The Rise and Fall of Marcha Verde in the Dominican Republic

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The Marcha Verde movement emerged in 2017 to protest bribery on the part of the Brazilian transnational Odebrecht. It conducted 25 protests in the provinces and large marches in July 2017 and August 2018 but ultimately failed to force the government to try those responsible. As a movement for the democratization of democracy through the construction of citizens' rights, it was a watershed moment in Dominican political history. However, it did not have time to build the social base that would have allowed it to challenge the authorities. The political parties that supported it were only interested in weakening the official party, and the electoral race intervened as the way to channel the movements' demands, leaving the radicals alone in calling for a transformation of the political sphere.

El movimiento Marcha Verde surgió en 2017 en protesta contra los sobornos efectuados por la transnacional brasileña Odebrecht. Aunque organizó 25 protestas en las provincias y grandes marchas en julio de 2017 y agosto de 2018, no logró forzar al gobierno a enjuiciar a los responsables. En tanto se trata de un movimiento para la democratización de la democracia a través de la construcción de los derechos ciudadanos, este fue un momento decisivo en la historia política dominicana. Sin embargo, no tuvo tiempo de construir la base social que le hubiera permitido desafiar a las autoridades. Los partidos políticos que lo apoyaron sólo estaban interesados en debilitar al partido oficial, y las elecciones que intervinieron en el proceso se convirtieron en la vía de canalización para las demandas del movimiento, dejando a los elementos radicales solos en su exigencia por una genuina transformación de la esfera política.

Keywords: *Social movements, Democratization de la democracia, Corruption, Neoliberalism*

This article takes a look at the Marcha Verde (Green March) movement that emerged in 2017 in the Dominican Republic and helped raise public awareness regarding impunity and corruption. Some argue that it originated in the earlier struggles of the 4 Percent for Education Movement, but its trigger was the announcement by a New York court that the Brazilian company Odebrecht had

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Figure 1. "La Marcha del Millón" at the Centro de los Héroes in Santo Domingo on August 12, 2018. This was the largest march in Dominican history outside electoral campaigns, with attendance estimated at 100,000–250,000. Photo courtesy of *Hoy*.

admitted having bribed government officials in 12 countries across Latin America and Africa. In the Dominican Republic alone, the company had paid US$92 million in bribes. Marcha Verde held two very large protests in Santo Domingo (July 16, 2017, and August 12, 2018; Figure 1). In addition, it conducted 25 protests in the nation's provinces during the first six months of 2017, but it was unable to force the government to address the accusations of corruption and impunity. Its social diversity allowed it to mount a successful campaign, but it was unable to build a social base that could keep the struggle going beyond the first steps. It had substantial participation from the opposition political parties, which used the protests as an opportunity to question the legitimacy of a corrupt government that reformed the constitution so that it could be reelected in 2016. However, its leadership was divided between moderates and radicals who sought to force the resignation of the president. Taken together, these factors explain its rise and fall.[1]

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social scientists have various theoretical approaches for the analysis of social movements. Some have explained these phenomena in relation to political processes and social context, others have emphasized culture and identity (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 1998; Slater, 1985), and yet others have identified strong ties between these movements and the construction of social citizenship (Holston, 2008; Isin, 2008). A fourth group has shed new light on resistance movements as a reaction to the implementation of the neoliberal policies of the past 40 years, suggesting that Latin American social movements were the catalyst for the emergence of progressive governments in

Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Boron and Lechini, 2006; Caetano, 2006, López Maya, 2010; Mestries, Pleyers, and Zermeño, 2009; Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Kuecker, 2008). More recently, a new wave of studies has proposed that a new type of antielitist, popular social movement has emerged that advocates horizontalism, "the flattening out of relations of power" (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Becker 2014).

