

Self-Authorized Representatives
Democratic Representation and Contemporary Politics

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I. Introduction

Democratic representation is usually taken to involve both authorization and accountability. Senators, for example, are both authorized and held accountable by their constituents through periodic elections. Yet, there are an increasing number of individual and collective actors making claims of representation despite being neither formally authorized nor formally held to account by those they claim to represent. The musician Bono, for example, claims to represent the interests of Africans on the issues of AIDS, debt and trade – but he has not been elected by any Africans, nor is he formally accountable to them. On most standard accounts of democratic representation, the absence of formal authorization and accountability renders Bono’s activities anti-democratic. In this work, I challenge that assumption and suggest that democratic theorists may not want to entirely dismiss the democratic functions and potentials of these “self-authorized” representatives. Self-authorized representatives may include perspectives and experiences that have historically gone unrepresented, and they may therefore facilitate a more just and democratic world. However, self-authorized representatives may also have other, perhaps less desirable potentials, which may produce something other than a democratic relationship of representation, or which may even be harmful to democracy. This paper examines the potential benefits, dangers, and moral risks that arise when groups and individuals function as representatives outside of the formal procedures of electoral authorization and accountability, and attempts to generate a set of criteria against which such claims of representation might be assessed.

I shall argue that at the level of the nation-state, self-authorized representation may be an important complement to electoral representation, precisely because of its potential to be both *responsive* and *inclusive* in ways that electoral representation cannot – two dimensions that I will argue are crucial to self-authorized democratic representation. Moreover, in contexts where there is an absence of electoral representation, both at the level of the nation-state and beyond, at the global level, these two features can translate into the achievement of democratic representation for voices that would otherwise remain excluded. The challenge from the perspective of democratic theory, however, is that self-authorized representatives simply *claim* to be representatives of marginalized groups. We therefore require normative criteria which will allow us to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate claims of self-authorized representation; and for this task, we need to understand what it means for groups and individuals to function as representatives outside of the formal procedures of electoral authorization and accountability. This points to the relevance and importance of this project: in a political landscape where self-authorized entities, such as civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are increasingly included in the decision-making processes of the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization, there is a pressing need for criteria which will answer the question of which actors “have legitimate claims to speak for [as examples] women or peasant farmers” (Warren and Castiglione, 2006: 15). This paper, therefore, will work to conceptualize these “self-authorized representatives” and begin to provide the normative and structural framework necessary to assess the democratic credentials of these extra-institutional representation claims.

Strikingly, democratic theorists have “embarrassingly little” to offer as informed

and critical commentators on issues of representation beyond formal representative institutions (Warren and Castiglione, 2006: 2). Much of the democratic theory literature remains focused on a traditional account of political representation: a principal-agent model in which the principal (voter) authorizes the agent (representative) to further the principal's interests, and holds the agent to account for their actions via renewal of authorization (re-election) or its withdrawal (removal from office). Democratic representation is clearly recognizable when it is based on this formal relationship of authorization and accountability, and we have criteria that enable us to judge its democratic legitimacy – traditionally, the congruence between the attitudes of constituents and of representatives on issues of policy (Eulau and Karps, 1977: 233). However, once representation claims – especially democratic ones - are removed from the context of electoral institutions, democratic legitimacy becomes far more difficult to determine. In the absence of formal authorization of a representative by election, and in the absence of accountability normally brought on by the reward of re-election or the sanction of removal from office, how are we to assess the claims made by self-authorized actors?

With the understanding that there cannot be a strict analogy between the realm of electoral institutions and the arena of self-authorized representatives, I address the standing gap between democratic theory and real-world extra-institutional relationships of representation by suggesting whether, and if so, how, the concept and criteria of democratic representation in formal institutions might translate into the arena of self-authorized representation. I will then examine several cases of self-authorized representatives to both evaluate the democratic potential of these representatives and test the criteria I have developed, asking the following questions: Can self-authorized representatives be responsive to the claims of groups in ways that elected democratic representatives cannot? Can they advance the basic norm of democracy: empowered inclusion of those affected in collective decisions and actions? (Habermas, 1996; Young, 2000, Warren and Castiglione, 2006). Can they serve as *democratic* representatives? And, finally, can self-authorized representatives have other, perhaps less desirable potentials, which may produce a relationship of representation which is less than democratic, or even harmful to democracy?

II. Normative Analysis of Self-Authorized Representation

Before I address these questions, I will outline the prevalent features of a self-authorized representative in order to situate this type of authorization and representation in relation to those with which we are more familiar. Table 1, below, summarizes the characteristics explained in this section. The purpose of using the term “self-authorized” is to capture the distinction between authorization that is formally granted and can be formally revoked (institutional), and authorization that is neither formally granted nor formally revoked (extra-institutional).

Of the authorization that is institutional in origin, I argue that there are two kinds: formal and informal. *Formal* authorization is granted from the public directly (election) or indirectly (appointment), or from a professional agency via licensing or certification (experts) (Brown, 2006: 208). As Reychler and Stellamans explain, “formal authority is

granted because the officeholder promises to meet a set of explicit expectations (job descriptions, legislated mandates)” (2004: 7). As it applies to the traditional model of democratic representation, formal authorization is expressed through the classic principal-agent format, where power is exercised by the principal (voter) over the agent (representative) with the threat that the granted authority can be revoked.

