

# HANDBOOK ON WORLD SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM

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*EDITED BY*

Jackie Smith

Scott Byrd

Ellen Reese

Elizabeth Smythe

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*Paradigm Publishers*

Boulder • London



*We dedicate this volume to the many thousands of activists in communities across the globe working tirelessly to show that a more just and equitable world is indeed possible. You motivate and inspire our work and have taught us so much.*



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

- ACORD = Association for Cooperative Operations Research and Development  
ACP = African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States  
AFL-CIO = American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organizations  
AFM = Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur  
AFSCME = American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees  
AFT = American Federation of Teachers  
AIM = American Indian Movement  
ALCA = Spanish acronym for Free Trade Area of the Americas  
ANSWER = Act Now to Stop the War and End Racism  
APEC = Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation  
ARCI = Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana, Italy  
ASF = Americas Social Forum  
ATTAC = Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens  
ATN = Africa Trade Network  
BOC = Brazilian Organizing Committee  
CADTM = Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt  
CAFTA = Central American Free Trade Agreement  
CANEVAS = Le Comit3 action non-violent, Quebec  
CAOI = Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Ind3gena [Andean Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations]

- CC = Critical Consumerism  
CCFD = Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement  
CEDETIM = Centre d'Etudes Anti Impérialistes  
CGIL = Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro  
CGT = Confédération générale du travail, France  
CIO = Congress of Industrial Organizations  
CLAC = Convergence des lutes anticapitaliste, Quebec  
COA = Camp Organizing Committee (Comitê Organizador do Acampamento),  
Brazil  
COBAS = Confederazione del Comitati di Base, Italy  
CONIC = Coordinadora de Organizaciones y Naciones Indígenas del Conti-  
nente [Coordinating Body of Indigenous Nations and Organizations of  
the Continent]  
CRID = Centre de recherches et d'informations pour le développement,  
France  
CSM = Call of Social Movements  
CtW = Change to Win Federation  
CUT = Central Única dos Trabalhadores, Brazil  
  
DAWN = Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era  
  
EED = Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst  
EJM = environmental justice movement  
ENDA = Environmental Development Action in the Third World Senegal  
EPA = Economic Partnership Agreement  
EPA = European Preparatory Assembly  
ESF = European Social Forum  
  
FEMNET = African Women's Development and Communications Network  
FEW = Forum for the Empowerment of Women  
FTAA = Free Trade Area of the Americas  
FTQ = Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec  
  
G8 = Group of Eight Industrialized Countries  
GATS = General Agreement on Trade in Services  
GATT = General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade  
GAWM = global antiwar movement  
GBM = Green Belt Movement, Kenya  
GCAP = Global Call to Action Against Poverty  
GJM = global justice movement  
GRAIN = Genetic Resources Action International  
GSF = Genoa Social Forum  
GSS = General Social Survey



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

HSA = Hemispheric Social Alliance

HDI = Human Development Index

IATP = Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

IBASE = Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas [Brazilian  
Institute of Social and Economic Analyses]

IC = International Council

ICT = information and communications technology

ICTSD = International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development

IDSN = International Dalit Solidarity Network

IEN = Indigenous Environmental Network

IFG = International Forum on Globalization

IGC = India General Council

IGO = intergovernmental organization

ILGA = International Lesbian and Gay Association

ILO = International Labor Organization

IMF = International Monetary Fund

INCEP = Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Políticos

IP = Interested Parties

ITUC = International Trade Union Confederation

IYC = Intercontinental Youth Camps

JWJ = Jobs with Justice

KSSP = Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad [Kerala People's Science Movement],  
India

LPM = Landless People's Movement, South Africa

MAI = Multilateral Agreement on Investment

MEP = Member of European Parliament

MST = Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, Brazil [Landless  
Workers' Movement] Movimento dos Sem Terra

MVR = Fifth Republic Movement, Venezuela

MWSF = Midwest Social Forum, United States

NAFTA = North American Free Trade Agreement

NCDHR = National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights

NEP = new economic policy

NIIGD = Network Institute for Global Democratization

NGO = nongovernmental organization

NPC = National Planning Committee (of the United States Social Forum)

OECD = Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PMA = People's Movement Assembly

- PT = Partido dos Trabalhadores, Brazil
- QSF = Quebec Social Forum
- REDOIL = Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands
- SAIIC = South and Meso American Indian Rights Center
- SEIU = Service Employees International Union
- SFJFW = South Florida Jobs with Justice
- SIN COBAS = Sindacato dei Lavoratori Intercategoriale Cobas, Italy
- SMA = Social Movements Assembly
- SMO = social movement organization
- TRIMs = Trade-related investment measures
- TRIPS = Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights
- TWN = Third World Network
- UNCED = United Nations Conference on Environment and Development  
in Rio de Janeiro
- UNEGRO = União de Negros pela Igualdade
- UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme
- UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNITE-HERE = Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees-  
Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union
- UQAM = Université du Québec à Montréal
- USSF = United States Social Forum
- VSIE = Vigilancia Social de la Industria Extractiva [Social Oversight of the  
Extractive Industry]
- WCAR = World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xeno-  
phobia and Related Intolerance
- WEF = World Economic Forum
- WFYS = World Festival of Youth and Students
- WILD = Women's Institute for Leadership Development
- WMW = World March of Women (Marche Mondiale des Femmes)
- WTO = World Trade Organization
- WVS = World Values Survey



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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been more than 10 years since the first World Social Forum, where more than 15,000 activists gathered from around the world to proclaim that “Another World Is Possible.” They were countering a widely accepted notion that progress, development, and other social goods required continuously expanding global markets. In 2011, the world looks much different, and government leaders and public officials at all levels are questioning earlier conventional wisdom. Instead of meeting to discuss strategies for deregulating global markets, leaders of the world’s biggest economies are meeting to discuss ways to better manage global financial actors. Former chief economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, recently co-authored a book entitled *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn’t Add Up*, which validates claims activists have been making for decades about the limits of economic models and logics as global organizing principles. The world has changed, and the World Social Forum should be seen as both an indicator and also as a catalyst for some of that change.

We are pleased to be able to offer this handbook for readers interested in thinking about the uncertain path to a more equitable, peaceful, and ecologically vibrant world. The research reported here draws from the work of contributors who have maintained long-term and extensive involvement in the World Social Forum process over its first decade, and it thus aims to help both activists and scholars understand this process as part of a long-term historical competition between capitalist elites pursuing their economic interests and popular forces struggling to achieve a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and their livelihoods. With 10 years of Social Forum experience, we can now begin to think more comparatively about the lessons learned from the variety of world, regional, national, and local Social Forums. We hope that by bringing together in a single volume this rich array of scholarship, we can contribute to the learning that will help movements for a more democratic and equitable world develop and thrive.

Collectively, the authors contributing to this volume have attended all of the World Social Forums and dozens of regional and local Forums as researchers, organizers, and participants. We are committed to the WSF process as offering the world a promising new form of politics to meet the ever growing and strengthening demands for justice, peace, and equality in a global economy. Although many of us work to help advance the work of the WSF process, we have strived to remain critical in our study and analysis of this process. We hope that the result is a work that can truly inform and guide future activism and scholarship.

Each of us has benefited from various sources of support for our research on the World Social Forum process, and we acknowledge this support. Most immediately, we are grateful to our research participants who are active in the Social Forum process. Our conversations and our work with them have been essential to our efforts to better understand this complex and evolving process. As editors, we are also especially appreciative of the dedication and hard work our contributors have done to develop the chapters in this volume and to make them accessible to readers outside the academy. We have learned a great deal from working with this very talented group.

A 2006 workshop at the University of Notre Dame helped launch this project by bringing together a growing network of scholars with the aim of expanding scholarly attention to the WSF process and strengthening interdisciplinary and cross-national collaboration. We are grateful to the following offices for their support of this workshop and for Smith's research on the U.S. and World Social Forums: the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts in the College of Arts and Letters, the Center for the Study of Social Movements and Social Change, the Office of Research, and the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame.

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## FOREWORD

When the World Social Forum (WSF) emerged in 2001, it was something very new, as political initiative, among the traditional political practices. Ten years after the Berlin Wall fell, the globalization process serving the interests of money was using all its power to subjugate the entire world. At the same time, protests against it were growing, with social movements multiplying street demonstrations. For WSF organizers a new political actor was emerging, heterogeneous and fragmented, constituted by many different types of organizations. They called it “civil society,” to stress its autonomy in relation with parties and governments. Declaring that “another world is possible,” they attributed special importance to the role of this new political actor to build a globalization process based on solidarity.

The WSF proposal was simple but disturbing: to create an “open space” without leaders; to allow people to connect horizontally, in an atmosphere of cooperation instead of competition; to forge a sense of unity among those resisting the dominant globalization process. Coming into this “public square,” they could better know each other, hear others’ experiences and learn with them, identify convergences, build freely new actions. And, consistent with the WSF Charter of Principles, they were not forced to adopt final common declarations.

It was a Forum, but it was not organized as Forums usually are, from top to bottom. The activities in it would be decided by the participants themselves and self-organized by them. Being a “Social” Forum, it was an alternative to the World “Economic” Forum, which congregated in Davos the leaders of the dominant type of globalization these movements were challenging. It was neither a new movement, nor a movement of movements, with leaders and disciplined militants discussing strategies and voting plans of action. It was simply a meeting point that did not exist before. Its function would be to help build unity among the organizations that were struggling—to give political power to them while safeguarding their extreme and rich diversity.

The process launched by the first WSF expanded itself all over the world, with Forums at various levels, including at the local level. Among them, two U.S. Social Forums were organized—in Atlanta and in Detroit.

We have two ways to get the meaning of this process: to read about it and to make the experience of participating of it. This book will be especially useful in the first way, with its deep and comprehensive analysis of its experiences as well as of the doubts and tensions they create. To have a complete appreciation of the WSF process newness—that is the experimentation of a new political culture—we need to use also the second way: to breath the Social Forums' atmosphere; to take up the Forums' invitation to join in political improvisation; and to experience the disorder and the joy of the encounters, the richness of the diversity of actions, and views of an emerging global society—the absence of commands guiding us to narrow-minded objectives, the provocations to imagine and dream.

Those engaged in the WSF process all over the planet hope it will continue its way inside U.S., to make possible the building of a new world of justice, peace, and love. I am sure this book will play an important role in this walk.

*Chico Whitaker, December 24, 2010*



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## INTRODUCTION

### LEARNING FROM THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUMS

*Jackie Smith, Scott Byrd, Ellen Reese, and Elizabeth Smythe*

As this book goes to press, it is quite clear that the global political order is in flux, and dramatic changes are on the horizon as the global economy reels from the combination of bank failures, rising energy and food prices, and increasingly urgent environmental challenges. Activists and critical intellectuals attentive to the global expansion of capitalism, particularly those in the global South, predicted most of these crises decades ago. As politicians and financial elites scramble to develop new bailout and economic recovery packages to stem the unfolding catastrophes, it is in these critical communities of activists and scholars where thoughtful, feasible, and sustainable alternatives to globalized capitalism are being developed, discussed, and tested. It is therefore essential that students of social change pay more attention to activism that targets global capitalism, particularly as it is manifested in the World Social Forum process.

The World Social Forums began in 2001 and since then have mobilized millions of people around the world. We would argue, along with many others, that the World Social Forum process is among the most important political developments of our time. Founders of the WSF envisioned it as an “open space” where activists could meet, exchange ideas, and plan actions. All those opposed to neoliberal capitalism were welcome as long as they did not advocate violent tactics. These world meetings, along with growing numbers of regional and local manifestations,



include large plenary events and cultural performances. But most of the activities are self-organized workshops that vary in both size and format. These workshops include debates by speakers on strategic and policy questions, demonstrations of practical skills (such as techniques for media advocacy or electronic communication), or consciousness-raising sessions where participants learn about issues, experiences, perspectives, or campaigns from activists and intellectuals. Some workshops develop plans for collective action, while others create or develop activist networks and coalitions.

The notion of the WSFs as a “process” signals the idea that the meetings themselves are not the main purpose. Instead, the goal of most organizers is to facilitate the exchange of ideas, to expand and deepen activist networks, and to provide new spaces in which people can reflect on and help realize alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Forums create ongoing opportunities for activists to come together to strengthen their alliances, foster shared identities and goals, overcome issue-based divisions, build trust, develop plans for cooperation, and disseminate ideas about strategies for advancing more sustainable and just social and economic policies. They generate reflection and learning through sustained interaction across time and place (Sen 2007).

We aim with this handbook to help document the decade-long World Social Forum process and inform contemporary activists and scholars about the lessons it offers. As the World Social Forums have expanded in geographic scope and increased the strength and depth of their supporting networks, activists have both drawn from past experiences and developed innovative ways to address the many challenges of organizing in today’s global context. By comparing the experiences of Social Forums in their local, national, and regional manifestations, and by considering the WSFs in historical context, we hope to contribute to knowledge that can make a more just and equitable world possible. We put forward this collection with humility, knowing that we can offer only a glimpse of this complex and expansive process and that our understandings are shaped by our own biases, linguistic limitations, and necessarily partial observations of what is taking place in the context of this multifaceted process.

A further goal of this handbook is to illustrate the potential that a variety of research methods provides for our effort to learn from the WSF process. While the process itself challenges traditional, Western methods and assumptions in social research (see Santos 2007), our contributors have adapted a variety of conventional methods—including

participant observation, survey research, discourse analysis, and network analysis—to make them more sensitive to issues of power and inequity and more useful in the development of movement-relevant knowledge. We anticipate that this book will serve as a guide to the Forum process that both informs readers about the WSF and raises issues and questions that stimulate reflection and debate among activists who continue to transform the Social Forum process. This handbook also offers a guide for activists not yet familiar with the WSF process but who may be interested in applying these lessons learned to other social movement domains.

### HISTORY, POWER, STRATEGY, AND IDENTITY AND THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUMS

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Globalizing processes have long served to expand global capitalism and protect capitalist elites. These processes have been met with fierce opposition from popular groups including Indigenous peoples, peasants, and workers. The current situation is no different in this regard. The expansion of global neoliberalism since the late 1970s has triggered transnational and cross-sectoral mobilization around issues such as trade, food sovereignty, war and militarization, human rights, and environmental concerns. As Rucht (Chapter 1) shows, contemporary resistance to neoliberal globalization emerges from a strong organizational and intellectual movement base that has in recent decades grown exponentially in scope and scale.

The World Social Forums have clearly provided a focal point—a center of gravity—for diverse streams of activism to come together across national and other boundaries in order to counter the power of global capitalist elites and their supporters in governments. It reflects the need to link local action with global politics as well as activists’ desire to shift their energies from mass street protests toward the articulation of alternatives to the current global political economy. But the expansion of the WSFs has been uneven, as the chapter by Smith and Smythe (Chapter 2) conveys, reflecting variation in organizing capacities across locales and a variety of network dynamics that affect the diffusion of the WSF process.

While activists’ views and understandings of global problems are strongly influenced by their experiences in national and local contexts, the WSF process aims to transform participants’ understandings of problems by encouraging dialogue across national and other differences.

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It advances social transformation by creating spaces where activists can develop their “political imaginations” about what sort of world is desirable while working together to develop practical strategies for making such visions possible. The slogan motivating the WSFs, “Another World Is Possible,” has been translated into countless national and local contexts, inspiring activists to consider their communities in a broader global context. When activists organize national and local “Social Forums,” they explicitly appeal to global identities and practices.

Thus, through the experiences of the WSFs, activists’ understandings of problems and their desired solutions are transformed, as are their understandings about how best to organize political action. Thus, Teivainen (Chapter 3) reflects on how the commitment of the WSFs to the concept of open space affects efforts to address power asymmetries. He argues for a politicization of the notion of open space in recognition of these asymmetries. Teivainen’s recommendation was embraced by activists working in the United States Social Forum (USSF), who have adapted the WSF’s open space to create a more *intentional space* (Juris 2008a) that can remedy long-standing race, class, and gender inequities. Chapters by Juris and colleagues (Chapter 15) and by Smith and Doerr (Chapter 18) illustrate the dynamism of the WSF process and the specific ways activists innovate within its framework.

The WSF Charter of Principles and its implementation have attracted many diverse groups seeking to advance particular issues and group interests. Chapters by Hewitt and Karides (Chapter 5) and by Becker and Koda (Chapter 6) illustrate the rocky road that feminist and Indigenous activists have faced as they have sought to challenge conventional understandings of identity. Capitalism is, according to feminist activists, intimately linked to patriarchy and gender inequality. This has meant that everyday practices and conventions instilled through socialization serve to reinforce the social hierarchies and resulting inequalities that the WSF process seeks to overturn. Activists themselves are often blinded to the ways their taken-for-granted assumptions and social practices reinforce oppression. This is particularly apparent in the frequent conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists in the Forum, and in Indigenous peoples’ ambivalence about engaging with the WSF process (see Becker and Koda, Chapter 6). These same dynamics are evident in Pommerolle and Siméant’s (Chapter 12) examination of the efforts of African activists to integrate their particular worldviews into the WSFs, despite their dependence on Northern donors. Hewitt and Karides demonstrate how feminists have

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struggled to transform the consciousness that has generated persistent gender inequities within the Forum process. Our contributors thus offer a long-term perspective on how various oppressed and excluded groups have engaged the WSF process, illustrating how their struggles have and continue to inform and transform it. Their analyses suggest that, although some progress has been made, much more work is needed to realize a world freed from the cultural bondage of racialized and gendered hierarchies that are central to globalized capitalism.

Other chapters demonstrate the role of Social Forums as spaces where oppressed groups can mobilize sympathy and support for their liberation struggles. P. Smith (Chapter 11) examines the ways the Dalit people of India mobilized around the Asian Social Forum and the World Social Forum in India to build international support for their human rights struggles against the caste system. Reese et al. (Chapter 7) document how labor activists at the U.S. Social Forum used their workshops to cultivate shared identities among working people. They show how groups have shared strategies and expanded support for campaigns to organize and build leadership among women of color, immigrants, and other workers historically neglected by the mainstream labor movement. Their research also reveals how women and people of color were disproportionately represented among the leaders and participants in Social Forum workshops compared to their shares among U.S. union members.

Several chapters consider how various movements have used the WSF process to advance their analyses of global problems and to build diverse alliances and strategies to address them. In many cases, the WSF helps activists frame their particular concerns in ways that connect them to a broader struggle against globalized capitalism. In turn, this facilitates their efforts to attract international allies and mobilize broader coalitions to advance their aims. Hewitt and Karides (Chapter 5) articulate most clearly the ways the Forum has helped movements confront—if not easily overcome—earlier divisions over identity politics. They show how feminists continue to advance at the Forums a “feminist political economy,” which views capitalist globalization as dependent on the reproduction of gendered and other hierarchies. Though feminists have made limited progress, the authors argue that they must continue to struggle within movement spaces like the Forum to transform the basic conceptual as well as material structures that marginalize women and other groups.

Many groups take advantage of the Forum as a gathering space for movements working on a variety of issues. The presence of groups

working on diverse issues and the global framework of the Forums allow movements to expand their alliance bases and deepen understandings of the ways global interdependencies affect their concerns. Smythe (Chapter 9) documents how the WSFs have facilitated activists' work to monitor ongoing global trade negotiations as they adapt their strategies of resistance and demonstrate connections between trade and a variety of social movement concerns. In the case of the peace movement, Reitan (Chapter 8) shows how the WSF process created a context where activists could address highly contentious questions such as the challenges that militarism in the global economy and Middle East politics present for the efforts to advance world peace. Kaneshiro et al. (Chapter 10) show how environmentalists used the WSF process to build both cross-national and cross-movement coalitions, often by linking their struggles with the larger struggle against neoliberal capitalism.

A key theme throughout this handbook is that, even as globalization processes transform particular locales, place still matters. As Reese, Kaneshiro, and their colleagues (Chapters 4 and 10) demonstrate, individuals' national background and their location in the world capitalist economy affect their experiences and preferred political goals and strategies. But more broadly, the specific location of each Forum affects its character as well as its contributions to the WSF process. Similarly, in the study by della Porta and Mosca (Chapter 13) we see that the rapid development of local Forums in Italy reflected not only the strong roots of local movements but also the role local Social Forums played in supporting the proliferation of new movement ideas and democratic innovations.

Dufour and Conway (Chapter 14) also illustrate how place matters. They show how the particular movement and organizational context in Quebec affected the form and emphases of the Quebec Social Forums. And Juris et al. (Chapter 15), Reese et al. (Chapter 7), and Smith and Doerr (Chapter 18) illustrate ways the particularities of U.S. political culture and social movements affected the development of the Social Forums in that country. U.S. exceptionalism—seen in its vast economic disparities and its segmentation by class and race—helped give birth to the practice of intentionality, which may in turn help advance the WSF in other places. Wood's chapter (Chapter 16) illustrates how the political context of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez obstructed the practice of "horizontality" that was advanced by activists in earlier Forums. By examining national and local settings as prisms through which the WSF

process is refracted, we can identify and perhaps anticipate their positive and negative implications for the evolution of the WSF.

We mentioned above that the WSF must be understood as a process, since it is in motion. The WSFs are constantly evolving, and activists operating within them are persistently trying new things, learning, and adapting as they engage with the basic principles that constitute the WSF process. Chapters by Doerr (Chapter 17), Smith and Doerr (Chapter 18), and Byrd and Jasny (Chapter 19) help capture some of the dynamism of the WSFs. Doerr's innovative research explores how activists working to advance more equitable language practices in European and African Social Forum spaces fared in these different settings. The distinctive linguistic contexts of these different regions, as well as the dominant linguistic practices within each region, affected the possibilities for "translation" within the Social Forums, and Doerr concludes that Africans were better able than their European counterparts to achieve the WSF visions of inclusivity and dialogue. Smith and Doerr again utilize comparisons across continents to identify emergent norms of solidarity and intentionality in the practice of the WSF process. And Byrd and Jasny employ network analysis to explore how different types of organizations mobilized networks through the WSF process over time. We hope that comparisons such as these can aid in learning that advances social movements seeking greater equity and inclusivity.

Finally, longtime observer and scholar-activist within the WSF process, Thomas Ponniah reflects on the empirical contributions of the handbook to consider what they tell us about the Forum's past and its future. He extrapolates important lessons about the WSF process as a space and an actor that should help inform future discussions and actions within the emerging and developing WSF process. His chapter, and those of all of our contributors, aim to contribute to the WSF's culture of reflexivity and learning. We hope that this handbook will both help expand scholarly research on the WSFs and be a useful guide to those who believe that another world is possible and who are working to make it happen.





## **PART I**

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# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT







## CHAPTER 1

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# SOCIAL FORUMS AS PUBLIC STAGE AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

*Dieter Rucht*

The World Social Forum (WSF) process is the most important manifestation of contemporary global justice movements (GJMs).<sup>1</sup> This chapter discusses the WSF as both a public stage and infrastructure that is vital to the development of contemporary transnational activism. It assesses the origins and development of the Social Forums and the various challenges the process faces, as well as its larger significance.

### THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AS STAGE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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Major gatherings such as congresses, jamborees, and mass protests, whether contentious or not, help to create and sustain social movements. In such gatherings, the adherents of a social movement physically meet with two aims: They first send a message to the outer world, making it aware of their existence, worldviews, demands, and activities. To this end, slogans are formulated, keynote speakers selected, journalists invited, and media-oriented events staged to demonstrate the strength and vitality of the movement. Gatherings thus serve primarily as *public* stages. Less

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obviously, these gatherings also aim at strengthening *internal* bonds by permitting activists to talk to one another, exchange experiences, bridge cleavages, and express solidarity. Ideally, gatherings will both energize participants and impress a wider audience.

Also holding social movements together are relatively durable *infrastructures* composed of social movement organizations, coordinating committees, educational and training centers, think tanks, media groups, newsletters, and the like (see Lofland 1996). Infrastructures allow for a sustained flow of communication between movement groups and networks and help mobilize resources and organize major gatherings. Unlike gatherings, infrastructures are not designed for external and internal “impression management” (Bromley 1993), but for the more mundane task of “keeping things going” even when a social movement is in abeyance. Infrastructures may be informal and loosely coordinated, or formal and more hierarchical. Over time, infrastructures may acquire a pivotal role, becoming nearly identical with the movement at large. In this event, the infrastructure represents the movement to the general public.

One can assume that the larger and more differentiated a social movement is, the more important the public stages and infrastructures are in holding the various parts together. Therefore, it is to be expected that these elements will play a crucial role, particularly in the case of GJMs given their heterogeneous elements with different organizational and cultural backgrounds, covering a wide range of issues, countries, and even continents.

Transnational movements are far from being a recent phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> The GJMs that emerged by the mid-1990s developed from some of these earlier transnational movements. For example, protesters at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meetings in Berlin in 1988 articulated the same basic critiques as today’s GJMs, yet few protesters came from abroad (Gerhards and Rucht 1992). GJMs became visible mainly via “counter-summits,” usually in the context of meetings of international bodies such as the World Bank, the IMF, other UN organizations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), G-7 and G-8, and the European Union (O’Brien et al. 2000; Pianta 2001). These were largely reactive activities insofar as they followed the schedules and agendas of official meetings. They made clear what challengers opposed, but did not convey to a larger public a positive message about preferred alternatives.

In the 1990s, the infrastructural base of the GJMs was still largely organized according to single issues such as human rights, women, and

ecology. However, some transnational organizations, such as Oxfam and 50 Years Is Enough and later Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (ATTAC) and Peoples Global Action, were beginning to mobilize around multiple issues.

With the emergence of the WSF and the subsequent creation of more localized Social Forums (see Smith and Smythe, Chapter 2), the situation of GJMs changed significantly. The Forums provide both a public stage and an infrastructure for the purposes mentioned above, and while they are merely one element of the broader GJMs, they have become an important focal point for the movements and an indicator of their vitality (see Pianta and Marchetti 2007; Pianta, Marchetti, and Zola 2009).

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### EMERGENCE OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS

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Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, GJMs became most visible via their protest activities. One variant were regional struggles and events such as the “Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism,” organized by the Zapatista movement in Mexico in 1996. The Zapatista struggle found much sympathy among GJM groups across the globe (Olesen 2005; Khasnabish 2010), inspiring subsequent meetings in the same spirit in Spain in 1997 and Brazil in 1999. Another stream of protest was linked to official meetings of the international organizations discussed above (Pianta 2001). Although receiving ample media coverage (Beyeler and Kriesi 2005; Kolb 2005; Olesen 2004; Rucht, forthcoming), these protests had little influence on how movements were portrayed by the mass media, particularly when protest was accompanied by violent activities of radical groups. Activities in the streets, moreover, allowed only simple messages to be conveyed and did not offer space for detailed information, let alone deliberation and decision making.

Given these limitations, it comes as no surprise that the idea of establishing a WSF was met with enthusiasm by many groups. At its inception, the WSF was set in opposition to the World Economic Forum (WEF), held annually in Davos (Switzerland) since 1971 to bring together economic and political leaders in informal and highly exclusive meetings (see Rupert 2000). By contrast, the WSF, held at the same time (usually in January), emphasizes social issues and is hosted in countries of the global South. It is deliberately conceived as a meeting of the people instead of elites.

The first WSF, based on an initiative of eight founding organizations (including ATTAC),<sup>3</sup> took place in Porto Alegre (Southern Brazil) in January

2001. It was hosted by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores or PT) and attended by roughly 20,000 participants from over 100 countries, among them several thousand delegates from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and social movement groups, but also 436 members of parliament from a range of countries. Virtually all themes of the GJMs were represented in one way or another, heralding a process that observers later called the "Social Spring" of Porto Alegre (Seoane and Taddei 2002: 99). Porto Alegre was chosen as the site for the WSF for a number of reasons: It is located in the southern part of the globe; it was promoted by a number of Brazilian NGOs; it has been home, since the late 1980s, to an innovative "participatory budgeting" process that allowed more democratic local decision making; and both the city and the state of Rio Grande do Sul had PT governments, which provided financial and infrastructural support for the event.

The subsequent two WSFs also took place in Porto Alegre in January of 2002 and 2003. They, too, were organized by a committee nearly identical to the representatives of the eight Brazilian founding groups. In 2004, the WSF moved to Mumbai, India, where the national Organizing Committee introduced some innovations to what was now being called the WSF *process*.<sup>4</sup> The attendance of hundreds of Indian groups among the estimated 115,000 participants gave this Forum a strikingly different character. Apart from the mainstays of the GJMs, large contingents of marginalized people, including Dalits, participated (P. Smith, Chapter 11).

When the Forum returned to Porto Alegre the following year, a much broader "Brazilian Organizing Committee"<sup>5</sup> organized the largest WSF to date, with an estimated 150,000 participants. WSF organizers constantly sought to expand participation from those most devastated by neoliberal globalization, and in 2006 they replaced the single WSF with three "polycentric WSFs," held in Caracas (Venezuela), Bamako (Mali), and Karachi (Pakistan). In 2007 organizers moved the Forum to Nairobi (Kenya) in an effort to strengthen the GJMs' activities in Africa. The Nairobi WSF was attended by 57,000 participants who were mainly Africans. Following Nairobi, the WSF has been held in alternate years to reduce the organizing burdens on activists and to encourage more local and national movement building. Accordingly, the 2009 WSF took place in Belém, in the northeastern part of Brazil. Despite Belém's remoteness, more than 100,000 people attended. The 2011 WSF was held in Dakar (Senegal).

The largest contingent of participants in any WSF meeting comes from the respective host country. Nevertheless, all World Forums and many regional and national ones also draw people from many countries.

Studies of WSF participants converge in their estimates of who attends the WSF (see Reese et al., Chapter 4). For instance, in Porto Alegre, apart from the many Brazilians, a significant number of people from other Latin American countries—predominantly the neighboring states of Argentina and Uruguay—took part. Europeans are the next most numerous group, followed by North Americans, Asians, with relatively few Africans and Arabs. At the Mumbai WSF in 2004, around 90 percent of participants came from India. With the exception of Mumbai, it appears that “ordinary” local people and particularly the marginalized and poor rarely attend the WSFs. The bulk of participants are members or formal delegates of political and social groups such as Indigenous associations, farmers’ movements, trade unions, and NGOs. In addition, independent activists, intellectuals, artists, and unaffiliated young people take part. Some groups can afford to pay for their representatives’ travel to the WSF, which implies that bigger, well-connected organizations with their own funding or external support are overrepresented, particularly when coming from countries very distant from the venue. Women are slightly overrepresented among WSF participants, if not in leadership positions or prominent events (Hewitt and Karides, Chapter 5).

The WSFs generally start with a large, colorful, and vibrant protest march and end with a concluding assembly and/or another march. Unlike other Forums, the WSF in Porto Alegre relied on a fairly sophisticated organization with thousands of paid helpers<sup>6</sup> and volunteers, air-conditioned facilities for the press, access to computer terminals, a considerable contingent of translators, semiprofessional or professional artists on stage, food and beverage vending areas, a large youth camp, and hundreds of booths for groups and campaigns. For the most part, the organization works reasonably well, but is limited by its reliance on volunteers and self-organized activities. Sometimes the translation is of poor quality or absent altogether, announced speakers may fail to show up, or the heat in the crowded tents is unbearable. The quality of the organization varies by location depending upon the organizing capacities of the local organizing committee. For example, one observer at the 2006 Caracas meeting remarked: “The forum was frustrating. More than 2,000 sessions scattered throughout the city were sometimes hard to find and often took a long time to reach. Given the obstacles faced by participants, many sessions started late, or not at all” (Blanding 2006: 18).

Apart from its manifestation as a huge and colorful gathering, it is difficult for outsiders to understand the nature of the WSF, because it

is really not an event but a global communication network resting only in part on a visible infrastructure. A fairly unobtrusive, though central, position is held by the International Council as the decisive body. During its two to three meetings a year and intense communication on the Internet (see Cardon and Haeringer 2006), the Council determines the location and basic shape of WSF meetings, as well as policies regarding the organization, financing, and program. The Council acts in close cooperation with both the small staff at the WSF office in São Paulo and the local WSF organizing committee. The local committee handles logistical and technical matters, as well as the program. At times, it may also act as a political counterweight to the International Council.

The general ideological base and aims of the WSF are laid out in different texts, most notably in the WSF Charter of Principles (January 2001, second version in June 2001). In addition, a number of declarations and calls have been made by various groups, such as the declaration of the Organizing Committee of WSF in Mumbai in 2004, a Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum in India (April and May 2002), declarations of the people's movements at various regional and world Forums, a memorandum of the International Council issued in Porto Alegre in 2003, and a number of declarations by smaller, self-elected groups of mostly intellectual individuals, such as the "Manifesto of Porto Alegre" (January 2005) and the "Bamako Appeal" (2006).<sup>7</sup>

These documents and calls differ regarding their claims, frames, and wording, reflecting the more or less contingent composition of the authors, but also the highly valued principle of diversity among the GJMs in general and the WSF in particular. Some parts of these texts have been met with harsh criticism, largely over questions of representation and authority to speak for the whole. Nevertheless, the two versions of the WSF Charter are widely considered to summarize the values and self-understanding of many groups and networks associated with the WSF process, and serve as a guide for groups organizing Social Forums. The WSF mission is perhaps best reflected in the first and fourth paragraphs of the Charter:

The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form

of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind [sic] and between it and the Earth.

The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights and those of all citizens—men and women—of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

Later paragraphs specify some of the broader goals and emphasize the decentralized and pluralistic character of the WSF, including its refusal “to be a body representing world civil society” (Paragraph 5):

The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants . . . . It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it. (Paragraph 6)

The WSF has inspired groups and networks in various parts of the world to organize smaller Social Forums, ranging from the continental to the national to the local (see Smith and Smythe, Chapter 2). According to some observers, between 2002 and June 2006, over 160 Social Forum meetings have been held in over 120 cities with well over a million participants. Like the WSF, these other Forums function as both public gatherings and as emerging social movement infrastructures.

### CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL FORUM ORGANIZING

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Forums are not just an indicator of the popular appeal and successful diffusion of the GJMs, but are also a barometer of the larger movements' challenges and problems, six of which are mentioned below.



### *WHO MAY PARTICIPATE?*

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Part of the attractiveness of the WSF is its open and vibrant character. In principle, the WSF is designed to allow every individual and group opposing global neoliberalism to participate. Only right-wing extremist and left-wing radical groups using violence against people as a political tactic (e.g., the Columbian FARC<sup>8</sup> and the Basque ETA) are excluded. Furthermore, WSF principles exclude political parties and elected government officials in their official capacity:

[The WSF is] a plural, diversified, nonconfessional, nongovernmental and nonparty context. . . . Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity. (WSF Charter of Principles, June 2001 version)

This vague directive allows room for interpretation. For instance, the Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt, who wished to give a talk in Porto Alegre in 2003, was not welcomed. The same applied to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, and Fidel Castro in 2002. The justification offered by WSF organizers is that established politicians have many opportunities to spread their word and therefore should not be given space at the WSF. In practice, this guideline has not been consistently followed, and presidents and political candidates have been allowed to speak on the sidelines of Social Forum events if not in the official Forum spaces themselves. For instance, organizers came under attack when they allowed PT presidential candidate Lula da Silva to give a speech and ministers of national governments participated in the 2002 WSF. Brazilian president Lula da Silva and Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez also spoke on the occasion of the WSF in 2005. The WSF policy of keeping established politicians separate or at least at the margins of the event was certainly violated during the WSF in Caracas in January 2006. To the dismay of many participants, Chávez used this event as a public stage to promote his "Bolivarian Revolution" and his "cult of personality" (Blanding 2006: 17).

### *WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE?*

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The WSF is intended as a gathering of "the people" rather than elites, and in particular it aims to serve those who suffer most from the effects

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of neoliberal globalization. In fact, however, it is predominantly a meeting of a leftist, though ideologically diverse, counterelite advocating on behalf of the most deprived and poorest people. Accordingly, there are repeated calls for reducing the proportion of group representatives and NGO officials in favor of “ordinary” people, particularly those from the poorest countries. To date, however, appeals for more inclusive Social Forums have had little effect, and the overrepresentation of more privileged activists continues. Many activists, particularly those from Southern countries, simply cannot afford the travel costs.

Drawing on the idea of the WSF as egalitarian and participatory, critics claim that too much space is reserved for the political stars of the movement, be they leftist party leaders or renowned intellectuals. Well-known individuals, such as Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy, Vandana Shiva, and Walden Bello, were put at the center of some meetings to attract the “masses.” In Mumbai, for example, such individuals had an audience of probably 100,000 people during their speeches. This “star cult” met with much criticism from participants who valued equality and grassroots structures. In response, the organizers of the WSF in 2005 and 2007 deliberately avoided promoting prominent speakers in favor of self-organized workshops. This, in turn, also raised criticism on the part of some who felt overwhelmed by the flood of small workshops and demanded some high-profile events that would attract crowds and enhance media coverage.

### *WHO MAKES DECISIONS?*

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Another controversial issue is who makes decisions about Forum locations, major panels, and financing. The recruitment of the decision-making body is clearly crucial. On the eve of the first WSF, decisions were made by seven people representing the groups who launched the WSF. Apart from the Brazil-based groups, ATTAC France was most influential, represented by its president Bernard Cassen. This ad hoc group was later replaced by a much larger body, the International Council (IC). At the time of the WSF 2003, the IC included around 100 groups and networks, by 2006 this rose to 143,<sup>9</sup> and by 2010 it was 156, plus 10 observers.

To the dismay of close observers, even years after its inception, the IC still has an opaque recruitment process that, apparently, works on informal co-option rather than on democratic and transparent procedures. Admittedly, it would be difficult to implement such procedures

because a fixed and clearly identifiable constituency does not exist that could send delegates according to well-specified principles and rules. Less understandable, however, is the fact that the IC remains a fairly “closed shop” without any external control. For many years, all it provided to the public were “rules of operation” and brief summary reports of its meetings that—for the most part—lacked specific information, such as details about organizational problems and internal controversies. Since 2007, however, the IC has been pushed to increase its transparency, and detailed reports of its meetings are now published on the WSF website.

### *WHO PAYS?*

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Further criticism involves the financing of the WSF. Some activists are concerned that considerable amounts of money come from local and regional governments and from foundations and corporate entities whose purposes contradict the values of the WSF. Critics fear that strings could be attached to these flows of money, softening its critical edge. Such questions were particularly salient in 2004 when the Indian Organizing Committee refused funding from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Indian government, and corporations. Over time, financial sources have become more diversified, and fees from participants are increasingly important, reducing the WSF’s dependence on institutional donors. Nevertheless, the 2005 meeting in Porto Alegre ended with a substantial deficit, and the risk of commercialization continues. For example, at the 2007 meeting in Nairobi, the cell phone company Celtel handled online registration, while also offering promotions for its mobile phones and displaying the company’s advertisements.

### *A PLACE FOR DECISION MAKING*

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The most vibrant debates have occurred over the WSF’s inability or rather its unwillingness to take strategic decisions. Touting the WSF as a “Forum for debate,” “a movement of ideas,” and “a process,” organizers have eschewed the idea that it can act as a unified actor (see Grzybowski 2006). While many praise the open structure of the WSF (Whitaker 2004; Teivainen 2004), others have become increasingly dissatisfied precisely because of this structure, which—in their view—allows only for idiosyncratic self-presentation and fails to generate political decisions or actions. For example, Hardt (2002: 113) characterized the first WSF

as “perhaps too happy, too celebratory,” while another critic bemoaned the WSFs and ESFs (European Social Forums) as a “self-congratulatory spectacle” (Levidow 2004). Thus far, all attempts to transform the WSF into a more coherent political force have failed or were rejected from the outset by the majority in the International Council. The greatest obstacle is certainly the sheer number and the heterogeneity of participants with their different cultures, ideological leanings, priorities, and strategies.

The situation at more localized levels is difficult to gauge. It seems to differ enormously depending on the location. In general, however, the chances of using the Social Forums to coordinate more coherent collective action are greater at more localized scales than at the world level, due to the more personal and more continuous interactions between key activists. The introduction and spread of local People’s Movement Assemblies in the context of the U.S. Social Forum may contribute to this process (Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18).

#### *CREATING A COMMON IDENTITY*

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Like many movements, GJMs are fairly clear about what they do *not* want. There is no doubt that they reject all forms of inhumanity, exploitation, and racism. Taking such a stance, however, does not imply that one has created a collective identity. First, such positions have been promoted by many “progressive” movements in the past not recognized as ancestors of today’s GJMs. Second, some of these aims are also promoted by groups that GJMs would perceive as their opponents rather than allies. Consider the rhetoric of the World Economic Forum that underlines its commitment to humanitarian values. When it comes to defining the “unwanted,” the lowest common denominator of GJMs is their opposition to neoliberal globalization (Rucht 2003). It is not by chance that GJMs use such a vague term as *neoliberal globalization* (or the *Washington Consensus*). This vague signifier allows different ideological tendencies to interpret it as best suits their organizational preoccupations and thematic priorities. To replace *neoliberal globalization* with the term *capitalism* or *imperialism* would risk alienating some groups. While many GJM activists define themselves as anticapitalist, many others do not. These latter groups oppose an excessive and ruthless capitalism, but not capitalism per se. It is this difference that marks the deepest and potentially most consequential cleavage among GJMs—a cleavage from which many internal and external conflicts around more specific questions can be derived. One stream

among GJMs wants to abolish international financial institutions like the WTO, while another advocates reform. These same debates marked other movements throughout history, including labor movements since the early twentieth century.

The WSF's prioritizing of "open space" (Wallerstein 2004; Whitaker 2004) over the establishment of common priorities and strategies fuels dissatisfaction, especially among radical groups. These groups complained that plenary speakers at the 2002 WSF did not reflect the (allegedly more radical) view of many participants, and in 2003 that strategy was not a major issue. Internal conflicts already became visible during the first WSF, when some activists destroyed Monsanto Corporation's experimental genetically modified plantation. In 2002, radical groups even organized a separate march against the "reformist WSF" parallel to the opening session. These conflicts escalated at the 2004 WSF when the Indian-led Organizing Committee was not able or did not want to integrate many of the radical groups, which then held their own gatherings. One such gathering was the People's Movement Encounter II; the larger one was called Mumbai Resistance and, according to reports, involved 310 political movements. The ESF in London in 2004 was also marked by a separate and physically distinct autonomous space, organized by groups that were critical of the main Forum organizers. However, the ESF in Athens and other Forums have physically incorporated some "autonomous spaces," accommodating radicals' strategy of keeping "one foot in and one foot out" of the WSF process.

Partly related to the division between moderates and radicals are contrasting views about organizational structures. In the language of the activists, this is the tension between the "verticals" and the "horizontal" (see also Wood, Chapter 16). The former, some of whom still embrace Marxist concepts of class struggle and revolution, tend towards hierarchical structures. Such a tendency can be found among some moderate groups as well, including more formally structured NGOs. In contrast, the "horizontal" promote a more decentralized structure, emphasizing the autonomy of individuals and groups, the necessity for network structures, and the value of "open spaces" (see also Nunes 2005a). The relative influence of verticals and horizontals varies over time and place. It seems that in the ESFs, especially in the London meeting in 2004, the verticals were most influential, while in the United States and Canada the horizontal tendency prevails.

*KEEPING THE MOMENTUM*

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These internal problems and conflicts are known to insiders, but are less familiar to the larger public. Organizers and many participants view the WSF as an impressive, peaceful, and colorful event—a meeting place for the peoples of the world. It is appealing to the mass media, which tends to be bored by ritualized summits of elder statesmen in suits who, at best, issue dry declarations with little that surprises. With the remarkable exception of North America, the WSF process has attracted much attention from many journalists. For instance, the 2006 meeting in Caracas—just one of three “polycentric” meetings that year—was attended by almost 5,000 journalists (Brand 2006). Whether such media attention translates into political impact, though, is a topic worthy of further investigation. Over time, it may well be that the WSF is becoming a routine event whose appeal to the outside world will fade. Such a trend can be clearly observed for the European Social Forum (Teune 2009).

Critiques of the WSF expressed from the very beginning continue today. Organizations like the transnational peasant network, Via Campesina, have voiced frustration with meetings that do not result in concrete actions. Sympathetic observers of the Social Forum process express similar worries. One of them is “skeptical about the usefulness of the civil society blah-blah-blah” and identifies a “depoliticizing tendency” (Teivainen 2007: 69 and 77). Nevertheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that the WSF process, including the numerous regional and local Social Forums, might become a tool for bringing different movements closer together.

SIGNIFICANCE AND PROSPECTS OF SOCIAL FORUMS

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The WSFs have become a major focal point for GJMs. According to one observer, the WSF “is making striking contributions to the reinvention of global politics” (Grzybowski 2006: 12). According to another, it is “one of the most significant civil and political initiatives of the past several decades, perhaps of this past century” (Sen 2004: xxi). While this may be an overstatement, one has to acknowledge that in some instances the WSF could attract even more public attention than the rival events of the elitist World Economic Forum. According to its slogan “Another World Is Possible,” the WSF reminds the public that the existing economic, political, and social order is not inevitable, and that many groups are

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coming together around concrete visions of alternatives and plans for their realization. Getting public attention, however, is not the primary concern of the WSF.

As a large gathering, the WSF basically serves two functions. First, it helps strengthen bonds within and across the movements, raising hopes, energizing many participants, linking large numbers of issues and groups, and creating an overarching identity of the WSF as a meeting place for global civil society.

Second, the WSF and regional Social Forums have become more than merely a series of annual or semiannual gatherings. A more stable infrastructure has come into existence and serves as a node of information, communication, and organization of different kinds of movements acting on different levels. At the global level, the International Council carries out this role, and at the European level European Preparatory Assemblies (EPAs) help reinforce and implement important lessons about how to organize around the World Social Forum principles. These bodies, along with more specialized organizations and networks such as the volunteer interpreter group known as Babels and networks of communications technology experts, help institutionalize the WSF process and contribute to the progressive advancement of knowledge and skills in transnational organizing (see Doerr, Chapter 17; Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18).

At subcontinental and national levels, a variety of organizational forms exist that are difficult to summarize. Yet, it is clear that occasional regional gatherings are gradually being complemented by more permanent coordinating structures. While the initial purpose of such structures was to enable further meetings, they have gradually taken on some of the ongoing work of coordinating and steering movement processes within a given territorial scope. The WSF serves as a key reference point and guide for Forums operating at more localized levels, but it is neither willing nor capable of steering and controlling them. It is likely that this reference point will lead to greater structural homogeneity. From the local to the continental levels, Forum organizers, especially in matters of value conflict, refer to the Charter of Porto Alegre, reflect on the development of the WSF process, and discuss the International Council's work.

Despite its apparent success, the WSF faces a variety of problems. It attracts both external and internal criticism regarding its organizational and financial background, structure, range of participants, and—most importantly—its unwillingness or incapacity to engage in strategic decision making and joint political intervention. These conflicts indicate

internal cleavages that, in the long run, may obstruct the emergence of a common identity as a “movement of movements” (Mertes 2004). Even if the Forums were to experience further growth, they are faced with three challenges in the long term: heterogeneity, routinization and ritualization, and the call for constructive solutions.

### *HETEROGENEITY*

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Tensions and cleavages are common in social movements. But while an issue-specific movement has more specific targets and opponents and is marked by relatively intense interactions (i.e., factors that help bridge ideological and strategic cleavages), the plethora of GJMs linkages is not dense and many are merely symbolic. One of these symbolic links is indeed the WSF. The variety of issues and the heterogeneity of political ideologies, social bases, and cultural backgrounds means that GJMs have not (or at least not yet) been transformed into a coherent movement, although most activists and many observers refer to it in the singular. For better or worse, they are far from representing a single overarching movement. While some organizers, especially from various leftist parties, still dream of creating a coherent global movement and want the WSF to become a unified actor, such an idea is deliberately rejected by the majority. Many activists in the WSF process view diversity and decentralization as assets rather than a burden. They argue that the acceptance of diversity and the creation of “tolerant identities” (della Porta 2005a) reduces the pressure to conform to certain ideological, organizational, and strategic models, encouraging both more durable networks and greater innovation. The WSF promotes participatory horizontal structures—as opposed to vertical structures based on delegation. Yet such diversity and horizontality risk diverting movements’ energies, diminishing their capacities to collaborate, expand, and deepen their impact on national and global agendas and policies.

### *ROUTINE*

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Over time, the WSFs and more localized Forums are losing their novelty and becoming matters of routine and ritualization. While routinization may be an asset because it builds on prior knowledge and avoids problematizing the same issues time and again, it can reduce both the excitement of participants and the interest of the mass media. Such a



situation tends to increase competition among social movement organizations seeking public recognition and resources from constituencies. This process goes hand in hand with a trend towards the “NGO-ization” and institutionalization of movement groups. Nevertheless, it is important not to make sweeping generalizations, as we might expect regional variations as well as active attempts by organizers to avoid such outcomes (Smith, Karides, et al. 2007).

Probably more consequential than routinization is the moderation of activists’ claims where partial success is achieved. Such moderation can also deepen internal cleavages by energizing the radical fringe. For example, differential responses of established institutions, whereby “legitimate” protest groups are granted limited concessions aimed at preemption and co-optation, “radical” groups are excluded and face discrimination and criminalization. This exacerbates divisions within movements.

### *PROPOSALS*

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A third challenge for the Social Forum process is the quest for constructive proposals. After a period of relatively few internal conflicts, owed largely to the total autonomy of issue-based movements and the preoccupation of defining what they oppose, GJMs are increasingly confronted with the challenge of moving beyond talk to action. Both from within and without, they are called on to clarify how “another world” might look, and what it will take to achieve this. Again, this challenge is likely to bring internal conflicts to the fore, deepening the cleavage between reformists and radicals. This cleavage, however, is less apparent if one concentrates on the People’s Movement Assemblies that take place at the end of many larger Social Forums. These assemblies, sometimes gathering thousands of participants, are spaces designed to address the tension between open space and action within the WSF process. It is here that groups work together to articulate and put forward declarations and calls for collective action.

### CONCLUSION

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While the factors above are likely to weaken the movements, other factors work in the opposite direction, thereby resulting in closer cooperation among movements and increased mobilization capacity. Such factors are

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(1) the growing relevance and urgency of transnational problems and related international politics; (2) the vast potential of Southern movements' continued growth; (3) the facilitating role of communication technology (particularly the Internet) as a tool for transnational cooperation and mobilization; and (4) the ability of many groups to learn from previous negative experiences and schisms. Many groups, though not all, have learned to embrace diversity and to accept "multiple belongings and flexible identities" (della Porta 2005), while at the same time avoiding an attitude of "anything goes." The Social Forum process is an important contribution in this respect. In a way, it helps to overcome the limits of both traditional NGOs aiming to get a seat at the negotiation table and more radical elements that eschew all forms of institutionalized politics. While the role of Social Forums may be limited to serving as a stage and infrastructure, the challenge for GJMs generally is to create a capacity for strategic intervention while at the same time maintaining diversity.

## NOTES

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1. Similar to the concept of the so-called new social movement I refer to the GJMs as a plurality of movements that belong to the same movement family (see della Porta and Rucht 1995).

2. For example, the movements focusing on slavery, workers' rights, women's rights, and peace in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Truly transnational groups and associations were formed since the second half of the nineteenth century (Boli and Thomas 1999; Rucht 2001; Sikkink and Smith 2002; Bauerkämper and Gumb 2010). For overviews on more recent transnational movement activity, see della Porta, Kriesi, and Rucht 1999; Andretta et al. 2003; Amooore 2005; Tarrow 2005; Smith 2004a and 2007; Smith et al. 2008; and della Porta 2005b, 2007, 2009a, and 2009b.

3. The initiative was by Brazilian groups. Besides ATTAC, it was supported by Associação Brasileira de Organizações não Governamentais (ABONG, a Brazilian NGO), Comissão Brasileira de Justiça e Paz (CBJP, the Brazilian Committee for Peace and Justice), Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania (CIVES, Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship), Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT, Unified Workers' Central), Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE, Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis), Justiça Global (CJB, Center for Global Justice), and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST, Landless Workers Movement).

4. The Indian approach was more inclusive than the Brazilian one had been. The India General Council (IGC) was the central decision-making body

“open to all social movements and organizations that are committed to the WSF Charter of principles.” It had 135 members which nominated 67 organizations representing the wide range of IGC groups to the India Working Committee, which was responsible for formulating policy guidelines. The India Organising Committee of 45 individuals was the executive body largely responsible for the work of organizing the 2004 WSF.

5. The Organizing Committee was made up of 23 organizations divided into 8 working groups, which included: Spaces, Solidarity and Popular Economy, Environment and Sustainability, Culture, Translation, Communication, Mobilization, and Free Software (linked to the Communication work group).

6. Material support in Porto Alegre comes mainly from the domestic and regional Workers’ Party and a number of commercial enterprises in Brazil. This stands in stark contrast to most other Social Forums especially at the national level. In the United States, for example, “the vast majority of the work is unpaid.” Paid staff in the U.S. National Planning Committee was “under 15 in the second USSF [U.S. Social Forum] and just 1 for the first” (written communication by Jackie Smith).

7. The Manifesto of Porto Alegre, issued by 19 prominent intellectuals active in the WSF process, generated extensive controversy since it was seen as attempting to speak on behalf of the WSF, contradicting the Charter of Principles. The Bamako Appeal was strongly influenced by a handful of French intellectuals.

8. Permission to participate was denied to a member of the FARC in 2001, although the individual was not physically hindered from doing so. Again in 2002, representatives of the FARC were not allowed to participate.

9. A categorization of the members in 2006 shows that multi-issue (33), human rights (14), trade union (14), and civic rights (13) groups are the most common. Regarding the areas, 49 groups are truly international, followed by 17 from Latin America, 6 from Africa, and 5 from Europe. The remainder come from other regions or could not be classified.



## CHAPTER 2

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### (IN)FERTILE GROUND?

#### SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM IN ITS REGIONAL AND LOCAL DIMENSIONS

*Peter (Jay) Smith and Elizabeth Smythe*

When the first World Social Forum met in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001 to challenge neoliberal globalization by claiming “Another World Is Possible,” few would have predicted the rapid growth in the number of activists at what became an annual global event. Nor would they have foreseen the proliferation of Forums from very local to regional, national, and continental ones (Glasius and Timms 2006). While impressive, this expansion of Social Forum activism has been uneven, both in terms of who participates in Forum activism and in where subglobal Forums emerge. This chapter explores Social Forum mechanisms that account for geographic variation in the global diffusion of this innovative form of collective action.

The study of social movement innovation has emphasized the mechanisms by which innovations spread. Less attention has been paid to

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questions of why it takes root in some places and not others (Soule 2004). The shift of scale in collective action from the local to the global has also been a focus of analysis (Tarrow and McAdam 2005) but not how global collective action stimulates forms of globally informed local activism. Moreover, those studying the global justice movement (GJM) and the WSF have emphasized questions of who is excluded and included in its processes, its innovative structure, and internal tensions (Juris 2008b). The role of place and context in shaping the nature of Social Forum activism at various levels or scales has been less of a focus.<sup>1</sup> Why Social Forum activism spreads from global to local Forums and the transmission mechanisms by which this occurs need to be investigated.

We begin with a description of the pattern of Social Forum activism we found in 2006 and discuss explanations for why it has been adopted more extensively in some places than others. Then through descriptions of Social Forums at various levels, we try to understand the role of place and political opportunity structures (Meyer 2004) in providing fertile ground for these innovations. We do not provide definitive explanations of why and how Social Forum activism does, or does not, embed itself in every place and space but rather raise questions that future case studies might address.

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## METHODS AND DATA ON SOCIAL FORUM DIFFUSION

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Data on numbers and origins of participants at WSF events are drawn from the WSF Secretariat and other reports. For other Social Forum activity we tried to find all those events and processes that self-identified as a Social Forum or referenced the WSF or other Forums, such as the European Social Forum (ESF). The search included listings contained in the online *Bulletin* of the WSF, a search of the Internet using translated key words in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Italian, supplemented by secondary sources describing Forums and other mapping efforts and studies (Glasius and Timms 2006). We classified the geographic scale ranging from the global to the local as follows:

1. Global
2. Intercontinental
3. Continental
4. Regional
5. National

- 6. Subnational
- 7. Local

The local level included urban areas and even neighborhoods within large urban areas. Language and other data limits means that some Social Forums may have been missed, especially those without online access, particularly in the Middle East and East Asia. We are thus providing a partial view, a snapshot in time.

Social Forums vary in goals and structures. Some form ongoing networks, with meetings and online exchanges, while others are oriented to organizing a discrete Forum event. Data included both types, along with the number and range of themes or issues addressed. Single-theme Forums (i.e., on migration) have become more common since 2001, as have Forums organized around identity, for example, Indigenous peoples. Over 600 events and organizations for which a minimum of information was available were identified. Of those, 411 were coded for details about the event or organization. The balance had incomplete or partial information.

Table 2.1 shows the geographic distribution of participants in the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Although attendance has grown from 20,000 in 2001 to over 150,000 by 2005, we can see that proximity clearly remains a factor in who participates in the global event. In 2005 most attendees came from surrounding regions, reflecting distance and travel costs.

Similarly, at Forums held in Caracas, Venezuela, and Bamako, Mali, in 2006 between 65 and 72 percent of participants were nationals of

**Table 2.1 WSF 2005 Participants by Geographical Origin**

Continent	National Origin	Percent
Total Participants	92,281	100.0
Brazil	73,856	80.0
Rest of the world	18,425	20.0
Latin America (without Brazil)	8,083	8.8
Europe	4,154	4.5
USA/Canada	2,376	2.6
Asia	2,266	2.5
Africa	1,474	1.6
Oceania	72	0.1

*Source:* IBASE (2006)—*World Social Forum: An X-Ray of Participation in the Polycentric Forum 2006*. Data is based on 59.5 percent of those registered for the WSF.

the host country, and 90 percent came from the continent where the respective Forum was held (IBASE, 2006).

Still, WSF events consistently attract participants from over 100 countries—132 in 2005 (WSF Secretariat). Those coming from a distance tend to be fewer and drawn from groups or classes that have access to resources and time to attend such events. However, the pattern of attendance at global events cannot be accounted for solely by distance or cost, as Table 2.2 indicates.

If only distance mattered, why would participants from France outnumber Mexicans at the Venezuelan Forum and those from Germany at the Mali Forum? Even more puzzling is why U.S. participation was lower than that of Canadians at the Mali Forum. Other factors must help account for this, including the relative strength of the Social Forum process in each country.

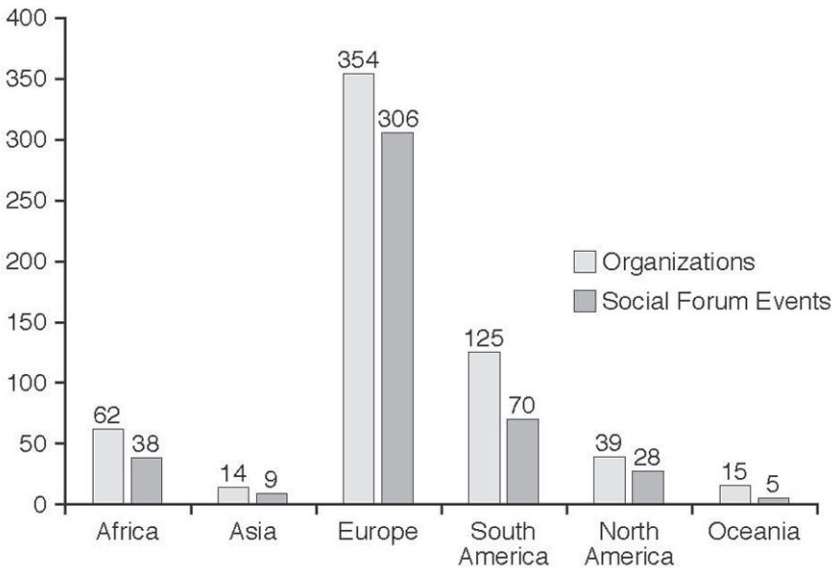
Illustrating global variation in the vibrancy of the WSF process, Figure 2.1 displays patterns of Social Forum events and organization across continents.

The numbers in Figure 2.1 further highlight that continental Europe—particularly France, Italy, and South America, especially Brazil—have been Social Forum hotbeds. Africa and North America follow, and Asia and Oceania were host to the fewest Social Forums and Social Forum organizations. A similar pattern emerges when we look at Social Forum organizations or networks.

**Table 2.2 Polycentric WSFs 2006 by Nationality of Participant**

Countries	%	Countries	%
Venezuela	65.0	Mali	72.3
Columbia	10.8	Guinea	3.7
Brazil	5.5	Senegal	2.0
Argentina	4.1	Nigeria	1.7
Chile	2.1	Burkino Faso	1.6
Mexico	0.3	France	3.3
France	0.7	South Africa	1.0
Germany	0.3	Germany	0.1
United States	2.2	United States	0.2
Canada	0.9	Canada	0.5
Other countries	13.9	Other countries	13.6

*Source:* IBASE (2006)—*World Social Forum: An X-Ray of Participation in the Polycentric Forum 2006*, Caracas and Bamako chapters ([www.ibase.br](http://www.ibase.br)).



**Figure 2.1 Number of Social Forum Events and Organizations by Region**

Numbers of events and organizations engaged in Social Forum planning do not, however, reflect the numbers of participants who are involved in the process in each region. While our data are limited, we do know that attendance varies widely from Forums in Africa with only a few hundred participants, even for continental events, to neighborhood Forums in cities such as São Paulo, Brazil, which draw tens of thousands of participants.

Figure 2.2 displays the geographic scale of Social Forums. We can see that the major growth in Social Forums is taking place at more localized scales. Over half of the Social Forums since 2001 took place at the national or subnational levels.

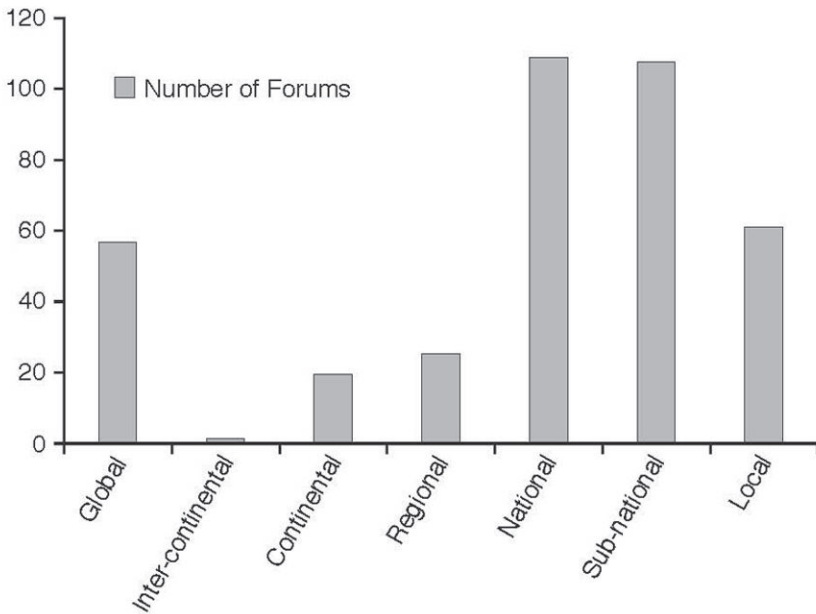
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#### EXPLAINING PATTERNS OF SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM

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The patterns we have uncovered lead us to ask what precipitates Social Forum activism. Corporate globalization has impacted every area of the globe, albeit unevenly, ranging from the loss or growing precariousness of employment to cuts in social services, environmental degradation, and a variety of human rights violations. Why does the response differ in terms of where Social Forum activism occurs?





**Figure 2.2 Social Forums by Scale\***

\*Data cover the range from January 2001 through December 2006.

Studies of diffusion (Soule 2004; Chabot 2000) identify direct and indirect processes of transmission of innovative movement practices. Direct channels include social networks through which communication, the transfer of resources and ideas, occurs from transmitters to adopters. Indirect channels include the adopter developing a sense of shared identity (perhaps involving a master frame<sup>2</sup>) with a more passive transmitter and/or becoming aware of these practices through agents such as the media.

But successful diffusion depends upon favorable political environments as well as actors. Which practices are successfully diffused and how they become locally embedded and adapted are complex questions requiring attention to place and the context of adoption. Given that Social Forum events require organizational capacity—including interorganizational networks, resources, and the space to resist—suggests that the political opportunity structure (McAdam 1996)<sup>3</sup> at the national or subnational level, the mobilization of resources, and the strength of existing social movements will be important factors. Regions peripheral to centers of power in the global system typically lack extensive resources for popular mobilization and face a stronger likelihood of repression (Smith 2004a).

Thus, the relative absence of both resources and political opportunities may account for the lack of Social Forum activism in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, in comparison, for example, to Europe or South America.

Direct transmitters of the WSF process, most notably the International Council (IC) of the WSF, can attempt to overcome some of these structural obstacles and encourage or facilitate the organization of continental, thematic, and local Forums. Indeed, the inclusive orienting principles of the WSF process have inspired this sort of activity in underrepresented regions throughout the WSF's history. Information, financial resources (some from foundations and NGOs), and technical assistance were provided in the context of decisions to move global WSF events to Mumbai, India, in 2004; cities in Africa, South America, and Asia in 2006; and Nairobi, Kenya, in 2007. All were intended to expand opportunities for those in the regions to participate in a WSF, but also to stimulate the growth of regional and local activism networks.

The development of Social Forums is also tied to global events or organizations. Pianta (2005) argues that the United Nations World Summits facilitated the development of transnational civil society networks and helped spread the organizing technologies that now permeate the WSF process. Key meetings of international institutions (WTO, IMF, G8) seen to embody neoliberalism have also stimulated forms of resistance that have, in turn, shaped the WSF process. Other channels of direct diffusion include individual activists who attended a WSF or continental event and returned home to "report back" to their group or network. Inspired or stimulated by their experience, they attempted to create a local process or event. Sometimes local or national networks were staging Forum-like events to protest neoliberalism before the WSF emerged, but then transformed themselves into Social Forums after the fact. Because this reflects a shared identification with the WSF process, we consider this an example of indirect diffusion. But transmission of ideas and networks does not guarantee diffusion, nor are practices uniformly adopted. We illustrate this with multilevel cases drawn from various continents that look at both broad patterns of Social Forum activism.

### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN THE NORTH: NORTH AMERICA*

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Few Social Forum events have been held in North America compared to Europe and South America. Even within North America there is variation. Despite having one-tenth the population, Canada has had a similar

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number of subnational Social Forums (20) as the United States (21). In contrast, only five Social Forums have been held in Mexico. Two of these were not Mexican events per se, the 2003 Cancún “Peoples Forum for an Alternative to the WTO” and the 2006 Southwest Border Forum. A large-scale event was held in the Zócalo in Mexico City as part of the global day of decentralized WSF actions in January 2008.

Attendance at global WSF events reflects similar trends. Data show that U.S. citizens and Canadians outnumber Mexicans attending global WSF events, in Canada’s case rising from over 250 in 2003 to almost 700 in 2005 (Conway 2006; Hadden and Tarrow 2007a). Canadians participating in the 2005 Youth Camp outnumbered those from the United States and Mexico. Although Mexico is proximate to Venezuela, site of the 2006 polycentric Social Forum, only 0.3 percent of the participants were Mexican, while 0.9 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively, came from Canada and the United States (see Table 2.2). Participants from Argentina, much further away than Mexico, but where the Social Forum tradition is stronger, composed 4.1 percent of participants. Mexico would seem to be a natural home for the Social Forum process since, as Wallerstein notes, the Zapatistas “have remained an iconic movement with the WSF, a sort of inspirational force” (2008: 3). For example, the Abruzzo Social Forum in Italy, itself a catalyst for other local Italian Social Forums, mentions Chiapas 22 times and Zapatistas 16 times on its website (Abruzzo Social Forum 2006).

The curious dearth of Social Forums in Mexico lies in the complexities of state-society relations, the strengths and weaknesses of collective actors, and the state of political activism. Mexico is fragmented by region, the richer north versus the poorer center and south; by class; and by ethnicity/indigeneity. The Left is also divided (Quintana 2006; La Botz 2006; Icaza 2008<sup>4</sup>). The Zapatistas’ refusal to endorse López Obrado of the Party of the Democratic Revolution in the 2006 presidential campaign or participate electorally in favor of the “the other campaign” to mobilize the excluded was criticized by others on the left for sectarianism and contributing to the victory of the right-wing National Action Party’s (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón. All this occurred in a context of repression and violence inhibiting grassroots organizing and social protest. Social Forum organizing in Mexico faces more obstacles and restrictive political opportunity structures than in some other Latin American and European countries.

What factors account for variations in Social Forum activism in Canada and the United States? In Canada there are significant differ-

ences between English Canadian and Quebec Social Forum activism attributable to differences in state-society relations, political opportunity structures, nationalism, and the role of civil actors such as unions. For most English Canadian activists in the 1980s and 1990s, free trade and neoliberal globalization represented a threat to Canadian identity and sovereignty. For civil society forces in Quebec, including the labor movement, globalization and free trade, in contrast, represented an opportunity to promote their nationalist project (Dufour 2003).

At the federal level in English Canada, state-society relations were reengineered during this period by successive neoliberal governments reframing citizens as consumers, thus reducing political opportunity structures for civil society actors leading to a “decline of the domestic nation-state as the site of democratic contestation” (Smith 2005: 180). In Quebec when opposition to neoliberal globalization emerged in the late 1990s against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), political opportunity structures at the provincial level remained open. Even as activists questioned the Parti Québécois stance on free trade and globalization, the government continued to promote an international presence, including NGOs supportive of the WSF process such as the Quebec-based development organization Alternatives. According to Dufour and Conway (Chapter 14), with such support 80 percent of the 700 Canadian WSF 2005 participants came from Quebec, including a sizable youth contingent. Youth have been instrumental in diffusing the social process to Quebec.

Nothing analogous has occurred in English-speaking Canada. Large anticorporate NGOs, such as the Council of Canadians, and national unions have been very visible at the global WSFs, but less so in the Social Forum process in English Canada, thus depriving it of considerable energy and resources (Conway 2006).

The United States has had 21 Social Forums including the U.S. Social Forum in June/July 2007.<sup>5</sup> Subnational Forums appear in a narrow band of the Northeast and Midwest, centers of a more progressive political tradition. That, however, does not explain Social Forum absence in the coastal U.S. Northwest. A Northwest Forum planned for October 2004 collapsed “when First Nations participation withdrew, citing conflicts over the pace and nature of decision making” (Conway 2006: 10).

The Northwest Social Forum’s inability to negotiate the tricky shoals of identity politics (Center for Communication and Civic Engagement 2007) offers a clue to the absence of more Social Forums in the United

States. Identity politics also marked the Midwest Social Forum, which was founded in 1983 as a yearly, largely white, Midwest Radical Scholars and Activists Conference and renamed “RadFest” in the late 1990s. It engaged in activities of challenging neoliberalism well before the WSF, and organizers adopted the name Midwest Social Forum in 2003 as the WSF’s influence spread. In 2005, concerned that it was too white, it changed from a centralized, hierarchical model to a more grassroots one composed of a minimum of 60 percent people of color and 60 percent women and representative “with respect to class, age, sexual orientation, ability, issue focus, and ideological or strategic perspective” (Becker 2006).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly the Boston Social Forum, held in July 2004, created a large multiracial network (Pramas 2004) of over 50 environmental, peace, human rights, civil rights, neighborhood, and women’s organizations and attracted 5,000 participants, 300 organizations, and 600 events. The Boston Social Forum and the Midwest Social Forum together suggest that location is very important (both are areas of progressive politics), as well as a grassroots organization reflective of the diversity of left politics in the area. The weakness of the Social Forum process in the United States is also linked to the changing political opportunity structure in that country following 9/11 and the rise of a politics of fear (Juris 2007; Hadden and Tarrow 2007a; Donohue 2004). Also, the tendency of the U.S. global justice movement to “emphasize mass protests . . . with no continuing grassroots mobilization and the lack of strong leftist parties in the U.S.” (Juris 2007: 5) limited the organizational capacity of the Left to effectively plan and hold Social Forums. The virtual invisibility of the Social Forum process in the tightly concentrated U.S. mass media also may have contributed to the lack of Social Forums. However, the U.S. Social Forums in 2007 in Atlanta and in 2010 in Detroit were attended by an estimated 12,000–15,000 and over 18,000 participants, respectively, suggesting that the WSF process may be gaining traction there over time.

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### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN EUROPE: FRENCH AND ITALIAN CONNECTIONS*

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In contrast to North America, we saw a huge number of Forums and considerable cross-national variation in France and Italy. France followed the discrete event model of Social Forums, while Italian Forums operated more as a process or network, as did some Forums in the United

Kingdom. One explanation may lie in the extent to which Social Forum innovations are compatible, or resonate with, local experiences, ideas, movements, and organizations. The role of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC), a key founding member of the WSF and influential in France (Waters 2004), may account for what Callincos calls a reformist Social Forum movement there. He identifies two other forms of European Social Forum activism, a radical one in which the Communist Party in Italy (PRC), the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire in France, and the Socialist Workers' Party in Britain play a role, and a horizontal, or autonomist strain, dominated by new social movements closer to the horizontalist tendency found in Social Forums (Lee 2004; Juris 2008b).

French and Italian Forum experiences illustrate differences in transmission and the role of political opportunity structures. The French disposition against globalization and the embracing of the Social Forum process is evident at regional (department) and local levels where our data indicate the existence of at least 46 Social Forums since 2002. The Gironde Social Forum (GSF), however, claims that in 2005 there were, by their count, over 100 local Social Forums throughout France (GSF 2006). Of the five Social Forums we profiled in detail, four had close links with ATTAC: the Alpes Maritime Social Forum, the GSF, Pays Nantais Local Social Forum, and the Region 89 (L'Yonne) Social Forum. Any discussion of Social Forum activism in France and the creation of the WSF and other European Forums must address the role of ATTAC.

ATTAC was formed in 1998 after an editorial in *Le Monde Diplomatique* by Ignacio Ramonet called for the creation of an organization to support the regulation of global finance capital and advocate for a tax on international financial exchanges that would support social and human rights. *Le Monde Diplomatique* director Bernard Cassen later helped found the WSF. Over 40 ATTAC chapters held the founding assembly of their network in June 2003 (Kolb 2005). Sommier and Combes claim "the global justice movement is largely associated with one organization, ATTAC" (2007: 108). ATTAC's more reformist position and influence in France are due in part to the more open opportunity structure in from 1998 to 2002 with a cohabitationist government and the Socialist Party dominating parliament. The influence of public intellectuals in France and ATTAC's link to *Le Monde Diplomatique* and socialist intellectuals gave it extraordinary influence, including obtaining state

funding for the 2003 European Social Forum in Paris. Even after 2002, the Gaullist-led government was unwilling to fully open France's doors to neoliberal globalization.

France's impressive Social Forum record is overshadowed by Italy's, which by 2006 had 227 entities identifying themselves as Social Forums. The hosting of the G8 summit in 2001 in Genoa and the first European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 had a role in the development of Social Forum activism (della Porta 2003: 11; Andretta and Mosca 2004; Reiter et al. 2007). However, this does not fully explain the variation in impact of such stimuli, since Britain has had both G8 summits and an ESF in London, yet little sustained Social Forum activism resulted. Clearly the ground was more fertile in Italy and France.

In the case of Genoa, even before the decision of the WSF's IC to encourage regional Forums, Italian organizers of the countersummit had called it a Social Forum (Glasius 2005). Many Italian Forums referenced the Genoa and Florence events on their websites. These Forums were modeled on types of direct, deliberative democracy. Data indicate that the majority of participants could be described as autonomists, alienated by traditional representative politics and parties (della Porta 2003: 12). Italy's political opportunity structure changed with the collapse of the party system in the early 1990s, which liberated many organizations from party allegiance and served as a catalyst to the rise of a more independent and autonomist Left (Reiter et al. 2007).

The autonomists strongly supported the Social Forum process and were at odds with the more vertically oriented radical elements within the organizing committees. Some claim this was a factor in the rather swift decline of the local Social Forum process in Italy.<sup>7</sup> This conflict is reflected in the Rome Social Forum in 2002 where there was a "revolt" because the Coordinating Group was "prioritizing efficiency over discussion."<sup>8</sup> The Social Forum process in Italy quickly mushroomed but lasted for a shorter period than elsewhere.

### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: SOUTH AMERICA BEYOND THE WSF*

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South America is the other major center of Social Forum activism, led by Brazil and Chile in terms of numbers of Social Forums. Four WSFs were held in Brazil, and it has also been the site for over 20 thematic Forums, several transboundary regional Forums, 24 subnational Forums,

and 2 national Social Forums. Given that several Brazilian organizations and activists were founding members of the WSF, this level of activism is not surprising. The links between the WSF, its Brazilian committee, and Social Forum activism are clear. How Social Forums have taken root, especially in affluent states, also reflects the changing political opportunity structure with local and national openings on the Left and the strong support that leftist parties and other organizations have provided.

The earliest subnational Forums were held in the state of Minas Gerais, heart of the populous (over 20 million) industrialized southeast. Place is reflected in the themes, attendance, and resources locals drew upon, and in the mix of social movements, unions, NGOs, churches, political parties, and supportive government entities controlled by the Worker's Party (PT). The roots of the Forum Social Mineiro are linked to the WSF and efforts to organize for the first WSF resulting in a 100-person delegation to Porto Alegre in 2001. This group also organized the first Forum Social Mineiro in September 2001 followed by others in 2002, 2004, and 2005. Like many of the early Forums in Brazil, the Forum Social Mineiro hosted actions and campaigns opposing the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Its open acceptance of participation by political parties in the organizing of the Forum also reflects the omnipresent role of parties in the Social Forum process in the region (despite WSF principles) and the close relationship of leftist parties emanating from the movements (Santos 2004).

The first national Brazilian Social Forum in Belo Horizonte in November 2003 built upon the experiences of the Forum Social Mineiro. The council for the Brazilian Social Forum is part of the WSF Brazil Council and represents a range of organizations including unions, such as Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the Landless Workers' Movement, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST). The first Brazilian Social Forum had 15,000 registered participants with 1,200 organizations and over 300 activities organized around three themes: "Imperialism (the FTAA and external dependence)"; "The Brazil that we have and the Brazil that we want"; and "The state and social movements."

The second Brazilian Social Forum in April 2006 also followed a subnational Forum held in the same location, in this instance the Northeastern Social Forum held in Recife in 2004. A different mix of participants reflected the region's poverty and historic settlement by former slaves. The organization of Afro-Brazilians, UNEGRO, had over 150 representatives and was organized around a single theme, a discussion



of the “political and institutional experiences in Brazil in the past few years” reflecting the corruption scandals of the Lula government and the upcoming election (Brazilian Social Forum <http://www.fsb.org.br>). Press coverage referred to the gathering as one of “activists for reelection of Lula, but with reduced hopes” (Osava 2006).

Outside Belo Horizonte, subnational Forums have been held across Brazil. What is particularly interesting about those held in the northeastern state of Rio Grande do Norte in 2002, 2003, and 2004 is their origins in small groups of activists, particularly feminists connected to the World March of Women who attended the first WSF.

We also examined Social Forum activism in the rest of South America, focusing on Chile because it had the second highest number of Social Forums in Latin America, although Argentina was a close second at 15, followed by Uruguay with 8.

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#### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN CHILE*

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Two national Forums were held in Chile in 2004 and 2006, along with three thematic Forums, all of them in Santiago. We also found 11 subnational Forums, most occurring in 2004–2006.

The stimulus for the first national Social Forum in 2004 was external, the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Santiago and the desire to organize a counterspace of resistance to neoliberalism. The opening march had over 60,000 participants with 8,000 individuals and 200 organizations registered to attend the Forum. Organizations included environmental groups, labor unions, churches, Indigenous organizations, women’s groups, and ATTAC. Funding came from NGOs, including Greenpeace, ATTAC, Amnesty International, some churches, and Swedish aid groups. Themes included Latin American integration, free trade agreements, environmental sustainability, democracy, sovereignty and globalization, human development and world peace, native peoples, and cultural diversity. The 2006 event, in contrast, was far smaller, with just 3,000 participants and 140 activities.

An example of a local Forum was one held in Araucanía in 2006. This southern region is home to the Mapuche, the main Indigenous group. It has a high poverty level, and struggles center around resource development. Those involved in the Araucanía Social Forum had first met at a Forum held in southern Chile, which had 300 individual and 30 organizational participants. Environmental organizations, a founda-

tion, and a local university provided support, as did *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Chile, and the European Union. Themes included the situation of the Mapuche people, the environment and biodiversity, democracy, development, the economy, and the media. The goals of the Forum included building stronger networks, raising awareness of the situation of the Mapuche people, and countering the national media's negative stereotyping of them as "criminals."

The contrast with the national Forum is evident. The latter had been stimulated by broader struggles over economic integration into the global neoliberal economy, the APEC summit, and the free trade agreement with the United States. The Araucanía Social Forum, in contrast, was advanced by locals who brought WSF activism back to their community and focused it around their identity and the plight of Indigenous people.

Despite Chile having higher per capita incomes than Brazil, Social Forum activism in Chile came much later, as a reaction to struggles over economic integration; a reflection in itself of a weaker Left and political regimes that have embraced neoliberalism. Chile's governments, even after the departure of Pinochet in 1989, continued to take the country in a neoliberal direction, as reflected in the 2004 United States-Chile Free Trade Agreement.<sup>9</sup>

The Latin American and European dominance of the WSF was problematic, however, since those most marginalized by neoliberal globalization were in the regions least well represented within the Social Forum process, especially Asia and Africa (Santos 2004). Thus an effort to diffuse Social Forum activism more widely began.

### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN ASIA*

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The WSF's International Council addressed the uneven participation early on and recognized that India, given its size, poverty, and civil society activism should be more represented in the Social Forum process. The IC's main tool of transmission is through stimulating and facilitating Forum events, not transferring financial resources.<sup>10</sup> The IC sought to stimulate Indian participation by moving the WSF there (Leite 2005). However, concerns about the capacity of the Indian organizing committee and the reluctance of some within the IC to move the WSF led to the decision to first hold an Asian Social Forum.

The Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, in January 2003 attracted over 15,000 delegates from 80 countries. Most were drawn

from India and South Asia, partly because the right-wing, proglobalization Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government delayed granting visas to many international delegates. Shortly thereafter, the IC decided that Mumbai would host the 2004 WSF. According to the WSF Secretariat, 74,126 people registered for the January 2004 Forum representing 1,653 organizations from 117 countries. Other estimates put participation at over 130,000. One spillover effect of holding the WSF in Mumbai is seen in the strong presence of South Asians at the WSF in Porto Alegre a year later (IBASE 2006).

This success of the WSF outside Port Alegre led to a decision to hold the third WSF polycentric Forum in 2006 in Karachi, Pakistan. Delayed by an earthquake, it was held March 24–29, with over 30,000 attending, mostly from Asia, but representing 58 countries. The fact that the Forum took place in a country under a military regime and on the front line of the U.S.-led “war on terror” and still reflected the energy observed in Mumbai was considered impressive (Rousset 2006).

In both India and Pakistan, the regional and world Forums resulted in strong mobilization of activists within the global process, such as the Dalits who have attended subsequent WSFs and formed linkages with other groups and networks (P. Smith, Chapter 11). Yet the region saw no blossoming of national or subnational Forums similar to Europe and Latin America. India has to date held only one national Forum in Delhi in 2006. Pakistan, whose political opportunities are more limited than in India, formed an organization in 2003 and held one national Forum in Lahore in 2004.

Only a few pockets of national Social Forums emerged in Asia and there are puzzling absences. Observers have noted the role that Southeast Asian groups played, especially since 1997, in challenging neoliberal globalization. Groups from South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia have been active opponents of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and bilateral and regional trade agreements (Caouette 2006). South Korean union and peasant organizations used WSF meetings in 2003 and 2005 to network with other groups in coordinated opposition to WTO ministerial meetings in Cancún and Hong Kong (Smythe, Chapter 9). As Caouette notes, groups have played an important role in knowledge production about globalization and its impact and have been key global network builders. Within the WSF, organizations such as Focus on the Global South (based in Thailand) have been central within networks dealing with trade issues (Anheier and Katz 2005). Yet,

aside from South Korea, which has held a national Social Forum every year since 2002, there is little evidence of Social Forum activism. The role of limited political space and opportunity here clearly merits further investigation. In contrast, the most marginalized world region, Africa, which has also been the target of WSF efforts to stimulate Social Forum activism, has exhibited a variety of Social Forum activism at various levels.

### *SOCIAL FORUMS IN AFRICA*

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Africa is the continent most victimized by globalization. With over 900 million people and 53 states, Africa is overrepresented in UN poverty data. The U.N. Human Development Index (HDI) ranks 23 sub-Saharan African states at the bottom of 177 countries. Of the 50 U.N.-designated least developed countries, 35 are in Africa. Given limited resources, weak civil society, and basic survival struggles, we might expect to find a smaller number of Forums in comparison to Europe and South America. Yet there is wide diversity in the number of Forums. The WSF IC has played a key role in this transmission.

Recognizing both the need for, and challenges of, developing a Social Forum process in Africa, the IC actively supported the first African Social Forum. Led by two well-known activists, a former Mali minister of culture and member of the IC and the head of a Senegal-based NGO Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde (ENDA), it was held in January 2002 in Bamako, Mali. This was followed by continental Forums in 2003 (Addis Ababa), 2004 (Lusaka), and 2005 (Conakry). In addition, the IC chose Bamako to host one of three polycentric WSFs in 2006 and Nairobi, Kenya, for the global WSF in 2007. The link to the global WSF process is very direct through collaboration with, and the support of, the IC and the Secretariat.

We identified 62 Forums on the continent, including several global, continental, and regional events. Regional ones included the West African Social Forums (Conakry, Guinea, 2004; and Cotonou, Benin, 2005), the Southern Africa Social Forums (Lusaka, Zambia, 2003; Harare, Zimbabwe, 2005); and Magreb Social Forum (Morocco, 2006). Another 50 have occurred at the national and subnational levels. The breakdown of our data for Forums at the national and local levels is as seen in Table 2.3.

South Africa and Nigeria, in contrast to their size and significance in sub-Saharan Africa, have seen few Forums, although the ones held in

**Table 2.3 African Social Forums—  
National, Subnational, and Local**

Country	Number	Country	Number
Algeria	1	Morocco*	4
Benin*	1	Niger	3
Cameroon	3	Nigeria	2
Central African Rep.	1	Senegal	3
Guinea*††	2	Somalia	3
Ivory Coast	3	South Africa (Durban)	1
Kenya†‡	4	Tanzania	2
Mali†‡	6	Tunisia	1
Malawi	2	Uganda	2
Mozambique	1	Zambia*†	1
		Zimbabwe*	2

\*Also host to regional Social Forum

†Also host to continental or World Social Forum

‡Also host to thematic Social Forum(s)

Nigeria attracted large numbers for Africa. The hotbeds of Social Forum activism, Mali and Kenya, may be linked to earlier experiences hosting major Forums, in Mali's case the first African Social Forum. The first Kenyan Social Forum was held in 2003. The presence of a U.N. agency and a stronger NGO base there might account for Kenya's engagement in the WSFs. Where Forums occur is not always directly tied to local resources. Niger, which ranks last on the U.N. HDI has had three Forums, and the first one in 2003 had over 700 participants.<sup>11</sup> In this instance, as in other African countries, outside support and resources from development NGOs,<sup>12</sup> aid agencies, and foundations has been important.

Like Niger, Mozambique ranks low on the HDI (168th), and its experience of civil war and floods make it an unlikely place to expect a Social Forum. Yet one was held in October 2006, illustrating the importance of personal connections as well as linguistic links in the transmission of the WSF process. Several activists who founded Mozambique's local Social Forum efforts attended the WSF in 2002. An assembly and the election of a national council followed in 2005. The Maputo local Social Forum in October 2006 had 200–300 participants, and it aimed to create stronger links among groups preparing for the WSF in Kenya. While organizers felt the event was a success, limited financial resources accounted for its slow gestation and organizational problems.

Our African data suggest that efforts to stimulate Social Forum activism and networks have had some success but remain heavily dependent on external, especially financial, resources. Often provided by foundations, large NGOs, and state aid agencies this assistance is not without controversy and risks limiting the nature and extent of resistance to neoliberal globalization in these places.

## CONCLUSION

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Our sketches of multilevel Social Forum activism show a diverse range of activities and networks. They provide a rich set of data that offers insights into how innovative practices of collective action are diffused. They show the importance of place in affecting how and where such practices become embedded. Examining patterns of variation in Social Forums can further our understanding of how the global and local link in collective action challenging neoliberal globalization.

Given the role of Brazilian and French organizations like ATTAC in creating the WSF, the strength of Social Forum activism in France and Brazil is not surprising. The timing of its emergence also points to the role of political opportunity structures that provided space for these organizations to flourish and mobilize resources. The key direct channel of diffusion of Social Forum activism has been through the processes and structures the WSF itself created, especially the WSF International Council and Secretariat, which have stimulated and supported Social Forum activism in peripheral regions. The experiences of activists who bring Social Forum practices from the WSF back to their homes has also been a channel of diffusion often facilitated by shared language or culture, as is the case in Quebec and Mozambique. Major events (such as the Genoa G8) and a shared identification or link to the master frame of resistance to neoliberal globalization have also been sources of Social Forum activism.