The Marcha Verde movement was a collective that, while it was critical of the neoliberal policies implemented by Dominican administrations, was not interested in enacting revolutionary change. Rather, it sought to fight impunity and corruption—to "democratize democracy" via deep political reforms, making citizens participants in government decisions (Santos, 2005: 97–110). This concept serves to frame it as a movement contributing to the establishment of political and social rights (see Holston, 2008, on "insurgent" citizens fighting for ownership of the land on which their homes are built). In short, social movements, via protests, may contribute to democratization and the construction of citizenship. The election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico in July 2018 and the great protests in Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, and Chile during the autumn of 2019 are nothing more than the pursuit of change in the framework of liberal democracy, the pursuit of a representative and deliberative democracy with respect for due process and the social rights of citizens and an end to impunity and corruption.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Marcha Verde was a moral and civic reaction from below to the type of society created in the past 40 years. The implementation of neoliberal policies since the 1980s has affected Dominican society economically, socially, culturally, and politically. The economy, once based in agriculture and mining, now depends on services, tourism, finance, and remittances from abroad. These changes have been accompanied by the privatization of public enterprises in the 1980s and 1990s, diminishing the state's managerial role in society. Although its capacity to respond to citizen needs has been reduced, the state remains a competent institution when it comes to collecting taxes, borrowing on behalf of the nation, maintaining social and political order, and, above all, creating a climate conducive to uninterrupted capitalist accumulation.

The first response to the neoliberal reforms came from the union sector and the neighborhood settlers, but it was not until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century that the middle-class sectors heavily affected by these reforms began to question them. This led to the establishment of the Coalición por una Educación Digna (Coalition for a Dignified Education—CED), which forced the neoliberal government of Danilo Medina (2012–2016) to comply with the General Education Act of 1997 requiring that 4 percent of the gross domestic product be invested in preuniversity education (Betances, 2016: 568–575). The CED's success lay in the support of a wide sector of business, the Catholic Church, and civic organizations. Other anticorruption movements followed but had little drawing power.

While these protests stimulated citizen awareness regarding corruption, things would not have gone far without the announcement by the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of New York that Odebrecht had acknowledged

having bribed government officials in 12 countries, paying US$788 million in bribes associated with 100 projects in Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Mozambique, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela. In the Dominican Republic, the company made profits in excess of US$163 million as a result of said bribes and admitted that it had a structured-operations department there that operated as a bribing entity (U.S. District Court, 2016). It was then revealed that Odebrecht had moved this department to the Dominican Republic because the country provided greater security for the corporation's criminal activities. Even worse, Roberto Tacla, head of an Odebrecht offshore group, stated that the US$788 million the corporation had admitted to might well have been three times higher (Durand, 2018: 274). In any case, there were clear criminal actions, and these revelations seemed to be just the tip of the iceberg.

U.S. justice is known to punish law-breaking companies, but the legal system protects them so that they can accumulate capital. Large companies do not care about the social consequences as long as their activities generate profits. If they are found to have broken the law, they pay vast amounts in fines but continue to operate as if nothing had happened (Bakan, 2004: 56–59). Since Odebrecht was registered on Wall Street as a public entity, it was subject to U.S. law. After the revelations, the Dominican authorities reached a plea agreement with the company. According to Durand (2018: 16), this was a case of a "corporate capture system based on a network of influence, using legal as well as dubious and corrupt mechanisms to attain excessive and undue influence that favored them, obtaining high profit rates and receiving more projects and concessions." This criminal conduct not only led to unfair competition with other U.S. companies but destructively affected democracy and put the capitalist system itself at risk. Odebrecht's way of operating was not hard to transfer to the Dominican Republic because the country has a long tradition of collusion between the construction business and the government. In fact, the national construction sector had developed in collusion with the authoritarian government of Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978) but, of course, was unable to compete with a giant like Odebrecht.

