

SPACES OF INTENTIONALITY: RACE, CLASS, AND HORIZONTALITY AT THE UNITED STATES SOCIAL FORUM*

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The World Social Forum process has sought to provide an “open space” for diverse movements to exchange ideas, interact, and coordinate as they build another world. Despite this inclusive impulse, many of the forums have been disproportionately white and middle class. Through an ethnographic account of the 2007 United States Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta, I examine one high-profile attempt to overcome this lack of diversity by establishing what I refer to as an “intentional” space. I argue that the intentional strategy pursued by USSF organizers achieved a high level of diversity in racial and class terms, but de-emphasized the role of the forum as a “contact zone” for translation, sharing, and exchange among diverse movement sectors. However, given the strong desire to overcome past exclusions among participants, the privileging of intentionality over openness and horizontality was widely viewed as legitimate, which has important implications for democratic practice.

On the evening of October 17, 2004, the second day of the European Social Forum (ESF) in London, nearly two hundred young radicals stormed the stage during an anti-Fascist plenary where London Mayor Ken Livingstone was expected to speak. The mayor and his allies had been widely criticized for their exclusionary, non-democratic practices within an officially open, participatory organizing process, reflecting a long-standing divide between the so-called “horizontal” and “vertical.”¹ After a brief scuffle, the radicals, who had established their own autonomous spaces during the forum, occupied the stage for roughly thirty minutes, publicly denouncing the top-down way the ESF had been organized under the influence of the mayor’s Socialist Action faction.² Activists then read a statement released by Babels translators earlier in the week: “Our most important principle is . . . self-organization. However, many opportunities for experimentation and innovation have been missed . . . resulting in the exclusion of many people, organizations, networks, [and] groups.”³ As they left the building, several protesters were beaten and arrested by the London police.⁴

This scenario can be contrasted with the events of July 1, 2007, the last day of the first ever United States Social Forum (USSF) in Atlanta, when a prominent indigenous leader from Ecuador began reading a statement from the Third Continental Assembly of Indigenous People during the People’s Movement Assembly. The woman who had accompanied him on stage had taken up most of their allotted two minutes, so his time concluded before he was able to finish, and one of the two moderators, an African-American woman, asked him to step down. She abruptly grabbed the microphone when he refused to stop. He continued for a short time, but soon left the stage in anger as many in the crowd chanted, “Let him speak, let him speak!” Ten minutes later several dozen indigenous people and their allies marched out of the theater, taking the stage shortly thereafter. As the Ecuadoran explained, “We have to unite, organize, and defend ourselves. I did not want to disappear. I am tired of receiving these kinds of insults. In my country they think we are savages, but they say, ‘you look so beautiful.’ It

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cannot happen again at the social forums, not to women, not to indigenous people!” A Native North American went on to denounce the history of racist oppression and marginalization of his people, followed by a drumming circle meant to heal and restore the speaker’s dignity. The moderator then returned to the stage and apologized for the offense, and everyone began to hug as the crowd chanted, “The People, United, Will Never be Defeated!”

Since the first World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001, the social forums have provided a platform for diverse movements, networks, and organizations to share information, develop common strategies, and build concrete alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Coming on the heels of mass actions in Seattle, Washington, Quebec, and Prague, the first WSF allowed global justice activists to articulate a positive vision of what they were fighting for. The forums have continued to facilitate movement building, while constituting pedagogical spaces and laboratories for new forms of radical democracy (Fisher and Ponniah 2003, Santos 2006). Meanwhile, what began as a singular event has since become a sustained process involving forums at the local, regional, and global levels. As the forums intersect with diverse social, cultural, and political contexts, new issues and tensions come to fore, reflecting the importance of place within the forum process (Conway 2008).

Indeed, conflicts and struggles within and around the forums reflect key tensions associated with particular organizing processes. The incidents described above point to important differences between the European and U.S. forums with respect to the conception and practice of open space. Unlike the WSF International Council (IC), which is based on formal membership, the ESF has been coordinated through an open committee comprised of anyone who wants to participate. Given this process, it should come as no surprise that conflicts would emerge around openness and horizontality. Since 2003, the USSF process has addressed another key contradiction in the practice of open space: the lack of racial and class diversity. The protest of indigenous peoples during the USSF was motivated by a deep sense of disrespect, yet it also reflected the crucial role of identity, voice, and representation in the U.S. context. It should also be understood in terms of a broader U.S. political culture where issues related to representation and affirmative action assume particular importance.

Such differences raise key questions regarding the relationship between openness, inclusiveness, and horizontality. Popularized by grassroots autonomous movements in Argentina, the term horizontality refers to an increasingly widespread mode of political organizing characterized by nonhierarchical relations, decentralized coordination, direct democracy, and the striving for consensus (Sitrin 2005: vi). As I argue elsewhere, global justice movements are more generally characterized by a “horizontal networking logic” (Juris 2008). At the same time, many movement sectors, particularly in the North, have been criticized for their white, middle-class composition (cf. Martinez 2000; Starr 2004). In contrast, as many participants and observers have noted, the USSF was characterized by significant racial and class diversity (cf., Guerrero 2008; Ponniah 2008). As we shall see, the USSF’s “intentional” organizing strategy helped generate a more inclusive space than previous forums. The participation and leadership of so many working class people of color, who are among the most directly affected by corporate globalization, was groundbreaking and inspirational, yet openness and horizontality were afforded much less importance.

This article addresses a longstanding tension between directly democratic forms of organization and the goal of racial and class diversity within radical social movements (cf., Epstein 1991; Lichterman 1996; Polletta 2002). Through an ethnographic account of the 2007 USSF in Atlanta I examine one high-profile attempt to confront this challenge by establishing what I refer to as an “intentional” space.⁵ I argue that the intentionality enacted by USSF organizers, which involved targeting and reaching out to grassroots base-building groups, achieved a high level of diversity in racial and class terms, but resulted in the exclusion of many other sectors from the organizing process, including larger NGOs, liberals, white radicals and anarchists, organized labor, and mainstream environmentalists and feminists.

Racial and class diversity was thus achieved in practice by favoring a specific model of social change: grassroots organizing, or “movement building,” within working class communities of color, de-emphasizing the role of the forum as a “contact zone” (Santos 2006) for translation, sharing, and exchange among diverse movement sectors. At the same time, given the strong desire among participants to overcome past exclusions, the privileging of intentionality over horizontality and openness was widely viewed as legitimate, even among those excluded from the organizing process. As further discussed below, these findings have important implications for democratic practice.

The following is based on participant observation at the USSF from June 27 to July 1, 2007 and follow-up interviews with key organizers and members of the National Planning Committee (NPC). Previous research was also carried out during the 2002 and 2005 gatherings of the WSF in Porto Alegre and the 2004 ESF in London.⁹ I begin with a critical analysis of the concept of open space, relating differing views of the forum to a tension between “deliberative” and “agonistic” democracy. I then discuss the role of intentionality within the USSF, before examining the consequences of intentional space for openness and horizontality. Finally, I briefly consider the Another Politics is Possible project, which challenged an overly rigid opposition between diversity and horizontality. I then conclude with some reflections regarding the need for a greater balance between open and intentional space at future U.S. forums.

