

Connecting social movements and political moments: bringing movement building tools from global justice to Occupy Wall Street activism

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Abstract

The current political moment has given birth to the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and other forms of resistance around the world. How might this moment of upsurge in global protest be sustained and expanded? This paper considers how earlier movements can contribute to today's struggles. Many contemporary activists conceptualize their struggle in local or national rather than global terms, and most have yet to fully explore the lessons and resources of earlier movements. Yet, the global justice movement and World Social Forums offer important strategic lessons and models to inform an emancipatory project that addresses the concerns of contemporary activists. Global justice movements have expressed a three-part strategy of resisting and rolling back neoliberal globalization, articulating alternatives to globalized capitalism, and working to build collective power. While OWS has helped spark new activism around the work of resisting economic globalization and (in a more limited way) articulating alternatives to capitalism, in many places it has been less attentive to the long-range work of movement-building. Efforts by OWS activists to connect with and build upon these earlier streams of organizing work can strengthen momentum for global social change.

The movement against corporate globalization began long before Occupy Wall Street began in September of 2011, and like movements before this, today's movements build upon the lessons, ideas, and networks developed through past struggles. Also important to note is that these struggles have originated for the most part outside the United States, and the spread of protests in North America and Europe reflect an intensification of neoliberal policies in the global North. Countries of the global South have long experienced the corporate exploitation and corruption of government that have become the main targets of the OWS movement. For many years people of the South have experienced the high unemployment and diminished public services that are now becoming commonplace in rich countries. They have developed means of survival and resistance over time, and people in the global North have much to learn from them. This essay explores some of the origins of what should be seen as a *global* uprising against corporate-led globalization in order to help clarify some of the lessons we have learned through struggle and hopefully to shed light on the path ahead.

Globalization Projects

Economic globalization, or capitalist globalization can be seen as a political *project* aimed at reinforcing the interests of those who control large stocks of capital over those without such advantages (McMichael 2006). The idea that globalization is a *project* disrupts the dominant notions of globalization, and by extension economic development, as inevitable, natural, and benign if not beneficial processes. It suggests that there are particular actors whose actions help construct globalization in ways that serve their interests. Thus, we can see the “globalization project” as involving particular practices and policies to advance the power of elite classes at the expense of the majority of the world’s population. It has done so by: 1) reducing public claims on resources, 2) restricting states’ roles in the economy, 3) restricting the collective power of workers, and 4) expanding the political power of transnational corporations.

The policies and ideology advancing the globalization project are often referred to as neoliberalism. In essence, neoliberalism portrays the welfare state as an obstruction to the efficient operation and therefore the profitability of “free markets,”¹ and thus seeks to limit the size and scope of government. Reducing states’ claims to collective resources extends to the realm of taxation, which at least as applied to corporations is seen as a major impediment to economic progress. Thus, neoliberalism has constrained the resources available to states by restricting the tax base while systematically reducing public services such as education, public transportation, and health care in order to balance government budgets. This has been happening in the global South since the 1970s, and while the North has also seen this developing over recent decades, its effects have become more widely and intensely felt since the global financial crisis of 2008. Neoliberalism further undermines public authority by advancing policies and ideologies that limit governments’ ability to regulate corporate practices. International trade agreements and national policies have curbed government efforts to protect consumers and limit the destructive effects of large corporations. This has had devastating effects on worker safety, the environment, and on the stability of the global economy.²

As it has chipped away at the welfare and regulatory authority of the state, neoliberalism has also systematically undermined the power of workers by attacking reforms that had served to advance and protect workers’ rights to organize and by advancing international trade and lending policies that prohibited governments from enacting laws to protect workers’ rights and to

¹ As Wallerstein (2004) observes, the notion that capitalism involves free or unregulated markets is essentially ideology rather than fact. In practice, capitalists prefer particular rules that reinforce their advantages in markets. Thus, institutions like the World Bank and IMF regulate government practices in ways that privilege global over national markets. And within nations, policies such as those protecting intellectual property help reinforce the interests of large-scale enterprises or monopolies over competition.

