

FROM: Jackie Smith, Marina Karides, Marc Becker, Dorval Brunelle, Christopher Chase-Dunn, Rosalba Icaza, Jeffrey Juris, Lorenzo Mosca, Donatella della Porta, Ellen Reese, Peter Jay Smith  
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## **Chapter 6:**

### **The World Social Forums and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Revolutions**

Thus far we've examined the emergence and development of the World Social Forums as a focal point for social movements seeking to dramatically transform the existing system of globalized capitalism. The forums emerged at a particular historical moment from networks of activists and organizations that were part of a growing movement for global justice. In the decade or so since the forums began, the global capitalist system has persisted—albeit within a more uncertain and crisis-prone context—and many of the problems global justice activists have protested have become more widespread and pronounced. Fewer people can now escape some direct experience of the economic downturn. And no one can deny the more frequent reminders of the realities of global climate change. Today we're witnessing a period of intensified global crisis that should expand the appeal of the World Social Forum's call for work to envision and build another world.

Illustrating this is the recent emergence of what some analysts are calling the revolutions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many of these protests have emerged in response to the intensified economic pressures people around the world are facing, coupled with widespread perceptions that existing representative institutions are corrupt and undemocratic. These themes should sound familiar to those reading this book, as they are the same grievances that motivated the earlier wave of movements we've analyzed here. Yet, what's different is that the protests seen in this recent period are less grounded in pre-existing organizations and networks than were the earlier global justice movement and the World Social Forum process it generated. In this chapter we discuss the contemporary protests and consider the ways these two strands of movements converge and diverge.

#### **The Revolutionary Wave of 2011**

In his analysis of the Middle Eastern protests, Horace Campbell (2011) identifies some key characteristics of "twenty-first century revolutions." In particular, this new wave of protests in the region was: 1) made up of ordinary people independent of political parties and established political forces; 2) network-based and using technology to foster autonomous, horizontal, and cooperative networks; 3) led by the initiatives of individuals to advance the movement's autonomous mobilization and emancipation; 4) reliant on revolutionary non-violence for self-defense; and 5) united around a vision for a world where human beings can live in dignity and freedom from dictatorship and violence. Despite the current violent paths these revolutions have taken in the case of Egypt and Siria, what seems to be the most amazing about these features of protests in the Middle East and North Africa is that they so closely resemble the forms and character of popular struggle that have been emergent around the world for quite some time. Indeed, these characteristics can be found in large quantities at the World Social Forum, and they

have helped shape and sustain countless local and national social forums over the past decade (see Juris, 2008; Polletta, 2002; Starr, 2000).

The World Social Forums and more recent mobilizations around the world also resemble social movements of both the recent and distant past in that they put forward a vision of democracy that is far more participatory and deliberative than what is experienced in particular institutional settings (della Porta 2009; Polletta 2002; Markoff 1996). This conception of democracy is prefigured by the very same *indignados* that have occupied squares around the world, transforming them into public spheres made up of “normal citizens.” As with past movements, we see an attempt to create higher quality of discursive democracy that recognizes the equal rights of not only delegates and experts but of everyone to speak and to be heard. In different places around the world, people are putting forward a vision of democracy open to discussion and deliberation of shared experiences and concrete solutions to specific problems, one that facilitates the elaboration of collaborative proposals regarding common goods, and encourages the formation of collective identities and solidarity. As we saw with the social forums, activists in this new wave of protests are not framing their claims in relation to the state, but are fighting for ‘dignity in autonomy,’ seeking new types of political relationships and practices. We see tremendous resonance, for instance, with the Zapatistas (Icaza and Vazquez 2013).

In 2008, Greece saw rebellions by students, union members, and other residents resisting fiscal austerity and state repression. Students were also prominent in protests against budget cuts and increased fees in Croatia, the UK, Chile, Quebec, and elsewhere. Young people were a notable presence in the protests that spread through the Middle East, beginning with Tunisia in December of 2010. As the protest wave spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere in the Middle East in early 2011, the world recognized the largely nonviolent protests across the region as a collective Arab resistance. Mass protests erupted in the United States in opposition to right-wing attacks on public sector unions and services. In Latin America and elsewhere, Indigenous peoples and environmental activists had been mobilizing increasingly militant mass resistance to environmentally devastating oil and gas pipelines and production and for the defense of Mother Earth and for *buen vivir* (Widener 2012; Icaza 2010, Walsh 2007 and 2010).