Successful diffusion is not guaranteed however. The IC itself has recognized this in a report on the financial challenges of rapid growth in the size of the WSF event and the spread of Social Forums:

According to many (IC members) who were interviewed, real internationalization has not occurred yet, only geographical expansion. Even though geographical expansion is part of internationalization, in terms of wider internationalism ownership is still wanting . . . (Lopez et al. 2006: 14)

Adoption may be very dependent on the resources (both internal and external) available to be mobilized, the political opportunity structure, the strength and unity of local social movements and organizations, and the extent to which Social Forum practices resonate locally. While mechanisms of diffusion might sow the seeds, they do not ensure that the garden will grow.

The emergence of so many national and subnational Forums suggests the importance of “rooted cosmopolitans” with flexible identities who, while grounded in the local context, engage in, or are part of, transnational networks struggling against neoliberalism (Tarrow and della Porta 2005: 237). The localness of the Social Forum activism we have identified and the diversity of responses to globalization raise questions about a unified and programmatic global response to neoliberalism. It reminds us too that, as exciting as the World Social Forums may be, the front line in this struggle is local.

## NOTES

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1. An exception to this is Janet Conway “Reading Nairobi as Place, Space, and Difference.” *Sociologists without Borders* 3(1): 48–70.

2. *Frame* refers to the social construction of meaning or interpretation used by collective actors to convince people to take collective action. For many in the global justice movement, neoliberal globalization represents the “master frame.”

3. By *political opportunity structure* we mean how open or closed domestic or international institutions are to collective actors. Political structures, including their degree of access and political responsiveness, along with level or type of repression, can expand or limit a collective actor’s opportunities. Groups that perceive threats from domestic opportunity structures or find them closed may seek out more open international institutions (e.g., the United Nations) or create their own opportunity structures (e.g., the WSF) as a means of pressuring domestic structures to be more responsive to their demands.

4. Rosalba Icaza. Email interview with P.J. Smith, December 8, 2008.

5. According to Jeffrey Juris, there was a San Francisco Forum in 2002, raising the number to 20. Communication presentation International Studies Association, March 1, 2007.

6. On the issue of race and the U.S. Social Forum, see Juris, Jeffrey S., (2008a) “Spaces of Intentionality: Race, Class and Horizontality at the United States Social Forum.” *Mobilization*.

7. This observation comes by way of a comment of an Italian activist to one of the authors at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya.

8. Authors' translation from Italian.

9. The center-left coalition of socialist and Christian democratic parties that has held power since 1990 continued to embrace neoliberalism. Even with the election of Bachelet in 2006 changes were marginal (Bonney). As Klein (2007) and others point out this is very much the residue of the shock of 9/11 in 1973 in Chile.

10. Raising resources is the responsibility of the local organizing committee. Most often they are composed of foundation funds, registration fees, and contributions from various NGOs and aid agencies. Dependence on a few large donors has generated controversy, especially in Mumbai, and led to a report commissioned by the WSF IC. See Lopez et al. 2006.

11. One of the Quebec organizations most active in Social Forums, Alternatives, supported and helped fund the participation of groups in the Niger Social Forum. The number of Canadians involved in West African Social Forums may be the result of the higher level of French-speaking Quebec NGOs in this region.

12. Via Campesina has been active, for example, in Mali. (Susan George, comments to authors, February 2007)





## CHAPTER 3

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# THE POLITICAL AND ITS ABSENCE IN THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE FORUM AND IN THE WORLD

*Teivo Teivainen*

It has become increasingly accepted that the world cannot be properly understood through theoretical lenses that consider state actors as the exclusive domain of the political. At the same time, there has been surprisingly little systematic analysis of how the political is manifested in the actions and articulations of the globalization protest movements that have been subject to much general attention since the spectacular street actions in Seattle during the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999. The movements themselves have tended to pay more attention to making politicizing claims about institutions considered their adversaries, such as the WTO or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), than to thoroughly debating the implications of the political nature of their own praxis. This lack of attention to the political nature of the articulations among the globalization protest movements is also reflected in the way they have generally been analyzed as members of an emerging “global civil society,” especially when these analyses rely on

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dichotomous oppositions between the political and the social or, to add another dimension, on the holy trinity of the political/social/economic.

On the one hand, I tend to be skeptical about some of the assumptions behind the civil society debate that we so often hear in both academic and activist meetings. One example is when the World Social Forum (WSF) is posited as providing a social counterpart to “balance” the excessively economic focus of the World Economic Forum. This kind of talk generally either assumes away questions of politics or looks at the political as something that simply has to do with the role of states vis-à-vis either of these forums. On the other hand, I would not want to deny totally the possibility of using “civil society” as a meaningful concept, especially since the social movements and other social actors themselves often refer to it. For the purposes of this chapter I will not rely on any concept of “civil society” as a predefined theoretical construct or analytical tool. I will rather focus on “practices that are shaped in its name” (Amoore and Langley 2004). In other words, I will refer to concrete social movements and nongovernmental organizations that may claim to form part of “civil society,” but my focus will be on the politics of their articulations, especially in the context of the WSF.<sup>1</sup>

#### “CIVIL SOCIETY” AND “DEMOCRACY” IN THE WSF CHARTER OF PRINCIPLES

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The WSF had its first annual gathering in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and has thereafter become perhaps the most important global arena for social movements and networks that seek democratic transformations of the capitalist world-system. It offers an excellent case study for analyzing the possibilities of global democratization in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, it is an attempt to facilitate democratic transformations in local, national, and global contexts and an arena in which these transformations are debated. Nevertheless, the WSF has faced various contradictory demands that have complicated the democratization of its own internal organizational structure, which has been expanding from a mostly Brazilian-based organization toward an increasingly global site of world politics.

The key document that defines the guidelines of the WSF is its Charter of Principles, elaborated between the first two forums, in 2001 and 2002. “Civil society” is mentioned twice and “world civil society” once in the Charter of Principles. The Charter makes clear that who gets to

define “civil society” at least in principle gets to decide who can take part in the WSF, because the WSF “brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world.” The standard definition of civil society offered by the Charter states that it is “a plural, diversified, nonconfessional, nongovernmental and nonparty context.” In other words, it does not include representatives of political parties, governments, or military organizations: three typically “political” kinds of organizations.

Despite the oft-repeated lip service to the WSF as an open “civil society” space, it is by no means open to all kinds of social movements and nongovernmental organizations. There is no strict ideological litmus test to screen the participants. Rather than strict boundaries, the ideological orientation that the participants are supposed to have constitutes frontier zones in which many such organizations that may not be committed to all the elements spelled out in the Charter of Principles in practice take part in the process. According to the WSF Charter of Principles, the organizations that can participate in the Forum are defined as

groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.

In the Charter of Principles, “democracy” is directly mentioned four times. Whereas Clause 1 defines the WSF as an open meeting place for “democratic debate of ideas,” Clause 4, when speaking about “globalization of solidarity” as a new stage in world history, says it will rest on “democratic international systems and institutions.” And, finally, Clause 10 tells us that the WSF upholds respect for the practices of “real democracy” and “participatory democracy.”

The WSF by no means includes all the movements and networks that aim at democratic transformations. Its composition has various geographical, sectoral, ideological, and civilizational limitations. The emergence of the WSF was, however, a key moment in the gradual shift of emphasis in the aims of many of these movements. The reactive protest dimension has been partially replaced by a more proactive democratization dimension. A somewhat simplistic, but illustrative, way to locate this shift is to call the wave of activism that made one of its

major public appearances during the World Trade Organization meeting in 1999 in Seattle “globalization protest movements” and to use the term *global democratization movements* to characterize the activism of the new millennium symbolized by the WSF. In other words, the WSF provided a channel through which many of the globalization protest movements of the 1990s have become the global democratization movements of the twenty-first century.

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### POLITICIZATION AS A METHOD OF DEMOCRATIZATION

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As argued by Barry Gills (2002: 164), the globalization protest movements need to be viewed as “symptomatic of something far greater than a mere reaction to globalization.” The main question I want to pursue is to what extent the emergence and further expansion of a forum that these movements have created points to new possibilities to apply democratic principles in the globalizing world. In this chapter I can provide only brief reflections,<sup>2</sup> and one of the issues at stake is how the movements have opened up new spaces for democratic claims by politicizing such social relations that have traditionally been considered to be outside the boundaries of the political. Transnational relations of capitalist production and gender hierarchies are two well-known examples of the spheres that the movements have attempted to politicize. Less attention has been paid to the articulations and power relations between the movements themselves.

The road from politicizing protests to transformative proposals is filled with dilemmas. The dilemmas become particularly thorny when the explicit ultimate aim is to articulate proposals of many movements into collective projects to create a radically different world. In such situations we must pay close attention to the workings of power not only in the structures that these movements want to transform but also within their own articulations. Even if the main slogan of the World Social Forum asserts that “Another World Is Possible,” it is embedded in the existing one. The WSF’s organizational structure and material resources are in many ways conditioned by the existing power relations of the capitalist world.

For the reproduction of capitalism, one of the ideological defense mechanisms has been depoliticization of power relations, especially—but not only—those located in the socially constructed sphere of the “economic.” The new democratization movements must face depoliticization

not only out there, in the world external to their movements. They also have to tackle the dilemmas that depoliticization presents in their own internal organizational efforts.

The difference between the inside and the outside of the organizational constructs of these movements is never absolute. For the sake of analytical clarity, however, we can make a distinction between internal and external depoliticization of the WSF. The former refers to the claims according to which the WSF is not a locus of power, as stated by its Charter of Principles. As an expression of wish this sounds excellent, but as a description of reality it is clearly erroneous. There are various kinds of power disputes within the WSF process, and if the aim is to increase the horizontality of WSF decision making, denying the existence of current hierarchies is not a good way to begin. What I would call the external depoliticization of the WSF consists of ideas and practices that consider it as a space where movements gather but which in itself should not have the characteristics of a political movement. I do not intend to claim that these depoliticizing tendencies are necessarily always harmful or outright undemocratic. My hypothesis is, rather, that they have presented various kinds of dilemmas that the WSF organizers have only gradually started taking into account. The WSF has experienced a learning process that is political in two interrelated senses. Like any process of learning, it is political because it involves various relations of power among those engaged in it. It is also political by reproducing and confronting different meanings and boundaries of the “political.”

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#### RETHINKING THE POLITICAL

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The politicization practiced by the globalization protest movements has been only partial, but it opens up new democratic horizons. Both within the movements and inside academia there is still much need for a radical rethinking of what kinds of possibilities politicization opens for democratic transformations. The WSF process, however, embodies the idea that there exists a new conception of the political that transgresses traditional definitions, especially—though not only—vis-à-vis territorial states and political parties. As has been stated by Cândido Grzybowski, the WSF participants “must be radically political” and engage in a “new way of doing politics” (2004: 1). A key Brazilian organizer of the WSF, Grzybowski concludes insightfully that “we engage in a fully political act, but it seems that we fear its consequences.” Also, many academic

observers like Arturo Escobar (2004: 208) have seen a “new theoretical and political logic on the rise” in the WSF, even if its contours are “still barely discernible.”

To explore the political in the WSF and in the globalization protest movements, it is important to move not only beyond state-centric conceptions but also beyond idealized accounts of horizontal networks that create new forms of participation that are assumed to be opposed or unconnected to questions of representation. The death of representational politics has been prematurely announced and celebrated by various activists and theorists of the movements (see Passavant and Dean 2004). In the beginning, the WSF organizers tended to exclude the questions of representation from the discussion on the new political logic within the WSF. There have, however, been increasing demands to deal with the perceived lack of representativeness within the WSF governance bodies. For example, during the first years of the WSF process there were relatively few African or Asian organizations that participated in the key decision-making bodies of the process, especially its International Council. Trying to deny the need to talk about representation became increasingly difficult as the underrepresentation of Africans and Asians grew more visible. And once talking about representation was accepted as a legitimate concern in the process, it was possible to consider the process in more political terms.

There exists a plethora of definitions of the political. As regards to the sites in which the political can be located, Roberto Mangabeira Unger’s two definitions of “politics” provide a helpful starting point. For him, the narrow meaning of politics can be stated as “conflict over the mastery and uses of governmental power.” To analyze the politics of practices and spaces other than those directly related to governments, it is more useful to rely on the broader meaning, which he defines as “struggle over the resources and arrangements that set the basic terms of our practical and passionate relations” (Unger 1987: 145–146). Here I will take the broader meaning as my starting point and consider the political not only in relation to state governments but also in other kinds of social relations including articulations between social movements.

A key question in defining the political is its relationship with democratization—in other words, with the increase in possibilities people have to take part in decisions that concern the basic conditions of their lives. My second argument here is that to be political is to politicize and politicization is a key aspect of democratic struggles. It means revealing

the political, and therefore potentially democratizable, nature of such relations of power that are presented as neutral. Politicization has been a central feature of many radical democratic attempts to expand the established boundaries of the political, including socialism (politicizing the relations of domination associated with capitalist economy) and feminism (politicizing the relations of domination associated with patriarchy).

One of my key assumptions is therefore that the political consists of the variety of social relations in which democratic claims can be assumed to be valid. The fact that many politicizing projects have not led to effective democratization has often resulted in disillusionment with politicization. Democratic hopes of radical political movements taking over the state have over the past decades repeatedly evaporated when newly installed governments have started to practice structural adjustment as proposed by international financial institutions and other policies in which key decision making tends to be shielded from democratic oversight. Politicization is a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition for democratization.

Even if not synonymous with democratization, politicization is a necessary element in democratic struggles, both today and tomorrow. Whereas some radical theorists of the past have claimed that in a post-capitalist future politics could be replaced with an “administration of things” (Engels 1989), we can observe similar depoliticization in the current claims that decision making within the WSF can “escape the logics of rivalry and power” (Whitaker and Viveret 2003). As Chantal Mouffe (1993: 140) has affirmed, “to negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them.” Relations of power cannot simply be fantasized away, neither in analyzing how social relations have been nor in imagining or proposing how they could be. As one of the world’s most important processes in which social movements interact, and at the same time a site of sometimes heated power struggles, the WSF provides multiple challenges for rethinking the political. In particular, it offers theorists and activists a possibility to construct such conceptions of the global political that may be helpful for both knowing and democratizing the world.

While the political should not be considered as exclusively linked to states, neither should it be conflated with the social by simply claiming that everything needs to be politicized (see Isin 2002). Instead of the postmodernist tendency to politicize for the sake of politicization, which

easily leads to an endless cycle of deconstruction in which the construction of institutions is difficult, the real need is to politicize in order to open up possibilities for democratization in sites of socially consequential power. My main focus is on such forms of the political that challenge the existing power relations of the capitalist world-system. Without pretending to locate the roots of all social power in the reproduction of capitalism, I would argue that while the WSF is explicitly opposed to “domination of the world by capital,” its organizers have tended to pay insufficient attention to how capitalist power relations affect the internal organization of the WSF itself.

### *DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGES TO ECONOMISM*

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The separation of the political and the economic is one of the mechanisms through which democratic claims have been contained under capitalism. According to the doctrine of economic neutrality, economic issues and institutions are somehow apolitical, beyond political power struggles and therefore not subject to democratic claims. With the constant, even if not always lineal, expansion of the social spaces defined as economic, the possibilities of democratic politics have been increasingly restricted.<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of economic neutrality is most obvious in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, but it also manifests itself in the WSF process. Especially during the first years of the process, questions of funding, labor relations, and provision of services within the WSF were considered mainly technical issues, handled through a depoliticized “administration of things.” The fact that the WSF is organized inside a capitalist world is also evident in the disadvantaged structural position of participants from relatively poor organizations and countries. To claim that the WSF is an “open space” may sound like a joke in bad taste for those who do not have the material means to enter the space. Furthermore, even if the organizers of the WSF have increasingly tried to apply the principles of a noncapitalist “solidarity economy” in the forum itself, the apparently mundane issue of the logistics of accommodation has been heavily conditioned by the profit-making logic of the local hotel industry that, especially in Porto Alegre, has heavily raised prices to take advantage of the increased demand during the annual WSF.

One of the results (and also causes) of the recent intensification of globalization protest movements has been the possibility to radically rethink the economic/political boundary. Not all these movements are, or



consider themselves, anticapitalist, though I am particularly interested in their potential to create conditions for a democratic postcapitalist world, as well as the possibility to create democratic organizational forms despite or inside capitalism. Many of the globalization protest movements have aimed at politicization of global relations of command associated with institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Economic Forum, and transnational corporations. These institutions claim to be purely “economic,” and therefore not subject to democratic norms. One of the ideological contradictions of the contemporary global expansion of capitalism is that while the “economic” institutions become more powerful, their political nature becomes, at least potentially, more evident.

The political nature of the economic institutions does not become evident automatically. The contradictions of capitalism create conditions for critical responses, but these responses are not generated without active social forces. The new transnational activism that emerged in the globalization protests of the 1990s has made it more visible that “economy” is a political and historical construction. To the extent that the movements can convincingly demonstrate that apparently economic institutions are in reality important sites of social power, it becomes more difficult for the latter to be legitimately based on inherently nondemocratic principles such as “one dollar, one vote.”

Economism is an ideological concealment of the political relations of command inherent in the “economic.” These power relations are hidden behind the doctrine of economic neutrality, but we are not only dealing with an imposed illusion. When enough people act as if something called an economic sphere with an autonomous and natural logic really exists, the sphere becomes “real,” even if socially constructed. By acting transgressively, by politicizing the economic through protests and proposals, the globalization protest movements have created conditions for a radical unthinking of the economic/political boundary. The WSF is one of the main processes in and around which this politicization has taken place. It is, at the same time, important to ask to what extent the WSF itself reproduces economism and creates apparently nonpolitical structures in its mode of organization.

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*NEGATIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS OF THE POLITICAL IN THE WSF*

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After various annual main events organized between the first forums held in Porto Alegre and the one held in January 2009 in Belém, and a

rising number of local and regional forums, one of the most controversial questions for the WSF is to what extent it should remain merely an arena where different movements gather and to what extent it should be conceived as a movement in itself. Another key issue concerns the dilemmas of making the WSF process more democratic. I would argue that these two questions have been tackled by the WSF organizers in overly depoliticized terms. The frustrations that this depoliticization has triggered have, however, led to attempts to politicize the process through sometimes excessively state-centric understandings of the political.

The WSF may not be a *movement* of a traditional kind, but it needs to be *in movement* in order to respond to the challenges its growth has presented. One of the intellectual prerequisites of this movement is to think of the WSF in political terms that transgress both the traditional state-centric conceptions of political practice as well as the currently fashionable depoliticized understandings of “civil society.” The political needs to be embraced, resignified, and used to create conditions for a more democratic world and a more democratic WSF process.

While almost no one involved in the WSF process would hold that the WSF is or should be totally apolitical, there has existed a depoliticizing tendency that has caused various problems for the process. Some of the problems related to the internal power relations of the WSF and to its role in the world have been innovatively confronted by the organizers over the years, but despite the learning process many of these problems remain.

The WSF was originally constructed as an “open space” where movements discuss democratic alternatives to domination of the world by capital and to different forms of imperialism. Compared to the traditional methods of political parties and alliances of social movements, one of the novelties of the WSF is that it has avoided constructing mechanisms that would pretend to represent the WSF as a whole. No one is allowed to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. While this principle resonates well with the emphasis on horizontal and leaderless networks that many radical activists profess today, it has also caused increasing frustration among organizations such as the transnational peasant alliance Via Campesina, which would like to make the WSF more effective in proposing and promoting concrete strategies of social transformations.

The Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (2002) once stated that in order to change the world we must first know that it is indeed

possible to change it. This helps us understand one dimension of why during its first years the WSF experienced a spectacular growth and provided so much inspiration for social movements and other actors engaged in processes of democratic transformation. The apparently simple WSF slogan, “Another World Is Possible,” aroused enthusiasm because it helped break the demobilizing influence of another simple slogan, generally attributed to Margaret Thatcher, according to which “there is no alternative” to the existing capitalist order.

After repeating in forum after forum that “another world is possible,” many WSF participants have become eager to know what that other world may look like and how we are supposed to get there. Various participants have become increasingly frustrated with the depoliticized dimensions of the WSF. For some, the demands for a more political WSF have meant the need to create more explicit alliances with, or allowing more involvement by, traditionally political actors such as political parties of progressive governments. For others, the key challenge is to invent ways in which the process itself needs to be practiced more politically without assuming that the only way to move beyond the frustrations caused by the depoliticized understandings of civil society is by involving traditionally political actors.

One way of distinguishing these different approaches within the WSF is to postulate a difference between “strategic politics” and “prefigurative politics.” The former option has been expressed by politicians such as Venezuela’s president Hugo Chávez as well as intellectuals such as Samir Amin or Ignacio Ramonet, who claim that the WSF should move from being merely a “folkloric” event or a “bazaar” towards a more strategic role that necessarily implies a more explicit articulation with progressive governments.

The prefigurative option, based on creating for the movements and their articulations new modes of internal organization that consciously resemble the future world they want to create (Grubacic 2003), has been prevalent among many participants of the Intercontinental Youth Camp, a relatively autonomous space generally located in the political and geographical peripheries of various WSF events. The advocates of prefigurative politics have generally been critical of the internal hierarchies within the WSF, including those that result from an excessive association with governments, and opt for less state-centric forms of being political. As pointed out by those who emphasize prefigurative politics, the WSF has not always practiced what it preaches. In particular, the aim of construct-

ing a democratic world has not been accompanied by sufficient attention to constructing democratic social relations within the WSF itself. At the same time, the criticism of the existing hierarchies within the WSF by Youth Camp activists and others has often been based on conceptions of horizontal networks or power-free open spaces that do not provide effective strategies for large-scale democratic transformations. In order to change the world, the democratic politics of the movements needs to be both strategic and prefigurative.

### THE WSF AFTER TEN YEARS: IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL DEMOCRATIZATION

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The dilemmas of politicization described above have contributed to a weakening of the initial enthusiasm about the WSF among a number of its longtime participants and observers. The WSF may certainly have lost some of the momentum it had during the first years. At the same time, the global expansion of the WSF has continued, and new movements from different parts of the world have become more actively involved. The expansion is also evident in the increased visibility of themes such as the struggles of the Indigenous or, more generally, stateless people in the agenda of the WSF. The organization of the WSF in Dakar in February 2011, the first centralized WSF event held in a country with a Muslim majority, may also help the process become more sensitive to religious diversity. Even if the Charter of Principles declares the WSF to be “nonconfessional,” various Christian organizations (and few groups from other religious tendencies) have been active in the process.

In 2010, when no global WSF event was organized, the intensity of enthusiasm varied between different regional, national, and thematic social forums. For example, while many participants commented positively on the dynamism of the U.S. Social Forum held in Detroit in June, the European Social Forum held in Istanbul in July received less passionate evaluations.<sup>4</sup> In Istanbul, one of the main concerns of the participants was that we did not seem to find efficient ways to use the window of opportunity opened by the financial crisis.

The financial crisis has helped delegitimize some of the previously dominant capitalist (or “neoliberal”) beliefs and practices that the WSF participants have repeatedly criticized. Suddenly, in 2008, it seemed that various world leaders started sounding almost as if they had borrowed key concepts and expressions from Social Forum panels. Many activists,

especially the more moderate and reformist ones, may have felt that the crisis had proved them right. Nevertheless, especially but not only in Europe, the financial crisis has not led to significant success stories of counterhegemonic democratic politics.

Even if the financial crisis of the past couple of years may already seem like a lost opportunity for the WSF and its movements, the importance of the collective learning about the construction of democratic alternatives should not be underestimated. If we live in a limited world based on an endless expansion of capitalist accumulation, the current social organization of the world is becoming increasingly unsustainable. There are growing signs that the physical, social, and ecological room for the further expansion of capitalism is reaching its limits. It is, however, probable that for future historians the current crisis may seem mild, compared to more chaotic times to come. With all its contradictions, the WSF can still be considered the most promising global arena for a collective learning about the alternatives that will be needed if we want the increasingly chaotic world order to be transformed into a more democratic one.

Putting into practice the radically democratic aims of the WSF demands time and resources. The increasing awareness of global challenges such as climate change has led many activists to emphasize the urgency of radical change. The initial WSF method has been criticized for being too slow, for producing too much talk and too little action.

It is not easy to estimate the political impact of the WSF, but as many contributors to this handbook demonstrate, it should not be reduced to mere talk. In Latin America, it is widely recognized that the WSF has contributed to paving the way for various electoral victories of left-oriented groups, even if the exact significance of that contribution can be debated. A multitude of new campaigns, demonstrations, political alliances, funding decisions, and ideas have emerged during the WSF meetings. The biggest street mobilizations ever, the antiwar protests of February 2003, were partially generated inside Social Forums. Transnational action networks have been strengthened, and new generations of activists are developing skills in globally networked “movement building.” Nevertheless, the transformative capacity of the WSF may still be too low and too slow.

It is unclear whether the WSF itself can or should become a more decidedly political movement aimed at democratizing the world, or whether its most important role is to give birth to new forms of political action

that are more capable of responding to the current political moment. Its role as an arena for collective learning about the alternatives can, however, continue to be significant. A democratic world is not possible unless we learn to think politically about transnational social movement articulations. Many aspects of the forms, and even the vocabulary, of future planetary politics are yet to be invented. The WSF can be regarded as an important innovation in the road to global democratization. Whatever its own future, it is likely to remain an important inspiration for further attempts to get together and change the world.

### NOTES

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1. For a strongly critical view on the usefulness of the concept of global civil society to analyze the “transnational archipelago of transnational interactions,” see Tarrow (2002: 245).

2. For further elaborations, see, for example, Teivainen (2002b); Teivainen (forthcoming-a).

3. On economism in general and what I call transnational politics of economism in particular, see Teivainen (2002a).

4. As I did not attend the U.S. Social Forum, this comparison is partially based on indirect sources such as my conversations during the European Social Forum in Istanbul with Chico Whitaker, who had just arrived from Detroit.



## CHAPTER 4

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# SURVEYS OF WORLD SOCIAL FORUM PARTICIPANTS SHOW INFLUENCE OF PLACE AND BASE IN THE GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE

*Ellen Reese, Christopher Chase-Dunn, Kadambari Anantram,  
Gary Coyne, Matheu Kaneshiro, Ashley N. Koda, Roy Kwon, and  
Preeti Saxena*

Much of the research on participation in social movements focuses on involvement in protests and social movement organizations, rather than on gatherings where the goals, values, and strategies of social movements are discussed (e.g., see Dauphinais et al. 1992; Scaminaci and Dunlap 1968; McAdam 1999; Morrison 1998; Barkan 2004; Buttel and Flinn 1974; Lee and Norris 2000; Norris 2002; Brady et al. 1995, 1996). In particular, there has not been sufficient academic research on the social and political characteristics of the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who have attended Social Forum meetings.

To our knowledge, there have only been a few surveys of WSF participants besides our own whose results have been published: Fundação Perseu Abramo's (FPA) survey of participants at the 2001 meeting (reported

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For a fuller discussion of our survey findings and our acknowledgements, see Reese et al. (2008a and 2008b). This research was funded by the Institute for Research on World-Systems and the Program on Global Studies at the University of California-Riverside, and the University of California Labor and Employment Research Fund.

in Schönleitner 2003) and IBASE's survey of participants at the 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 meetings. This paper reports and compares results of surveys of attendees at the World Social Forum meeting in Porto Alegre in 2005 (WSF05), the 2007 WSF meeting in Nairobi (WSF07), and the U.S. Social Forum meeting in 2007 in Atlanta (USSF07). We also compare our findings to WSF survey results by IBASE in order to assess the representativeness of our data.<sup>1</sup> In addition, we compare our survey findings to results of surveys at other Social Forum meetings, global justice protests targeting transnational institutions, and other social movements. In an effort to understand how the characteristics of those who attend a "world event" like the WSF compare with the broader world population, we relate our results to a number of other data sets including the 1999–2004 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), the 2002 survey of the Pew Global Attitudes Project, the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS), as well as to U.S. and international census data.<sup>2</sup> Comparisons were also made between residents of Latin America surveyed by the 2003 Latinobarómetro survey and Latin Americans surveyed at the WSF05, as well as between residents of Africa (hereafter "Africans") and Africans at the WSF07 using the 2004 Afrobarometer.<sup>3</sup>

The location and local support base shape who participates in Social Forums. As is true with participants of global justice protests (Fisher et al. 2005; Bédoyan et al. 2004), most WSF participants come from the vicinity of the meeting place, with large majorities of Social Forum activists from the continent where the Forums are held. Brazil, Kenya, and the United States provide very different political contexts for these meetings. Brazil is a semiperipheral country with a relatively strong and militant labor movement and left current, which managed to elect a president affiliated with the Socialist Workers' Party. Although the Workers' Party suffered losses in local elections in Porto Alegre preceding the WSF05, the city had been a strong bastion of the Workers' Party for many years. Unions and leftists were far weaker in Kenya, an impoverished nation in the periphery, and in the United States, a hegemonic state in the core dominated by neoconservatives. Of the three nation-states, the Kenyan government was the most repressive towards domestic social movements and had the fewest resources for making concessions to popular demands.

The support base of each meeting influenced the kinds of organizations and people in attendance as well. For instance, the Porto Alegre meeting had strong support from the local and national Brazilian Workers' Party. Leftist movement organizations and unions were highly active



within the local organizing committee as well. The Kenyan government—more authoritarian and centrist compared to Brazil’s government—was not a strong supporter of the political goals of the WSF, but saw the Nairobi meeting mainly as an opportunity to encourage tourism. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and churches were highly active in organizing for the meeting, and a telecommunications company was a major sponsor, a factor that generated much consternation among veteran WSF participants. As a result the Nairobi meetings saw greater attendance from religiously and politically moderate individuals. In contrast, the organizers of USSF07 were leftist social activists, many of whom were affiliated with community-based organizations and operating without government sponsorship. These groups targeted their outreach towards grassroots organizations of low-income people of color as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and feminist groups within the United States (see Juris and Smith, Chapter 15). This had the effect of attracting participants who were far to the left of the political mainstream in the United States. Thus, both differences in organizing strategies and political contexts affected the kinds of people attending each meeting.

## DATA AND METHODS

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To better understand the types of people that attend the Social Forums, our research team collected a total of 639 surveys from adult attendees of the WSF05 meeting at Porto Alegre, Brazil, 535 surveys from attendees of the WSF07 meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, and 582 surveys from attendees of the U.S. Social Forum meeting in Atlanta in 2007. Respondents completed paper copies of questionnaires, which collected information on their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, their political views, their affiliations with different types of organizations and social movements, and their political activities. The WSF07 and USSF07 surveys were more extensive than the WSF05 survey. Questionnaires were collected in English, Spanish, and Portuguese at WSF05; English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Swahili at WSF07; and Spanish and English at USSF07. To maximize the representativeness of these samples, the survey was conducted at the full range of venues where all participants were welcome: the registration lines, workshops, plenary events, places where opening marches began and ended, solidarity tents, and cultural performances.

Registration data from the WSF meetings indicate that our samples include a disproportionately high number of international participants.

Whereas Brazilians made up 80 percent of WSF05 registrants, they made up only 54 percent of our sample. Similarly, while about 48 percent of WSF07 registrants were Kenyan, Kenyans made up only 39 percent of our sample. We don't yet have registration data for the USSF07, but we suspect we may have oversampled Spanish-speaking and female participants there. We also surely missed attendees not literate in the above languages. To overcome some of these sampling biases, we weighted our WSF samples according to regional and country-level registration data released by the WSF Organizing Committees of 2005 and 2007 (IBASE 2005, 2007).<sup>4</sup> We were unable to weight our USSF07 survey data because the registration data for this meeting has not yet been publicly released. Despite these sampling biases, we believe our survey results provide one of the best available portraits of Social Forum participants. Other studies of Social Forum participants report similar methods to our own (della Porta et al. 2006: 23-24; IBASE 2005, 2007).

## FINDINGS

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This chapter mainly focuses on the political views and activities of Social Forum participants, but we will first provide a brief overview of our findings regarding participants' social characteristics and how they compare to the general public and other survey research on social movement participants.<sup>5</sup> Consistent with prior research emphasizing the importance of "biographical availability" to participation in social movement events (McAdam 1986), Social Forum attendees are disproportionately young (most were between 18 and 35 years old) and single compared to the general population. Most participants are also not caring for children under the age of 18. Our 3 surveys also found that the majority of Social Forum attendees had 16 or more years of education, which is considerably higher than the educational attainment of the general adult population. Levels of religiosity were higher in the Nairobi sample, particularly among African respondents. Even so, our survey results, as well as those of IBASE, show that Social Forum attendees generally have lower levels of religiosity compared to the general public.

Our findings regarding the high levels of participation among youth and those with university educations are in line with the results of IBASE's WSF05 and WSF07 surveys, as well as surveys of participants of Social Forums in Europe and Australia (della Porta et al. 2006; Bramble 2006). Our findings also parallel other studies of the social

characteristics of social movement participants. For example, research shows a positive relationship between rank-and-file feminist activism and being unmarried, having fewer children, and attaining higher levels of education (Dauphinais et al. 1992). It also shows a high level of participation by youth and college graduates in antinuclear rallies in the United States (Scaminaci and Dunlap 1968). Educational attainment is also positively correlated with protest participation in Eastern Europe (Morrison 1998), as well as support for environmentalism in both the United States and Eastern Europe (Barkan 2004; Buttel and Flinn 1974; Lee and Norris 2000).

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 report valid responses to survey questions. Table 4.1 provides information on respondents' organizations, movements, and protests. More than 60 percent of respondents at all three meetings were attending their first WSF, but differences in the share of new attendees differed significantly across meetings. The Atlanta sample had the highest share of new attendees (90 percent), which is not surprising given that the USSF07 was the first national Forum in the United States, and organizers targeted grassroots groups organizing low-income communities, many of which lacked resources for participating in prior Social Forums. The Porto Alegre sample had the lowest share (61 percent) of new attendees, which is not surprising given that WSF05 was the fourth WSF meeting hosted by this city. Similarly, IBASE reported that about 70 percent of its WSF respondents in 2005 had not participated in a prior WSF meeting.

Although most respondents were not veterans of the Social Forum process, over 80 percent of respondents in each survey belonged to some sort of political or religious organization, although levels of any and various kinds of organizational affiliation differed significantly across the three meetings. The highest share of nonaffiliates was found at Porto Alegre, where youth membership was particularly high and where the WSF had gained the reputation of being the "Woodstock" of Brazil (IBASE 2005).

In line with IBASE's survey results, NGOs and social movement organizations (SMOs) were the most common affiliations. While representation of members of these two kinds of organizations was fairly balanced in Porto Alegre, NGO members predominated in Nairobi and SMO members predominated in Atlanta. Similar to the Atlanta sample, among Social Forum participants surveyed in Florence and Genoa, more respondents claimed involvement in a "political movement" (63 percent) or in a "student collective" (58 percent) than in an NGO

**Table 4.1 Political Experiences and Affiliations of WSF and USSF Participants**

		WSF 2005	WSF 2007	USSF 2007
<i>Prior Participation in Social Fora</i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> =144.09***			
None		60.7%	80.4%	89.8%
One		20.3%	12.9%	06.5%
Two		10.3%	02.8%	01.7%
Three–Five		08.7%	03.7%	01.3%
Six or More		00.0%	00.2%	00.6%
<i>Organizational Affiliations</i>				
NGOs	Chi <sup>2</sup> =43.68***	41.3%	56.2%	33.7%
Labor Unions	Chi <sup>2</sup> =17.26***	21.8%	11.6%	19.6%
Political Parties	Chi <sup>2</sup> =52.09***	20.6%	06.8%	07.7%
SMOs	Chi <sup>2</sup> =109.75***	36.3%	17.4%	52.3%
Government Agencies	Chi <sup>2</sup> =0.28	03.2%	01.9%	03.7%
Religious Groups	Chi <sup>2</sup> =6.00*	n/a	10.7%	05.9%
No Affiliations	Chi <sup>2</sup> =15.59***	19.6%	14.9%	11.1%
<i>In a leadership or paid position<sup>†</sup></i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> =23.04***			
Yes		n/a	48.1%	66.1%
No		n/a	51.9%	33.9%
<i>Attending on behalf of an organization</i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> =20.27***			
Yes		79.5%	77.4%	68.0%
No		20.5%	22.6%	32.0%
<i>Protests during the past 12 months</i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> =107.52***			
None		16.8%	34.0%	11.9%
One		21.4%	09.2%	10.6%
Two–Four		35.8%	30.9%	38.5%
Five or More		26.0%	25.9%	39.0%
<i>Actively Involved in at Least One Movement</i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> =20.98***			
Yes		72.5%	65.8%	79.4%
No		27.5%	34.2%	20.6%
<i>Engaged in an International Campaign<sup>†</sup></i>				
	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 2.63			
Yes		n/a	67.3%	61.4%
No		n/a	32.7%	38.6%

Note: \* =  $p < 0.10$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , † = For these questions, the percentages given only contain respondents with one or more organizational affiliation.

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2005 WSF, 2007 WSF, and 2007 USSF meetings collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

(53 percent) (della Porta et al. 2006: 45). Given the extent of poverty in Africa and the heavy reliance among African activists on international funding, it is not surprising that NGO representatives were more common at the WSF07 in Nairobi than at Social Forum meetings occurring within wealthier regions (see also Bond 2005). Party members were also particularly prevalent in Porto Alegre, probably reflective of the strong presence of socialists there. Union membership was lowest in Nairobi, reflective of the weakness of the labor movement there, as well as its distance from Social Forum organizers (see Kwon et al. 2008). While one might expect greater involvement in international campaigns among WSF attendees than USSF attendees, we found similar levels of engagement among both organizational affiliates and all respondents in our Nairobi and Atlanta samples.<sup>6</sup>

Nearly half (48 percent) of organizational affiliates in our WSF07 sample and more than half (66 percent) of such respondents in our USSF07 sample claimed that they were in a “leadership or paid position” within an organization (a question not asked in our WSF05 survey), a statistically significant difference. The gap in leadership and staff representation was slightly larger among all respondents (30 percent at Nairobi versus 53 percent at Atlanta, results not shown). In all three of our surveys, most respondents were attending on behalf of, or planning to report back to, an organization about their experience at the Social Forum, although significantly fewer USSF07 respondents claimed this, perhaps because fewer organizational resources were needed to travel to a national Forum than to an international one. These findings are consistent with prior research on participants of social movements, which suggests that, rather than being socially isolated individuals, participants tend to be well-integrated within organizations and institutions that provide incentives, resources, and opportunities for their mobilization (McAdam 1999; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Passy 2001; Tarrow 1998). Likewise, Fisher et al. (2005: 112) found that 40 percent of those attending global justice protests learned about the protest from an SMO and that 40 percent traveled to it with such an organization.

Nearly 20 percent of those surveyed by the WVS belonged to a religious group. This represents nearly twice the share of WSF07 attendees reporting an affiliation with a religious institution or movement, and more than three times the share of USSF07 attendees making this claim. This finding suggests that Social Forum attendees generally have lower levels of religious affiliation compared to the general public.<sup>7</sup> This conclu-

sion is also consistent with the lower levels of religiosity found among Social Forum attendees than the general public. Context does matter, however. About 16 percent of respondents at the Genoa Social Forum in 2001 and the European Social Forum in 2002 claimed current or prior involvement in a religious group (della Porta et al. 2006: 45).

On the other hand, except for attendees of the Nairobi meeting, Social Forum attendees generally appear to be better integrated within organized labor compared to the general public. The WVS found that only 12 percent of the general public belonged to unions, while 22 percent of Porto Alegre respondents and 20 percent of Atlanta respondents were members of trade unions. Again, attesting to the importance of place, Social Forum participants in Florence and Genoa showed even higher rates of union membership (44 percent), reflecting the mobilizing role of labor parties (della Porta et al. 2006: 45). Likewise, about 21 percent of Latin Americans in our Porto Alegre sample were union members, compared to only 3 percent of Latin Americans surveyed by the Latinobarómetro survey. Surprisingly, 21 percent of those surveyed by the Afrobarometer reported union membership, compared to only 5 percent of Africans in our Nairobi sample.

Participation in social protests varied significantly across venues, but was generally high among respondents in all three surveys. Slightly more than one-quarter of respondents in our WSF05 and WSF07 surveys and 39 percent of USSF07 respondents claimed to have participated in 5 or more protests during the past year. Protest levels were lowest among the Nairobi respondents, with about one-third reporting that they had participated in no protests in the past year, compared to only 17 percent of Porto Alegre respondents and only 12 percent of Atlanta respondents. Our respondents appeared to protest more than respondents in IBASE's WSF07 survey, perhaps because our question did not specify the form of protest. Only about 40 percent of the respondents of IBASE's 2007 survey reported that they participated in nonviolent street demonstrations, while 26 percent participated in street demonstrations with civil disobedience.

Yet, even these figures are high when compared to results obtained by the WVS sample of the general public. The WVS found that only 15 percent had ever attended a lawful demonstration. Likewise, while fully 82 percent of Latin American WSF05 respondents had attended at least 1 protest in the past year, only 20 percent of those surveyed by the Latinobarómetro had ever attended such a demonstration. Similarly,

while 65 percent of African WSF07 respondents had attended at least 1 protest in the past year, only 25 percent of those surveyed by the Afrobarometer had ever attended a protest. The GSS found that only about 6 percent of its U.S. respondents had participated in a protest in the past 5 years, compared to 88 percent of USSF07 respondents who protested at least once in the past year.<sup>8</sup>

The lower level of protest found in our WSF07 sample is likely to be related to the high levels of government control and repression of social movements within Kenya and Africa, as well as to the high level of NGO participation, while the high protest rates found in the USSF07 sample are probably related to the high level of participation by leftists, representatives of SMOs, and staff and leaders of political organizations, as well as the less repressive context within the United States.

Although significantly lower among Nairobi respondents, movement participation was very high among respondents of all three of our surveys compared to the general public. About 73 percent of Porto Alegre respondents and 79 percent of Atlanta respondents claimed that they were actively involved in at least 1 social movement from a list of 18 types of movements, compared to 66 percent of Nairobi respondents.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps because respondents were asked about their participation in specific movements, these figures are higher than those obtained through IBASE's surveys, in which 55 percent of WSF05 respondents and 48 percent of WSF07 respondents claimed to participate in a popular social movement. At all three Social Forums, the environmental, human/civil rights, and peace movements were three of the five most common movements in which respondents were actively engaged. Not surprisingly, compared to the other two samples, a higher share of Nairobi respondents was involved in the movement for health care rights and to resolve the HIV epidemic (a particularly acute crisis in Africa). In Porto Alegre, a higher share of respondents was involved in the alternative media and socialist movements, while the feminist movement was better represented among Atlanta respondents. Representation of the LGBT rights movement was nearly three times more extensive in Atlanta than at the other two events. Anarchist and communist movements were among the least common movements in which our samples of Social Forum respondents claimed involvement (results not shown). IBASE's 2005 report found "combating discrimination" to be among the most common areas of action, similar to our finding that the "human and civil rights movement" was among the most popular. IBASE also found education and social assistance to

be very popular areas of action (these were not included in our list of movements). Surveys collected among participants of the Genoa Social Forum in 2001 and the European Social Forum in 2002 revealed that 46 percent belonged to promigrant organizations, 44 percent to trade unions, and 42 percent to ecological organizations (della Porta et al. 2006: 45). In contrast to the high levels of movement participation of Social Forum attendees, the WVS sample showed that only 3 percent of the general public was affiliated with a human rights organization, 5 percent belonged to a women's group, 5 percent belonged to an environmental or animal rights group, and 2 percent participated in the peace movement.

Despite general similarities in respondents' views, there were statistically significant differences across venues in their political opinions on nearly all questions shown in Table 4.2.<sup>10</sup> Our surveys revealed that Social Forum attendees tend to be fairly radical in their political beliefs compared to the general population, although this was significantly less the case at the Nairobi meeting.

While 56 percent of those at Porto Alegre and Atlanta wanted capitalism to be abolished, significantly fewer Nairobi respondents (only 34 percent) answered in this manner; most of the latter group sought to reform capitalism when asked to choose one answer. Also, a significantly greater share (63 percent) of Nairobi respondents wanted to reform the International Monetary Fund (IMF), compared to 24 percent of Atlanta respondents and 14 percent of Porto Alegre respondents; whereas 54 percent of Atlanta respondents supported abolishing the IMF, 59 percent of Porto Alegre respondents favored replacing this institution with a more democratic alternative. Similar patterns were found for attitudes towards the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) (results not shown). Likewise, IBASE's 2005 survey found that more than 80 percent of respondents expressed distrust of the IMF and WTO. In contrast, nearly 58 percent of the WVS sample and 73 percent of the Pew Global Attitudes Survey sample of the general public claimed that the influence of institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO was "good."

Atlanta and Nairobi respondents were more united in their opinion on the United Nations, with more than 67 percent of both groups calling for reforming it and less than 8 percent of both groups seeking to leave it alone (a question not asked in Porto Alegre). However, a comparison of the responses from Nairobi and Atlanta show that nearly twice as many Atlanta respondents wanted to abolish or replace the United Nations (15 percent versus 28 percent). This latter finding is somewhat



**Table 4.2 Political Views of WSF and USSF Participants**

		WSF 2005	WSF 2007	USSF 2007
<i>Views on Capitalism</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =43.926***†			
Reform		44.3%	55.3%	36.0%
Abolish		55.7%	34.4%	55.9%
Neither		n/a	10.3%	08.0%
<i>Views on IMF</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =165.189***†			
Negotiate/Reform		14.3%	63.1%	23.5%
Abolish and Replace		59.1%	15.3%	21.0%
Abolish		26.6%	18.0%	53.5%
Do Nothing		n/a	03.6%	01.9%
<i>Views on UN</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =22.39***			
Reform		n/a	77.6%	67.4%
Replace		n/a	10.0%	17.5%
Abolish		n/a	05.3%	10.8%
Do Nothing		n/a	07.1%	04.2%
<i>Political Views</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =167.58***			
Far Left		n/a	10.1%	45.2%
Left		n/a	36.3%	37.2%
Center Left		n/a	12.8%	07.6%
Center		n/a	16.5%	04.3%
Center Right		n/a	10.7%	01.1%
Right		n/a	05.2%	01.3%
Far Right		n/a	00.9%	00.7%
Indifferent		n/a	07.6%	02.6%
<i>Best Level to Solve Contemporary Problems</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =8.17*			
Community/Subnational provinces		58.5%	50.5%	57.6%
National		10.1%	09.8%	10.2%
International/Global		31.5%	39.8%	32.2%
<i>Part of Global Social Movement</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =3.12*			
No		n/a	16.8%	12.7%
Yes		n/a	83.2%	87.3%
<i>Views on Establishing Democratic World Government</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =91.79***			
Good idea, and it's possible		25.0%	46.8%	45.1%
Good idea, but it's not possible		39.4%	38.4%	26.5%
Bad idea		35.6%	14.8%	28.5%
<i>Views on WSF not Taking a Political Stance</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =n/a			
Agree		46.1%	68.6%	n/a
Disagree		53.9%	24.3%	n/a
Neutral		n/a	07.1%	n/a

(continued)

**Table 4.2 (continued)**

		WSF 2005	WSF 2007	USSF 2007
<i>Views on Capitalism</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =43.926***†			
<i>In Favor of Tobin Tax Proposal</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 9.17***			
No	n/a		20.4%	12.5%
Yes	n/a		79.6%	87.5%
<i>In Favor of Reparations for those Affected by Slavery, Colonialism, and Racism</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 14.49***			
No	n/a		15.2%	07.2%
Yes	n/a		84.8%	92.8%
<i>In Favor of Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =7.69***			
No	n/a		14.2%	21.5%
Yes	n/a		85.8%	78.5%
<i>In Favor of Women's Right to an Abortion</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 150.57***			
No/ never	n/a		32.0%	12.6%
Yes, under all circumstances	n/a		32.5%	72.3%
Sometimes/ it depends	n/a		35.5%	15.1%

Note: \* =  $p < .10$ , \*\* =  $p < .05$ , \*\*\* =  $p < .01$ , † = The Chi-square tests exclude WSF05 survey results because the survey questions excluded the last category of responses.

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2005 WSF, 2007 WSF, and 2007 USSF meetings collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

ironic given the extent of the U.S. government's influence within the United Nations, but is in line with the extent of radicalism shown among USSF07 participants—many of whom were people of color. In contrast to our survey results, the WVS found that 51 percent of respondents in the general population had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in the United Nations.

With the exception of Nairobi respondents, who were less radical than other Social Forum participants, leftists were overrepresented among our samples of Social Forum attendees compared to the general world population. The WVS reports a fairly balanced distribution, with 56 percent of general respondents identifying as left-of-center, while the GSS reports that only 27 percent of the U.S. population identified this way. We found that 59 percent of Nairobi respondents and 90 percent of Atlanta respondents identified as left-of-center in their political orientation. We

did not include this question in the 2005 survey. However, IBASE reports that 80 percent of WSF05 respondents identified as left-of-center, while 48 percent of WSF07 respondents did so as well.<sup>11</sup> Again, della Porta et al.'s (2006) work on the 2002 European Social Forum provides interesting comparisons: 96 percent of respondents identified as left-of-center, with 37 percent labeling themselves as "extreme left."

In all three surveys, when asked to choose one, a majority of respondents claimed that the "community" was the best level to address the problems of global capitalism, while 30–40 percent of respondents in each sample chose the international or global levels, and only about 10 percent chose the national level. Despite the popularity of "acting locally," more than 80 percent of both Nairobi and Atlanta respondents considered themselves to be part of a "global movement," a question not asked in Porto Alegre.<sup>12</sup>

A large majority of respondents in all three samples believed that creating a democratic world government was a good idea; however, less than half of each sample, and only one-quarter of WSF05 respondents, believed that this was both good and possible. Support for a democratic world government was greatest in the Nairobi sample (85 percent indicated it was a good idea), perhaps because domestic opportunities for activists to influence policies are more closed within Kenya and other African countries than in Brazil or the United States, either because of greater repression or insufficient revenue. Brazilians and other Latin Americans, on the other hand, may be more skeptical than respondents at the other venues that a world government would be dominated by core countries. On the other hand, the Nairobi sample was less supportive of the WSF taking positions on political issues than the Porto Alegre sample (24 percent versus 54 percent), perhaps due to a lesser familiarity or political affinity with it. A survey of European Social Forum participants similarly found that 80 percent of respondents agreed that building new institutions of world government would be the best way to advance the "causes of the movement" (della Porta et al. 2006). The WVS and Pew Global Attitudes Survey did not contain comparable questions, although large majorities of WVS respondents indicated support for global-level solutions to various problems. For example, 80 percent of WVS respondents claimed that a state cannot solve its environmental problems by itself, 73 percent said that a state could not solve criminal problems by itself, and 83 percent claimed that the United Nations should be involved in international peacekeeping.

There was a fairly high degree of consensus among respondents in our Nairobi and Atlanta surveys on other political questions, with nearly 80 percent or more of respondents in both samples supporting the Tobin tax (a tax on international financial transactions that would be used to redistribute income from rich nations to poor nations); reparations for people adversely affected by slavery, colonialism, and racism; and the use of quotas by political parties and governments to increase women's political representation. Support for these policies was significantly higher among Atlanta respondents compared to those from Nairobi, however, as would be expected given their stronger left orientation. The Atlanta and Nairobi respondents were more divided over the question of a woman's right to have an abortion, with more than 70 percent of Atlanta respondents supporting it under all circumstances, compared to only 33 percent of Nairobi respondents. This is almost identical to the 35 percent of the respondents in IBASE's 2007 report that either agreed or strongly agreed with the legalization of abortion. This finding is probably related to the comparatively high share of religious and conservative respondents in the Nairobi sample. In general, Social Forum attendees are more supportive of a woman's right to an abortion than the broader public. The WVS found that only 6 percent of its respondents "always" supported this right, while only 40 percent of U.S. respondents surveyed by the GSS supported a woman's right to have an abortion for "any reason."

We also found differences in respondents' political activities and opinions *within* each Social Forum sample based on their place of residence. In particular, we compared the political characteristics of local respondents (those from the host city of the Social Forum), domestic respondents (those from the host country), and international respondents. It is likely that respondents from the host city would differ considerably from those who traveled to the Forums from other cities or countries, since the latter groups would either need sufficient personal income or have access to travel funds through their employment or organizational affiliations in order to participate. International participants would need the most resources to participate since they would be traveling the farthest. Differences in local and national political cultures and the relative strength of different types of activist networks are also likely to shape differences observed among these three types of respondents.

Due to space constraints, we can only briefly summarize the differences we found between local, domestic, and international respondents (see Reese et al. 2008a for more details). In general, the findings suggest

that local participants were less engaged in protest movements and were more likely to be rank-and-file activists, while the high cost of attendance for international participants made them a more selective group of highly committed, and internationally oriented, participants.

The only statistically significant difference in opinion observed in the WSF05 sample was that international respondents were significantly more supportive of establishing a democratic world government compared to domestic and local respondents. In the USSF07 sample, domestic respondents were significantly more supportive of abolishing the WTO compared to other respondents, and local respondents were the least supportive of this. A significantly higher proportion of domestic USSF07 respondents than local or international ones also claimed to be “far left” (49 percent versus 39 percent and 10 percent, respectively); most (65 percent) of international participants identified as “left.” Of course, the term *far left* may mean something entirely different for a U.S. resident than where leftist parties are more accepted and influential. Nevertheless, it reveals how far American USSF participants perceived themselves to be from the political mainstream of their own country.

Political divisions across place were greatest within the WSF07 sample. International respondents were much more radical in terms of their goals compared to domestic and local respondents, and had significantly higher levels of support for abolishing or replacing the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. Local respondents were significantly more supportive than other respondents of reforming rather than abolishing capitalism. Whereas 85 percent of international respondents identified as left-of-center, only 21 percent of local respondents and 36 percent of domestic respondents identified this way. International respondents were also significantly more supportive than Kenyan respondents of using international and global strategies for addressing social problems, of the WSF taking political positions on issues, and of the Tobin tax. On the other hand, Kenyans were significantly more supportive of creating a democratic world government compared to international respondents. The largest gap in opinions was on the question of a woman’s right to an abortion. About 61 percent of international respondents supported it under all circumstances, which was more than 8 times the share of local respondents with this view and more than 10 times the share of other Kenyan respondents with this view. Most likely, this finding is related to the higher level of religiosity among Kenyan as opposed to other respondents (see Reese et al. 2008b).

## CONCLUSION

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The strong presence of local participants at WSF meetings suggests that the strategy of changing their location and organizing at multiple scales is useful for helping to ensure the inclusion of various social groups and movements in the WSF process. On the other hand, our findings also point to remaining gaps in the inclusivity of these meetings, with the least educated (most likely, the poorest), and those with family responsibilities disproportionately absent from them. These types of exclusions mirror those found in other social movements and protests, and are not unique to the Social Forums (Brady et al. 1995, 1996; Dauphinais et al. 1992; Scaminaci and Dunlap 1968; Morrison 1998). Allocating additional resources to facilitate these groups' participation and giving grassroots organizations mobilizing them an even larger role in organizing Social Forums would help to address these shortcomings.

Our surveys of those attending the WSF05 meeting in Porto Alegre, the WSF07 meeting in Nairobi, and the USSF07 meeting in Atlanta revealed considerable variation in respondents' involvement in particular types of organizations and movements, their frequency of protest, and their political orientation. Most likely, such differences can be attributed to variation in national and regional political contexts, as well as differences in the composition and strategies of the local committees organizing each meeting. The greatest disparities in political views between domestic and international respondents were found in the WSF07 sample in which NGO and religious affiliations were comparatively high; respondents in the WSF05 and USSF07 surveys were a more homogenous group of leftist activists.

Our findings suggest that most Social Forum attendees are already highly integrated within social movement networks. The vast majority of those surveyed were already "actively involved" in one or more social movements, protested multiple times in the past year, and belonged to civic or political organizations (i.e., SMOs, NGOs, and unions). The vast majority were also attending on behalf of some organization or planning to report back to some group about their experiences at the Social Forum. Such findings are consistent with prior survey findings on "global justice" protesters (Fisher et al. 2005) and other research on social activists (Brady et al. 1996; Dauphinais et al. 1992; McAdam 1999; Norris 2002), which highlight the important role that organizations play in mobilizing participants. Nevertheless, those not currently active in at

least one social movement made up about one-third of respondents at the WSF07, slightly more than one-fourth of respondents at the WSF05, and one-fifth of respondents at the USSF07. In the WSF07 sample, nonactivists were disproportionately found among respondents from the host city (making up 43 percent of local respondents); similar patterns were not observed in our WSF05 and USSF07 samples, however. We also found that, except for the USSF07 sample, international respondents protested more than domestic respondents and claimed a significantly higher share of organizational staff and leaders.

## NOTES

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1. The Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analyses (IBASE) conducted surveys of WSF participants in 2005 and 2007. Its 2005 survey used a stratified sample based on information from the WSF's registration database. It collected a total of 2,540 surveys in four languages (Portuguese, French, English, and Spanish). Based on registration data from prior meetings, it used a stratified sample of four groups: (1) Brazilian participants; (2) other Latin American participants; (3) participants from other countries; (4) campers. Its WSF07 survey collected a stratified sample that included 823 Kenyans, 848 non-Kenyan Africans, and 809 respondents from other countries. Researchers then weighted the results from these groups according to the following distribution of actual attendees: 48 percent Kenyans, 22 percent non-Kenyan Africans, and 31 percent from other countries. As discussed more fully below, our findings are generally similar to the results obtained by IBASE, with some exceptions.

2. European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association. *European and World Values Surveys Four-Wave Integrated Data File, 1981–2004*, v.20060423, 2006. Aggregate file producers: Análisis Sociológicos Económicos y Políticos (ASEP) and JD Systems (JDS), Madrid, Spain/Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands.

3. The World Values Surveys (WVS) are conducted by a transnational network of social scientists and gathered through face-to-face interviews of “nationally representative samples of the publics of more than 80 societies” on all inhabited continents ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). The 1999–2004 wave of the WVS that we used had a sample size of 101,172 and included 70 nations. All regions of the world were well represented in the WVS, including a much greater representation of Asians (27.8 percent) than our WSF sample. Although 14.6 percent of the sample was from Africa, many countries in that continent were not represented (including Kenya). The 2002 Pew Global Attitudes Survey had a sample of 38,321 respondents from 44 nations, although a large share

came from Asia (40.7 percent of the total). The Pew Global Attitudes Survey conducts surveys with a sample that is fairly nationally representative, although its urban populations are sometimes oversampled. This survey seeks to gauge the public's perception of their lives and the current state of the world. The Latinobarómetro and Afrobarometer are based on annual nationally representative surveys. The former includes residents of 18 countries within Latin America in 2003, while the latter includes data gathered from residents of 16 African nations in 2003–2004. For complete citations of census data used, see Reese et al. 2008.

4. The 2005 figures listed attendance by region of the world (Europe, Asia, Africa, etc.), as well as attendance by the top 15 represented countries. We first created weights for the 15 available countries and then assigned weights for the rest of the countries in our sample so that our country/region demographics matched those released by the Organizing Committee. For 2007, the Organizing Committee listed the attendance rates of Kenyans, other Africans, and other regions of the world. We weighted our cases accordingly.

5. Our comparisons to the general public here are based on information from the 1999–2004 World Values Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS). For more details on this part of our survey findings and how they compare to the social characteristics of the general public and sources consulted, see Reese et al. 2008.

6. Among all respondents, 44 percent of Nairobi respondents were involved in an international campaign, along with 46 percent of Atlanta respondents.

7. Our survey question may have led to an underestimation of the rates of church and temple membership since we asked respondents about affiliations with “religious groups.”

8. Data on this question comes from the cumulative GSS database for 1972–2006.

9. We excluded participants in other types of movements here in order to make results comparable across surveys. Overall movement participation levels were slightly higher.

10. Statistically significant differences were reported at the 0.05 level. We could not compute a Chi-square test for the question on whether or not the WSF should take positions on issues because a “neutral” choice was added to the question in the WSF07 survey.

11. We recalculated IBASE's results, reporting the percentages for valid responses and excluding nonresponses, so that they would be more comparable to our findings.

12. Differences across venue on these two questions were only significant at the 0.10 level.







## **PART II**

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# CAMPAIGNS AND MOVEMENTS IN THE SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS





## CHAPTER 5

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# MORE THAN A SHADOW OF A DIFFERENCE? FEMINIST PARTICIPATION IN THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

*Lyndi Hewitt and Marina Karides*

*Globalization reinforces a sexist and patriarchal system. It increases the feminization of poverty and exacerbates all forms of violence against women. Equality between women and men is central to our struggle. Without this, another world will never be possible.*

(Call of Porto Alegre, 2001)

The World Social Forum (WSF) and the Social Forum process present a new space for feminist activism. Activists who fight gender inequalities and injustices locally, as well as those building transnational feminist movements, use the WSF to move their programs forward and attempt to imbue feminist analyses into the Forum. Many feminist organizations see the WSF as providing a space for the lateral exchange of political information, strategies, and networking. Unlike the United Nations and other hierarchical structures in which they have engaged, the WSF has assisted feminists and other social movement sectors in developing a grassroots global dialogue and practice of justice so that groups and networks within and between sectors can meet in democratically oriented

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We are grateful to Ellen Reese and Jackie Smith for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the chapter.

space. For many feminists and other marginalized groups, the WSF is distinctly more positive than other movement settings in recent history, although it remains wrought with challenges for women and feminists.

A long line of feminist research documents the various roles women have played in transformative social movements such as the U.S. civil rights, national liberation, and labor movements. Scholarship on women in social movements has examined how and why women participated in various movements, the significance of their impact, the gendered patterns of social activism, and the sexist or patriarchal environments women negotiate to be social justice activists (Evans 1979; Kuumba 2001; Robnett 1997; West and Blumberg 1990). Women activists have always faced the extra burden of the “second shift,” (Hochschild 1989) of pressing for gender equality within “extrafeminist” social movement organizations as well as in the larger society (Roth 2004).<sup>1</sup>

The WSF replicates some patterns of gender inequality that have been documented in these earlier movements, but it also breaks from those patterns in important ways. Our chapter reviews and assesses how women and feminist organizations engage in the WSF process and how they have been included (or not) in events, decision-making bodies, and as participants. As we show, women’s participation in the WSF and the legacy of transnational women’s organizing encouraged WSF organizers to adopt a more feminist process than they might have otherwise.

Many of the feminist and women’s transnational activist organizations that participate in the Forum advance feminist political economic critiques of neoliberalism. As we discuss below, their feminist approaches to economics and politics distinguish them from many of the other sectors active in the WSF. While the call of Porto Alegre includes gender subordination as an essential feature of neoliberal globalization, we find that a feminist political economy perspective does not inform many of the actions at the WSFs unless initiated by women’s organizations. By “feminist political economy perspective” we mean the understanding that gender, as a construct, is fundamental to the operation of global capitalism. While organizations that participate in the WSF may appreciate women as a marginalized social group or incorporate feminist practices such as inclusive decision making, these are not the equivalent of appreciating the world-system as a gendered one.

While women’s and feminist concerns were not embraced initially by the Forum, the efforts of women’s organizations to bring them there have moved forward at an exceptional pace and without the usual resistance

by central organizers. While women's groups have not avoided the additional work, still we find a shade of difference between the inclusion of feminist concerns and women's participation in the WSF and that of previous social movements. This bodes well for the future of feminism and gender equality in social activism. Feminist activism has impacted the WSF process both in terms of developing an egalitarian transnational culture and encouraging the practice of participatory democracy.

The organizational form of the WSF allows for issues of inequality to be more easily vetted than in traditional labor unions (Cobble 1990; Milkman 1990). But other factors are also at work. For instance, women and others who have experienced unequal treatment within social justice sectors themselves shape how the WSF is used by the most marginalized groups (Smith, Karides, et al. 2007). We also suggest that, in addition to the impacts of feminist organizing within extrafeminist movements and within nations, the strength of the early transnational women's movement and its well-founded theoretical critiques of global capital have bolstered opportunities for gender justice within the WSF.

We first turn to an analysis of gender dynamics in the Forum and the location of feminism within it and conclude our chapter by reflecting on the shadow of a difference the WSF makes for feminist organizing. Like many others who study the WSF, we are also deeply engaged in it (e.g., Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Sen et al. 2004; Smith, Karides, et al. 2007). Both authors have attended Social Forums since 2003, participating actively within them as both scholars and activists.<sup>2</sup> Our analysis combines insights from our own experiences and observations and other participants' public writings about the WSF, as well as the scholarly literature.

## WOMEN IN A TRANSNATIONAL SPHERE

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The global women's movement, along with the human rights movement, has been heralded as one of the major forces of early transnational organizing for social justice. This may help explain why the WSF constitutes a new, though imperfect, opportunity for feminist politics. First, the formation of the WSF was in part influenced by the successes of transnational feminist networks, which helps explain why it is less resistant to feminist concerns. Feminist activists from around the globe collaborated in building the earliest and most meaningful bridges over the economic and cultural North-South divide. Through their organizing in and around U.N. conferences, including preparatory meetings and

parallel NGO forums (Chen 1995; Desai 1996; Friedman 2003), as well as other political gatherings such as the Encuentros initiated by Latin American feminists (S. Alvarez et al. 2003), women's networks learned from their challenges and adapted more effective models of dialogue. They developed democratic ways of working across national, cultural, and other divides. Their feminist practices and strategies for building coalitions have influenced other types of transnational activism, even if credit is not always given to them.

Second, the WSF and those organizations that are most active in its organizing process are prepared to address the inequalities that recur even in these progressive venues, recognizing that the long patterns of social inequality embedded in the global socioeconomic system endure. As we demonstrate with examples below, the momentum to dissolve sexism and gender bias exists within the WSF. Although it still requires the added physical and emotional labor of feminist organizations, addressing gender inequity is part of the organizational structure of the WSF.

A feminist political economy perspective guides many of the women's organizations that participate in the WSF, especially those working to give the Forum a feminist consciousness. The foundation of their political and social activism is based on a developing critique of the gendered and racist nature of globalization, and it overlaps with (and informs) the WSF Charter of Principles. We begin with a brief articulation of feminist political economy and continue with a broader discussion of women's transnational activism in relation to the Forum.

### *ALL ECONOMIES ARE GENDERED*

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Schools of feminist thought, including radical feminism, socialist feminism, Black feminist thought, and postcolonial feminism have helped to develop a feminist perspective on the political economy. Applying traditional feminist concepts to broad-scale economic processes, feminist political economic analyses start with the assumption that economies are shaped by gender.

The impact of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies on poor and low-income women in the global South was the catalyst for the body of literature built in the early nineties by feminist scholars (Ward and Pyle 1995; Enloe 1989; Mies 1986; Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1985; Mohanty 1991). Foremost in these analyses is that the socially and economically subordinate position of women made them most vulnerable

to the effects of neoliberalism but also drove the engine of export-led production and the globalization of sweatshops. These writings were early in connecting macroeconomic policies to changes in the daily lives of poor women in the global South and global North.

Women workers in large-scale factories located in free trade zones and others working alone or in small groups in their living rooms fueled the global assembly line (Hsiung 1996). While traditional schools of global economy wrote extensively on the negative impact of free trade, deregulation, and unscrupulous finance schemes, feminist studies of global restructuring offered the only explanations as to how and why women workers, especially in the global South, featured so prominently in neoliberalism. Over the last 30 years, the large-scale incorporation of “third world women” into sweatshop labor and factory work has fueled export-led development, a system of production that strips global South nations of the ability to develop or grow local items for local consumption and makes them dependent on the global market for the goods they need at increasingly higher prices (Mies 1986).

The increase in women’s paid and unpaid labor is one of the most identifiable features of neoliberalism. Feminist political economists studying this phenomenon contextualize how this occurs in various regions and cultural contexts and across borders. For instance, with cuts in social programs due to IMF loan requirements, women’s carework has increased to cover the absence of government programs for children, the sick, or the elderly. In the global North, women’s increased presence in professional fields, the extra work often required of professional women due to gender discrimination in these fields, limited access to public child care, and the increasing number of single mothers increased the demands for carework. This, coupled with southern women’s need for employment created a transnational migration network of careworkers as women from the global South leave their families to care for families in the global North (Misra and Merz 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Thus, biases around race, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship status are foundational to the operation of neoliberal capitalism.

Black feminist thought advanced our thinking about the intersections of social inequalities and their impact on women’s lives (Hill Collins 1990). Highlighting that gender is not experienced independent of race, class, sexual orientation, etc., Black feminist thought informed broader feminist analyses of the political economy to consider how social inequalities operate in concert (Lorde 1991). Documenting and theorizing



how social inequalities interact and are ideologically engaged by global capitalists to maintain systemic and profitable economic unevenness has been the work of many feminist political economists (Osirim 2003).

The “triple shift” of formal, informal, and household work and how these operate together to the detriment of women and the profit of global capital is another central concern of feminist political economy. Feminist scholars also highlight the increase in militarism and violence and limits on women’s social and political expression that exist in many nations. What brings these analyses together under the rubric of feminist political economy is the articulation of how gender is implicated in global economic change, structures of political power, and in the formation of national and international policy (e.g., Cabezas et al. 2007).

Although not with a uniform perspective, the women’s and feminist organizations that contribute to the WSF process hold a deep understanding of the gendered processes of the global social-political-economic system. In most cases, they build feminist political economic theories from the grassroots. However, just as in the academic realm, feminist analyses of neoliberalism at the WSF are often ghettoized and misunderstood.

While many women’s groups attend the WSF to share with each other their struggles and tactics for feminist organizing, they also hold events to inform a wide activist population about gender and feminist issues. Yet there is a consistent absence of men at these events. Women’s groups, especially those that have been active in organizing the Forums, ask: If feminist political economic thought reveals the logic of neoliberalism and does not just apply to women, why is it not more fully integrated in WSF general events? The World March of Women, as well as many organizations that participate in the Feminist Dialogues meetings that occur prior to and within the WSF, have all raised this concern.

Women’s transnational activism has succeeded in building both a theory and praxis for women’s organization worldwide to challenge neoliberalism as the gendered phenomenon it is. We argue that the women’s movement that connects women’s organizations at the local and transnational levels shaped both the WSF and how women’s groups operate within it.

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## THE TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

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The emergence and development of contemporary feminist transnational collaboration is well documented (Antrobus 2004; Keck and Sikkink

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1998; Moghadam 2005; Peters and Wolper 1995). Shifting availability of resources and political opportunities and the agency of movement actors have converged to shape the development of the movement over time; from explosive growth in the 1980s and early 1990s, to a decrease in movement visibility during the late 1990s, and now to its transformative role in contemporary global justice activism. Moghadam points out that,

While not all feminists agree on the matter, many argue that “the women’s movement” is a global phenomenon, and that despite cultural differences, country specificities, and organizational priorities, there are observed similarities in the ways that women’s rights activists frame their grievances and demands, form networks and organizations, and engage with the state and intergovernmental institutions. (2008: 63–64)

Not all feminist scholars share Moghadam’s somewhat optimistic characterization of transnational feminism. For instance, Mendoza (2002) expresses tremendous skepticism about “transnational feminism” as a project. She argues that, although more recent postcolonial versions of transnational feminism have attempted to pay theoretical attention to intersectionalities, they have failed to incorporate adequately a political economic perspective. Mendoza believes that such theorizing has failed in providing a basis for solidarity across differences of class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Desai (2005) also highlights the contested nature of transnational feminism, and joins Mendoza in her worry about the ways that transnational feminist practices have both reflected and intensified power and resource differences among women.

We keep such cautions in mind here. While we refer to a global or transnational feminist movement, we do not intend to convey a monolithic set of harmonious ideas and actors. Rather, we understand the movement in a critical, pluralist way, with an explicit awareness of the tenuous, heterogeneous, and complicated nature of coalitions. We also acknowledge that there are voices that remain unheard in even the best collaborative efforts.

The contemporary phenomenon we think of as the global women’s movement began taking shape in the 1970s, and was facilitated in part by U.N. World Conferences, particularly those associated with the U.N. Decade for Women. The earliest efforts saw tensions in priorities between women of the global North and South (Desai 2002; Keck and

Sikkink 1998). Confronting those differences ultimately led to learning and growth for the movement, as well as discovery of common ground in spite of material and identity differences. Transnational networks proliferated and resources were on the rise for new organizations and initiatives, face-to-face meetings, and other forms of communication and collaboration. Effective movement building continued well into the 1990s, during which feminist activists seized upon a series of U.N. World Conferences and parallel NGO forums to infuse a feminist human rights framework and agenda for global politics (Friedman 2003).

While activists celebrated political gains leading up to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, many worried about the lack of concrete improvements, as well as the growing strength of forces opposed to women's rights. The post-Beijing era is often characterized as one of stalled progress, as women's rights activists faced increasing internal and external challenges. Some leaders feel that feminist concerns have been compartmentalized, or "siloed," (largely unintentionally) at the expense of coalition building (Ackerly 2006). To cite a specific example, the Beijing Platform for Action divided women's issues into "critical areas of concern," which promoted a narrower issue focus and arguably impeded the potential for coalition building around cross-cutting frameworks. Resources available to the movement had begun to shrink; fundamentalisms, militarism (e.g., the Bush administration's "war on terror"), and unbridled neoliberalism were manifesting ever more oppressively in women's lives. Even so, the global justice movement was growing in strength and organization, mounting resistance to many of the same oppressive forces that women were confronting.

In the post-Beijing, post 9/11 world, women's movements have looked for new ways of working. Cognizant of the somewhat reactive, U.N.-driven nature of previous change efforts, many feminist activists are determined to maintain their autonomy from global governance and national institutions, creating their own agendas and articulating their own priorities. Feminists have sought new spaces and partners in their quest for social justice and have seized opportunities to build sustainable alliances with extrafeminist social justice movements interested in toppling the same enemies. For many, the WSF has offered refreshing possibilities for such partnerships. The conduciveness to coalition building, relatively low bureaucratic barriers for participation, the holistic approach that recognizes intersections of multiple oppressions, and critical and inclusive methods of organizing are all positive features of the WSF space and process that

feminists have identified. That said, the WSF has not been a panacea for transnational collaboration. Women and feminist activists have approached the space with a combination of hope and skepticism (Hewitt 2008), equipped with the lessons of previous decades of experience, thoughtfully asking “Will this be a productive space for us?” In this regard, there have been both successes and disappointments at the WSFs.

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*FEMINISTS AND THE FORUM*

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The challenge to a democratic WSF is not only a matter of the overrepresentation of men on panels, but also of its decision-making bodies and lack of feminist thought in shaping them. As Swedish-Peruvian political writer and activist America Vera-Zavala’s description of the Mumbai WSF suggests:

The same men dominated the “star” panels . . . . Many panels consisted entirely of men. . . . Everywhere you could see “homosocial” relations; men preferring to talk with men, men favoring men when organizing a seminar or editing a book. (2004)

Such analyses illustrate weaknesses in the very inclusivity that the Forum purports to maintain. The following sections consider such concerns more closely.

A primary concern of feminist participants and organizations in the WSF is the way in which the economic analysis of neoliberalism or globalization, although critical, overshadows socially based critiques throughout the Forum program. Certainly its foundation, as a protest of the World Economic Forum and as a prospect for building alternatives to economic globalization, explains the primacy of economics. Although feminist political economic thought appeared to inform the call for Porto Alegre, the first meetings did not include enough feminist panels to serve this call.

The *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* (AFM), an early feminist participant in the WSF, objected to its “limited field of issues.” As late as five years after the WSF’s inception, this organization and others claimed that rather than offering a plurality of views, economic analyses dominated the Forum, perpetuating a monolithic vision of the methods by which to create a just society. The dominant critiques of neoliberalism at the WSF veiled how gender and race structure the global economy. Many

participants argued that gender, other social inequalities such as race and sexual orientation, and environmental concerns were not addressed in the general dialogue of the Forum. Obando (2005) from Women's Human Rights Network explains her assessment of the 2005 Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil:

Expressions of fundamentalism are mutually supportive and are borne of the same logic that confers absolute power on economic systems like capitalism, and on fascist political systems like that of the United States.

The first four WSF meetings had all or part of their programming defined by the WSF International Council. In 2005, the WSF formally implemented a self-organizing format so that participating groups and organizations defined the entire programming. The impetus for implementing the self-organized format was to empower activist groups from around the world to determine topics of discussion for panels and events as they deem necessary.

While the International Council adopted the self-organizing format in order to include a broader range of issues, the expansion of self-organized events contributed to the hegemony of gender-blind perspectives on global capitalism at the WSF. Many of the self-organized panels overlooked feminist political economy (Jara 2005). A challenge for feminist organizations in the WSF is to strengthen current radical critiques of capitalist globalization by infusing them with a feminist political economy perspective. As the World March of Women suggests, feminist participation in the Forums contributed to the diversity of the social movements engaged in the WSF, but most participants did not adopt feminist analyses of neoliberalism (Conway 2007).

### *WOMEN IN SOCIAL FORUM ORGANIZATIONS*

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Feminist organizations are also concerned with women's underrepresentation and mode of participation in the organizing and decision-making bodies of the Social Forums, including the International Council and Organizing Committee. Examining the preparatory assemblies of the European Social Forums, Doerr finds that representation was uneven not only by gender, but also based on region, migrant status, and discursive style. Thus, "women without," or women from the peripheralized regions

of Europe, were unable to voice their concerns at these assemblies and to gain sufficient visibility in the program of the European Social Forum (Doerr 2007, Chapter 17).

One very telling example of gender imbalance in the Forum process and activist networks that helps perpetuate it is the Manifesto of Porto Alegre, written in 2005 by 18 men and 1 woman. The World March of Women, *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*, and other active WSF feminist participants suggest that this manifesto—intended by the authors as an expression of the entire WSF—fails to incorporate gender. Specifically, feminists argued that its 12 specific points fail to give a feminist analysis of the global political economy. Neither did it specifically address gender inequality, violence against women, or women’s marginalization and exploitation. While the struggle against discrimination is listed in the Manifesto, critics argue that this does not demonstrate an understanding of the interactions of multiple forms of oppression and how they are integral to the political and economic struggles that dominate the WSF. The lack of women activists involved in the creation of the document, such as those prominent in transnational activism and informed by feminist political economy, suggests, in the least, gender negligence.

Eventually the entire process of creating the manifesto was critiqued for being exclusive and generally unrepresentative. It was widely discounted since the WSF Charter of Principles maintains that no body can legitimately speak for the whole. Gender inequalities and women’s underrepresentation within panels and main events continue to persist within the WSF. Yet, the WSF Charter of Principles pronounces a commitment to egalitarianism, providing an avenue for participant organizations to confront such problems (Teivainen 2002; Smith, Karides, et al. 2007; Karides 2006).

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*GENDER AND PARTICIPATION ON THE GROUND*

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Feminists also criticize the uneven representation of men and women in panels and conferences and the absence of persons of color, particularly in high-profile events at the WSF. Women are clearly not as present in larger or more significant WSF events (*Articulación Feminista Marcosur* 2005). This controversy has informed the WSF process in an ongoing manner. Social Forum organizers have also invited public discussion about such inequity. For example, at the first Americas Social Forum (ASF) in 2004 in Quito, Ecuador, the first panel consisted

of criticisms of its organizing process. The most incisive critique was waged by a program organizer and panelist at the opening plenary. Her remarks focused on the lack of representation of women from all ethnic and racial groups, Indigenous persons, and African descendants. As she states:

The majority of the persons involved in organizing and working on the ASF program were women, but when we looked at our program when it came time see who was going to speak it was white men—the program still reflects the old order. What path should we follow to create balance? This is the central challenge. (Authors' field notes, Quito ASF, 2004)

This challenge was taken up in the WSF that took place in Mumbai, India, in 2004 where women and feminism had a strong presence. One activist reflects that while the overall programming did not change, there was a stronger representation of women, stark testimonies of gender oppression, and firsthand accounts of experiences with gender violence. Vera-Zavala (2004) explains that the Forum's inherent gender bias, "somehow . . . was challenged and overtaken by women who decided to occupy more space than they had been given."

The often cited observation that in Mumbai, "women were everywhere," may not actually mean that women were represented more than men in the Forum. As Vera-Zavala (2004) reminds us, it is an internationally observed phenomenon that in parliaments, public meetings, and the like, it takes only a 30 percent presence of women for them to be considered in the majority. Women's participation must include their roles as organizers and as panelists as well as participants or attendees in the Forum.

Women panelists have always participated in the WSF program. On average, they represented a third of the panelists between 2001 and 2004 in WSF organized events and large self-organized events. Unlike Doerr's analysis of the European context, the transnationalism of the World Social Forums seems to permit a wider range of groups and women's interests, although this is difficult to concretely assess without identifying the ethnic background of all participants. The trend of increasing participation by women suggests that the WSF is maintaining its commitment to participatory politics. In 2004, women were about 43

percent of the panelists at the panels, conferences, and tables sponsored by the WSF as well as the large self-organized events prepared for that year (Karides 2006).

The visibility of feminism and women in the Mumbai Forum was also encouraged by a number of prominent women's organizations that coordinated the efforts to sponsor fewer and larger-scale events on women and gender issues and to increase women's participation. These organizations included the World March of Women (WMW), *Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur* (AFM), *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era* (DAWN), and *African Women's Development and Communications Network* (FEMNET). The efforts of these feminists demonstrate not only their commitment to the WSF process but also a sense that the WSF is obliged to adapt its methods to make it more inclusive of women and feminism (Conway 2007). In addition, the local organizing efforts for the Mumbai Forum were largely carried out by NGOs. Unlike the Brazilian Forums, the state had very little involvement in India and this may help to explain the increased number of women who may be more present in the NGO sector than in the state (Karides and Ponniah 2008).

#### *YOUTH CAMP AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

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Among the most striking examples of the infringement of women's rights are the incidents of violence against women that occurred at the Youth Camp at the WSF 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The Intercontinental Youth Camps at the WSFs provide a space for persons to camp, congregate, and share in political discussions and socialize. Organizers wanted the camps to reflect the kind of progressive society that participants in the WSF envision for the future. In this space, young women were sexually harassed and a woman was raped by a man attending the Forum. According to Obando (2005), there were 90 reported cases of violence against young women. In response to this gender violence, both men and women organized a protest march through the camp. The Lilac Brigade formed to provide help to women who suffered abuse and to create a process for reporting such violations. Yet, the perpetrators were not arrested or even effectively sanctioned by the WSF organizers (Hodderson 2005).

It is significant that one of the major transgressions at the Forums was against women. Had a feminist perspective informed the organization of the WSF and Youth Camp, an educational program for men sharing



bathrooms and living space with women or a “women only” space for bathing might have been created. This could have prevented those incidents of sexual harassment. Some of the men interviewed in the camp, while stating they were sympathetic to feminist concerns articulated in the protests, suggested that the women harmed should have “known better” than to share bathrooms with men. Their comments revealed just how pervasive sexism was among these men.

This event simultaneously demonstrates the lack of feminist consciousness that exists in the ranks of WSF organizers and some youth participants and the very thoughtful and active feminist consciousness of participants in the Youth Camp. The latter illustrates the strong ethic of social justice we found among so many Social Forum participants. Unfortunately, men’s participation at women- or feminist-centered events continues to be weak. Moreover, women-centered events generally make up only 4 percent of the program (Karides 2006).

An ongoing tension in the WSF is that its intent for fairness is often superseded by the realities of gender constructs that continue to inform how we act even as social justice activists. Feminist participation in the WSF is fruitful, but it has required women to engage in additional labor. These women and feminist organizations have rallied for better representation and more access to decision-making bodies. By doing so, they help resocialize other activists and spread the meaning of feminist political economy for making another world possible. This mirrors what Becker and Koda (Chapter 6) found among some Indigenous organizers in the WSFs.

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*DEFINING THE SHADOW: MAKING SPACE FOR FEMINISM*

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The title of Alvarez et al.’s (2003) article, “Another (Also Feminist) World Is Possible,” captures the sentiment of many of the women and feminist activist groups that participated in the Forum. The Forum is recognized as a space where feminist organizations can initiate contacts, expand their organizational capacities, and strengthen the transnational feminist network. Also important for many feminists is the fact that the Forum provides a venue consisting of participants that may be sympathetic to the creation of a feminist political economy. In addition, as the global justice movement has expanded over the last decade, numerous women worldwide have engaged in various activist organizations that often lead them to the WSF, where they are introduced to feminist analyses and perspectives on neoliberalism.

Feminist organizations debate about how to build a feminist orientation into the WSF process. Leon (2002), director of the Agencia Latinamericana de Información Women's Program, argues that the "critical approach characterizing feminist thought" can provide the groundwork necessary for breaking with the single-minded mentality of neoliberal globalization. Some feminist organizations have called for a separate space delegated to them at the Forum so that they may promote their own agenda. Yet others reject this position as being a U.N.-style strategy and a self-imposed marginalization of women's issues (Hewitt 2009). Asking for a separate space within the context of the Forum is also counterintuitive to the Charter of Principles, which stipulates that there will not be a segregation of activities. The majority of women's organizations participating in the WSF as represented at the Feminist Dialogues and in events sponsored by the World March of Women argue for democratizing the WSF, promoting inclusiveness and breaking from its current man-centered model. One call made by many of these organizations has been to establish gender equality as one of the Forum's main themes or axes. Another is to widen the political agenda of the Forum by generating a gendered and feminist understanding of the inequities inherent in global capitalism.

Finally, after the era of transnational feminism framed by the United Nations, the WSF is a new way of acting for international feminist organizations honed in the tradition of Nairobi and Beijing. As a meeting space, the WSF enables progressive women's movements to work in solidarity with a range of organizations and feminist orientations, including radical, socialist, and ecological feminism. It also allows them to engage with the other progressive movements. The opportunity exists for lateral exchanges among groups and organizations, regardless of relative status. At the WSF, even the smallest groups from the most marginalized regions have an opportunity to sponsor events (as long as they can finance their trip). The WSF is in effect a mandate for greater inclusiveness, equality, and solidarity in a transnational dialogue for human rights and social justice.

While the examples above show that the WSF is not a perfect democratic space, we believe the tools to achieve it are present, and that it holds tremendous potential relative to other extrafeminist movement settings; indeed, feminists have already pushed it further than they have been able to push extrafeminist social justice movements in the past. This may be a reflection both of the receptiveness of the space and of the

savvy, strategic approaches of feminists, many of whom have developed cross-sector and cross-national organizational experience by working in transnational networks. Certainly some of the success of feminism at the Forum is due to effective organizing within various movements represented at the Forum. Yet, the relatively swift changes toward a more feminist approach are largely due to the influence of feminist organizations operating within the WSF, as well as the intersectional, feminist process adopted by the WSF organizers.

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*BELÉM AND THE HOUSEWIVES OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM*

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In Belém, Brazil, the site of the 2009 WSF, the Feminist Dialogues events were held within the context of the Forum for the purpose of engaging a wider audience. Speakers continued to emphasize the importance of making economic thought more responsible to women and their families and of men sharing social and household responsibilities as a matter of economic change. They outlined what they see as new divisions within the women's movement, such as those based on rural versus urban livelihoods.

At the two Feminist Dialogues events and at other workshops focusing on gender and development, the place of feminist organizations and feminists at the WSF was addressed. The position that the WSF is a positive space of engagement for women's groups was reinforced. The success of women and gender at the WSF in Mumbai, for instance, was credited to Indian feminists who brought patriarchy to the center of that event. Several leaders in transnational feminist organizing repeated that women's organizations have "no choice but to engage" or "don't have the option of not linking up" with movements of the WSF.

The added labor this requires of women's and feminist organizations as participants in other movement sectors was recognized, and this highlights the point we make here regarding the "second shift." A few organizers underscored the fact that feminism and women's issues (and racism) are often given mere lip service in the Forum process and in particular movement sectors, but this should not keep women's groups from engaging with the WSF. That the overwhelming majority of participants at gender-oriented events are women remains the same. That some men perceive them to be intentionally segregated contradicts the WSF mission of collective participation.

Most profoundly, at the Feminist Dialogues event “A Dialogue Between Movements: Breaking Barriers, Breaking Bridges,” an Indigenous activist from Brazil discussed the problems with gender violence and subordination within her movement and explained Indigenous women’s strategies for addressing these violations. Another speaker representing a large Indian trade union talked about the difficulties of getting middle-aged men to identify India’s burgeoning labor force of young women as workers to be organized. It was largely these young women workers insisting on their presence and participation that led to their incorporation in the union. In both these examples, and a third given on the status of women’s issues in Via Campesina, it was clearly the women, the “wives” of the organizations, that did the added labor to bring women, gender issues, and feminist analysis to the forefront.