OPEN SPACE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The first World Social Forum was the brainchild of a transatlantic alliance between Bernard Cassen, Director of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and President of *Le Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens* (ATTAC—France), and Brazilian NGO leaders Oded Grajew and Francisco Whitaker. This pathbreaking event was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001 as direct a response to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. Since the first globally coordinated actions against capitalism inspired by Peoples’ Global Action, including the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in November 1999, global justice activists have communicated a powerful rejection of the neoliberal order. The WSF provided an opportunity to develop an affirmative vision.

The tension between intentionality and openness was present from the beginning of the forum process. On the one hand, the WSF expressed a clear rejection of neoliberal globalization, and was defined by several parameters: (1) that it be held in the South, (2) that its name be the World Social Forum, and (3) that it be held at the same time as the WEF, its principle adversary (Fisher and Ponniah 2003: 4; see also Teivainen 2002). In addition, the Charter of Principles specifically excluded political parties and military organizations, and no one would be allowed to speak on behalf of the forum. These initial “intentions” were meant to ensure that the WSF would be rooted in civil society, that it would be self-organized, and that it would be globally diverse. Beyond these stipulations, the forum would provide a space for all civil society actors opposed to neoliberalism to exchange ideas, share resources, and coordinate around common initiatives. In this sense, the WSF was guided by a radically democratic ethos of openness and horizontality.

The Brazilian Organizing Committee (OC) organized the first three gatherings of the WSF, which moved to Mumbai in 2004. Since then, the WSF has rotated between Porto Alegre and other cities, shifting to a bi-annual format after the 2007 WSF in Nairobi. The International Council was convened after the first WSF as a way to enhance the forum’s international legitimacy, in part, by promoting regional and thematic forums. Since 2001, the WSF has become a truly global process involving diverse events at multiple levels. Regional forums have played key intermediary roles, bringing together local and national movements around common issues, while helping them link up to wider global processes.

Organizers view the forum as an “open space,” an arena for diverse movements to exchange ideas and information, interact, and coordinate as they struggle to build another world (cf., Patomäki and Teivainen 2004; Sen 2003). Unlike a political party, no singular identity, program, or perspective holds sway (in theory), allowing multiple networks and groups to interact across their differences. As I argue elsewhere, the notion of open space reflects the inscription of a horizontal networking logic, characteristic of global justice movements more generally, within the organizational architecture of the forum (Juris 2005, 2008). Given its goal of facilitating deliberation and debate around new ideas, practices, and alternatives to neoliberalism, numerous scholars have characterized the forum as an emerging global public sphere (cf., Smith 2004; Smith et al. 2008; Glasius 2005; Ylä-Anttila 2005). At the same time, there has been a heated debate about whether the forum should also be viewed as a civil society actor, providing a means for organizations and movements not only to communicate and coordinate with one another, but also to articulate common positions and engage in collective action.

In Patomäki and Teivainen’s (2004) formulation, the forum has been alternatively construed as a space or a movement, the former resonating with a Habermasian model of deliberative democracy, the latter reflecting a Gramscian emphasis on counterhegemonic struggle (Glasius 2005). These competing visions reflect a struggle between “networking” and “command” logics constitutive of the forum process itself (Juris 2005, 2008). As Jay Smith (2006) suggests, this constitutive tension can also be expressed as an opposition between two conceptions of the public sphere: “discursive” and “agonistic,” both of which are reflected in the principles and practice of the forum.

With respect to the former, the forum’s open space ideal is often conceived along Habermasian lines as a discursive public sphere where rational-critical debate on public issues is conducted and where decisions are based on the quality of argumentation rather than social status (Calhoun 1992: 1). According to Habermas (1989), the “lifeworld,” or the sphere of autonomous personal relations guided by communicative interaction, should be shielded from the “system,” which is rooted in the logic of money and power (Calhoun 1992: 30). In this sense, the bourgeois public sphere was meant to be an “institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (Fraser 1992: 110), where citizens could deliberate and produce critical discourses outside the market and state. It was also to be open and accessible, and status inequalities would be bracketed (Fraser 1992: 113). Leaving aside the intractability of inequality (see below), it is important to note that deliberative public spheres tend to de-emphasize non-communicative action (cf. Smith 2006: 5-6). In this sense, Habermas (1996) has more recently noted that opinion formation should be seen as distinct from the enactment of opinions, an activity reserved for the institutional political sphere (361-62). Moreover, publics are by definition self-organized: no single person or group can determine their direction or speak on their behalf (Warner 2002).

Although organizers clearly defined the forum as an agonistic space with respect to the WEF and neoliberalism, it was also seen as a space for movements to communicate with one another, share ideas, and debate alternatives. The WSF Charter of Principles, in particular, has a decidedly Habermasian bent (Smith 2006), as it defines the forum as “an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences, and interlinking for effective action.”⁷ Although the WSF encourages planning and coordination, the forum itself does not act, but provides an open space for self-organized discourse and exchange. As Jai Sen (2003: 2) explains, “The forum... is not an organization or a movement, or a world federation, but a *space*—a nondirected space, from and within which movements and other civil initiatives . . . can meet, exchange views, and . . . take forward their work, locally, nationally, and globally.” The Charter thus specifically states that no one can speak in the name of the forum or all of its participants. Moreover, reflecting the Habermasian separation between system and lifeworld, the WSF is viewed as a space without internal struggle, while political parties and military organizations

are excluded (Smith 2006: 9). In practice, of course, the forum's open space ideal is often contradicted, as evidenced by the power struggles within various organizing committees, the critical support to the forums provided by political formations such as the Brazilian Workers' Party, and the massive public rallies and speeches by leaders such as Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula) of Brazil and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.

The contrasting view of the forum as a civil society actor reflects an alternative model of democratic practice that Chantal Mouffe (1999) calls "agonistic democracy" (Smith 2006). Without completely rejecting the deliberative view of the WSF, a focus on its agonistic dimensions reveals critical aspects of the forum that discursive perspectives often overlook. Indeed, as Colin Wright (2005) points out, a critique of the Habermasian public sphere can shed light on the weaknesses of the forum's open space approach. USSF organizers may not have explicitly theorized their actions in such terms, but their intentionality resonates with criticism of deliberative democracy for failing to take into account power relations and the structural and cultural exclusions that are a constitutive feature of public spheres, including the open space of the forum (cf., Ylä-Anttila 2005).

First, whereas in the Habermasian public sphere competing views are articulated as alternative normative claims to be judged by the rational strength of their supporting arguments, for Mouffe social and political relations are always infused with power. On this view, democracy goes beyond deliberation to also encompass political conflict and struggle. As with discursive models of the public sphere, more simplistic conceptions of open space can be similarly criticized for positing a neutral space of rational-critical debate. Indeed, as many observers have noted, the idea that internal power struggles are absent from the forum is both naïve and may reinforce inequalities (Biccum 2005; Juris 2005; Patomäki and Teivainen 2004; Wright 2005). An agonistic view of the forum means that, internally, diverse movement sectors are always involved in power struggles even as they work to build democratic alliances. Still, one can retain a more nuanced approach to open space as a guiding vision and a process entailing significant conflict and contradiction.