Austerity measures in Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain met with long-lasting, mass protests directly inspired by the Arab Spring. The Spanish and then Greek *indignados* occupied hundreds of squares in order not only to protest cuts to the welfare state in their respective countries, but also to demand fundamental changes in representative institutions. “*Democracia real ya*” (real democracy now) was the main slogan of the Spanish *indignados* protesters that occupied the Puerta del Sol in Madrid, the Plaça de Catalunya in Barcelona and hundreds of squares in the rest of the country from May 15<sup>th</sup> 2011. Like WSF and global justice activists, the *indignados* pointed to the failures of representative democracy using slogans like “*Lo llaman democracia y no lo es*” (They call it democracy but it’s not), and “*No les votes*” (Don’t vote for them). Similarly, in 2008 citizens in Iceland demanded the resignation of the government and its delegates in the Central Bank and financial authority in response to their role in the 2008 financial collapse. In Portugal, Facebook played a role in bringing more than 200,000 youth of the “*Geracao A Rasca*” (desperate generation) to the streets in March 2011. The *indignados* protests in turn fueled new mobilisations in Greece. Demonstrators everywhere were united in their focus on government corruption as a central issue.

In Wisconsin, Republican Governor Scott Walker’s attacks on public sector unions led to large and sustained protests. Beginning on February 14, 2011, a group of university students in

Madison brought the governor a Valentine's Day card to demonstrate their displeasure with his policies. From this small start, people began to occupy the Capitol building to protest the governor's policies. Using a method that Occupy Wall Street subsequently replicated, they organized food, medical attention, child care, and a library. After weeks of growing demonstrations, on March 12, 2011, more than 100,000 people rallied at the Capitol in opposition to the governor's policies and actions in solidarity with those protests were held throughout the nation.

Inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and responding to the working and middle class casualties of Spain and Europe's debt crisis, hundreds of thousands of protesters, many of them unemployed youth, took to the streets of Madrid on May 15, 2011 and occupied the Puerta del Sol square, sparking a wave of similar mobilizations and encampments around Spain that would become known as 15M or the movement of the *Indignados* (see Rivas et. al. 2011). Indeed, the combination of mass public occupations with large-scale participatory assemblies provided a template that would be enacted in New York's Zuccotti Park, in part via the influence of Spanish activists residing in New York and in other countries. For instance, that summer a similar movement of Israeli youths sprang up in Tel Aviv, using tent cities and popular assemblies to shine a light on the rising cost of housing and other living expenses.

Around the same time in Mexico, the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) mobilized those directly affected by the war on drugs that had been launched by the Federal Government five years before. The MPJD brought together for the first time relatives of the victims of violence to demand an end to the violence. Their campaign, "No mas Sangre" (No more Blood), mobilized a broad Mexican public which took to the streets and social media to demand accurate information about the true costs of the six year war: 60,000 killings; 20,000 disappeared people, over 250,000 displaced people and hundreds of widows and orphans (Ramirez 2012). A year later, during the spring of 2012, an intense debate between university students and Presidential candidate Enrique Peña Nieto led to the emergence of the "#yo-soy-132" (#I am 132) pro-democracy movement that quickly spread to all major Mexican cities.<sup>1</sup> Inspired and supported by "Occupy Wall Street" collectives from the United States, *Indignados* from Spain, and "Anonymous Hispano," an even Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, the #yo-soy-132 movement has continued to engage in nonviolent resistance such as street demonstrations, economic boycotts, public meetings and performances, and counter reports on the state of the nation. Participatory assemblies convened through social media (facebook, twitter) shape agendas and activities, and enable students to offer their collective support to other popular movements in Mexico, including the MPJD, the Zapatistas, autonomous labor unions, anti-Oil and educational advocacy groups.

