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**ARTICLE**

# Archipelagic geographies, civil society, and global development

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**Abstract**

Civil society is seen as a key actor within and for global development. However, spatial representations of civil society within the global development landscape are dominated by scale, place, and verticality, neglecting more relational understandings of civic participation. Engaging with archipelagic thinking, drawn from the work of Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and others, this paper makes a case for thinking about civil society through archipelagic relational ontologies. By employing an archipelagic lens to empirical material from research with civil society groups in Barbados and Grenada, the paper explores the relational creativity and metamorphic transformations that are part of civil society action. Utilising an archipelagic lens to think about civil society organising emphasises how civil society activity is produced, performed, and operationalised through creative relational arrangements that span (and contest) dominant spatial categories. For civil society actors this ‘metamorphic creativity’ – the crafting of these relations, the bringing together of ‘bits and pieces’, and the transforming and reworking of these relations to produce new forms and spaces of civic activity – is key to sustaining civil society and their own civic identities. This illustrates the creative, yet fragile nature of civil society, concluding that through these metamorphic relations civil society actors foster new civic spaces and identities, yet civil society simultaneously may also be constituted through, and potentially (re)produce (new) hierarchies of power.

**KEYWORDS**

archipelagic geographies, civil society, global development, The Caribbean

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Our ability to really carry out programmes is because of our network which we have built up over the last 38 years. A vast network of friends, well-wishers and supporters...

(Lincoln, founder, CSO in Barbados, 23 November 2015)

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Civil society is recognised as one of the most ambiguous and debated terms within political thought. Within Eurocentric discourses it is often framed as a space in which ‘citizens can organise, debate and act’ situated between the market, the family, and the state (Buyse, 2018, p. 967). Civil society has become a key arena within the global development landscape. In this context civil society, particularly in reference to the global South, has (problematically) come to be associated with ‘formal NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and CSOs [civil society organisations], often aid- or foreign-funded, involved in service delivery or undertaking a “watchdog” function by holding government and other actors to account’ (Hossein et al., 2019, p. 9). While there are multiple critiques of this narrow conceptualisation of civil society (see for example, Lewis, 2002; Obadare, 2012) it is this version of civil society as it is constructed within the global development sphere on which this paper focuses. As Banks, Hulme & Edwards comment, ‘there is a need to be careful to distinguish between NGOs and other civil society actors, such as labour unions or social movements which act in, and are affected by, the politics of development in different ways’ (2015, p. 708).

While there is a long global history of diverse forms of associational life, non-governmental actors gained momentum in the global development context in the 1960s and 1970s (O’Sullivan, 2021). The idea of civil society came to the fore in the early 1990s in response to liberal democratising and market liberalising reforms in the global South, with civil society building an integral part of the World Bank’s good governance agenda (Banks et al., 2015). While much has been written about civil society’s effectiveness in the development context, this paper’s primary objective is to (re)examine the spatialities of civil society within the global development landscape, and the practices, materialities, and power imbalances these spatialities engender. The paper begins by considering how civil society in this context has been spatialised to date, detailing the dominance of scale and place within global policy templates. The paper goes on to argue that relational ontologies, in particular archipelagic thinking and the relational creativity accentuated by it, go beyond these positions to engage in the diverse relationalities embedded in civil society organising.

The paper proceeds by applying an archipelagic lens to empirical material from research with civil society groups from the Caribbean islands of Grenada and Barbados, and through this analytic articulates the relations that constitute civil society, what these relations do to the material and socio-spatial practices of civil society groups, and the geographies of these relations – in essence arguing that civil society organising is enhanced, shaped, and even made possible through myriad relationalities. This echoes existing geographical literature on the relationalities of social movements and contentious politics. However, this paper adds to geographical scholarship on civil society by employing an archipelagic lens to emphasise the relational creativity and metamorphic transformations that are part of civil society action. Compared with other relational framings, archipelagic thinking pays greater attention to the creative invention and metamorphic potential of relations. Utilising an archipelagic lens to think about civil society organising emphasises how civil society activity is produced, performed, and operationalised through creative relational arrangements that span (and contest) dominant spatial categories. For civil society actors, this ‘creativity’ – the crafting of these relations, the bringing together of ‘bits and pieces’, whether social, material, or financial, and the transforming and reworking of these relations to produce new forms and spaces of civic activity are key to sustaining civil society and their civic identities. Civil society actors then engage in processes of ‘archipelagic metamorphoses’ within their work, dynamically bringing together spatially disparate relations and fragments to transform and create new civic spaces and new forms of power and identity through which they can engage. This illustrates the creative, yet fragile nature of civil society, concluding that while civil society actors foster new civic spaces and identities through these metamorphic relations, civil society simultaneously represents a space that is constituted through, and potentially (re)produces (new) hierarchies of power. By engaging with archipelagic thinking and the idea of archipelagic metamorphosis, this paper advances thinking on the relational geographies of civic engagement and the ways in which relations can produce transformative possibilities for contemporary civil society.

## 2 | CIVIL SOCIETY, GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

The spatialities of civil society within the global development landscape have been dominated by scalar hierarchies and vertical donor/recipient relations. This contrasts with the relational thinking advanced in geography (and other disciplines) to explore wider forms of civil society and civic participation. This section will examine these contrasts, beginning with the spatialities of civil society within the global development context.