² For instance, in 1999 the *Gramm–Leach–Bliley* Act repealed the Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, which was passed in the wake of the Great Depression in order to regulate banks and enhance financial stability.

support living wages. Thus, since the 1970s organized labor has declined substantially. At the same time, however, we have seen a dramatic rise in the power and concentration of transnational corporations. This is not an accident. Rather, we can identify particular policies that have enabled corporations to grow and consolidate (see, e.g., Harvey 2005). Deregulation contributed to a frenzy of corporate mergers and high levels of market concentration in many key industries. Corporations have used their vast resources to expand their political influence, and this influence has been used to shape both national and international policies. In the global arena, for instance, international trade agreements and World Bank loans are often crafted with the aid of corporate lobbyists (See Sklair 2001; Robinson 2004; Perkins 2004).³

If capitalist globalization can be seen as a class project, then we might understand the work of those resisting this form of global integration in similar terms. We might call this oppositional *project* aimed at advancing global integration based on democracy and human rights, or what may be called “democratic globalization” (Smith 2008). But regardless of what it’s called, the key idea is that there is a basic *shared vision* of the purposes global integration serves and a *shared identity* among those groups whose actions, while largely uncoordinated, are oriented in ways that help advance or reinforce this project. In addition, organizations and networks that can help disseminate information and coordinate actions are crucial to advancing a democratic political vision against that offered by neoliberal globalizers (Smith 2008). The idea of “unity in diversity” has been emphasized by global justice activists to remind participants of the fact that while we share a larger vision, we retain important differences that contribute to our movement’s vitality and its collective power. The goal of advancing “one world with room for many worlds,” in the words of the Zapatistas, may be helpful in advancing thinking among Occupy Wall Street activists. This idea stresses the fact that we share a desire for a world that offers more economic, political, and cultural freedom but that is united around a commitment to defend shared humanity.

The key elements of a people’s globalization project include: 1) Resisting and rolling back the neoliberal globalization project, or what Walden Bello calls *deglobalization* (2003); 2) Articulating alternative visions for globalization; and 3) Building collective power to advance alternatives. Resistance to neoliberalism is essential, since neoliberalism actively undercuts the abilities of non-elites to even survive, much less to build power. The neoliberal rules of the global economy—including the austerity measures implemented by national states—must be rolled back and transformed into policies that better support people and communities. But in addition to rolling back the globalization project of

³ Steven Colatrella (2011) refers to this increasing harmonization of state policies to serve the interests of global capital as global governance, which he links to an increased frequency, size and intensity of strikes between 2007 and 2010. He argues that the prevalence of strikes in industries central to the operation of capitalist globalization (i.e., transport and energy) and their increased tendency to focus on state austerity policies that are driven by global governance imperatives make them particularly potent challenges to the legitimacy of the state and global institutions.

elites, oppositional forces must put forward an alternative vision of how the world might be organized. This vision helps dispel the myth that neoliberal globalization is inevitable, and inspires people to struggle for something better. Until people can imagine alternatives to the capitalist system, they will not be moved to participate in our movements. Thus, the creative work of imagining alternative worlds is an essential element of the people's globalization project. Finally, if alternatives are to be realized, much work remains to be done to build power of those outside the global elite. Although our numbers far outstrip those of our opponents, we lack the common sense of purpose and unity that is required to begin building another kind of world.

The metaphor of a river is useful for understanding how diverse movements combine energy, inspiration, and lessons across time and space. Many tributaries feed the main river, and sometimes wander off in varied directions drawing something from prior movements and flowing both towards and away from the river's main branch at different points. Like rivers, movements evoke images of fluidity, constant change and intermingling. An important question for activists today is how to connect this political moment of upsurge in popular protest with the ongoing networks and strategic paths forged by movements that precede this moment.

In this essay I examine three main streams of protest in the recent history of global justice or alter-globalization activism: the counter-summits against the international financial institutions and the G-8⁴, local autonomous and Indigenous movements such as the Zapatistas, and the World Social Forum process. Of course, we can find evidence of all three of the practices or tasks of the people's globalization project in each of these streams, but one theme tends to predominate in each approach. The task of resisting and rolling back neoliberal globalization has been most apparent in the counter-summits. The work of demonstrating and articulating alternative visions has been central in the local and Indigenous struggles, whose histories extend back long before the origins of capitalism. And the World Social Forum process has been most deliberately engaged in the work of building movement power.

