Globalization, Social Movements, and Peacebuilding

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Syracuse University Press, 2013 (Forthcoming)

Chapter 8

The World Social Forums as Transformative Peacebuilding

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Most analysts of peacebuilding view civil society actors as essential to any post-war peace. Paffenholz and Spurk summarize seven key functions of civil society identified in the literature, including protection, monitoring, advocacy for marginalized groups, socialization for a culture of peace, and fostering social cohesion (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). Several observations can be made about these expectations of civil society in regard to post-war peacebuilding. First, these functions require fairly extensive capacity on the part of civil society. Even in societies that have not undergone wars, such capacity is likely to be weak or underdeveloped. Second, civil societies in post-war contexts face particularly difficult challenges in undertaking these tasks, given the devastation and social polarization that occurs in wartime. Third, with globalization, the abilities of civil society actors to monitor and hold authorities accountable and to engage in advocacy depend upon their ability to target international actors as well as national officials. Fourth, many social movements are actively engaged in peacebuilding-related activities in non-war contexts around the world, and lessons about post-war peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict might be found by paying more explicit attention to the role of social movements in peacebuilding.

While few social movements articulate their goals in this way, in practice, many are engaged in work that contributes unambiguously to peace by: addressing latent conflicts before they manifest themselves in violent ways; cultivating social cohesion; socializing people in democratic norms, values, and practices; and developing analyses of social problems and their solutions. We discuss the World Social Forums as an important example of contemporary transnational social movement mobilization that is engaged in such peacebuilding work on a global scale. In making this argument, we are expanding notions of peacebuilding beyond the national context to the world-system level. We also argue that much significant peacebuilding work takes place in contexts of latent conflict, rather than in the post-war settings more commonly addressed in the literature. Our analysis leads to the conclusion that more

scholarly attention should be devoted to uncovering and theorizing the peacebuilding work being done by critical social movements.

Before we begin our analysis, however, we must clarify what we mean by "civil society." Volumes have been written on this concept, and we don't intend to review these debates here. With Kaldor, we define civil society as ""the sphere of ideas, values, organisations, networks, and individuals located primarily outside the institutional complexes of family, market, and state" (2003:4).[1] Civil society can contain elements that are "uncivil" (Anheier 2007), including groups that promote intolerance, violence, and exclusivity as well as those fostering social cohesion and cooperation. The aim of peacebuilding should be to encourage processes that foster the latter and discourage or pre-empt the former.

Clarifying Concepts: Peace and Peacebuilding

Any consideration of peacebuilding should begin with the question, "what is peace?" In his review of the peacebuilding literature, Jon Barnett critiques existing scholarship in peace research for failing to adequately theorize the connections between development and peace (Barnett 2008). Consistent with Bolten's conclusions in chapter 3, he argues for a definition of peace as freedoms and opportunities, rather than merely the absence of violence:

> By moving away from a theory based on what peace is not, by articulating the complex and interdependent characteristics of peace as freedoms and opportunities, and by focusing as much on processes as outcomes, the theory of peace as freedom facilitates a more nuanced and multivariate assessment of peace based on its contingent nature. In this view, it is not the case that there is either peace or violence, because peace is not constructed in such dualistic terms. Rather, peace as freedom suggests that peace is more or less present based on the degree to which each important freedom and opportunity is present and the degree to which they are collectively present. (Barnett 2008:86)

This definition of peace resonates with those advocating a broader and more holistic understanding of the social systems that contribute to peace, war, and violence (see, e.g., Philpott and Powers, Eds. 2010). It also stresses that peacebuilding is a task required in many more situations than the post-war settings currently emphasized in the literature. It also offers a method for evaluating the forces and social processes that contribute to peace or its reduction, complicating the rather simplistic notions of "conflict cycles" that move from latent conflict to greater levels of escalation and sometimes overt violence to de-

escalation and (hopefully) post-war peacebuilding. Finally, it is consistent with the visions put forward with many social movements working to promote social change in diverse contexts.

Achieving peace as defined in terms of freedom and opportunity requires more concerted efforts to address the larger problem of structural violence. As the introduction and other contributions in this volume argue, the global social and political order is rooted in structural violence, that is the "[d]enial, through the distribution of resources and opportunity, of people's means of realizing basic needs and potential" (Uvin 2003:xx).[2] The global economy is organized around an economic model that requires the perpetual accumulation of capital. This accumulation of wealth –which is assumed to generate constant economic growth that will eventually 'trickle down' to benefit all—depends upon the extraction of surplus value (profits) from the products made by workers. In other words, it requires the exploitation of people and the environment, at least in the short term. In practice, there has been little evidence that wealth trickles down in the longer-term; to the contrary, many analyses find that economic globalization has contributed to further concentration of wealth both within and between countries (Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009; Milanovic 2005; Weisbrot et al. 2002).

The global political order is likewise founded in basic inequality, and is inherently linked to the world economic system. The inter-state political order was consolidated in the West, and was imposed on the peoples of the global South through processes of imperialism and colonial occupation (Escobar 1988; Escobar 2004). Although colonialism was discredited and abandoned in the post-World War II era, it left a lasting legacy of exploitation by requiring newly "independent" states to both adopt models of statehood derived from Western experience and to become integrated into a global political and economic order that was controlled by Western powers (see, e.g., Pogge 2008; Farmer 2004).

If the conditions generating violence and peace are fundamentally linked to the world capitalist economy, then scholarship on peacebuilding must pay attention to the efforts of social movements that are resisting this global neoliberal order. Moreover, if the world economy is an underlying source of violent conflicts, then civil societies in countries experiencing war must have the capacity to affect global structures if they are to be effective at peacebuilding within particular national contexts. To the extent that social movements are developing transnational networks of increasing scale and capacity, they can better address the root causes of violence and war.

In addition to refining our conceptualization of peace, it is essential for us to interrogate our understandings of peacebuilding. As defined originally by Johan Galtung, peacebuilding is distinguished from peacekeeping and peacemaking mainly by its role in advancing "positive peace," or the elimination of structural violence. For Galtung, "peacebuilding achieves positive peace by creating structures and institutions of peace based on justice, equity and cooperation" (Galtung 1975:282-304, cited in Paffenholz 2010:44-45).