THE IMPACT OF THE U.S. JUDICIAL PROCESS

The U.S. revelations were made public on December 21, 2016, and immediately became the topic of conversation in the Dominican Republic. On the national radio station Z101, Ricardo Nieves and other commentators called for some kind of response. A group of activists including María Teresa Cabrera, Jonathan Liriano, and Carlos Pimentel was assembled by the broadcaster (María Teresa Cabrera, interview, July 10, 2018), and this led to a meeting at the Public Policy Observatory of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo attended by representatives of groups such as Poder Ciudadano (Citizen Power), Justicia Fiscal (Tax Justice), and Impunidad Cero (Zero Impunity) that had fought for the 4 percent reform. They called for a march in Santo Domingo on January 22, 2017 (Fernando Peña, interview, July 8, 2018).

Activists had been pessimistic until the New York court revelations, and so the color green, symbolizing hope, was chosen for the January 22 march. It was

also decided that citizens would be the protagonists and there would be no final speech or specific leader; from the beginning, this movement was planned as one with a collective, rotating leadership and horizontal management and organization. Following in the footsteps of the struggle for education, the march was conceived as a civic activity for the whole family, and committees were set up to clean the streets during and after the protests. The protests began with the playing of the national anthem, and the marches were held on Sundays so that the whole family could attend without affecting economic activities. Over 60,000 people marched on January 22, far exceeding the 5,000 expected by the organizers (Jonathan Liriano, interview, June 13, 2018). (The biggest march of the 4 Percent for Education Movement never exceeded 10,000.) This demonstration, then, set a precedent in popular struggles and initiated the most important social movement in national history (Díaz, 2017a). The main demands were the identification of and due process for the officials who accepted bribes in the Odebrecht case, the recovery of the money and due process for the executives of the Brazilian company, the creation of a special commission against impunity with the support of the United Nations, and publication within 30 days of a report by the Chamber of Audits of the assets of the presidents and ministers who had come into contact with the Odebrecht negotiations between 2001 and 2014 (Campos, 2017). This petition was backed by almost all the opposition political parties and a variety of popular organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The most important element, however, was the participation of citizens unwilling to accept violations of the law with impunity.

On January 22, Marcha Verde began to impose its demands on national life, and official propaganda could no longer label the marchers as subversive because a Gallup poll showed that 91 percent of the population supported the movement (Díaz, 2017b). March organizers proved that, at minimal cost and in the absence of any rewards or promises, people were willing to protest corruption, something unprecedented in national history (Díaz, 2017c). Undoubtedly, a popular movement was beginning to develop from below, and this revealed the government's lack of legitimacy, calling into question the representative character of the liberal democracy.

On January 10, 2017, 12 days before the march took place, the president had appointed a commission to investigate the process behind the Punta Catalina thermoelectric plant, the contract for which had been awarded to Odebrecht. The commission was headed by Father Agripino Núñez Collado, who had played a prominent mediator role among business, the unions, and the government in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite some initial problems, the commission issued its report on June 39, 2017, concluding that Law 340-06 on acquisitions and contracts had not been violated. The report did not address the bribes of government officials, the funding of the president's electoral campaign, or the overvaluation of 17 public projects carried out by Odebrecht (Núñez Collado, 2017). Marcha Verde saw this as a cover-up of the central issue of corruption and reinforced its accusations (Santaella, 2017). The government had wanted to use the report to regain some legitimacy in the eyes of skeptical citizens who kept calling on the Office of the Attorney General to charge those involved in the Odebrecht bribery scandal. In addition to the marches, the leaders of the collective launched two new campaigns to encourage participation.

THE LIBRO VERDE AND LLAMA VERDE CAMPAIGNS

Marcha Verde organized the Libro Verde (Green Book) campaign to collect signatures in support of its demands. The purpose was to influence the speech that the president was to make to the National Congress on February 27, Independence Day, causing him to clarify his position in relation to the Odebrecht bribes (Carlos Pimentel, interview, July 9, 2018). Signatures were collected across the country February 5–22. A total of 312,415 was successfully delivered to the National Palace by a committee made up of Carlos Pimentel and María Teresa Cabrera. The day of delivery was named Día Verde (Green Day), and there were events throughout the country to raise awareness of impunity and corruption (*Diario Libre*, February 19, 2017).

