

**The Role of Social Movements in Gun Control: An international comparison
between South Africa, Brazil and Australia**

by

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The Role of Social Movements in Gun Control: An international comparison between South Africa, Brazil and Australia¹

Adèle Kirsten

Introduction

This paper argues that social mobilisation against gun violence in Australia, Brazil and South Africa has been shaped by strategic responses to the political, social and economic conditions specific to each country. These strategies have contributed to the success of each campaigns, bringing about significant changes in firearms legislation and resulting in the issue of gun control remaining high on the political agenda. The paper also argues that the concept of social movement used in the South African literature on social movements fails to capture the complexity of the dynamic relationship between movements and the state and the interplay between social mobilisation and policy change. The paper identifies the ‘catalyst events’ that led to social mobilisation in the three countries. It locates this within a context of a history of violence and years of groundwork undertaken prior to the mobilisation and campaigning in all three case studies. It goes on to look at the strategies and tactics adopted by the three campaigns, identifying similarities and differences, which include grassroots mobilisation, the role of the media and relations to the state.

This paper is based on a review of the relevant literature, 62 face-to-face interviews and eight focus groups with activists, favela residents, and members of civil society organisations, government officials, journalists and members of Parliament in the three countries. Thirty four interviews were done in South Africa, 20 in Brazil and eight in Australia of which three were by email. Two of the South African focus groups were with the Gun Control Alliance and the other three with community activists in Mapela, the Vaal and Elsie's River.² In Brazil, two focus groups were conducted with Viva Rio staff and one with the residents of the favela Rocinha. Participant observation was also an important aspect of this study as the writer is the former Director of Gun Free South Africa, one of the case studies under review. The writer was therefore a central participant in the development of the strategies adopted by GFSA in its fight for stricter gun control in South Africa. The writer is also a colleague of the leadership in both the Brazilian and Australian gun control movements, namely Viva Rio and the Coalition for Gun Control and knowledge of these case studies is also drawn from interactions with these colleagues through the international small arms control network.

A Defining Moment

“History is dotted with decisive events that leave indelible marks on nearly everyone’s memory” (Chapman, 1998:13). In each case, gun control organisations were either formed in response to a particular event or an event acted as a catalyst giving fresh impetus to an existing organisation.

¹ I would like to thank the interpreters and moderators of the Brazil and South Africa focus groups for their invaluable assistance: Maria Helena Moreira Alves and Jessica Galeria in Brazil; Millicent Maroga in South Africa; and Josephine Bourgois for assistance with individual interviews in Brazil. I would also like to thank Jacklyn Cock and Karl von Holdt for their support, insights and comments on the final manuscript.

² These three sites represent a cross section of the diversity of community activists involved in GFSA and are in different provinces, rural and urban, women and men, young and old.

Brazil

In July 1993, eight street children were gunned down by police on the steps of the Candelária church in central Rio de Janeiro. Two weeks later, 22 residents in the Vigário Geral favela were killed at random by military police. On 17 December 1993 the city of Rio came to a standstill as thousands of people, dressed in white, gathered in the streets to observe two minutes of silence. Their message, “*Make time for Rio – Stop to Begin Again.*”³ was a plea to do something about the violence in the city.

The electronic city clocks, situated in the centre of the boulevards skirting the famous Rio oceanfront, were set for a 24-hour count down to 12 noon on 17 December. As the minutes and seconds ticked away, it was a constant reminder for Rio’s citizens to act. Radio and television stations joined in the 24-hour countdown. Even the prisons, police and traffic officials joined in the two minutes of silence. Rubem César Fernandes, one of the main organisers of this ‘*two-minutes of silence*’ campaign was clear that it was more than a protest. It was an organised response from civil society calling for an end to the escalating violence and to the atmosphere of insecurity and fear that had fallen over Rio de Janeiro (Viva Rio, 2003). Fernandes says that it was also a “chance for a new beginning”⁴ and gave Rio residents an opportunity to begin to imagine a city that was not so divided.

Like many other campaigns, this campaign started as a public, visible response to an incident, mobilising thousands of people in support of a key message. But, as in most campaigns, it required a group of people to drive the process and provide leadership. The vice president of one of the most powerful media houses in Brazil, *O Dia*, took the initiative. He recruited a well-known social justice activist, Betinho (Herbert de Souza) as well as another media house, *O Globo*. In September 1993, a group of academics, trade unionists, activists, business people, and the three biggest media owners came together to talk about how to respond to the violence in Rio. Fernandes, currently Director of Viva Rio, and at the time a professor of anthropology, was one of the people at that historic meeting. He recalls that it was “the first time you had people together from very high places at the same time as you had people in the NGO movement, the trade unions and the favelas.”⁵

These discussions happened in a context of strong dissatisfaction with and alienation from the State of Rio. There was no consideration at this stage of involving government. By 1993, Brazil had been going through a process of democratisation for several years. However, there was still enormous mistrust of the state and in particular the security forces. The idea of a ‘civil society’ also did not exist in Brazilian discourse. As Fernandes says, “we didn’t have the words for civil society – this word was not our common language”.⁶ Fernandes goes on to add that although there was a nominal centralised organising committee, no formal organisation was responsible for the mass mobilisation, “It was just movement”.⁷

It was also a symbolic action and the media played an important role in getting people committed to the idea, mainly through the involvement of the two major daily newspapers, *O Globo* and *O Dia*. The direct involvement of the media owners and editors was one of the

³ The Portuguese translation is: *Dá um tempo para o Rio – pára para começar de novo*

⁴ Interview with Rubem César Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

distinguishing characteristics of Viva Rio, both as a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Brazil and in comparison to gun control movements in other parts of the world. The role of the media in the fight against gun violence and in the development of social movements is critical and will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

While organising the campaign, the committee set up a 40-person commission to answer two questions: ‘What can be done to reduce violence in Rio?’ and, ‘How can we (those not in government) help?’ The commission sat for two weeks. People from many different perspectives on the issue came to talk about these two questions – the wife of a drug baron, chiefs of police, former prisoners, academics, and activists. The media was present throughout the proceedings. The *Viva Rio* (VR) campaign which started in 1993 as a direct response to two episodes of urban violence, has evolved into a large and influential organisation which continues to mobilise the public on issues of public safety and at the same time undertakes large scale projects aimed at improving the quality of life of Rio’s residents.

South Africa

1994 was a key year in South Africa. On 27 April, millions of South Africans cast their votes for the first democratically elected government and South Africa entered a new democratic era. In the months leading up to the elections, Peter Storey, then a Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, began to articulate his concern that easy access to and excess of guns in our society was one of the biggest threats to our emerging democracy. “We weren’t basing our thinking on any statistics, on any research at all. Just the gut feeling that guns were beginning to dominate the scene in *every way*. That’s all.”⁸

The response to this threat was the ‘*gun free South Africa*’ campaign calling on people to hand in their guns. On 16 December, the first Day of Reconciliation⁹ of the new South Africa, people began to trickle into one of the 167 hand-in points. Storey recalls waking up on the morning of the 16th “with a genuine hope, a sense that today we may be surprised. We had been discouraged, we had been warned, we had been told ‘you’re crazy’. But that we might be surprised because this is a country where surprises happen”.¹⁰ For others this optimism was laced with the fear that no weapons would be handed in, that there had not been enough time to educate and mobilise. David Newby, one of the organisers of the campaign in the Western Cape, remembers the excitement and the surprise of receiving reports of guns being handed in at Claremont. “I was over the moon – 20 guns! It was a drop in the ocean, I was thinking. But I was also afraid that no one would hand in their guns. That’s what I was most afraid of.”¹¹ The hand-in provided people with the means to make a difference, resulting in some courageous acts. Newby’s most memorable moment was a woman phoning in, saying, “I stole my husband’s gun and I hid it away because he was always threatening me with it. And I took it out today and I went and handed it in – and this thing has been burning a hole in my mind for 18 months. Today, I’m free, thank you, I’m free.”¹²

⁸ Interview with Peter Storey, 9/10/02

⁹ 16 December is a significant day in the lives of all South Africans – for some it was celebrated as the Day of the Covenant commemorating the battle of Blood River when the Boers defeated the Zulu armies in 1838, for others as the anniversary of the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) the armed wing of the ANC, in 1962. It was renamed the Day of Reconciliation.

¹⁰ Interview with Peter Storey, 9/10/02

¹¹ Interview with David Newby, 10/10/02

¹² Ibid

The hand-in was also a challenge to government to act. The Minister of Safety and Security responded to the campaign by declaring a 24-hour amnesty. The police participated by staffing all hand-in points to ensure that the correct procedures were followed, that weapons and ammunition handed in were rendered inoperable and to ensure some measure of protection for those coming to hand in weapons as well as those working at the hand-in points. The South African Police Services (SAPS) were also responsible for transferring all weapons and ammunition to a secure storage facility. A total of 900 firearms and explosives including 199 pistols, forty two AK-47s, 72 hand grenades and more than 7000 rounds of ammunition were handed in across the country in 24 hours. Although this number was disappointing, the GFSA campaign had put the issue of national gun control on the political and social agenda (Meek, 1998).

An unexpected result of this campaign was that it made the gun lobby visible. The South African Gun Owners Association had been in existence for several years but, as Storey said, “no one had ever questioned their right to be gun owners. This campaign was doing that.”¹³ The gun lobby has continued to oppose the work of GFSA in the fight against gun violence.¹⁴

Australia

On the afternoon of 28 April 1996, one man, armed with two semi-automatic rifles, gunned down 35 people at a popular holiday resort in Tasmania, Australia.¹⁵ Eighteen people were wounded. By mid afternoon the regular radio and television programmes were being interrupted by news flashes of a man ‘running amok with a gun’ at Tasmania’s Port Arthur tourist site (Chapman, 1998:1,13). The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, who had only taken office in February 1996, moved swiftly. The following day he announced his intention to introduce sweeping gun control reforms. A week after the massacre on 4 May, thousands of people gathered in Hyde Park, in the heart of Sydney. Families of those killed at Port Arthur, mothers with babies in push chairs, survivors of previous gun massacres, trade unionists, health workers and concerned citizens gathered with placards and banners calling for stricter gun control.¹⁶

The mass shooting shocked the Australian people. “This was not part of the Australian identity”, said Chapman.¹⁷ Coverage of the shooting dominated radio and television news bulletins and current affairs programmes. The media described the massacres as “the worst and largest civilian death toll involving a single gunman anywhere in the world this century” (Chapman, 1998:15). What followed was an impassioned debate between those who argued that Australia couldn’t be allowed to ‘go down the American path’ and those who opposed almost any form of gun control. As in South Africa, the campaign for stricter gun laws made visible the presence of an organised voice of gun owners, often referred to as the gun lobby.¹⁸

Ironically, attorney Roland Browne, a resident of Hobart (capital of Tasmania), and a leading gun control advocate had, just one month before, written a letter to the Hobart Mercury pointing out that a gun massacre such as had been witnessed in Dunblane (UK) just a few

¹³ Interview with Peter Storey

¹⁴ Interview with Martin Hood, 12/10/02

¹⁵ Although Tasmania is an island off the coast of mainland Australia, it is administratively one of eight jurisdictions, i.e. six states and two territories

¹⁶ Interview with Rebecca Peters, 24/11/02

¹⁷ Interview with Simon Chapman, 16/07/02

¹⁸ Email communication with Philip Alpers, 23/11/03

months before could be repeated in Tasmania because of the easy access to semi automatic weapons in the State. At the time of the killings he was in a meeting of the Tasmanian Coalition for Gun Control (CGC), planning a meeting with the Tasmanian Police Minister for the following week on the need for gun law reform.¹⁹

The CGC was a small group of dedicated individuals consisting of a journalist, a public health policy advisor, attorneys, trade unionists, and activists. Some of them had been working behind the scenes for several years reviewing the Australian gun laws across the various states. Rebecca Peters, a journalist and at that time a law student, had developed a comprehensive guide on Australia's gun laws.²⁰ As the press inundated the two CGC spokespersons, Chapman and Peters, they were able to respond rapidly because for years they had been researching and writing documents and having their views filed in press cuttings across the country. In a time of pre-shooting apathy they had largely been ignored. However, when the Port Arthur massacre happened they were ready to respond.²¹ Within a few hours of the massacre, they began organising and mobilising to get people out onto the streets, calling for stricter gun laws.

