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**SPECIAL ISSUE**

***FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE LOCAL:  
SOCIAL FORUMS, MOVEMENTS, AND PLACE***

**guest edited by Scott C. Byrd and Elizabeth Smythe**

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**FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE LOCAL:  
SOCIAL FORUMS, MOVEMENTS, AND PLACE  
(Introduction to Special Issue)**

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The history of the modern world-system is characterized not only by the meteoric rise and fall of empires and global elites but also by peoples and movements that have challenged their power and dominance. Globalizing processes working to consolidate and protect transnational capital classes and their state assemblages have been met with fierce opposition throughout these waves by subordinate and threatened groups. The current situation is no different. Since the onset of neoliberal capitalist expansion in the mid-1980s transnational resistance and mobilization around issues such as trade, food sovereignty, war and militarization, human rights, and environmental concerns increased exponentially (Smith 2004b; Smith and Wiest 2005). Fueling this growth are social movements organized from the global to the local that have built solidarity and capacity across borders through a series of global campaigns, transnational gatherings, and high-profile mobilizations. One of the most vibrant examples of transnational activism throughout the last decade has been the World Social Forums (WSF) which originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. The WSF emerged as a potent transnational mobilizing force within the global justice movement and has provided a space for anti-neoliberal mobilization to flourish.

The World Social Forums represent an ongoing process linking social movement organizations with networks, coalitions, and activists as well as their activities and campaigns the world over. Organizations, movements, and activists engage each other on many levels: 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 (Byrd 2005; Fisher and Ponniah 2003; Juris 2008; Smith et al. 2007). Since its inception in January 2001, the WSF has expanded to hundreds of regional, national, and community Forums facilitated by a diverse set of decentralized organizing groups and coalitions (Glasius and Timms 2006; Smythe and Smith this issue). Transnational gatherings such as the WSF promote the integration of local grassroots groups and national civil society organizations into a global civil society whose aim is to create a more democratic, just, and peaceful planet (World Social Forum 2002). These encounters also provide a space for organizations and movements involved in struggles between states and non-state challengers as well as larger states and weaker states to articulate these imbalances and develop strategies to ameliorate those tensions (della Porta et al 2006; Smith 2004a). The WSF has proved especially useful for the formation and work of transnational

networks and coalitions by providing a common space for mobilizing organizations, articulating proposals and projects, and diffusing these mobilizing ideas to participant home countries as well as to other movements and organizations engaged in the Forum process (Reitan 2007; Smith 2008).

This collection of articles seeks to examine the geographic, political, and organizational contours of this expanding process through understanding the diffusion and translation of Social Forum activism in different political and cultural contexts. The special issue begins with a macro-analysis of Social Forum activism and mobilizations throughout the world. From there we have included a series of “on the ground” examinations of the diverse global contours of Social Forum activism: two World Social Forums held in Venezuela and Kenya; a domestic Forum held in Montreal, Quebec; and an account of grassroots Social Forum activism in Italy. We also incorporate a short reflection on nine years of Social Forum activism against the backdrop of the most recent WSF held in January 2009, in Belém, Brazil. At the most basic level, this collection attempts to capture the diversity and multi-level nature of an expanding global process and its relationship to the current economic and political world-system. Empirically, we hope the following articles unpack these transnational movement dynamics and mechanisms in a way that is beneficial to scholars of social movements, globalization, and international relations. Collectively, this project represents an attempt to provide a space for scholars from a diversity of disciplines employing multiple methodologies to describe and explain a complex organizational process evolving at the global, regional, and local levels.

We view this collection and analysis of the WSF as important endeavors because of two basic dynamics that make the Social Forum process unique. On one hand, the WSF as an emerging transnational social movement itself is a reflection of the current global economic and political conjecture, and on the other hand, the WSF as a process has been influenced and translated in very different ways by local, grassroots actors across the globe. For example, the WSF has undergone several organizational and ideological innovations throughout its growth and development (Teivainan 2007) which include: deregionalizing the site of the WSF away from Brazil, including a move to India in 2004, the poly-centric Forums in 2006 (Bamako, Caracas and Karachi), and the African WSF in 2007; shifting to a self-organizing structure and more open thematic consultation process; and most recently the decision to move toward a bi-annual format (holding the WSF every two years). Deregionalizing the WSF made the gatherings more accessible and less expensive for local activist and organizational participation, and in symbolic terms, by expanding outside of South America, the innovations helped legitimate the WSF as a truly global, inclusive process. Furthermore, the move in 2005 to more self-organization and a “horizontal” organizing logic embodied innovations meant to ameliorate tensions over representation and control over Forum events as well as to increase participatory pathways for more open collaboration. But at the same time, not all Forum ideas and innovations are taken up by various local organizing groups who have translated Social Forum ideology to fit their local political and cultural context (as noted by Wood’s article in this issue).

The rise of transnational social movement activity and international non-governmental organizations throughout the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, while impressive, also demonstrates uneven growth across North-South divides and regions (Beckfield 2003; Smith 2004b; Wiest and Smith 2007). A need exists for research on transnational movement linkages, coalition growth patterns, and organizational inequalities within this global network of affiliations. Smith and Smythe’s article provides such an analysis of the transnational contours of

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Social Forum activism and mobilization. They trace and map the geographic and temporal landscape of Social Forum events and organizations across the globe. We consider this an important endeavor considering the lack of such comprehensive data existing to date. The authors find that Forum activities may be influenced by a number of factors that arise at a regional, country, or local level and be reproduced during such transnational gatherings where variation in resources availability, the nature of political opportunities in a region or country, and the history of linkages to Social Forum activism influence the diffusion and fertility of the “event-process”. Their findings confirm earlier work noting uneven global social justice activism throughout Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, but they also find new patterns of involvement in North America and Europe that highlight important differences in political culture and historical linkages to progressive and leftist traditions.

The next two articles bring to life these tensions over political culture and tradition by tracing the diffusion of Social Forum activism to Quebec, Canada and Caracas, Venezuela. Dufour and Conway begin their examination of the Quebec Social Forum by situating the Social Forum as both an event and a process and then embedding their analysis within the longer history of political mobilization in Quebec, Canada. Planning and organizing this domestic Forum proved to be a long drawn-out, contentious process that exposed many tensions and political schisms within the broader progressive community. By historicizing the Quebec Social Forum they are able to interpret these cleavages and conflicts more adequately and apprehend their larger significance within the Quebec political context. They find that the conflicts that plagued the organizing of the Quebec Social Forum are a reprise of those that appeared in the movements of the late 1990s and came to a head in the 2001 massive demonstrations against the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Quebec City. The schisms are more substantive, rather than simple conflicts over tactics and resources, but represent differences over political ethics and democratic practices as well as a fundamental disagreement about how political and societal transformation is created.

Wood’s article traces the diffusion of “horizontalism” within the Intercontinental Youth Camp of the Social Forum from Porto Alegre, Brazil to Caracas, Venezuela. Her initial focus is on the importance of understanding the layers of political context in diffusion processes, and how these contexts become important through the ways that they affect internal debates amongst activists. She finds that while elements of horizontalism are not new, the importance of prefigurative forms of organizing within the Social Forum process and the frame of horizontalism as an identity and a strategy fundamental to its success is. Wood argues that the relational context of Caracas and recent events held in that city (The World Festival of Youth and Students) blocked the diffusion of the horizontalist identity from Porto Alegre to Caracas by limiting the interest and willingness of local activists to engage in discussions of identity and strategy. The next two articles while looking at similar issues of identity and diffusion focus in on the organizational dynamics of the movements themselves while also examining framing dynamics and issues of legitimacy, representation, and voice.

della Porta and Mosca’s contribution of the Italian case finds that the Social Forum process there maintains strong local roots but also has differential effects on movement organizational models and collective identities at the domestic level. They show how local Social Forums, serving as arenas for exchanging ideas, play a cognitive role in the import, but also the translation, of new movement ideas and innovations. Through cross-fertilization among different movement families and by spreading a method of working together that becomes part of the

repertoire of action with local social movement organizations, these local, community-based Forums build dense organizational networks and more tolerant activist identities. Their extensive ethnographic methodology provides rich, “on the ground” experiences and findings that highlight, with greater empirical detail, some of the same tensions and issues only alluded to in other research on the World Social Forums or within the broader global justice movement.

The final article by Pommerolle and Simeant is also a rich ethnographic examination; this time, of the 2007 World Social Forum held in Nairobi, Kenya. This contribution is valuable because there has been very little written about this Social Forum, as well as African transnational activism in general, and because the next WSF in 2011 will go back to Africa and be held in Dakar, Senegal. They examine the complex relationships between “northern and southern” activists and organizations, South African activists with activists from the rest of the continent, and French and English-speaking activists from Africa. Issues at the crux of this analysis are those that challenged the heart of Social Forum legitimacy in Africa—those of voice (who speaks for and with Africa), commodification (who owns the Forum and stands to benefit from it), and inclusion (who is in and who is out of decision-making processes and Forum participation). To engage with these issues they assert that scholars must examine the “concrete conditions” and exchanges between transnational organizations and campaigns, national context, and individual activists to understand tensions, alliances, and “lines of domination” within global civil society.

Taken together the articles in this special issue provide specific accounts of a transnational social movement process embedded in various national and local, political cultures and spaces. We believe that these accounts represent a deeper understanding of Social Forums and their development throughout the world while also develop an alternative epistemology of transnational activism, one that places movements and place in a reflexive, multi-level framework of analysis. While various political contexts may function as forces or structures that moderate, amplify, or dampen Social Forum activism and diffusion we are also reminded that movements are the cause and the Social Forums are the effect. Thus, where movements are strong, the Forum process is strong; and where movements are weak, the Forum process struggles to set roots or risks being translated by the local actors to serve their own needs.

Lastly, we would like to thank all contributing authors for their hard work and patience as well as the entire editorial staff of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* for helping make this special issue a reality. We hope that this collection of articles expands our current knowledge of transnational activism and movement processes not only related to the World Social Forum process and global anti-neoliberal mobilization, but also to global civil society in general. It is also our hope that such knowledge will work to ameliorate inequalities that exist between organizations, movements, and activists throughout the world-system and help incubate alternatives both global and local that seek to manage the negative impacts of the world-economy.

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## (IN)FERTILE GROUND? SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM IN ITS REGIONAL AND LOCAL DIMENSION

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### ABSTRACT

*Since its inception in 2001 World Social Forum (WSF) has grown in numbers and drawn activists from all areas of the globe. It has also spawned a myriad of social forums around the world. But the pattern of participation within the WSF global event or within other forums has not been evenly spread in geographic or spatial terms. This chapter examines how and why social forum activism emerged in some places and not others. We map the social forum from the first WSF in 2001 through its proliferation and fragmentation over time as it has taken root at various levels—continental, national, regional and local. Then we provide comparative case studies of sub-global forums drawn from North and South America, Europe and Africa. We also compare different manifestations of social “forumism” along a number of dimensions. Drawing on comparative politics and its emphasis on the specifics of place and the role of context we discuss these patterns and the factors that might account for why these forms of resistance find barren or fertile ground around the world.*

### INTRODUCTION

When the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre Brazil in January 2001 to coincide with the meeting of the World Economic Forum and challenge neo-liberal globalization with the slogan “Another World is Possible”, few would have predicted the rapid growth in the number of activists who gather at the annual (and now bi-annual) global event. Few also would have foreseen the proliferation of forums since then ranging from very local (e.g. neighborhood, community) to regional, national and continental ones (Glasius and Timms 2006). Even more forums have been organized around themes (such as education) and shared identities (gender, ethnicity). This expansion of social forum activism, however, has been uneven, both in terms of who participates in forums, or where geographically sub-global forums emerge. This article addresses the question of where social forum activism has emerged and why. It examines some of

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the mechanisms by which social forum activism has diffused globally as an innovative form of collective action.<sup>1</sup>

While the study of social movement innovation is not new much of it has focussed on the mechanisms by which innovations spread and networks of activists link up. Less attention has been paid to where innovation diffuses to, and most importantly, as Soule (2003) has pointed out, why it takes roots in some places and not others. Explaining the shift of scale in collective action from the local to the global has also been a major focus of analysis (Tarrow and McAdam 2005) but how global collective action stimulates a new form of globally-informed local activism has been a subject of less analysis. Moreover, while those studying the global justice movement (GJM) have seen the emergence of the WSF as an important development, their analyses have centered on who is excluded and included in its processes, its innovative structure and internal tensions (Juris 2008). Less attention has been paid to the role of place and context in shaping the nature of social forum activism at various levels or scales.<sup>2</sup> Why social forum activism spreads from global to local forums and the transmission mechanisms by which this occurred need to be investigated.

We begin then with a discussion of our data and a description of the pattern of social forum activism we found looking at those geographic regions where adoption has been extensive and where it has not. We discuss possible explanations for this pattern of diffusion and begin, through descriptions of social forums at various levels, to try to understand the role of place and political opportunity structures (Meyer 2004) in providing fertile ground for these innovations. Our intention is not to provide definitive explanations of why and how social forum activism does, or does not, imbed itself in every place and space; rather, our goal is to raise questions that future case studies might address.

### METHODOLOGY

We began with the question of who participates in social forums and where forums occur. Data on numbers and origins of participants at WSF events are drawn from 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 another forum, such as the European Social Forum (ESF). The search included listings contained in the on-line 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).

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<sup>1</sup> This article is not a critique of the social forum process. For an analysis of the WSF as a space of contestation and contested space see Jackie Smith, Marina Karides, *et. al.* (2007) *Global Democracy and the World Social Forums*. Boulder, CO.: Paradigm Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> An exception to this is Janet Conway "Reading Nairobi as Place, Space, and Difference." *Sociologists without Borders* 3(1): 48-70.

We classified the geographic scale ranging from the global to the local as follows:

- 1 Global
- 2. Inter-continental
- 3. Continental
- 4. Regional
- 5. National
- 6. Sub-national
- 7. Local

The local level included urban areas and, in some cases, neighborhoods within large urban areas. Reliance on the Internet and secondary sources and the languages used means that some social forums may have been missed, especially those without online access, particularly in the Middle East and East Asia. The absence of structure, continuity or institutional memory in some of these networks means we are providing a partial view, a snapshot in time.

Social forums also vary in their goals and structures. Some form ongoing networks, with meetings, on-line exchanges or other activities, while others are clearly oriented to a project of organizing a discrete forum event. Data included both types along with the number and range of themes or issues addressed. Single theme forums, such as those dealing with education or health, have become more common since 2001. We also discovered a number of forums organized around identity (eg. gender or ethnicity) rather than an issue or theme. Over 600 events and organizations for which a minimum of information was available were identified. Of those, 411 have been coded to date for details about the event or organization. The balance had incomplete or partial information.

**PATTERNS OF SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM: WHERE?**

**Table 1: Growth of the global WSF since its inception in 2001 to 2007 (total participants).**

| Year | City, Country        | Number of people |
|------|----------------------|------------------|
| 2001 | Porto Alegre, Brazil | 20,000           |
| 2002 | Porto Alegre, Brazil | 50,000           |
| 2003 | Porto Alegre, Brazil | 100,000          |
| 2004 | Mumbai, India        | 115,000          |
| 2005 | Porto Alegre, Brazil | 155,000          |
| 2006 | Polycentric -Total   | 127,000          |
|      | Caracas, Venezuela   | 72,000*          |
|      | Bamako, Mali         | 25,000           |
|      | Karachi, Pakistan    | 30,000           |
| 2007 | Nairobi, Kenya       | 57,000*          |
| 2009 | Belem, Brazil        | 115,000          |

Source: IBASE– *World Social Forum: An X-Ray of Participation in the Policentric Forum* 2006 p 13 (available at [www.ibase.br](http://www.ibase.br)) and Bulletin of the WSF March 12, 2009

\*Estimated data

As Table 2 suggests proximity is clearly a factor in who participates in the global event. In 2005 most were drawn from surrounding regions, a reflection of distance and costs of travel.

**Table 2: WSF 2005 participants by geographical origin**

| Continent                      | National origin | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Total Participants             | 92,281          | 100     |
| 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 – *World Social Forum : An X-Ray of Participation in the Policentric Forum 2006*. Data is based on 59.5% of those registered for the WSF.

Forums held in Caracas, Venezuela and Bamako, Mali in 2006 show a similar pattern where between 65-72 percent of participants were nationals of the host country with 90 per cent of participants drawn from the surrounding continent (IBASE, 2006).

While WSF participants are drawn mostly from surrounding regions the events attract participants from many countries—132 in 2005, according to the WSF secretariat. Surveys conducted by the Brazilian NGO IBASE and a number of academics (Chase-Dunn et al. 2006; Brunel 2006) confirm 163 cities around the world were represented. Those coming from a distance are fewer in number and drawn from groups or classes that have access to resources and time to attend such events. However, the pattern of their attendance at global events cannot be accounted for solely by distance or cost, as Table 3 indicates.

If distance alone accounted for participation levels why would participants from France outnumber those of Mexico at the Venezuelan forum and those of Germany at the Mali forum? Even more puzzling is why U.S. participation is lower than that of Canadians at the Mali forum. Other factors are at work including the relative strength of the social forum process in each country.

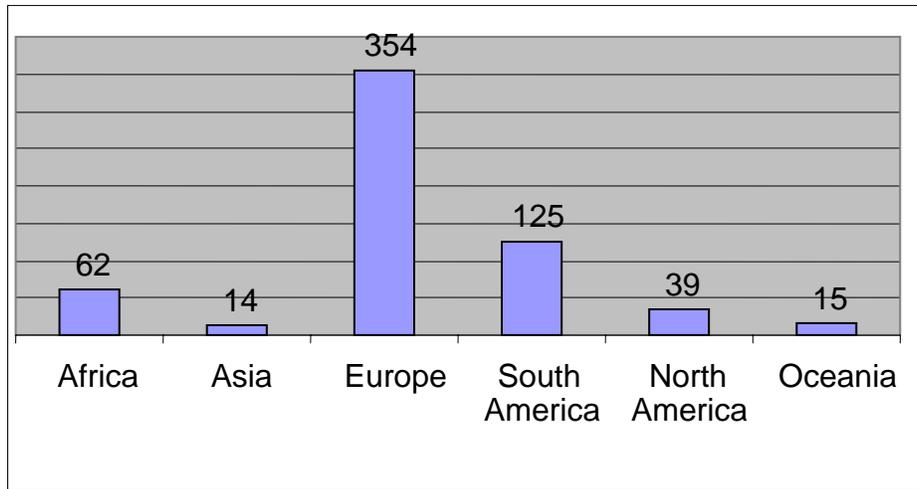
Once we examine the broader range of social forums at various levels another interesting pattern emerges. As the chart below indicates Continental Europe, particularly France and Italy, and South America, especially Brazil, have been social forum hotbeds.

**Table 3: Polycentric WSFs 2006 by nationality of participant (in %)**

| Venezuela       |      | Mali            |      |
|-----------------|------|-----------------|------|
| 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) *the World Social Forum: An X-ray of participation in the polycentric forum, 2006, Caracas and Bamako chapters* (www.ibase.br).

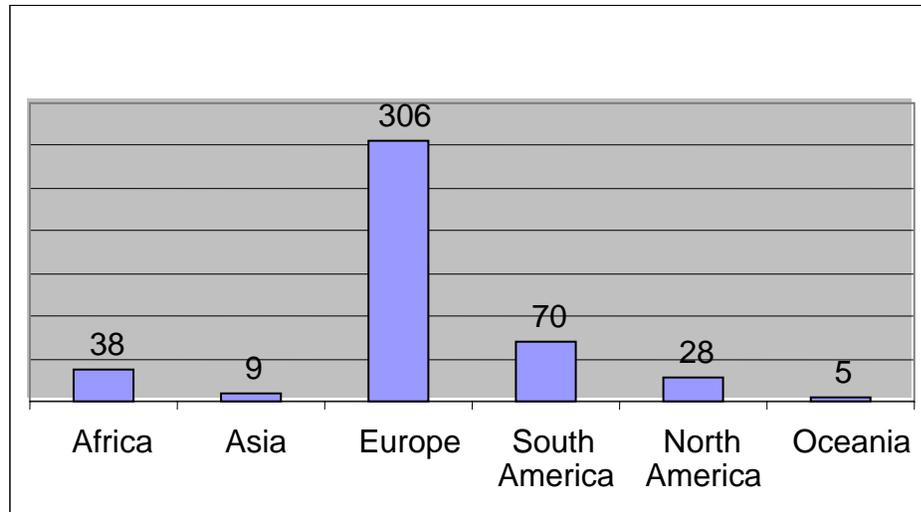
**Chart 1: Totals for all Fora per Continent**



A second pattern emerges when we separate out social forum organizations or networks (chart 2) from the total number of all social forums<sup>3</sup> (chart 1).

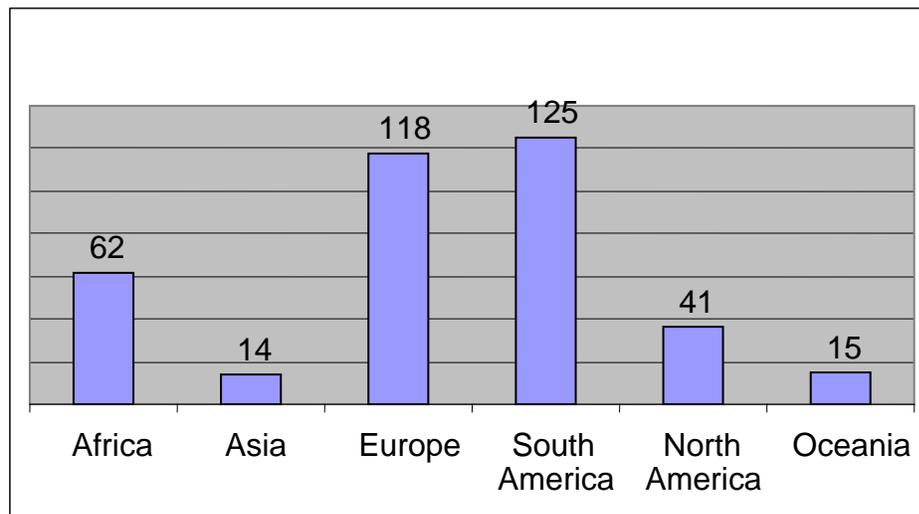
<sup>3</sup> The number of organizations exceeds the number of events since some organizations did not hold any events at all.

**Chart 2: Number of Social Forum Organizations per Continent**



South American social forumism is more tied to holding events than is the case in Europe, especially Italy, where the number of social forum organizations dwarfs the number of forum events or gatherings held.

**Chart 3: Total Forum Events per Continent**

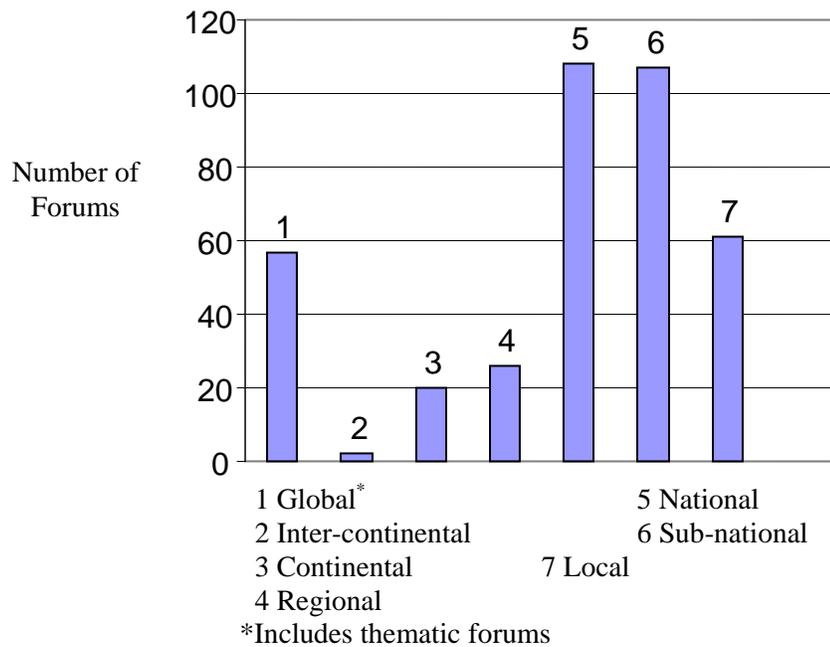


Numbers of events do not tell the whole story however, since they do not reflect how many participants were involved. While our data on attendance is limited we do know that it varies widely from forums in Africa with only a few hundred participants, even for continental events,

to neighborhood forums in cities such as Sao Paolo, Brazil which draw tens of thousands of participants.

As Chart 4 indicates the global-local balance has also shifted with over half of the social forums since 2001 occurring at the national level or below.

**Chart 4: Social Forums by Scale**



**PATTERNS OF SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM: WHY?**

The most interesting question is why these patterns occur? What precipitates social forum activism? Corporate globalization has impacted virtually every area of the globe, albeit unevenly, ranging from the loss of employment, or its growing precariousness, to cuts in social services, social exclusion, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. Why is the response to these global forces different in terms of where the activism occurs?

Studies of diffusion, defined as the flow of social practices (Soule 2003; Chabot 2001), have identified a process involving the transmission of innovative practices through various channels, both direct and indirect, to those adopting the practices. Direct channels include social networks through which communication, the transfer of resources and ideas could occur. More indirect channels include the adopter developing a sense of shared identity (perhaps involving a

master frame<sup>4</sup>) with a more passive transmitter and /or becoming aware of these practices through agents such as the media. The adoption of these practices is not a given, however. Which practices are successfully diffused and how they become locally imbedded and adapted are more interesting and complex questions, and require attention to the place and context of adoption. Given that social forum events, in particular, require organizational capacity, resources and the space to resist suggests that the political opportunity structure (McAdam 1996)<sup>5</sup> at the national or sub-national level, the mobilization of resources and the strength of existing old and new social movements will be important factors. Geographic regions peripheral to centres of power in the global system may lack resources and while resistance to the impact of globalization might emerge there is also a strong likelihood of repression (Smith 2004). Thus the relative absence of both resources and political opportunities may account for the lack of social forum activism in Africa, in comparison, for example, to Europe or South America.

Direct transmitters include the International Council (IC) of the WSF and the secretariat which, after the second WSF, sought to encourage and facilitate the organization of continental, thematic and local forums in Asia and Africa, seen as under-represented in the WSF process. Information, financial resources (some from foundations and NGOs) and technical assistance have all been provided in the context of decisions to move global WSF events to Mumbai, India in 2004, various cities in Africa, South America and Asia in 2006, and Nairobi, Kenya in 2007. All were intended to provide opportunities for those in the regions to participate in a WSF, but also to stimulate regional and local activism networks.

