweaving with routine political life, organizational efforts, and institutional design. The narrative of revolution helps to enable an extraordinarily inclusive form of civic practice—welcoming into the public square actors who would be largely marginalized in many other national settings—in part because of its synergies with the organizational and institutional components of politics, which also owe their contemporary configuration to the process initiated on April 25, 1974. My emphasis in this chapter on contributions to civic initiative and inclusion made by actors operating outside the official political sphere—such as authors, painters, poets, musicians, protest leaders, and others involved in telling the story of April—helps to identify the significance of narratives of revolution for contemporary civic life. We now turn to

an examination of social connections that cross social boundaries, another potential source of strength for the objectives under discussion here.

How Boundary-Crossing Social Ties Can Enable a Globalized Civic Perspective

Many scholars have shown that both direct social connections and patterns of indirect connection within populations help to shape political participation by individuals as well as the broader contours of public life and discourse (Bearman 1993; Zuckerman 2005; Fishman 2004; Mische 2007), but this point of fairly wide agreement leaves us with the need to specify *how* networks can enhance democracy. I am especially concerned here with two questions, which I consider to be interrelated: (1) What consequences follow from the growth or decline of boundary-crossing ties—such as “town-gown” connections between university students and residents of the towns where they study, bonds between recent immigrants and families who have lived in a locale for generations, close relations between middle-income individuals and those substantially above or below them in the income hierarchy, or links between intellectuals and workers? (2) Can the network ties and conversations of ordinary citizens help *enable* civic life to effectively engage the *global scale* of economic and social dynamics affecting the lives of citizens? The severing or withering of cross-class and boundary-crossing ties (such as those I mention above by way of example) is a feature of contemporary social life that has attracted the concern of social analysts such as Christopher Lasch (1995), and which is closely related to the decline of cross-class mass-membership organizations persuasively documented by Skocpol (2003). Given the theorized decline of boundary-crossing or cross-class social connections, it makes good sense to examine whether the presence of such connections—where they *are* to be found—contributes to the quality of civic life. After all, if boundary-crossing connections are in decline but nonetheless *do* enhance civic life in one fashion or another, that finding would identify both a significant threat to the civic sphere and a way in which concerned individuals’ simple choice of conversation partners and associates might hold surprisingly large implications for the evolution of civic life.

For reasons to be explained in what follows, I argue that the ability of civic actors to successfully address the global scale of contemporary economic and social phenomena in their discourse is related to their networks and more specifically to their boundary-crossing ties. Indeed, I provide evidence that the capacity of public actors to defend their interests in ways that cognitively and discursively *globalize* is strongly rooted in the nature of their social ties. Whether activists, leaders, and ordinary citizens think of their own interests, and articulate them in the context of political life, in ways that look to the global horizons of the contemporary world or in ways highly constrained by the blinders of localism is largely a function, I argue, of the network dynamics presented here.

I make use of a concept designed to capture the capacity of leaders and activists to look beyond their immediate context and to engage the increasingly global arena of contemporary economic and social processes. On the basis of extensive field research, discussed in *Democracy's Voices* (Fishman 2004), I argue that the points of reference and the policy remedies articulated in the political discourse of community leaders can either focus consistently on the thoroughly local arena or extend well beyond it. I conceptualize the result—in the political language, initiatives, and proposals of civic leaders—as constituting either *globalizing discursive horizons* or *narrow localism*, typically of a defensive nature. Based on fieldwork in Spain, I show how certain sorts of network ties (such as friendships between miners and university professors, shared political work linking activists to authors and engineers, and other cross-class connections) have enabled those local leaders and activists shaped by them to promote their community interests in ways that address both national and broadly global concerns—rather than simply those pre-occupations most powerfully bounded by locality.

The *discursive horizons* articulated by local leaders in their efforts to promote employment and other straightforward material concerns of local communities may be thoroughly bounded by the confines of locality, or expansively focused on crucial processes, challenges, and potential solutions located far beyond the local context and, for that reason, of meaning to a broad national or even international audience. The discursive horizons of local communities, such as the industrial towns where I conducted extensive fieldwork in Spain, may be expansively global or irredeemably local, with large consequences for the ability of community civic life to engage extralocal actors and audiences in dialogue and with equally large implications for the capacity of those same local actors to successfully identify genuine causes of local problems, and potential remedies for them, anchored in large dynamics transcending their immediate context. One of the most crucial dimensions of civic innovation in the contemporary world is precisely the ability of local actors to connect their challenges and aspirations to geographically distant realities and processes.