Framing the 'defining moment'

The social movement literature identifies some of the key factors necessary for effective social mobilisation. One factor is an 'internal stimulus' (Hall, 2003). In the three case studies reviewed, the gun massacres in Australia and Brazil and the advent of democracy in South Africa acted as internal stimuli for social mobilisation in the fight against gun violence. The response to the 'defining moment' was similar in all three instances, with influential individuals and long time social or political activists coming together and organising a campaign to mobilise a significant section of civil society behind a call to action.

All three case studies demonstrate that a 'defining moment' doesn't just happen – it is constructed by social actors. It consists of both the event itself and the responses of the social actors. Rebecca Peters asserts that, "Port Arthur was in fact the 'end' and not the 'beginning'."²² It was the end in the sense that the CGC's ability to respond rapidly to the Port Arthur massacre was the culmination of years of preparation for such a moment and led quickly to decisive legislative reform. The scale of social mobilisation in response to the massacre was unprecedented and it provided the necessary pressure for government to act.

Laying the groundwork

Although the 'internal stimulus' acted as a catalyst for action and campaigning in all three case studies, there is clear evidence that there was at the very least a tacit knowledge of violence as a social problem in the years preceding the 'catalyst event'. The Australian campaign was not just the result of public outrage to the Port Arthur massacre. A group of social activists had been working on the issue for several years prior to the events described above. The CGC was formed in 1992 and had done a lot of groundwork on the issue of gun violence. It had developed a policy framework for drafting new firearms legislation and was beginning to work with the department of justice in early 1996 in drafting legislation at state level. When the Port Arthur massacre made the news, Prime Minister John Howard was

¹⁹ Email communication with Roland Browne, 10/12/03

²⁰ Interview with Rebecca Peters, 24/11/02

²¹ Email communication with Philip Alpers, 23/11/03

²² Email communication with Rebecca Peters, 30/03/04

presented with the NSW draft, which enabled him to move rapidly on the policy front and offer the public a concrete solution. Thus the Coalition was able to mobilise public support for the policy in response to the massacre.²³

The CGC activists did not think they would be able to “influence in any significant way what was in the media at that time.”²⁴ They were surprised when the national media outlets said: ‘we need uniform gun laws, we need registration of all guns, and we need to ban all semi-automatics.’²⁵ These were arguments the CGC had been putting forward for several years before 1996. Peters goes on to say, “we thought we were still trying to establish this as the norm, but in fact what happened is that it had become so established that these newspapers and TV thought this was their opinion. Everyone said, ‘time to change the gun laws, here are the three most important things.’”²⁶ What the CGC had been saying for years had in fact filtered into the public domain, and the Port Arthur massacre had consolidated media and public opinion in favour of gun control. Peters comments that, “it was like all the parts were sitting there waiting to come together and Port Arthur provided the moment where they all came together. And although we didn’t plan it ... but if you lay your groundwork very, very solidly, if you landscape it and all the surfaces point down, stuff flows to the point where you want it. We had done the groundwork so well, that even though at that point we were inundated and could not deal with all the media enquiries, we couldn’t communicate all the things (we wanted to), but because we had done such good work before, it didn’t matter.”²⁷

As in Australia, there was prior knowledge of violence as a social issue among social justice and political activists in Brazil and South Africa and these activists led the civil society response to the ‘catalyst event’. A distinguishing feature was their experience of political and state violence. Many activists interviewed spoke about their own experience of police violence, the brutality of the apartheid state and the presence of guns in South African society. South Africa experienced high levels of violence during the four years of the negotiated settlement (1990-1994), such as the train shootings in the Vaal, hostel violence and the KwaZulu-Natal massacres. Many interviewees talked about South Africa being ‘awash with guns’ in this period.²⁸ As one interviewee said, “People were actually saturated with violence.”²⁹ There was also a growing awareness, that “the violence within homes, the workplace, etc was a part of our ‘institutionalised memory and it had to be broken’”.³⁰ Most, if not all of the key protagonists in the ‘*gun free South Africa*’ campaign had been anti-apartheid activists and part of the mass democratic movement. This experience played a major role in their understanding of the nature of armed violence and the need for alternatives and strengthened their resolve that guns had no place in a new democratic order.

Some of the founding members of VR were political activists who had opposed the military dictatorship and gone into exile in the mid 60s.³¹ When they started returning in the late 70s one of the biggest adjustments they needed to make was getting used to the high levels of violence. Antônio Bandeira, a political activist and now head of the disarmament project in VR, remembers: “I saw contrasts, the things people did not yet see. The issue of guns did not

²³ Interview with Rebecca Peters, 24/11/02

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Interview with Martin Umbayazi, 1/07/03

²⁹ Interview with Father Pete John Pearson, 8/10/02

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ There were two waves of exiles in response to the military dictatorship – in 1964 and 1968

exist. People were still not discussing violence. But I saw how Brazil had become violent”.³² As a professor of political science, Bandeira started writing about this issue in newspapers, but he discovered that no one wanted to discuss it. There appeared to be no channels through which to deal with the issue, either at the level of civil society and the NGO community or through the state.³³

In all three instances, the ability of influential individuals, analysts and activists to respond to a specific event and frame it as a ‘defining moment’, created the momentum for a public campaign to influence public policy, particularly in the area of security and justice. The conditions existing prior to the catalyst event played an important role in creating the climate in which civil society could organise and to some extent influenced the strategies they employed. In the case of Australia and South Africa, the presence of a sympathetic government was critical in providing an enabling environment. It also set the scene for moving beyond protest into influencing public policy on firearms legislation.

The growth and development of the gun control movement in three case studies

Brazil

A history of violence

In the seventies, the military dominated the political system in Brazil (Fernandes, 1994). The trade union movement and other social movements had been crushed by the dictatorship and it was difficult to organise for social change on a large scale. For many activists one way forward was to look downward to the “local plane, to communities” (Fernandes, 1994:26). The thinking was that action at the grass roots level could pave the way for social change. This history of social organisation at the grass roots has shaped VR’s post-dictatorship strategy of working at the grass roots through project development and implementation.

In 1986, almost 20 years after the coup, Brazil entered a period of political transition from a repressive military regime to a democracy and although this was a gradual process, many consider 1986 as the end of the dictatorship (Landman, 2003:5). After the transition, Brazil experienced a “dramatic increase in crime levels, especially violent crimes” (Landman, 2003:6). Violent crime was characterized by high levels of gang activity and the availability of firearms, especially in urban areas (Ibid). The growth of criminal organisations associated with the illegal commerce of drugs and firearms has meant an increase in violent crime, particularly in Rio de Janeiro (Viva Rio, 2001; Landman, 2003:18). The gangs and their ‘private armies’ are in control of much of the urban space in the favelas³⁴ and this has had a significant impact on police strategies to reduce gun violence as well as those adopted by civil society organisations such as VR.

Brazil has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, 25.78 per 100,000³⁵ (UN, 1998). In 1995 Brazil recorded 41,000 firearm homicides, 88% of their total homicides for that year. Over a period of almost 20 years firearm related mortality rates for young men between the

³² Interview with Antônio Rangel Bandeira, 24/10/02

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Favela is a term used in Brazil to describe shanty towns or informal settlements, often excluded from basic social services

³⁵ South Africa’s firearm homicide rate per 100,00 is even higher at 26.63

ages of 15-19 years have risen dramatically from 35% of all non-natural deaths in 1983 to 65% in 2001 (Viva Rio, 2002). In addition, during the dictatorship the police were an agent of political repression and were known for their use of torture and human rights abuses. Although police practice has changed over the last 10 years, they continue to be feared by the people. According to Landman there has been an “increase in police violence and brutality since the political transition, especially towards the poorer citizens who are considered the ‘dangerous classes’”(Landman, 2003:31). In the period 1993 to 1996, the police were responsible for 942 deaths. The number of people killed by police increased from 155 in 1993 to 209 in 1996 (Cano, 1997:30). They were also responsible for the massacres in Rio in 1993.

One explanation for the levels of violence in Rio is the disparity between rich and poor which creates a sharp division of the city along economic, social and political lines. Both Brazil and South Africa have amongst the highest income inequality coefficients in the world with Brazil being the highest (0.63 in 1991)³⁶ (Landman, 2003:4). In the early 90s Zuenir Ventura, a well-known Brazilian journalist and a founding member of VR, wrote a book about Rio, one of the central themes of which was the violence which threatened to further divide an already divided city. His book, *‘Cidade Partida’* (The Divided City) became a reference point for talking about the city as one divided from itself, primarily along the lines of the affluent middle classes in the *‘zona sul’* and the favela residents who occupy land on the hills between these areas and are largely excluded from the formal social and political institutions of the city³⁷ (Ventura, 1996). Residents have little or no access to basic social services, inadequate, often non-existent policing and no formal political representation at local or state level.

This type of violence is clearly articulated by one of the residents of Rocinha.³⁸ “I have another vision in general of what this violence is. Like for example, if you feel here in the favela that people feel hungry, this is also violence for me. Violence is not just the fact that you are assaulted or that there is robbery...but I have a conception that also includes social violence; the very existence of a favela is a violence. Why do we have to live on the top of the hills just like goats? Like others can live in the asphalt.³⁹ All the history of the existence of favelas in Brasil and in Latin America passes through a type of violence – passes through an economic and social violence of the nation in which we are inserted.”⁴⁰ This history demonstrates that the two mobilising incidents of armed violence in mid 1993 in Rio were not uncommon and the experience of violence at the hands of the police was only too familiar for Rio residents. What made a difference this time was that there was an organised public response to the shootings, demanding action and seeking solutions.

Social mobilisation: campaigns and projects

The two defining characteristics of the civil society response to the massacres in Rio, which Fernandes describes as both symbolic and practical, were critical in defining the character of VR and its ongoing strategic direction. The *‘two minutes of silence’* was a strong symbolic action, and the Commission was a practical response as it explored ways in which civil society could reduce levels of violence in the city. This dual strategy of mass mobilisation around a symbolic event which “appeals to the heart, on the one hand, and on the other giving

³⁶ The Gini coefficient is one of the indicators for income inequality and it ranges from 0 (absolute equality) to 1 (absolute inequality).

³⁷ Interview with Zuenir Ventura, 31/05/03

³⁸ Rocinha is one of the largest and oldest (early 1920s) favelas in Rio.

³⁹ Asphalt is the term used to describe the wealthy suburbs, implying good roads and infrastructure

⁴⁰ Rocinha focus group, 31/05/03

people something practical to do, which works and gives results”, is central to how VR conducts its campaigns and implements its projects at the grass roots.⁴¹

Campaigns: mass mobilisation & engaging with the state

The focus of most of VR’s campaigns over the last 10 years has been a call to stop the violence in Rio. Fernandes argues that violence is confusing and often results in people acting out deep prejudices and historical resentments regarding the cause of violence. He believes that campaigns help to clarify the debate and get people to focus on the key issues (Viva Rio, 2003). Through campaigning, VR has mobilised mass support for its goals and engaged with the state in one way or another, whether it was through protesting about the high levels of violence, or challenging the state as was seen in some of the early campaigns such as the ‘*Rio Desarme*’ and ‘*React Rio*’⁴² campaigns, or lobbying the state to change the firearms laws.