In terms of the relation between the forum and the outside world, some organizers and participants have criticized the notion of open space for reproducing a liberal notion of civil society based on dialogue rather than collective action. These actors would like to see a greater emphasis on the forum's instrumental as opposed to its prefigurative goals (Juris 2008; c.f., Polletta 2002). While recognizing the pedagogical role and the radically democratic spirit of the forum, they would also like to see the development of a common set of strategies and demands, as evidenced by repeated efforts to promote a forum-wide platform, including the G19 statement at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre and the Bamako Appeal at the polycentric WSF in Mali the following year. Most recently, Walden Bello (2007) has argued for the need to develop a strategy of "counter-power," suggesting that the WSF, along with its methodology of open space, may have outlived its usefulness. In response, defenders of open space, such as Chico Whitaker (2007), have maintained that the WSF as a space and the movements that use that space should continue on their related, yet separate paths. For critics, however, privileging the deliberative role of the forum undervalues the importance of conflict and struggle required to achieve concrete political victories.

On another level, with respect to inclusiveness and access, public spheres always already involve significant exclusions, which reproduce prevailing structures of privilege and inequality. As Nancy Fraser (1992: 120) suggests, contra Habermas, in highly stratified societies it is not possible to bracket status inequalities. Even if marginalized groups are formally admitted to the public sphere, informal protocols of style and interaction may continue to mark status differences, preventing them from participating on an equal footing. At the same time, subordinate groups often lack the material means to access public spheres, making it difficult for them to participate in the first place.

Such cultural and structural exclusions have also been at work within the forums (Ylä-Anttila 2005). With the exception of the 2004 WSF in Mumbai and the 2007 WSF in Nairobi

(and now the USSF), forum participants have been disproportionately lighter skinned and middle-class (Alvarez et al., forthcoming).⁸ Such disparities can be partly explained in structural terms as resulting from an unequal access to resources. Indeed, the “tyranny of distance” prevents many poor people from traveling to the forums. As Chase-Dunn et al. (forthcoming) note, delegates at the various editions of the WSF have tended to come from the host country and surrounding regions. Exclusion has also worked along religious and cultural lines, a point that has been made in terms of Muslim participation (Caruso 2004; Daulatzai 2004). Despite formal openness, structures of privilege and inequality erect “invisible” barriers to participation that are masked by the discourse of openness, making it more likely that powerful groups will predominate. Consequently, as Janet Conway observes, “inequalities among movements get reproduced in the open space unless there is affirmative action to ensure that marginalized and minority populations are present and their voices and perspectives amplified” (2008: 62). This was precisely the goal behind the intentional strategy of USSF organizers.

Finally, a discursive model of the public sphere can also be criticized for stressing rational-critical debate to the exclusion of the performative dimensions of public spaces. As many observers have noted, the forums are not only platforms for deliberation and debate, they also generate powerful emotions and collective identities (Hardt 2002; Juris 2008; Osterweil 2004).⁹ However, analyses of open space tend to overlook the more spectacular side of the forum. In this sense, following Smith (2006: 8), we might turn to Hannah Arendt, for whom politics also involves the “realm of appearance, performance, and drama.” For Arendt, political identities are never fixed and stable, but are rather produced in the context of performative, agonistic interactions (Honig 1995). Moreover, instead of being fully formed in the private realm, identities and interests are generated and negotiated in the public sphere itself (Calhoun 1992: 35). The forums thus provide platforms, beyond mass protests, for diverse movements to perform their identities, generate affective solidarity, and communicate political messages, often through dramatic struggle (Juris 2008). This is precisely why rallies, public conflicts, and festival spaces such as the youth camp are so critical to the politics of the forum.

THE USSF’S CONTRIBUTION: FROM OPEN TO INTENTIONAL SPACE

As I made my way to the staging area before the start of the USSF opening march on June 27, 2007, Tom Goldtooth, Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, was addressing the crowd: “Because we’re first inhabitants we understand what racism is, we understand what genocide is, we understand what capitalism is!” Amy Walker, from the Eastern Cherokee, followed Goldtooth, along with Reverend Joseph Lowery, a former civil rights leader who denounced racial and class domination. Thousands of protesters began filing in with colorful signs and t-shirts, representing diverse racial and ethnic communities. The large number of Latinos, African Americans, immigrants, and indigenous people was striking, particularly when compared with past forums and global justice protests in the U.S. When the march began I moved to a spot on a nearby hill to watch the various blocs marching by: Grassroots Global Justice, Acorn, Jobs with Justice, *Derechos para Todos*, the People’s Freedom Caravan, the Immokolee Workers, Critical Resistance, and other largely people-of-color groups dedicated to social, economic, and environmental justice. There were also immigrant rights, solidarity, and peace groups, and two anarchist samba bands. Despite the oppressive heat and humidity, the atmosphere was welcoming and festive. The opening march set the tone for the rest of the forum, where people of color made up at least half, if not more, of all participants, while young women of color assumed visible roles as presenters, plenary speakers, and organizers.

Given previous dynamics of participation within the forums, why was this one so different? How did the USSF achieve such a stunning level of racial and class diversity?

These questions assume greater importance in the U.S. context, where the largely white complexion of past global justice actions has drawn criticism since the challenge, “Where was the Color in Seattle?” was issued following the anti-WTO protests (Martinez 2000; cf., Starr 2004). As we shall see, the unprecedented diversity at the USSF resulted from an intentional strategy that reflected the more agonistic dimensions of the forum as well as the critiques of the deliberative model of public space explored above. Indeed, racial and class diversity was among the most notable contributions of the USSF, as was its role in linking U.S. movements to the global forum process in a more organized and visible way.

The USSF was a long time in coming. Whereas regional forums were first held in Europe, Asia, and Latin America in 2002, 2003, and 2004 respectively, the initial USSF did not take place until June/July 2007. For years activists at a global level had noted the lack of U.S. presence at the WSF. A review of the statistics, however, suggests that U.S. delegations have been among the largest, even if not on a per capita basis (see Hadden and Tarrow 2007: 221). Since 2003, the U.S. has had one of the top foreign delegations at every WSF, including the polycentric forum in Caracas (<http://www.ibase.br>). In this sense, U.S. activists have gone to the WSF, but they have not had as visible a collective presence as other contingents. As it turns out, the delayed start of a national-level forum process in the U.S. was the result of a strategic decision, which will be examined below. At the same time, however, this lag should also be viewed in terms of a set of wider obstacles, including a public opinion less supportive of the global justice movement than elsewhere, a discursive shift towards war and terrorism in the U.S. political context, and a greater focus on domestic concerns among U.S.-based movements (Haddon and Tarrow 2007).