In the Spanish industrial towns where I conducted interviewing and fieldwork, leaders and activists whose civic discourse was thoroughly bounded by localism limited their demands and initiatives to the (often unsuccessful) efforts to keep their towns' factories, mines, and facilities open. In the 1990s, the militant mobilization of the Andalusian town of Linares offered a clear instance of such limited discursive horizons in the campaign intended to keep Santana Motor from closing the plant located in the town. In the wave of demonstrations, road and rail line blockades, building occupations, and so forth initiated by town residents, two of the central slogans of Linares' activists were "2,400 jobs and not one less" and "Linares," the name of their municipality. The impact of national, European, and global economic dynamics, the global policies of multinationals, and the plight of workers in similar situations in other towns, as well as potential remedies articulated around district-wide, regional, or broader policy initiatives, were *all* absent from the discourse and demands of Linares

protesters. Their efforts, protests, and disruptions were all about their concrete and bounded local interests—and nothing else. “2,400 jobs and not one less.” Social protest in this instance was thoroughly lacking in civic imagination or innovation and could hardly be thought to contribute to any public goal lying outside the immediate context of the town. Many other towns and industrial areas have shared the political or discursive style of Linares, limiting their demands and proposals to the narrow effort to secure or maintain local interests. As was discussed in this chapter’s introduction, the mining valley of the Caudal in the northern region of Asturias—where towns such as Mieres or Turón focused their mobilizations on attempts to keep specific mines open—offers some of the clearest examples of this same pattern.

Other towns or districts with socioeconomic structures—and problems—similar to those of Linares or the Caudal valley, however, instead articulated their analyses and objectives through globalizing discourse that linked the local to the regional, national, and global arenas. The Nalón coal valley of Asturias, adjacent to the localistic Caudal, provides one of the clearest instances of such a contrast. The Nalón valley defended its interests through globalizing discourse that informed numerous campaigns and endeavors launched in the 1990s. Leaders in the Nalón pushed not simply to keep specific mines open but instead to reindustrialize the entire area; their statements in support of that objective clearly linked their valley’s employment crisis to multilevel economic trends and dynamics of global scale (Fishman 2004, ch. 3). They criticized regional, national, and European policies while warning of the dangers of extraordinarily high unemployment as manifested by the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s. The Nalón’s leaders and activists delivered public statements and produced publications replete with references not only to their valley but also to distant places—and times—in Spain, other European countries, and beyond. A speaker in a seminar organized in San Martín, one of the valley’s towns, asked rhetorically in 1990 whether the problems of that town could be resolved *exclusively* within San Martín and offered the obvious answer in the negative, rejecting the blinders of localism. Leaders and activists constantly looked beyond their valley and its towns for solutions to the problems they faced. A variety of industrial areas in other regions of Spain shared the globalizing “frame” of the Nalón. Workers and unionists in Catalonia’s Baix Llobregat district, located just outside Barcelona, and in the old textile town of Alcoi in Alicante province, provide instances of a globalizing approach to politics and civic life in areas structurally quite unlike the Nalón valley. Whether the issues at play involved environmental conditions, corporate behavior, or employment policy, leaders and activists in the globalizing towns looked to distant horizons articulating positions consonant with the global scale of the problems being felt in their towns. In all these cases—and others that I studied in *Democracy’s Voices*—leaders of industrial towns showed a noteworthy ability to conceptualize and articulate their towns’ interests, and remedies intended to address those interests, in broadly global terms, whereas their counterparts in numerous nearby and economically similar communities focused instead on simple defensive localism of the narrowest sort.

What accounts for these great differences in the degree to which communities manage to address the genuinely global scale of the problems that are felt locally? Why are the civic endeavors of local activists informed by globalizing perspectives in some settings and localistic blinders in others? Remarkably, in the field settings I studied, the distinction between globalizing discourse and defensive localism is essentially uncorrelated with variation on the more conventional dimension of politics differentiating between radicalism and moderation. Both globalizing and localistic leaders and activists may be either moderate *or* radical. Yet the horizons adopted by discourse do match up with a fundamental difference among local leaders, namely the extent to which their social connections cross important social boundaries. Boundary-crossing social ties proved capable of generating globalizing discourse—and thus a crucial type of civic innovation—whereas their absence was typically associated with narrow localistic discourse and political initiatives.