The development of social forums, as with other forms of transnational resistance, is also tied to global events or organizations. Pianta (2005) argues that UN World Summits played a role in the development of transnational civil society networks. Similarly key meetings of international institutions (WTO, IMF, G8) seen to embody neo-liberalism have stimulated social forum forms of resistance. Other channels of direct diffusion include individual activists who have attended a WSF or continental event and return to their place of origin to “report back” to the group or network to which they belong. Inspired or stimulated by their experience, they then seek to create a similar local process or event. When an event engaged in anti-neoliberal activities pre-dates the WSF, but then transforms itself into a social forum event after the fact as a result of a shared identification, indirect diffusion has occurred. Transmission alone does not guarantee successful diffusion, nor does it suggest that practices are uniformly adopted at either a continental, national or local level. We illustrate this with multilevel cases drawn from various continents which look at both broad patterns of social forum activism.

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<sup>4</sup> 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.”

<sup>5</sup> By political opportunity structure we mean how open or closed domestic or international institutions are to collective actors (social movements). 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 (eg. the United Nations) or create their own opportunity structures (eg. the WSF) as a means of pressuring domestic structures to be more responsive to their demands.

### **Social Forums in the North: North America**

Relatively few social forums events have been held in North America compared to Europe and South America. That said, within North America there is a great deal of variation. Despite having one tenth the population Canada has had a similar number of sub-national 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. However, a large-scale event was recently held in the Zocalo in Mexico City as part of the global day of decentralized WSF actions in January 2008.

Patterns of national attendance at global WSF events reflect similar trends. Data show that Americans 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 2007) Canadians participating in the 2005 youth camp outnumbered those of the US and Mexico. Although Mexico is proximate to Venezuela, site of the 2006 Polycentric Social Forum, perhaps due to the relatively high cost of airfare for Mexicans, only 0.3% of the participants were of Mexican origin, in contrast to .9 for Canada and 2.2 for the US. (See Table 3) On the other hand participants from Argentina, a much greater distance to travel than Mexico, but where the social forum tradition is stronger, composed 4.1% of participants. Mexico, on the face of it, would seem to be a natural home for the social forum process but, in fact, is not. This is curious for, 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).

The relative dearth of social forums in Mexico lies in the complexities of state-society relations, the strengths and weaknesses of collective actors, and the current state of political activism in Mexico. Of particular salience is that Mexico is increasingly fragmented by region, the richer north versus the poorer center and south, by class, and by ethnicity/indigeneity. The left today in Mexico is also divided between the non-institutionalized left and the more institutionalized left which, in turn, is itself divided. (Quintana 2006; La Botz 2005; Icaza 2008) The refusal by the Zapatistas to endorse López Obrado of the Party of the Democratic Revolution in the 2006 presidential campaign or participate electorally in favour of the “the other campaign” to mobilize the excluded has been criticized by others on the Mexican left for sectarianism and perhaps contributing to the victory of the right wing National Action Party’s (PAN) candidate Felix Calderon. All this has occurred in a context of repression and violence in Mexico that inhibits 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 might account for variations in social forum activism in Canada and the United States? In Canada there are significant differences between English Canadian and Quebec social forum activism attributable to historical differences in state-society relations, political opportunity structures, nationalism, and the role of important civil actors such as unions. For most English-Canadian activists in the 1980s and 1990s free trade and neo-liberal 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 for Quebec to promote its nationalist project. Thus while English Canadian activists fought unsuccessfully against the Canada United States Free Trade Agreement (1989) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (1993) in Quebec for much of the 1990s the pro-sovereignty governing Parti Québécois (PQ) “was supported by all unions ... and major social groups” (Dufour 2003:17).

At the federal level in English Canada state-society relations were re-engineered during this period by successive neo-liberal governments re-framing citizens as consumers, greatly reducing political opportunity structures for civil society actors. “The result,” claims M. Smith, was a demonstrable “decline of the domestic nation-state as the site of democratic contestation and political life.” (2005:180) In Quebec, on the other hand, as opposition (lead by youth and feminists) to free trade and neo-liberal 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 PQ’s stance on free trade and globalization the government continued to promote an international presence, including NGOs supportive of the WSF process such as Alternatives. According to Dufour and Conway (this volume) with NGO, government, political party and union support eighty per cent of the 700 Canadian WSF 2005 participants came from Quebec, including a sizable youth contingent. Youth, including those that attended the WSF, have been instrumental in diffusing the social process to Quebec, advocating on its behalf and providing a horizontalist vision of the WSF process. In 2007 the Quebec labor movement, facing reduced access to power as the result of a new Liberal government, dropped its reluctance to support the Quebec social forum process and cooperated with autonomist youth activists to stage a successful Quebec Social Forum with 5,000 participants.

Nothing analogous has occurred in English-speaking Canada. Large anti-corporate NGOs, such as the Council of Canadians, and national unions have been very visible at the global WSF but less so in the social forum process in English Canada thus depriving it of considerable energy and resources. According to Conway,

the agenda of localizing the Social Forum has been taken up in a variety of ways, at a variety of scales, but most often by an ad hoc group of activists ... coming from diverse movement experiences and cultures. ... In virtually every Social Forum process in Canada, the labour movement, as a movement, has been notable by its absence. (2006:10)

The United States has had 21 social forums including the US Social Forum in June/July 2007.<sup>6</sup> U.S. sub-national forums appear in a narrow band of localities situated in the Northeast and Midwest. In partisan politics these tend to be “blue states”, centres of a more progressive political tradition. That, however, does not explain social forum absence in the coastal Northwest U.S., which is also “blue”. A Northwest forum planned for October 2004 collapsed “when First Nations participation withdrew, citing conflicts over the pace and nature or decision-making.” (Conway 2006:10)

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<sup>6</sup> According to Jeffrey Juris there was a San Francisco Forum in 2002 raising the number to 20. Communication March 1, 2007 presentation International Studies Association, March 1, 2007.

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 U.S. Identity politics also marked the Midwest Social Forum (MWSF). The MWSF was founded in 1983 as a yearly (largely white) Midwest Radical Scholars and Activists Conference engaged in activities of challenging neo-liberalism pre-dating the WSF. Renamed RadFest in the late 1990s it became the MWSF in 2003, an example of diffusion over time. 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% people of color and 60% women and representative "with respect to class, age, sexual orientation, ability, issue focus, and ideological or strategic perspective" (Becker 2006).<sup>7</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 BSF and the MWSF 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 the US post 9/11 and the resulting politics of fear (Juris 2007; Hadden and Tarrow 2007). As Donohue (a BSF activist) indicates:

Daily struggles against new wars, new funding cuts, new court rulings, and new arrests leave activists unable to develop a coherent response to the broad assault on the public sector, civil liberties, civil rights, and international law. (Donohue, 2004 July 7)

Defending the right to dissent in an increasingly authoritarian political environment was of critical importance. 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 US" (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 a very successful US Social Forum was finally held at the end of June, 2007 in Atlanta and was attended by over 11,000 participants. Its success led to a decision of the organizing committee to hold a second one in Detroit in 2010.<sup>8</sup>

### **Social Forums in Europe: French and Italian Connections**

Within Europe, in contrast to North America, we see a huge number of forums and much variation in number and type particularly in France and Italy. France follows the discrete event model of social forums while Italian forums operated more as a process or network, as did some forums in the UK. One explanation may be the influences of different organizations or types of mobilization and the extent to which social forum innovations are compatible, or resonate with,

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<sup>7</sup> On the issue of race and the US Social Forum see Juris, Jeffrey S, (2008) "Spaces of Intentionality: Race, Class and Horizontality," *Mobilization* 2009.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the USSF see Jackie Smith et Jeffrey Juris et al

these 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, as an influential network of organizations 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 where 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 which is closer to the horizontalist tendency found in social forums. (Lee 2004; Juris 2008).

French and Italian forums also illustrate differences in transmission and the role of changing political opportunity structures.<sup>9</sup> The French disposition against globalization and the embracing of the social forum process is evident at the 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 one hundred 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 Gironde Social Forum, Pays Nantais Local Social Forum, and the Region 89 (L'Yonne) Social Forum. Any discussion of social forum activism in France then, as well as in the creation of the WSF and other forums (in northern Europe and South America), must address the role of ATTAC.

ATTAC was formed in 1998 after an editorial in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (LMD) by Ignacio Ramonet calling for the creation of an organization to oppose global finance capital and an appeal by LMD director Bernard Cassen to form an organization advocating for the Tobin Tax to regulate economic processes and support social and human rights. Cassen later helped found the WSF. Expansion to over 40 ATTAC chapters led to the founding assembly of the network in June 2003. (Kolb 2005) Today, in France, 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 1998-2002 with a cohabitationist government and the Socialist Party dominating parliament. The influence of public intellectuals in France and ATTAC’s link to LMD and socialist intellectuals also gave it extraordinary influence including obtaining state funding for the 2003 European Social Forum in Paris. Even after 2002 the Gaullist-led government, with its legacy of *dirigisme*, was unwilling to fully open France’s doors to neoliberal globalization and the dictates of the market.

France’s impressive social forum record is overshadowed by Italy 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 clearly had a role in the development of social forum activism (della Porta 2003:11; Andretta and Mosca 2004; Reiter 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 or widespread social forum activism resulted. Clearly the ground has been 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 counter-summit had called it a social forum (Glasius 2005).

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<sup>9</sup> The focus here is on France and Italy for three reasons: 1) the high incidence of social forum activism; 2) differences in preferences for events versus processes or networks and 3) language limitations of the researchers.

Many of the social forums in Italy referenced the Genoa and Florence events on their websites. These forums and their assemblies were modelled on types of direct, particularly, 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). Changes in Italy's political opportunity structure, in particular, the collapse of the Italian party system in the early 1990s liberated many organizations from their party allegiance (Reiter 2007) and served as a catalyst to the rise of a more independent and autonomist left.

The autonomists were strongly supportive of the social forum process and found themselves 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>10</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" (Rome ) [researcher's translation from Italian], and a struggle between the horizontals (autonomist) and verticals. The social forum process in Italy quickly mushroomed but many lasted for shorter periods than elsewhere and, in some cases, such as the Abruzzo Social Forum, were created primarily to promote local causes, such as the privatization of water.

### **Social Forums in the Global South: South America beyond the WSF**

After Europe South America is the other major center of social forum activism, led by Brazil and Chile (in terms of the number of social forums) held. Brazil is clearly at the heart. The first three world forums were held there, as was the 2005 WSF. Brazil has also been the site for over 20 thematic forums, several trans-boundary regional forums, 24 sub-national forums and two national social forums. Given that several Brazilian organizations and activists were key founding members of the WSF this level of activism should come as no surprise. 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 largest number and earliest of sub-national forums, with the greatest attendance, were held in the state of Minas Gerais, heart of the populous (over 20 million) industrialized southeast. The role of place is reflected in the themes, attendance and the resources locals can draw upon including social movements, unions, NGOs, churches, the WSF Brazil Council, political parties, and supportive Worker's Party (PT) governments. For example, Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais, has had a PT government for some time and uses participatory budgeting. This made it an obvious site to host the Forum Social Mineiro.

The roots of the Forum Social Mineiro are linked to the WSF and efforts by a group of university professors, unions and others 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. The same group became part of the WSF committee in the state and helped organize the BSF held in Belo Horizonte in 2003. Like many of the early forums in Brazil the Forum Social Mineiro hosted actions and campaigns focus

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

on opposing the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The Forum Social Mineiro resembles the WSF in structure and process. Despite referencing the WSF principles, however, the open acceptance of participation by political parties in the organizing of the forum is distinctive and has not been accepted by the organizing committee of the BSF. One organizer interviewed was frank about the omnipresent role of political parties in the social forum process in Brazil and the hypocrisy of pretending they are at arm's length. The relationship between the parties and movements on the left in Brazil is a close one and parties are often seen as 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 (BSF) 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 (MST). The BSF in form looks very much like the WSF whose charter is referenced frequently in documents. The first BSF had 15,000 registered participants with 1200 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 BSF held in April 2006 followed the same pattern of being staged after a sub-national forum had been held in the same location, in this instance the Northeastern Social Forum held in Recife in 2004. The second BSF also occurred during a year in which no World Social Forum was held. A different mix of participants reflected the region's poverty and historic settlements by former slaves. The organization of Afro-Brazilians, UNEGRO, had over 150 representatives. This forum 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 run up to the fall election. (Brazilian social form <http://www.fsb.org.br>) Press coverage referred to the gathering as one of "activists for Re-election of Lula, but with reduced hopes" (Osava 2006).

Outside Belo Horizonte sub-national forums have been held across Brazil. What is particularly interesting about those held in the north-eastern 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 sought to examine social forum activism in the rest of South America, how and where it diffused and the role of political opportunity structures. We decided to examine Chile because it has had the second highest number of social forums in Latin America, although Argentina comes a close second at 15, followed by Uruguay with 8.

### **Social Forums in Chile**

Two national forums were held in Chile in 2004 and 2006, along with three thematic forums on education, democracy and social work in 2005 and 2006, all of them in Santiago. In addition we found eleven sub-national forums, most occurring in 2004-6.

The stimulus for the first national social forum in 2004 was external, the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum for Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Santiago and the desire to organize a counter space of resistance to neo-liberalism during the meeting. The opening march had over 60,000 participants with 8,000 registered and 200 organizations including environmental groups, labor unions, church 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 People and Cultural Diversity. In contrast the 2006 event was smaller with 3000 participants and 140 activities.

An example of a local forum was one held in Araucanía in 2006. This region of southern Chile is home to the Mapuche people, the country's main indigenous group. It has a high level of poverty and struggles centre around resource development. Those involved in the Araucanía SF had first met at a forum held in southern Chile. The 2006 event had 300 participants and 30 organizations involved including indigenous groups and institutes, Mapuche communities and environmental rights groups. Environmental organizations, a foundation, and local university provided support along with *Le Monde Diplomatique* Chile, and the European Union. The themes addressed 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 social networks in the region but also 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 and addressed the broader struggles over economic integration into the global neo-liberal economy and externally-linked events, especially the APEC summit and the FTA with the US. The Araucanía SF in contrast was diffused through locals who brought social forum activism back to their community and focused it around their identity and the plight of indigenous people.

Despite 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 which have embraced neo-liberalism. Chile's governments, even after the departure of Pinochet in 1989, have continued to take the country in a neo-liberal direction, as reflected in the US-Chile Free Trade Agreement which came into effect on January 1, 2004.<sup>11</sup>

From the very outset WSF organizers recognized that the Latin American and European dominance was problematic and that those most marginalized by neo-liberal globalization were in the regions least well represented within the social forum process, especially Asia and Africa (Santos 2004). Thus began an active effort to diffuse social forum activism more widely.

### **Social Forum Outreach in Asia**

The WSF's International Council had addressed the uneven participation in social forums early on and recognized that India, given its size, poverty, and civil society tradition of activism should be more represented in the social forum process. The IC's main tool of transmission is through

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<sup>11</sup> The centre left coalition of socialist and Christian democratic parties which has held power since 1990 has continued to embrace neo-liberalism and though the new female socialist president Michelle Bachelet won for the coalition with 53 per cent of the vote in a run-off in 2006 her policies indicate continuity (Bonnetfoy) with marginal changes in terms of addressing very high levels of inequality. As Klein and others point out this is very much the residue of the shock of 9/11 in 1973 in Chile.

stimulating and facilitating forum events, not transferring major financial resources.<sup>12</sup> The IC sought to stimulate Indian participation through regional events but also 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 in India.

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 rightwing, pro-globalization Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government delayed granting visas to many international delegates. Shortly thereafter the IC made the decision that Mumbai would host the 2004 WSF. According to the WSF secretariat 74,126 registered for the January 2004 forum representing 1,653 organizations from 117 countries. Other estimates put participation on site at over 130,000. Holding the WSF in Mumbai is credited too with the strong presence of South Asians at the WSF in Porto Alegre a year later (IBASE 2006).

This success led to a decision to hold the third WSF polycentric forum in 2006 in Karachi, Pakistan. Delayed because of the earthquake it was held March 24-29, with attendance of over 30,000. Taking place in a country under a military regime and on the front line of the war on terror yet still incorporating the energy that had been observed in Mumbai was considered impressive (Rousset 2006). While 58 countries were represented most participants again came from the region.

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 in Porto Alegre and Nairobi and formed important linkages with other groups and transnational networks (Smith 2008). What is striking, however, is that there has not been a blossoming of national or sub-national forums similar to Europe and Latin America. India has to date held only one national forum in Delhi in 2006. Pakistan formed an organization in 2003 and held one national forum in Lahore in 2004, not surprising perhaps given the nature of its political opportunity structure, in contrast to India.

Beyond the WSF outreach efforts, only a few pockets of national social forums emerged in Asia and there are some puzzling absences. Observers have noted the role that Southeast Asian groups have been playing, especially since the financial crisis of 1997, in the transnational networks 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 have used WSF meetings in 2003 and 2005 to network with other groups in coordinated opposition to WTO ministerial meetings in Cancún, Mexico and Hong Kong. Groups in this region, as Couette points out, have played an important role in knowledge production about globalization and its impact and have been key global network builders. Moreover, 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

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

forum activism at the regional, national or sub-national level. The role of limited political space and opportunity here clearly merits further investigation.

In contrast, as we indicate below, the most marginalized region, Africa, which has also been the target of WSF efforts to stimulate social forum activism, has exhibited, though modest, a variety of social forum activism at various levels.

**Social Forum Outreach, Africa**

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

Recognizing both the need for, and challenges of, developing a social forum process in Africa the IC actively supported the development of 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 (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 a very direct one.

To date there have been 62 forums in total on the continent including several global, continental and regional events, as well as thematic forums. Regional ones include:

|                 |      |                  |
|-----------------|------|------------------|
| West African SF | 2004 | Conakry, Guinea  |
|                 | 2005 | Coutonu , Benin  |
| Southern Africa | 2003 | Luskake, Zambia  |
|                 | 2005 | Harare, Zimbabwe |
| Magreb          | 2006 | Morocco          |

Another 50 have occurred at the national and sub-national levels. The breakdown of our data for forums at the national and local levels is as follows:

**Table 4: African Social Forums-National, Sub-national and Local**

| Country              | Number | Country               | Number |
|----------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------|
| Algeria              | 1      | Morocco <sup>5</sup>  | 4      |
| Benin <sup>1</sup>   | 1      | Niger                 | 3      |
| Cameroon             | 3      | Nigeria               | 2      |
| Central African Rep. | 1      | Senegal               | 3      |
| Guinea <sup>2</sup>  | 2      | Somalia               | 3      |
| Ivory Coast          | 3      | South Africa (Durban) | 1      |
| Kenya <sup>3</sup>   | 4      | Tanzania              | 2      |
| Mali <sup>4</sup>    | 6      | Tunisia               | 1      |
| Malawi               | 2      | Uganda                | 2      |
| Mozambique           | 1      | Zambia <sup>6</sup>   | 1      |
|                      |        | Zimbabwe <sup>7</sup> | 2      |

1. Benin has also hosted a West African Social Forum
2. Guinea also hosted an African and a West African Social Forum
3. Kenya has also hosted 3 thematic forums and the WSF in 2007 Zambia has also hosted an
4. Mali has also hosted a thematic Cotton forum and an African and a World Social Forum (polycentric)
5. Morocco has also hosted a Magreb Social Forum
6. African and a Southern African Social Forum
7. Zimbabwe has also hosted a Southern African Forum

South Africa and Nigeria, given their size and significance in Sub-Saharan Africa, have seen the development of few forums, although the ones held in Nigeria attracted large numbers for Africa. The hotbeds of local social forum activism, Mali and Kenya, may be linked to earlier experiences hosting major forums, in Mali's case the first ASF. The first Kenyan social forum was held in 2003. The presence of a UN agency and a stronger NGO base might account too for Kenya's numbers. Where forums occur is clearly not directly tied to local resources. Niger, which ranks last on the UN Human Development Index has had three forums, the first in 2003 had over 700 participants.<sup>13</sup> In this instance, as in other African countries outside support and resources often from development NGOs,<sup>14</sup> aid agencies and foundations has been important.

Like Niger, Mozambique ranks low in 168th place on the Human Development Index and having experienced civil war and floods seems an unlikely place to expect a social forum. Yet one was held in October 2006. The Mozambique case illustrates the importance of the WSF personal experience and the link of the Portuguese language in stimulating individual activists at the local level. The participation of several of its founders in the WSF in 2002 in Porto Alegre

<sup>13</sup> One of the Quebec organizations most active in social forums, Alternatives, supported and helped fund the participation of groups in the Niger SF. The number of Canadians involved in West African SFs may be the result of the higher level of French-speaking Quebec NGOs in this region.

<sup>14</sup> Via Campesina has been active, for example, in Mali. (George, 2007)

stimulated local organizing efforts in 2002 and the creation of a committee. An assembly and the election of a national council followed in 2005. Held in Maputo in October 2006 the social forum had 200-300 participants and was intended to create stronger links among groups and prepare for participation in the WSF in Kenya. While organizers felt the event was a success the challenges of mobilizing financial resources accounted for its slow gestation and some of the organizational problems.

Our African data suggest that efforts to stimulate social forum activism and networks have had some success but remains, as does much of social forum activism in marginalized regions within and across countries, 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 and shaping the nature and extent of resistance to neo liberal globalization in these places.

## CONCLUSION

Our sketches of multi-level social forum activism on various continents show a diverse range of activities and networks. They provide a rich set of data which offers insights into the way in which innovative practices of collective action are diffused. They also show the importance of place in how and where such practices become imbedded. The data have the potential, in the interesting patterns they reveal, to further our understanding of how the global and local link in collective action to challenge neo-liberal 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 should come as no surprise. The timing of its emergence also points to the role of political opportunity structures which, in both France and Brazil, 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 they created, especially the decisions and actions of the International Council of the WSF and the secretariat which have stimulated and supported social forum activism, particularly in peripheral regions. The experiences of activists who bring social forum practices from the WSF back to their "home" 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 neo-liberal 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 internationalisation has not occurred yet, only geographical expansion. Even though geographical expansion is part of internationalisation, in terms of wider internationalism ownership is still wanting..... Even in terms of geography, the absence of Eastern Europe, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and large parts of the Arab world is very well noticed. According to them, ownership of the WSF needs to be internationalised more (Lopez 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 rich diversity in the extent and forms of social forum activism around the world also points to the importance of place and context. A deeper understanding of these differences and how the global is linked and adapted to the local level will require more collaborative and comparative research with an emphasis on the specifics of place.

The emergence of so many national and sub-national 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 neo-liberalism (Tarrow and della Porta 2005: 237). The localness of the social forum activism we have identified and the diversity of responses which globalization stimulates also raise questions about a unified and programmatic global response to neo-liberalism. It reminds us too as scholars that, as mesmerizing as the WSF may be, the front line in this struggle is local.

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## EMERGING VISIONS OF ANOTHER WORLD? TENSIONS AND COLLABORATION AT THE QUEBEC SOCIAL FORUM

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### ABSTRACT

*The Quebec Social Forum (QSF) took place 23-26 August 2007 in Montreal. It attracted about 5000 people from across Quebec. Both organizers and observers viewed the event as an unqualified success. In this article, we seek to describe and document this historic gathering and to understand it in its Quebec context, against the larger organizing process which produced it. We also situate the Social Forum, both as event and process, within the longer history of social mobilization in Quebec. Historicizing the Social Forum in this way helps us interpret its cleavages and conflicts more adequately and apprehend its larger significance. We argue that the conflicts that have plagued the organizing of the Quebec Social Forum are a reprise of those that appeared in the movement in the late 1990s and came to a head in the 2001 massive demonstrations against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Quebec City. The chasm then was widely perceived as one over tactics but we argue, then and now, it is more substantive than that. It is about the clash of profoundly different ethics, practices and theories of democracy and, beneath them, different horizons of hope and visions of transformation. The organizing of the Social Forum is the occasion for this debate, which may say something about the significance of the Social Forum more generally and the challenge it poses to established cultures and practices of politics on the left. The cleavage is generational but not only or simply. It signals a struggle and transition but the outcomes are not yet clear and are certainly not pre-ordained.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Quebec Social Forum (QSF) took place 23-26 August 2007 in Montreal on the campus of *Université du Québec à Montréal* (UQAM). It attracted about 5000 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. Both organizers and observers viewed the event as an unqualified success.

In this article, we seek to describe and document this historic gathering and to understand it in its Quebec context, against the larger organizing process which produced it. We also wish to situate the Social Forum, both as event and process, within the longer history of social mobilization in Quebec, especially under the rubric of the ‘alter-globalization’ movement<sup>1</sup>. Historicizing the Social Forum in this way helps us interpret its tensions more adequately and apprehend its larger significance. We are interested in *reading* the Quebec Social Forum for what it tells us about collective actors in Quebec, their present orientations, capacities, limitations, and conflicts, as well as their contributions to the global movement against neoliberal globalization, one crystallization of which is the world-wide social forum process. We also think the Quebec Social Forum helps us perceive the contours of a politico-cultural struggle and transition in social movement politics that has been underway in Quebec for the last decade and that we suspect is also symptomatic of seismic shifts in the nature of politics more globally than the appearance of the World Social Forum augurs.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006) argues that our time is one of paradigmatic transition in which the hegemony of the socio-cultural paradigm of western modernity is being displaced. He suggests that the appearance of the World Social Forum is both a symptom and a response to that condition. One aspect of the transition is the deep crisis in left politics, in both theory and practice, and the tensions manifest between that emancipatory tradition and the newness represented by the World Social Forum. He identifies two facets of its newness that make it disturbing for 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 World Social Forum is utopian in a world devoid of utopia and to a left which has lost hope in utopia. We think that the struggles over the Quebec Social Forum bear this out. Thus this is an empirical exploration of the claims that Santos is advancing in a global and highly abstracted way, grounded in the study of a particular place-based social forum process.

At a roundtable organized at the *Université de Montréal* on October 12, about six weeks following the event and involving some of the key actors, somewhat overlapping but also conflicting visions of the Social Forum were clearly manifested, expressing tensions persistent in the organizing process and running deeply through the history of the alter-globalization movement in Quebec. For Raphaël Canet (2007a), member of the Secretariat of the QSF and 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. The Forum could certainly help facilitate the convergence of struggles of the organizations present but, he said, “it is not the QSF which will change things but those who participate in it.” From this perspective, what is primary is the creation of a pre-figurative space, conceived of as both event and process, that is the most inclusive and horizontal possible in which both unaffiliated individuals [les citoyen(ne)s] and activists articulated to movements and organizations [les militant(e)s] find their place.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘alter-globalization’ highlights the search for an alternative form of globalization and is preferred in some quarters to ‘anti-globalization’ as a way of describing the movement of movements against neo-liberalism.

