



Chapter One

GLOBALIZATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUMS

In the 1970s and 1980s, protests against the lending policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) emerged in the global south. By the late 1990s, tens of thousands of protesters were gathering wherever the world's political and economic elite met, raising criticisms of global economic policies and calling for more just and equitable economic policies. As the numbers of protesters grew, so did the violence with which governments responded. Governments spent millions and arrested hundreds of nonviolent protesters to ensure their meetings could take place. Italian police killed Carlo Giuliani, a twenty-three-year-old protester, at the meeting of the Group of 8 (G8) in Genoa in 2001, dramatizing for activists in the global north the brutal repression against activists that is common in the global south. The size of police mobilizations against these overwhelmingly nonviolent protests was unprecedented in Western democracies, and it signaled the declining legitimacy of the system of economic globalization promoted by the world's most powerful governments. After years of such protests against the world's most powerful economic institutions—the World Bank, International Monetary

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Fund, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the G8—a team of Latin American and French activists launched the first World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2001.

Over just a few short years, the WSF has become the largest political gathering in modern history and a major focal point of global efforts to promote an alternative vision of global integration. Mobilizing around the slogan “Another World Is Possible,” the WSF began as both a protest against the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland, and as an effort to develop a shared vision of alternatives to the predominant, market-based model of globalization. Many see the WSF as a crucial process for the development of a global civil society that can help democratize the global political and economic order, and some would argue that it is the most important political development of our time. This book aims to introduce readers to the WSF process—by which we mean the networked, repeated, interconnected, and multilevel gatherings of diverse groups of people around the aim of bringing about a more just and humane world—and the possibilities and challenges this process holds. In this chapter we describe the political and economic conditions that gave rise to the global justice movement and the WSF.

The first WSF was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in late January 2001. The timing of the WSF was strategically chosen to coincide with the WEF, an annual meeting of global political and economic elites typically held in Davos, Switzerland. The WEF is a private interest group that has worked since its founding in 1971 to promote dialogue among business leaders and governments and to shape the global economy. Over the years an ever-more-impressive list of political leaders have participated in this private event, for which corporate members pay upward of \$15,000 for the opportunity to schmooze with the global power elite. Civil society has been largely shut out of the process of planning an increasingly powerful global economy.

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The WEF is widely criticized for providing a space where the future of the world is decided but excluding the democratic participation of most of the globe's population. French and Latin American activist groups and political organizations were among the first to protest the WEF in 1999. This eventually blossomed into the idea of a WSF that received sponsorship in Brazil from the Worker's Party, a political party that won government elections in the city of Porto Alegre, supported the principles of global economic justice, and was willing to work with social change activists to coordinate the first WSF.

This first meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, drew more than twice the 4,000 people organizers anticipated, and the global meeting now regularly attracts more than 150,000 registered participants. Its first attempt to move outside of Porto Alegre was in 2004 when the WSF met in Mumbai, India. After a return to Porto Alegre in 2005, it moved to Africa (Nairobi) in 2007 in an effort to expand opportunities for different activists to participate. Inspired by the call for open discussions of and organizing around visions of "another world," activists launched regional and local counterparts to the WSF around the world. This expanded opportunities for citizens to become part of the WSF process and helped sustain and energize local organizing efforts.

The WSF has become an important, but certainly not the only, focal point for the global justice movement. It is a setting where activists can meet their counterparts from other parts of the world, expand their understandings of globalization and of the interdependencies among the world's peoples, and plan joint campaigns to promote their common aims. It allows people to actively debate proposals for organizing global policy while nurturing values of tolerance, equality, and participation. And it has generated some common ideas about other visions for a better world. Unlike the WEF, the activities of the WSF are crucial to

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cultivating a foundation for a more democratic global economic and political order.

The WSF not only fosters networking among activists from different places, but it also plays a critical role in supporting what might be called a global counterpublic (Olesen 2005; cf. Fraser 1992). Democracy requires public spaces for the articulation of different interests and visions of desirable futures. If we are to have a more democratic global system, we need to enable more citizens to become active participants in global policy discussions. Without a global public sphere, there can be no plural discussion of global issues. Even the most democratic governments lack public input and accountability for actions that influence the living conditions of people in other parts of the world.