VR’s early campaigns were primarily a protest against violence, with little direct engagement with the state. Ventura comments that “in the beginning VR focused on social protest and agitation. This involved mobilising people to go onto the streets, to protest and to complain to the government”. He adds, “This was very beautiful, and it was visible. It was something the media was interested in, but after... there wasn’t really continuity. Almost you ask yourself, what next?”⁴³ VR was forced to reflect on its style of work and what was being accomplished, which Ventura believes was ‘fundamental to the organisation and its growth’.⁴⁴ VR decided to deepen its work at the grassroots (in favelas). At the same time it recognised that the state was an important role-player in achieving the goal of an integrated and less violent city. However, at this stage, it had little or no relationship with the state due to the historically antagonistic relations between the state and the NGO sector and the presence of a highly militarised police force and security sector. This had created a climate of mistrust and according to one activist, “this is a country that has a history of the public being abandoned by the state”.⁴⁵

In 1995 the Social Democratic Party won the elections and Enrico Cardoso was elected President. VR saw this as an opportunity to engage with the state and invited President Cardoso to visit VR in Rio. This facilitated a dialogue with the state governor on the possibility of VR and the state collaborating on community projects. VR was optimistic that despite their limited resources they would be able to enter a new phase of working at the grassroots with the support of the state.⁴⁶ However, in late 1995, the son of the Chairman of the Federations of Industries in Brazil was kidnapped. Two days later another two people were kidnapped. VR responded rapidly, organising the ‘*React Rio*’ campaign under the campaign slogan: ‘*One Billion for One Million*’, a promise to mobilise a million people and a challenge to the state to invest one billion *reals*⁴⁷ in public security in Rio. In tropical storms, 400,000 people marched, demanding an end to violence. Given the emerging positive relationship with the government, Fernandes thought this incident could unite the state and civil society in their response to reducing violence, but he underestimated the extent to which the state was threatened by VR’s ability to mobilise, which was perceived as challenging

⁴¹ Interview with Rubem César Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁴² React Rio was a march of 400,000 people against violence (95); Rio Desarme was a disarmament campaign – both are described later in the text

⁴³ Interview with Zuenir Ventura, 31/05/03

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Interview with Eucresio Ribeiro, 25/10/02

⁴⁶ Interview with Rubem Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁴⁷ Brazilian currency

government on key social issues.⁴⁸ Fernandes says that the state governor felt “we were going beyond the limits of what civil society should be involved in”.⁴⁹ This was a key moment for VR as it altered its relationship both to the state and to the marginalised in Rio. In the words of Fernandes, this was “almost a second foundation”.⁵⁰

Another factor which consolidated this shift was the growing understanding that violence is a complex problem requiring a multifaceted approach. Ventura says that “in the same way that violence is historical and is decades of accumulation, then in the same way in looking at reducing that violence, we had to look at long term solutions and changing the culture (and) developing a culture of non-violence. A more long term solution was needed”.⁵¹

Projects: work in the favelas

In 1996, VR began implementing projects at the grass roots, deepening their engagement with the marginalised and those most affected by gun violence. It initiated an education project called *telecurso*, an accelerated learning course operating primarily in low-income neighbourhoods. The *telecurso* is a video-based curriculum, approved by the State Secretary of Education and taught by live instructors. Students receive their elementary school certificate after nine months, which is equivalent to seven years of formal schooling. Without this certificate it is almost impossible to enter the formal job market. Since 1997, more than 60,000 students have participated in these courses (Viva Rio, 2003). Although the main aim of the *telecurso* is to provide people with the opportunity to participate in the formal economy, it was also created to build social cohesion. Eucrazio Ribeiro, one of the co-ordinators of *telecurso* says, “what we (VR) created was to work with socially excluded people, to create jobs, to turn people into social actors, to create community leadership”.⁵²

This education project demonstrates three key elements which are present in almost all of VR’s projects: using a methodology of pilot projects; partnership with the state; and developing public policy. The pilot project methodology has enabled VR to test an idea to determine its feasibility and then replicate it if the pilot is successful. Included in this strategy is developing partnerships with the state to either assist in the replication of the project through funding or partnerships, or to wholly take over the project. The *telecurso* was one of VR’s first major successful project in disadvantaged communities and was also one of the first examples of a successful partnership with the state. They entered into a partnership with the Labour department and the city mayor to establish 144 telesalas (classrooms) in disadvantaged areas. VR’s intention was that this partnership would result in government developing an education policy for ‘dropouts’⁵³ and eventually taking over the entire project, with VR maintaining links to the project through the local leadership and continuing its role in building social citizenship.

Many of VR’s projects are aimed at the general public, such as the citizen’s rights counters, which provide free legal advice (*balcão*) and the environmental projects. Others such as the *telecurso* and the *Fight for Peace* boxing club are primarily aimed at young men. In Brazil, as in South Africa, men between the ages of 14-24 years are most at risk for gun death (Viva

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Email communication with Rubem Fernandes, 15/03/04

⁵¹ Interview with Zuenir Ventura, 31/05/03

⁵² Interview with Eucrazio Ribeiro, 25/10/02

⁵³ term used to describe students who leave school before completing their elementary education

Rio, 2001). The majority of young men who go into the drug/gun trade have only two to four years of formal schooling. Ribeiro supports targeting this group by saying, “It is mainly geared to young men who dropped out of school...that is why they go back to school to get this as a passport to get work in the formal sector. In the absence of this certificate they either go into the informal sector or into narco trafficking. The telecurso creates alternatives.”⁵⁴

This shift in emphasis to a more grassroots and constituency based approach gave rise to a shift in the discourse within the organisation. Although it had always acknowledged that the social exclusion of many of Rio’s residents was a major factor contributing to the violence, it began to emphasise the links between these two. Almost all interviewees described the work of VR as addressing the problem of violence and social exclusion through implementing projects that build social citizenship.^{55 56}

Fernandes argues that despite shifts in the discourse within the organisation, VR has maintained its focus on reducing violence but has increasingly included the underlying causes such as lack of participation in political structures and lack of access to the formal job market. He also believes that given the nature of violence in Rio it is not possible to maintain a ‘single issue’ focus on firearms.⁵⁷ As a result, VR initiated a range of projects from small arms control to micro credit and neighbourhood gardener’s programmes. Another example of this is VR’s environmental projects. It has engineered one of the most successful and innovative environmental water recycling projects in the favela of Ramos, in conjunction with the State Secretary for the Environment. The area is now home to a range of social services, including the *balcão*, ‘future stations’ (computers) and tele-classrooms (Viva Rio, 2003). This shift is reflected in VR’s current mission statement which states that VR is an organisation “dedicated to raising consciousness and mobilising the public as well as undertaking large scale projects that directly improve the quality of life of Rio’s residents” (Viva Rio, 2003).

Working in a contested terrain: relations with the state, civil society and the media

VR recognised that solutions to urban violence required strategies that engaged with a number of role-players such as the state, civil society, at-risk groups and the media, some of whom may be opposing forces, for example at-risk youth and the police. VR thus established a human rights and public security programme which includes human rights training with the police and piloting a community policing model in the favelas while simultaneously conducting life skills training, which includes citizenship rights and responsibilities (Viva Rio, 2001). Another opposing force is the organised gun lobby and the firearms manufacturers. As in South Africa, the fight against gun violence involves countering the views and agenda of this lobby, both through the media and in Congress, where they have been particularly vocal in expressing their opposition to the new firearms legislation.

Over the last five years VR has worked increasingly with the state at federal and state level on a number of projects, such as the Children’s Hope Centre, human rights and policing, the disarmament programme and the citizens rights counters (Viva Rio, 2003). It also receives significant state funding.⁵⁸ As VR has expanded its projects in the favelas and its partnership with the state has grown, many confuse VR with the state. An example of this is a police

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Viva Rio staff focus group two, 2/06/03

⁵⁶ Rocinha focus group, 31/05/03

⁵⁷ Interview with Rubem Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁵⁸ 20% of Viva Rio’s current budget is state funded

officer asking a Viva Rio staff member to “tell Rubem to please raise my salary.”⁵⁹ Some of the VR staff attribute this to a lack of confidence in public institutions and acknowledge that VR does fulfill some of the functions of the state, especially in disadvantaged areas, as the state often does not have the capacity to perform these functions in these areas. Others see this confused identity as potentially damaging to their work at community level as well as ‘making the state lazy’ to do its own work. Staff agree that although VR operates in many different arenas, it cannot respond to all the demands to implement new projects. Some staff described VR as “an octopus filled with tentacles – we go everywhere” and another added that in fact VR was more like a toucan bird, “which has a small body and a huge beak”.⁶⁰

Fernandes believes that civil society and the state have different roles to play in the struggle against armed violence, “because of the nature of NGOs they can never be part of government or be in any way identified with official power” (Fernandes, 1994:12). However, VR has been criticised for working too closely with the state, in particular with the police. The Left in Brazil has been critical of VR’s level of engagement with the state. Another critique is that VR’s partnerships have been with the state and the private sector rather than with other civil society organisations. VR’s leadership see this criticism as the inability of what they call the ‘orthodox Left’ to engage with the new reality of working for social change.^{61 62}

VR has also been criticised for working at the local level rather than engaging with overarching structural inequalities and socio-economic policies, the underlying causes of the violence. There is a critique from the Left which says that one cannot change gun violence without changing the structural realities. Fernandes disagrees and is clear that although VR’s approach is guided by implementing projects that make a difference in the lives of ordinary people and reduce some of the factors that contribute to the violence, it does not see itself as trying to address the fundamental causes of violence and poverty in the city at the macro level. In comparing the social movements of the seventies with civil society organisations in the nineties, Fernandes identifies working at the local level as common to both, as “social movements were typically perceived as expressions of localised problems...they created relationship networks in which local initiative was taken for granted; The Third sector, in comparison to the other two sectors, by contrast, demands that we focus on small things. Its concern is with the social rather than the political and the economic” (Fernandes, 1994: 39). He believes the best way to impact on the macro level is to work at a micro and mesa level.

One of the founding members of VR, Luis Eduardo Soares, a sociologist and briefly State Secretary of Public Security in the new Lula government, feels that the biggest problem with this approach is that an NGO runs the risk of becoming a social welfare organisation. This gives rise to a depoliticisation of issues. He goes on to describe how this manifests itself in the NGO community and politics in general: “VR is now trusted by everyone and by every government because of the price it pays for that – which is depoliticisation. It’s so deeply depoliticised, this organisation, that no one feels uncomfortable–no political force will feel uncomfortable in dealing with VR. Because it shapes its language and its approach without betraying its various principles of course but to adapt itself to the dialogue, to the terms of new dialogue that would be required by new leaders, by new political forces that will take office – it will always be a partner, to anyone, to everyone. There is a price to pay.”⁶³ He

⁵⁹ Viva Rio staff focus group two, 2/06/03

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Interview with Antônio Bandeira, 30/05/02

⁶² Interview with Marcello Zacchi, 29/05/03

⁶³ Interview with Luis Eduardo Soares, 1/11/02

believes that NGOs and civil society organisations should not limit themselves to delivering services or initiating projects, but that one of their goals should be to strengthen critical political consciousness.