The politics, governance, and monetary support of the global development industry<sup>1</sup> provided the conceptual drivers and financial means to re-shape the civil society sector in the global South (Banks et al., 2015). Within the global development context, this was founded on (and reproduced) a dominant spatial imaginary of civil society, with Mercer and Green (2013)

describing a global policy template for civil society comprised of formalised organisations separated into local, national, and regional civil society supported by the international donor community. This version of civil society is bound to its assigned scale, resisting attempts to conceive of civil society as something that can work beyond or through such boundaries. These scalar models dictate the scope of power and practice of CSOs, producing a topography of stacked layers, which are then embedded within the routinised practices and relations of civil society (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Leitner et al., 2008). A key site is the 'local', whose situatedness provides comparative advantage, imagined through groups' abilities to foster community participation in the context of increasing emphasis on decentralisation and localisation (Banks et al., 2015; Mercer & Green, 2013). While civil society in global development discourse has been associated with these limited spatialities (for critiques, see Mamdani, 1996; Lewis, 2002; Obadare, 2012), geographical interest in wider forms of civil society – for example, contentious politics, transnational activism and advocacy, and translocal movements – has produced a rich body of work on the varied spatialities of civic action. It is to this body of work that this paper will now turn.

Geographical attention to social and political change has been integral in articulating the relational and spatial nature of such activities, with geographers emphasising how social and political change is constructed through the formation, maintenance, and breakdown of different relationships that transcend normative boundaries and borders (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Magdahl, 2022; Massey, 2005). Relational philosophies and vocabularies emphasise flattened ontologies – networks, assemblages, convergence, and entanglements – which challenge binary modes of thinking, hierarchies, and verticalities. As Anderson and McFarlane comment, '[they] seek to blur the divisions of social-material, near-far, structure-agency' (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 124; Marston et al., 2005; Springer, 2014). Relations are understood as generative, producing a sense of impermanence, of open-endedness, of being 'thrown together', of something that is continually in flux (Anderson, 2008; Massey, 2005). Relational thinking also accentuates the temporally shifting coming together and dissolution of different parts, encouraging a politics that engages with 'the existence of the multiple processes of co-existence' (Anderson, 2008, p. 232) and one which asks questions about the many historical and contemporary ties (and absences) between geographically disparate people, places, and political struggles (Davies, 2012; Featherstone, 2008; Massey, 2005; McFarlane, 2009).

Of particular relevance here is the work relational thinking does to challenge the local/global binary associated with social activism (Featherstone, 2008; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Kinkaid, 2019). Highlighting the interconnectivity of social and political change, relationally focused accounts detail how progressive agendas can be made by incorporating ideas from further afield, with political action tied to broader aspects of global change and not solely conducted through bounded institutions or immobile practices (Davies, 2012; Featherstone, 2008; Kothari, 2012; Martin & Miller, 2003; Massey, 2005; McFarlane, 2009; Routledge, 2008). This moves politics away from being something that exists in a particular place to a focus on the intertwined and unequal influences that configure our world. While emphasising connections across space, relational theorising has also detailed the importance of specific sites of action within broader spatial formations, articulating a tension between a focus on relations and the agency, autonomy, and capacities of sites themselves (Woods et al., 2021). Routledge (2008), for example, uses the transnational Peoples' Global Action movement to develop the idea of convergence spaces to understand these global networks as place-based yet not place-bounded. Relational theorising then emphasises the relations and connections integral to political and social struggles, without losing the relevance of more situated sites of action and more localised forms of global struggles (Cumbers et al., 2008; Massey, 2005; Miller & Nicholls, 2013; Woods et al., 2021).

Geographers have also made important contributions to thinking about sites of power and agency and how these are distributed through and across spatial formations. While power and agency can be thought of as diffused across such formations, scholarship has articulated how human and other-than-human actors and materials can become differentially positioned within such formations and how intersecting social inequalities can shape spatial arrangements (Cumbers et al., 2008; Hope, 2021; McFarlane, 2009; Müller, 2015; Routledge, 2008). Attention to both circulations and concentrations of power shows how focal points of power are produced, how power is sustained, and the (im)mobilities of such power (Featherstone, 2015; McFarlane, 2009). Notions of hubs, apexes, and nodes point to concentrations of power and agency within spatial formations. Cumbers et al. (2008), for example, describe 'imagineers' as key individuals for sustaining global justice networks, embodying the social relations through which the network mobilises its communicative, financial, and knowledge-based resources across geographic space. While detailing these inequities of power, perhaps most importantly relational thinking articulates the ways in which these relations are generative of (new) forms of power and agency that can challenge pre-existing arrangements and spatial categories (Featherstone, 2008, 2015, 2021; Kinkaid, 2019).

The relational geographies of political and social change challenge global/local binaries, articulate the fluidity of social relations within political organising, and consider how agency and power are distributed through collective

formations (Davies, 2012; Featherstone, 2008; Leitner et al., 2008). This interest in the spatialisation of the political also attends to the arrangements through which change may occur, such as networks, assemblages, and convergences, with these theorisations used to articulate the fluid, unsettled nature of such formations and the importance of processes of rupture, diffusion, and coherence, yet also rootedness, for understanding political action (Davies, 2012; McFarlane, 2009; Routledge, 2008). This paper will now move on to consider another strand of relational theorising, that of archipelagic thinking, and its utility in the context of political, social, and civic action.