Informal representation occurs when a formally authorized representative extends the use of that authority to act as a representative for those with whom he or she has no electoral relationship. For example, Jane Mansbridge (2003) discusses the work of Barney Frank, a Democrat from Massachusetts who, in addition to his traditional activities as a Member of Congress, “consciously sees himself as a surrogate representative for gay and lesbian citizens throughout the nation” (Mansbridge, 2003: 523). Strictly speaking, this activity lies beyond the formal legislator-constituent relationship for which Frank was formally authorized, but he “has a sympathetic district constituency” that, he says, understands that “issues concerning gay and lesbian discrimination are important to me” (Mansbridge, 2003: 523). Frank is considered a legitimate representative for gay and lesbian citizens not only because he is one of the few openly gay members of Congress but also, I argue, because of the formal authority initially granted to him, and the informal authorization provided to him after he informed his constituents of his activities. Frank received feedback from his constituents informing him that they approve of his work in this area – and if they did not approve of the work, they could choose to hold him accountable by voting him out of office. Because his constituents have not done so, and have instead demonstrated their approval of these activities, Frank has been informally authorized to continue this work.

Informal authorization occupies a position somewhat in-between that of formal authorization and self-authorization: unlike the former, and like the latter, informal authorization is not granted on the basis of promises made (prospective) through formal channels (voting). Instead, and in common with self-authorization, informal authorization has an entrepreneurial element: the representative independently chooses to supplement his/her formally authorized position on an issue of interest. However, unlike self-authorization, voters can choose whether or not to support that independent decision (retrospective) *through formal channels* (voting). Informal authorization “brings with it the subtle yet substantial power to extend one’s reach...beyond the limits of the job description” (Reychler and Stellamans, 2004: 7-8) – but it also retains its institutional foundation, making it distinct from self-authorization. In other words, the authority of both formal and informal authorization is based upon the foundation of formal representative institutions; and in both cases, that authorization can be formally revoked if the constituency so desires.

Self-authorization, then, is *extra*-institutional. The representative chooses to self-authorize in relation to a particular issue or set of issues (entrepreneurial), but does so outside of formal representative institutions. In other words, there is no electoral constituency, no voter, that can *formally* authorize, prospectively or retrospectively, their claims. That is not to say, however, that there is not retrospective granting of authority of a kind. By this I mean that there is a distinction between the claim of representation and the granting of the authority to be a representative. The difference between informal representatives and self-authorized representatives, then, is not that there is an *absence* of

authorization or accountability with self-authorized representation; rather, it is that authorization and accountability do not come from traditional institutional sources.

TABLE 1 – Types of Authorization¹

	AUTHORIZATION	MECHANISM OF AUTHORIZATION	MECHANISM OF ACCOUNTABILITY	NORMATIVE CRITERIA	CONSTITUENCY
INSTITUTIONAL	Formal	Prospective vote	Vote	Aggregative – Keeping promises	District-based (e.g. State)
	Informal (Entrepreneurial)	Retrospective vote	Vote Discursive	Aggregative and Deliberative – Responsiveness, Inclusiveness	District-based Cross-district
EXTRA-INSTITUTIONAL	Self-Authorized Representatives (Individuals, CSOs, NGOs)	Retrospective market-based authorization (Book sales, media, membership) Discursive authorization	Exit accountability Peer/Reputational accountability Discursive	Deliberative – Responsiveness, Inclusiveness Aggregative – (membership)	District-based Cross-district Global (i.e. not bound to geographic constituencies)

Before I consider what authorization and accountability might look like in an extra-institutional context, which I will examine in the next section, there are three more characteristics of self-authorized representatives that I would like to outline. Thus far, I have established that a self-authorized representative is an extra-institutional actor who makes a claim of representation, which, if successful, acquires retrospective authorization from extra-institutional sources. There are a few features to unpack here. First, an extra-institutional actor can be an individual, a non-governmental organization (NGO), or a foundation. Whatever their extra-institutional form, the self-authorized representative (SAR) makes a claim of representation and acts in a representative capacity. In other words, they are not simply charitable organizations or service-delivery organizations, although these may be aspects of their work; instead, these actors try to mobilize state actors. Second, the representative claim itself may be explicit or implicit. For example, in some cases the representative claim is a clear statement – consider Bono’s now-famous claim, “I represent a lot of people [in Africa] who have no voice at all...They haven’t asked me to represent them.” In other cases, the claim may not be explicit; instead, an entity’s mission statement may serve to embed it in a normative relationship with a

¹ This table is not necessarily exhaustive. It may not include all of the mechanisms of authorization and accountability for extra-institutional representatives; it is only meant to summarize this section of the discussion.

specific group. Human Rights Watch, for example, does not specifically claim a representative relationship and yet it is not particularly controversial to imagine that an entity which claims to “challenge governments and those who hold power to end abusive practices and respect international human rights law” (Human Rights Watch 2007), and actually functions in that capacity, represents those who are victims of human rights abuses.

Can the SAR be responsive?