Resisting and rolling back globalization: counter-summits and anti-corporate activism.

The counter-summits can be traced to the early days of global neoliberalism, and some of the very first summits of G-7 leaders saw popular counter-summits organized by a group called TOES—The Other Economic Summit. TOES was formed by activists and scholars whose work critiqued the economic model

⁴ The G8 was formed in the 1970s, at the time when neoliberalism came to be a dominant force in world politics. It is an annual meeting of the governments of the world's leading economies to discuss and coordinate government policies relevant to global economic policy. While pressure from some of the larger countries of the global South forced the G8 to expand its numbers to the G20 after 2005 or so, the U.S. and other core members have continued to meet in smaller groups, as they plan to do in the spring of 2012.

being put forward by G-7 leaders. Their aim was to help expand popular discourses about the global economy at a time when the world's most powerful governments were expanding their efforts to coordinate economic policy on a global scale. TOES organized parallel summits to the G7 meetings through much of the 1980s, and they published books that collected evidence about the impacts of the neoliberal globalization project in different parts of the world—particularly in low-income countries.

The model of citizen's parallel summits was used by other groups seeking to affect human rights and environmental policies, and during the 1990s especially, there was a tremendous growth in transnational organizing around United Nations global conferences. Transnational alliances of activists came together in these settings—as they had in smaller numbers at the TOES meetings—to exchange ideas and compare experiences of people in different countries and contexts. These conversations all contributed to the tools activists had for organizing transnationally and for targeting international arenas. They also helped networks come together in new ways, as activists came to better understand each other and the inter-dependencies of the issues they were addressing (see, e.g., Friedman et al. 2005; Broad and Hecksher 2003).

During the 1990s activism in the UN and international economic arena increased and became more confrontational. In 1995 the World Bank and IMF celebrated their 50th anniversary, and activists marked the occasion by forming an alliance called “Fifty Years is Enough!” Following the 1995 World Bank/IMF meeting, there was a rapid expansion of critical research and activism on these institutions and on the newly formed World Trade Organization. Also contributing to this rising tide of critique were organizations and networks that arose in response to regional free trade agreements, especially the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Finally, in 1999 at the third Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization we saw one of the largest protests on U.S. soil against a global financial institution at the “Battle of Seattle.”⁵ The Battle of Seattle was seen as a milestone in the history of global protests against corporate-led capitalism. It was followed by large-scale and often militant protests at subsequent global financial meetings of the World Bank and IMF, the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the G8, and the World Economic Forum (see, e.g., Starr 2000).

The significance of these protests has been to articulate opposition to the globalization project and to resist the expansion of neoliberal policies that is typically on the agenda at these meetings. Also, activists aim to bear witness to the negative effects of global trade policies and international lending by the World Bank and other entities, and to the role of corporations in shaping these practices. Often the official accounts leave out the negative effects, or the costs of economic globalization, which are often forced upon the world's poorest

⁵ In the years leading up to the Battle of Seattle, protests at the G8 summits had become quite large and confrontational, but these drew less attention than the resistance at the WTO conference.

people in the form of displacement, unemployment and precarity, vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters, and various other forms of social exclusion. Thus, the efforts of social movements to give voice to those most harmed by economic globalization are important to both developing an analysis about how global capitalism works and to shaping public discourses and challenging dominant frames that ignore the problems and long-term risks associated with these policies.

In addition to challenging dominant approaches to the global economy, the global summit protests served to bring activists from different countries and sectors together in new ways. This allowed people to consider more complex interpretations of the problems and to investigate the limitations and benefits of different alternatives being put forward. For instance, it is common in these settings for labor activists to come together with environmentalists and with activists from poor countries and communities. As they have sought to build alliances to resist global trade and financial policies, they have learned to consider how diverse people and groups understand the problem. In the process, they have developed more nuanced approaches to their analyses and understand the importance of solutions addressing the needs of people in both the global North and South. Also, they have developed a critique of corporate-led globalization that shapes today's Occupy Wall Street movement.