### 3 | ARCHIPELAGIC THINKING AND GEOGRAPHIES OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As detailed above, geographical engagement with broadly defined civil society has produced a significant body of work on the varied spatialities of social and political change. Drawn from and perhaps particularly relevant for engagement with islands, archipelagic thinking embodies the relational, with islands seen as ‘important spaces for varying expressions of relational entanglements’ (Pugh & Chandler, 2021, p. 5). Through an archipelagic lens, islands are conceptualised through lines of connectivity and relations (Davies, 2017; Pugh, 2016; Stephens & San Martínez, 2020), with Chandler & Pugh commenting: ‘islands are localised sites of relational entanglements’ (Chandler & Pugh, 2021, p. 4). Drawing heavily of the work of Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite, among others, archipelagic thinking encourages epistemologies that focus on ruptures, emerging relations, connections, and transformations. This produces three key areas of thought: first, destabilising dominant geographical categories; second, the importance of island-to-island relations; and finally, islands as sites of creativity and metamorphosis. This final point, the creativity embodied in archipelagic thinking, is crucial here, with synthesis, transformation, merging, and inventiveness all key to archipelagic thought, with Glissant, for example thinking of the Caribbean as ‘a place of encounter and connivance’ and creolisation through ‘a limitless métissage’, which can be understood ‘as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences’ (1997, p. 33,34). Archipelagic thinking then nuances and brings to the fore the metamorphic potentialities created through relations (Pugh, 2013).

As with the spatial turn in wider geographical scholarship, relational thinking within island studies challenges dominant, and often binary, geographical categories such as global/local, core/periphery, and land/sea. Of particular concern to archipelagic thinking is disrupting the mainland/island dualism, where islands are presumed to be isolated, insular, peripheral, and separate from the mainland, yet simultaneously embedded, often in a dependent form, in world systems (Baldacchino, 2020; Pugh, 2016; Stratford et al., 2011). Islands are traditionally positioned as enclosed spaces (DeLoughrey, 2013), bordered (Mountz, 2011; Sheller, 2013), and bounded (Baldacchino & Clark, 2013), yet archipelagic thinking destabilises the paradoxical and dualistic nature of previous island theorising, emphasising the relations through which islands are co-constructed. As Grydehøj & Casagrande comment, ‘[you] cannot abstract islands ... from the islanders and the mainlanders, who dream of one another’s lives’ (2019, p. 57). Islands are then co-constructed through their diverse relations with the mainland and with other islands. As Nimführ and Otto (2020) contend, islands can be theorised as nodal points within scalar flows, emphasising their ‘relational rootedness’ (Baldacchino, 2020; Hong, 2017; Pugh, 2016, p. 1054). Glissant (1997) accentuates the connectivity of islands, seeing the Caribbean as a region that is continually being (re)produced through encounters, with the idea of islands as isolated intimately connected with Western dominance and the violence of Empire. Archipelagic thinking then has emancipatory potential (Glissant, 1997; Stephens & San Martínez, 2020; Stratford, 2013).

An archipelagic lens destabilises binary categories such as island/mainland by emphasising the flows, movements, and connections that co-construct islands as places. Within this wider relationality, archipelagic thinking focuses on the nature and importance of island-to-island connections. Benítez-Rojo (1997) develops the idea of repeating islands to give a sense of the possibilities about thinking of collective island-to-island relations, particularly in reference to colonial rule in the Caribbean. Archipelagic thinking goes into further detail articulating the idea of island-to-island relations not only through repetition but also multiplicity, of spaces of interconnections (Stratford et al., 2011). As de Certeau comments, ‘What the map cuts up, the story cuts across’ (de Certeau, 1988, p. 129, cited in Baldacchino & Tsai, 2014). Archipelagic thinking expresses not only the coming together of fragments and the relations between them, but also how the togetherness of these parts become collectively significant because of their relations to each other (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2019; Stratford et al., 2011). Baldacchino and Tsai (2014), for example, interrogate the re-imagining of Taiwan as an archipelago, contending that there is a shift towards horizontal island-to-island relations in the three islands of Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu, which articulates a shared political narrative (often in opposition to the central administration) and foregrounds

awareness of islanders' rights. A key question for archipelagic thinking then is 'how do islanders perform their identity in terms of island–island relations rather than, and apart from, island–mainland interactions?' (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 124).

An archipelagic lens magnifies island-to-island connectivity and the potentiality of these entanglements. This sense of creativity and coming together is also articulated in the metamorphic potential of the archipelago. Fragmentary rupture, transformation, and metamorphosis is explored by Derek Walcott in the lecture he gave following his Nobel Prize in 1992. He opens by detailing how he observed a performance of *Ramleela*, a dramatisation of the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, being performed in the village of Felicity in Trinidad. He describes how the performance was not one that embodied mimicry of India or grief for the loss of a past, but rather represented a creative and generative transformation producing something beyond its original. He articulates: 'Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape' (Walcott, 1992, n.p.). Pugh draws on this idea of fragmentary metamorphosis to examine the Barbados Landship as a dance performance which draws on island, sea, and ship relationalities to become 'the essence of Barbados and the Caribbean archipelago' (2016, p. 1050). The Landship is then emblematic of the generative relationality and creativity that constitutes Barbados, as Pugh comments: 'For Captain Watson and other Landship members interviewed "the Landship is the product of Africa, England, the ship, the sea – but it is Barbados!"' (2016, p. 1053). This bringing together expresses the 'accumulation of sediments' to create or transform something, the search for a distinctive yet relational island culture, and it is this emphasis on generative creativity that archipelagic thinking adds to the relational turn in human geography (Glissant, 1997, p. 33; cited in Pugh, 2016, p. 1053).