Just as the WSF serves as a foundation for a more democratic global polity, it also provides routine contact among the countless individuals and organizations working to address common grievances against global economic and political structures. This contact is essential for helping activists share analyses and coordinate strategies, but it is also indispensable as a means of reaffirming a common commitment to and vision of “another world,” especially when day-to-day struggles often dampen such hope. Isolated groups lack information and creative input needed to innovate and adapt their strategies. In the face of repression, exclusion, and ignorance, this transnational solidarity helps energize those who challenge the structures of global capitalism. While many activists will never have the chance to attend the global WSF meeting, they see themselves as part of the process and know they are not alone in their struggles. Aided by the Internet and an increasingly dense web of transnational citizens’ networks, the WSF and its regional and local counterparts dramatize the unity among diverse local struggles and encourage coordination among activists working at local, national, and transnational levels.

The Global Scene: Politics and Economy in the Neoliberal Era

Globally and nationally, the logic of the relationship between governments and corporations changed somewhere between the late 1970s and the early 1980s (McMichael 2003; Brunelle 2007). The global justice movement and the WSF challenge the economic and political restructuring initiated during this period, increasing social inequalities, environmental degradation, and political injustices throughout the world. In this section, we review how global economic restructuring taking hold in the mid-1980s undermined democracy and transformed the globe.

Changes in the World's Economic Principles

For fifty years up until the mid-1980s the ideas of John Maynard Keynes dominated economic policymaking. The principles of Keynes, or Keynesianism, included two very important features that informed economic policies in the United States and the world in the aftermath of the Great Depression. First, government involvement in economic development was encouraged as vital to successful capitalist industrialization (Portes 1997; McMichael 2003). Government duties included providing a buffer against cyclical economic downturns and planning and developing various economic sectors (Kiely 1998; Portes 1997; McMichael 2003). Second, government was also needed to reduce the inevitable inequalities produced by capitalist development. Such redistribution and assistance would not—according to Keynesian principles—interfere with economic growth, but rather it would help foster it.

The Keynesian era and the organization of the global political economy on these principles ended in the mid-1980s and

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were replaced with what is widely referred to as the Washington Consensus (Williamson 1997), or neoliberalism. Former U.S. president Ronald Reagan and former U.K. prime minister Margaret Thatcher are two leading politicians responsible for ushering in the neoliberal era. Neoliberals argue that prioritizing the interest of capital is the only assurance for national economic success. Governments were required to drastically reduce their involvement with the economy, and good governance was measured by the extent to which a state could promote development through market forces. Government attempts at poverty alleviation and the reduction of social inequality became viewed as detrimental to economic growth. Neoliberal proponents view all regulations on corporate activity, such as those that protect the environment from toxic dumping or workers from unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, as a hindrance to economic growth.

Proponents of economic globalization like to argue that if governments enact policies to encourage international trade and economic growth (profits) for corporations, the benefits will automatically “trickle down” to all sectors of society. One of the claims made by those advocating a free-market model for global economic governance is that, if progress is to be achieved, *there is no alternative* (TINA) to the global expansion of capitalism. Margaret Thatcher made such a claim very explicitly. Neoliberals have shaped the policies of global institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization to promote this particular vision of global economic integration. Because those adopting this model of economic development occupied positions of power within the world’s richest and most powerful countries, they were able to effectively impose the neoliberal model of globalization from above. They did this through the terms of international aid and loans and through unequal trading arrangements (McMichael 2003; Peet 2003; Robinson 2004; Babb 2003).

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Critics of economic globalization argue that markets alone are not able to achieve many important social goals, such as ensuring a humane standard of living for all people, protecting the natural environment, and limiting inequality. Markets sometimes aid economic growth, and they have succeeded in generating vast amounts of wealth and technological innovation, but they also have contributed to rising global inequalities. Moreover, many experts argue that the recent decades of rapid globalization have not generated economic benefits for most of the world's poor. They point to World Bank and United Nations statistics to demonstrate that, for instance, the poorest 100 countries are actually worse off economically than they were before the 1980s, and that the costs of global economic restructuring have disproportionately affected the world's poorest people (see, e.g., UNDP 2005).