For Jacques Létourneau (2005), in charge of international relations for the *Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux* (CSN), it is the formally-constituted organizations of civil society and particularly labor unions which are in the forefront of contesting globalization. Thus, “in 2001, at the People’s Summit it was us, the labor centrals, who mobilized... the Quebec Summit, it was us.” Accordingly, the QSF could not have happened, could not have been imagined or put in place, without the “large organizations” (read: unions and big NGOs). Their material support underwrote the process and their constituencies expected accountability. In the organizing process, they were not prepared (because they were constrained by their positions as unions) to grant decision-making voice to unaffiliated activists. The CSN views the QSF *event* as an open space, quite apart from the organizing process that produced it. The organizing, in fact, demanded a more hierarchical structure with those in the leadership clearly designated and mandated. For them, political assessment of the value of the QSF would be determined by the concrete actions and outcomes, not those that are taken in the name of the QSF, but that flow from the event, not in the praxis of organizing it, nor in the quality of the event itself.

We argue that these two different and sometimes concurrent visions of what the QSF should be have resulted in tensions that have characterized the organizing of the Quebec Social Forum and which are evident in the two perspectives expressed above. We also argue that these tensions are a remix (or a new expression of/or linked with) of those that appeared in the movement in the late 1990s and came to a head in the 2001 demonstrations against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas in Quebec City. The dispute then was widely perceived as one over tactics but we argue, then and now, it is more substantive than that. It is about the encounter between two profoundly different sets of ethics, practices and theories of democracy reflecting different horizons of hope and visions of transformation. The organizing of the Social Forum is the occasion for this debate, which says something about the significance of the Social Forum and the challenge it poses to established cultures and practices of politics on the left. It signals a struggle and transition but the outcomes are not yet clear and are certainly not pre-ordained.

The tensions that we observed in Quebec between 2001 and 2007 are not unique and illustrate those that occurred in the Global justice movement. As Hélène Duriez notes (2004: 166), the Genoa counter-summit in July 2001 and the tragic death of activist Carlo Giuliani had crystallized a cleavage in the movement. Polarized around the question of violence as a valuable tactic, this conflict is not just about action modality, but also about organizational modality, discourses and beliefs.

We begin by looking back, to the emergence of the alter-globalization movement in Quebec in the late 1990s. We then turn to the World Social Forum and its influence and expressions in Quebec, along with those of the Intercontinental Youth Camp. Following that we discuss the process of organizing the Quebec Social Forum and its culmination in the events of August 23-26 before offering our conclusion.

We have based our narrative and analysis on the findings of several empirical studies undertaken by each of us separately over the last five years. Our research activities have included documentary and discursive analysis of about thirty key actors or organizations involved, directly or indirectly, in producing the QSF and include their histories of engagement in the 1990s with the problematic of globalization. In the immediate lead-up to the QSF event in August 2007 we attended and observed the majority of preparatory meetings, analyzed the minutes of them all, and interviewed members of the Secretariat of the QSF and representatives of other key organizations: the main women’s movement federation, the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*

(FFQ) and the main labor union federation, the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CSN), as well as the main union federation who chose not to formally participate, la *Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec* (FTQ). We also interviewed two participants from earlier Social Forum organizing initiatives. Additionally, we were participant-observers at the QSF event. Finally, we reviewed all available written documentation.

Our analysis is rooted in three main convictions: place matters; history matters; and power matters. Because social forums take place in specific geographical contexts, they are embedded in histories of mobilization and trajectories of activism of the place that influence their form and content. Social forums are not “spontaneous” events but the results of local past experiences with the World Social Forum process combined with specific histories of local struggles (de Sousa Santos 2002). Appreciating the historical moment in which the events occur is crucial in understanding the dynamics among local actors and their role in determining the shape of the resulting event (Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005; Keating and della Porta 2008). Accordingly, we are attentive to the power dynamics that were expressed during the preparation of the QSF. The analyses that we developed here are based on the narratives of some actors involved in the process, especially youth activists who are not affiliated with specific organizations. These actors are sometimes considered to be marginal to the Quebec scene, because they do not have as many resources as well-established organizations, because they are less numerous in terms of membership –in fact, they do not have a membership- and because they employ different discourses often described as “radical” by the media. We believe that the tensions resulting from the co-presence of two ways of thinking and acting “alternatively” (or for another world) has nothing to do with that their “objective weight” and is of great interest from the point of view of the analysis.

### **ON THE ‘FIELD OF GLOBAL PROTEST’: THE ALTER-GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC**

Relative to the appearance of the anti-free trade movement in Canada, which had its roots in the mid-1980s and the broad support it had achieved by the time of the 1988 federal election, mobilization against neoliberal globalization did not manifest itself in Quebec until the mid-1990s (Duchastel 2003). For purposes of situating the QSF in this history, several distinct threads and moments must be distinguished. The first is the process of trans-nationalization of social movements in Quebec.

The women’s movement under its umbrella organization, the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* (FFQ), has been one of the main movements responding to conditions of neoliberal restructuring but also to the globalization of feminism and the trans-nationalization of feminist solidarities that had been fostered through United Nations processes since the 1970s. In the mid-1990s, the FFQ organized a ten-day march of thousands of women against poverty, for bread and roses. *La marche du pain et des roses* was a phenomenal success in terms of mass mobilization, public sympathy, international feminist solidarity and concrete policy gains. The Quebec women’s march gave birth to a world-wide mobilization, the World March of Women (WMW) in 2000 (Giraud 2001). This initiative of the Quebec women’s movement attracted six thousand women groups (but also unions and political parties) from 163 countries which organized local, national and global marches against poverty and violence against women during the year 2000.

This network, which is still alive and active, is one of the most important global feminist mobilizations and a key player at the World Social Forum. In its formation, the WMW preceded both watershed events of the anti-globalization movement, the shut-down of the World Trade Organization in Seattle and the inaugural World Social Forum in 2001. One of the characteristics of Quebec social movement history regarding alter-globalization is the central role women's movements played in the mobilization.

Along with women's groups, unions were the first to start the fight against globalization, through the protest against free-trade. In Quebec, protests against free-trade began as early as 1986, shortly before the adoption of the first free-trade agreement with the US. But, the *Coalition québécoise d'opposition au libre-échange*, composed mainly of unions, did not have much success at the national level before the mid-1990s (Brunelle and Deblock 2000). Confronted with a consensus of the elite on the subject of free-trade, and with an absence of clear allies on the political Left, the coalition developed differently from its Canadian counterpart (the Action Canada Network), which was formed mainly around the left nationalist movement. The Quebec coalition became the *Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale* (RQIC) in 1994 and would become an active partner of Common Frontiers Canada and an active member of the Hemispheric Social Alliance, officially founded in 1999 (Brunelle and Deblock 2000).

Despite the earlier feminist-led mass mobilization in Quebec, its internationalization through the late 1990s as the World March of Women, and its clearly anti-neoliberal position, and despite the earlier Quebec unions' coalition, the 'alter-globalization' movement in Quebec is usually dated from the anti-MAI mobilization of 1998. It was at this point in time, that several new social actors emerged that were specifically oriented towards the fight against globalization (or for a different form of globalization) (Lemire 2003).

The mid-to-late 1990s had seen the emergence of radicalized student and anti-poverty movements in Quebec. CANEVAS, *le Comité action non-violent*, coalesced in 1996 advocating non-violent direct action to resist corporate globalization. In May 1998, it came to international attention as part of the world-wide movement against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment when activists shut down a Montreal hotel where the agreement was being discussed. This action gave the group its permanent name, saAMI, meaning "dirty MAI" in French.

This mobilization was a turning point for many Quebec activists. Between it and the watershed events of April 2001 in Quebec City—the mass protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas—virtually all of Quebec's social movements had entered "the field of global protest" (Dufour 2006).<sup>2</sup> 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 US, 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

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<sup>2</sup> Dufour (2006: 319) demonstrates that a "field of global protest" was constructed in Quebec wherein (1) there is a shift in the "privileged mode of belonging to a space" defined territorially and or through networks of social actors; (2) the progressive inclusion of the 'global' in actors' awareness of being situated in a global context, of the interdependence of different scales of social life, and their growing adoption of transnational strategies; (3) the axes which structure the field changed: less around the nation and more around left-right cleavage; (4) state-society relations created specific constraints and opportunities.

new activism in some Quebec student and anti-poverty movements was characterized by the increased use of direct action, affinity group organizing, use of spokes-councils, street theatre, popular education and an eschewing of both lobbying and reliance on major media (Conway 2003).

In the aftermath of the successful use of mass non-violent 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. They posed major challenges to established ways of doing things among the more institutionalized centers of power in the movement: in Quebec, the major labor unions, the FFQ, 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 Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), and particularly in the debate over “diversity of tactics.”

Even if most of the organizations involved in the counter-summit were against the FTAA, some key organizations, traditional allies of the governing Parti Québécois on the national question, wanted to keep the demonstrations under their control and minimize embarrassment to the Quebec government. A significant and growing number of other groups were aligned in planning multiple forms of non-violent 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 these groups were broadly aligned, even as they pursued different tactics. Some key organizations like the FFQ straddled both positions and individuals from all these protesting organizations could be found in the range of spaces and approaches that constituted the field of protest in Quebec City in April 2001.<sup>3</sup>

The Quebec People’s Summit mobilizations involved all central actors in Quebec (unions, student federations, women groups, anti-poverty groups, environmentalists) and the RQIC was the “maestro” of the organizational aspect of the event, able to mobilize affiliated activists. For those actors, popular education, workshops and street protests (but controlled ones) were the preferred tools. During workshops the level of cooperation and collaboration among actors, including the less formal ones, was very high. The more profound and significant political divide was that over the ‘diversity of tactics’ which manifested itself most concretely as the main tension between these groups and the CLAC (Convergence des luttes anti-capitaliste-Convergence of Anti-capitalist struggles), including the many thousands of young people who were sympathetic to the latter. A multiplicity of actors and practices can be identified with the diversity of tactics position as well, including many diverse anarchist groupings and practices associated with the Black Bloc (Dupuis-Déri 2003). Broadly understood, respect for ‘diversity of tactics’ implied both an escalation and a diversification of tactics beyond both the routines of lobbying and of legal, stage-managed demonstrations and an ethic of respect for the tactical choices of other activists. This involved an explicit agreement NOT to publicly denounce the tactics of other activists—even those with which you disagreed.

Although for some, embracing diversity of tactics was part and parcel of their anti-authoritarian 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 turn to tools of popular education, cultural work, and grassroots community

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<sup>3</sup> See Dufour 2007 and Conway 2003 for somewhat diverging readings of the cleavages.

organizing—not just to the highly confrontational forms of direct action as was often assumed. However, proponents also argued for a return to more militant and confrontational tactics, including direct action and civil disobedience. In the name of both escalation and diversity, they defended ‘property destruction,’ from posting stickers, 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, which constituted the line in the sand between it and the other groups.

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 to democratic decision-making in which small autonomous groups decided on the nature of their participation in a direct action and organized independently of any centralized movement authority. This often implied a repudiation of representative forms of democracy, including institutions of the liberal democratic state and of labor unions and more bureaucratized movement organizations. By the time of the demonstrations in Quebec City, those advocating diversity of tactics, most prominently, the CLAC, also repudiated the ‘dogmatism of non-violence,’ which they understood to be an authoritarian move to *a priori* render certain forms of political resistance illegitimate. They critiqued a too rigid violence/non-violence binary and rejected the highly ritualized forms of civil disobedience which had protesters passively handing themselves over to the police.

In the lead-up to the Quebec City mobilization, a large pan-Canadian coalition of groups from across the activist spectrum, excluding CLAC, collaborated in organizing the People’s Summit and the mass demonstrations. CLAC was excluded (and excluded itself) from the *Table de convergence* because it was committed to mass direct action within a diversity of tactics framework. SalAMI participated in the Table and organized non-violent civil disobedience, so the exclusion of CLAC was presumably not based on their commitment to direct action *per se*, but on the impasse around establishing agreed-upon tactical boundaries (Bouchard 2001: 4). While the CLAC was explicitly committed to shutting down the Summit, SalAMI was oriented to attracting “*Monsieur et Madame tout le monde*” to Quebec City within an explicit commitment to strategic non-violence (Kruzynski 2002). Even if the CLAC position could be objectively seen as marginal to that of other groups involved in the People’s Summit, the tensions around “diversity of tactics” were symptomatic of a deeper disagreement about what the fight should be.

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 a confrontation with police at the fence, and the denunciation of the ‘violence’<sup>4</sup> of “anarchists” by major labor and feminist leaders, drove a wedge into the movement (McNally 2001; Starhawk 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,

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<sup>4</sup> We are marking ‘violence’ to indicate its’ loaded 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.

we see the persistence of a generational divide<sup>5</sup>, specifically around the role and importance of pre-figurative and utopian practices, particularly in terms of individual participation and direct democracy and related to alienation from the established modes of organization and decision-making on the left. However, between 2001 and the lead-up to the QSF, this division had transformed somewhat. The terms and tone of the debate had changed to a more conciliatory and less polarized one. 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.

### THE FORUM AND THE CAMP: ABROAD AND AT HOME

Ever since its inception in January 2001, the World Social Forum has been a magnet for Quebec-based activists and organizations. Although official numbers do not exist, informal polling suggests that the number of Canada-based participants in Porto Alegre rose from about 250 in 2003 to approximately 700 in 2005 (Conway 2006). A survey of the 2005 WSF, conducted by the *Observatoire des Amériques* found that Canadian respondents were more than twice as numerous as US respondents (69 versus 33). Of the Canadians, 30% were from Quebec. (Brunelle 2006). In 2005, the Quebec delegation was large and included a sizable youth contingent, organized principally by the Montreal-based international development NGO, Alternatives, and funded through the Quebec Ministry of International Relations. Other prominent organizations from Quebec included the World March of Women, which until 2006 was headquartered in Montreal, the CSN, *Développement et Paix* (Development and Peace), and the networks of “*économie solidaire*” (solidarity economy). Alternatives and the World March are also members of the International Council of the World Social Forum. Certainly, the enthusiastic political and financial support of major unions, student federations and the Quebec State (through specific programs) helps explain the robustness of the Quebec presence at the World Social Forum, especially in Porto Alegre.

In important ways, the WSF is a product and innovation of the anti-globalization movement, especially as it appeared in the mass demonstrations in the North following the shut-down of the WTO in Seattle (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, with little room for grassroots participation (Conway 2004: 118–121). Access to international fora 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 neo-liberalism. In the WSF, participation is key to the creation of another world, not

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<sup>5</sup> 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 conceptions, most of them are young.

something to be contained or feared, which is not to say that there have not been debates in the WSF as well about optimal forms and levels of participation.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest organizational expression of the Social Forum in Quebec was the *Forum Social Régional de Québec/Chaudière-Appalaches* which took place in September 2002 and led to the founding of a permanent network ([www.reseauforum.org](http://www.reseauforum.org)). The event was the result of collaboration between 20 institutionalized groups working on a wide range of concerns. Although clearly inspired by the WSF in Porto Alegre and sharing its opposition to neoliberal globalization, this event was not a social forum as the term is usually understood. It was centrally organized and structured as a deliberative process to produce a common declaration (Conway 2006). After the event, the declaration was diffused to many progressive groups in the Quebec City region. In December 2002, a “constituent assembly” of about 100 participants voted on an organizational structure and so established a permanent communication and action network called *Réseau du Forum Social de Québec Chaudière-Appalaches* (Bouchard 2003). By 2007, however, this network was very small with a limited presence in the regionally-based mobilizing toward the QSF (Canet 2007b).

In Porto Alegre in 2003, a meeting of activists from Quebec and English-Speaking Canada discussed the possibility of jointly planning a Canada-Quebec-First Nations Social Forum. The failure of this effort is a complex story we cannot analyze here. What is important to note is that it was an important defeat for the Quebec activists who had been involved, notably those associated with Alternatives (including unions) (Létourneau 2005; Beaudet 2005). Throughout 2004, Alternatives pursued cross-sector 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; FTQ 2005).

In the lead-up to the 2005 World Social Forum, *le Comité de Québec pour le FSM 2005* organized a delegation of more than 600 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 Quebec Social Forum could proceed without major investment by Quebec’s unions (Pelletier 2005). Those who wished to pursue the possibility of organizing a Social Forum in Quebec organized meetings in Porto Alegre where about 150 people struck a committee to initiate a different kind of organizing process than that which had been earlier spear-headed by Alternatives. More than half of those committed to moving forward were young people. Small and medium NGOs as well as a large student delegation participated in this decision (Pelletier 2005). *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 indicates, this association was composed of both delegates from organizations and individual activists involved on their own behalf (Canet 2007b).

After extensive outreach to over 5000 organizations across Quebec, an inaugural meeting took place in November 2005 in Quebec City. A Trois-Rivières “headquarters” was formed

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<sup>6</sup> This is manifest in ongoing criticism about and debates within the WSF’s International Council about its legitimacy, representativeness, and (un)democratic functioning, as well as the challenged to the WSF represented by the culture and practices of the Intercontinental Youth Camp. See Guay, 2005 for more details.

(*Collectif Mauricie*), which spearheaded the organizing process for a Quebec Social Forum, 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 ways of life and are produced by the self-organization and participation of all those who come. They are conceived to be a “laboratory of practices,” and emerged as a critique of the World Social Forum, which was perceived by IYC organizers as limited to debating, rather than enacting, alternatives to neo-liberalism (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. Based on the International Youth Camp’s vision, le *Campement Jeunesse du Québec* – renamed le *Campement québécois de la jeunesse* a year later – was launched in 2003 (Conway and Morrison 2007).

Committed to consensus decision-making, the Quebec youth camp organizers prioritized participatory debating in their planning process (Perreault 2006). In conceiving a self-managed village of solidarity patterned on the IYC, organizers welcomed people of all ages who were interested in horizontal modes of organizing (Campement Jeunesses du Québec CJQ 2003: 1). The first Camp took place 11-20 August 2003 in a rural area south of Quebec City near St-Malachie, Comté de Bellechasse. Despite limited financial resources, the organizers attracted over 200 participants (CQJ 2004a: 1). Further editions of the *Campement* took place each year, with growing success in terms of the numbers of participants and the scope of issues addressed. In 2007, the *Campement autogéré* (renamed in April 2007) took place from 19-21 August in Montebello, on the eve of the QSF, during the North American leaders meeting on the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP). The campers were at the forefront of the SPP protest.

According to our interviews, the *Initiative vers un FSQ* was driven by profound divisions among actors about the purpose and goals of a Quebec Social Forum as well as how to organize it (Rodrigue and Eme 2007; Canet 2007b; Roy 2007). On one side were a group of young Montreal-based activists, inspired by the *Campement* experiences, oriented to individuals’ participation and direct democracy rather than to organizational representation in a coalitional structure. They were devoted to the QSF as a process in which individual volunteers directly participate in horizontal and decentralized decision-making practices and to the Social Forum event as a space for showcasing and experimenting with alternatives (Canet 2007a). In their view, a Quebec Social Forum, 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-based membership. 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 Philips 2001). These two radically opposed visions had been temporally neutralized by an organizing process that allowed the same weight for “citizens” and organizations (between November 2005 and June 2006), but, in the end did not allow for sufficient convergence of interests and identities and the process was abruptly halted (Rodrigue and Eme 2007; Canet 2007a).

### TOWARDS THE QUEBEC SOCIAL FORUM: IS ANOTHER PROCESS POSSIBLE?

After this failure, the organizing process was re-imagined to allow different compromises and incorporate new players. Instead of a process driven primarily by individual volunteers, the remaining organizers, essentially students involved in the association *Alter-UQAM*, who had been behind the second and third UQAM social forum and part of the *Initiative vers un FSQ*, decided to allow organizations to formally participate. They proposed writing a Quebec Social Forum Charter to clarify how the organizing process would work. A newly-constituted Montreal-based organizing group led by those from Alter-UQAM took the lead on the project. The Trois-Rivières collective was dissolved and the Charter adopted through a re-founding assembly in September 2006.

As 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 civil society groups and its imagined geography is that of Quebec— and self-consciously 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. It was drafted by Raphaël Canet, a veteran of the Trois Rivières initiative and associated with Alter-UQAM, who would become a member of the Secretariat of the project, in collaboration with other Alter-UQAM activists.<sup>7</sup> He advocated the participation of individuals, those not acting as delegates of organizations, in the organizing and decision-making process of the QSF in the name of building an inclusive process. 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 (CSN and FTQ) had long doubted the usefulness of a Quebec Social Forum. In their view, there were already multiple sites at which social organizations converged (e.g., *Réseau de Vigilance*, a watchdog network formed during the 2003 election to monitor the Charest Liberal government ; the annual *Journées d’Alternatives*; regular citizens’ forums in Montreal). Despite their substantial experience in Porto Alegre, it was not clear to them how a Quebec Social Forum would be different nor what it would add. Nevertheless, during the founding meeting in September 2006, several positions were articulated by participants, drawing clearly on their knowledge and experience in Porto Alegre. Some thought that a QSF would “facilitate breaking free of a strictly local dynamic and allow for some kind of convergence between organizations” (PV 2006). Others imagined the QSF as a place to assemble progressive

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<sup>7</sup> The QSF Charter is directly inspired by the Saguenay Regional Social Forum held in 2006.

forces in order to develop paths to common action. From this perspective, a QSF would, above all, be “a space for the convergence of struggles.” (PV 2006).

According to Canet (2007a), 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 CSN, were largely denied access to government. It had therefore become more immediately relevant to engage with the social movements in order to build counter-power. For the leadership of the FTQ, building formal relationships with movements remained a bad option because it risked the little access they already had to the corridors of power. Officially, the FTQ was not interested in participating (Gagnon 2007) or organizing 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 give 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 members 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 which 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.

The first General Assembly reflected a greater diversity of participants than subsequent meetings as participation by unaffiliated persons without the right to vote dwindled. Labor organizations (the CSN, affiliates of the FTQ, the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec), women’s groups associated with the FFQ, 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 *Initiative pour un FSQ* and in Alter-UQAM and brought the autonomist sensibilities of these efforts to bear on the process. They included three spokespersons out of six representing the logistical committees and two 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 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 on a largely volunteer basis. Because of their presence and deep involvement, they had the *de facto* power to make many proposals and decisions between meetings of the general

assemblies. Perhaps ironically, given these strategies, they were able to be effective carriers of the vision of the Social Forum as a more open, horizontal, consensual, and 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.<sup>8</sup>

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. 240 organizations and 30 individuals proposed self-organized activities. The Program Committee had determined eight themes and three transversal axes where a diverse array of discussions were grouped to facilitate convergence among them. The axes were: Societal Projects for Tomorrow's Quebec; Resistance and Alternatives to Neo-liberalism: Local and Global; and Feminist Agendas/Issues and Strategies. Despite being structured by the themes and axes, the program of activities expressed a wide range of diverse content.<sup>9</sup>

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 culture; aboriginal peoples; and any consideration of social movements in Canada (PV 2007a). People of color and immigrant communities were largely absent from the organizing process and were only about five per cent 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 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; (8) spirituality, ethics and religions. Themes five through eight were least addressed in workshops (PV 2007a). 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 transversal 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 FFQ (Burrow 2007).

According to Canet (2007b), an important and original contribution of the QSF lay in 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 multi-disciplinary spectacular cultural fest, took place in the

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that at the end, unions contributed for 11% of the total income of the QSF, registrations 18%. (Bilan organisationnel du FSQ, 2007: 47).

<sup>9</sup> The themes and axes were not really prescriptive and were used as a way or "putting some order" in the creative disorder the amount of proposals has created, even if they were named before proposals for the self-organized activities has been received. No proposal was rejected.

middle of downtown Montreal in the Parc Émile-Gamelin, the site of the Forum's cultural program adjacent to UQAM where the workshops took place.

The Écofest collective facilitated a full schedule of activities dedicated to promoting practices of “alternative everyday, ecological and sane consumption.” Its program incorporated local artists, multiple activities and performances. More than 2000 people frequented the space daily during the Forum. In collaboration with Moisson Montréal and Poubelle Anonyme, the team of *L'être Terre* served 1500 free meals per day from left-over 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. Those who participated in the cultural events in the park were, on the whole, younger than those who participated in the workshops inside UQAM. According to the survey previously cited, the average age of respondents was 42-43 years (Bilan organisationnel du FSQ 2007: 49), but it is possible that the small survey sample underestimated youth participation. On August 26, the last day of the forum, an Assembly of Social Movements took place which issued a statement of solidarity produced and signed by a majority of the organizations which had been involved in the organizing. The closing event was a march of about 1000 people (Colbert 2007).

## CONCLUSION

Between the 2001 Quebec Summit of the Americas and the 2007 QSF, the political context had changed. In April 2001, the death of an alter-activist in Genoa and the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> were not yet tragedies. The issue of violence and violent tactics was openly discussed and a significant number of activists were relatively tolerant of a “diversity of tactics”. In 2007 the global social justice movement had become more institutionalized or, at least, more “routinized”, through social forum processes. Counter-summits have been de-emphasized in favor of more activities where concrete alternatives proposals are worked on. In this new context, violence is no longer a legitimate subject of debate. The World social forum Charter clearly excludes strategies of violence. The “alter-globalization” label has been imposed. Nevertheless, tensions inside the movement remain but are differently expressed. Today in Quebec, these tensions are driven by youth activists, inspired by the “youth camp culture.” In 2001, these young activists were just beginning their involvement. Some were participating in their first big demonstration while others were just spectators but questioned the tensions around a “diversity of tactics” and for the most part, were too young to be concerned. Between 2001 and 2007 events the people involved are different, but the tensions involve the same dynamic of confrontation between two political cultures. The continuity between the two periods is not a material continuity (of activists or organizations) but a symbolic and substantive one.

In an interview preceding the QSF, a representative of the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* (FFQ), Nancy Burrows (2007), predicted that the Forum would reflect the state of social movements in Quebec, both their strengths and weaknesses, no more—no less. It will be the fruition of their capacity to mobilize, their collective organizing means and resources, and their ability to work effectively in coalitions. It would also reflect the particular strength of the women's movement in Quebec society and in relation to other movements and, particularly, the organizational vitality and influence of the FFQ. Burrows noted the absence of immigrant groups from the organizing process. After the event, the representative of the CSN said that the Forum

also showed the current weaknesses, notably the strategic divergence between key organizations in the labor movement which prevented a strong labor program at the Social Forum, even though people affiliated with various unions participated in the event. We also noted the virtual absence of Aboriginal people both from the organizing and the event, notwithstanding the fact that the Assembly of First Nations had formally joined the QSF early on.

If we follow Burrow's understanding of the QSF, it could not be different from the struggles and power relations that characterize the current dynamics among the groups that constituted the Forum. The Forum as an event therefore represented weak potential for social transformation, reproducing social relations of domination and exclusion within the progressive *milieu* itself. While this reading captures certain features of the QSF, it ignores others.

The survey conducted by the Secretariat of the QSF (407 respondents), indicates that of the attendees affiliated with organizations, most came from community organizations and NGOs (20%) and political parties (20%) (Bilan organisationnel du FSQ 2007: 49). Among the attendees who were registered, 40% reported being unaffiliated (PV 2007a; Bilan Organisationnel du FSQ 2007:49). What does this signify about the character of engaged civil society in Quebec and 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 variable across place and scale, its technology of open space is now widely understood and appreciated. Both Letourneau and Canet see the Social Forum 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 in the Forum 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. 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 left-over food throughout the Forum. For them, the Forum is valuable in and of itself for what it promotes and allows and for what it may generate.