Libro Verde was accompanied by a letter asking the president, among other things, to "make this cause your own and provide immediate, real and in-depth answers to a people who wish to reverse the unbearable moral and ethical degradation that jeopardizes the sustainable functioning of Dominican society" (7 Días.com.do, 2017). The president responded: "I will spare no effort to make the truth known on all points involving this bid and the construction work, as well as any other issue. I am aware that our society demands justice, transparency, and participation in all social spheres but especially in public institutions. You can believe me when I tell you that I am listening to these demands" (*El Día*, February 27, 2017). In his speech, however, the president made no reference to the bribery of Dominican officials or the overvaluation of the infrastructure built by Odebrecht, let alone the financing of his 2012 election campaign. The leaders of Marcha Verde responded that the president had "demonstrated that he is part of the structure of impunity and corruption that oppresses the Dominican Republic in his refusal to have independent prosecutors and the United Nations investigate those responsible for bribery, overvaluation, and illegal financing in the Odebrecht case" (*Diario Libre*, March 27, 2017).

Regarding the request that the UN support a commission of independent prosecutors, the executive's legal consultant, Flavio Darío Espinal, said, "The Convention with the United Nations (UN) does not contemplate prosecutors' being sent to address cases of bribery involving the Odebrecht construction company" (Guzmán Then, 2017). Government indifference did not discourage Marcha Verde activists: they launched a new campaign called Llama Verde (Green Flame). Activities took place March 13–19 and involved the carrying of three torches to Santo Domingo, one from Dajabón in the west, another from Barahona in the south, and the third from Higüey in the east. Getting the torches through the municipalities along the route was a challenge of coordination, but this, in turn, served to establish contacts between the municipalities involved. Llama Verde fostered high expectations because "the national press was paying attention to what we were doing, and, in addition, we saw that wherever the torch arrived that evening or night—wherever the torch spent the night—this was going to be an event because people would go to the park" (Carlos Pimentel, interview, July 9, 2018). When the torches arrived in Santo Domingo, a concert had been organized to receive them (*Diario Libre*, March 16, 2017).

These two campaigns showed that Marcha Verde was on the rise and that awareness of the consequences of corruption was increasing. There is no doubt

that they had a major impact, particularly among middle-class sectors that rejected the government propaganda portraying the movement as temporary and insignificant. They encouraged further marches in the various provinces and allowed the new militants to know each other better and coordinate their actions. These contacts helped build a social base and proved essential for the second major march, which took place on July 16, 2017, and was a resounding success, doubling the attendance of the first.

MARCHA VERDE IN MOTION: POLITICAL REFORMS AND LOCAL DEMANDS

Protest marches became the political centerpiece of 2017, and all of them sought to link the scourge of corruption with the need for fundamental political reforms while pointing to the connection between that corruption and the lack of attention to social demands. In the course of the first six months of 2017, 25 marches were carried out in different cities and populous neighborhoods (Carlos Jiménez Briceño, interview, July 8, 2018). Concerts with invited artists were held, and in the summer two denunciation camps were set up, one in Santo Domingo in front of the offices of the attorney general and another at the Monument to the Heroes of the Restoration in Santiago. These camps did not last long but were a source of concern for the authorities—particularly the one in Santiago, where one of the largest marches against the government had taken place. There was consensus among observers that "the march of [March] 26th in Santiago, heart of the Cibao region, was as big as the one in the capital and surpassed it in enthusiasm and creativity, including a masque carnival troupe proclaiming the end of impunity" (Díaz, 2017d).