The idea for a U.S. Social Forum had been discussed at prior forums, but the project ultimately coalesced under the stewardship of Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ), an alliance founded in June 2002 by a network of grassroots organizations that had gone to the WSF earlier that year. Also in 2002, the IC had asked Jobs with Justice and the Fifty Years is Enough network, which were on the Council, to organize a U.S. forum, but they responded that it was still premature given that the forums were largely unknown within grassroots communities. As a member of GGJ and the NPC explained:

If we called for it back in 2002 we wouldn't have seen the diversity that we saw in 2007. There just wasn't enough awareness of the process, and those who were familiar with it tended to be folks who were more white, who came from the anarchist sector, who came from the policy and solidarity groups and some labor, so it would have looked more like Seattle. Not that that was bad, I mean that was a very significant and important historical event, but we felt it was important that it be broadened and deepened, so we pushed back on it. (personal interview, August 24, 2007)¹⁰

GGJ organizers realized that without a coordinated effort to ensure diversity, the open space represented by a U.S. social forum would have informally excluded many historically marginalized groups. When the IC met in Miami in November 2003 during the mobilization against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Summit (and the annual Jobs with Justice meeting), GGJ finally agreed to look into the possibility of organizing a social forum in the U.S. A pair of meetings was held in Washington, D.C. in April 2004, one for grassroots groups, which drafted a proposal for the USSF, and one for a larger array of organizations that had been involved in the IC and the WSF. A call then went out to mostly grassroots groups with the goal of forming a national coordinating committee of fifty organizations. By August 2004 only 22 organizations had applied, and all were accepted, the majority of which had bases in working-class, people-of-color-communities. From the beginning, USSF organizers developed a set of intentional strategies that would address many of the shortcomings associated with the deliberative model of open space.

As organizers recounted at the Moving the Movement Workshop on the first day of the USSF, an effort had been made to ensure that organizations from what they called the

“grassroots base-building” sector would assume a leading role and have ownership of the process. As an NPC member explained:

If we didn't build diversity in from the start it would have been harder to build it in later. That's why we felt that we should take the approach of starting from this sector, with the groups that are historically marginalized from national processes, for them to get together first and build the foundation for the forum, and from there other sectors would be incorporated so we can all sit around like we are today, equally and in dialogue. (from session recording, Moving the Movement Workshop, July 28, 2007)

USSF organizers thus recognized and addressed the structural barriers that prevent marginalized groups from participating in open spaces.

In the discourse and practice of USSF organizers, “grassroots” came to signify a particular kind of organization defined by a specific politics. At the risk of obscuring the political diversity inside the NPC, most, but not all, of the member organizations shared several important characteristics. First, there was a widespread commitment to grassroots organizing, where the goal is to help communities build sustainable organizations that empower their members, achieve tangible victories, and remain accountable to their base (Polletta 2002). This “communitarian” politics is defined by a sense of belonging to a community with a shared history and identity that confronts common challenges through formal organizations rooted in the conditions of daily social life (Lichterman 1996: 106-107). This is in sharp contrast to the highly institutionalized politics of mainstream labor, environmental, and other large nonprofit organizations, as well as the “personalized” politics of middle class direct action activists, anarchists, and radical environmentalists, which involve a more diffuse sense of belonging, flexible modes of commitment, and an individualized style of grassroots participation (24).

Second, and related to this point, the communities that are most directly affected by prevailing structures of exploitation and inequality are viewed as the principal agents of social change. In the U.S., these include working class communities, people of color, indigenous peoples, youths, and gays and lesbians, among others. Middle class and white activists also have an important role to play, but oppressed communities should be at the forefront. Third, whereas traditional community organizing strategies focus on pragmatic politics rooted in people's self-interest (Polletta 2002: 179), many of the organizations in the NPC were committed to building broader multiracial and multiclass movements led by oppressed people of color.¹¹ Finally, there was also a widespread emphasis on popular education, leadership development, and community empowerment as concrete strategies for building long-term structures of resistance and change.

During USSF workshops and interviews, organizers continually referred to their recruitment strategies in terms of intentionality, reflecting the grassroots politics outlined above. In this sense, USSF outreach specifically targeted working-class people of color. As one NPC member explained,

The intentionality comes in here in that the folks who were brought together in Grassroots Global Justice said if it's going to be in the U.S. it's got to be different. And so part of the difference was that we said we want to focus on grassroots base-building organizations, of and inside working class communities of color. (personal interview, August 22, 2007)

Rather than circulating the initial call for the coordinating committee broadly, the early recruitment strategy was directed. As the NPC member continued,

This is where the intentionality comes in, because if we just sent out a broad call, you know, part of the open space is that you make it broad, whoever wants to come, but who would respond would be very different.

Throughout the process, the outreach group continued to recruit grassroots people of color organizations as anchors within specific regions. This targeted strategy was open in a formal sense, although, as she continued, “Our intentionality was that we might not have asked you to come in, not because we wanted to prevent you from coming, but we only had so many resources.” As a result, the NPC would ultimately be led by historically marginalized groups, including people of color (85 percent), women (64 percent), under the age of 40 (51 percent), and queer identified (15 percent) (Guerrero 2008: 179).

In addition to focusing on the grassroots base-building sector, the city of Atlanta was specifically chosen as a site for the USSF to highlight the history of struggle against racism and white supremacy. The USSF was initially scheduled for 2006, but when Hurricane Katrina hit, organizers decided to postpone it. Organizers then created three bodies: the Organizing Committee in Atlanta, the National Planning Committee, and the Southeast Organizing Committee (SOC). Open working groups were also created around logistical tasks, including the website, media, program, outreach, and fundraising. In June 2006, the SOC held a Southeast Social Forum in Durham, N.C., which was extremely diverse in racial and class terms. The Border Social Forum in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez in October provided another example of the way, as one organizer put it, “People of color and low-income folks . . . from both sides of the border . . . were a mobilizing force” (personal interview, August 8, 2007). In contrast, a major Northwest Social Forum had also been scheduled to take place back in October 2004, but it was cancelled when the Indigenous and Youth Programming Committees withdrew to protest their perceived marginalization (Guerrero 2008: 176).

Ultimately, organizers were pleased with the diversity and representation of the USSF itself, which included significant participation by grassroots base-building groups: anti-racists, farm workers, environmental justice activists, welfare rights organizations, anti-displacement and gentrification groups, grassroots worker and community-based organizations, immigrant rights activists, and queer liberationists. Other sectors also had a visible presence, including anti-war movements, fair trade networks, environmentalists, women’s groups, direct action activists, anarchists, and alternative media and technology collectives, but the most prominent delegations involved organizations with a base among low-income people of color. As a result, participants included large numbers of working class African Americans, Latinos, indigenous peoples, and, to a lesser extent, Asians, as well as white and middle class activists. As an NPC member recalled:

We were excited about how the social forum turned out . . . not exactly as we had envisioned it, but pretty close. . . . You know, it was mainly people of color, a lot of low-income, people of color-led organizations...and we also thought that it represented just about every segment of movement building in this country, from the environmental social front, to the women’s social front, the gay and lesbian social front. (personal interview, August 8, 2007)

Participants also noted the racial and class diversity. As one activist told me after the USSF,