Feminists’ housework within the WSF is far from complete. Nevertheless, women’s groups in Belém acknowledged that the WSF is a critical space for actors in the women’s movement to build allies transnationally and locally. Quite subtle and significant was the suggestion by feminist speakers that many movement sectors still need to be nurtured to appreciate women’s groups and feminism as partners and equal (not secondary) participants in a network of antineoliberal movements. This is an important first step toward building mutual critiques of existing social structures and formulating alternatives, but may be a step back from integrating feminist political economic thought into opposition to neoliberal global capitalism.

## CONCLUSION

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Decades of feminist scholarship have demonstrated that addressing gender inequality is pivotal to making another world possible. In other words, strategies for combating neoliberalism need to be devised with a gendered lens. Women do 80 percent of the world’s work and own 1 percent of the world’s property, and are 70 percent of the world’s poor (Borren 2002). The gendered world-system affects not only those of us who fall into the constructed category of women particularly, but all people. Gendered inequality sustains the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. For several decades feminists have informed progressive political organizations about the influence of gender in shaping politics and economics (Van Dueren 2002). Yet when leftists or social justice

movements give women a voice, it is usually only other women who listen, rather than the broader movement.

The most promising expression of the WSF is its organic nature. Changes seem to occur not as a series of dictates but as a response to the organizations and groups that are increasingly claiming the WSF as their own. The thematic trajectory of the WSF also indicates commitment to reform and inclusiveness. Gender-related themes were absent in the early years of Forum organizing. The development of transversal themes (subthemes that are expected to cut across major themes) in 2002 and their formal appearance in 2004 reflects the initial inclusion of social concerns such as patriarchy, racism, and identity politics in WSF programming. By 2007, the WSF held in Nairobi, Kenya, included gender as one of its nine main themes. Greater recognition of the importance of gender and patriarchy by WSF organizers demonstrates the durability of the WSF principles and the ability of organizers and activists to use them that keeps many groups, including feminist organizations, engaged with the Forum process. Although women and feminists in the WSF are still working a “second shift” in their pursuit of social justice, they are seeing some fruit for their labor.

We argue here that the WSF constitutes a new and different kind of space for feminist activism. The prefigurative politics inherent in the WSF require a rigorous commitment to self-critique and an ability to adapt quickly in response to criticisms based on exclusionary or unjust internal practices; such a methodological orientation is consistent with, and even informed by, feminist principles that have been circulating for decades. As Waterman (2002: 8) notes,

There can be no doubt of the debt the global justice movement . . . owes to women’s movements and feminist thinkers of the 1970s–80s. The influence can clearly be seen within the CSM [Call of Social Movements] and the Charter themselves. Much of the thinking of the new movement (on counterpower resting in a democratic diversity) and behavior (public cultural outrage and celebration) can be traced back to feminists.

Thus, by virtue of its democratic process and its holistic, intersectional substantive approach, the WSF has opened up new possibilities for transnational feminist organizing, and particularly for equitable collaboration among feminists and other global justice activists. The WSF

as a site of resistance represents a departure from both the patriarchal cultures of many left movements and also from the slow-moving, over-bureaucratized context in which much feminist organizing of the 1980s and 1990s took place.

There seems to be less progress in terms of the integration of feminist political economic thought into the theoretical orientation of the speakers represented at WSF workshops and events. We both have observed and applauded that more panels have women speaking on the gender component of a particular issue. But this is not the same as recognizing the gendered nature of globalization and global governance structures. Because the WSF invokes process as its organizational form, it is by intention malleable. Rather than having to convince a hierarchical institutionalized body with official decision-making power that bias or underrepresentation exists, women's organizations as well as other marginalized groups are able to protest at the actual Forum event and at the preparatory or post-Forum meetings. With sufficient funds to travel, many of these groups can also participate in decisions as part of the Organizing Committee or International Council and oblige the WSF to fulfill its "mandate." Demands by participants who have identified unfairness in the WSF process are frequently given consideration and acted upon.

While there is access for groups and organizations to participate in the decision-making process of the WSF, the counterpoint is the "tyranny of structurelessness" (Freeman 1972). Just as in the second-wave feminist movement that Freeman (1972) was addressing, the WSF, without any formal structure of leadership, will tend to have groups and persons with material or ideological power take leadership and develop an informal structure of participation. For instance, the Organizing Committee and International Council may have an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of groups in particular sectors or regions or ideology that may be more or less feminist friendly (Teivanen 2002; Smith, Karides, et al. 2007). The concern expressed earlier that some feminists find the self-organized format of the WSF a greater challenge for spreading feminist political economic analysis is an example of how the loose structure of the WSF exhibits the common problems of anarchic organizational forms for promoting equality.

The WSF represents the most novel organizational form for social justice activism in decades. It may be that the feminist form, unacknowledged and borrowed, from women's movements provides a new road for

merging feminist analysis (and other marginalized perspectives) with prominent globalization critiques.

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## NOTES

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1. Hochschild's concept refers to the additional daily household labor that employed women perform after finishing their paid work. Men in broad-based social justice movements such as labor unionism typically are free from the added work or the emotional strain of promoting gender equality within the movement.

2. The authors attended events sponsored by many women's organizations active within the Forum, including groups such as the World March of Women, FEMNET, DAWN, and Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur. Additionally, both authors participated in the Feminist Dialogues meeting immediately prior to the 2007 WSF in Nairobi. The authors kept extensive field notes, conducted interviews, and digitally recorded portions of sessions.



## CHAPTER 6

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# INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND SOCIAL FORUMS

*Marc Becker and Ashley N. Koda*

At the 2003 World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Nilo Cayuqueo, a Mapuche activist from southern Argentina, protested that Indigenous issues become marginalized in mass movements of civil society.<sup>1</sup> Rather than meeting alone as Indigenous peoples in a small room, Cayuqueo argued, they should have a platform at one of the massive plenary sessions so that their concerns would reach a larger audience. If they were not allowed a place on the main stage, perhaps they should organize their own event instead.

This story points to broader issues and struggles that Indigenous peoples face in organizing within the context of the Social Forum process. While Social Forums provide a convenient venue for Indigenous activists to gather and strategize around common concerns, their voices and issues are often marginalized in broader organizing efforts. Activists want to take advantage of opportunities to share their experiences with a wider audience, but a lack of numbers and resources hinders their ability to capitalize on these massive gatherings. Should Indigenous peoples take advantage of the momentum that the Social Forum process provides, even though they risk disappearing into a larger movement? Or should they retreat into their own spaces where they have more control over their messages, even if this means losing the partial access to public stages that they enjoy as part of a Social Forum? Whether to merge or retreat is by no means a new concern, and it echoes long-running debates



about whether Indigenous peoples should organize on an ethnic basis as peoples with unique cultures and concerns, or whether they should join the left in a broader class-based struggle (Hale 1994). Participating in Social Forums presents Indigenous activists with tradeoffs that require strong local bases and parallel political spaces in order to successfully solidify their place in the overall scheme of social movements.

This chapter provides an overview of Indigenous participation in the Social Forum process. It is based on collaboration with, and observation of, Indigenous involvement in the WSFs as well as their own transnational gatherings. We struggle together with Indigenous activists as to whether Social Forums are the best venue to broadcast their concerns, or whether Indigenous issues would be better served by creating separate political spaces. Perhaps the best solution is to work simultaneously with broader Social Forum processes while at the same time working to consolidate their own bases as Indigenous communities.

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*INDIGENOUS ISSUES AND THE PROCESS OF TRANSNATIONAL RECOGNITION*

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The problems that follow the expansion of capitalism greatly affect Indigenous peoples. Corporations continue their excessive exploitation of oil, natural gas, forests, and minerals, which takes a great toll on Indigenous lands. Indigenous peoples are often targeted because they oppose the methods of extraction that corporations use that threaten the survival of all. As Mander (2006: 4) suggests, “paradigm wars” are “the opposite understandings of how human beings should live on earth.” In contrast to the Western world, Indigenous ways of thinking emphasize reciprocity, collective ownership, and community values. For that reason, native cosmologies do not align well with capitalist expansion. With a different value system, Indigenous peoples are often relegated to the margins, or ignored completely when economic expansion occurs within their territories.

Indigenous peoples have long resisted corporate invasions into their territories that are rich with precious resources. Structural adjustment programs and free trade agreements further inspire Indigenous mobilizations. In southern Mexico, the Mayans organized a neo-Zapatista movement to oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) because they feared it would increase already large disparities in economic wealth and threaten their communal lands. Both federal governments and global institutions repeatedly violated the International Labor

Organization's (ILO) Convention 169 that grants Indigenous peoples "the absolute right to be consulted about decisions that affect their territories or resources" (Bell 2006: 182). Rather than a complete stoppage of industrial development, Indigenous peoples want to be consulted as to whether these projects can be pursued in more appropriate and less invasive manners (Corpuz-Tauli 2006: 51). Their grievances, unfortunately, often fall on deaf ears. Neoliberal policies have particularly negative repercussions on Indigenous peoples.

The more neoliberal policies chipped away at Indigenous cultures and ways of life, the more Indigenous peoples felt compelled to "go transnational" and target international governance institutions. Political and economic globalizations caused Indigenous peoples to engage in new methods of mobilizing for their rights and lands (Bell 2006). Although Indigenous peoples have realized some significant successes and are more judicially and electorally savvy at a local level, they also need to address global forces that affect their sovereignty.

With an increase in globalization, transnational social movements also rise to address pressing concerns of human rights, environmental degradation, and capitalist exploitation (Robinson 2002; Silver 2003; Tarrow 2005). Transnational movements play a large role in fostering political exchanges between allied actors "facilitated by global economic integration and communication . . . linking preexisting domestic communities with actors from other countries" (Fox and Brown 1998: 30). Given this reality, creating transnational linkages with other social movements can increase the opportunities for local groups to realize political gains.

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### *GLOBALIZATION OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS*

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Indigenous peoples have long mobilized in response to cultural, structural, and direct violence associated with imperialism and capitalist development. In North America, native peoples organized against the structural violence associated with being sequestered within reservations, as well as the contested cultural violence associated with unquestioned adherence to Western ideals. During the 1970s, the American Indian Movement (AIM) responded to direct police violence and other injustices done to Native Americans. Indigenous peoples gained a growing awareness that they could challenge previously dominant Western ideals.

The World Social Forum represents a novel approach of organizing civil society on a transnational, horizontal, and South-South basis,

with a particular focus on political and social issues. For decades, and broadly forming one of the principal influences on the emergence of the WSF, Indigenous activists in the Americas had already been following such organizing strategies. They created international pan-Indian movements with the intent to integrate various groups across the Americas to work together for social change. With Indigenous peoples bringing their grievances from the local to the federal and global levels through transnationalism, Indigenous social movements played important roles in advancing the Social Forum process. Their organizing efforts built opposition to neoliberal economic reforms and militarism, issues that were central to the broader WSF. Sometimes Indigenous peoples introduced new issues, such as self-determination and territorial autonomy, that were directly relevant to their lived realities. In addition, Indigenous peoples struggled with many of the same issues that were hotly debated in the WSF, such as whether to take advantage of their unified strength and momentum to create formal organizational structures.

Indigenous activists' coalition work has repeatedly been frustrated by non-Indigenous activists' inability to appreciate the far-reaching and long-term impact of colonialism on native traditions, culture, and ongoing experiences. Moreover, the dominant discourses and structures of cooperation have reinforced Indigenous marginality in coalition spaces. For example, as Indigenous activists mobilized against planned celebrations for the October 12, 1992, quincentennial of Christopher Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, divisions emerged between the so-called popular and Indianist wings of the Indigenous movement. In 1991, Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú and other Indigenous leaders who favored a closer working relationship with sympathetic sectors of the left met in Guatemala in a Continental Encounter of Five Hundred Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance (Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Políticos 1993; Hale 1994). The *Coordinadora de Organizaciones y Naciones Indígenas del Continente* (CONIC, Coordinating Body of Indigenous Nations and Organizations of the Continent) was critical of these efforts and denounced this Encounter as an attempt to obtain political goals distant from Indigenous concerns and to usurp Indigenous issues. According to CONIC (1992: 2), "90 percent of the delegates represented the popular sector, and only 10 percent represented Indigenous issues," illustrating "the marginalization of the participation of Indigenous delegates." They declared that this campaign did "not respond to the demands of Native Peoples," nor did it "guarantee that Indigenous proposals

will be respected in the future” or allow for “each people to decide their own destiny.” Guillermo Delgado-P. (1994: 82) notes that an alliance between Indigenous organizations and popular movements tends not to work, leading Indigenous movements to reject the patronizing attitudes of popular movements. “From an Indigenous point of reference,” Delgado observes, “Indigenous peoples’ histories remain colonial when reduced to class.” This history and these experiences informed and influenced how Indigenous peoples approached the Social Forum process.

### *INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AT THE SOCIAL FORUMS*

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Indigenous peoples did not have a significant presence at the relatively small first two editions of the WSF in Porto Alegre in 2001 and 2002. By the time of the third edition in 2003, Indigenous peoples (along with many other members of civil society) recognized the significance of the Social Forum process and the opportunities and openings that it provided to their struggles. Almost lost among the 100,000 participants, a notable number of Indigenous participants engaged in an important range of meetings and issues. As with other sectors of civil society, these activists scrambled to take advantage of the openings that this huge meeting provided.

Several discussions at the 2003 WSF focused on the impact of extractive industries on Indigenous peoples. Marcelo Claudio from the Asamblea de Pueblo Guaraní [Assembly of Guaraní People], for example, discussed Shell’s and Enron’s exploitation of petroleum resources on Guaraní lands in Bolivia. Henry Tito Vargas of Vigilancia Social de la Industria Extractiva (VSIE, Social Oversight of the Extractive Industry) in Bolivia argued that it was important to develop alliances between people in North America and Europe, where transnational corporations are located, and the developing world where the impact of their exploitative policies are often felt the most directly and harshly. As Indigenous activists recognized, and as Sikkink (2004) notes, international institutions present political opportunities for collective action at both the domestic and international levels. Indigenous peoples, however, remain at a great disadvantage in their confrontations against global capitalist ventures. Their voices carry little weight in government, and they face enormous difficulties shaping the polity at the transnational level. The WSF held out the promise of helping to surmount some of these obstacles. Nevertheless, feelings of marginalization from the broader WSF process led

some Indigenous activists to propose holding a forum parallel to the WSF when it was scheduled to return to Porto Alegre in 2005.

As in Porto Alegre, the vast majority of delegates at the 2004 WSF in Mumbai were local activists from India. A very large number of these were Indigenous peoples, though not the same ones who struggled for a voice in Porto Alegre. Most Indigenous activists from the Americas did not have the resources (or even the interest) to travel halfway around the world for this meeting. Instead, local “Indigenous” peoples, including 30,000 Dalits (untouchables) and adivasi (tribal peoples), attended. They raised new issues for the Forum of communalism, casteism, racism, and patriarchy. In Mumbai, Hindi replaced Portuguese as an “official” language, but the Forum became a de facto bilingual event with sometimes notable and polarizing results. Although translations were provided for major events in the large halls, white European faces dominated English-language events while Indians largely attended events addressing local issues in which Hindi became the *lingua franca*. Without the participation of Indigenous peoples from the Americas, activists lost an opportunity to build a stronger South-South transnational movement.

Indigenous peoples had a vastly expanded presence in the July 2004 Americas Social Forum (ASF) in Quito and the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre. It was largely because of the strength of Indigenous-based social movements and the power they lent to antineoliberal struggles that the ASF was held in Ecuador. Meeting before the ASF, the Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala (the Americas) gathered 300 delegates to give “birth to new spaces and strategies for Indigenous peoples to reclaim what is theirs and to live with peace and autonomy” (Bell 2006: 181). Delegates debated 10 themes that included land rights, autonomy and self-determination, diversity and plurinationality, intellectual property rights, relations with multilateral organizations, the role of Indigenous peoples in the WSF, gender and the role of women, political participation, militarization, and communication. These themes illustrate the broad conceptual reach of Indigenous movements. Activists refused to limit themselves to narrow “ethnic” issues.

A final statement from the Indigenous summit, the Kito Declaration, strongly condemned neoliberalism and the role of multinational corporations. These entities, the statement notes, “are disregarding our collective rights to our land, changing legislation to allow privatization, corporative alliances, and individual appropriation” (II Cumbre Con-

tinental de Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala 2004). In response, the delegates resolved to work toward an agenda and alliances to confront these oppressive policies. They declared an unalienable right to their territory, and argued in favor of the legitimation of their own models to govern those autonomous spaces. Finally, and echoing a theme commonly raised in social forum spaces, they expressed solidarity with Hugo Chávez and the Venezuelan people in the face of U.S. imperialist aggression.

Discussions at the summit carried over into the ASF. One of five themes at the ASF focused on Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, and the persistent issues of racism, poverty, and exclusion that they faced. Given that neoliberal policies often have a most intense impact on these populations, a complete rejection of free trade agreements was also ever-present in their discussions. During the Forum, Ecuador's Indigenous federations organized a march for life and against free trade agreements. Although not listed in the official program, it was obviously a coordinated event. While Indigenous movements led the march, it reflected the broad diversity of issues presented at the Forum, including those of gender, sexuality, youth groups, leftist political parties, environmental groups, and peasant concerns. Afro-Venezuelan representative Jorge Veloz noted that "the construction of this other possible world comes through respect, dialogue, and interculturalism." Indigenous peoples and Afro-Latin Americans believed they had unique perspectives to contribute, and they provided leadership and a model for how broader civil society might organize itself.

Half a year later, Indigenous activists once again turned out in force for the 2005 Porto Alegre Forum to meet in a "Puxirum of Indigenous Arts and Knowledge." In the Brazilian Tupi-Guarani Indigenous language, *Puxirum* means "a joining of efforts for a common goal." Their meeting ended with a declaration that "another world is possible, and we are part of that world" (Puxirum 2005). Having their own spaces within the Forum, however, became a double-edged sword. The Puxirum was geographically separated from the rest of the Forum. This created a wonderfully beautiful space for debate and reflection, but also hindered communicating Indigenous concerns to fellow activists. Few of the 155,000 delegates in Porto Alegre managed to wander the several kilometers down the Guaiba riverfront to where the Puxirum was located at the edge of WSF activities. Over the course of the week, Indigenous delegates increasingly left their space to join the Forum's main activities.

Separating themselves from the central thrust of the Forum no longer seemed like such a wise decision.

A year after the Puxirum, Indigenous activists had a rather reduced presence at the 2006 polycentric Forum in Venezuela. Several panels on Indigenous issues were listed in the massive program, but unlike the Puxirum they were spread across the Forum. In the crowded city of Caracas, it became difficult to move from one event to another. As a result, an Indigenous presence was diffused or lost in the confusion. In being reintegrated into the broader Social Forum process, Indigenous peoples lost part of their visibility and initiative. As with Mumbai, few Indigenous activists from the Americas made the journey to the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, Kenya, where again, in the African context, constructions of Indigenous identities took on different meanings. Again, the contextual divide surrounding Indigenous identities resulted in a lost opportunity to build bridges across cultures.

After an absence of four years, the WSF returned to Brazil in 2009 at the city of Belém on the mouth of the mighty Amazon River. Gathering in the Amazon, Indigenous and environmental issues were a central focus in the Belém forum. Indigenous peoples had a very large tent where they held a series of discussions on the environment, territory, development, and other concerns. The sessions ended with a broad-ranging conversation on the “crisis of civilization,” environmental collapse, postdevelopment strategies, and how to build a better life. Miguel Palacín from the Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígena (CAOI, Andean Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations) proclaimed, “for Indigenous peoples, our participation in the forum was very important.” The principle themes that they discussed—specifically the crisis of civilization, decolonization, collective rights, self-determination, climatic justice, and defense of the Amazon—helped set the agenda for future gatherings, both of Indigenous organizations as well as the WSF. Indigenous contributions also helped shape discussions in broader social justice movements.

### *INDIGENOUS PEOPLES SUMMITS*

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Even while struggling to retain a presence in the social forum process, Indigenous activists continued with their efforts to strengthen their own transnational movements. In March 2007, thousands of Indigenous peoples gathered for the Third Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala at Iximché, a sacred Mayan site

located in the Guatemalan highlands two hours from the capital city. The summit concluded with a rally in Guatemala City's main plaza and the reading of the "Declaration of Iximché" that called for a continued struggle for social justice and opposition to neoliberalism and all forms of oppression. The energy at the closing rally reflected the summit's success in building on previous organizing efforts to converge a strong continental Indigenous movement.

The summit's slogan, "from resistance to power," captured the spirit of the event. It was not enough to resist oppression, delegates argued, but Indigenous peoples needed to present concrete and positive alternatives to make a better and more inclusive world. Ecuadorian Indigenous activist and Continental Council member Blanca Chancoso called for Indigenous peoples to be treated as citizens and members of a democracy. She rejected war making, militarization, and free trade pacts. "Our world is not for sale," she declared. "Bush is not welcome here. We want, instead, people who support life. Yes to life. Imperialism and capitalism have left us with a historic debt, and they owe us for this debt." She emphasized the importance of people creating alternatives to the current system.

The most visible and immediate outcome of the summit was the "Declaration of Iximché" (III Cumbre Continental de Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala 2007), a strong statement that condemned Bush's militaristic and imperialistic policies and called for respect for human rights, territory, and self-determination. It ratified an ancestral right to territory and a protection of resources from the mother earth, rejected free trade pacts, condemned the construction of a wall between Mexico and the United States, and called for the legalization of coca leaves. For an Indigenous summit, the declaration was perhaps notable for its lack of explicit ethnic discourse. Instead, it spoke of struggles against neoliberalism and for food sovereignty. On one hand, this pointed to the Indigenous movement's alignment with broader popular struggles in the Americas. On the other, it demonstrated a maturation of Indigenous ideologies that permeate throughout the human experience. Political and economic rights were focused through a lens of Indigenous identities, with an emphasis on concrete and pragmatic actions.

Indigenous summits were important not only for developing shared language and frames among native groups, but they also provided listening opportunities for non-Indigenous activists committed to helping expand cross-sectoral coalition work in places like the World Social Forums. For instance, Joel Suárez from the Americas Social Forum announced at



the summit that the Third ASF meeting would be held in Guatemala in October 2008. "For it to be successful," Suárez emphasized, "the Forum must have an Indigenous and female face." With Guatemala's majority Mayan population, the ASF did have a dominant Indigenous feel and presence. The Forum ran from October 7 through 12, culminating with a march on the highly symbolic anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas that Indigenous activists have claimed as a day of resistance against exploitation and oppression. During the Forum, Indigenous peoples discussed issues of land, water, food sovereignty, and plurinationalism. Humberto Cholango, president of Ecuarrunari, the movement of highland Kichwas in Ecuador, emphasized the broad nature of Indigenous struggles. "From a position of unity, we bring together other social forces, not only Indigenous peoples who have been excluded and abused," he said. "A large majority of *compañeros* and *compañeras*, young people, women, students, and workers are also victims of the neoliberal model." This theme of unity and of linking struggles and bridging divides ran throughout the forum.

Indigenous delegates declared in a summary of their debates, "We have arrived at the consensus that the primary enemy of all of the species that inhabit the planet and the cosmos is capitalism." Neocolonial governments were responsible for underdevelopment that leads to unemployment and out-migration. For this reason, they were fighting to "re-found our states and develop a path toward plurinational states." Indigenous peoples also discussed their participation in broader Social Forums. Roberto Espinoza from CAOI insisted that Indigenous peoples not be relegated to a folkloric presence, but be integrally involved with debates on substantive issues. The International Council that organizes the WSF has faced a problem of a lack of Indigenous representation. Espinoza acknowledged that CAOI has been invited to sit on the council, but with other pressing and more local issues it is often difficult to commit the resources necessary to attend these meetings. A lack of Indigenous representation reflects a broader problem with the Social Forum process: Only those with the time, resources, and visas necessary to travel are able to organize and participate in them.

During the ASF, Indigenous organizations solidified their plans to hold the Fourth Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala in Puno, Peru, in 2009. Under the twin topics of plurinationalism and the *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* ("to live well, not better"), delegates debated a wide range of issues including opposition

to the privatization of natural resources, extractive enterprises, and the criminalization of social movements. Panels also focused on issues such as food sovereignty, climatic justice, and migration. At the Guatemala summit, women decided to overcome their marginalization by holding their own meeting. On the eve of the Puno summit 2,000 women gathered into plenary sessions and workshops on a range of topics such as collective rights, the construction of power and democracy, alternative development models, violence and discrimination, communication, and identity. Indigenous children and youth also held parallel forums to build movements to defend their interests.

Tupac Enrique Acosta of the Indigenous advocacy group *Tonatierra*, who has long participated in these transnational meetings, commented, “There are ebbs and flows in the process of the continental Indigenous movements. The summits are highlights, high points, you could say, in the process.” Activists had developed strategies of working on two tracks. While organizing their own Indigenous summits, Indigenous organizations also continued to attend the large social forums, leveraging the increased coherence that they gained in their separate meetings into a more visible presence in the larger forums, thereby addressing some of the problems of marginalization that they had previously faced.

### *UNITED STATES SOCIAL FORUMS*

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Held in Atlanta, Georgia, in June 2007, the first United States Social Forum (USSF) provided an excellent opportunity for Indigenous peoples in North America to mobilize and express their concerns. Organizers intentionally sought to bring native issues to the forefront to provide an opportunity to advance their struggles. Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) moderated a plenary “Indigenous Voices: From the Heart of Mother Earth.” The goal was to share models of organizing strategies, and to examine how they facilitate movement building and collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous efforts. Goldtooth framed the discussion with an emphasis on the importance of environmental issues to Indigenous struggles. Underscoring this theme, Patty Grant-Long from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians began the plenary with an analysis of the Cherokee’s loss of land. Carrie Dann from the Western Shoshone continued along the same theme with a discussion of their long struggle for land rights. She noted that there are no documents that record their land being taken away, and therefore it

still rightfully belongs to them. “Indigenous rights are the foundation of human rights in this country and we have to come to terms with that,” said Julie Fishel of the Western Shoshone Defense Project.

Ikaiki Hussey from the Aloha Anina Society spoke about the militarization of Hawaii, and made a passionate call for support for Indigenous and demilitarization struggles as part of a larger struggle against imperialism. Demilitarizing Hawaii is important, Hussey said, “because it helps the people of Hawaii and because it is part of taking apart the U.S. empire.” He pointed to how the United States used its military bases in the Pacific as a launching pad for attacks on Iraq. “It is an amazing testament to resilience that Indigenous people are still here,” Hussey said. “That says a lot about strength and the ability to withstand in the face of all those struggles.” His comments placed Indigenous issues at the heart of the Social Forum process.

Faith Gemmill from the Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands (REDOIL) network spoke to the history of exploitation of petroleum resources in Alaska. The United States wants to terminate 229 tribes in Alaska, and she cautioned that the government plans to come south to the continental United States and do the same. Gemmill finished with a call to speak out against the Bush administration and its energy regime that opened 95 percent of Indigenous land to oil and gas exploitation. “It is my hope that in my lifetime I will see our land returned to its rightful owners,” she said. “People must change the way they are living. We must give Mother Earth time to repair and heal itself.” Finally, Enei Begaye from the Black Mesa Water Coalition condemned a history of resource mining. Her organization is a coalition of Navajo and Hopi activists fighting to keep corporations from destroying their land and polluting the water. “Water is a sacred element,” Begaye emphasized, “water is life.” Begaye called for people to stand together to battle climate change. “Our Mother Earth is not for sale,” Begaye said, echoing a common theme throughout the plenary. Many Indigenous activists took advantage of the spaces the Forum provided to present demands for which they had long struggled.

The opportunity at the USSF to communicate the importance of Indigenous issues, however, did not meet the expectations of all Indigenous peoples. Acosta (2007) sent a message to USSF organizers highlighting several principles that he contended the USSF should adopt in regards to Indigenous peoples. He maintained that the USSF must demand that the United States government desist from violating the territorial

rights of Indigenous nations and stop blocking adoption of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the absence of government action, the USSF itself must implement the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that the U.N. Human Rights Council had adopted. While Acosta demanded that the USSF take stances on Indigenous issues, this ignores that Social Forums normally do not take positions but rather create spaces for social movements and organizations to gather and strategize. Nevertheless, Tonatierra has long played a key role in organizing transnational Indigenous movements, and Acosta's comments and criticisms cannot be easily dismissed or taken lightly. Competing ideas of how best to exploit the spaces that Social Forums present, of course, are not limited to Indigenous movements. Along with other activists, Indigenous rights activists debated the value of participating in a process that speaks but does not act.

The USSF closed with a People's Movement Assembly, a final plenary that provided groups with opportunities to present their resolutions. Because so many people wanted to speak and time was limited, organizers instructed speakers to make short, focused, and inspirational speeches. Almost everyone complied, limiting themselves to brief snippets of much longer proposals and declarations. When Nicolas "Miguel" Chango, an Indigenous delegate from Ecuador, exceeded his strict two-minute time limit, the moderator took the microphone. Indigenous delegates strenuously objected, protesting that they had been disrespected. The audience shouted, "Let him speak!" The entire plenary came to a standstill as organizers debated how to proceed. A large Indigenous contingent took the stage with drums to conduct a healing ceremony to restore dignity, and to foster understanding and trust. Finally, Chango was allowed to finish his lengthy speech.

Observers came away with different impressions of this event. Many people were upset, because it symbolized five centuries of marginalization and the silencing of Indigenous voices. Was this an example of a different Indigenous sense of time that values broad spaces to discuss and debate issues before reaching consensus, or was it just an example of an egotistical individual who sought to monopolize spaces to his own benefit? Indigenous delegates leveled charges of racism against the moderator, pointing to continuing and underlying tensions between historically excluded and marginalized peoples. George Friday, the African American woman who had been moderating the assembly, apologized and acknowledged that she had made a mistake. In a sense,

the outcome was positive because participants immediately identified and addressed the issue. “We’re trying to build unity, but there are going to be differences,” said Cindy Wiesner, a member of the National Planning Committee. “We have to learn to navigate conflict and listen, but also stand for what we each believe in and for what’s good for the whole” (van Gelder 2007). These are delicate balancing acts. In any case, what this conflict revealed was how Social Forums too often replicate exclusionary structures and decision-making processes of the broader society. Not only did this conflict raise issues of who has the right to speak, but how one speaks and for how long. Needless to say, these tensions are not unique to Social Forums, but can be found in any organizational meeting of civil society—including summits run by and for Indigenous peoples.

Perhaps as a result of the conflicts in Atlanta, Indigenous peoples had a heightened presence at the second USSF in Detroit in 2010. As at the 2007 Forum in Atlanta, Indigenous leaders were at the front of the opening march, but this time native singers and dancers also welcomed delegates as they were ushered into the massive Cobo Hall at the end of the march for the opening ceremonies. Jihan Gearon from the IEN participated on an evening plenary that presented alternatives and solutions to problems social movements faced. Gearon situated her comments in a global context, including the Cochabamba People’s Climate Change Accord that had met in Bolivia several months earlier. The IEN took a lead role in organizing the Indigenous Peoples Movement Assembly where Goldtooth emphasized an urgent need to develop political connections with the global south to solve common problems. At the closing National People’s Movement Assembly, the Indigenous sovereignty group was the first one to present their resolutions to the Forum. Placing Indigenous peoples at the front of the marches and ceremonies served to acknowledge symbolically that they were the first inhabitants of the Americas.

Organizers in Detroit remained very aware of the importance of connecting with the local Indigenous community. Bineshi Albert from the IEN noted that this was hard to do in Atlanta because most Indigenous communities had long since been forcibly removed. Detroit, however, has a larger urban Indigenous presence, which helped to create a different space. Nevertheless, Will Copeland from the Detroit Local Organizing Committee commented that it took time and effort to develop communication between African American and Indigenous communities because of large cultural gaps. Events such as a welcoming dinner hosted by the local community helped to bridge these divides and build solidarity

among participants. In Atlanta, Indigenous peoples had their own tent and it was easy to connect with each other in their own spaces, but, as Albert observed, they had not connected with others on common issues such as militarization, the environment, and the criminal justice system. In Detroit, Indigenous activists worked hard to make their presence felt on a wide variety of issues that concerned them.

Few Indigenous peoples from the global South made it to the USSFs, much as few people from North America attended the Indigenous summits in Central and South America. In a way, this was to be expected because as a country-based forum, the USSF was not framed as a venue to build transnational solidarity networks. On the other hand, it does highlight challenges that building a continental movement faces. Many Indigenous rights activists in the global South are highly politicized and grounded in a class analysis of society, whereas those from the North are more likely to frame their identity and activism around cultural issues.

CAOI leader Miguel Palacín was one of the few representatives from the South at the Detroit forum. He spoke about the move in the South from resisting oppression to making concrete actions and proposals. He described their two key proposals for the establishment of plurinational states and embracing the *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* (living well). The demand for plurinational states, Palacín explained, is to recognize the diversity that is in their countries, to make democracy more horizontal, and to develop more equilibrium in relations. Living well means harmony, being in equilibrium with our own selves, and realizing a full life with other beings in nature. The point is not just to accumulate riches, but to redistribute these resources for the betterment of humanity. His overtly political demands failed to gain much resonance in an audience focused more directly on cultural concerns. Such differences create challenges to making use of the Social Forum process to build a strong transnational movement.

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### *MOVING FORWARD: STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCEMENT*

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As history illustrates, transnational social movements potentially can heighten awareness of Indigenous issues, thereby broadening appeal for their concerns. This could aid in the development of more social networks and increase access to political resources. By becoming part of transnational social movements, Indigenous organizations can gain recognition in the eyes of the United Nations, as well as garner attention of other

social movement leaders and activists. Alison Brysk (1996) documents how transnationalism positively affected Indigenous groups, especially in South America where they have forged relationships with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). With recognition from IGOs and NGOs, transnational movements could expand the political opportunities for Indigenous peoples. Moreover, the internationalization of Indigenous issues provides a challenge to romanticized images of Indigenous peoples as accommodating, generous, and content with their living and working conditions. The breakdown of these kinds of stereotypes aids in increasing international support for Indigenous rights both among policymakers and the broader public. Nevertheless, entering the global arena does not necessarily mean that Indigenous peoples will garner support from other organizations for their causes.

Social Forums, though self-proclaimed as inclusive spaces, are exclusionary in various ways, hindering their capacity to advance Indigenous causes. In general, whites have been overrepresented in global justice movements including at WSF meetings. Álvarez et al. (2008: 394) found that of those surveyed at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, whites consisted of 51 percent of their sample, while only 2 percent reported to be Indigenous. Moreover, Indigenous issues were addressed less frequently than other issues such as war, human rights, and democracy. A content analysis of WSF events and workshops found that the percentage of events that focused on Indigenous issues ranged between 2 and 3 percent. By contrast, other issues such as agriculture, peace, democracy, and human rights each made up around 6 percent of events (Glasius and Timms 2006). These figures cast doubt upon the extent to which the WSF meetings are really as inclusive as they purport to be. Rosa Alvarado, an Ecuadorian Indigenous leader, noted that “only a limited amount of Indigenous people have taken part so far in the World Social Forum, and their debates have not reached the grassroots level” (Cevallos 2006). Social forums have provided limited useful spaces for Indigenous peoples.

Could Indigenous peoples realize greater benefits by departing from a Social Forum process that embraces broad themes? Rather than becoming lost as a marginal player in a much larger movement, should they create their own spaces for organizing? Alternatively, Indigenous activists perhaps need to work simultaneously on both a local and global level, as well as independently and in concert with other social

movement activists, in order to build a strong unified movement while not losing track of their own issues, concerns, and identities. Currently, most Social Forums employ a particular language and set of values as defined by the dominant culture's discourse. Indigenous peoples have a difficult time communicating their own unique beliefs in that broader environment (Wuthnow et al. 1984). As a result, Indigenous peoples too often find themselves relegated to the margins in social justice organizing efforts.

By entering a Social Forum space, Indigenous peoples risk losing control of their own movements. Nevertheless, the decision to participate with other social movements can also prove to be effective because of the opportunities for increased exposure that it provides. "Each expression of political demands can be only partial," David Meyer (2007: 74-75) notes, "by cooperating with groups that may appeal to the same funders or members, an organization may obscure its own identity in service of the larger movement, hurting its own visibility and survival." Indigenous organizations that align with larger concerns such as antiwar or antisystemic movements run the risk of having their distinct issues marginalized, or being invited to participate as mere tokens to advance someone else's agenda.

On the other hand, being marginalized might prove to have certain benefits. Marginal sites provide groups a political space to "challenge not only the dominant interpretation legitimizing one way of life or set of normative beliefs over others but also the prevailing interpretations of past events" (Wilmer 1993: 38). Marginal sites can provide Indigenous peoples with an opportunity to redefine their own histories, as opposed to embracing the perspective of the dominant discourse. Indigenous peoples can create sites that focus solely on their problems and at the same time use their own languages, worldviews, and meanings. In this manner, they can begin to address the problems of Indigenous peoples who have fallen prey to vicious stereotypes through the rewriting of colonial histories. Excluded and marginalized peoples who demand inclusion by occupying marginal sites have the opportunity to challenge and possibly change the dominant discourse (Wilmer 1993: 39).

The Social Forum process continues to hold open the possibilities of Indigenous peoples overcoming their marginalization through the formation of coalitions built upon shared values, trust, and common interests with other groups. Coalitions can increase access to resources and increase a movement's ability to reach collective goals (Wood 2005). This



is part of a well-established pattern. During the nuclear freeze movement in the 1980s, organizational expansion helped increase attention from the mass media, politicians, and other public figures (Meyer and Rochon 1998: 250). Co-optation, resource inequality, and domination, however, can hinder the coalition-building process. From a resource mobilization perspective, Zald and McCarthy (1980: 6) examine the pressures that lead to cooperation and conflict among social movement organizations. The benefits of entering coalitions are increasing the ability to secure resources, broadening bases of support, increasing public legitimacy, and improving access to important power holders. A concern with securing resources, nevertheless, leads to competition and conflict among social movement organizations to gain members, foundation grants, and credit necessary for advancing their agendas.

Understanding competition for resources helps to explain the dilemmas of coalition building that Indigenous groups face. In some respects, Indigenous peoples would benefit from forming coalitions because it would help them to garner more public exposure and increase their influence by linking with others groups for a general cause. Brysk (1995: 578) notes that if Indigenous peoples unite with others on environmental and human rights concerns, it can strengthen the chances of tying other issues such as cultural destruction, loss of land rights, underdevelopment, and lack of political representation to values that are already widely accepted. On the other hand, Indigenous peoples have difficulties aligning with other groups that tend to frame problems in terms of specific issues, such as environmentalism. Despite the positive aspects of coalition building and participation, Indigenous peoples must exercise caution with whom they choose to ally.

For those who are marginalized, the shift to participating in Social Forums at transnational levels can prove to be daunting; yet, with a strong organizational base, activists can successfully navigate these scale shifts. In discussing the importance of encounters, Sonia Alvarez (2000) expands on Elizabeth Friedman's discussion of "transnationalism reversed" that suggests that movements should strengthen themselves at the local level before participating beyond a country's borders. Taking part in local encounters enables a greater sense of the collective, while also providing a greater degree of political awareness among the locals. With a strengthened base, movements are able to enter the transnational arena with a more formalized presence. Though Indigenous peoples have gained some clout at the United Nations, solidifying support at the local

level and strengthening identity and solidarity shows that Indigenous movements have a strong organizational base that might translate to additional victories.

While a strong organizational base can be beneficial when venturing beyond the local level, several disadvantages still remain when Indigenous peoples join coalitions. Yet, strategies do exist to avoid complete co-optation. For example, the Women's Caucus within the feminist-friendly organization ACT UP/LA gained status, respect, and recognition within a white male-dominated organization by employing boundary-making strategies that included "formalizing women's space and reinscribing gender differences." The Women's Caucus attained control over their own agenda, and most importantly, the overwhelming support of the general body of men, by creating separate meetings with women only, and by formalizing their meetings by adopting policies and procedures that aided in gaining legitimacy from the broader organization (Roth 1998: 98, 139). Likewise, as Indigenous peoples become involved in coalitions with environmental, peace, or antiwar movements, it would be beneficial for them to retain their own organizational autonomy. Maintaining their unique identity among others would help to strengthen support for Indigenous agendas.

In light of the potential difficulties of coalition building, Jones et al. (2001: 207) contend that network evocation, or differentiating tasks among groups, can aid in cooperation within coalitions. Coalitions sometimes make the mistake of dividing tasks ineffectively. For example, individual social movement organizations in coalitions tend to take on decelerative (lobbying, organizational methods, public speaking) and accelerative (strikes and demonstrations) functions at the same time. Network evocation entails one organization taking on decelerative tasks while other organizations take on accelerative tasks to build the "critical mass." Effective division of labor within coalitions can be useful for Indigenous organizations because movement information can be disseminated quickly as opposed to what would develop if each organization in a coalition completed the same tasks as another.

Indigenous peoples around the world have been struggling to make their voices heard, including through Social Forums that attempt to call attention simultaneously to many difficult social problems. A danger to Indigenous activists is that their concerns will disappear into the broad sweeps of wider struggles. But separating Indigenous concerns from

wider movements also threatens to marginalize them. This presents a conundrum with which Indigenous activists continue to struggle. By forming thematic forums specific to their issues, Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to debate, develop strategies, and create their own political spaces. Indigenous activists need to build stronger coalitions and participate in Social Forums while still maintaining a certain level of organizational autonomy within them. At the same time, it is incumbent upon non-Indigenous global justice activists to listen, reach out, and strategize about how to engage Indigenous voices in Social Forum processes. Doing so will bring the knowledge and wisdom that Indigenous communities have gained from hundreds of years of resistance to capitalism to the WSF. Taking such steps will help Indigenous peoples enter the transnational scale without fear of being silenced.

## NOTES

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1. Who defines *Indigenous* quickly becomes a highly contentious issue (Martínez 2006). Generally we use the term to refer to those who trace their heritage to before the arrival of European colonial penetration and remain on the margins of modern capitalist society. This paper largely focuses on the Americas, although similar processes of capitalist penetration and social exclusion have also occurred in Africa and Asia. The use of a capital “I” in reference to Indigenous peoples is intentional and based on (and in respect for) the stated preference of the board of directors of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC) as a strong affirmation of their ethnic identities.



## CHAPTER 7

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### BUILDING NATIONAL LABOR SOLIDARITY: UNIONS AND LABOR ACTIVISTS AT THE 2007 UNITED STATES SOCIAL FORUM

*Ellen Reese, Kadambari Anantram, Linda J. Kim,  
Roy Kwon, and Preeta Saxena*

From the start, Brazilian labor activists played key roles in building the World Social Forum (WSF). Interest in the Social Forum process has grown over time within the international labor movement, attracting leaders of some of the largest international trade union federations, rank-and-file union activists, representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and workers' centers. Surveys of WSF participants revealed that union affiliates made up as many as one-fifth of respondents in 2005 and about one-tenth of respondents in 2007 (Reese et al., Chapter 4). Here we examine their participation in the first United States Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2007, which drew 12,000 to 15,000 participants.

Our research combines information collected from surveys of USSF participants and from workshops addressing labor issues. Our survey

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results indicate that the USSF mainly attracted the left-wing of organized labor, as well as disproportionate numbers of youth, women, and people of color. They show that, compared to their nonlabor counterparts, labor activists at the USSF protested at higher levels, were more radical in their political goals, and reported higher rates of participation in prior WSF meetings. Our field research then explores the themes and outcomes of the workshops led by labor activists. We found that labor activists used USSF workshops to pursue four types of projects at the USSF: (1) encouraging the spread of social movement unionism; (2) challenging sexism, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment within the labor movement; (3) forming or expanding national labor networks and increasing support for U.S. workers' rights campaigns; and (4) expressing labor solidarity against neoliberal global capitalism. For the most part, labor activists' discussions at the USSF were disconnected from those taking place at the WSF and European Social Forum (ESF) meetings, and few workshop leaders encouraged action at the transnational level. Before discussing our research findings, we first review research on the role of organized labor at previous Social Forum meetings. We then provide a brief overview of the U.S. labor movement as well as recent efforts to revitalize and reform it to include more women and people of color.

### LABOR AND THE SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS

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Representatives of Brazil's Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), the country's largest labor confederation, and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST, the Landless Workers' Movement) served on the Brazilian Organizing Committee since the very first WSF in 2001. Other highly militant Southern unions from South Africa and South Korea also participated, which helped attract other leftists in the labor movement to the WSF as well as regional and local Social Forums (Santos 2006: 47; Waterman 2004, 2005, 2007; Waterman and Timms 2004). Moderate labor activists affiliated with NGOs were also present, especially at Social Forums in Africa (Bond 2005; Pommerolle and Siméant, Chapter 12). The traditional international and regional union federations, including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC),<sup>1</sup> were notably absent in the first WSF, but participated in later meetings (Waterman 2004: 228; Waterman 2005: 141-153). By 2005, the WSF's main leadership body, the International Council, included representatives of unions and union federations from around

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the world, international labor union federations (including ITUC), as well as regional trade union federations from Africa, Europe, and the Americas (Santos 2006: 188–195).

The mix of labor organizations involved has led to considerable political differences and debate among labor activists at Social Forums. Based on his participation and observation of labor events at various social forums, Waterman suggests that, despite the participation of left-leaning labor activists, most of the “big union” events at the WSF were reformist and in line with the Decent Work agenda advanced by the International Labor Organization, the United Nation’s interstate body for labor issues (Waterman 2004; Waterman and Timms 2004; Waterman 2007). He argues that the Decent Work agenda is a reformist one that basically seeks to improve labor and social rights under capitalism (Waterman 2007: 8). This agenda contrasts with the more radical critiques of neoliberal capitalism and the overarching principles of democratic participation, inclusivity, and egalitarianism contained in the WSF Charter of Principles. According to Waterman (2005), the international trade union organizations participating in the WSF mostly emphasize lobbying for legal gains through existing international and national institutions. Though they seek support from social movements and community groups, they tend to view themselves as the dominant partner in any alliance and the trade union struggle as the primary one. He also claims that unions from the global North tend to have paternalistic attitudes towards their Southern counterparts, believing it is their role to assist rather than learn from Southern workers’ organizing efforts. During preparatory meetings for the 2007 WSF meeting in Nairobi, Kenyan and other union leaders sought to bring “all WSF activities under the banner of ‘Decent Work,’” and even threatened to boycott it if they could not “control the wording of workshops and selection of facilitators” (Waterman 2007: 14–15). Though WSF organizers thwarted this, the well-funded Decent Work affiliates organized most of the labor workshops at the 2007 WSF. Other workshops were organized by left-leaning unions and unionists, who promoted a radical and utopian “Global Labor Charter,” and formed a new international network among labor activists involved in the WSF (Waterman 2007).

Similar tensions between bureaucratic reformists, often affiliated with the European Trade Union Confederation, and radical advocates of direct action and participatory democracy in the labor movement were apparent in the European Social Forums (Bieler and Morton 2004; Glasius and

Timms 2006; Smith et al. 2005). Yet, both radicals and reformers could unite around the goals of establishing an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the right to strike at the European level. In general, radical unions worked more closely with other social movements than did more reformist unions. But even the latter unions collaborated with social movements around issues such as immigrants' rights, unemployment benefits, and opposition to neoliberal policies.

Although the ESFs helped nurture ties between trade unionists and social movements, the most important unions did not attend them. Fewer unions participated in the 2003 meeting than in 2002, and there appeared to be less cooperation between unions and social movements on joint actions (Bieler and Morton 2004). Other accounts characterize labor activists—and especially union leaders—at Social Forums as generally reformist in orientation (Smith, Karides, et al. 2007: 81). They also document tensions between union representatives (“verticals”) and some radical activists (“horizontal”) over their preferences for more or less hierarchical forms of organization and decision making (Glasius and Timms 2006; Smith et al. 2005). Nevertheless, research based on surveys of attendees finds that, compared to all other WSF participants, representatives of organized labor (1) attended significantly more protests, (2) claimed active involvement in more types of social movements, and (3) were significantly more supportive of abolishing rather than reforming capitalism (Kwon et al. 2008; Reese et al. 2008).

In sum, prior research suggests that representatives of organized labor are politically divided between radicals and reformists. Observations of labor workshops suggest that many focus on short-run campaigns and reforms. However, survey data reveals high levels of support for long-term radical goals among representatives of organized labor attending Social Forums. Before examining labor activists' participation in the USSF, we first provide some background on the U.S. labor movement and the USSF.

### *THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT AND THE USSF*

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Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, the U.S. labor movement is facing a deep crisis, including a wave of antilabor rulings and legislation, global outsourcing of jobs, a rise in contingent employment, and declining real wages for most workers. Union membership, declining since the 1950s, also reached crisis levels. By 2007, only 12 percent of the

labor force and less than 8 percent of private sector workers belonged to unions (Milkman and Kye 2007). To counteract such trends, the 1990s saw more unions joining forces with community organizations and social movements in efforts to revitalize the U.S. labor movement. Unions increasingly relied on community support for labor campaigns. Unions and central labor councils also formed or joined labor-community coalitions for goals like affordable housing, environmental justice, and living wages. Collaboration with community groups and other movements has helped integrate social movement tactics into union campaigns, increasing labor's political leverage. Nevertheless, many U.S. unions remain wary of cooperating too closely with community groups, fearing that they lack sufficient resources to justify a partnership, or that broadening their base will divert attention from workplace issues or challenge existing leadership (Clawson 2003; Nissen 2003, 1995; Johnston 2000; Obach 2004; Robinson 2000; Tait 2005; Voss and Sherman 2000).

Working-class politics in the United States is deeply structured by ethnic, racial, and gender divisions, creating additional barriers to community-labor collaboration. Historically, mainstream unions, dominated by white men, rarely joined community-based and poor workers' movements, especially those led by women and people of color. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this, especially with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s, the United Farm Workers in the 1960s, and various other unions, such as United Electrical, where leftists were influential. Generally, however, the spread of "business unionism" within the U.S. labor movement after World War II and anticommunist purges of union leadership discouraged unions from collaborating with community organizations. "Business unionism" made unions into top-down "service bureaucracies," narrowly focused on serving existing members through collective bargaining and grievance procedures (Clawson 2003; Fletcher and Gapasin 2008; Robinson 2000; Tait 2005).

Greater collaboration between unions and community groups was encouraged by the spread of social movement unionism since the 1990s. Social movement unionism refers to a broad orientation toward the working class that encompasses unemployed and unorganized workers; the extension of demands beyond the workplace; a willingness to use direct action and other social movement tactics; bottom-up, nonbureaucratic processes of organizing and decision making; and left-wing political orientations among leaders (Johnston 2000; Obach 2004; Robinson 2000; Nissen 2003; Scipes 1992; Voss and Sherman 2000).



Social movement unionism was fueled by the new energy and resources devoted to labor organizing within the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) under the leadership of John Sweeney and the New Voice slate. The rise of community groups aiming to bridge workplace and community concerns also helped foster new alliances and diversified the labor movement’s organizational forms and tactics (Fine 2006; Tait 2005). The pressures exerted by neoliberal restructuring, the infusion of more women and people of color into organized labor, and the increased presence of organizers with experience in other social movements within unions also encouraged these trends. The spread of social movement unionism was, however, very uneven and partial (Clawson 2003; Fletcher and Gapasin 2008; Johnston 2000; Nissen 2003, 2004; Obach 2004; Robinson 2000; Rose 2000; Voss and Sherman 2000).

Leadership struggles and debates about the future direction of the U.S. labor movement intensified at the turn of the century, leading to a historic split within the labor movement. In 2005, seven unions left the AFL-CIO labor federation and formed the Change to Win (CTW) federation.<sup>2</sup> The CTW affiliates claimed that the AFL-CIO and the Sweeney administration were not doing enough to revitalize the labor movement and to organize workers. Their decision to break away from the AFL-CIO partly stemmed from struggles over leadership and control, but also reflected strategic differences (for more details, see Fletcher and Gapasin 2008).

Other efforts to reform the U.S. labor movement focused on improving its relationships with organized labor in other countries. Embedded within a hegemonic nation-state, the U.S. labor movement has long held a poor record of building transnational ties to unions in other countries. Many U.S. unions have long promoted protectionist policies in an attempt to reduce job competition, enhance their bargaining power, and maintain their wages and benefits (Bonacich 2005). Robinson (2002) traces this exclusionary politics back to the Fordist era of unionism when unions linked their demands to national economic growth and when the spread of Cold War anticommunism increased labor’s cooperation with national corporations and government-funded projects to undermine the spread of socialism overseas. This, along with unions’ work to develop an anticommunist international labor federation, limited the extent of international labor solidarity in the United States (Moody 2001 [1997]; Robinson 2002; O’Brien 2000; Fletcher and Gapasin 2008).

There are, however, signs that solidarity with workers around the world is becoming more important to the U.S. labor movement. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. unions have largely abandoned their active involvement in Cold War anticommunist programs. Threats associated with the rise of neoliberal globalization have also spurred unions to step up efforts to curb abuses of workers' rights (Aguirre and Reese 2004; Moody 2001 [1997]; O'Brien 2000). For example, the AFL-CIO actively participated in the historic 1999 protest against the World Trade Organization in Seattle along with labor activists from other countries. U.S. unions have also been active in international campaigns against free trade agreements and have participated in various cross-border campaigns and actions over the past decade (Dreiling 1998; Howard 2007). Even so, the U.S. labor movement has not been very engaged with the World Social Forum process, despite opportunities it provides for building alliances across movements and borders (Smith 2006).

In sum, U.S. unions have been, in general, historically dominated by white men and characterized by a "business unionism" model emphasizing service to existing members rather than a commitment to organizing the unorganized and to pursuing social justice. U.S. unions also have a poor record of solidarity with workers in other countries, participating in government-sponsored anticommunist campaigns, and promoting protectionist policies, sometimes at the expense of Southern workers. There have, of course, been exceptional unions and nontraditional labor organizations that have deviated from these patterns, such as workers' centers and antisweatshop organizations. Over the past decade, unions have recruited more women and people of color and have become more involved in international and transnational campaigns. These trends have been highly uneven and partial, however, leaving much work to be done to make the U.S. labor movement more inclusive of *all* working-class people both within the nation and abroad.

It is within this context that many labor activists around the country attended the USSF. The Forum was organized mainly by left-leaning staff of base-building organizations, many of which targeted low-income communities of color. As a result, most USSF attendees were nonwhite, leftist in their political orientation, and involved in multiple social movements (Juris et al., Chapter 15; Reese et al., Chapter 4). The 2007 National Planning Committee included representatives from two unions (Service Employees International Union [SEIU] and Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees-Hotel Employees and

Restaurant Employees International Union [UNITE-HERE], both CTW affiliates) and various other labor organizations and prolabor networks, including Jobs with Justice, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the Miami Workers Center, People Organized to Win Employment Rights, Southwest Workers' Union, and United Students Against Sweatshops.

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### CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIZED LABOR AT THE USSF

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To examine the social and political characteristics of union members and labor activists attending the USSF, our research team collected a total of 582 surveys from adult attendees, 20 percent of whom completed the survey in Spanish (see Reese et al., Chapter 4). Here, we report our findings for two types of representatives of organized labor: union members and those reporting active involvement in the labor movement. We consider a respondent to be a union affiliate if he or she reported that he or she was either "affiliated with" or "belonged to" a union. By this definition, about 23 percent of our sample was union affiliated. Respondents who reported that they were "actively involved" in the labor movement but who were not affiliated with a union were considered to be "other labor activists." Nearly 7 percent of our sample fell into this category. This latter group includes unaffiliated individuals and members of other groups, including workers' centers and NGOs.

Among union affiliates, nearly 1 out of 5 respondents held a leadership position within their union, while 12 percent were employed as staff within their union. About 37 percent of union affiliates claimed to be "actively involved" in the labor movement, about 3 times higher than the percentage of USSF participants not affiliated with a union. About 44 percent of union affiliates claimed that their union was affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The most common union memberships mentioned were the Communication Workers of America, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and the National Education Association. Among union affiliates that did not identify as part of the AFL-CIO, about 18 percent claimed that their union belonged to the CTW federation. About 64 percent of CTW affiliated members belonged to SEIU, the largest union in that federation and one of the two unions represented on the USSF National Planning Committee. As of 2007, CTW's membership was about one-third the size of AFL-CIO's membership, while about one-third of CTW members belonged to SEIU.

In light of this, SEIU-affiliated members seem to be overrepresented among USSF union affiliates. Although AFL-CIO and CTW members appeared to be underrepresented as a share of all union members, the 3:1 ratio of AFL-CIO to CTW members closely mirrored those in the broader union movement.

Table 7.1 compares characteristics of union members with other labor activists and all other USSF respondents. The Chi-square statistics reported in this table and in the following ones indicate differences that are statistically significant, or not likely to be due to chance. Although women and nonwhites were less prevalent among labor activists than other USSF participants in our survey, both groups were overrepresented at the USSF given their share of all U.S. union members in 2007 (44 percent and 20 percent, respectively) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). Women made up a majority of all three groups of USSF respondents, although they were a smaller majority among unionists than other types of respondents. About 63 percent of nonunion labor activists were white, compared to 50 percent of union members and 47 percent of other USSF respondents. Blacks and Latinos made up a larger share of union members (16 percent and 14 percent, respectively) than other types of labor activists (6 percent and 8 percent). Similarly, only 6 percent of other labor activists were immigrants, compared to 16 percent of union members and 20 percent of all other respondents, and these differences were statistically significant.

A majority of labor activists and union members in our USSF sample, like most other respondents, were young (between the ages of 18 and 35). The USSF disproportionately attracted younger unionists; only 26 percent of all U.S. union members were 16 to 34 years in age in 2007 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008). Like most other USSF attendees, more than two-thirds of union members and other labor activists reported 16 or more years of education. Table 7.1 shows that differences in class identity were statistically significant at the 0.01 level across the three groups. While 50 percent of union members identified as part of the working or lower class, less than 40 percent of the other groups did. The share of union members identifying as part of the upper class was also slightly more than half as great as among the other two groups (16 percent versus 34 percent and 36 percent). Most respondents in all groups reported household incomes less than \$60,000.

Table 7.2 provides information about respondents' political activities and organizational affiliations. Similar to their counterparts at the

**Table 7.1 Social Characteristics of USSF Participants that Are Unionists, Other Labor Activists, and Nonlabor Participants**

		Union Members	Other Labor Activists	Nonlabor
<i>Gender</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =5.83 <sup>†</sup>			
	Female	53.1%	64.2%	64.9%
	Male	46.9%	35.9%	35.1%
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =13.89			
	White	50.4%	62.8%	46.9%
	Black	16.0%	05.9%	12.8%
	Mixed/Multiracial	09.6%	11.8%	10.1%
	Latino/Hispanic	13.6%	07.8%	17.1%
	Asian	02.4%	05.9%	05.6%
	Indigenous	00.0%	00.0%	01.1%
	Middle Eastern	00.8%	01.9%	00.0%
	Other/Refused to Answer	07.2%	03.9%	04.8%
<i>Immigrant</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =7.26*			
	Yes	16.4%	05.6%	20.3%
	No	83.6%	94.4%	79.7%
<i>Age</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =15.09			
	Under 18	02.3%	05.7%	03.4%
	18-25	25.2%	37.7%	26.4%
	26-35	30.5%	32.1%	26.4%
	36-45	11.5%	05.7%	13.9%
	46-55	16.0%	09.4%	10.2%
	56-65	12.2%	05.7%	15.2%
	Over 65	02.3%	03.7%	04.4%
<i>Years of education</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =0.17			
	Less than 16	31.6%	34.0%	31.1%
	16 or more	68.4%	66.0%	68.8%
<i>Perceived Class</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =17.53**			
	Upper	15.8%	34.0%	35.5%
	Middle	34.1%	28.0%	28.8%
	Lower/Working	50.0%	38.0%	35.7%
<i>Household Income</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =7.42			
	> 60,001	29.9%	13.9%	26.9%

Note: <sup>†</sup> =  $p < 0.10$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ , \*\* =  $p < 0.01$

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2007 USSF meeting collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

WSF, labor activists at the USSF claimed higher levels of protest activity than other attendees. Although U.S. labor activists have not been as engaged with the Social Forum process as their counterparts in Brazil and Western Europe, about 40 percent of unionists and nonunion labor

**Table 7.2 Political Participation of USSF Attendees**

	Union Members	Other Activists	Non-Labor
<i>Protest past 12 months</i> $\text{Chi}^2=22.57^{**}$			
None	7.7%	0.0%	16.6%
One	7.7%	4.0%	13.2%
Two-Four	33.9%	40.0%	40.0%
Five or More	51.3%	56.0%	35.1%
<i>Attended a prior WSF</i> $\text{Chi}^2=13.42^{**}$			
Yes	40.2%	40.7%	22.5%
No	59.8%	59.3%	77.5%

Note: \*\* =  $p < 0.01$

Source: Surveys of Attendees of the 2007 USSF meeting collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

activists in our USSF sample claimed that they had attended prior WSF meetings, compared to only 23 percent of other respondents.<sup>3</sup> This shows the important role the labor movement plays in facilitating rank-and-file activists' participation with the WSF process.

In Table 7.3, we compare the political views of labor activists with other USSF participants. Here, we combined respondents that either belonged to or were affiliated with a union or claimed that they were active in the labor movement into one category that we call "labor activists." On several questions, we found that labor activists were significantly more radical in their political views than other USSF attendees. First, about 68 percent of labor activists called for the abolition of capitalism compared to 58 percent of nonlabor respondents.<sup>4</sup> A majority of both types of respondents called for reforming the United Nations, rather than abolishing or replacing it. However, only about 63 percent of labor activists called for reforming the United Nations, compared to 74 percent of other respondents.<sup>5</sup> Most USSF respondents identified as left-of-center in their political orientation. However, identification with the "far left" was slightly more common among labor activists than other USSF respondents (57 percent versus 42 percent, respectively).<sup>6</sup>

In sum, we found that the USSF mainly attracted the left-wing of the labor movement and that union affiliates and labor activists were significantly more radical in some goals compared to other USSF attendees. Our surveys also revealed that the union members drawn to the USSF

**Table 7.3 Political Views of Labor Activists and Other USSF Attendees**

		Labor Activists	Nonlabor
<i>Views on Capitalism</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =4.27*		
Reform		32.7%	42.4%
Abolish		67.3%	57.6%
<i>Views on United Nations</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =9.95**		
Reform		63.1%	74.2%
Replace		19.4%	17.5%
Abolish		17.5%	8.3%
<i>Political Views</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> =12.44†		
Far Left		57.1%	42.1%
Left		34.2%	39.9%
Center Left		4.0%	9.5%
Center		3.4%	4.8%
Center Right		0.7%	1.3%
Right		0.7%	1.6%
Far Right		0.0%	0.9%

Note: † =  $p < 0.10$ , \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ . The category "labor activist" combines the categories "union members" and "actively involved"

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2007 USSF meeting collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

were disproportionately young, female, and persons of color compared to the composition of all union members. Along with other labor activists, they were politically active at the international level. About 68 percent of union affiliates and 52 percent of nonunion labor activists reported involvement in an international organization or campaign (results not shown). And as we noted above, about twice the proportion of unionists and labor activists as other USSF respondents had attended a prior WSF meeting.

#### FIELD RESEARCH ON LABOR WORKSHOPS

At the USSF, members of our research team observed a total of 22 workshops that focused on labor issues. Researchers carefully observed workshops and answered a standard set of questions regarding the composition of panels, audience members, and the content and outcomes of the workshop. A copy of the field notes on each workshop observed can be viewed on our project website (<http://irows.ucr.edu/research/tsmstudy/lerf/lerftoc.htm>). Here, we summarize our main findings.

Generally, the labor workshops at the USSF, like other workshops there, had a more pragmatic than ideological quality to them (Juris et al., Chapter 15). Nevertheless, a number of common themes emerged from the labor workshops, suggesting that organizers were aiming to promote greater ideological coherence within the labor movement.

First, many of the workshop panelists and participants emphasized the need for greater solidarity among workers. They called for greater community involvement in workers' struggles and international solidarity with workers in other countries and noted the importance of the labor movement in work for social justice. Opposition to neoliberal global capitalism was another theme that appeared in at least one-third of the labor workshops we observed. This theme has been central in all WSF meetings, helping to unite activists across diverse movements (Kaneshiro et al., Chapter 10). In the USSF labor workshops, the issues facing U.S. workers were linked to "neoliberalism," "globalization," or "global capitalism." These discussions tended to be brief and cursory, however, and there was little or no discussion about possible alternative economic systems in these workshops. Instead, the flaws and discontents associated with neoliberal global capitalism were discussed along with concrete steps for organizing or supporting specific campaigns or networks.

More commonly, labor workshops emphasized the need to transform the U.S. union movement through social movement unionism and efforts to confront sexism, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiments within the labor movement. Because these latter two themes seemed to pervade most of the workshops observed, we discuss them in greater detail below. We then discuss how these labor workshops were used to expand national labor networks and to increase support for particular campaigns for U.S. workers' rights. Here, we note how the USSF mainly focused on local and national initiatives; workshop participants demonstrated relatively little engagement with the WSF process or transnational campaigns.

### *PROMOTING SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM*

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Community-labor partnerships and nontraditional forms of worker organization largely characterized labor activism at the USSF. Eighteen of the 22 workshops observed were either co-led by representatives of unions and other types of labor organizations or led solely by nonunion labor organizations, such as workers' centers, community organizations, or community-labor coalitions.<sup>7</sup> Union members were featured in about half of these



workshops,<sup>8</sup> but only five were solely led by union representatives; the other six were co-led with various nonunion groups. Overall, these numbers reflect the high degree of participation by nontraditional labor organizations and a high degree of community-labor cooperation in the planning of these workshops. Jobs with Justice (JWJ), founded in 1987 to build broad alliances of workers and community groups, was well represented at the USSF. Jobs with Justice reports on its website that over 350 staff, leaders, and members from 16 local JWJ coalitions participated in the USSF.<sup>9</sup> Representatives from JWJ were included as panelists in four of the workshops we observed, as well as the plenary panel on the labor movement.

About three-fourths of the USSF events we observed included some discussion of community-labor alliances, including the role of consumers, faith-based organizations, college students, and other community organizations. Boycotts were encouraged as a way to get the community involved in struggles for workers' rights. At least half of the workshops discussed cross-movement connections, such as between movements for housing rights, immigrants' rights, racial justice, women's rights, human rights, and environmental justice.<sup>10</sup> Jobs with Justice's strategy of having members formally commit to show up five times a year for struggles other than their own was encouraged at one workshop; other workshops promoted innovative tactics and organizational forms, such as workers' centers and faith-based networks. Use of the Internet to gain public support for workers' campaigns and overcome the limits of the mainstream media coverage of workers' struggles was also discussed.

### *OVERCOMING RACISM AND SEXISM*

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Most workshop organizers overcame the usual pattern of white men speaking for the labor movement, and they attracted the participation of many women and people of color. Although a majority of union members and other labor activists in our USSF survey were white, the panelists leading the workshops we observed appeared to be more racially diverse; our research team estimated that roughly 33 percent were white, 33 percent Latino, 17 percent African American, 4 percent Asian American, and 10 percent were another race or ethnicity. Except for four workshops that drew largely white audiences and two that drew mostly people of color, the audience at most of these workshops was also fairly mixed racially. On the other hand, few Asians appeared to be present, perhaps in part because relatively few Asians reside in the southeast United States. Translation (mainly into

Spanish) occurred in nearly one-third of the workshops. Women made up more than half of all the workshop panelists and more than half of these USSF workshops drew gender-balanced audiences.

Many of the observed labor workshops focused on forming or strengthening ties between activists and building trust and mutual understanding across racial and ethnic groups. Some included discussions of the current and historical experiences of oppression among particular racial and ethnic groups, such as Filipino, Latino, and Dominican immigrants, and/or native-born African Americans. Cross-class and multiracial alliances were also promoted. Workshop panelists shared strategies for overcoming anti-immigrant sentiment among U.S.-born workers; they also raised consciousness about how immigration from the global South was linked to imperialism and neoliberal global capitalism. Workshops on campaigns to improve the rights of domestic, immigrant, and agricultural workers addressed how racial, gender, and class inequality interacted in the lives of these workers and encouraged labor activists to get more involved in improving the rights of these workers. The workshops focusing on domestic workers were particularly spirited, involving chanting, singing, and clapping to demonstrate audience members' support for these workers' rights, and to express and strengthen feelings of solidarity among domestic workers themselves, who were racially and ethnically diverse.

In these respects, the workshops promoted the kinds of "tolerant identities" that della Porta observed among participants of Social Forum meetings in Europe, which are "characterized by inclusiveness and positive emphasis upon diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identification. They develop around common campaigns . . . and [are] nurtured by an 'evangelical' search for dialogue" (della Porta 2005: 187).

Just as tolerant identities helped unite activists in Europe, USSF labor activists emphasized the multiple aspects of workers' identities (e.g., as women, immigrants, African Americans, etc.).

Other discussions focused on organizing people of color and building women's leadership within trade unions. UNITE-HERE discussed the training it provides for workplace leaders from North America, including Spanish-speaking leaders. Meanwhile, women's empowerment was the main focus of a workshop organized by the South Florida Jobs with Justice (SFJWJ). Drawing a predominantly women-of-color audience, SFJWJ discussed the successful implementation of a program in which they sent black women workers to Guatemala and Latinas to Haiti to increase international and cross-racial labor solidarity. Workshop leaders encouraged

women labor activists to join organizations such as Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD) and STITCH focusing on the empowerment of women of color as a way to develop their leadership skills.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, our findings show that the labor workshops at the USSF were used to encourage participants to confront inequalities rooted in racism, sexism, and anti-immigrant sentiment within the U.S. labor movement and society. They also shared success stories about forming effective cross-racial alliances and leadership development strategies to address social inequalities within the U.S. labor movement. The USSF provides a rare opportunity for labor activists to address such inequities in open and constructive dialogues.

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### *BUILDING NATIONAL NETWORKS AND SUPPORT FOR LABOR CAMPAIGNS*

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Slightly more than half of these workshops focused solely on organizing at the local and national levels. Workshop leaders and other participants mostly used the USSF to gain public support for campaigns to organize U.S. workers in particular occupations or industries. For example, they gathered signatures for postcards in support of a proposed bill for a domestic workers' bill of rights to be sent to legislators in New York. Other workshops solicited audience support for various consumer boycotts.<sup>12</sup> Petitions and postcards in support of workers' demands at Verizon Wireless and Burger King were also circulated throughout the USSF, including the plenary session on labor rights. Several groups also raised money during their workshops by requesting donations or selling T-shirts.

One of the most significant outcomes of the USSF was the formation of a new national network of domestic worker organizations. Workshops, some of which were closed to the public, focused on developing the goals and plans for this network as well as building relationships among members from different cities and different racial and ethnic groups. At another workshop, AFL-CIO staff focused on expanding their National Day Labor Organizing Network by encouraging groups that organized immigrant workers to join it.<sup>13</sup>

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### *LABOR SOLIDARITY AND OPPOSITION TOWARD NEOLIBERAL GLOBAL CAPITALISM*

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Although USSF labor workshops focused mainly on local and national issues, they occasionally linked U.S. workers' struggles to global capital-

ism and the international spread of neoliberal policies. For example, one workshop specifically addressed the devastating impact of free trade on workers in the rust belt, including job loss across industrial, service, and entertainment sectors. International speakers made up slightly fewer than 7 percent of all speakers, helping to bring global perspectives, mostly from the global South, into the discussions. International speakers appeared to be more common within labor workshops than workshops addressing other issues and movements (Juris et al., Chapter 15). These patterns represent a shift away from the paternalism and nationalism that has historically pervaded U.S. organized labor.

Transnational alliances between labor organizations were also mentioned in nearly 40 percent of the observed workshops, although usually as brief remarks within broader discussions. Most of the transnational alliances mentioned involved unions or workers' associations that supported each other's national or local campaigns or exchanged information and skills; only three involved transnational campaigns or actions.<sup>14</sup> Other examples of transnational alliances included efforts by labor activists and their allies to shape international policies and support changes in other nations' policies that would benefit workers. For example, participants at the workshop on public sector workers discussed how international law may be a useful tool when it is combined with organizing workers, and the Boston May Day Coalition described their efforts to promote migrant workers' rights in the United States in accordance with a call by the Migrant Workers' Rights Assembly at the 2007 WSF.

Notably, this latter example was one of the few times we observed USSF workshop leaders making an explicit link to discussions about workers' rights taking place at the WSF. Discussions about U.S. workers' rights generally seemed disconnected from the WSF and other transnational initiatives. Indeed, we observed no discussions about the "Decent Work" agenda or the "Global Labor Charter" circulating among WSF attendees. There was also very little discussion of international free trade agreements, international governance institutions, or the problem of "precarity," which were common themes for labor activists at the WSF and ESF (see della Porta and Mosca, Chapter 13; Bieler and Morton 2004; Waterman 2004, 2007; Waterman and Timms 2004). Instead, the USSF was mainly used by labor organizations to expand national labor networks and increase moral and financial support for specific campaigns for U.S. workers' rights.

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## POSTSCRIPT: LABOR ACTIVISTS AT THE 2010 USSF

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Organized labor continued to play an active role in the second U.S. Social Forum in 2010. The National Planning Committee included representatives from several unions, namely AFL-CIO and AFSCME, as well as other workers' organizations, such as the National Day Laborers' Organizing Network, Jobs with Justice, and the Southwest Workers Union. Centro Obrero, a workers' center for immigrant day laborers, and Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice served as anchor organizations for Detroit's local organizing committee. The location of this forum in Detroit, the heart of the rust belt, helped highlight the impacts of the global economic crisis on workers throughout the nation. An analysis of the workshop descriptions for workshops focusing on either "labor" or "workers," reveals that about 40 percent of them addressed the global economic crisis.

Various workshops focused on organizing unemployed workers. At one such workshop, laid-off workers and representatives from the Unemployed and Anxiously Employed Workers' Initiative (a project affiliated with the Northeast Indiana Central Labor Council) shared information about their efforts to organize unemployed workers, a group that has traditionally been neglected by unions. The initiative is signing up workers at the unemployment insurance office and union offices throughout Indiana and helping them meet their immediate needs, such as preventing home foreclosures, or helping them obtain material assistance. Once workers join, they are mobilized to take action around demands for job creation, better job training, and extensions on unemployment insurance. Workshop participants from various organizations, including Jobs with Justice and Common Security Clubs, also shared their experiences with organizing unemployed workers. A total of 125 local Common Security Clubs have been organized across the nation by members of churches, community organizations, and unions; local groups educate themselves about economic issues, provide mutual aid, and take action in response to the economic crisis. Workshop participants were encouraged to support the national campaign for creating 1 million jobs (organized by the Center for Community Change, the AFL-CIO, and other groups) and participate in a national march for 1 million jobs taking place in Washington, D.C., on October 2, 2010.

Other workshops focused on mobilizing against public sector cutbacks, another manifestation of the economic crisis. At one such

workshop, “They Say Cutback . . . We Say Fightback: Responding to the Economic Crisis Through Movement Building,” workshop organizers emphasized the importance of building regional alliances and mobilizing in response to efforts to cut back and privatize the public sector. Panelists discussed how the context of fiscal crises was used by groups on the right to advance the agenda of privatization, and participants shared stories of mobilizing, sometimes successfully, against cutbacks such as closures of local libraries and health clinics, and cuts in public school funding. In small groups, participants discussed the challenges they faced in building such alliances. Workshop participants also emphasized common demands that could be used to unite public sector workers, their clients, and other community members, such as demands for increases in corporate taxation, less spending on prisons, wars, etc.

Community-labor coalitions remained a key theme in the 2010 USSF. About 72 percent of the workshops focusing on “labor” or “workers” addressed community-labor alliances. The vast majority of workshops were sponsored by nontraditional workers’ organizations, coalitions, or networks, including many workers’ centers and local chapters of Jobs with Justice. Only about 9 percent of these workshops were sponsored by unions. The United Automobile Workers sponsored three workshops, and many of its members participated in other events. Representatives of other unions were also present and sponsored workers, including representatives of SEIU, American Federation of Teachers (AFT), United Steelworkers, and various affiliates of the AFL-CIO. Community-labor alliances were addressed in multiple ways, including workshops encouraging greater participation among unionists in supporting international human rights struggles, such as the struggle for Palestinians’ rights and the campaign to close the School of Americas, which trains military forces that have suppressed human rights and labor activists abroad. More commonly, community-labor alliances were discussed in response to cross-cutting issues affecting both workers and community members, such as the struggle for good jobs and environmental justice in the port trucking industry.

As they did in 2007, labor activists at the 2010 USSF highlighted struggles of nontraditional workers—many of whom are immigrants and workers of color—through various workshops, such as those focusing on day laborers, domestic workers, and restaurant workers. A major accomplishment of the 2010 USSF was the founding meeting of the Excluded Workers’ Congress, which brought together hundreds of activists from

a variety of mass-based labor organizations across the country. This congress represented an extension of the work of building a national network of domestic workers' organizations that occurred at the 2007 USSF. Attendees representing all sorts of workers excluded from U.S. labor laws were present, including domestic workers, day laborers, farm workers, taxi drivers, temporary workers, and restaurant workers, as well as workers living in "Right to Work" states. Members of various U.S. unions and labor activists from around the world, including India and Brazil, were also present to express solidarity and to emphasize its importance to revitalizing the U.S. labor movement. Speakers and cultural performers emphasized the importance of unity and mobilization among low-wage workers. They educated the audience on the issues facing particular groups of workers—Chinese immigrant restaurant workers in San Francisco, African American workers in southern states, Latino immigrant farm workers in Florida, etc.—and their common quest for human rights, equality, dignity, and better wages and working conditions. Speakers also shared concrete strategies for improving excluded workers' rights through organizing campaigns and through state and municipal legislation. Attendees sang and chanted together and loudly cheered in celebration when a speaker reported New York state legislators' approval of a Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, an important victory for Domestic Workers United that set a precedent for domestic workers in other states.

Having learned the potential of the USSF to increase support for workers' campaigns in 2007, labor activists took to the streets in protest during the 2010 USSF. At one protest, Teamsters, along with other labor activists and environmental justice activists, demanded the end of the world's largest waste incinerator in Detroit, calling for "zero waste" alternatives that would create good jobs. Another protest, sponsored by the Restaurant Opportunity Center, was held at a local restaurant chain in support of underpaid workers facing harassment and retaliation for organizing. A third protest, called by the Farm Workers' Organizing Committee, targeted J. P. Morgan Chase Bank; protesters demanded that the bank end its bad lending practices to homeowners and take action to end the exploitation of tobacco workers by Reynolds American, a company it has helped to bankroll (Twin Cities Independent Media Center 2010). Such actions not only demonstrated the militancy of labor activists attending the USSF, but also their commitment to work in coalition with community activists.

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CONCLUSION

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Most of the labor activists surveyed at the USSF identified as part of the “far left” and expressed support for radical political goals, such as abolishing capitalism. However, most of the labor workshops and protests, like many of those occurring at the WSF, focused on short-term reforms and immediate steps to strengthen particular labor campaigns or networks. Similar tensions between radicals and reformists within the labor movement as those observed at the WSF and ESF meetings also occurred during the USSF. However, these tensions mainly involved informal exchanges between audience members, often self-identified as socialists, and workshop leaders. Few workshops set up formal debates among workshop panelists where broader strategic and ideological differences could be expressed, as have occurred more commonly at the WSF and ESF. In this sense, the participants in the USSF labor workshops described above resembled European Social Forum participants’ emphasis on “tolerant identities” (della Porta 2005), which embraced diversity and emphasized unity around concrete goals.

Although the labor workshops at the USSF seemed to have a more pragmatic quality than an ideological one, the USSF nevertheless provided a space where workshop leaders sought to increase the ideological coherence among labor activists. The workshops we observed conveyed four types of beliefs and normative commitments. First, workshop leaders promoted social movement unionism, especially community-labor alliances and other types of innovative organizing methods and forms, as key to strengthening the U.S. labor movement. Second, they expressed a commitment to confronting the racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and sexism within the U.S. labor movement and the wider society that have long divided the U.S. working class. Like their counterparts at the ESF, USSF participants thus acknowledged “multiple belongings” (della Porta 2005). They emphasized how workers faced multiple kinds of oppression (as immigrants, women, and people of color, etc.), how these various forms of oppression intersected in the lives of particular groups of workers, and the need for labor activists to support excluded and non-traditional workers as well as other movements, such as the movement for immigrants’ rights. The popularity of these latter themes was undoubtedly related to the composition of those attending the USSF, who were disproportionately women and people of color. Workshop leaders were even more racially and ethnically diverse than our survey



respondents, revealing how USSF organizers successfully overcame the pattern of white male leadership pervading U.S. unions.

Third, the USSF provided labor activists a site to form or expand national-level labor networks and campaigns to improve the lives of U.S. workers and working-class communities. In 2010, such themes were linked to the global economic crisis. This probably represented an important upward scale shift for many of these USSF workshop participants. Like most other USSF participants, labor activists expressed a preference for local-level strategies for change over national or international/global ones (Reese et al., Chapter 4).

Finally, the workshops provided a space to express opposition to neoliberal global capitalism and to express the need for greater solidarity among workers and working-class communities. In 2010, such themes were linked to the global economic crisis. Support for international solidarity among workers was occasionally expressed at the labor workshops, and various panelists drew connections between local struggles within the United States and larger shifts within the global political economy. Discussions about ongoing transnational initiatives, particularly joint cross-border campaigns, among the labor activists attending the USSF were rare, however, distinguishing these discussions from those occurring within the WSF and ESF. This is not simply the expression of a long-standing parochialism within the U.S. labor movement. It probably also reflects U.S. labor activists' deep sense of crisis about the state of their labor movement, where less than 8 percent of private sector workers belong to a union.

The relative absence of discussions about transnational campaigns and initiatives is troubling, however, given the extent of economic globalization and the challenges it presents for U.S. workers. This gap was also rather striking given that survey findings reveal that most labor activists in our USSF survey reported involvement in international campaigns or organizations, while 40 percent of them reported participation in a prior WSF meeting. Following Smith (2006), we argue that fuller engagement with the WSF process, and closer integration between the USSF and WSF process, would help to build the kinds of transnational ties needed to address the challenges that neoliberal global capitalism and the global economic crisis present for U.S. workers.

## NOTES

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1. The ITUC was formerly known as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

2. The new coalition included the Service Employees International Union, United Food and Commercial Workers, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, Laborers' International Union of North America, United Farm Workers of America, and UNITE-HERE.

3. These differences were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

4. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

5. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

6. This difference was statistically significant at the 0.10 level. On this question, we excluded those who were "indifferent" in our analysis.

7. We considered a workshop to be "co-led" by a union if a union was represented among the workshop's panel of speakers or facilitators.

8. Most of the unions represented at these workshops were affiliated with the AFL-CIO, including the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers; Communication Workers of America; United Steelworkers; and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Only two workshops were organized or co-led by unions affiliated with the Change to Win Coalition. Those workshops featured representatives from UNITE-HERE and Service Employees International Union (SEIU). A representative from SEIU, the largest union affiliated with the Change to Win Coalition, was also featured in the "labor movement" plenary.

9. <http://www.jwj.org/news/updates/2007/08.html> (retrieved July 12, 2009).

10. These numbers do not include workshops in which people addressed issues of race and gender but did not necessarily identify it as women's rights or racial justice.

11. Members of the audience raised the point that some women leaders do not feel comfortable informing their (often male) leaders that they are part of a women's leadership organization, demonstrating the persistence of male domination within the labor movement.

12. These included the boycott of Verizon Wireless and American Eagle Outfitters (for trying to prevent unionization of its workers), the boycott of DuPont (because of its use of perfluorooctanoic acid to make household products), and the boycott of Burger King (because of its low wages).

13. The AFL-CIO adopted new policies allowing members of workers' centers to participate in AFL-CIO committees and to participate in Central Labor Councils.

14. These included (1) a campaign by UNITE-HERE and European unions to organize garment workers employed by a French-owned company; (2) a transnational campaign to oppose the Free Trade Area for the Americas agreement; and (3) the "Global Women's Strike" in support of policies valuing women's unpaid caregiving work.



## CHAPTER 8

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### THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AS A BOUNDED OPEN SPACE:

#### MAINTAIN IT, FIX IT, OR NIX IT? EVIDENCE FROM POST-9/11 GLOBAL ANTIWAR ACTIVISM

*Ruth Reitan*

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#### POST-9/11 GLOBAL ANTIWAR ACTIVISM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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The movement that emerged in response to the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq is perhaps the most varied transnational network ever to protest war. Although difficult to gauge, this fluid network has included thousands of groups mobilizing tens of millions on all continents and coordinating sustained campaigns to counter foreign bases and to stage civil society-led trials to expose the Bush administration's and its allies' war crimes. The reemergent peace movement has staged some of the largest national demonstrations ever recorded, in addition to unprecedented transnational days of action. The first was held on November 9, 2002, where nearly 1 million people flowed through the streets of Florence, Italy, on the closing day of the first European Social Forum (ESF). The next morning, several hundred activists gathered at a Social Movements Assembly and set February 15, 2003 as a global day

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of mobilization. This call was reaffirmed at the World Social Forum (WSF) the following January in Brazil and was disseminated via activist listserves and websites. The “2/15” appeal was answered by as many as 30 million people in nearly 1,000 cities from more than 100 countries. An estimated half million marched in Berlin and New York City, 1 million in Barcelona and Madrid, nearly 2 million in London, and 2.5 million in Rome. So impressive was the global outpouring that even the mainstream U.S. press, which until that time had largely fallen into lockstep behind Bush, took notice. A *New York Times* op-ed pronounced the emergence of a new “superpower” of world public opinion “eyeball to eyeball” with the president and his policies (Tyler 2003).

Since 2003, this global network has coordinated many more days of protest, though none has rivaled 2/15’s passion or numbers. Still, antiwar activists continue to meet and plan actions and campaigns at world and regional Social Forums and other milieus. Recent transnational meetings include the World Against War conference in London in 2007, the sixth Cairo Antiwar Conference in 2008, and the Assembly of Antiwar Movements at the WSF in Belém in 2009. At these meetings, the network has organized more sustained activities to challenge the United States’ global military and economic hegemony and construct a more peaceful, just, and multipolar world. These include the Occupation Watch Center, which provides firsthand, critical information about events on the ground, caravans, fact-finding missions, and human shields in Iraq. In addition a World Tribunal on Iraq—the first session being held at the 2004 WSF—to investigate the war crimes of U.S. leaders and their partners was established. Other activities include ongoing protests against NATO, a reinvigorated campaign against foreign bases, as well as a series of campaigns in support of the Palestinian cause, namely a global boycott and divestment campaign targeting Israel, calls for prosecuting its war crimes in Palestine under the International Court of Justice, and the “Free Gaza” flotillas.<sup>1</sup>

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### MOVEMENT EMERGENCE AND MISCIBILITY WITHIN THE WSF

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What role have the world and regional Social Forums played in supporting this post-9/11 antiwar movement and in facilitating its articulation, or *miscibility*,<sup>2</sup> with extant movements, especially those opposing neoliberalism? The answer is important, for it contributes to debates critiquing the nature of the forum and questioning its future. Namely, should the

WSF continue as an open and horizontal space while innovating on its decentralized model? Should it instead be considerably restructured toward improving its efficacy in articulating movements? Or, should it be scrapped altogether and replaced with some other organizational form that could better support the aims of realizing alternatives to neoliberal globalization and neoimperial wars? What is being challenged in this debate is the way in which the WSF attempts to promote, while at the same time protecting, diversity and decentralization within its spaces and, by extension, in the broader struggles against neoliberalism and for radical democracy. To gauge the Social Forums' relative success in fostering movement miscibility, I analyze the emergence of a global antiwar movement (GAWM) within the WSF spaces. Next, I address the more extreme critique that the Forum model actually impedes alliance building with the most decisive antineoliberal and anti-imperial forces of our times by examining the two most ambitious initiatives attempting to bridge this gap, those of the Beirut and Cairo antiwar conferences, both organized outside the WSF spaces and strictures.

To begin to assess the WSF's efficacy, we should first bear in mind the variety of actors involved in its founding, as well as the participation of over 100,000 people in a single Porto Alegre meeting. Recall, too, the myriad regional, national, local, and thematic forums in which activists engaged. Countless individuals and organizations within the Social Forums thus have the potential to serve as "*movement crossovers*" in support of miscibility with the resurgent peace movement (Reese et al. 2010). Indeed, through their involvement in multi-issue organizations and movements, many activists have built bridges with the GAWM. For purposes of brevity and clarity, however, we will focus below on the key crossover role of Focus on the Global South (hereafter "Focus") and its director Walden Bello in particular within major international meetings, protests, events, and campaigns that this organization has helped to facilitate within the world and regional Forums.