The third and final characteristic of the SAR explicitly addresses the first of the four questions I initially posed: Can self-authorized representatives be responsive to the claims of groups in ways that elected democratic representatives cannot? The short answer is, in principle, yes: The SAR arises out of a perceived need for representation, where the scale and scope of contemporary politics has eclipsed the territorial basis of representation, exposing a democratic deficit. As Mansbridge argues, “The situation has changed from the time when territorial representation captured many of a voter’s most significant interests, but in the United States the representational system has not changed with it” (2003: 523). At the national level, informal representation has arisen to cope with the blind spots produced by this mismatch between the voter’s interests and the territorial-based representational system, as exemplified by Barney Frank. Self-authorized representatives can operate both here, at the national level, in addition to informally authorized representatives (Jesse Jackson, for example, is a self-authorized representative who works, at the national level, for the defence of civil rights and to even the economic and educational playing fields in all aspects of American life), but also at the global level, providing a voice for those who would otherwise be excluded on the grounds of citizenship.

At the global level, self-authorized representatives have arisen in response to the fact that those who are affected by a nation-state’s policies do not always fall within that nation-state’s borders. Nation-states have, of course, electoral boundaries (usually tied to territorial borders) which limit who shall be included as members. However, as Iris Young argues, when the scope of social and economic interactions does not match the scope of political jurisdiction, the nation-state system can enact and legitimate profound exclusions (2000: 9). The economy operates on a scale far beyond the reach of any individual nation-state, and a number of contemporary issues also express the inadequacies of the territorial basis of representation: global warming and the spread of AIDS, as examples, are issues of global concern that require more than solutions within geographic constituencies. As a result, self-authorized representatives are stepping in to help fill those gaps.

These issues highlight the point that the traditional understanding of “the people” – which equates ‘the people’ with the population of an existing state (Canovan, 2005: 41) – is not appropriate for the complexities of contemporary politics. First, because “the people” are not necessarily a geographically-bound electoral constituency, or a people bound by shared citizenship, assuming membership as the basis of inclusion may result in the exclusion of those who are most affected by a decision/issue. Second, simple political egalitarianism may capture only one (perhaps geographical) dimension of representation,

and may therefore enable or fail to name inequalities in other dimensions of representation. The extra-institutional status of the SAR provides the flexibility required to address these two structural challenges to recognition: the SAR does not assume an established group and a fixed population, and can also contribute to the norm of proportionality. Let me begin to unpack this.

The people is not always the electorate

Formal political institutions, such as federalism and single-member electoral districts, traditionally link political representation with territory, thereby restricting membership to those who qualify as citizens within those borders. As Young points out, “The problem with restricting the issue of inclusion in this way, however, is that by virtue of its definition or scope the polity itself may wrongfully exclude individuals or groups” (2000: 8). Margaret Canovan explains,

Although the borders of polities have been delivered by historical contingencies, politicians and theorists usually find it convenient to take them for granted and assume that they contain a political community – a people. But this is not necessarily so, and in some cases it is very obviously not so. (2005: 110-11)

There are nation-states that are, in some sense, moving beyond this territorial frame. Italy, for example, has given the vote to expatriate Italians; it is more appropriate to say, then, that such a nation-state bases inclusion on membership rather than territory. Of course, in most cases, membership in the electorate is intimately tied to territory; but even where it is not, as in the case of Italy, assuming membership as the basis of inclusion may still result in the exclusion of those who are most affected by a decision/issue.

When “an established group and a fixed population” is assumed, “we miss the first and most important distributive question: How is that group constituted?” (Walzer, 1983: 31). Walzer’s point that membership is itself “the primary good that we distribute to one another” (1983: 19) is an important one: to the extent that people are *excluded* from membership may be the extent to which people are deprived of access to goods and services/representation/social justice. This is one place where the democratic potential of self-authorized representation reveals itself: because it does not assume an established group and a fixed population, it has the potential to address this structural challenge that inhibits institutional representation.

If one’s status as a state citizen or state subject is extraneous to the representative claim, how, then, does ‘the people’ form? As Canovan argues, “‘the people’ as an entity or group capable of exercising power is/are not readily available. Far from being a given, it/they has/have to be in some way constructed, mobilized or represented to be in a position to wield power or to be checked in doing so” (2006: 88-89). This is an important point – discussing ‘the people’ as an entity, or as a body able to exercise political authority, seems to skip over issues of construction or mobilization of the people, of which representation is a part. I argue that ‘the people’ may form around the self-authorized representative claim. Specifically, the representative claim, when successful, acts as a lightning rod for the mobilization of a people. The SAR imagines a people in

relation to a problem and the representative claim of the SAR actually tests that intuition. If the intuition has merit, the claim organizes that potential collection of affected people with respect to some good (or some bad) that they have in common. As Canovan argues,

It may be that the authoritative “people” that haunts our political discourse is indeed best thought of neither as a formally organized corporate body nor as an atomistic collection of individuals, but instead as an occasional mobilization through which separate individuals are temporarily welded into a body able to exercise political authority. (2006: 356-57)

In short, rather than defining “the people” on the basis of membership, as institutionalized representatives must, the self-authorized representative may define the people on the basis of the affected principle: “every individual potentially affected by a collective decision should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision proportionally to his or her stake in the outcome” (Warren, 2006: 385-86). For example, Bono’s organization, DATA, has suggested that climate talks should focus on the world’s poor, as it is the poorest Africans who will suffer “the earliest and the most,” based on the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (DATA, 2008). By defining “the people” in this way, as those who are affected, the self-authorized representative encourages “the structure of decision rules [to] follow the contours of power relations, not those of memberships” (Shapiro, 1999: 37-38).