The thing I enjoyed most was that, as a person of color myself, the racial balance of the people attending the social forum was in many ways liberating . . . because it provided a critical mass of people to allow for more open expression than occurs when you go to a majority white event. (personal interview, August 17, 2007)

USSF organizers also recognized that movements always involve power relations and struggle. Rather than allowing themselves to be dominated by more financially and politically powerful groups led by “white liberals” (Global Exchange and Greenpeace were frequently mentioned), grassroots base-building sectors made a strategic decision to build up their own power base. In addition to large nonprofit organizations, grassroots, people-of-color groups also had to position themselves vis-à-vis other sectors: big labor, environmentalists, anarchists, and direct action groups. Organizers thus stressed “grassroots” not only to counter

large bureaucratic organizations associated with the “nonprofit industrial complex” (INCITE! 2007), but also other kinds of grassroots formations that involve a more personalized politics practiced by many white, middle-class activists: direct-action groups, anarchist collectives, and radical environmental groups. As an NPC member explained during the International Perspectives on the WSF session:

We were in Seattle and saw various axes of power: one was dominated by the AFL-CIO and other unions. Another was controlled by the ecologists. Another axis was controlled by a large number of NGOs with large budgets. There was also a fourth axis of power in the streets, which the press called anarchists, the black bloc, youth, or the Direct Action Network. We sent a delegation there from indigenous, African American, Asian, and Latino organizations. We realized we didn’t have a platform of power, an identity within this process...We then created a project, a plan for finding new ways of participating to give a voice to the grassroots in the struggle for global justice. (from session recording, July 29, 2007)

The formation of Grassroots Global Justice should be viewed in this context as part of the process of building a strong identity and power-base among grassroots people of color organizations. Beyond the forums, this emerging grassroots sector also played a key role in the November 2003 mobilization against the FTAA Summit in Miami, organizing a caravan and protest bloc called Root Cause. As organizers explained, this sector is under-funded, which presented a significant challenge in organizing the forum. Foundations were skeptical about whether the sector could successfully pull off such an event, and were hesitant to support the USSF. For organizers, the fact that the USSF was perceived as not only successful, but also as having been one of the best run forums in logistical terms, was a major source of pride. When I asked one NPC member what she liked about the USSF she responded, first, the diversity, but second, “the fact that we were actually able to pull it off...logistically, we had our shit together: you went through the lines, you got your packet, there was a beautiful program (Personal Interview, August 22, 2007).” Moreover, the fact that this sector was able to carve out a lead role in the process meant they were in a position to implement an intentional outreach strategy. The significant racial and class diversity that characterized the USSF thus resulted, in part, from a conscious and deliberate struggle for hegemony.

Organizers also stressed the movement-building role of the forum. This is not to say they rejected open space, but they de-emphasized horizontality and openness. On one level, when I asked NPC members about the movement versus space debate they often refused to take sides. At the same time, although there were more than 900 self-organized workshops, many organizers stressed alliance building, popular education, and deliberate efforts to bring about a particular kind of social change. In this sense, each day of the workshops was organized around a different movement-building theme: consciousness, vision, and strategy. As an NPC member explained during the Moving the Movement workshop,

From the beginning we looked at this as a movement-building process. We looked at this event as just one little step in the road...of building the kind of movement that can get us to the point where we can respond to all the stuff going on in the world. (from session recording, July 29, 2007)

In their outreach, organizers thus specifically targeted groups involved in “movement-building,” by which they meant community organizing among grassroots communities of color. Although this strategy may have left out other sectors, it allowed organizers to plug into many already existing movements involving working class people of color.¹² The organizers’ movement-building strategy thus helped them achieve a diverse forum in terms of race and class, but this came at the expense of a stronger emphasis on horizontal sharing and exchange across sectors.

Once again, this strategy involved a high degree of intentionality. As an NPC member suggested during the Moving the Movement session, “This is a very intentional process. . . . It’s a people of color movement, so we’re talking about black folks, Latinos, indigenous folks, Asian folks, which we led with a process of self-determination.” In this sense, organizers promoted a particular vision of movement building rooted in oppressed communities. As a USSF document explains, “There is a strategic need to unite the struggles of oppressed communities and peoples within the United States (particularly black, Latino, Asian/Pacific-Islander and indigenous communities) to the struggles of oppressed nations in the Third World.”¹³ This model privileges community organizing, popular education, and leadership development. It also reflects an anti-imperialist, nationalist frame that views oppressed communities in the U.S. as “internal colonies.” As the statement continues, “The USSF should place the highest priority on groups that are actually doing grassroots organizing with working-class people of color, who are training organizers, building long-term structures of resistance.” By reaching out to many already-existing, grassroots, people-of-color formations, including environmental justice networks (see Faber 2005), the Right to the City alliance, and an emerging coalition of community-based Workers’ Centers, organizers ultimately succeeded in turning out their base among working-class people of color.

Finally, USSF organizers also made room for the more collective, emotional, and performative dimensions of democratic public spheres, emphasizing another critical role of the forum: providing a platform for building affective attachments and collective identities (cf., Melucci 1989). Again, this more agonistic approach to democratic practice complicated the more limited Habermasian version of open space as restricted to rational-critical debate. Social forums have always provided a space for conflict and spectacle, but organizers made a point of highlighting the performative dimensions of the USSF. If the goal is to create an intentional space, a platform is needed to represent, communicate, and make that intentionality visible. Beyond the opening march and ceremony, music, and cultural events, USSF organizers put a great deal of time and effort into organizing large, compelling plenary sessions as well as public panels at the People’s Movement Assembly.

At the most basic level, larger public gatherings generated emotion and collective solidarity. The Hurricane Katrina plenary, for example, on the first evening of the WSF was a rousing affair where largely African-American community organizers and activists talked about their experiences and denounced the criminal, racist response of the U.S. government. The crowd broke into emphatic cheers whenever a panelist made a poignant or emotional remark, such as this declaration by a woman from Biloxi: “People come first . . . period! It’s human rights!” Then, when a former Latino contract worker pointed out that African Americans aren’t given jobs because “they want our communities to fight . . . old slaves [against] new slaves,” the audience began to chant, “Si, se puede. Si, se puede” (Yes, we can!), in response to his appeal for unity. Indeed, USSF organizers opted for the large plenary format, in part, because of its emotional impact. As an NPC organizer explained referring to her experience during the 2006 Polycentric WSF in Caracas,

Part of our choice . . . was that some of us were really inspired by the Caracas example, where every night at the main arena there would be the evening plenaries. . . . There were amazing discussions. I remember all of us would be really excited. (personal interview, August 22, 2007)

In this sense, rather than separating the “serious” work of deliberation from the more spectacular and festive moments of the forum along its margins, USSF organizers followed the Caracas model in merging the discursive and performative dimensions of public space.

At the same time, the plenaries and panels also provided arenas for representing and enacting particular identities and foregrounding key issues. On the one hand, these gatherings, which involved up to 4,000 participants, provided a platform for groups to perform their identities and for organizers to publicly demonstrate their commitment to diversity, voice, and

representation. Organizers spent hours working on these issues. As an NPC member explained,

We spent a lot of time on representation: how many women, how many people of color? We broke down every single panel. How many Latinos, indigenous people, African Americans, folks from the South, queer folks, internationals, white folks, working-class? (personal interview, August 22, 2007)

Organizers thus recognized the need to take proactive measures to overcome structural and cultural exclusions.