VR has a formal and institutional relationship with the media which is not seen in the other two case studies. For example, one of its most innovative projects, the *Radio Viva Rio*, is the result of a partnership with the Globo Radio network (Viva Rio, 2003). This station, broadcast throughout Rio, produces original content focusing on low-income communities with the goal of providing information and entertainment. Two other communications projects, the *Viva Favela web Portal* and the *Viva Favela Radio Network* are both geared towards providing information on the day-to-day life in favelas (Ibid). Those most familiar with VR's history, such as Fernandes and Ventura, argue that it is precisely the initial concept of using the media as a major stakeholder in the fight against urban violence that has shaped VR and made it different, not just to NGOs within Brazil but across the globe.⁶⁴

Focus on Firearms: Changing the law

In late 1994, VR in alliance with evangelical churches organised the '*Rio Desarme*' campaign in response to a military police invasion of favelas.⁶⁵ For the first time VR focused specifically on firearms as a cause of violence. The organisers were inundated with hundreds of guns handed in by favela residents. They had not been prepared for this and decided that more research was needed on the nature and extent of gun violence in Rio. It was only in the late 90s that VR again focused specifically on the issue of gun control, both through its campaigns and its research programme. The collection of data on types of firearms used in gun related crime in Rio and other supporting data were critical in building the relationship with the state. It increased confidence in the NGO sector and enhanced its ability to contribute to the debate on security and firearms control.⁶⁶ In 1999, VR organised the '*Rio, Abaixo essa Arma*' (Rio, Put that Gun Down) campaign to mobilise support for a change in firearms legislation. Over a million signatures were collected in support of a law banning the commerce of small arms in Brazil.⁶⁷ This focus on firearms and the strengthening of legislation and arms control management systems has remained central in subsequent campaigns. For example, the most recent campaign of September 2003 when 50,000 people, including Brazil's Minister of Justice, the Secretary of Public Security, the Governor of Rio, and other representatives of government joined community associations, civil society organisations, actors and singers, religious leaders and students on the famous Copacabana beach to march for a gun free Brazil.⁶⁸ This public display of support was timed to coincide with a decision in Congress regarding sweeping reforms to the country's gun legislation. "Public opinion needs to keep up the pressure on elected officials",⁶⁹ said Fernandes, and it played an important role in getting Congress to vote and approve new gun legislation known as the Disarmament Statute in late 2003. The new law restricts firearm ownership through increasing the age limit and introducing gun registration. It also increases penalties for illegal possession and trafficking and provides for a future national referendum on the banning of civilian firearms ownership.

⁶⁴ Interview with Zuenir Ventura, 31/05/03

⁶⁵ Interview with Rubem Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁶⁶ Interview with Pablo Dreyfuss, 2/06/03

⁶⁷ 1,312,929 audited signatures were collected.

⁶⁸ Viva Rio press release, 9/03

⁶⁹ Ibid

Character of the organisation

VR evolved from a one-off campaign into an organisation. After the defining moment of the 1993 massacres in Rio, VR registered as a non-profit NGO. The shift from a middle class activist movement with the capacity for mass mobilisation to an organisation locating its work in communities has had an impact on the character of the organisation. As it grew so did the diversity of its active participants. More and more the struggle was taken to those most affected by gun violence. This is clearly reflected in the breadth and range of its projects. Although there has been a growth in grassroots leadership within the organisation, the current VR board of 35 which consists of business leaders, trade union leaders, media and publicity professionals, community leaders, and professionals such as architects and attorneys, still reflects an elite, middle class leadership.

VR exhibits all of the features of a social movement: broad based leadership, strong collective identity, multiple identities of support and mass mobilisation. Its logo represents the city as one which has to be brought together.⁷⁰ For many, the primary reason for being part of the movement is the chance to impact on altering the social inequalities in the city. Employees and volunteers identify strongly with the organisation's vision of an undivided city. Many interviewees could not always articulate the link between VR projects and their impact on violence reduction, but they were clear that these did make a difference. One of the residents of Rocinha put it this way, "I think it (VR) has been extremely important, very important, and it has helped diminish the violence, the social violence because it has given opportunity for people to better their business, to get credit, to open space for employing other people. If they can make their little business a little bit bigger they can then employ people. So you have more people employed. And this helps to keep these people, who are now employed, from going hungry, and need to assault and rob to eat."⁷¹

Many of those active in VR are active in other community activities and organisations such as the residents of Rocinha. VR has several projects in this favela but long before VR arrived, residents had been organising in their community on social issues. As one of the residents said, "Everything we have here, everything, infrastructure, sewerage, health, education, was because of the mobilisation of the community. Nobody came here to say 'we are going to come and give you stuff'. No, we sweated a lot, we sweated a lot to get it".⁷² For many poor people, the only way of making sure they get services is through community and social mobilisation. The residents of Rocinha have done this by asserting their power through their numbers to influence government practice. In any form of social mobilisation it is important to understand the location of power in the local and national context and how best to influence that. One of Rocinha's most influential leaders and an active member of VR, Carlinhos Costa, describes how he got involved in social justice issues, "You have to make a choice very early in your life when you live in a favela...around nine or ten you make a choice for yourself. You get involved in things like mini schools projects, anything...and those that do not want to know about this kind of thing, you know their future is one of crime."⁷³

VR has maintained an extraordinary capacity for social mobilisation along with its growth as a formal organisation. Although it has continued to expand more rapidly than either of the

⁷⁰ Interview with Rubem Fernandes, 26/10/02

⁷¹ Rocinha focus group, 31/05/03

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Interview with Carlinhos Costa, 25/10/02

other two case studies, it has maintained an ability to devolve constantly to project level leaders. All decisions go via the Director but Fernandes devolves the actual work and day-to-day maintenance of projects to the VR employees. He sees VR as a 'true social laboratory. A laboratory of hope' (Viva Rio, 2003). He believes that VR is part of the new growth of civil society, usually referred to as the Third Sector in Latin America; "though non-governmental and non-profit, it is organised, it is independent and the prime target for its mobilisation is the voluntary dimension of human behaviour. Again this is not new but what is new is their growth and their relational patterns they involve" (Fernandes, 1994:7).

South Africa

History of violence

South Africa has inherited a culture of violence which was embodied both in the violence of apartheid and the romanticisation of the armed struggle and mythologizing of the AK-47 (Kirsten, 2000:7). Guns have always been a feature of the South African landscape, and have been an important weapon in maintaining the border between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the colonized and the colonizer (Kirsten, 2001). The masculine identity of colonizer and gun owner reinforces the racial dimension of gun ownership in South Africa, where during the apartheid era private firearm ownership was restricted to whites. For some black South Africans owning a firearm is an expression of having attained full citizenship rights under the new democratic government. These factors make gun control a contested issue in South Africa, particularly within civil society (Ibid).

The call for a gun free South Africa emerged from people's experience of decades of structural and state sponsored violence during the apartheid era. It was also a response to the high levels of armed violence which had marked the four years of negotiations prior to the 1994 general elections. Although the threat of violence was present primarily through the structural violence of apartheid and the repressive violence of its security forces, it was also present in the anti-apartheid forces. According to a leading trade unionist at the time, there was a loss of control over young cadres, especially in the self-defence units and some of them engaged in criminal activity in the 80s, which was not for political ends. This contributed to the demand for guns and the movement of weapons into communities.⁷⁴ This phenomenon was widely understood but not publicly acknowledged. The '*gun free SA*' campaign cited this as another reason for a weapons hand-in. "This growth of criminal violence took place almost unnoticed under the mantle of political strife.... Under the surface was an organised criminal campaign to establish violence as the main arbiter of social conduct so that the line between criminal and political violence is no longer clear at all" (GFSA, 1994).

During the political transition, South Africa, like Brazil, experienced a dramatic increase in violent crime (Schonteich, M & A Louw, 2001). Between 1994 and 1999, violent crime increased by 22% (Ibid). It is these high levels of violent crime that set South Africa apart from other crime-ridden societies (Landman, 2003:14). Multiple factors have contributed to the growth of violent crime over the last 10 years. These include: the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy; a culture of violence; inequality and the increasing wealth gap; and the proliferation of firearms (Ibid).

⁷⁴ Interview with Jay Naidoo, 10/02/03

South Africa is a heavily armed society. In 1994 there were 3.5 million licensed firearms in the hands of civilians, with approximately 1500 new applications each day. Applications peaked around the 1994 elections with 236,033 new licences issued in that year. This was in contrast to the following year which showed a sharp drop to 150,928 new licences (Chetty, 2000). In 1994, there were 26,832 homicides, 11,134 of which were committed with a firearm. While the number of people murdered in South Africa since 1994 has declined, the percentage of people killed by firearms has increased from 41% of all murders in 1994 to 49.3% in 2000 (Chetty, 2000; GFSA, 2002). This legacy of violence continues to impact on the economic, social and political relations being forged in South Africa's recently established democracy. Solutions to the problem of violence in South Africa must be grounded in the recognition that it has inherited a culture of violence, which accepts violence as a legitimate solution to conflict (Kirsten, 2000).

Strategies: social mobilisation and public policy

The period immediately after the hand-in was a critical time in the life of the gun control movement in South Africa. Activists were demoralised. Some felt the hand-in had been a failure. For most there was an implicit understanding that one weapons hand-in could not achieve the goal of a gun free South Africa; a more sustained long-term campaign was needed. For most the hand-in was largely a symbolic gesture, yet with the very practical result of getting some guns off the streets and beginning to publicise concerns about gun violence. For some the hand-in was more than just getting guns off the streets. It was also about training a new generation of activists to mobilise and organise. David Newby, a leading gun control activist in the Western Cape at the time, felt that, "It was this micro experience of working at the grass roots that excited me and kept me going."⁷⁵

Sharon Trail, co-ordinator of the 'gun free SA' campaign was clear that the broader impact of the hand-in was not the number of guns collected but raising awareness. "There was not a person in South Africa who wasn't talking about the gun free campaign, and that was what we wanted to do", she said⁷⁶ This hand-in campaign put the issue of gun violence on the agenda in a coherent way and helped crystallise the issue in the public's mind.⁷⁷ It was this achievement that convinced the loose network of people who organised the campaign to become an organisation. In May 1995, the 'gun free SA' campaign became Gun Free South Africa, a national NGO based in Johannesburg. At this meeting, GFSA forged its mission statement, clearly stating its goal of "making a material contribution to building a safe and secure nation, free from fear, by reducing the number of firearms in society" (GFSA pamphlet, 2001).

GFSA was working in the context of a newly established democracy. One of the most important shifts during this period for civil society and NGOs in particular, was the trend of engaging with and influencing the development of public policy. This occurred in a number of ways. Some NGOs entered into formal partnerships with government to develop policy jointly, others acted as consultants and still others remained outside of any contractual arrangement with government and chose to act in the more traditional manner of influencing policy through advocacy strategies which included lobbying members of Parliament. This had an impact on the structure and function of NGOs, some evolving into policy research institutes, others creating policy research departments. There was a demand from government

⁷⁵ Interview with David Newby, 10/10/02

⁷⁶ Interview with Sharon Trail, 16/10/03

⁷⁷ Interview with Sheena Duncan, 14/08/02

for people outside of it to provide expert knowledge on a range of new policy issues such as land reform, reproductive health issues and security sector reform.