We will see how movement crossovers like Focus quickly expanded the breadth of existing antineoliberal movements within the WSF spaces by reorienting their own multi-issue organizations, as well as the many networks and campaigns in which they are involved, in an effort to prioritize war and imperialism as a threat equal to and bound up with neoliberal globalization. These movement crossovers also recognized that the impending war had reignited the dormant peace and anti-imperial movements worldwide, and thus sought to draw these new actors into coalitions

across geographic, issue, and ideological lines. These efforts were aimed at coordinating domestic and transnational protests and building more sustainable campaigns that could mobilize against U.S. military and economic imperialism. What this tremendous bridging activity demonstrates is that the WSF's dual commitment to flexible, decentralized organization and to maximum diversity of actors and issues has greatly facilitated the reemergence of the GAWM and its articulation with existing movements, particularly those opposing neoliberal globalization. This provides evidence that the Forum's design should be neither radically fixed nor entirely nixed.

Focus is an illustrative example of a movement crossover organization because of its strategic embeddedness in multiple movements, federations, and networks comprising not only the GAWM but also those constituting the alter- (or antineoliberal) globalization movement, such as *Our World Is Not for Sale* (see Reitan 2007; Smythe, Chapter 9). As a Southern-based organization with a global agenda, it also holds a unique geographical bridging position between antineoliberal and antiwar groups in the global North and those of Asia and the Middle East. Bello in particular has been able to act as a pivotal crossover due to his extensive global contacts from prior participation with prodemocracy groups in the Philippines, 1960s U.S. activists from his student years, and transnational NGOs such as Food First, Oxfam, and Greenpeace.

Focus and their partners within *Our World Is Not for Sale* were thus well situated to comprehend and then reorient to shifts in global opportunities and threats presented in the wake of the response of the United States to the 9/11 attacks. In this climate, Focus emerged as a key alterglobalization movement/GAWM bridge builder within the Forum spaces. Bello (2004: 57) counseled his fellow activists that "we need to understand how the two connect—which also means trying to bring together two different movements." Toward those ends, Focus has utilized the WSF and ESF to effectively bridge diverse movements and actors. Evidence of this activity is found in the many seminars, workshops, plenaries, tribunals, "terrain" spaces, antiwar and ESF Preparatory Assemblies, and WSF International Council and steering group meetings. Each will be briefly outlined below.

Following 9/11, the regional and World Social Forums quickly became prime milieus for fostering movement crossovers. The looming war galvanized European NGOs and social movements' preparations for the first ESF in Florence. While some of these relationships stretched back decades, the most immediate predecessors were the planning group for

the protests against the meeting of the Group of Eight Industrialized Countries (G8) in Genoa in July 2001 and the “Other Davos” meeting held in 1999, a precursor to the first WSF. This ESF organizing committee acted as a movement crossover by prioritizing the war theme in Forum seminars, as well as staging the first mass demonstration in Europe of up to 1 million on the closing day. It also coordinated the first European Social Movements Assembly (SMA) the following day, which set the 2/15 global day of mobilization against the war (Reitan 2002).

Likewise, Focus and its partners within the Our World Is Not for Sale network have utilized the world and regional Forums in ways that realize the WSF Charter’s first stated goal, that of incubating new movements. They have held numerous transnational meetings bringing formerly unconnected actors together to share information and discuss issues toward developing a common antineoliberal critique, concrete campaigns, and a coordination framework among network participants at all levels. Equally important, with regard to the Charter’s second goal of articulating social movements, both Focus and Our World Is Not for Sale have also used the Social Forums to good effect as spaces for encountering others beyond their main network and areas of concern, who nevertheless perceive neoliberalism and war as common threats. For example, at the first ESF in Florence, Bello shared a platform in a packed meeting hall with activists from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, members of the newly formed Asian Social Forum, and others from Indonesia, East Timor, and Russia in a critical dialogue on war in Asia.<sup>3</sup> This participation, as well as Focus’s presence at all subsequent ESFs, has facilitated movement crossovers among issues and bridged Asian and European activist communities.

This Asia-based networking within the Forums seeking to bridge the alterglobalization movement and GAWM has continued over the years. In preparation for both the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings in Korea and the Hong Kong WTO ministerial in 2005, for example, Our World Is Not for Sale member Korean People’s Action initiated an Asian Peoples’ and Social Movements Assembly against War and Neoliberal Globalization at the fifth WSF in Porto Alegre. Endorsed by Focus and a number of trade unions, peasants groups, women’s organizations, and peace and justice groups from across the region, the assembly sought not only to mobilize for the upcoming events, but also to unite and coordinate Asian-wide struggles and strengthen regional solidarity and resistance against neoliberalism and war.

Another mass meeting held consistently within both the world and regional Forums that promotes movement crossovers is the Global Assembly of the Antiwar Movement (hereafter, the Global Assembly). At the second ESF in Paris in mid-November 2003, for instance, in addition to large seminars and smaller workshops focusing on war, neoimperialism, and military bases, a couple hundred activists met for the Global Assembly. There they discussed March 20, 2004 as the next transnational day of action, which was preferred by U.S. activists and was eventually agreed to at the closing Social Movements Assembly.<sup>4</sup> That same year at the WSF in Mumbai, Focus helped to convene another such assembly, which they estimated to be the largest and most diverse transnational meeting of peace movements ever held (Focus 2004b). At the WSF in January 2007 in Nairobi, the Global Assembly was again convened in addition to a number of self-organized antiwar workshops and seminars, while “Peace and War” was 1 of 21 “forums on struggles, alternatives, and actions” organized by WSF facilitators.<sup>5</sup>

The breadth of signatories to these Global Assembly declarations and others like them evidences considerable movement bridging: Among them are the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, the Brazilian trade union CUT, the Continental Campaign Against FTAA, Corpwatch, the Canadian Polaris Institute, the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Jubilee South, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and Korean People’s Action, and the NGO Federation of Nepal.

In addition, transnational peace coordination has gone beyond meetings and assemblies aimed at planning mass demonstrations. The Social Forums have provided a key site of innovation for these more sustained initiatives and campaigns, including a network against foreign military bases and civil society tribunals exposing and condemning recent war crimes. At the fourth WSF in Mumbai, India, over 100 activists convened several planning workshops toward building an International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases that was eventually established in March 2007 (No Bases Network n.d). Also in Mumbai, the newly launched World Tribunal on Iraq held the first of several international public hearings, called the World Court of Women on U.S. War Crimes (Sokmen 2008).

Perhaps the most propitious methodological and spatial innovation of the WSF to enhance alterglobalization and antiwar articulation was staged just prior to and during the WSF 2005. Methodologically, six months before the Forum, the International Council began a consultative



process to gauge the themes of most concern to social movements, which in the end garnered responses from over 1,800 organizations via the Internet and through other means of communication. This participatory consultation method prefigured the spatial innovation that was realized in Porto Alegre the following year. Eleven themes were identified by the Forum's organizers as most popular, and some 2,500 workshops, panels, and seminars were organized around them. But further, workshops with complementary themes were clustered in the same space along the Guaíba river: The issues of "peace, demilitarization, and the struggle against war, free trade, and debt" were grouped together to enhance movement crossovers and miscibility (Smythe 2008).

As this consultation launched by the International Council demonstrates, movement crossovers are also fostered between the regional and world Forum events in their planning meetings, chief among them the International Council and the European Preparatory Assemblies. Focus is one of several Our World Is Not for Sale members on the International Council, which has proven to be a space for diverse groups to institutionalize and diffuse the WSF as a permanent global process, as well as to dialogue, debate, and foster solidarity and miscibility toward coordinating action. Likewise, at the European Preparatory Assemblies in Paris in December 2004, for example, European antiwar activists met with representatives from Asia and the Americas to set a third global day of action marking the second anniversary of the Iraq invasion, on March 19–20, 2005 (Nesbitt 2005). And in tandem with the European meeting, 400 Indians representing a broad swath of civil organizations were joined in Hyderabad by 20 international activists for a meeting aimed at both consolidating the nationwide movement and strengthening ties to the global antiwar movement. There they also pledged to mobilize in March 2005 (Focus 2004b). This call was reiterated within the Global Assembly in late January at the WSF in Porto Alegre.

As final evidence of extensive movement crossovers and miscibility within the Forum spaces vis-à-vis the GAWM, Focus has been part of a fluid steering group to better coordinate antiwar activity since late summer 2004. This group draws together over 20 representatives from the largest antiwar coalitions and antineoliberal networks worldwide and often meets at the Social Forums (Focus 2004b). Its members have included newly formed national and regional antiwar coalitions, namely Stop the War Coalitions from the United Kingdom and Greece, South Africa's Antiwar Coalition, the Asian Peace Alliance, Japan's Peace Boat,

the Mexican Serapaz, India's Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, and the United Kingdom's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Indicative of the considerable movement articulation between traditional and newly formed peace groups and existing antineoliberal networks is the additional representation of ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens) Japan, San Francisco's Global Exchange, the South American Hemispheric Social Alliance, Italian movements of the ESF, Red Mexicana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio, Brazil's Movimento dos Sem Terra (MST) and the global Via Campesina it helped establish, and the World March of Women against poverty and patriarchy.

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FIX OR NIX THE WSF? LESSONS FROM THE BEIRUT  
AND CAIRO ANTIWAR CONFERENCES

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The above evidence suggests that the decentralized design of the WSF, along with the diversity of actors and issues it attracts, has in fact facilitated rapid and widespread reorientation and crossover activity on the part of alterglobalization and antiwar bridge builders like Focus, allowing them to link concerns of war and militarism to preexisting struggles against neoliberalism. This implies that safeguarding the WSF as an open and flexible space without attempting to prioritize issues or set a collective agenda may in fact be the most efficacious way of facilitating dynamic movement emergence and coalescence.

But before we can draw this conclusion, we must first address the more existential critique that Bello (2007, 2008) raised and that sparked considerable debate. He questioned whether the WSF actually *impedes* the global struggle against neoliberalism and imperialism by stifling alliances with the most decisive antihegemonic forces on the ground. Bello suggested that the Forum should be discarded altogether. His concern arises from the fact that while movement crossovers had considerable success in linking East Asia, Europe, and the Americas within an emergent antiwar movement to the alterglobalization movement and WSF, there was a relative absence of both coordination partners and mass mobilization in Arab countries. The latter included the very people most threatened by, and actively resisting, the U.S. wars.<sup>6</sup> Fearing that opportunities were being lost, Bello charged that the WSF's organizational rules and model were partially to blame.

These concerns are justified. When compared with other regions of the globe, Arab participation on the WSF's International Council, for

example, is miniscule. Out of over 150 organizations, only 6 represent Arab or other Muslim groups.<sup>7</sup> Attendance at WSF and other regional Forums on the part of Middle Eastern activists has also remained comparatively low, and the Social Forum has been experimented with less frequently in these countries than their regional neighbors. While small Forums have been convened in Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, and the Magreb, their organizers—mostly European-funded development and human rights NGOs—acknowledge their failure to connect with grassroots movements, which perceive the Forum as an elite-driven process (Arab NGO Network for Development 2008). Forum supporters meeting to discuss its future in the region lamented that, with the exception of Palestinian civil society, Arab participation continued to be low, poorly coordinated, and lacking a sense of ownership in the overall process.<sup>8</sup>

In the face of these challenges, two ambitious meetings held in Beirut and Cairo have attempted to bridge the geographic, ideological, and organizational gulfs that lie between those organizing against war within the WSF and groups most adversely impacted or violently opposed to the occupations—the latter characterized by pan-Islamism, Marxist-Leninism, and militant anti-imperialism. Scrutinizing these initiatives will help us answer, first, the question whether antineoliberal and anti-imperial struggles would be better served if the WSF were to lessen its commitments to decentralization and diversity by abandoning its prohibitions on specific actors and actions. This would entail allowing Forum participants to take collective decisions and set a common agenda, as well as permitting armed anti-imperial groups and the political parties that support them to fully participate. Second, examining the Beirut and Cairo meetings helps us assess the more critical question of whether the Forum has outlived its utility, become a burden to the movements, and should be abandoned and/or replaced.

The Beirut International Strategy Meeting of Antiwar and Antiglobalization Movements was held on September 17–19, 2004. It followed from discussions in the Global Assembly held at the Mumbai WSF that same year. Consistent with its role within the Forum spaces, Focus played a key coordination role in the Beirut meeting, as did the French-based Civilian Campaign for Protection of Palestinian People (Focus 2004a; ISP 2004). Unburdened by the WSF's prohibitions against collective decision making and justifiably concerned by the lack of Arab activists to be found within its spaces, the organizers were keen to set a more ambitious goal in Beirut: not only to strengthen ties with Middle East-

ern and Arab activists, but also to articulate a strategic plan of action to counter imperialism, globalization, and U.S. and Israeli occupations (ISP 2004). Focus put much work into this event, including attempts to visit Baghdad in spring 2004 in order to identify civil society groups to invite to Lebanon, a trip that had to be cancelled at the last minute when fighting broke out in Falluja and elsewhere (Bello 2008).

Despite these initial setbacks, Focus and their partners were nevertheless successful in gathering hundreds of activists from 54 countries, the majority being Lebanese, Palestinians, Iraqis, Greeks, Egyptians, and Jordanians. Others came from India, the Philippines, Japan, Turkey, Canada, and the United States, the latter represented by United for Peace and Justice coalition members including the American Friends Service Committee, Global Exchange's antiwar campaign Code Pink, and Corpwatch. This shows that the meeting did go some way toward achieving its first goal of fostering contacts and greater understanding between Middle Eastern activists and those from outside the region, in addition to promoting greater transnational mixing among antiwar and antineoliberal activism.

Yet the second objective proved largely elusive. The discussions were fraught with tensions, which precluded those present from agreeing on how to move forward (ISP 2004; Bello 2008). The sources of these conflicts were manifold, and speak directly to whether the Social Forum model should be fixed or nixed. Within the local Lebanese context, grassroots groups and NGOs expressed concerns akin to those that gave rise to the WSF Charter barring political parties and armed groups from participating in the Forum space. Allowing two communist parties and one Islamist party that supported armed resistance—namely the Lebanese Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and Hezbollah to act as sponsors—in the view of other civil society actors closed the space in which a more progressive kind of politics and broader political analysis could be articulated. Canadian participants summarized this critique as follows:

Those involved in frontline struggles for the basic rights of refugees, women, migrant workers, detainees, and queers in the Middle East expressed their frustration at having been told, for years, that their struggles must take second place to the movement against U.S. imperialism and Israel. (ISP 2004)

The Beirut meeting's focus and design seemed to reinforce their lower-ranked status in the hierarchy of issues and actors.

Similarly, the few African delegates present questioned why the Middle Eastern wars and occupations were prioritized, while their own resource, proxy, and interethnic conflicts that pervade much of the continent garnered little solidarity or attention from the global antiwar, anti-imperial, and antineoliberal movements. Unsurprisingly, it was the traditional Marxist parties of Lebanon and the United Kingdom's Socialist Workers' Party who countered these critiques with the rationale that, since we cannot fight on all fronts nor for all issues simultaneously, we must first strategically unite against the capitalist and imperialist enemy in the most important regional conflicts where they are embroiled (ISP 2004).

This argument, long advanced by traditional leftist parties, is linked to another tension that surfaced in Beirut, which Bello (2008) found to be even more polarizing. It arose among Iraqi exiles and internal refugees and other European anti-imperialist groups with Iraqi partners, and was characterized by disagreements over the duties of international solidarity and the nature of the Iraqi resistance. Here, Bello seems to have gone through a learning process as a consequence. In Lebanon, he was responsible for initiating a discussion on alliance formation with a talk entitled "Beirut 2004: A Milestone in the Global Struggle Against Injustice and War." In this speech he chastised the global antiwar and alterglobalization movements for conditioning their solidarity on whether Arab resistance aligned with the values and tactics of a largely secular and nonviolent global North (and the WSF Charter). Carrying an embrace of "diversity of tactics" to an extreme, Bello advocated for noninterference and unconditional solidarity with the actually existing forms of local resistance against U.S. occupation (ISP 2004).

Sharp criticism of Bello's *laissez-faire* stance came from close quarters, and echoed the very same fears that generated the commitment to a Social Forum milieu characterized as nonpartisan and nonviolent. A number of local activists protested that such a *carte blanche* position actually empowers nationalists, Islamists, and armed forms of resistance, to the detriment of more precarious, democratic civil and political groups that are trying to take root in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Lebanon. The critics instead called upon GAWM and alterglobalization movement activists to form alliances consistent with their own ideological principles and values of democratic accountability, justice, equality, human dignity, the value of life, and true self-determination by the people, and not merely with whoever happens to be the strongest faction (ISP 2004).

According to Bello (2007), the Beirut meeting was the last major initiative concerning Iraq in which East Asian-based groups like his own were to play a leadership role. He and his colleagues nevertheless have continually tried to identify and initiate relationships with Iraqi civil society groups who could potentially bridge the Shia-Sunni schism and who have local credibility, as well as global acceptability. Their post-Beirut efforts have yet to bear fruit, however. Focus members have also continued to attend antiwar gatherings in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, both within and beyond the strictures of the WSF (Bello 2007). A second such initiative of which Bello has been supportive but only minimally involved with is the Cairo Antiwar Conferences, which are only tenuously related to the Social Forum process.<sup>9</sup> These meetings embody a more militant anti-imperialism and hierarchical structure, and thus provide a more extreme counterexample to the WSF's decentralized and prodiversity model. They therefore offer a clearer test case for whether the Forum should be fixed or nixed.

The driving force in the global North behind the Cairo conferences has been the United Kingdom's Socialist Workers' Party, which organized the Stop the War Coalition and has been heavily engaged with the WSF and ESF process. Their involvement in both initiatives has been controversial, stemming from what many criticize as their "commandist" logic and organizational model. Bello (2008) recently characterized the conflict in this way:

In Europe, in many countries, the antiwar mobilization fell under the leadership of ... groups that were very prominent on the old left ... with traditional structures and methods of working .... So the Stop the War coalition for instance in England: You saw these tensions between what was called the horizontals and the verticals .... I think the SWP [Socialist Workers' Party] did a lot of good work but at the same time ... both in the ESF and in Stop the War, people felt that it had a ... commandist ... way of relating to other movements and organizations. We saw this tension especially in the ESF in 2004 in London .... At this point I think we cannot afford divisions coming from another era resurrecting themselves in the struggles of this era ... [but] you can never completely break with the past. However new or reconfigured this movement is, there are still tendencies, struggles and issues—whether it's an organizational thing or a vision thing—that also get reproduced now, and it must not be underestimated, the impact of what I would call the "dead hand of the past" of earlier movements.

The dead hand of the past that has forged a considerable wedge between traditional Marxist parties like the Socialist Workers' Party and the broader alterglobalization and antiwar movements has spurred the former to establish the most ambitious—and controversial—initiative outside the WSF to date, that of the Cairo Antiwar Conferences. Held annually between 2002 and 2008, the aim has been much like that in Beirut: to bridge *geographical*, *issue-related*, and *ideological* gaps among activists. In order to assess the overall success of the Cairo conferences, each kind of bridging will be briefly addressed below.

With respect to geographical bridging, the Cairo process has been the most sustained effort to establish a space where political parties and armed resistance groups from the Middle East opposed to U.S.-led war and neoliberal globalization and in support of democratization can meet each other and their international counterparts. John Rees of the Socialist Workers' Party and Stop the War Coalition, who along with Elias Rashmawi of the U.S. Workers World Party and Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) launched an International Campaign against U.S. Aggression on Iraq at the second Cairo conference observing:

Where else can you sit down in a single evening and listen to senior people from Hamas, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, people from the revolutionary left and people from the antiwar movement around the globe? There is no other place. So whatever people's criticism might be, ... it's ... the best conference there is in the Middle East on this question. I also think it has helped in opening up some political space for the democracy movement in Egypt. These are not insignificant achievements. (Rees in Howeidy 2007: 1)

The Cairo meetings have attracted a few hundred delegates annually, including communists and anti-imperialists from Europe and the Americas, U.N. representatives, anticolonial heroes, and major opposition parties from across the Arab world. An international steering committee was established after the first conference aimed at implementing the groups' decisions and maintaining coordination among antiwar groups worldwide. The U.K. Socialist Workers' Party and Stop the War Coalition, along with their allies in the umbrella Respect Party, and joined later by the more radical Scottish Palestinian Support Committee, have played lead roles in this North-South coordination. This coalition hosted a number of their Middle Eastern comrades in London for the World

Against War conference in December 2007, issued the annual call for and then coordinated demonstrations in March 2008, and turned up in force at the sixth Cairo conference that same month, bringing the largest Northern contingent of some 30 people (Wight 2008; First Cairo Declaration 2002). On the ground, the Cairo Conference is funded by Egyptians with business interests in Iraq and hosted at the Egyptian journalists' union offices by an umbrella group encompassing an array of ideologies called the Egyptian Popular Campaign to Confront U.S. Aggression. It is led by Egypt's banned Muslim Brotherhood party and includes other Islamists, Marxists, Nasserists, trade and professional unionists, popular committees, and researchers (Crooke 2003).

With respect to issue bridging, the conference's themes radicalized as the wars, occupations, and resistance intensified. Yet throughout, its coordinators have maintained the twin targets of war and globalization in order to promote issue miscibility. Before the onset of the invasion of Iraq, the conference was framed as being "against U.S. hegemony and war on Iraq and in solidarity with Palestine." Subsequent conferences have reflected the rising prominence of Palestine's Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, casting the meeting as an "International Campaign against U.S. and Zionist Occupation." And as the Iraqi insurgency grew, the conference morphed into the "Popular Campaign for the Support of Resistance in Palestine and Iraq and Against Globalization" wherein they expressed solidarity with Hamas, Hezbollah, and the "legitimate Iraqi resistance" (First Cairo Declaration 2002; Second Cairo Declaration 2003; Final Declaration of the Cairo Conference 2006).

Thus, the diversity of actors drawn largely from the Middle East suggests that the Cairo initiative has been perhaps the most successful, sustained effort at opening a space for those most adversely impacted by war and occupation in the region itself. These organizational and outreach efforts should be acknowledged, closely studied, and selectively built upon by others who wish to forge alliances within the region. That being said, the central role played by Islamist and communist anti-imperialist parties that openly support or participate in armed struggle has meant that most of the individuals and groups participating in Social Forums—as well as many local and regional activists with critical concerns similar to those expressed in Beirut—have steered clear of Cairo. Middle Eastern Studies scholar Joel Beinin (2008) of the American University in Cairo notes that many local progressives have avoided the conference for a number of reasons: so as not to be associated with the Muslim Brothers; out of a



rejection of the single-minded focus on “resistance” against Zionism and imperialism that supports all forms of armed struggle and tolerates anti-Semitism; or due to the widespread belief that the first conference was financed by Saddam Hussein. Other European activists have criticized the heavy presence of the U.K. Stop the War Coalition and its attempts to control the meeting (Wight 2008). Still others who did attend have bristled at the ideological framing and strategic vision that they feel is anathema to the prefigurative ethos of the broader alterglobalization and antiwar movements and the WSF. The crimes of the former Iraqi regime and its lack of democracy, one observer noted, are blamed on U.S. sanctions, while local business interests and Arab populism are championed (Crooke 2003).

On balance, what the evidence and these critiques suggest is that the Cairo antiwar conferences have indeed provided a platform for political parties of all kinds opposed to U.S. dominance to meet, discuss, and issue strong statements calling for armed resistance. What these meetings have been much less successful than the WSFs at doing is attracting a broad base of allies opposed to economic and military hegemony, much less providing a space for grassroots democratic and progressive movements of all kinds to meet one another and build toward common action.

## CONCLUSION

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In the final analysis, then, we must conclude that the polarization and power imbalances exacerbated in the Beirut and especially Cairo initiatives suggest that, far from having outlived their utility, the proscriptions laid down in the WSF Charter aimed at preserving and promoting great diversity within the Social Forum milieus ought to be maintained. Specifically, these uphold the WSF as a nonpartisan, nondeliberative, nonhierarchical, and nonviolent space, and thus prohibit political parties, armed resistance groups, and decision making or agenda setting on behalf of the Forum as a collective whole. For it is these very constraints placed on diversity that hold the most promise of supporting democratic and nonviolent struggles around the world, be they longstanding or emergent.

This is not to say that reforms should not be pursued. To the contrary, the many changes made to the Social Forum process noted earlier highlight how its coordinators and active participants continue to better its functioning. These have been in response to the widely felt and justified need among Forum participants to improve the quantity and quality of

opportunities for mutual encounter, debate, and dialogue among their diverse movements. Finding ways to enhance these nascent efforts to promote intercultural and interpolitical understanding is the necessary groundwork if more coherent strategies and powerful movements, drawing on shared knowledge and repertoires of action, are to be articulated (Santos 2008).

Furthermore, as the Forum strives to achieve greater inclusion of marginalized and underrepresented groups—grassroots Arab and Muslim activists chief among them—several lessons can be gleaned from the Beirut and Cairo conferences. While an appropriate forum for discussion and potential adaptation of these lessons is within the WSF's expansion commission,<sup>10</sup> they arguably apply more broadly to any transnational civil society organization interested in bridging to Arab or other underrepresented regions and actors. First, the outreach, networking, and rapport building that transnational movement crossovers like Focus and Stop the War Coalition have done throughout the Middle East should be selectively tapped into and supported by the WSF and regional Social Forum organizers. This is an important step toward developing a more comprehensive and proactive policy in the region to foster progressive local movements and encourage their articulation with extant movements organizing in the forum spaces. Other steps include foundation and government grants as well as solidarity funds raised by the Northern-based groups on the WSF International Council being better targeted toward ensuring Arab participation in the world and regional Forums and toward building local, national, and regional Social Forums. World Social Forum organizers, with the help of International Council members like Focus and others, should also make a more concerted effort to identify and invite organizations from the region to join the Council.<sup>11</sup>

Yet if we are to remain true to the WSF's organizational ethos of bounded diversity plus decentralization, the WSF expansion commission and International Council should not be seen as primarily responsible for bringing the WSF to the Arab region, nor elsewhere. This chapter has shown that it is the very decentralized structure of the WSF that provides space for and indeed relies upon autonomous initiatives by transnational crossover groups such as Focus and individuals like Bello, and more importantly by activists indigenous to the region itself. These network bridges provide the necessary partners for and critical feedback to the WSF as to how it can better serve the actually existing movements and better link them with others. While Bello's critique was

framed as a polemical, either/or choice between the WSF and “other,” in practice his criticisms and those of others tend to avoid sharp dualisms (see Santos 2008) and serve to foster a creative tension that pushes the Forum forward.

The above points to the real genius of the WSF methodology and adds further evidence for why it should be supported and maintained. The challenge continues to be ensuring that key crossovers and bridge builders like Bello work within the Forum’s rather broad and amorphous framework to generate new ideas and thinking about how to organize globally against all forces of oppression and marginalization. Furthermore, finding more effective ways of translating the lessons of these disparate autonomous experiments outside of the Forum, as well as the critiques of its functioning, into the WSF’s operation is crucial if we are to avoid frustrations leading to groups leaving the WSF process altogether. The coordination against war and imperialism is a fascinating and crucial study in progress of this dynamic.

This chapter has shown that future innovations must spring from and enhance the organizational ethos of the Forum space. Conversely, claims that, in the name of efficiency, appeal for common priorities and positions to be adopted by all those who participate may in fact hinder the WSF’s dynamic efficacy, and should thus be guarded against. We can therefore conclude that, rather than being radically fixed or entirely nixed, those involved in the WSF should deepen the twin commitments to decentralization and bounded diversity—while retaining key limits on the diversity of actors and actions allowed within. Evidence from the global antiwar movement suggests that this is the best way to protect the forum so that it may continue to serve as an incubator and articulator of diverse, progressive struggles.

## NOTES

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1. For a full account of recent debates, see World Social Forum 2008 and CADTM 2008.

2. Vasi (2006) defines movement miscibility as the fluid mixing of actors with compatible beliefs. It connotes a two-way, fluid process whereby trigger events combine with Internet technology to create simultaneous mobilizations among movements with compatible ideologies that, to varying degrees and lengths of time, dissolve into one other.

3. Ruth Reitan. 2002. Participant Observation. European Social Forum. Florence, Italy, November 7–10. Unpublished notes.
4. Ruth Reitan. 2003. Participant Observation. European Social Forum. Paris, France, November 12–15. Unpublished audio recording and notes.
5. Ruth Reitan. 2007b. Participant Observation. World Social Forum. Nairobi, Kenya, January 19–26. Unpublished notes.
6. Reasons for this relative dearth of solidarity relationships and participation are complex and manifold, and include, for instance, the colonial legacy of the region; the U.S. Left's historical ignorance and neglect of the region, the rise of interreligious tensions after 9/11, and U.S. government surveillance and repression of groups associated with the region after 9/11. It is thus unrealistic to assume that these challenges can be quickly addressed within the Social Forums. Nevertheless, growing Arab participation in the nascent United States Social Forum (USSF) has fostered dialogue and cooperation among progressive U.S. Arabs and Jews. Yet, groups advocating human rights, democratization, or the separation of religion and state are still often regarded as agents of international neocolonialism deemed unaccountable, unrooted, and illegitimate locally. For a discussion of the challenges these issues pose to the Social Forum process, see Arab NGO Network for Development 2008.
7. These are the Arab NGO Network for Development, All Arab Peasants and Agricultural Cooperatives Union, General Union of Oil Employees in Southern Iraq, Ittijah (Union of Arab [Palestinian] Community Based Organizations), Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, and the Palestinian NGO Network.
8. Stop the Wall. 2008. "Preliminary Discussions about Possibilities to Stimulate Arab Participation in the WSF." Email correspondence. Ruth Reitan.
9. This is despite the fact that the Cairo antiwar conveners have, since 2005, cast this meeting as part of a larger "Cairo Social Forum" (see Riddell 2007).
10. The expansion commission was established by the WSF International Council in 2003 and is organized into regional working groups, one of them for Arab countries. Other commissions include finance, strategy, content and methodology, and communications.
11. The decision to hold the 2011 World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal, was an explicit attempt to strengthen connections with Muslim groups.



## CHAPTER 9

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# OUR WORLD IS NOT FOR SALE!

## THE WSF PROCESS AND TRANSNATIONAL RESISTANCE TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS

*Elizabeth Smythe*

Since the 1990s transnational campaigns of resistance to neoliberal policies and trade agreements have emerged from streams of activism at the national and regional level. Environmental, human rights, and labor activists, along with development nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and peasant organizations have come together from both the North and the South in response to efforts of corporate and political elites to push a procorporate global economic agenda through international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The goal of neoliberalism advocates was to embed a set of policies known as the Washington consensus into the rules of the international system and national regulatory regimes. These rules would facilitate capital mobility, provide security for corporate investors by limiting the roles of states in national economies, and open national borders to flows of goods, services, and capital. Policies encouraged the privatization of public assets and services, shrinking the state sector and weakening its regulatory role (Harvey 2005). Global South countries' need for debt relief and access to Northern markets made them vulnerable in negotiations with international financial institutions. The social impact of neoliberal

policies was reflected in growing inequality within and between national economies, increasingly precarious employment for workers, and threats to basic human rights and environmental sustainability (Milanovic 2005; Brysk 2002; and Najam et al. 2007).

Among the early transnational campaigns were those of environmental and development organizations against the World Bank and the IMF. However, it is the ministerial meeting of the WTO in Seattle in 1999 that is most well-known for the dramatic disruption of the meeting by direct action in the streets, the strong police presence, and the 50,000 to 60,000 activists, including trade unionists and environmentalists, who marched together. Waves of protests and campaigns of resistance at meetings of the G8, the World Bank, the IMF, and the World Economic Forum subsequently swept cities around the world. Protests often saw violent responses on the part of police and security forces. Among the most reported were the deaths resulting from the police shooting of a protester in Genoa in 2001 and the tragic suicide of Lee Kyang Hae in 2003. Hae headed South Korea's Federation of Farmers and Fishermen, and his suicide at the foot of the barricades surrounding the WTO meeting in Cancún was intended to protest the impact of WTO trade deals on farmers.

Social movements and NGOs recognized the need to create and strengthen global networks to challenge international trade and investment agreements, the key drivers of global neoliberal policies. Activists also sought to bridge both geographic and ideological differences and develop alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Since its inception in 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) and its regional, national, and local manifestations have provided spaces for networks to develop their analyses of neoliberalism as they strengthen and enlarge their transnational campaigns of opposition to it. Thus, many of the networks that are part of the development of the WSF have both shaped and been reshaped by it, and network activists have come to rely on the WSF process and its regional and local Forums to advance their organizations and campaigns against neoliberalism.

Various networks seeking to organize transnational campaigns have used the WSF and other Social Forums to pursue their goals. Trade has been a theme for many activities at WSF meetings since 2001, which is not surprising given that trade liberalization is a central element of the economic globalization WSF participants reject. This chapter examines the activities of this global network to educate, mobilize, and coordinate

opposition to neoliberal trade agreements at WSF meetings. In particular, I focus on their activities at the WSF in 2003, 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and 2007 in Nairobi, as well as at a number of regional Social Forums. I argue that Forums have played an important role in: (1) providing a space for educating and raising awareness about neoliberal trade agreements; (2) serving as a venue for activists to share strategy and tactics of opposition to agreements; and (3) providing an arena where activists can define and share alternative visions of the global economy. At the same time, trade activists have played a major role in the development of the WSF. The discussion draws on my research on opposition to neoliberal trade agreements, which included participant observation at WTO-sponsored symposiums and interviews with activists in Geneva from 2001–2005. Data also have been gathered from programs of the WSF from 2001–2007, along with participant observation at workshops or other trade-related events at the WSF meetings in Porto Alegre in 2005, Nairobi in 2007, and the United States Social Forum (USSF) in 2007.

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#### TRANSNATIONAL RESISTANCE FROM PARIS TO PORTO ALEGRE

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While there has been much discussion in sociology around defining and measuring networks, this chapter defines them as “relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 2). Networks of resistance to globalization had roots in earlier, more regionally focused, struggles—a reflection of the multiple arenas in which neoliberal trade and investment rules have been negotiated.

In North America, negotiations of a Canada-U.S. free trade agreement in 1985 generated a network of Canadian opponents who, when faced with trilateral negotiations of an agreement with Mexico in 1991, joined their Mexican and American counterparts to define a broader critique of globalization and neoliberalism (Foster 2005). When U.S. trade negotiators intended to spread North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) rules protecting corporate foreign investors and limiting state regulation across the Americas and Asia (through the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum [APEC]), North American activists recognized the need to broaden their links with trade activists in Latin America and Asia. Thus, the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) formed in 1993 and the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) began

bringing together organizations and individuals from the North and the South (Foster 2005; Reitan 2007: 166).

Efforts to embed neoliberal trade rules multilaterally in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had already begun in 1986 with the launching of negotiations on agriculture, trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS), trade-related investment measures (TRIMs), and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). These talks culminated in the creation of the WTO. The 1995 decision of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to launch negotiations on a multilateral investment agreement was also directly linked to both GATT negotiations and the NAFTA. Developing country opposition at the WTO to rules protecting corporate foreign investors and limiting states' regulatory authority had convinced U.S. negotiators to first seek a precedent-setting agreement at the OECD, which could then be imposed on individual countries of the global South bilaterally, avoiding the risk that Southern country coalitions might emerge to resist these policies. While the European Union, Japan, and Canada preferred to negotiate at the WTO, they were stymied by Southern opposition at the Singapore ministerial in 1995.

Third World Network (TWN), a Malaysian-based think tank founded in 1984 (Caouette 2006: 7), closely monitored efforts to push investment rules at the WTO and the OECD and played a key role in alerting North American activists to these negotiations. The resulting transnational campaign involved a broad network of organizations and movements. It was important and innovative in the cooperation among NGOs and movements in both the North and the South and in using the Internet to share information quickly. For instance, it distributed widely a leaked copy of the draft Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), along with a detailed analysis of its implications, quickly killing the MAI's chances in the OECD.

Following the collapse of the MAI negotiations in 1998, campaign activists realized that negotiations would simply shift to the WTO or to regional and bilateral arenas. The November 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle included an attempt to launch such negotiations on investment rules. Opposition to negotiations in Seattle involved more contentious direct action and the emergence of alternative media (Reitan 2007). The dramatic eruption of opposition before cameras in Seattle streets ensured that mainstream media and the broader global public were aware of, and more attentive to, these issues.



There was division in the campaign, however, between those seeking to reform the WTO and those who wished to abolish it. North-South divisions also emerged over using trade rules to enforce stronger labor standards and environmental protection in global South countries. Some in the South feared that such proposals would be used to keep goods from the South out of Northern markets. Disagreements arose over tactics of opposition, especially direct action that might lead to attacks on property. The Seattle campaign managed to bridge many of these divisions through a common website for both reformers and those seeking to abolish the WTO and through meetings and strategy sessions to develop common positions (Reitan 2007: 172). Rather than debating WTO reform or abolition, groups unveiled a civil society declaration on November 29, "No New Round, instead Turnaround," which called for a moratorium on "further negotiations that would expand the scope and power of the WTO" (No New Round 1999). Over 1,000 civil society organizations in 73 countries signed the declaration.

Government reactions to these campaigns varied from expanded civil society consultations to increased transparency (Smith and Smythe 2003) and public relations efforts to sell the merits of trade agreements. At the WTO, it included a symposium to bring together negotiators and NGOs. The post-Seattle response, reinforced by the events of 9/11, also included efforts to insulate trade negotiating venues from disruptive protests using stronger physical coercion.

Key groups active in Seattle were part of the network of groups attending the annual WTO symposiums where they were expected to sit through official briefings and limit themselves to posing questions. However, at the first meeting in 2001, Martin Khor of the Third World Network denounced the symposium's shallow efforts to engage civil society and publicly presented a declaration on the WTO entitled "Our World Is Not for Sale: Sink or Shrink!" which had been developed and circulated among a large number of organizations prior to the meeting.<sup>1</sup> This cooperation became formalized with the creation of the website and network, Our World Is Not for Sale.

Civil society capacity to monitor and analyze trade negotiations in a language that activists could understand also increased over time. Organizations such as TWN and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) placed full-time staff in Geneva to monitor WTO developments. The NGO-funded International Centre for Trade and Sustainable

Development (ICTSD) also began producing regular bulletins available to thousands of activists via the Internet. The network also provided an opportunity for information to flow from the global South to the North so that transnational campaigners could hear about the local impacts and implications of these agreements in the South.

The Our World Is Not for Sale network describes itself as “a loose grouping of organizations, activists, and social movements worldwide fighting the current model of corporate globalization embodied in the global trading system” (Our World Is Not for Sale 2008: 1). Contact and coordination is done via conference calls, email, and face-to-face meetings prior to WTO symposiums, ministerial meetings, and venues such as the WSF. Decisions are made by consensus. Divisions nevertheless continued in the network. For instance, shortly after the network was formed, one of its largest members, Oxfam, launched its “Make Trade Fair” campaign in 2002. Oxfam’s release of its “Rigged Rules and Double Standards” report spearheaded the campaign, reflecting a view that the promotion of trade is a key means to poverty reduction and that reform of agricultural trade rules—especially in terms of better market access and subsidy reductions—were central. The publicity around “Make Trade Fair” and the campaign’s recruitment of pop stars and distribution of T-shirts sporting the logo were viewed skeptically by critics. Some in the network were concerned at the

strong reformist connotations whereby trade can be made more fair and equitable within the current institutional framework . . . which makes it susceptible to complicity with the institutions at the helm of advanced liberal initiatives, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank. (Ilcan and Lacey 2006: 208)

The report ignored more radical alternatives to neoliberalism such as relocalization, reflected in the call of organizations like Via Campesina for food sovereignty, or for more South-South trade. Leading activists, such as Walden Bello of Focus on the Global South and Vandana Shiva criticized the report’s “schizophrenic analysis,” as it attempted to reconcile two incompatible paradigms: “one which gives precedence to people’s democracy, another which gives precedence to trade, commerce, markets” (Shiva, as quoted in Ilcan and Lacey 2006: 218). Meanwhile, the mainstream press gleefully reported that “Oxfam Backs Globalization”

(Blustein 2002). Despite differences, the network has persevered and organizations have continued to work on common campaigns around areas of consensus. One of the spaces where this work has been possible is the World Social Forum.

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### THE WSF AND THE ORGANIZATION OF RESISTANCE TO TRADE AGREEMENTS

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The WSF developed as an inclusive, diverse, and horizontal space that includes both social movements and NGOs “opposed to neoliberalism and domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism” (WSF 2001). The transnational network challenging the WTO has been very involved in the WSF from the beginning. There is much overlap between the IFG, the Our World network, and the WSF International Council. The Our World network of 43 organizations had 12 of its members on the 130-member WSF International Council in 2005 (Santos 2006). Since many members of Our World are themselves regional or national networks, the overlap is even greater than numbers suggest. At the same time, strong financial support for the WSF has come from some of the largest reformist NGOs, such as Oxfam International (Lopez et al. 2007).

While the first WSF in 2001 preceded the launch of the Doha Round of trade negotiations in November 2001, the WSF programs still reflected substantial trade concerns. In an analysis of events organized by participants at the WSF in Mumbai in 2004, Anheier and Katz (2005: 220) noted the salience of trade in the three networks they identified. The level of involvement of trade activists in the Social Forum process suggests that it has facilitated the development and strengthening of their network and campaigns in several ways. These include:

- Developing a shared ideology through common frames linking trade and investment agreements to questions of social justice, development, and democracy. This includes defining alternative visions of trade agreements and globalization.
- Developing, maintaining, and extending transnational networks and solidarity through the bridging of geographic distances, North-South divides, and reform and resistance perspectives.
- Educating and mobilizing civil society by linking the implications of the global for the local, or regional level, and, in turn, bringing

knowledge of the impacts of neoliberal trade agreements from the local back to the global through testimonials and exchanges of experience.

- Developing and coordinating specific strategies of resistance and campaigns of opposition globally and across regions.
- Sharing information on strategies and best practices of resistance.

The WSF has facilitated the work of transnational networks of resistance and helped to address the challenges activists face of contesting neoliberalism in multiple arenas.

### *A TALE OF TWO FORUMS: PORTO ALEGRE 2003 AND 2005*

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The WSF meetings in Porto Alegre in 2003 and 2005 preceded key WTO ministerial meetings in September 2003 and November 2005. The WTO meetings were particularly crucial to advocates of trade liberalization. Strong U.S. and EU pressure on global South countries had resulted in the 2001 Doha agreement to launch a new round of trade negotiations. But Southern resistance, led by India, had stopped the addition of investment and a number of other issues to the negotiation agenda. A decision was to be made in Cancún about adding these so-called Singapore issues.<sup>2</sup> Though the Mexican government strongly supported U.S. and Canadian negotiators' efforts to integrate NAFTA rules into the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement, activists saw Mexico as a site of resistance, given the devastating impacts of neoliberalism on that nation's agriculture sector, the uprising in Chiapas on the day NAFTA came into effect, and the inspiring struggles of the Zapatistas (Khasnabish 2007). The Summit of the Americas on the FTAA was also to meet in Miami in November. The January 2003 WSF thus was the site of many workshops and events dealing with the FTAA Summit (ALCA in Spanish) and the upcoming WTO meeting.

The Our World network sponsored six panels on trade and "the road to Cancún" bringing together key actors from the Our World network including Lori Wallach of Public Citizen, Martin Khor of TWN, representatives from the AFL-CIO, the peasant organization Via Campesina, a representative from Senegal, and Ivan Palanco of the Mobilization Committee Toward Cancún from Mexico. The panels and workshops were designed to inform activists about the significance of the WTO meeting in Cancún and to explain the complicated issues around expanding the

negotiating round to include the “Singapore issues.” To bridge the divisions about reform or abolition of the WTO, discussions centered on the need to stop the further expansion of the WTO agenda. Panels also showed the linkages among regional and multilateral trade agreements. Testimonials on the devastating impact of NAFTA on Mexican farmers were linked to the FTAA and the WTO to show activists the real impacts that such an FTAA would have on them. The connection to the local was also reflected in the emphasis of Brazilian delegates on Brazil’s role in both the FTAA and WTO negotiations, and the need to maintain civil society pressure on the Lula government to continue to resist neoliberal trade rules. On the final day of the WSF, the People’s Assembly called for a large mobilization of activists on the ground in Cancún:

In the coming year, our campaigns, against the WTO, the FTAA, and trade liberalization will grow in size and scope. We will campaign to stop and reverse liberalization of agriculture, water, energy, public services, and investment.

In particular, we will organize mass protests around the world during the fifth ministerial meeting of the WTO in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003 and during the ministerial meeting of the FTAA in Miami, USA, in October. (Call of the World Social Movements, Porto Alegre, Brazil, January 27, 2003)

The WSF was not the only venue where coordination of transnational action occurred. Network members had met in Mexico City November 15 and 16 and in Oslo, Norway, in December 2002 to intensify collaboration and define a strategy. Meetings at the WSF, however, provided an opportunity to reach out to a broader range of groups in Latin America, raising awareness of the importance of the Cancún meeting and its link to other regional struggles.

At the Cancún meeting, trade activists coordinated actions inside and outside the venue (Danaher and Mark 2003). While activists with credentials were permitted inside the venue (though excluded from the negotiations), where they could lobby negotiators and talk to media, activists outside the fenced-off venue continued with protests. The range of groups in the streets included a large contingent of Mexican and Korean farmers who had seen their livelihoods destroyed by trade agreements.

The lead-up to Cancún had also seen the formation of the Group of 20 countries led by India and Brazil who pushed for more aggressive reductions in agricultural subsidies by the United States and European

Union (Taylor 2007). In addition, a coalition of African and least-developed countries and the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries also banded together. Dubbed the G90, they strongly opposed the push by the European Union, Japan, and Korea for negotiations on the Singapore issues. Negotiators' disagreements led to an impasse and meeting adjournment amid confusion and shock and anger on the part of the United States and European Union.

The intentions of EU and U.S. trade negotiators quickly became clear as they tried to split Southern coalitions and pushed bilateral or regional trade agreements. Over the following winter and spring, efforts were also made to restart WTO negotiations by involving representatives from Brazil and India in talks with the European Union, United States, and Australia, the so-called Five Interested Parties (IP). Intensive bargaining in Geneva in July 2004 resulted in a new framework to relaunch negotiations with the Singapore issues effectively off the table.

For trade activists these developments represented a victory, but also challenges. A more assertive group of Southern countries had thwarted the neoliberal agenda, but now their key negotiators would be bargaining with the United States and the European Union in Geneva behind closed doors. The July agreement also ensured there would be another ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005. It is at ministerial meetings, rather than in backrooms in Geneva, where NGOs have access to negotiators and global media. The WSF meeting in Porto Alegre in 2005 thus provided another opportunity for activists to share knowledge and understanding of what had transpired at the WTO and to organize opposition to the upcoming ministerial meeting. Given the location of the ministerial meeting, it provided an opportunity for Western Hemisphere groups to strengthen links with Southeast Asian activists—particularly militants from Korea and Hong Kong—and to strengthen local networks of resistance (cf. Reiman 2001). For Southeast Asian activists, the WSF provided an opportunity to be involved in workshops and encourage Western Hemisphere groups and organizations to come to Hong Kong.

### *PORTO ALEGRE AND THE ROAD TO HONG KONG*

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With the return of the WSF to Porto Alegre came a new way to develop the program. Consultations with 1,800 organizations generated 11 themes organized into 2,500 Forum activities. Each theme was assigned a physical space. The third theme was “peace, demilitarization, and the

struggle against war, free trade, and debt.” Thus, all the activities around issues of trade and debt were within one area, facilitating interaction among activists and organizations involved in trade campaigns.

Events informed activists about developments since Cancún, especially the implications of the July framework and the restart of WTO negotiations. Analysis and interpretation of complex negotiations has been an important aspect of the work of several member organizations of the network since the anti-WTO protests in Seattle. The advantage of the WSF as a venue, however, is that analysis can be linked to the experiences and campaigns of local activists and, in turn, analysts receive input about what is happening in these regions. Two workshops on the first day, “Outcome and Implications of the July Framework Agreement” (Our World Is Not for Sale), and “Plans for the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong” (International Gender and Trade Network) dealt with interpreting developments in Geneva.

A second goal was to mobilize opposition to the WTO ministerial meeting and trade liberalization within activists’ home countries, and at the ministerial meeting itself. An Our World session called “Mapping the Road to Hong Kong” included a discussion of strategy for protesting the WTO ministerial in Hong Kong together with the Hong Kong People’s Alliance on the WTO, a network of 22 groups based in that city. Their representatives provided information on the situation in Hong Kong and details on the site venue and called for other trade activists to join an International Coordinating Network that was meeting in February 2005 in Hong Kong to plan events. The session moved from broader international issues and an update on WTO developments in Geneva to more specific actions and events. As Walden Bello of Focus on the Global South indicated, the goal was to “prevent a consensus from emerging at the (WTO) meeting,” to ensure that our national governments “don’t make concessions,” and “to coordinate to created conditions for mass mobilization in the street” (author’s notes for Panel: Mapping the Road to Hong Kong, World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, January 30, 2005).

The WSF thus provided opportunities for activists to coordinate international actions designed to pressure national governments, the key decision makers in WTO negotiations. They could share information on local campaigns, develop strategies for regional cooperation, and exchange experiences. For instance, at the Plenary of Social Movements Against Free Trade, a range of groups from Mexico to Korea reported on their campaigns. A subsequent session outlined the Global Week

of Action on Trade planned for April 10–16, 2005, and activists there shared their plans and proposals. This plan to have a global week of locally organized events had originated with 100 trade activists who met in Delhi in 2003. The idea was then brought to the 2004 WSF in Mumbai and publicized at the WSF in 2005.

The emergence of the G20 coalition at the WTO and the efforts of the European Union and the United States to split it by giving a privileged role in negotiations to Brazil and India means that these countries are now key trade players. The WSF provided an opportunity to mobilize Brazilian trade activists around the broader campaign to “sink or shrink” the WTO, and to pressure the Lula government to maintain the solidarity of the G20 coalition and press the interests of Southern countries in the WTO. Focus on the Global South and the Hemispheric Social Alliance organized a session with this in mind. “The G20: What Achievements and Whose Interests?” included WTO negotiators from Brazil and Bangladesh debating WTO critics from groups such as Action Aid. The Brazilian negotiator tried to justify his country’s positions and reassure critics that Southern countries were better off in forging multilateral trade agreements and claimed that, while being part of the inner circle at the WTO, Brazil still consulted with, and represented, the interests of the G20. Audience questions and comments reflected local concerns about the Lula government’s attitude toward neoliberalism, its relations with agribusiness, and the lack of congressional or civil society input into negotiations.

The WSF also provides spaces where activists can define and articulate alternatives to neoliberalism. Many movements and organizations have shared their alternative visions at the WSF. The International Forum on Globalization profiled its proposals in its 2002 publication of *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible*,<sup>3</sup> at the WSF and sought feedback for subsequent editions. Similarly, the Hemispheric Social Alliance, as part of its efforts to challenge neoliberal trade agreements and the proposed FTAA, issued its *Alternatives for the Americas* in 2002, providing a set of principles and an alternative vision that would allow national governments more policy space to meet their development and social needs. The 2005 WSF also had a number of events designed to address the question of alternatives. The Our World network workshop on January 30 addressed “Alternatives to Neoliberal Globalization,” recognizing a need to do less of what organizers called “fire fighting” at WTO ministerials and more educating publics about



alternative policies. A set of ideas coming out of a conference in Bangkok in 2004 were discussed. Speakers from the Polaris Institute and Public Services International outlined visions of what should, or should not be, in trade agreements. Breakout groups of workshop participants identified what they thought the limits and scope of trade agreements should be.

The 2005 WSF also included many sessions addressing regional and global trade issues such as the services negotiations under the GATS at the WTO, or broader concepts such as food sovereignty. Thus, the WSF has provided space to strengthen, broaden, and coordinate trade campaigns, be they local, regional, or global. These efforts had to continue as the attempts to complete the Doha Round of WTO negotiations continued to move forward (albeit very slowly) and as the United States and the European Union continued to advance aggressively their interests through regional and bilateral trade agreements.

Like prior WTO meetings, the WTO ministerial in Hong Kong in December 2005 faced concerted opposition by trade activists, who held marches during the week that numbered between 5,000 and 7,000 participants. As in Cancún, the venue where the WTO delegates met in Hong Kong was surrounded by fences and barricades. NGOs with credentials continued their activities inside the convention center, coordinating with the activists in the streets. In the case of Hong Kong, activists “came from countries as far-flung as South Korea, the United States, Kenya, Brazil, the Philippines, France, South Africa, and Indonesia to manifest their overwhelming opposition to this institution” (James 2006: 1). Korean activists, many members of the Korean Peasants League, came out in force, and over 1,500 engaged in colorful and dramatic protests. Despite a huge security presence, they challenged the barricades, and while over 1,000 protesters (many Korean) were arrested, most were released. According to critics, division, coercion, and manipulation of delegates marked the proceedings inside the convention center. WTO secretary-general and former EU trade commissioner Pascal Lamy admitted that the meeting barely moved the WTO forward to completion of the Doha Agenda, an achievement the *Economist* derided as an “expensive experiment in sleep deprivation” (Smythe 2007: 219). Since then, WTO negotiations faced breakdown, restarts, and stumbles as momentum slowed during the months preceding the U.S. presidential election and the recession. But on other fronts, efforts to embody neoliberal trade rules in bilateral and regional agreements continued.<sup>4</sup> Social Forums provided space to articulate and organize resistance. The cases of the USSF and the WSF in

2007 discussed below illustrate how Forums facilitated activist efforts to resist the pressure on Southern countries to sign Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union and bilateral trade agreements with the United States.

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*FROM BRUSSELS TO NAIROBI: THE SOCIAL FORUMS TAKE ON EPAs*

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Since the 1970s, the European Union has had special trade arrangements with countries in the South, particularly former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. Under these agreements the European Union reduced tariffs on products from these countries going into the markets of EU members providing them with enhanced access to EU markets in comparison to countries outside these agreements. By the 1990s, these preferential arrangements were found in violation of multilateral trade rules that prohibit discrimination amongst a country's trading partners. In response, the European Commission negotiated agreements that were accorded a temporary exemption from WTO rules. The last, the Cotonu Agreement, was due to expire at the end of 2007. Given the failure in Cancún and the slowing momentum of multilateral negotiations, the European Union used this looming deadline to aggressively negotiate new Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the 77 ACP countries. In October 2006, the European Union outlined this new policy designed to advance its economic competitiveness using EPAs to achieve market access for services and investments that it was unable to do at the WTO. The European Union thus hoped to circumvent Southern opposition at the WTO through bilateral negotiations with smaller groups of vulnerable global South countries. The EPAs, even to the dismay of some EU member countries

also seek investment liberalization, guaranteed protection for European corporate property and increased "intellectual property" rights, the opening up of ACP services sectors and government procurement (public tenders) to the operations of European companies, the imposition of inappropriate "competition" rules and much else. (Keet 2007: 5)

Negotiations had begun as early as 2002. Given that the majority of ACP countries with over 90 percent of the population are African, that Africa has been the center of resistance to EPAs is no surprise. Many of these countries have small, vulnerable economies that would be devastated if

access to EU markets were lost. The African Trade Network (itself linked to TWN) initiated the first Stop EPA pan-African campaign in December 2002. It was clear, however, that EPAs could not be challenged without the support of European activists, and the Seattle to Brussels civil society network that had developed after Seattle was a logical partner. In April 2004, European civil society groups, along with ACP groups, decided to actively participate in the campaign.

The European Social Forum (ESF) provided an opportunity to link the North and South anti-EPA campaigns. At the London ESF in 2004, the Stop EPA European campaigners held a strategy meeting and publicly launched the European Stop EPA campaign. The ESF included panels on the EPAs, bringing representatives of European groups together with African activists from organizations such as the Southern and East African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute and the African Trade Network. Panels provided a rough guide to EPAs, informed European activists about the campaigns in Africa, and examined how the EPA campaigns linked to other trade campaigns. Participants also shared their anti-EPA campaign plans and strategies for opposing free trade policies.

Social Forums in Africa and the polycentric WSF in Mali in 2006 provided further opportunities to strengthen the networks. With the EU deadline of the end of 2007 and growing pressure on the ACP countries, the WSF meeting in Nairobi in January 2007 provided a focal point for mobilizing resistance to the EPAs. Hundreds of sessions addressed the issue of EPAs, and were offered by a variety of environmental organizations and regional anti-free-trade networks,<sup>5</sup> along with the Our World network and the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP). Events provided an opportunity for experts on the negotiations such as Yosh Tandon from the South Center in Geneva, Dot Keet from the Transnational Institute, or Walden Bello from Focus on the Global South to explain how these agreements fit into the broader context of trade negotiations. Other panels provided space for Africans to testify to the local impacts of neoliberal policies and the potentially devastating impacts of these agreements. Many shared information about local anti-EPA campaigns. Sessions brought Europeans and African activists together to look at joint strategies. As TWN reported, for some Europeans these sessions were eye-openers.

An Austrian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) at the Africa Trade Network's activity on the theme "Stop-EPAs: Resist Europe's new colonial agenda" expressed shock at the depth and breadth of the

EPAs and the arm-twisting tactics employed by the European Commission. (Obeng 2007: 25)

Tactics included dividing ACP countries into more vulnerable negotiating groups and using aid as a lever with the smallest and most impoverished countries. The Hemispheric Social Alliance also shared with European and African activists its experiences of Northern and Southern activists uniting in opposition to trade agreements. Sessions also included explorations of alternative South-South regionalism and efforts to mobilize.

These culminated in a march to the Nairobi headquarters of the European Union on January 24, where thousands of demonstrators confronted the EU representative and handed over a petition with 30,000 signatures calling for

an EU-ACP partnership that will: Protect ACP producers in domestic and regional markets; Be based on the principle of nonreciprocity, as instituted in the Generalized System of Preferences and special and differential treatment in the WTO; Reverse the pressure for trade and investment liberalization; and Allow for the necessary policy space and support for ACP countries to pursue their own development strategies and protect and enable the fulfilment of all human rights. (Memorandum 2007: 2)

Activists noted that the EPAs “do not take any of these concerns into consideration, and do not meet the development needs of ACP countries,” and called for an end to the EPAs (Memorandum 2007: 2).

#### FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE NATIONAL: THE USSF AND THE BILATERAL U.S. TRADE AGENDA

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The WSF and regional Forums provided a means for activists from the North and the South to maintain and strengthen the connections necessary to resist EU bilateral neoliberal trade agreements. Similarly, the first United States Social Forum, held in Atlanta June 28–July 1, 2007, provided an opportunity for Americans opposed to regional and bilateral agreements to link with activists in the countries involved. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA),<sup>6</sup> which had passed in the U.S. House of Representatives by two votes, highlighted the need for more North-South cooperation among activists. The USSF provided a

space for activists from Central and South America and Korea to bring home the need for U.S. activists to mobilize against bilateral neoliberal agreements. The CAFTAs had been heavily criticized by groups including well-known economist Joseph Stiglitz, but the USSF provided a space to continue the struggle against similar agreements that were pending with Peru, Colombia, and Korea. Also at that time, Costa Rican activists were gearing up for a referendum in October 2007 on their own bilateral deal with the United States.

Panels and workshops dealing with bilateral trade issues, food sovereignty, and continental migration were linked to the impact of regional and bilateral agreements. The author's observations from several workshops show how networks worked to link activists from both sides of these agreements to share information, strategize, and coordinate campaigns. Most important for many Southern activists was the need to strengthen resistance to these agreements on the part of organized labor within the United States, often seen by their Southern counterparts as too close to power.

At panels such as the "North and South United Against the FTAA and CAFTA" representatives from the Hemispheric Social Alliance shared experiences and practices of mobilization gained from campaigns of opposition to the FTAA in countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico, and Brazil. The panel, "Countering the Bilateral Free Trade Strategy: The Right to Sovereignty Under a Free Trade Regime," brought representatives of a Korean Women's Peasant Alliance together with peasants from Colombia, a small farmer from Missouri, and Immokalee Farm Workers from Florida. Each discussed the impacts of neoliberal policies in their locales and described their strategies of mobilization and action. Groups such as Korean Americans Against War and Neoliberalism and the U.S.-based Alliance for Responsible Trade (a partner in the Hemispheric Social Alliance) were able to bring the American audience a message about the impact of these agreements. Efforts to build alliances and mobilize used a broader social justice frame, rather than one centered solely on job losses for U.S. workers. The USSF provided space to educate audiences about the impact of free trade agreements, and to share strategies and best practices for resistance and for mobilization. Activists from Colombia described how 22,000 people blocked the Pan-American highway, while representatives of the Immokalee workers in Florida discussed their successful boycott of U.S. fast food corporations in cooperation with student groups who shut down Taco Bell outlets on 20 U.S. university campuses and obtained higher prices for the tomatoes they pick.

As these two cases of the USSF and the WSF in 2007 illustrate, Social Forum processes provided the space where American and European activists could become more sensitized to the impact of regional and bilateral trade agreements in the South and learn what activists there were doing to resist these agreements. The dialogue and exchanges within Forums also allowed them to see the link between these agreements and the struggles they faced within their own communities in the North and how they could coordinate their own acts of resistance to feed into and support those in the South, thus strengthening the transnational networks of resistance. In this way Social Forums can play a role in countering the divide-and-conquer strategies that the United States and the European Union resorted to in the wake of the failures at the WTO to push their trade liberalization agenda.

## CONCLUSION

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Social Forums are clearly not the only venues where activists have developed networks and educated and mobilized civil society against international neoliberal trade agreements. But they have built upon previous work within national and regional struggles against free trade (Foster 2005) and offered an important opportunity for movements to come together to resist official trade liberalization agendas at the WTO and later in regional and bilateral arenas. The WSF meetings of 2003 and 2005 provided space to raise public awareness, mobilize, and strategize resistance to key WTO ministerial meetings in Cancún and Hong Kong. With the slowing momentum in the WTO, the United States and European Union shifted tactics to push trade liberalization aggressively through bilateral agreements that limited the resistance of smaller countries in the South. Again Social Forums provided a way for activists in both the United States and the European Union to link with activists in these countries to mobilize resistance once again. In this effort Social Forums offer advantages that other venues and organizational forms lack. One is their horizontality (see Wood, Chapter 16). Although larger organizations may dominate, there is space to hear from local groups, movements, and organizations. Forums can bridge distances, bringing activists together from across the globe. Because Forums take place regularly, activists learn and develop analyses over time. Participants often represent organizations to whom they report on the information and the shared experiences gathered at Social Forums. The autonomy of

Forums also allows activists to go beyond critiques of neoliberalism and to draw from their local experiences. As one activist recounts:

The first WSFs were mainly about analyzing what was going on. Then we used them to mobilize international action. Now we're planning actions and strategy over the long term and building strong networks across all the boundaries that traditionally divide us. With African involvement, this has been the best Forum so far. (Ronnie Hall, coordinator of the trade program of Friends of the Earth International, quoted in Wainwright 2007: 1)

Organizations like the IFG and networks like Our World have forged a broader understanding of globalization. Along the way their work has shaped discussions and networks within the WSF. At the same time Social Forums have provided a space for bridging divides and mobilizing.

The presence of militant Korean trade and peasant organizations at Forums in Brazil and Kenya is notable, as was the presence of South American and Hong Kong trade activists in Nairobi. Despite concerns that Forums have become dominated by large, well-resourced Northern NGOs, Social Forum events are still much more inclusive social spaces than U.N.-sponsored or other intergovernmentally organized conferences, such as World Summit on Sustainable Development, which make major efforts to seek civil society input.<sup>7</sup> Local social movements and activists who are in touch with the lived reality of neoliberalism have a much stronger presence within Social Forums than in U.N. meetings. Social Forums provide a more open, less hostile environment where groups can articulate radical critiques of, and pose alternatives to, neoliberal trade agreements. This is not a trivial matter, given the level of government coercion and efforts to exclude activists at meetings of major international organizations like the WTO or the G8.

For activists, the scope and complexity of trade agreements and their multiplication at various levels pose major challenges in linking the local experience to global campaigns and coordinating across countries and regions. Moreover, as Robin Broad noted (2004), free trade is the one aspect of the Washington Consensus paradigm that has been most resistant to attack. This is due partly to its association with ideas of openness, economic prosperity, and a more cosmopolitan world. Public opinion polls in many countries indicate a generally positive attitude to open markets and free exchange. Yet with the recent downturn, at least in the United States, those that see free trade as a threat outnumber those who see it as an opportunity

for economic growth (Jones 2009). The same surveys indicate that, when asked who benefits from trade agreements, most respond that it is corporations that benefit while they themselves have not. Along with bridging distances and divides, breaking the powerful hold of “accepted wisdom” by confronting it with real experience and everyday knowledge is another major challenge that transnational networks face (Ayres 1998). Social Forums have provided a critical space for activists to address these challenges.

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## NOTES

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1. This is based on my field notes of July 6, 2001.
2. The four issues were new rules on investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation. These proposed areas for negotiation were rejected by developing countries at the first ministerial of the WTO held in Singapore.
3. This is based on an earlier publication released at the Seattle ministerial in 1999 called *Beyond the WTO: Alternatives to Economic Globalization*. Both the IFG and HSA documents advocate relocalized economies with community control and strengthened U.N.-based international institutions that privilege human rights and environmental sustainability over trade liberalization, with corporate capital subject to more local and international regulation.
4. The growing challenge of resisting complex bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade agreements was recognized by many. Even keeping track of developments on many trade fronts was difficult. In September 2004, the Asia-Pacific Research Network (which includes members of the Our World network) and the Spanish-based research network Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) noted “the ongoing trend already evident, but accelerating with the collapse at Cancún ministerial, to push the neoliberal agenda through bilateral trade agreements.” The group launched a new website against bilateral free trade and investment agreements ([www.bilaterals.org](http://www.bilaterals.org)).
5. These include the Africa Trade Network (ATN), EcoNews, Eastern African Farmers Federation, Friends of the Earth, Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD), Alianza Social Continental (Hemispheric Social Alliance), and Greek Network for an Alternative Agricultural Policy.
6. Originally the agreement included Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Subsequently the Dominican Republic became part as well, and the agreement is now officially the US-DR-CAFTA.
7. As Carr and Norman (2008) point out, despite efforts of the United Nations to widen the participation of civil society in the United Nations, participation is still determined largely by donor nations, conference themes, and processes of accreditation.





## CHAPTER 10

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# GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND THEIR MOVEMENTS AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUMS

*Matheu Kaneshiro, Kirk S. Lawrence,  
and Christopher Chase-Dunn*

Global environmentalism is a particularly important theme in the global politics of the Left. Some have argued that, of the movements emerging from the 1960s, the environmental movement has had the most salient and enduring impact in world politics (Chase-Dunn and Babones 2006; Rootes 1999a). It also remains one of the largest transnational movements to date (Johnson and McCarthy 2005; Smith 2004b). Furthermore, the environmental justice movement (EJM) may have potential to link different movements and regions together into a larger social struggle (Faber 2005). This chapter assesses the different forms of environmentalism around the world, considering the capacities this movement has for uniting diverse movement segments around common antisystemic framework(s).

We begin by examining some of the main forms, struggles, and debates among environmental groups around the world, whose diversity is reflected at the World Social Forums. We then consider the possibilities for the environmental movement(s) to emerge as a major transnational force. Despite the differences among environmentalists, we find that the World Social Forum (WSF) allows these activists to find common ground in their struggle against environmental degradation, particularly as it is

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linked to unfettered global capitalism. The case of environmentalism at the Forum suggests that activists engaged in different struggles—not exclusively environmental—and from different regions of the world are being brought together in what seems to be an emerging diverse, yet unified, movement of movements.

### THE DIFFERENT FACES OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

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The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED), or the “Earth Summit,” was an international political response to environmental concerns. Conferees from the global South emphasized sustainable development as a solution to the problem of environmental degradation. The global North instead stressed regulation, while the larger countries of the global South (led by Brazil) were fearful of further encroachment on their sovereignty. Regulation was seen as a way for the North to control developing nations. Similar to the 1972 U.N. Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm, political actors emphasized state sovereignty over international governance, limiting opportunities for global environmental regulation and further dividing the interests between the North and South (Chasek et al. 2006: 237; Chase-Dunn 1998: xxi).

The differing perspectives on environmental action as exemplified above also play out in environmental movements around the world. The form of environmentalism one group takes is often tied to the resources it has and the environmental risks it faces, often falling along class lines. The large U.N. summits have been stimulants in the creation of national and transnational environmental organizations (see Johnson and McCarthy 2005), attracting NGOs to participate in the summits and in parallel conferences. The groups that have had the resources to attend the international conferences tend to be NGO-based, institutionalized, and oriented toward global solutions to environmental problems. Such can be said for the mainstream “environmental movement,” which typically focuses on protecting the biosphere and its inhabitants, such as the protection of the wilderness and endangered species (Ali 2006; Gottlieb 2005; McNeill 2000). This form of environmentalism has historically been most popular for the dominant stratum of society: white and middle- or upper-class persons, primarily located in the global North (Taylor 2005).

The other core branch of environmentalism is known as the EJM, which has many participants located in the global South and/or among

subordinate groups everywhere, including ethnic minorities, youth, women, and the poor (Ali 2006; Taylor 2005). The environmental justice movement focuses on issues of environmental rights and distributions of the costs and benefits of environmental use, such as environmental racism (the disproportionate dumping of environmental hazards on disadvantaged populations) and the right to potable water. The EJM tends to be a conglomerate movement that links multiple social movement issues, most notably human rights with environmental concerns. It calls for equity of environmental risks and rewards, recognition of the diversity of participants and their particular concerns, and democratic participation and transparency of policymaking organizations (Schlosberg 2004).

Large Northern groups (such as the Sierra Club) dominate the international institutional arena and tend to focus on reforming the existing world system. Reformists include advocates of the “Third Wave” environmental ideology, which is typically supported by members of large NGOs that have attempted to create alliances with transnational corporations and governments, often appointing corporate representatives to serve on their boards of directors. Radicals, on the other hand, accuse the “Third Wave” movement of engaging in “greenwashing,” which does not attack the root of environmental degradation and legitimates hazardous corporate practices. Radicals are found in both the North and the South, ranging in their ambitions from challenging existing politico-economic structures to calling for the total abolishment of capitalism. Despite such divisions between environmentalists, cooperation between groups is found within many environmental campaigns. As della Porta and Rucht (2002) argue, specific campaigns seem to overcome ideological cleavages, at least in the short term.

Many environmental activists recognize the need to actively struggle against the devastating environmental effects that result from the deregulation of capital, as capitalism prioritizes profits at all costs. Activism is therefore also directed against institutions that facilitate large-scale environmental degradation through the promotion of global capitalism. This is evinced in the major protests found at various international economic conferences (Curran 2006: 56–60), most notably at the WTO meeting in Seattle, which served as a key symbolic event for the future of antisystemic movements.<sup>1</sup> The environmental movement merged with the larger global justice movement in recognition of the inseparability of the environment from the political economy (Buttel and Gould 2006).

## GOING TRANSNATIONAL

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In today's world political economy, the global arena is becoming an increasingly important battleground, being the locus of many far-reaching decisions that affect distant lands (Jorgenson 2006; Rootes 2005). However, many environmental organizations, primarily environmental justice and organizations with fewer resources, maintain a local or national focus because they simply lack the resources to act beyond immediate concerns unless they receive help. Even environmental groups with the resources and channels to act transnationally face a dilemma: National funding sources expect to directly benefit from their contributions, rooting environmental groups' actions closer to home (Rootes 2005, 1999b). Because of their greater access to resources, a greater number of transnational social movement organizations are found in the core (Smith and Wiest 2005).

Environmental justice groups are in a particularly difficult position to act transnationally, being so diverse and locally oriented. Environmental justice groups based in the United States, for example, often focus their grievances about their marginalization through racial-identity politics, framing their struggles as a movement of minorities *against* dominant groups (Faber 2005). This precludes alliances with powerful actors that may provide resources or a voice in political decision making. Groups in the global South often adopt nationalist, populist, or communitarian ideologies that struggle for basic human rights *through* political channels (rather than *against* them, Glover 2002). Despite these obstacles, there has been evidence of the increasing collaboration transnationally of national and local EJMs with other EJM groups, and expansion of targets from local and national to international policy (Faber and McCarthy 2001).

Some argue that local campaigns increasingly depend on transnational actors and organizations to succeed (Rootes 1999a). Transnational collaboration increases the resource supply for groups in less affluent nations, as groups in wealthier nations are more likely to supply resources such as information, technical assistance, and capital (Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002).<sup>2</sup> The victims of the Union Carbide chemical gas leak in Bhopal, for example, started their struggle domestically but made little progress in getting their health concerns addressed after 10 years of campaigning. After many had given up, groups such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International provided expertise and publicity to help create institutions that addressed the health needs of the survivors (Zavestoski 2006).

Transnational advocacy networks from outside the nation can bring political leverage to disadvantaged populations who are embedded in closed political environments (known as the “boomerang effect,” Keck and Sikkink 1998). Faber (2005) argues that Southern environmentalists view the U.S. government favorably as a potential leader in defending human rights and environmental protection, leading some groups in the South to make connections with U.S. activists.

Even across movement boundaries, collaboration with other struggles has been important in attaining numbers, information, resources, and political leverage. The history of the antidam movement in Brazil is a history of the expansion of a movement’s frame beyond its localized struggle. What began as just a land struggle evolved into an ecological, labor, and land struggle, as brokering with other movement groups reignited the movement and allowed for collaboration with international actors (Rothman and Oliver 1999).

The World Social Forum process has become an important resource for global environmentalists. Formed as civil society’s response to the World Economic Forum, the WSF has become a space that gathers a plethora of globally minded activists who strive to create another world (Reitan 2007). Environmentalists of all forms (from protectionist to water-rights), of all scales of action (from local to global), and from all over the world (from the North and South) are brought together to simply deliberate; while some learn and expand their frame of reference, others create ties and coalitions. The Forum helps activists frame environmental issues in terms of a broader opposition to antineoliberal capitalism, which helps to link different forms of environmentalism and fosters cross-movement and transnational alliances.

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### ENVIRONMENTALISTS AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

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The following analysis provides a sketch of environmentalists at the World Social Forum. Our findings illustrate differences between groups on the basis of their position within the world system. In world systems literature, the world is divided into three different positions in the international power structure. Wealthier nations are in the “core” and have greater political, military, and economic power, often suppressing and exploiting (such as in extracting resources from) poorer nations, the “periphery.” In between the core and periphery are “semiperiphery” countries, which are intermediate between the core and periphery in

terms of wealth and power. Existing theory posits that the semiperiphery tends to serve as the locus of radical antisystemic change over history, whereas the periphery tends to oblige with the existing power structures (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). This chapter generally supports this theory, as it is found that environmentalists from the semiperiphery (and the core) tend to be the most radical at the World Social Forum, being more skeptical of existing political and economic institutions. Those from the periphery, on the other hand, tend to be the most conservative, willing to work within existing institutions rather than overturning them. Additionally, those from the periphery tend to be more favorable toward collaboration with external actors outside of their nation-state.

Despite the differences found between environmentalists at the World Social Forum, we also argue that Forum participants have sought to unite seemingly incompatible groups beneath a common umbrella of struggle. Our content analysis of workshop themes and organizers suggests that the Forum has brought various types of environmental activists together, and has also built alliances between environmental activists and nonenvironmentalists from around the world by linking their concerns to the broader theme of neoliberal global capitalism. In doing so, the Forum has the potential to iron out ideological cleavages between movements by focusing activists' attention on a common enemy: unrestrained neoliberal capitalism.

### *SURVEY DATA*

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We now turn to the characteristics of the environmentalists at the World Social Forums in 2005 (Porto Alegre, Brazil) and 2007 (Nairobi, Kenya). The following results are based on surveys administered by the Transnational Social Movement Research Working Group at the University of California–Riverside. The surveys focus on demographic and social characteristics of attendees at the World Social Forums, as well as their political attitudes and movement affiliations. Data were gathered from 639 Forum participants in 2005 (Porto Alegre) and 535 in 2007 (Nairobi). In order to better capture the diversity of the Forum participants, we used three languages in Brazil (English, Spanish, and Portuguese) and five languages in Kenya (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Swahili). To ensure proper translation, we had a second translator back-translate the survey into English to identify errors, and then requested that changes be made accordingly. Our research team was dispersed in a variety of locations

including the registration line, the opening march, and solidarity tents to sample as many participants as possible at different sites where numerous participants gathered. To add validity to our sample, it may be noted that comparing our findings to the survey conducted by Instituto Brasileiro de Análises Sociais e Econômicas (IBASE),<sup>3</sup> show similar results though our respondents tended to be slightly more diverse in their demographics (e.g., nation of residence and race/ethnicity, see Reese et al., Chapter 4).

Those who identified as “actively involved” in the environmental movement in our survey were singled out in our analyses, and comparisons were made on the basis of their positions in the world system (which is based on Kentor 2000). For most of our findings, we compiled the two data sets into one, allowing us to have a larger sample size and be more confident in our findings.

One must keep in mind the characteristics of our samples and take this into consideration when drawing inferences about activists in global civil society. The World Social Forum itself comprises a self-selected group of activists who have the resources to attend the Forum. Most are very politically active (in terms of protest activity and movement involvement), highly educated, and relatively young (see Chapter 4), which may distinguish these activists from the larger “multitude” of activists around the world. For the purpose of brevity, the following text will refer to “World Social Forum environmentalists” and “environmentalists” interchangeably, although our findings are exclusive to environmentalists who attended the World Social Forum in 2005 and/or 2007.

The host country also has a profound effect on the composition of World Social Forum attendees. A substantial proportion of participants come from the host country and is most likely shaped by a distinct regional and national political culture and environmental history. Brazil (2005) is a semiperipheral country situated in South America, and Porto Alegre is a rather affluent city. Brazilian environmental philosophy can be traced back to the environmental historian Jose Augusto Padua in 1786. Formal conservationist groups emerged in the 1950s, mainly composed of the middle class, youths, women, and intellectuals. Through the gradual decline of the authoritarian regime, environmentalism became an important symbol of resistance, as environmental groups were not repressed as extensively as other kinds of social movements. Environmentalism blossomed in the 1970s as state environmental agencies were created and the decline of authoritarian rule accelerated. Environmental groups then broadened their missions by including general social and

political concerns, thereby allying with other social movement and political groups. The Green Party's alliance with the Workers' Party led to electoral victories, and the 1992 Earth Summit located in Rio de Janeiro further solidified the environmental ethos of Brazil. As a stronghold of the Workers' Party, Porto Alegre (which has hosted many of the World Social Forums) is one cornerstone of environmental politics, as it was the founding location of the first explicitly green NGO in 1971 and had a green electoral victory on the city council in 1982 (Goldstein 1992; Hochstetler and Keck 2007). Environmentalism, thus, has a strong presence in Porto Alegre as well as in Brazil in general.

Kenya (2007) is a peripheral country in Africa surrounded by other "poor" nations, but Nairobi is an important center of operations for NGOs working in Africa. The role of NGOs in Africa has come under criticism by observers of the African Social Forum, who claimed that the political messages of the Forum were affected by the large presence of NGOs vis-à-vis grassroots social movements (Bond 2005). Additionally, since the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is headquartered in Nairobi, our sample may bias environmentalists from Kenya who are particularly favorable toward global institutions and "Northern" norms. Kenya's environmentalism is also distinguished by the Green Belt Movement (GBM), which began in the 1970s as a grassroots group whose main activity involved the planting of trees in the previously deforested landscape in Kenya. While largely serving as a model for local environmentalism, the GBM has become an internationally recognized phenomenon, as its founder Wangari Maathai won the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize and now works closely with UNEP. The GBM can now be seen as an environmental justice movement, most notably exemplified by its empowerment of women, who account for most of its members. It also advocates for good governance, democracy, peace, and the eradication of poverty (Maathai 2006; Thomas-Slayer and Rocheleau 1995).

As Table 10.1 indicates, our two samples are complementary, as they include different sections of global civil society. The Brazilian 2005 survey provides considerable representation of environmentalists from the semiperiphery (77.2 percent of the environmentalists in our 2005 sample) and Latin America (69.8 percent from South/Central America including Mexico and the Caribbean; 54.3 percent from Brazil). The Kenyan 2007 survey provides representation of environmentalists from the periphery (44.3 percent of the environmentalists for our 2007 sample are in the periphery) and Africa (52.5 percent from Africa; 40.8 percent



**Table 10.1 World-Systems Location of 2005 and 2007 WSF Participants by Geographic Region<sup>1</sup>**

	South/ Central America	Europe	North America	Asia	Africa	Oceania	World <sup>2</sup>
Core	0.0	56.1	36.8	3.5	0.0	3.5	24.5
Semiperiphery	83.9	0.8	0.0	12.9	2.4	0.0	53.2
Periphery	13.5	0.0	0.0	9.6	76.9	0.0	22.3
N	111	33	21	23	43	2	233

Note: Figures displayed in row percentages.

<sup>1</sup>World-Systems positions are based on Kentor's (2000) country positions in the world economy. Our South and Central American samples include Mexico and the Caribbean. The "Asian" sample consisted of 2 individuals from Japan and Sri Lanka, 16 from India, and 1 each from Korea, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Vietnam. Our "European" sample was exclusively Western European with the exception of 1 Russian.

<sup>2</sup>The "World" column displays total percentage of environmentalists by world system position.

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2005 WSF and 2007 WSF meetings collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

from Kenya). Due to the heavy overlap between geography and world systems positions, it is difficult to tease out effects resulting from variation on the basis of geographical or world systems positions; that is, do opinions of WSF activists vary by the geography of their home country, or do such opinions vary on the basis of their home country's position in the global political/economic/military power structure? While this chapter identifies differences of opinion that exist on the basis of world systems positions, significant differences between the local populations (Brazilians in 2005 and Kenyans in 2007) and the world systems populations will be noted when applicable,<sup>4</sup> thereby helping us to disentangle the different effects. Unless otherwise noted, there are no significant differences between the Brazilian and semiperipheral populations, and between the Kenyan and peripheral populations.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The World Social Forum attracts many types of environmentalists as shown in Table 10.2. There is a strong representation of environmental justice activists (as most evidently found in our following content analysis), including environmentalists from the global South (semiperiphery

**Table 10.2 Characteristics of Participants in 2005 (Porto Alegre) and 2007 (Nairobi) WSFs**

	Core n = 57 (24.5%)	Semiperiphery n = 124 (53.2%)	Periphery n = 52 (22.3%)		Core	Semiperiphery	Periphery
<i>Proportion environmentalist, by area</i>	25.0	26.1	19.8				
<i>Age*</i> Chi <sup>2</sup> = 19.081				<i>Race or Ethnicity***</i> Chi <sup>2</sup> = 100.667			
25 and under	23.6	37.7	27.1	White	75.0	40.2	2.1
26-35	38.2	19.7	29.2	Black	1.9	19.6	66.7
36-45	9.1	20.5	14.6	Latina/o	3.8	5.4	2.1
46-55	7.3	5.7	16.7	Mixed	5.8	8.9	0.0
56 and above	21.8	16.4	12.5	Middle Eastern	0.0	0.0	4.2
N	55	122	48	Asian	7.7	7.1	8.3
<i>Gender*</i> Chi <sup>2</sup> = 8.625				Indigenous	0.0	1.8	8.3
Female	61.4	46.0	33.3	Other	5.8	17.0	8.3
Male	38.6	54.0	66.7	n	52	112	48
N	57	124	51	<i>Years of schooling</i>			
<i>NGO affiliation</i>				10 or less	0.0	6.7	4.2
No	45.3	41.7	36.0	11-15	25.9	34.5	33.3
Yes	54.7	58.3	64.0	16 or more	74.1	58.8	62.5
N	53	115	50	n	54	119	48

Note: \* = p < 0.05, \*\* = p < 0.01, \*\*\* = p < 0.001.

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2005 WSF and 2007 WSF meetings collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

and periphery) as well as environmentalists of color. In fact, there are proportionally more environmentalists in the semiperiphery than in the core according to our sample. Not surprisingly, there are a number of white environmentalists, and environmentalists from the core are disproportionately white. However, there are a considerable number of black environmentalists (32 percent of whom were from Brazil, and 19 percent from Kenya) particularly in Brazil, as our surveys confirm that a high proportion of Brazilians are environmentalists.<sup>5</sup> We also find that environmentalists are, in other ways, relatively privileged, as the costs for attendance for nonlocal populations are high. For example, we do not find that environmentalists from the South are primarily youth and females (as is normally the case according to Mayes 1999). This may be due to the particular sample that the Forums tend to attract: those with the money and time to attend, as older males would have fewer social barriers to preclude them from attending the Forum (e.g., children and poverty).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, environmentalists also tend to be very well educated (as is true of the rest of the Forum population).

Environmental activism that is affiliated with NGOs is very common at the World Social Forum. Southern environmentalists in our sample may thus be biased toward institutionally based environmentalism, which may not fully represent the number of ad hoc, radical groups (without professional staff) that focus on their immediate struggles. Representation of NGOs is particularly strong in the periphery, where 64 percent of our environmentalists are affiliated with an NGO. Given the large NGO presence from the periphery, we can assume that resource transfer occurs between environmentalists in wealthier nations to those in poorer nations (Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002), particularly considering Kenya's role in hosting the UNEP and many international NGOs focused on African social issues. Our 2007 sample does suggest this, as 71.4 percent of the NGO environmentalists from the periphery reported that they were affiliated with an organization that was "international in scope." This is also confirmed by the findings of Pommerolle and Siméant (Chapter 12 and 2010), who have noted that all of the African delegates they interviewed at the WSF were sponsored by an NGO.

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*ON POLITICS AND ECONOMICS*

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When analyzing the opinions of environmentalists, we again find evidence that those in the periphery were the most likely to favor global

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and boomerang strategies for change. Specifically, Table 10.3 suggests that those in the periphery may perceive a democratic world government or the United States to be a valued resource for addressing their concerns. Particularly for those in the periphery, the majority of our sample thought that a democratic world government would be a good idea. When Brazilians are taken out of the sample, semiperiphery respondents were actually the most likely to favor a democratic world government (92.9 percent). The semiperiphery was conversely the most likely to favor the replacement (rather than reform) of the United Nations (even more so when excluding Brazil), while the periphery overwhelmingly favored its reform. Those in the periphery also overwhelmingly preferred to foster a single global organization to coordinate international social movements. Those from the core, ironically, tended to believe that having a single global organization to coordinate international social movements would be a bad idea.

A majority of environmentalists, like most other WSF attendees, mainly favor two “levels” for addressing most social problems: global institutions and local communities. Higher proportions of semiperiphery and (especially) peripheral environmentalists prefer community-level strategies for solving problems, while those in the core are the most likely to favor global strategies. The periphery was also the least likely to favor a global approach for solving problems, in favor of local approaches.<sup>7</sup> This finding speaks to the different experiences of environmental issues, as well as the different resource bases across nations. Activists from the periphery may find a greater need to address their immediate, local concerns such as the provision of basic resources for their communities, while those more prosperous have the luxury of focusing on global, abstract targets such as global warming (Barchiesi et al. 2006). Additionally, those in the periphery may not have the resources to move beyond their locale, while those in the core have greater resources and are thus more able to act transnationally (Smith and Wiest 2005).

Another difference between the periphery and semiperiphery lies in their perception of the state. Those in the semiperiphery are the most likely to favor the strengthening of the state, particularly when excluding Brazil (the figure becomes 25 percent). This may be due to the difference in political corruption between the semiperiphery and the periphery; the semiperiphery may find solace in the state’s protection from global forces, while those in the periphery may be distrustful of the state, often being embedded within states that do not have the resources to combat

**Table 10.3 Political and Economic Opinions of WSF Participants**

	Core	Semiperiphery	Periphery		Core	Semiperiphery	Periphery
<b>On Politics</b>							
<b>Compiled Data Set</b>							
<i>Level to best solve problems</i>				<i>Opinions on a democratic world government</i>			
Local	48.8	54.1	65.9	Good idea	80.8	69.8	81.6
National	4.7	12.2	6.8	Bad idea	19.2	30.2	18.4
Global	46.5	33.7	27.3	n	52	116	49
n	43	99	44				
<b>2007 Data Set</b>							
<i>There should arise a single global organization to coordinate international social movements.**</i>				<i>What should be done with the UN?†</i>			
Chi² = 11.823				Chi² = 11.247			
Agree	29.4	47.4	67.4	Reform	83.9	73.7	91.7
Neutral	23.5	10.5	11.6	Replace	6.5	26.3	2.8
Disagree	47.1	42.1	20.9	Abolish	3.2	0.0	0.0
n	34	19	43	Do nothing	6.5	0.0	5.6
			n	31	19	36	
<b>On Economics, 2007 sample unless otherwise indicated</b>							
<i>On Capitalism***</i> Chi² = 20.617				<i>International Monetary Fund***</i> Chi² = 19.240			
(Compiled sample)				Reform			
Reform	42.6	42.0	61.5	Replace	45.2	16.7	22.5
Abolish/Replace	44.4	57.1	28.8	Abolish	32.3	44.4	10.0
Neither	13.0	0.8	9.6	Do nothing	0.0	0.0	0.0
n	54	119	52	n	31	18	40

(continued)

Table 10.3 (continued)

	Core	Semiperiphery	Periphery		Core	Semiperiphery	Periphery
<i>The world needs less economic growth</i> (2005 sample)				<i>World Trade Organization**</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 19.840		
				Reform	27.6	38.9	71.8
Agree	65.0	66.0	37.5	Replace	41.4	16.7	17.9
Disagree	35.0	34.0	62.5	Abolish	31.0	38.9	7.7
n	20	100	8	Do nothing	0.0	5.6	2.6
<i>Debt in less affluent nations</i> <sup>†</sup>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 8.909			n	29	18	39
It should be eliminated	91.2	84.2	66.7	<i>World Bank***</i>	Chi <sup>2</sup> = 23.760		
... significantly reduced	8.8	5.3	23.1	Reform	20.0	36.8	72.5
... collected in full	0.0	10.5	10.3	Replace	36.7	26.3	15.0
n	34	19	39	Abolish	43.3	31.6	12.5
				Do nothing	0.0	5.3	0.0
				n	30	19	40

Note: † = p < 0.10, \* = p < 0.05, \*\* = p < 0.01, \*\*\* = p < 0.001.