Archipelagic thinking emphasises the relevance of island-to-island relations and destabilises mainland/island dualisms. There are then natural affinities with theories of assemblage and networks, but archipelagic thinking also carefully nurtures the idea of metamorphosis, emphasising the materialisation of vital forms and the ability to 'create transformations of inheritances into something new' (Pugh, 2013, p. 20). This is the crux of archipelagic thought, connecting past and present (and future), and emphasising the creativity of archipelagic relations to craft something new out of fragments, ruptures, and relations. Archipelagic thinking is about relationality but also about the transformative potentials of these relations as they reshape (and emancipate) histories and geographies. As detailed in section 2, civil society organising within the global development context tends to be understood through limited geospatial imaginaries, yet geographical attention to wider civic engagement, often inspired by relational ontologies, has detailed the varied and generative nature of the spatialities of political and social change. Archipelagic thinking has encouraged an understanding of (predominantly) islands that foregrounds island-to-island relations and metamorphic transformations. The remainder of this paper is concerned with what applying an archipelagic lens to thinking about the spatialities of civil society in the global development context may highlight.

#### 4 | METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT: CIVIL SOCIETY IN BARBADOS AND GRENADA

Civil society is an important facet of social, civic, and political life in the Caribbean, with contemporary associational life shaped by historical forms of organising and more recently through engagement with the global development industry (Hinds-Harrison, 2014; Williams-Pulfer, 2016). Following independence struggles across the region, the civil society sector was stimulated by injections of funds from international donors in the 1970s and 1980s (Webson, 2010). The contemporary civil society sector in Barbados and Grenada comprises of a diverse number of groups and individuals, with varying structures, working practices, financial support, and ideologies. Many groups are community based, with some working at national and regional scale, or advocating for the sector more widely. These are accompanied by a few international NGOs, often working through local groups. The European Commission, through the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and its associated funding mechanisms, developed Non-State Actors panels in both Barbados and Grenada. These panels work at a national level and aim to promote civil society engagement in national development and policy dialogue (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Commission and its Member States, 2017). In Grenada, the Committee of Social Partners also provides civil society with a national level forum to advocate for policy change and engage in dialogue with the state. This then reflects aspects of the global policy template described in section 2, particularly donor-supported regional and national umbrella civil society groups.

The research from which this paper is drawn focused on the lived experiences of people who worked for, volunteered with, or were activists within self-defined civil society organisations in Barbados and Grenada. This paper is based on engagement with representatives from 40 civil society organisations in Barbados and Grenada between September 2015

and April 2016. The project included in-depth work with seven case study organisations (four in Barbados and three in Grenada) incorporating repeat interviewing and sustained participant observation. Alongside these, semi-structured interviews were conducted with civil society actors from a wider selection of civil society groups in both countries (16 interviews with representatives from 14 groups in Barbados and 19 interviews with representatives of 19 organisations in Grenada). These interviews were sometimes accompanied by participant observation and informal conversations with civil society allies. Relevant groups were selected using a purposive sampling method via internet databases, Facebook, newspapers, and snowball sampling of interviewees. The research participants were predominantly key figures within their organisation, and pseudonyms have been used in this paper. The interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed by the author, with data coded and analysed manually.

## 5 | AN ARCHIPELAGIC LENS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

While spatially bounded representations of civil society are dominant within global development discourse, this section, using empirical material from research with civil society in Barbados and Grenada, highlights the archipelagic relationalities that constitute civil society organising, and interrogates how the social and material practices of civil society are made and remade through these archipelagic relations. The empirical material presented here articulates the creativity required for civil society organising, the need to foster new relations to transform civic space, the (unknown) potentialities of these relations and the desire to transform ‘past’ experiences into something new.

### 5.1 | Civil society as flows of people, ideas, and materials

Cindy runs a non-profit organisation in Grenada, which aims to support the welfare of cocoa farmers and organic cocoa growing. While embodying many characteristics that are often ascribed to ‘local’ civil society within the global development lexicon, Cindy’s organisation, as others, is constructed through flows of people, ideas, and materials that stretch across geographical categories. This is particularly noticeable through the development of her volunteer tourism programme.<sup>2</sup> Cindy explained the benefits voluntourism had brought to her organisation, and how the volunteers had worked alongside her colleague Lucy:

Oh [voluntourism], that’s been great. ...We had six French pastry chefs who contacted us. They wanted to [come] because they work with chocolate so much, they wanted to see where it comes from. We didn’t make that much because it was so intense with six people, but probably \$1000. [Lucy] always thinks they’re going to pick the cocoa, she said it was like babysitting, they’d run over and say [Lucy] ‘how’s this pod’ and she’d be like ‘just crack it open and keep going’. If we go in with that mentality, [that] we’re not really going to get a lot of work out of it ... And also, if they go back, the word of mouth that’s great ... Having run a business, we built our business on word of mouth and that’s so important, it really is.

(Cindy, founder, CSO in Grenada, 13 February 2016)

In articulating the importance of the voluntourist relations, Cindy reflects the traditional dualistic approach to mainland and island, commenting on the separation between the two, differentiating the island of Grenada where ‘chocolate comes from’ with the French pastry chefs, who she and Lucy have to ‘babysit’. Yet she also details the flows and relations between the two as she describes how the pastry chefs bring with them financial and social resources to support (and generate) her civic organising. Cindy talks about how ‘when they go back’ the pastry chefs will take their experiences and knowledge of her civic work with them, which she hopes will foster further engagement and support for her work, increasing the group’s contacts outside of Grenada and raise awareness of their concerns. Cindy hopes that these connections will shape (and strengthen) her civic organising in the future, with the French pastry chefs telling others about her work. She articulates how civil society organising in Grenada is being constructed through the coming together of geographically disparate flows and relations. There is also the possibility that the civic arena in France is being reshaped by the pastry chefs’ experiences in Grenada, which is certainly something that Cindy is hoping for. Cindy’s civic activity is then the product of flows of people, ideas, and materials which span geographical borders, with civic engagement in geographically disparate places being co-constructed through these relations.