The people is not ‘simple’

Institutional representatives must adhere to the principle of simple political egalitarianism, which often captures only one (perhaps geographical) dimension of representation. The acknowledgement that citizens are of equal standing in terms of political power or influence, reflected in the electoral rule of one person/one vote, is, of course, an important one, and can be supplemented by various electoral reforms to increase the legislative presence of disadvantaged groups. However, formal electoral institutions are inherently more rigid than, for example, the political claims of recognition; a vote is too blunt an instrument to capture the shifting and multi-dimensional nature of identity claims. Self-authorized representatives are not constrained by the principle of simple political egalitarianism, and are therefore flexible in their ability to represent issues of recognition and/or redistribution. Of course, that there is no functional equivalent to the rule of one person/one vote in the arena of self-authorized representatives will be a key challenge for democratic theory and practice. But this, it seems to me, is part of the point of the existence of a self-authorized representative: to represent those dimensions of each citizen that, at any point in time, have no presence via electoral mechanisms. In a way, then, the self-authorized representative actually interferes with simple egalitarianism, insofar as it can contribute to the norm of proportionality.

So where universal suffrage guarantees that all citizens are treated indistinctively, proportional representation tries to ensure that their views are given an equal

chance to be heard. The former must be faceless and blind to differences, the latter must acknowledge them. It is thus incorrect to posit a dualism between individualism (one head/one vote) and actually situated individuals (interest-group pluralism) and refer them to liberal and democratic representation respectively since democracy entails both. Indeed, in democratic representation two rights converge: the right to an equal voice and the equal right to be heard, or the electoral right and the right to be represented. (Urbinati, 2006: 41).

I suggested above that the SAR defines the people on the basis of the affected principle: “every individual potentially affected by a collective decision should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision *proportionally* to his or her stake in the outcome” (Warren, 2006: 385-86, emphasis added). I suggest that in addition to this issue of inclusion, the affected principle also introduces the issue of proportionality. These are equivalent, I think, to what Nadia Urbinati refers to as *isonomia* (the distribution of suffrage) and *isegoria* (the distribution of voice). In her words,

It is reasonable to say that any issue of “fair representation” is an issue that pertains to the dialectics between part and whole (minority/majority) or the relationship between arithmetical equality (one head/one vote) and proportional equality (all ideas should have a chance to be represented, not only those that get the majority of the votes). This is why although a normative theory of democracy does not specify any single system of representation it does give some clear indications about proportionality since it requires that fairness be defined in relation to the maxim of distributive justice (which is the realm of proportionality). (Urbinati, 2006: 40)

A situated individual has multiple facets of identity and interests of varying salience and intensity at any given point in time. And this complexity may not be captured by a formally elected representative but may be captured by a self-authorized representative: unlike formal representatives, self-authorized representatives do not exist to represent the complete set of interests of an entire geographic constituency; they do not compete for votes and can therefore afford to be more single-minded and agile than a state or political party, partial to particular peoples and particular issues. Because a political party represents a particular set of interests in order to compete for votes², it is possible – even probable – that an institutional representative may be structurally incapable of capturing all of a person’s (or people’s) interests and concerns. I may, for example, vote for a particular party or representative because I feel that the platform best approximates my concerns with the environment and health care. However, that representative may not fully satisfy my concern with the issue of child poverty both in Canada and elsewhere. As a result, and because of the existence of self-authorized representatives, I may choose to donate to World Vision or Unicef or Make Child Poverty History – I will consider which organization’s mission best fits my particular concerns and/or which organization I think will best utilize the funds I contribute. I will, in fact, shop for representation. In addition to casting a vote for an institutional

² The word “party” or “parties” suggests they speak for the values and interests of *part* of the society. And yet, they tend to be broad-based, moving towards the centre to capture more of the vote.

representative, then, I may also choose to cast a vote (of a kind) by donating money or time to a particular organization for a particular cause. This particularism complicates the issue of *where* representation occurs and contributes to a profusion of different representative entities.

The norm of proportionality may be required in order to encourage “the particular perspectives of relatively marginalized or disadvantaged social groups” so that they “receive specific expression” (Young, 2000: 8). This, Young suggests, makes a system of representation inclusive, and I argue, is one of the potential virtues of the self-authorized representative. The particularity of the self-authorized representative potentially serves to *widen* the scope of public deliberation if it includes historically marginalized and alienated groups in contexts where they would otherwise remain unrepresented.

In this section, I have argued that the extra-institutional status of the self-authorized representative can provide the flexibility required to address structural issues that challenge institutional representatives: specifically, the inappropriateness of assuming membership as the basis of inclusion, and the increasing irrelevance of simple political egalitarianism. The SAR is responsive in two ways: the SAR does not assume an established group and a fixed population, and the SAR contributes to the norm of proportionality. This allows the SAR to capture or name those who are affected by a decision/issue, providing representation to those who may have otherwise gone unrepresented. I am arguing that a self-authorized representative is responding to what Young (1990) refers to as “self-development,” and Amartya Sen (1990) as “equality as capabilities”: a need for the basic conditions that are required to make life choices. I am establishing a connection, in other words, between representation and social justice; in order to make this claim explicit, I need to first address the element which makes responsive representation democratic: empowered inclusion.

Can the SAR be inclusive?