GFSA recognised that this new and changing environment offered opportunities to influence both the practice and the policy on the use of firearms in South Africa. Similarly to VR in Brazil, GFSA realised it needed to go beyond social mobilisation in order to change the above-mentioned processes. The organisation's decision to work at both a policy level and at the grass roots was influenced by its understanding of the nature of the gun problem in South Africa, which is one of easy supply and high demand. By focusing on policy, GFSA could influence the supply side by making access to firearms more difficult through the legislative process. By focusing on mobilising at the grass roots, GFSA could begin to impact on the demand side by understanding the factors that drive people to want a gun, posing alternatives and exploring ways in which people can live together without guns. This dual strategy was based on the understanding that GFSA needed to mobilise support for the goal of a gun free South Africa through gun violence reduction programmes across a diverse range of constituencies and interest groups, involving people at local level. It needed to be a dual strategy which addressed demand and supply factors simultaneously, the one informing and influencing the other, creating a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

In the small arms literature this duality is often referred to as the demand and supply dynamic of small arms proliferation. The two are inextricably linked. Unless activists understand how the trade and use of firearms is organised, – i.e. the demand – they will not understand how to control the supply of weapons.⁷⁸ Jacklyn Cock argues that in South Africa the demand for guns “is socially constructed and the supply socially organised and therefore the solution is a social one” (Cock, 1997). This has led to some practitioners emphasizing that the locus for small arms control should be centered on developing strategies for lowering the need for weapons on the part of citizens (BICC, 1996). The GFSA case study demonstrates that it is possible and indeed necessary to address both demand and supply factors simultaneously.

Although GFSA pursued this dual strategy for several years, the link between demand and supply and therefore the need to work at both the grassroots level and on public policy, was not always understood by everyone in the organisation. In 1999 when the Firearms Control Bill (FCB) became a reality it provided the perfect opportunity for the link between the two to become more visible and to some extent this helped to achieve what Moyer describes as the connection between efforts at the grass roots and their impact at national level: “The power of most social movements comes from the strength of its local groups...yet grass roots groups are often unable to make a connection between their own efforts and what happens at the national and international level. It is important for activists to clearly see a direct connection between their own efforts and their impact at national level” (Moyer, 1987). This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Building alliances

GFSA is a single-issue campaign. This influences the organisations' strategic choices and means that it focuses primarily on firearms as the instrument of violence. Central to organising around a single issue is the understanding that other structures, initiatives and institutions organise around other key social justice issues such as violence against women,

⁷⁸ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue meeting, Cape Town, 3-5 March 2004

HIV/AIDS and access to social services. Building alliances with these organisations was regarded as important in achieving the goal of a gun free South Africa.

In the first few years, the challenge for GFSa was to build a solid support base for the objectives of the campaign through building its organisational base; developing alliances with other civil society organisations; and engaging with the state. This was done by building and strengthening contacts with local community leaders and structures; developing campaigns and programmes aimed at shifting attitudes to guns; developing relationships with like minded organisations to facilitate networking and putting the gun control issue on others' agendas; developing relationships with government departments, in particular, safety and security, justice and defence, at provincial and national level; working with the media; and developing research capacity. One example of how GFSa built its support base and developed alliances is its work within the religious sector, in particular the Catholic Justice and Peace (J&P) network. This was one of the major contributing factors to GFSa's growth. J&P works primarily with young blacks in disadvantaged areas and it "really gave us (GFSa) a whole new understanding of what young people in township areas were thinking about guns and how enthusiastic they were by making their premises gun free zones."⁷⁹

Research: building a strong case

An important component in GFSa's ability to influence the debate on gun control was its use of research data to support the need for changes in the firearms legislation. Most of GFSa's research has been linked to current policy issues and has addressed some of the most pressing questions on the nature and extent of gun violence, looking at strategies to reduce gun deaths.

One of GFSa's first commissioned research reports highlighted the risks of firearm ownership and the extent of gun usage in crime. In a docket analysis on gun crime and self-defence in two police precincts, one of the most important findings was that victims in possession of a firearm were four times more likely to have their firearms stolen than to use them in self-defence. This statistic has remained one of the most powerful pieces of information in the gun control debate, particularly in the fight to convince potential and current gun owners that having a gun puts you more at risk rather than being an effective means of self-defence. Added to this was the finding that using a gun in self-defence increases the likelihood that the perpetrator will fire his firearm between three and fourfold (Altbeker, 1999). The central findings of the research results were reflected in the news headlines. The Star led with "*Having a gun does not make you safer,*" while the Sowetan headline was "*Guns not an effective crime deterrent – study.*" GFSa could not have said it better. It captured what the organisation had been saying for a long time and could now back up with accurate data. Another purpose of the research was to share information, to raise awareness and to get people talking about a central issue in the new South Africa. This is one reason why GFSa was regarded as a serious voice in the arena of small arms control both at home and on the international stage. Its growing international connections, the increase in research capacity, the increase in staff capacity and the growth of its local and national networks contributed to this phenomenon.

⁷⁹ Interview with Sheena Duncan, 14/08/02

Gun Free Zones

Campaigning has been one of GFSA's most effective means of engaging communities on the issue of gun violence at both a national and local level. Over the last 10 years GFSA has run three campaigns. The first was the hand-in. The two most visible and successful GFSA campaigns have been the Gun Free Zone (GFZ) campaign and the Firearms Control Act (FCA) campaign.

The GFZ campaign became the most important entry point to working with communities on the issue of gun violence. When GFSA started the campaign in 1996, the intention was to enable people to do something practical about gun violence in their communities; something that was relatively easy to implement, with potential to empower people who supported the vision of a gun free South Africa, with the means to make visible their support and demonstrate their commitment to that vision. The GFZ campaign was one of the corner stones of building GFSA into an organisation. The approach was to work initially within sectors that were sympathetic and supportive of the broad aims of the organisation, hence the focus on schools and religious bodies. The aim was to use the existing base of support to expand into new geographical areas and new constituencies such as the health, women and youth sectors.

GFSA developed a workshop pack aimed at community leaders and activists, providing them with the tools and workshop outline which equipped them to run workshops, showing people how to declare certain public spaces such as church buildings, recreation centres and health clinics gun free zones. This they did without the direct involvement or physical presence of GFSA. This approach enabled communities to interpret the campaign according to their needs and implement according to what was appropriate in their context. The pack included copies of GFZ signs for easy reproduction as well as hard plastic signs – the customary gun free logo with a red circle around a gun and a slash through the gun. The image was simple with a clear message – no guns allowed. The process of becoming a gun free zone is integral to the campaign and is based on the idea that if those who have ownership of the building (not necessarily materially but in the social sense) agree to be gun free then it makes it far easier to implement the policy as well as monitor and maintain it (GFSA, 1996).

It acted as a vehicle to organise communities around the gun issue but more importantly it enabled people to discuss issues of public safety in general. Restricting the use of firearms is central to the GFZ message but once people had declared their public buildings as a GFZ they wanted to do more. So what had begun as a limited focus on one aspect of public safety broadened into issues of general public safety such as street lighting, public policing and community-police relations. It also became a tool for mobilising people in the public policy process, primarily through the formal submissions process on the FCB. Although the GFZ campaign was not primarily a crime fighting measure, in some locations where it has been successfully implemented, reduction of firearm carrying and firearm crime and violence have been reported.⁸⁰

One of the underlying purposes of the campaign was to build community support and solidarity around the call for a gun free South Africa. As the campaign got off the ground and the GFZ signs became visible in a variety of settings, GFSA realised the strength of the visual impact of the signs. Without words a powerful message was being conveyed to South Africans as they went about their daily business. Just as no-smoking signs had slowly

⁸⁰ Mapela Focus group, 5/11/03

embedded themselves in our consciousness, could the no gun signs begin to have the same impact in reworking social meanings?

Mapela

The work of GFSA activists in the community of Mapela is one example of the effectiveness of the dual strategy of grass roots mobilisation and policy work as a tool for building a movement. Mapela is a rural village of approximately 40,000 people, situated 35kms North West of Makopane, in Limpopo Province. When GFSA placed an advert in *The Star* calling on people to support the GFZ campaign and offering materials to assist communities in implementing it, Samuel Kobela, an unemployed resident of Mapela active in local community affairs, requested the GFZ pack. On his own initiative he set up a volunteer committee to look at ways in which his community could participate in the campaign. They had meetings with several stakeholders in the community, including religious leaders, school principals, traditional leaders and the police. After months of discussion, the residents of Mapela asked the GFSA national office to run a workshop in the community so that they could get the gun free zone project underway.

The committee systematically worked at getting the entire village declared a gun free zone. This is a clear example of how a campaign can be adapted and enhanced at the grass roots. GFSA provided the means but the bulk of the work was at the grass roots. The Mapela GFZ project generated public interest. The TV show *Carte Blanche* did a half hour insert on the Mapela community. When they arrived the crew was greeted with the GFZ sign wherever they went. Every building in the community from the shebeen to the schools and the tribal authority hall proudly displayed the sign. The message from community residents was simple—gun free zones make for a safer place.⁸¹

Mapela remains a gun free zone community eight years later. This does not mean that no one in the village owns firearms. It means that there is limited public carrying and misuse of guns.⁸² It has been a model not just for other communities in South Africa but throughout the world. GFSA representatives at international conferences have used Mapela as an example of community mobilisation around small arms reduction efforts and many people have been inspired and encouraged by the efforts of a small group of people who, with limited resources, but incredible passion and commitment, were able to make a difference to the lives of a small rural community. But the impact did not stop there.

Influencing public policy

Kobela was one of several community-based representatives who made it to Parliament during the public hearings on the FCB, in June 2000. He addressed Members of Parliament (MPs) of the Safety and Security portfolio committee on why they needed to take tough measures on gun ownership and used his community as an example of how it is possible to live a gun free existence. Very few of the speakers had his experience and insight. He had something unique to say. He did not take long to make his submission, perhaps seven of the 10 minutes allocated. But the impact of his words resounded in the applause of the MPs as he finished his last sentence. It was unprecedented to see MPs clapping after an oral submission. Kobela's words and ideas came back to the committee again and again, months later, as they

⁸¹ *Carte Blanche* TV programme

⁸² Mapela focus group, 5/11/03

deliberated the finer points of the legislation. Those in favour of including firearm free zones in the legislation kept coming back to his submission, reminding the other members that this was something wanted and needed by communities – and that it was possible. The committee recognised that in some ways, the residents of Mapela had led the way in doing something active about safety in their area. It was now time for the state to do its part.⁸³

On his way home that evening Kobela reflected on his experience and wrote down some of his thoughts. This is what he had to say:⁸⁴

First, I would say, when I heard the news that I would be going to Cape Town to make an oral submission on the Firearms Control Bill, I got excited nervous and proud. I got excited in the sense that it would be my first time to fly and also my first visit to Cape Town and to Parliament as well as to the sea. I got nervous when I thought of presenting before the MPs and I felt proud at being invited by the Safety and Security Portfolio Committee.

In the evening, Adele acted as the Portfolio Committee Chairperson and asked me to present. After my presentation she asked me questions. She encouraged me – and this kind of practice really helped me. I went to bed at 23h00 and woke up at 5am.

During the Public Hearings I listened carefully to presenters. Some of the presenters were furious, criticising the Bill as a whole. Nevertheless, I realised how friendly the MP's were. When the Chairperson called my name, I felt nervous, but when I started talking I regained confidence. My presentation focused on two issues: Gun Free Zones (GFZs) and the Age Limit. I supported chapter 20 (of the FCB) on GFZs. GFZs are about community safety and the initiative has been going on for three years in Mapela and is getting support from more residents. I also objected to the age limit of 18 (in the FCB) and proposed the age should go to 25. This will exclude school going kids and will also make the implementation of GFZs in schools easier. After my presentation the MP's applauded me for the work I've been doing.

As a result, Section 140 of the FCA makes provision for the Minister to declare certain places as firearm free zones. There are severe penalties for anyone entering or storing guns in a firearm free zone. This section was promulgated in June 2001 (FCA, 2000).