The importance of flows of people, materials, knowledge, and ideas for civil society organising in the Caribbean was also apparent in connections with members of the diaspora. In my second interview with Lisa, the founder of a Barbadian organisation focusing on gender equality, she called her sister Bernice, who was living in New Jersey, and put her on speakerphone. Lisa had told me previously that Bernice was the secretary for the organisation and thought it might be useful for me to speak to her myself. We launched into a three-way conversation about the organisation, and Bernice's role:

For me the role I played was secretary, so I drafted letters for her, sent out emails, now I do the event coordinating. I send out flyers, letters, any graphic work and I still help co-ordinate the event and they do the physical execution.

Asked about trying to do all of this from New Jersey, Bernice replied:

It's not hard to do just the theoretical part, I lack being able to do the physical, being fully hands on unless I'm there. Because most things I want to participate in, with a speaker, and I don't get to hear what they say in that moment, being there to participate, you know the entire atmosphere, what you've put so much work and energy into come alive.

Our conversation continued to what she thought she brought to the organisation:

Well marketing skills [laughs] definitely all of them, just being, and what I think I has been the help that I think I bring specifically [is] that I grew up in Barbados, I've lived in Canada, I'm now working in New Jersey. It's that interaction with so many different cultures. Sometimes we have to break outside of what we know and try another way ... and we've been calling on that. In Barbados we do this and the greatest hope is you can do this [something different].

(Conversation with Lisa and Bernice, founders, CSO in Barbados, 12 November 2015)

Bernice articulates not only how she is a (sometimes partial) part of the organisational life of Lisa's group, but also how she feels she is helping to foster new civic subjectivities and spaces by being outside of Barbados. She feels that living overseas has given her a different perspective on what gender equality might mean and sees her work within civil society as helping to develop alternative ways of being for other women who remain in Barbados. She speaks of her diasporic connections, of growing up in Barbados but moving away, to fantasise about a different future for women in Barbados. These diasporic relationalities, as Bernice and Lisa explain, support their civic organising in Barbados. With longstanding connections to North America, Canada, and the United Kingdom, the latter embedded in the patterns and histories of enslavement, colonialism, and decolonisation, civil society relations often operate along similar grooves, with other civil society activists describing how they focused their energies on building connections with people living in New York, Toronto, or London. Some civil society groups work intensely to establish these connections, for example Trevor, the founder of a Grenadian civil society group, articulated his desire to develop connections in New York and in the UK with people of Grenadian heritage. Whilst articulated to me as important resources that drive civil society, these connections may also reflect the potential power imbalances between diasporic communities and civil society groups, with those in the diaspora potentially having greater influence than civil society groups 'on the ground', and driving inequalities between civil society groups, locales, and campaigns (Lamba-Nieves, 2018). This emphasis on the importance of 'off-island' relations for civil society organising reflects a civic space that is co-constructed relationally through multiple flows and connections. Civil society is not then fixed 'in place', but its actions and practices are the product of relations between mobile people, ideas, and materials, with civil society scholarship needing to pay attention to their practices, processes, and entanglements of power.

There is a fluidity about these connections, they are made, then broken, and sometimes remade, reliant on mobilities of human and non-human materials. Flows and connections outside of the borders of the nation state, whether with members of the diaspora or with international volunteers help to support certain aspects of civil society, for some civil society groups, nurturing civil society activists' abilities to foster new civic and political identities and enabling them to continue to create opportunities to experiment with new ways of being and living. While often articulated as resources, these relations also have the potential to restrict civil society activity, as it becomes reliant on relations in which power is disbursed unevenly between different actors. These relations are entangled with the uneven geographies of Grenada and Barbados' positioning in a global political economy in which they are marginalised and made vulnerable. While to some extent destabilising the relevance of traditional geographical categories such as mainland/island or core/periphery in theorising civil society organising, the



geographies of these relations articulate the dominance of the global North (and often ‘mainlands’) as avenues of support in sustaining civil society groups in Grenada and Barbados, and how relations often work through global cities such as New York or London. While these relations help us to understand civil society organising as not contained within a particular locale, rather as the product of mobile flows and relations, they are situated in and can reproduce historical and contemporary geographical power relations in which the Caribbean is precariously positioned.

## 5.2 | Island-to-island relations

Alongside the flows and connections that traverse (and destabilise) geographical categories, civil society activists also articulated the importance of relations between islands in the Caribbean, less so with reference to material or financial support, but through the sharing of experiences and a camaraderie with civil society activists based on other islands. This was evident in my conversation with Keith, who founded an organic growing movement in Grenada and explained to me the importance of mutual relations with fellow organic growers across the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica, to help him move towards his vision:

I am a member of the Jamaica organisation right now, but we do have contact as you know sister organisations you know Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Dominica, we keep in touch ... I am in contact with Jamaica, really organically linked.