Letourneau, the CSN, and other established, institutionalized centers of the movement like the FFQ and progressive NGOs like Alternatives see the Forum 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 more instrumental and conjunctural. For them the value of the QSF will be reflected 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 a common action (Appel solidaire des mouvements sociaux 2007; see the political assessment of the QSF PV 2007b). Similarly, in QSF meetings following the event, these entities resisted endorsing a second QSF in favor of mobilizing around the WSF's globally-coordinated activities on January 26, 2008.

For the autonomist youth, the organizing process and the event represent a seamless whole. Both should be pre-figurative of the alternative world that is in the process of being constructed. Hence, the organizing process itself is a key arena of contestation. For 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, be accountable to those who are financing it and are the

legitimate representatives of progressive civil society in Quebec by virtue of their mass membership and internal structures of democratic decision-making. For the young people, their sense of accountability is different. They went to Porto Alegre, were transformed by the Youth Camp and felt an acute responsibility to bring it home to Quebec and root alter-globalization in quotidian practices, if only for a few days a year (Pelletier 2005). Hence, they want a second QSF held in a location that would allow for a camp and for the orientations that the camp represents.

It is the tension between these fundamentally different visions of what the Social Forum, as both process and event, is, or should be, that operated as a motor of creativity and social experimentation. The innovative organizational architecture of the QSF, as the product of multiple compromises, is the direct result of this tension. In the practice of producing the Social Forum, these diverse actors were also creating new ways of being collectively together.

de Sousa Santos (2002) refers to these tensions as the different temporalities of struggle that co-exist 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, the ethical responsibility of each person to engage in the construction of alternative futures and the rights conferred through participation; on the other, for the CSN and the FFQ, 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). 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 Quebec Social Forum process.

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 suggest. However, we have argued that the divisions apparent in the QSF are more than simply conjunctural. They signal a more profound transition underway in political life in Quebec and beyond, to which the social forum phenomenon itself testifies and is a response.

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## **HORIZONTALIST YOUTH CAMPS AND THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION: A STORY OF BLOCKED DIFFUSION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Between 2001 and 2005, the Intercontinental Youth Camp at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil became associated with a decentralized, horizontalist form of organizing. When the polycentric forum took place in 2006, this horizontalist identity and strategy did not diffuse successfully to the new site in Caracas, Venezuela. This article argues that for diffusion to be successful, the local hosts must be able to deliberate on the locally new idea, see themselves as similar to the earlier users, and have the opportunity to adapt the tactic to the local context. Analysing interviews with participants, and activist writing, I argue that the relational context of Caracas, Venezuela, along with recent events in that city, made such processes impossible. In particular, the deliberation essential for diffusion was blocked by the centralization and polarization of the political field, the formalization of the potential adopters, and the temporal proximity of a similar event, the World Festival of Youth and Students.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

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 is both an identity and a way of organizing and making decisions most recently associated with new anti-capitalist 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 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 article 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 not in either 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. I want to make an argument about the importance of understanding the layers of context in diffusion processes, and how these contexts become important through the ways that they affect internal debates amongst activists. My evidence is not systematic, but I believe it is suggestive. In order to understand how youth camp organizers and participants understood their practices, I looked at the available report-backs by participants from the camps, coverage by journalists about the camps and activist blogs. In these sources, I looked for expressions of, and references to the political identity “horizontalism” that has become associated with the Intercontinental Youth Camps. What I found prompts me to argue that the relational context of Caracas, Venezuela, and recent events in that city, blocked the diffusion of the horizontalist identity from Porto Alegre to Caracas by limiting the interest and willingness of local activists to engage in discussions of that identity.

#### **DIFFUSION OF HORIZONTALIST INNOVATION**

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 acceptance of some specific item, over time, by adopting units – individuals, groups, communities – that are linked both to external channels of communication and to each other by means of both a structure of social relations and a system of values, or culture*” (1968).

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 amongst 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 Ruel 1990: 526; Rogers 2003: 429). Through deliberation, potential adopters have an opportunity to abstract an idea or practice from its original setting (Strang & Meyer 1993: 492). In his study of the African American reinvention of Gandhian non-violence, Chabot (2000) recognized how a tactic becomes transformed through, among other things, the use of intellectual dislocation. Intellectual dislocation is a process of abstracting an idea from its original setting that takes place through deliberation. In this manner, participants in a local social movement 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 2003a). 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 in 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 (1980) 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” (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 1959; 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 Argentinian social movements, Marina Sitrin explains horizontalism “does not just imply a flat plane for organizing, or non-hierarchical 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 network of rather heterogeneous groups—including anti-authoritarian, 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 non-hierarchical 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 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 amongst ‘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 Argentinian 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 increasingly 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, non-hierarchical 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, this tension has taken place. In the following, I will use formal and informal activist documents to track the emergence and increasing 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 discussions about the components within the horizontalist identity – a rejection of hierarchical forms of organization, electoral politics, 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). Through time, 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 at Porto Alegre and was coordinated by traditional Brazilian youth organizations including leftist parties such as the PT (Workers Party), the Communist Party of Brazil, the Unified Socialist Workers Party, and the Socialist Youth Union (Juris 2006; Morrison 2006b). They organized in various ways, reflecting their ideology and routine ways of operating, ways that tended to be relatively hierarchical 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 was comprised of 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 2005a: 283 in Morrison 2006b: 38). Various commissions and organizing structures were initiated; street kids and hip-hop activists worked on cultural events, while architecture students joined the Planning and Infrastructure Commission to develop environmental plans for the site, and the Communication Commission that consisted mainly of PT youth and university communications students developed community radio projects (Morrison 2006b: 42).

With these multiple hubs emerging, 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 to the WSF project (Nunes 2005a: 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 other organizers that were perceived to exhibit an “old school” approach, in particular, those activists from party organizations and student unions.

The conflict began to intensify. The COA tried to reduce the tension between proponents of the different identities. 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 2002). They accused the party organizations of ‘having their own agendas’ at the IYC that would lead to division and sectarianism. Next, the Camp Organizing Committee almost prevented some groups in the Intergalaktika space from carrying on self-organized activities since the COA wanted everybody to share the spaces (Nunes 2005b: 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 2005a: 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 2005b: 301). Ironically, this decision placed the ‘autonomous’ non-partisan activists in the odd position of controlling the activities for IYC 2003 in a most “non-horizontalist” manner (Morrison 2006b: 47).

As time has passed, the IYC became increasingly associated with a ‘horizontalist’ identity (Nunes 2005a). 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 the IYC in 2005 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 counter power” (cited in Juris 2006). There was a push to reject what were perceived as ‘old’ ways of doing things, in favour 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 and partly a product of the local context (Osteweil 2004). While the IYC in Porto Alegre is partly a result of trends in the global justice movement worldwide, it also reflects the vision, capacities and dynamics of activists and

organizers who reflect the local history of Porto Alegre and the larger context of Brazilian politics (Youth Facilitation team at the World Social Forum Secretariat, 2006).

Porto Alegre is one of the wealthiest cities in Brazil, and one whose left wing political life over the past twenty 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 his promises to the poorest Brazilians, and for continuing to sign onto neoliberal trade agreements. By the time of the first WSF, increasing numbers of grassroots activists were beginning to distance themselves from the party. Some of these activists, especially the younger ones began to embrace a horizontalist identity.

Of course, the horizontalist ideal of the IYC trumpeted by organizers and writers was never fully enacted. Horizontalist organizers interviewed by Morrison critiqued the IYC in Porto Alegre for intentionally or unintentionally engaging in “vertical” practices. Nevertheless, the IYC in Porto Alegre 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.

2005 ended up being the biggest camp to date. The 35,000 registered campers accounted for 22.6% 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 principals as horizontalism and self management (Gonzalez 2005). Nevertheless, the horizontalist identity and culture celebrated in Porto Alegre, was not found to the same extent at the IYC in Caracas Venezuela the following year.

### **BLOCKED DIFFUSION OF THE HORIZONTALIST IDENTITY**

The horizontalist identity would be most likely to diffuse to new sites when local organizers in those sites had information that articulated the usefulness and attractiveness of the innovation and when those potential adopters had an opportunity to engage in deliberation about that innovation. Despite the horizontalist identity being central to the intercontinental youth camp 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 pre-existing, dominant local models of organization and political identities.

The Intercontinental Youth Camp was organized in Caracas as part of the larger World Social Forum. 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 and interactions it itself. 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 anti-militarism, and they will be camping at a military site. This could become quite interesting!" (Windisch and Price 2005)

Many participants were enthusiastic about the camp in Caracas, citing good security, access to vegetarian food, and effective organization. One Venezuelan student 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," said Alex Reyes. "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). The camp was much smaller than it had been in previous years, with the registered camping population numbering 1,200 people, well below the expected number (Morrison 2006a). There were two youth camps in Caracas. 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). 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 arguing that the camp newspaper, *El*

*Querquerre*, was organized and largely written by people who weren't staying in the camp (Baribeau 2006). While my evidence is only partial, there were no report backs describing 'horizontalism' or using the language that had been used around the space in Porto Alegre. I believe that this lack of discussion around horizontalism in Caracas suggests 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 way that there is no evidence 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 because of the way it was 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.

### **Centralized Political Networks**

Let us look at the relational context of the new host city first. As elucidated earlier, past research has shown that certain types of relational contexts are more receptive to locally new ideas. Rogers (2003) noted that the relational context of a site of reception can constrain or facilitate its receptivity to innovations. One of the barriers to diffusion is a centralized political context. 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 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). This corresponds with observations that those actors less influenced by these central leaders are often more likely to innovate. Elisabeth Clemens (1997) noted in her study of the diffusion of policy innovations in 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S., "The potential for innovation was concentrated at the peripheries of American politics, where marginalized actors mastered alternative forms and dominant institutions were less firmly established, providing opportunities for experimentation" (91-92).

Local political networks were centralized around the party organizations that either supported or opposed Chavez. As I've explained, past research has shown that the centralization of political networks can limit the possibility of deliberation by limiting the diversity of opinions participating in debates. 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 new identities to be experimented with. As Levine and Crisp (1999: 129) point out, comparative work on political parties has shown how political parties often channel conflict and constrain the choices of political actors. Nevertheless, through the 1980s and 1990s there have been recurrent attempts by social movement organizations and citizen groups to adopt more participatory and decentralized approaches to decision-making (Crisp and Levine 1998, Friedman 1999). These experiments in civil society emphasized their small scale, autonomy from state control, and internal democracy (Crisp and Levine 1998: 41). In the early 1980s, neighborhood movements emerged in urban middle-class areas, and a few years later, partly as a result of the impact of transnational feminist organizing, the women's movement began to expand. There was also an attempt to develop a coordinating committee of NGO organizations of women that used

decentralized and non-hierarchical decision-making (Friedman 1999: 365). However, the coalition did not endure, as pressure against non-partisan organizing models increased.

Particularly since Chavez was elected in 1998, party organizations have reasserted themselves as the dominant organizational form in the political field (Laako 2006). This party-centrism does not suggest that Chavez has only promoted this form of organization. In 2001, Chavez and the movements associated with him launched the Bolivarian circles, a network of loosely-knit political and social organization 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.

Unsurprisingly, some WSF organizers and local activists feared that the WSF in Caracas would end up being controlled by the Chavez government. Others disagreed, and 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 Hernández argued that this Forum was characterized by a “more markedly politician-state character”. He argued that this meant that the debates were different to those at past forums, focussing more “on electoral strategies and on the resistance to the imperialism and on regional integration” (Boron 2006). He continued, saying that the Caracas WSF was nearer to an orthodox anti-imperialist project than an alter-globalization forum. He argued 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 of 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 politics 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). It wasn't simply the presence of party organizations that limited the openness for horizontalism at the IYC. The Brazilian Workers Party (PT) is equally influential in the Brazilian context and Indian Communist Parties had been involved in the hosting of the WSF in Delhi.

Political parties of course, are formal, bureaucratic organizations (Michels 1959). Their structure limits the deliberation essential to the incorporation of outside political innovations. The degree to which an organization is bureaucratic is measured by formalization (Rogers 2003: 377). *Formalization*, or the degree to which an organization emphasizes its members' following rules and procedures, inhibits the likelihood that participants in a particular organization will discuss an outside innovation. However, if an innovation is discussed and adopted, formal organizations make implementation of a decision straightforward. The 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 were 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). This was not unusual. In Porto Alegre, the city government also played a central role in organizing and supporting the WSF and the youth camp. However, the PT has a more recent

collaborative relationship with social movements like Brazil's Landless Rural Workers Movement, (MST) than Chavez' 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 MVR organizers in Caracas were less comfortable with horizontalist models of organizing. 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 forum 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)" 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 IYC's less likely.

### **Polarized Political Context**

The second aspect of the local political context that limited the openness of the local organizers to the horizontalism of earlier IYC's were two different polarizations. The first was between the forces supporting and opposing the Chavez regime. This polarization 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 (Ganz 2000: 1005)." Polarization limits 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.

Tied to the polarization around the upcoming elections was a second historical tension between parties and more horizontally organized social movements. Middle class social movements had experimented with non-hierarchical forms of organizing in Caracas in the past, partly as a critique of political parties (Crisp and Levine 1998; Ellner 1999; Friedman 1999). Indeed, there had been a rivalry between the models and identities for at least twenty 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). As a result, in the polarized context of Caracas, the organizers of the forum rejected horizontalism. The IYC Camp director 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 said, pointing 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," he said. 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.” 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.

### **Recent Success of World Festival of Youth and Students**

There was another reason why horizontalism was rejected by the organizers in Caracas, and that was the recent success of the World Festival of Youth and Students. Six months before the WSF opened in Caracas, the same organizing body organized a forum that was in many ways similar to the WSF. The World Festival of Youth and Students brought fifteen thousand 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 you 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 youth wing of the Fifth Republic Movement (JVR). 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 National Preparation Committee (NPC) 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” (CRA 2006). Even the IYC, they argued, would not be a horizontalist space in Caracas. 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.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Regional Social Forum of Western Ontario in Canada recently argued that they wanted to organize their forum “through self-management and a participatory framework.” They continued,

“We encourage participants and organizers to create a culture among us that overcomes the vertical politics of our world. ... We hope to learn from the Intercontinental Youth Camp (IYC) of the World Social Forum in reconciling the tensions between how we think and how we live, in a “practical laboratory” that will hopefully intensify this ongoing process in each of us ” (2008). The Intercontinental Youth Camp lives on as model of horizontalist experimentation, and is associated with a particular political identity. 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 who 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 those who were 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 pre-existing 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, and most recently in Belem.

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## **BUILD LOCALLY, LINK GLOBALLY: THE SOCIAL FORUM PROCESS IN ITALY<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Considered an innovation because of its capacity to develop transnational processes, the World Social Forum however also has strong local roots as well as effects on organizational models and collective identities at the domestic level. Focusing on the Italian case, this article shows how local social forums, as arenas for exchanges of ideas, played a cognitive role in the import, but also the translation of new ideas, as well as helping the emergence of dense network structures and tolerant identities. The first section of the article examines how local social forums contributed to innovation in the organizational formulas of the Global Justice Movement—considering both structure (organizations) and process (methodologies) aspects—through the development of different, more participatory conceptions of internal decision making. It then addresses the innovations in the definition of collective identities, stressing the linkages of local struggles and global framing as well as the development of a cross-issue discourse around an anti-neoliberal frame. The final section will discuss the contribution of local social forums to contemporary social movements, stressing the role of these new arenas for the cross-fertilization among different movement*

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<sup>1</sup> The empirical research for this article was conducted as part of the research project on “I social forum in Italia, Francia e Germania: tre diversi modelli di mobilitazione” (Social forums in Italy, France and Germany: three different models of mobilization) which is part of the more general project “Scienza politica e scienze cognitive. Nuovi paradigmi deliberativi per far fronte all’incertezza dei problemi poco strutturati” (Political science and cognitive sciences. New deliberative paradigms to face uncertainty in low structured problems), coordinated by Massimo Bonanni and financed by the Italian Ministry for the University and Research, and the research project DEMOS (Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of the Society, <http://demos.eui.eu>), financed by the European Commission. Although the authors share responsibility for the whole article, Lorenzo Mosca wrote sections 1 and 2 and Donatella della Porta wrote sections 3 and 4. We wish to thank the editors of this special issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* and two anonymous referees for their useful comments on a previous version of this article.

*families and spreading a method of working together that becomes part of the repertoire of action of local social movement organizations. The empirical research consists mainly of in-depth interviews and focus groups with activists from social movement organizations which were involved in local social forums.*

## LOCAL SOCIAL FORUMS AS BRIDGES: AN INTRODUCTION

The World Social Forum (WSF) brought together a huge number of social movement organizations that were moving from concerns about specific issues to a broader opposition to neo-liberal globalization, as well as to the effects it has on social justice and democracy. It developed from within a history of transnational campaigns that addressed International Governmental Organizations from the ‘50 years is enough’ mobilization against international financial organizations (in particular the IMF and the World Bank) to the debt campaign of Jubilee 2000, from the protests against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the successful mobilization against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), from the European Marches against Unemployment, targeting the European Union, to the UN of the Peoples. The WSF has in fact been welcomed (or feared) as a most visible sign of a transnationalization of politics, beyond the traditional boundaries of international relations. Recently, many activists and observers noticed a process of decentralization and re-localization of the WSF, symbolically stressed first by the polycentric structure of the 2006 annual event and then by the decentralized structure of the 2008 event.<sup>2</sup> In addition, more and more attention has been paid to local (or national) struggles on employment issues and against the construction of big infrastructure projects (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 ones, or had strong local roots.<sup>3</sup> The same can be said of the transnational campaigns that converged in the WSF which were “grounded by, and constituted of, a sense of place” (Drainville 2004: 17), as well as contributing to constructing a sense of place (57). The use of terms such as “rooted cosmopolitans” testifies to this complex linking of different 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 in this article, a local dynamic developed in the social forum process along with the transnational one. In a process of cross-level diffusion, ideas of consensus and global justice spread across different (constructed) territory, with the local social forum acting as a sort of bridge between local and global concerns. They, and the organizations and groups that participated in them, adopted and adapted (or translated, to use De Sousa Santos’ 2008 term) the ideas elaborated in the WSF at the local level. Transnational events provided activists with occasions to meet, build linkages of trust, exchange ideas, and network. The

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<sup>2</sup> The eighth WSF did not take place in a particular venue because of the choice to organise a Global Day of Action worldwide in the same day (January 26<sup>th</sup>).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noticing 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 (interview 1: 3).

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 the mobilizations that followed by both facilitating relations of mutual trust between activists of different groups and by spreading horizontal and consensual decision-making as a way to construct new networks. The relationship of reciprocal knowledge and trust built during social forums 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. 2002; della Porta et al. 2006). Less visible but equally important have been, however, 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 coordinate 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 and 2005b). Since 2003, many of the local social forums that disappeared were supplanted by either local organizing of the ‘Stop the War’ committee or gave birth to new networks on issues such as migrant rights or alternative life styles, thus contributing to the spreading of new organizational formulas.

As elsewhere, local social forums have operated as the backbone of the GJM. The specificity of the Italian case 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 the political institutional system. 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 specificity of the Italian case makes our case study not fully generalizable, it provides however the possibility of observing the mechanisms of cross-level diffusion through a sort of magnifying lens.

In this article we bring together several different research projects carried out as part of a study of the GJM and local struggles. Our data is derived from in-depth interviews with representatives of social movement organizations and social forums which were conducted in Tuscany, Milan, and Venice, Novara and Abruzzo (a regional gathering of six territorial social forums)<sup>4</sup>. To complete the picture, in 2007, we also interviewed the initiator of the European

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews in Tuscany were conducted by Elena Del Giorgio; in Milan and in other Italian regions by Lorenzo Mosca.

network of local social forums which, since 2004, has played a significant role in the ESF organizational process.<sup>5</sup>

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. In Tuscany in 2003 in-depth interviews were carried out with members of six local social forums (Arezzo, Livorno, Lucca, Massa, Pisa and Prato). In this article, we also reference focus groups (FG) run in Florence in 2002 with six groups of activists of the local Florence social forum (della Porta 2005a).<sup>6</sup> 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. In Milan, we interviewed 37 groups which had been involved in the local social forum in order to examine the transformative effects of such an experience on existing social movement organizations. Interviews were conducted between May and November 2004 using a semi-structured questionnaire focusing on the groups' history, organizational structure, decision-making methodology, modalities of action and framing, as related to globalization processes and to the social forum process in Italy. Interviews with representatives of other local social forums were carried out in 2006, within the framework of research on conceptions and practices of democracy in the Global Justice Movement (della Porta 2007). These local social forums were selected because they clearly represented 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. We also reference 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). It is important to stress that our data refer to subjective memories. Our methodology entails a number of advantages and limitations. Semi-structured 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 group, as a group interview, allows 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 process (Polletta 2006).

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the promoter of the European network is an Italian trade unionist which was leaving in Manchester when the continental coordination was created. Afterwards, she moved to Greece where the following European Social Forum took place in May 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Focus groups were conducted with generational homogeneous groupings (15-19; 20-26; 27-35; 36-45; 46-60; 61-80) of between 7 and 9 people (overall 45 people were involved in them). Each group included activists of both genders, with different political backgrounds. The groups met with a researcher for about two hours in a university seminar room, discussing general questions about the movement and the social forum process. The meetings were taped and transcribed for qualitative analysis.

In the next section, we illustrate how local social forums contributed to innovation in the organizational formulas of the GJM—focusing on social movement organizations coming from different social movements (i.e. international solidarity, labor, ecologist, and feminist) considering both structural and process aspects—through the development of different, more participatory conceptions of internal decision making. We will then discuss the innovations they promoted in the definition of collective identities. The final section will illuminate the contribution of local social forums to contemporary social movements, stressing the role these new arenas play in the cross-fertilization of different movement families.

### **TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: NETWORKING AND CONSENSUS**

*“The Turin Social Forum wants to be an open place in which also the individuals, as well as the organized actors, can meet and work together; a space in which internal differences are accepted and given positive value, and not considered as an instrument to be used in order to acquire larger visibility and impose working contents and methods; a space in which there should be no place for hegemonic attempts and instead the search for a sufficient degree of maturation and consensus as guiding principles for each initiative” (webdocument 5).*

*“We will experiment an organizational path that favors participation, research of consensus and achieving largely shared decisions” (webdocument 6).*

Most Italian local forums such as the Turin Social Forum quoted above, reference the Charter of Principles of Porto Alegre and the “work agreement” of the Genoa social forum in their constitution. 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 the common organizing elements of local social forums, often marked by the absence of leadership, and the emphasis on horizontal, non-hierarchical relations (Fruci 2003). Local social forums define themselves as networks (on networks see Powell 1990). 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 socio-demographic characteristics and ideological orientation meet each other. A spokesperson for the Abruzzo social forum claimed, “the local forum is made up of different souls: it is the union of diversities without ideological affinity and with theoretical references varying from Naomi Klein, to Alex Zanotelli [an Italian priest espousing liberation theology], to Marx” (interview 2: 6). The code of conduct of the Florence social forum defines its role as “a network structure composed by individual and collective actors

that share the principles and the analyses contained in the charter. It is an instrument to act at various levels. It is first of all a table for confrontation, not a monolithic political actor. Its subjectivity is expressed in movement forms and it refuses dogmatic positions” (webdocument 7). Similarly, the Catania Social Forum states that the movement is composed of “a kaleidoscope of colours and experiences” (Piazza and Barbagallo 2003: 6). Local political and social structures were reflected in some differences in the structure of the forums. Research on Tuscany indicated that local 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, non-hierarchical networking of individuals and groups with different backgrounds. According to one of the promoters of the European network of local forums, “the idea to build a network among local forums was an answer to the necessity to overcome the schizophrenia of the social forum process where some ideas of horizontality<sup>7</sup> included in the charter of principles of the WSF that work well when we meet in the European forums and in the European networks, in the everyday praxis of the single countries do not work at all” (interview 1: 2). This main focus was stressed at the first meeting of a European coordination network of local forums which took place during the London ESF in 2004, where, following the strategy “one foot in, one foot out” (Juris 2005)<sup>8</sup>, people from different local forums from all over Europe (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, UK) organized the seminar “Build locally, link globally: the role and the future of local social forums in Europe”, the workshop “the Local Social Forum network in Europe” and an open space. The statement made at the end of the public meeting was reiterated at the supranational level – a conception of the social forum as an experimental arena for exchanges of ideas that had developed at the local level. As the document claimed, “We are a group of participants to local social forums all over Europe, who are networking between local social forums in Europe. The purpose of the network is to get to know each other, learn from each other, build up memories, exchange experiences on operating practices and processes, and on activities taking place in local social forums” (web document 2). This concern with democracy was also reflected in the call to democratize the London ESF process that was promoted, among others, by the people involved in the network of local social forums. The call asked for a more inclusive process and criticized the organizational phase 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 (web document 3).<sup>9</sup> The European coordination

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<sup>7</sup> Horizontality has to be understood as “an attempt to allow everyone to become active and direct participants in the decisions and actions that affect them. It implies equality of power in the sense that there is no dictation of directives or obligations to the individual, but rather mutual agreements and commitments” (web document 1).

<sup>8</sup> Which 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.

<sup>9</sup> During the London ESF, the European network of local forums supported its activity through a mailing-list (<http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/eulsf>) and a website (<http://workspace.fse-esf.org>); it also decided to hold regular workshops during the meetings of the European preparatory

network of local forums organized another seminar during the fourth ESF (webdocument 4) under the title “The Role and future of local social forums.” People joining the network produced a common 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 local forums in the organizational process of the ESF and invited all men and women to contribute more to the social forum process at local levels. Local forums were presented as being able to bridge the local and global levels, providing opportunities for participation and building alternatives (webdocument 4).

Our research on social movement organizations that took part in local social forums indicates that most of the organizational innovations characterizing social forums resonate in the organizations that participated in these arenas and in similar coordination activities. 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 which is extremely horizontal, networked, and privileges decentralized initiatives around common symbols. This is the case, for example, of the Euro Mayday campaign, a network struggling for recognition of the rights of precarious workers (interview 3), and the Rete Lilliput, an Italian network active on campaigns concerning fair trade, non-violence and ecology (interview 4). Its very name recalls the power of the many little Lilliputians facing the giant Goliath of neoliberalism.