A democratic self-authorized representative will be responsive in a manner that promotes the basic norm of democracy: empowered inclusion. Empowered inclusion requires those who are affected by the decisions and actions of the self-authorized representative to have some input into those decisions. Young refers to this ‘self-determination’: “being able to participate in determining one’s action and the condition of one’s action; its contrary is domination” (Young, 2000: 32). In formal electoral politics, that participation is facilitated via a constituent’s vote for their representative. In the absence of the vote, the self-authorized representative must provide other mechanisms that allow for the empowered inclusion of the represented. I can now propose an answer to the second question I posed: Can self-authorized representatives promote the democratic norm of inclusion? In principle, yes – and they may do so in ways that are even more robust than (though not a replacement for) electoral institutions.

The self-authorized representative can provide empowered inclusion, or self-determination, through various mechanisms of accountability³ (membership with exit option, for example), or through deliberative accountability with the affected: DATA, for

³ A detailed explanation of accountability mechanisms is offered in the following chapter - the structural analysis of self-authorized representatives.

example, works “with African leaders from across the continent to gather on-the-ground intelligence about which anti-AIDS and poverty interventions are working, and which are not,” and then feeds “that intelligence back” into their own work “with policymakers in Europe and the U.S.” (DATA 2007). *Democratic* self-authorized representatives, then, not only respond to the needs of the affected, but also respond in a manner that promotes their empowered inclusion.

Can the SAR be democratic?

Because self-authorized representatives have the potential to be both responsive *and* inclusive, the conventional view that elected representatives have greater legitimacy than others is inadequate. In other words, and in response to the third question posed at the beginning of this paper, self-authorized representatives *can* serve as *democratic* representatives, supplementing formal representation when it cannot adequately achieve the dimensions of responsiveness and empowered inclusiveness that are critical to democratic representation, and providing democratic representation in contexts where electoral representation does not exist. Self-authorized representatives, then, may be a necessary complement to formal and informal democratic representation in order to advance the broader norm of democracy. When they function in democratic ways, the self-authorized representative includes those perspectives and experiences that are not already included in a meaningful way – they are representing the unrepresented. In that sense, self-authorized representatives are an alternative to electoral representation, but a part of democratic representation, more broadly. By engaging with a specific group of people, who have historically gone unrepresented, to their detriment, self-authorized representatives may contribute to a larger system of democratic representation.

Can the SAR promote harm?

However, self-authorized representation may not result in democratic representation; instead, the SAR may consider the affected to be incapable of acting on their own behalf (trustee representation), or reinforce or exacerbate the unequal positions of the privileged and underprivileged (under-representation), or be unaccountable and unresponsive to those the SAR affects (failed representation). In answer to the final question, then, the answer is yes: self-authorized representatives can have other, perhaps less desirable potentials, which may produce something other than a democratic relationship of representation, or which may even be harmful to democracy. Table 2 summarizes the possible outcomes of self-authorized representation in relation the dimensions of responsiveness and inclusiveness, which I conceptualize below.

TABLE 2 – Dimensions of Self-Authorized Representation

		Empowered Inclusion	
		-	+
Responsiveness	-	Failed Representation	Under-Representation
	+	Trustee Representation	Democratic Representation

A *trustee* may be responsive to a given group, but not inclusive. The trustee acts “in the interest of the represented” (Pitkin, 1967: 209), but does so without the input of the affected. The SAR does not solicit information from the community, but decides in isolation which issues are most pressing. Because the SAR treats the affected as a group that needs to be taken care of, rather than one currently capable of “independent action and judgement” (Pitkin, 1967: 209), this type of representation does not enable self-determination, i.e. participation in articulating and “determining one’s action and the condition of one’s action” (Young, 2000: 32). The result, therefore, is trusteeship rather than democratic representation. However, it should be noted that this SAR might still achieve an important good for a community. Moreover, trustee representation may very well be better than no representation, i.e. where there is no electoral representation.

Under-representation occurs when the SAR is inclusive, but *unresponsive* or, rather, not democratically responsive. In this scenario, the SAR enables empowered inclusion for the already-powerful, providing them with yet another venue of representation. The SAR does not, therefore, respond to the need for basic conditions required to make life choices; instead the SAR represents the interests of those already well served by the existing system – powerful special interests and business groups, for example. By reinforcing the unequal positions of the privileged and underprivileged, this type of self-authorized representation can undermine, rather than supplement, simple political egalitarianism.

Finally, if the actions of a self-authorized representative are *unresponsive* and *exclusive*, *failed representation* is the likely result. This self-authorized representative claims to represent the interests of a given community, but neither responds to the interests of that community, nor includes the affected in his/her decision-making in a manner that is empowered. A particularly salient example might be Osama bin Laden, who claims to represent the interests of the followers of Islam, but without consultation, as evidenced by the response of Islamic authorities condemning the attacks on the World Trade Center. Furthermore, his focus is not the need for basic conditions required to make life choices (including non-domination), as evidenced by the Taliban’s (with whom

bin Laden reportedly has close ties) extreme version of Islamic rule in Afghanistan, which, for example, banned women from working, and included vicious punishment or death for any opponents or dissidents. The Ku Klux Klan is another example of failed representation – claiming to represent white people, this organization is secret and violent (characteristics it shares with al-Qaeda), and therefore unresponsive and unaccountable. And, of course, any group which aims for the exclusion or marginalization of other groups violates the principle of publicity, which demands transparency and accountability.