Owning the project

Other examples of local communities defining and shaping the GFZ campaign are the shebeen gun free zone initiative in Geluksdal on the East Rand and the youth initiative in schools in Diepkloof, Soweto. A local teacher and Catholic Justice and Peace activist, Mike Moses, approached shebeens in Geluksdal to participate in the GFZ campaign. It was easy enough to get schools and churches in the area to go gun free but he felt it was important to test out the idea in a venue in which guns are most often seen, and where the risks for gun violence are high. There is sufficient evidence demonstrating the link between alcohol abuse and firearm related deaths (NIMSS, 2001). There was enough interest to get a few tavern owners together to discuss the idea. They developed a code of conduct which they all put up in their shebeens, making it clear that guns were no longer allowed in their taverns.

Similarly, Thabiso Mollo of the Diepkloof Youth Against Crime joined the GFZ campaign as part of his ongoing work in his community. He convinced his organisation to launch an

⁸³ Notes taken during the portfolio committee hearings, September 2000

⁸⁴ Letter written by Samuel Kobela and abbreviated here, also in preface to De Villiers, S (ed), *A People's Government. The people's Voice*.

intensive campaign to get schools in the Diepkloof area declared gun free zones. In a letter to *the Star*, Thabiso notes, “Safe schools enhance the culture of learning and teaching. Our schools have become battlefields and we don’t want to see further loss of life...through guns...have managed to safeguard all schools in Diepkloof now, which means all schools are gun free zones.” (The Star, 11/10/99). Thabiso himself, like many young men his age who were politically involved in the late 80s and early 90s, had a firearm. Since being involved in this campaign he no longer has one.⁸⁵

In both of these instances, the agents for change were GFSA activists but, importantly, they were both working within community structures and they used those structures to introduce the GFZ campaign. They had the basic aims of the campaign in mind but were able to alter and develop it together with their community colleagues, so as to best suit the needs of their constituencies. There are many examples of how the GFZ campaign has been used in communities across the country. It has also become an international reference point and is being implemented in various settings such as the disarmament campaigns in the Solomon Islands and in Sierra Leone. As part of the UN led demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) processes in these countries, weapons free villages were established for the duration of the mission.⁸⁶

The GFZ campaign is a good example of how grassroots mobilisation can help develop a coherent voice against gun violence. It is an approach in which the ideas and projects are owned by the people who are often most affected by gun violence. This in turn has provided an avenue for people at the grass roots to influence the direction of the organisation. In the case of GFSA this has happened through branch structures, regional committees and grass roots representation at the national committee meetings and on the board.

Influencing public policy: relations with the state, civil society and the media

The Gun Control Alliance

GFSA’s strategy of building alliances, increasing the support base for its long-term goals and laying the groundwork for significant policy change began to coalesce around the FCB. In 1997 GFSA was a member of the Firearms Policy Committee appointed by Minister of Safety and Security, Sydney Mufamadi with a brief to assist his department in developing policy guidelines for new firearms legislation. The work of the committee was brief and its influence limited, but it provided a framework for government to put in place a comprehensive firearms control strategy. This took several years to come to fruition and in December 1999 government published the FCB.

GFSA recognised that it could not win the battle for gun control on its own. The Gun Control Alliance (GCA) which was formed in early 1999 was based on the need for stricter gun control and therefore it was able to accommodate and include a range of individual and organisational views and beliefs. The GCA has over 450 members and consists of national bodies such as the South African Council of Churches and the Gender Commission, national and provincial NGOs, community based groups such as Women Against Child Abuse (WACA) in Orange Farm and Mamelodi, local churches and health professionals such as the Childhood Accident Prevention Foundation. The essence of alliance politics is finding

⁸⁵ GCA Gauteng focus group, 2/11/03

⁸⁶ www.undp.org.fj

common ground and working towards a unified end. This the GCA did through the Gun Control Charter which spelt out the key demands necessary for effective gun control. The Charter was the rallying call for stricter gun control and it provided a common denominator for diverse organisations.⁸⁷

The FCB was published in the government gazette in December 1999, with a 6-week period to make written submissions to Parliament. GFSA and the GCA developed a submissions pack to assist partners in making their submissions called *Make Your Voice Stop a Bullet!* It contained information on the law making process, how to write a submission and where to send it. The GFSA analysed the FCB, examining the links between community concerns about gun violence, the demands as stated in the Gun Control Charter and what was in the Bill. For example, many communities felt that one reason for gun violence in their communities was that young people had easy access to firearms. Suggested criteria for ownership included increasing the age, possession of a competency certificate, no history of violent behaviour and no incidence of substance abuse. Through the workshop process people began to realise that they could speak on behalf of their communities much more effectively than anyone else. In fact they were the ‘experts’ when it came to knowing what they as a community wanted and needed on the issue of gun violence and safety in their communities.

The analysis of the Bill also included identifying those clauses which would most enhance gun control. Priority clauses that were non-negotiable and seen as the cornerstone of stricter gun control, such as limiting the number of firearms and the introduction of a competency certificate, were identified together with other clauses which were important but on which the GCA was willing to negotiate and possibly compromise. Although the fight for gun control had already started with the hand-in in 1994, in the year 2000 it centred on the FCB, with Parliament as the main battlefield.

Relations to the state

Prioritising the key clauses was both strategic and cost efficient and enabled GCA activists to keep focused, while allowing them some space in which to manoeuvre. This was incorporated into their lobbying strategy. The Gun Control Charter also provided a focus both in mobilising support at the grass roots level and in dealing with government officials and MPs. It also created a climate of trust because government and MPs knew the position of the Alliance with regard to the Bill and what it would fight for at all costs. This was one of the factors that enabled the Alliance to influence the final legislation to a significant degree.^{88 89}

All government officials and MPs interviewed commented positively on the GCA approach to lobbying. As one police official said, “this made our job much easier, because although we knew you were going to give us a hard time, we always knew that we were dealing with one group of people who were largely speaking with one voice, and you told us upfront where the fight was going to take place. This was not so for the other groups.”⁹⁰

One thing that made the FCB campaign unique and effective was the redefinition of expertise to include experiential knowledge, whereby ‘expert opinion’ was integrated with the voice of the grass roots – an expert opinion from another vantage point. The process of influencing

⁸⁷ www.gca.org.za

⁸⁸ GCA W. Cape focus group, 11/11/03

⁸⁹ Annelize van Wyk, 12/02/03

⁹⁰ Interview with Ric de Caris, 26/09/02

public policy is many faceted. However, some of the key ingredients for success include clarity on identifying the issue for policy action, identifying solutions, building broad based political and community based support and having a good media strategy.⁹¹

Other essential ingredients to successful advocacy are more difficult to quantify, i.e. passion for the issue, the ability to learn on the job and an instinct for opportunity. Almost all the GFSA and GCA activists interviewed spoke about believing in the issue as a key ingredient for success. Reflecting on why she had got involved in the GCA, Carole Bouwer, the Director of RAPCAN,⁹² acknowledged that although it was part of her job to do so, “it made absolute sense (to get involved) because of my personal experience (of impact of gun violence). I think *that* for me is a key issue in advocacy – there has to be a level of passion and commitment about the issue. *You can’t just do it. You’ve got to have some kind of passion.*”⁹³

Influencing public opinion

When GFSA started campaigning in 1994 it was seen as a radical and marginal group. By the time the legislation was before Parliament in 2000, several newspaper editorials were calling for support of stricter firearms legislation and some were even suggesting a ban.⁹⁴ This indicates the success of GFSA’s campaign to place gun control high on the public agenda. The media played an important role in contributing to public knowledge and debate on the issue of gun. The issue was covered extensively during the FCB public hearings in mid 2000 but it had also received regular coverage in the years preceding the public debate on the law. In 1997 when government was beginning to make public its intention to tighten up on gun ownership, the headlines of the Sunday Independent said it more clearly than any GFSA spokesperson: *Ban on private guns?*⁹⁵ The newspapers had begun articulating what the organisation had been saying for several years, as their own editorial perspective, without quoting the organisation. This is one of the most tangible measures of successful advocacy – when the lobbyist’s views become those of wide sectors of society.

Changing the law

The FCA, passed in October 2000, essentially raised the barrier for firearms ownership by increasing the age limit and requiring a competency certificate prior to application for a firearm licence. Limits were also imposed on the number of firearms that an individual could own. The law put in place greater administrative controls such as regular licence renewals and stricter penalties for offences committed under this Act (FCA, 2000). This legislation formed part of an overall firearms control strategy which included increased border controls, destruction of surplus weapons and cooperation agreements with neighbouring states.

Sections of the law, such as the Firearm Free Zone provision, have been promulgated over the last three years. There have been long delays and the regulations were only finalised in early March 2004, which meant that the law only came into effect in July 2004. The promulgation of the new law is critical in controlling and reducing the supply of firearms. However, the experience of GCA activists reinforces the view that not only the law but also the process leading up to the legislative debate can alter society. Katherine McKenzie, a researcher and

⁹¹ Joint interview with Jabu Sosibo & Nyami Booi, ANC MPs

⁹² Resources aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

⁹³ GCA W. Cape focus group, 11/11/03

⁹⁴ Business Day, 10/02/2000

⁹⁵ Sunday Independent, 27/07/97

policy consultant who made a submission on the FCB made this point: “I think that laws can change society and the way people behave, how they function and how we do things.”⁹⁶

Character of the organisation

Strategy

Although GFSA evolved from a one-off campaign into an organisation, it has remained a single-issue campaign. GFSA’s understanding of campaigns is one of sustained goal directed work over a number of years. Campaigning has been essential to building the organisation. It has brought new activists, new ideas and new constituencies. Building the organisation has also meant putting systems in place to communicate with supporters and active members. This includes a quarterly newsletter, a monthly resource pack, quarterly public seminars and workshops on project work or campaigns. The GFZ campaign was the beginning of mobilising at the grass roots and the FCA campaign enabled community representatives to help change the law by making their voices heard in Parliament.

Organisational structure & identity

The expansion and growth of the organisation has brought a number of challenges and dilemmas. One was greater participation of the grass roots leadership in the formal leadership structures of the organisation, which meant having more influence on its strategic direction. Active members and supporters called for the creation of local and regional structures, which would report to the national office and the national committee.⁹⁷ Activists wanted some institutional acknowledgement that they belonged and representing local interests in a national decision making body such as the GFSA national committee was one way of doing that. GFSA has a 10 person board comprising academics, activists, religious leaders and grass roots leadership. The increasing demand at the local level had a direct impact on the organisations’ staffing component. New positions such as regional organisers and a national organiser were created. The organisation also expanded its operations in the Western Cape and opened a field office in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. GFSA now has more than 30 branches across the country in eight of the nine provinces.

Another challenge is to build capacity at the grass roots level to the extent of building a strong core of activists who understand the vision and strategies of the organisation and are able to provide leadership at the local level. One of the dilemmas for GFSA is how best to integrate the social movement aspect of the organisation with its growing institutionalisation, which is reflected in the creation of branch and regional committee structures. The character and social composition of the organisation has changed substantially since GFSA was started by a group of primarily white, middle class women and men who had one or other religious affiliation and an anti-apartheid background. As GFSA grew so did the diversity of its active participants. Many of those active in GFSA are active in other social justice issues. For example, most of the active GFSA supporters in the Vaal triangle are also involved in other projects, organisations and community activities. These include community police forums, youth formations, violence against women networks and local churches.⁹⁸ This is true for almost all GFSA branches. GFSA is rooted at the local level while also having a national and international profile.

⁹⁶ GCA W. Cape focus group

⁹⁷ Interview with Joseph Dube, 18/09/02

⁹⁸ Interview with Magous Matou, 25/09/02

Australia

A history of violence

Australia has a history of mass shootings⁹⁹ (Chapman, 1994). Prior to the Port Arthur massacre in 1996 massacres in several states had received media attention. In 1987 there were five mass shootings in Australia. Two prominent massacres occurred in Melbourne, just months apart, and became known as the Hoddle and Queen Street massacres. Although these shootings led to some changes in the state laws in Victoria, they had no impact on gun laws in other states. The massacres forced the then Labour government to establish a National Committee on Violence,¹⁰⁰ one of whose recommendations was for a more uniform approach across states to firearms registration and licensing.