The case of rete Lilliput also reflects efforts to improve its internal democracy through structures able “to facilitate” interaction creating an organism called a ‘subnodo’ [sub-knot], “with the function of joining and not coordinating but facilitating the local junctures, issue-working groups and so on” (ibid.: 2). Lilliput 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. In the words of an activist:

*Lilliput was already using completely different methods, some more effective, some less so, but with great emphasis on the consensus method ... a horizontal approach and the attempt to avoid ‘assemblearism’ by adopting some precise rules with regards to debates and the decision-making process. These things have also created dissent because initially they were not accepted in the movement whilst later on they were accepted even in other coordinations such as the ‘Stop the war’ committee” (3).*

Although slowing down decision-making (and being criticized for this by the representatives of more decisive organizations, interview 5: 5-6), the consensus method respects different positions often producing more effective decisions as they are more widely shared (interview 4: 5-6). Consensus tries to reach consensual 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. In the case of disagreements that involve fundamental beliefs and values, the decision

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assembly (in charge of the ESF organization) and to organize a space for local social forums within the 2005 WSF event in Porto Alegre.

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.). Social forums also had a transformative effect on older organizations. Local social forums in fact included organizations with longer histories, like those involved in labor conflicts or NGOs active on issues such as solidarity with the South, environmental protection and migrant rights. The first European Social Forum in Florence (2002) had seen a significant presence of several unions—from traditional ones to newly-emerged critical ones, from unions developed in neo-corporatist states to those present in more pluralist ones, from national unions to European confederations, from trade unions to peasants' unions. Unions were also present as members of several coordination committees and network organizations, such as ATTAC and in local social forums.

After the end of the "Fordist-Keynesian" mid-century compromise (Crouch 1999), in Europe large workers' organizations had supported neoliberal policies, (privatization, deregulation and flexibilization of the labor market) implemented even by progressive governments, as inevitable. However by 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). Protests against the privatization of public services (in particular transport, schools and health) arose in most European countries (Moody 1997). In countries with pluralist industrial-relations patterns (marked by the presence of multiple representative organizations in competition with each other), new trade unions 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 public against private values, and services against goods.

Inspired by a new protest cycle, unions amplified their frames beyond the defense of specific workers' rights to issues of citizenship and democracy but 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 trade unions, 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 in with the anti-neoliberal movement (Béroud 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. These unions started to stigmatize social dumping brought on by unrestrained competition among nations based on reducing wages and making labor more flexible, that is, making employment precarious. In fact, the waves of protest against neoliberal globalization seem to have produced a process of "social re-appropriation" (Mc Adam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) by rank-and-file members of bureaucratized organizations (see della Porta, Andretta, Mosca and Reiter 2006, chap. 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 towards 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, in the name of 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” (interview 6: 9). Even if common participation in social forums did not bring radical and traditional trade unions closer together, or unite the traditional trade unions (interviews 7, 8 and 9), the encounter with organizational models external to labor brought about a (renewed) emphasis on participation, that 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 old solidarity associations whose roots were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially after their encounter with other types of groups and organizational models, organizations with a long history, although not modifying radically their own structures, have introduced several innovations in order to favor and advocate greater participation of their members. More recently formed organizations have adopted decisional methods and structures that radically break with a representative conception of democracy.

Some of the older organizations, where more hierarchical organizational models still prevailed (interview 12: 8), reacted to mobilizations linked to the social forum process by bringing more attention to their member base. Manitese (Italian word for “outstretched hands”)—a non-governmental development organization founded in 1964 which operates at the national and international level to further justice, solidarity and respect among peoples (webdocument 8)—has started to reflect on its own decisional methods, producing several changes, promoting “a shift from a hierarchical management determined by the past to a shared formula with several units” (interview 13: 6-7), as well as some experimentation with consensus-based decisions.

Recent organizations engaged in international cooperation have also been affected. Emergency is such a case. It is an independent, neutral and non-political Italian organization founded in order to provide free, high quality medical and surgical treatment to the civilian victims of war, landmines and poverty (webdocument 9). The movement has brought about a crisis of growth in the organization, provoked not only by the exponential increase in the demand for information but also for participation (interview 14: 1-2). This challenge led to a more participative conception of the organization. As a volunteer put it, “it is as if a little baby suddenly became an adult and took steps forward too quickly, so we have almost collapsed ... we have had moments of great tension because of the pressures we have felt on us ... and this has been the impulse for all changes... one year ago we created the territorial groups... the associates’ assembly has also increased in terms of number of participants” (13).

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 centres<sup>10</sup>, that represent an important part of the Italian movement (interviews 10 and 11). In these groups, cross-fertilization with other experiences (in

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<sup>10</sup> Social centres are communities managed by young politically engaged people (mainly students and unemployed) who squat unused buildings where they organize social, political and cultural activities.

particular with the Zapatistas) was reflected in a growing attention to conceptions of deliberative democracy, especially those that linked “horizontal” forms of assembly and participation to the transformative power of consensual methods.

Hence, the organizational structures of the movement appear flexible and mutable, with a “variable geometry” configuration (Castells 1996) made of decompositions and continuous recompositions in which the end of an experience often constitutes also the seed that leads to the generation of new groups. In the “spirit of Porto Alegre”, the method of consensus offered an instrument to organize a diverse and broad base; as an interviewee put it, “even if the social forums’ 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” (interview 16: 5).

### **TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FRAMING: THE GLOBAL IN THE LOCAL**

*“The Novara social forum, which is based in our city, aims to coordinate with national and international social forums, oppose neoliberal globalization and build together a new narration of the world for the globalization of rights, solidarity, and peace ... We commit ourselves to "territorialize" the movement, addressing local issues on the themes of labor, environment, health, consumption, communication, education and rights” (webdocument 11).*

*The aim of the movement is “to spread direct participation and citizenship to defend common goods from private economic aggression and to re-establish priority of politics on economics” (interview 20).*

The first quotation, above is taken from the Novara social forum constitution, and clearly indicates neo-liberalism to be the main enemy of the GJM. It also stresses the important function of translation from the transnational to the local level. In the second quotation of an activist from the Venice social forum describes what, according to its organization, is the main scope of the movement; the definition and defense of the “public good” against market liberalization is also mentioned by a spokesperson of the Abruzzo social forum (interviews 2). The innovations in the organizational formulas described previously, with the increasing influence of a networked structure, interacted with the development of a specific conception of a multilevel and multi-issue identity, as expressed in the mentioned 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 re-frame global issues in local environments; on the other, they link local struggles with global concerns on democracy, participation and social justice. They push for a combination of local roots with global visions. Stressing this aim, the charter of the Florence local social forum states, “We are individual citizens, unions and associations, movements and self-organized groups, Florentine political and social actors that assemble in the social forum of Florence. We feel part of an international movement that aims at challenging the oligarchies and their anti-democratic procedures, represented by the big global economic and military organizations” (web document 10).

Besides, most of the local social forums present a multi-level model of mobilization being active in specific territories but also mobilizing in national and transnational campaigns and coalitions active on multiple issues. In this sense, they inverted the evolution towards specialization on single-issues experienced by social movements of the eighties and the nineties (i.e., see della Porta 1996 for the Italian movement and Ranci 2001 for solidarity movements). Social forums acted in fact as bridges between different movements. One of their main features is indeed 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). Local social forums therefore understand themselves 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. According to one of the promoters of the European network, the coordination is not supposed to launch common mobilizations and campaigns, as this task is developed by the European Assembly of Social Movements, but “to encourage the birth of new local forums, spread our experience recognizing the diversity of the forums from one country to another ... grow together, stimulate those that had not yet tried to create a forum and exchanging experiences that we are practicing ...” (interview no 1: 7).

Social forums were able to spread multi-issue frames across the various groups that took part in them. An activist of the Florentine social forum during a focus group 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 twenty to sixty, 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 in contacts situations that in the past years had not met enough, or met only during emergencies, for short periods... this is instead the first experience I live 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...” (ibid.: 89). In the words of the same activist, “the forum has something evangelic, new, that we were waiting for... in the way of discussing, exchanging ideas, getting in contact with each other in a different ways, of avoiding conflicts and so linking together very different components, that now look at each other in a different way” (ibid.: 144).

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. Although with different emphases, the radical trade unions present themselves as not only social, but also political actors who frame their specific interventions on labor issues in a more complex vision of society. As an activist told us, “it was our understanding that it was necessary to avoid a model in which unionist claims only concern for your salary and then leave 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” (interview 11: 3).

During more recent protests, identification between the working class and citizens more generally has been strengthened. According to one representative of the Sindacato dei Lavoratori Autorganizzati Intercategoriale Cobas (SLAI COBAS, <http://www.slaicobas.it>), in the transport sector of Milan a “wild” strike held on December 2003 produced solidarity because the drivers were also striking in the name of workers who did not have the possibility of striking, “The worker does not have the minimal possibility of protecting himself, of protecting his salary, the

rights he has obtained etc. so we, the people who were breaking that system, have been seen as instituting revenge, as if ‘finally someone tried it’ and the citizens have been even stronger than the media: that was an exceptional thing” (interview 6: 5).

In the unions’ environment, apart from recalling class identity, there has been attention also to a redefinition of the concept and the function of labor. This innovation is particularly visible in the organizations that emerged from the movement, combining labor issues with societal ones. The Chainworkers<sup>11</sup> discourse emerged with the diffusion of temporary work in commercial chains like Blockbuster and McDonald’s but then “we started to talk about social temporariness” to the “whole working class ... not just workers in the commercial chains. This was something much larger. The message was extended to all working categories because we realized that this process of increasing job insecurity was involving not only the commercial chains but all the companies too, in the sense that the new workers were not hired but signed temporary contracts” (interview 3: 1). The action on temporary work, organized around the ironic symbol of San Precario (saint of precarious workers), was extended from labor issues to everyday life, “Saint Precario has five axes of security which are: income, house, love and friendship, access and services. So within these five themes it is always possible to find a kind of affinity with other people” (ibid.: 11). The challenge to the conception of labor is also perceived in more traditional unions. For example, as the Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici (FIOM, <http://www.fiom.cgil.it>) representative emphasizes the growing presence of temporary workers challenge the traditional approach to labor (interview 17: 3).

New and “political” identities also developed in the galaxy of organizations engaged on the issue of international solidarity. First it should be emphasized that these organizations have developed a genuine political orientation: “Behind their demands – for the respect of human rights, against racism, for helping the third world, in defence of immigrant workers and political refugees – there is a quest for individual emancipation and a deep democratization both of Western and non-Western society” (Passy 2001: 10).

In more traditional associations participation in the social forum process pushed them towards innovations in their identity. For the Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI)<sup>12</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 (interview 19: 1). Manitese also has a long history and, over time, the generational and territorial heterogeneity of the association substantially increased bringing about a re-elaboration of its organizational identity with the development of local perspectives “very committed also from a political point of view and working in contact with Zapatista movements, which means that they reflect more deeply on globalization issues” (interview 13: 5).

With certain differences, the outcome of participation in local social forums and similar activities accompanying the emergence of the movement is the singling out of a global stake in opposing neo-liberalism. Recognition of similarities across countries through involvement in

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<sup>11</sup> Chain Workers is a group based in Milan that aims at mobilizing precarious workers of malls and supermarkets through public demonstrations and picketing (for more information, see: <http://www.chainworkers.org>).

<sup>12</sup> An association for social promotion with 1.2 million members, 6,000 clubs and permanent chapters all over the national territory, 126 territorial and regional boards; dealing with culture, public delegations and free time.

international networks enables the construction of a supranational identity, as in the case of solidarity movements (Smith 2001). From this perspective the representative of the radical union Sindacato dei Lavoratori Intercategoriale Cobas (SIN COBAS, <http://www.sincobas.org>) reminds us:

*The desire for projection at an international level is reflected in our symbol which contains the acronym 'Solidarity. Unity. Democracy'. This is not by chance: in the same years in France the radical union Solidarité, Unité, Démocratie ("Solidarity, Unity, Democracy" –SUD) emerged, and given that we had this contact ... the common idea was that we had to become a European trade union ... In some way, this implied evoking a European trade union rather than constructing it, evoking it by including such words in the symbol" (interview 10: 4).*

Generally speaking, the process of neoliberal globalization has become a reference point for a definition of the group's identity. As our interviewee 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" (ibid.: 4-6). Also in many other groups, the collective identity has been modeled around the criticism of neoliberal globalization and war. The very issue of opposition to war provides links to more moderate organizations (interview 12: 2-3). Such developments are signaled by the representative of a more traditional organization such as the ARCI (which was one of the main organizers of the first European Social Forum held in Florence in 2002) and by the Christian labor association Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani (ACLI, <http://www.acli.it>), "a group of young ACLI members accelerated the number of practical actions on the issue of peace in the international area... from there a sensibility for more practical actions matured, and there was a change in the international arena which led to this new structure, to a new way of looking at things" (interview 12: 1). 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 (interviews 10 and 13).

## **LOCAL SOCIAL FORUMS AS BRIDGES: CONCLUSION**

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 participative conception of the organization; organizations founded during the waves of anti-neoliberal protests are characterized instead by a highly flexible and networked structure and decisional 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 forum planning some of the frames and organizational strategies proposed by new groups found resonance in traditional organizations which 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. As a representative of the ARCI puts it, “this very elastic and open model is used when needed, and we know that this is the system and the model: a platform is proposed and all the people who agree join each other. Then, as it arose, this thing may disappear, but what you still have is the method” (interview 19: 19).

The rhizomatic evolution (emergence, disappearance, and re-emergence) 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) made the process unmanageable. In others cases the decline followed some general ebbs in the mobilization, or the opening up of other networking spaces (e.g., for the organization of peace protests). Sustaining common spaces of coordination and mobilization is indeed a difficult task. As one of the promoters of the European local forums network puts it, “Working with a forum logic is definitely hard... it is the most difficult thing in the world as you have to abandon your organizational belonging, you have to accept differences, you have to accept a method based on listening and not on imposition and to define common objectives in a constant and common work” (interview 1: 5). Local social forums tended in fact to remain active especially in those areas where widespread local struggles against large infrastructure projects sustain mobilization processes. Examples include local social forums that are still active 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 F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program supposed to locate a part of the production near Novara (interview 2, 20 and 21). This means that the reference to an ‘abstract’ 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 transnational 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” configuration can be 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 of, 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 plurality 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 helps logistical coordination, enables the emergence of tolerance for differences and mutual trust and allows frame-bridging and the transnationalization of identities. Trust among activists developed in transnational campaigns was transferred to the local level, and vice-versa. 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. 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 which 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’ (Strand 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, chap. 7).

This article highlights in particular that the work of translating the global to local settings requires the presence of bridges or brokers facilitating such a process. As Diani (2003: 107) 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.” 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 re-contextualize foreign ideas and practices in domestic arenas (Roggeband 2007). Besides, the process of translation requires some specific conditions in the potential adopters. In the case of more traditional social movement organizations which tend to be more hierarchical (see also Wood 2005: 105) and not specifically mobilized around global justice (i.e. 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 (interviews 7, 8 and 17). The process of translation seems indeed to work more effectively at the horizontal level (between different organizations) than at the vertical one (from the top to the bottom), but more specific research is necessary to investigate in detail the potential and limits of cross-level diffusion of ideas.

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## **INTERVIEWS**

1. Promoter of the European network of local social forums
2. Spokepersons of the Abruzzo social forum
3. Activist of the group Chainworkers and EuroMayDay campaign
4. Activist of the Lilliput Network
5. President of the association Associazione per i Consumi Etici e Alternativi (ACEA)
6. Delegate of the radical union Sindacato dei Lavoratori Autorganizzato Intercategoriale (SLAI COBAS) in the ATM (Milanese public transport)
7. Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori (CISL) union member responsible for relations with the movements in Milan
8. Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) union member formerly responsible of the relations with the movements in Milan
9. Delegate of the union Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Trasporti – Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (FILT-CGIL) in the ATM (Milanese public transport)
10. National secretary of the radical union (Sindacato Intercategoriale dei Comitanti di Base) SIN COBAS
11. Delegate of the radical union Comitanti di Base della Scuola (COBAS-school) in Milan
12. Responsible of the international department of the catholic association Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani (ACLI) in Milan
13. Voluntary of the association Manitese
14. Responsible of the volunteers in the association Emergency
15. President of the fair trade cooperative Chico Mendes
16. Activist of the working group on Critical Consumerism of the Milan social forum
17. Responsible of the international office of the metalworker union Federazione Impiegati Operai Metalmeccanici (FIOM) in Milan
18. Voluntary of the association "Un Ponte per"
19. Organizational responsible of the association Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI) in the province of Milan
20. Member of the Venice social forum
21. Member of the Novara social forum

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**AFRICAN VOICES AND ACTIVISTS AT THE WSF IN NAIROBI:  
THE UNCERTAIN WAYS OF TRANSNATIONAL AFRICAN ACTIVISM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Transnational social movement studies have long neglected the way activists from the South, and particularly from Africa, have participated in World Social Forum processes. Alterglobal activists have also been accused of neglecting or dominating southern voices. The organization of the WSF in Nairobi was seen as an opportunity to make African voices be heard. This examines how African activists participated in Nairobi, and the complex relationship they have to northern and other southern (such as Asia and Latin America) activists. The African alterglobal movement is seen as a space of tensions (i.e. between South Africans and the rest of the continent, between French and English speaking Africa, or between NGOs and more radical organizations) reflected in national mobilizations. Our team of 23 French and 12 Kenyan scholars made collective ethnographic observations in more than a hundred workshops and conducted 150 biographical interviews of African activists in order to examine how: Africa was referred to in the WSF; activists financed their trip to Nairobi; and Afrocentric, anti-imperialist, and anticolonial arguments have been used.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Although a rich literature has developed on World Social Forums (WSF), regional Social Forums, and other transnational contentious gatherings, and scholars have carried on surveys on their composition and participation (Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005), few studies have addressed what is at stake with the localization, both geographic and symbolic, of the Forums. Why observe the WSF in particular? First of all, even if the other WSFs also took place in the “Global South”, the 2007 WSF was the first one 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 and incarnating Africa, the more so as 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 alterglobalism, incarnated *inter alia* by the African Social Forum (ASF).<sup>1</sup> It also 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 these networks 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 and its participants, is thus a means of addressing some of the shortcomings of the sociology of transnational social movements, much of which remains today, despite some exceptions (Wood 2005; Rothman and Oliver 2002), mainly centered on Western civil societies, or, at best, on transnational campaigns concerning the South (dams, child work, debt), but mainly animated by northern activists. We know that transnational militancy of the South exists, but it is generally considered to be an adaptation or an appropriation of external dynamics (Bob 2002; Wing 2002). We are not satisfied with the binary explanations of this activism (seen either as an emergent *sui generis* civil society, or as the “compradors” of an ever-patronizing North). This is why we would like to show how African activists managed to participate in the WSF in Nairobi and what the conflicts were surrounding the right to talk about, for, and from, Africa. These questions are linked. In an alterglobal space which seeks to obscure 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 (Wagner 2004). Agency, identity, and injustice (Gamson 1992), the three central components of collective action, do not rest only on intentional and strategic use of symbols. More precisely, the manipulation of symbols is always deeply rooted in social settings. A robust materialism is often what allows us, 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 denounce injustices or build bridges amongst African activists themselves, or between them and other transnational activists.

## METHODS AND DATA

Our aim was to understand the links between material constraints, activists’ socialization, interactions between the participants in the WSF, and the stake of African representation in the Forum, not only in terms of numbers, but also in the content of the debates. A wide scale qualitative methodology was seen to be most appropriate one. Our work, therefore, is based on a collective survey conducted in Nairobi in January, 2007. A team of 23 French and 14 Kenyan scholars<sup>2</sup> carried out collective ethnographic observations in 130 workshops of the WSF, along

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<sup>1</sup> As in political action, words are an issue, we chose to use the term “alterglobal” (a translation of the French “altermondialiste”) movement which is used by many European and Latin American activists, and which is preferred to the “Global Justice Movement,” perceived as too consensual and too Anglo-Saxon.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the authors, the following people were involved in the project: Evelyn Awino, Idris Irshad, Lilian Kayaro, Leonard Wambaya, Charles Mutua, Mwadzoya Mwandeje, John Ndung’u, Margaret Njeru, Nicholas Odoyo, Oita Etyang, Vincent Opondo, Andrew Otieno Aura, Lizz

with 150 interviews with African activists at the forum. The ethnographic observation was aimed at observing the composition of the audience, the content, language, and rhetorical form of the debates, and the way in which Africa was referenced by speakers. A standardized observation sheet, combined with photos and sometimes recording or filming, was used as a support for the small ethnographic reports which included analytical elements summarized after the workshops or the observations. The interviews had a biographical section as well as one more focused on the practical aspects of the participation in the WSF, for example: was it the first trip abroad; how did activists manage to pay for their trip to Nairobi; did they belong to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other kinds of organizations?

In order to combine an analysis of the social conditions and the symbolic work of protest in this forum in Africa, this article is divided into two parts. The first part will answer the question: “whose forum was it?” and will focus 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 will answer the question “whose voices were heard?” during the forum focusing on the ways identities and legitimate claims to speak in the name of Africa were built in a space of tensions.

### **WHOSE VOICES? SPEAKING IN THE NAME OF AFRICA: DOUBLE BINDS AND CENSORSHIP**

This World Social Forum, more than others, was an opportunity to observe how activists from Africa and the rest of the world speak about Africa in an internationalized activist gathering. This helps us to understand the difficulties faced by all movements that intend to denounce domination and at the same time display agency (Gamson 1992) as well as the constraints faced by internationalized actors who claim to authentically represent their constituencies. Because the current situation in Africa seemed to provide obvious proof of the misdeeds of globalization and capitalism, mobilizing in turn in the name of Africa did not go without constraints or even double binds.

#### **Agency and Domination**

This is the classical double bind of social movements to, on the one hand, be able to criticize situations of misery without falling into pessimism or impotence, and on the other, to celebrate agency without falling into populism, thus ignoring real difficulties or dismissing possible supporters or allies by a supercilious claim of cultural and political autonomy. These are the traditional and intersecting dilemmas of pessimism and populism (Grignon and Passeron 1989). In Nairobi, Africa was, at the same time, acted upon and the actor; in practice and in words.

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Kariuki, Benjamin Osiemo, Dominique Connan, Mathilde Debain, Nedjib Sidi Moussa, Fanny Laredo, Fernando Isern, Marie Baget, Camille Le Coq, Julie Aubriot, Marame Ndour, Guillaume Thiery, Xavier Audrain, Samadia Sadouni, Thomas Atenga, Nathanaël Tstotsa, Alphonse Maindo, Florence Brisset, Sara Dezalay, Pascal Dauvin, Lilian Mathieu, Dominique Cardon, Nicolas Haeringer, Ayito Nguema. All conducted interviews and/or ethnographic observations and should be therefore thanked.

These constraints weighed both on African and non-African activists, the latter always trying to preempt possible charges of paternalism as they expressed various degrees of ethnocentrism in their relations with African causes and activists.

Was this WSF a success or not? 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, and the representatives of the Kenyan Organization Committee, claimed that the criticisms of the organization focused on elements that should have been excusable or ignored the difficulties specific to Africa, and revealed the “neocolonialism” of some northern activists. Many representatives of INGOs, more familiar with Africa than some of their radical counterparts, found, sometimes not without paternalism, that “for Africa”, this WSF was a success. Conversely, the most virulent critics of the organization were often those for which the African dimension of the forum was not an issue. Some, such as the networks of the CADTM, wished to denounce “the elite” of the ASF. Others argued that since a country of the South had succeeded in organizing a WSF with much popular local participation (as in Mumbai) there was no point in sparing the feelings of Kenyan organizers.

Northern activists often feared being seen as patronizing. Thus at the WSF, they seldom criticized African governments, even the most repressive. Supporting anti-imperialism and defending activists everywhere can be touchy. At most NGOs considered some African governments as “puppets” or accomplices of northern governments. They, therefore, 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 US and Britain.” Admittedly, there is nothing more widely shared than anti-imperialism at a WSF, especially since this term has seen a revival, for instance through the writings of Negri and Hardt. But even Northern activists’ solicitude towards the “victims of imperialism” could be perceived as patronizing. That explains the uncomfortable position of northern activists in a number of workshops. When the debates corresponded to what they claimed to desire (a speech of the South on the South), they tended to offer their help by encouraging civil societies from the North to criticize governments of the North, and let civil society actors from the South, if they wished or could, to criticize their own governments. They thus set out a form of international division of labor for criticism of governments. For example, in a workshop on AIDS, a Canadian woman speaking to a mainly African audience claimed, “One is complementary. We must put pressure on our governments, and you on yours so that they do not pay the debt that you do not pay for colonialism. Mobilize yourself to let us know your goals” (Fieldwork notes, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007).

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 the debt; mainstream or radical feminists; and “first hour anti-colonialists”, who have struggled since the 1950s, against the domination of the North. Moreover, the behavior of northern activists and their ethnocentrism sometimes had less to do with their ideologies, and more to do with their familiarity with the African continent, their socialization or their social position. Such radical activists vilified the venality of the African “volunteers” of the WSF (most of whom were, in fact, paid). Some participants took photos of street children without questioning the meaning of their actions. Other radical militants would

insist on putting their local partners (whose travel their organization had financed) out in forefront as evidence of the grassroots constituencies in their NGO. Radical “tiers-mondistes”<sup>3</sup> would stay in one of the very comfortable hotels necessary to host the whole delegation and its meetings and to ensure 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, instead worrying about what might become of these children once the activists who had supported them had departed.

A striking aspect of WSFs in general, and this one in particular, is the reactivation of an ideology shaped around the third-world, which had been strongly challenged in the 1980s. Its strong presence is undoubtedly linked to the convergences it permits, sometimes due to its vagueness. In various workshops in Nairobi, one could re-discover dependency theory (Samir Amin, its most renowned African theorist, was among the “stars” of the WSF) and “Third Worldism.” “The Third world is the third estate of the world”, declared Gus Massiah, of the Centre d’Etudes Anti Impérialistes (CEDETIM) having rediscovered the origin of the term Third World. Liberation theology (with one of its main theorists, the sociologist François Houtard), all forms of anticolonialism (the “Franz Fanon space” was particularly active) and finally Afrocentrism, either in its Afro-American (Malcom X grassroots movement), or African versions (seen in many references to Sheik Anta Diop) were all represented in the program. Throughout the WSF, a moderated form of Afrocentrism thus seemed to be one of the processes making it possible to claim agency and to mobilize identity and pride, while denouncing the fate imposed on Africa. Thus Afrocentrism was a way of binding what Gamson (1992) identified as the three central components of collective action: injustice, agency, and identity.

A first aspect of this Afrocentrism consisted of pointing out what Africa could be proud of, including celebrating great 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 Guevarra) such as Amilcar Cabral, Chris Hani, Dedan Kimathi, Mary Nyanjiru, Mekatilili Wa Menza, Modibo Keita, Patrice Lumumba, Ruth First or Thomas Sankara – all of whom were martyrs of colonialism or *apartheid*, or more precisely, the fight against *apartheid*. Many speeches at the opening ceremony were peppered with shouts of “Amandla.”