For us today, this stream of activism reminds us of the need to be aware of how the larger structures of globalized capitalism constrain the people's ability to secure their own livelihoods as well as their democratic rights (e.g. Markoff 1999). These structures need to be resisted and rolled back to create spaces for new visions and relationships to emerge. This sort of resistance needs to happen in tandem with other efforts aimed at advancing an alternative project to global neoliberalism. In other words, they must remain attentive to the larger vision of a more desirable kind of globalization and be supportive of, or at least not destructive of, efforts to build a shared identity that can unite diverse groups in struggle.

The experiences in counter-summit organizing that brought together more formalized and professionalized transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations generated some important conflicts and conversations about power inequities within movements. Although the tensions have by no means disappeared, as a result of the interactions that were possible in counter-summit organizing, there is greater knowledge and appreciation of the different skills and resources that less resourced, locally organized membership groups bring to global movements (Alvarez 1999; Plyers 2011). More importantly, there are now more direct transnational links among grassroots organizations and activists as a result of the counter summits, and activists are making use of these ties to coordinate their activities without professional NGO intermediaries (von Bülow 2010).

Advancing alternative visions - local autonomy and Indigenous movements

One of the key inspirations to what is known as the alter-globalization or global justice movement has been the Zapatista movement that arose in response to the North American Free Trade Agreement and related neoliberal economic policies in Mexico. The Zapatistas came to international prominence when they rose up to oppose the NAFTA in 1994, and the writings of a key (multi-lingual) spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, have resonated with activists around the world. The Zapatistas called people from all around the world to convene in an *encuentro*, an encounter, or forum, to discuss the challenges of economic globalization and to begin a process of articulating alternatives and building opposition. The Zapatistas inspired many because they offered a sense of alternative cultural and economic practices that could replace the forms that many saw as inadequate for meeting people's needs.

Indigenous peoples in other places also began coming together and articulating their visions of how a different, and more human-centered world might look in response to the mobilizations around the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. During the 1990s local Indigenous communities were coming together in new ways in order to challenge this celebration. Transnational Indigenous organizing was also facilitated by the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, which was part of the process that led to the establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2002. Indigenous leadership has remained an important part of contemporary global justice activism, and as many Indigenous people remind their fellow activists, they've been fighting global capitalism for 500 years and have some lessons to inform the larger struggle.

Thus, it should not be surprising to see the place Indigenous movements have held in the organization and discourses within the World Social Forum process. Despite small numbers, Indigenous groups have assumed an important role in the main plenary sessions and cultural activities surrounding many world, regional, and national social forums. Particularly notable is the leadership Indigenous discourses played immediately following the global financial crisis at the 2009 World Social Forum in Belém, which focused on "the civilizational crisis." Discussions at that forum highlighted the efforts in Bolivia and Ecuador to establish rights of Mother Earth in their national constitutions and stressed the need to establish better ways to measure progress and well being. The Indigenous notion of *buen vivir*, or living well, gained a large following in Belém and has become quite common in larger debates about responses to the economic crisis. Since 2009, these ideas have made inroads into official debates in the United Nations, through, for instance, the Bolivian government's introduction of UN resolutions to advance a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.⁶ In addition, these and other resolutions have called for a re-

⁶ Several UN resolutions have been passed to advance the call for Mother Earth Rights. In 2009, UN General Assembly Resolution 63/278 established April 22 as "International Mother Earth Day" (renaming the U.S.-designated Earth Day), and in each subsequent year resolutions have

assessment of conventional economic measures of well-being. In 2012, for instance, the UN hosted a High Level Meeting on Happiness and Well-Being, in response to UN resolutions sponsored by Bhutan (A/RES/65/L.86; and A/RES/65/309).

At the same time, autonomous groups were developing in other parts of the world to reclaim community rights. A group called Reclaim the Streets was formed in the UK and spread to other parts of the world, offering a critique of capitalism and its expansion to all aspects of social and cultural life (for a good overview of these, see Starr 2000). Ad Busters critiqued the culture of consumerism and the rise of marketing that accompanied neoliberal globalization. Local organizations of squatters and gardeners organized to control abandoned spaces in cities and to meet local needs. Common themes in these efforts are their connection to local communities, their sensitivity to culture and its corruption by economic forces, and their concern for local autonomy. These elements of movement were present at the protests and people's summits held alongside the global trade negotiations and meetings of the global financial institutions. They were also important foundations to the World Social Forum process that emerged in 2001 (Pleyers 2011).