Both a face-to-face survey of more than three hundred local union and political leaders and my extensive in-depth qualitative interviewing with many of the same leaders showed a strong association between intellectual-worker connections—a prime example of boundary-crossing social ties—and the predisposition of leaders to articulate their political objectives through globalizing discourse. The local leaders in the towns I studied were primarily either industrial workers or others clearly committed to speaking on behalf of such workers. Their linkages to intellectuals—defined in the study as university professors or authors of general works intended for an educated public—took many forms including friendships formed in childhood (before the individuals involved followed one or another career path), joint work inside a political party or association, participation in a public forum or symposium, and visits to a university to consult with scholars. Connections between intellectuals and workers took many forms, but in the data collected (and discussed in *Democracy's Voices*) one important type of variation made little or no difference in the impact of the ties. Friendship ties between intellectuals and workers, rooted in individual biographies, proved neither stronger nor weaker in their effects than more institutionally defined ties forged by joint work in a political or labor organization. The prevalence of interchange between intellectuals and workers proved predictive of the local leaders' predisposition toward globalizing discourse, but the genesis of those social connections in personal friendship or institutional work exerted no impact at all on the frequency with which local leaders articulated globalizing discourse. On the other hand, leaders who enjoyed *multiple* ties to intellectuals were even more inclined to articulate globalizing discourse—with its innovative framing of public issues—than leaders enjoying only one tie to an intellectual. Several ties thus matter more than one lone cross-boundary connection, but the difference between connections that emerge inside formal institutions such as political parties and others that take shape in the personal realm of friendship—or other forms of acquaintance enabled by the twists and turns in personal biographies—appears to be unimportant for our purposes.

Another dimension of variation, itself a matter of considerable theoretical significance, proves decisive. The leaders interviewed belonged to two historically quite different subcultures, one of them socialist and the other initially communist but now postcommunist. The quantitative evidence generated by my survey of local leaders shows that ties between intellectuals and workers exerted a thoroughly dissimilar effect in these two subcultures. Whereas within the postcommunist subculture local leaders tied to intellectuals were more than twice as likely as their unconnected counterparts to articulate globalizing discourse, among leaders of the socialist subculture ties to intellectuals exerted no meaningful impact on the prevalence of globalizing discourse. This large empirical disparity in the capacity of boundary-crossing social ties to foment civic discourse commensurate with the new challenges of a globalized world offers us a puzzle worthy of considerable attention: What determines whether boundary-crossing social ties will carry great power to remake civic life—or instead none at all? The implications of this question are of broad significance. The ties in question involve substantial effort on the part of those who expand their social connections and conversations to include people of dissimilar circumstances or group membership, but what determines whether efforts to build all sorts of boundary-crossing ties—from town-gown connections to conversations between musicians and miners or immigrant workers and their professional neighbors—will yield a large civic impact or none at all?

From the standpoint of a structural network analysis of social relations that theorizes social ties on the basis of their placement in a holistic pattern of direct and indirect network connections—or disconnections—among individuals, the ties between workers and intellectuals would appear to be similar in the two Spanish subcultures. In both instances, two quite separate social worlds are connected by the ties in question. A great deal of excellent scholarship, such as Ronald Burt's deeply insightful *Brokerage and Closure* (2005), provides a strong rationale for the structural approach to social ties, with its emphasis on ways in which any given dyadic tie takes on one or another significance as a function of its placement in larger network structures that—precisely through the accumulation of individual ties—may either isolate tightly knit social communities from one another or, instead, connect those communities to one another even if only through a very few structurally crucial boundary-crossing ties. That perspective offers a plausible approach for thinking about how intellectual-worker connections may influence collective outcomes, structurally connecting two social worlds that are largely isolated from one another. That structural perspective is not, however, the only possible prism for conceptualizing the substance and significance of social ties. Social networks and their structural composition actually rest on a large set of direct (and often two-way or dyadic) conversations and interactions (Mische 2003), a fact that offers an alternative perspective for understanding social connections (Fishman 2009): ties can be understood through a prism emphasizing the direct two-way, or dyadic, conversations and connections themselves, instead of the

large structural pattern of indirect connections to distant others highlighted by some network analysts. I argue that the purely structural analysis of social ties that searches for the key to their impact in the placement of any given tie within larger complex networks (of indirect connections to distant others) is useful for many purposes, but not for others. After all, in the Spanish industrial towns I studied, intellectual-worker ties played essentially the same structural or network role in the two subcultures, linking the disparate social worlds of intellectuals and workers to one another, but the ties made a large impact on civic discourse in one subculture and no impact in the other. Clearly something other than the network structure itself was at play.