Source: Surveys of attendees of the 2005 WSF and 2007 WSF meetings collected by the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group.

corruption. Thus, the idea that the South as a whole would favor the strengthening of the state for protection against global economic forces (Mertes 2004) may actually be more accurately a semiperiphery phenomenon among environmentalists.

In terms of economic opinions, we find that environmentalists from the semiperiphery share many of the beliefs of their counterparts from the core, both being quite radical. Opinions on economic growth, for example, are nearly identical as members from both regions feel that the world needs less economic growth (around 65 percent). Environmentalists from the core and semiperiphery were consistently less likely to favor reform and more likely to favor the replacement of the transnational economic institutions (the IMF, WTO, and World Bank), while a sizable number from both of these regions still favor the abolishment of all three of these institutions (between 31 percent and 45 percent). Interestingly, however, a few of those from the semiperiphery (as well as periphery) believed that external national debt of the less affluent nations should be collected in full, while none in the core did.

Particularly when Brazilians are excluded in our analysis, we find that the semiperiphery is the most radical in terms of reforming or abolishing capitalism. Of those 67.9 percent favored either the replacement or abolishment of capitalism, with 28.6 percent favoring its reform. This is consistent with the idea that the semiperiphery may be the locus of radical change to the existing world system, or at least its Left retains more radical ideologies, though our variables are too limited (and our sample too selective) to truly determine this (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997).

What is perhaps the clearest finding in this set of data is the relatively reformist orientation of those in the periphery. Over 60 percent of our survey respondents from the core and semiperiphery believed that the world needed less economic growth, while 37.5 percent from the periphery shared this belief. This suggests that activists in peripheral nations are primarily concerned with the provision of basic necessities that are lacking through “sustainable development,” valuing economic growth in their region. The periphery faces problems of *underproduction*—or, at least, a poor allocation of resources that leave them shortchanged (to use a gross euphemism). Related to this finding, those in the periphery were far more likely, over two-thirds of them, to favor the reform of our three transnational economic institutions. Conversely, those in the core and semiperiphery were around three times more likely to favor the institutions’ abolishment in comparison to those from the periphery.

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THE FRAMING OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

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Environmentalism at the World Social Forum involves a vast array of actors and assumes many forms, each having differing struggles, strategies, and opinions in terms of how a “better world” should look. The flexible nature of the Forum, serving as a communicative arena for actors to share their experiences and learn from each other (Whitaker 2005), facilitates the bringing together of such a contentious environmental crowd under the same roof, potentially to become part of one movement. The Forum opens its doors to almost any sector of an amorphous global civil society that is willing to deliberate with others, allowing activists to exchange information and create ties to foster a sense of “we-ness.” By analyzing the themes and participants of workshops held at various World Social Forums, one finds that environmental frames are extended across movement issues, environmental organizations participate on panels that are not explicitly geared toward environmentalism, and explicit cross-movement and cross-border links are solicited.

The workshops that are held at the Forum appeal to collective frames that link different environmental groups. The titles tend to be abstract and flexible in their interpretation, allowing a number of groups to identify with the theme. One of the panels at the 2005 Forum in Brazil, for example, was titled “Nature for Sale,” described in the program text: “The world’s poorest people, especially women and children, are desperately in need of safe water and sanitation services . . . . The poor can lose access to these basic services when profit-oriented transnational water companies move in” (World Social Forum 2005: 5). This workshop description framed environmentalism flexibly through peoples’ common subjugation under neoliberalism and dispossession, encompassing issues such as poverty and women’s rights. The panelists who participated in this event similarly represented a wide range of environmentalism from all over the world, including the following groups: Sobrevivencia, a Paraguayan umbrella organization concerned with numerous environmental issues such as water rights, ecological sustainability, and biodiversity; Friends of the Earth International, a large U.S. NGO; the World Rainforest Movement, a conservationist group with head offices in Uruguay and Britain; and even Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), one of the most powerful workers’ unions in Brazil.

Environmental organizations also participated in events that were not explicitly based on environmental issues, including panels devoted to



indigenous concerns, public services, and neoliberalism. One self-organized panel in 2004, for example, was titled “NAFTA & FTAA the Global North Meets the Global South,” which included participation from the Environmental Health Coalition and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice working on what is commonly perceived as an economic/labor issue. Additionally, North and South divides are bridged in such panels through identifying the commonalities faced across borders.

Other panels were explicitly oriented toward creating links between movements, as in a 2005 panel titled “Climate Justice: Linking Human Rights, Environmental Justice, Labor Rights and Climate Change.” One major axis in the Caracas 2006 polycentric forum was “capitalism and threats to life,” encompassing issues such as global warming, Indigenous lands, and sexual and reproductive rights. It is likely that such workshops facilitate “brokering,” or bridging between previously unconnected movement groups, in this case between labor, Indigenous, feminist, human rights, and environmental groups.

Considering the flexible identity of “environmentalism” at the World Social Forum, it is reasonable to argue that the vast majority of environmentalists that are represented at the Forum can be considered environmental justice activists. These environmentalists are not focused solely on the relationship between humans and nature (conservation), but on the relationship between humans in general and their rights to the environment. Additionally, many of these environmentalists have links to other movements, particularly evidenced in the strong human rights framework in the workshops. A network analysis of our data shows that the environmental movement at the Forum is one of the three most central movements in the network of movements (out of 18 movements—third to human rights and peace in 2005, and second to human rights in 2007), meaning that it has one of the most numerous and important connections with other movements (Chase-Dunn and Kaneshiro 2009). Environmentalism at the Forum is thus not an isolated issue, but is strongly tied to other issues. Quite tellingly, many attendees at the World Social Forum also had multiple links with other movements, making this finding not exclusive to environmentalists.

## CONCLUSION

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The environmental movement’s size and diversity makes persistent ideological cleavages inevitable. Our surveys have demonstrated that

differing forms of environmentalism found at the WSF are related to one's location within the world system. The clearest finding is that the environmentalists in the periphery tend to be more "reformist" in their orientation toward social change, and are more trusting (and perhaps even dependent) on collaboration with external actors. Those in the core and semiperiphery at the WSF tend to be more "radical," although there is considerable variation within each group.

Despite the numerous differences that are found between environmentalists, we also find that the workshops at the World Social Forum attempt to bridge these differences by presenting a common "master frame" to unite activists. The Forum seeks to change the current hegemonic system of neoliberal economics, which is the common tie that is used to link environmentalists together with each other, as well as with other groups of activists. As such, we find that much of the environmentalism at the Forum is, in actuality, environmental justice, as environmentalists at the Forum have strong ties with other social justice movement groups. In other words, grievances at the Forum are framed in terms of human rights and antineoliberal economics, which allow these groups to collaborate and cohere as a potential collective movement. Additionally, the blending of environmental issues with other common struggles (i.e., basic human rights) helps to break down simple "North-South" divides by creating shared interests, as groups across oceans are able to better understand how class universally interacts with environmental concerns.

We can think of the environmental case at the Forum as a microcosm for the Forum in general. Environmentalists are able to put aside their differences with each other, as well as with other activist groups, as collaborators that all struggle for a better world. Similarly, the Forum in general serves to bring disparate activists together from all over the world and unite them under a single frame: opposition to neoliberal capitalism. The environmental movement may be of particular importance if a true "movement of movements" arises. The malleable character of environmentalism (particularly of environmental justice) has contributed to its history of collaboration with other seemingly incompatible groups. As a multidimensional yet universal movement, environmentalism can serve as a hub to link the plethora of activists together. Furthermore, the environmental movement is a growing movement that links numerous levels (from the grassroots to the international), and has managed to influence international policies (Faber 2005). The role of environmentalism

within the network of movements may, indeed, be pivotal for bringing forth another world.

## NOTES

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1. Broad and Heckscher (2003) argue that transnational movements against global exploitation date back to European colonialism, such as in the resistance to the slave trade and the First International Workingmen's Association's fight for workers' rights. More recently, Indigenous antidam movements in poorer locations like the Philippines stimulated anticorporate movements in the United States in the 1980s. Concerns of environment groups can also spread to development and human rights organizations, broadening the set of actors and interests struggling against the international capitalist system.

2. Dalton and Rohrschneider (1999) also find that recipients of aid tend to be reformist (versus revolutionary). Thus, NGO activists in the global South (which have a strong presence at the Forums), being likely recipients of foreign aid, may adopt a more reformist orientation than their less organized counterparts. Radicals, on the other hand, need not be seen as incompatible with reformists, as they may serve a critical role for environmentalism in providing ideas that continually "revive" the environmental movement (Rootes 1999b).

3. IBASE is a Brazilian group that researches the World Social Forums. They base their samples on information from the WSF's registration database, using stratified samples of 2,540 individuals in Brazil (2005) and 2,480 in Kenya (2007).

4. A majority of our peripheral respondents who reported active involvement in the environmental movement are from Kenya (53.8 percent), though we do not find any statistically significant differences between their responses and those of the remaining peripheral respondents, with the exception of Kenyans being more favorable toward a democratic world government. Those in Brazil (76.6 percent of the semiperiphery sample), on the other hand, significantly differ from the rest of the semiperiphery respondents in their demographics, likely due to having fewer constraints that prevent locals from dropping or attending the whole Forum: They are younger, more gender balanced, and have fewer NGO affiliations.

5. The large number of black environmentalists in Porto Alegre may have been "papaleros," a movement of people who are employed in the recycling industry of Porto Alegre and other areas of Brazil.

6. The majority of our respondents from the periphery relied on personal funds for attending the Forum (39.5 percent in Kenya, 55.6 percent in Brazil). Those from the core or semiperiphery had more varied sources of support, such as work and political/social organizations.

7. The preference of respondents from the periphery for engaging in local strategies to resolve social problems seems to run contradictory to their tendency to view potential global institutions favorably. The difference may lie in the *potential* that the periphery perceives in global organization (i.e., theoretical global world governance and/or international social movement organization), which contrasts with the *reality* and practicality of social movement mobilization in the current world (i.e., the current level to best solve problems). Although the periphery positively views potential global social/political action, the current reality and reach of social movement actors in the periphery makes mobilization at the local level the most effective level for social action. This difference may also be emblematic of the saying “think globally, act locally.” Similarly, the respondents from the core were largely split in their favoring of local and global levels of social action, whereas the largest proportion of such respondents tended to disfavor the potential presence of a single global organization to coordinate social movements. A potential explanation for this seeming contradiction may be the core’s favoring of independent social movements that operate on a global scale, as opposed to having a single global organization that coordinates these otherwise independent social movements. Resolutions of these seeming paradoxes will be reserved for future research.



## CHAPTER 11

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# THE ROAD TO THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM: THE CASE OF THE DALIT MOVEMENT

*Peter (Jay) Smith*

This chapter analyzes the role of the movement to improve the rights of the Dalits (an oppressed caste formerly known as the “untouchables” in India) at the World Social Forum (WSF). In so doing, it serves to rectify the dearth of empirical studies of not only why and how locally based groups become part of the global justice movement and the WSF but the impact they can have on shaping the issue framing and organizing dynamics of Social Forums. The focus will be on one key organization in particular, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). I begin with a brief discussion of the relationship between the global and the local and the centrality of networks as a link between the two. I then discuss how Karl Polanyi’s ideas help us to understand this dynamic between the global and the local, particularly the emphasis that Dalits place on the state to resist the “disembedding,” or the freeing, of the economy from social or political regulations. Polanyi’s analysis also permits us to better understand the dialectic of globalization within an Indian context first in terms of the impact of neoliberal globalization in the form of the new economic policy

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(NEP). I then discuss the impact of the NEP upon the Dalit community, including the Dalit countermovement and the NCDHR's decision to "go global" and take their struggle against casteism and neoliberal globalization beyond the Indian state and to the WSF. I argue that in taking their cause beyond India and to the WSF, the Dalits have as a primary objective making the Indian state better serve the interests of the Dalit people. Their struggle, in turn, has contributed to the global movement's articulation of critiques of, and demands on, the state.

Finally, this research utilizes case study methodology based on a combination of various types of data and methods, including participant observation at the 2004, 2005, and 2007 World Social Forums and interviews with Dalit leaders. In addition, I examined the content of messages and documents circulated through a Dalit listserv, and reviewed Dalit scholarship, and numerous policy documents on the impact of globalization upon the Dalits.

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#### GLOBALIZATION, NETWORKING, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

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According to Manuel Castells (1996) the "space of places" is being subordinated to a new space of power, the "space of flows"—of commodities, capital, technology, ideas, and culture across national boundaries. Yet it would be a mistake to view places as static and not engaged in contesting what occurs at the global level. According to Munck, place is "a product of complex interacting social relations" which is being "penetrated by transnational social and cultural relations in a complex manner" (Munck 2007: 107). Places and the local communities living in them have a dynamic, interactive relationship with global forces.

It is this nexus between the global and the local that is at the heart of the global justice movement. These social movement mobilizations are projected by means of "loosely coupled networks" organized "around particular campaigns or series of campaigns" using a variety of means to advance their causes. What links these various heterogeneous networks and issues is a common "opposition against 'neoliberal globalization'" (della Porta and Tarrow 2005b: 12). These networks provide the bridge that connects the global with particular places, thus facilitating a complex relationship between the two. Yet, despite their global connectivity, these networks remained rooted in specific geographies.

A common approach to analyzing transnational activism focuses on "advocacy networks." Keck and Sikkink argue that advocacy networks

“plead the causes of others or defend a cause or proposition” in what they describe as the “boomerang” pattern (1998: 8–9). When the “channels between the state and its domestic channels are blocked . . . domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to bring pressure on their states from outside” (1998: 12). However, the Dalits’ activities are better understood in terms of a “double boomerang” strategy (Kaldor 2003). That is, the Dalits not only reach out to allies to put pressure on the Indian state from above. They also use international arenas and allies to pressure Indian civil society to, in turn, put pressure on the Indian state to amend its policies on economic globalization and to conform to international norms on human rights.

Bennett (2005) suggests that a new generation of transnational activism has emerged. This new type of activism contrasts with the first generation of transnational activism identified by Keck and Sikkink, which centered on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and “campaigns aimed at national or international institutions to achieve specific policy goals” (Bennett 2005: 212). The second generation of activists is instead characterized by diversity and direct, social justice, multi-issue, permanent campaigns along with the growing diffusion of supranational targets (Bennett 2005: 212). Increasingly, this new generation of activists has become embedded within larger webs of activism. Reitan (2007) subsequently modified the duality of Bennett’s model to recognize the existence of a hybrid model of transnational activist networks that contains elements of both NGO advocacy networks and Bennett’s second generation model. The Dalits, like other hybrid transnational activist networks, advance what Reitan describes as “bivalent claims,” stressing both economic redistribution and cultural recognition.

Domestic networks become active transnationally in response to the threats posed by the external environment of neoliberal policies (Tarrow and della Porta 2005; Reitan 2007). These policies are sometimes perceived as a threat to the protections and provisions of the welfare state (Udayagiri and Walton 2002), or as a threat to the identity of oppressed groups. Historically, transnational activists have found that United Nations (U.N.) agencies help to expand their political opportunities. This is because certain NGOs have been granted official status, permitting them to address and advise the United Nations, its agencies, and international conferences (Martens 2004). More recently, the WSF has become an increasingly important space for transnational activism and convergence. The Dalits have participated within both U.N. conferences

and the WSF, thus inserting themselves into a large, complex web of transnational activism.

As a social movement, the Dalits do not reject the state, but see a more responsive state as key to advancing their claims. In this regard, the Dalits are acting as the other half of Polanyi's "double movement," that is, as a protective countermovement. For Polanyi, the double movement was key to understanding how history advances. The nineteenth century "great transformation" led to the expansion of the free market as part of an attempt to disembed, or free, the market from social and political regulations. At the same time, however, a countermovement occurred. This countermovement reflected an impulse for social protection and ultimately led to the creation of the welfare state. In both instances, the role of the state was critical. First, the state acted to "disembed" the economy from society and to facilitate and protect the expansion of the market. Then, the state itself came under great pressure to make the "process of economic improvement . . . socially bearable" (2001: 40).

This impulse towards social protection, however, was not merely economic. According to Polanyi, a person "does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets" (2001: 48). This is particularly true of the Dalits, who as much as they are fighting for material goods, are fighting for social recognition, for human rights, and their human dignity.

Today, Polanyi's analysis in terms of the national level can be scaled upwards to the global level to include nonstate political spaces such as the WSF as part of the countermovement to seek "social control" over an unfettered global capitalism (Munck 2007: 139). That said, this countermovement is not limited to the movements represented at the WSF and varies across time and space. Within the global justice movement there are differences in understandings of how the countermovement should occur and of its relationship to state power. In the global North (the richer and more powerful nations), particularly in Europe, there is a tendency for many activists involved in the global justice movement to stress the autonomy of the countermovement from the state, and to be highly critical of state power (della Porta et al. 2006). Yet, as Santos argues, "there are those who think that the state is a social relation and, as such, it is contradictory and continues to be an important arena of struggle" (2006: 114). This is particularly true in areas of the global South (the poorer and less powerful nations). For example, in Latin



American populist antineoliberal movements stress the centrality of the state as a site of resistance. Elsewhere, transnational feminist networks “criticize neoliberal capitalism [and] call for the return of the welfare, developmentalist state” (Moghadam 2005: 19).

In a variety of respects, the Dalits are akin to other social movements from the global South. Like those movements, the Dalits stress the importance of influencing multiple arenas, including the United Nations and the WSF. The Dalit decision to “go global” was an important one. To understand it, one must understand the complexities of the Polanyi problematic within the Indian context. The following section discusses the impact of neoliberal globalization upon India, the Indian state, and the Dalits in particular.

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### *NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION COMES TO INDIA*

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When neoliberal globalization arrived in India in 1991 by means of the NEP, it altered the role of the Indian state in the economy and society. Gone was Nehru’s vision of a democratic socialist republic ushering in development and secular modernity through means of state planning, import-substitution industrialization, and a commitment to political and social justice.

According to most observers, what precipitated the adoption of the NEP in July 1991 was an economic and political crisis. The government of India faced a variety of severe problems, including rising fiscal and current-account deficits, mounting domestic and foreign debt, high inflation, and dwindling foreign reserves (Teltumbde 1999; Corbridge and Harriss 2003). A rescue package from, and pressure by, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank led a compliant government to adopt the NEP, which liberalized trade, abandoned import-substitution industrialization, and introduced a structural adjustment program into the domestic economy. This program included a variety of measures, such as privatization of the public sector, removal of restrictions on both private sector and foreign investment in the economy, an emphasis on export-led growth, cuts in social services and welfare expenditures, along with a wage freeze and cuts in public subsidies (Teltumbde 1999; National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights 2004).

By and large, the ruling castes and classes in India embraced the reforms and neoliberalism. As Corbridge and Harriss claim, economic liberalization was a part of an “‘elite revolt’ against the slow but steady march to power in the country and in many state capitals of the poor and dominated castes” (2003: vii). Thus the NEP can be seen as “an undemocratic backlash” whereby various elements of India’s elites sought to

impose very different “visions of order and modernity” upon the Indian masses (Corbridge and Harriss 2003: 235).

Overall, the result is that “the reforms in India seem to be making life harder for the poor” (Corbridge and Harriss 2003: 165). The reforms, in particular, have had a negative impact upon the Dalits. To understand why, one must recognize how important the Indian state, even with its inequities and dominant caste character, has been as a means of social protection and improvement for the Dalits, who number between 170 and 200 million or one-sixth of India’s population. Historically, the Dalits represent the most marginalized, impoverished, and discriminated against element of Indian society. In recent decades, thanks to state measures, the lives of the Dalits have improved somewhat. In part, the positive role the state has played is due to the great Dalit leader, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), recognized as the primary architect of the post-Independence constitution. Under Ambedkar the Indian constitution recognized the need for equality and social justice for all (Oommen 2004: 245). For the Dalits, the constitution included a host of positive measures including the abolition of “untouchability,” forbidding its practice in any form. While it has not disappeared, the practice has eroded in part because of the implementation of the Constitution and other antidiscriminatory and preventative laws.

Given the state’s key role in helping the Dalits to advance, the privatization of the public sector is viewed as a threat to Dalit interests. “Reservations,” or constitutionally mandated affirmative action in the public sector and in public educational institutions, fostered an emerging Dalit middle class that “created hope for advancement in the entire Dalit population” (Teltumbde 1999: 16). Viewed from the perspective of the Dalits, privatization is not merely an economic decision in favor of the market allocation of resources, it is about the social and economic organization of power, a backward step leading to dereservation by the backdoor. While Dalit gains from the Indian state have been insufficient, they are nonetheless real. Yet, as one Dalit document notes, the

[e]stablished truth is that all these small gains and the impact thereof are set to be wiped out with the New Economic Policy. Faced with this grim prospect, Dalits need to oppose the dominant processes of globalization. (NCDHR 2004: 4)

The Dalits, moreover, became very concerned in the 1990s over the threat of rising Hindu cultural nationalism described as “a middle-class,

high-caste project of cultural homogenization that seeks to create a unified, homogeneous Hindu political identity . . . under the general category of ‘Hindu’” (Shani 2004: 47).

In taking their struggle for social and economic justice and cultural recognition and protection to the transnational level, the Dalits drew their inspiration from Ambedkar, a source of inspiration and immense Dalit pride and respect. In philosophical terms, Ambedkar can be distinguished from the other inspiration for contemporary Indian social movements, Gandhi. Whereas Gandhi saw the world in terms of harmony, Ambedkar saw it in terms of contradictions, first being the caste system, second being capitalism and class. In addition, Ambedkar was a modernist, a believer in the state as an instrument of socioeconomic justice. His emphasis on modernity, internationalism, and the state sets him apart from many locally focused neo-Gandhian Indian new social movements that are inspired by Gandhi’s vision of local empowerment, social harmony, and antiseccularism (Omvedt 2003).

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*INTERNATIONALIZING THE DALIT MOVEMENT*

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In important respects, Ambedkar embodies a key duality in the globalizing Left between economic justice and the struggle for cultural recognition. Today, Dalit activists have widened the basis of their struggle against casteism and neoliberal globalization, shifting scales beyond the nation-state. Their struggle is highly influenced by Ambedkar, including his emphasis on the state’s role in providing social protection.

In moving their struggle for economic justice and cultural recognition beyond India, the Dalits accessed a wide range of new international venues, including UN agencies and the U.N.-sponsored World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in 2001 held in Durban, South Africa. However, the WSF is where the Dalits have delivered their strongest indictment of the effects of global capitalism on the Dalit people. Their activities at the WSF are, however, closely linked to their international activities elsewhere.

Until the 1990s, the internationalization of the Dalit issue was not done so much by Dalits in India but by a transnationally linked Dalit diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and other countries. Members of this diaspora made representations on behalf of India’s Dalits at the United Nations in the early 1990s. By 1998, however, thanks to the emergence of a Dalit middle class, improved organizational capacity, and

communicative structures, a more extensive Dalit movement took shape, one composed of a variety of networks within India and abroad. While there is no central hub to the movement, in 1998 a key node emerged, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). The NCDHR represents a significant step forward in terms of Dalit mobilization, becoming “the first national human rights organization for the Dalits,” bringing the Dalit movement to a new level organizationally (interview with Vincent Manoharan November 2004).<sup>1</sup> Its name belies the fact that this is a transnational and global campaign. Unlike the Northern-based diasporic networks, it is based in India and engages in a variety of political arenas from the local to the global levels. It has advanced the Dalit cause at various U.N. agencies, especially the U.N.-sponsored WCAR. These interventions, in turn, fed into the global justice movement at the WSF. In brief, the NCDHR operates within what Rothman and Oliver (1999: 43) describe as “nested opportunity structures.” Within such structures, “local political opportunity structures are embedded in national political opportunity structures, which are in turn embedded in international political opportunity structures.” These “nested opportunity structures,” however, are not limited to official structures of governance but include U.N. “sponsored international governmental conferences and transnational conferences of civil society groups” including the WSF (Smith 2004a: 321–322). While the NCDHR is not the only India-based Dalit organization involved in transnational activism, it was one of the first and most visible.

The NCDHR is a loose network structure with a National Secretariat in New Delhi and is composed of activists working in a variety of NGOs, including, prominently, the National Federation of Dalit Women. Many come from southern India, but the campaign extends across the country (Hartmann 2003). Underlying the formation of the NCDHR is a key concern; to publicize the plight of the Dalits at both the national and international levels, the latter with the intent of internationalizing the Dalit issue. This emphasis on publicity is a common feature of other advocacy networks that, as Keck and Sikkink note, serve to “pry open space for new issues” (1998: 13). In its efforts to seek international recognition and assistance against internal and external threats, the NCDHR has associated itself with a variety of transnational networks. These networks represent a hybrid of first- and second-generation activism. Advocacy, for example, remains a key feature of these networks, but the networks also favor long-term multi-issue campaigns. They also involve more people and leadership from the global South than traditional types of Northern-based transnational advocacy networks.

In 2000 the NCDHR took a significant step in transnationalizing the Dalit struggle by playing a formative role in the establishment of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) based in Copenhagen, Denmark. The IDSN views “caste discrimination as one of the most severe human rights problems in the world today and aims to ensure global recognition of the problem and global action for its eradication” (IDSN 2006).

Organizationally, the IDSN is composed of three distinct types of networks: (1) international human rights organizations; (2) national Dalit solidarity networks; and (3) national advocacy groups (IDSN 2006). The IDSN’s many international associates include Human Rights Watch and the Lutheran World Federation. National Dalit solidarity networks have been established in Europe and the United States by development and human rights NGOs. These networks conduct local awareness campaigns, alert media, and lobby governments to promote action opposing caste discrimination. Together, these networks and the IDSN “facilitate interventions at international and multilateral bodies” (IDSN 2006). In recent years these interventions have become more common, facilitating Dalit presentations at U.N. and E.U. bodies and agencies. For example, in November 2006 the voices of Dalit women “were heard for the first time in the European Parliament and at the European Commission at round tables organized by the IDSN” (IDSN 2006: 3).

Finally, there are national advocacy platforms in the countries of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Japan, where castes are found. The first three are specifically Dalit platforms, but a similar caste phenomenon exists in Japan, where the Buraku Liberation League campaigns for the eradication of Buraku discrimination. Beyond this, the NCDHR is linked to numerous other networks and NGOs.

The NCDHR has chosen arenas where, with the assistance of the IDSN, they can maximize exposure at both the international and domestic levels. The first significant opportunity to highlight the issue of caste discrimination internationally came with the U.N.-sponsored WCAR in 2001. Although the NCDHR’s effort to have casteism condemned at the WCAR was blocked by the Indian government, the conference proved advantageous to the Dalits in terms of publicizing the group’s concerns. The media-savvy Dalit delegation of 200 representatives attracted mass media attention, internationally and within India. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan supported the Dalits and invited Paul Divakar of the NCDHR to speak before world leaders. As Thek-aekara noted, before his international audience Divakar “Made a succinct but moving presentation of the plight of India’s 160 million Dalits. And he

had his elite audience completely riveted” (2001: 1). The NCDHR also had a domestic audience in mind, “This conference grabbed the headlines of every Indian newspaper and TV station and brought caste back into the news with a vengeance” (Thekaekara 2005: 1). Once home, the NCDHR staged rallies to mobilize the Dalits and held press conferences in India publicizing the plight of the Dalits (Ahmed 2004). By this time, the NCDHR had developed the prototype of a campaign designed to maximize exposure at both the global and national levels, one evident at the Asian Social Forum in 2003 and the WSF in Mumbai in 2004.

### THE ROAD TO THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

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At approximately the same time as WCAR, the NCDHR became involved with the broader global justice movement and the WSF. The NCDHR realized that globalization was contradictory. As the general-secretary of the NCDHR, Vincent Manoharan, asked rhetorically, “When you [India] internationalize your trade, when you internationalize your business, when you internationalize your market,” should you not expect to be “internationalizing your problems also? We’ve got every right to do that” (interview, November 2004).

For the NCDHR, the WSF demonstrated promise as an arena to contest neoliberal globalization. In 2001 the NCDHR sent Manoharan to more closely investigate the WSF. With its slogan “Another World Is Possible,” the WSF was particularly attractive to the Dalits, who were searching for another transnational venue that would complement their activity within U.N. bodies. According to Manoharan:

So, when I went to [the] WSF, I thought it was the right platform by which we have got two legs. Earlier it was one, casteism. Now it is capitalism also. Casteism reflected in the form of untouchability, capitalism in the form of globalization. Now we had a double-barrelled gun. Earlier it was one. Now it is two. Within India the casteist forces are the classist forces also. [And] the casteist forces are joining hands with the globalization forces. (Interview, November 2004)

Combined, then, the United Nations and the WSF provided opportunities for the Dalits to fight against the main two sources of their oppression—caste and class. While the general-secretary distinguished between the purposes of the two venues, in fact, their bivalent campaigns against caste and class have become intertwined at the WSF. Since the WSF

begin in January 2001, the NCDHR has attended all meetings of the WSF, as well as the European Social Forum (ESF) meetings in 2003 and 2004 and the Asian Social Forum (ASF) meeting in 2003. They were most prominently visible at the 2004 WSF meeting in Mumbai, playing a major role in shaping the themes of the Forum.

The NCDHR was most visible and influential at the ASF, the WSF meeting in Mumbai, and to a lesser extent, the polycentric WSF in Karachi in 2006. Previous to 2003, Dalit participation at the WSF was limited to a minimal number of participants, as few Dalits had enough funds to travel to Porto Alegre, Brazil. The decision to hold a regional social forum in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, in January 2003 changed this. The ASF attracted 15,000 delegates from 80 countries, mostly from India and South Asia.

Similar to the WCAR, the NCDHR realized that the ASF represented an opportunity to both educate and mobilize their constituency on the impact of neoliberal globalization. Thus, prior to the ASF the NCDHR, who were part of the official Forum organizing committee, along with various constituents of the Dalit movement began a campaign of education and mobilization among the Dalit community in five Indian states. The primary purpose of the campaign was “[t]o spread the word about the ASF and why there was a need for the Dalit voice to be heard . . . at this international conference” (NCDHR 2003b). This campaign was also necessary for the Social Forum process, which, while highly visible in Europe and South America, was virtually unknown in India. This campaign, moreover, was funded internally, with small amounts from the Dalit people themselves, and from NGOs supportive of the Dalit movement (interview with Manoharan 2004).

At the ASF, the Dalits were well represented, with nearly 7,000 participants from 24 Dalit organizations, along with 17 organizations from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Japan (Jain 2004). Joining them were participants from the IDSN who also participated in the 11 seminars and 14 workshops sponsored by the NCDHR. Much of the indictment of neoliberal globalization is found in a document of the NCDHR entitled *Dalits on Globalization—Making Another World Possible* (2003a). Unlike mainstream economics, which views the market as neutral and devoid of power relations, the document proclaims that, “the market is not ‘neutral’” and “works in a discriminatory manner in the case of Dalits” (NCDHR 2003a: 1). The market, moreover, as a site of power “dictated by the social hierarchy” was excluding “Dalits from entering productive processes,” leading to “increasing disparities in living standards between

Dalits and the dominant castes.” There was, then, a need “to bring a Dalit perspective into the current globalization discourse by making the linkages between untouchability, caste discrimination, and denial of access to opportunities and choices in the global market.” It was, in addition, critical to demystify the “myth of the neutrality . . . of structural adjustment, trade liberalization, and privatization” (NCDHR 2003a: 4).

Noteworthy is the document’s emphasis on social protection with repeated demands upon the state to act:

The Dalit community calls on the State to fulfill its constitutionally mandated responsibility to protect their stakes and promote equal access to the marketization process for social groups that have been historically marginalized. (NCDHR 2003a: Fact Sheet I)

The ASF was a “dress rehearsal” to test the possibility of organizing the WSF in India—a test that went well. The International Council of the WSF, its governing body, had in 2002 contemplated holding the annual meeting outside South America in an attempt to make the WSF less Euro- or South American-centric. Likewise, for the Dalits it was a dress rehearsal for the WSF in Mumbai, where they displayed themselves on a much larger stage.

As part of the preparation for Mumbai, Dalits, including Vincent Manoharan of the NCDHR, were represented on the Indian Organizing Committee. There was widespread agreement in the committee to expand the limited focus of earlier Social Forums to include other areas impacted by neoliberal globalization, such as patriarchy and communalism (i.e., religious sectarianism as in the 2002 Hindu attacks in the state of Gujarat against Muslim minorities). There was, however, initial reluctance by the Indian Organizing Committee to highlight casteism as a major theme in Mumbai. Casteism was claimed to be country specific. In response, retorted Manoharan:

[Caste] is not only in India affecting 250 million people, it is in South and East Asia and it is not a question of our community, the Dalits. Other people are facing it, our brothers, the Romas [Gypsies], our Burakus [Japan], our Nigeria people [Orus, Osus], . . . are facing it [casteism]. (Interview, November 2004)

Ultimately “the WSF said it [casteism] would count,” a decision that contributed greatly to the success of the Forum, not only by adding to the themes of the forum but by adding the considerable energy of the Dalits and their compelling message (interview November 2004).<sup>2</sup> In many ways,



for the NCDHR, the WSF Mumbai was the ASF writ large in terms of their objectives, their mobilization prior to Mumbai, their use of public space, and their core messages. Thus, for example, just as the NCDHR conducted a campaign of education and mobilization prior to the ASF, it conducted another campaign on a much larger scale in order to make the WSF and the issues of globalization meaningful to the Dalits (NCDHR 2003b). As a result, it reached millions of Dalits throughout India. This pre-Forum campaign was consistent with the intentions of the WSF to encourage activities across India promoting the WSF, underscoring that the Social Forum was not merely an event, but a process (Santos 2006: 200). After their six-week campaign across India, “tens of thousands [of Dalit] activists . . . reached Mumbai . . . joining their brothers from elsewhere in South Asia–Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka” (Moliner 2004: 1).

The scale of the WSF in Mumbai was much larger than the ASF, with up to 130,000 participants attending each day. While most were South Asian, thousands of participants and NGOs from countries around the world were present, providing the Dalits with a large and diverse audience. Not unlike the ASF, the Dalits, an estimated 30,000 strong, skilfully used the WSF as a public space of empowerment where they could make themselves and their causes known. Here, Moliner claims, “the NCDHR was one of the most vocal organizations at the World Social Forum in Mumbai” (2004: 1).

The Dalits skilfully used the open, public space of the WSF in two senses. First externally, as Moliner (2004: 1) notes, “it was virtually impossible to avoid the Dalit political presence.” The Dalits announced their appearance at Forum events with the relentless sounding of drums, songs, and music,<sup>3</sup> turning “the same drum which traditionally connotes their ‘impurity’ into an emblem of pride and self-assertion” (Moliner 2004: 1). Thus, with their music, the Dalits brought passion, pride, and anger that fuelled the vibrancy of the WSF. All this is a pointed reminder that passion and emotional expression are fundamental ingredients of politics and “can be strategically used by activists” as “an aspect of all social action and social relations” (Goodwin et al. 2001: 6).

Second, internally, within the tents and buildings, the Dalits, the NCDHR, and the IDSN among them, organized 14 events, from seminars with hundreds in attendance to larger conferences drawing thousands. They focused on the key issues raised at the ASF, namely, the impact of neo-liberalism on the Dalits, including its intensification of casteism. There was, as well, little doubt of the Dalit belief in the potential efficacy of the state. As one participant put it, “We must defend the constitution of India,” for

it “has invaluable provisions on fundamental human rights” (unidentified participant: author’s WSF notes 2004). Yet, at the same time, there was an awareness that the market was negatively affecting Dalit advancement. As one Dalit participant asked, “How can people denied basic rights compete in the market?” (author’s WSF notes 2004). Finally, the WSF was used to highlight the importance of internationalizing the caste issue by including other international descent-based communities. In doing so, the intent was to put pressure on India and other governments with castelike systems to apply international and national norms. According to one NCDHR participant, the WSF was another “opportunity to embarrass the Indian government into action” (Umakant 2004). While the Dalit movement sought to make casteism a focus of indignation for thousands of global activists, it was really “domestic concern that Dalit activists [were] hoping to spur by the high-profile meeting in Bombay” (Asia Human Rights News 2004). That said, Conway claims that “the Dalit movements made a claim on the WSF and the worldwide antiglobalization movement that another world is not possible without a global struggle against casteism in all its forms, both within and outside of India” (Conway 2004a: 1).

Since 2004, the Dalits’ visibility has varied at the WSF and other Social Forums. Because their primary focus was on casteism, they mainly worked with similarly concerned networks and organizations from other countries. However, at both the WSF and other regional forums, the Dalits made efforts to insert themselves into a wider range of networks on the basis of reciprocity. Prior to the WSF 2005, for example, they travelled across Brazil to meet with landless peasants and participated in direct actions for the homeless. The linkage of the Dalits, who overwhelmingly work on the land as small landowners or landless laborers, with the *Movimento dos Sem Terra* (MST) or “landless movement,” strengthened the role of peasant farmers, including *Via Campesina*, within the WSF.<sup>4</sup>

Evident in a supportive role of the NCDHR at all the WSF meetings are the organizations based in the global North such as the Lutheran World Federation, which support them based on altruistic solidarity. At one time social movements in the global North with their emphasis on altruistic solidarity dominated transnational activism (Reitan 2007). However, today, it is Southern-based NGOs and networks, including the NCDHR, the Third World Network, Focus on the Global South, the Our World Is Not for Sale network, *Via Campesina*, and the feminist network Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era that are increasingly taking the lead in forging new and more egalitarian forms of international solidarity.

## CONCLUSION

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What emerges from the activities of the NCDHR and the Dalit movement at the United Nations and the WSF is a strategy that recognizes the importance of targeting multiple opportunity structures and venues—local, national, international, global, within civil society or the market. The question is, has this strategy been effective? Have the Dalits successfully increased global awareness of casteism and brought about improvements for the Dalits within India? There are indications that the Dalits have effectively publicized their cause, bringing it not only to international but also domestic public opinion. Material progress for Dalits within India has been more modest.

In terms of publicity, the WCAR conference proved to be a publicity triumph for the Dalits internationally and domestically. Beyond this, there are indications of growing international and domestic awareness of the Dalit cause. For example, the rally before the WSF 2004 meeting kept the Dalits in the news and also helped mobilize their community. The WSF 2004 itself was a success in terms of creating awareness for the Dalits. After the WSF, mainstream international media began devoting more time and space to the Dalits. Since 2005, for example, a variety of European countries and the United States have produced radio and television documentaries sympathetic to the Dalits.

Elsewhere internationally, the spotlight has become more intense. In 2005 an extensive debate on the Dalit issue, initiated by Jeremy Corbyn, MP, a Dalit supporter and WSF participant, took place in the British Parliament. The debate, claimed Corbyn, demonstrated “the way caste discrimination is rising rapidly up the human rights agenda” (2005). In May 2007 the British Parliament held a subsequent debate on caste discrimination. Within the United States and Europe there have been meetings with representatives of civil society along with intense lobbying of politicians, governments, and the European Union by the IDSN, other Dalit solidarity networks, and leaders of the NCDHR (IDSN 2004, 2005).<sup>5</sup> In February 2007, after testimony by two prominent NCDHR leaders, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the human rights situation of the Dalits in India (IDSN).

Dalit stature within the global justice movement was further reinforced when Ruth Manorama, president of the National Federation of Dalit Women, member of the NCDHR, and prominent participant at the 2004 and 2005 WSF meetings, was awarded the Swedish Parliament’s Right Livelihood Award in 2006 (commonly known as the Alternative Nobel

Prize). Other awards have followed. In September 2007 the NCDHR received the prestigious Rafto Prize for Human Rights. According to the Rafto Foundation: "By the selection of NCDHR for the 2007 award, the Rafto Foundation is sending a strong message to the international community that it is time for action to bring an end [to one of] the world's most serious human rights problems." In receiving the award, Vincent Manoharan noted the award also had a domestic Indian focus, stating, "[T]he Rafto Prize will make the Dalit cause more visible within India and hopefully put it higher on the international agenda" (Rafto 2007). There is other evidence of rising international concern about the Dalits. Since 1996, a host of U.N. agencies have delivered decisions critical of the Indian government and supportive of the Dalits on issues of human rights and caste discrimination.

This growing awareness and publicity is an indication of the increasing international legitimacy of the Dalit cause. However, domestically, and materially, what has changed? Moreover, to what extent can these changes be attributed to Dalit and NCDHR activities outside of India? The latter question is very difficult, if not impossible, to answer with any precision given the complexities of Indian politics. That said, one of the purposes of bringing the WSF to India was to highlight the negative effects of globalization on India itself prior to national elections in May 2004. Without attributing causation, evidence exists of growing Indian antipathy to neoliberal globalization prior to the election. As one opinion survey put it, "reforms: the elites want it, the masses don't" (*The Hindu*, May 20, 2004).

With the victory of the United Progressive Alliance coalition, led by the Congress Party, and responding to public pressure, the Indian government acknowledged the importance of the social protection of the Dalits, especially Dalit women. The government's discourse regarding this issue changed significantly. At the end of 2006, speaking before a Dalit-Minority International Conference, the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh (himself the creator of the NEP), made another significant concession acknowledging what no other Indian leader had ever done, that, "The only parallel to the practice of untouchability was *Apartheid* in South Africa. Untouchability is not just social discrimination. It is a blot on humanity" (Prime Minister's Office, December 27, 2006).

Elsewhere, the Congress-led government came under pressure to extend reservations, that is, affirmative action, beyond government, a cause led by the NCDHR, domestically and internationally, with support from the European Parliament. The idea of reservations is anathema

to most in the private sector, itself largely controlled by the dominant castes and hostile to Dalit advancement. By the end of 2005, the United Progressive Alliance passed a new constitutional amendment obliging private schools, colleges, and professional training institutes not receiving government funding to reserve more than one-fourth of their seats for Dalit students as well as students from other socially and economically disadvantaged groups (Das 2006). Yet, one must also ask whether this constitutional amendment will be effectively implemented or whether it will simply serve as a fig leaf for continuing neoliberal reforms. The new constitutional amendment is a reminder that the focus of the Dalit struggle will continue to focus on state policies (Corbridge and Harris 2003: 238) even as it has now taken on a networked form spilling out into India's civil society and beyond, into the global justice movement.

The government is also cooperating with the Dalit Women's movement. In November 2006 the government launched the Dalit Women's Access to Justice and Dignity project focusing on building the capacity of Dalit women leaders to identify cases of violence against Dalit women and bring them before the criminal justice systems. By itself, this is not a great leap forward, but it is an indicator that the government has recognized the phenomenon of violence against Dalit women and must be seen at least to be cooperating with the Dalit community. This represents a significant departure from the previous government.

In the historical scheme of things, these are modest gains. Much more remains to be done. Moreover, there is no guarantee of completely ridding India from the stigma of casteism, a system that has been in place for 3,000 years. The Dalit movement, vigorous as it is, is marked by poverty and fragmentation—of gender, region, language, religion, and to some extent today, class, which limits what unity is achievable. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the Dalits are no longer invisible. They have their own transnational movement and are increasingly heard nationally and internationally. The struggle for Dalit human rights and against neoliberal globalization is therefore likely to continue in the form of a permanent campaign in a variety of venues, both state and nonstate, nationally and transnationally.

## NOTES

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1. Vincent Manoharan (General Secretary, NCDHR). Interview by author, New Delhi, November 8, 2004.

2. The IDSN stresses that Manoharan and the NCDHR were “instrumental in securing a place for caste discrimination as one of the five main themes” of the WSF 2004 (IDSN 2004: 7). These themes included neoliberal globalization, war and militarism, caste oppression, patriarchy, and religious fundamentalism.

3. This sentence was written by the author and taken from his contribution to Smith, Karides, et al. *Global Democracy and the World Social Forums* (2007: 44).

4. For more on the role of the MST and Via Campesina at the WSF see Reitan (2007).

5. For a detailed breakdown of lobbying activities see the Annual Reports of the IDSN, various years.





## **PART III**

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# LOCAL PLACES AND GLOBAL SPACES







## CHAPTER 12

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### AFRICAN VOICES AND ACTIVISTS AT THE WSF IN NAIROBI:

#### THE UNCERTAIN WAYS OF TRANSNATIONAL AFRICAN ACTIVISM

*Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle and Johanna Siméant*

A rich literature has developed on World Social Forums (WSFs), regional Social Forums, and other transnational contentious gatherings. Scholars have carried out surveys on their composition and participation (Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005c; Reese et al., Chapter 4). But few studies have addressed what is at stake with the localization, both geographic and symbolic, of the World Social Forums. Why observe this WSF in particular? First of all, even if the other WSFs also took place in the South, the 2007 WSF was the first World Forum held in Africa, if one excludes the polycentric Social Forum of January 2006, held in Bamako, Karachi, and Caracas. The organizers of this Forum were not unaware of the stakes in making African voices heard in the WSF process, especially since Africa is perceived as the continent most victimized by globalization. Reflecting on Africa at the WSF in Nairobi means at the same time thinking about the emergence of an African alter-globalism,<sup>1</sup> incarnated *inter alia* by the African Social Forum (ASF). It also

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implies reflections on the diversity of transnationalized African networks (both in organizational and ideological terms), on the tensions between the latter, and on the complex relationship they have to Northern and other Southern (such as Asia and Latin America) activists. The African alterglobal movement, if anything, is a field of multiple tensions.

To observe the World Social Forum in Nairobi from the point of view of the South—in particular Africa—is thus a means of addressing some of the shortcomings of the sociology of transnational social movements. Despite some exceptions (Wood 2005; Rothman and Oliver 1999), today these are mainly centered on Western civil societies, or, at best, on transnational campaigns concerning the South (dams, child labor, debt), but mainly animated by Northern activists. Transnational militancy of the South is generally considered through its adaptation and appropriation of external dynamics (Bob 2002; Wing 2002). Binary explanations of this activism (seen either as an emergent *sui generis* civil society, or as the “compradors”<sup>2</sup> of an ever-patronizing North) are not satisfying. This is why we would like to show how African activists participated in the WSF in Nairobi and what the conflicts are around the right to talk about, for, and from Africa.

These questions are linked. In an alterglobal space that often overlooks or downplays them, it is important here to think about the hierarchies, the conflicts, or even quite simply the division of labor within transnational activism. That presupposes attention to the social and material conditions of activism. Agency, identity, injustice (Gamson 1992), the three central components of collective action, do not rest only on intentional and strategic use of symbols. The manipulation of symbols is always deeply rooted in social settings. A robust materialism is what allows, by pointing to the constraints of collective action in a transnational setting marked by huge divides in terms of resources, to understand what is at stake in ideological constructions that try to denounce injustices or to build bridges between African activists themselves, or between them and other transnational activists.

In order to combine an analysis of the social conditions and the symbolic work of protest in this Forum in Africa, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the material conditions of attendance at the WSF and how they were translated into debates about the representativeness of this Forum. The second part examines how identities and claims to speak in the name of Africa were constrained by this space of tensions.<sup>3</sup>

WHOSE FORUM? DEBATES AND TENSIONS ABOUT  
AFRICAN ATTENDANCE AT THE WSF

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In October 2006, only 8 percent of the members of the International Committee of the WSF represented an organization whose headquarters were in Africa.<sup>4</sup> Involving African delegates in the WSF was thus considered a necessity for the Forum to be seen as a true worldwide initiative. Nairobi was, therefore, chosen to host the seventh Forum from January 20–24, 2007. But the geographical localization of the Forum was not enough to certify that the event was fully African. Debates arose about its representativeness, and tensions were visible inside the space of African internationalized activism.

The figures for African attendance at the Forum, as well as the relationships of African groups and delegates to external actors, were at the center of debates during and after the event. Those numbers must be used with some caution as should any self-quantification of political activity. Indeed, these figures were crucial to measure and show evidence of the vibrancy and representativeness of the Forum. However, even the most quoted of the official figures was probably overestimated and claimed 45,000 registered participants—far smaller than the 100,000 participants initially expected, or in comparison to the previous Forum in Porto Alegre (Organizing Committee of World Social Forum 2007).<sup>5</sup> The official figures, however, do indicate that African delegates were a majority, or at least that it was the greatest participation of African activists since the WSF's inception. Indeed there were approximately 30 Africans in 2001 in Porto Alegre, 200 in 2002, and a bit more in 2003. These numbers are equivalent to the attendance at the African Social Forum (200 African delegates in Bamako in 2002, in Addis Ababa in 2004, and between 300 and 650 in Lusaka in 2004). By contrast, in Nairobi there were between 400 and 1,000 Tanzanian delegates, between 50 and 120 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, between 25 and 50 Malians, more than 200 Senegalese, 150 Sudanese, 360 South African, and the same number of Ugandan delegates.<sup>6</sup> African delegates in Nairobi were more than mere participants; a good number came to make presentations in one or more panels. Among the 130 panels observed by our team that were directly linked to African themes or organizations,<sup>7</sup> African speakers represented more than a quarter of the speakers in the majority of cases. A bit less than a third of the panels had a majority of African speakers. Only a dozen panels included less

than a quarter African speakers. The participation and contribution of African delegates in the first WSF held in Africa was therefore much more than symbolic, and clearly far greater than in any previous WSF.

The participation of Kenyan people in the Forum was at the core of several controversies before,<sup>8</sup> during, and after the Forum. It is reported that the participation of Kenyans was lower than the attendance of nationals from India or Brazil (CRID 2007), even if Kenyan delegates made up 90 percent of African delegates (Organizing Committee of World Social Forum 2007). The main reason said to account for this was the entry fee, which first amounted to 500 Kenyan shillings (\$7 U.S. dollars) and dropped to 50 Kenyan shillings (\$0.75 U.S. dollars) after protests were addressed to the local committee. In spite of this, a few groups of Kenyan, French, South African, and Japanese activists expressed their discontent by forcing open the gates of the stadium and demanding free entry for everyone. The reality of this financial constraint was never contested but some regular participants to the Forum and the local organizers claimed afterwards that it had never been easy to facilitate the participation of the poorest. Churches as well as ecumenical networks were the only ones able to massively mobilize people from the slums as they serve as intermediaries between them and Kenyan NGOs connected to international networks (Orvis 2003).

The most destitute were not the only ones to have been mobilized and subsidized to participate in the Forum. All African delegates from outside Kenya interviewed by our team were sponsored by Northern organizations that paid for their plane tickets and their stay in Nairobi. The Centre de recherche et d'informations pour le développement (CRID), a French NGO network, sponsored 47 partners including 19 African delegates with funding from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other organizations—including the German faith-based NGO Evangelische Entwicklungsdienst (EED), national delegations of Caritas Internationalis, Action Aid, Oxfam, and of the Red Cross, Brot für die Welt, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT, a French trade union) as well as smaller groups representing Via Campesina or the Comité pour l'annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde (CADTM)—provided subsidies to support participation by Southern partners. This external patronage has been in place since the beginning of the involvement of African delegates in the process of the WSF (Sulmont 2004).<sup>9</sup>

Northern NGOs and donors subsidized participation of African delegates for different reasons, one of them being to strengthen their

relationships with their partner organizations, in contrast to the idea promoted by the Forum itself that it is an arena of equal exchanges. For instance, a panel on water issues was organized and attended by Italian and Kenyan activists who had been in contact for a long time, and the aim seemed to have been to maintain these privileged relationships more than to create new ones. Other panels were opportunities for Northern NGOs to look for new partners and projects to subsidize, and to expose and publicize the projects of their Southern counterparts. For instance, in the case of an African women's rights NGO, the organization reported on their activities in a seminar during the Forum before presenting them to their donor, which had organized a meeting after the Forum to review their grant proposals.

In spite of this financial link, Northern delegates refused to talk about patronage. A lot of them claimed that a new kind of relationship had arisen in the alterglobal movement where North-South relationships have changed radically. Gus Massiah, one of the French founders of the WSF, claimed on several occasions in Nairobi that it was necessary "to stop saying we helped our Southern partners to come. We should overcome this North-South relationship to create a shared global project" (CRID 2007). In spite of this reminder, the dependency of African delegates on the good will of their Northern counterparts was overtly criticized because it reportedly reproduced an imperialist domination (Abdul-Raheem 2007). Other African delegates did, however, ask for the intervention of Northern donors, as it was their only way to attend these international meetings. Some African delegates were able to use this material dependency to their advantage. For instance, some were so well connected to Northern donors that they were granted significant funding to attend the WSF, and gave their surplus grants to finance less well-connected activists. The autonomy of African alterglobal activists was often emphasized in panels where African and Southern audiences were in the majority, claiming that they "wouldn't be domesticated by NGOs," since many NGOs were funded by Northern governments or sometimes international financial institutions. In one of these sessions a South African participant warned, "We should be suspicious of our donors and what they are expecting from us."<sup>10</sup> The material divide between alterglobal actors leads to an international division of activist work, and not only material, but also symbolic, conflicts (on who is legitimate and has the right to talk) between Northern and Southern actors. But divisions also occur inside the internationalized space of African activism.

*INTERNATIONALIZED AFRICAN ACTIVISM AS A SPACE OF TENSIONS*

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The international division of activist work in Africa creates tensions that are masked or reflected in ideological oppositions. Divisions about reformist/radical approaches or about the relationships of the African alterglobal movement to African governments and international financial institutions are also a reflection of social divides along linguistic and regional lines and differing histories of cooperation. These cleavages were put aside and even denied by African delegates who saw the focus on cleavages as a misconception or a cliché perpetuated by Northern observers.

The first edition of the African Social Forum was held in January 2002 in Bamako. It was born out of a will of African movements to promote African participation in the WSF and to bypass European initiatives, which also attempted to organize African participation in the WSF. The ASF nevertheless benefitted from the beginning from support from the French civil society and the French state department for development, now part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two West African activists, Taoufik Ben Abdallah and Aminata Traoré, both very well connected to transnational networks, were key in helping attract international support for the ASF (Sulmont 2004). Opening up gradually beyond its West African members, the council of the ASF was created in 2004 and is made up of more than 40 African organizations from all over the continent.

However, critics from inside and outside the ASF have never disappeared. They blame the ASF for maintaining relationships with African governments and intergovernmental organizations like the African Union (Sulmont 2004). Another cleavage draws a line between those who want to anchor the ASF in community and mass movements and the promoters of the ASF who have come from NGOs (Hlatshwayo 2004). Another common cleavage in the alterglobal space divides the ASF between those who consider the WSF as a “space” and those who see it as a “movement” (Van der Wekken 2005). The former favor debates and exchanges while the latter hopes to unite activist groups in a common struggle (Ngwane 2007). These multiple tensions are signs of struggle between diverse networks and traditions of mobilization, notably (but not only) between some francophone activists, who were early leaders of the ASF, and South African activists who were not involved from the beginning. This might have been caused by a lack of relationships between different parts of the African continent but also by the desire of European and Brazilian founders of the WSF not to involve white,

English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon NGOs and, consequently, their perceived “Southern” partners like South African organizations (Sulmont 2004), even if the latter have a strong radical tradition.

South African activists have been integrated into the ASF with some reluctance also because there were fears that they wanted to dominate the African alterglobal movement.<sup>11</sup> Their activist know-how as well as their radicalism, both inherited from the struggle against Apartheid and renewed in the protests against the neoliberal policies of the Mbeki government, were visible during the WSF in Nairobi. They took part in the protests against the entry fees, they were among the few African delegates involved in the social movements assembly, and they were noticeable in some panels where they expressed their radical and experienced approach to activism by raising their fist when talking, using anti-Apartheid slogans like *Amandla*, and speaking to other delegates as “comrades.” South African activists were perceived by many of their African counterparts as having hegemonic ambitions, mirroring the South African state’s strong pretention to diplomatically speak for Africa. Nevertheless, important internal divisions exist among South African activists. There is indeed a strong divide between, on the one hand, mass and community movements like the ones fighting against privatization of water and electricity, some of whom are Trotskyist, and on the other hand NGOs organizing international campaigns like the Treatment Action campaign to expand HIV/AIDS patients’ access to health care, the success of which reinforced South Africa’s reputation for activist mobilization (Zuern 2006).<sup>12</sup> These national divisions thus make it impossible to generalize about the South African activist space, which is itself divided along the NGOs versus social movements line, as is the WSF itself.

A sociological analysis might question this conventional distinction between NGOs (not all are well funded, exclusive, or driven by Northern agendas) and social movements (not all are grassroots or conforming to the participatory ideals and egalitarianism often proclaimed by participants), but when mentioned during interviews this distinction made sense to African alterglobal activists. Nongovernmental organizations, which were described as formally structured, dependent on external funding, exclusive, and led by reformist intellectuals, were seen to contrast with social movements, including trade unions, and grassroots groups, which were said to better reflect popular demands and to aim to radically change the social and political order.



In Nairobi, the divide was also clearly displayed when activists demonstrated at the offices of the local organizing committee, using the classic repertoire of social movements to express their discontent with the entry fees. The strength of this division in Nairobi can be linked to the intensity of this tension inside the African alterglobal movement. While the declaration of the ASF insisted on the necessity of building the ASF from “grassroots social movements,” some African commentators regretted that, despite these aspirations, NGOs’ financial superiority gave them disproportionate influence in the ASF process as well as in the Nairobi WSF. If in Latin America, in particular, there is a strong critique of the “NGO-ification” of social movements, based on the idea that NGOs tend to depoliticize critiques of society, this hegemonic position of NGOs in the alterglobal movement, and in Nairobi, should be considered in light of recent African social history. “Civil society” organizations and notably NGOs have been flourishing since the 1980s because of international support, as well as internal democratic protests and weaknesses of the state (Igoe and Kelsall 2005). The NGOs took over from trade unions, which were indeed moribund (except perhaps in Southern Africa), because of one-party regimes and structural changes in economies. After offering themselves as partners to the state and to external donors, NGOs became targets of critics and tried to find new sources of legitimacy by working with community-based organizations.

African trade unions came back onto the alterglobal scene during the WSF in Nairobi. This new process of internationalization of trade unions as well as their tendency to import NGOs’ “know-how” testified that they were now part of the alterglobal movement. It also showed that cleavages between NGOs and social movements were less clear than they seemed to be in past delegates’ discourses. It was also apparent that trade unions were also divided over radical and reformist goals. The “social movements” side of the WSF was actually still dominated by non-African activists, as was shown during the Assembly of Social Movements.<sup>13</sup> To counterbalance this absence, African activists and especially women were encouraged to come and talk during the Assembly, where every organization could make a declaration and propose a protest activity.

This ongoing opposition between NGOs and social movements has also led to changes, especially in the way organizations express their representativeness. Whereas those who claimed to be social movements blamed NGOs for being too distant from the people they are working for,

these very critics have been largely assimilated by the NGOs that invited spokespersons from the “grassroots” to make presentations during the WSF. This was especially the case with the “Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus,” which held dozens of seminars where professional activists and “people from the ground,” as they were introduced, shared the stage. During a panel on “Economic and Social Human Rights,” a young woman introduced as Marcy told the story of her life in the Kibera slum.<sup>14</sup> Her tricky position as an intermediary between NGOs and the community was brought to light when young men in the audience denounced NGOs as using communities for their own purposes. Marcy did defend NGOs, while at the same time admitting that in the past they may have been “using ordinary people.” As a spokesperson she had to adjust her answer to suit both the people she was supposed to be representing (i.e., slum dwellers) and the NGOs who had given her the opportunity to be considered as the representative of her community.

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WHOSE VOICES? SPEAKING IN THE NAME OF  
AFRICA—DOUBLE BINDS AND CENSORSHIPS

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This Forum, more than others, was an opportunity to observe how activists from Africa and the rest of the world speak about Africa in an international movement event. This helps us to understand the difficulties faced by all movements that intend to denounce domination and at the same time be capable of agency (Gamson 1992), as well as the constraints faced by internationalized actors who claim to represent their national or local constituencies. The current situation in Africa seemed obvious proof of the misdeeds of globalization and capitalism. But mobilizing in the name of Africa did not go without constraints or even double binds.

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*AGENCY AND DOMINATION*

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The classic double bind for social movements is to, on the one hand, be able to criticize situations of misery without falling into pessimism or impotence, and, on the other hand, to celebrate agency without ignoring real difficulties or dismissing possible supporters or allies by a supercilious claim of cultural and political autonomy. In Nairobi, Africa was at the same time acted upon and the actor—in practice and words. These constraints weighed both on African and non-African activists,

the latter always trying to pre-empt possible charges of paternalism, as they expressed various degrees of ethnocentrism in their relations with African causes and activists.

Was this WSF a success? The answers to this question, during and after the Forum, revealed the position of non-African activists towards Africa (as a reality that they knew more or less, and as an issue that mattered more or less). The members of the African Social Forum, or the representatives of the Kenyan Organizing Committee, claimed that the criticisms of the material organization of the Forum focused on elements that should have been excusable or neglected due to the difficulties specific to Africa, revealing the “neocolonialism” of some Northern activists. Many representatives of international NGOs, more familiar with Africa than some of their radical counterparts, found, sometimes not without paternalism, that “for Africa,” it was a success. Conversely, the most virulent critics of the organization were often those for whom the African dimension of the Forum was not an issue. Some, such as the networks of the Comité pour l’annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde, wished to denounce “the elite” of the ASF. Others argued that since a country of the South had succeeded in organizing a WSF with good popular participation (in Mumbai), there was no point in sparing Kenyan organizers.

Northern activists often feared being considered patronizing. At the WSF, they thus seldom criticized African governments, even the most repressive ones. Such issues can be touchy. As most NGOs considered some African governments to be “puppets” or accomplices of Northern governments, they let Africans decide whether to criticize their leaders or not. Thus, in a workshop on “Extractive and Local Livelihoods,” activists of the Niger Delta accused the federal government of Nigeria of being an accomplice of the oil companies, while the Western participants denounced “an ugly face of capitalist exploitation” and blamed it on the United States and Britain (direct observation). Admittedly, there is nothing more shared than anti-imperialism at a WSF, especially since the revival of this term, for instance through the writings of Hart and Negri (2000). But even Northern activists’ solicitude towards the “victims of imperialism” could be perceived as patronizing. When the debates corresponded to what they claimed to wish (Southern voices speaking about the South), they tended to offer their help by encouraging civil societies from the North to criticize governments of the North, and letting civil societies from the South do the same, if they wished or could,

with their own governments. They thus set out a form of an international division of labor for criticism, strongly structured by double binds and censorship about who has the legitimacy to speak about what and to criticize whom.

Northern activists, of course, do not have a unified perception of Africa, as very diverse militant layers coexist within the WSF, including development and aid organizations, Trotskyites opposed to war, Christian militants against Southern debt, mainstream or radical feminists, and “first hour anticolonialists.” Moreover, the behavior of Northern activists and their ethnocentrism sometimes had less to do with their ideologies, and more with their familiarity with the continent, their socialization, or their social position. Such radical activists would vilify the venality of the African “volunteers” of the WSF (most of whom were, in fact, paid). Some participants would take photos of street children without questioning the meaning of their gestures. Other radical militants would insist on putting their local partners (whose travel their organization had financed) out in front as evidence of their grassroots constituencies. “Tiers-mondistes”<sup>15</sup> would stay in one of the very comfortable hotels necessary to host their whole delegation, and ensure adequate meeting space and access to the Internet. Conversely, those most familiar with the continent did not idealize the participation of the poorest Kenyans, and did not regard the looting of an overly expensive food concession (owned by a close relative of the Kenyan Minister of Home Affairs) by street children as a completely positive act, worrying what would happen to these children once the activists who had supported them had left.

A striking aspect of WSFs in general is the revitalization of earlier emancipatory ideologies advanced by or for the Third World, such as demands for a “New International Economic Order” to counteract the dependency produced by colonialism and pan-Africanism, both of which were challenged in the 1980s with the rise of neoliberal globalization. The strong presence of these themes is undoubtedly linked to their resonance with many core values and principles of the WSF process, as well as to the subtle—and sometimes vague—ways in which they are expressed. In various workshops, for instance, in Nairobi, activists could rediscover or very likely encounter for the first time dependency theory (Samir Amin, its most renowned proponent, was among the “stars” of the WSF) and “Third Worldism.” “Third world is the third estate of the world,” declared Gus Massiah, of the Centre d’Études Anti-impérialistes (CEDETIM), thereby reclaiming the origin of the term. Liberation theology (with

one of its main theorists, the canon and sociologist François Houtard), all forms of anticolonialism (the “Frantz Fanon space” was particularly active) and finally Afrocentrism, either in its Afro-American (Malcom X grassroots movement) or African (cf. many references to Sheik Anta Diop) versions were all represented in the program. Throughout the WSF, a moderated form of Afrocentrism seemed to be one of the processes making it possible to claim agency and to mobilize identity and pride, while denouncing neoliberal globalization’s impacts on Africa. Thus, it was a way of binding what Gamson (1992) identified as three central components of collective action: injustice, agency, and identity.

A first aspect of this Afrocentrism classically consisted of pointing out what Africa could be proud of, including the celebration of African intellectuals such as Sheik Anta Diop and Joseph Ki Zerbo. The great historical figures of African independence struggles were evoked through the names given to the physical spaces of the Forum. Meeting places were given exclusively African names (except for Che Guevara): Amilcar Cabral, Chris Hani, Dedan Kimathi, Mary Nyanjiru, Mekatilili Wa Menza, Modibo Keita, Patrice Lumumba, Ruth First, or Thomas Sankara—all of them being dead heroes of independences, martyrs of colonialism or apartheid.

The choice of the names of spaces speaks for itself: It expressed the ambivalent relation that African alterglobalists have to African leaders. On the one hand, they strongly assert the sovereignty of African states, but are aware that this can be used by governments as a tool for legitimation, as was done historically when anti-imperialism was fastened onto a project of national construction. On the other hand, they criticize the “puppets of the North” (i.e., national leaders). The criticism of the corruption of some African leaders was done more in private situations, between friends, from the North or the South, and not only out of fear of reprisals once returned home. While “beginner” activists (here, Kenyans, peasants, squatters, hawkers who came to testify) did not hesitate to clearly denounce the political leaders, senior activists have adopted, since their beginnings, an ambivalent attitude. The dilemma faced by the majority of critics of domination is: What can be said against these leaders that will not be exploited by adversaries? Criticizing African leaders can provide new arguments to the international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, always eager to denounce corruption and encourage “good governance.”

Pan-Africanism, the call for a true United States of Africa, seems to have been embraced as a way of challenging African leaders without

having to spell it out, because, in calling for union there is an implicit critique of colonization and inherited borders. The denunciation of the debt is very revealing of these rhetorical strategies. The example of the debt of the Democratic Republic of Congo is very often used, undoubtedly because it makes it possible to criticize a *former* African leader, Mobutu, and explain why Africans should not have to pay the debt of an illegitimate dictator supported by Western countries. It thus allows Africans to say that Western countries are still accountable for the horrors committed by their ancestors.

More generally this form of “side” criticism, which consists of denouncing vague or remote culprits and processes (economic partnership agreements, international financial institutions, Northern imperialism, heritage of colonization) was frequently found in Nairobi. That, indeed, makes it possible to endorse a critical discourse, even when one is a citizen of an authoritarian regime. It thus reconciled a moderate activism within one’s national space with a radical language directed towards external enemies in international circles. It therefore left the question of accountability of national leaders blurred. This seems to be a strong characteristic of what the alterglobalist discourse allows. It is amplified by the fact that African activists can seldom allow themselves to confront their leaders head on.

Another way of combining agency and the critique of domination was observed in speeches evoking the evils of Africa, but at the same time denying these evils by claiming that Africa is so much more than that. Kenyan activist Wahu Kaara’s speech at the opening ceremony of the WSF reflected this form of expression, which, in the context of an energetic speech, mobilized, indeed, a form of agency:

Africa is not a dying continent!

Africa is not a bargain continent!

Africa is not a poor continent!

Africa is not a dying continent!

Africa is not a continent of diseases!

Africa is not a continent of malnutrition!

Africa is a continent of human spirit!

It can be very sentimental and very emotional . . . very sentimental and very emotional because we are here in Nairobi to say that Africa is here and now to stay! Yeah! And I am saying this as an African woman because we have refused to die we are living for Africa. . . . (fieldwork notes, January 20, Uhuru Park, Nairobi)

The making of this African agency also resulted in the delimitation of “them” and “us” as a way of tracing the borders between friends and enemies, between those who can legitimately endorse the cause of Africa, and those who cannot. Kaara’s speech marked this very strong division between “us” and “them”:

no matter what agendas THEY have . . . no matter what power THEY have . . . be it economic or be it political be it whatever . . . this time around the World Social Forum has given an opportunity to make a linkage with the others all over the world.

This cleavage among you-us-them appeared in many workshops. “Us” was being used as Africa and “You” as “the North.” That could appear paradoxical in a Forum defined, according to its charter, as an “open space,” a coordination of movements from all over the world. To point out this cleavage is often a way to prevent Northern activists from dominating struggles for the South.<sup>16</sup> This you-us divide could be very situational, expressing the bitterness African activists felt when realizing that the place where they stayed was far less comfortable than that of the Western activists, that they did not have the means to buy the food or drink sold at the WSF venue at prices designed for Westerners, or when, in a workshop, people who they felt had no legitimacy to talk monopolized speeches. When expressed, this cleavage made Western delegates turn silent.

African identity within the WSF was thus prone to transformations depending on the interaction or situation. From the remote “them” of the international financial institutions, which was central in building the inclusive “us” of the participants to the WSF, activists shifted quickly to a less clear “you” and “us,” that could crystallize a “situational anti-imperialism” where the “you” indicated the North, the whites, the moderate ones, that is, all those who were resigned too easily to the unjust order of the world. Conversely, a Northern activist who idealized “African tradition” could be challenged for this caricatured and antimodern vision of Africa. Whereas in a mixed audience, the reference to the traditions “that work” is a classic one, and relates to certain currents of development ideologies, which insist that traditions should be used as a tool of social engineering in order to aid poor countries’ development. The same ambivalence towards a supposed African tradition or identity could be observed when it came to religion. According to the situation, religion

could be alternatively denounced as an obstacle to the emancipation, or on the contrary, put at the very heart of the “African soul.” The South African case is characteristic of this unstable African identity. South Africans enjoy legitimacy due to their fight against Apartheid, but they are often regarded as insufficiently or “not exactly” African, as “atypical” (for their specific historical trajectory, their exemplary transition to democracy, their leaders’ promotion of neoliberal economic policies, or as the only African country authorizing homosexual marriage, etc.). These aspects thus raise the question of the forms of legitimacy asserted by militants.

### *CULTURAL LEGITIMATION AND SELF-CENSORSHIP*

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Organizing a WSF in Africa was almost an injunction to make Africa central within the Forum. However this “injunction to Africa,” even as it opened a space of competition to speak in the name of Africa, resulted in various forms of claims of cultural legitimacy and authenticity. What was at stake was the right to talk, sometimes against the North, but also vis-à-vis other African activists. The first aspect of this cultural call to legitimacy is asserting traditions or cultural features and claiming that agency and identity result from those cultural resources. This tradition could be a militant one, for example, the reference to independence and the struggle against Apartheid. Tradition was also asserted through forms of expression, such as singing or dancing, often done between the sessions or inaugurating them. It could also be more largely depicted as an “African culture,” sometimes idealized, often poorly clarified, and associated with consensus, a sense of community, the role of the family, the importance of elders and other traditional social bonds, or male-female complementarities.

But this reference to a (re)invented tradition did not have as its only role the dismissal of Northern activists perceived as too quick to take over struggles. Indeed, no militant from the North, within the WSF, dared to challenge an African activist as not having a legitimate right to speak. An African at the WSF was at least supposed to be a witness, even a victim, attesting personally to the misfortunes of Africa. Thus, in a workshop on migration, women who had tried to cross the desert told their stories and were listened to as victims. In a workshop at the Franz Fanon space, a Kenyan from the Sengwer group explained how his community had been deprived of its land. This implicit assignment



to the status of witness is ambivalent. It makes the people worth being heard, as much as is any activist. But in the WSF it turned every African talking into a potential witness, even when African activists did not *mean* to make testimonies. The politeness and attentiveness of many Western activists towards their African counterparts, as well as the tendency not to contradict, was therefore linked to the fact that Africans were often not treated as activists but as something else: victims or witnesses, but far less often as experts.

The issue of African-ness also had a central role in situations where the public was mainly African, and where one then saw competing strategies of representativeness. What seemed to be at stake in this internationalized space that sometimes looked so much like just another international conference, was to avoid being challenged as non-African (that is, being too “Westernized,” cut off from grassroots, or traveling too much). This was the case for some Kenyan artists who performed at the Forum “in the name of a sacrifice for Africa,” and who reluctantly acknowledged that they spent most of their time in the United States for professional reasons. This tendency to cultural legitimation bears a strong denial of extraversion (Bayart 2000) and internationalization. It raises a central issue, as charges of “not representing anybody” were often heard, in criticism of some “stars” of African alterglobalism. One cannot deny that the transnationalization of activism can contribute to worsening the gap between the most internationalized activists, sometimes those most gifted with social and financial resources, and the others. Hence this insistence to show that one is actually African, that is, “culturally” African, that one does not reproduce colonialist patterns, does not travel, and is therefore more “rooted” than “cosmopolitan” (Tarrow 2005).

This was particularly evident in the workshops relating to sexuality. Northern activists here tried to be discreet, and avoided appearing to be imposing discourses that would have been rejected if promoted by the North. This was reflected in the workshop “Reclaiming Our Sexualities” at the Queer Spot. This workshop benefited from the support of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), reflected in the discrete presence of its communication officer Stephen Barris, who confined himself to the Spanish-English translation. The goal was clearly to minimize the presence of whites on this theme during the Forum, as acknowledged in a report written afterwards.<sup>17</sup> This was by far the workshop where we heard the most discussion about Africa (the term *Mother Africa* was even used) and what was “really” African. The reproach that

homosexuality was “not African” appeared to be the major obstacle to address. The audience was mixed, with a small African majority. With these short interventions one after the other, the goal seemed to be increased visibility rather than a potentially explosive dialogue (although small group dialogues with Kenyans in English and Kiswahili had been organized before). Four of the five speakers were African, all of them from English-speaking countries. The South African activist and poetess contested the use of homophobia by postcolonial leaders who affirmed that homosexuality was “un-African.” The Nigerian woman recounted her work on homosexuality in Nigeria:

There are people who are born Nigerians, who are living in Nigeria, who have never left the country, but who have same-sex relationships. In English you would say they are homosexuals, in the local language it was more difficult to find a language for the behavior because with the advent of colonialism and Christianity and the Jihad that took place ... a local language censorship has taken place as they try to institutionalize the moral code that they have brought in.

She recalled that although the absence of the term *homosexual* in her language was used to argue that the reality did not exist, traditional terms indicate this type of relations, and could be discovered by questioning old people. The leader of the Coalition of African Lesbians then held up a book of anthropologists, collecting life stories and testimonies of lesbians in Africa. She insisted on the importance of this compilation and challenged the idea of homosexuality as un-African, calling for a reappropriation of terminology “to tell our communities who we are without using colonial language.” The same manner of speaking about what is really African—or not—could also be found in less radical workshops, connected to the world of international development and Northern NGOs, for example on the best ways to fight HIV in Africa. This claim of African-ness shouldn’t therefore be understood as a result of a hypothetical and rigid “African culture,” but rather as an illustration of the constraints faced by activists when trying to build a collective identity, and particularly an identity that couldn’t be claimed by rival associates in the alterglobal movement. Transnationalization of activism does not dilute national and cultural identities, rather, it encourages the assertion of identities that can be legitimately claimed as proof of having constituencies.

*REFLECTIONS ON THE 2011 WORLD SOCIAL FORUM IN DAKAR, SENEGAL*

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Along with the research team who accompanied us at the Nairobi WSF, we attended the 2011 WSF in Dakar, Senegal, where we observed workshops and surveyed 1,100 participants. The team was struck by the many similarities they saw in these two African WSFs. There was, for instance, continued reliance on Northern organizations for resources and a remobilization of discourses of Afrocentrism and anti-imperialism. There was also a notable presence of professionalized NGOs, and a persistence of inequities in activists' ability to participate effectively in WSF activities. We also observed continued self-censorship by Africans in critiquing African leaders in workshops with mixed audiences. In contrast, the most critical discourse we heard on African leaders was in a workshop held by ActionAid Uganda, where Siméant was the only white person in the audience, and where activists talked of their inability to criticize African leaders "because they kill us" (Siméant field notes February 9, 2011).

An important difference between the Nairobi and Dakar WSFs, however, is the fact that Senegal is a French speaking and mainly Muslim country. Thus, there was less participation by South Africans, Kenyans, and other activists from English-speaking Africa, and therefore more openings for participation by groups that had been less involved in earlier Forums. This meant that many meetings did not have the same energetic style as Nairobi—no *Amandlas* here! More significantly, local sensitivities around issues of sexuality made it difficult for LGBT rights organizers to make their concerns visible at the Forum. We were also struck by the underrepresentation of local religious actors at this Forum, compared to Nairobi. This was likely due more to the constellation of the local organizing committee in Dakar than to a deliberate exclusion of religious-based organizations. World Social Forum participants, for instance, followed and offered their support for Imam-led protests against power cuts held in a nearby suburb.

The Assembly of Social Movements at the Dakar WSF continued to demonstrate the Forum's dynamism and potential for popular mobilization. It was energized both by the uprisings taking place simultaneously in Tunisia and Egypt and by performances of popular young Senegalese rappers, who, diverging from patterns we saw in the workshops, openly criticized the Senegalese government. These rappers from the Dakar suburbs, Matador, Fou Malade, and Thiat from the group Keur Gui, later launched the *Y'en a marre* ("enough is enough") collective, which

was particularly active in the huge protests against President Wade's constitutional reform program in late June and July 2011.

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## CONCLUSION

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Examining African participation in the WSF suggests two important aspects that need to be taken into account in the study of transnational activism. The first is the necessity to examine concrete conditions, and the second is that social movements must not be considered unified actors. They should be seen as spaces of struggle and tension around the right to legitimate speech, and in this case, legitimate speech for Africa. This struggle, moreover, results largely from the paradoxical position activists necessarily confront as they claim to advance goals of equity and participation in a global order that is hierarchical and exclusive. Internationalization complicates this reality already experienced by social movements within national frameworks. These two aspects, although analytically distinct, are not separable. Dealing in detail with the concrete conditions of transnational protest (a "sociology of the plane ticket") shows where the tensions, alliances, and also lines of domination are in the spaces of transnational protest. Without being only a reflection of it, certain ideological confrontations are a way of translating, in protest language, realities that correspond to antagonisms of social position, on a national or an international scale. This material and symbolic study of the WSF underlines how far the reality of this protest event is from the egalitarian image of a global civil society.

But it also shows how it is possible for newcomers, outsiders, or dominated actors to challenge the unequal relationships they are confronted with even in the international activist world, through the use of symbols and discourses linked to cultural legitimacy and the possibility of building an "us." Further research will need to address how new legitimacies acquired in internationalized activist space are used in national contexts.

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## NOTES

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1. We use the term *alterglobal* (a translation of the French "*altermondialiste*") *movement*, which is meaningful for European and Latin American activists and is preferred to the *global justice movement*, perceived as too consensual and too Anglo-Saxon.

2. Referring initially to trade brokers, the term *comprador* was used in

dependency theory to name local bourgeoisies in countries dominated by the North and whose interest was to collaborate with it.

3. Our work is based on a collective survey conducted in Nairobi in January 2007. Thirty-seven scholars carried out collective ethnographic observations in 130 workshops of the WSF, along with 150 interviews with African activists at the Forum. All the members of this team conducted interviews and/or ethnographic observations and should be therefore thanked.

4. See [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=3\\_2\\_1&cd\\_language=3](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=3_2_1&cd_language=3) (retrieved July 2, 2007).

5. The draft final report published in April 2007 by the organizing committee mentioned 74,309 registrations.

6. There were also between 1,000 and 1,500 Indians, 150 Pakistanis, 600 North Americans, 400 Brazilians, 20 Haitians, 1,000 French, 400 Italians, 240 Belgians, 150 Spaniards, and 50 British.

7. Our research team observed a bit more than 10 percent of the registered panels. We did not attend panels that were organized only by Latin Americans or Asian organizations nor did we participate in panels where issues discussed were not affecting the African continent. The main themes of the panels observed were food sovereignty, war and peace, international trade, debt, land issues, work and trade unionism, human rights, environment, media, migrations, women, civil society, and sexual issues.

8. The ecumenical network led by Caritas and the All African Church Conference sent a letter to the organizing committee in November 2006 asking for a decrease of the entry fee to 40 Kenyan shillings (\$0.60 U.S. dollars) and for the establishment of a solidarity fund.

9. African organizations have been sponsored by French Cooperation, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Oxfam Novib, and the Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD) to prepare the African Social Forum in Bamako in 2002 and to attend the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002.

10. Panel “Reclaim People’s Source of Livelihood—The Land Struggle of People of Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa” organized by the Kenya Land Alliance, January 23, 2007.

11. This fear of a South African hegemony was also present in the Southern African Social Forums (Dwyer and Larmer 2006).

12. These divisions were clearly expressed when South Africa was considering hosting the WSF. Activist groups were so divided that they preferred to abandon the idea of hosting the forum.

13. The Assembly of Social Movements is traditionally held at the end of the WSF, and was attended by around 500 people in Nairobi. Its main organizers were the World March of Women, the Committee for the Abolition

of Third World Debt (CADTM), Focus on the Global South, and individuals like Christophe Aguiton.

14. Organized by the Building Eastern Africa Community Network (BEACON), Equal in Rights, and Kenya Human Rights Commission, January 21, 2007.

15. Literally, “Third-Worldist” refers to this powerful ideology born in the 1950s.

16. The cleavage is then more North-South than Africa-North. During a Jubilee workshop, a young antidebt activist from Norway was contradicted by an Ecuadorian activist who challenged “this guy from the North, a young man.”

17. “World Social Forum—Nairobi 2007 Respect for All! Another World Is Possible—for African LGBT People, Too,” February 26, 2007. Retrieved July 26, 2010 (<http://www.babels.org/forum/viewtopic.php?p=2961>).



## CHAPTER 13

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# GLOBAL MOVEMENTS IN LOCAL STRUGGLES: FINDINGS ON THE SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS IN ITALY

*Donatella della Porta and Lorenzo Mosca*

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### LOCAL SOCIAL FORUMS AS BRIDGES

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The World Social Forum (WSF) brought together a huge number of social movement organizations that were moving from concerns about specific issues towards a broader opposition to neoliberal globalization and its effects on social justice and democracy. It developed from a history of transnational campaigns that addressed international governmental organizations and international treaties such as the “50 Years is Enough” mobilization against international financial organizations (in particular the IMF and the World Bank), the antidebt campaign of Jubilee 2000, the protests against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the successful mobilization against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the European Marches Against Unemployment (targeting the European Union), to the campaign for a United Nations of the Peoples.

The WSF has been welcomed (or feared) as a most visible sign of a transnationalization of politics, beyond the traditional boundaries of

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international relations. Recently, many activists and observers noticed a process of decentralization and relocalization of the WSF, symbolically stressed first by the polycentric structure of the 2006 annual event (Smith, Karides, et al. 2007) and then by the decentralized structure of the 2008 event.<sup>1</sup> In addition, references to the WSF emerged in local (or national) struggles on employment issues and against the construction of big infrastructure projects such as high-speed railways or military bases (Pleyers 2007; della Porta and Piazza 2008). The local dimension of the Social Forum process is however not new. Many of the hundreds of organizations that participated in the WSF and its regional counterparts were local or had strong local roots.<sup>2</sup> The same can be said of the transnational campaigns that converged in the WSF that were “grounded by, and constituted of, a sense of place” (Drainville 2004: 17), as well as contributing to constructing it (57). The use of terms such as *rooted cosmopolitans* testifies to this complex linking of local and transnational identities (Tarrow 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005).

If the Social Forum process developed within local struggles, it also contributed to transforming them. As we argue below, a local dynamic developed in the Social Forum process along with the transnational one. In a process of cross-level diffusion, ideas of consensual decision making and global justice spread across different (constructed) territories, with the local Social Forum acting as a sort of bridge between local and global concerns, influencing the organizations that took part in them. The Social Forums, and the organizations and groups that participated in them, adopted and adapted (or translated, to use Santos’s 2008 term) the ideas elaborated in the WSF to the local level. Transnational events provided activists with occasions to meet, build linkages of trust, exchange ideas, and network. The emotional intensity and cognitive relevance of the WSF gave impulse to the spreading of an ethic (or “spirit”) of reciprocal acceptance and respect, as well as helping in linking local and global concerns. Local Social Forums promoted protest campaigns by both facilitating relations of mutual trust between activists of different groups and spreading horizontal and consensual decision making as a way to construct new networks. The relationship of reciprocal knowledge and trust built during Social Forum activities spilled over to new networks. The experiences within the Social Forums and similar campaigns and activities pushed activists and organizations to bridge their specific concerns with more general and global ones.



We examine this process in one country, Italy, where the Social Forum process has been particularly relevant. The first and most visible Social Forum in Italy was the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), which brought together more than 800 groups (many of which were either local groups or local chapters of national and transnational ones) that organized the mobilization against the G8 summit in 2001 (Andretta et al. 2003; della Porta et al. 2006). Less visible but equally important were the large number of local Social Forums created just before and after the GSF. Many of them developed a few months before the protests against the G8 in Genoa (often under the label of anti-G8 coordination) in order to organize the mobilization. In most cases, they survived, and many more were formed in that year and in 2002. In the spring of 2003, shortly after the first European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence, 170 Social Forums were catalogued in Italy, in both urban and rural areas (della Porta 2005a, 2005b). Since 2003, many of the local Social Forums that disappeared were supplanted by local mobilizations of the Stop the War Coalition or gave birth to new networks on issues such as migrant rights or alternative lifestyles, thus contributing to the spreading of new organizational formulas.

As elsewhere, local Social Forums have operated as the backbone of the global justice movement (GJM). The centrality of Italy to the early spread and broad diffusion of local Social Forums can be linked to different structural and conjunctural characteristics. On the one hand, as a result of the corruption scandals of the early 1990s, a strong tradition of protest movements had developed into dense civic society networks outside of the political institutions. These networks nurtured simultaneously a criticism of the parties of the Left and opposition to the incoming right-wing government led by Silvio Berlusconi. On the other hand, in Italy the organization of significant “eventful” protests (such as the anti-G8 summit in 2001 and the first edition of the European Social Forum in 2002) contributed to creating a network of trust among activists, as well as a collective identity and broader societal support (della Porta et al. 2006). If the peculiarity of the Italian case makes our case study not fully generalizable, it at least provides the possibility of observing some mechanisms of cross-level diffusion through a sort of magnifying lens.

Our data is derived from 45 in-depth interviews with representatives of social movement organizations and Social Forums active in Tuscany, Milan, Venice, Novara, and Abruzzo (a regional network of six territorial Social Forums) and six focus groups with activists of the Firenze Social

Forum. To complete the picture, in 2007, we also interviewed the initiator of the European network of local Social Forums that, since 2004, has played a significant role in the ESF organizational process.

Tuscany represents an interesting case, being the region where the first ESF was held in 2002, as well as having a traditionally rich milieu in terms of civil society's spread and reach. Milan was chosen as a paradigmatic case, having been considered for a long time the "capital" of social movements in Italy, but also having subsequently undergone a process of fragmentation of its social movement sector (Melucci 1984). The remaining local Social Forums were chosen as examples of long-lasting experiences and thus appeared as crucial (even though not representative of the reality in the whole country) for looking at the Social Forum dynamic. Beyond that, we also refer to other studies on local Social Forums in Italy.

In what follows, we suggest that local Social Forums contributed to spreading new organizational formulas (the network, the method of consensus) and new frames (from single- to multi-issue, from local/national to transnational identities and opposition to neoliberalism) that continued beyond the local Social Forums themselves. We do so by reporting the perceptions of activists of different types of organizations involved in local Social Forums about the changes in their mobilizing structures and framing. It is important to stress that our data refer to subjective memories.