These protests contributed to the growing sense that opponents of the status quo were not alone and that popular action could be successful at large-scale change. In this context, the call by the Canada-based culture-jamming group, Adbusters, for the occupation of Wall Street, would generate massive response in cities around the United States and worldwide as well as subsequent forms of transborder and on-line solidarities. The widespread circulation of images from these protests continues to spark the intense feelings of solidarity and hope among activists and encourages demonstrations of mutual support. For instance, activists in Cairo's Tahrir Square ordered pizzas for demonstrators who were occupying Wisconsin's state capitol. Activists at the 2011 World Social Forum in Dakar, Senegal staged multiple actions to demonstrate support for protesters in Egypt and elsewhere as they were just emerging. Meanwhile, Anonymous Hispano hacked the website of Mexican political party PRI and the

main private media corporation TELEVISA in support of the #yo-soy-132. Following 2011 reports of large-scale protests with similar themes continued. In the summer of 2013, for instance, opposition to an increase in public transport fees turned into massive demonstrations around the country. Middle classes, poor and *favela* residents came together to demand that government spending for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics be redirected to public services.

What is common to virtually all of these protests is an emphasis on the failure of democratic governments to be responsive to the basic needs of their citizens. Protesters have voiced outrage over growing economic hardships and have demanded greater accountability of public officials. They have critiqued conventional political parties and electoral processes and highlighted the widespread problem of corruption. Paralleling the global justice slogan, “You G8, we 6 billion” (della Porta et al. 2006), the various world occupiers legitimated their claims by stating, in various ways, “We are the 99%.” Yet, in addition to housing, education, health care, decent jobs and an end to official corruption, many activists—particularly those outside the United States--were calling for “dignity.”<sup>2</sup> Faced with widespread police violence and other forms of state repression, activists are demanding a cultural shift, a new relationship between states and citizens.

In the United States, for instance, the Occupy Wall Street movement spread more in response to the initial attempts by police to arrest large numbers of protesters than to activists’ initial calls to occupy Wall Street. Like the WSF process, this new wave of protests has responded to the disappearance of public space for democratic deliberation and exchange. Thus, many involve protest occupations physically rooted in local territories aimed at reclaiming spaces for public life. At the same time, there is an interest in connecting local settings to larger networks, and most protest groups have quickly forged connections with trans-local counterparts through interpersonal and online networks.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in November 2011 activists staged an international march from Nice, France to Italy and Greece. A year later activists gathered in Florence for “Firenze10+10” to mark the tenth anniversary of the first European Social Forum. That meeting helped launch an anti-austerity strike that generated massive protests in 23 European countries. It also led to the creation of the “Global Square” initiative to help activists from around the world coordinate their activities at the 2013 World Social Forum in Tunis ([www.global-square.net](http://www.global-square.net)). Following their dispersal from encampments, activists in some places have continued to meet—hosting discussions, planning actions and campaigns, producing media, and building and modifying organizational forms. They have also engaged in conversations and reflection with other activists, including those who have been part of the World Social Forum process, and these discussions have produced both tensions and adaptations as different generations of activists learn to work together (Smith 2012).

How should we make sense of these protests—situated as they are in specific locations, yet taking place simultaneously and often with overlapping participation, shared discourses, and similar tactics? Moreover, how might we think of them in relationship to the World Social Forum process? While these newer political manifestations appear to share the WSF’s critique of the global economy and its effects on people, communities, and the planet, their articulations of grievances are often locally-rooted and have not encompassed a global, systemic analysis (cf. Pearce 2013). Nevertheless, since global capitalism is a common source of the grievances fueling this protest wave, it is not surprising to see these local-global connections beginning to be made. Certainly protesters’ ability to witness resistance by people like them in other countries

facilitates these analytical links, as was true in much earlier pro-democracy struggles (Markoff 1996).

The WSF process emerged from *transnational* networks and was more explicit from the start in targeting neoliberal globalization as the problem. Nevertheless, from the very start it sought to give voice to locally-rooted struggles, both in the “open spaces” of the World Social Forums and in the larger WSF process which linked the global with regional, national and local forums. The main impetus of the WSF has been to create a global platform wherein many “local” struggles around multiple and simultaneous forms of oppression and dispossession such as racism, violence, land grabbing, and environmental degradation, could converge, engage in dialogue and mutual learning, and foster transnational solidarity (Icaza 2010).