When I asked him more about his connections with Jamaica, Keith replied:

Let's start with technical information, they are trying things over there that work, they tell you this is working in Jamaica so you try it in Grenada to see if it works right. So, some solutions to problems that are common across the region, one organisation may find the solution and pass it around. Even how they organise their programme could help you in strategising your programme ... They have a very good link with the universities in the States, so they have a lot of resources you know knowledge-based resources that come down. So, we're trying to see if through SGU [Saint George's University in Grenada] ... From that you get workshops, a lot of time they have webinars and I follow their webinars and I learn a lot.

In the case of Jamaica, they are getting tons and tons of knowledge, it is pouring in from different sources, universities, farmers, and so on – they're building much faster than us in fact ... I want to do the same here, use these projects as springboard projects, they wouldn't jump very far but again these little projects can produce knowledge. And market is a big thing ... In Jamaica the organic movement is integrally linked with the tourism industry so they have a good market ... There's an organic market every Friday, every Friday in the Chinese association ground so you can go and get your organic produce, all in a line you know. It's very well organised.

(Keith, founder, CSO in Grenada, 23 February 2016)

The knowledge that flows through these relations seems key to the development of Keith's organisation and his plans for organic growing in Grenada. He articulates the contours of Jamaica's links with universities in the States and the trickle-down effect he feels this knowledge can have towards the movement in Grenada. He also sees his Jamaican counterparts as sources of ideas for how to make organic agriculture work in island contexts – for him, the organic movement in Jamaica seemed to be a vision for how the movement could operate in Grenada. The importance of sharing visions and models of working between islands was echoed by Sherry, the director of a CSO in Grenada working to preserve sea turtles and marine ecology:

Our whole set up was based on Trinidad's. [They] have been around a long time and they're like the most established, they have large populations [of sea turtles]. What they do is amazing, and it would be great of it could just be uplifted and brought here. A lot of what we do is based on what they do. Our guys went over there initially to see how it worked...

(Sherry, director, CSO in Grenada, 15 February 2016)

Other civil society activists also spoke of the importance of island-to-island relations within Caribbean civil society, with Pam, the founder of a CSO in Grenada, articulating her sadness at what she perceived as the loss of these

connections, as civil society has become more atomised. She explained how regional civil society meetings were integral to her growth as an activist, describing them as 'a university without walls', the loss of which she attributed to changes in funding and human capacity (Pam, founder of a CSO in Grenada, 1 February 2016). It is the contemporary absence of the solidarities forged by island-to-island relations that Pam spoke of, and the possibilities that these relations offered for progressive politics in the region that was integral to her own activism. In contrast to this absence, another participant, Kim, the founder of a CSO in Barbados working on children's literacy, described how developing connections with other islands was driving her work. Contrary to Keith, whose connections are primarily online, she recounted experiences of moving between islands to work with other CSOs and how this helped her develop not only her own ideas but also civil society activity on other islands, illustrating the importance of island-to-island mobility for civil society organising. Initially Kim was approached by the Dominican Minister for Economics, who invited her to Dominica after hearing her speak at an event in Barbados:

The whole [library] service [in Dominica] grew in a building that was donated by the same person who donated our old buildings, so we say well what a historical connection and he told me point blank you need to come to Dominica. I took him up on that of course ... it was him who realised the value and potential of this NGO and said no we're not just separated by ocean, our historical background was the same, so if you work in Barbados, you must be able to work in Dominica.

On her visit to Dominica, Kim spoke to librarians, and voluntary and business associations, and toured different libraries around the island:

There's so many things that are similar and that's when I realised this template what we're striving for here in Barbados is not unique just to Barbados and perhaps can be applicable to other islands.

Other trips to Antigua, St Vincent, and Guyana followed, with Kim developing her vision from one which focused on Barbados to one which centred the wider Caribbean and provided her with ideas for her own work:

It made me think if we gathered together and looked at the template of the social change we're looking at for Barbados and then you applied that to Dominica and Antigua, you understand it's a whole new Caribbean a whole new crop of politicians, a whole new crop of creative individuals, a whole new crop of teachers that would be plugged in ... We also found NGOs who were kind of trying to do the same work and so it was a matter of sharing the projects, this is what worked well, listening to how they do things and they're even more artistically minded than we are, which is wonderful.

(Kim, founder, CSO in Barbados, 12 December 2015)

Conversations with Keith, Pam, Sherry, and Kim show the relevance of shared experiences and camaraderie for the development of civil society activities. They show how the identities of civil society actors are formed through island-to-island relations, how civil society organising in Barbados and Grenada is shaped by social relations made between and through islands, and how civil society activity has the potential to reshape some of these island-to-island connections. The conversation between Kim and the Dominican Minister for Economics shows how these island-to-island connections are shaped by historical and contemporary (post-colonial) relations, with the shared architectural infrastructures providing a platform for the sharing of ideas. Yet these more optimistic regional dynamics are fragile, with other civil society actors I spoke to, in similar way to Pam, remarking on the difficulties of creating cross-island movements, for example due to poor transport links, tensions between actors on each island, or differing priorities. As Grenade comments, relations in the Caribbean 'are haunted by historical ghosts, compromised by conditions of vulnerability, poverty and insecurity, undermined by political will and stymied by the absence of common institutions' (Grenade, 2011, p. 4). These island-to-island relations remain embedded in global and regional hierarchies, with Jamaica and its connections to universities in the United States important for Keith. While destabilising dominant North-South dynamics, these relations between islands also (re)produce particular hierarchies of power, with Kim from Barbados driving the development of literacy programmes across other small Eastern Caribbean states and Keith and Sherry from Grenada keen to look to larger islands, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago respectively, for models of civil society activity. In this context this appears to be a way of sustaining resources and enhancing the prospect of success, making prolonged civic engagement more likely. Civil society activity between and through islands shapes

political, social, and civic identities on individual islands and is important for pushing for social change across the wider Caribbean. The impact of this camaraderie goes beyond the activists themselves, to foster changes in civil society and opportunities for civic engagement. Encounters between civil society groups across islands can then be generative of new ideas, and as Pam commented the loss of such encounters is also shaping civic subjectivities.