The fact that most of the speakers were people of color and predominantly young women physically embodied the organizers' intentionality around the kind of movement they had aimed to facilitate, while addressing the way movements often silence oppressed communities. Several panel speakers commented on this, such as a Native American woman who began her presentation during the Plenary on War, Militarism, and the Prison-Industrial Complex by stating, "I just want to say that I am honored to be here, and as a woman of color I feel heard tonight, so thank you. It seems hard to do these days." Another Native American organizer specifically contrasted the USSF to Seattle during the panel session before the People's Movement Assembly, perhaps ironically, just a few hours before the microphone was snatched from the hands of another indigenous speaker, as described above:

A couple years ago we indigenous people fought our way to the front at the Battle of Seattle. . . . We should not have . . . to fight our way to the front of our homelands. We are indigenous people, the first Americans. So the indigenous peoples thank the NPC and the many people involved for not allowing that to happen. We are indigenous peoples. We're at the front of the line at the march, where we have a presence, so we thank you for allowing us to have that space.

On the other hand, the plenaries allowed organizers to emphasize key themes through "movement-building moments," including the Iraq War, Hurricane Katrina, drilling on Native American land, and the massive immigrant rights marches in 2006. Plenary sessions, such as Workers' Rights, and Gender and Sexuality, were added later. The goal was to use these moments as opportunities to explore commonalities across struggles and to discuss movement-building strategies. As an NPC member explained,

The intention was an expression of our overall intentions and goals for the USSF. We saw this as a space to actualize them. One of the objectives was to lay out the landscape and political debates within each of these themes, and get people to think out various strategies. (personal interview, August 22, 2007)

Hurricane Katrina, in particular, offered an opportunity to critically examine racism and highlight multiple thematic intersections. As a respondent exclaimed after the panel, "If you're workin' in criminal justice, you're talkin' about Katrina, if you're workin' on health care, you're talkin' about Katrina, if you're workin' on housing, you're talkin' about Katrina. We're livin' a Katrina nightmare in this country!" (from recorded plenary session on Hurricane Katrina, July 28, 2007)

INTENTIONALITY AND HORIZONTALITY

As I have been arguing, the significant racial and class diversity at the USSF resulted from a deliberate strategy, generating what I refer to as an "intentional space." Although organizers did not entirely reject the open space model, they placed a greater emphasis on establishing a space with a particular racial and class composition, balance of power, and movement-building strategy. However, this commitment to inclusiveness and diversity was associated

with a weaker commitment to horizontality and openness. As a result, racial and class diversity was achieved in practice by privileging a strategy of grassroots organizing over a more open space of convergence among diverse sectors with distinct political visions, organizational practices, and strategies for social change.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006) has argued that the social forums should be viewed as “contact zones,” which establish planes of interaction and exchange among movements with distinctive knowledges, temporalities, subjectivities, scalar practices, and alternative visions of social and economic organization (cf., Tsing 2005). As Santos explains:

Such a task entails a wide exercise in translation to expand reciprocal intelligibility without destroying the identity of the partners of translation. The point is to create, in every movement or NGO, in every practice or strategy, in every discourse or knowledge, a *contact zone* that may render it porous and hence permeable to other NGOs, practices, strategies, discourses and knowledges. (2006: 133)

In this sense, the intentional strategy of USSF organizers ensured that people of color, working-class communities, indigenous peoples, and other oppressed groups would be able to contribute their perspectives to the overall “ecology” of epistemologies and practices. At the same time, by privileging one strategy—grassroots organizing—over all others, racial and class diversity was achieved by downplaying the forum’s wider role as a facilitator of translation across sectors.

Rather than a singular public sphere, Santos’ view reflects a model of the forum as a multiplicity of spaces, an overarching arena promoting cross-fertilization among diverse “counterpublics” (Fraser 1992; cf., Lichterman 1996). This is precisely the promise of the USSF. As organizers recognized, however, the first step was to ensure that historically marginalized groups had a strong presence by implementing an intentional organizing strategy. At the same time, although this process led to a diverse, grassroots, and movement-oriented forum, it was less open than it might have been. Moreover, the NPC attempted to manage much of the content and tone of the forum, particularly during the more visible public moments. In this sense, the USSF was less a space for translation and exchange than a platform for expressing a particular kind of grassroots identity and politics. This was apparent in at least two fundamental ways.

First, the goal of ensuring that the USSF was led by grassroots base-building groups meant that other sectors were initially left out of the organizing process. On the one hand, the criteria to join the NPC limited membership to certain kinds of organizations. The two requirements were that groups had to be member-based and they had to be involved in movement building. In other words, members had to be communitarian organizations engaged in or providing support for grassroots organizing. Individuals, policy-oriented NGOs, intellectual and student groups, environmental organizations, and informal networks including anarchists, direct-action activists, and independent media practitioners were largely excluded from the NPC. Rather than creating a wider space for dialogue and translation, communitarian politics were privileged over both bureaucratic forms of organization as well as more informal, personalized modes of commitment.¹⁴

On the other hand, the specific outreach strategy employed by the NPC primarily targeted grassroots base-building organizations rooted among working-class communities of color. This had the salutary effect of reversing traditional hierarchies, but at the same time, a great deal of energy, creativity, and experience from other sectors may have been lost. When I asked an NPC member whether a completely open process where anyone could participate regardless of their organizational affiliation, as in Europe, would work in the U.S., she neatly summed up the contradiction between openness and diversity:

If we were to throw open the U.S. Social Forum, what you would get the first time would be activists, organizations with more capacity, maybe more intermediaries rather than base-

building organizations, and it probably would be more white than not. This would provide the level of transparency and openness that people value, but would also replicate the very oppressions that prevent people from coming to the table (Personal Interview, August 22, 2007).

In this sense, the invisible exclusions of open space were replaced by more visible barriers.

A second way the tension between intentionality and openness was made visible had to do with the movement versus space dynamic. In this sense, organizers articulated a particular vision of social change based on building powerful movements through long-term community organizing, grassroots base-building, and popular education. The ability of organizers to insert this model as the dominant paradigm helps explain why the USSF was able to attract so many groups that organize among working-class people of color, and thus why the forum was so diverse and inclusive. Moreover, this movement-building focus also helps explain the importance given to larger public moments as well as the specific composition, style, and tone of the plenaries and many of the workshops.

One result of emphasizing a particular kind of movement, however, was that less attention was paid to alternative strategies, tactics, and political visions. Which is more effective: community organizing, direct action, lobbying, or media work? Should social movements pursue state-oriented or autonomous strategies for social change? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of vertical versus horizontal forms of organizing? How might these different strategies, tactics, and organizational forms work together within a broad-based movement? As one participant pointed out, "There was a great deal of racial diversity, but little ideological diversity (personal interview, August 17, 2007)." Put differently, the translation dynamic of the forum was muted. Beyond ideology, what was perhaps more notable was a lack of interaction between diverse strategies, political visions, and forms of commitment.