In contrast to the global sources of the WSF, recent protests began in local settings and often focused on national politicians, state policies, and police violence. Yet, as activists in these protests have learned about struggles and state repression elsewhere, they are seeing the common causes of their complaints and developing more global analyses and networks (della Porta 2012). As Saskia Sassen observed, “[t]his is a *global politics* centered on local actions that resonate with each other across the globe--each fighting specific local materialization of a global power system” (1998:192-3, emphasis added). These are, in Santos’s words, expressions of “globalized localism” (Santos 2006).

The recent wave of mobilization has expressed contradictions and tensions that have been common to pro-democracy struggles throughout history. In particular, the “creative tensions” outlined in this book, which center on the politics of representation and strategy (movement relationships with dominant institutions), are reproduced the interactions between the “new generation” of activists and WSF organizers.<sup>4</sup> Yet, they occur at a time of both widespread and intensified systemic crisis *and* unprecedented transnational social mobilization. In contrast to earlier periods, this latest protest wave can flow into an existing model of global organizing through the WSF process. While this is not necessarily an automatic or easy move, there are efforts from both sides to bring these protest streams together. As Occupiers and *indignados* have entered it, the World Social Forum has been renewed as a platform for exchange and learning that, although full of conflict and tension, seems likely to continue advancing transformative movements through dialogue, reflection, and joint struggle.

The experiences of the 2013 World Social Forum in Tunis revealed that the influx of a new, often inexperienced, surge of younger activists into the World Social Forum process brings new energy and thoughtful reflection as well as intense debate. Questions persist about how to incorporate these new voices while remaining true to the core principles guiding the forums.<sup>5</sup> To help contextualize these interactions, below we compare this new wave of protesters with those in the WSF process to see how they differ and what these differences might say about their origins and future trajectories.

### **Similarities and Differences between the WSFs and Contemporary Protests**

Drawing from surveys done of participants in the OWS movement and social forum meetings,<sup>6</sup> we compare and contrast those mobilizing in the contemporary revolutionary wave with the earlier mobilization in the WSF process.

[Table 6.1 About Here]

Table 6.1 shows that the WSF and the US Social Forums have been better than the more spontaneous OWS protests at mobilizing less privileged groups. More non-whites were active in the WSF and USSFs, and more women attended the 2007 USSF meeting. Interestingly, OWS has been less able to mobilize people who have been most affected by the inequalities these movements resist. The same has been true also of the anti-austerity protests in Iceland, Spain or Greece, which also enjoyed very high levels of support among the population at large.<sup>7</sup> In part, this is likely due to the heightened repression and more precarious economic situations experienced by people of color in the United States and worldwide. But what these data show is that more deliberate organizing work such as that done in the social forums can overcome the inequities that are reproduced by the system in which we work and live. When movements arise more quickly and through less formally organized means of communication—such as happened in the recent protest wave—less privileged people tend to remain on the margins. This happens even in movements claiming to champion equality and social justice. An organizer with the US Social Forum explained the logic of the USSF’s practice of intentionality—of deliberately working to mobilize those groups most harmed by economic globalization, even if this compromised short-term strategic goals:

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 (Jeff Juris Interview of USSF organizer, August 22, 2007).

Like the activists at the World Social Forums, activists in the Occupy Wall Street protests and the *#yo-soy-132* mobilizations tend to be highly educated when compared to the general populations. Educational levels are highest among OWS participants and lowest among WSF attendees. Students are often on the front lines of protests, motivated by recognition of their reduced opportunities for education and employment but also by their privileged position in relation to other struggles and inequalities. OWS surveys differ in the percent of participants who are aged 18-25, with Milkman and her colleagues’ survey revealing a greater involvement of youth when compared to WSF and USSF attendees. As more people are being pressed by worsening economic crisis and resulting joblessness and indebtedness as well as by direct forms of state surveillance and violence, can we expect the ranks of protest participants to extend beyond these more educated groups?