Political Participation on a Global Scale

Given these failures of market-oriented approaches to governing the world economy, participants in the WSF criticize the “democratic deficit” in global institutions. They argue that we need a model of global integration that allows a wider range of people—not just financial experts—to be involved in shaping decisions about how our economic and social lives are organized. Yet along with the economic principles of neoliberalism guiding the current world order is the elite strategy of *depoliticization*, or the deliberate effort to exclude civil society from political participation in global governance.

Depoliticization is driven by the belief that democracy muddles leadership and economic efficiency. This crisis of democracy is reflected in the proliferation of public protests and other forms of citizen political participation, which are seen by the neoliberals as resulting from excessive citizen participation in

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democracy. In other words, states and governments have been overburdened by democratic demands that increase their involvement in social and economic programs. Through the depoliticization of society, citizens and their organizations, either for profit or nonprofit, are forced through measures such as the privatization of public spaces, for instance by replacing public parks with condominiums, and political repression to withdraw from a shrinking public sphere. Instead, they are encouraged to operate on their own through market forces. States and governments are not only deemed incapable of tackling issues such as homelessness, housing shortages, or environmental pollution, they are also rendered powerless. Therefore, under neoliberalism, the governance of democracies is not the sole responsibility of elected and accountable governments but, rather, of markets.

How have we come to a world stage where the problems we face are not attributed to faulty economic reasoning and corporate profiteering but to the influence of “nonexpert” citizens on economic and social policy decisions? The crisis of democracy was a diagnosis developed by political and economic elites in the 1970s, a time when the WEF was first launched. Two reports had a profound impact on how governments came to redefine their relations with their citizens and social organizations in the ensuing years. The first is a report made to the Trilateral Commission, in 1975, and the second, the report of the Commission on Global Governance, tabled in 1995.

The Trilateral Commission

David Rockefeller, president of the Chase Manhattan Bank, founded the Trilateral Commission in 1973 (Sklar 1980). This initiative was prompted by three sets of events. The first and foremost event was the deterioration of relations among the three economic poles of the capitalist economy (e.g., North

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America—basically the United States and Canada, at the time, the European Community, and Japan) after former U.S. president Nixon removed the U.S. dollar from the gold standard, changing one of the major foundations of the global economy as it was structured since the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944.

The second event was the growing politicization of Third World nations and the process of decolonization that shattered the control of colonial empires over many regions of the globe. In particular, the Bandung Conference, a meeting in 1955 of newly independent nations that had not officially aligned themselves with either the capitalist or socialist nations, and the founding of the Organization for Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in 1966 represented to U.S. economic leaders a potential threat to the country's influence around the globe. The third event that triggered the creation of the Trilateral Commission was the growing student unrest throughout the world in the late 1960s, which was fueled in part by the social revolutions in the Third World and by the growing social opposition to the war in Vietnam.

Soon after its creation, the Trilateral Commission conducted a study to assess what they saw as the ills that were plaguing democracy. The report, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, provided a framework accepted by many politicians and academics to define and explain the crisis of democracy (Crozier et al. 1975). The report spells out a theory of cycles according to which increasing participation on the part of citizens in political affairs leads to social polarization. In turn, this polarization fosters distrust toward the political process, which leads to a weakening of its efficacy and efficiency, and ultimately, to lower political participation. Consequently, governments should encourage political passivity so that prevailing excessive citizen democratic participation can be reduced. Instead reliance on expertise, experience, and seniority was emphasized as the best model for effective governance.

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The Commission on Global Governance

The context that led to the creation of the Commission on Global Governance in 1995 is quite different from the one that gave birth to the Trilateral Commission, but some of the underlying issues are similar and important to understanding the movement toward depoliticization. The end of the Cold War and the mission to chart a new course for the United Nations for its fiftieth anniversary were precursors to the Commission on Global Governance.