In the early 1990s, Boutros Boutros-Ghali's <u>Agenda for Peace</u> and end of the Cold War contributed to the expansion of international intervention in national conflicts. It also led to the use of the peacebuilding term to refer quite narrowly to interventions in post-war situations which tended to take on a managerial and problem-solving-orientation. The emphasis has thus become more on post-war state-building than on the reduction of structural violence as a means of preventing violence. The "liberal peace" advanced through international peacebuilding prioritizes economic liberalization, thus serving to "modernize and relegitimize a fundamental status quo respectful of a national and international market economy" (Paffenholz 2010: 55-56).

It is this conventional understanding of peacebuilding—and its role in maintaining the structural violence inherent in the global economy—that authors in this volume and other critical peace researchers are contesting. An improved conceptualization of peacebuilding would focus on the larger set of processes that shape social relations, rather than on strictly post-war contexts or settings of high conflict escalation. Thus, Burton (1990) offers the concept of "provention"—the promotion of conditions that create cooperative relationships that help satisfy basic human needs-- as both a strategy for preventing overt violence and a remedy to structural violence. Similarly, Lederach "sees protracted social conflict as a system and focuses his elicitive approach on the relationships within that system" (Fetherston 2000:204). Peacebuilding thus entails work on transforming relationships that are manifest in specific places and histories.

But such approaches still lack a critical analysis of power, which must be "as much about understanding our own participation in [discourses of war and militarization] as it is about understanding how they are being played out in the context of a specific conflict" (Fetherston 2000: 207). In this respect, the field of peacebuilding has often struggled to develop tools that can extend peacebuilding work outside the range of conventional actors and that can be applied at supranational levels. For instance, not only do conventional approaches downplay the importance of actors outside national contexts in peacebuilding, but they also tend to marginalize relatively powerless, nonviolent groups within post-war societies while privileging the voices of potential spoilers, who tend to be armed militants. Methods are needed that bring into focus the continuity of structural and manifest violence across societies and allow us to undertake the renegotiation of relationships in the vast spatial geography of today's global economy.

Finally, we point to some of the major challenges identified in the literature for external interventions seeking to help build lasting peace. As we noted above, virtually all studies of post-war peacebuilding efforts highlight the important role played by civil society actors in securing a durable peace. Paffenholz's important work on this topic concludes that there is general agreement in the peacebuilding literature on the following: First, the role of outsiders should be limited to supporting domestic actors. Second, civil society peace initiatives are as important as official or unofficial diplomatic

efforts to advancing durable peace. Third, the proliferation of new non-governmental organizations in response to international funding has a negative effect on peacebuilding, since it crowds out local efforts and actors (Paffenholz 2010:59).

These conclusions reinforce the argument in the introduction to this volume that the notion of civil society "empowerment," as applied in much scholarly and practitioner discourse is problematic. The term suggests that civil society can be strengthened from the top-down in a one-way process of dropping in resources. But considerable experience attests to the fact that civil societies consist of complex sets of relationships, and outside interventions must account for these complexities, as well as the effects of external actors' asymmetrical relationships with the societies in which they engage, when doing peace work. Santos's (2007) notion of "social emancipation," offers some critical leverage into our thinking about the relationships of civil society and peacebuilding while reinforcing the notions of peace as freedom and opportunity discussed above. Replacing conventional notions of civil society "empowerment" with the idea that peace work should involve social emancipation emphasizes the long-term task of strengthening civil societies' capacities to advance social cohesion, articulate latent conflicts over resources and other inequities, and to support cross-cutting ties and a culture of democracy. This sort of work is hardest in post-war settings, and is impossible without attention to global factors that affect social mobilization.

Putting together the strands of thinking we outline above, we argue that neither peace, defined as freedoms and opportunities, nor peacebuilding, as the elimination of structural violence and transformation of social relations, can be achieved without a fundamental re-ordering of the world economic and political system. States and other actors with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo are not likely to be the main catalysts of this kind of re-ordering. Nevertheless, they are generally regarded as the core players in conventional peacebuilding strategies. Such strategies therefore preclude the greatest possibilities for structural transformation, particularly insofar as they reproduce those dominant discourses of power which constrain the space for broader civil society participation in peace processes.

Because the task of social emancipation requires a re-thinking of relationships and the social orders reproducing them, the types of activities that constitute peacebuilding may be as much cognitive and symbolic as structural. The act of deconstructing the discursive processes which reproduce consent for everyday violence is an important aspect of what Fetherston refers to as "transformative peacebuilding." Fetherston points to anti-hegemonic social movements as key agents of this process, emphasizing their role in creating and exploiting spaces for critical reflection and dialogue about existing social relations:

A *minimal requirement* [for transformative peacebuilding] appears to be opening critical space, where the very foundations of social meaning and practice are examined and where a diversity of critical social movements contest the 'regime of truth' without reproducing it. A *maximal potential,* encompassing some minimal shared normative base (produced through communicative action) would *attempt* to reconstruct a consensual basis for local hegemony, repairing and reforging distorted communication networks at localized 'everyday' sites of social structures and action. (2000:213, emphasis original)

This opening of critical space and creation of a new shared normative base is, moreover, key to the process of social emancipation. Given this understanding, we argue that social movements are indispensable and indeed are central to any transformative peacebuilding process. As a reflection and articulation of contemporary social movements around the world, the World Social Forum has been explicit in its aim of creating "open space" for social movements opposed to the existing neoliberal global order to meet, exchange ideas and experiences, and build networks and strategies for bringing about "another world [that] is possible." The very questioning of the inevitability of the neoliberal model of globalization through the WSF slogan "another world is possible" begins to open the sort of critical space Fetherston views as minimally essential to transformative peacebuilding. The fact that the WSF articulates a critical analysis of *global* structures that activists see as reproducing inequality, social exclusion, and violence reflects its critique of conventional, state-centric responses to violence that fail to address the world-systemic causes of violence in all parts of the world.