In terms of political and organizational characteristics, OWS protests and the WSF 2007 meeting attracted the highest percent of new activists (those who had not participated in a demonstration in the past year) as well as the highest percent of those affiliated with a non-profit or non-governmental organization. OWS protesters appear to identify more strongly with political parties than WSF and USSF attendees. This probably reflects the fact that many OWS participants are newly mobilized activists who have had less opportunity than the more seasoned participants in the WSF process to learn about the avenues for political engagement and the political analyses offered by movements outside conventional political parties. Another important political difference in these populations is that OWS activists don’t tend to oppose capitalism as a system as much as WSF activists do. Milkman and her colleagues’ survey of OWS activists showed that just 13.1% of active participants reported being motivated by

opposition to capitalism as a system, compared to more than half of those surveyed at the USSFs and at the 2005 WSF.<sup>8</sup>

One key difference between the previous wave of organizing in the WSF process and the contemporary revolutionary wave is that technological changes have impacted how people organize, reflecting the mutually constitutive nature of embodied and online protest (Juris 2012; della Porta 2012). The use of social media in particular has allowed newer movements to penetrate deeply into the social fabric and mobilize many newcomers who have never been active before in social movements. This contrasts with most WSF participants (see tables 3.4-3.6), who tend to be quite active in social movements and other political organizations. At the same time, these emerging "logics of aggregation" within the Occupy movements, the *Indignados*, or the #yo-soy-132 have resulted in a tendency towards more individualized modes of participation and less formal organizational commitments that have made them more dependent on the occupation of public spaces than other movements (Juris 2012).

### **A Global Revolution?**

Historians may one day refer to this period as a revolutionary one. However, it is important to note that the term "revolution" we use differs from common understandings today. Revolutions are shaped by their particular historical content. Not all revolutionary moments in history are violent or chaotic, but rather are times when social change is brought about by large numbers of people acting together. They are often associated with the expansion of social justice to more of the population. For many, revolutions involve the transfer of state power from one group to another.

But today many activists reject the notion that the changes they seek can be achieved through state power or any form of centralized authority, given how neoliberal globalization has transformed the state to make it more market-friendly, less responsive to popular pressure, and less attentive to social welfare. As government practices are shaped more by global forces, activists increasingly recognize that the changes they seek require shifts in global institutions and power relations. Thus, we see the revolutions of today as connected to the analyses, visions, and practices found in the WSF process, and they are increasingly becoming connected to networks of WSF activists. Echoing themes in the World Social Forums, today's new wave of activists emphasize meanings, identities, and social relations instead of elections, policy campaigns, and political parties to address inequalities. In other words, they emphasize cultural over institutionalized politics to challenge not just explicit power relations but the hegemonic ideas, values, and meaning that reproduce domination and exploitation (see, e.g., Alvarez et al. 1998; Conway 2004; 2012; Escobar 2004; Walsh 2007; 2010).<sup>9</sup>

In his study of revolutionary waves over hundreds of years, Colin Beck found that protest waves "tend to occur when there is a relatively rapid expansion of world culture and hegemonic decline" (Beck 2011:194). World culture involves the spread of shared ideas and discourses, including notions of human rights, environmental justice, and democracy. Thus, we discussed earlier how the World Social Forums have expressed long-standing world cultural values that challenge the cultural hegemony of neoliberalism, including the idea of rights for Mother Earth, for reorganizing social policies around good living rather than economic growth, and even the notion that "another world is possible." By helping develop and spread global discourses and practices that delegitimized the dominant globalization project by highlighting the realities of persistent poverty and racism, exposing the failures of representative democracy and the lack of democracy in global financial institutions, and by advancing critiques of consumerism,

individualism and corporate power, the World Social Forum and the movements that have been part of it all helped set the stage for today's revolutionary moment (cf. Wuthnow 1986). In a similar way, earlier political activism had a direct impact on contemporary activism and more generally on the politics of knowledge generation through the creation of gender and race studies, environmental studies, and other critical cross-disciplinary programs in many universities (Rochon 1998; Carroll and Sapinski 2013).