I argue that this large disparity in the impact of intellectual-worker ties on the discourse of local leaders is strongly rooted in subculturally embedded meanings attached to the ties (Fishman 2004, 25–28, 145–66). Both closed-ended survey research findings and qualitative interviewing suggest that whereas the postcommunist subculture has seen intellectual-worker linkages as intrinsically meaningful and valuable, the socialist subculture has tended to view the ties in instrumental fashion as a means to an end. At the time of the field study, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) was firmly located in government in Madrid and a primary utility of the ties was to increase local leaders' access to distant office holders and institutions in the country's capital, Madrid. In this sense the ties performed the function of *brokerage*, potentially offering tangible forms of advantage. In contrast, in the postcommunist subculture the ties were conceptualized as intrinsically meaningful—as being valuable on their own even if they generated no concrete benefit external to the experience itself—and in that sense they can be understood to constitute *conversation*. In the socialist subculture the intellectual-worker linkages are best understood as representing *brokerage*, offering those involved access to distant sources of power, influence, and resources centered in the PSOE government in Madrid. The intellectual-worker ties that emerged among Spanish socialists are best understood by adopting the theoretical prism of scholars such as Burt, who view ties through their structural placement in large and complex networks; many of the participants in these ties understand them to constitute opportunities to gain access to distant sources of power or resources, precisely the perspective suggested by Burt's theory of brokerage. But for those who take the direct dyadic—and thus conversational—content of their ties to be intrinsically meaningful, as appears to be the case in the postcommunist subculture, the structuralist network gestalt proves quite unproductive. The power of the ties in such contexts is carried by their experiential effect, by conversation itself, rather than through distant resources and content newly made available by network connections.

Thus if boundary-crossing ties, such as connections between intellectuals and workers, are to generate powerful civic results, they must be embedded in cultures that afford them meaning and purpose. The socially rooted sense that conversation across societal boundaries is of value matters as much as the accumulation of social relations that traverse class or identity frontiers. To put the matter differently: the

meaning placed on social interaction helps to determine its effects, and that meaning is strongly conditioned by the subcultural milieu in which social ties are embedded. I take as especially significant the extent to which ties are seen by those involved as a means to an end—and in that sense as instrumentally useful—or as an end in and of themselves, which is to say intrinsically meaningful. Whether one spends time with given people because one sees the experience itself as enjoyable and meaningful or because one thinks that the connection to those people will likely prove useful for other purposes is the crux of the matter. I assume that both circumstances are quite common, but that the consequences of human ties seen in these two very different lights are quite dissimilar. This claim holds important implications of both a practical and theoretical nature, but before examining them it will be useful to briefly consider additional support for the claim.

The work of various scholars offers much evidence that the social ties that carry the greatest impact on civic behaviors are indeed those seen by their participants as intrinsically meaningful, as constituting *conversations* of value in and of themselves, just as this chapter argues. Paul Lichterman's important analysis of how some church groups that are engaged in civic endeavors manage to tie together socially diverse actors shows that the style or culture of group interaction decisively shapes the prospects for attaining the goal of civic togetherness (Lichterman 2005). Those church groups that approach their own interactions reflexively—valuing social connections and conversation as intrinsically meaningful and discussing how to improve them—were far more successful at generating civic togetherness than those groups that lacked a cultural commitment to the intrinsic value of their own interactions. In a similar vein, Sirianni and Friedland found that cultural change enabling a genuinely civic journalism rested heavily on participating journalists' capacity to *listen* and to their related willingness to take time to value direct conversation (Sirianni and Friedland 2001, 202–20). In another significant contribution, Eiko Ikegami's important historical analysis of cultural and aesthetic bonds in Japan—and their carryover relevance for the political sphere—argues that boundary-crossing ties that were valued on the basis of the cultural activity that constituted their very content ended up exerting a large impact on the network structure of the larger society and its political endeavors (Ikegami 2005). Ikegami shows that the Japanese stitched together social connections crossing hierarchical lines of division because participants valued their aesthetic activities and cultural interactions with diverse others as *intrinsically meaningful*. The expressive enjoyment of joint cultural activity rather than an instrumental search for useful connections to distant holders of power and resources remade network structures and thus the groundwork for broad-based political activity.