Our methodology entails a number of advantages and limitations. Semistructured interviews encourage the emergence of interviewees' memories without placing them into too strict a framework. Moreover, the number of interviews is high enough to allow for the reconstruction and comparison of various organizational processes. The focus groups, as group interview, allowed us to go beyond individual accounts and to look instead at the interactions between different actors (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989; della Porta 2005c). However, our sources are stronger in investigating the subjective memories of the activists rather than in telling the "true" history of the mobilization. In fact, our aim is to reconstruct the narrative of the Forums, as presented by the activists involved, considering these narratives as relevant for an understanding of the cultural and symbolic mechanisms involved in mobilization processes (Polletta and Lee 2006).

In what follows, we focus on local Social Forums and the social movement organizations that participated in them from different social

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movements (i.e., international solidarity, labor, ecological, and feminist), and we consider both structural and procedural aspects. In the next section, we first identify some main tenets of the organizational model promoted by the local Social Forums and illustrate how organizations that belonged to local Social Forums tended to adopt some of these organizational formulas. In a similar vein, we will then discuss the innovations promoted by the local Social Forums in the framing of the movement's collective identities, as well as of its opponents. The final section will illuminate the contribution of local Social Forums to contemporary social movements, stressing the role these new arenas play in the diffusion of ideas not only across countries and social movement families, but also across territories within a nation. The local Social Forums are conceptualized as translators (Santos 2008) of the message of the World Social Forum at the local level, and as promoters of horizontal views of participation and decision making within the larger Social Forum process.

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*TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL  
STRUCTURE: NETWORKING AND CONSENSUS*

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Most Italian local Forums refer to the WSF Charter of Principles and the "work agreement" of the Genoa Social Forum in their constitutions. They present themselves as open, public arenas for permanent discussion, collaboration, and cross-fertilization, not as organizations. According to this interpretation, a Forum is "a platform for local civil society" (Fruci 2003: 174). Forums are structured on the basis of informal "work agreements," often foreseeing quite autonomous working groups focusing on specific issues (Fruci 2003; Del Giorgio 2004).

The principles of participation and dialogue, infrequent recourse to voting, time-limited delegation on specific issues, control of delegates, and the consensus method of decision making represent common elements in local Social Forum organizing, often marked by the absence of formal leadership, and the emphasis on horizontal, nonhierarchical relations (Fruci 2003). Local Social Forums define themselves as networks. They present themselves as spaces characterized by a high degree of internal pluralism where individual and collective actors who are very diverse in terms of sociodemographic characteristics and ideological orientation meet each other.

Local political and social structures were reflected in some differences in the structure of the Forums. Research on Tuscany indicated that lo-

cal Social Forums were more heterogeneous where they opposed local right-wing governments and where there was a tradition of collaboration between different parties and movements (Del Giorgio 2004). Similarly, the building up of a European network of local Social Forums shows an increased reflection upon the specific conception of democracy behind it, a conception that emphasizes “horizontality” as bottom-up, nonhierarchical networking of individuals and groups with different backgrounds.

Our research on social movement organizations that took part in local Social Forums in Italy indicates that most of the organizational innovations characterizing Social Forums resonate in the organizations that participated in these arenas and in similar associations. In some cases participation in the Social Forum process helped to develop innovative organizational ideas that were already present at the foundation of the groups. These new associations, emerging from the GJM, have an organizational structure that is extremely horizontal, networked, and privileges decentralized initiatives around common symbols. This is the case, for example, of the EuroMayDay campaign, a network struggling for recognition of the rights of precarious workers, and the Rete Lilliput, an Italian network active on campaigns concerning fair trade, nonviolence, environmental justice, and peace.

Rete Lilliput—whose very name recalls the power of the many little Lilliputians facing the giant Goliath of neoliberalism—particularly emphasized the need to improve internal democracy through structures able “to facilitate” interaction. This network also brought to the Italian movement new decision-making methodologies such as consensus, initially received with skepticism but then adopted by movement organizations at various levels. Although slowing down decision making (and being criticized for this by the representatives of more centralized organizations), the consensus method is praised by many activists for respecting different positions and for often producing more effective decisions that are more widely shared. In Lilliput’s conceptualization, consensus is a method to reach agreement through discussion and good communication. The emphasis is not on unanimity but on the importance of the *process* of decision making, and of the participation of all members in it. All arguments have to be heard and discussed and, in the case of disagreements that involve fundamental beliefs and values, the decision-making process can be blocked by a veto. Voting is not excluded, but there has to be consensus that a vote should be taken, and a consensus on the voting method (qualified majority, simple majority, etc.). Lilliput’s definition

of the methods of consensus tended to spread to the Italian local Social Forums, influencing not only the organizations that emerged during the process, but also older ones.

Local Social Forums included in fact traditional organizations, like those involved in labor conflicts or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active on issues such as solidarity with the South, environmental protection, and migrants' rights. The first European Social Forum in Florence (2002) had seen a significant presence of unions—from traditional ones to newly emerged critical ones. Unions were also present as members of several coordination committees and network organizations, such as ATTAC, and in local Social Forums. While after the end of the “Fordist-Keynesian” midcentury compromise (Crouch 1999) many European unions had supported neoliberal policies, by the second half of the nineties an opposition to these policies had emerged, both inside and outside the more institutionalized trade unions (see O'Connor 2000; Schoch 2000).<sup>3</sup> In fact, the waves of protest against neoliberal globalization seem to have produced a process of “social reappropriation” (McAdam et al. 2001) by rank-and-file members of bureaucratized organizations (see della Porta et al. 2006, Chapter 2), and innovations by a leadership facing a crisis in membership and influence.

Common to these trends is a critique of the bureaucratization of traditional trade unions and a move toward a more participatory model, and a tendency to “externalize” conflicts emerging in the workplace, where trade unions tend to be weak (Denis 2005: 287). Radical, grassroots trade unions are critical of delegation, favoring instead direct worker participation, a forgotten form of democracy in the workplace. One interviewee from a radical union underlined this with an example:

All our proposals have been checked beforehand by the workers. This is the meaning of democracy in the workplace: When you introduce a platform, before discussing it with companies, you present it to the workers and you vote on it in a referendum. . . . This must concern everything—the national contract, local agreements, etc. They must be voted on in a referendum and it must be a binding referendum. (SLAI Cobas 2004: 9)<sup>4</sup>

Even if common participation in Social Forums did not bring radical and traditional trade unions closer together or unite the traditional trade unions,<sup>5</sup> the encounter with organizational models external to labor

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brought about a (renewed) emphasis on participation, which had once characterized labor's original discourse (Reiter 2006).

It has been noted recently that “a decentralized and more democratic organizational structure has replaced a hierarchical and centralized structure” (Passy 2001: 11), not only in labor organizations but also in the solidarity associations (which support both international campaigns and domestic ones) whose roots were in the late nineteenth century. Especially after their encounter in the Social Forum process with other types of groups and organizational models, NGOs with a long history have—without modifying radically their own structures—introduced several innovations to favor and encourage greater participation of their members. More recently formed organizations have adopted the Social Forums’ decision-making methods and structures that radically break with a representative conception of democracy.

Some of the older organizations, in which more hierarchical organizational models had prevailed, reacted to mobilizations linked to the Social Forum process by paying more attention to their membership base. Manitese (Italian word for “outstretched hands”), a nongovernmental development organization founded in 1964 that operates at the national and international level to further justice, solidarity, and respect among peoples, has started to reflect on its own decision-making processes. This in turn produced several organizational shifts, as well as some experimentation with consensus-based decision making. Recently founded organizations engaged in international cooperation have also been affected. This is the case of Emergency, an independent, neutral, and nonpolitical Italian organization founded to provide free, high-quality medical and surgical treatment to the civilian victims of war, landmines, and poverty. The organization faced a crisis of growth, prompted by the exponential increase in the demand for participation by activists socialized within the Social Forum process. This challenge led to more participatory organizational reforms.

The encounter with the Social Forum process and in particular with the Zapatistas’ experiences brought changes even in the decentralized and participatory organizational model promoted by the youth squatters in social centers<sup>6</sup> that represent an important part of the Italian movement. In these groups, cross-fertilization with other experiences (in particular with the Zapatistas) was reflected in a growing attention to conceptions of deliberative democracy, especially those that linked “horizontal” forms of assembly participation to the transformative power of consensual methods.

Local Social Forums favored, therefore, the development of a flexible structure of coordination. In the “spirit of Porto Alegre,” the method of consensus offered an instrument to organize a diverse and broad base. As one interviewee put it: “Even if the Social Forum’s structure in Milan did not persist, a thousand things arose in other places and, in any case, we have known each other at least on a personal level and we carry on meetings so it has certainly started a participative process” (CC 2004: 5).<sup>7</sup>

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*FRAME TRANSFORMATIONS: THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL*

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Local Social Forum constitutions clearly indicate neoliberalism to be the main enemy of the GJM. They also stress the important function of translation of mobilization frames from the transnational to the local level. The innovations in the organizational formulas described previously, with the increasing influence of a horizontal, networked structure, interacted with the development of a specific conception of a multilevel and multi-issue identity, as expressed in the slogan “Build locally, link globally.”

In the construction of collective identities, the local Social Forums stress two linkages. First of all, they aim at bridging the global and the local, by “territorializing” the movement. On the one hand, local Social Forums translate and reframe global issues in local environments; on the other, they link local struggles with global concerns on democracy, participation, and social justice.

Most of the local Social Forums present a multilevel model of mobilization active in specific territories, but also mobilizing in national and transnational campaigns and coalitions active on multiple issues. In this sense, they reversed the evolution towards specialization on single issues experienced by social movements of the eighties and the nineties.<sup>8</sup>

Social Forums act at the cognitive level as bridges between different movements. One of their main features is their composite nature based on the convergence of various social and political actors who, in the past, have often competed with each other or, at least, focused on different issues (della Porta 2006). Emerging from the WSF Charter of Principles, local Social Forums are put forward by organizers as political laboratories, arenas of interaction and planning of further activities and actions, spaces where a common identity stems from the encounter of different individual and collective actors.

Social Forums were able to spread multi-issue frames across the various groups that took part in them, translating them into a multilevel

discourse. During a focus group discussion, an activist of the Florentine Social Forum stressed the innovation brought in by the Forum considering it “a great novelty and a huge asset as it brings together men and women, from 20 to 60, who discuss with each other, opposing the logic of the old leftist parties of separating women, young people, and so on” (quoted in della Porta 2005a: 186). The main added value of the Forum is “to put [groups in contact with one another] that in the past years had not met enough, or met only during emergencies, for short periods ... this is instead the first experience I have had that is so alive in terms of contacts and networking, where being in contact and being in a net is the most important element ... this is the most positive part ... the value of the Social Forums” (della Porta 2005a: 89).

Meeting in the Forum contributed to a sort of opening up of organizational and individual identities, first of all by the bridging of different frames. Relevant changes happened, for instance, in the labor movement, as it engaged with the Social Forum process. The new trade unions, as well as some unions in the metallurgical industry and the public sector, were heavily critical of privatization, outsourcing, and public management doctrine (particularly the introduction of balanced-budget principles). Accused of defending old privileges, public-sector unions often sought public support by claiming to defend the public against private values. Inspired by a new protest cycle, these unions amplified their frames beyond the defense of specific workers' rights to issues of citizenship and democracy and also experimented with a new, participatory organizational model. In Italy (but also in France and Spain) the turn of the millennium was characterized by general strikes against pension reform, privatization of public services, and cuts in public health and education. Various networks of movements joined the labor struggles, bridging labor issues with those of global justice, defense of the environment, peace, and gender equality. The new radical unions criticized the neoliberal turn of other trade unions, but also adopted new models of internal democracy (based on the rotation of leaders and on decisions taken either unanimously or by qualified majority) and joined the antineoliberal movement (Bérout et al. 1998). In recent years, and in part stimulated by rank-and-file discontent, criticisms of neoliberal economic policies have also been voiced within the traditional trade union confederations. Unions started to stigmatize the reduction of social rights brought on by the free market.

Although with these different emphases, the radical trade unions present themselves as not only interested in labor rights, but also political



actors who frame their specific interventions on labor issues in a more complex vision of society than is usually found among traditional unions. As an activist of the critical union Confederazione dei Comitati di Base (COBAS) told us:

It was our understanding that it was necessary to avoid a model in which the unionist claims concern only for your salary and then leaves to political representation the issues of what kind of school you want, what its perspectives should be, what the social function of your work should be. This classic division of labor between what pertains to the trade unions and what pertains to the role of political parties in parliament was challenged. (COBAS-school 2004: 3)<sup>9</sup>

During more recent protests, identification between the working class and citizens has been strengthened. In the unions' environment, apart from recalling class identity, there have been debates on the definition of the concept of labor and of workers' identities. This innovation is particularly visible in the organizations that emerged from the movement, combining labor issues with societal ones. An action highlighting the problems associated with temporary work, organized around the ironic symbol of San Precario (saint of precarious workers), was extended from labor issues to issues pertaining to everyday life including income, housing, love and friendship, access, and services, which makes it easier for workers to find affinity with other people. The challenge to traditional conceptions of labor—that is, through the growing presence and consciousness of temporary workers—is also gaining more attention in conventional trade unions.

New and “political” identities also developed, through participation in the Social Forums, in the galaxy of organizations engaged on the issue of international solidarity. Participation in the Social Forum process also pushed more traditional associations towards innovations in their identity. For the Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana (ARCI),<sup>10</sup> which was founded in 1957 as a collateral association to the Italian Communist Party but became more autonomous over time, the redefinition of its identity has entailed a strong commitment to the issue of peace. Its involvement in local Social Forums increased its attention to the negative impacts of globalization, both in the North and the South of the globe. The ARCI is, in fact, very much involved in initiatives on migrant rights.

Within the Social Forums, frames are not only bridged across issues, but also across territorial levels. Those NGOs with a tradition of involve-

ment in solidarity with countries in the South became more sensitive to the links between local and global struggles and the role of power and inequality in transnational alliances. For instance, the generational and territorial heterogeneity of Manitese substantially increased, bringing about a reevaluation of its organizational identity on the basis of encounters with Zapatistas that influenced the development of local perspectives.

Generally speaking, the process of neoliberal globalization has become a reference point for a definition of groups' identity. As our interviewee from the *Sindacato dei Lavoratori Intercategoriale Cobas* (SIN Cobas, <http://www.sincobas.org>) adds:

It is obvious that whenever you reflect on issues such as cooperation, North-South inequality, the exploitation of child labor ... globalization is the context ... at the basis of everything there is a critique of the economic system as entailing growth without limits, and it's not just a critique of inequalities ... but a critique of growth as such and of development. (SIN Cobas 2004: 46)

The organization's collective identity has thus been modeled around a critique of neoliberal globalization and war. The very issue of opposition to war provides links to more moderate organizations.

With certain differences across organizations and participants, the outcome of participation in local Social Forums and similar forms of coordination accompanying the emergence of the GJM is the singling out of a global stake in opposing neoliberalism. Recognition of similarities across countries through involvement in international networks enables the construction of a supranational identity, as in the case of solidarity movements (Smith 2001). Symbols and myths in fact help distant actors to identify with one another—as in the case of the “Zapatistas' experience” in which radical unions, as well as international solidarity organizations, have been involved, thus strengthening links between local and global concerns. The WSF process and the local Social Forums it has generated provide opportunities for activists to encounter the analyses, stories, and symbols that extend their critique of neoliberalism while deepening the network structures emerging to resist neoliberal hegemony.

## CONCLUSION

Local Social Forums have helped to spread consensual decision-making practices and multiple, tolerant identities (della Porta 2005a) developed

in the World Social Forums and in its macroregional expressions to the local level. In their work of translation, they have particularly stressed horizontality, as well as the need for rooting global concerns in local contexts.

By focusing on Italian local Social Forums as well as some of the organizations engaged in them, we underlined how various organizational networks active on different issues have interconnected and mobilized together, generalizing their claims, extending beyond national borders, and experimenting with alternative organizational formulas. This process involved both organizations coming from previous cycles of protest and organizations born after the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999.

As we have seen, novel aspects of structure and process developed in the organizational formulas. Formed by rooted cosmopolitans, local Social Forums contributed to bridging different territorial levels. Local Social Forums cultivated a networked structure, defining themselves as arenas for mutual learning between individuals and groups with different previous political and social experiences. Participation in these networks had, indeed, a transforming impact on those who took part in them. More traditional organizations tend to maintain hierarchical structures but with a more participatory conception of the organization; organizations founded during the waves of antineoliberal protests are characterized instead by a highly flexible and networked structure and decision-making methods oriented towards participation and consensus formation.

As far as identity is concerned, participation in the Social Forum process promoted a reshaping of organizational identities constructed in opposition to neoliberal globalization. As local Forums tend to frame their activities in terms of global struggles and mobilize also at the transnational level, supranational identities tend to emerge among actors involved in this type of coordination. Participation in local Forums is reflected in frame bridging on several issues. During participation in planning Forums, some of the frames and organizational strategies proposed by new groups found resonance in traditional organizations that were influenced by their encounter with emerging organizations.

The local Forum formula contributed to spreading a logic of networking and multi-issue involvement (political and social at the same time) that became central to many movement organizations. The precarious nature of some ad hoc experiences—which emerged to coordinate specific campaigns and then dissolved themselves—was not perceived as a weakness but rather as an opportunity for future initiatives.

The complex evolution (emergence, disappearance, and reemergence) of local Social Forums in recent years testifies to the difficulties of building permanent arenas of encounters. In some cases, such as in the big cities (Milan, but also Rome), the very size of the first meetings (involving hundreds of groups and thousands of activists), as well as a legacy of strong internal conflicts, made the process unmanageable. In other cases, the decline followed general ebbs in mobilization, or the opening up of other networking spaces as gatherings drawing together activists from multiple organizations and movements (e.g., for the organization of peace protests).

Sustaining common spaces of coordination and mobilization is indeed a difficult task. Local Social Forums tended in fact to remain active especially in those areas where widespread local struggles against large infrastructure projects sustained mobilization processes. Examples include local Social Forums that are still active (although with different names) in large protest campaigns against the high-speed train in Val di Susa and the bridge on the Messina Strait (della Porta and Piazza 2008), but also those opposing a flood barrier system against the high tide and the sinking of Venice, the construction of a highway tunnel in the mountain chain of the Gran Sasso in Abruzzo, and the location of production for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program near Novara. In all these struggles, concerns for the environment converged with demands for quality jobs, social rights, and democratic decision making involving the local population. This means that the reference to a transnational Forum process is a necessary but not sufficient condition to keep local Social Forums alive.

However, even when these pluralist arenas collapsed, innovations concerning organizational formulas, as well as multi-issue and multi-level frames remain a part of the repertoire of collective action exerting a durable impact on local settings. Thanks to the previous experience with local Forums, new coalitions, networks, and roundtables with “variable geometry” configurations have been easily and rapidly formed depending on the issues and the targets of different campaigns. The Social Forum process can then be considered relevant not only in and of itself but also for its capacity to produce long-lasting transformations in, and cross-fertilization among, the organizations that have been involved in such a process.

As argued elsewhere (della Porta and Mosca 2007), pluralist arenas like local Social Forums created the conditions for different actors to

meet and discuss. The heterogeneity of associative and thematic commitments on the part of the activists and the affiliation of the organizations themselves in networks facilitated a process of “contamination in action” that helped logistical coordination, enabled the emergence of tolerance for differences and mutual trust, and allowed frame bridging and the development of multilevel identities. The trust among activists, which developed in transnational campaigns, was thus transferred to the local level, and common experience in local mobilizations increased it. Local Social Forums as arenas for exchange of ideas played a cognitive role in the import, but also the translation of new ideas. They thus helped dense network structures and tolerant identities to develop.

In sum, ideas travelled cross-level, from the local to the global, and vice versa. In this process of diffusion, the local Social Forums can be seen as brokers, or translators. Research on diffusion among social movements has looked at how ideas concerning organizational structure, strategies of action, or definitions of the world “travel” from movement to movement, sector to sector, city to city, center to periphery, and—on occasion—from periphery to center (McAdam and Rucht 1993; Soule 2004). While the role of structural (or geographical) proximity and direct linkages in facilitating diffusion has been stressed, the symbolic construction of similarities that travel through indirect channels also plays an important role. Besides direct interactions or structural similarities, the “cultural understanding that social entities belong to a common social category [also] constructs a tie between them” (Strang and Meyer 1993: 490). Regardless of actual similarities, in fact, the subjective perception of common circumstances leads to an idea being considered relevant and adopted. While some visions of diffusion stress its unreflective, unconscious nature, research on social movements has instead emphasized the active role of social movement activists as adopters and adapters of ideas coming from other movements or other places. In this sense, particularly relevant is the presence of spaces and actors for communication beyond borders. The rich and varied repertoire of action of new global movements is indeed the product of enhanced occasions for transnational encounters (della Porta and Diani 2006, Chapter 7).

This chapter highlights in particular that the work of translating the global to local settings requires the presence of brokers facilitating such a process, but also interpreting it in a particularly horizontal and multilevel version. As Diani noted, “brokers’ most crucial property lies in their capacity to connect actors who are not communicating because

of some specific political or social barrier . . . brokerage is crucial for the survival of chains of interaction, and therefore for the connectedness of a network as a whole” (2003a: 107). In the specific cases under study, leaders or innovators in the process were people who had experiences in larger WSF/ESF contexts and/or with cross-movement coalition building. The role of these “rooted cosmopolitans” as translators, who help make the connections across diverse constituencies, seems to be an important element of the processes described in this article. However, “rooted cosmopolitans” do not just translate but also interpret and recontextualize foreign ideas and practices in domestic arenas (Roggeband 2007). The process of translation requires some specific conditions in the potential adopters. In the case of more traditional social movement organizations that tend to be more hierarchical (see also Wood 2005: 105) and not specifically mobilized around global justice (e.g., trade unions), some leaders who attended the ESFs and the WSFs found it difficult to translate the “Social Forum spirit” into their organizational settings at the local level. The process of translation seems to work more effectively at the horizontal level (between different organizations) than at the vertical one (from the top to the bottom).

We can add that the Italian experience was not unique. Local Social Forums from all over the continent stressed the importance of horizontal networking at the first meeting of a European network of local Forums that took place during the third ESF (London, 2004), where, following the strategy “one foot in, one foot out” (Juris 2005),<sup>11</sup> people from different local Forums from all over Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom) organized seminars and an open space. The conception of the Social Forum as an experimental arena for exchanges of ideas was considered as most appropriate also for the supranational level.

This concern with a certain vision of democracy was also reflected in the call to democratize the London ESF process that was promoted, among others, by the activists involved in the European network of local Social Forums. The call asked for a more inclusive process and criticized the organization of the third ESF, claiming that basic principles of the WSF Charter had been treated with contempt, with organizers employing an opaque and confusing “faux-consensus,” outsourcing ESF functions to private companies, and making the organizing process inaccessible (Horizontals 2004). The European network of local Social Forums organized another seminar during the fourth ESF (Athens, 2006) and

produced a statement that, for the first time, was read during the Assembly of Social Movements (one of the most important events of the ESF, characterized by high visibility and large participation) advocating a bottom-up approach. The statement stressed the role of the local Forums in the organizational process of the ESF and invited all men and women to contribute more to the Social Forum process at the local level. Local Forums were presented as being able to bridge the local and global levels, providing opportunities for participation and building alternatives. The network of local Social Forums was also present in the fifth ESF (Malmö 2008) where it organized two workshops.

In this way, local Social Forums did not only translate the global message at the local level, but also taught at the supranational one the experiences made at the local one. Their struggle for a horizontal and networked vision of democracy has been an important contribution in the permanent debate on democratic visions that (even if not always explicitly) characterizes much of the activity of the ESF and the WSF.

## NOTES

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1. The eighth WSF did not take place in a particular venue because of the choice to organize a Global Day of Action worldwide on the same day, coordinated through a website (January 26).

2. It is worth noting that what we define as “local Social Forum” can vary a lot from one country to another. While in Italy and France, local Social Forums have been mainly organized at the local and municipal level, in other countries like Greece, Austria, and Sweden they are organized at the national level.

3. Protests against the privatization of public services (in particular transportation, schools, and health care) arose in most European countries (Moody 2001 [1997]).

4. *Sindacato Lavoratori Autorganizzati Intercategoriale—Comitati di Base (SLAI Cobas)*, delegate. 2004. From interview with Lorenzo Mosca, November 2004, Milan, Italy.

5. The Italian trade union rebuilt itself on a unitary basis around the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL)* in 1944, before the end of World War II. The tensions of the Cold War led to the division of the unitary union in 1948 and the formation of three major trade union confederations: the CGIL (of socialist and communist inspiration), the *CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori, Catholic)*, and the *UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro, secular)*. Toward the end of the 1960s, these three organizations got

closer again, forming a confederation that became increasingly conflictual during the 1980s.

6. Social centers are communities managed by young, politically engaged people (mainly students and unemployed) who squat in unused buildings where they organize social, political, and cultural activities.

7. Critical Consumerism (CC), Working Group of the Milan Social Forum. 2004. From interview with Lorenzo Mosca, November 2004, Milan, Italy.

8. See della Porta (1996) for the Italian movement and Ranci (2001) for solidarity movements.

9. Confederazione del Comitati di Base della Scuola (COBAS-school), delegate. 2004. From interview with Lorenzo Mosca, November 2004, Milan, Italy.

10. An association for social advancement with 1.2 million members, 6,000 clubs, and permanent chapters all over the national territory, 126 territorial and regional boards; dealing with culture and free time.

11. The phrase means positioning at the margins of the official Forum, creating autonomous self-managed spaces but also being present in the official space of the Forum.





## CHAPTER 14

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# DIVERGING VISIONS OF ANOTHER WORLD IN THE MAKING OF THE QUEBEC SOCIAL FORUM

*Pascale Dufour and Janet Conway*

The first edition of the Quebec Social Forum (QSF) took place on August 23–26, 2007, in Montreal on the campus of Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). It attracted about 5,000 people from across Quebec around the slogan, “It’s our turn to think another Quebec” in the largest assembly of progressives in Quebec’s history. In this chapter, we go back to this historic gathering and situate the Social Forum, both as event and process, within the history of alterglobalization mobilization in Quebec.<sup>1</sup> Historicizing the Social Forum in this way helps us to interpret its internal tensions and its larger significance in terms of what it reveals about collective actors in Quebec, their present orientations, capacities, limitations, and conflicts, as well as their contributions to the global movement against neoliberal globalization. We argue that the first QSF makes visible a politico-cultural struggle and transition in social movement politics that has been underway in Quebec and more globally for the last decade.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006) argues that our time is one of paradigmatic transition in which the hegemony of the sociocultural

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paradigm of Western modernity is being displaced. The deep crisis in left politics, to which the World Social Forum (WSF) is a response, reflects this. Santos identifies two facets of the newness of the WSF that make it disturbing to the Left. First, the Social Forum as a political form represents a break with the disciplines of modern political organization, be it based on representative democracy, democratic centralism, or participatory democracy. Second, the WSF is utopian in a world devoid of utopia and to a Left that has lost hope in utopia (Santos 2006). Our grounded study of a particular place-based Social Forum process explores these claims.

At a roundtable organized at the Université de Montréal on October 12, 2007, about six weeks following the event, conflicting visions of the Social Forum were clearly manifested among key actors. They expressed tensions persistent in the organizing process and running deeply through the history of the alterglobalization movement in Quebec. For Raphaël Canet, member of the Secretariat of the QSF and member of the student group Alter-UQAM, the QSF was an opportunity to create spaces of encounter among activists, especially between those in organized social movements and ordinary citizens who share concerns about collective well-being. What is primary, in both the organizing and enactment of the event, is the creation of a prefigurative space that is the most inclusive and horizontal as possible, in which both unaffiliated individuals (*les citoyen(ne)s*) and activists affiliated with movements and organizations (*les militant(e)s*) find their place. The Forum facilitates the political convergence of struggles but, he said, “it is not the QSF that will change things, but those who participate in it.”<sup>2</sup>

For Jacques Létourneau of the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, the formally constituted organizations of civil society and particularly labor unions are in the forefront contesting globalization. Thus, “in 2001, at the People’s Summit [against the Free Trade Area of the Americas] it was us, the labor centrals, who mobilized . . . the Quebec Summit, it was us.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the QSF could not have been enacted without the “large organizations” (read: unions and big nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs). Their material support underwrote the process; their constituencies expected accountability; thus, in the organizing process, the unions refused to support conferring decision-making power to unaffiliated and, in their view, unaccountable activists. The Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux views the QSF event as an open space. The organizing process, in contrast, to be more democratic and efficacious,

required a more hierarchical functioning with those in the leadership clearly designated and mandated. Létourneau's political assessment of the value of the QSF rests on the concrete actions and outcomes that flow from the event, not in the praxis of organizing it nor of the quality of the event itself.

These overlapping but distinct conceptions produced deep tensions in the organizing of the QSF. We further propose that these tensions are a reprise of those that appeared in the alterglobalization movement in Quebec in the late 1990s and that came to a head in the 2001 massive demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Quebec City. The dispute then was widely perceived as one over tactics. However, we argue, then and now, it is more substantive than that. It is about the meeting of profoundly different ethics, practices, and theories of democracy and, beneath them, different horizons of hope and visions of transformation.

We begin by looking back, to the emergence of the alterglobalization movement in Quebec in the late 1990s. We then turn to the WSF and its influence and expressions in Quebec, along with those of the Intercontinental Youth Camp. Finally, we focus on the tumultuous process of organizing the QSF and its culmination in the event of August 23–26 before offering an analytical conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

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*ON THE "FIELD OF GLOBAL PROTEST": THE  
ALTERGLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC*

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The alterglobalization movement in Quebec is usually dated from the anti–Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) mobilizations of 1998 and the appearance of several new social actors. However, even before this, Quebec feminists led a major mass mobilization against neoliberalism in the mid-1990s (which later inspired the international World March of Women), and Quebec unions mobilized and formed coalitions against free trade.

The mid-to-late 1990s had seen the emergence of radicalized student and antipoverty movements. Le Comité action nonviolent (CANEVAS), coalesced in 1996 advocating nonviolent direct action to resist corporate globalization. In May 1998, it came to international attention as part of the worldwide movement against the MAI when activists shut down a Montreal hotel where the agreement was being discussed. This action gave the group its permanent name, *salAMI*, meaning “dirty MAI” in French (Salami 2001).

This mobilization was a turning point for many Quebec activists. Between it and the watershed events of April 2001 in Quebec City protesting the Free Trade Area of the Americas, virtually all of Quebec's social movements had entered "the field of global protest" (Dufour 2006). The anti-MAI mobilizations signaled a change in the political terrain: a growing awareness of the negative effects of globalization, a break with nationalist political elites who had favored greater free trade and economic integration with the United States, and a willingness to consider more militant forms of protest. The period was marked by the appearance of new actors, especially young people, new modes of organization, and codes of solidarity. The new activism was characterized by increased use of direct action, affinity group organizing, use of spokescouncils, street theater, and popular education and eschewing of both lobbying and reliance on major media (Conway 2003).

In the aftermath of the successful use of mass nonviolent direct action in shutting down the World Trade Organization talks in Seattle in November 1999, the new activist currents grew in size and influence across North America and posed major challenges to established ways of doing things among the more institutionalized centers of power in the movement, which in Quebec, included the major labor unions, the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec*, and large NGOs. These conflicts came to a head in April 2001 at mass protests around the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City against the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), and particularly in the debate over diversity of tactics.

Those entities involved in the alternative People's Summit and protests were all critics of the FTAA, but key organizations, traditional allies of the governing *Parti Québécois* on the national question, were also concerned to keep the demonstrations under their control and minimize embarrassment to the Quebec government. At the same time, a significant and growing number of other groups were aligned in planning multiple forms of nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, to discredit the leaders' summit, to demonstrate their deep and principled opposition to the FTAA, and to demand that the government release copies of the agreement. All of the foregoing groups were broadly aligned, even as they pursued different tactics. Some key organizations like the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* straddled both positions, and individuals from all these protesting organizations could be found in the whole range of spaces and approaches that constituted the field of protest in Quebec City in April 2001.<sup>5</sup>

The more significant political divide was that over diversity of tactics, which manifested most concretely between the groups described above and the Convergence des Lutes Anticapitaliste (CLAC). Broadly understood, respect for diversity of tactics implied both: (1) an escalation and a diversification of tactics beyond both the routines of lobbying and of legal, stage-managed demonstrations, and (2) an ethic of respect for the tactical choices of other activists, which involved a pact *not* to publicly denounce the tactics of other activists.

Although for some, embracing a diversity of tactics was part and parcel of their antiauthoritarian ideological commitment, many others were driven by a more diffuse sense of mounting social and ecological crises and political urgency. This, coupled with a profound alienation from established channels of political representation, led proponents of diversity of tactics to argue for a return to more militant and confrontational tactics, including direct action and civil disobedience, in addition to popular education, cultural work, and grassroots community organizing. In the name of both escalation and diversity, they defended property destruction—from stickering, spray painting, and guerrilla murals to window smashing and defacing of signs. It was this last aspect, coupled with CLAC’s refusal to negotiate the boundaries of acceptable tactics, that constituted the line in the sand between it and the other groups and led to the mutually taken decision that CLAC would not participate in the Table de Convergence.<sup>6</sup>

Organizing within a framework of respect for diversity of tactics was embedded in a further commitment to “affinity groups” as the unit of organizing and democratic decision making. Affinity groups are small autonomous groups that decide on the nature of their participation in a direct action and organize independently of any centralized movement authority. This often implied a repudiation of representative forms of democracy, of both the institutions of the liberal democratic state and also of labor unions and more bureaucratized movement organizations.

The spectacle of April 2001, the sustained defiance at the fence by thousands of young people, the violence of the police response, the mass labor-led march walking away from the confrontation at the fence, and the denouncement of the “violence”<sup>7</sup> of “anarchists” by major labor and feminist leaders, drove a wedge in the movement (McNally 2001; Stawhawk 2002). For multiple reasons, some of them having to do with the post-9/11 context, these particular debates over tactics and understandings of violence were much less salient by the time of the QSF in

2007. However, a significant underlying tension had not disappeared. In particular, we see the persistence of a generational divide on the Left,<sup>8</sup> specifically around the role and importance of prefigurative and utopian practices with regard to individual participation and direct democracy. Preferences for direct democracy, strongest among youth, are related to alienation from the established modes of organization and decision making on the Left, while older activists tend to adhere to representational forms of democracy embodied in bureaucratic, formal organizations. However, between 2001 and the lead-up to the QSF, this cleavage had transformed somewhat. The terms and tone of the debate had changed to be more conciliatory and less polarized. In the next section, we show how the earlier debates, which had been articulated by many in 2001 as questions of strategy and tactics, reappeared as conflicting appropriations of the Social Forum.

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*THE FORUM AND THE CAMP: ABROAD AND AT HOME*

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Ever since its inception in January 2001, the WSF has been a magnet for Quebec-based activists and organizations, as well as sizable youth contingents, organized principally by the Montreal-based international development NGO, Alternatives, and funded through the Ministry of International Relations. Other prominent organizational entities from Quebec have included the World March of Women, which until 2006 was headquartered in Montreal, the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, Développement et Paix, and the networks of “économie solidaire.” Enthusiastic political and financial support of major unions, students federations, and the Quebec state helps explain the robustness of the Quebec presence at the WSF meetings, especially in Porto Alegre.

In important ways, the WSF is a product and innovation of the antiglobalization movement (Leite 2005; Whitaker 2007). As a particular political form and mode of organizing, the Social Forum poses challenges to conventional activist practice in both Quebec and English Canada, based as it has been on coalitions of formal organizations with formally delegated representatives and little room for grassroots participation (Conway 2004b: 118–121). Access to international forums had previously been the exclusive business of NGO personnel or national social movement leaders. In the WSF, any group, no matter how small or informal, that supports the WSF Charter is welcome to attend and organize its own events as part of the WSF program. Any person, regardless of affiliation,

can attend the Forum. The agenda of the Forum is amazingly open, with little filtering of political opinion beyond the required opposition to neoliberalism.

In Porto Alegre in 2003, a meeting of activists from Quebec and English-speaking Canada discussed the possibility of a pan-Canadian Social Forum. This effort was aborted within a year and was experienced as an important defeat by the Quebec activists (Létourneau 2005; Beaudet 2005).<sup>9</sup> Throughout 2004, Alternatives pursued cross-sectoral discussions toward a Quebec-wide Social Forum. However, this effort was also frustrated, as the major Quebec unions opted out of the Social Forum process in favor of prioritizing mobilization against the neoliberal agenda of the Charest government in Quebec (Létourneau 2005; Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) 2005).<sup>10</sup>

In the lead-up to the 2005 WSF, le Comité de Québec pour le FSM 2005 (Quebec Committee for the WSF 2005) organized a delegation of more than 600 to go to Porto Alegre. In a public conference in Montreal prior to the 2005 WSF, it became clear that organizers were divided about the relationship between organizing Quebec participation in the WSF and organizing a Social Forum in Quebec, and whether any process of organizing a QSF could proceed without major investment by Quebec's unions (Pelletier 2005).<sup>11</sup> Those who wished to pursue the possibility of organizing a Social Forum in Quebec organized meetings in Porto Alegre of about 150 people. L'Initiative vers un FSQ was founded a couple of months after, during the organization of the second UQAM Social Forum, in March 2005. As Canet (2007) mentioned, this association was composed of both delegates from organizations and individual activists involved on their own behalf. The organizations involved tended to be small and medium-sized NGOs.

After an extensive outreach to over 5,000 organizations across Quebec, an inaugural meeting took place in November 2005 in Quebec City. A Trois-Rivières "headquarters" was formed (Collectif Mauricie), which spearheaded the organizing process towards a QSF, planned for June 2006 in Trois-Rivières. However, two months prior to the event, short of funds and low on registrations, organizers called it off.

More youth-led, this organizing attempt was greatly influenced by the ethos and methodology of the Intercontinental Youth Camp (IYC) that has been organized annually alongside the WSF (Côté and Ruel 2006). Hundreds of Quebec youth participated in the IYC and since 2003 had organized youth camps in Quebec. The youth camps are constituted as

autonomous spaces for experimenting with alternative forms of life and are produced by the self-organization and participation of all those who come. They are conceived as a “laboratory of practices,” and have emerged as a critique of the WSF, which has been perceived by IYC organizers as limited to debating, rather than enacting, alternatives to neoliberalism (IYC 2003). Making the IYC a lived alternative to neoliberal capitalism meant paying concrete attention to the practices of everyday life involved in constructing the built environment, planning and sharing physical space, the provisioning of food and water, managing waste, promoting ethical exchange and consumption, fostering a safe and respectful environment for all participants, and practicing forms of management and governance based on consensus. The organizing approach rejected hierarchy and encompassed an expectation of participation by all in both decision making and camp chores.<sup>12</sup> Based on the Intercontinental Youth Camp’s vision, le Campement Jeunesse du Québec—renamed le Campement québécois de la jeunesse a year later<sup>13</sup>—was launched in 2003 (Conway and Morrison 2007).

According to our interviews, l’Initiative vers un FSQ was riven by profound divisions (Rodrigue and Eme 2007; Canet 2007; Roy 2007).<sup>14</sup> On one side were a group of young Montreal-based activists, inspired by Campement experiences, oriented to individuals’ participation and direct democracy rather than to organizational representation in a coalitional structure. They were devoted to QSF as a process in which individual volunteers should directly participate in horizontal and decentralized decision-making practices and to the Social Forum event as a space for showcasing and experimenting with alternative forms of life (Canet 2007). In their view, a QSF, as both process and event, should include all individuals who were willing to fight for “another globalization,” without qualification. On the other side, were the Trois-Rivières-based leaders of locally rooted organizations who were involved in the QSF as part of their jobs and as representatives of their organizations. For them, organizations carried greater political weight, both because of their financial resources and the legitimacy conferred by having broad bases of membership and formally elected leaders. In their view, a Quebec-wide Social Forum could not be held without the collective social actors traditionally involved in large coalitions in Quebec (Laforest and Phillips 2001). These two radically opposed visions of functioning had been temporally neutralized by an organizing process that allowed the same weight for individual “citizens” and organizations (between November 2005 and June 2006),



but, in the end, it did not allow for sufficient convergence of interests and identities and the process was abruptly halted (Rodrigue and Eme 2007; Canet 2007).<sup>15</sup>

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*TOWARD THE QUEBEC SOCIAL FORUM: IS ANOTHER PROCESS POSSIBLE?*

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After this failure, the organizing process was reimagined to allow different compromises and incorporate new players. Instead of a process driven primarily by individual volunteers, the remaining organizers, essentially the students involved in the association Alter-UQAM, which were behind the second and the third UQAM Social Forum and part of l'Initiative vers un FSQ, decided to allow for organizations to formally participate. They proposed writing a Quebec Social Forum Charter in order to clarify how the organizing process would work. A newly constituted Montreal-based organizing group strongly led by those from Alter-UQAM took the lead on the project, the Trois-Rivières collective was dissolved, and the Charter was adopted through a refounding assembly in September 2006.

As with other processes aligned with the WSF, the QSF Charter imagines the Social Forum as an open space of encounter among diverse social groups who share opposition to neoliberal globalization. It is not constituted as an actor but as a space for reflection, debate, and the formulation of proposals. However, the QSF Charter has several distinguishing characteristics. It addresses "citizens" alongside movements and groups of civil society and its imagined geography is that of Quebec—and self-consciously to Quebec beyond the metropolis of Montreal, including the "regions"—not to Canada nor to the world. The formulation of a Charter allowed those involved to negotiate about the purpose and goals of the QSF. However, very rapidly, between September and December 2006, any debate about the vision of the Social Forum both as process and event was overtaken by the exigencies of organizing the event.

The central labor bodies (Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux and Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, or FTQ) had long since doubted the usefulness of a Quebec Social Forum.<sup>16</sup> In their view, there were already multiple sites at which social organizations networked. It was not clear to them how a Quebec Social Forum would be different, nor what it would add. During the founding meeting in September 2006, several arguments were advanced. Some thought that a QSF would "facilitate breaking free of a strictly local dynamic and allow for some kind of convergence between organizations" (Assemblée de foundation 2006).<sup>17</sup>

Others imagined the QSF as a place to assemble progressive forces in order to develop paths to common action. In this perspective, a QSF would, above all, be “a space for the convergence of struggles.”<sup>18</sup>

According to Canet (2007), in order to understand why, in 2007, these powerful groups finally embarked on the process of organizing the Forum, one must look to the larger political context in Quebec. The Liberal Party was in power, and the unions, especially the *Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux*, were largely denied access to the government. It had therefore become more immediately relevant to engage with the social movements to build counterpower. For the direction of the FTQ, building formal relationships with the movements remained a bad option because it risked the little access they had to the corridors of power in this period. Officially, the FTQ was not interested in participating (Gagnon 2007).<sup>19</sup> The FTQ was neither officially involved in organizing nor participating in the QSF in 2007, although various members and local affiliates attended the event.

In analyzing the minutes of the preparatory meetings, one can see how rapidly the understanding of the QSF as an event rather than a process came to prevail. The discussion was quickly overwhelmed by a managerial logic, dominated by concerns over efficiency and effectiveness in producing the event rather than inclusivity and participation in the process.

The first structural decision was not to allow individual participants (“citizens”) the right to vote in the General Assembly, which was the decision-making body of the Social Forum. The Assemblies remained open to anyone interested, but voting rights were restricted to the three permanent member groups of the General Secretariat, to the representatives of the five logistical committees, to the representatives of each of eight regionally based collectives convened for the purpose of mobilizing for the Forum, and to representatives of each of the organizations committed to the process (one vote per organization). This arrangement was widely seen as a compromise between a logic of “horizontality,” in which all individual participants were accorded the same weight and decision making proceeded according to consensus, and a coalitional logic that recognized the weight of formal organizations bringing material resources to the process and their accountability to larger constituencies both for the use of resources and direction of the process.

Without the right to vote, participation by unaffiliated persons dwindled as the organizing process proceeded. Labor organizations

(the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, affiliates of the FTQ, the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec), women's groups associated with the Fédération des Femmes du Québec, several Quebec student associations, and some large NGOs, notably Alternatives and l'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) were particularly prominent in the General Assemblies and dedicated significant financial and human resources to the organizing. However, it is also essential to recognize that a significant number of key players in the organizing effort had a history in the 2005 l'Initiative vers un FSQ and in Alter-UQAM and brought the autonomist sensibilities of these efforts to bear on the process. They were three spokespersons out of six representing the different logistical committees and two persons out of three permanent members of the General Secretariat. Thus, they had significant voting power when voting was employed, which, in the end, was rarely. In practice, the process unfolded on a largely consensual basis.

According to our interviews, because they did not have a comparable organizational weight and power, the Alter-UQAM activists sought to occupy strategic positions in the organizing process, which they were able to do because they carried the enormous workload of the everyday organizing, and on a largely volunteer basis. Because of their consistent presence and deep involvement, they had the de facto power to make many proposals and decisions between the General Assemblies. Perhaps ironically, given these strategies, they were enabled to be effective carriers of the vision of the Social Forum as a more rather than less open, horizontal, consensual, participatory process. Despite a structure favoring organizational weight, these activists exerted considerable influence in the daily production of the Forum through their consistent presence and endless work on numerous committees.

In the end, 315 workshops and 150 cultural activities were mounted as part of the QSF according to the principle of *auto-gestion*, or self-organization. A total of 240 organizations and 30 individuals proposed self-organized activities. The Program Committee had determined eight themes and three transverse axes according to which a diverse array of discussions was grouped, to facilitate convergence among them. The axes were: Societal Projects for Tomorrow's Quebec; Resistance and Alternatives to Neoliberalism: Local and Global; and Feminist Agendas/Issues and Strategies.

The program of activities expressed a wide range of content. Nevertheless, organizers noted some worrying absences: discussion of more specifically localized or regionalized issues; the question of war; the relationship

between a culture of consumption and alternative cultures; aboriginal peoples; and any consideration of social movements in Canada (PV, General Assembly, October 20, 2007).<sup>20</sup> People of color and immigrant communities were largely absent from the organizing process and were only about 5 percent of attendees at the event. No preparatory process had targeted them specifically. Issues of racism were virtually absent from the program and the event, although there was some attention to questions of migration and the rights of refugees. These absences were pervasive even as the themes explicitly invited attention to them, in some terms at least. The themes were: (1) human rights and the struggle for equality: rights of peoples and diverse identities; (2) environment and ecology; (3) public services and social programs: struggles against privatization of the common good; (4) the world of work, labor struggles, and the economy of solidarity; (5) arts, culture, and pluralism of communications; (6) citizen participation, democracy, and popular power: rethinking the political; (7) solidarity and peace: against imperialism and war; and (8) spirituality, ethics, and religions. Themes five through eight were least addressed in workshops (PV, General Assembly, October 20, 2007).<sup>21</sup> Beyond the absences, it is important to recognize the impressive participation of women, who constituted about 60 percent of attendees, and the permeation of feminist concerns in the naming of the themes and transverse axes of the Forum and in numerous self-organized activities. Women were prominent as speakers in the large-scale, centrally organized events, and feminist perspectives were reflected in the documents and statements of the QSF. All were attributable to the strong and consistent organizing and mobilizing efforts of the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* (Burrows 2007).<sup>22</sup>

According to Canet (2007), an important additional and original contribution of the QSF lay in its organizing the program into two dimensions: the first promoting the classic form of dialogue and debate in diverse formats and the second promoting a great array of spaces for cultural and artistic expression (a film festival, displays of visual and performing arts, music, and circus). The opening ceremonies of the QSF, a multidisciplinary spectacular cultural fest, took place in the middle of downtown Montreal in the Parc Émile-Gamelin, which was the site of the Forum's ongoing cultural program and adjacent to UQAM where the workshops took place.

The Écofest collective facilitated a full schedule of activities in Parc Émile-Gamelin dedicated to promoting practices of "alternative everyday,

ecological and sane consumption.” Its program incorporated local artists, multiple artistic activities, and all kind of performances. More than 2,000 people frequented the space daily during the Forum. In collaboration with Moisson Montréal and Poubelle Anonyme, the team of L’Être Terre served 1,500 free meals per day from leftover food. Access to the park’s activities was open to the public and organizers reported that people living in the neighborhood were delighted by the initiative and frequented the space during the days of the Social Forum. It is interesting to note also that those who participated in the cultural events in the park were, on the whole, clearly younger than those who participated in the workshops inside UQAM. According to the survey of attendees by the Secretariat of the QSF (407 respondents), the average age of respondents was 42–43 years (Bilan organisationnel du FSQ 2007: 49), but it is possible that the limited survey sample underestimated the participation of youth. On the last day of the Forum, an Assembly of Social Movements took place, issuing a statement of solidarity produced and signed by a majority of organizations that had been involved in the organizing. The closing event of the Forum was a march of about 1,000 people (Colbert 2007).

## CONCLUSION

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In an interview preceding the QSF, Nancy Burrows, a representative of the Fédération des Femmes du Québec, proposed that the Forum would reflect the state of social movements in Quebec, both their strengths and weaknesses, no more—no less.<sup>23</sup> It would be the fruit of their strong capacity to mobilize, their collective organizing means and resources, and their ability to work effectively in coalition. It would also reflect the particular strength of the women’s movement in Quebec society and in relation to other movements. If we follow Burrows’s understanding of the QSF, the Forum could not but reflect contemporaneous struggles and power relations. If this reading captures certain features of the QSF, it also leaves other elements unexamined.

According to the survey by the Secretariat of the QSF, of the attendees affiliated with organizations, 20 percent came from community organizations and NGOs, 20 percent came from political parties, and more than half came from unions (Bilan organisationnel du FSQ, 2007: 49). Among the attendees who were registered, 40 percent reported were unaffiliated (PV, General Assembly, October 20, 2007;<sup>24</sup> Bilan organisationnel du FSQ, 2007: 49). What does this signify about the character of engaged

civil society in Quebec? What does it say about the place of the labor movement? What does it say about the Social Forum as a particular political form and culture of politics? And furthermore, what do the persistent conflicting views of the Social Forum, manifested throughout the organizing process, the event, and the roundtable signify?

In our view, the Social Forum is a new political praxis and form. Although somewhat variable across place and scale, its technology of open space is now widely understood and appreciated. Both Létourneau and Canet see the Social Forum above all as a space for free association, not as an actor that issues declarations or embarks on campaigns. However, after that basic recognition, they diverge significantly. Canet, Alter-UQAM, and the youth associated with the Campement see the Forum as a space of experimentation, to generate alternative ways of life in daily practice, in which all people, regardless of affiliation or lack thereof, have a right and responsibility to participate.<sup>25</sup> In organizing the Forum, they ensured the prominence of cultural and artistic expression and space for enacting everyday practices of alternative ways of life, such as providing free meals from leftover food throughout the days of the Forum. For them, the Forum is valuable in and of itself for what it promotes and allows, and for what it may generate.

For Létourneau, the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, and other established, institutionalized centers of the movement like the Fédération des Femmes du Québec and progressive NGOs like Alternatives, the Forum is seen as a potential site for the convergence of struggles. For them, the Forum is a means to an end, and their commitment to it is accordingly more instrumental and conjunctural. For the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, the Fédération des Femmes du Québec, and the large NGOs, the value of the QSF will be born out (or not) in future collective mobilizations that were enabled through the event. Hence, they were somewhat disappointed that the Social Movements Assembly did not produce a stronger call for common action (*Appel solidaire des mouvements sociaux*, 2007; see the political assessment of the QSF, General Assembly, November 17, 2007).

For the autonomist youth, the organizing process and the event should represent a seamless whole. Both should be prefigurative of the alternative world that is in the process of being constructed. Hence, the nature of the organizing process itself is a key arena of contestation. For the large organizations, the process is merely a means to an end. What is important is that it be efficient and efficacious in producing the event. They also seek it to be accountable to those organizations that are financing it and

who are the legitimate representatives of the will of progressive civil society in Quebec by virtue of their mass membership, internal structures of democratic decision making, and election of leaders. For the young people, their sense of accountability is different. They went to Porto Alegre and were transformed by the Youth Camp. They felt an acute responsibility to bring it home to Quebec, to root alterglobalization in quotidian practices, if only for a few days a year (Pelletier 2005).<sup>26</sup>

Santos (2002) refers to these tensions as the different temporalities of struggle that coexist in the Social Forum: one driven by a sense of immediate urgency and the exigencies of struggle whose terms are already set; the other by the vision of different possible futures, beyond the terms of the present, which can be and are being constructed in the free spaces of the present, the blueprint for which does not exist. Underpinning these different political ethos are quite different sensibilities about democracy. On the one hand, for the young autonomists, is the ethical responsibility of each person to engage in the construction of alternative futures and the rights conferred through participation; on the other hand, for the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux and the Fédération des Femmes du Québec, is the power and legitimacy conferred by mass organization, the necessity and desirability of formal, designated, and accountable leaders, and their (putative) capacity to represent and mobilize a constituency beyond themselves. The Social Forum has allowed these differences to become politicized without automatically becoming polarized. Santos attributes to the Social Forum this capacity of creating a space and a culture of politics that allows for “depolarized pluralities” (2006: 166 ff.). We think this helps account for the differences between 2001 and 2007 in Quebec, between the polarization of the anti-FTAA demonstrations and the creative tension, both conflictual and collaborative, of the QSF process.

The dynamics of the second QSF, which took place October 8-12, 2009 in Montreal, seem to bear out this observation about the *productive* character of the encounter in the Social Forum among depolarized pluralities. Although ostensibly very similar in terms of organizing process and format, the organizing dynamics of the second QSF were remarkably free of the tensions that had marked the organizing of the first one, to the detriment of the Forum.

The carriers of the autonomist politics and culture of the Youth Camp, who contested the vision of the first QSF had, by 2009, virtually disappeared from the scene. Although they continued to engage in other activist spaces, including regional Social Forums, they had largely

withdrawn from the QSF process. The absence of their active critique and ongoing experimentation with alternative modes and cultures of politics in both the organizing and enactment of the event undeniably impoverished the second QSF. Without the engagement at the heart of the process of organizers with an alternative sensibility, the major social actors and community organizations enjoyed a relative hegemony over the culture of politics that produced the second QSF. It allowed those actors to be protagonists over the Forum without having their entrenched ways of doing politics in the alterglobalization milieu unsettled in the course of day-to-day negotiations with the autonomist currents over the making of the Forum. Although the second Forum was also the site of creative actions, diverse citizen initiatives, and the participation of young people, its political culture was not subject to the same level or kind of politicized contestation that we saw in the organizing of the first Forum.

The QSF surely was and remains a reflection of the social forces of the place, their capacities and limitations in any given moment, as Burrows (2007) suggests.<sup>27</sup> However, we have argued that the cleavages apparent in the QSF are more than simply conjunctural. They signal a period of change as new political forces and modes of expression (autonomist youth currents) emerged and challenged the civil society forces that had been hegemonic in Quebec for decades. This change concerns not only Quebec society, but more generally Northern democratic countries as seen in the major antiglobalization demonstrations of the late 1990s. The Social Forum phenomenon itself testifies and is a response to this change.

## NOTES

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1. The term *alterglobalization* highlights the search for an alternative form of globalization and is preferred in some quarters to *antiglobalization* as a way of describing the movement of movements against neoliberalism.

2. Raphaël Canet. 2007. "Permanent of the General Secretary, QSF," Interview, Montreal, June 2007.

3. Jacques Létourneau. 2005. "In Charge of the International Relations." Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux, Montreal, Interview, December 2005.

4. For a discussion of methods and sources, see Dufour and Conway (2010: 31–32).

5. See Dufour 2006 and Conway 2003 for somewhat diverging readings of the cleavages.

6. The Table of Convergence refers to the coordinating body of the coalition of groups who organized the protest activities.



7. We are marking “violence” to indicate its complex and contested meaning. For some in the context of the 2001 demonstrations, violence was implied in any form of defiance of police, resisting arrest, or property destruction. For others, notably those advocating diversity of tactics, it was more narrowly understood to mean harm to persons. See Conway (2003) for more extended discussion.

8. Talking about a “generational divide” does not mean that all young activists shared the same point of view but rather that among the activists who share a different conception, most of them are young.

9. Beaudet, Pierre (Director of Alternatives in 2005). Interview, Montreal, December 2005.

10. The earliest Social Forum initiative in Quebec was the Forum Social Régional de Québec/Chaudière Appalaches in September 2002, which produced a permanent network. By 2007, however, this network was very small and was only weakly present in the regionally based mobilizing toward the QSF (Canet 2007b).

11. Eugénie Pelletier. 2005. Interview, London, Ontario, June 26, 2005.

12. Campement Québécois de la Jeunesse 2004. “Campement Québécois de la Jeunesse.” From a computer disc, internal to and belonging to organizers of the Campement Québécois de la Jeunesse, titled: “Mouvance FSM: Campement Québécois de la Jeunesse 13 au 23 août 2004.”

13. Campement Jeunesses du Québec. 2003. “Qu’est-ce que le Campement?” Retrieved May 2006 (<http://www.campementjeunesses.org/?q=node/view/31>).

14. Martin Rodrigue and Valérie Eme (founders of the Quebec Youth camp and members of the General Secretary of the QSF in 2006), Interview, Montreal, June 2007; Raphaël Canet, “Permanent of the General Secretary, QSF,” Interview, Montreal, June 2007; Louis Roy (Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux representative to the QSF), Interview, Montreal, June 2007.

15. Ibid.

16. FTQ. Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec. 2005. Interview with the person in charge of international relations, Montreal, December 2005.

17. Assemblée de foundation. 2006. Transcription of audio recording. Available upon request.

18. Ibid.

19. Denise Gagnon (Director of International Solidarity, FTQ), meeting, Montreal, October 2007.

20. General Assemblies of the QSF. Transcription of audio recording. Available on request.

21. Ibid.

22. Nancy Burrows (Fédération des Femmes du Québec representative, Interview, Montreal, August 17, 2007.

23. Ibid.

24. See note 20 above.

25. Raphaël Canet. 2007. “Permanent of the General Secretary, QSF,” Interview, Montreal, June 2007.

26. See note 11 above.

27. See note 22 above.



## CHAPTER 15

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### IN THE BELLY OF EMPIRE: THE U.S. SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS

*Jeffrey S. Juris and Jackie Smith with  
the USSF Research Collective*

In 2007, an estimated 15,000 people came together in Atlanta for the first United States Social Forum (USSF). The meeting was arguably one of the largest and most diverse political gatherings in U.S. history, as a significant majority of participants were people of color, low income, Indigenous, disabled, and/or gender nonconforming. More importantly, it was part of a much larger, truly global World Social Forum (WSF) movement that since 2001 has mobilized hundreds of thousands of people from over 130 countries. This report draws from our collaborative ethnographic research at the U.S. Social Forum to describe and analyze

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Members of the 2007 Social Forum Research Collective include: Christopher Chase-Dunn, Gary Coyne, John Filson, James French, Christopher Hausmann, Jeffrey Juris, Matheu Kaneshiro, Marina Karides, Ashley Koda, Daisy Lomeli, Peter Luu, Katie Miller, Bridgette Portman, Ellen Reese, Preeta Saxena, Jackie Smith, Peter (Jay) Smith, Elizabeth Smythe, Sarah Van Mill, Ana Velitchkova, and Jason Wellman. We are grateful for the financial support of the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts, the Center for the Study of Social Movements and Social Change, and the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Thanks also to Walda Katz-Fishman, Alex Khasnabish, Eileen Otis, Ruth Reitan, Sidney Tarrow, and the Notre Dame Studies in Politics and Movements seminar for input on earlier drafts.

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the USSF as a national instance of the WSF process.<sup>1</sup> The political and economic dominance of the United States, as well as its belligerence and intransigence in global affairs, makes counterhegemonic mobilization here particularly important for efforts to improve social and ecological conditions around the world. It is also more difficult. Thus, to the WSF slogan, “Another World is Possible,” U.S. organizers added that “Another U.S. is necessary.”<sup>2</sup>

We approach this work not only as scholars, but also as activists and citizens. Our interest in the WSF grows in part from our sympathies with its goals of enhancing global social and economic justice and democracy. We do not simply celebrate the Forum, or affirm what we see as the critical accomplishments and potential of the WSF process. Our main concern here is to examine how place matters. How does the World Social Forum manifest itself in a social and political space that many activists consider the “the belly of the (global capitalist) beast”? And what does this mean for the larger global struggle?

The location of Social Forums impacts their form and content. The USSF reflected distinctive positions regarding the core tensions and debates of the WSF process with respect to other national, regional, and global Forums (cf. Smith, Karides, et al. 2007). The differences in how U.S. activists responded to questions about whether the Forum should remain an open space or develop a more formal political platform, who can participate, what sorts of changes are sought, and whether action should focus on local, national, or global levels reflected the specific political cultures and institutional contexts of the United States.

As an iteration of the WSF, the USSF should be seen as one attempt to respond to earlier movement experiences and to move the process closer to an ideal of inclusive, participatory democracy that effectively challenges global militarism, social exclusion, and neoliberalism. The USSF organizers adapted the Forum to their national context as they interacted with global-level Forum organizing. The World Social Forum organizers were paying close attention to the USSF, and many noted its importance for both strengthening U.S. citizens’ participation in and contributing to the momentum of the WSF process. Prior to the USSF, organizers put forward 2010 as the date of the second Forum, providing a focal point for long-term national strategizing and planning at the Forum. Many participants have used local Forums to expand on the work they began at the USSF. The USSF thus interfaces with the wider WSF, integrating local, national, and regional experiences into

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a transnational process of experimentation with ideas, strategies, and methods for practicing global democracy.

## OVERVIEW

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Participants at the USSF came to Atlanta from all 50 states and Puerto Rico, and delegates from 68 countries participated as panel speakers and observers (see [www.ussf2007.org](http://www.ussf2007.org)). During the 5-day meeting held June 26–July 1, 2007, there were over 950 self-organized workshops and 6 plenary sessions addressing each of the Forum’s themes: (1) war, militarism, and the prison industrial complex; (2) immigrant rights; (3) workers in a globalized economy; (4) women and queer liberation; (5) Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice; and (6) the rights of survivors of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The USSF raised the bar for other Forums with respect to its diversity in terms of participation by marginalized groups—racial and sexual minorities, Indigenous peoples, and the physically challenged (Ponniiah 2008a).

As an open space designed to foster democratic, grassroots participation, the USSF built upon organizing models used in other Forums to encourage organizations to submit proposals for workshops and panels. Self-organized activities composed the core of the Forum’s activities, and participants were asked to organize their sessions according to daily themes of consciousness raising, visions of social change, and strategy. The final day consisted of a People’s Movement Assembly, where workshop leaders were invited to report to the larger assembly the analyses and action plans developed. When participants were not attending workshop or plenary sessions, they could peruse literature, view films, purchase fair trade goods and handicrafts, and meet with organizers in tents dedicated to themes such as solidarity economies, water, immigrant rights, Indigenous peoples, women, and peace and justice. There were also designated “open spaces” where groups could meet to continue conversations begun in workshops or otherwise network and relate Forum activities to their ongoing work. A wide array of cultural events, receptions, and parties provided countless opportunities for activists to interact and develop new friendships while they recharged their batteries and exposed themselves to new perspectives and ideas.

Social Forums are situated in and reflect particular geographies of space and time. In this sense, the USSF was shaped by the particular histories and political cultures of the United States, as well as by the

more local context and activist history of the U.S. South and the city of Atlanta. Although U.S. citizens are increasingly aware of how they are affected by global capitalism, dominant media and popular discourses downplay global interdependencies and perpetuate widespread ignorance of the global effects of U.S. policies. Many, but not all, participants at the Forum understood the implication of the political-economic nexus of the United States to the rest of the world, and indeed the WSF process itself aims to help activists better understand these connections.

Particularly salient in the United States is the absence of the strong socialist and communist parties and unions found elsewhere. This is a result of direct repression of radicals and communists during the Cold War and national legislation that institutionalized a business-friendly model of union organizing (Clawson 2003; Fletcher and Gapsin 2008). Coupled with this is the fact that, as the world's sole superpower and a driving force behind neoliberal globalization, the United States exhibits a more extreme version of the depoliticization that has characterized the spread of neoliberal ideology (Brunelle 2007; Teivainen 2007). In addition, the narrowness of the U.S. two-party system, together with greater openness in terms of institutional access, has served to submerge ideological debates while encouraging a more pragmatic, depoliticized approach to political activism than is typical in countries with more competitive multiparty parliamentary systems.

In the 1990s, class-based politics in the United States remained underdeveloped as neoliberal policies put labor organizers on the defensive and as many movement groups addressed discrimination and social exclusion largely in terms of culture and identity. Neoliberal policies such as deregulation and financial liberalization caused major declines in the labor movement in the United States and worldwide. As its traditional base declined, identity-based movements helped strengthen the U.S. Left by expanding participation from groups such as women of color, Chicano/as, African Americans, Asian Americans, and queer activists. These groups fostered a greater awareness within the U.S. Left of the diversity of experiences within U.S. society and economy, including economic globalization's differential impacts within the U.S. population (e.g., Tait 2005). While this has laid a foundation for dialogue that can enhance collaborative politics and coalition building, it also presents significant organizing challenges.

Negotiating the tricky shoals of identity politics was a key factor in the USSF. In the past, differences have proven an obstacle to hosting a

Social Forum in the United States, as the collapse of the Northwest Social Forum attests (Center for Communication and Civic Engagement 2007; cf. Hadden and Tarrow 2007b). The USSF organizers also confronted regional identities and inequalities by deciding to hold the Forum in the U.S. South. Finally, the USSF occurred just as a thaw was underway in the chilly climate facing U.S. activists after 9/11. The events of 9/11 and its aftermath clearly dampened public dissent, even as global justice protests continued to flourish elsewhere (Podobnik 2005; Hadden and Tarrow 2007b). The Forum also occurred in the midst of a war, a heated congressional battle over immigrant rights, state-level battles over same-sex marriage, a historic split in the U.S. labor movement, and in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, as the USSF host city, Atlanta's rich history of civil rights activism, as well as its status as the headquarters of major global corporations such as the Coca-Cola Company and CNN, helped shape the perspectives and discourses of USSF participants.

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#### WHAT IS THE U.S. SOCIAL FORUM? OPEN SPACE OR ACTOR

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A core tension within the WSF process—perhaps the main tension—is the question of what the Forum is or should be. Some take the position that it has served its role well as a space for convening diverse movements and organizations from around the world to develop shared analyses and action plans, but that it is time for participants in the “movement of movements” to become more unified (Bello 2007). They argue that the WSF process should work to consolidate the power of its diverse constituencies and mobilize them around a shared political platform. In other words, they want the WSF to become a global political actor, uniting its diverse forces to leverage its power against a formidable adversary. Others, including WSF co-founder Chico Whitaker (2005), believe that “the Social Forums are not this power but only spaces—open spaces—that facilitate the building of this power.”

The USSF process deliberately sought to incorporate the notion of open space, and the self-organization of workshops as well as the provision of meeting spaces for more spontaneous encounters reflected this ideal. Even as it was committed to creating open space, however, the USSF planning committee explicitly urged attention to strategy and action by defining thematic emphases for each day of workshops. The first two days of the USSF helped set the stage for the third, which focused on the articulation of strategies for achieving collective goals. The conceptual

schema behind this framework emerged in part from Project South, a leading member of Grassroots Global Justice, a coalition of community-based social justice groups in the United States that serves as a liaison between U.S. movements and the WSF.

Within other regional and global Social Forums, those seeking to use the WSF to build a unified movement have organized Social Movements Assemblies where participants can issue global calls to action (Reitan 2007). These have generated “final documents” and programmatic statements variously seen as either closing or opening space within the Forums. Following this model, the People’s Movement Assembly (PMA) was intended by USSF organizers to provide a locus for coordinated political action. The specific name was adopted to enhance the assembly’s resonance within U.S. civil society. Each morning of the USSF, a program was distributed that described and publicized the PMA, which was to convene at the end of the Forum to discuss action plans aimed at sustaining the USSF process. During the PMA delegates from organizations and regional assemblies presented the action proposals they had developed.

Regional and national Forums are not required to abide by a particular organizational structure, but they *are* guided by the precedents of previous Forums and the WSF Charter of Principles (see <http://www.Forumsocialmundial.org.br>). Within this framework, USSF organizers aimed to move the U.S. Forum process toward more concrete steps for political action. The USSF thus reflected organizers’ desire to foster sustained and united action through the Forum process, and was consistent with recent efforts to move the WSF beyond an “open space.” For instance, at the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, Kenya, a fourth day was added to consolidate platforms for action around the themes of the event. Overall, we saw a pragmatic use of the open spaces created by the USSF to coordinate, disseminate, and build solidarity around shared actions or campaigns. Most importantly, activists and groups that work explicitly on a single issue were unavoidably exposed to other analyses and methods of struggle.

The United States Social Forum organizers tended to focus on the task of movement building as a response to the open space versus political actor question. In a sense, the USSF straddles both tendencies, as it recognizes the need to cultivate collective identities, analyses, and networks while maintaining a focus on movement and action.<sup>3</sup> The National Planning Committee (NPC) maintained, and the fact sheet handed out before the PMA clearly stated, that the Forum is an open space and that the PMA is a separate, yet related process. Even so, the voices calling for

the USSF to take collective action, to be more than an open space, and to build a united movement, were particularly strong, as has been the case during social movement assemblies at other Forums. The USSF fused the culture of the WSF process with movement dynamics in the United States, particularly those of the grassroots, base-building organizations that led the organizing process.

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### WHO PARTICIPATES? IDENTITY AND ISSUES AT THE U.S. SOCIAL FORUM

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A major challenge for proponents of open space is to ensure wide participation from groups typically excluded from institutionalized politics. Open space thus emphasizes inclusion as a core objective. In practice, however, the notion of open space neglects the ways power and privilege amplify certain voices over others, while deep-seated structures of inequality generate unintended exclusions (Teivainen 2007). Both institutionalized and informal rules of presentation and social interaction serve to marginalize less privileged groups. For example, poor people lack the resources required to travel and take part in the Social Forums. As a result, participants at prior WSF meetings in Brazil and other regional Forums have been predominantly white and middle class (Alvarez et al., 2008).

The United States Social Forum organizers were explicit in their aim of reversing past exclusions and integrating some of the most marginalized groups into the organizing process. As a result, a major achievement of the USSF was its high level of diversity among both participants and organizers. This reflects what Juris (2008) calls the “intentionality” of the USSF organizing process, which prioritized leadership by people of color, Indigenous people, poor people, and nongender-conforming activists. This delayed the USSF by several years, while organizers worked to raise awareness of the WSF process and its global analysis at the grassroots level. The Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, founded in 2002 to help connect community-based organizations with the WSF, agreed at the November 2003 meeting of the WSF coordinating body, the International Council (IC), to help promote a U.S. Social Forum. By the first USSF, the NPC involved 35 organizations, the majority of which were grassroots, member-based, people-of-color-led organizations, which reflected a deliberate outreach strategy.

The USSF succeeded more than any other Forum, save possibly the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, in bringing together participants from a wide variety of backgrounds and levels of privilege (Guerrero 2008; Ponniah



2008a). Perhaps because of the great diversity of people attending and the levels of gender, racial, and other forms of exclusion in U.S. politics, identity was a salient theme in the Forum's plenary sessions and workshops. Each plenary session was purposefully organized to include speakers of diverse and less privileged backgrounds, including African Americans; immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) individuals; and Indigenous people. Few whites appeared on plenaries. Participants also exhibited an unusual sensitivity to how their relative privilege affected their views and actions. In addition, many workshops were organized around specific social identities, such as those focusing on issues affecting women, workers, immigrants, LGBT communities, Indigenous peoples, and black and brown communities.

Given the salience of issues of identity, marginalization, and inclusion, our observer team noted considerable self-reflexivity on the part of participants. In plenary sessions, workshops, and informal conversations, participants frequently referred to the diversity of the "we." At the same time, attendees also consistently asked how to involve those who were not able to attend the USSF. At a session entitled the "Peace Caucus," which explored how peace organizers could better integrate social justice issues and diversify their ranks, one speaker urged his colleagues to expand their visions of peace work, get out of their "comfort zones," and move beyond the "freeze-dried hippies" of his generation. In addition, labor activists frequently reflected critically on the history of trade unionism, urging greater attention to workers excluded from the ranks of organized labor, such as international migrants and those in the domestic and service sectors. Also LGBT activists were well represented, bringing to the fore concerns about sexual-identity-based discrimination. Native American activists also succeeded in raising the salience of Indigenous rights concerns in the U.S. Left. Meanwhile, the visible translation of speakers' voices into American sign language helped raise consciousness of the rights of the deaf and other people with physical disabilities.

The goals of building unity while respecting diversity, bridging ideological differences, and cultivating analyses of neoliberalism that helped attendees see connections among issues tended to be advanced by participants with longer histories of movement or Social Forum participation and experience with cross-sector coalitions. Organizers on the NPC demonstrated highly effective leadership qualities when they confronted conflicts that erupted in the course of the Forum. For instance, one of the emcees during the PMA on the final day of the

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USSF offered an emotional apology for having grabbed the microphone from an Indigenous speaker after he and his colleague exceeded their allotted time. The apology came after a group of Native activists took the stage to denounce the silencing of Indigenous voices and enacted a public healing ceremony. What began as a divisive incident became an opportunity for learning and building solidarity. Skills in listening to diverse voices, understanding, and empathy are critical to effective deliberation and democracy (Baiocchi 2003; Polletta 2002). This example thus demonstrates how the Forum contributes to the democratization of politics locally, nationally, and globally.

In sum, the question of “who is at the table” was probably the defining feature of the U.S. Social Forum. The commitment of USSF organizers to reaching out to groups traditionally excluded from both mainstream and movement politics generated a model of organizing—intentionality—that challenges WSF practices while helping to address one of its glaring contradictions. If it is to address the real needs of those most harmed by the effects of global neoliberalism, the WSF must find ways to involve the poor and other marginalized groups. The articulation of diverse identities and issues at the USSF was thus both a step forward for the WSF process and a reflection of the deep class and racial divides in the political culture and context of the United States (Juris 2008).

The USSF’s intentionality challenged existing notions of open space by engaging in deliberate efforts to bring the most marginalized groups to the table, particularly working-class people of color. In an effort to broaden the base of the U.S. Left, the NPC focused most of its energy on mobilizing oppressed groups such as migrants, low-income communities, and queer people within formal organizations dedicated to grassroots base building. While major trade unions were part of the NPC, there was rather little effort to mobilize the rank and file of the labor movement around the USSF. Indeed, the presence of working-class whites was noticeably limited. Larger nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and more informal direct action and anarchist-oriented collectives also had minimal visibility. More generally, perceived middle-class and white activist formations were neither targeted nor highlighted by the NPC, although such groups can be expected to play a larger role in future USSF organizing (Karides 2008). In this sense, the NPC’s intentional strategy was widely perceived as necessary and legitimate for overcoming past structural exclusions, but more formal openness within the organizing process might facilitate greater movement building across sectors (Juris 2008).

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## REVOLUTION, REFORM, OR A NEW POLITICS ALTOGETHER?

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A perennial source of tension in social movements relates to whether social change can happen through reform or whether more radical transformation is required. Divisions between radicals and reformists have caused irreparable rifts within movements, and they have played an important role in the WSF process and the wider global justice movement. Our observer team found that the U.S. context shaped this discussion in key ways. To a large extent, the legacy of the Cold War polemic has limited the appeal of socialism in the United States, producing a qualitatively different slant on debates about the role of the state and the best route to power for marginalized groups (cf. Fletcher and Gapasin 2008; Waterman and Timms 2004).

In resisting hierarchy of all kinds and challenging the depoliticization that is inherent to neoliberal policies, the WSF, and particularly the USSF process, has encouraged organizers to speak less about the radical-reformist divisions and more about how to foster new politics that can avoid the strategic pitfalls of the past. This new politics responds to the exclusion and hierarchy associated with traditional politics. It places emphasis on nontraditional political actors, new political identities, and new political practices that might overcome historic obstacles to social transformation. It aims to move discussion outside of the polarizing radical-reformist discourses towards potentially more unifying and productive efforts at envisioning alternatives.

A key manner in which the tension between radical and reformist politics was articulated at the USSF involved discussions on the “nonprofit industrial complex,” an issue popularized through the circulation of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence’s (2007) book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. This complex, many activists argued, has diverted political work away from popular organizing and toward elite lobbying efforts and other professional political strategies. Professionalized organizations, often lumped under the term NGOs, are seen as mirroring the hierarchies and inequities of the political system that excludes so many disadvantaged groups. They therefore are unlikely to seek fundamental changes in the structures that afford them a relatively privileged role. Directors and staff of NGOs also depend on wealthy donors and private foundations, which can limit their goals, tactics, and activities.

Members of the NPC were highly skeptical of private foundations as a primary source of funding for either the Social Forums or for social

activism more generally, even as they continued to cultivate and rely on such sources for much of the operating budget.<sup>4</sup> This reflects previous critiques of the WSF in both Mumbai and Porto Alegre for relying on international NGOs and corporate funding. Groups like Project South and Grassroots Global Justice encouraged financial self-reliance and more selective reliance on foundation and government funding. This tension was also visible in workshops not specifically addressing this issue. For instance, in a workshop on welfare rights, one of the session leaders discussed the need for grassroots welfare rights organizations to build their own alliances rather than depend on larger nonprofit organizations to do this work. They claimed that such larger organizations, and their funders, were not as committed to the cause over the long haul as those directly affected by welfare rights issues, and they cited a recent move away from these issues by the Community Change Coalition as one example of this shift.

Although the critique of professional and conventional politics was pervasive, it is difficult to characterize the overall tendency of USSF participants with respect to the radical-reformist divide. Many participants in the USSF seemed to adopt a flexible, pragmatic approach to strategy, although a large majority of participants stressed popular education and participatory democracy. While organizers had a highly developed ideological discourse with respect to the intersections of multiple forms of oppression, including those based on race, class, and gender, participants tended to focus on everyday issues or on the specific goals and initiatives of particular campaigns.

Given that the USSF took place as the mainstream media was beginning to focus intensively on the presidential primaries, there was surprisingly little evidence of formal electoral politics at the USSF. One panelist lamented that, "There's not one voice in Congress" willing to help workers against the power of corporations, and a woman at a workshop exclaimed, "In no way will I lift a finger to help the Democratic Party." This contrasts with experiences in other parts of the world, such as Europe and South America, where political parties have actively engaged with and responded to the Forum process (Baiocchi 2004; cf. della Porta et al. 2006).

Although electoral politics were largely absent from the USSF's agenda, activists engaged in considerable discussion about the role of conventional political strategies, such as electoral campaigning, collecting petitions, working with all levels of government (but mostly the local),

and using the court system. This seemed particularly true for sessions on international trade and environmental justice, where labor organizers in particular came under fire for emphasizing lobbying over grassroots education and mobilization. Participants also discussed the need for greater and more principled unity between labor and immigrant rights movements around immigration policies, criticizing the compromises the AFL-CIO and other groups made to pass the recently defeated immigration reform bill.

Workshops focusing on labor issues also provided evidence that a new kind of politics, often called social movement unionism, was underway within the U.S. labor movement (Taylor and Mathers 2002; Waterman 2005; Turner et al. 2001). Many of these workshops featured community-based organizations alongside representatives of national unions. They emphasized the importance of grassroots participation by workers, labor-community alliances, and the use of nontraditional tactics and alternative media. They also called for the expansion of innovative labor organizations such as worker centers and labor solidarity networks with students and faith-based groups. Closer ties between immigrant worker centers and traditional unions were being forged through the AFL-CIO's National Day Labor Organizing Network.

The political culture of the United States makes it difficult to organize in explicit opposition to capitalism. Although many U.S. citizens would find no objection to the WSF goals of advancing human rights, environmental sustainability, and economic justice, and most would also agree that consumerism is a destructive force today, few would readily join a campaign explicitly rejecting globalized capitalism. Recognizing this reluctance, one participant at a socialist workshop warned against using the term "socialism" when talking to U.S. workers about their rights. Even so, socialists were highly visible within many workshops and at literature tables. In addition, other anticapitalist workshops emphasized nonstate-centered, bottom-up efforts, including anarchism, autonomy, and direct action, although such panels were fewer in number than might be expected given the influence of these perspectives, particularly among younger, U.S.-based, global justice activists. Indeed, autonomous spaces and other radical, self-managed projects were less visible at the USSF than at other regional Forums and the WSF where they have had a particularly strong presence at the youth camps (Juris 2005). This is partly due to the fact that such informal modes of activism are often associated with white and middle-class activists (cf. Polletta 2005).

The notion that the WSF process cultivates new forms of politics is an attempt to move beyond traditional reformist-radical cleavages. Since ideological polarization in the United States is much less pronounced, we saw less emphasis on the notion of a new politics at the USSF than at other Forums. Yet, for the United States, a national meeting of movements and organizations not initiated and organized by funders, a political party, or a major union is undoubtedly a novelty. In subsequent events, such as the Left Forum, it was acknowledged by several grassroots organizers—some of whom did not attend the USSF—that the way their organizations practice politics has changed as a result of the USSF. The political culture of the United States may constrain the speed at which ideas spread, but not their ability to flow across borders.

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### WHERE IS THE ACTION? LOCAL, NATIONAL, OR GLOBAL?

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One of the most significant aspects of the Social Forums is their ability to help connect local social and political processes with global ones. Indeed, the Forum's continuity across time and space helps distinguish it from other social movement campaigns and makes it a key element of contemporary efforts to counter global capital. As a *process*, it develops the connective tissues that link local and global action over time. As a *space* that brings together diverse groups to exchange ideas and insights, it encourages the articulation and dissemination of new tactics and strategies for confronting global adversaries. But the development of new repertoires of action is not something that happens easily, and Forum organizers frequently complain about the tensions between organizing globally and locally.

The first national Social Forum in the United States confronted particular challenges in this regard. The U.S. global superpower role contributes to a particularly unilateralist, jingoistic, and racist public discourse that mirrors those of earlier empires. The absence of political leadership in the U.S. Congress to constructively address problems arising from global interdependence means that movements promoting multilateral policies face an uphill struggle. At the very least, such movements must do a significant amount of educational work, and may even be criticized as unpatriotic (Maney et al. 2005). These factors, along with the comparatively weak position of the U.S. global justice movement in the post-9/11 period (cf. Hadden and Tarrow 2007b), help account for the late entry of the United States into the WSF process.

Our observer team reported that a majority of workshops focused on local-level actions. This is due in part to the grassroots constituencies mobilized at the USSF, but it also reflects the domestic orientation of many U.S. movements (Hadden and Tarrow 2007b). Many local issues from cities and regions around the United States, such as post-Katrina relief, housing crises, deportations, and other attacks on immigrants, seemed as relevant at the USSF as Atlanta-based issues or national concerns. But in the context of the USSF, local organizers were challenged to expand their political visions. By comparing notes, local groups learned about how national and global forces create similar problems in different local communities. They also saw how variations in local contexts shape the effectiveness of different tactics. A particularly powerful example of this was a workshop on immigration where more than 50 people from around the United States gave testimonials about what was being done in their communities, and urged others to take their ideas back home. On the bus home from Atlanta, a group of Latino/a activists from Chicago talked excitedly about encountering Brooklyn youths who had found a unique way of combating police harassment.

At a workshop called “Another Politics Is Possible,” local grassroots collectives from cities such as New York and Los Angeles shared their experiences, successes, and obstacles in trying to build and implement organizational models and practices based on horizontality and direct democracy. Another session on anarchism provided a similar Forum for sharing and exchange among local anarchist collectives around the country. In addition, a workshop about the rights of domestic workers included representatives from various grassroots groups across the country, each aiming to provide support and encouragement to its counterparts. By thinking of their actions not as isolated efforts, but as part of a larger set of local confrontations against a similar adversary, participants could expand their political imaginations beyond their local contexts to identify the root causes and possible solutions to local problems. At a follow-up meeting, a young person from Chicago who was working on youth employment opportunities explained, “It was like meeting a mirror image of myself. People doing the same work as me . . . and without going to Atlanta, I never would’ve known.”

At the national level, numerous workshops built on the insights of organizers and activists with a larger-scale vision. They were used to launch new national coalitions on major economic grievances. The Alliance of Domestic Workers, the Right to the City Alliance, the Solidar-

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ity Economy Network, and the Hip-Hop Caucus are examples of such efforts. Networks also emerged to expand existing campaigns working for immigrant rights, victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and health care. A panel on trade and migration organized by the National Network on Immigrant Rights explored the relationship between NAFTA and immigration, and then provided a space for networking and alliance building around these issues. A workshop aimed at furthering “blue-green” alliances (cooperation between the labor and environmental movements) generated suggestions for better national-level coordination between the AFL-CIO and environmental groups. The USSF meeting also provided a rare opportunity for members of organizations affiliated with the Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign—an initiative that frames the problem of poverty in terms of international human rights—to meet each other, exchange ideas and experiences, and coordinate future actions.

The international dimension of organizing was also critical to the discussions in Atlanta. Yet, we found that international perspectives were largely confined to sessions dealing with labor, women, international migration, trade, and the WSF process itself. This does not mean that the global or international context was irrelevant to sessions on other topics, but that it did not occupy a significant amount of most participants’ attention. However, some workshop organizers did link local issues to larger global forces. For example, in a workshop organized by the Right to the City Alliance, urban gentrification was linked to global economic restructuring and the international spread of neoliberalism. A number of sessions about food sovereignty were also explicit in connecting global policy processes to their analyses of local experiences. Plenary sessions were particularly useful in explaining how the global economy affected the core issues on the USSF agenda. For instance, speakers emphasized how corporate power and influence in politics, international trade agreements, and an aggressive U.S. foreign policy affect local communities in the United States and around the world.

In sum, we found that although most of the energy at the USSF focused on local-level actions, by engaging the USSF organizers were expanding their political horizons and developing deeper analyses of the causes and solutions to local problems. National-level action in formal institutional settings was somewhat constrained by the political culture of the United States, especially its two-party system that limits the movement’s access to influential allies. There were also a good number



of sessions that enabled exchanges fostering transnational campaigns. The number of such sessions should be expected to increase as U.S. citizens gain experience in the Forum process, expand their ties with activists from other countries, and come to identify with the Forum's global imagined community.

## CONCLUSION

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We have drawn on our collective observations, perspectives, and insights to describe what we felt were some of the critical themes and dynamics at the U.S. Social Forum, and how these related to both the broader global Forum process, and the national and historical context in the United States. In this sense, we have attempted to ground a global process of movement building and convergence within the contours of a specific place and time.

The USSF can only be understood in light of several unique historical, structural, and institutional factors that shape the terrain and horizon for oppositional politics in the United States. These include: the lack of strong working-class parties and labor unions that are found in other parts of the world; the historical effects of racism and anticommunism; the role of the United States as the world's sole remaining superpower and major purveyor of neoliberal ideology and practices; the narrow and rigid two-party political system combined with relatively open channels for institutional access; the lack of a substantial critique of global corporate-led capitalism among U.S. political elites; a corporate-dominated mainstream media and culture; the relative isolation of U.S. civil society from others around the globe; the relative weakness of the U.S. global justice movement compared to other regions of the world; and the strength of identity-based movements and politics in the United States.

These factors provide significant challenges and important opportunities for grassroots social movements. For example, while it is much more difficult to mobilize in the United States around a broader class-based politics and anticapitalist critique, movements are generally freer from party influence and have more space to develop innovative discourses and practices. Indeed, the weakness of the institutional Left in the United States has allowed grassroots community-based organizations to fill the void and begin forming broader national movements for radical social change. The U.S. movement context is, however, frequently parochial

in its outlook and tends to be organized around particular identities and localities. Strategically it tends to emphasize single-issue organizing and to focus on concrete actions and campaigns rather than long-term, cross-sectoral movement building. This presents significant challenges for a WSF process that aims to build links across racial, class, and ethnic differences; develop connections between local, national, and global scales; and build strong ideologies and identities that can sustain movements over time. The USSF attempted to address these weaknesses, but ultimately reflected them as well.

### *POSTSCRIPT: USSF 2010*

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As we go to press, the second U.S. Social Forum is fresh in our memories. The Social Forum *process* has lived up to its name, and we observed shifts with respect to many of the core tensions we identified in the first USSF. While the USSF has not settled the tension between open space and action, it has upped the ante by expanding the People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs) substantially and by bringing them more directly into the main spaces of the Forum (see Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18). Organizers invited groups to hold PMAs prior to, during, and after the USSF, in addition to the national PMA held on the last day of the Forum. Facilitator trainings were held daily during the Forum, and participants could view resolutions and ideas emerging from assemblies held throughout the week. While there were glitches and confusion, when skilled organizers led the PMAs, effective deliberation and decision making resulted. This may be one of the most important outcomes of the second USSF.

The USSF continues to be unique among global Social Forums and within the U.S. political landscape for its diversity and its inclusion of so many politically marginalized groups. Poor people, people of color, LGBT activists, and Indigenous peoples made up the core of the National Planning Committee leadership again. Although there was some reflection about whether and how to expand organizing efforts beyond these marginalized communities in order to expand dialogue and solidarity across levels of privilege, the intentional organizing strategy remained intact, including a strong commitment to ensuring that the poor and marginalized lead the USSF process. In practice this meant that although diverse movement sectors participated in the Forum, organizers from oppressed groups and grassroots base-building organizations in particular

continued to assume the most visible roles at the Forum and within the USSF organizing process.