The World Social Forum Process as Transformative Peacebuilding

The World Social Forum process is the most prominent example of contemporary anti-hegemonic movements, and it is unique among historic movements for its ability to bring together a highly diverse array of movements and organizations under a single—albeit broad-- banner. Begun in 2001 as an effort to help focus and strengthen a growing "movement of movements" opposing the many harmful effects of economic globalization, the World Social Forums have expanded over time and place to mobilize many hundreds of thousands of people. It is conceived not as an organization or a movement, but rather as an ongoing process of convening, conversing, and "movement-building" in movement-created "open spaces" (Blau and Karides 2008; Karides, Katz-Fishman, Brewer, Scott, and Lovelace 2010; Teivainen 2002) Thus activists refer to it as the World Social Forum *process.* Attesting to the vibrancy and expanding nature of the WSF process is the proliferation of Social Forums at local, national, regional and global levels that are linked both through the networks that participate in them as well as through shared

identities and discourses (see, e.g. Smith and Karides et al. 2007; Santos 2006; Smith and Doerr 2011; della Porta et al. 2006).

We argue in this chapter that the WSF is a global project of <u>transformative peacebuilding</u>. Its transformative potential emerges from its focus on the structural violence of the world capitalist economy as an underlying cause of violence around the world, its creation of "open spaces" for critical dialogue and networking that in turn help aggregate civil society resistance to global neoliberalism while supporting viable alternatives to the existing world system. Figure 8.1 illustrates this dynamic, and its relationship to conflict dynamics.

Figure 8.1 about here

The World Social Forum process creates a multiplicity of "open spaces" for people to come together across many differences and in more equitable and inclusive ways to deliberate (see Bowman, chapter 9) about what sort of world is desirable. Activists in the WSF process have worked to sustain dialogue and learning across the time and distance that separates the various Social Forums. Thus, the WSFs help foster new relationships, advance dialogue, and socialize people in the norms and practices of democracy, thereby strengthening the foundations for peaceful societies. Drawing from many years of research on the World Social Forum process, and from participant observation work at World Social Forums and at regional, local, and national (U.S.) social forums (USSF), we identify ways that the practices being promoted through this process can contribute to effective and sustainable peacebuilding work. Smith attended the World Social Forums in 2001 and 2005 in Porto Alegre Brazil, the European Social Forum in 2004; Boston, New York, and Midwest Social Forums in the United States, and both U.S. Social Forums. She also served as a member of the USSF National Planning Committee for the 2nd USSF in Detroit and organized local Social Forum activity in her community. Miller and Burns attended the USSF in Detroit.

The open space of the WSFs contributes to social movement efforts to develop unified and coordinated strategies for resisting neoliberal globalization and its many localized consequences. The WSF Charter of Principles explicitly opposes neoliberalism, and encourages movements to articulate their struggles around this shared understanding. In this sense, it confronts the structural violence of the world system and therefore demands strategies to advance system-level change.

But mobilizing resistance to the existing order alone cannot bring peace. The strength of the WSFs and the spirit that motivates many to participate is the idea that "another world is possible." The open spaces of the Forum provide opportunities for activists to share ideas about alternatives to globalized capitalism and to develop strategies and networks for making these alternatives viable. By providing

alternatives to those generated by and reinforced through the existing patriarchal, militarized, and fundamentally conflictual global order, the WSFs offer a path towards global transformation. Below we explore the significance of the WSF's opposition to neoliberal globalization to peacebuilding. We then consider how the WSF notion of open space contributes to the work of advancing peace as freedom and opportunity. Our aim is to show how the practices of social movements can inform new thinking about transformative peacebuilding.

Uniting struggles against global neoliberalism.

Within the context of the global economy, efforts to advance peace --as freedoms and opportunities—require a fundamental transformation of the world economy. The countries of the global South, and the people who are marginalized in the global economy—including many workers, the unemployed, racial, gender, and other minority groups – lack many of the freedoms and opportunities enjoyed by those of the global North and those with greater access to power and wealth. By privileging the voices of the global South—including the marginalized "Souths" in the North-- the World Social Forum process encompasses what Santos (2006) calls the "politics of emancipation," since it requires of those who seriously engage with it critical reflection on the operation of power in global, national, and local politics. The WSF process is perhaps most clear and unified on this point, even if debates remain over how to challenge existing power relations.

The World Social Forum aims to bring activists and organizations together with the explicit purpose of fostering dialogue and networking that builds global resistance to neoliberal globalization. Its significance in this regard is first that it provides a space for contact among activists that would otherwise not be available. The sort of contacts it fosters encourage new understandings of the common sources of the diverse problems activists confront in their local settings. Second, by uniting activists around explicit opposition to neoliberal globalization, the WSF process contributes to the articulation of new collective identities that transcend long-standing divides among nations and peoples, creating what della Porta calls "flexible identities and multiple belongings" (2005).

First, the WSF challenges neoliberalism by providing an arena for public testimony and the development of shared interpretations of global political and economic processes and their impacts. This allows activists to understand the effects of economic globalization for people around the world. Many are surprised to learn, for instance, that people in very different national contexts face similar problems. Others learn of the varied ways that neoliberal economic policies impact people in different settings, and they sometimes gain insights into how the policies of their own governments contribute to suffering elsewhere in the world. Hearing these stories helps activists forge shared understandings of their struggles to improve conditions in their own locales. It helps them see their local struggles as part of a much larger,

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global one that is being waged in many places. Testimony from activists around the world helps legitimate and validate their claims against the powerful forces that advance neoliberal globalization, aiding their work to challenge dominant discourses. The knowledge that there are many activists in different parts of the world carrying out similar work can help motivate continued struggle in local settings, where many activists often feel alienated and overpowered.

Second, by providing spaces where activists can encounter one another across many differences, the WSFs foster the construction of collective identities that can form the basis of sustained coalitions. The critique of neoliberalism offered within the WSF helps activists see how globalized capitalism reinforces competition and division among people. It does so through multiple, overlapping hierarchies of patriarchy, racial inequality, and nationalism. Such an interpretation or framing of global capitalism and its effects helps groups transcend long-standing divisions among movements. But given that many activists work in "issue silos" in their routine, localized contexts, it is often difficult for them to see or to find ways to transcend the structures that reproduce deep social divisions.