Generally speaking, all the manifestos read at the marches made two points: the need to reform state institutions and the need to highlight citizen demands. The manifesto read at the Santiago march summarized concerns regarding political reform and underlined the citizenry's concerns and aspirations. The concerns were the prevalence of impunity and the absence of general and fiscal controls over public management, the concentration of power in the hands of the ruling party, the perversion of the political system and its parties, the exclusion or marginalization of citizens, and the failure of public entities given their manifest corruption. The aspirations were the building of a vigorous social force to monitor the actions of political parties and the ruling class, the establishment of an independent, impartial, and sovereign judiciary, an end to corruption, the creation of an Attorney General's Office against Corruption and Organized Crime, and the restructuring of the Chamber of Audits (*El Caribe*, March 26, 2017; Diaz, 2017e).

These manifestos reflected the concerns of many social movements throughout Latin America: the *piqueteros* in Argentina, the indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia in the 1990s, and, more recently, the National Regeneration Movement in Mexico and the 2019 protests in Chile, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Betances and Figueroa-Ibarra, 2016; Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Becker, 2014; Webber and Carr, 2013). Similarly to these movements, Marcha Verde sought the establishment of the rule of law within the confines of liberal democracy, attempting to articulate a diversity of organizations that open up spaces in which democracy was "democratized" and made participatory.

The marches revealed that their leaders were not improvising but had experience in conducting popular movements (Juan Bolivar Díaz, interview, July 18, 2018). Marcha Verde was a heterogeneous grouping led by the middle class, avoiding identification with political parties but allowing them to participate as long as they did not do so under their political banners (Altagracia Salazar, interview, July 12, 2018; Guadalupe Valdez, interview, July 9, 2018). Press debates highlighted the fact that some Marcha Verde activists thought that the movement itself should become a political party and a group of 89 intellectuals issued a manifesto calling for the president's resignation (Hector Turbi, interview, June 17, 2019; Servicios de Acento.com.do, 2017).

THE FRAGMENTATION OF MARCHA VERDE

The manifesto calling for the president's resignation divided Marcha Verde. A minority group of radicals experienced in the management of popular assemblies thought that a political-social movement had been consolidated and was alarming the government and therefore it was appropriate to call for the president's resignation and convene a constituent assembly (Carlos Jiménez Briceño, interview, June 17, 2019). The moderates who made up the majority of the collective's followers considered the idea of removing the government from power via mobilizations wishful thinking and argued that the mobilizations were important in raising public awareness and diminishing the legitimacy of the constituted power but hardly enough to topple it. They thought that the electoral process was the proper way to displace the Dominican Liberation Party from power (Manuel Robles, interview, June 4, 2019).

The moderates were well aware of the participation of political parties, which did not give the organizers money but brought their supporters to both the large marches in the capital and those that took place in the provinces (Manuel Robles, interview, June 4, 2019). The importance of the opposition parties was noted when, after the large march of August 12, 2018, as they began preparing for preliminary elections, they stopped participating in the marches because they had apparently achieved what they wanted: smearing and weakening the government. The parties' preelectoral preparations coincided with the deepening of the division in Marcha Verde. The radicals stressed the need to consolidate the organization of the collective to forge a political-social leadership that could put political pressure on the government and force it to end impunity and corruption. The leadership had to adopt a discourse that shifted from the social to the political; the transformation of the political sphere was proposed because the existing institutions were perceived as incapable of fostering change (Carlos Jiménez Briceño, interview, June 17, 2019). The moderates, in contrast, were inclined to participate in the electoral process. Most of them submitted their resignations to the committees to which they belonged, stating that, while they continued to identify with the collective's goals, they wanted to participate in the Democratic Coalition, a group that emerged toward the end of 2019 and sought to participate in electoral policy. According to María Teresa Cabrera (interview, June 17, 2019), the coalition's objective was to "remove the PLD [Dominican Liberation Party] from power [as] a condition for thinking about some democratic changes. . . . This party has a vocation for perpetuity in power,

and for the time being the electoral process is the only way to displace it." Jonathan Liriano and other leaders formed a small political group called Bien Común (The Common Good) with the intention of participating in local elections. With the departure of the moderates, virtually all the journalists on the communications committee left, and after the march of August 12 Marcha Verde had no regular coverage on radio, television, or even social networks (Jonathan Liriano, interview, July 4, 2019; Altagracia Salazar, interview, June 7, 2019).