The choice of names for meeting places speaks for itself; as it represents the ambivalent relationship 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. their own national leaders). Direct criticism of the corruption of some African leaders is done more in private situations, between activist friends, from the North or the South, not only out of fear of reprisals once they have returned home. While “beginner” activists (here, Kenyans, peasants, squatters, hawkers who came to testify at the WSF) did not hesitate to clearly denounce their political leaders senior activists, in contrast, have adopted, since their beginnings, an ambivalent attitude toward leaders. The dilemma faced by the majority of critics of domination is what can

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<sup>3</sup> Literally “third-worldist”, refers to this powerful ideology born in the 1950s and which took its name in France in reference to the Third-Estate of the French Revolution.

be said against these leaders that will not be exploited by adversaries? This constraint arises within nationalist or anti-imperialist frameworks since criticizing African leaders can provide new arguments for international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank who are always eager to denounce corruption and encourage “good governance.” PanAfricanism, the call for a true United States of Africa, seems to have been 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 its inherited borders. The denunciation of debt is a very revealing example of these rhetorical strategies. The example of the debt of the Democratic Republic of Congo is 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 this illegitimate dictator who was supported by Western countries. It thus allows Africans to say that western countries are still responsible and should be 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 (be they European Partnership Agreements, IFIs, the North, imperialism, or the heritage of colonization), was frequently heard in Nairobi. This form of criticism indeed makes it possible to endorse a critical discourse, even when one is a citizen of an authoritarian regime, by thus reconciling a moderate activism within one’s national space, with a radical language directed towards external enemies in international circles—leaving the question of accountability of African national leaders blurred. This seems to be very characteristic of what the alterglobalist discourse allows. It is amplified by the fact that African activists seldom dare to confront their own 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. “Welcome to Wahu Kaara, the African revolutionary!” says the presenter on stage. After a series of “*Karibu*” and “*Welcome*”, she explains to her audience why Nairobi is welcoming:

*“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, 20th of January, 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

claim to 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 other the world. (fieldwork notes, 20th of January, Uhuru Park, Nairobi)*

This division among you/us/them appeared in many workshops. "Us" was used to represent Africa and "You" "the North." That could appear paradoxical in a forum defined, according to its charter, as an "open space", a coordination of civil society movements from all over the world. To point out this cleavage is a way to prevent northern activists from dominating struggles for the South.<sup>4</sup> This you/us divide could be very situational, expressing the bitterness African activists felt when they realized that their accommodations or housing was far less comfortable than that of the Western activists, that many Africans did not have the financial means to buy the food or drink sold at the WSF venue at prices designed for Westerners, or when, in a workshop, people whom they felt had no legitimacy to talk monopolized speeches. Contesting this situation could very quickly make Westerners turn silent.

African identity within the WSF was thus prone to transformations depending on the interaction or situation. From the remote "Them" of the IFIs, that was central to building the inclusive "us" of the participants of 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 anti-modern vision of Africa. In before a mixed audience the reference to traditions "that work" is a classic one, and relates to the influence of certain currents of development ideology. The same could be observed when it came to religion, which could, according to the situation, be alternatively denounced, or on the contrary, placed at the very heart of the "African soul." The South African case is characteristic of this unstable African identity. South Africans enjoy or claim a strong legitimacy among Africans due to their fight against apartheid, but they are often regarded as insufficiently or "not exactly" African, as "a-typical" of Africa. These aspects thus raise questions about the forms of legitimacy claimed by these militants.

### **Cultural Legitimism and Self-Censorships**

Organizing the World Social Forum in Africa was almost an injunction to make Africa central within the Forum. However this "injunction of 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, which also have to be understood in terms of class. What was at stake was the right to talk, sometimes against the North, but also *vis-a-vis* other African activists. The first aspect of

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<sup>4</sup> The cleavage is then more North/South than Africa/North. During a Jubilee workshop, this young anti-debt activist from Norway was contradicted by an Ecuadorian activist who challenged "this guy from the North, a young man" (January, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007).

this cultural legitimism is asserting and representing traditions or cultural features and claiming that agency and identity result from one's own cultural resources. This probably is a classical phenomenon (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). 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 at the beginning of them. But it could also be more largely depicted as an "African culture", sometimes idealized, often poorly defined in terms of 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 of Africans 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 endorse the nature of the testimony.

The issue of Africaness 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 which sometimes looked much like any another international conference<sup>5</sup>, was to avoid being challenged as non-African (that is, being too "westernized", cut off from grassroots, 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 "lived" in the USA since they spent most of their time there for professional reasons. This example illustrates the tendency to a real cultural legitimism with 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 widening the gap between the most internationalized activists, sometimes those most gifted with social and financial resources, and the others. Hence this insistence on showing that one is actually African, that is, "culturally" African, that one does not reproduce colonial patterns, does not travel, and is, therefore, more "rooted" than "cosmopolitan" (Tarrow 2005).

This insistence by all activists, either from the North or the South, in the denigration of extraversion and internationalization was particularly evident in the workshops relating to sexuality. Northern activists here tried to be particularly discrete, and avoid appearing to be imposing codes that would have been rejected if they had been promoted by the North. This was reflected in the following discussion of the Kasarani, Queer Spot, workshop "Reclaiming our sexualities" which took place on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. This workshop benefited from the organizational support of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), reflected in the discrete presence of its communication Officer Stephen Barris, who confines himself to the

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<sup>5</sup> On the specific culture of international spaces, see Riles (2001)

Spanish/English translation. The goal was clearly to minimize the presence of whites on this theme during the entire forum, as Barris acknowledged in a report written after the WSF.<sup>6</sup> This was by far the workshop where our team members heard the most discussion about what is “really” African, or Africa-like, in terms of references (the term “Mother Africa” was even used). The reproach that homosexuality is “not-African” appears to be the major obstacle to be addressed. The audience was mixed, with a small African majority. The large number of speakers provided limited opportunity for the audience to express themselves. With the speakers’ short interventions, one after the other, the goal seemed to be increased visibility rather than a potentially explosive dialogue (although in 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 Africa. Two were South African; one a Ugandan refugee in South Africa; and the fourth was a Nigerian woman. The South-African activist and poetess explained LGBT struggles and described the use of homophobia by postcolonial leaders who affirmed that homosexuality was “un-African.” She explained, “we are here precisely to re-conquer our sexualities”. The Nigerian woman recounted the work she had carried on about 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 (some applause). 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 recalls that although the absence of the term “homosexual” in her language is used to argue that the reality did not exist, there are traditional terms to indicate this type of relationship that can be discovered by questioning older people. The leader of the Coalition of African Lesbians then held up a collection of life stories and testimonies of lesbians in English-speaking Africa by a group of anthropologists. She insisted on the importance of this compilation, and challenged the idea that homosexuality is un-African, and called for a re-appropriation of terminology “to tell our communities who we are without using colonial language” (Fieldwork notes).

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<sup>6</sup> “At the closing ceremony on Thursday afternoon (...) We decide to ask for a speech to be read but the program is already overloaded: someone takes our script, but cannot guarantee that it will be read. In the following minutes, our speech in the name of “the gays and lesbians of Africa” is announced but does not materialize. One hour, two hours, three hours... Kasha, a Ugandan activist, and I decide to go backstage to ask what's going on. (...). An hour and a half passes, and finally comes her moment to shine. I wait behind the scenes: a European – especially a white man – would discredit the attempt by trying to speak in the name of the gays and lesbians of Africa”. “World Social Forum - Nairobi 2007 Respect for All! Another world is possible – for African LGBT people, too”, 26/02/2007, retrieved on Friday, 06<sup>th</sup> July 2007 (<http://www.babels.org/forum/viewtopic.php?p=2961>).

The same manner of speaking about what is really African and what is not could also be found in less radical workshops, connected to the world of international development and Northern INGOs, as for example, in workshops on AIDS and the best ways to fight HIV in Africa. This claim of Africaness here shouldn't, therefore, be understood as the 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 (Poletta & Jasper 2001), and particularly an identity that couldn't be claimed by rival associates in the alterglobal movement. Transnationalisation 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.

## CONCLUSION

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 the fact that social movements cannot be considered unified actors. On the contrary, they should be seen as spaces of struggle and tensions around the right to legitimate speech, and in this case, legitimate speech for Africa. Internationalization complicates this reality already experienced by social movements within national frameworks. 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. Focusing on concrete conditions makes it possible to understand how (without being only a reflection of it) certain ideological confrontations are a way of translating, in protest language, realities which 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 often portrayed egalitarian image of global civil society. But it also shows how it is possible for newcomers, outsiders, or dominated actors to challenge these unequal relationships 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 hierarchies and new legitimacies acquired in internationalized spaces are used in national contexts.

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## WORLD SOCIAL FORUM ACTIVISM IN BELÉM AND BEYOND<sup>1</sup>

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### **BELÉM 2009: THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM GOES TO THE AMAZON**

A young man dressed as a clown shelters under our umbrella in the center of Belém in the downpour before the opening march begins while a group of people with painted bodies and feathered headdresses chant and charge up the middle as thousands of marchers push apart to let them pass to the front. The words “save the Amazon” are spelled out with human bodies. Union members are present in force, all donning shirts with their syndicate’s name and logo. All these scenes are just a small part of the kaleidoscope of images that are the World Social Forum in 2009. But what do they mean; and what does this most recent manifestation of the World Social Forum process tell us about this nine-year struggle to define an alternative vision to global neo-liberal capitalism? This article provides a brief reflection of nine years of Social Forum activism against the backdrop of the most recent World Social Forum held in the city of Belém, in the northeastern state of Para, Brazil from January 27-February 1, 2009.

As with all World Social Forums, Belém brought together a wide array of activists, organizations, and individuals united under the slogan “Another World is Possible.” Involving over 2000 activities and in excess of 130,000 participants spread over two university campuses, each one of which included a dispersed set of venues, any attempt to provide an overview of the event and its significance is challenging. Thus, all views presented here are thus partial, and should be taken as such. As editors of this special issue we both attended the Forum and are part of a network of scholar activists who have attended a number of forums. We knew at the outset our own experience of the Forum would be a limited one. So we put out a call to a number of our colleagues in this network who were in Belém and asked for their input. We were interested in

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Belém Research Collective to this report: Marc Becker, Truman State University; Scott Byrd, University of California, Irvine; Janet Conway, Brock University, Canada; Michael Hardt, Duke University; Matt Kaneshiro, University of California, Riverside; Thomas Ponniah, Harvard University; Ruth Reitan, University of Miami; Peter J. Smith, Elizabeth Smythe, Concordia University College of Alberta, Canada, Alberto Teixeira da Silva, Federal University of Para, Brazil; and Sylvia Escárcega Zamarrón, Loyola University, Chicago. Contributions are cited by last name in parentheses.

receiving their observations on the themes or groups that they were following; on who was or was not represented there; what major themes or issues emerged and how well they were addressed; the extent of contention or consensus among groups and networks; and any other aspects of the Forum they felt were noteworthy. We received responses from nine scholars and thus the Belém Research Collective was born. The participants are drawn from a variety of social science disciplines and countries including the United States, Canada, Brazil and Mexico.<sup>2</sup> While its size, scope and chaotic nature make any view of the WSF partial it is our hope that by bringing their insights together and drawing from them we can provide a somewhat more complete understanding of the Belém WSF.

### **World Social Forums and the Political Dimensions of Time and Place**

When the first World Social Forum was organized by a group of Brazilian and French activists in Porto Alegre Brazil in January 2001 to coincide with the meeting of the World Economic Forum and challenge neo-liberal globalization under the slogan “Another World is Possible” few would have expected it to grow and spread to the extent that it has (see Smith and Smythe this issue). Organized under a set of principles outlined in its charter the WSF was intended to be an “open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals and free exchange of experiences” (World Social Forum 2002). Opposed to neo-liberalism it was to be a “permanent process of seeking and building alternatives” and “open to pluralism and diversity.” While clearly political the Forum was intended to be distant from partisan or party representations. As a space of debate the Forum is not a body that makes decisions and participants do not deliberate on its behalf. According to the charter “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.” Over the years, however, the Forum has taken on some limited structure with a small Secretariat and staff in Sao Paulo, Brazil and an International Council of about 150 representatives of NGOs and social movements who meet periodically and take decisions particularly around the dates, frequency and location of future World Social Forums.

Over time the World Social Forum has been accompanied by a proliferation of regional and local Forums (see articles in this issues as well as Glasius and Timms 2006). In addition World Social Forum gatherings grow in size and change in terms of organizing processes and priorities. Each WSF proves to be very much a creature of the time and place in which it occurs. Thus, the first three Forums from 2001-3 in Porto Alegre, Brazil look much different than those of 2004 in Mumbai, India, or the three polycentric Forums in Mali, Pakistan and Venezuela in 2006. Most recently the WSF has taken place in Nairobi, Kenya in 2007 and again in Belém, Brazil in 2009. In 2010 the WSF will facilitate a global day of mobilization in place of one WSF

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<sup>2</sup> The participants were: Marc Becker, Scott Byrd, Janet Conway, Michael Hardt Matt Kaneshiro, Thomas Ponniah, Ruth Reitan, Peter J. Smith, Elizabeth Smythe, Alberto Teixeira da Silva and Sylvia Escárcega Zamarrón. Note that portions of the Ponniah contribution appeared on [www.zmag.org](http://www.zmag.org), Conway’s on [www.rabble.ca](http://www.rabble.ca), and Becker’s on his website at [www.yachana.com](http://www.yachana.com).

event, and in 2011 it will return to Africa as Dakar, Senegal will play host.<sup>3</sup> In each instance the location choice is deliberate and intended to both highlight key concerns or issues and stimulate and further develop regional and local networks. Consequently, the International Council made a calculated political decision to hold the Forum in the city at the mouth of the Amazon in Northeastern Brazil, a region at the very heart of the struggle over a model of development and its environmental consequences that threaten the way of life of indigenous peoples with global implications.

While it is normally the case that each Forum draws from the local region, the 2009 WSF was very much a Brazilian Forum because of its remote location and cost of international travel. In terms of numbers involved Belem was large compared to other gatherings. According to one of the organizers, Candido Grzybowski of IBASE, 115,000 people registered. There were 15,000 in the youth camp and in total, 133,000 people participated, coming from 142 countries, although Brazil was by far the best represented (estimated at around 60%).<sup>4</sup> It included 1,900 indigenous people of 190 ethnic groups and tribes, plus 1,400 "quilombolas" (descendants of runaway African slaves). Of the 5,808 organizations involved, 4183 were from South America, 489 from Africa, 491 from Europe and 334 from Central America, 155 from North America and 27 from Australia and New Zealand (Kirk 2009). Thus, the thematic landscape of the sessions and events was related to the host's continent and the struggles reflected there. In this case, neo-liberal globalization influences the nature and pace of development in the region and its implications for people, especially indigenous people, and for the environment. At the same time broader themes such as climate change and concerns over human rights are also addressed—shaped not just by place, but also by the temporal context in which the Forum occurs.

As in 2003, the looming US invasion of Iraq shaped its themes and preoccupations, so in 2009 the financial crisis and the accompanying economic dislocation of the United States, and the election of a more progressive African-American president had an impact. The further development of global climatic and food crises as focal issues, and the recent Israeli incursion into Gaza also clearly shaped the themes and discussions in Belém. There have also been major political changes in South America since the Forum began. As Thomas Ponniah observed "the Forum arose in 2001 in a context in which social movements were strong but progressive state actors were weak" in Latin America. In contrast in January 2009 it is safe to say that the left has been on the rise as reflected in the presence of four of these leaders in Belém during the Forum which we discuss below. Now as Mark Becker points out, the "rejection of neoliberalism had quickly become the dominant discourse."

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<sup>3</sup> See the World Social Forum website (<http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>) for upcoming social forums and other mobilizations including the US Social Forum occurring June 22-26, 2010 in Detroit, Michigan ([www.ussf2010.org](http://www.ussf2010.org)).

<sup>4</sup> This estimate is based on estimates from registrations and the total number of participants. One of the problems with such estimates concerns the manner in which people registered on site; with many people having not been asked for contact information which would include country of origin. Numbers can be accessed at [www.ibase.br](http://www.ibase.br).

### Belém Organization and Key Themes

The way in which themes are identified as the framework around which the Forum is organized has evolved over time. The thematic consultation has moved away from a top-down process of organizing themes and highlighting them with major events anchored around well-known public intellectuals and activists like Noam Chomsky or Aruhdhati Roy. After some criticism the WSF in 2005 moved to a more bottom-up process where groups participated in on-line consultations and offered proposals for themes. These were then cross-referenced and common elements identified. In 2005 this resulted in 13 themes, each of which was assigned a physical venue on site where events and activities were held. The WSF has continued to follow this process of encouraging organizations and movements to participate in the identification or modification of themes and to organize theme-linked activities. In the case of Belém, the WSF built on the nine themes identified for the WSF in Nairobi and launched an iterative consultation process around them in May 2008. Three hundred groups and organizations responded by the close in late July and the result was the identification of ten “theme objectives for action” to which groups could link up to four self-organized events. The additions made to the 2007 themes from the 2009 WSF are indicated in bold below as well as the percentage of self-organized sessions and workshops in 2009 facilitated for each theme in parentheses.

1. For the construction of a world of peace, justice, ethics and respect for different spiritualities, free of weapons, especially nuclear ones (6.6%)
2. For the release of the world domain **by capital**, multinationals corporations, imperialist, **patriarchal, colonial and neo-colonial** domination and unequal systems of commerce, **by cancelling the impoverish countries debt** (8.0%)
3. For universal and sustainable access to the common property of mankind and nature, for the preservation of our planet and its resources, particularly water, forests **and renewable energy sources** (10.5%)
4. For the democratization **and independence** of knowledge, **culture and communication** and for the creation of a system of shared knowledge **and acquirement** with the dismantling of Intellectual Property Rights (8.6%)
5. For the dignity, diversity, ensuring the equality of gender, race, **ethnicity, generation, sexual orientation** and elimination of all forms of discrimination and caste (discrimination based on descent) (9.1)
6. For insurance (during the lifetime use of all people) of the economic, social, human, cultural and environmental rights, particularly the rights to food, health, education, housing, employment and decent work, **communication and food security and sovereignty** (21.8%)
7. For the construction of a world order based on sovereignty, self-determination and on people's rights, **including minorities and migrants** (4.2%)
8. For the construction of a democratic, emancipator, sustainable and solidarity economy, focused on **every** people and **based on ethical and fair trade** (5.4%)
9. For the construction and expansion of truly **local, national and global** democratic political **and economic** structures and institutions, with the participation of people in decisions and control of public affairs and resources (12.0%).

10. **For the defense of the environment (Amazonic and others ecosystems) as source of life for the planet Earth and for the originary peoples of the world (indigenous, afro-descendent, tribal and riverine), that demand their territories, languages, cultures, identities, environmental justice, spiritually and right to live.** (6.1%)
11. Other: for proposed sessions and workshops that submitted no theme by choice or omission (7.8%)

Clearly the insertion of the tenth theme is a reflection of the significant emphasis on the environment, the Amazon ecosystem and indigenous peoples in 2009. Notable as well is the addition of explicit references to food security and sovereignty. The dominant theme, as in other WSFs, was number 6 which is chiefly concerned with the issue of human rights, with over 20% of the sessions and workshops. Environmental issues (if you were to combine theme 3 and 10) saw a clear increase in its percentage, nearly 17% of events, compared with previous Forums (2005 and 2007) where the theme was under 10% of the total sessions and workshops. Following the identification of the themes the activities and the program are organized around them. Unlike the WSF in 2005 however, the venue was not organized according to the themes rather the activities were split between two very different universities; the Federal University of Para (UFPA) and The Federal Rural University of the Amazon (UFRA) (Conway).

In addition the venues included a series of thematic tents which had organized activities for groups of people expected to be between 100 to 300 participants. The Federal Rural University of the Amazon hosted the bulk of these tents some of which were thematic and others that were issue specific. They included: Curumin Ere (dealt with children and adolescents); Afro-negritude-Quilombola; Indigenous Peoples; Panamazonica; three Multi-use tents; Collective Rights of Stateless People and Nations; Sister Dorothy (a reference to Sister Dorothy Stang—an activist nun who was murdered for her work in the Amazon); Urban Reform; Human Rights; Social Cartography. Most of these tents were stretched out along a long dusty road with fenced lush tropical green spaces. UFRA also hosted the large youth camp along the sides of the road. In contrast, the rest of the thematic tents, including the ecumenical and inter-religious space, the world of work (labour) and the Cuba 50 Year Anniversary Tent, were located at the other university, the Federal Public University of Para. Some critics argued that this physical dislocation of events had the effect, given the difficulty of moving easily or quickly from one venue to the other in the traffic, heat, humidity and daily afternoon downpour of rain, of essentially re-enforcing the gap between the more resourced non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements—a perennial issue at the World Social Forums. The reality however, is that many groups and organizations had activities located in both venues, however the capacity of individuals to more easily from one venue to the other was clearly limited.<sup>5</sup>

The new emphasis on indigenous people and the Amazon was also reflected in the program and activities which began with an opening ceremony on January 27 followed by the traditional march through the city's downtown. This was followed on January 28 by a day of

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<sup>5</sup> Attempting the journey by land taxi was nearly impossible during certain times of the day, but for more adventurous individuals there was a fleet of agua taxis making the trip back and forth in much less time from each campus (both campuses were located on the riverbank) for 2 Real—approximately \$1.50 USD.

activities devoted to Pan-Amazonia and the impacts of activities such as mining and deforestation particularly on the indigenous peoples of the region.

## **MULTIPLE CRISES: FROM ECONOMIC TO ECOLOGICAL TO CIVILIZATIONAL**

In this section we try to summarize our impressions of the major themes and issues that were addressed by participants at the Forum. Ruth Reitan describes these in terms of a series of crises which we use to organize some of the observations and comments of our contributors.

### **The Economic and Financial Crisis**

Among the themes outlined for the Forum several addressed aspects of the international economic and financial system including 2, 6 and 8 above. As with many past WSF gatherings the Belém Forum combined elements that included the analysis of the origins and implications of the global financial crisis and testimonies of its real impact on people and communities. Organizations and networks like the Transnational Institute and Our World is Not For Sale participated in a three-part workshop on “A Global Answer to the Financial Crisis: A Cross Networking Seminar”. These activities culminated in a series of events focussed specifically on defining an alternative set of proposals under the title “Citizens Response to the Financial Crisis: A New Financial System is Possible” which were presented in the Assemblies discussed below. These go far beyond the regulatory and stimulus proposals of governments and look at alternatives which put finances at the service of people and communities and address issues of redistribution and progressive taxation. A call was also made for activists to mobilize and come to London on April 2, 2009 to challenge leaders at the G20 meetings.

The focus of another set of activities linked very specifically to the second theme outlined above and the power of multinational capital. Panels on “Rolling back the power of Transnationals” linked activists in Latin America with those in the European Union countries to examine ways to hold European MNCs accountable for their actions in Latin America through the use of Peoples Tribunals. The issues raised had clear links to a number of other crises discussed below and are part, as one participant noted, of “inter-linked crises”. Participants recognized that while recent events have led to surprising state actions to preserve capitalism they do not herald a new way of thinking and many of the measures to date have benefitted multinationals and the financial sector. There was broad agreement that while this crisis may pose an opportunity there is a real need both to articulate alternatives and mobilize trans-nationally.

The trade policy of the European Union was the focus of two more sessions “Unmasking the Global Europe Strategy and Partnership Agreements” and followed with a discussion of Trade Policy of the European Union in Latin America and Strategies of bi-regional resistance and alternatives. Again activists from the European Union countries and from Latin America discussed the role of European multinationals and strategies to expose the extent to which their activities in extractive sectors, financing dams and the privatization of public services threaten local communities, the environment and indigenous peoples in regions of South America.

The Belém WSF saw as well an enhanced attention to re-localizing economies represented in the huge number of activities addressing the solidarity economy outlined in theme eight above. This presence has been facilitated by the creation of an international network and

many activities during the Belém WSF linking local activists in Brazil with those in countries such as India to Canada and addressed questions ranging from re-localizing food systems to land rights for women.

### **Climate Change, the Amazon, and Environmental Crisis**

The Belém WSF saw for perhaps the first time the environmental crisis come to the forefront at a WSF. As Alberto Texeira da Silva notes the choice of a city in the Amazon region, “a rich and vital territory of resources, cultural heritage and biological diversity” which is shared by eight countries was not an accident. It is, he argues, the epicentre of the struggle over a sustainable future for the planet. Beset by threats such as “poverty, inequality, economic stagnation, corruption, violence and climatic catastrophes”, the situation in the region cries out for linking across networks and movements. As he points out the Pan Amazon day included three major themes: Development, climatic change, environmental justice, security and food sovereignty; Work, human rights, economic, social, cultural and environmental; and Land, territory, identity, national and popular sovereignty, regional integration.

The issue of climate change intersected with many other themes and activities during the Belem WSF—from trade to tourism, women’s and indigenous rights, food sovereignty and housing. Climate Justice Now!, a network of over 200 organizations from both the global south and north, held extensive meetings focusing on climate and ecological debt, the Amazon, and false solutions to the climate crisis. They also used the Forum as an opportunity to empower participation by more southern organizations, especially indigenous groups from the Amazon and the rest of South America (Byrd). Many indigenous communities throughout Amazonia have been hit hard not only by the effects of climate change, predominantly desertification and flooding, but also through the myriad of ways South American governments in concert with mostly outside private entities are seeking to take advantage of the “carbon offsets” that the Amazon provides. Indigenous populations are threatened by displacement both through “environmental protection” of fragile ecosystems and through the mono-cropping of tree plantations established to act as carbon sinks. Additionally, networks such as Climate Justice Now! and other organizations used the Forum space to plan mobilizations and common campaigns working towards the UNFCCC negotiations held last December in Copenhagen.

### **Indigenous Peoples, Buen Vivir, and the Crisis of Civilization**

By far one of the most notable aspects of the 2009 Forum was the visibility of indigenous people and their concerns. Once confined to the margins of the Forum selling crafts, the struggles of indigenous peoples were highlighted both in the program, in the thematic tent and in the Assemblies on the final day. As Miguel Palacín from the Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI) noted "for indigenous peoples, our participation in the Forum was very important." (Becker) The principle themes discussed included the crisis of civilization, decolonization, collective rights, self-determination, climatic justice, and defence of the Amazon.

The struggle for recognition of indigenous rights has often taken place in international arenas dominated, as Sylvia Escarcéga Zamorrón points out, by states and international organizations where a unified front was required, in contrast to the WSF, where indigenous people were able to interact with each other and an array of other movements. This created some

challenges however. While the struggles of indigenous people and issues of environmental justice were at the forefront of the Forum it does not mean there were not real divisions and struggles. Indigenous people had a limited voice in the organization of the Forum, were sometimes not treated appropriately or with respect, and were often seen by local non-indigenous Brazilians as exotic. At the same time their meetings and activities identified a “crisis of civilization” and put forward alternatives including a different view captured in the notion of “buen vivir”, living well. Indigenous delegates also sought to mobilize and made a call to organize a global mobilization for mother earth on October 12, 2009, the day often marked as the “discovery” of the Americas by Columbus.