In thinking about how this stream of activism can inform contemporary activism, what is perhaps most important is the ways these articulations of alternatives to globalized capitalism help expand the space for people to imagine different ways of organizing economic life. Such imagination is crucial to convincing people that challenging existing social relations is a viable project with potentially beneficial outcomes. Moreover, by actually practicing alternatives, activist groups can both advance the idea that "another world is possible," while also providing tangible benefits for people. As the crises of global capitalism intensify, moreover, these alternative projects will be increasingly essential to helping communities survive.

Indigenous peoples' traditions offer some particularly important insights, and this may account for their expanding influence in transnational networks. Perhaps most important is the stress upon the need for new relationships – especially between humans and the natural world but also within human communities. Indigenous traditions' notions of interdependence, cyclical understandings of time, and reciprocity have found resonance among those seeking to address global problems. Indeed, the fact that environmental degradation is typically accompanied by inequality and discrimination reinforces the idea that all social relationships need to be re-configured if we are to address global ecological crisis. Early in the OWS movement, Indigenous activists criticized the language of "occupation," raising consciousness about the long history of violent occupation that has been integral to Western culture.

been passed by the General Assembly reiterating a commitment to advancing greater harmony with nature ([A/RES/64/196](#); [A/RES/65/164](#); and [A/RES/66/204](#)).

Indigenous notions of autonomy (sovereignty) can also contribute to contemporary activist discourse and consciousness by helping structure better relationships within movements. Unlike some of the autonomist tendencies that have emerged with the Occupy Wall Street movement, for Indigenous peoples, autonomy is meaningless without the context of community. Thus, individual responsibility to the community is a key piece of the Indigenous visions of a preferred world. The idea of community self-reliance and *collective* autonomy is put forth as an alternative to the competitive individualism of the capitalist world-system.

Building power—the World Social Forums

Following the Battle of Seattle, activists struggled over questions of how best to challenge the juggernaut of neoliberal globalization. While many continued to resist at the sites where governments met to plan economic policies, others sought more offensive strategies that would allow the movement to more clearly articulate ideas about the alternatives. Up until now, the movement was largely reacting to government initiatives rather than offering a more pro-active strategy for advancing social change. Also, it was becoming apparent that regardless of how well planned protests were, it was impossible for activists to counter mounting government repression or to prevent small groups or agents provocateur from instigating vandalism and other forms of violence.

In this context, organizers from Brazil and France put forward the idea of convening a World Social Forum to parallel the annual World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland. There was already a tradition among activists of organizing resistance at the World Economic Forum, and this helped capture the imaginations of activists from a wide variety of places. What further attracted participants to World Social Forums was the idea put forward in its slogan, “another world is possible.” The first WSF attracted four or five times as many participants as organizers had planned, and about 20,000 activists met in Porto Alegre Brazil for this inaugural gathering. In the years that followed, the annual World Social Forum grew to more than 150,000 and was held in various parts of the global South. Forums are places where activists converge to exchange analyses and ideas, develop strategies and coordinate organizing efforts, and build relationships.

Almost immediately, people began organizing local, national and regional social forums and connecting these to the analyses and themes of the global meetings. By 2006, WSF organizers made more deliberate efforts to decentralize the meetings and encourage more localized organizing, and in 2008 they made the world meeting a bi-annual event to further support this. Thus, in its first decade the WSF process has mobilized literally millions of people around the world. Moreover, it has cultivated networks of organizations and individuals through which critical ideas and information about the global economy and its alternatives can flow. Many of these networks are active in very local settings, but they connect people and ideas across national borders and identities. The

WSF Charter of Principles helps unite these diverse groups around a shared aim of resisting neoliberal globalization.

This proliferation of spaces of social forums and the fact that they are connected across time and place through networks and online communications is what is referred to by the notion of the WSF *process*. The WSF has survived in part because it refuses to become a platform for action, and has sought to remain an open space for the building of networks and ideas about how to make another world possible. Within these open spaces, however, activists and groups do plan and coordinate mass actions. For instance, the WSF process contributed to large-scale global protests such as the massive anti-war protests of February, 2003 and the World March of Women (Dufour and Giraud 2007). In addition each forum's Assembly of Social Movements generates numerous calls for "global days of action" to draw attention to and concentrate activist energies on particular themes. Nevertheless, emphasis on the idea of Forums are primarily open spaces has helped generate an unusual amount of *reflexivity* among participants, which has enabled it to change in response to criticism. In its attempts to t has also helped cultivate a diversity of leadership from groups outside those of relative privilege.