As an arena for exchange, the WSF helps nurture "the politics of emancipation," by providing a platform from which groups and movements can identify the common forces that impact their lived experiences in different ways (Santos 2006). This process of bearing witness and providing space for public testimony mirrors what scholars of truth commissions see as essential to the process of peacebuilding. As Priscilla Hayner notes of the truth commissions responding to mass human rights abuses, public testimony around the experience of such abuses often confirms generally-held beliefs rather than revealing new facts. Thus, Hayner says, "the importance of truth commissions might be described more accurately as *acknowledging* the truth rather than finding the truth" (1994: 607). Having such an established public record can nevertheless be effective in condemning the crimes committed, identifying and rectifying the patterns of social behavior that led to the crimes, and granting moral recognition to the experiences of victims. In focusing on neoliberalism as the common target of resistance and providing a space for public testimony of its impacts, the World Social Forum advances a form of global truth-telling that shares some of these functions of truth commissions.

If neoliberal globalization is an important cause of violence, then exposing it as a perpetrator of violence is important to altering the social relationships that generate violence. Paul Farmer discusses how the "erasure" of the history of colonialism, slavery, and other forms of institutionalized violence perpetuate structural violence:

[T]he concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression. Oppression is a result of many conditions, not the least of which reside in consciousness. We will therefore need to examine, as well, the roles played by the erasure of

historical memory and other forms of desocialization as enabling conditions of structures that are both "sinful" and ostensibly "nobody's fault." […] Erasing history is perhaps the most common explanatory sleight-of-hand relied upon by the architects of structural violence. Erasure or distortion of history is part of the process of desocialization necessary for the emergence of hegemonic accounts of what happened and why. (2004:307-308)

Thus, by aggregating multiple realities as they are experienced, the World Social Forum process is able to bring to light alternative interpretations of historic and current events. Similar to conventional peacebuilding processes, it serves as a global truth commission that enables victims of structural violence to name their oppressor and seek redress. Any end to the violence depends on transforming the relationships between aggressor and victim, and thus the arena provided by the WSF should be seen as a vital space for peacebuilding work around the world. Below we provide examples of three campaigns operating within the WSFs that have used the space to advance shared understandings and to offer alternative collective identities and projects aimed at challenging the hegemony of global neoliberalism.

Food Sovereignty

Via Campesina has emerged as a preeminent network of activists advocating for greater local control of food production. Since the 1996 World Food Summit, Via Campesina has advocated for "food sovereignty," a notion that has gained greater prominence with the expansion of global justice activism and the World Social Forums. Food sovereignty has been a theme at multiple World Social Forums, where Via Campesina and its partner organizations have organized workshops to inform activists and recruit participation in a transnational network of groups and activists demanding greater access to secure sources of food.

This example illustrates how movements can advance new frameworks for popular understanding which can, over time, alter the dominant "discursive opportunity structure" (Ferree 2003: 209). The discursive opportunity structure affects the resonance a given set of ideas will have in the public sphere, thereby shaping the scope of politically acceptable demands, practices, and identities. Food sovereignty challenges the notion that food may be treated as a commodity and used as a means of making profits. Instead, it suggests that basic human rights depend upon people's access to and control of the means of food production. Food sovereignty challenges the more conventional notion of "food security," which has been advanced in official inter-governmental negotiations. Whereas food security does not necessarily require a fundamental questioning of the dominant economic order, food sovereignty helps focus attention on the politics of food production.[3] It stresses the idea that food is a basic right, and it highlights the need for transforming policies regarding land distribution and access by linking them to notions of human

rights and human needs. "Food sovereignty" thus challenges the globalized food industry by stressing the importance of locally produced, and ecologically sustainable food sources which emancipate local populations from exploitative outside markets, energy-intensive global distribution networks, and expensive agricultural technologies and their industrial complexes.

The World Social Forum's structure as an ongoing, multi-level, and transnationally networked space for activist discourse and movement-building has allowed food sovereignty activists to link otherwise dispersed struggles that range from small farmers defending their rights to land, local producers and consumer groups opposing corporate food production monopolies and the spread of biotechnology, and resistance to the spread of environmentally harmful agricultural practices such as confined animal feeding operations. Since Social Forum gatherings typically take place in urban areas, they encourage efforts to show connections between rural and urban interests, while illustrating the potential for urban food markets. For instance, the 2010 U.S. Social Forum in Detroit featured a "people's movement assembly" on food sovereignty which helped profile the ways activists in that post-industrial city are expanding people's access to healthy food while cultivating a broader critique of corporate food production that linked the interests of Detroit and other U.S. activists with those of people around the world.

Solidarity Economy Networks

While food sovereignty activists have sought to alter dominant discourses and assumptions about acceptable methods for determining people's access to food, other activists have worked to build local markets for a variety of products and services. The notion of solidarity economy begins with the recognition that capitalism's basis in competitive market dynamics is a basic obstacle to achieving peace and human well-being. Policies encouraging individuals to pursue narrow self-interests to achieve economic growth have not, activists point out, produced the intended "trickle down" effect capitalism's proponents have predicted. Instead, they encourage predatory and exploitative practices that weaken social cohesion and threaten long-term environmental health. Solidarity economy activists work to reorient economic practices in ways that nurture local, equitable, and ecologically sustainable markets.

The WSF's agenda of challenging neoliberalism has provided a "privileged space" for groups working to connect diverse movements advancing the solidarity economy (see Allard et al. 2008). Thus, it has helped support the strengthening of formal networks aimed at building and maintaining initiatives. For instance, the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (SEN) was launched at the first U.S. Social Forum by solidarity economy activists who had been active at world Forums and had maintained ties with some of the vibrant solidarity economy networks in Latin America and other countries of the global South. SEN sponsored a tent and co-sponsored several workshops to help educate USSF participants in the ideas

behind solidarity economy and to demonstrate its viability by presenting examples of and organizing tools for local solidarity economy initiatives. It later joined the USSF National Planning Committee and worked to build its national presence with the 2nd U.S. Social Forum in 2010. This network thus engages in transformative peacebuilding by functioning as both a global truth-telling mechanism showing the destructive tendencies of global capitalism and a support system for alternatives to competitive market economies.