Beyond these critical analyses, the World Social Forums and the movements that preceded them helped generate new knowledges that shape and inform today's movements (Conway 2004, Escobar 2004). Specifically, activists' work to build alliances across diverse populations negatively impacted by global capitalism, and to resist state violence used to uphold the inequities of the system, informed their understandings, practices, and identities, in sometimes subtle, yet important ways. For instance, feminists have persistently criticized their exclusion and exploitation in coalitions, and this conflict has helped generate new practices and sensitivities that aim to reduce gender-based discrimination in movements. Similarly, cross-national alliances between activists of the global North and South have generated conflicts based in power inequities. While some of these conflicts ripped groups apart, in some cases they helped advance new insights and suggested new ways of working to mitigate the effects of inequalities. We might even see them as necessary precursors to the World Social Forum process itself. Castells refers to the identities that are shaped through struggle and interaction within and among movements as "resistance identities," since they are constructed around specific and often local communities in opposition to global manifestations of power (Castells 1996).

The availability of these critical analyses and knowledges about how to mobilize diverse groups meant that initially small protest incidents, assisted by the use of digital media, could quickly turn into mass resistance. Facebook, Twitter, and other online platforms have been adopted by occupiers to provide visibility to their protests, gain media attention, recruit new members, and circulate minutes, photos and video feeds of their assemblies. The internet was crucial to the diffusion of the movement tactics and practices. New technologies of communication have often been perceived by activists and observers as enhancing democratic procedures and individual participation.

As Valeriani (2012) noted, central to the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia has been the presence of an élite of tech-savvy activists bridging disperse networks within society. In Spain the Free Culture and Digital Commons Movement had an important role in the genealogy of the 15M, providing resources and an organizational logic that incentivized individual participation (Fuster Morell, 2012). Networks of experienced media activists also played key roles in all major occupations in the United States, generally through participation in media and tech tents and working groups. Media teams often included media activists who moved between movement networks bringing specific practices with them (Costanza-Chock 2012). Within a year of the first OWS protests in New York City, the online Inter-Occupy network became the main public face of OWS activity, which had disappeared in many locales.

In comparison with mobilization processes like the WSF, which occurred in an earlier era of the internet (web 1.0) and drew mainly on e-mail lists and websites, the *indignados* relied on "web 2.0" platforms. While the former favored a "networking logic" among different and autonomous collective actors, the latter facilitated a "logic of aggregation" among interpersonal networks mobilizing ephemeral "crowds of individuals" who were difficult to keep together over time and "which disaggregate as easily as they aggregate." Moreover technologies embodying the logic of aggregation "are far less effective than email lists for facilitating complex,

interactive discussions regarding politics, identity, strategy, and tactics” (Juris 2012: 267). While new media made communication cheaper, faster and easier, thereby mobilizing many new and inexperienced activists, they also complicated the work of forging a shared sense of purpose and identity among activists, leading to frequent clashes, rapid burn-out, and disengagement (Mattoni 2012).

A particular set of tensions and strategic dilemmas have thus plagued the contemporary movements, including a divide between newer and more seasoned activists, difficulties recognizing and negotiating internal differences, a lack of common political and organizational principles beyond the General Assemblies, deficits in transparency and accountability, and difficulties transitioning to new tactics, strategies, visions, and structures. In short, activists are now faced with fundamental questions about how to build a movement capable of actually transforming the deep inequalities they have attempted to address. The WSF process may provide a foundation for these new mobilizations to build upon, if these waves or streams of struggle can be combined.

While both waves of protest use a cosmopolitan language, claiming global rights and blaming global financial capital, the global justice movement moved from the transnational to the national (and the local), while the new wave took the reverse route. In fact, protests followed the geography of the emergence of the economic crisis, which hit with different strength and in different times European countries (della Porta 2012). Research has already singled out numerous examples of cross-national diffusion of frames and repertoires of action from one country to the next. Both direct, face-to-face contacts and mediated ones have contributed to bridge the protest in various parts of the world, in a sort of upward scale shift. On October 15th a Global Day of Action launched by the Spanish *Indignados* produced demonstrations worldwide: protest events were registered in 951 cities in 82 countries. The degree of transnational coordination of the protest, however, hasn’t reached that of the global justice movement at the turn of the millennium, which was aided by the World Social Forum process and the spaces it created for exchanging ideas and networking. The forms of transnational brokerage in the newest social movements emerged later and remain rather weak, based largely on inter-personal contacts mediated through new media. The emergence of new movements during a time of world-systemic crisis has also made these mobilizations more sensitive to national political opportunities (or the lack thereof) than the earlier and more transnationally oriented global justice movement.