The moderates left the collective to join the electoral process, some of them as candidates for local posts. In assessing the significance of their exit, we should bear in mind that these were social movement leaders rather than politicians and had to change their discourse and conform to the system's rules. In the 1990s, Virtudes Álvarez and Ramón Almánzar, leaders par excellence of popular movements of the day, tried to accomplish this transition with very little success (Betances, 2016: 504–510). While Bolivia's Evo Morales succeeded in shifting from social movement leader to politician, the same has not happened in Ecuador with the conversion of the indigenous social movement into the Pachakuti indigenous party (Becker, 2011: 1–18, 199–210), whose successes and electoral alliances have been limited. In fact, what prevails in Latin America is the recruitment of social movement leaders by political parties and the state (for example, a large part of the social movement in Venezuela, the *piqueteros* in Argentina, an important part of Bolivia's social movement under the management of Morales, and the student movement in Chile). The Landless Movement in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, are exceptional cases of insubordination. Meanwhile, the moderates who left Marcha Verde will find it difficult to become political leaders with aspirations to "democratize democracy." This is the reality of social movements: living between co-optation by political parties and the state or remaining autonomous and fighting for socioeconomic demands.

The radical group, for its part, continued with its social movement activities, organizing the fifth Marcha Verde meeting on May 12, 2019; it continued to define itself as a "sociopolitical, nonpartisan movement, with a vocation to transcend the electoral political situation with specific actions to combat impunity and corruption." Participants in the meeting agreed to "denounce reelection," which they considered corruption, and "condemn the bribing of legislators" (Guadalupe Valdez, interview, June 6, 2019). On this the new leaders of Marcha Verde agreed with the moderates who had left the collective, but the latter did not support their call for protest in Santiago on July 14, 2019. There was no significant press coverage, and public participation was limited. It should be noted, however, that the context was not favorable to the march: the population was awaiting President Medina's announcement regarding whether he would seek reelection, and he announced that he would not only on July 22. Since then, the new Marcha Verde leaders have not called for any marches, and the movement was barely mentioned in the press on January 22, its fourth anniversary.

MANIFESTOS

While political divisions affected it deeply, Marcha Verde did open up a vast space for social demands by the citizenry. This became evident in the course of the provincial marches, where manifestos that portrayed the reality of social

life were read aloud. In Puerto Plata, for example, in the first provincial march on March 5, 2017, "the movement require[d] that the municipal authorities cancel the concessions granted in favor of the company Triple A for the collection of the drinking water service fees and . . . comply with budget stipulations" (Pérez, 2017). During the San Francisco de Macorís march, it was pointed out that "a group of bad Dominicans stealing billions of pesos [was] preventing the sick from finding relief in the country's public hospitals" (Torres, 2017). In Bonao it was noted that corruption and impunity had led to the disappearance of more than 1.6 billion pesos in mining funds, including 140 million belonging to the Centro Universitario Regional del Cibao Central (*Listín Diario*, August 14, 2017). Finally, in Cotuí it was stated that the government was violating the law and the constitution by "taking ownership of the 5 percent that belongs to us, diverting what is ours toward Punta Catalina and into the pockets of officials, stripping our people of more than 2.5 billion pesos" (Movimiento Popular Dominicano–Regional Nordeste, 2017).

This social movement was aware of the ways in which corruption prevented the demands of citizens from being met, and it understood the need to create organizations that would give it a strong and permanent social base. In fact, it recognized that only by creating a strong social base of grassroots organizations could campaigns really pressure rulers to comply with and enforce the laws. All of these manifestos emphasized the need to democratize society and the state.