### 5.3 | Transforming and remaking the civil society landscape

While so far this paper has concentrated on the flows and connections that are generative of civil society organising in Barbados and Grenada, for some civil society activists these relationalities provide a space for reflexivity, contestation, and remaking. Alyson runs a community organisation based in Grenada and, over the course of three interviews at her house, she shared with me her frustration at civil society's position within the global development industry, directly challenging the verticality of donor–civil society relations. She spoke of her dissatisfaction with international donors and their support for civil society in the global South. Drawing comparisons between her own lifestyle and those of international NGO workers, Alyson spoke of how the wealth inequalities between global development workers from the North and South 'is totally messed up'. Comparing the differences, she commented:

I've had more eviction notices from rented houses than you wouldn't believe, [my friend] had to give me money for rent, help out for the kids in school. You know, I often think the [International NGOs] that are here they can pay for the schooling and stuff [of INGO workers' children] and I get a note from the teacher saying I owed them \$250 for the term and my daughter won't be allowed back to school. The irony of life began to kick me. This is messed up; this is totally messed up.

Alyson also spoke of the injustices she perceived in the ways international donor money is structured and administered, articulating the separateness and distance of international organisations and those, like her, who 'live(s) and breathe(s) the people they are doing it for':

Of donor money, certainly forty to seventy-five percent of it is spent on the administration at the top. By the time it gets down to us we have twenty-five percent to spread around. You know the office structure alone on the UNDP or the EU office can feed so many people all over the world. So much of it has gone into what they call doing accountability and policy making. This stuff is all airy-fairy paperwork because the realities on the ground will not be realised whatever kind of policy you have ... unless it lives and breathes the people they are doing it for.

(Alyson, founder, CSO in Grenada, 5 February 2016)

Alyson recounted an experience of having to temporarily stop implementing her project to complete a financial report. While sat at her computer, two volunteers, who had walked in off the street, worked on the project, taking it further than she had imagined, without any funding. Alyson felt the limitations of being anchored to donor agencies, telling me she would rather solicit the assistance of volunteers and manage organisational finances through other methods, such as crowdsourcing. Alyson spoke with hopefulness about not being dependent on donor funding and the opportunities that would arise from this. These relations and the frustrations (and hope) engendered within them motivated Alyson to operate her own organisation in a different way.

Alyson is then reflecting on, and contesting, the historical and contemporary geographies and imbalances that shape her civil society activity. She articulates the inequalities that these relations engender, drawing particularly on the differences between her children and the children of INGO workers. The inequalities between North and South (and donor and NGO) are articulated at a personal, domestic level in the ways in which their children are schooled. Other participants I spoke with reflected on how the international donor model reinforces neo-colonial relations and sustains inequalities, and how damaging this can be to community trust and confidence. Pip, a civil society activist in Grenada, also spoke of the damaging nature of his relations with global spaces. He recounted to me how he had experienced racist and ableist discrimination and marginalisation during his attendance at a global forum:

Most of the time we went to meetings ... it's kind of unequal, you know psychologically some barriers cannot ... I mean there's some, it can be a little bit of tension. I remember a particular experience where

for those people to save a few dollars they tell me to buy a ticket, go to London to collect a ticket to go onward to Estonia. So what I did, I took a cab upon leaving, they say they don't reimburse cabs you've got to take the train. The guy was a Dutch guy, the officer handling that. That young man said we don't pay cabs, it was about £5, he didn't want to pay it me back. I said keep your damn money, they gave the impression that you're trying to steal ... So, they have no trust but they don't understand, I in particular have a disability, I carrying luggage.

Pip went on to describe how he felt groups from countries in the global South were often marginalised, peripheralised, and misunderstood within wider global networks.

I remember some people making disparaging remarks about this small organisation ... I understand the dynamics and some people coming in there they don't necessarily have people coming in from a professional point of view ... They don't understand the kind of sacrifice we put on, so there is these kinds of drawbacks and sometimes you go to meetings and you have people making disparaging comments, like who are these people, especially the professionals. Because we're from the South we give our life to this thing. Our life is not something to give away, for the most part, from the Northern part it is a kind of philanthropy and that's good, there's nothing wrong with it, but this is our way of life. This isn't our choice, we give it all and it doesn't get acknowledged.