Nevertheless, as with the earlier wave of activism reflected in the early WSFs, the essence of “21<sup>st</sup> century revolutions” is a continuation of long-standing popular demands for greater and more authentic practices of democracy (della Porta 2012). These demands have been expressed consistently, if episodically, throughout modern history. People are demanding a more direct role in the decisions that affect their lives—including decisions about the global economy. This goal of participatory democracy fosters the evolution of practices of what activists have called “horizontality,” or the privileging of decentralized leadership and rejection of hierarchies. A rejection of violence can be linked to this rejection of hierarchy and demand for participatory forms of governance. For violence is antithetical to the consensual norms of radical democracy (Arendt 1993). What earlier and contemporary movements both attempt to do is create spaces where these ideals can be expressed, and where the values of an alternative society are prefigured.

While many observers of recent protests may see these features as novel, they have been apparent in many movements throughout history (Wallerstein 1990; Markoff 1996). For

instance, women's shared experience of discrimination contributed to feminist movement practices that were sensitive to power inequities and that were reflexive in orientation. Similarly, large segments of environmental and peace movements—often influenced by feminist activism—encourage horizontalism and radical democracy in their practices. The Zapatistas embraced and advocated similar ideas following their 1994 uprising. Protests against the global financial institutions, Argentines' responses to the 2001 collapse of their economy, and the World Social Forums all exhibit similar tendencies toward horizontality. There is, in short, a very long and rich tradition of struggle for more equitable and democratic forms of decision making and governance—a tendency which can only emerge in spaces that are liberated from dominant models of hierarchy and control. Such spaces are found in the occupations of more recent times, but it is in the more formally organized spaces of the social forums and other established spaces where activists have worked to implement systematically practices that overcome the tendencies towards exclusion and inequity that the dominant social orders reproduce.

As we discussed in chapter 2, activists in the WSFs have found that creating completely open spaces for participation does not ultimately achieve equity, given that people live in the context of such unequal access to rights and opportunities (Teivainen 2012; Doerr 2007;2009). Within the system in which we now live, it is very difficult to overcome the tendency toward hierarchy that is reproduced through well-established patterns, practices, and identities. One's nationality, gender, and race carry implied hierarchies that individuals don't always appreciate. Thus, activists in many Occupy encampments found that their General Assemblies tended to be dominated by more privileged groups (Smith and Glidden 2012), and as we saw above, those most harmed by the inequities of globalized capitalism are underrepresented among protest participants. The work of achieving the vision that has been articulated in emancipatory movement spaces requires a re-thinking of these basic practices, habits, and identities that infiltrate these spaces in unseen ways.

Observers of the U.S. Social Forum process described the Forum as a “movement building machine,” that is “an infrastructure that is explicitly designed for the production of social capital, networks, identities, meanings, frames, solidarities, knowledges, skills, strategies, and repertoires” (Juris et al 2010). Indeed, USSF organizers are explicit in their commitment to movement-building, and they have maintained this as a key objective of their organizing work.<sup>10</sup> As Occupy and other contemporary activists work to mobilize “the other 98%”—that is those who are not among the 1% of people already active (see Whitaker 2012)—they are increasingly using the language and methods of movement building. The debates about how to respond to the Arab uprisings, *indignados*, and occupiers around the world have helped open new initiatives to expand the WSF's capacity to support these movements while strengthening global analyses and networks. This is seen, for instance, in the “Global Square” activities at the 2013 WSF in Tunis and in the efforts of USSF organizers to build connections with OWS activists.<sup>11</sup>