In August 1991, the Strathfield massacre occurred in Sydney in which eight civilians and two police officers were killed. There was a lot of media coverage, with protest marches and people asking the question, “Are our gun laws strict enough?”¹⁰¹ Again, some changes to the gun laws were made in New South Wales but there was no sustained campaign or social mobilisation. The Strathfield shooting highlighted the loopholes in the law, particularly with regard to the regulation of civilian possession of semi-automatic firearms. According to one activist, “Little by little reform happened, but there remained a big gap – no banning of semi-automatics in the hands of civilians”.¹⁰²

Civil Society responses

There are two gun control groups in Australia, Gun Control Australia (GCA) and the CGC. GCA was established in the early 80s in response to several gun control issues, one of which was the commemoration of what is known as the Bacsa-Rosvoll shootings and the other the control of shotgun noise¹⁰³ (Crook, 2000). GCA’s main focus is improving the gun laws in the state of Victoria. The CGC was in existence as state based groups in several states as early as the late 80s, almost a decade prior to the Port Arthur massacre. These were small, dedicated groups of between two to ten people. It reached its peak in 1996/97 when it organised as a national group consisting of the state and territory groups and mobilized a large number of people over a very short period of time in response to the Port Arthur massacre. There was an influx of members, supporters and money, both to the national coordinating group as well as for each state and territory group. As the law came into effect almost six weeks after the Port Arthur massacre, the need for ongoing mass mobilisation was significantly decreased. The core group that has remained believes that if necessary that kind of mass mobilisation can and will happen again.¹⁰⁴ Right now it is neither necessary nor appropriate. In essence, the Australia campaign did not have any substantial grass roots involvement in the development and direction of the campaign. It was led by a small core group and continues to operate at that level. Similar to the social characteristics of the other two case studies, the campaign was

⁹⁹ Definition of a mass shooting or massacre is between 5-6 or more people killed in one incident

¹⁰⁰ Report at www.aic.gov.au/publications/ncv/mono1.html (54ff)

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rev Harry Herbert, 15/07/02

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ The Bacsa-Rosvoll shootings were two teenage girls killed with shotguns in two separate incidents in the 70s and 80s

¹⁰⁴ Email communication with Same Lee, 10/12/03

led by experienced social justice activists and most of those who joined the campaign were already involved in other community related issues such as campaigning for adequate childcare. The enormous public expression of outrage coupled with the fact that Howard had just been elected, created a climate for more decisive action to be taken on the issue of gun control. Rev Harry Herbert says, “He (Howard) was under pressure to act. His political antennae told him to do something about this”.¹⁰⁵

Changing the law

The 1996 Firearms Agreement, which led to legislative reforms, has had a substantial impact. Australia ended up with reasonably uniform gun laws across eight jurisdictions, for the first time since its federation in 1901. Other significant gains included: the introduction of minimum standards; the registration of all firearms; limits on ammunition sales; and the prohibition of significant categories of firearms. This latter provision resulted in the Federal Government spending approximately \$370,000,000 buying back over 600,000 illegal firearms. The effect of these reforms has been to significantly cut the gun death rate. Further, while in the decade prior to 1996 public mass shootings were occurring on an almost annual basis, there has not been a public mass shooting in Australia since 1996.¹⁰⁶

Character of the organisation

The Australia campaign has many of the key elements of successful social mobilisation. The CGC had a clear goal – to tighten up Australia’s gun laws – and it was able to mobilise significant public support for this goal. It also mobilised key constituencies such as the trade union movement behind the call for legislative reform. It combined public support for a new firearms policy and outrage at the gun massacre to ensure a radical overhaul of the Australian gun laws. The media played an important role in bringing the issue of gun violence into the public domain. As a journalist and media advocacy trainer, Peters was aware of the possibilities the media offered to bring people’s attention to assert the importance of this issue in the public eye and to provide solutions. Peters stresses that, especially after an event such as Port Arthur, “we must not just say it’s important but here’s what needs to be done”.¹⁰⁷

The CGC has received public recognition for its work on the issue of gun violence. In 1996, Rebecca Peters received one of the highest awards that can be bestowed on an Australian citizen – the Australian Human Rights Medal – for her overall contribution to human rights, in particular her work on domestic violence and gun control.

The CGC never became an organisation. Rebecca Peters was the only full-timer, and then only for short bursts between jobs and study. It was under resourced and hampered by outside apathy and internal over-work. In the words of one interviewee, “it was never a well-oiled machine”.¹⁰⁸ It was also highly energized and worked intensively over a very short period with spectacular results, but to call it an ‘organisation’ would be to exaggerate.”¹⁰⁹ Currently CGC operates as a lobby group that responds to gun control issues if and when they arise.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Harry Herbert

¹⁰⁶ Email communication with Sam Lee & Roland Browne, 10/12/03

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ Email communication with Philip Alpers, 24/11/03

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Email communication with Sam Lee, 10/12/03

A big difference between the Australia case study and that of Brazil and South Africa is that the CGC has not had to face the challenges of expansion and the complexities of becoming an organization and running ongoing campaigns. The Australian model is one of organising with a small dedicated team and limited resources, resulting in creative and innovative ways of working, looking for every opportunity and using it to the absolute maximum.

Analysis of the three case studies

This section of the paper analyses the similarities and differences between the three case studies in terms of strategic perspectives, relations with the state, grass roots projects and social movement qualities.

A dual strategy

Pursuing a dual strategy of grassroots mobilisation and influencing public policy has defined how both GFSA and VR have approached the issue of gun violence. Their choice was influenced by their understanding of the firearm problem in their respective countries as one of insufficient state control of firearms on the one hand, and on the other, the link between the demand for guns and political transition and socio-economic exclusion. This includes legitimate gun ownership and illegal ownership for criminal use. Although both GFSA and VR adopted a dual strategy there are some differences in how they have implemented it.

In the case of GFSA, mobilising at the grassroots was not just about engaging people in projects within their local context to improve public safety and reduce the demand for guns. It was linked to enabling people at the grass roots to influence the policy process as shown in the story of Mapela. In the case of VR, although the projects at the grass roots may be designed to influence public policy, such as the *'telecurso'*, the process of piloting a project is seen as influencing the policy direction rather than the direct input of people at the grass roots. One reason for this may be that GFSA has a narrower focus, reducing firearm violence, whereas Viva Rio has a much broader focus, which includes dealing with the problem of social exclusion through building social citizenship as one way to reduce the violence.

Despite the differences in the execution of the dual strategy, making the links between demand and supply explicit in practice and not just in theory is one of the distinguishing features shared by VR and GFSA in the international small arms control movement. Although Australia's strategy is predominantly one of influencing public policy it has not followed a dual strategy model. In South Africa and Brazil, the call for a reduction in firearms violence was also linked to a broader social transformation agenda and both GFSA and VR have organised specifically around the idea of creating a new society.

Relations with the state: collaboration and confrontation

Influencing public policy implies engaging with the state and all three studies demonstrate the complex nature of the relationship between social movements and the state on the issue of gun control. In all three case studies the social movements collaborated with the state in proposing alternatives and supporting or influencing the direction of policy on firearms control. In the case of South Africa and Australia the relationship with the state was present from the beginning. In both instances, the focus was on changing firearms legislation in a context in which government was sympathetic to the principle of gun control, which made the state both accessible and open to policy suggestions from the civil society perspective. This was not true

for Brazil where, in its early years, VR's relationship to the state was one of challenging, for example, its insufficient levels of public security spending, rather than one of co-operation and partnership as is the now the case. All three case studies demonstrate the necessity for strategic engagement with the state throughout the policy process, taking into account the varying levels of support for gun control within the different arms of government. For example, because of Brazil's federal system of government, even under the Lula government, VR cannot assume that all government institutions and officials will be sympathetic and supportive of gun control. This was similar in the Australia example. In the case of South Africa, although the firearms legislation was under the control of national government, support for the policy remains uneven across various departments, in particular within the department of Safety & Security as well as in the SAPS.

The relationship to government in these cases has been nuanced, as its aim is to influence both ideas and behaviour through a mixture of pressure, lobbying and cooperation. All three organisations used a combination of these approaches depending on the issue and which arm of government was being addressed. They also used social mobilisation such as organising rallies and getting people to Parliament. Although there has been cooperation with the state by the three organisations under review, in all three there has also been a strong element of lobbying government, in particular during the process of drafting and finalising the legislative framework. The use of research data which demonstrates the need for gun control and supports international norms was very important in influencing the policy process and was successfully used by activists in all three case studies. In all three examples, pressure was directed at influencing the state to alter the firearms legislation but it was also directed at changing attitudes in society through challenging the views of the gun lobby. The presence of the gun lobby as a chief adversary within civil society, rather than the state, is a significant factor in the fight against gun violence and contributes to the complexity of the relationships these three organisation have, both with the state and with civil society.

Grassroots mobilisation

One of the distinguishing features of VR and GFSA is their work at the grassroots, a feature which is absent in the Australia example and limited in other small arms control organisations around the world. The strategic choice to engage at the grass roots is informed by the understanding that the problem of gun violence in Brazil and South Africa is partly caused by the prevailing attitude that gun violence is an acceptable norm. For many, even though gun violence may not be acceptable, there is a sense that it is an inevitable feature of life. One of the VR volunteers described the presence of gun violence in her community as “*‘Jeito’* – that’s just the way it is”.¹¹¹ Working at the grassroots is one way to begin to alter the attitude and behaviour of people towards guns.

GFSA and VR share some similarities in how they work at the grass roots and this includes implementing projects at local level; enabling people to influence and change practice at a local level such as the GFZ project in South Africa or the citizen's rights counter in Brazil; and building social cohesion. However, there are also some significant differences, such as the goals of the project, the way in which community residents are included in the project design and implementation and evaluation of the projects. GFSA's projects are focused on reducing firearms violence through building a coherent understanding of the problem and providing people with the means to impact on their local situation. They include extensive

¹¹¹ The term *‘jeito’* comes from the slave period and is used when people express powerlessness.

consultation at each step to ensure that the project can be sustained, managed and expanded according to local needs, which facilitates joint evaluation of successes and failures. The inclusion of grass roots leadership in the organisations structures has also made this possible.

VR's projects are diverse, ranging from micro-credit schemes, to teaching life skills to youth at risk, to changing the gun laws, and all are undertaken with the aim of overcoming social exclusion within the city and working towards social integration and building a culture of social citizenship. Although each project may have defined goals, such as using sport as an alternative to crime and armed violence in the 'Fight for Peace' boxing club, it is not always made explicit how this contributes to the overall goals of the organisation (Viva Rio, 2002). VR's strategy of rapid expansion coupled with a philosophy of being a 'social laboratory' means that there has been *ad hoc* expansion and a proliferation of projects, with inadequate reflection on the purpose and impact of many of these.¹¹² This approach has also meant that many of those who benefit from VR's projects see themselves as recipients of a social service rather than shaping the project. This is exacerbated by the history of social exclusion from all forms of formal political and economic practices in the city. The organisation has recognised this and in the last year has begun to put in place some mechanisms to ensure greater reflection on their work, including monthly management and project coordinator meetings and assessing how and under what conditions they should embark on new projects.¹¹³

Australia adopted a strategy of mobilising significant sections of society behind a particular goal rather than engaging at the grass roots through project work. Australia is a stable, first world, resourced country whose social programmes and systems do not give rise to the kinds of problems experienced by Brazil and South Africa and therefore requires different strategies.