Another result of the particular movement-building strategy within the USSF was that more informal networks characterized by a personalized mode of politics, including a greater commitment to horizontality and autonomy, were less involved in the organizing process than has been the case elsewhere, particularly in Europe. Although the groups that spearheaded the USSF process are generally resource poor, most have traditional organizational structures, involving vertical leadership, formal membership, and paid staff supported by foundation funding. In many ways, they resemble the classic social movement organizations of resource mobilization theory. As Piven and Cloward (1978) argue, however, formal organizations can dampen the spontaneity and militancy required to build mass movements. In this sense, there has been growing criticism of what some grassroots activists and observers are now calling the "nonprofit industrial complex" (INCITE! 2007). At the global level, where formal organizations dominate the IC, informal networks have played a significant role by organizing youth camps and autonomous spaces outside, yet still connected to the official forums (Juris 2005). Although direct action, anarchist, and other groups committed to horizontal organizing did attend the USSF, they had little access to, and impact on, the organization of the event.

This helps to explain why movement building was emphasized over open space. This is not to say open space was absent. Indeed, roughly 900 self-organized workshops covered a vast array of themes. Still, the plenaries and public events consistently stressed movement building as opposed to establishing a contact zone for sharing, exchange, and translation among groups with diverse political visions, ideological perspectives, tactical preferences, and strategies. By way of comparison, while the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre was entirely self-organized, the USSF featured central plenary sessions where specific issues, strategies, and communities were highlighted. Even the workshops reflected an intentional strategy, as organizers were asked to engage issues of concern to grassroots communities and to address USSF goals with respect to youth and racial/class diversity.¹⁵

Moreover, on a logistical level, the greater involvement of informal, anarchist-oriented sectors, particularly groups such as Food Not Bombs or radical environmental networks with

experience organizing action camps, may have helped organizers address the lack of affordable food and housing.¹⁶ At the same time, these networks are usually dominated by white, middle-class youths with strong subcultural identities. As noted by many activists of color and white antiracist organizers, such countercultural groups tend to create environments that people of color find unwelcoming (cf., Martinez 2000; Starr 2004). Indeed, as Paul Lichterman (1996) suggests, white radicals are more likely to emphasize alternative communities, while for activists of color, political activity is often rooted in their everyday networks of social relations. Consequently, the greater participation of white radicals may have complicated efforts to achieve racial and class diversity. At the same time, if the USSF is to play a role as a contact zone for interaction and exchange among diverse practices, knowledges, and forms of commitment, other sectors will have to participate more fully in the organizing process, which will both require and facilitate a greater emphasis on translation.

CONCLUSION: IS ANOTHER POLITICS POSSIBLE?

I walked into a ballroom at the Renaissance Hotel in Atlanta on the morning of Friday, June 29. The room was packed with several hundred people, mostly young. Slightly less than half were people of color. The chairs were set up in concentric circles, and in a corner a few childcare volunteers were watching a group of kids. As I entered the room, two organizers handed me a paper with questions about horizontalism, intersectionality, “living the vision,” and social transformation. The session began with a drumming circle and chant. Facilitators then welcomed us to the “Another Politics is Possible” initiative. Another Politics is Possible was a study group, session, and track at the USSF, as well as a delegation of grassroots groups, childcare volunteers, and individuals—mostly mothers and women of color. The participating groups were mainly small, collectively run, and committed to building an alternative politics based on horizontality, autonomy, and self-management. The session explored the prospects and challenges for developing nonhierarchical approaches to organizing and movement building in the United States.

We began by breaking into groups of three or four where we discussed questions such as, “How do you practice leadership development when you are trying to implement a horizontal structure and politics?” or “When and how do you decide to make demands of and organize against dominant institutions, or build an alternative to that institution?” Afterward, delegates from grassroots people of color collectives—the Immokolee Workers, the Garment Worker Center in Los Angeles, INCITE!, Sista II Sista, and the Center for Immigrant Families in New York City, among others—took turns responding to the larger group.

The session complicated the neat binary I have set up in this article between open and intentional space. On the one hand, a relatively open space *was* created where groups could come together and share ideas and experiences regarding various approaches to social change. Moreover, the overall theme dealt with issues that had been obscured in the larger USSF. Indeed, several respondents challenged not only nonprofit structures but also the model of grassroots organizing. As one participant explained, “It might sound a little harsh, but in our organization we don’t believe in organizers. We’re animators and consciousness raisers in our community.” Another participant stressed intentionality by noting,

Having a nonhierarchical or horizontal collective structure doesn’t mean just having an open circle for everyone to come in. . . . It means having very intentional, deliberate structures. . . . If we just have an open space, our internalized privileges or oppressions or entitlements come out.

The Another Politics is Possible session was an attempt to build a space that was horizontal *and* intentional, and where participants grappled with alternative visions. In this

sense, there is no reason why a collectively run, self-managed process cannot create an intentional space. However, the tension between openness and intentionality is more complicated. The session was not *completely* open: organizers decided which questions to address, how to structure the discussion, and who would present publicly. In strict terms, creating a space is always intentional. As Rodrigo Nunes (2005: 61) suggests, “The very idea of ‘open space’ is contradictory—for it to be opened, it must be opened by someone, for some purpose and with some people in mind; no matter how open this first determination is, it always already creates an exclusion.” The relationship between intentionality and openness is better viewed, then, as a continuum rather than as a strict opposition.

As I have argued, the USSF succeeded where many previous forums have failed in building a process that was not only diverse in terms of race and class, but that was also led by grassroots organizations with a base among working class communities of color. In achieving this, the USSF confronted an important contradiction: as with broader public spheres, open spaces tend to reproduce exclusions due to structural barriers and power inequalities. In response, USSF organizers developed a vision for how the space of the USSF should look and took strategic steps to make that vision a reality by engaging in a more agonistic approach to democratic practice. However, efforts to generate inclusive spaces may contradict other values that are important to activists, such as openness and horizontality. As I have argued, many sectors were left out of the organizing process, while the more visible, public moments of the USSF had a predetermined content, composition, and tone defined by the NPC. In this sense, the organizers’ intentionality privileged grassroots organizing over alternative strategies. Racial and class diversity were thus achieved at the cost of downplaying the forum’s role as a contact zone for translation, interaction, and exchange among diverse knowledges, visions, practices, and forms.

In comparative terms, it is interesting that few groups openly challenged the NPC regarding openness and horizontality, as has occurred regularly at the European and World Social Forums. I heard a few isolated comments, but there were no actions such as the storming of the stage at the 2004 ESF in London. Sessions such as *Another Politics is Possible* or an anarchist workshop I attended where one might expect critiques to have been raised, were silent on these issues. Instead, there seemed to be agreement across sectors that the USSF was an opportunity to begin rebuilding a U.S.-based global justice movement by addressing past critiques of racial and class exclusion. As a white male activist explained in our breakout group at the *Another Politics is Possible* session, “It’s wise for groups to put boundaries and limits on it [the USSF organizing process] that are perhaps overly excessive, at least for now. We need to break down where we’re coming from and we need to start fresh, and this is how we are starting fresh. Maybe it’s not horizontal, maybe it’s the opposite, but we’ll work back toward the middle from there.”