III. Structural Analysis of Self-Authorized Representation

In the last section, I offered a normative analysis of the functions of self-authorized representatives. In this section, I offer a structural analysis; that is, what might democratic representation actually look like in the realm of self-authorized representatives? I suggest that an analysis of two intersecting dimensions of extra-institutional representatives will be helpful: (1) mechanisms of authorization, and (2) mechanisms of accountability.

Mechanisms of Authorization

My point in this section is to achieve some analytical separation between representation and elections. Standard accounts of political representation see elections as *the* authorization mechanism that provides representation with its democratic element. For most democratic theorists, that self-authorized representatives are not elected is a point of concern – there is a simple *claim* of representation which suggests arbitrariness, since there are no formal procedures of authorization beyond self-appointment or self-selection. However, this lack of formal authorization is the defining feature of a self-authorized representative, and I argue an important and necessary one; if they are to be able to address the democratic deficits of electoral institutions, they must not be restricted in the same ways lest they reproduce the same problems. It is precisely because they are *not* restricted to the limits of existing national electoral systems (e.g. principles of territorial constituencies and simple political egalitarianism), that they are able to represent groups and issues in ways that are required and demanded in contemporary politics. However, if self-authorized representatives are to fulfill democratic functions, we need to identify alternative modes of authorization with potentially democratic characteristics.

If it is important for the represented to grant authority to *self*-authorized representatives, what alternative types of authorization might demonstrate approval of the self-authorized representative's decision to, in fact, self-authorize? I argue that where there are no elections to select and prospectively authorize representatives, *retrospective* authorization might be an important consideration. Retrospective authorization might take one of the following forms: one, the self-authorized representative acquires a following (*membership*), based on a convergence of interests as expressed in a mission statement; two, *public agreement* expressed by the general public as well as peers of the

self-authorized representative and the media; three, the self-authorized representative receives financial contributions from *donors* to pursue their work; and four, *voting* within organizations can act as a signal to the self-authorized representative: boards of trustees can vote on issues of policy such as grant-making, geographic focus, spending, investment, management, and professional standards, and members can sometimes elect representatives to the Board of Directors.

The representative voice of the self-authorized representative grows with these serial and incremental authorizations: it is “retrospective” only in that the claim of representation is made prior to authorization, and is then progressively affirmed or ignored. Strictly speaking, then, the “retrospective” aspect of the authorization is inaccurate: it is only a claim until it is authorized. This is analytically quite different from formal authorization, which emphasizes, if not reduces, authorization to an isolated act (the election); instead, self-authorized representation emphasizes a *process* of authorization that is ongoing and dialectical. I would argue, then, that the self-authorized representative achieves retrospective authorization as a result of the legitimacy of the representation claim; in other words, retrospective authorization is intimately connected to *responsiveness*.

Mechanisms of Accountability

“A crucial feature of representative democracy,” argue Grant and Keohane, “is that those who govern are held accountable to the governed” (2005: 29). Traditionally, constituents hold representatives accountable via election. Representatives are required to provide an account of their actions to their constituents, who either re-elect representatives to reward their behaviour, or remove representatives from office, to sanction their behaviour. Ideally, this process of accountability demands a certain transparency – the decisions and actions of the representative must be publicized in order to be judged – and should therefore ensure “a certain kind of behaviour on the part of the representative” (Pitkin, 1967: 57). Barber concurs: “It is because those of us in modern democratic societies can easily deprive [representatives] of power – depose them, if you will – at certain intervals that they have (at least theoretically) the incentive to rule in a way responsive to our interests” (1984: 145).

Many scholars are concerned, then, by the fact that, “NGOs never have to face voters or bear any sort of accountability” (Rabkin, 1999: 37), that “NGOs are not elected, not accountable to any body politic” (Rivken and Carey, 2000/01: 37) and that “NGOs are not very often connected, in any direct way, to masses of ‘people’” (Anderson, 2000:117). It seems that the legitimacy of NGOs is largely disconnected from their accountability, and this is a point of both criticism and concern; NGOs lack the formal accountability mechanisms of re-election or removal from office and yet continue to serve as representatives of the poor and the marginalized. Other scholars suggest that the issue of electoral accountability is fetishized (Spiro, 2002). There is a tendency to offer the democratic state as an ideal form in which accountability works perfectly through periodic elections – but voter turnout is often low, and there is a large literature that suggests the average voter is less than astute and less than interested.

Still others argue that weakness eliminates the problem of accountability altogether – after all, NGOs can hardly do the same level of damage as governments and corporations.

In general, the weakness of NGOs – their dependence on reputation and funding and their lack of coercive force or huge material resources – makes the lack of formal accountability mechanisms for them less likely to lead to serious abuses of power than is the case for states. (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 38)

I would only like to suggest that there are other forms of accountability that may do as well as, and perhaps better than, formal accountability on many measures, including normative legitimacy. While it is true, then, that NGOs are not elected, it does not necessarily follow that they are not, or cannot be, held accountable in some way. It is simply that they will be held accountable *differently* than states and legislators, and for different powers and purposes. In other words, accountability mechanisms should be appropriate with respect to the powers and functions of self-authorized representatives.