Given the serious social, economic, and environmental crises facing the country, and the widely perceived inadequate response on the part of elected officials, including the Obama administration, a large number of workshops and plenaries emphasized grassroots strategies beyond the institutional political sphere. This focus on the need for a new politics, which was present in Atlanta, was perhaps even more urgent in Detroit. Our observers also noted that more workshops reflected greater levels of skill and experience in coalition work, and our general impressions are that many facilitators had greater familiarity with the U.S. and World Social Forums than was apparent in 2007. More of the workshops made better use of the space for networking and strategizing as opposed to offering one-way information sharing. At a time and in a place (Detroit) when the limitations and outright failures of existing political institutions are striking, activists seemed more prepared to think in new ways.

Finally, the global context of the above-mentioned crises made it easier for activists at the 2010 USSF to see the connections between global forces and local contexts. Also, expanding global activist networks and the interest the first USSF had triggered in other regions brought greater numbers of international activists to Detroit. Thus, the 2010 USSF revealed a more global consciousness and flavor than its predecessor had. This, together with the emphasis on moving from “Detroit to Dakar” for the next World Social Forum, will certainly contribute to the process of expanding U.S. activists’ global imaginations and networks.

At the same time, the Detroit USSF should be remembered for its contribution to efforts to engage local initiatives, organizations, and political struggles in Social Forum host cities. While other Social Forums had attempted to do this, the Detroit USSF prioritized the goal of contributing to the host city and shining a light on its stories and struggles. “Detroit Highlighted” workshops were held on the first and last days of the Forum to profile local groups and leaders. Work camps and solidarity actions supported practical efforts to expand housing, food, education, and environmental justice, and to support organizing work in Detroit. Also, an entire plenary session was devoted to the host city. The World Social Forum process affects the places where it sets foot, and U.S. organizers wanted to remind their colleagues that local efforts and support for locally based organizations are essential to overall struggles to make another world possible.

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APPENDIX: U.S. SOCIAL FORUM: WHAT WE BELIEVE

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We, the organizers of the first United States Social Forum:

- Believe that there is a strategic need to unite the struggles of oppressed communities and peoples within the United States (particularly Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific-Islander, and Indigenous communities) to the struggles of oppressed nations in the Third World.
- Believe the USSF should place the highest priority on groups that are actually doing grassroots organizing with working-class people of color, who are training organizers, building long-term structures of resistance, and who can work well with other groups, seeing their participation in USSF as building the whole, not just their part of it.
- Believe the USSF must be a place where the voices of those who are most marginalized and oppressed from Indigenous communities can be heard—a place that will recognize Indigenous peoples, their issues and struggles.
- Believe the USSF must create space for the full and equal participation of undocumented migrants and their communities.
- Believe the USSF should link U.S.-based youth organizers, activists, and cultural workers to the struggles of their brothers and sisters abroad, drawing common connections and exploring the deeper meanings of solidarity.
- Believe the USSF is important because we must have a clear and unified approach at dealing with social justice issues, and meaningful positions on global issues.
- Believe that a USSF sends a message to other people's movements around the world that there is an active movement in the United States opposing U.S. policies at home and abroad.
- Believe that the USSF will help build national networks that will be better able to collaborate with international networks and movements.
- Believe the USSF is more than an event. It is an ongoing process to contribute to strengthening the entire movement, bringing together the various sectors and issues that work for global justice.

(Source: [www.ussf2007.org/en/we\\_believe](http://www.ussf2007.org/en/we_believe))

*RELATED LINKS*

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United States Social Forum 2007: <http://www.ussf2007.org/>

United States Social Forum 2010: <http://www.ussf2010.org/>

Grassroots Global Justice: <http://www.ggjalliance.org/>

People's Movement Assemblies: [www.pma2010.org](http://www.pma2010.org)

World Social Forum: <http://www.Forumsocialmundial.org.br/>

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NOTES

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1. For details on this methodology, see the longer version of this report, published in *Mobilization* 13 (2008): 373–384.

2. For a statement of the U.S. Social Forum's core beliefs, see Appendix.

3. This likely reflects the relative absence of developed political ideologies in the U.S., which results from electoral rules that limit competition to two major parties.

4. USSF organizers are engaged in a process of dialogue with foundations aligned with the Funders Network on Trade and Globalization to explore these tensions and to educate funders about the WSF process.



## **PART IV**

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# DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS





## CHAPTER 16

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# YOUTH CAMPS AND THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION: A STORY OF HORIZONTALISM AND BLOCKED DIFFUSION

*Lesley J. Wood*

From their inception at the first World Social Forum (WSF), the Intercontinental Youth Camps (IYC) were sites of organizational experimentation. In particular, the camps in Porto Alegre, Brazil, were associated with “horizontalism.” Horizontalism became both an identity and a way of organizing and making decisions, and was associated with emerging anticapitalist social movements in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Although widely celebrated as an innovation by observers of the World Social Forum process and some participants in the camps in Porto Alegre, this horizontalist identity was not intrinsic to the Intercontinental Youth Camp as an institution.

When the WSF and the IYC left Brazil for India in 2004 and for the polycentric sites of Bamako (Mali), Karachi (Pakistan), and Caracas (Venezuela) in 2006, the horizontalist identity did not diffuse to the new locales. This chapter looks at the diffusion of the horizontalist identity from the Intercontinental Youth Camp at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2005 to the IYC in Caracas the following year. I do this from a distance, as I was neither in Porto Alegre nor in Caracas. I became interested in the question of how the Venezuelan context influenced the World Social Forum after having informal discussions with activists who had recently returned home from the 2005 World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS).



One Toronto activist told me that she had been told by a member of the organizing committee in Caracas that the World Festival was seen as a “test run” for the upcoming World Social Forum. This compelled me to look more closely at how available models for organizing and local contexts influence the evolution of global justice movement convergences such as the WSF. Contexts become important through the ways that they affect internal debates among activists. The relational context of Caracas, Venezuela, and recent events in that city limited the interest and willingness of local activists to discuss and implement horizontalism.

### DIFFUSION OF HORIZONTALISM

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While the classic work by Everett Rogers (2003) on diffusion describes the process as one whereby a bounded innovation is transmitted, received, and adopted in a linear process, I follow Sean Chabot (2000) and others in arguing that the diffusion of political practices is an ongoing, social process. In my observations on the spread of the horizontalist youth camp identity I use Katz’s definition of diffusion because it emphasizes this process in a way that shows its complexity: “Diffusion . . . [is] defined as the (1) acceptance of some specific item, (2) over time, (3) of some specific item—an idea or practice, (4) by individuals, groups, or other accepting units, linked to (5) specific channels of communication, (6) to a social structure, and (7) to a given system of values or culture” (1968: 272).

Indeed, I believe that for the incorporation of a new political idea, potential adopters must have an opportunity to engage in deliberation. Deliberative discussions involve conversations among relative equals, who offer a diversity of viewpoints, share claims that are backed up by reasoned arguments, and, for some theorists, have some reflexivity about the agenda and the procedures for discussion (Cohen 1989; Dryzek 1990; Fishkin 1991). Such conversations are crucial for allowing potential receivers to be reflexive, strategic, and sustainable about their tactical decision making (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002: 727; Opp and Roehl 1990: 526; Rogers 2003: 429).

Through deliberation, potential adopters have an opportunity to abstract an idea or practice from its original setting (Strang and Meyer 1993: 492). In his study of the African American reinvention of Gandhian nonviolence, Chabot (2000) recognized how a tactic is transformed through abstracting an idea from its original setting that takes place through deliberation. In this manner, participants in a local social move-

ment field can evaluate a tactic and decide whether to certify the practice as appropriate and useful and thus generate rules and practices for its local use (Tilly 2003). Incorporation of an innovation into an organization's repertoire amounts to a mutual adaptation of the innovation and the organization (Van de Ven 1986). "Adaptation must occur because the innovation almost never fits perfectly in the organization in which it is to become embedded. Thus, a fair degree of creative activity is required to avoid or to overcome the misalignments that occur between the innovation and the organization" (Rogers 2003: 395). Without such activity, a new or revitalized tactic is much less likely to be experimented with within a new context.

Theories of social networks have found that certain structures of relationships facilitate such deliberation. Dense cliques of individuals or organizations tend to support social processes that lead to conformity within the clique, making discussions about ideas easy and the adoption of innovations, once accepted, quick (Morris 1981; Strang and Soule 1998: 272). However, such cliques are less likely to be diverse and have information from or adopt innovations from outside that clique. In contrast, social structures characterized by weak ties between such cliques allow information and innovations to spread easily (Gould 1991; Granovetter 1973; Rude 1964). As a result, deliberation about innovations between diverse participants is most likely in a context that combines weak and strong ties.

However, weak ties that provide the new ideas may be broken or constrained within systems that are highly centralized or competitive. Indeed, highly centralized networks, also known as hierarchical networks, are dominated by a single prestigious node/organization/actor. As Ron Burt writes, "A system is centralized to the extent that all relations in it involve a single actor. It has a hierarchical structure to the extent that a single actor is the direct or indirect object of all relations in it" (1980: 117). In such a network, diffusion is much more dependent on the opinion and activity of these opinion leaders than in less centralized networks.

Some organizational forms are also understood to be more innovative than others. When we turn to this topic, we find that there is contradictory information about the relationship between it and the incorporation of innovations. This is in part due to a conflation between analyses of innovativeness and analyses of openness to innovations (Strang and Soule 1998). Nevertheless, a long tradition of work in sociology has argued that formalized, centralized bureaucratic organizations have an increased

tendency to reproduce themselves and avoid risky innovations (Michels 1958; Weber 1968). However, Zmud (1982) and others have found that such organizations, once they've taken the risk, are more able to adopt or implement innovations than decentralized and informal organizations (in the case of organizational innovations).

The "innovation" I'm examining here is the identity and practice of horizontalism or horizontality. In her study of recent Argentinean social movements, Marina Sitrin explains that horizontalism "does not just imply a flat plane for organizing, or nonhierarchical relationships in which people no longer make decisions for others. It is a positive word that implies the use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus, processes in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created" (2006: v). Osterweil explains that horizontalism is associated with loose networks of rather heterogeneous groups—including antiauthoritarian, autonomist, feminist, anarchist, and other groups and individuals—who believe that "the most important thing in the politics for a New World is how we relate to each other in making it happen" (2004: 499). Sitrin argues that *horizontalidad* is a new way of relating, based in affective politics and against all the implications of "isms" (2006: vi). The elements of horizontalism are, of course, not new. For years, social movement activists and theorists have talked about nonhierarchical approaches to organizing and direct democracy. New social movements have long argued for the importance of prefigurative forms of organizing. However, what is new is the frame of horizontalist and horizontalism as an identity and a strategy.

Movement identities are associated with particular strategies, and vice versa. Following Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, I see these as relationally constructed. Political identities revolve around boundaries separating "us" from "them." They are constructed partly through the pattern of relationships among "us" and between "us" and "them." They are also constructed partly through the stories about "us" and about "them" and about how "we" treat "them" and how "they" treat "us" (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 79). The emergence and transformation of such relationships and identities are thus rooted in the political histories of a particular place and time.

The increasing articulation of a horizontalist identity in Porto Alegre was tied to the popular rebellion that led to the collapse of the Argentinean government and economy in December 2001. In the months following that moment, activists involved in taking over factories and creating popular assemblies and neighborhood infrastructure increas-

ingly began to describe themselves as horizontalists, and their process as *horizontalidad*. Solidarity activists around Latin America and across the globe picked up the term and began to use it to describe their own emphases on autonomy; networked, nonhierarchical structures; and prefiguration. Activists referred to movements like the Zapatistas of Mexico, the MST of Brazil, and networks like People's Global Action as horizontalist. In particular, the term began to be used by activists to differentiate themselves from activists who utilized what were seen as "old" ways of doing politics.

Since the first World Social Forum, tension between horizontalists and others has occurred. In the following, I will use formal and informal activist documents to track the emergence and increasingly prominent articulation of a horizontalist identity within the Intercontinental Youth Camps of the WSFs. I do this by analyzing movement media, blogs, and movement documents, and focusing on references to horizontalism—a rejection of hierarchical forms of organization, electoral politics, and political parties, and an embrace of prefiguration and network structures.

Since the first WSF in Porto Alegre, the IYC has involved conflicts between activists who identified explicitly with a "horizontal" identity and those described as having a more "vertical" approach to politics (Juris 2006; Morrison 2006b). Since the first WSF, the control of the IYC has shifted back and forth between the horizontalists and those they saw as their opponents. The first IYC was a response to a shortage of affordable housing at the WSF in Porto Alegre and was coordinated by traditional Brazilian youth organizations including leftist parties such as the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Communist Party of Brazil, the Unified Socialist Workers' Party, and the Socialist Youth Union (Juris 2006; Morrison 2006b). They organized in ways that were critiqued by horizontalists as hierarchical, instrumental, and bureaucratic.

Shortly after the first IYC, a broader youth committee was set up, which quickly became the 2002 Camp Organizing Committee (Comitê Organizador do Acampamento: COA). This committee comprised two interconnected bodies: the Rio Grande do Sul Youth Committee, run mostly by the autonomous social movements, and a National Youth Committee, dominated by leftist partisan youth (Nunes 2005b: 283; in Morrison 2006b: 38). In this context, some activists who identified with the horizontalist identity argued that the emphasis on decentralized collaboration should become more explicit and intentional. As the program for the 2002 IYC began to come together, some organizers began to talk

about the IYC as having a process and an identity that was different from the WSF project (Nunes 2005b: 284), and one that was experimenting with new ways of interacting, living, and organizing. When the second camp began, its participants held workshops in buildings made of biodegradable materials, ate organic food from agricultural cooperatives, and had their waste recycled by teams of volunteers (Morrison 2006b: 45). Also within the IYC in 2002 was the Intergalactika Laboratory of Global Resistance, which became a hub for groups locally and internationally who identified with principles and practices of horizontalism (Morrison 2006b: 46; Osterweil 2003). Proponents of this emerging approach, however, came into conflict with those that were thought to exhibit an “old school” approach, in particular, those activists from party organizations and student unions.

The COA tried to reduce the tension between the different positions. First they prevented members of the Union of Socialist Youth, the PT Youth, and the National Student’s Union from putting up their own marquees, claiming both that the large membership and resources of these organizations would be overbearing for other groups of campers, and pointing to Principle 9 of the WSF Charter of Principles, which prohibited political party representation (WSF 2001). They accused the party organizations of “having their own agendas” at the IYC that would lead to division and sectarianism. Next, the COA almost prevented some groups in the Intergalaktika space from carrying out self-organized activities since the COA wanted everybody to share the spaces (Nunes 2005a: 302–303). At the end of the 2002 WSF, the camp did not agree to a final resolution as they had the previous year, despite the efforts of many participants. Indeed, one observer argued that the participants from the leftist political parties and the participants identified with the horizontal networks barely interacted (Nunes 2005b: 286–287).

As a result of these battles, and increasing suspicion by “horizontalists” of the motives and approaches of political parties and student unions, the majority of the IYC organizers decided that the COA would take on exclusive responsibility for logistics, registration, and the allocation of space for self-organized activities in the next camp (Nunes 2005a: 301). As time has passed, the party organizations that initiated the first IYC became increasingly marginalized. By 2005, members of political parties made up less than a third of the COA (Oliveira 2005: 324–325). The camp manual for that year explained that the camp was designed to “create a short-circuit in the old forms of political representation. It’s

a laboratory of the new political militancy seeking to make resistance an act of creation, to promote counterpower” (Juris 2006: 2). There was a push to reject what were perceived as “old” ways of doing things, in favor of what was framed as the “new” approach of horizontalism. That same year, the IYC formally identified itself as “an innovative space for generating new forms of social, political, and cultural interaction.”

The battle between promoters of the “new” horizontalist identity and what were seen as “old” party activists reflected similar struggles across the Forum and the global justice movement as a whole. The battle was partly a product of the global trend, partly a product of the local context (Osterweil 2004). The founding site of the WSF, Porto Alegre is one of the wealthiest cities in Brazil, and one whose left-wing political life over the past 20 years has combined both the party orientation of the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores) with experiments in participatory democracy. The PT was elected in 1989, after years of popular frustration with the existing parties. The newly elected government did not want to replicate the old ways of operating, especially in the post-1989 environment. In this context, participatory budgeting was introduced by the government in Porto Alegre (Biaocchi 2006). While implemented by the party, the practice was deeply influenced by the radical Freirian popular educators, neighborhood councils, and progressive clergy that have long played a key role in Brazilian politics. This emphasis on dialogue, direct participation, and capacity building is clear within the IYC as it is in the WSF at large (Morrison 2006b: 29). However, despite the progressive approaches of the PT, some social movements continue to be frustrated with electoral and state-oriented politics.

The push towards horizontalism that emerged at the IYC in Porto Alegre is partly a product of this frustration. Beginning in the mid-1990s, the PT has been critiqued for not following through on its promises to the poorest Brazilians, and for continuing to sign onto neoliberal trade agreements. By the time of the first WSF, increasing numbers of grass-roots activists were beginning to distance themselves from the party. Some of these activists, especially the younger ones, began to embrace a horizontalist identity.

Although the enactment of horizontalism was never complete at the IYC, in Porto Alegre, the youth camp increasingly developed an identity and strategy that its participants would refer to as horizontalist. Indeed, this became naturalized to such an extent, that by the time of the IYC in 2005 it appeared an essential and intrinsic element of the

Intercontinental Youth Camps. In 2005, after the WSF in Mumbai in 2004, the IYC returned to Porto Alegre and the horizontalist identity became increasingly articulated. A report from the Camp Organizing Committee (2005) described the IYC process in the following manner:

The political process can be characterized by ideas such as self-management, horizontality, diversity, and creative resistance, experimenting and proposing alternatives that oppose capitalist and neoliberal hegemony... The organizational process is based on a horizontal-hierarchical hybrid structure with ten commissions and the COA (Organizing Committee of the Camp) as the main organs of articulation and collective decision making. All decisions are made by consensus and the commissions have a high degree of autonomy in order to decentralize the process as much as possible. The participants of the process are individuals as well as representatives of groups, organizations, and social movements, most of them Brazilian, yet without leaving aside the focus on international issues.

The IYC in 2005 ended up being the biggest to date. The 35,000 registered campers accounted for 22.6 percent of the total Forum population of 155,000 (IBASE 2006: 14). However, the sheer size and diversity made the horizontalist practices unwieldy. In the past, participants from each section of the camp were able to coordinate tasks, share information, and communicate to new participants what was expected (Morrison 2006b: 30, 54). In 2005, this system was overwhelmed by the scale of the event. Many participants did not understand the way they were expected to participate and treated the space simply as accommodation. Despite attempts to keep the space as an alternative economy and society, one that reflected values of social justice, theft and the rape of some young women occurred. Nevertheless, activists reporting back on the experience continued to articulate the camp's two main organizing principles as horizontalism and self-management (Gonzalez 2005). But things changed when the WSF left Brazil the following year for three cities: Bamako, Mali; Karachi, Pakistan; and Caracas, Venezuela.

#### BLOCKED DIFFUSION OF THE HORIZONTALIST IDENTITY

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Despite the horizontalist identity being central to the IYC in Porto Alegre, in Caracas, the local context and timing of the World Social Forum and the Youth Camp meant that the discussions necessary for

diffusion were blocked. As a result, the IYC's identity was much more influenced by the preexisting, dominant local models of organization and political identities.

The Intercontinental Youth Camp was organized in two sites in Caracas. The Organizing Commission of Caracas was made up of representatives of different youth organizations that hoped to create a place that was not only inexpensive housing for youth but a forum for events. The coordinator of the camp, "El Che," explained, "As things stand, the youth camp will be held at La Carlotta, the military airbase in Caracas, a place that can hold the expected 26,000–35,000 people. Imagine a whole bunch of young people coming to the youth camp with a range of ideas, from anarchism to antimilitarism, and they will be camping at a military site. This could become quite interesting!" (Windisch and Price 2005).

Many participants were enthusiastic about the camps in Caracas, citing good security, access to vegetarian food, and effective organization. One Venezuelan student, Alex Reyes, explained, "At night, people get together here, and have fun together. We were in the pacifist tent, and [in another there was] samba, salsa, we played drums, and danced." "We're here to have another opportunity to get to know people. . . . The best way to [do that] is to live with them and spend time with them," said Jean Carlos Rosa, another member of the group (Baribeau 2006).

However, there were criticisms of the camps. The numbers were much smaller than in previous years, with the registered camping population numbering 1,200 people, well below the expected number (Morrison 2006a). Heavy rains, the resulting mud, and the distance between the WSF main site and the youth camp led the more isolated camp to become largely neglected. There were also concerns about the lack of water, light, and safety at the camps. One participant, Jade, compared the camp to the one in Porto Alegre, arguing that in Porto Alegre the camp was much more expansive (Jade 2006).<sup>1</sup> Another camper critiqued the decision making for being undemocratic. One French Canadian activist, Pierre Marin, argued that camp decisions were hierarchical and failed to consult campers and that the camp newspaper, *El Querrequerre*, was organized and largely written by people who weren't staying in the camp (Baribeau 2006). No report backs described the camp as horizontalist. Indeed, the director general of the Intercontinental Youth Camp, Eduardo Che Mercado, agreed with the critique that the organization was being done in a top-down manner. "[Those who make this criticism are] totally right. We've realized, and have been learning with the people in



both camps that our way of being and our way of living in Venezuela is really vertical. The [F]orum has reflected that [working in a horizontal manner] has been very difficult for us, but it also has reflected that we have the will and the possibility to work towards it" (Baribeau 2006: 1).

It is clear that the explicit "horizontalist" identity of Porto Alegre's IYC had not diffused to Caracas. Why not? I think that this can be explained by the absence of deliberation amongst local organizers about horizontalism. This lack of deliberation is due to the way that the local context was centralized around party organizations, and polarized between those who supported Chavez and those who opposed his regime. Deliberation was also limited because of the timing of the event—shortly before an election—which added to the polarization, and shortly after the recent success of the World Festival of Youth and Students, which had largely utilized a party-centric model of organization.

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*CONTEXT-CENTRALIZED POLITICAL NETWORKS IN CARACAS*

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As soon as the location was announced, some WSF organizers and local activists feared that the WSF in Caracas would end up being controlled by the Chavez government—and lose its celebrated autonomy from government. In the end, most participants argued that the Venezuelan context influenced the Forum in important ways (Boron 2006; Brunelle 2006; Hernandez 2006). One observer, Luis Hernandez, argued that this Forum was characterized by a "more markedly politician-state character." He argued that this meant that the debates were different from those at past Forums, focusing more "on electoral strategies and on the resistance to the imperialism and on regional integration" (Hernandez 2006: 1). He continued, saying that the Caracas WSF was nearer to an orthodox anti-imperialist project than to an alterglobalization Forum. He noted that the party models associated with the Left of the 1970s were reborn there, and were consuming other expressions of critical thought (Hernandez 2006). Others celebrated this shift. John Hammond (2006) interviewed Edgardo Lander, a sociologist on the Venezuelan Facilitating Committee, who commented that earlier Forums expressed a general feeling that social movements should be independent from unions, parties, and governments because movements are "more genuine and more expressive of the sentiments of the base. But the world has changed." He argued: "The military of the United States is more aggressive, the impact of free trade is felt more,

and politically you can't maintain that separation" (Hammond 2006: 127). Of course, others noted, the WSF has never been autonomous from government. The Brazilian Workers' Party is equally influential in the Brazilian context, and the Indian Communist Party had been involved in hosting the WSF in Delhi. However, the PT and the Indian Communist Party have a more recent collaborative relationship with social movements like Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST) than Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR). The MST, while not a horizontalist organization, incorporates the popular education approach of Paulo Freire, with his emphasis on awakening the critical consciousness and sense of responsibility of all movement participants through discussion.

The political networks in Caracas have historically been dominated by a small number of players, most notably, the political parties (Levine and Crisp 1999; Ellner 1999: 77; Friedman 1999). Although stable, this system left little room for emerging social forces to find expression or to experiment with new identities. Centralized social networks are a barrier to diffusion. By "centralization" Rogers means the degree to which power and control in a system are concentrated in the hands of relatively few individuals. Research suggests that the more an organization or a system is dominated by a few strong leaders, or the more centralized it is, the less likely it will be innovative or open to new ideas (Rogers 2003: 380, 411).

The party organizations that dominated city and national government provided a great deal of support to the WSF and IYC in Caracas, as they had in Porto Alegre. Dan Morrison explains that the Venezuelan state provided sound equipment, food for volunteers, and services such as infrastructure and electricity. The state also provided building materials for tents to host the Forum activities and establish parts of the two planned World Youth Camps. The main camp was designated in a park outside of the city and bus rides were provided. If the first camp was to fill, the backup camp was designated for a city park near the main areas of WSF events. The state also organized thousands of civil servants and volunteers who managed the venues (Morrison 2006a).

Unsurprisingly, the organizers in Caracas were less comfortable with horizontalist models of organizing. The prominent role of the state and supportive political parties that operated within a bureaucratic, hierarchical model made the possibility of deliberation about organizational approach and incorporating the horizontal tradition of earlier IYCs less likely.

*POLARIZED POLITICAL CONTEXT*

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The second aspect of the local political context that limited the openness of the local organizers to the horizontalism of earlier IYCs was the presence of two different tensions. The first was between the forces supporting and opposing the Chavez regime—and a sense by some that this moment required a rejection of horizontalism. The second was between those who supported party models and those who favored nonhierarchical models of organizing that highlighted the ineffectiveness of horizontalism.

These tensions helped to block the diffusion of horizontalism. As Marshall Ganz argues, the strategic capacity of an organization is greater if “a leadership team includes insiders and outsiders, strong and weak network ties, and access to diverse, yet salient, repertoires of collective action” (2000: 1005). Polarization constrains the diversity of participants in any deliberation, as conversations tend to be limited to one side or another of a debate. Because of the polarized nature of the political context, and the urgency around defending the Bolivarian “revolution,” from internal and external threats, there was less openness to discussing the possibility of horizontalist ways of organizing.

The first tension emphasized the historical moment as a reason to reject horizontalism. The IYC director general Che Mercado argued that “now was not the time to make changes. If I’m honest, within the Forum organization, there’s no horizontality. It doesn’t exist. And this is a historical moment in the country, there should not be horizontality.” He pointed out that it was an election year and that he thought that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez needed to be reelected. He continued, “As soon as we’ve achieved this, we can begin to work in the evolution of this new revolutionary political process, which obviously should be horizontal and that I personally call popular power” (Baribeau, 2006: 1). One participant at the WSF reported hearing this explanation repeatedly, “The priority was to defend the Bolivarian revolution. Now was not the time for risk taking” (Baribeau 2006: 1). Many had hoped that December’s parliamentary elections, which, after a partial opposition boycott, gave the governing coalition 100 percent of the seats in the National Assembly, would be the turning point where Chávez supporters were given the political space to act less defensively (Baribeau 2006). In this context, open deliberation about the horizontalism was much less likely.

The second tension overlapped with the first in its emphasis that horizontalism was a middle-class distraction from “serious politics” that responded to people’s real needs. This rejection was tied to the way that middle-class social movements had experimented with nonhierarchical forms of organizing in Caracas in the past, partly as a critique of political parties (Crisp and Levine 1998; Ellner 1999; Friedman 1999). As a result, there had been a rivalry between the models and identities for at least 20 years. The middle-class neighborhood movement, with its emphasis on civil society and explicit opposition to political parties, had emerged in the 1970s and 1980s partly as a rejection of the centralized political arena. In return, while at various moments the parties had attempted to penetrate that movement, tensions continued between them (Crisp and Levine 1998: 43). Since Chavez was elected in 1998, such projects have been marginalized. This does not mean the parties only promoted vertical decision making. In 2001, Chavez and the movements associated with him launched the Bolivarian Circles, a network of loosely knit political and social organizations of workers’ councils that emphasized participatory democracy and autonomy from the government. These circles have played a key role in organizing support for the government, as well as resistance to the oil company executives. They are both of the state and apart from it. However, at the time of the 2006 WSF, vertically organized parties dominated the political landscape. These two tensions limited the possibility of discussing or incorporating horizontalism into the WSF in Caracas.

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*RECENT SUCCESS OF THE WORLD FESTIVAL OF YOUTH AND STUDENTS*

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There was a third reason why horizontalism was rejected by the organizers in Caracas, and that was the recent success of the World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS). Six months before the WSF opened in Caracas, the same group of organizers had organized a forum that was in many ways similar to the WSF. The World Festival of Youth and Students brought together 15,000 left-wing youth and students from 144 countries around the slogan “For Peace and Solidarity, We Struggle Against Imperialism and War.” Like the WSF, the WFYS involved cultural events, speeches, and meetings between delegations of youth activists from different countries. Like the WSF, the WFYS aimed to build alternatives to the current neoliberal order. The event surpassed expectations in terms of size and was declared a success.

Like the WSF, the festival in 2005 was hosted by the youth wing of the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR). Clearly tied to the ruling party, the WFYS was not a horizontalist event. The first WFYS had been initiated by the Soviet Union in 1947, and despite some shifts since 1989, the festival is still dominated by communist parties. Coming out of the Soviet context, this model continues to be dependent on state support. The president of the Venezuela NPC defined in Acronym list as National Planning Committee for the WFYS reported that youth organizations in Venezuela are collaborating with the country's government to organize housing, transportation, and conference facilities. The fact that Caracas had hosted such an event so recently limited the openness of the Venezuelan organizers to the more horizontalist approach identified with the IYC. As a result, the organizers for the Intercontinental Youth Camp at the WSF were less receptive to the horizontal approaches used in past Forums. This recent history hardened the boundary between those who would be most likely to identify as horizontalists within Venezuela and the organizing committee.

Local anarchists critiqued the WSF process in Venezuela. They argued, "Judging from past experience (National Social Forums, events of solidarity with Venezuela, the Sixteenth World Festival for the Youth and the Students), as well as the organization and dynamics of the very same Committee for the Promotion of the Sixth World Social Forum in Caracas, we have good reasons to believe that the next World Social Forum, which will take place in Caracas, January 24 to 29, 2006, will not be the diverse, self-managed, open, independent and participatory encounter as it is claimed to be in its mission statement" (Comisión de Relaciones Anarquistas 2006: 1). Even the IYC, they argued, would not be a horizontalist space in Caracas. Along with the centralized political networks and the polarized context, the recent success of the World Festival of Youth and Students made it less likely that the local organizing committee would be interested in discussing new models of organization and adopting new political identities and practices.

## CONCLUSION

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Billy Wharton recently wrote, "If one political concept dominated the proceedings of the [2010] U.S. Social Forum, it was horizontalism" (2010: 1). The model associated with the Intercontinental Youth Camp continues to spread through the World Social Forum process to the

national Forums such as the USSF. However, as we've seen here, this horizontalist identity is not inevitably part of the Social Forum process, or even the IYC. Instead, the spread and use of it as a political identity is constrained by the ways that a local context allows its activists to deliberate about its meaning and use.

The horizontalist identity so central to the IYC in Porto Alegre was not adopted by Caracas activists in part because of the way that the context limited the interest and incentive of local organizers in deliberating about the new identity. The context made deliberation about horizontalism unattractive because of the way that political networks were centralized around a limited number of formal, political parties that were operating within a polarized context that hardened the boundaries between "us" as conference organizers and "them" (portrayed occasionally as those who were apathetic, middle class, or actively opposing the Chavez regime). In addition, the recent success of the World Festival of Youth and Students in Caracas provided the organizers with a preexisting model of organization, the effect of which also limited the interest and incentive local organizers had to experiment with new tactics.

Why does this story of failed diffusion matter? It matters for two reasons. First, it shows how local contexts can facilitate deliberation and diffusion, or block these processes. Second, the story suggests that we need to understand the way local contexts accumulate in order to construct the practices and identities in the global justice movement and transnational social movements more generally. We must consider the importance of sequence and proximity in the development of social movement repertoires and recognize that the development of the WSF will forever be altered by its time in Porto Alegre, Delhi, Caracas, Bamako, Karachi, Nairobi, Belém, and beyond.

## NOTES

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1. Jade. "Polycentric World Social Forum 2006." Blog entry, <http://forumsocialmundial.blogspot.com/> (retrieved April 20, 2006).



## CHAPTER 17

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# DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSION AND LANGUAGES IN THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS

*Nicole Doerr*

How do activists in groups associated with the World Social Forum (WSF) and European Social Forum (ESF) processes deal with the perceived trade-offs between participatory, deliberative democracy and efficiency in multilingual meetings? Scholars who have studied practices of democracy in social movements have found that even at the national level, groups may perceive practices of participatory democracy and “deliberative talk” as time inefficient: “Participatory democracy, no surprise, usually takes longer than adversarial decision making. It demands more patience, energy, and time on the part of its participants” (Polletta 2002: 12). Researchers who study feminist experiments with participatory democracy have proposed that decision making should be particularly slow, consensual, and inclusive in those discussion moments in which it touches upon “foundational” questions, issues, or rules of working together (Chambers 1995: 173). This should be especially true for movements that seek to overcome social inequalities (see, for example, Snyder 2006; Wood 2005).

The choices activists make about working language and multilingualism constitute such foundational questions, especially for transnational groups whose work extends across national political and cultural boundaries. Thus, some activists may prefer to operate in a single language (English, or another “lingua franca”) to save resources and to allow

decisions to be taken within a set time frame. Others, conversely, see it as important to work together multilingually, translating each other's statements into different languages to include different native language speakers in collective deliberation. Since most social movements lack resources for holding regular meetings, there is considerable pressure to make decisions within delimited time frames. This pressure works against the ideological preference these activists express for a more inclusive and heterogeneous political sphere. For example, I found that a radical "horizontal" protest network such as EuroMayDay justified more pragmatic-styled English language practices in its transnational network meetings to make decisions that enabled it to embark on more immediate direct action. Conversely, I found two other variants of multilingual, potentially inclusive, language practices in two other groups. The first variant involved self-organized, multilingual, simultaneous translation by Social Forum activists who worked together with specialized activist interpreters; the second variant consisted of a more informally organized, deliberative practice of multilingual facilitation in meetings relying on experienced multilingual facilitators who translated statements into three or four languages. I suggest that these two multilingual approaches are more effective at helping groups to develop innovative ideas, coordinate actions, and cultivate more long-lasting bonds of solidarity among their members (Polletta 2002; Staggenborg 1989).

Guided by curiosity about how activists tackle the tensions between linguistic inclusion and efficiency within multilingual deliberative spaces, this chapter contributes to the literature in social movement studies and feminist discourse theory. I am interested in the context conditions in which deliberation takes place in social movements, which Donatella della Porta has described as comprising the "conditions of plurality of values where people have different perspectives but face common problems" (della Porta 2005: 340–341). At the core of the following analysis is the assumption that "deliberation (or even communication) is based upon the belief that, while not giving up my perspective, I might learn if I listen to the other" (della Porta 2005: 340–341; Young 1996). I focus on one particularly relevant aspect of deliberative discussion processes: their inclusiveness (see Young 2000: 107). When trying to realize in practice the idea of the WSF as an "open," "deliberative, or discursive public space" (Smith, Karides, et al. 2007: 33), activists in Social Forum preparatory meetings face a twofold dilemma: They want to include everyone, and thus they have good reasons for discussing



global problems multilingually, but they also usually have little time and scarce resources to provide translation, and thus might opt for working together in English only.

In order to understand the complex “politics of language” in the WSF process, I follow the analysis of feminist and critical sociologists who have shown that the use of a single, majority language within deliberative discussion arenas might, under certain conditions, reflect the culturally and class-specific gendered style of some groups more than others (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1982; Young 1996). Moreover, activists and scholars in the area of migrants’ movements and alternative multilingual media have questioned the widespread use of global English or Western European language hierarchies in Social Forum meetings, suggesting that it increases the privilege of highly educated speakers from the global North (Boéri and Hodkinson 2004; see also Busch 2006). Conversely, it seems that the difficulties of working together multilingually have also encouraged democratic innovations and new forms of language activism within the ESF process (see, e.g., Doerr 2009a).

I assume that groups’ language practices are influenced by activists’ political values, embedded in the cultural norms of their broader societal context. The different “movement communities” from which groups come, as well as varying access to resources (Meyer and Staggenborg 2007: 14–16), affect decisions about language use. I will examine the choices and microprocesses of decision making through which activists choose the language practices within their own meetings (see Jasper 2004). As my focus is on the problem of inclusivity within the practice of deliberation, I will ask to what extent less privileged activists had opportunities, depending on the language practice chosen by a group, to express themselves and to comprehend discussions within meetings. In my analysis of language practices in group meetings, I thus explore the basic question of whether these meetings allow less privileged activists to effectively follow public discussions in meetings in their own language, and to make contributions in their own or an alternate, familiar language.

I examined the language practices within transnational Social Forum preparatory assemblies and small-scale network meetings (EuroMayDay), held between larger Social Forum events and/or transnational days of action. My focus on preparatory meetings helps capture the routine language practices in multilingual meetings that are less publicly visible, but important for the ongoing networking and agenda setting within the global justice movement (Smith 2007).

The first case I selected was the large and more formally organized European Social Forum Preparatory Assemblies of the ESF process, referred to as the EPA.<sup>1</sup> To assess the impact of language practices within groups operating with fewer material resources and with a more “horizontal,” decentralized networking strategy (Juris 2005), I compared the EPA with the EuroMayDay network, which emerged in 2004 at the margins of the London ESF and which focused on the issue of precarity (Mattoni 2006).<sup>2</sup> My third case involves the relatively advanced multilingual language practices of South African groups and networks in the WSF process. These groups were committed to multilingual practices and viewed them as part of their broader struggle for inclusion in a socioeconomically and linguistically fragmented social context (Naidoo 2006; Ndlovu 2008).<sup>3</sup>

I first analyzed the language practices of groups through participant observation and analysis of transcriptions documenting linguistic practices. This analysis focused particularly on each group’s resources and strategies. Second, I analyzed activists’ perceptions of language practices in meetings. I did this through 105 interviews with meeting participants and a survey of 100 participants collected within meetings.<sup>4</sup> As an observer interested in the practice of discourse rather than an active participant, I tried to combine my analysis of transcripts and recordings of discussions in meetings with the perceptions of participants, facilitators, and interpreters in the meetings obtained through supplementary email discussions.<sup>5</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Language practices are a fragile component of participatory democracy in the WSF and ESF processes, though some groups have made creative use of nonmaterial resources to address this problem. My observations suggest that, in all three cases I studied, translation was being neglected in strategically relevant situations where important theoretical or political topics were discussed. In all the meetings I studied, I could observe at least some occasions where there was no translation from English into other local languages, and activists with limited or no English language skills spoke up significantly less. As I argue in Section 3, this happened when organizers failed to provide translation for meetings involving strategically important moments of decision making, and/or in sessions where speakers used very specific, theoretically demanding vocabularies

reflecting the language use of academics or experts. In both situations, many non-English speakers were excluded from the discussion. This result demonstrates the risk in deliberative settings of excluding the narratives of less privileged groups in situations in which those narratives would be particularly relevant (see Polletta 2006: 90). I begin with a description of how activists relied on various material, technological, and/or cognitive resources to tackle the challenge of multilingualism.

During plenary sessions of the European Social Forum Preparatory Assemblies, as many as 400 participants used simultaneous translation. The foreign language skills of the participants in the EPA of the ESF process, who came from more than a dozen countries, varied considerably.<sup>6</sup> Table 17.1 gives an overview of the findings from the survey I conducted with participants in the EPA and those in ESF preparatory meetings taking place at the national level. Ten percent of participants in these preparatory meetings did not speak English, while 34 percent had an active command of more than two foreign languages, and 63 percent claimed to speak English fluently.

Findings illustrated in Table 17.1, it should be noted, might reflect a nonresponse bias, since the small number of participants without foreign language skills (4 percent) may be due to the fact that I distributed my questionnaires only in English, Italian, and German. Given this limitation, and the fact that my respondents belonged to the groups most actively involved in the EPA, it is noteworthy that among these “insiders,” more than two-thirds relied on simultaneous translation provided by Babels activist interpreters. Babels is a group of volunteer activist interpreters who specialize in providing simultaneous translation and digital

**Table 17.1 Survey on the ESF Preparatory Process:  
Answers to Several Questions on Languages**

Linguistic skills of participants in ESF preparatory meetings <sup>a</sup>	Percentage of participants (%) <sup>b</sup>	Number of cases (N)
No foreign language skills	4	4
Do not speak or understand English	10	9
Speak English fluently	63	58
Speak more than two foreign languages	34	31
Total N	—	100

<sup>a</sup>Meetings at the European and national levels.

<sup>b</sup>Percentages add to more than 100 percent as multiple responses were possible.

support for translation using open software and radio transmitters. The group's mission is to make it possible for all activists to participate fully in the ESFs and related preparatory meetings (Doerr 2009a). In the EPA, Babels's simultaneous translation allowed speakers to intervene in their own languages, but as this was self-organized by volunteers, translation sometimes did not work "efficiently" from the perspective of the ESF organizers. As one of them later opined:

Technical questions regarding simultaneous translation in the ESF process are really not easy. We quarreled on the question of languages for working together in the EPA. For example, how many interpreters do we take for which countries? A. said that providing Romanian translation is impossible, but we will have six participants from Romania in the EPA! They lack money to pay for their own interpreters! . . . When I address people from other countries in the EPA I speak English in order to show respect. . . . Sometimes I really have the impression that people do not understand what I say. This is a big problem. My solution is that I repeat what I want to say in English, again and again, until they understand. (Interview with activist from the groups Genoa 2001 and Greek Social Forum Network, Istanbul, September 22, 2005)

This ESF organizer provides insights into why ESF and EPA organizers, themselves mostly professional activists used to participatory or representative practices of decision making in their own groups, appreciated working with simultaneous translation and consensual decision-making practices in the EPA. The organizers and facilitators of the EPA came to see the need for slow, multilingual debates in plenary assemblies where they had experienced, either personally or indirectly, the exclusionary aspects of linguistic marginalization. As the above quote illustrates, they advocated practices that would allow more participants to follow discussions in their own languages.

In the second case I studied, EuroMayDay, organizers were in the process of rejecting ESF-style simultaneous translation, which they perceived as frustrating, inefficient, and organized from the top down. Some activists in EuroMayDay came to prefer working in English as their "lingua franca" within plenary discussions. One EuroMayDay activist said:

I perceive simultaneous translation in the Social Forums as a very difficult model. In the ESF in Paris, I found it easier to follow the discussions directly in French instead of listening to simultaneous

translation that did not work well. Here in the EuroMayDay meetings everything works in English. This is also very “basic” as a solution. . . . However, the “NoLager meetings”<sup>7</sup> are much more advanced than us: They work with interpreters and often in two or three languages. (Interview with EuroMayDay activist from Germany at the EuroMayDay meeting in Hamburg, October 22, 2005)

The interviewee also suggests that there is a third, “more advanced” variant in addition to organized simultaneous translation (as used in the ESF) or English-only meetings (such as those organized by the EuroMayDay group): meetings working “with interpreters and often in two or three languages.” As will be shown, this is the alternative practiced by South African groups hosting workshops organized to prepare the WSF in which local facilitators translated all statements back and forth between English and two or three other national South African languages.

In contrast to the EPA, the EuroMayDay meetings were organized by a radical group and sought to develop a decentralized network organizing direct action and protests at the European level. With little or no institutional support or money, they mobilized protests in support of the rights of undocumented migrants, workers with short-term contracts, and other people affected by “social precarity” (Mattoni 2006). In the transnational EuroMayDay meetings I studied, which included 70–80 participants, the plenary assemblies were conducted mostly in English. Translation for non-English speakers was informal and casually organized alongside these assemblies.<sup>8</sup> Plenary discussions in English do not seem to have created major problems for the majority of (anarchist, autonomous, and direct-action-oriented) participants in the transnational EuroMayDay meetings. Most of these activists came from Western European countries<sup>9</sup> and Slovenia, and were more or less fluent in English. However, the more pragmatic practice of using English in the transnational meetings made active participation very difficult for both Italian and Slovenian activists who did not speak English, as well as for the target groups attending the transnational network meetings.<sup>10</sup>

My third case covered meetings of South African Social Forums and progressive groups in the period of discussions and preparations for the Nairobi WSF 2007 (between 70 and 150 participants). I was a guest and participant observer in two WSF workshops organized by the

Center for Civil Society of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban in cooperation with local community activists and the national Social Movements Indaba network. I also observed other meetings organized by the shack-dwellers' movement, Abahlali, and the national Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW). Activists in these meetings used no simultaneous translation technology. An important difference with respect to the European groups was that the advanced multilingual skills of African facilitators provided an important cognitive resource. Some of the South African activists I interviewed said that they were fluent in at least 3 or 4 of the 11 national languages or other African languages.<sup>11</sup> Those who described themselves in interviews as people with a "middle-class" background, or as "academics," were fluent in the prevailing national languages (English or Afrikaans), and often knew fewer of the other South African languages spoken by activists from local communities or local Social Forums. Despite this context, most of the plenary assemblies I attended were conducted in three or four languages.

Compared to their European colleagues, the South African facilitators, given their practice of a comparatively deliberative form of informal translation, had a more demanding role. In the WSF preparatory workshops in Durban, for instance, facilitators would translate statements from English into the three Bantu languages: isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Sesotho.<sup>12</sup> Hence, South African activists' choice of multilingualism emerged not only from facilitators' experiences and skills in active multilingual translation, but also from a conscious struggle for political and linguistic inclusion in the South African global justice movement. A facilitator of one of the workshops mobilizing for the WSF said:

The very notions of "civil society," globalization, neoliberal ideology, existentialism, and the public are yet to be fully articulated linguistically in many "African" languages ... perhaps it is not a matter of illiteracy but maybe a resistance at the level of language... When facilitating meetings you are essentially trying to become the transient conductor of meaning. This is essentially absurd, but part of the struggle against oppression is the struggle against Western rationality. Emotions and gestures can have more to say than carefully plotted "end goals." Therefore, the fluidity of language, even if it means repeating the same thing a few times, could, and one may argue does, build a sense of shared meaning and gradually gets people to learn the "other" language. (Email interview with facilitator involved in the South African Social Forums process, March 15, 2008)

In other words, the quality of translation largely depended on facilitators' individual choices and their patience, for example, in "repeating the same thing a few times." In lively discussions, facilitators were forced to decide, in the flow of conversation, how much and which concepts of participants' statements they would translate. The facilitators' creative reinterpretation was checked by other participants. In all meetings organized by South African groups in which I participated, I observed participants who signaled their disagreement in situations in which there was no translation. Frequently, such demands for more active translation and more inclusive practices of facilitation came from women's groups who participated in, or organized, the meetings. These activists would interrupt facilitators or experts to remind them that they had "forgotten" to translate some of the perspectives or procedural rules for working together (such as those designed to uphold gender equality). In all cases I studied, and as will be shown below, such internal struggles for discursive and linguistic inclusion seemed to be a useful tactic for informing facilitators of the need to change the rules of collaboration.

*LANGUAGE PRACTICES, POWER IMBALANCES,  
AND STRUGGLES FOR INCLUSION*

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Retracing the micro-level processes of strategic choices made within group deliberations, I found that language practices depended very much on the language options preferred by facilitators or informal leaders of meetings. Language practices were also shaped by the group's expectations regarding available resources and time constraints within the broader context of the environment in which their group had emerged (Meyer and Staggenborg 2007). I found that facilitators insisted on English-language, "pragmatically styled" decision making where they lacked experience with multilingual deliberative spaces. This was often linked to linguistic and discursive power imbalances in groups. Facilitators' own prior experiences of linguistic exclusion or participation in political struggles for language diversity and long-term working experiences with multilingual formats help explain facilitators' preferences for more or less linguistically inclusive, multilingual practices.

It should be noted that time is an important dimension, both for facilitators to learn to work together multilingually, and also for understanding how internal struggles for discursive and linguistic inclusion within groups develop. Facilitators in the EPA and in South African groups

said they had worked together for several years, noting the difficult and continuous learning processes this involved.<sup>13</sup> Babels has advocated from the very beginning of the ESF process for greater awareness of linguistic exclusion among the ESF organizers in the EPA (Boéri and Hodkinson 2004: 2). Babels was supported by other groups of “grassroots brokers” who, at the margin of the EPA or within its informal leadership circles, constantly lobbied for more gender-inclusive discussion rules or linguistic inclusion of less privileged activists in decision-making processes (Doerr 2009b; see also Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18).

Compared to the EPA and the South African groups, such internal struggles for linguistic and/or discursive inclusion were less intense than at the transnational EuroMayDay network, at least in those early transnational meetings where activists were first getting to know each other. To be sure, local EuroMayDay groups in Italy, Austria, Germany, or Spain had developed innovative multilingual mobilization strategies to include undocumented migrants into collective action (Doerr 2008). In the group’s internal transnational meetings though, there was no agreement on formal rules for translation.

Some of the founding members from the Italian EuroMayDay group, themselves fluent in English, argued for working together in English on the group’s email list: “One of the good things within EuroMayDay is that we do not use interpreters for our discussions like they do in Brussels. [We talk] in English, of course, because it is the language of the libertarian Internet spoken by everybody, not only the language of Empire.”<sup>14</sup> The above quote was taken from a controversial discussion on translation and language use on the EuroMayDay email list. In such email debates, some of the postings, including the one above, view English as a transverse global language. Other EuroMayDay activists who worked with migrants preferred language diversity in joint actions: “For us in Madrid, translation is very important. . . . For instance . . . people who translate the stories of migrants on Indymedia. It is important within our campaign that these tales get translated.”<sup>15</sup> Different positions on language and translation in the EuroMayDay network led to conflicts in the transnational meetings that I explore below.

The meetings of South African groups form a counterexample to the EuroMayDay meetings. Most South African facilitators were clearly aware of the consequences of “dominant languages” such as English or Afrikaans in the broader environment of their continuing struggle against linguistic racism in the post-Apartheid era. The meetings I studied each



included very different groups of participants with different socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> South African groups had developed very advanced multilingual communication practices, and thus relied on English without translation in very few plenary sessions. However, in the meetings I studied, the few English-only plenary sessions (no more than 10 to 20 percent of the sessions) ended up shifting the debate towards theoretically and intellectually demanding topics, while more concrete local issues were left aside. Multilingual facilitators within the Social Forum process were conscious of this problem.<sup>17</sup> South African interviewees demonstrated a sharp awareness of culturally embedded injustices in the use of specific vocabularies and dominant idioms. An interview with a leader from the Landless People's Movement (LPM) illustrates that it was in everyday life that activists evolved their own political commitment to multilingualism as a strategy of inclusion:

We are fighting against landowners who frequently use their own languages [probably English or Afrikaans] so that nobody understands what they decide while they are trying to evict our people. On such occasions we might for instance get arrested while waiting for a commissioner to talk to the people. The policemen may understand Zulu and tell you that you have five seconds to leave the room, otherwise they will use pepper spray. (Interview, Peter Maritzburg, August 2, 2006)

As the above narrative indicates, activists confronted with multiple racial, social, and linguistic injustices came to validate multilingualism rather than English. These results indicate that activists make sense of multilingualism based on their routine experiences in broader societal struggles and contexts, their prior experiences of linguistic exclusion, their participation in political struggles for linguistic inclusion, and their working experiences with multilingual and intercultural deliberative spaces.

#### MULTILINGUAL FORMATS AND THE PRACTICE OF DELIBERATIVE TALK

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A very important finding in all three cases I studied is that translation was absent or neglected in those moments when important decisions were taken (EPA, EuroMayDay), or in those situations in which strategically or theoretically relevant topics were discussed (South African groups). To understand whether linguistically marginalized participants themselves

would actually speak up to problematize this, we have to look at three interrelated factors: contingent internal struggles for linguistic inclusion within the deliberative process, leaders' positions on language practices, and activist interpreters' or group members' support for linguistic inclusion.

Simultaneous translation in the EPA of the ESF process contained both inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. Within the plenary assemblies, non-English-speaking activists had good opportunities to actively participate in discussions, thanks to the Babels activist interpreters. One problem, however, was that organizers and facilitators—in what was perceived by many participants to be a “vertical” leadership style—made many important decisions and deals in informal meetings and social gatherings (Maeckelbergh 2009). Translation was mostly absent in these informal encounters where it would have been particularly important. Participants who did not speak English began to protest against this (Doerr 2008). With their protest, these activists made the Babels translators aware of the contradictions in the conceptions of democracy and language practices by the organizers and facilitators of the EPA. As a consequence facilitators integrated the need for multilingual translation into their understanding of what is required for participatory decision making in the assembly. Less privileged activists had the impression that facilitators did not listen to them during the coffee breaks. However, they found more support if they raised this as a problem in the main plenary assemblies. Confronted with the scrutiny of EPA activists and networks from many countries, facilitators had to consider the claims of less privileged and linguistically marginalized activists. Where they did not, activist interpreters from Babels would at times demonstratively interrupt simultaneous translation to protest against linguistic marginalization. Interviews with Babels activists show that they consciously monitor the “politics of language” in the informal as well as plenary sessions:

I remember one EPA before the London ESF. I was among the voluntary interpreters from Babels. The quality of this meeting was particularly bad. A part of the English participants tried to trick the French and Italians by playing on subtle linguistic differences within decision making. But as I speak French and English, I told the French and the Italians what was going on and made sure that they knew that they were going to be manipulated. (Interview with Babels activist, Berlin, June 15, 2008)

The accounts from the members of Babels indicate that the political interventions of activist interpreters are a very important normative resource for transnational social movements. Such actions reflect the Babels members' self-understanding of their role as explicitly political actors and activists, and not simply technical service providers.

The case of EuroMayDay in comparison to the EPA not only confirms the exclusionary dimension of English-only practices, but also the greater obstacles faced by linguistically marginalized participants in social contexts in which English had informally been established as the dominant language. Clear examples of the exclusion of non-English speakers could be observed in meetings in which facilitators and informal leaders pushed activists to come to a quick decision within the plenary assembly.<sup>18</sup>

In a meeting in Milan in February 2006, for instance, EuroMayDay facilitators hurried participants from Italy and other countries to reach agreement on a joint action plan that they considered important for enhancing the public visibility of their network. Within this meeting, some organizers had informally worked out a plan for a Europe-wide action that they wanted all other groups in the network to join.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that, unlike EPA activists, linguistically marginalized activists did not blame EuroMayDay organizers for failing to provide translation, but instead blamed themselves:

I do not actively speak English, nor do I understand discussions in English. In this meeting I could probably follow most of the discussion because my friends translated everything for me. . . . In meetings in Italy in my own network, we translate everything for activists who speak only English, French, or Spanish. This takes longer but the quality of discussions is better. . . . Here, I do not speak up, because I feel ashamed. (Interview with Italian EuroMayDay activist, Hamburg, October 22, 2005)

The above quote reveals something quite unanticipated: The interviewee's own network in Italy uses multilingual forms to include, for instance, undocumented migrants. In the transnational EuroMayDay meeting, however, the activist expresses the difficulty of speaking up in an English session as someone who does "not actively speak English." Yet it was in the transnational meetings, where the content and shape of collective actions of the network were decided, in which non-English speakers were excluded from the most important moments of decision

making. Purportedly this occurred because of time constraints that were seen as best accommodated through English-only discussions.

Another observation I made was that the presumably more pragmatic and “faster” English practices were not more time efficient. This was because the transnational character of the meetings introduced political incomprehension. In contrast to their local group meetings, EuroMayDay network meetings involved people from different countries who did not always understand each other’s strategies, action plans, and preferences. Sessions with a style of facilitation aimed at “pragmatic” decision making in English without time for deliberation and translation continuously led to misunderstandings, confusion, and frustration. Conflict emerged in such sessions, not only because activists who did not speak English could not follow the discussion, but also because participants who were fluent in English and had traveled long distances were frustrated by a lack of progress. This latter group actively expressed dissent with the facilitation style.<sup>20</sup> A British interviewee, following a plenary session of the Milan meeting, expressed his dissatisfaction:

In the group in which I participate in the U.K., we work with anarchist practices: nonhierarchical . . . . Doing a consensus like at yesterday’s meeting is very difficult, because then only the loudest people matter. The facilitators in the plenary assembly yesterday, instead of speaking to themselves and then present it as a point, in each situation in which someone said something [she or he] should have asked whether there is agreement or disagreement. (Interview with an activist from the Wombles, February 19, 2006)

Interestingly, it was after such a plenary session in which, according to a participant, “only the loudest people matter,” that facilitators signaled a change in their style. They tried to work with more inclusive rules for consensual decision making, giving more time for translation, and asking whether proposals were understood by participants. I argue that such changes in the facilitation style illustrate ongoing microprocesses of reflexive learning as they happen through and within independent public spaces created by social movement activists (Melucci 1989).

My findings indicate that the facilitators changed their style where participants asked them to do so. The expression of disagreement during plenary assemblies or immediately thereafter thus turned out to be an effective way to affect changes in the rules. Indeed, gender shaped

the discourse and linguistic practices in Milan if not in all EuroMayDay meetings. At the Milan meeting, for instance, all plenary assemblies were facilitated by a group of men using a pragmatic style in which they would urge other participants to keep in mind the priority of a time-efficient decision. A few smaller working group meetings were facilitated by women and men with slower-paced, more multilingual practices. It was the women among the EuroMayDay activists from Milan who, during breaks in the meetings, would gather to assess unfruitful plenary discussions and develop alternative proposals (Doerr 2008). The transnational EuroMayDay network, marked by discursive, linguistic, and also gendered imbalances within the practices of facilitation and decision making, was at the beginning of a reflexive learning process. Confronted with a new transnational format and the internal critique raised by participants, EuroMayDay organizers began to recognize linguistic exclusion. They tried to change the rules to allow more inclusive multilingual deliberations. Similar learning processes could also be observed among the activists in the EPA, where it was especially the newcomers who expressed their frustration with the slowness of multilingual practices, while more experienced activists acknowledged their necessity (Doerr 2009a).

In a very different and socioeconomically asymmetric context, the practices of South African groups offer advanced examples of multilingual communication. They also provide more evidence that English-only sessions reduce the diversity of voices within a local multilingual setting. A good example of this phenomenon was the absence of translation in a few sessions at one of the WSF preparatory workshops in Durban. Despite a high level of participation by foreign activists, intellectuals, and academics from outside South Africa, only a few sessions (about 10 percent) took place exclusively in English, with little effort to provide effective translation. In one such session, chaired by English native speakers with backgrounds in academia, scholars talked about their achievements without inviting participation from the audience. The same overrepresentation of English-speaking contributions was also observed in other sessions, such as when activists came to discuss the political agenda setting for the upcoming Nairobi WSF.

In such sessions, more contributions by African grassroots activists, instead of well-known speakers with academic backgrounds, would have been particularly valuable for multidirectional deliberations between activists from different countries and backgrounds. My interviews indicate that it was a lack of familiarity with the group-specific, abstract language

and vocabulary that speakers used that led to a neglect of translation in some sessions. However, where multilingualism had become part of the shared norms of interaction, South African participants would intervene after such English-only sessions to protest linguistic and political marginalization. As one interviewee commented:

There is a clear dominance of English in big plenary meetings like in the meeting today. That is why we try to work with translation in two or three languages here. Translation has the effect of making the meetings longer, but it also makes them more democratic. But this is not enough. What is still lacking in the WSF process is an expression for the languages of artists. . . . My best experiences with democracy come from the intergalactic spaces<sup>21</sup> in which women were able to “unbreak” the “big” meetings. For instance, a group of women had agreed among themselves to bring their children to the meetings. That was good; it showed their strength and the diversity for which the movement intends to speak. (Interview with activist from the Antiprivatization Forum, Durban, August 6, 2006)

Those interviewees who had previous experiences with feminist and radical democratic rules and practices also expressed their disagreements with facilitation within the plenary sessions, making practical suggestions, to quote from the above interview, on how “to ‘unbreak’ the ‘big’ meetings.” Indeed, after plenary sessions in which participants had openly expressed their discomfort with “big” meetings and the language of experts, the facilitators I observed would make organizational changes to introduce small group discussions or give participants more occasions for interactions outside the plenary assemblies.

## CONCLUSION

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Activists and scholars have raised concerns that “deliberative talk” involves complex trade-offs between strategic considerations and participatory democracy. In this chapter I have tried to understand how groups in emerging transnational social movements deal with the challenge of multilingualism in their meetings. I found that translation was neglected by facilitators and group leaders in moments in which it would have been particularly valuable. This was the case whether activists worked with simultaneous translation or other practices, and faced time constraints, in strategically relevant situations where important topics

were discussed. Yet, depending on the case, experienced participants who were linguistically marginalized would express their criticism, thus helping to make multilingualism part of the shared norms for “good deliberation.” The South African groups I studied provide very strong examples of a practice of deliberative multilingual communications. This practice helps groups to build bonds of solidarity within a deeply divided societal context. Conversely, for European groups, activists who promoted linguistic inclusion, such as the Babels network, have been a particularly important transnational group of grassroots brokers who support an ongoing reflexive learning process as seen in the EPA of the ESF process (Doerr 2009b). Facilitators in European groups such as EuroMayDay only resorted to using their multilingual skills after internal criticism was expressed. This reveals an ongoing reflexive learning process that takes place in transnational movement settings.

These findings call for a democratization of the language of decision making in the heart of the WSF process. They show innovative ways to integrate multilingualism within deliberative discussion as was observed in place-specific group cultures such as in South African Social Forum meetings. Moreover, new emerging forms of “language activism” such as the Babels activist interpreters also reflect innovation in democratic practices and suggest a need to rethink the meaning of political efficacy. The challenge of the WSF process would thus be to help diffuse these innovative practices to other groups and individuals in the global justice movement. This would help to realize the Social Forum ideal of a truly reflexive public sphere and inclusive political process in which learning occurs through listening to the other (Melucci 1989; della Porta 2009; Doerr 2009b). Research needs to explore how marginalized groups can extend the cultural conventions of mainstream public deliberation if they are able to express dissent and turn their own multilingual skills and experiences into a resource to reimagine the public sphere within and beyond social movements.

## NOTES

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1. The EPAs are co-organized and financed by political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and trade unions (Andretta and Reiter 2009).
2. The term *precarity* has been defined as a condition “which describes an increasing change of previously guaranteed permanent employment conditions into mainly worse paid, uncertain jobs” (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, quoted in Mattoni 2006).

3. Prishani Naidoo. 2006. Talk at the World Social Forum Preparatory Meeting in Durban, University of Durban, July 23, 2006; Molefi Ndlovu, Center for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. Email interview conducted by Nicole Doerr.

4. The sample of interviews (N=105) is composed of 80 interviews with activists participating in the transnational and national ESF preparatory assemblies, 15 interviews with activists participating in the transnational EuroMayDay network meetings, and 10 interviews with activists from South African groups, see in detail Doerr (2008). My data for the survey (N=100) was exclusively collected in meetings preparing for the ESF events.

5. For further details on participant observation, critical discourse analysis, interviews, and survey, see Doerr (2008).

6. Participants in the EPA come from countries such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

7. These meetings were organized by the “NoLager network” in the context of protest actions against migrant deportation camps.

8. EuroMayDay groups from across Europe met in cities such as Berlin, Paris, Hamburg, and Milan. I studied the EuroMayDay meetings in Hamburg (October 22–23, 2005) and in Milan (February 18–19, 2006).

9. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

10. The use of English in transnational EuroMayDay meetings might be one among a number of other more structural and material obstacles to access when trying to understand why the actual target groups of the EuroMayDay network—the “precarious people”—were not present at the transnational network meetings (Doerr 2008; Mattoni 2006).

11. Namely English, the “Bantu Trinity” of isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Sesotho, and Afrikaans.

12. Email interview with a facilitator involved in the South African Social Forums process, March 15, 2008.

13. Result based on my interviews. For more on the case of the EPA, see Doerr (forthcoming).

14. Email post by a EuroMayDay activist from Italy on the EuroMayDay listserv, June 8, 2005. Note the slight contradiction between the affirmed idea (to talk in English only; in the quote “[we talk] in English, of course”) and the more mixed, multilingual practice: This statement was made in French by an Italian activist to address another French-speaking activist who had criticized the English-only postings on the listserv.

15. Transcript of a plenary discussion in the EuroMayDay meeting in Hamburg, October 22–23, 2005.



16. The WSF workshops, for instance, included local community activists, local Social Forum activists from Durban, and academics from North America and the WSF organizing committee. The Abahlali meeting included shack-dweller communities and foreigners who did not speak local languages, and the meetings of the national Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) in Johannesburg included women and lesbians from the countryside as well as journalists from abroad, professional activists from NGOs, and academics.

17. Email interview with a facilitator involved in the South African Social Forums process, March 15, 2008.

18. See fieldnotes on the EuroMayDay meeting, February 18, 2006.

19. Ibid.

20. Result of participant observation within the EuroMayDay meeting in Milan, February 18, 2006.

21. The first “Intergalactika Laboratory of Disobedience” took place at the Youth Camp in the context of the WSF in Porto Alegre and has been described as a “prototypical model for future autonomous spaces at the forums” (Juris 2005: 261).



## CHAPTER 18

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# DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION IN THE U.S. AND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUMS

*Jackie Smith and Nicole Doerr*

Democratization is an ongoing, conflict-ridden process, resulting from contestation between social movements and political elites (Markoff 1996; Tilly 1984). The struggle to make elites more accountable to a larger public has produced the democratic institutions with which we are familiar, and it continues to shape and reconfigure these institutions. It also transforms the individuals and organizations involved in social change, generating social movement cultures, norms, and practices that evolve over time.

In this chapter, we conceptualize the World Social Forum (WSF) process as part of a larger historical struggle over people's right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. As other contributions to this handbook have shown, the WSF has emerged from and brings together a diverse array of social movements and has become a focal point for contemporary movements struggling against the antidemocratic character of neoliberal globalization.

Neoliberalism's threats to democratic governance result from its expansion of the political and economic authority of international financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization; its hollowing out of national states through privatization, the international debt regime, and international trade policies; its privileging of expert and technocratic knowledge over all other

sources of knowledge; and its depoliticization of economic policymaking (Brunelle 2007; Harvey 2005; Markoff 1999; McMichael 2006).

This chapter identifies innovations in participatory democratic practice that activist organizers in the WSF process developed in response to these antidemocratic tendencies of global neoliberalism. We explore, in particular, how the WSF process in the United States and Europe has contributed distinctive models of democratic practice. We find that the particularities of place shape both the content of democratic innovations, as well as the prospects for the spread of new forms of action across time and space. At the same time, regardless of place we find that individual activists play important brokering roles, connecting marginalized groups with the WSF process and linking Social Forum events across time and place. The WSF process provides a structure within which activists can develop, refine, and adapt democratic innovations advancing a global challenge to neoliberal globalization.

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### SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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Modern political institutions are based on the notion that public authority stems from the consent of the people. Thus, elites must make claims to legitimate authority based on popular mandates that remain open to constant challenge by mobilized publics (Markoff 2009). Over the course of history, contention between movements and authorities has expanded the franchise to include groups historically marginalized because of gender, race, or landlessness and made democratic institutions more responsive and fair in their representation of the will of the people. They have done so, for instance, by creating novel forms of participation such as petitions, referendums, people's assemblies, and tribunals, and by challenging legal restrictions on voting and on public expression (Markoff 2004; Tilly 2004, 1995; McCarthy and McPhail 2006).

Polletta's work on the history of participatory democracy in social movements documents how activists have developed strategies aimed at both changing existing political arrangements and cultivating practices that reflect activists' values (2002). Many movements have faced serious tensions or splits over whether to prioritize participation or political expediency and policy impact. Nevertheless, activists' deep commitment to participatory democracy is reflected in the persistence of practices and values that are "prefigurative" of the society activists envision, and they have tended to generate organizational structures with a minimal divi-

sion of labor, rotating tasks, decentralized authority, and an egalitarian ethos (Polletta 2002). Participatory democracy, according to Polletta, contributes to the “collective self-development” of popular groups, making the dichotomy between participation and political impact a false one.

The emphasis of many (though certainly not all) Social Forum activists on the *process*—rather than on events or particular movement outcomes—seems a deliberate response to the supposed tension between efficacy and participation. Indeed, Social Forum activists are quite explicit in their references to historical rifts in their movements and are perhaps unusually self-reflexive in their effort to develop a process that accounts for the mistakes of the past and builds upon the insights and experiences of earlier movements. Their actions signal a commitment to long-term collective engagement around shared principles, but with an end point that remains ambiguous. As many activists like to say, “We’re making a path as we walk.” Thus, in the WSF what becomes central are the activities of engagement, strengthening relationships, cultivating skills and leadership, building consensus around core values, and inspiring creativity and new associational forms.

The WSF process should thus be seen as an outcome of earlier movements from places around the world. As a result of engagement with this global networked process, WSF activists are increasingly informed about lessons and practices of movements in other parts of the world. Activists can therefore reflect more deliberately and comparatively on how different national structures and cultural factors affect organizing possibilities and on what organizational practices and norms are most effective at bridging the many differences within the WSF.

Polletta’s research identified three major relational bases for social movements advancing participatory democracy in the United States: religious fellowship, tutelage, and friendship (2002: 16). She argues that these basic relational structures affect the forms of participatory democracy enacted by movements and shape the possibilities for activists to manage conflict and change. Elsewhere, Polletta and Doerr (2010) have developed a notion of democracy in the ESF and the WSF as operating on the base of a relationship of translation, a relationship that is different from those motivating earlier instances of participatory democracy and that has strengths and weaknesses. Here we explore two norms of participatory democracy we have observed in the WSF process, which we see as helping constitute the relationship of translation, namely “solidarity” and “intentionality.” We argue that the World Social

Forums contribute to the development of new associational norms that are more explicit in their recognition of the need for cross-sectoral and cross-national alliances.

By solidarity and intentionality we refer to Social Forum organizers' deep commitment to the WSF process and its guiding Charter of Principles (see Rucht, Chapter 1). What we've witnessed in the course of several years of participant observation research is an expanding level of trust in the process that animates the World Social Forums. This trust motivates activists and keeps them connected to the WSF process despite the high cost of participation and the frustrations that often accompany transnational activism. It typically emerges from activists' greater appreciation of global interdependence and the need for strong transnational and cross-sectoral alliances. It guides activists as they work simultaneously to redress inequalities within their movements as well as in the larger society.

History has shown, however, that these types of alliances will not develop through top-down processes and superficial or paternalistic forms of solidarity, but rather through mutual understanding and empathy and commitment to a shared struggle, or what Waterman calls "complex solidarity" (Waterman 2001: 235-236).<sup>1</sup> The WSF helps guide activists as they learn to work together through particular Social Forum activities. Social Forum organizers have been criticized for failing to fully democratize their decision-making processes. Indeed, we share some of these critiques. Nevertheless, the practical work of organizing particular Forum events requires some delegation of authority, even where a mechanism for such delegation is absent.

Intentionality is a norm that can aid the work of reconciling the democratic values of the WSF process with the practicalities of organizing large-scale public events. The "intentionality" of the Social Forum is evident in its reflexivity—in the level of deep discussion among organizers about how to make the process more participatory and inclusive of marginalized groups (see, e.g., Juris 2008). It is also reflected in a commitment to what Doerr calls "careful listening," which aims to "change those culturally specific 'hearing habits' that work against traditionally marginalized groups" (2009: i).

What is also interesting to note here is that, while Polletta's past research focused only on U.S. cases, the emergence of the WSF process and the cross-national parallels we have seen in the practice of participatory democracy reveal similarities in how movements develop in different parts

of the world. Such similarities in norms, practices, and values allowed the WSF to emerge and sustain transnational cooperative efforts over more than a decade. These preexisting commonalities that transcend national boundaries also help activists overcome resource and other constraints to unite across such diversity. While particular national histories are important and while differences remain in the nature of movement association and understanding of democratic practice, a common cultural foundation is emerging to facilitate transnational organizing in the spaces of the WSFs. Activists express this common foundation as “unity in diversity,” or in the language of the Zapatistas, they seek “one world with room for many worlds.” Diversity is thus often put forth by Social Forum organizers as a value, a goal, and strength of this “movement of movements” rather than an obstacle.

### THE WSF PROCESS AS GLOBAL DEMOCRATIZATION

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The World Social Forum process must be seen as a response to the loss of legitimacy of representative democratic institutions, which have become increasingly ineffective at representing and responding to popular interests under neoliberalism (Brunelle 2007; Markoff 1999, 2003b). Framed initially as a challenge to the global financial elite who gather annually at the World Economic Forum, the WSF is explicit in its demands for both an expanded global agenda that privileges social and ecological concerns over financial ones and for greater representation and inclusiveness in politics. It challenges dominant, Western traditions that adopt scientific and technical approaches to decisions that are fundamentally about core social values (Santos 2006). Since its first gathering in 2001, the WSF has continually encouraged activists to find ways to translate global principles and values into local political contexts, leading to a proliferation of Social Forums at local, national, and regional levels. This process of encouraging new understandings and practices that enhance connections between the global and the local makes the WSF a profoundly important force in contemporary global politics.

The WSF slogan, “Another World Is Possible,” highlights this effort to encourage new modes of thinking and acting as a means of advancing global change. By linking popular movements across time and place, the WSF process helps expand activists’ political imaginations, encouraging thinking that transcends the conventional notions of state and citizenship and the issue-segregation encouraged by institutionalized politics.

Unlike those in most national social movements, activists in the World Social Forum raise important questions about the state as a form of social organization. There is frequent acknowledgement that the state is essential to advancing movement interests, but that it needs to be fundamentally altered if it is to address popular needs over those of global capital. This realization that basic institutions of society are fundamentally incapable of addressing popular needs is unsettling, and it can create huge challenges for activist groups working to generate and coordinate social change activism. By emphasizing the Forum's "open space" character over particular strategies and priorities, WSF organizers have continually created new avenues for popular engagement with a process whose ends and identity remain fluid. By refusing to privilege any particular organizational model or political strategy, open space increases possibilities for new democratic forms to emerge. By facilitating workshops and sessions that bring groups together, it generates dialogues across differences, including sensitive listening that can help break down long-standing power structures that maintain existing lines of power and privilege.

The WSF emphasizes creating "open space" where people can gather to articulate ideas about what sort of world they desire. There is extensive literature on the importance of such "free spaces" for the development of social movements (see, e.g., Polletta 1999 for a review and critique). Spaces freed from the physical and cultural constraints of dominant institutions and social relations enable free and creative deliberation that allows new collective identities, visions, and strategies to emerge. As the WSF has matured, it has consistently produced new efforts to expand spaces for local-level participation. It has done so by encouraging more localized manifestations of the Social Forums, fostering decentralized organizing and planning in the Forums themselves, modifying practices that reinforced existing patterns of inequality and privilege, and developing new decision-making and communications technologies that facilitate popular participation in the WSF process. The WSF process also establishes routines of regular communication across diverse networks that focus activists' energies on the shared project of organizing Social Forums and enhancing the Forum's inclusivity and representativeness—in other words, strengthening participatory democracy from local to global levels.<sup>2</sup> This process has been uneven and contentious. Progress in advancing solidarity and intentionality depends upon what we refer to as "grassroots democracy brokers" to help bridge diverse constituencies and address contradictions between ideals and practice in the Forums.

While the major organizational work of the WSF is to create open spaces, and organizers have resisted formal structures and hierarchies, the process has necessarily generated transnational and transmovement associational structures that have enabled it to evolve and learn over time. This strengthens activists' shared sense of "who we are" and what sort of world "we" want and think is possible. Building upon preexisting network ties, activists in the WSF process have worked very deliberately to expand associational ties across sectoral, class, and national boundaries—that is, to be intentional in their enactment of the WSF process. This has often meant developing new organizational models and practices such as thematic Forums and the People's Movement Assemblies discussed below. By creating spaces where networks can expand and intersect, the WSF process provides new opportunities for increasing popular democratic mobilization around the world. As Polletta observed:

[P]reexisting network ties militate against the formation of mobilizing identities. [ . . . One dynamic through which such constraints are surmounted] is the *network intersections* that provide an aggrieved population new access not only to physical, financial, and communicative resources, but also to people whose only weak ties and consequent social distance and status enable them to challenge existing relations of deference. (Polletta 1999: 26, emphasis original)

The WSF process, we argue, encourages a constant expansion of such network intersections. Norms of solidarity and intentionality that undergird the process nurture skills and reinforce innovations that advance cross-cutting network ties. Below we discuss prominent examples of new practices, in particular by the "grassroots brokers" who help bridge local and translocal movement spaces and socialize activists in norms that aid coalition work. Such brokers include linguistic and communications technology activists whose expertise enhances their influence as promoters of new norms. We then examine a novel form of democratic practice, the Social Movement and later People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs), which were introduced as part of the European and U.S. Social Forums. These assemblies helped to resolve a core division among activists about whether the Forum should remain an open space for debate or whether participants should develop and ratify unified positions or actions against neoliberal globalization.



GRASSROOTS BROKERS IN THE UNITED STATES  
AND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUMS

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The European Social Forum (ESF) was created by European global justice activists in 2002 during a period of relative movement growth (della Porta et al. 2006). Unlike previous mobilizations (Rucht 2002), the ESF attracted a high number of participants from small local groups and/or resource-poor organizations meeting in regular European preparatory assemblies, the so-called EPAs (Doerr 2009b). Decision making during the ESF's early development saw many difficulties stemming from national and organizational, as well as ideological differences (see, e.g., Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005). Over time, however, ESF organizers developed norms of deliberation in which differences of political identity and ideology were recognized as a resource of reciprocal learning—drawing on place-specific experiences of cross-ideological cooperation in the Social Forums (della Porta 2005; della Porta and Mosca 2007).

The ESF has grown into a transnational and transmovement alliance that has contributed to several successful Europewide political campaigns that included both “radical” global justice activists and more “moderate” leftist and Green Party members of the European Parliament and the European Trade Union Federation. In particular, the EPAs developed a reflexive culture of consensus that differed from decision-making practices in national contexts in its stronger openness to disagreement and confrontation (Doerr 2009a). This innovation was introduced and implemented by a new group of actors: grassroots brokers, including multilingual translators who worked together with Social Forum leaders to facilitate preparatory meetings at the European level.

Grassroots brokers came from volunteer translators, migrant rights groups,<sup>3</sup> anarchist and feminist organizations, and media networks that worked to institutionalize inclusive linguistic translation and rules of gender equality, transparency, and responsive consensus. A comparative study shows that the EPAs, unlike the National Preparatory Assemblies (NPAs), institutionalized transparent and inclusionary decision making through the efforts made by grassroots brokers to create effective spaces for networking beyond place-specific cleavages of identity and ideology (Doerr 2009a). Indeed, ESF leaders—themselves professional activists from unions, political parties, and large movement organizations—operated as facilitators in an unfamiliar transnational setting. They routinely made concessions to grassroots brokers, whom they relied upon as skilled translators in

meetings. Responding to emergent group norms and practices, movement leaders gradually learned and changed their leadership style to respond more respectfully to differences of class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status. For instance, facilitators in the EPAs implemented a gender equity rule in plenary discussions—an idea grassroots brokers had not been able to implement in the NPAs. They did so by incorporating new practices and solidarity funding to advance gender equity (Doerr 2007).

In contrast to the ESF process, which was initiated and led early on by largely middle-class activists, the U.S. Social Forum process has been led from the start by leaders of organizations that mobilize low-income groups and people of color, making it rather atypical in the entire WSF process. The U.S. Social Forum's National Planning Committee (NPC) is intentionally composed mainly of representatives of organizations that mobilize those most marginalized by economic globalization. U.S. movement leaders have done the most to help implement the idea of intentionality as a basis for coalition. While intentionality emerges from and complements the principles of the WSF, particularly its impetus for emphasizing the voices of the global South, this norm focuses activist attention on the role of power and privilege in coalition work. It encourages specific action to remedy inequities and exclusions. It acknowledges that recognizing power asymmetries is not enough, and creating "open space" is not sufficient to counteract the hierarchies and exclusions resulting from the realities of power and material and social inequality (Juris 2008; Teivainen, Chapter 3).

Intentionality as articulated by USSF leaders has meant that privileged groups such as middle-class, male, and white activists are asked to "step back," allowing those without privilege to lead. Those groups accustomed to being in the shadows, in turn, are being called upon to "step up," to lead, and to articulate their needs in ways that can support collaboration. The task of sustaining a commitment to intentionality while also advancing the Social Forum process has not been easy, and it has led USSF leaders to move more slowly than some members of the WSF community would have liked. But after two U.S. Social Forums, an intentional culture of networking gained strength and transformed marginalized groups into leaders in national and transnational movements, thus extending the developmental and solidarity benefits of participatory democracy.

The U.S. Social Forum process emerged around the goal of intentionality in response to class and racial divisions within and among

U.S. social movements. Middle-class and generally white activists tend to be more engaged in formal organizations that operate nationally or transnationally. In contrast, those engaged in the struggles of the poor, led by people of color, or addressing the needs of those most excluded by dominant institutions, such as LGBT and disabled people, tend to be involved in more local organizations (see, e.g., Polletta 2002; Lichterman 1996). During the 1980s and 1990s, there were national efforts to expand networks among these grassroots or mass-based organizations, generating, for instance, alliances around environmental justice (Faber 2005) and worker issues (Tait 2005). Some members of these grassroots alliances had begun attending the World Social Forums, and helped form the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, whose aim was to expand the WSF process among grassroots and poor people's organizations in the United States.

Thus, the USSF process was born out of an explicit struggle to alter class and race relations and leadership in national movements and to reprioritize movement agendas. The fact that the WSF International Council designated the Grassroots Global Justice Alliance to lead the U.S. Social Forum process gave the network legitimacy and enabled its leaders to ensure that inequalities would not be reproduced in the USSF process. Organizers worked to involve grassroots leaders, especially from marginalized groups, and tried to build a movement out of geographically scattered and issue-specific networks, community organizations, and social justice workers across the United States (Karides et al. 2010). This meant prioritizing inclusivity over mobilizing the largest numbers for the USSFs. The articulation of intentionality fostered greater participation by people of color, linguistic minorities, migrants, women, and disadvantaged groups than other Social Forums had realized (Juris 2008; Juris et al., Chapter 15; Karides 2008; Katz-Fishman and Scott 2008; Reese et al., Chapter 4).

Thus, to a much larger extent than in the ESF, migrants, women organizers, and LGBT activists became leaders in organizing and decision making for the USSFs. For instance, LGBT activists reported feeling marginalized by the homophobic culture of discourse in the more inclusionary EPAs and the ESFs (Doerr 2007), but were facilitators, staff, and lead organizers in the USSF. Also, while migrant rights organizations were formally invited but informally marginalized in the EPA organizing process (see, e.g., Boéri and Hodkinson 2004), they served as anchor organizations in the 2010 USSF and have held leadership positions on

the NPC since its inception. These groups worked as bilingual leaders to raise activists' awareness of the perspectives and needs of migrant communities and to build a U.S. movement of excluded workers, migrant rights, and rights to the city.

Bringing in their own networks and experiences with consensus-based decision-making processes, grassroots leaders and Indigenous groups used the USSF process to mobilize large numbers of people of color and other less privileged groups to expand cross-sectoral networking and transmovement coalitions (Karides et al. 2010). While considerable work remains to address the many dimensions of oppression manifested in the forms of marginalization and social exclusion the WSF process challenges, the USSF has the potential to transform both the U.S. social movement sector as well as the WSF process itself.

The experiences of the ESF and USSF both demonstrate the democratizing tendencies in social movements. While the USSF experience makes the ESF process look comparatively elitist and top-down, the process of organizing Social Forums has led the ESF down a path towards enhanced participation and leadership from more marginalized and grassroots organizations. The USSF demonstrates a more dramatic innovation through its introduction of the principle of intentionality at the very start. But both processes have generated a very distinct group of actors: grassroots brokers. These are activists whose actions and political intention, in different place-specific settings, serve to improve the inclusivity and equality of deliberation and extend the network of involved groups.

Grassroots brokers build bridges between socially and geographically distanced people and organizations. In the WSF process they exhibit keen listening and effective and subtle communications skills. They help socialize other activists to listen carefully and in new ways. They are leaders who speak in ways that value diversity and that run counter to Western cultural norms of speed, action, and efficiency. In other words, they sensitize activists in the submerged traditions and practices that may be key to realizing "another world." They transform the more passive notion of listening into an active task of emphasizing reflection over talk. They often slow down discussions about logistics and planning to allow time for crucial dialogue and mutual understanding to take place (see Doerr 2009a, Chapter 17).<sup>4</sup>

In the ESF, grassroots brokers were neither leaders of political parties, nor part of the established movement leadership. Their ambiguous

organizational positions enabled them to encourage relationships of trust among adversaries (Polletta and Doerr 2010). For example, grassroots activists in Europe created a network called Babels composed of volunteer translators who exchange their services for attendance at the EPAs. Babels made it possible to conduct meetings with groups in which more than 10 languages were represented (Boéri and Hodkinson 2004). The multilingual practice of young translators in the ESF and the intentional leadership of women of color in the United States encouraged older participants, in particular women, to speak comfortably in their preferred language, which was liberating for those who had experienced the stigmatization of their way of speaking, race, or gender. In both the transnational and domestic arenas of the Social Forums, grassroots brokers were thus able to extend the institutionalized conventions and the impact of participatory democracy by turning their own culturally distinct experiences of marginalization into a positive and innovative struggle for democratizing the Forums (migrants providing translation, feminists monitoring inclusive consensus processes, LGBT activists becoming facilitators in meetings).

U.S. information and communications technology (ICT) activists found themselves in a similar role of brokers as were translators in the European context, and they also faced similar obstacles of having to challenge their treatment as service providers rather than activists in their own right. Many ICT activists see communications technology as a key to radical social change. They understand the Internet as providing space that is at least partially and potentially much freer from the incursions of globalized capital. They join movements to experience a more collaborative work environment than they find in their professional lives, bringing their skills and hopes for achieving the democratic potential of technology to the work of movement building. In this way, they enact norms of solidarity and intentionality, deliberately putting their skills at the service of movement building, but also seeking ways to do this on their own terms.

In doing the “technical” work, ICT volunteers tend to step back from the political work of developing content. They go into the “shadows” to do work that facilitates participation and inclusion (see Smith and Smythe 2009). Their work is particularly crucial to transnational activism, which requires regular long-distance communication among geographically dispersed activists who frequently lack relevant skills and resources. Developing technological solutions to the challenges of distance and

communications costs is what motivates many ICT activists. But developing effective tools requires ongoing interactions and sometimes very contentious negotiations between ICT and other activists. Too often the radical commitments of ICT activists are not appreciated, as most activists' engagement with them is limited to requests for technical support or complaints about the website. Or ICT activists' commitment to using only free and open source software is compromised in the course of organizing work aimed at minimizing technological skill requirements and reaching populations not already engaged in social movement networks.<sup>5</sup> Different communications cultures and styles, which can be exacerbated by differences in age, race, and gender, can complicate efforts to address these conflicts.

In the USSF case, these differences caused major tension during the 2007 USSF and contributed to the widely perceived failures of the People's Media Center. In 2010, more conscious effort was made to alter the ICT strategy within the NPC, and from the earliest NPC meetings organizers were encouraged to attend training sessions in using the website and online organizing features ICT activists had built. The ICT organizers also brought some important innovations aimed at facilitating long-distance organizing by the NPC.<sup>6</sup> This did not prevent a major blowup of tensions late in the process when many remained frustrated with online registration and other glitches, but grassroots brokers both from the ICT network and the NPC leadership mediated a discussion that advanced mutual understanding, as well as strategic thinking about the role of ICT and ICT activists in the movement. As was true with the translators in the ESF, ICT activists' indispensable skill and knowledge gave them leverage to address their grievances while also socializing other activists to appreciate the importance of their work in advancing open spaces for participatory democracy.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, grassroots brokers in contemporary global justice activism play key roles linking marginalized communities to social movement networks and building new movement technologies that help foster intergroup linkages and communications. Many organizers on the NPC, for instance, are grassroots leaders who are helping link their constituencies with the USSF process. This often means extensive work helping constituents understand and appreciate the potential of the USSF process as well as educating NPC members about the particular needs and challenges of their constituencies. For instance, Indigenous peoples' delegates to the NPC repeatedly and patiently explained to NPC organizers the resource

limitations and other challenges they have in mobilizing Indigenous participation in the USSF. Poor people's, disability rights, and feminist groups reminded organizers of the challenges poor people have in attending Social Forums, and encouraged the provision of services to meet health and child care needs during the Forum.

Thus, grassroots brokers expand people's understandings of what solidarity means while facilitating the practice of intentionality. They bring cultural and technical skills that are usually seen as nonpolitical into politics. They are generally not understood as leaders in the traditional sense, but their leadership has been and continues to be essential to the WSF process. Moreover, through structures like Babels and the ICT Working Group, these forms of leadership are becoming institutionalized in the WSF process, along with new understandings of what it means to do "political" work towards another possible world.