Take Back the Land

Take Back the Land is a U.S.-based network that unites opposition to neo-liberalism by advancing a platform of housing as a human right. Take Back the Land formed around an explicit recognition of a widespread housing crisis in the United States. It unites a variety of constituencies which have been impacted recently by practices of predatory lending and financial de-regulation, as well as those who have historically been marginalized from access to land and housing. Local groups are able to articulate their agendas and goals autonomously, but spaces such as the U.S. Social Forum provide the opportunity to build what activists refer to as a "trans-local network." Differences of strategy and tactics and in ideas about the role of private property remain as creative tensions among activists in this network, but the principles of "housing as a human right" and "community control over land and housing" provide a shared set of goals and values around which groups and individuals of different backgrounds and ideological orientations can come together to address shared housing insecurities.

In this way, Take Back the Land network challenges the commodification of land which has been a central feature in the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism and advances a critique that extends beyond the state of housing in the United States. Convened in 2009 by the U.S. Human Rights Network's Land Housing and Action Group, Take Back the Land also bears strategic and symbolic connections to the Landless Peasants' Movement in Brazil. A 2009 "U.S. Housing and Human Rights Tour" by organizers of the South African Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign also facilitated connections between the struggles of several Take Back the Land local action groups in the U.S. and poor communities in South Africa that have faced increasing marginalization as the state has embraced neo-liberalism.

The 2010 U.S. Social Forum subsequently provided an opportunity for U.S. activists to deepen their analysis of the global nature of the housing crisis and demonstrate solidarity across borders. Members of the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign and other anti-poverty and anti-racist groups organized a soccer game in Detroit to raise awareness of official harassment and displacement of poor people and movements in advance of the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. They also staged a parallel "Poor Peoples' World Cup" organized by the Poor Peoples' Alliance and Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign. (Western Cape Anti-Eviction, 2010). The Take Back the Land and allied movements are thus engaged in

contesting one of the most fundamental conditions that structures social relations: the ownership of and access to land. Landlessness and homelessness are key elements of structural violence that perpetuates social exclusion and violent conflict across the globe, and Take Back the Land is using the WSF process to bear witness to the pervasiveness and systemic causes of homelessness. It thereby challenges the legitimacy of a global economic order that denies so many people this basic right of access to shelter.

The WSFs, Open Space and Conflict Transformation

The WSF's open space ideal helps characterize it as a movement-defined space where social movements and civil society groups have largely unrestricted access, and where there is the explicit goal of fostering dialogue and collaboration across many social divides. The only groups formally restricted from participating are those espousing violence and those rejecting the Charter principles of opposition to global neoliberalism.[4] This contrasts the kinds of civil society spaces emphasized in the peace studies literature, which tend to focus on the performance of discrete peacebuilding functions once violent conflict has ended. In such spaces, the groups invited or most able to participate are typically those already relatively privileged. Many groups, moreover, remain dependent upon external resources in order to participate. As a space that is explicitly devoted to not just engaging but supporting the leadership of groups that have been historically marginalized, the WSF process addresses latent conflicts based in long-term social exclusion and deprivation. Thus, activists have debated extensively the question of whether and how to accept funding from foundations and other powerful entities as well as how to generate resources to expand participation by the very poor.

As Fetherston argued, a minimal requirement for transformative peacebuilding is the creation of a critical space where movements can contest the existing "regime of truth." The refrain of "Another World of Possible" that is repeated at different Forums is an important retort to Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that "there is no alternative" to liberal capitalism. In this sense, the World Social Forum's commitment to creating "open space" for dialogue, reflection, and strategizing forms the basis of a platform for global scale conflict transformation. The open space created by the WSF process is used by movements to experiment with alternative discourses and symbols that can be used to legitimize challenges to "mis-framing" (Fraser 2009) and other discursive dynamics that serve to reinforce existing power asymmetries.

The recent United States Social Forum revealed important efforts to transform movement discourses and thinking about the work of advancing social justice. In the titles of workshops and in the language used in plenary sessions and official publications, USSF organizers reinforced language such as "gender justice," "climate justice," and "disability justice" in order to challenge conventional discourses

and socialize activists in new ways of thinking about their own demands and about the perspectives and concerns of groups that tend to be marginalized even in movement settings.

While gender and disability issues have traditionally been discussed in terms of "gender rights," "disability rights" or "disability access," groups discussed how a "justice" framework highlights intersections between struggles and moves beyond single-issue and state-centered approaches to advocacy. And considering environmental issues in terms of justice helps overcome common misperceptions that poor people are not interested in healthy environments, or that there is a hierarchy of issues and needs separating environmental concerns from other matters of equity and social justice. Such efforts should be seen as responses to the experiences of marginalization, "discursive demobilization" (see Chapter 2 by Cecelia Lynch), and subversion of activist agendas through securitization and other processes documented in earlier chapters. They serve as a crucial starting point for the advancement of dialogue across difference and the work of "translation" (Santos 2006).

Organizing the open spaces of the World Social Forum process has not been easy, and has generated some of the most vibrant and contentious debates within the WSFs. In the process of organizing the 2004 European Social Forum, for example, divides developed between the "horizontals," who demanded a greater degree of self-organization, and those whom they dubbed "the verticals," including traditional left political parties, who adhered to top-down organizing (Juris, 2008). This reflects the fact that in the process of bringing diverse groups together around the project of organizing Social Forums, activists confront the reality of power and its operation, even in the spaces of movements working to resist oppression, hierarchy and inequality (Juris 2008; Patomäki and Teivainen 2004). Smith and Karides and their colleagues (2007) discuss the tensions between those arguing for the preservation of the WSF as "open space" as opposed to a platform for collective action reflects one of the core "creative tensions" driving the WSF's dynamism and innovation (Smith and Karides et al. 2007). The two U.S. Social Forums that have taken place have sought both to uphold the principles of open space and to challenge historical patterns of exclusion through a deliberate process that relies upon leadership by those most harmed by economic globalization—specifically poor people and people of color. Organizations on the USSF National Planning Committee have been selected for their ability to mobilize grassroots leadership in marginalized communities. This organizing strategy reflects an <u>intentionality</u> that challenges the conventional understandings of "open space" in the WSF process while also potentially helping advance the basic principles articulated in the WSF Charter (Juris 2008; Smith and Doerr 2011).