Yet, the growing participation of organizations in UN conferences sponsored by its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the establishment of world conferences signified the need that an increasingly interlinked global economy required some form of global governance. For instance, the first Earth Summit held in Stockholm in 1972, where a large number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were invited, gained an international prominence that no previous conference ever had.¹ Running parallel to the official conference was a nongovernmental organization forum that included a daily newspaper, which provided immediate and often critical coverage of negotiations inside the summit that otherwise would have been much less open to public scrutiny. The Stockholm pattern was repeated, and expanded, at subsequent UN conferences on issues such as population, food, human rights, development, and women (Rice and Ritchie 1995).

Although the first Earth Summit set a precedent for international decisionmaking and global participation, it was the second Earth Summit in 1992 that revealed the difficulties besetting world governance and eventually led to the Commission on Global Governance. The commission report, *Our Global Neighborhood*, acknowledged that national governments had become less and less able to deal with a growing array of global problems. It argued that the international system should be renewed

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for three basic reasons: to weave a tighter fabric of international norms, to expand the rule of law worldwide, and to enable citizens to exert their democratic influence on global processes (Carlsson and Ramphal 1995). To reach these goals, the commission proposed a set of “radical” recommendations, most notably the reform and expansion of the UN Security Council, the replacement of ECOSOC by an Economic Security Council (ESC), and an annual meeting of a Forum of Civil Society that would allow the people and their organizations, as part of “an international civil society,” to play a larger role in addressing global concerns.

The commission report recognized that global governance operates through a complex set of venues at the world level including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and major partners such as the then Group of 7 (G7), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as well as regional organizations such as the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and Mercosur (the Southern Common Market). The Economic Security Council proposed in the report was to provide a focal point for global economic and social policy, mirroring the structure of the UN Security Council and remaining an intergovernmental organization. In one of the most profound statements in recognition of dilemmas facing global governance, the report stated:

At a global level, what model of decision-making should an emerging system of economic governance adopt? It will have to draw on lessons from regional and national levels and from business organizations where inflexible, centralized command-and-control structures have been shown to be unsustainable. Multilayered decision-making systems are emerging that depend on consultation, consensus, and flexible “rules of the games.” Intergovernmental organizations, however, still face

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basic questions as to who should set the rules and according to what principles. (Commission on Global Governance 1995: 146–147)

Significantly, the report also stated that global governance cannot rest on governments or public sector activity alone, but should rely on multinational companies—which “account for a substantial and growing slice of economic activity” (Commission on Global Governance 1995:153). Whereas it recognized a need for civil society and NGOs to be active in global governance, the report supported the increased role of market forces and the expansion of neoliberal agents of globalization such as the WTO. In effect, it endorsed the notion that business and private enterprise should take a dominant role in global governance, while NGOs and civil society should play a subordinate role assisting governments and business in (market-oriented) development at the local level.

Like the report presented by the Trilateral Commission twenty years prior, the report of the Commission of Global Governance also fails to provide a meaningful role for civil society in global governance. In both reports, society and citizens remain a depoliticized entity. However, our analysis highlights a fundamental contradiction in the globalization program envisioned by the authors of these reports. Although both seek to remove civil society from playing a substantive role in the development of global policy, the Commission on Global Governance recognized that civil society needed to have some role if the institutions of governance were to be seen as legitimate. Without popular legitimacy, the stability of this new international order would be compromised. This tension between the desire to exclude most of the population from policymaking while also strengthening the possibilities for global governance creates opportunities for challenges from those who are denied a voice in shaping the direction of globalization (Markoff 1999).

The WSF: A New Principle of Global Politics

If we consider the increasing privatization, commercialization, and depoliticization of social life and the underlying rational mechanism of efficiency, profit, and accumulation, it appears as if the wheels of history were set in the mid-1980s on an inexorable path toward the dominance of corporations and the eradication of social equality, justice, and political freedom. With this panorama it is hard to see how one can explain the emergence of the WSF as a political body that runs in a radically different direction. How could we even think the WSF was possible? Yet contrary to Thatcher's claim that there is no alternative, the WSF, empowered by self-conscious transnational social movements, arose as a global force to be reckoned with by governments and corporations. The WSF is an arena for the practice of a democratic form of globalization and a common public space where previously excluded voices can speak and act together to challenge the TINA claim.