### **Human Rights: An Expanding Theme**

The prominence of various other themes has also changed over time. In recent gatherings of the WSF the theme of human rights has become a central one reflected in the growing proportion of activities and discussions at the WSF which link to it. This was seen again in Belém in themes 5, 6 and 7 above and the large number of activities linked to them. The Forum included a wide range of debates on human rights and the impact of globalization on them and the expansion, as Peter J. Smith observed, of the concept of rights, especially in relation to free trade and the right to food. He notes as well the concern about the loss of women’s rights to livelihood reflected in a series of panels which argued that “the concept of women’s economic, social and cultural rights must be expanded so that achieving a decent life becomes recognized by the United Nations as a human right” (Smith). Participants argued that “neo-liberal globalization and climate change threaten the key conditions necessary for women’s livelihoods such as the right to land, water, forests, food and income security”

Rights were also the focus of activities and discussion about strategies for holding corporations accountable for human rights violations and the need to develop norms that are part of an international human rights regime. The strong emphasis on the discourse of human rights was also reflected in the case of indigenous peoples and the challenge of implementing the recently passed UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” Indigenous participants from Kenya and the Amazon challenged the effectiveness of such declarations when they remain the domain of NGOs and lawyers. As these critics pointed out, without translation and dissemination few in their villages know their collective rights.

As in many other themes addressed at the WSF there were differences amongst participants over the rights discourse which has emerged and its uncritical reliance on universality, the UN human rights system, and its lack of attention to questions of power. In fact questions of political power have been a part of the Forum since its inception and we now turn to it as one of the perennial questions with which activists and scholars studying the Forum process have wrestled.

## PERENNIAL QUESTIONS

### The WSF and its Relationship to Political Power

Political power both private and public has been a recurring tension and issue in the development of the World Social Forum as a space which is supposed to be political but not partisan. Clearly the support of left governments in the city of Porto Alegre and the state Rio Grande do Sul were crucial to the development of the Forum in its early years. This was no different in Belém where the PT controlled government of the state of Para provided 11 million dollars worth of infrastructure and funds (Kirk 2009) and had a prominent presence in publicity and sponsoring of various facilities. As Hardt indicates the relations between social movements and left governments in Latin America has reflected two conflicting attitudes. The first is one of resistance which refuses the structures of representation and the second one of support which trusts in them. The state is necessary to achieve the goals of the movements, as Ponniah points out, because of the resources it provides but while outright resistance may be unwise, naïve support may be as well. The presence of five political leaders in Belém once more highlighted this tension within the WSF and made for a number of ironies.

Political leaders in Latin America from Lula to Chavez have continued to claim the WSF and the social movements gathered under its name for their own since the beginning. Groups and movements within the Forum continue to be divided over their presence. The delicate balance has usually been struck by having such leaders speak at a venue which is adjacent to, but not formally part of, the WSF venue. While cheering crowds greeted the newly elected Lula in 2003, his assertion in 2005 “I belong here” just before he jetted off to Davos and the World Economic Forum was met with some jeers as disillusionment with his presidency had set in, while Chavez was cheered. Belém reflected the new reality of the rising tide of left governments in South America and the desire of at least some movements to engage with them. The gathering of the four leaders of Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Paraguay, at the invitation of the Via Campesina network and its most prominent member the Landless Workers Movement (the MST) to meet with a select group of 1000 activists on the afternoon of January 29 reflected this ambivalence, since Lula himself had deliberately not been invited. While showing a willingness to engage with the political leaders of Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay and Venezuela, Stedile of the MST made clear, according to reports (Gonzalez 2009), that they had to move more quickly and undertake more radical structural change. It was only at the invitation of the other four leaders that Lula joined them in the former airport hanger turned auditorium for the evening event, a roundtable discussion on “Latin America and the challenges of the international crisis.” With the presence of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Fernando Lugo, Evo Morales, and Inacio Lula da Silva on stage media around the world took notice. Correa called for a new model, “a socialism for the twenty-first century.”

Yet many of the issues that were being addressed back at the campuses the next day including issues of de-forestation, bio-fuels and the impact of mining and agri-business on traditional and indigenous communities occurred under Lula’s watch. The president continues to regard the Amazon as an “inexhaustible resource” which requires more roads and dams to develop.

### Voices Heard and Not Heard

The city of Belém and its 1.4 million inhabitants provided a major contrast with the city of Porto Alegre which has hosted the Forum four times previously in Brazil. Poorer and more ethnically diverse, Belém showed the stark contrasts of first world with its gleaming revitalized waterfront areas of chic restaurants and bars and the dusty, crumbling roads, sidewalks and allies of the very poor neighbourhoods surrounding the two university venues, much like the 2007 Nairobi Forum had.

As our articles in this volume illustrate the issue of inclusion continues to be a concern. NGOs dominate at the WSF because they have the resources. Yet the space of the WSF is intended to be inclusive and diverse. However some voices are not heard. In the WSF in Nairobi it was those of the slums, Africans themselves. In Belém there was a clear commitment to raise up the struggles of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon and indigenous people in general as reflected in the opening ceremonies, the march on the first day, the Pan Amazonia day on the 28 of January and the assemblies on the final day.

Those outside Brazil, even from neighbouring countries in South America, were also there in relatively small numbers as were those from more distant areas of the global south. Part of this silencing of other voices was related to language. At this Forum translation was limited to only a minority of the sessions—1400 of the over 2000 events were in Portuguese only (Brand and Sekler 2009). Many dealing with the most pressing issues of the region including the struggles in the Amazon were only in Portuguese. Much of the translation in the self-organized sessions which was provided was paid for by better-resourced NGOs reinforcing the communication gap with local movements and activists.

On the other hand, new voices were heard, those of the indigenous peoples, especially of the Amazon region, those of the quilombolos, albeit much less loudly than those of the Amazon peoples, and the stateless people of Palestine. While clearly their issues were linked to the thematic tent addressing Collective Rights of Stateless People and Nations their concerns were often linked to broader themes at the Forum. For example in a panel organized by Via Campesina, including participants from Haiti, Mozambique, and Palestine the environmental/agricultural dimensions of the conquest of Palestinian territory and issues like Israel's appropriation of the water resources in the territory in 1967 and the more recent burning of fields of crop land and olive trees were highlighted allowing Palestinians struggles to be framed within broader land issues and concerns (Kaneshiro). Organizations such as the network of Arab women brought Palestinians refugees face to face with Brazilian peace activists (Bourque 2009).

WSF organizers have also continued to try to use technology to bridge the distances of geography and include more voices. Belem Expanded—a new way for those who cannot come to Belém to express their participation was introduced in 2009. Local events and action were connected with a group in Belem via the internet, telephone, radio broadcasts and screening of video using the social networking website of the WSF ([www.openfsm.net](http://www.openfsm.net)). The Forum continued to offer itself as a space where existing networks can broaden, reinforce and develop further as has been the case in the past.

## Networking

Expanding and developing transnational networks remains a key aspect of the social Forum process. As Matt Kaneshiro points out, surveys of past social Forums conducted by the Department of Sociology and the Institute for Research on World-Systems (IROWS) at the University of California, Riverside “indicate that 46.2% of the sample attended the Forum to network, and 30.7% to organize. A sizable portion of activists reported an intention to connect with others and collaborate on campaigns at the Forum.”<sup>6</sup> Many of our contributors saw evidence of this along with the interconnection of many of the themes and campaigns. As Kaneshiro notes:

*A common grievance at the indigenous tent was agribusiness’ effect on the indigenous lifestyle: land dispossession, pollution, and deforestation – all of which threaten the very lives of the indigenous people. Here one sees the intersection between environmentalism, indigenous rights (and race relations), and basic human rights. Agribusiness leads to the displacement of peoples, leading to the death of children from polluted rivers, or poverty and prostitution in towns due to the complete overturning of their (previously sustainable) economies. The linking of environmental issues with other movements was a ubiquitous theme found in the self-managed activities, the Environmental Tent, and the Human Rights Tent.*

In Belém there was a real emphasis on encouraging and facilitating cross-network convergence as reflected in the final in a workshop on Friday January 30 where a cross network space was devoted to addressing alternatives and strategies of mobilization around the crises of food, climate, finance, social, labor, and water.

## Mobilization

The development at recent Forums of a space on the final day for thematic assemblies to develop and present their alternatives, proposals for changes and calls to action and mobilization seems also to have laid to rest in large part the debate about the Forum as space or movement. The argument of a number of its founders that it is intended to be a space—“non-deliberative and non-decision-making” space had been challenged particularly in 2005 when 19 eminent persons during the WSF issued a manifesto of common proposals. Since that time Forums have allowed space on the final day for assemblies which are separate from the Forum where statements, proposal, and calls to action can be issued, as did the Assembly of Assemblies in the mud and rain on the final afternoon in Belém. The final Assembly of the Social Movements issued a statement “We Won’t Pay for the Crisis, the Rich have to pay for it!” that called for radical change that meets “social needs and respects nature’s rights as well as supporting democratic participation in a context of full political freedom.” (Assembly 2009) While divisions still exist between more radical and reformist elements as they have for some time in the global justice movement the statement identifies some proposal that all share and recognizes a different ethos of living articulated by the indigenous people in a call for “the construction of a society based on a

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<sup>6</sup> Much of IROWS’ research on the Social Forums can be found here: <http://www.irows.ucr.edu/>

life live in harmony with oneself, others and the world around by acknowledging the active participation and contribution of the native peoples.”

## CONCLUSION

The global financial crisis taken together with other interconnected global challenges questions the legitimacy of global neo-liberalism capitalism. Given that the Forum was intended as a space to define alternatives and struggle against neo-liberalism there was a sense of a crisis of civilization and of the immanence and real possibility for change and transformation which stood in stark contrast to the glum images of bickering political leaders and bewildered CEOs at the 2009 World Economic Forum. Clearly the climate crisis, environmental issues, and the struggles of indigenous peoples were more central to WSF than ever before. As Michael Hardt notes the way the Forum organizers “have continually sought to open it to new populations and experiences” is impressive. New networks addressing real concrete alternatives such as international solidarity economies, reparations and adaption funds for climate victims, and an international declaration of rights for displaced peoples have emerged. The rapid economic decline during 2008 had, as Ruth Reitan observed, created a “decentered and radically open plain of collective uncertainty, vulnerability, and possibility. In the space of the Belem Forum, I could sense that another world IS possible, but it is a wild one, in all its connotations, good and bad.”

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Moghadam, Valentine M. 2005. *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 251 Pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801880247, Paper, \$22.00.**

[Ed. note: this book received honorable mention in the 2006 Political Economy of the World-System book awards].

In sociology, much of the current research on development notes the adverse affects of globalization on women, especially economic, but fails to offer a critical feminist analysis of its inherently gendered processes. A few scholars such as Cynthia Enloe (see *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, 1989, California) have sought to examine how global relationships, especially among state actors, rely upon traditional gender constructions but the overall literature is sparse. Valentine M. Moghadam offers a welcome contribution in *Globalizing Women* which bridges the divide between feminist sociology and world-systems analysis.

Moghadam argues that feminist organizers have become important nonstate political actors in the contemporary world-system, with the power to mobilize resources against “the hegemonic and particularistic aspects of globalization.” This mobilization is made possible and augmented by social ties that transcend national boundaries, which Moghadam refers to as “transnational feminist networks” (TFNs). Members of these networks are united by a common agenda such as antimilitarism or reproductive rights and their activities generally include lobbying policy makers, monitoring government action, sending action alerts, attending conferences, organizing protests, and composing petitions. In this way, TFNs represent a dialectic within globalization in which those that have been adversely affected are now mobilizing to mediate its affects.

*Globalizing Women* extends Moghadam’s previous sociological research connecting the contradictory effects of globalization on women with a proliferation of feminist transnational activism. The detailed attention to the goals and barriers faced by feminists in their struggle for gender-based equality in the contemporary world-system make a path-breaking contribution.

Feminist readers will appreciate Moghadam’s deep commitment to understanding global feminism from the inside out. As a senior researcher with the WIDER Institute of the United Nations University (World Institute for Development Economics Research), Moghadam had unique access to TFN representatives permitting the use of qualitative methodology. Her analysis of TFNs is based upon her own observations as a participant at international meetings and conferences as well as interview data gathered from representatives of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), WEDO (Women’s Environment and Development Organization), SIGI (Sisterhood is Global Institute), and WLUML (Women Living Under Muslim Law). Additional secondary sources include TFN publications and website information. However, the focus of *Globalizing Women* is not upon profiles of TFN members as much as the broader context of TFN formation and their contributions in an era of increasing globalization. Consistent with world polity theory, Moghadam argues that the diffusion of information among feminist organizations (which rapidly increased with internet technology) in response to the

deleterious effects of globalization fostered the creation and proliferation of a global feminist community and a collective movement for women's rights as "human rights."

Overall, *Globalizing Women* is well-written and clearly organized. In the preface, Moghadam begins with an overview of her research methods followed by a lengthy glossary of Acronyms and Terms. Readers may want to bookmark this page, as they will refer back to this list often. In chapter one, Moghadam presents her main argument suggesting that a transnational feminist movement exists within the larger global justice movement and offers human-rights based alternatives to capitalist globalization. These alternatives are based upon the conception of globalization as a gendered process responsible for the feminization of labor and rising social inequalities in a hierarchical world-system.

Chapter two reviews the competing perspectives on the defining features and gender dynamics of globalization. Moghadam advocates for a broader theoretical exploration of globalization that considers gender a central point of analysis. Using both Marxist feminism and the logic of world-systems analysis, Moghadam describes how women's position in the world-system is affected by patriarchal institutional forms (multinational corporations, state agencies, etc.) with the most influential actors located in core countries. Here, Moghadam is careful to discuss both the pros and cons of globalization, particularly those associated with women's increased labor participation and the dwindling role of the welfare state. While free market expansion has created low-wage jobs for women in developing regions, the quality of jobs has not always elevated women's social status and new informal economies such as sex tourism have created dangerous employment opportunities for women. These scenarios motivate TFNs and activists "on the ground" to demand action.

This attention to women's labor continues in chapter three where Moghadam articulates how worldwide expansion of a female labor force, the role of female labor in the global economy, and the persistence of social and gender inequalities underpin the rise of TFNs on a global scale. She argues that free-market globalization has led to increased inequality, particularly in developing and less-developed countries, where women workers bear the brunt of regional crises resulting from neo-liberal policies. TFNs have supported women workers by voicing concern that decision-making among global institutions is undemocratic and that many financial and trade agreements undermine international regimes on human rights, worker's rights, and environmental protection. Moghadam provides several examples of how TFNs like WIDE and WEDO have mobilized around women's labor issues.

Yet, the actions of TFNs range dramatically. In chapter four, Moghadam describes the collective consciousness and identity of TFNs and highlights their differences and unique characteristics. She carefully describes how TFNs vary by class privilege and organizational style; WIDE and WEDO for example, are well-funded and managed by highly educated women while others function with meager resources. Additionally, many TFNs make concerted efforts to avoid masculine styles of organizational management in their day to day functions. Some also refrain from accepting money from outside organizations and/or from offering paid employment, as these conditions invite potential conflict, especially for women activists living and working under oppressive gender regimes.

Nevertheless, TFNs are united by common feminist issues that transcend location. Moghadam argues that international feminist organizations formed a transnational or supranational network around common concerns for gender equality. In turn, these networks facilitated information exchange, feminist research, and a supportive community.

An interesting extension of this chapter might include an analysis of how some TFNs may disagree on certain feminist issues such as female genital mutilation or abortion. This may provide a more nuanced perspective on how cultural differences shape and possibly divide feminist organizing. Unfortunately, Moghadam touches only briefly (one paragraph at the end of chapter six) on how religion can divide feminists.

In chapter five, Moghadam describes TFN critiques of neoliberal capitalism which highlight the need for both economic justice and gender justice. Structural adjustment and global trade policies increased social inequality around the world, especially for women who were a source of cheap labor for companies in developing regions. In response, TFNs sought change by advocating policy in defense of the welfare state, the natural environment, and economic policies for women by women. Moghadam summarizes the valuable contributions of DAWN, WIDE, and WEDO - three TFNs countering neoliberalism.

Chapter six, "Feminists versus Fundamentalists" is, by far, the most compelling chapter in *Globalizing Women*. In this chapter, Moghadam discusses how TFNs such as WLUML and SIGI mobilized in response to the combined effects of capitalism and Islamic fundamentalism. These TFNs are united by the daunting task of advocating for gender equality in the context of a society influenced by the religious teachings of Islam. Groups like WLUML and SIGI must rely less on formal ties to governmental and UN agencies and more upon social and professional networks because they view governmental networks as patriarchal, authoritarian, and corrupt. Both groups have successfully weakened the power of some authoritarian Islamic regimes by educating women of their rights and internationally denouncing gender-based violence such as honor killings. Moghadam credits TFNs with the global dissemination of information on the atrocities committed against women and girls in Algeria during the 1990s and in Afghanistan under Taliban leadership.

In chapter seven, Moghadam details the challenges of feminist organizing. This chapter will be much appreciated by readers familiar with the barriers and frustration of grassroots organizing. Moghadam finds that TFNs that limit or refuse external funding are generally more radical ideologically and less effective compared with others, due to fewer resources and less structured organizations. For instance, the Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (AWMR) is an anticapitalist, antimilitarist, group that functions entirely on volunteer labor with no offices, paid staff, or stable financial resources. Due to these limited resources, AWMR is unable to network at international conferences and develop into a larger, more professional organization. However, they hold regional conferences dedicating most of their efforts towards improving conditions for women in Mediterranean regions. Though AWMR has achieved some goals including resolutions on violence against women in Algeria, Yugoslavia, and Turkey, their activities are severely constrained restricting them from extending feminist efforts beyond domestic politics.

Moghadam's final chapter synthesizes her findings that TFNs have created a collective consciousness of global feminism around universal women's issues such as women's human rights and that TFNs represent a challenge to capitalism and its patriarchal institutional powers. Moghadam concludes by suggesting a closer alignment of global feminism with the labor movement. Given the exploitation of female labor and the increasing participation of women in unions, an alliance is entirely possible and could, potentially, reorient globalization processes from being market-driven to people-driven.

At the end of *Globalizing Women*, the reader has become more familiar with a fascinating community of feminist activists and can situate their goals within the context of a patriarchal and capitalist world-system. Therefore, this book has much to offer students of inequality and globalization as well as a general audience interested in the subject matter. Moghadam's work is a defining example of how feminist scholarship can provide further insight on globalization and development. While the critical feminist reader may wish for a deeper understanding of how TFNs deal with the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality in global feminist activism, Moghadam is the first to document in detail the efforts and struggles of TFNs and their role in the world polity. As feminist networks continue to align with other social movement organizations, it will be interesting to observe the changing status of women in the future world-system.

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**Baronov, David. 2008. *The African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 248 pages, ISBN-13: 978-1-59213-915-6 Cloth (\$49.50).**

David Baronov's *The African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange* provides an exhilarating if somewhat repetitive tour of the ways in which African medical practices have appropriated and modified western medical practices in Africa while also valorizing the worth of the social medicine practiced there by indigenous healers. These practitioners are able to use these western techniques in addition to their own traditional ones. But the title of the book is somewhat misleading as it could also be interpreted to make a case for the African transformation of western medicine in western countries, something Baronov hints at but does not really demonstrate. Still, Baronov is a clear, interesting writer and handles the theoretically and factually dense material that he presents very well.

Baronov begins by announcing that he plans to take a more culturalist than structuralist stance with regard to world systems. Thus the current world-system should be analyzed more in terms of a single system over the *longue duree* than as broken into its system components of core, periphery, and semiperiphery. Here, his narrative is more evocative of Braudel than Wallerstein, as he seems to favor a postmodern as opposed to positivist way of seeing cultural developments in world systems. He does a beautiful job, however, in demonstrating the ways in which western "tropical medicine" was used to usher in western colonial domination in Africa, showing how some justified this incursion on simply the humanitarian grounds of health delivery to Africans alone. It is particularly ironic, as he shows, that such western mandates as concentration of workers for industrial agriculture, or deforestation (which led to an epidemic of malarial mosquitoes in newly heated pools) caused a greater "need" for western medicine.

Indeed, the story of colonization in medical terms is one of the strongest aspects of the book. Matching this in importance, though, is the story of Africa's pluralistic medical practitioners (PMPs), or traditional healers, who, we learn, artfully combine traditional methods, a respect for empiricism (they learn as they practice and from others' past practices), and a little

realized (in the core, which stereotypes them as “witch-doctors”) respect for Western methods, when the PMP judges them to be appropriate.

Baronov’s first chapter, which deals with his theoretical foundation, is very well done, and begins to lay out a foundation for the incorporation of more culturally-based orientations as part of world systems theory. Here, he suggests that medicine, wherever practiced, inevitably incorporates empirical (“facts” and objects), conceptual (social relations and power), and interpretive (symbolic cultural expression that reifies values and beliefs) issues, all of which may operate in contradiction to one another. This point of view refreshingly teases apart the taken for granted in medicine.

Another strong aspect of this book is Baronov’s section on the evolution of medicine in the West, with special attention given to the history of health care in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America. Although this particular story is also told in other places, he encapsulates it well, and uses it to demonstrate the notion of the somewhat arbitrary nature of medicine as socially constructed as well as scientifically derived. In the 1800s, the United States, too, had more PMP-like practitioners, with its wide array of homeopaths, naturopaths, osteopaths, chiropractors, and so on. Only a few of these classes are now professionally recognized, and the proportional number of training and practice opportunities has declined exponentially for practitioners other than allopaths, the group we recognize as medical doctors today.

Baronov asserts that biomedicine can be broken into three spheres, scientific enterprise, symbolic cultural expression, and manifestation of social power. As a scientific enterprise, biomedicine reifies the triumphalist nature of 19<sup>th</sup> Century science, and is based on seeing nature, including bodies, as physical machinery, subject to statistically normative evaluation, and also subject to critique and correction when statistical deviation from normative expectations occurs. For Baronov, this point of view must be taken into account, but he argues that the West has remained preoccupied with it at the expense of the other two points of view, which are not similarly discarded by Africa’s PMPs.

When seen as symbolic-cultural expression, the role of western biomedicine as an ideology becomes clearer. In its often repeated assertions about the superiority of biomedicine over other world medical practices, biomedicine asserts the superiority of western thinking across the board. PMPs in Africa, by contrast, rightly see western practices as only one of a variety of techniques that can be brought to bear when disease occurs.

As social power, biomedicine deploys its own forms of western bureaucratic organizations that serve to reinforce the general nature of the western-type state writ large. It has health systems, hospitals, networks of licensing and accreditation, and public health apparatuses, all of which serve to reinforce the power of “rational” western or western-type institutions, all to the benefit of capitalist and imperialist interests ultimately. Africa, however, more than most other settings, has been resistant to this form of medical institutionalization, and its people and PMPs, although willing to use medical-organizational resources, are often still interested in maintaining traditional medical resources as well.

As a more holistic form of practice, African medicine (in the traditional sense) entertains the notion of there being “two spears” that must be taken into account in treating the diseased body. The idea comes from the idea that natural causes can kill or injure, but that there is also a supernatural (read social) area that incorporates all the other dimensions of a person’s life above the level of the body in isolation. This can kill or injure as well. Treating the body alone without treating with the levels above it is a fruitless endeavor.

A potential criticism of this book, however, is that it romanticizes folk medicine to some extent. Often, the tacit goal of such medicine in pre-modern formations is to promote group survival, especially in symbolic-cultural ways, at the expense of the individual body in many cases. This is appropriate to traditional society, but as societies modernize (in world systems terms, aspire to the semi-periphery or core), it becomes less so. Modern societies are perhaps appropriately focused on individual health, and public health conceived of as a scientifically derived system. In recent years, a belated emphasis on patients' social networks (family, work, etc.) has been taken up by treatment teams, but this holism has resulted from the development of western social work, not from embracing traditional systems. Where elements of traditional medicine have been appropriated, they have been either in the form of effective medicaments (Baronov points this out), or as outcomes-justified techniques, like acupuncture. Also, the book is layered in such a way that one often gets the impression that one has read very similar material earlier.

*The African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange* embraces a relatively new area in world systems analysis: the exploration of discrete cultural flows. As such, it offers richness as it explores the particular natures of global locations and cultures. Baronov's focus is so precise here, in fact, that potential attention to world systems *qua* broad ecological market systems is muted, except insofar as the story of imperialism in Africa is retold from a fresh, medical vantage point. The particular smaller system-dynamics of medical meaning flows across cultures is fascinating, however, and points to some potential amplifications Baronov could make in future work.

One area for future study may be the penetration of the West by frank African medical-spiritual practices in the form of Voodun and similar West African sets of ideas. In the southern United States, these practices are sometimes used by minority populations, and serve to restore the holism that Baronov celebrates.

A more significant penetration may be that of West African medical-spiritual meanings and the Black church in the United States. Because these have been overlaid by Christianity, they are difficult to identify. Still it is likely that many of the forms, if not the specific content, of these practices have been inherited from African ones. Examples include: much time spent in church mirroring collective ritualized African practices, reliance on prayer and group involvement as healing practices in and of themselves, and the role of charismatic pastors in key roles as spiritual leaders and healers, mirroring the African practices Baronov cites. The enclave nature of slavery followed by intense racism and segregation has preserved these forms for at least the last 200 years.

*The African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange* is essentially a delightful exploration of the contributions of African medicine in a fresh new perspective. It makes an outstanding contribution to the emerging field of cultural studies within world systems analysis.

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**Bergeson, Albert J., ed. 2008. *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Readings on Politics, Religion, and Society*. London: Routledge., 175 Pages. ISBN-13: 978-0415954259, Paper, \$34.95.**

Sayyid Qutb (1906-66) is one of the most influential intellectuals of the Islamic revival, along with his fellow Egyptians Rashid Rida and Hasan al-Banna and Iran's Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini. He is associated with the radical and even extremist wing of the Islamic revival, as distinct from the moderate wing that is associated with thinkers such as Iran's Ali Shariati, Egypt's Hasan Hanafi, and the Swiss Muslim Tariq Ramadan. Another Islamic tendency, more reformist or liberal, has been advanced by a number of Iran's "new religious intellectuals" (e.g., Abdolkarim Soroush, Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mohsen Kadivar), along with women's rights groups such as Malaysia's Sisters in Islam. The radical wing, therefore, is but one tendency within the Islamic revival, although it is arguably the most vocal and visible, primarily because of its association with *jihadi* activities and the media's preoccupation with it.