Social movements

All three cases studies have features of social movements such as mobilising significant sections of society around particular goals, entering into alliances and partnerships and campaigning around social issues. Central to social movements is what has been described as 'contentious challenge', which is "based on common purposes and social solidarities in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow, 1998:4-5). In the case of the gun control movements under review, the chief adversary is located in civil society in the form of the organised lobby of gun owners and the arms industry, rather than in the state. This explains why these movements simultaneously developed a cooperative relationship with government and a mobilisation of the public against the gun lobby.

Neither GFSA in South Africa nor the CGC in Australia can be described definitively as social movements as they lack some of the central features. GFSA has never adopted a strategy of mass mobilisation and therefore has been unable to test the extent to which South Africans identify with its goal of a gun free South Africa and whether a mass movement could be developed in support of this goal. At the height of GFSA's public campaigning there was evidence of a strong identity among activists, not just for the goal of a gun free South Africa but also with the organisation. This seems to have diminished and is reflected in activists attaching more meaning to direct personal benefits, such as the opportunity for employment, rather than the meaning derived from being associated and involved with a dynamic

¹¹² All three Brazil focus groups

¹¹³ Participant observation, Rio de Janeiro, 24 May – 2 June 2003

organisation whose goals they support.¹¹⁴ CGC's strategy was to put in place new firearms legislation and once that happened no further social mobilisation was required. It was never its intention to build a mass movement as it felt the gun law would have the desired impact of reducing gun availability and impacting positively on attitudinal change, which in fact has been the case.

VR exhibits all of the features of a social movement, including an ability to mobilise thousands of people at short notice in support of the call to stop violence as well as the presence of a strong collective identity. Staff, Board members, volunteers and project participants all identify strongly with the organisation and its vision of an undivided city.¹¹⁵ This is evident in their total commitment to the organisation and its vision, the passion with which they speak of their own projects and the meaning that the overall work of VR brings to their lives. Castells describes this search for identity as a central force in the current globalised world and says, "the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning – identity is becoming the main and sometimes the only source of meaning..." (Castells 1996:3). Belonging to an organisation or movement which has a central organising principle remains a strong source of identity for activists in GFSA and in VR.

The meaning of the term 'social movement' has changed over the last 20 years and today it can be seen as possibly new forms of social activism, "directed to transforming society, augmenting democratic power rather than undermining it" (Sachs, 2004). Fernandes believes that VR is a social movement some, but not all of the time. He regards the notion of social movements as constantly evolving, being modified and challenged by the work of organisations such as VR. This is in part due to the history of social movements in Brazil where, according to Fernandes, "they suffered a problem of isolation: breaking with traditional forms of mutual help and assistance, they unintentionally separated themselves from the poor majority; attacking business and government, they moved away from the elites. Isolated from the masses and the upper classes, they finally came to the limit of their mobilisation potential" (Fernandes, 1994:156). This resulted in what Fernandes calls a 'crisis of paradigms' and emerging out of that crisis is the current form of civil society organisations, commonly referred to as the Third Sector in Latin America. Implicit in this shift is a recognition that the social reality is made up of multiple points of view and that activists and their organisations need to engage with a range of role-players, including the state.

An important development in the last decade has been the phenomenon of an emerging global civil society, the World Social Forum being one example. According to Jacklyn Cock, South African professor of sociology and peace activist, "the concept of a global civil society suggests both a new space of social interactions and new social patterns. It is a terrain constituted by transnational networks and alliances of individuals and groups who understand themselves to have some point of affinity; some shared political or ethical understanding" (Cock, 2004:22). GFSA and VR recognised the importance of taking this struggle into the global arena, as it provides a space in which to influence the direction of the movement globally and in particular to share the success of working at the grass roots in the fight against gun violence. They were both founding members of the IANSA, established in late 1998, which now has more than 500 member groups around the world in 52 countries.¹¹⁶ Although the CGC is a member of IANSA it is not active in the movement.

¹¹⁴ Vaal Focus group, 19/07/03

¹¹⁵ All three Brazil focus groups

¹¹⁶ www.iansa.org

Finally, the combination of strategies adopted by each of the three organisations is primarily shaped by its location within a particular socio-economic, political and historical context which defines how it chooses to engage with the state, civil society and its adversaries. There are similarities among all three countries, for example, having a democratic government allowed for a more cooperative relationship with the state than would otherwise be the case. Another similarity is their colonial history of dispossession, exploitation and oppression. Guns played a central role in maintaining control over the new social order and continue to be a source of identity, primarily among white males, both in South Africa and Australia. In Brazil, the identity with guns is primarily as a ‘tool of the trade’ in organised crime and drug trafficking rather than as a form of cultural identity.

The differences are also significant between the Australian case study and those of Brazil and South Africa, which share similar political and socio-economic histories. Australia is regarded as a developed country and is a member of the OECD. Brazil and South Africa are regarded as upper middle-income countries¹¹⁷ but due to the large number of poor people, they are both considered as developing countries, or what Lawrence calls ‘advanced third-world countries’ (Landman, 2003:4). Brazil and South Africa are further characterised by a polarisation of wealth, poverty and social exclusion. They have also both recently experienced political transition and are still in a process of democratisation. It is these factors, in particular the difference between Australia on the one hand, and Brazil and South Africa on the other, and the similarities between the latter two, which have shaped the specific strategies adopted in each of the case studies under review.

Conclusion

The current discussions and concepts put forward in the South African debate on the form and meaning of social movements are inadequate in explaining the successful social mobilisation that occurred in all of the three case studies analysed here. Habib describes South African civil society in the new democratic era as consisting of three distinct blocs: NGOs in partnership with the state on policy development and service delivery; ‘informal community based networks’ which are “survivalist responses of the poor and marginalised who have no alternative in the face of a retreating state”; and ‘social movement’ organisations with an emphasis on challenging the state as in the case of the Treatment Action campaign (Habib, 2004). This description of the current status of civil society in South Africa, in particular its relations with the state, omits some important new features and ways of organising which are described in this paper.¹¹⁸ There has been little description and analysis of the complex dynamic that exists between the state and civil society and the kind of organisational form and strategic perspective which is demonstrated in all three of these case studies, in particular in South Africa and Brazil. One of their distinguishing features is the pursuit of a dual strategy of influencing public policy change while mobilising grassroots support through local projects, not just for legislative change but also for changes in attitude and practice within civil society (Fernandes, 1994; Sachs, 2004).

¹¹⁷ World Bank category

¹¹⁸ Most likely to be found in the TAC as well

References

Interviews

Australia

Simon Chapman, 16/07/02 (Associate Professor in Public Health & Community Medicine, University of Sydney and a prominent health activist in Australia); Rev Harry Herbert, 15/07/02 (Minister of the Uniting Church, Sydney, Australia and active in the 1996 gun control campaign); Simon Mount, 20/07/02 (Attorney in Auckland, New Zealand, with an interest in gun control); Rebecca Peters, 24/11/02 (leading figure in the gun control campaign in Australia and currently Director of IANSA); Sam Lee, 10/12/03 via email communication (Attorney and one of the core people in the CGC still active in campaigning for stricter gun legislation); Roland Browne, 10/12/03 via email communication (Attorney, one of the leading figures in the 1996 gun control campaign and remains one of the core people in the Coalition for Gun Control); Philip Alpers, 23/11/03 via email communication (Journalist and gun policy activist).

Brazil

Rubem César Fernandes, 26/10/02 (Founding member of Viva Rio and currently Executive Director).
Antônio Rangel Bandeira, 24/10, 30/10/02, 30/05/03 (Political activist in the 60s, served in government from 1979 to 2000 and joined Viva Rio in 2000 to head up the small arms control programme).
Carlinhos Costa, 25/10/02 (Community leader in the favela of Rocinha and appointed as coordinator of the Public Safety Programme in January 2003).
Eucrezio Ribeiro, 25/10/02 (A coordinator of the telecurso programme of VR).
Zuenir Ventura, 31/05/03 (Well-known Brazilian author and journalist and founding member of Viva Rio).
Luis Eduardo Soares, 1/11/02 (Sociologist and founding member of Viva Rio. Also secretary for Public Safety in the state of Rio in mid 90s where he was responsible for significant police reforms).
Col Jorge Silva, 31/10/02 (Retired police officer, currently teaching at the University of Rio).
Luke Dowdney, 24/10/02 (Coordinator of the Fight for Peace Boxing club, VR)
Amaro Domingues, 28/10/02 (Viva Rio board member and community leader).
Marcello Zacchi, 29/05/03 (Recent ex-Director of Sou da Paz, a sister organisation to Viva Rio working in Sao Paulo, and currently in the federal department of Public safety).
Denis Mizne, 13/08/03 (Director of Sou da Paz).
Luciano Patricio, 28/10/02 (One of the trainers and co-ordinator of the human rights education for police in Rio).
Pablo Dreyfuss, 2/11/02 (Senior researcher in the disarmament program)
Leriana Figueredo, 29/05/03 (Social worker and facilitator of the citizenship classes in the Fight for Peace Boxing Club project)
Viva Rio staff focus group I, 30/05/03; Viva Rio staff focus group II, 2/06/03; Rocinha focus group, 31/05/03

South Africa

Peter Storey, 9/10/02 (Founding member of GFSA and retired Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa).
Sheena Duncan, 14/08/02 (Chairperson of GFSA, patron, human rights veteran and founding member of GFSA).
Alan Storey, 18/09/02 (Methodist Minister in Midrand, Gauteng and founding member of GFSA).
Rev. David Newby, 10/10/02 (Founding member of GFSA, at the time Minister at the Central Methodist Mission in Cape Town).
Father Peter-John Pearson, 8/10/02 (Catholic priest and active in the GFSA campaign in 1994; currently heads up the SACBC Parliamentary Liaison office).
Samuel Kobela, 18/09/03 (Community activist in Mapela, Limpopo Province).
Joseph Dube, 18/09/02 (GFSA National Organiser).
Ric de Caris, 26/09/02 (Advocate in SAPS who assisted in drafting of the FCA, currently at SaferAfrica, NGO).
Jaco Bothma, 12/12/02 (Director of the Central Firearms Register, SAPS).
Jay Naidoo, 10/02/03 (Former trade unionist, now a businessman).
Wyndham Hartley, 12/02/03 (Parliamentary journalist, Business Day).
Frances Chatburn, 20/02/03 (Community activist in Elsies River, Cape Town).
Martin Umbayazi, 1/07/03 (Field worker/researcher at Network of Independent Monitors, Durban).
Jessie Duarte, 1/08/03 (MEC for Safety and Security in Gauteng when the GFZ project was initiated, currently in Dept. of Foreign Affairs).
Sharon Trail, 16/10/03 (Co-ordinator of the GFSA campaign in 1994).
Magous Matou, 25/09/02 (Community activist, Justice and Peace fieldworker in the Vaal).
Martin Hood, 11/10/02 (Attorney, Member of the South African Gun Owners Association).
Annelize van Wyk, 12/02/03 (United Democratic Movement MP).
Paul Swart, 19/02/03 (Democratic Alliance MP).

Paula Proudlock, 20/02/03 (Attorney and programme manager of the Child's Rights programme of the Children's Institute).
 Jabu Sosibo, 9/09/03 (African National Congress MP and chief whip of the portfolio committee on safety & security).
 Nyamizeli Booi, 9/09/03 (ANC MP).
 Mululeki George, 10/09/03 (ANC MP and Chairperson of the Portfolio committee on Safety & Security).
 Western Cape GCA focus group, 11/09/03
 Gauteng GCA focus group, 5/11/03
 Mapela community focus group, 7/11/03
 Vaal focus group, 19/07/03

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