The WSF is not simply (or even mainly) a reaction against neoliberal globalization. Instead, it grows from the work of many people throughout history working to advance a just and equitable global order (see Smith 2007). In this sense, it constitutes a new body politic, a common public space where previously excluded voices can speak and act in plurality. With the help of the ideas of noted political theorist Hannah Arendt, we propose to see the WSF not as the logical consequence of global capitalism but rather as the foundation for a new form of politics that breaks with the historical sequence of events that led to the dominance of neoliberal globalization. Arendt viewed the political as a sphere that is not ruled by processes and where the unexpected can happen:

It is not in the least superstitious, it is even a counsel of realism, to look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable, to be

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prepared for and to expect “miracles” in the political realm. And the more heavily the scales are weighted in favor of disaster, the more miraculous will the deed done in freedom appear; for it is disaster, not salvation, which always happens automatically and therefore always must appear to be irresistible. (1993:170)

Precursors to the WSF

If our understanding of the WSF is to be set apart from the processes of neoliberal globalization, we need to see more concretely the unexpected events that sit at the beginning of this break in our political history. The WSF is a culmination of political actions for social justice, peace, human rights, labor rights, and ecological preservation that resists neoliberal globalization and its attempts to depoliticize the world’s citizens. We identify four key factors that interacted to help set the WSF in motion. These factors include:

- Third World protests against international institutions;
- Transnational networks and global mobilizations around political events that challenged the logic of depoliticization (such as those in Seattle in 1999 and Chiapas in 1994);
- Civil society dissatisfaction with the UN system;
- The rise of a transnational feminist and women’s movement.

More than any other global actions or transnational networking, the 1999 Seattle protests by a wide range of national and international demonstrators against the ministerial meetings of the WTO and the Zapatista Movement from Chiapas, Mexico, are cited over and over again as the precedents to the WSF.

After discussion of the factors listed above, we showcase these two events to highlight their roles in helping bring forth the WSF process.

Third World Protests of International Bodies

The origins of the WSF may lie in the countries that have been most deeply impacted by globalization—the countries of the global south, or the Third World countries. In the 1970s and 1980s, those countries found themselves increasingly squeezed by large international debts and low prices for the goods they export. They had borrowed money from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to cover both large-scale industrial development projects as well as to meet the rising costs of fuel during the 1970s successive oil crises. Now these loans were coming due, and they found themselves unable to service their debts while also continuing to develop their national economies and meet the needs of their citizens. Furthermore, the World Bank and IMF began attaching strict conditions to the loans they made, forcing Third World governments to cut government spending and raise interest rates in order to obtain international financing (McMichael 2003). They reasoned that these policies—though painful in the short term—would allow long-term economic growth and, more importantly, ensure that debtor countries could pay back their loans. Essentially, governments had to force their citizens to bear the brunt of the costs of the debt. And in many poor countries, this led to what have been called “IMF riots,” where citizens protested both the policies of global financial institutions as well as the actions of their own governments (Walton and Seddon 1994).

The IMF riots demonstrated that people in the Third World saw international institutions as a major cause of their economic hardships. Moreover, they saw that their own governments were part of the problem, but that their governments were limited in

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their ability to pursue policies at odds with those favored by the World Bank and IMF. The people also saw that their governments held little sway in those institutions.

Transnational Networks and Global Mobilizations

Meanwhile, in the global north, or the rich Western countries, citizens were organizing around a growing number of environmental problems. Environmentalists and unionists joined forces with each other, and across nations, to contest proposed international free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (Ayres 1998; Smith and Smythe 2004), while workers and their allies organized transnational campaigns against the practices of multinational corporations (see, e.g., Sikkink 1986). Northern citizens also became more interested in how the policies of their governments were affecting people elsewhere in the world. Some of this interest grew from the peace and solidarity movements of the 1970s and 1980s (Rucht 2000). The interventionist policies of Western governments encouraged transnational solidarity campaigns between Northern activists and their counterparts in the Third World (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Smith 2007).