BUILDING A SOCIAL BASE

The creation of organizations is essential to the success of a social movement that wants to go beyond a petition-based campaign. The social base of a social movement is made up of organizations, networks, participants, cultural compilation, memory, and traditions that contribute to its campaigns (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 114). Marcha Verde began to build a social base around the organizations that joined the marches after January 22, 2017. These included social movements such as Poder Ciudadano, Justicia Fiscal, Impunidad Cero, the Comité para la Defensa de los Derechos Barriales, the Corriente Magisterial Juan Pablo Duarte, the Frente Amplio de Lucha Popular, Articulación Campesina, and the Confederación de Mujeres and civic/civilian groups such as the Centro Juan Montalvo, Ciudad Alternativa, the Foro Ciudadano, Oxfam International, the Centro Juan XXXIII, Participación Ciudadana, the Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos, the Fundación Masada, and Santiago Somos Todos. These provided the basis upon which new structures began to be created (Carlos Pimentel, interview, July 9, 2018).

Following in the footsteps of the CED, Marcha Verde was organized into working committees for organization, collections, content, communications, and socio-educational and cultural areas. In fact, it went beyond the CED to create municipal assemblies that elected delegates to a national assembly. Delegates were to rotate every six months so that everyone would have a chance to participate in decision-making structures at the national level. More than anything, this ensured that the structures would not become rigid. In addition to the municipal delegates there were five delegates from the representative organizations that had provided the initial base for Marcha Verde

and a 15-member national committee. To carry out routine tasks, a national coordinating committee met regularly every three months and if necessary held extraordinary meetings (María Teresa Cabrera, interview, July 10, 2018; Manuel María Mercedes, interview, June 17, 2019). The working committees supported its efforts. NGOs also participated in the national assembly but had only one delegate each because they were not representative organizations. However, there were members of NGOs on the working committees, and they played a very significant role there. In short, the national assembly laid down the "party line" and the national coordinating committee put the plan together and established priorities (María Teresa Cabrera, interview, July 10, 2018).

Marcha Verde set up a successful horizontal structure during the first stage, but as it grew and faced the reality of the political division between moderates and radicals, it faltered. The heated discussions in marathon assemblies drove away many citizens unaccustomed to political debates. Even key leaders such as María Teresa Cabrera, Manuel Robles, Carlos Pimentel, and Jonathan Liriano became less tolerant of the political positions of the radicals (Carlos Pimentel, interview, June 17, 2019; Altagracia Salazar, interview, June 7, 2019). This disrupted the efforts to build a social base. Despite these shortcomings, however, these were unprecedented efforts to incorporate large sections of the population into the fight against impunity and corruption.

THE FOROS VERDES AND CONVERSAOS VERDES

The Foros Verdes (Green Forums) and Conversaos Verdes (Green Exchanges) were among the original efforts to build the social foundations of the collective. After the initial great national march in Santo Domingo on July 16, 2017, there was a period of reflection on the successes achieved and determination of next steps. The second national assembly, held in October 2017, decided to engage in consultations (Foros Verdes) to outline a program for ending impunity and corruption, and an educational campaign (Conversaos Verdes) was launched to raise citizens' awareness of the movement's demands.

These two campaigns sought to take the public pulse regarding the future course of the movement. Forums were conducted in 2017 in Gran Santo Domingo, Higuey, Santiago, and Azua to consult the grassroots organizations on the draft of the anicorruption program. Three key points were discussed: the strengthening of citizen power, political articulation, and the fight against impunity and corruption. Organizations were invited to develop and present proposals. According to Manuel Robles (interview, July 10, 2018),

> the need to consolidate links, create new social organizations and political groupings was raised because Marcha Verde is understood to be a conglomerate based on what we call "unity in diversity." Marcha Verde was intended to be a force capable of bringing together all social groups in the country and all political parties willing to put pressure of such magnitude on the political system that the state would be forced to reduce the degree of impunity and corruption. . . . However, the proposals in these forums were weak, and little was achieved, to the point that no new forums have been held.