The leadership and participation by Indigenous peoples in the 2010 Social Forum exemplifies this practice of intentionality. In addition to a role in planning, Indigenous peoples caucused each day prior to the start of USSF sessions to reinforce this shared identity within the larger space of the USSF and to identify and address conflicts, concerns, and challenges as they arose during the Forum itself.

Experimenting with this open space caucus helped strengthen organizational capacity among Indigenous activists and organizations dispersed across North America while also helping advance forms of engagement with the Forum that better reflected the cultural traditions, norms, and knowledges of Indigenous communities. This work has been ridden with conflict for many years, and prior engagements between Indigenous leaders and the U.S. and World Social Forum process have been far from smooth (Becker and Koda 2011). But as Becker and Koda show, Indigenous leaders and organizations have remained engaged with the WSF process, and in the course of this work have helped inform non-indigenous activists' understandings of the violence economic globalization and Western cultural imperialism have done to Indigenous peoples around the world. The Indigenous people's water ceremony at the Detroit USSF, for instance, opened space for dialogue and understanding of the issues facing Indigenous communities by inviting non-indigenous participants to observe and be present during the sacred ritual. The water ceremony makes explicit the connection between humans and the environment, raising awareness of the need to care for and protect precious water resources, as well as acknowledge broader environmental injustices. The water ceremony links to the broader concerns of Indigenous peoples from the Detroit area on the cooptation and commercialization of spiritual practices, as well as continuing marginalization from historic lands and resources. By bringing indigenous issues to the center platform of discussion, and by inviting non-indigenous peoples to observe and participate in this ritual, Indigenous activists were able to utilize open spaces within the Forum to cultivate mutual concern and respect and foster awareness of the connections between Indigenous and non-indigenous activists' needs and concerns. By continuing to engage with the WSF, leaders in the Indigenous movement are helping advance a broad and fundamental critique of the global economic order as a principal source of violence and inequality.

This example demonstrates the important role that the WSF's articulation of "open space" can play in peacebuilding. The open space ideal articulated in the WSF Charter of Principles aims to avert conflicts over strategies and tactics that have traditionally divided movements. By remaining a space for dialogue and convergence, the WSF explicitly rejects any attempts to take action in the name of the WSF. While activists within the process have debated the utility of the concept, and while some have pushed for more attention to collective action, thus far the principle of open space has remained, largely because of the remaining challenge many activists see of incorporating the voices and perspectives of those most harmed by economic globalization. Advocating a particular course of action without greater assimilation of the perspectives of these marginalized communities is seen as likely to reproduce the failures of earlier movements.

Yet, participants in the WSF process are impatient for social change and are eager to find ways of advancing their struggles for justice. Thus, one sees in the WSFs a variety of efforts to rectify the tensions

between open space and action, most notable among these being the Social Movement and (in the U.S.) People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs). These are assemblies typically held at the end of Social Forum gatherings where activist groups and networks put forward calls for specific collective actions and campaigns. They allow groups to find allies and collaborators in their work, and facilitate action that can strengthen alliances that unite people across sectoral, racial, cultural, and national divides.

The people's movement assembly of the anti-war movement at 2010 USSF reflected the critical work of creating bridges between diverse groups and across power levels. Comprised of diverse groups with varying agendas, the PMA in Detroit addressed a critical gap in involvement from Palestinian groups by recognizing the importance of expressing anti-war demands as a broader set that includes U.S. policies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While much of the focus remained on the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the PMA opened a space for a more dynamic and equitable conversation of the role of the U.S. in a more diverse set of situations and included a call for changes in U.S. policies towards Israel. Thus, through learned experiences of a more narrow focus within the anti-war movement, activists saw the need to expressly create a tie to more marginalized and typically separate Palestinian groups and include those issues within the anti-war forum.

As Smith and Doerr (2011) observe, and as the above discussion suggests, the Forum process involves significant reflection on the processes and power relations present within social movements while simultaneously seeking to create processes and structures that foster more equitable practices. This resonates with what Lederach, Neufeldt, and Culbertson (2007) write on the role of reflexivity in learning from experiences and thus developing experienced-based theory to support the work of transformative peacebuilding. The Forums are recognized spaces of contestation in which power dynamics exist and are consistently challenged (see Smith et al. 2008, Teivainen 2004). While much has already been written on the challenges facing the WSF and its regional Forums in regard to power relations and dynamics, there remains among many leaders and participants a clear commitment to a reflexive engagement in working within the existing open space framework to transform power relations. Santos thus characterizes the WSF as "a space on the move" (2008), suggesting a process able to transform political realities through the intentional renegotiation of relationships and the formation of new modes of thought and interaction. The functions of open space notions advanced through the WSF process thus present important opportunities for peacebuilders to think further about the possibilities for conflict transformation that exist in the realm of consciousness, culture, and discourse.

With open space, the WSF explicitly confronts the dualistic thinking that is characteristic of Western cultural traditions. One aspect of this that we can see in this discussion of open space is the WSF's challenge to the notion that cultural work is separate from and less important than work focused on policy processes and institution-building. Such an "underestimation of the political nature of the

cultural" (Osterweil 2004: 497) also functions to preserve a results-oriented conceptualization of political work that tends to marginalize civil society actors, especially those groups least prepared to engage in the conventions of institutionalized politics--such as poor people, ethnic minorities, and Indigenous peoples (Osterweil 2004). It thus narrows the scope of action to formal policies and political institutions that are exclusive and essentially designed to reproduce existing social hierarchies and inequalities. Transformative peacebuilding, in contrast, requires efforts to imagine institutions and policies grounded in differently ordered social relations, and therefore must privilege cultural work that can help articulate alternative values and models of social organization while fostering collective identities and commitments to support new institutions. The WSFs' public performances, plenary sessions, celebrations, and information-sharing bazaars are thus important examples of the sort of activities that contribute to transformative peacebuilding.