What, then, might accountability look like in the realm of self-authorized representation? Grant and Keohane (2005) have provided the groundwork for global mechanisms of accountability in their article, “Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics.” They identify six accountability mechanisms that are useful here: market, public reputational, peer, hierarchical, fiscal, and legal accountability, which I suggest correspond with the mechanisms of authorization I identified earlier (see table 3 at the end of this section). To Grant and Keohane’s list of mechanisms of accountability, I would like to add one more: *voice accountability*.

Voice is defined as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs” (Hirschman, 1970: 30). According to Albert Hirschman, this type of accountability is employed when a firm’s customers or an organization’s members express their dissatisfaction to those in charge who, in turn, “search for the causes and possible cures of customers’ and members’ dissatisfaction” (1970: 4). Hirschman further argues that, “to develop “voice” within an organization is synonymous with the history of democratic control through the articulation and aggregation of opinions and interests” (1970: 55). I argue that voice accountability can also be utilized by those outside of an organization, specifically, those who are *affected* by a self-authorized representative’s claims and actions. The poor and the marginalized, for example, are unlikely to pay the dues required of member organizations, and are generally unable to escape from an objectionable state of affairs (which is likely why they require representation); however, they can utilize the voice mechanism – articulate their opinion in an attempt to change their circumstance – when a self-authorized representative, whether individual or organization, actually speaks to those people they hope to affect – and of course, not only speaks to them, but hears them and responds to them.

Market accountability is defined as accountability to “investors and consumers, whose influence is exercised in whole or in part through markets” (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 37). Grant and Keohane provide the examples of investors refusing to support countries whose policies they dislike, or consumers refusing to buy products from companies with reputations for undesirable labour standards. I suggest that self-

authorized representatives may be subject to a form of market accountability – specifically, exit accountability. *Exit accountability* is a market-based feedback mechanism traditionally provided by membership levels. The self-authorized representative is made aware of the approval of his/her actions/goals in terms of membership levels: high approval is expressed via a stable and perhaps growing membership, and low approval is expressed by the exit of members from the organization. There are three more attributes in favour of exit accountability: one, the cost of exit is low; two, entrance and exit is entirely voluntary unlike, say, citizenship; and three, it can occur at any time the member chooses, unlike periodic elections. Some will argue that “exit” is less democratic than “voice,” but the two are not mutually exclusive; in fact, as Hirschman argues, “the *effectiveness* of the voice mechanism is strengthened by the possibility of exit” (1970: 83). This is because NGOs, for example, occupy a rather competitive market for both funding and members; as a result, an organization is attentive to its members because of the threat of exit. In addition to this traditional usage of exit, within organizations, I would like to suggest that exit also occurs outside of organizations, when a member, or members, of the affected refuses the grounds of the representation claim. Unlike voice, in which one articulates their opinion in an attempt to change their circumstance, exit is a refusal of the representation claim altogether and I argue, therefore, conceptually distinct.

Public reputational accountability is, according to Grant and Keohane, involved in all the other forms of accountability: “Superiors, supervisory boards, courts, fiscal watchdogs, markets, and peers all take the reputations of agents into account. Indeed, reputation is a form of ‘soft power,’ defined as ‘the ability to shape the preferences of others’ (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 37, citing Nye, 2004: 5). Self-authorized representatives will often make efforts to justify their actions to a broader public, thereby manifesting reputational accountability. Al Gore, for example, has established a reputation as an environmental activist and has arguably played an important role in the public’s emerging concern about climate change. Public reputational accountability is another important mechanism of accountability for an *individual* self-authorized representative, who is unlikely to be subject to other means of accountability, such as market or hierarchical accountability. Grant and Keohane concur: “The category of public reputational accountability is meant to apply to situations in which reputation, widely and publicly known, provides a mechanism for accountability even in the absence of other mechanisms as well as in conjunction with them (2005: 37).

The following mechanisms of accountability are, I think, less inclusive and less democratic than those listed above; however, they still provide a measure of accountability, and are therefore useful in an extra-institutional context. *Peer accountability* “arises as the result of mutual evaluation of organizations by their counterparts. NGOs, for example, evaluate the quality of information they receive from other NGOs and the ease of cooperating with them” (2005: 37). Because partnerships and networking are critical to the functioning of NGOs, peer accountability can be vital for these types of organizations: “Organizations that are poorly rated by their peers are likely to have difficulty in persuading them to cooperate and, therefore, to have trouble achieving their own purposes” (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 37). Organizations that are poorly rated may also have trouble attracting members and donors: the American Institute of Philanthropy, Charity Navigator, and the Better Business Bureau, are charity

watchdogs which provide information on the financial efficiency, accountability, governance, and fundraising practices of charities, for the benefit of potential members and donors. Moreover, because networks of peers can only be as legitimate as the actors involved, NGOs might be asked to adhere to professional codes of conduct, as evidenced by the signing of the International Non Governmental Organizations' Accountability Charter in 2005.

Hierarchical accountability refers to relationships within organizations, where “superiors can remove subordinates from office, constrain their tasks and room for discretion, and adjust their financial compensation” (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 36). Often, boards of trustees act in this regard – they may be invited in as outsiders, in a sense, to act as evaluators and reviewers, voting on policies, positions, and operational budgets, thereby adding a degree of accountability. Some organizations, such as Oxfam International, provide their members with the ability to elect representatives to their Board of Directors, which also adds an element of hierarchical accountability. *Fiscal accountability* “describes mechanisms through which funding agencies can demand reports from, and ultimately sanction, agencies that are recipients of funding” (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 36). Finally, those entities that are neither states nor international organizations are subject to the laws of the states possessing jurisdiction (Grant and Keohane, 2005: 36). *Legal accountability*, then, ensures a certain kind of behaviour on the part of the self-authorized representatives – funds will not be siphoned off, for example.