Creating unity in diversity was a big challenge for Marcha Verde. Research on coalition formation shows that while coalitions benefit from the participation of organizations in nonhierarchical structures based on consensual decisions and from open discussions that promote dialogue and the acknowledgment of differences, this remains a challenge. The NGOs and groups that made contributions to Marcha Verde and supported the collective because the movement's demands aligned with their goals had difficulty maintaining this because of pressure from their donors, which required them to be "efficient" and "show results" (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001: 7; Lebon, 2013: 763). The same can be said of the various civic groups, political parties, and unions. This is important to the understanding of the development of Marcha Verde and explaining why this type of movement can arise, grow, and then, all of a sudden, begin to deflate. It is not easy to maintain such coalitions, where the diversity includes the whole political-ideological spectrum.

In his assessment of the Conversaos Verdes, Manuel Robles (interview, July 10, 2018) comments that these were part of a completely different strategy because they called upon citizens rather than organizations:

> These are spaces where social communicators are invited to give talks meant to raise awareness regarding impunity and corruption. Conversaos Verdes are three-hour spaces where people can talk about the impact of corruption in their lives. These communicators include well-known journalists and personalities. These talks tell you what a citizen is, what the roles of citizenship are, and how corruption affects the quality of life and public services assigned to low-income people. These have huge impact because the number of attendees ranges between 200 and 300.

The Conversaos Verdes were a way of educating people in a top-down process. Middle- or upper-class communicators visited communities, but these were not exchanges between community members like those of the ecclesiastical base communities in Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. While people gathered to listen to the upper-middle-class communicators promoting the democratization of society and the state, quite possibly with the best of intentions, once the lecture was over, so was the conversation. This was another challenge for Marcha Verde, because it was difficult to maintain such activities without a strong link to the institutions that supported these events. All these activities were discontinued as a result of the collective's fragmentation. Those who had made its existence possible left the movement and mostly joined the Democratic Coalition, simply abandoning the fight. Today, Marcha Verde consists of a relatively small group of radical militants with little drawing power and, apparently, little functionality.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering Marcha Verde as a movement for the democratization of democracy via the construction of citizens' rights is useful for understanding it. It also helps us understand that building a democratic society takes a long time and that social movements are just one of many subjects involved in

political and social struggles and depend for their success on their ability to build alliances with a diversity of social and cultural subjects. Marcha Verde failed to achieve its goals—auditing the 17 projects built by Odebrecht, bringing those who received the US$92 million in bribes to justice, and explaining the financing of then-President Danilo Medina's election campaigns—but it was a watershed moment in recent Dominican political history. It discredited the Medina administration and raised awareness among citizens regarding the scourge of impunity and corruption. No previous movement had prompted so many people to corner a corrupt government and confront a large part of the political class on this issue. Marcha Verde took the first step in raising social awareness regarding the social costs of corruption.

The collective failed because it did not have time to build the social base that would have allowed it to challenge the authorities. Crucially, political divisions within the movement prevented the implementation of a design that could handle its social and cultural diversity. While the political parties substantially supported the collective and even managed to get their members to attend the marches without displaying party symbols, they were ultimately only interested in weakening the government and the official party. Finally, the electoral race intervened as the way to channel the social movements' demands. Political parties offered their support as long as their calendars allowed it but turned to preelection campaign activities as soon as that became necessary. In this regard, it is very significant that the moderates were inclined toward electoral participation, which they considered the only way to fight impunity and corruption. The radicals were left alone in calling for a transition from the social to the political in order to transform the political sphere.

NOTE

1. This research is the product of two stays in the Dominican Republic during the summers of 2018 and 2019. I carried out 24 interviews, which were recorded and then transcribed. In addition, I systematically read the newspapers *Hoy*, Servicios de Acento, 7Días, *Listín Diario*, and *Diario Libre* and reviewed a variety of official documents related to the Odebrecht case.

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