If the revolutionary wave of today is to expand beyond the groups already mobilized, and if it is to generate pressure in ways that can avoid large-scale repression and lead to social transformation, it must find ways to allow for diverse constituencies with distinct organizing traditions, practices, and worldviews to coexist and work together within a more or less coordinated movement field. The autonomy and creativity of localized activists and groups should be supported, but this needs to happen in a framework that helps build the power of the movement while constantly struggling against exclusion and hierarchy. As we go to press with this second edition, we see evidence that leaders in the World Social Forum process and its

manifestations in the United States and elsewhere are helping open spaces for dialogue and convergence across these generations of activism. This dialectical exchange with a new generation of activists, like the other creative tensions that have permeated the WSF process, will continue to revitalize and renew people's ongoing struggle to advance global democracy.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Peña Nieto was a candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which governed Mexico for 71 years until its defeat in 2000. Students confronted him about human rights violations and femicides that occurred during his administration as former Governor of the State of Mexico. Major commercial media outlets (TELEVISA and TV Azteca) did not report or distorted the event and in response students produced an online video in which 131 of them displayed their student ID: "131 students respond to Peña Nieto" The video became viral in social media and a trending topic in twitter within less than a day.

<sup>2</sup> Recognizing this, the organizing theme for the 2013 World Social Forum in Tunis was "dignity" (<http://www.fsm2013.org/en>).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to examples in the text, the "Inter-Occupy" network has helped foster coordination and joint actions among local OWS groups in the United States. Making Worlds (<http://makingworlds.wikispaces.com/>) is an initiative to expand attention to reclaiming the commons among OWS and other activists. The #globalNOISE initiative is a blog that seeks to promote simultaneous global actions in local spaces (<http://blog.globalnoise.net/>). Twitter feeds, listservs, websites, and other digital tools are common to all these efforts to share information and coordinate action.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., [At World Social Forum: Unity and Dissent Within Global Movements](#), Jordan Flaherty, *Truthout*; [Analysis: Decolonizing the WSF](#) Justin Hyatt, *IPS News*. [Tunisia, Social Transformation and the World Social Forum: A Perspective on Moving Grassroots Internationalism Forward](#) by Kali Akuno, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement.

<sup>5</sup> This was the subject of intense deliberations in the WSF International Council during preparations for the 2013 WSF in Tunis, as well as in the U.S. Social Forum's National Planning Committee (Smith 201X).

<sup>6</sup> *Occupy Research Demographic and Political Participation Survey (ORGS)* is based on 5,074 survey respondents. Surveys were collected between December 7, 2011 and January 7th, 2012, and were distributed to Occupy groups identified through Facebook and web sites. In addition, the decentralized team of researchers distributed the survey through their personal networks and social media. More details on the survey and methods are at: <http://www.occupyresearch.net/2012/03/23/preliminary-findings-occupy-research-demographic-and-political-participation-survey>.

<sup>7</sup> According to the survey GETS, Encuesta sobre tendencia sociales 2011, 70% of Spaniards expressed partial (25%) or strong or very strong (45%) agreement with the positions expressed by May 15<sup>th</sup> Movement. In contrast, just 18% who expressed little or no agreement.

<sup>8</sup> Just under half the respondents to the 2007 WSF survey (Nairobi) indicated the view that the capitalist system needed to be changed.

<sup>9</sup> This is not to say these movements are not attentive to material concerns and distributional issues: they are. Rather, there is a more widespread recognition of the key role played by culture and ideas in reinforcing hegemonic agendas, and a conscious attempt to offer alternatives to dominant discourses, agendas, and frames.

<sup>10</sup> See: [http://wiki.ussocialforum.net/images/d/df/What\\_we\\_believe.pdf](http://wiki.ussocialforum.net/images/d/df/What_we_believe.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., "Occupy Theory Links Ideas and Action" USSF Updates Sept. 22, 2013, At: <http://www.ussocialforum.net/node/498>; "Perfecting the USSF as a Tool for Building Movement Power," USSF Updates July 7, 2013, At: <http://www.ussocialforum.net/node/495>; "The 2013 World Social Forum: Report from the USSF Delegation" USSF Updates May 2, 2013, At: <https://community.ussocialforum.net/civicrm/mailling/view/?id=111&reset=1>.