At the same time, the United Nations was sponsoring a number of global conferences on issues such as women's rights, environmental protection, and peace that provided opportunities for citizen activists from around the world to meet, exchange stories about their work, and compare analyses of the global and local problems they faced. Aided by advances in technology and reduced costs of transnational communication and travel, these efforts generated more long-term and sustained transnational cooperation than was possible in earlier decades. Beginning in the 1970s there was a tremendous growth in the numbers of formally organized groups working across national borders to pro-

mote some kind of social or political change. Thus, between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, the number of transnationally organized social change groups rose from less than 200 to nearly 1,000 (Smith 2004a). Many more transnational citizens' groups were formed around other goals, such as encouraging recreational activities, supporting religious or professional identities, among others. These groups were not only building their own memberships, but they were also forging relationships with other nongovernmental actors and with international agencies, including the United Nations. In the process, they nurtured transnational identities and a broader world culture (Boli and Thomas 1999).

NGO Dissatisfaction with UN Conferences

A third factor that fueled the idea of an alternative venue was the growing dissatisfaction among NGO participants with the mediocre results, if not setbacks, coming out of the conferences convened by the UN—especially the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; and the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen. For a number of NGOs that participated in these UN conferences, dissatisfaction changed into disillusionment at the five-year review (dubbed “Rio/Beijing/Copenhagen plus five”) conferences aimed at assessing governments' follow-through on the commitments they made at these world conferences. Activists at the review meetings called these the “Rio [or Beijing or Copenhagen] minus five” conferences, highlighting governments' failures to fulfill their conference promises.

Besides their disappointment with the inability of UN conferences to affect the practices of governments, civil society groups that worked hard to influence the texts of the conference agreements felt that much of their efforts in the UN were futile.

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The real obstacles, they realized, were not the absence of multi-lateral agreements, but rather the structure of the UN system and the refusal of major countries to address key global issues. Moreover, they saw that many environmental and human rights agreements were being superseded by the WTO, which was formed in 1994 and which privileged international trade law over other international agreements. Agreements made in the UN were thus made irrelevant by the new global trade order, in which increasingly powerful transnational corporations held sway (Smith 2007).

The Global Women's Movement and Feminist Participation

Women's social movement organizations throughout the world have been very effective in establishing networks to promote international responses to gender injustices and violence against women (Moghadam 2005). While women's organizations continue to participate in UN-led conferences, many are also very active in the WSF. The first Feminist Dialogues was held in 2003 in Mumbai, India, as a follow-up to the Women's Strategy Meeting held at the 2002 WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in which feminists from around the world came together to discuss their dissatisfaction with men dominating the WSF. In 2005 and 2007 the Feminist Dialogues preceded the WSF event to provide a space to consider feminist concerns that many organizations feel are sidelined at the WSF and to collectively influence the forum (Macdonald 2005). Nevertheless, one of the main contributions of feminist political organizations has been inclusiveness of the participatory process and the principle of not prioritizing one injustice over another.

While focusing on gender, feminist activists (especially those from the global south) emphasize the intersection of inequalities such as race, gender, nation, class, and sexuality. In addition, feminist activism challenges hierarchical organizational

structures that establish formal leadership that tend to silence the voices of the majority. The history of transnational feminist organizing provided important models for fostering decentralized, respectful dialogue and cooperation that helped inform other social movements seeking to bridge national and other differences (see, e.g., Rupp 1997; Alvarez et al. 2004; Polletta 2002; Gibson-Graham 2006). In fact, the model of the “encuentro,” a meeting that is organized around a collectivity of interests without hierarchy, on which the Zapatistas and later the WSF process built, emerged from transnational feminist organizing in Latin America (Sternbach et al. 1992; Smith 2007).

Zapatismo and the Battle of Seattle

Many accounts of the 1994 Zapatistas’ uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, and the so-called Battle of Seattle during the WTO ministerial meetings of December 1999 speak of their implications for global democracy and for citizens’ mobilizations around the world (Burbach 1994; Harvey 1998; Bello 2000; Gill 2000; Halliday 2000; Kaldor 2000; Seoane and Taddei 2002; Scholte 2000). These two key events helped break the continuity of the processes of neoliberal globalization and, therefore, helped open the possibility for the WSF to emerge as an alternative political body (see Escobar 2004). The events of Chiapas and Seattle reflect not simply resistance to globalized capitalism, but rather they were catalysts to a new political dynamic within the global landscape.