We saw in the articulation of alternative discourses in the USSF that open space also supports positive framings of conflict that provide opportunities both for social emancipation and deliberation across difference. This parallels what Lederach calls the "moral imagination" (2005), which consists of efforts to imagine conflict in new ways and to accept the possibility of positive developments to emerge through relational engagement.[5] Similarly, many activists in the WSF discuss "new movement subjectivities" and "political imagination" that are emerging through the process. Frequent references to variations on the Zapatista slogan, "Somos todos Subcomandante Marcos"[6] emphasize both activists' rejection of hierarchy and the movement's decentralized leadership while also signaling awareness of interdependencies and the possibility of "becoming the Other" (Sullivan 2005: 371). Such processes of subjective transformation do not occur naturally or easily. They require time and repeated opportunities for groups to encounter one another and to discuss their differences. Activists urging more "horizontal" forms of organization stressed how such forms are "modes of producing identities" that contribute to the renegotiation of identities, while vertical organizations more typical of earlier movements assume the "representation of given identities" (De Angelis 2004: 593). The sequential organization of at least nominally linked Social Forums thus provides a context for exchange, reflection, and learning that can contribute to the transformation of social relations and structures around the principles of inclusiveness and participation.

The crucial contribution of open space to transformative peacebuilding, then, is that it facilitates alliance-building by expanding what Santos calls "contact zones," in which actors and ideas are "render[ed] porous and hence permeable to other NGOs, practices, strategies, discourses, and knowledges'' (Santos 2004: 342). Such a formulation recognizes the central position that language and identity can have in escalating or de-escalating potential conflicts and echoes Lederach's description of the moral imagination as requiring "a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on

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dualistic polarity" (2005: 5). Participants' willingness to devote the time, resources, and energy to participating in the WSFs' open spaces signal their desire for dialogue and a commitment to building and re-thinking relations across multiple divides. A commitment to "language justice" and the presence of multi-lingual discussion at many Social Forum workshops is a good example of this, as it often requires a rethinking of conventional strategies based in political expediency and efficiency (Doerr 2008). Participatory working sessions, which exemplify the notion of "contact zones," similarly focus on transformational aspects of relationships and building alliances, rather than conventional results-oriented frameworks. In a session on community-based economies, participants bridged diverse backgrounds and locales to question discourses encountered in their daily work and create strategies for working in their local context, while forging relationships across political, social, cultural, and economic divides. The WSF process can facilitate the construction of alliances and mutual respect without explicit agreement, thus functioning as a dynamic form of conflict management that circumscribes conflict within negotiated boundaries of civility (Anheier 2007). These boundaries remain fluid, however, and such a process is thereby potentially able to avoid the over-institutionalization of conflict (Anheier 2007: 44) that entrenches unequal power relations between participants.

Conclusion

While civil society has been seen as vital to the effective implementation of post-war peacebuilding projects, there has been relatively little effort to develop our theories about how particular civil society formations and practices affect the prospects for achieving sustainable peace. Countering the assumptions inherent in the "liberal peace" theory, we have argued that critical social movements both within and outside of societies experiencing wars are essential to any serious effort to cultivate sustainable peace, since they help address issues of structural violence that emanate from the global economic order. They engage in what Fetherston has called "transformative peacebuilding," addressing the larger structures of violence and therefore improving prospects of generating lasting and just peace processes. Not only do these social movements help focus attention on the underlying sources of many violent conflicts around the world, but contemporary transnational movements have developed models of action aimed at bridging multiple differences among people from different class, racial and ethnic, and national backgrounds. They also have developed structures to facilitate collective action that articulates and supports alternatives to dominant structures that are based in inequality and exclusion.

However, the cultivation of new models of economic and social engagement, the development of identities that cross-cut dominant social cleavages, and the strengthening of people's commitment to collective political projects are tasks that are difficult even for civil societies operating without the challenges of violent conflict. To expect civil society groups to be able to take on these tasks in an