It was Sayyid Qutb who revived the Islamic concepts of *jahiliyyah* and *jihad*, calling on Muslims to reject Western values and practices, resist regimes that had turned away from Islamic laws and norms, and return to the presumably immutable principles of Islam as delineated in the Qur'an. He was particularly emphatic on rejecting the option of Christian/Western-style secularism and returning to or reinforcing the fusion of religion and the state. The *jahiliyyah* denotes the so-called age of darkness that characterizes the period prior to Islam; in the Qutbian worldview, the contemporary age of lack of correct religious commitment is again one of darkness, necessitating *jihad*. In his writings, Qutb emphasized the centrality of the Islamic concept of *jihad*, defining it not so much as an inner struggle to do right by God, but as the right and indeed duty of Muslims to wage war to defend or advance themselves and their religion in the face of anti-Islamic challenges.

Qutb was a member of the *Akhwan Muslemeen* (Muslim Brotherhood), founded by Hasan al-Banna, and was arrested, along with other Brothers, when they began to challenge the policies of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The brutality of conditions within the prisons, and the routine use of torture, affected Qutb greatly and contributed to his determination to call for *jihad*. For this he was sentenced to death. Nasser went on to inspire a generation of Third Worldists in Egypt and across the Arab world. But Sayyid Qutb has inspired and motivated even more generations and populations of Muslims across the globe.

Given the importance of Sayyid Qutb, it was surprising that a collection of his writings was not available in English. In this respect, Albert Bergeson has provided a valuable service by putting together a sample of Qutb's key writings. The reader includes two essays by Bergeson that provide an introduction and overview and that place Qutb's writings not only in the national context of their time but also in historical and comparative perspective. What comes across, at least to this reader, is an unexpected fascination with Qutb and a sympathetic approach that colors some of Bergeson's comparisons. Not only does Bergeson's introduction *not* include a discussion of the other tendencies within the Islamic revival that I have mentioned above, but he compares Qutb's Quranic literalism to the "strict constructionists" of some legal scholars of the American constitution. While superficially this is a useful comparison, the ramifications of a Qutbian Quranic fundamentalism are rather different from those of an American constitutional

fundamentalism. In particular, Qutbian scripturalism would have dire implications for the rights of non-Muslims, non-practicing Muslims, feminists, and human rights more generally.

Bergeson has included excerpts from *Milestones*, one of Qutb's most famous writings. Here Qutb is keen on distinguishing Islam from Christianity, emphasizing that Islam does not have a priesthood as does Christianity and therefore could not have a theocracy (he was evidently unfamiliar with Shiism and did not live long enough to witness clerical rule in the Islamic Republic of Iran); that implementation of Sharia law "cannot be achieved only through preaching" (p. 37); that Islam is "God's religion for the whole world" and therefore "has the right to take the initiative" (p. 40); and that *jihad* has to be offensive and preemptive and not just defensive (p. 54). He writes approvingly of how in early Islamic history "the *jihad* movement marched on, confronting those who were near to the land of Islam, one stage after another. ... This was followed by open warfare, with the Muslim armies moving far into the lands of both the Byzantine and Persian Empires, leaving no pockets behind them" (p. 142). While Qutb would interpret the militant march of Islam as a "right" and as divinely ordained, is it so surprising that the Byzantine ruler that Pope Benedict quoted in 2006 would beg to differ, and thus express angry and insulting words about Islam?

Qutb goes on to indict those who interpret despotism or injustice in political or economic or racial terms as "hypocrites." They are deceiving the Believers, he opines, because the true nature of the struggle is "between beliefs – either unbelief or faith, either *jahiliyyah* or Islam" (p. 41). Elsewhere, he writes that "all mankind were divided [by the Quran's revelations] into three classes: Muslims who believed in the Prophet's message; those at peace with him who enjoyed security; and those who were hostile and feared him" (p. 46). Like other Islamists (notably Khomeini), Sayyid Qutb was clearly aware of socialism and Marxism, and sought to dissuade Muslims from turning to that option by insisting on its fallacy. (In Khomeini's case, the use of imprisonment, torture, and execution was another form of dissuasion – and this despite the fact that the new constitution banned torture. Those who experienced this form of Islamic justice were members or supporters of the left-Muslim group the Mojahedin or various non-violent communist groups.)

Like many ideologues, Qutb idealizes his belief system and exaggerates its liberatory nature. For example, he writes that "Islam does not force people to accept its beliefs; rather, it aims to provide an environment where people enjoy full freedom of belief. It abolishes oppressive political systems depriving people of this freedom, or forces them into submission so that they allow their peoples complete freedom to choose to believe in Islam if they so wish" (p. 47). The value of religious freedom is posited by moderate, reformist, and liberal Muslims, but not by radicals or extremists. Nor is it a principle or legal right in place in most Muslim-majority countries (other than former Soviet republics). Apostasy, for example, is considered a criminal offense: Muslims cannot change their religion, although conversion to Islam from other religions is encouraged. Non-Muslim citizens are forbidden to proselytize, but Muslims proselytize not only in Muslim-majority societies but in Europe and the United States. It is difficult to envision "full freedom of belief" – or diversity or dissent – in the Qutbian worldview.

Lest one think that only Christian missionaries had contempt for the people they came to convert, here is Sayyid Qutb on Islam's entry into Africa: "Islam created civilization in central Africa among the naked people, for by its very existence it clothed bare bodies. Thus the people entered the civilization of clothing, embraced by the Islamic orientation that was applied. Also, people began to abandon their doltish lethargy for energetic work to exploit the material treasures

[of the world]. Additionally, they left the state of tribalism for the *umma*. They stopped worshipping specific totems and began worshipping Allah” (cited in Akhavi, 1997: 382). In his introduction, Bergeson makes an interesting distinction between Orientalism I (which posits Muslims as passive, feminine and weak) and Orientalism II (which posits Muslims as extremist and aggressive). It is useful, however, to note that “Othering,” not to mention territorial expansion, may be found in Islamic history as well.

In his introductory chapters, Bergeson mentions that Sayyid Qutb shared Nasser’s commitment to social welfare. And yet, the concept of social justice in Sayyid Qutb’s writings takes a back seat to the concepts of *jahiliyyah* and *jihad*. While the notion of *adl* (justice) is a major concept in the Islamic heritage, it has been traditionally associated with notions of equity or fair-mindedness; the notion of *social justice* appeared in the 1940s – in part in response to the spread of socialist ideas in the Muslim world. As argued by Shahrough Akhavi, referring to the French scholar of Islam Olivier Carré, the Arabic term for social justice is a 20<sup>th</sup> century neologism coined by Muslim writers taking cues from ideas imported from abroad. It came into currency for the first time in Sunni Islamic discourse in 1949 in the writings of Muhammad al-Ghazzali, Abd al-Qadir Awda (who had trained as a lawyer in France), and Sayyid Qutb (Akhavi 1997). The latter’s book *Social Justice and Islam* was completed in 1948 and published in 1949. In the 1950s, however, Qutb turned away from social justice and toward a strict interpretation of Islamic scripture and law, in part because the Nasser government had appropriated social justice and popular welfare as its *raison d’être*. The absence of a serious consideration of economic oppression and social justice by Qutb and other *jihadi* thinkers, much less a critique of capitalism, is perhaps why these themes are conspicuously absent in contemporary Islamist movements and their literatures.

Bergeson is to be commended for producing this valuable collection. It is useful for graduate studies and of course for scholarly reference. I recommend that it be used in conjunction with studies on other tendencies within the Islamic revival, notably reformist or liberal Islam, and Islamic feminism.

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**Bonacich, Edna and Jake B. Wilson. 2008. *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor, and the Logistics Revolution*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 273 pages, ISBN-13 978-0-8014-4572-9 Cloth (\$65.00), ISBN-13 978-0-8014-7425-5 Paper (\$23.95).**

Scholars frequently understand globalization to be caused by the communications revolution of the 1990s, especially the compression of time and space within the world-system generated by the internet's capacity for instant communication and super fast flow of information. Likewise, analysts have extensively explored the importance of neoliberal economics as a key to the globalization process, especially how it permits externalization of production costs and results in the concentration of power in the domains of transnational elites, corporations, and institutions. It is surprising, given the great volume of publications, that very few scholars have analyzed globalization from the perspective of how commodities are transported. In part, this oversight is remarkable because scholars have certainly recognized the importance of ocean transport in early epochs of the world-system, especially its role in the development of mercantile capitalism and the subsequent rise of the modern world-system. Arguably, the movement of goods is the most important part of contemporary globalization, because it links production to consumption; and, arguably, it was the decline in shipping costs and the shrinking of time and space resulting from the containerization of freight that caused contemporary globalization to happen. As one of the few studies of the relationship between transportation and globalization, Bonacich and Wilson's study is a significant contribution to our understanding of the contemporary world-system.

The logistics revolution and its consequences are the central points of focus to their book. They define the logistics revolution as "a quiet change" to how "consumer goods are being produced and delivered" (p. 3). It has a "sizeable impact on society and the way it is organized" (p. 3). The revolution is how the "entire cycle of production and distribution is now viewed as a single integrated unit that requires its own specialists for analysis and implementation" (p. 3). Following arguments advanced by Marxist geographers, such as David Harvey, the authors maintain the logistics revolution was caused by the structures of global capitalism, especially the "disjuncture" between supply and demand (p. 4). "Disjuncture" is perhaps the wrong term, as global shipping had been sufficiently linked by containerization well before the author's logistic revolution came about. Instead, "re-working" or "re-structuring" or "rationalization" would be a better term for what transpired. Bonacich and Wilson argue the logistics revolution was a structural response to the chronic problem of over-production, a re-ordering of the system of transportation that shifted the relationship between supply-producer and demand-retailer toward the latter's advantage. It resulted in significant efficiencies in transport costs, as well as warehousing inventory. The rationalization resulted in giving retailers power to dictate terms of production on suppliers (pp. 4-6).

The real intent of the book, however, is to understand the logistics revolution's consequences for transport workers. They assert, "this book tells the story of those workers and the work they do to get us the goods we all depend on" (p. vii). The authors continue, "we are concerned with how logistics workers have fared in the logistics revolution.... We are interested not only in what is happening to these people but also in their potential for organizing their rights as workers" (pp. vii-viii). They convincingly illustrate the negative impact on each labor segment, especially in terms of wages, hours, and benefits. Bonacich and Wilson conclude the study with recommendations for how labor might fight back by taking advantage of the inherent vulnerabilities within the tightly coupled system of global transport.

Following the structure of their overall purpose and argument, the book is wisely divided into three sections. The first explains the logistics revolution through a case study of how Wal-Mart organizes the transport of commodities to its stores. The second explains how cargo is moved from factory to store. It has chapters on containerization; the steamship lines; landside transportation, and the warehouse system. The third part offers analysis of labor, with chapters on maritime, landside, and warehouse/distribution workers. Given the immense scope of these topics, the authors correctly narrow the focus of the study to the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, which handle 80% of the containers arriving from Asia and constitute the world's fifth largest container port (p. vii). The selection of these ports also owes to the author's deep knowledge about local labor and logistics, which is manifest through the extensive first-hand detail and insights throughout the book.

The story of how Wal-Mart became the dominant corporation in the era of neoliberal globalization is well known to readers of this journal. But, the importance of the logistics revolution for this story may be less well known. During the 1980s, I worked for a shipping agency that represented international ocean carriers. Like many participants in revolutions we were largely unaware of the big changes that were happening as we moved freight throughout the world. While intermodal traffic was a full reality – we moved cargo door-to-door on one bill of lading -- Wal-Mart was not a player. Bonacich and Wilson illustrate how the logistics revolution gave Wal-Mart the leverage it needs to dictate almost any beneficial terms of production, packaging, and delivery it needs upon their suppliers, especially those in distant locations like China. Of special importance is their explanation of Wal-Mart's logistics innovations, such as their infamous computer system and use of "electronic data interchange," which is rapidly making the once ubiquitous barcode obsolete (pp. 6-12). The notion that one company could or would dictate the terms of production by leveraging the logistics was nowhere on the horizon for us. Simply put, it was a "game changer," for global capitalism. In terms of "getting the goods" Bonacich and Wilson "got it" when few others have.

A minor but not insignificant flaw with *Getting the Goods* is with the author's discussion of ship ownership. They either do not know or fail to consider the importance of the industry's interlocking and overlapping ship ownership. Owners of carrier companies tend not to own all the ships in their fleet. Instead, owners invest in multiple ships owned by multiple carrier companies. This strategy allows for a diversified investment portfolio, as owners do not want to keep eggs, very expensive eggs, all in one basket. Investment in multiple ships and carriers allows owners to participate in multiple trade routes and invest in multiple trade specialties that have their own unique ships -- roll-on & roll-off for cars, mining, and agricultural equipment; break-bulk for primary products; and container ships. The interlocking ownership has the significant consequence of stabilizing what can be a viciously competitive and tumultuous industry. It facilitates agreements about trade routes, rate structures, and managing the vagaries of global trade. Interlocking ownership is one of the important forces in the conference system that organized global shipping. While the authors do well in discussing the impact of de-regulation, especially the demise of the conference system, it appears significant to consider what happened to the ownership structure with de-regulation, especially considering the owners lost their exemption from anti-trust law. An explanation for how stability was maintained during and after deregulation is also needed.

When I worked in the industry, we were keenly aware of the system's critical vulnerability to labor action, especially the powerful West Coast longshoremen union. From this

perspective, Bonacich and Wilson's argument about labor's ability to bring the system of production, distribution, and consumption to a screeching halt is absolutely correct. Labor used this threat multiple times, especially during the early 1970s when a new generation of mixed roll-on & roll-off and container able ships hit the docks threatened to further reduce jobs with mechanization. Despite these actions, jobs were lost, wages reduced, and benefits cut. Despite the vulnerability capital was well positioned in the relations of power, especially with state tools like the Taft-Hartley Act, to contain labor's threat and move forward with the logistics revolution that made neoliberal globalization possible. In today's transportation world, the relations of power remain in the favor of capital. The current collapse in the global capitalism, however, offers the opportunity for labor to strike back. Bonacich and Wilson's recommendations for collective action offer an important strategy for undoing the negatives of the logistics revolution and building a more just world for transportation workers and other laborers in global production facilities.

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**Ritzer, George, ed. 2007. *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell. 731 Pages, ISBN13 978-1-4051-3274-9 Cloth (\$175.00).**

Now decades into what many scholars are calling the global era, the term "globalization" simultaneously evokes strong sentiments both inside and outside the academy, while eluding concrete definition. There are perky cheerleaders that extol the worldwide penetration of a particularly Western, if not solely American, set of economic, political, and cultural norms and values. Of this group, the neoliberals are only the most vocal proponents of this (third-wave?) imperialism. There are also virulent opponents, those actively resisting the imposition globalization from above and who are now frequently labeled as terrorists by the other side. They object to the assault on labor, environmental destruction, and social disintegration that they link to globalization. There are those who claim globalization is nothing new, just the continuation of trends toward systemic integration that began millennia ago, and others who proclaim its death while asserting the emergence of a post-globalization period. And of course there is the amorphous middle, the "undecided," who sense that something may be different but are not sure how or why or what to say about it.

Attempting to provide comprehensive coverage of "globalization," this volume, edited by George Ritzer, is a hefty book both in terms of price and trees killed. Yet even at 700+ pages, it is impossible in one volume to provide depth across the myriad issues that accompany this all-encompassing process; indeed, library shelves are filling with monographs on globalization covering just one of the many subjects broached here. The text, as a whole, is therefore not dense. Instead, it is constructed of thirty-five brief survey-style chapters, most in the fifteen- to twenty-page range, separated into three sections ("Introduction, Major Domains, Major Issues and Conclusions"), each section led by a thorough and thoughtful introduction by Ritzer. The obvious

goal is for the book to act as a reference piece containing the important arguments and issues, with enough detail to generate greater than cursory knowledge, with references to the appropriate sources for those whose interests run deeper.

This is a survey of the historical present – not the globalization as evolutionary process that many world-systems scholars have been tracing but the changes that have taken place only within the last few decades. You will be disappointed if looking for *la longue durée* - fifty years is a long time in most of the chapters. Rare exceptions exist, such as the discussion of colonialism's devastating legacy in the agrarian South by Philip McMichael and in the measurement of income inequality since 1820 in chapters by Glenn Firebaugh and Brian Goesling, and by Roberto Patricio Korzeniewicz and Timothy Patrick Moran. While suffering from this relative presentism, which leaves the origin of globalization to the imagination, world-systems theory and analyses based on it receives its share of attention in an overview by William Robinson, in the works on income inequality by Korzeniewicz and Moran, on the hierarchy of world cities by Michael Timberlake and Xiulian Ma, and it is also mentioned in the introduction by Ritzer and in the chapter on the features of globalization by Roland Robertson and Kathleen E. White. And, as expected in a book on globalization, systemic processes are at the core of each chapter, even when not made explicit.

The book touches on most of the most salient topics in the globalization scholarship on the recent past and present, and offers some projections into the future. It begins by introducing the debate over the nature and meaning of "globalization." Ritzer offers a unifying definition of globalization as a set of processes and flows that are typified by the adjective MORE: faster speeds, increasing integration and interconnectivity, and encompassing greater numbers of spaces in the world. Agreement on what globalization is, even if abstract, is critically important if we are to progress as a science and I think few would object to this definition. But descriptions of the effects of MORE attract more dissension. Indeed, in the first chapter of the book, Anthony McGrew must generate a series of Cartesian quadrants to help the reader understand all the various perspectives and positions. Within this particular text are the world polity school (e.g., John Boli and Velina Petrova) and others who see mostly positive trends toward world-wide isomorphism and convergence on various measures such as democracy, education, health, and income. And there are those who see divergence (e.g., Korzeniewicz and Moran), with globalization increasing the divisions between the haves and those without. There is even a review of the popular press in Robert J. Antonio's trenchant critique of Thomas Friedman – whose unabashed sanguinity makes him an easy but necessary target. Just within the academy the range of positions is large, although for the most part the authors in this text find globalization to be somewhat ambiguous in its effects, with both positive and negative changes, but with more of the latter for most of the authors.

Part one of the book includes the aforementioned discussion of globalization as general phenomenon (e.g., McGrew; Robertson and White; Antonio; Boli and Petrova) and an encyclopedic overview of the major institutions, organizations, and other actors involved by George M. Thomas. A survey of the most prominent theories is provided by William Robinson. Ulrich Beck, in an aphorism-filled piece, describes the necessity of cosmopolitanism as an advance from the parochialism of national perspectives. To my pleasant surprise, a chapter on methodology – often but inexplicably missing in many volumes, is provided by Salvatore Babones, whose statistical mastery, well known to *JWSR* readers, is presented here in an accessible manner. Methods are also front and center in the competing within- and between-

nation inequality analyses, contained in part three of the book. The debate is now a classic: on one side are Firebaugh and Goesling, using purchasing power parity (PPP) and finding lessening inequality; on the other are Korzeniewicz and Moran, using foreign-exchange rates (FX) and reporting growing inequality. China and India are the heavyweights whose trajectories will exert strong influences on the future of these studies.

Part two covers “the major domains” of analysis. The environmental effects of globalization, one of the most pressing concerns of our times, are discussed by Steve Yearley. A proponent of ecological modernization theory, Yearley states that “studies conducted to date do not allow us to determine the environmental pros and cons of globalization” (p. 252), but ecological modernization theory has failed most empirical tests (e.g., York, Rosa, and Dietz 2003) and the global South has experienced an unequal share of the environmental costs of extraction, production, and waste disposal (e.g., Jorgenson 2007). We need not be ambiguous on this point. There is, however, recent evidence of the positive affect of environmental NGOs in reducing levels of degradation in the South (e.g., Shandra et al. 2008). But would the NGOs be needed if the negative effects of, particularly economic, globalization were not weakening the ability of people to protect their environment without external intervention?

The political economy of globalization, while more or less present in many chapters, receives large coverage in this section. Here, and also in many other chapters, the authors dispel various claims about globalization. Subhrajit Guhathakurta, David Jacobson and Nicholas C DelSordi consider the national backlashes and the creation of state barriers against immigration, noting how wrong projections about a global melting pot as the end of globalization have turned out. The debate over the relevance of the nation-state is one of the most common in the globalization literature of course. The authors in this text take a position similar to Saskia Sassen (2006), who argues in a recent book that the state is the birthplace of the global and retains a significant amount of control over global processes but that the global and state remain in a tango as each has particular institutional capabilities and a subject to a mutual feedback loop. Likewise, Peter Dicken finds that transnational corporations, while global in reach, are still shaped by the state of their origin and subject to state regulation, providing an opportunity to constrain their formidable power. The shape and structure of the polity is changing, according to Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, with the development of a global normative culture and non-territorial politics, but with the state still a major site of power. Tim Blackman also considers the role of the state, but from an examination of “smart” states that invest in education, R & D, and infrastructure and succeed in the new terrain and “dumb” states that do not.

One of the features of TNCs, and global capitalism, is outsourcing, an example of *noncreative* destruction for Ritzer and Craig Lair, particularly when analyzing it from a social and not purely economic lens. Similarly, agro-industrial production, dislocation, and supermarkets are revealed for their calamitous effects by McMichael, who decries monocrops, and the loss of control over food and livelihood that have resulted, particularly in the global South. A description of Chinese non-market capitalism declared in a book by Giovanni Arrighi (2007) as “accumulation without dispossession” because of the persistence of rural labor would seem to provide a better model, but replication of the unique path of China is no doubt highly improbably given the different historical trajectories of different nation-states. However, as McMichael notes, hunger amidst scarcity has been replaced by hunger against abundance (p. 224) and it is hard to imagine that the plight of peasants in China is markedly better.

There are a number of chapters that feature discussion of cultural effects. The central questions are whether globalization is a wholly homogenizing force - called "grobalization" by Ritzer, defined as "the growing imperialistic influence of business, states, and so on" (p.7) - or if there is room left for the continued existence of unique localness, or some combination. The latter, called "glocalization," is considered by Melissa L. Caldwell and Eriberto P. Lozada Jr., who call for more critical analysis of the recursive effects between the global and local by taking a position in the "militant middle-ground (p.509). John Tomlinson calls for new, more flexible, cultural concepts needed to explain the myriad systems of meaning and multiple identities that exist in cultures throughout the globe. Manfred B. Steger takes on globalism as a hegemonic ideology based on the market and more recently militarism and US empire, while Douglass Goodman focuses on consumption, with Western uniformity globally but also with mass-marketed uniformity in local differences. Organizations, and MBA programs, are seen as promulgating a U.S.- styled business model that has led to global isomorphism in a chapter by Stewart Clegg and Chris Carter. Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce discuss the transmission of ideology in media, as well as media as source for disseminating symbols and information of resistance, such as the Zapatista movement on the internet and radio. Howard Tumber and Frank Webster also focus on the role of media - and information and communication technology more generally - in reporting on war and as a weapon in warfare. War and terrorism appear later as the topics of chapters by Gerald Schneider and by Gus Martin.

The major social institutions, in addition to the polity and economy are each taken as object and subject of globalization. Religion, in a chapter by Peter Beyer, is becoming more plural within regions as migration and missionaries are taking their beliefs and practices across borders. An explosion of higher education has also become a global phenomenon, according to Peter Manicas, a claim echoed earlier by Boli and Petrova. Medicine and healthcare, as discussed by Farnoosh Hashemian and Derek Yach, is unequally distributed as the global South experiences the highest levels of mortality and disease. But the emergence of borderless diseases, whose spread is facilitated by travel and trade, may be an unwelcome example of a flattening of the world. Sport, a contender for inclusion as a leading institution, is an example of a glocal phenomenon by David L. Andrews and Andrew G. Grainger, and also by Caldwell and Lozada Jr. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Olympics, here national pride mixes simultaneously with global spectacle. Missing from this analysis of institutions are chapters dedicated to kinship and law; if the book could stand another fifty pages these would be warranted.

Part three captures "major issues and conclusions." Carolyn Warner discusses the possibility of a reduction in political and business corruption through the adoption of American standards. Given the continuous stream of indictments and forced resignations ("to spend more time with family") in the US, it seems that global corruption may increase instead. The expansion of discrimination based on sexuality and the growth of the sex-trade is another effect of globalization according to Kathryn Farr, who also considers the opportunities to counter them. The forms and possibilities of resistance to global processes, particularly the movements opposing neoliberal capitalism, are featured in a chapter by Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner. Anti-systemic forces (cf. Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1997) and openings for contestation are often mentioned in chapters throughout the volume, helping to put holes in the armour of what is often portrayed as inexorable and monolithic. In this way, the book provides a modicum of hope.

But this is not an overly optimistic text. Telling is Ritzer's choice of closing with Bryan Turner's vision of an already developing global anarchy, in which Mad Max roams through a chaotic wasteland bespeckled by the occasional fortress of the wealthy. A future in which only robots and cockroaches remain to clean up our mess would be a logical next step. The book, then, leaves the reader less hopeful than despondent. But the future is probably not for the faint-hearted. Global warming is already occurring and its pace seems to continually exceed previous forecasts; together with the dramatic increase in population, denudification of the landscape, and ocean acidification that have occurred since industrialization in the mid-nineteenth century, geologists are claiming that we are now in a new era – named the Anthropocene for its human causes (Zalasiewicz et al. 2008).

Of course, the possibility of a better world is possible. Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) has proclaimed the approach of a bifurcation point in which the world will be different following its conclusion, only how different and in what ways it is difficult if not impossible to forecast. The only certainty is that humans will play the most significant role in constructing the future. Christopher Chase-Dunn (e.g., 2002, 2005) envisions the emergence of a global democratic commonwealth, if the progressive movements captured in the World Social Forum and other anti-systemic forces continue to move in positive directions and ultimately prevail (see Thomas and Tumber and Webster on the WSF in this text). It is also (equally?) possible that the world enters another dark age as energy shortages lead to a reduction in complexity. (For some interesting projections on the future, see Patomaki 2008; Wagar 1999). The future remains to be seen and experienced of course.

Overall, the volume performs quite well. And I must admit a certain level of apprehension accompanies my approach to edited volumes in general and handbooks and reviews specifically. They tend to leave me unsatisfied by their sacrifices; breadth for depth, omission of important topics or perspectives or authors, inclusion of material that does not meet my needs or seems unnecessary – like the B-side songs on most pop-music albums. This book is better than most of those in its class, providing sufficient depth as well as breadth of most of the material I wanted, or learned that I needed, with little filler. Of course, every reader will have different interests and expectations when engaging an edited handbook so one person's highlight will often be another's chapter to skim or skip altogether; the perfect volume, then, may not exist for the individual. But I would wager that *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* will achieve high marks for all but the most narrowly focused or those with abundant expertise in the area.

Regardless of what happens, twentieth- and now twenty first- century globalization is an incredibly important phenomenon with both positive and negative effects that requires awareness and understanding from all those affected; i.e., everyone. *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* promises to deliver much more than that and does so fairly well. This book is ideally suited for advanced undergraduate and graduate students in a survey-style course and most all would benefit from engagement with at least some of the topics, discussions, and analyses. To be sure, the formidable price will complicate the decision formula for many. But this is a quality reference source that will not suffer the fate of the less expensive but once and done books filling many of our shelves.

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