What activists implicitly recognized is that deliberative approaches to democracy often neglect the power imbalances as well as the structural and cultural exclusions that are constitutive of any public sphere. In this sense, for the USSF to become a truly open, democratic space and for it to fulfill its broader role as a contact zone between different movement knowledges, visions, and practices, proactive steps must be taken to ensure that historically marginalized groups can participate on a more or less equal footing. This suggests that intentional strategies that might otherwise be viewed as closed, top-down, and non-democratic, may in fact be widely recognized as legitimate if they are seen as advancing longer-term democratic goals. At some point, however, if other sectors are to remain committed to the USSF, they will demand a greater role in the organizing process. This will inevitably lead to questions about openness and horizontality.

Indeed, NPC members have since talked about the need to open up and bring in other sectors. As one organizer explained, “If we were going to fall short, if we’re going to accept criticism, we’re willing to live with the criticism that it wasn’t broad enough in terms of bringing in these other sectors” (personal interview, August 24, 2007). Regarding the next

USSF and new membership of the NPC, he continued, “We want to see broader diversity, but we also want to make sure the grassroots doesn’t get overrun.” One of the main challenges for the next USSF will be precisely to move toward greater openness, while maintaining a certain level of intentionality so that working class communities of color continue to have a strong presence. At the same time, it will also be important to build unity between people of color and an embattled white working class that has also borne the brunt of neoliberal globalization. Meanwhile, as the incident involving the African-American moderator and indigenous speaker suggests, there are also significant differences and rifts to heal within and between people of color communities.

Finally, in order to bring in a greater diversity of sectors, it might help to think about the USSF less as a single space, and more, as mentioned above, in terms of a multiplicity of spaces that are self-organized and autonomously managed (cf., Juris 2005). As Nancy Fraser (1992) has argued, in a highly stratified society with significant social inequality, multiple publics are required to overcome structural barriers and ensure participatory parity. Even in a theoretically egalitarian and multicultural society, however, a plurality of publics is still preferable to avoid cultural exclusions based on “filtering diverse rhetorical and stylistic norms through a single, overarching lens (126).” At the same time, an “additional, more comprehensive arena” (Fraser 1992: 126) would allow members of different publics to interact across their social, cultural, and political differences. The USSF represents precisely such an arena. In this sense, the NPC would become a space of coordination, allowing different political ideas, styles, and visions of the forum to flourish. Proactive measures may still be necessary to ensure grassroots participation, but recognizing and institutionalizing a plurality of spaces would allow the USSF to become more broad-based, participatory, and politically diverse.

While recognizing and facilitating a multiplicity of spaces within the USSF would enhance its radically democratic character and pedagogic function, proponents of a more agonistic democracy may well ask how this will advance concrete struggles for social and economic justice. Indeed, the WSF was initially created as a way to support the global struggle against neoliberalism. As others have pointed out, though, there is no necessary contradiction between an organization’s prefigurative goals, in this case the forum’s role as a laboratory for radical democracy, and its more instrumental objectives (Breines 1982; Polletta 2002; cf. Juris 2008). Indeed, as Francesca Polletta (2002) suggests, participatory forms of organization also have a critical strategic dimension: enhancing solidarity, facilitating learning, and generating innovation. If the USSF is to help build a powerful, broad-based coalition for long-term social transformation, it will not only have to include historically marginalized voices, it will also have to foster a broad sense of ownership among diverse movement sectors. The future of the USSF depends, in large part, on whether organizers are able to achieve this delicate strategic balance.

NOTES

¹ The “horizontalists” was a self-named group of activists committed to openness, transparency, and direct democracy that was created during the London ESF organizing process in opposition to the dominant faction surrounding Mayor Ken Livingstone, which they dubbed the “verticals.”

² Socialist Action is a far Left Marxist/Trotskyist group that infiltrated the UK Labour Party and became an ardent supporter of Mayor Livingstone in the context of the Greater London Authority.

³ Babels is a network of volunteer translators and interpreters founded prior to the 2002 ESF in Florence.

⁴ Beyond the continued debate surrounding the ESF organizing process, this action also led to a subsequent race-related controversy, as three organizers of color, including Lee Jasper (Ken Livingstone’s senior race advisor), wrote a letter to the *Guardian* condemning the white radicals for stifling their antiracist speech (<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/10/299527.html>). In response, another group of prominent anti-racist leaders issued a statement criticizing the use of race by Jasper and his colleagues as a way to detract from what they saw as a legitimate critique of the role

of the mayor's Greater London Authority within the ESF organizing process (<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/10/299638.html>). Despite the highly racialized nature of this exchange, the themes of racial representation, participation, and diversity were not major issues at the London ESF, as they were at the U.S. Social Forum.

⁵ I adapt this term, in part, from members of the National Planning Committee themselves, who frequently refer to "intentionality" to characterize their organizing strategy.

⁶ This previous research was based on my participation as both an activist and observer with a Barcelona-based global justice network called the Movement for Global Resistance.

⁷ www.forumsocialmundial.org.br (accessed December 15, 2003).

⁸ Although some observers noted the prominent role of European NGOs in Nairobi (Elizabeth Smythe, personal correspondence), the Kenyan Organizing Committee reported that two-thirds of all registered delegates were black and 60 percent came from Africa (Conway 2008).

⁹ Regarding the importance of identity within social movements, see Melucci (1989). For more on the emotional dimensions of social movements, see Goodwin et al. (2001).

¹⁰ Interviewee names have been suppressed to protect anonymity. For additional details on the history of the USSF, including a list of specific participating organizations from the grassroots sector, see Guerrero (2008).

¹¹ For a summary statement of the "grassroots" politics of the NPC, see the document "What We Believe," https://www.ussf2007.org/en/we_believe (accessed October 26, 2007). White anti-racist activists have articulated a similar vision (see Starr 2004).

¹² Some observers noted a differential pattern of participation, whereby attendees at workshops devoted to vision, strategy, and issues related to neoliberalism and trade were primarily white, while sessions focusing on specific issues, such as housing, poverty, and Hurricane Katrina involved many more people of color (Elizabeth Smythe, personal correspondence; see also Albert 2007; Smith and Juris et al., this issue).

¹³ From document, "What We Believe." See note 11.

¹⁴ However, not many groups from other movement sectors applied and no applicant was ever rejected. Meanwhile, the process eventually opened up, and a few non-base-building organizations did ultimately serve on the NPC, including Sociologists without Borders, the American Friends Service Committee, the 50 Years is Enough Network, and the Ruckus Society.

¹⁵ In the end, members of the program group decided not to vet specific workshops, however, given the large number of proposals (Personal Interview, August 17, 2007).

¹⁶ NPC members did make an effort to secure alternative facilities, but they faced a shortage of meeting spaces in Atlanta and scheduling conflicts at the historical black colleges (Personal Interview, August 8, 2007).

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