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effective way in the aftermath of wars is highly problematic, and most efforts to do so will likely fail in the short term. Moreover, they will be dependent upon external funding, thereby limiting the potential for local leadership development and the visions of social emancipation and open space that have been articulated by analysts and activists in the World Social Forums.
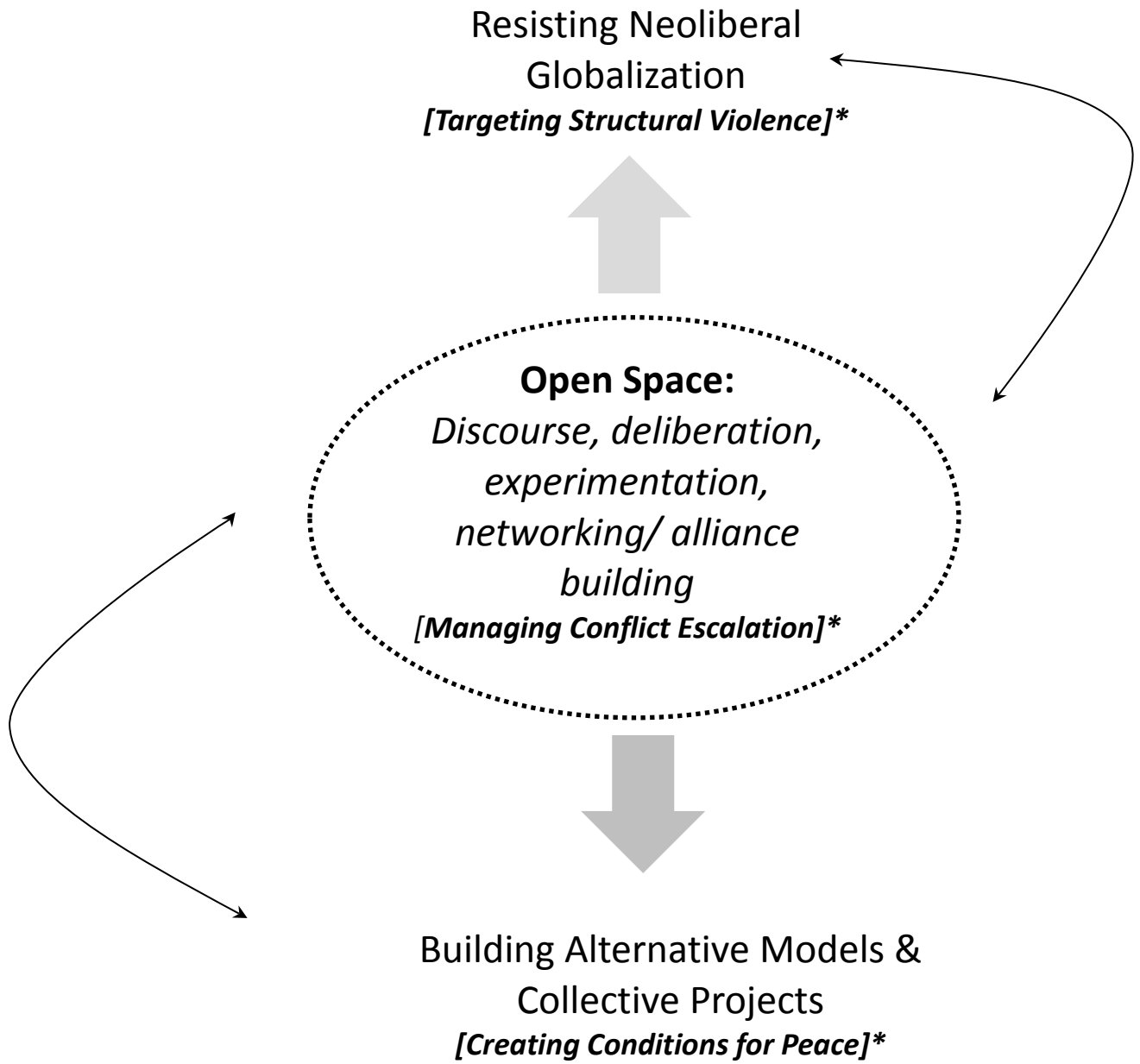
The World Social Forum is an important example of the kind of social movement activity that contributes to peacebuilding, because it focuses explicit attention on the world economic system as the main source of the grievances many local communities and activist groups are working to change. Moreover, it is not designed as a conventional movement campaign, but rather as a *process* that aims to develop relationships among diverse activists working across geographic space as well as time. It is a reflexive process that seeks to learn from the diverse experiences of movements around the world and to constantly improve its own operations to better achieve ideals of ever-more inclusive participation and solidarity around shared principles if not actions. Over time, it has helped build trust among groups with little experience working together. By cultivating ongoing dialogue and exchange, it generates new collective identities that help activists see themselves in new ways, where belonging is not restricted as it is with conventional class and national divisions. It has fostered in its first ten years the commitment among activists to a nonviolent process oriented towards large-scale social change. The practices in the WSF thus constitute functions that peace researchers have deemed important civil society contributions to peacebuilding.

Transformative peacebuilding requires the fundamental reordering of large-scale social and economic relations, and this is impossible without efforts of movements to develop new collective identities that can transcend historical cleavages and unite people in long-term collective struggles for justice. Peacebuilding scholarship and practice should support critical social movements and identify practices and forms that reinforce civil society projects for social emancipation. Scholars must expand their conceptual lens to consider the world-systemic context of peacebuilding and to appreciate the need for "peacebuilding" work outside the particular contexts of post-war societies and even states. Work to imagine new relationships outside of existing structures (including states) that serve to perpetuate inequality and violence is impossible in settings polarized by war and other forms of violence. The work required of civil society peacebuilders is best done in situations of more limited polarization and minimal overt violence, and this sort of work to prevent the escalation of conflicts into violence needs greater material and symbolic support.

The narrow focus on civil society in post-conflict peacebuilding in the peace research literature promotes a reductionist view of civil society because it limits its role to a stage when civil society is weakest and its involvement in peacebuilding is instrumentalized and linked to the aims of foreign donors. Instead, the work of civil society peacebuilders to prevent the escalation of conflicts into violence

needs greater material and symbolic support. It is this kind of work that can yield important lessons about the imagining of new relationships outside of structures perpetuating inequality and violence. Because of its explicit focus on the structures that reproduce hierarchy, inequality, and violence, the World Social Forum, then, is a crucial case for considering both how social movement actors are already involved in peacebuilding at the world-systemic level and how this understanding of peacebuilding can help build strong civil society networks that can prevent the escalation of conflict into violence.

Figure 8.1: World Social Forum Dynamics

Resisting Neoliberal
Globalization
[Targeting Structural Violence]*

Open Space:

*Discourse, deliberation,
experimentation,
networking/ alliance
building*
[**Managing Conflict Escalation**]*

Building Alternative Models &
Collective Projects
[Creating Conditions for Peace]*

*These practices reflect steps in the conventional "conflict cycle."

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Notes

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[1] Kaldor's book focuses on *global* civil society, which she sees as extending "beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies" (2003:4).

[2] Webster and Perkins define this concept as follows: "[s]tructural violence occurs when political and economic systems are organized in ways that oppress, exploit, and dominate certain segments of a population while privileging others who hold power and wealth" (Webster and Perkins 2001: 330).

[3] This effect is similar to that discussed in Chapter 1 by Neil Cooper, who showed how conventional arms control discourses shift analyses and remedial efforts away from basic human needs.

[4] In practice, there is relatively limited enforcement of this rule, which is articulated in the Charter of Principles, although explicitly violent groups are excluded and workshops that counter these principles are not accepted.

[5] Of course, given that the WSF process focuses on the *structural violence* and often latent conflicts resulting from the inequities of economic globalization, this re-thinking of relationships may first require an escalation of conflict as marginalized groups come to advance new collective identities and claims for justice.

[6] For instance, in the first USSF in 2001, French farmer-activist José Bové was arrested for his role in "decontaminating" a Monsanto-owned field of genetically engineered soybeans, which were being grown in a province that banned GMOs. Stickers saying "Somos todos José Bové" were quickly distributed and participants chanted this upon hearing the news of Bové's imminent deportation. The slogan has also been chanted to support international migrants and other targeted groups.