Zapatismo

In 1994 indigenous people in Mexico took up arms to protest their governments’ acceptance of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The Zapatistas quickly emerged as one of the

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first globally networked groups to resist economic globalization. Their struggle inspired many activists in all parts of the world to more actively resist the growing global trade regime. For many, the emergence of a global citizens' movement is credited to the appearance of the Ejercito Zapatista de liberacion nacional (EZLN) on the world scene, January 1, 1994, the same day that NAFTA came into force (Amin et al. 2002; Benasayag and Sztulwark 2002). According to Samir Amin and others, the EZLN ushered in an era of "new radicality" fundamentally different from that which prevailed before then.

Worldwide supporters of the EZLN helped popularize some of the writings of the Zapatista leader, Subcomandante Marcos, which were becoming widely known among activists during the 1990s. When the 1999 Seattle and subsequent protests generated complaints from movement critics that "we know what you're against, but what are you *for*?" Marcos's words proved fruitful in inspiring activists to focus on the quest for alternatives. He argued that one of the main problems of economic globalization is that it does not allow other forms of economic organization to coexist along with it. It displaces other forms of economic life. Its need to continually expand and conquer makes it incompatible with any desire for diversity in either nature or society. But Marcos argued that we can have "one world with room for many worlds" if we can rein in the movement toward economic globalization. A tolerance for diverse forms of economic organization, a respect for local autonomy and participation in economic decisions, and a celebration of the possibilities for innovation and adaptation fostered by diversity were values that Marcos encouraged (Olesen 2005). The widespread attention to his work demonstrates the transnational resonance of his ideas (Khasnabish 2005).

Following the 1994 EZLN uprising, the Zapatistas used the Internet strategically to call on others to join their struggle for a new sort of world (Cleverly 1995; Ronfeldt et al. 1998). Many

around the world responded to their call, and they traveled to Chiapas to participate in international meetings, or “encuentros,” on how to confront economic globalization. Many more organized in their local communities in support of the same goals of the Zapatistas: “against neoliberalism and for humanity” (Schultz 1998). Khasnabish (2005) analyzed the effects of Zapatista discourses on protest movements around North America, arguing that Marcos’s analysis of the problems of economic globalization and the possibilities for popular liberation inspired the “political imaginations” of many people facing common experiences in the global neoliberal order.

The Zapatista uprising and subsequent mobilization are without doubt a cornerstone to the global justice movement. They established and disseminated a pattern of transnational mobilization that continues to inspire and inform activists throughout the world. Moreover, the writings of Marcos and the approach to organizing he promoted provided a focal point that helped bring activists together around a shared understanding of their values and organizing capacities. The networks Zapatismo inspired—including an important grassroots network called People’s Global Action—provided an infrastructure of people, organizations, and ideas required for the WSF’s emergence. These groups organized resistance to every meeting of the G8 during the late 1990s, helping catalyze global resistance to the World Trade Organization and its 1999 ministerial meeting in Seattle (cf. Juris 2004b; Juris 2008; Notes from Nowhere 2003; Starr 2005).

The Battle of Seattle

Transnational networks and concerted efforts toward global action; a growing recognition of the limitations of the UN; feminist organizing principles together with resistance in the global south to international institutions provided the preconditions

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for the emergence of new movements for a different kind of globalization. While these factors percolated in various nations at different rates in numerous social justice organizations, by 1999 the stage was set for the entrance of a new form of political participation.

Unexpectedly for many, the global justice movement seemed to explode on the scene in Seattle in 1999. Tens of thousands of college students, labor union members, educators, public health workers, unemployed workers, environmental activists, feminists, immigrants, and other concerned citizens came to protest the ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization. The vast majority of activists engaged in peaceful protest, and some sought to nonviolently disrupt the meeting by occupying the streets surrounding the conference hall where WTO delegates were to meet. But police were unprepared for the volume of protesters, and they responded with brutality, triggering what was called “the Battle of Seattle.” Although subsequent inquiries showed that the police were at fault by instigating violence against protesters and bystanders, the mainstream media portrayed the protesters as violent and unreasonable (Smith 2002).