Table 3. Mechanisms of Extra-Institutional Accountability		
<i>Mechanism of Authorization</i>	<i>Included</i>	<i>Mechanism of Accountability</i>
Membership	Member	Exit Accountability Voice Accountability Public Reputational Accountability Peer Accountability
Public Agreement	Affected Member Donor General Public	Public Reputational Accountability Voice Accountability Exit Accountability Peer Accountability
Donations	Member Donor	Fiscal Accountability Legal Accountability Public Reputational Accountability Peer Accountability
Votes	Board of Trustees	Hierarchical Accountability

IV. Examples of Self-Authorized Representatives

Thus far, I have argued that democratic representation may be found where it is unexpected: outside of the electoral relationship between elected officials and their constituents, when a person or entity simply offers a claim of representation and is neither formally authorized nor formally held to account. These self-authorized representatives may have authorization and accountability mechanisms at work which, though unfamiliar, can have normatively desirable properties. I have also argued that in order to be a democratic representative, a self-authorized representative must not only be responsive to, but also inclusive of, those they represent. If authorization is intimately connected to responsiveness, then accountability is intimately connected to *inclusion*. In other words, a self-authorized representative who has been authorized retrospectively, and is therefore deemed responsive, can only be a trustee representative; it is the mechanism of accountability that allows for the theoretical possibility of a trustee (responsive) self-authorized representative to become a democratic (responsive *and* inclusive) self-authorized representative. I am therefore most interested in those (authorized) self-authorized representatives which lie on the responsive half of table 2:

Empowered Inclusion

	-	+
Responsiveness	-	+
	-	+

Failed Representation	Under-Representation
Trustee Representation	Democratic Representation

I will therefore select examples of self-authorized representatives based on the *democratic* mechanism of accountability they employ – in other words, I will limit myself to exit, reputational, and voice accountability. I cannot expect that these mechanisms of accountability will be clearly separable; as I mentioned above, reputational accountability is involved in the other accountability mechanisms, as is voice. However, I think it is possible to find limiting cases, in which one mechanism of accountability clearly trumps another. For example, a self-authorizing individual such as Bono will likely rely primarily on public reputational accountability, given that he is not himself an organization which employs exit or peer accountability. Reputational accountability will likely be supplemented by voice, but I suspect the former trumps the

latter in this case – members of government meet with Bono because of the reputation he has established with his work in Africa.

Another limiting case might be the Rwanda Women's Network. The RWN caters to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence across Rwanda in the recognition that women and children bore the brunt of the genocide, and remain the most vulnerable and marginalised groups within Rwandan civil society. In addition to their advocacy work, the organization's core programmes include educating women on issues such as their human and legal rights and sexual gender-based violence, and empowering women with their families to improve their socioeconomic status. Given the nature of this work and the fact that it is a non-member organization, I think it likely that the RWN will primarily be subject to voice accountability.

Larger organizations such as Oxfam will, I suspect, primarily be subject to exit accountability. Oxfam International was founded in 1955 by a group of non-governmental organizations with a like-minded purpose - to overcome poverty and injustice. Its mission is a just world without poverty and its goal is to enable people to exercise their rights and manage their own lives. In order to achieve this, Oxfam conducts both development work (taking communities out of poverty) and advocacy work (trying to affect policy decisions on the causes of conflict). Oxfam works at all levels, from global to local, with the intent of empowering people to work their way out of poverty. Oxfam has a board of directors and is a member-based organization. Members help to formulate Oxfam's direction, participate in governing bodies, and elect representatives to the Board of Directors.

V. Conclusion

I have argued that there are representative deficits in the formal institutions of electoral politics produced by the rigidities of the structures involved: electoral districts represent individuals primarily as geographical inhabitants and can ignore other interests and facets of identity which may be more important; the vote, which reflects the principle of simple political egalitarianism, cannot capture the shifting and multi-dimensional nature of identity claims; and a nation-state's emphasis on membership as the basis of inclusion can exclude those non-members who are affected by its policies. It is not only, then, that formal institutions are ill-suited to the contemporary world and its novel problems; they may in fact be responsible in some ways. Moreover, in contexts outside of electoral representation, self-authorized representatives may increase and improve responsiveness and inclusiveness for those who are guaranteed neither simple political egalitarianism nor geographic representation. The democratic theory literature, with its focus on elections and geographic constituencies, cannot adequately explain this observable phenomenon.

This paper has helped to fill the gap between real-world examples and the democratic theory literature by conceptualizing this phenomenon of extra-institutional representation: I have offered a normative and structural analysis of self-authorized representatives in order to demonstrate their potential in providing an important complementary relationship to electoral representation, as well as their critical role in

providing democratic representation in contexts where there is no electoral representation. Self-authorized representation may not look familiar, as it differs from our traditional understanding of democratic representation, which is based on formal authorization and accountability; however, the potential of self-authorized representatives to be responsive and inclusive serves an important function for historically marginalized groups, and may therefore facilitate a more just and democratic world.