The power of network ties in all of these instances was unleashed by an approach to social connections that valued direct interactions among diverse actors as inherently meaningful and valuable. The power of network ties was quite real, but it was contingent on a culture of social interaction that valued human relations, expressiveness, and

interaction as an intrinsic good instead of viewing them instrumentally as a vehicle to construct “useful” contacts with distant others. Networks and social ties were able to forge an infrastructure supportive of civic life because they were constituted within a cultural framework valuing direct human interactions instead of conceptualizing them only as a means to other ends. This theorization of *how* network ties shape civic activity challenges some common approaches to networks such as those exclusively focused on the search for individual advantage, but it is strongly congruent with a central finding of established scholarship in this field, namely the claim that different types of ties generate different sorts of effects (Granovetter 1974; Wellman 1992; Centola and Macy 2007). Instrumentally conceived network ties, which conceptualize direct two-way interaction as useful only insofar as it affords access to distant resources, certainly also exert effects, but not—I argue—in the making of an innovative and high-quality civic life. The analytical “preference for selfish preferences” (Sanchez-Cuenca 2008) that characterizes a great deal of social science, that is to say the assumption that essentially all social life is driven by individual self-interest, fits some human action but not *all* human action given the importance of altruistic and other nonselfish motivations.

Thus social ties to diverse others help to nourish civic life by encouraging political actors to articulate a global discourse that addresses concrete local problems in ways that look well beyond their localities. But the ability of boundary-crossing ties to elicit this outcome is, in turn, a function of the culturally rooted beliefs and understandings that actors hold about their interactions. For ties to diverse others to realize their civic potential they must be enabled by a perspective that values interactions with others as an intrinsic good rather than simply as an instrumental “means to an end.” Various systems of belief and of meaning may accord that status to social interactions, but others do not and thus may lead actors to an understanding of their interactions that encourages them to pursue benefits accruing from their network-based access to distant others but to undervalue the potential benefits of their direct conversations and interactions with immediate others.

Conclusion: Tying Together the Significance of Networks and Narratives for Civic Innovation

I have sought to show that cultural phenomena such as narratives of national political events as well as relational phenomena such as networks and social ties can work together with the institutional infrastructure of politics to foster innovative and inclusionary forms of civic practice. This claim rests on the sort of multicausal and configurative analysis that constitutes Weberian methodology (Fishman 2007). My argument implies that those constellations that underpin innovative civic outcomes are sustained by viable forms of *complementarity*, convincingly embedded in national and local histories, rather than being copied from one or another external

model in template form. In the large project required to stitch together the synergy of networks, narratives, institutions, and other facilitating conditions for a lively and inclusive civic life, many different types of effort and creativity are surely needed. My contribution in these pages does not attempt to provide a comprehensive map for that large effort but instead seeks to underscore the breadth of the venues and forms of action that can contribute to civic innovation commensurate with the challenges of a globalized and highly unequal contemporary context. Despite the political and institutional nature of much that needs to be done to enliven and renew civic life, this chapter has identified meaningful and important contributions that can be made by those who largely eschew specialized or explicitly political work. My analysis highlights the significance of the selection of others with whom one speaks and associates—the choice of one’s friendships and social ties—and the importance of the stories one tells or, better yet, elaborates. Cultural and associative work—including conversation itself—can make a huge contribution to enabling a country’s civic life. The patience to listen—an essential part of conversation—and both the energy and expressive imagination needed to construct compelling narratives, play an enormous role in the successful civic experiences I have related. The ability of civic-minded political actors on the Iberian Peninsula to construct new ways to address the global scale of contemporary challenges and to incorporate the poor into the public square offer us hope that much can be done and accomplished not only by redesigning institutions but also by applying the best civic spirit to our associative, conversational, and cultural efforts.

Notes

1. Fieldnotes, Lisbon, January and April 2006.
2. Javier Baeza, interviews.
3. The exact phrase in Spanish was “*Por nuestro futuro, no al cierre.*” This and other elements of the story of the Asturian coal valleys are related in detail in Fishman (2004).
4. Fieldnotes, Lisbon, April 23, 2004.
5. The complete statement by Oliveira de Silva, the leader of the center-right PSD in Maia, can be found at www.scribd.com/doc/38862/Discurso-evocativo-do-25-de-Abril Accessed on May 22, 2009.
6. Timoteo Macedo, interviews, Lisbon, April 27, 2006; February 7, 2008; June 20, 2008; January 12, 2009.
7. Joao Ferrao, interview, Lisbon, January 13, 2009.
8. I am grateful to Jose Soeiro for making available the full text of his remarks.
9. Timoteo Macedo, interviews.
10. Pedro Soares, interview, Lisbon, January 14, 2009.
11. Many of the political posters of the revolutionary period are reproduced in a volume published by a Lisbon daily newspaper on the revolution’s thirtieth anniversary in 2004 (Diário de Notícias 2004).

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