(Pip, founder, CSO in Grenada, 27 February 2016)

Pip articulates a sense of difference between those within the global network from the North and those from the South, in terms of wealth (professional philanthropists vs volunteers) and of lived experience 'this isn't our choice'. These contestations against dominant global power relations are part of Pip and Alyson's civic identities, highlighting their sacrifices, legitimacy, and responsibilities to development in Grenada, and how these intersect with their activist identities (Yarrow, 2008). Alyson illustrated how her rejection of international donor relations separated her from other civil society actors in Grenada. It felt as if this questioning was part of a process of legitimisation, of both her as a civil society activist, the work that she did, and the ways in which her organisation operated. For Pip, the story of his journey embeds his civil society activity in global hierarchies of (im)mobility, with the injustice experienced during his movement shaping his own engagement with global civil society and how he produced civic space on his return to Grenada. Pip largely disengaged with the international donor community, rejecting the injustices he perceived, focusing instead on nurturing activism in Grenada. These contestations provide a springboard for the remaking of relations through which civil society activity is based, with both Alyson and Pip focusing their energies on developing relations that are not connected to international donor channels. In doing so, Alyson and Pip are destabilising the relevance of North–South relations, and in particular their hierarchical dynamics, for the development of civil society. Through their antagonism towards dominant relations, they are attempting to remake the imaginary geographies of civil society, particularly within the global development context, and also transform their own organisational processes, philosophies, legacies, and modes of legitimacy. This then is not about inheriting and being content with the existing model of civil society organising, it is about creating something new. This reflects the metamorphic potential of relations – the bringing together of fragments, of experiences, of reflections to craft an alternative way of being within the civil society sphere. This contestation and remaking of relations by civil society actors has an emancipatory potential, with Pip and Alyson articulating a desire to transform aspects of the civil society landscape in Grenada, pushing back against the dominant relations in the global development industry.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

The dominant spatial representations of civil society within the global development context, and their associated relations and practices, accentuate and drive certain types of civil society organising, foregrounding scalar models and vertical relations between international donors and 'local' civil society. A relational approach understands civil society as constructed through diverse relational arrangements, which produce more expansive civil society practices, forms of organising, and modes of being. Archipelagic thinking foregrounds the creativity that is part of civil society organising – the forming of new relations and connections, the contestation and remaking of 'old relations', and the bringing together of (mobile) resources to create (new) spaces for civic organising and engagement. Whilst an archipelagic ontology may

lend itself to Barbados and Grenada, there is also potential for relationality to be foregrounded in thinking about civil society in other places to understand more about the complexities of civil society action. Three conclusions can be drawn from thinking with an archipelagic lens about civil society.

First, an archipelagic lens magnifies the many relations and flows that constitute civil society, form new civic, political, and social identities, and the role they play in crafting alternative ways of being. Compared with other relational framings, archipelagic thinking offers greater engagement with the creative invention and metamorphic potential of relations. An archipelagic lens accentuates the importance of creativity, invention, and transformative relations for civil society organising, with civil society actors understood as engaging in processes of 'archipelagic metamorphoses' within their work, dynamically bringing together spatially disparate relations and fragments to transform and create new civic spaces and forms of power and identity. This creativity takes many forms, as the vignettes above testify – we have seen how civil society actors draw on diasporic, international, and island-to-island resources and connections in attempts to transform civic space and we have seen the ways in which civil society actors may attempt to contest, remake, and bring relations together to create new spaces for civic organising and engagement. We can see the desire of (some) civil society activists to transform relations based on asymmetrical geographies and power relations, as these relations become, for some, spaces of reflexivity and contestation. For some, civil society subjectivities and organising can then be understood as emancipatory, founded on challenging the terms of existing relations and the remaking, transforming, and metamorphosing of the civil society sphere.

Second, an archipelagic lens articulates how these relations may challenge the dominant geographies (for example, island/mainland or global/local), associated with civil society, its actions and practices, conceptualising civil society as the product of relations between mobile people, ideas, and materials. Civil society can be thought of as produced through relations between multiple (unsettled) locales (Horst, 2018), echoing Pugh's (2016, p. 1054) idea of 'relational rootedness', contrasting with the dominant spatialities ascribed to civil society in the global development context, where scalar models restrict awareness of the wider geographies and forms of social and political agency that are involved in building civil society. Multi-focal experiences, such as camaraderie, shared experiences, support, identity, and solidarity are all important constructs for civil society organising, yet these relations, while challenging the dominant models of civil society, may (re)produce (new) hierarchies of power (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018). Thinking about civil society relationally asks questions about what or who moves through these relations, how these relations are formed, who has control over them, and who can turn them to their advantage (Massey, 1991). This points to the paradoxical nature of civil society in which it is often represented as a space through which inequalities and power imbalances can be challenged, yet also demonstrates that civil society can simultaneously reflect (new) hierarchies of power.

This leads to the third conclusion that can be drawn from thinking archipelagically about civil society: that civil society both theoretically and 'on the ground' is often highly fragile. Thinking with the archipelago, as this paper has done, moves away from understanding civil society organising through a global policy template and the practices and relations embedded within it, rather an archipelagic lens magnifies the many creative practices and relations that constitute civil society that exist outside of this policy template and the importance of them for the civil society landscape. It has explored the ways in which civil society actors create, transform, and metamorphose civic spaces and identities to nurture various forms of civic activity. A relational and particularly archipelagic ontology for civil society organising emphasises the creativity, transformation and metamorphosis that is part of civil society work – this perhaps provides the greatest hope for civil society organising.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Here the global development industry refers to the 'complex of state and non-state actors, donors and NGOs focused on planned intervention in the Global South' (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012, p. 640).
- <sup>2</sup> While the literature has detailed the contradictory impacts of volunteer tourism on the volunteers and their host communities, there is agreement that both the concept and the industry have grown and diversified exponentially over the last two decades (Baillie Smith et al., 2013), with Wearing's definition resonating most easily with the type of voluntourism used by Cindy and other civil society groups in Barbados and Grenada, in which volunteer tourists are understood as 'those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (Wearing, 2001, p. 1).

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