With respect to the innovatory and developmental potential of participatory democracy (Polletta 2002: 12–14), this comparison shows that in European and U.S. contexts, in national or transnational settings, in periods of movement growth or decline, diversity was a key value used to enhance the impact of the Forum. Through the intentional practice of deliberation, grassroots brokers in the EPAs and in the USSF NPC were able to challenge the gender, race, and class biases that contribute to participatory democracies' frequent crises. This shows the potential of the WSF as a multiscalar participatory experiment that makes diversity a key value and practice in support of solidarity networks that link local, national, and transnational social movement spaces.

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### FROM SOCIAL MOVEMENT ASSEMBLIES TO THE PMAs

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One of the central questions debated since the creation of the WSF is the relationship between action and deliberation. Some WSF organizers want it to take joint decisions as an instrument for movement action, while others prefer its "open space" character, which fosters dialogue between different groups and individuals (Sen 2004). European and U.S. activists have addressed this tension in different ways.

During the first WSF in Porto Alegre (2001), a group of Europeans who would later organize the ESF held a "European Social Movement Assembly," the first of many such assemblies at ESF events (Bolini 2002). The Assemblies aimed to create a more action-oriented space to build a Europewide grassroots movement. Discussions in these spaces focused

activist attention on collective action (Aguiton and Cardon 2005). Assemblies invited all people to deliberate and resist a culture of unaccountable and nontransparent decision making in the WSF's International Council (Haeringer et al. 2009). In 2010, U.S. activists expanded on the notion of social movement assemblies and organized People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs) alongside the entire five days of the second USSF. This innovation not only helped move past the debate over whether the WSF should privilege open space or action—a debate never as entrenched in the U.S. as elsewhere—to offer a model for expanding public deliberation, decision making, and action on issues that matter in people's lives.<sup>8</sup> The PMA “process,” as activists call it, resembles the WSF in that it can be organized at multiple scales and that different Assemblies aim to speak to one another and to the larger USSF process. They create opportunities for popular participation around activities and goals that contribute to movement convergence.

In the place-specific context of the ESF, the Social Movement Assemblies are a controversial mechanism of decision making within the Forum space. The Charter of Principles makes clear that the WSF is not supposed to be a movement actor, and WSF organizers also warn that no group of experts or intellectuals shall speak or decide on behalf of the WSF (Whitaker 2004). And yet, Social Forum organizers must make decisions on the location, structures, themes, and finances of large Forum events and days of transnational collective action (Teivainen 2004). This inherent organizational paradox is often confronted in preparatory meetings for Social Forums at regional and global levels. Bringing together a hundred or a few hundred organizers each, the U.S. NPC meetings and the European EPAs constitute a perhaps less visible but all the more important “backstage” (Rucht 2008) for political agenda-setting work and networking in the global justice movement.

In the regional ESF and the global WSF, grassroots and often resource-poor activists criticized preparatory assemblies outside Forum events for their exclusivity and lack of transparency (Kavada 2007; Maeckelbergh 2009). Many activists and analysts blamed the democratic deficit, in particular, of the International Council (IC) of the WSF. The IC involves only a select number of about 160 delegates and observing organizations,<sup>9</sup> yet it makes crucial decisions in regard to the location, political content, and finances of the WSF (Teivainen 2002). To improve openness of their own regional preparatory assemblies for the ESF, Europeans used the EPAs to strengthen resistance against neoliberal politics of the European



Union and build a Europewide social movement for democracy that would include “moderate” unionists and party activists as well as “radical” grassroots global justice activists, Central and Eastern Europeans, and migrants (della Porta 2009; Andretta and Reiter 2009; Doerr 2007).

The ESF founders therefore created regular European Social Movement Assemblies within each of their EPAs, allowing them to issue timely calls for action or declarations on more proximate European protest campaigns, transnational days of solidarity, and E.U.-wide protests. Calls for action are publicized over email lists and documented on the ESF’s homepage.<sup>10</sup> European Social Movement Assemblies also enable mutual information and decision making on issue-specific political campaigns through “network meetings,” held the day before each EPA. Network meetings, as well as Social Movement Assemblies, work as informal mechanisms of open-ended, deliberative agreement that excludes voting. The distinct culture of consensus in the EPA means that facilitators invite all participants to voice disagreement and respond to them until a common position emerges. This practice does not require strict consensus on all issues and by all actors/participants, but it makes the support of proposals by a larger transmovement assembly possible (Doerr 2009a).

The open-ended, deliberative style that made European Social Movement Assemblies so effective for informal networking and long-term development of a diverse movement, however, complicated attempts at immediate decision making. At the ESF in Paris (2003), grassroots activists rebelled against the decision on the location of the subsequent ESF, which was made by an exclusive group of professional activists working for local mayors and for political parties, unions, and transnational movement organizations. During the contentious preparations for the ESF in London (2004), European Social Movements Assemblies turned into an arena for reciprocal accusations in which British “horizontal” groups demanded more accountability by leftist party leaders and politicians, without much success (Maeckelbergh 2009). To reform their increasingly exclusive European Assemblies during the following ESFs in Greece (2006) and Scandinavia (2008), ESF organizers, inspired by the WSF, introduced consultation rounds to facilitate a more bottom-up methodology (Fuster Morell 2010; Pleyers 2010). In other words, organizers introduced online platforms as a tool that provided more horizontality, transparency, and wider grassroots-access to the decision making on the program for the forum (Fuster Morell 2010). Thus, the Social Movement

Assemblies were a mechanism that allowed for solidarity declarations among issue-specific networks and pluralist national organizations, but they increasingly failed to include the dispersed local level of participants into the continuous work of organizing.

Addressing these same concerns, the USSF developed the practice of People's Movements Assemblies (PMAs), particularly in advance of the second Forum in 2010. PMAs were introduced on the USSF website and other movement literature as a way for local groups and larger coalitions or campaigns to get involved in the USSF process in their locales. The purpose is to facilitate deliberation around particular issues or key concerns in particular locales, and to help overcome the difficulties people—especially those low-income communities of color and other marginalized groups at the center of the USSF process—have in traveling to national Social Forums. Thus, this innovation results directly from the particularities of U.S. geography and the intentionality of the USSF process.

Activists were encouraged to organize PMAs before, during, and/or after the USSF to catalyze action. People's Movement Assemblies were organized, for instance, in Detroit in advance of the USSF to generate popular input into decisions about what protest actions to ask USSF participants to support and suggestions about how to make the USSF most helpful to local organizing efforts. In addition, about 50 PMAs were held during the USSF itself, in designated spaces.<sup>11</sup> Each day of the Forum, training was offered for PMA facilitators, who were invited to report the results of their PMA in the PMA space, which was open throughout the entire USSF. The National People's Movement Assembly took place on the last day of the USSF as a plenary session (with no concurrent sessions scheduled). For each of the 13 themes of the USSF, PMA organizers distilled the PMA deliberations into a list of core principles and calls to action designed to build unity and forge collective action in the weeks and months following the USSF. All participants were invited to vote (with colored paper slips) on whether they or their organization agreed to be in solidarity or to consider taking action on particular proposals.<sup>12</sup> As the vote did not eschew one option, but instead, allowed for multiple options, it symbolized and demonstrated for participants the novel relationship of solidarity in the WSF, which encourages collective action by heterogeneous groups. Organizers of the PMAs see them as helping build a community between the issue-specific and widely dispersed grassroots movements involved in the USSF and as

a mechanism for generating collective action without violating the WSF commitment to being an open space.<sup>13</sup>

Facilitators of the PMAs encouraged both the building of personal networks between grassroots activists and larger group discussions and united the people whom they included using chants, small group discussions, “fish bowl” exercises, and joint marches. Despite these attempts, not all small group discussions were successful. Some PMA organizers emphasized joint resolutions over dialogue and participatory deliberation. In many of those cases, frames were proposed by academic speakers or movement professionals promoting particular goals and proposals. Observers reported that some PMAs were chaotic and poorly facilitated or that decision making was not inclusive or transparent. And while more emotionally charged PMAs may have energized participants, they did not necessarily generate effective decisions. A key point here is that, like the WSF process itself, the PMAs provide templates for action that are used in more or less effective ways by activists. Indeed, PMAs varied enormously in how inclusive and participatory they were, and facilitators were not always well versed in the novel PMA methodology or aims of the process. Participants who did not attend PMAs or review the program or online descriptions of the PMA process were often confused by the closing PMA. Clearly having more experience organizing within the WSF process is helpful, and we can expect that the efforts following the 2010 USSF to train PMA facilitators and to support the ongoing mobilization of more PMAs in the United States (such as through the use of PMA organizing kits) may enhance their effectiveness. The process both requires, and will likely aid the development of, new grassroots brokers, as it emphasizes the very skills that are necessary for these types of movement leaders to emerge.

A striking difference Doerr observed between the PMAs, and their European counterparts, was that PMAs were full of energy, resounding with enthusiasm and the emotional “pleasures of conversation” (Jasper 2010: 13) shared among all participants. There was a desire to foster conversation aimed at generating solidarity. The emphasis on facilitator training and on encouraging participation from people with little prior experience clearly responded to a need in the U.S. polity. Given the limited political repertoire in contemporary representative democracies, many—particularly those with limited education and/or skills in public speaking—feel frustrated and alienated from politics. The point of the PMAs is to foster a process that can bring those excluded from global politics into political dialogues and allow them to experience participatory

democracy. The PMAs might thus become “rituals that recreate group solidarity” (Polletta 2002: 79). Successful rituals of “deliberative talk” produce group solidarity through attention to emotions of participants, supporting the mutual recognition and trust that aids in the development of new ideas about collective action aimed at fostering societal change. In contrast, the European Social Movement Assemblies, tended to lack such attention to emotional work.

What makes PMAs distinct from the more established model of the Social Movement Assemblies is their more continuous, grassroots-oriented, ad hoc decision-making style. Unlike the IC or the EPAs, the PMAs are grounded, often local, meetings that are explicitly designed as a tool for grassroots activists. They are linked to the USSF (and by extension the WSF) process but allow organizers greater autonomy in defining their timing and locations. Like the European Social Movement Assemblies, PMAs can be supported by a common webpage ([www.pma2010.org](http://www.pma2010.org)). Unlike the ESF webpage with its periodic updates from the coordinators of the EPAs and the ESF networks, the PMA webpage is widely accessible to use as a participatory tool for local activists to share documents, reports, and calls for transmovement building and collective action. Online and face-to-face meetings organized within a larger, national process that is continuous rather than focused on specific issue campaigns or events can foster relationship building at local levels, sensitizing local activists to the larger political environment and nurture extralocal ties. Polletta identifies the importance of these functions for participatory democracy:

The challenge for participatory democracy movement groups is to coordinate actions and programs across decentralized units. . . . Absent such coordination, not only is regional or national action hampered; so too is local action. Connections among units provide mechanisms for comparing results and trading information. When groups are isolated, the experimental, innovatory functions of participatory decision making suffer. (Polletta 2002: 228)

Although they currently reflect more potential than actual achievement of participatory democracy, the emergence of the European Social Movement Assemblies and the PMAs demonstrates how the World Social Forum process can contribute to innovations in participatory democracy. By creating open spaces for people to gather, build relationships, and develop ideas for confronting the challenges facing communities at local,

national, regional, and global levels, the WSF is an incubator for new experiments in global democracy. Thus, while the WSF still refuses to take action *as* the World Social Forum, it nevertheless advances collective action for radical democracy.

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## CONCLUSION

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The World Social Forum process has contributed to the development of deliberative norms of solidarity and intentionality that help guide social movement relations. These norms emerge from past movement experience and help advance new democratizing projects as part of the contemporary global justice movement. A particular type of movement leader, what we call a “grassroots broker,” has emerged within the context of the Social Forums to help communicate and socialize activists in these norms. Their actions and leadership thus helps build solidarity among diverse groups and facilitates greater inclusion of marginalized groups. Both of these norms—solidarity and inclusion—help animate a global social movement process that encourages activists to confront inequalities while also developing mutual respect, trust, and commitment to the larger WSF process.

As it cultivates leaders skilled in ways that aid multisectoral and transnational organizing, the WSF’s open space also fosters the emergence of new participatory democratic projects, such as the Social Movement Assemblies of the European Social Forums and the much newer People’s Movement Assemblies in the United States. Such projects are typically initiated by grassroots brokers, and they expand opportunities for people to engage in dialogues about social problems and to take steps towards possible solutions. They also help socialize activists by enacting and reinforcing the values and goals of inclusion, equity, and participation expressed in the WSF Charter of Principles. Operating within the larger framework of the WSFs, these assemblies help develop citizens’ skills in democratic practice while also cultivating global awareness and solidarity and deepening social movement networks.

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## NOTES

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1. “Complex Solidarity” according to Waterman emphasizes “equality, liberty, peace, tolerance, and emancipatory/life-protective ideals.” It stresses relationships among peoples and is “an active process of negotiating differences,

or creating [rather than assuming] identity.” It avoids binary ways of thinking and encompasses values such as complementarity, reciprocity, and restitution.

2. One important example of this is the “Expanded” project, started at the Belém WSF in 2009, which connects local sites around the world with WSF sessions via the Internet.

3. We use the term *migrant* rather than *immigrant* to reflect preferences expressed by migrant rights groups at the U.S. Social Forum. The term emphasizes solidarity by highlighting the fact “we are all migrants,” moving for economic and other reasons, whether crossing national borders or not.

4. We saw this happening on numerous occasions at USSF NPC and EPA meetings.

5. For instance, the USSF National Planning Committee decided against the preferences of ICT leaders to allow links to commercial social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter from its website.

6. These improvements to the USSF website included more interactive and online organizing components, a wiki site designed to be used by working groups and other organizers, and the introduction of new technologies for online note taking and conference calls. Many, but not all activists are familiar with these technologies. Some feel too pressed for time to learn new technologies—especially when their own constituencies lack access to the Internet or even computers.

7. Smith fieldnotes, USSF NPC meeting, March 28, 2010.

8. The absence in the United States of an effective multiparty electoral system may help explain why activists in that country have not engaged this debate as extensively.

9. This composition of the International Council, depending on specific periods, includes a varying number of 7 to 10 observing organizations. See “Composition of the International Council,” March 3, 2008, and updated “Composition of the International Council,” retrieved August 11, 2010 ([http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=WSF\\_IC\\_Reports%26Updates](http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=WSF_IC_Reports%26Updates)).

10. [www.fse-esf.org](http://www.fse-esf.org) (retrieved July 21, 2009).

11. The PMAs were regional or thematic, covering issues like excluded workers, Indigenous peoples’ rights, gender justice, and migrant rights.

12. Participants could vote as individuals and/or as delegates of organizations. If acting in the latter capacity, they generally would be committing to discuss the proposal within their organization.

13. Details on the PMAs at <http://organize.ussf2010.org/pma-list> and at <http://pma2010.org/> and from the authors’ fieldnotes from NPC meetings, a Detroit PMA in May 2010, and the USSF June 22–26, 2010, as well as from interviews with lead PMA organizers.



## CHAPTER 19

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# TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION: ANALYSIS OF WORLD SOCIAL FORUM NETWORKS

*Scott Byrd and Lorien Jasny*

A major aim of the World Social Forum process is to increase solidarity building and cooperation with groups from many different countries while also promoting more democratic inclusion of diverse actors. While these objectives are not inherently conflictual, managing such transnational affiliations can produce unintended organizational consequences. This chapter examines the affiliations between movement organizations, coalitions, and networks that collaborate during meetings of the World Social Forum (WSF).

In this chapter, we view transnational movements as “networks of interaction between different actors which may either include formal organizations or not, depending on shifting circumstance” (della Porta and Diani 2006: 16) that are “mobilized with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interactions with power holders in at least one state other than their own, or against an international institution or a multinational economic actor” (Tarrow 2001: 11). While this

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definition is rather broad, it sufficiently encompasses the diversity of actors and motivations present at WSF gatherings. It highlights the importance of the “circumstances” or contexts that affect transnational movement interaction to produce varying patterns of organizational collaboration.

Organizations, movements, and activists engage each other on many levels at the WSF. They celebrate diversity and generate solidarity; integrate struggles from the local to the global; exchange tactics and strategies; and propose common projects and action plans. Organizations and movements are the primary actors facilitating and diffusing the Forum process. Since its inception in January 2001, the WSF has inspired hundreds of regional, national, and local Forums facilitated by decentralized organizing coalitions and organizations (see Smith and Smythe, Chapter 2; Glasius and Timms 2006). Beyond the individual organizations and movements that constitute the WSF process, we contend that the Forums can be thought of as a multiorganizational field serving as a transnational mobilizing infrastructure that produces a specific cultural and ideological environment within the global justice movement as well as global civil society writ large (see Rucht, Chapter 1; Byrd 2005; Smith et al. 2007).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the reflexivity between Forum incarnations in various political and cultural contexts produces a dynamic case in which to examine the ways organizations relate to each other and innovate in their networking strategies over time.

In this chapter we trace the development of Forum organizing logic and framing of the WSF as a nonhierarchical gathering for collaboration and networking within the global justice movement (GJM), relating the Forum process to existing literature on organizational collaboration and change. We then analyze the consequences of organizational design, technical innovations, and issue resonance designed to produce more open and horizontal collaboration by conducting a network analysis of organizations that facilitated sessions and workshops during the 2003 and 2005 WSFs in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Finally, we discuss the implications of the WSF for facilitating transnational networking.

#### HORIZONTAL INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION

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Though many hundreds of thousands of individuals attend Social Forums, the Forum officially operates as a gathering of movements, coalitions, and networks. The WSF Charter of Principles explicitly states that the WSF shall be



an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, *by groups and movements of civil society*. (Article 1, emphasis added)

As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition *among its participant organizations and movements*, and places special value on the exchange among them. (Article 12, emphasis added)

Furthermore, the WSF's organizational environment focuses on exchange and diffusion of ideas and tactics as a primary driving force connecting participants. It achieves this objective by promoting an antihierarchical organizing logic, variously termed "horizontalism," "autonomous space," or "self-organization" by Forum organizers and founders (see Wood, Chapter 16).

As a space for neoliberal resistance where alternatives to it can flourish, the WSF encourages participant organizations and movements to find commonality in their grievances, as well as to discover differences in their strategies and tactics in order to ultimately build larger and more diverse networks of contention (Juris 2008; della Porta 2006). The process has thus generated innovative methods to help movements engage in more inclusive and democratic collaboration and to better integrate their struggles. But at the same time, such lofty objectives have generated tensions and debates among participants and Forum organizers concerning representation and organizational planning.

Between the 2003 and 2005 WSFs, critiques emanating from participants led to several organizational and technological innovations (Teivainen forthcoming-b). During that time, the Forum had grown substantially in size, and went from being a gathering primarily coordinated by the Brazilian Organizing Committee (BOC) and International Council (IC) to one that was largely self-organized by participants. The shift to a more horizontal organizational design was intended to maintain the WSF's legitimacy and commitment to principles of solidarity and resistance to all forms of hierarchy. Essentially, this reflexive organizing logic and form became part of the Forum's collective action frame—or call to action (Snow and Benford 2000). The Forum process thus promotes a mobilizing structure that perpetuates horizontal learning and contributes to a more democratized organizing logic within the GJM. At the same time, however, we believe that such a shift could produce more fragmentation and schism by drawing in organizations with radically different

objectives, strategies, and tactics. In the following section we highlight the development of Forum innovations and outline various frameworks of organizational development that will guide our empirical analysis.

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### HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL ORGANIZING

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From the beginning the WSF emerged as not only a countermeeting to the World Economic Forum, but was also meant to be a countersymbol to globalized capitalism. In building this process, organizers were keenly aware of past attempts to organize transnationally around diverse movement goals. Thus, creating a space for exchange that had little structural intervention from the BOC or IC would reflect the diversity of movements in the GJM and potentially expand collaboration. To democratize the space and thereby encourage innovation, WSF organizers avoided hierarchical organizing tendencies, in part as a form of resistance to the patriarchy and hierarchy endemic to neoliberal capitalism.

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### *SYMBOLIC AND INSTRUMENTAL INNOVATIONS*

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The WSF has undergone several organizational and technological innovations throughout its growth and development (Teivainen forthcoming-b). These include: deregionalizing the site of the WSF away from Brazil; shifting to a self-organizing structure and more open thematic consultation process; and most recently the decision to move toward a biannual format (holding the WSF every two years). These innovations have both symbolic and instrumental meaning to the Forum participants and organizers. Deregionalizing the WSF made the gatherings more accessible to activists and organizations outside South America. In symbolic terms it legitimated the WSF as a truly global process. The move towards self-organization and a more horizontal organizing logic helped ameliorate tensions over representation and control over Forum events and increased pathways for more participation and collaboration.

The removal of centralized control over the program motivated organizations and movements to engage in more networking and collaboration before the Forum. Technological innovations played a prominent role in assisting this collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Movement, coalition, and network representatives and activists could view other groups' proposals online and organize joint workshops before the WSF itself. Glasius and Timms (2006) found that compared to 2003, 2005 organizational networks

produced a more even distribution of topics covered by the sessions and workshops. Our interest here is to evaluate the collaborative networks created in 2003 and 2005 to determine how the changes to the WSF's operation shaped relations among WSF participants.

### *ORGANIZING DYNAMICS*

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While a significant amount of social movement research employs network and relational approaches, much of this analysis focuses on either organizations as attributes of individual relations or organizational ties as predictors of movement outcomes such as resource acquisition, protest mobilization, or collective identity (Diani 2003b). We, on the other hand, are employing network analysis to understand how learning and innovations within the WSF process affect patterns of collaboration and issue resonance.

Social movement scholars affirm the importance of understanding contestation and mobilization processes that can be fundamentally influenced by organizational structures and activities that constrain or enable collective actions (Zald and Ash 1966; Piven and Cloward 1979; Clemens 1996). At the same time, organizational activities—especially collaboration and coalition building—may affect the capacity of groups to mobilize resources, recruit members, and engage in innovation or framing of issues to increase diffusion and endorsement of their claims or ideology (Ganz 2000; Polletta 2002). Unfortunately, the literature on corresponding constraints and opportunities related to transnational coalition building is lacking.

In light of this absence we see the integration of social movement perspectives into institutional and organizational research as broadening the analysis of organizing processes and expanding our understanding of how organizational interactions become entangled around multiple, competing logics, contradictions, and ambiguities (Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008). The integration enables social movement perspectives to embrace a more contextual focus centered on how “limits on alternatives, pressures for continuity, and dynamics of convergence often exercise considerable force” (Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2008: 5). Networks may function as structures that moderate, amplify, or dampen Forum collaboration and diffusion, either by mobilizing power and resources or by working as political forces within the Forum. WSF organizers sought to enhance collaboration across a diverse set of actors without consoli-

dating power and resources in a few, already privileged organizations. As a result, we expect organizations that have been active in the WSF process from the beginning, especially the members of the BOC and other core organizational participants, to embody the innovations put forth between 2003 and 2005 and be greater promoters of horizontalism than those organizations new to the process.

Building on Michels's (1958) and Freeman's (1972) work, we see organizations tending to evolve towards more hierarchical, institutional, and formalized structures over time, and that those in power tend to reproduce structures of interaction within organizations that maintain that power. Freeman's work examined the absence of formalized decision-making or representative structures (such as consensus-based groups), which often produce informal or backstage hierarchies and centralization of power. This tendency towards centralization is also found in organizational networks (Barabasi and Albert 1999; Newman et al. 2006). In the case of the WSF, not all actors enter the process on an even playing field. Larger NGOs and early adopters of the process may find themselves in more privileged positions compared to smaller grassroots organizations and those that are new to the process. Thus, even though the BOC and IC effectively diminished their control over program themes and large-scale events at the Forum, these organizations may still exhibit dominance formally or more informally within the Forum as a multiorganizational field (for example, by being the most prominent collaborators).

Building on these perspectives, the Forum can be understood as an infrastructure that allows for the emergence of new forms of interorganizational relations. It is also, as Rucht observes (Chapter 1), a stage on which movements' symbolic struggle to create liberated or autonomous spaces of interaction is enacted. Organizations and movements interacting in the WSF reproduce the organizing logic of the Forum and at the same time learn from these interactions. Again, dominance and power at the Forums, while not formal or instrumental, may be more subtly displayed by organizations or networks of organizations that are more centrally located in the multiorganizational field at large. To further complicate matters, many of the organizational affiliations are cross-cutting, for example, labor and environment or women's and religious groups. Cross-cutting affiliations could ameliorate tensions between groups or reproduce them. Issues of representation and power among affiliations are not only conditioned upon macro-organizational dynamics but are

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also dependent on the political culture and organizational structure of individual groups and their technological and networking savvy. Furthermore, individual activists—whom Smith and Doerr term “grassroots brokers” (Chapter 18)—could be very influential in creating the context and interpersonal connections to increase organizational collaboration and exchange.

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*ISSUE RESONANCE*

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The diversity of views, cultures, and opinions on display at the Forum challenges organizers hoping to build alliances to frame their struggles in ways that bring groups together. By viewing the Forum as a multi-organizational field where organizations introduce, contest, and construct various thematic frames, we are able to determine which frames become collective calls to action by seeing which ones gain prominence in the network. The Forum’s articulation of major thematic sections such as debt relief for developing nations, technology transfer, and global governance also helps groups come to shared understandings and framings of issues, despite the Forum’s explicitly nondeliberative nature. The open thematic consultations in 2005, for instance, introduced a fieldwide frame articulation structure allowing Forum participants to connect Forum events and issues in a relatively unified and compelling way. What gives the resultant collective action frame or one of its components resonance within the Forum is not so much the originality or newness of its ideational elements, but the manner in which they are connected to themes and issue groupings, making them more or less visible to different organizations and networks.

One of our interests concerns the relative similarities of these collective frames constructed by organizational relations compared to those of individual participants’ issue affiliations. Scholars have found that multi-issue themes such as human rights and social justice produce greater connectivity for coalitions and networks than do single-issue collective frames (Van Dyke 2003; Bandy and Smith 2005; Reitan 2007). Chase-Dunn and his fellow researchers (2007) evaluate individual issue linkages at the 2005 WSF by surveying participants about what issues they are involved with—involvement with multiple issues for one individual produces a link between those issues. A network analysis of these interpersonal issue linkages finds that issues of peace, human rights, global justice, and environmentalism are central to the individual

participants of the Forum. Considering that the Forum is primarily an event engaged in by organizations and movements, we evaluate issue linkages between organizations to determine the centrality of issues between organizations and sessions. Two core questions drive this analysis. First, how have innovations in organizational design and technology affected organizational outcomes (collaboration and hierarchy)? Second, what thematic issues (multi-issue or specific-issue) have greater prominence at the World Social Forum?

In order to examine these network dynamics, we analyze organizations that facilitated sessions at the 2003 and 2005 WSF. We expect that the organizational innovations and horizontal learning between 2003 and 2005 outlined above will have produced a more open space for collaboration and horizontal networking in 2005. This, in turn, should facilitate more even distribution of organizational ties between groups, decreasing heterogeneity between ties among participants and hierarchy in the multiorganizational field as a whole. We first determine if shifts in hierarchical structure originate in the core groups (BOC and early adopters) and spread outward to others in the network. Late adopters, who began participating in the WSF after 2003, will have had less time to become socialized in WSF norms, and thus are not expected to exhibit more egalitarian patterns of network ties. Thus, our investigation of networks formed at the two WSFs considers whether the structure of the core group of organizations becomes less hierarchical and whether they decrease more than the network as a whole.

Finally, to evaluate issue prominence in the WSF networks, we will examine the linkages among thematic issues joined through organizational collaboration in common sessions. We will examine the differences, if any, from Chase-Dunn et al.'s (2007) findings of individual issue linkages against a network of organizational thematic issue linkages to determine what, if any, difference exists among individual and organizational participation at the Forum. Following other work on coalition formation and collective framing, we predict that multi-issue themes such as human rights and social justice will be core to the organizational thematic networks.

## METHODS AND FINDINGS

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Network data from the organizations participating in both World Social Forums were obtained by tying individual organizations to the sessions

they sponsored and in which they participated (based on the workshop descriptions contained in the official programs of the WSF meetings in 2003 and 2005). In network theory, this data structure is called a two-mode network, with organizations and the respective sessions (events) as the two different modes. Two organizations are linked if they both sponsored the same session in the program. While this tie does not tell us much about time spent collaborating, it does signal that these groups have engaged in at least a minimal level of exchange and that they share common goals and support. We then analyze organizational ties to both sessions and organizational participants to measure a group's centralization and the extent of hierarchy in the networks. Finally, we look at the links between organizations and themes of sessions to determine thematic prominence in the network.<sup>3</sup> Two themes are linked when those two different thematic sessions are linked by an organization that participates in each of the sessions (organizations link sessions and sessions link themes).

We selected those organizations that were part of either the Brazilian Organizing Committee (BOC) or the International Council (IC). This sample was then further reduced to only those organizations that participated in both 2003 and 2005. By strictly controlling the size and membership of this grouping we can test how the interactions of these key players change over time. Table 19.1 displays the numbers of sessions each sample participated in and the number of organizational session collaborators. The combined samples for each year represent the total number of sessions participated in by both the BOC and IC. Sessions were proposed in 1 of 11 session themes and each session represents only 1 theme (see Table 19.4 for a list of themes). While this sample of organizations does not encompass the entire network, it is sufficient to show the effects of organizational design shifts on multiorganizational fields established at the WSF.<sup>4</sup>

Centrality measures have a long history in network analysis and are arguably the most useful tool for understanding the structure of the network as a whole, as well as the role of individual organizations. Anheier and Katz (2005) have displayed how analysis of centrality measures of Forum interorganizational links, in this case linkages between organizations that participate in common sessions, can reveal not only inequality in the entire network structure, but also how certain organizations may facilitate connectivity among issue sectors or disparate networks. Degree centrality refers to the relative prominence of an organization

**Table 19.1 Organizational Collaborators and Sessions for 2003 and 2005 WSFs**

	2003	2005		
	Sessions	Collaborators	Sessions	Collaborators
Brazilian Organizing Committee	21	78	72	432
International Council	63	213	150	491
Combined Samples*	74	251	195	861

\*Column numbers do not add up because of shared sessions between the BOC and the IC members.

or theme. In the organization network, the degree of one organization is the number of other organizations it has cosponsored or facilitated sessions with. In the theme network, it is the number of other themes present in the same session.

### *HIERARCHY AND HORIZONTALISM*

Our questions about network centralization and hierarchy demand that we investigate the structure of these networks beyond simple degree distributions or network centrality measures. Since the networks at our two time points are of different sizes, we must find a measure that is not dependent on the size of the network. If we were to limit the samples only to those organizations present at both time points, we would potentially miss exactly the structural changes we are examining. We thus measure inequality among interorganizational links, or what Snijders (1981) termed the heterogeneity index (H). Like the standard network centralization measure, the heterogeneity index is 0 when all links among organizations are the same (or the network is regular)—the larger the index the more hierarchical the structure of the network (Snijders 1981; Stokman and Baveling 1998). Calculating the heterogeneity index for all samples in 2003 and 2005 reveals the extent to which the multiorganizational fields are separated into uneven levels of organizations, some of which may be well connected while others are isolated from the network core.<sup>5</sup> Larger H index scores in 2005 than 2003 would counter the assertion that the shift in organizational design produces a more “horizontal,” less hierarchical, network with less inequality in the ties between organizations. A smaller H index in 2005 would mean that the links are more evenly distributed between all organizations in the network.



**Table 19.2 Network Measures for 2003 and 2005 WSFs**

	Network Density	Mean Degree	H Index
Combined Network 2003	.088	21.94	5.54
Combined Network 2005	.015	13.05	2.03
Reduced Network 2003*	.116	7.21	4.06
Reduced Network 2005*	.096	5.62	3.19

\*The reduced network represents the core of organizations that were present at both the 2003 and 2005 WSFs.

In short, we find support for our expectation that the network as a whole changed from 2003 to 2005 to reflect a more horizontal, less hierarchical structure in collaborative sessions. However, while hierarchy among core organizations decreased, contrary to our expectation, hierarchical relations among core organizations decreased less than the network as a whole. Table 19.2 shows basic network statistics of density and mean degree, and also the heterogeneity index that we use to assess centralization and hierarchy in the networks.

The decrease in hierarchy for the entire network (combined samples) and core groups (reduced sample) between 2003 and 2005 gives strong evidence in support of our expectations. We interpret this to mean that the linkages between organizations in 2005 were much more evenly distributed than in 2003, and we see a clear relationship between these results and the organizational innovations that were implemented and horizontal learning between the gatherings. Thus, the shift towards self-organization and decentralized planning of the Forum produced a more horizontal and open design for organizational collaboration. Although we cannot tease out a direct correlation, we contend that organizational innovations and learning between the Forums increased the amount of collaboration without expanding the numbers of diverse organizational affiliations. Such significant increases in on-the-ground collaboration are a testament to the usefulness of online or virtual collaboration and exchange between the 2003 and 2005 gatherings and most especially working towards the 2005 WSF. This finding stands in stark contrast to much of the organizational and network literature predicting an increase in hierarchical relations developing over time in complex systems of interaction, showing how movements can enact cultures that counter dominant organizational trends.

Like the network as a whole, the core organizations in the reduced network exhibit less hierarchical structure in 2005 than in 2003. However, they still form a more hierarchical network in 2005 in comparison to the overall network. This may indicate that the organizational design shifts and horizontal learning in the WSF decreased inequality across the network as a whole but could not remedy uneven exchanges of links between core participants and new organizations that entered the network in 2005. The finding makes sense in light of the sheer increase in the number of sessions and organizational collaborators from 2003 to 2005 (three and a half times the number in 2003), and the decrease in hierarchy for the reduced sample (the 63 organizations that are common in both networks). Core, early adopting organizations may have taken advantage of their prominence within the network to reach out to other groups and bring them into the fold as collaborators. The expanding size of the network created the possibility for growth in interorganizational ties, and the reduced H index score shows that organizations took advantage of this opportunity to create a more horizontal, inclusive structure rather than maintaining the hierarchal organization displayed in 2003.

### *ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS*

To further illustrate how hierarchies can vary over different types of organizations and networks, we ranked the top 20 most prominent organizations, networks, and coalitions at each gathering based on their number of links with other organizations, divided by the total number of links. The BOC members, especially the Brazil's Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), Landless Workers' Movement (MST), ATTAC, and IBASE, are very prominent actors in these networks (see Table 19.3). In 2003 5 out of the 8 BOC members were in the top 20 organizations in degree centrality, and in 2005 there were 6. Clearly, the BOC members are collaborating with many other organizations, as well as bringing new organizations into the network. In fact, their prominent role may actually work to facilitate the spread of the network not only within the scope of these two Forums, but also to other Forums in other regions of the world and to other organizations that may replicate the process elsewhere. Although we did not track new entries versus old entries into the network, we can say that out of the 432 organizations that the BOC members collaborated with in 2005 at least 346 of those collaborators were not members of either the BOC or IC ( $432 - 86 \text{ IC members} = 346 \text{ organizations}$ ), and out of the 491 organizations

the IC collaborated with, at least 405 organizations were outside of the IC and BOC. Remember that the BOC has only 8 members and the IC has 86. Thus, the BOC brought many more noncore organizations into the network per organizational member than did the IC. Conceptualizing horizontality and antihierarchical organizational designs as producing decreases in network centralization measures, as we did above, may be problematic for a network such as the WSF. We find that the WSF's open collaborative design may actually produce more diverse exchanges as new organizations enter the network and work with more established members, but that the design may also decrease hierarchy by connecting isolated or disconnected organizations and by more evenly distributing organizational linkages among participants. The later process would be in line with the innovations driven by the WSF implemented between 2003 and 2005.

Other interesting findings to note are the rankings of organizations, networks, and coalitions in Table 19.3. The most obvious difference between 2003 and 2005 is the increased prominence of transnational aid organizations, especially ActionAid International. Having not appeared in the top 20 in 2003, ActionAid rose to the highest organization in degree centrality in 2005. ActionAid International is a large NGO from South Africa with offices in Rio de Janeiro, Bangkok, Nairobi, and Brussels, and has projects in over 50 countries. ActionAid was instrumental in utilizing the Forum not only to connect physically with its satellite organizations all over the world but also to meet with its campaign and project collaborators from other countries. The WSF served as an opportunity for it to train and educate organizers, network with other organizations, and build larger campaigns and projects in common cause with Forum participants.

We also discovered that transnational and regional coalitions and network organizations play an important and prominent role at the WSF (6 out of the top 20 organizations in 2003, and 7 in 2005). Coalitions and networks may use the Forum not only to connect with member organizations from various countries, but also to recruit new organizations and promote their campaigns and activities. One such transnational coalition of subsistence farmers and agricultural workers, Via Campesina, has been instrumental in utilizing the Forum to expand its network and promote its campaigns and programs. Work by della Porta et al. (2006), Smith, Karides, et al. (2007), and Juris (2008) finds that transnational coalitions and networks function as diffusion mechanisms spreading the Forum process to various regions of the globe. Thus, the prominence of

**Table 19.3 Normalized Degree Centrality Measures for Top 20 Actors in 2003 and 2005**

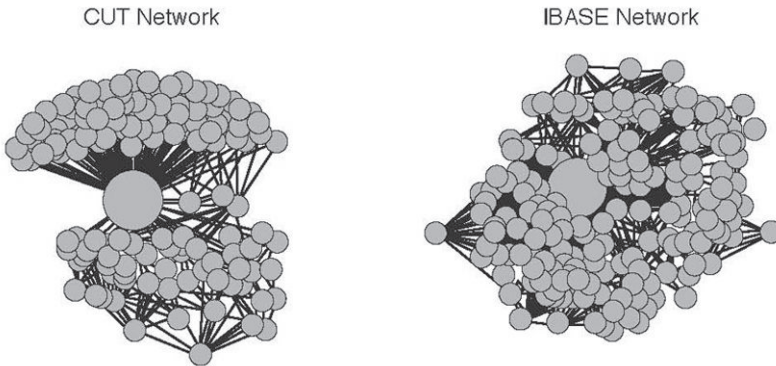
2003		2005	
Organization	nDegree	Organization	nDegree
CUT*	4.133	ActionAid	3.765
Christian Aid	3.467	IBASE*	3.052
CAFOD	2.933	CUT*	2.427
Friends of the Earth	2.933	MST*	1.904
FASE*	2.933	ATTAC*	1.642
Alternatives <sup>-</sup>	2.800	Paulo Freire Institute	1.497
REDES*	2.400	Oxfam	1.424
Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance <sup>-</sup>	2.400	Social Watch	1.235
IBASE*	2.267	DAWN <sup>-</sup>	1.206
PACS <sup>-</sup>	2.133	Alianza Social Continental <sup>-</sup>	1.163
Africa Trade Network <sup>-</sup>	2.133	Focus on the Global South	1.134
Via Campesina <sup>-</sup>	2.133	FASE*	1.017
Marcha Mundial das Mulheres <sup>-</sup>	1.867	Via Campesina <sup>-</sup>	.988
CMT <sup>-</sup>	1.867	ALOP <sup>-</sup>	.930
Focus on the Global South	1.733	Plataforma Interamericana de Direitos Humanos <sup>-</sup>	.930
Jobs with Justice	1.733	InterAction <sup>-</sup>	.887
Caritas	1.733	CIVICUS <sup>-</sup>	.887
ATTAC*	1.600	REDES*	.872
Inter Press Service	1.600	Inter Press Service	.799
Global Exchange	1.600	EURALAT	.785

\*Brazilian Organizing Committee Members.

<sup>-</sup>Regional or Transnational Network/Coalition.

these groups of organizations in the Forum's multiorganizational field provides further evidence of their importance in the WSF process as it has expanded to more regional and local gatherings.

Figure 19.1 displays the interorganizational networks, or ego networks, of the two most prominent BOC members, CUT and IBASE. An ego network is the graphical representation of all the other organizations with which one organization is affiliated, along with the affiliations among the other organizations that are connected in the network. The upper half of CUT's ego network is dominated by other unions and union affiliates that are separated from the bottom half of the network by the absence of affiliations (except for three other groups that are not unions). The IBASE ego network is more integrated with most organizations having



*CUT and IBASE are represented by the enlarged nodes in their respective network.*

**Figure 19.1 Ego Networks for CUT and IBASE in 2005**

multiple affiliations to others in the network. By simply looking at these graphs we cannot comment on the structure and function of these ego networks and their effects on the entire network, but we can demonstrate that different organizations approach collaboration and coalition work in ways that produce very different structures of interaction. While this may appear obvious, the differences in the structures of interactions, and their ramifications for the network as a whole, is not well understood in this specific context, nor in the literature about multiorganizational fields more broadly. We contend that examination of these various combinations of structural patterns and organizational attributes (labor versus social justice) is crucial for understanding Social Forum dynamics and the structure of the global justice movement as a whole.

### *ISSUE PROMINENCE*

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To assess which themes are most important to the networks active in the WSFs, we analyze the “degree centrality” of Forum events and themes, similar to how we analyzed degree centrality of organizations. This will allow us to distinguish between central and marginal themes, as well as which themes may serve as master frames within the global justice movement (Anheier and Katz 2005). By evaluating the salience of issue themes such as trade, peace and justice, and technology, we will be able to evaluate the organizational strength between interconnected issues

and the extent to which the network itself amplifies certain themes more than others.

Looking at how groups cluster around themes, we find that human rights, economic justice, and social justice are central and prominent issues in the organizational/session networks, but that peace and environmentalism are more peripheral themes (see Table 19.4). Thus, organizational/session issue linkages differ from the individual participant issue linkages (Reese et al. 2006), but not significantly. Peace and environmentalism are ranked seventh and eighth in the list below socialization of knowledge and Indigenous sovereignty and rights. Clearly, multi-issue themes are more conducive to promoting transnational collaboration among organizations and movements. Although we do not examine the individual sessions in this analysis we do find that many of the most prominent sessions, such as with the United Nations People's Assemblies, contain cross-sectoral affiliations with organizations from many different countries.

These findings bring into question the role of frame articulation and elaboration in multiorganizational fields where individual participants may differ from organizational actors. This difference from the individual issue network and the organizational may be due to high proportions of individual participants being highly educated, affluent, and from developed countries (see Reese et al., Chapter 4), compared to the organizations, at least in the core, that are mostly Southern NGOs and grassroots networks that are targeting issues of importance to the global South. Again, while this chapter concerns the macro-organizational

**Table 19.4 Session Issue Themes for 2005 WSF**

Session Issue Themes	2005 Combined Sample nDegree
Human Rights and an Egalitarian World	38.70
Social Justice	22.10
Economic Justice	19.96
Socialization of Knowledge and Technology	9.32
Indigenous Sovereignty and Rights	8.77
International Democratic Order	8.49
Defending Diversity and the Environment	7.95
Peace and Demilitarization	6.14
Communication and Media Rights	3.88
Ethics and Spiritualities	3.75
Arts and Resistance Cultures	1.75

level of analysis, an examination of inequalities among organizations and individual activists and how they are related to discursive processes in multiorganizational fields could help clarify our understanding of how meaning generation and the social construction of global problems unfolds.

## CONCLUSION

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Our analysis shows that the WSF's efforts to modify its organizational design to produce a more horizontal, antihierarchical, and open collaborative framework helped reshape interorganizational networks of WSF participants between 2003 and 2005. The Forum process evolves as organizations internalize the WSF principles, learn from their experiences, and engage in practices that produce less hierarchical relations between organizational collaborators. We contend that this shift produced a more open and horizontal space for organizational exchange, networking, and coalition building. The core, early adopting organizations are the most centralized and connected in the network. They play the role of brokers, bringing in new and diverse sets of organizations and integrating isolated actors (see Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18). Individual organizations may play very different roles in 2003 compared with 2005, and some adopt a mostly participant role rather than brokering and integrating other organizations or sessions.

Large gatherings of organizations such as the WSF may find that a more open and self-organized framework facilitates network growth and integration across a wide diversity of themes and organizational cultures. We see the implications of this work extending well to issues related to global democracy formation and the interpenetration of movement actors within institutional fields. Furthermore, connectivity and heterogeneity among affiliations are dependent on scale and the growth of new entries. Thus, smaller Forums or assemblies may find that an elaborate self-organizing structure and consultation process may be beyond their logistical and resource capacity. Although, our research here suggests that if groups remain engaged in the process those obstacles may be overcome through organizational learning and innovation.

We find that individual and organizational networks differ in their issue centrality. Human rights, economic justice, and social justice frames play a prominent role in the organizational/session networks, but peace and environmentalism do not. The prominence of these social justice

and human rights issues highlights the primary concerns of global South organizations. It is not clear from this analysis how these organizational collective action frames are transported by Forum participants back home to their domestic organizations in the United States, Europe, Asia, or Africa, or if environmental issues are incorporated into other themed sessions such as human rights and social justice (similar to what Kaneshiro, Lawrence, and Chase-Dunn find in Chapter 10). Further research could explore the content of individual sessions, trace framing processes from region to region, and determine how such organizational logics translate in different contexts. Furthermore, we hope this research will help to guide inquiries into how organizational designs and logics affect organizational behavior, especially relationships between organizations in multiorganizational fields such as the global justice movement or more generally in global civil society.

## NOTES

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1. The boundaries of this multiorganizational field are defined by joint activities, cofacilitation of sessions and workshops, and organizational affiliations (see, e.g., Klandermans 1992).

2. Similarly, Smith, and Doerr (Chapter 18) show how technology helped facilitate collaboration in the USSF.

3. For more extensive elaboration of our methodology, see Byrd and Jasny (2010).

4. The IC and BOC samples represent approximately 10 percent of the total organizations at each Forum—over 700 organizations participated in 2003 and over 2,000 organizations in 2005.

5. The role of the BOC is obviously heightened by its connections to other organizations throughout Latina America; although, many of the new organizations with which the BOC collaborates are not from Latin America.



## **CONCLUSION**

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### THE SPACE AS ACTOR

#### THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS

*Thomas Ponniah*

*[T]heories of justice must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition.*

Nancy Fraser

*Toward the end of the second millennium of the Christian era several events of historical significance transformed the social landscape of human life. A technological revolution, centered around information technologies, began to reshape, at accelerated pace, the material basis of society.*

Manuel Castells

The chapters in this volume are investigations of a relatively new object of study, a process established by social movements whereby activists could annually come together to discuss, debate, and articulate alternatives to neoliberal globalization (World Social Forum 2001).<sup>1</sup> The first World Social Forum (WSF) took place in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and since then the process has undergone numerous innovations: expanding

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Thank you to the editors for their helpful comments on this Conclusion. This essay is dedicated to James Parker.

to include local, national, and regional Forums; deregionalizing the site of the WSF away from Brazil (Smith and Smythe, Chapter 2); decentralizing the site via the polycentric Forum of 2006 (Bamako, Caracas, and Karachi), bringing the event to Africa in 2007 (see Pommerolle and Siméant, Chapter 12); shifting to a self-organizing structure and more open thematic consultation process; and, most recently, the decision to move toward a biannual format, that is, holding the WSF every two years. As well, the Forum has been spectacularly capable of attracting passionate interest: Over 100,000 participants regularly attend its annual meetings, and local Forums have also had impressive numbers. Certainly the Social Forum process—in all of its abundant, discordant concord—challenges standard academic and activist conceptions of social movement form and content.

As Rucht (Chapter 1) observes, the Forum emerges from a history of transnational campaigns: the first resistance in the Global South against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies beginning in 1976 and continuing throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the campaigns against the North American Free Trade Agreement, the 1996 Zapatista “Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism” (Zapatistas 1998), the 1996 organizing by the Tricontinental Center for “an Other Davos” (Houtart and Polet 2001), the 1998 movement against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, the 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” the antidebt campaign of Jubilee 2000, and the European Marches against Unemployment (della Porta and Mosca, Chapter 13). However, while the Forum is influenced by earlier movements and thus to some degree can be imagined in historical or genealogical terms, it also represents an unforeseen experiment in social movement organizing.

For an analyst, the Forum can be an intellectual labyrinth: While the perceived adversary is not inside but outside the Forum’s perimeter, the event itself defies traditional categories of understanding. The rhizomatic multiplicity of figures, tones, and discourses makes it difficult for the theorist to grasp the process in its totality. Dualistic framings like space versus actor, knowledge versus network, or class versus identity do not explain the Forum precisely because this social movement process destabilizes dichotomies by encompassing them within broader, interwoven frameworks. The thread that can help us navigate the terrain, the “object,” under investigation begins with two questions that regularly orient debates about the Forum. The first concerns the form of the Forum: Should the Forum be a space or an actor (Ponniah and

Fisher 2003; Sen et al. 2004; Bello 2007; Whitaker 2007; Ponniah 2008b; Juris and Smith, Chapter 15)? The second concerns the content of the Forum: What alternative models of progress, of well-being, of justice is this social movement process proposing against the contemporary version of globalization (Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Santos 2006)? Building on the chapters in this volume, I will make an argument that attempts to answer the above questions by introducing two new concepts: The Forum is a *global social movement knowledge process* characterized by its proposals for *multivalent expressive participatory democratic alternatives*. The novelty of the Social Forum is that it is not simply an object of inquiry but also a subject that inquires: It is the first global social movement process whose primary quest, or Grail, is to articulate alternative forms of knowledge and enhance their resonance in the wider public sphere. The Forum is a process that advances not by force of arms, or even primarily by protest, but by toppling conceptual categories via its innovative form and content.

## FORM

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In essence, the Social Forum space facilitates the production of alternative knowledge to the neoliberal form of instrumental rationality that has dominated social policy for the past generation. Participants in the Forum are active in many diverse mobilizations but they can also be seen as participating in a global social movement knowledge process. The Forum process constitutes a new type of social movement action. To understand this point we need to review the space-actor discussion that has regularly taken place in relation to the Forum.

The central debate about the nature of the Forum—among its primary organizers—has from the beginning concerned the question of whether it should be a political actor or a pedagogical space (Ponniah and Fisher 2003). In the most recent version of this debate, Walden Bello and Chico Whitaker, both representatives on the International Council of the World Social Forum (WSF), disagreed on the purpose of the Forum. Bello, the executive director of Focus on the Global South, who believes that the Forum should be a political actor, argued that the Forum was now at a crossroads (Bello 2007). Bello acknowledged that the Social Forum had contributed a great deal to the quest for an alternative globalization. However, he contended that the Forum’s “open space” methodology, which on principle refuses to take a collective stand on any political issue, including ones that have unanimous agreement

among movements at the Forum, was now inhibiting decisive political agency. He argued that there was substance to the allegation that the Forum was becoming a cultural festival that was disengaged from actual struggle. The article provocatively concluded by asking, “Is it time for the World Social Forum to fold up its tent and give way to new modes of global organization of resistance and transformation?”

In response to Bello, Whitaker, who has been the most prominent guardian of the open space methodology, argued that “crossroads do not have to close roads” (Whitaker 2007). He noted that while the Forum’s Charter of Principles prevented the International Council from making statements that spoke for all participants at the World Social Forum, the open space format left possible the opportunity for movements to autonomously build global alliances that enacted collective programs. Therefore, for Whitaker the WSF’s crossroads were in fact two paths that could persist simultaneously, not as adversaries, but as mutual sources of inspiration. The open space could continue to allow movements to express themselves while formulating new social projects without having to represent all participants. Building on Bello and Whitaker, we can add a third interpretation of the event: The Forum is a social movement process that is both a space and an actor. The Forum constitutes an original type of collective action, emerging in the new context of informational capitalism, in which knowledge space has become a novel form of agency.

Modern conceptions of agency generally frame subjects—including social movements—as rational actors who have a coherent historical direction; for example, Turner and Killian defined a social movement as “a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist change in the society or organization of which it is part” (1987: 4). In contrast, building on new social movement theory, Manuel Castells has persuasively added that contemporary movements should be imagined as network subjects oriented around a particular identity (Castells 2004). Revising both of these models, rational actor and network, I will instead suggest that the Forum is a social movement process, emerging from an era of informational capitalism that is characterized by a nonsubjective subjectivity that enables the articulation and diffusion of alternative knowledge. The nondirectional agency of the Social Forum process consists of an open yet bounded (Reitan, Chapter 8) knowledge space. However, this arena should not be simply imagined in terms of the modern conception of space as a yielding, virgin surface on which agency impresses itself: The Forum is not just an inactive container within which movements

interact. The space of the Forum is an agent, a subject that facilitates articulation—in both senses of the term—as expression and concatenation. It is a new type of collective action, not characterized primarily by a rational or network intentionality, but by a provisional nonsubjective subjectivity whose main goal is to facilitate the elaboration and linkage of alternative forms of knowledge.

To fully understand the Forum as a knowledge-producing form of collective action, we have to examine the structural setting that constitutes the conditions for its emergence. Castells, in his *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000) contends that contemporary globalization represents the onset of an informational capitalism propelled by a new technological modality. While past industrial productivity depended on accessing energy sources in order to increase economic growth, the new social structure's key factor of development is the action of knowledge upon knowledge: "the technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication." That is to say, knowledge has become the most prominent source of capitalist productivity (Castells 2000: 17). The new source of productivity is reshaping the structure and agency of every aspect of society with the most obvious example being labor: In the information age a much greater premium is placed on the development of "knowledge workers" (Castells 2000: 224–231).

This new factor of production brings with it not only new content but also a new form of production. For Castells, contemporary globalization, mirroring the morphology of information technology, is characterized by a network structure (ibid). He contends that this new organizational logic is reshaping corporations and states along a network pattern; they are being forced to adapt this logic precisely because it is the most successful method in an economy characterized by information technology. Following the above, Castells argues that contemporary social movements are also characterized by a network structure. He proposes that the network is the most basic unit of the global justice movement, that is, it is a "network movement" not simply a movement that networks (Castells 2004: 152). Activists at the Forum have also noted this organizing principle: An innovative group of activists and writers emerging from the Forum have named their project "Networked Politics" ([http://www.networked-politics.info/?page\\_id=8](http://www.networked-politics.info/?page_id=8)). However, as mentioned earlier, Castells has argued that knowledge was the key new factor for advancing productivity. Information technology has become central to globalization precisely because of the former's capacity to create new knowledge with greater intensity, extension,

and velocity than ever before. This amplified articulation of knowledge has been crucial to the expansion of capitalist production around the world. Thus knowledge is the essential content, while networking is the novel form of informational capitalism.

Building on Castells's argument, I would like to suggest that the key element of production in the Social Forum process is not networking—which is instead the formal principle—but instead the articulation of alternative knowledge. The Social Forum, mirroring the globalization that it interrogates, was created to give social movement actors an opportunity to debate proposals for a new society (World Social Forum 2001). The panels, workshops, and seminars at every Forum are composed of discussions, manifestos, and policy papers. These alternative documents, which interrogate customary economic, cultural, environmental, and political models, are the essential content of the Social Forum journey. This content corresponds to the current form of globalization: The informational economy not only produces knowledge workers but also sets the stage for a new social movement process. The Forum is history's first global social movement knowledge process, with alternative knowledge being its basic content and networks being the corresponding structural strategy for communicating the content.<sup>2</sup>

The Forum process, however, is not simply a reflex against a new form of capitalist modernity: While the information economy opens up a new horizon of opportunities in terms of reimagining agency, it does not inevitably produce the Social Forum process. The Social Forum embodies a new content—an internal transformation among social movements—specifically a new desire to link multiple, substantive, social movement demands and their reciprocal theoretical categories.

## CONTENT

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With informational space as its essential subjectivity, the Social Forum opens up the possibility for constructing multivalent development frames that can unite divergent activists without constraining them to one set of actions or way of thinking. By using the word *development* to help describe the Forum's alternatives, I refer to the most general meaning of the term, that is, social change that increases our well-being in all of its dimensions. I do not use the word in the narrow sense used by President Truman when he initiated the post-World War II development era that divided the world into the “developed” and the “developing” (Truman

1949, 1967). From the point of view of the Forum's open space methodology, there is not one group that has a monopoly on what constitutes "development," "well-being," or "civilization." There is no dragon guarding a golden conceptual hoard. The open space format suggests that the definition of these terms has to be reimagined in distinct, though not necessarily disassociated, ways by every individual, group, and culture.

Reitan (2007), with typical insight, has noted that contemporary social movements are characterized by a bivalent nature, that is, they encompass two families of justice claims: redistribution and recognition. The political philosopher Nancy Fraser has argued that global justice is a three-dimensional project that includes redistribution and recognition but also brings in the question of representation (Fraser 2005). The chapters in this handbook implicitly demonstrate that the Social Forum process is a multivalent one, encompassing four distinct types of social movement concerns: economic redistribution, cultural recognition, ecological renewability, and political representation. These social movement alternatives all overlap in their belief that every new model of progress has to integrate new forms of participatory democracy.

In the following sections, I will describe each of the four strands of social movement alternatives that are proposed at the Forum. In order to describe them, I build on the classic sociological themes of class, status, and power (Bendix and Lipset 1954), but I add the category of ecological sustainability. I use these categories because the Forum organizers implicitly used them in their original characterization of the types of alternatives that would be presented at the Forum (Fisher and Ponniah 2003). Those four categories were: (1) the production of wealth and social reproduction; (2) the affirmation of civil society and public space; (3) access to wealth and sustainability; and (4) political power and ethics in the new society. These categories essentially encompassed economic, cultural, ecological, and political alternatives.

Defining social movement alternatives according to each of these categories could mistakenly imply that they are monolithic; movements are, of course, never one-dimensional, but instead have multiple concerns. Movements thread their numerous aims into a chain of equivalence that links their various interests via one overarching frame (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: vii–xix). Thus redistribution-oriented movements are also concerned with other questions, but they foreground redistribution because they believe that it is decisive in solving the challenges posed by their other concerns.

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*REDISTRIBUTION-ORIENTED MOVEMENTS*

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The first frame or valence that characterizes the alternative conceptions of development or well-being produced in the Forum process concerns the most obvious one: redistribution. Through much of the past century, movements that were committed to an alternative project ultimately oriented their campaigns around the issue of economic reallocation. While reinventing distribution was certainly not the only goal of past social movements—cultural and political agendas loomed as well—economic change was generally their foundational motive. Correspondingly, during much of the twentieth century, state reallocation was the cardinal principle for leftist visions of progress, such as social democrats in the First World, communists in the Second World, and national liberation movements in the Third World (Wallerstein 2004).

In contrast to both neoliberals and traditional statist, social movements within the overall Social Forum process emphasize a different form of redistribution that is concerned with questions of labor (Reese et al., Chapter 7), international trade (Smythe, Chapter 9), and the participatory budgeting embodied by the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil. Porto Alegre was the site where the WSF was first held: The city was seen as an appropriate site for the Social Forum because it was renowned for its innovative participatory budgetary process implemented by the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) in 1989. The process encouraged all citizens to take part in constructing the city's budget. Over the past two decades, thousands of citizens have participated annually in formulating the municipality's economic priorities. The budget process is a 10-month exercise oriented around 16 regional assemblies and 6 thematic ones (Santos 2005: 316). The thematic assemblies are (1) Transportation and Circulation, (2) Education and Leisure, (3) Culture, (4) Health and Social Welfare, (5) Economic Development and Taxation, and (6) City Organization, Urban and Environmental Development. The process is structured by a number of phases (Santos 2005: 319) that include regional assemblies meeting and delegating representatives to serve on the budget council. The representatives organize smaller meetings to propose the budget priorities for the following year; the proposed priorities are forwarded to the current Municipal Council (councilors elected by traditional democratic means). Simultaneously, the representatives attend training sessions on municipal finance. A draft budget is constructed by the budget council



and municipal bureaucrats and is sent to the mayor and the Municipal Council for consultation. The budget council amends the budget for a final approval from the Municipal Council and for eventual implementation. Altogether these phases aim at maximizing public involvement in setting the city's social and economic development priorities.

The city has utilized the participatory budget process since 1989 and there have been clearly progressive social effects. New public housing units, which sheltered only 1,700 new residents in 1986, housed an additional 27,000 in 1989. Sewer and water connections in the city of Porto Alegre went up from 75 percent of total households in 1988 to 98 percent in 1997. The number of schools has quadrupled since 1986. Porto Alegre's health and education budget increased from 13 percent in 1985 to almost 40 percent in 1996. The share given to participatory budgeting in overall budget allocations has increased considerably: Seventeen percent of the total budget was allocated through participatory budgeting in 1992; this share grew to 21 percent in 1999. An indicator of its success is the enhanced level of participation. The number of participants in Porto Alegre grew from less than 1,000 per year in 1990 to more than 16,000 in 1998, to about 40,000 in 1999 (World Bank 2009). As well, the influential Brazilian business journal *Exame* has regularly nominated Porto Alegre as the Brazilian city with the best quality of life based on the following indicators: "literacy, enrollment in elementary and secondary education, quality of higher and postgraduate education, per capita consumption, employment, child mortality, life expectancy, number of hospital beds, housing, sewage, airports, highways, crime rate, restaurants and climate" (Santos 2005: 310). The success of this innovative budget process has made Porto Alegre the model for an alternative conception of redistribution advocated within the Social Forum process.

The proposal for a participatory budget process destabilizes the standard conception of the political debate: conservatives who advocate for the market versus progressives who advocate for the state. The participatory budget process implicitly suggests that both the market and the state have to be supervised by the broader public. Simply having the market discipline the state or the state regulate the market does not solve the profounder need for the public to have the capacity to shape social decisions without those choices distorted by the imperatives of the market or of the state. Participatory budgeting offers a third solution that goes beyond the market versus state dichotomy.

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*RECOGNITION-ORIENTED MOVEMENTS*

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Over the past generation the dominant radical critique of redistribution, often advanced by postmodern theorists, has been from the vantage point of questions of status and identity (Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). They argue that economic reallocation does not inevitably undo discrimination grounded in racism, sexism, or homophobia, therefore progressive politics should at the very least give equal attention to the question of cultural recognition.

The social theorist Nancy Fraser has made the case that movements oriented around cultural diversity implicitly begin from the proposition that status is constituted via our relations with others (Fraser 2000). Therefore, if a group is systematically depicted via negative stereotypes, then their self-perception becomes distorted. A number of social movements have attempted to defy prejudice by organizing identity-specific groups that collectively affirm the embattled community. This celebration is intended to articulate a new self-consciousness for those within the organization and a new awareness for those outside the group. This politics of recognition has motivated the bid by movements within the Social Forum process to eliminate various forms of discrimination such as those that afflict women, the Indigenous, the Dalits, people of African descent, immigrants, and other communities of color (Hewitt and Karides, Chapter 5; Becker and Koda, Chapter 6; Reese et al., Chapter 7; P. Smith, Chapter 11; Pommerolle and Siméant, Chapter 12).<sup>3</sup> And, as surveys show, demands to address social inequalities, such as those rooted in gender and racial discrimination, appear to be widely shared by Social Forum participants (Reese et al., Chapter 4, Table 4.2).

The Forum process is transforming how movements interpret themselves. Within the multiplicity of organizations in the process, numerous groups use “boundary-making strategies” (ibid). That is, they form identity-based caucuses or working groups in order to gain self- and other recognition. Becker and Koda (Chapter 6) and Hewitt and Karides (Chapter 5) note that women’s caucuses did this in the past—for example in the AIDS activist organization Act-Up (Roth 1998: 139). However, Social Forums do not simply allow individual cultural groups to promote themselves. Forums also engage activists in work to produce new types of subjectivity such as “tolerant identities” (della Porta 2005) that is, forms of self-definition that are open to cross-fertilization (see also Reese et al., Chapter 7). Hewitt and Karides demonstrate such efforts on the

part of feminist activists working to demonstrate the linkages between neoliberalism and gender hierarchies.

Building on della Porta's concept, but using a term that is more in line with my analysis, I suggest that the Forums produce "network identities," or identities that are evolving and reshaping themselves via new encounters with different actors and movements. Keck and Sikkink (1998) noted that social movements often appeal to the international in order to bring attention to their local concerns—that is, to produce a "boomerang effect." We can qualify this concept by noting that not only are there external impacts, but also "internal boomerang effects." Collective actors participate in the Forum process and—via what we could call an "intermovement ferment"—return with the beginnings of a new network identity. Della Porta correctly notes that these new types of identity allow for solidarity despite their heterogeneity (della Porta 2005). The Social Forum process does not simply give individual identity movements an opportunity to be recognized, it also transforms the self-perception of movements, producing an alternative network understanding of themselves.

Thus, there are what Reese et al. (2010) have called "movement crossovers" or activists that combine participation in one or more movements, and such activists make up the vast majority of Social Forum attendees (Reese et al., Chapter 4, Table 4.1). We can add that the boundaries of movements are also crossed within the self-definition of movements as activists transform their identity, for example, from one focused on local poverty alleviation to one that is also cultural, environmental, democratic, and global. The Forum process acts as a stage on which numerous transnational and cross-sectoral exchanges take place that inevitably stagger bounded identity categories and the dualisms that underpin them. These multilingual encounters diffuse expanded notions of collectivity and increase appreciation for diversity of experience and for the plethora of interpretations (Doerr, Chapter 17). While dialogue among different groups produces conflict, it also leads to cross-fertilization, a variable geometry of mobilization, and novel hybrid forms of framing, decision making, and self-definition.

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### *RENEWABILITY-ORIENTED MOVEMENTS*

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Another criticism of the standard model for social change has been oriented around the challenge of renewable or sustainable develop-

ment. The various activists in the Social Forum movement not only criticize neoliberal economics and traditional status hierarchies but also critique their ecological impact, practices, and conceptions in terms of nature-society relations. As noted by Kaneshiro et al. (Chapter 10), there are a number of different types of environmentalism in the Social Forum process focusing on a variety of concerns such as global warming, deforestation, water shortages, salinization, desertification, and the collapse of fisheries. The authors contend that beneath the diversity, organizers at the Forum frame “environmental issues in terms of a broader opposition to neoliberal capitalism.” We can add that environmentalists in the Forum process implicitly contend that neoliberalism has disembedded nature from society: The context from which social life emerges has implicitly been reimagined by neoliberals as a separate entity that can be disfigured without regard to the impact it has on its inhabitants. Many Social Forum participants argue that the alternative is to reembed society back into nature via a process of ecological democracy.

The term *ecological democracy* was first mentioned to me via a conversation with the late scholar/ecologist Smitu Kothari. I use the phrase interchangeably with the terms *living democracy* (Shiva 2003b) and *biodemocracy* (Organic Consumers Association 2009), which have also been mentioned by social movements in the Forum process. The definition of ecological democracy that I will use builds on the concept of participatory democracy: While participatory democracy argues for the public’s consultative and executive involvement at each level of policymaking, ecological democracy adds that every decision has to include consideration of all beings on the planet. Ecological democratic movements have argued that neoliberalism is incommensurable with sustainable development because of its commodification of the commons and its centralization of control over nature (Shiva 2003).

In terms of commodification, the ecological democrats argue that neoliberalism promotes unsustainable production and consumption. Contemporary economic policies are destroying the sustainability of resources because of the enclosure of the ecological commons and the privatization of biodiversity via new trade agreements (ibid: 116). The ecological democrats believe that the process of commodification does not proceed alone. It occurs simultaneously with a process of centralization—neoliberal policies consolidate the future of nature and human, economic, social, political, and cultural rights within the evaluative

criteria of economic competition. The result of this centralization of control under the rule of the market is a scarcity of resources (Larrain 2003: 125). Movements contend that the paucity of means not only produces hunger; dearth also incites competition for scarce resources amongst different communities and species. Social Forum environmentalists argue that the hunger of the other becomes a necessary complement to one's own survival, thus nature and society's creative multiplicity is deformed and made oppositional. War, not peace, becomes the social and ecological norm (Shiva 2003: 118). The ecological proposals presented in the Forum argue that the environmental challenge that society faces emerges from the dual nature of neoliberalism. The latter's policies produce both commodification and centralization with these challenges collectively inhibiting global access to resources, destroying nature, and distorting nature's complementary diversity.

Social movements propose increasing renewability by reembedding the economy back into nature via a process of ecological democracy. Ecological democracy's conception of sustainable development is premised on ecological indivisibility, and thus interdependence, between society and nature (Shiva 2003: 118). Movements argue that interdependence can flourish if based on renewable forms of energy. Economies can be prevented from creating waste or using pollutants because society has the technology to establish the renewable use of resources such as solar power and wind energy (Greenpeace 2009).

Ecological democrats also propose that sustainable development necessitates a commitment to the local. There are numerous political decisions that can be decided at the local level and do not need to be decided by a national authority (Focus on the Global South 2008). Related to the idea of local governance is a call for a renewal of people's sovereignty that includes their inherent right to natural resources. The new form of governance has to be one that is accountable to the public trust. Movements believe that services that are currently in the private sector have to be brought into a new democratically accountable civil society sector (Focus on the Global South 2008). As mentioned earlier, while participatory democracy argues for the public's consultative and executive involvement at each level of policymaking, ecological democracy adds that every decision has to include consideration of all beings on the planet.

The environmental movements at the World Social Forum believe that renewable development can be achieved via greater decentralization,

decommodification, and democratization. The movements converge in framing neoliberalism as their common adversary because they interpret it as perpetuating a severance between nature and society via two processes: commodification and centralization. They propose numerous solutions such as the call for the transformation of the production and consumption of energy and they believe that solutions must be as participatory and thus as local as possible. The proposals made by environmentalists overlap with the anticorporate and antibureaucratic aims of other streams of the global justice movements in terms of the larger critique of commodification and the dualistic conceptual schemes that underpin it. The ecological democratic call for indivisibility is an attempt at effacing the most basic dualism that underpins modernity's conceptual schema: the breach between nature and society.

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#### *REPRESENTATION-ORIENTED MOVEMENTS*

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The traditional redistribution model has not only been questioned or qualified by identity movements and environmentalists but also by associations that are fundamentally concerned with questions of political representation. Many activists contend that some groups' political interests are more likely to be represented than others. The various activists at the Social Forum do not only investigate maldistribution, misrecognition, or nonrenewability, they also question the system of political governance. Instead of viewing representative democracy as an inevitably progressive form of authority, Social Forum movements maintain that representative democracy itself favors political-economic elites. Thus, against standard forms of democracy, many civil society actors explicitly argue that new participatory forms of politics—what I call “expressive” forms of democracy—need to have equal weight with representative democracy, or even in some cases, to replace it (Parameswaran 2003: 324–329).

Examples of expressive democracy are nonhierarchical, consensus decision making, participatory budgeting, referenda, community councils, cooperatives, forms of social auditing, and the inclusion of civil society in state decision making (Fisher and Ponniah 2003). As well, the recent call for a horizontalist strategy and identity is an example of a nonstatist form of expressive democracy (Wood, Chapter 16; Byrd and Jasny, Chapter 19).

Overall, we can define these new forms of political participation as self-representative: They are attempts at facilitating direct public input.

However, they are also what a theorist of Romanticism might deem “expressive” in the sense of giving each individual the opportunity collectively to articulate his or her unique contribution to society (Taylor 1989: 368–370). Rather than imagine democracy simply as a rationalized process, the Social Forum process implicitly perceives democracy to be an act of human self-fulfillment. Participation in the democratic process enables the citizen to express his or her political potential within a social framework. The public is given the opportunity to express its ingenuity, knowledge, and experience in tackling the most important questions that society faces. Through the process of public deliberation each individual embodies his or her desire to be an agent, not a spectator—a self-conscious subject not an instrumentalized object—of social life. In the Social Forum imaginary, the relationship of political engagement to “human nature” could be compared to the relationship between language and thought. The former completes the potential of the latter—thus a participatory, expressive democracy is essentially a form of self-realization that incorporates the cognitive, affective, and intersubjective character of human experience.

One of the most prominent examples of the concern for representation is advocated by the social movement Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad [Kerala People’s Science Movement]. They assert that the prevailing conception of democratic governance has led to the elite monopolization of political decision making. Against elite governance, they argue that a durable political practice is one that is decentralized such that everyone can collaborate in its conception, implementation, and benefit (Parameswaran 2003: 324–328). The process of moving from elite rule to participation must itself be participatory: Means and ends must concur.

Fundamentally, the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) argues against the corporate model. The concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few is unsustainable and creates passive citizenry. To transform this situation, they propose participatory democracy as both the end and means of a new society (Parameswaran 2003). The KSSP is a social movement organization that inspired Kerala’s “People’s Campaign for Decentralized Planning” (Isaac and Franke 2000: 21). Kerala is a state of 32 million people in the south of India. It has the most impressive social development statistics in all of India. For example, Kerala’s infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births is 16.3 compared to 67.6 for India in general; its female school enrollment rate (ages 6–17) is 90.8 percent compared to 66.2 percent in India overall; and its immunization cover-

age rate (12–23 months) is 79.7 percent compared to 42 percent for the whole country (Shah and Rani 2003: 2). The situation in Kerala rapidly improved after 1950. At that time adult literacy was at 50 percent, compared to over 90 percent now, and life expectancy at birth was 44 years, compared to 74 now (ibid: 3). Dreze and Sen (2002) suggest that Kerala's success is the result of public action that promoted extensive social opportunities and the widespread, equitable provision of schooling, health care, and other basic services (Dreze and Sen 2002). The state of Kerala since 1957 has regularly committed itself to a process of extensive health care provision, funding for education, and land reform. Since that time progressive coalitions have regularly been in government pushing forward their social program agenda.

The pattern of Kerala's social policy is consistent with the statist framework that dominated progressive thinking for much of the twentieth century. The state regularly allocated a large percentage of its budget for social welfare, however, in 1996 the Left Democratic Front government embarked on its People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning (Isaac and Franke 2000; Isaac and Heller 2003). The government massively decentralized political decision making. All local governments were given new administrative capacities. As well, 40 percent of the state budget was devolved to local, self-governing institutions and the latter were given the authority to articulate, sponsor, and legislate their own development projects. They design their projects by a "multistage process of iterated deliberation between elected representatives, local and higher-level government officials, civil society experts and activists, and ordinary citizens" (Isaac and Heller 2003: 79). The essential goal of this deliberative process has been to promote grassroots participation. The Campaign's focus on participation has included substantial effort to empower women, tribal communities, and Dalits. The results of the Campaign are the creation of new sources of democratic self-representation (Isaac and Heller 2003: 107).

In terms of the conceptual implications of the KSSP's proposals, we have a process that is analogous to that of Porto Alegre. While the latter's participatory budget process aimed at breaking the divide between economy and society by reembedding the economic back into the social, the KSSP's goal is to reintegrate politics back into society. In order to eliminate the division between a political elite and the general public they call for participatory planning to facilitate the public's capability to shape society.



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CONCLUSION

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In 2003, William Fisher and I first suggested that the alternatives proposed in the Forum, despite their differences, converge in calling for participatory democracy (Ponniah and Fisher 2003). That pattern has continued: While the four categories of movement alternatives are distinct, they are also permeated by a common, undifferentiated commitment—a “master frame” (Snow and Benford 1992: 140)—that allows them to converge despite their differences. The implicit alternative theory of progress advanced by the Social Forum process contends that new forms of expressive participation are integral to tackling questions of class, status, ecology, and power. The meaning of the Social Forum process lies in its reconceptualization of the categories by which we understand what constitutes progress or well-being.

This reconceptualization occurs via multiple temporalities and spatialities. As Dufour and Conway (Chapter 14) point out, movements within the Forum space operate within the exigencies of the present or within a prefigurative politics that aims to proceed far beyond the present. We can add other temporalities: Some movements also attempt to restore the past, while others—often Indigenous—perceive time as cyclical and therefore pay little heed to linear notions of “development.” In terms of space, there are multiple spatialities at the Forum—with movements focused on the local, national, continental, or global, or a mixture of all of these scales. The Forum’s attempt to reimagine progress or well-being not only challenges societal norms but also interrogates our underlying philosophical categories, including standard perceptions of time and space.

Through much of the twentieth century social advance was evaluated primarily, though not only, in terms of the level of economic mobility or redistribution that a society could achieve. Over the last generation there has been a sustained interrogation of this framework with critics arguing that questions of identity and environment deserve equal acknowledgement. Today, however, the Social Forum process proposes that new forms of participatory expression are an integral condition for tackling the obstacles posed by economic, cultural, environmental, and political hierarchies. Thus, the process has opened up new sectors of experience to social-political intervention (Teivainen, Chapter 3). The attempt at producing new forms of democracy in order to enhance redistribution, recognition, renewability, and representation synthesizes many past

tendencies. In the last decades the call for greater public participation has been heard numerous times—perhaps most famously with Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960s (Hayden 2005). However, the previous aspirations for a participatory democracy were not embedded within a multivalent project. Some institutionalized overt examples of this project are the Social Movement Assemblies of the European Social Forums and the People’s Movement Assemblies of the U.S. Social Forum (Smith and Doerr, Chapter 18). The content produced by the Forum movement is unique: It emerges from social movements’ assessment of the failures of the Soviet Union, of neoliberal globalization, of representative democracy, and of the faith in technocratic knowledge that is common to all of them. The Social Forum process implicitly refuses to be the instrument of any empire, enterprise, electoral party, or expert—hence its emphasis on alternative models of democracy that do not privilege any one actor over another.<sup>4</sup>

However it is not only the content, but also the form, that is innovative. The Forum—reflecting an aspect of the globalization that it opposes—is the first global social movement knowledge process of the twenty-first century. The Forum process makes informational space into a new type of agency. Beyond the rational or network actor the Forum posits a new nonsubjective subjectivity in which the primary goal is not simply the production of protest but instead the articulation of alternative knowledge. It is the first example of a collective arena as a collective agent. The Forum is not simply a space or an actor, but instead it is a space that is an actor. And like all oracles, it not only heralds but also reconfigures the future: It is reshaping the social movement landscape. Movements around the planet are reimagining themselves as more than just mobilizations—but also as enunciators of new visions that involve multiple temporalities and spatialities.<sup>5</sup> In order to fully grasp the nature of contemporary collective agency, future research on global social movements will have to incorporate a new theory of form and content that emphasizes the alternative knowledge production that has been facilitated by the advent of an information age.

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## NOTES

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1. For a definition of neoliberalism, I use MacEwan (1999: 4): “The policy calls for reducing the economic roles of government in providing social welfare, in managing economic activity at the aggregate and sectoral levels,

and in regulating international commerce. The ideas at the foundation of this policy are not new. They come directly from the classical economic liberalism that emerged in the nineteenth century and they proclaimed ‘the market’ as the proper guiding instrument by which people should organize their economic lives. As a new incarnation of these old ideas, this ascendant economic policy is generally called ‘neoliberalism.’”

2. Santos has also noted that the Forum is a generator of knowledge that emphasizes the importance of cognitive justice (2006). My analysis is different from Santos’s because I add a number of crucial points. First, the Forum emerges from a context that is shaped by informational capitalism—hence, it is consistent with a structural transformation occurring across the world. Second, I note the implication of the first point: Informational capitalism facilitates the emergence of a new type of global social movement process oriented around informational space. Third, I consider participatory democracy to be the underlying substance that cuts across all of the alternatives presented in the Social Forum process, that is, I read the Forum as necessarily embodying an attempt at a universalist convergence of difference—not only a postmodern plethora of difference.

3. One of the many interesting examples of this call for recognition is the issue of “paradigm wars” mentioned by Becker and Koda (Chapter 6). They note Indigenous people posit a belief in reciprocity and collectivism against the common-sense, individualized Western understanding of the self. This alternative conception of the self is given a global voice—and the possibility of mutual affirmation—via the Social Forum process.

4. Doerr (Chapter 17) raises, of course, the key question of the efficiency of participatory democracy. Paraphrasing Oscar Wilde, one could reasonably note that the problem with participatory democracy is that it takes up too many spare evenings.

5. Dieter Rucht points out that the challenge for global justice movements is to create a capacity for strategic intervention, while at the same time maintaining diversity. This will be a key challenge for the Social Forum process in the future as social movements struggle for the broad-scale implementation of alternative social models.



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## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Kadambari Anantram** received an MS in environmental economics from the University of York, U.K.; an MA in environment, development, and policy from the University of Sussex, Brighton, U.K.; and an MA in sociology at the University of California–Riverside. Her research interests include the environment, food security, rural development (especially within India), and global civil society. Her research on the Social Forum process appears in *Mobilization* and the *Handbook of Globalization Studies* (2009).

**Marc Becker** teaches Latin American history at Truman State University. His research focuses on constructions of race, class, and gender within popular movements in the South American Andes. He is the author of *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (2008) and *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (2011). He was an Organizing Committee member of the Midwest Social Forum (MWSF).

**Scott Byrd** teaches sociology at Murray State University. His research and writing have appeared in *Globalizations*, *Mobilization*, *Social Movement Studies*, and the *Journal of World-Systems Research*. His areas of study are social movements, organizations, globalization, and the environment.

**Christopher Chase-Dunn** is distinguished professor of sociology and director of the Institute for Research on World-Systems at the University of California–Riverside. He is the co-author of *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems* (with Thomas D. Hall, 1997), *The Wintu and Their Neighbors* (with Kelly Mann, 1998), and *The Spiral of Capitalism and Socialism* (with Terry Boswell, 2000). He is the founder and former editor of the *Journal of World-Systems Research*.

**Janet Conway** is Canada research chair in social justice at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. She is the author of *Identity, Place, Knowledge: Social Movements Contesting Globalization* (2004) and *Praxis and Politics: Knowledge Production in Social Movements* (2006). She has written widely on the World Social Forum. Her current research is on Indigenous peoples' engagement with the global justice movement through the Social Forum process.

**Gary Coyne** is a PhD candidate at the University of California–Riverside. He received his MA from the University of California–Riverside, and his work with the UCR Transnational Social Movements Research Working Group has been published in *Mobilization*. His research interests include political generations, global civil society, and social movement recruitment and participation. His dissertation examines patterns in language use among international nongovernmental organizations and other transnational actors.

**Donatella della Porta** is professor of sociology in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Among her recent publications are *Social Movements and Europeanization* (2009, edited with M. Caiani), *Another Europe* (2009, ed.), *Democracy in Social Movements* (2009), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (with Michael Keating, 2008), and *Voices of the Valley, Voices of the Straits: How Protest Creates Communities* (with Gianni Piazza, 2008).

**Nicole Doerr** received her PhD in social and political sciences from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California–Irvine and at the Free University–Berlin in the European Union's Marie Curie Program. Her research focuses on deliberative democracy, translation, visual culture, gender, and transnational organizations. She is the co-organizer of the European Sociological Association's Research Network on Social Movements and directs the Research Group on Gender at the Center March Bloch in Berlin.

**Pascale Dufour** is associate professor of political science at the University of Montreal. She focuses on collective action, local Social Forums in Quebec and France, and social movements in comparative perspective and in the context of globalization. Her work appears in *French Politics*, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *Mobilization*,



and *Social Science Quarterly*. She has co-edited *Transnationalizing Women's Movements: Solidarities Beyond Borders* (2010).

**Lyndi Hewitt** is assistant professor of sociology at Hofstra University. She has attended and organized events for five Social Forums over the last decade and most recently participated in the Gender Justice Working Group for the second U.S. Social Forum. Her recent scholarship addresses differences in discursive strategies among contemporary transnational feminist networks, the influence of funding on the strategies of women's and feminist SMOs, and feminist activism and its relationship to the Social Forum process.

**Lorien Jasny** is a PhD student in sociology at the University of California–Irvine, where she works in Professor Carter Butts's networks, computations, and social dynamics lab. Her areas of study are social networks, political sociology, and methodology.

**Jeffrey S. Juris** is assistant professor of anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Northeastern University. He is the author of *Networking Futures: The Movements Against Corporate Globalization* (2008) and co-author of *Global Democracy and the World Social Forums* (2008). His research focuses on new media and social movements, and the U.S. Social Forum process. He is currently writing a new book on free radio and autonomy in Mexico.

**Matheu Kaneshiro** is a PhD student at the University of California–Riverside. His research focuses on social movements (particularly the environmental movement), political sociology, and demography. His research has appeared in *Mobilization*, *Engaging Social Justice: Critical Studies of 21st Century Social Transformation*, *Social Change*, and *Resistance and Social Practices*.

**Marina Karides** served as a representative of Sociologists for Women in Society on the Gender Justice Working Group for the second U.S. Social Forum. Her recent publications include two edited volumes and a co-authored book on the World Social Forum and U.S. Social Forum. Her fieldwork in Trinidad and Tobago, the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and New Orleans examines how women create work conditions in the informal sector or how international networks better their lives and resist neoliberal globalization.

**Linda J. Kim** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California–Riverside. Her research focuses on race, gender, media, and social movements. Her research appears in *Global Studies Association 2007: Contested Terrains of Globalization* (2007), *Critical Sociology* (2008), *North and South in the World Political Economy* (2008), and *Encyclopedia of Asian American Folklore* (2010).

**Ashley N. Koda** is a graduate student at the University of California–Riverside. Her areas of specialization include race and ethnicity, and organizations. Her research interests include charting urban and economic development within Native American communities as well as North-South relations between Indigenous populations.

**Roy Kwon** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of California–Riverside. His research interests include transnational social movements, political economy, globalization, economic development, and inequality. His current research, carried out at the Institute for Research on World-Systems, focuses on path-dependent colonial development and global within-country income inequality.

**Kirk S. Lawrence** is a PhD candidate in sociology and a researcher at the Institute for Research on World-Systems at the University of California–Riverside. His research interests include the political economy of the environment and energy use, and economic development. His research appears in the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* and in *Globalization and the “New” Semi-Peripheries* (2009).

**Lorenzo Mosca** was awarded a PhD by the University of Florence in 2004. He then got a postdoctoral fellowship, first at the European University Institute and then at the University of Trento. He is assistant professor in sociology of communication at the University of Roma Tre. His research interests focus on political participation, political communication, ICTs and democracy, and social policies.

**Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle** is senior lecturer at the Université Paris I–Panthéon Sorbonne. She works on collective action and political reforms in Africa, with a focus on Cameroon and Kenya. She is the co-editor of *Politique Africaine*.

**Thomas Ponniah** is a lecturer and assistant director of social studies at Harvard University and faculty associate of Harvard’s Project on Justice,

Welfare, and Economics. He is the co-editor of *Another World Is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum* (2003).

**Ellen Reese** is associate professor of sociology at the University of California–Riverside. Her research focuses on welfare state development, social movements, and gender, race, and class. She is the author of *Backlash Against Welfare Mothers: Past and Present* (2005) and *They Say Cutback; We Say Fightback! Welfare Rights Activism in an Era of Retrenchment* (2011).

**Ruth Reitan** is assistant professor in the University of Miami's Department of International Studies, where she researches global politics, transnational social movements, and the World and European Social Forums. She is the author of *Global Activism* (2007) and *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuba and African American Leaders in the 1960s* (1999). She is a member of Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD).

**Dieter Rucht** is co-director of the research group Civil Society, Citizenship, and Political Mobilization in Europe at the Social Science Research Center Berlin and professor of sociology at the Free University of Berlin. His research interests include political participation, social movements, political protest, and public discourse.

**Preeta Saxena** is a PhD candidate at the University of California–Riverside. She received her MA in sociology from the California State University–Northridge. Her research interests include gender, criminology, and transnational social movements. She is currently conducting research regarding North-South differences among feminist activists at the World Social Forum and the determinants of protest participation among social forum attendees. Her work has appeared in *Mobilization*.

**Johanna Siméant** is professor of political science at the Université Paris I–Panthéon Sorbonne. She is the author of *La cause des sans papiers* (1998) and *La grève de la faim* (2009), co-author of *Le travail humanitaire* (2002), and co-editor of *Face aux crises extrêmes* (2006) and *Un autre Monde à Nairobi* (2008). She has published diverse articles in French and English on social movements and the transnationalisation of activism and works currently on activism in Mali.

**Jackie Smith** is professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. She is author of *Social Movements for Global Democracy* (2008), co-author (with Dawn Wiest) of *Social Movements in the World System: The Politics of*

*Crisis and Transformation* (forthcoming 2012), co-author of *Global Democracy and the World Social Forums* (2007), and co-editor of other books on transnational organizing, including *Coalitions Across Borders* (2005) and *Globalization and Resistance* (2002).

**Peter (Jay) Smith** is professor of political science at Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada. His research focuses on new communications technologies, globalization, trade politics, transnational networks, democracy, and citizenship and appears in the *Journal of World-Systems Theory; Information, Communication & Society*, and *Globalizations*. He is also coauthor of *Global Democracy and the World Social Forums* (2007).

**Elizabeth Smythe** is professor of political science at Concordia University College of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, teaching international relations and comparative politics. Her current research examines the role of the World Social Forum in networks of resistance to trade agreements and the food sovereignty movement, trade rules, and food labelling. She co-edited the *Journal of World-Systems Research* special issue "From the Global to the Local: Social Forums, Movements and Place" (January 2010).

**Teivo Teivainen** is professor of world politics at the University of Helsinki. His previous affiliations include director of the Program on Democracy and Global Transformation at the San Marcos University in Lima, Peru, and distinguished visiting professor of development studies at Saint Mary's University in Canada. On behalf of the Network Institute for Global Democratization, he is a founding member of the International Council of the World Social Forum.

**Lesley Wood** is associate professor of sociology at York University. She is an activist scholar who is currently researching the dynamics that influence protester-police interactions.



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