A key feature of the organization behind the Seattle protest was the lack of formalized leadership. Rather than a single organization or political body representing the protesters as a single entity, smaller units referred to as affinity groups came together around shared values and identities, uniting with others to forge a common front against the meetings of the WTO. While some affinity groups blocked traffic and engaged in other acts of civil disobedience, trade unionists and other activists marched along preordained march routes and gave passionate speeches denouncing the WTO’s policies before a stadium full of supporters. The actions held that day in Seattle were not directed by a single person, group, or organizing unit. Rather they happened organically from the context of protest in which they were situated and from each organization’s own traditions of protest.

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Global mobilizations like the one in Seattle also present opportunities for learning about the struggles of other groups and understanding the relationship among the organizations attending. For instance, many church members that participated in the Seattle protests learned about the damaging effects of global economic policies through their interactions with other church members around the world. They marched to demand greater equity and justice for all members of their faith (and presumably other faiths as well), regardless of where they were from. Students and teachers that found their schools increasingly impoverished by cuts in public budgets see a connection between their experiences and the changes in the global economy. Unions and professional associations have also been motivated by both threats to their members' interests as well as by their solidarity with their counterparts around the world.

Given this rapid growth of transnational networking, by the time of the Seattle WTO meeting many participants had already learned a great deal from each other and had cultivated skills for organizing protests at the local, national, and increasingly at the transnational level. Moreover, subsequent global mobilizations in cities such as Prague, Quebec City, Genoa, Barcelona, and Washington, D.C, continued to provide critical spaces for learning, coalition building, and action. At the same time, many of us activists felt global protests alone were insufficient. Rather than simply denouncing what we were *against*, it was also important to articulate a clear vision of what we were fighting *for*. In January 2001, the first ever WSF was organized precisely to provide a space for developing concrete alternatives to corporate globalization. Indeed, the WSF process is an important place for popular education about the injustices occurring all over the world as a result of the policies of economic globalization. At the same time, the process creates opportunities for groups to learn about and articulate economic and political alternatives and plan future mobilizations.

24 CHAPTER ONE

Conclusion

Protesters in Seattle and elsewhere and participants in the social forums have challenged people to ask whether the world's major economic institutions are producing the kind of world in which we want to live. The answer, activists argue, is that we cannot govern by markets. Rather, we need political institutions that can help balance competing social interests and goals. By separating trade and other economic policy decisions from other policy areas (such as human rights, public safety, or environmental protection), governments have undermined their own legitimacy and introduced untenable contradictions into international law. Social forum participants argue that the goal of reducing restrictions on international trade must not be allowed to trump other social values and goals.

Governments gain their legitimacy from popular elections and recognition by their populations as their representatives. But with globalization, governments are delegating more policy decisions to international institutions such as the WTO or the European Union. While global interdependence requires some policy coordination to ensure peace and common security, the way governments have managed international policy has created a "democratic deficit" in global institutions. Many of those protesting economic globalization argue for greater government accountability and responsiveness in both domestic and international policy arenas. As they have pursued their particular aims—such as environmental protection, human rights, and equitable development—civil society groups have found themselves uniting behind demands for a more democratic global polity. The protests against economic globalization are really wider battles about whether people and democratic institutions, or technical experts and markets, should govern the global system.

Understanding the WSF process as a fundamentally new form of politics challenges the visions of history that emphasize

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chronological chains of processes where all that happens is the logical consequence of its context and its immediate past. Although growing out of a long tradition of struggle, the process of rebellion made visible in Chiapas and Seattle has begun to fracture the historical process of neoliberal domination. The continuity of corporate globalization is now in question. By challenging the relentless progression of privatization, trade liberalization, consumption, and individuation, the rebellion has created another temporality within which the WSF is clearly situated.

The following chapters explore in detail the WSF process. We consider how the process has developed over time, focusing on the creative tensions that have both challenged organizers and helped propel the process forward.