The WSF process (or something based on it) can help connect the new mobilizations of the current moment with movements past by providing a space or format for the convergence of networks and activists that can help articulate and crystallize the idea of an emancipatory political project. Because it reflects the collective wisdom of previous moments of mobilization along with a history of learning and experimentation enhanced by an ongoing process of reflection and transnational dialogue, it is a valuable resource for today's movements and can help avoid the repetition of conflicts and mistakes of the past.

The WSF's significance is that it helps bring together other streams of movement in a space that both encourages the search for alternatives to economic globalization and builds resistance to economic globalization. Thus, it draws in and complements the other streams of protest while helping activists gain greater awareness of one another and build collective power. An important part of the WSFs has been its encouraging of critical exploration of how the inequities of the global economic order are reproduced in social movements themselves. Activists in the WSFs have pointed to the ways earlier movements reproduced gender, class, racial, and other hierarchies and exclusions. They have been explicit in their intention to resist this tendency in their ranks, even if they have not always been successful.⁷

An especially important innovation that can challenge the many hierarchies and exclusions endemic to capitalist society is the US Social Forum's practice of *intentionality*, which has deliberately brought to the fore leadership from among those groups most harmed by economic globalization (Karides et al.

⁷ Frequent protests against WSF leadership such as the protests against the VIP lounge in 2001 and the Mumbai Resistance in 2004 have resulted in new sensitivities and practices in the WSF process (see Smith and Karides et al. 2007).

2010; Juris 2008; USSF 2012). Again, while the efforts at intentionality do not always produce the desired reversals of privilege and hierarchy in the movement, it is clear that the USSF has made important advances in making women, people of color, poor people, Indigenous, gender non-conforming, and other marginalized and excluded groups more central in the planning and agenda-setting of the forums.

The Occupy Wall Street movement has at its origins the idea that people must come together to resist corporate influence and the effects of globalized capitalism in their local settings. The emergence of the OWS protests has created opportunities for building new alliances and identities at the local level. But we must look beyond the local to find tools for advancing the project of building alliances that can challenge the larger structures targeted by OWS. Occupy activists can learn from the World Social Forum experiences ways to build relationships in our movement that don't replicate the inequalities of race, class, and gender against which we are struggling. Indeed, many activists who have been part of the WSF process are bringing these lessons directly into their local work with OWS networks (see USSF 2012). In addition to helping inform coalition work, the analysis of globalization advanced through the WSF's many years of organizing, meeting, and sharing experiences across diverse communities and regions of the world can bring many insights to local Occupy activists' discussions about what sort of world we want to advance, and how.

Conclusion

Movements of the recent past and from around the world offer important insights for those involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement. First, movements resisting globalized capitalism should consider themselves as engaged in a political project of building unity and power among those requiring alternatives to the capitalist model of economic and social life. The WSF process has shown that a unified vision of what sort of world is preferred is less important than a shared understanding of the key principles that should guide relationships among people and between people and the earth. This shared identification with core values can build power among "the 99%."

OWS and other activists have become more aware that what is needed is *global-*level change in the economic, political, and cultural system that structures our entire society. This requires a multifaceted but intentional effort to encourage struggle on many fronts. There must be work to roll back the policies and practices that undermine people's ability to live dignified lives both now and in future generations. But in addition to that, we need to put forward alternative visions that can capture people's imaginations and give them a sense that another world is indeed possible. *And* we need to work systematically to build unity and power among a very diverse population who are or will increasingly be the losers if the current model of economic globalization continues.

This work requires a humility and mindfulness that is reflected in the wisdom of many Indigenous peoples, expressed in the Zapatistas' call for "walking

questioning.” We are building new kinds of relationships, new ways of doing politics, and a new culture, and we must remain open to possibilities and ideas we had not anticipated. We need to move outside our comfort zones and adapt our organizing styles as we learn from each other. We need to develop more active listening styles so that we are able to learn and adapt (see Doerr 2012). The consensus process embraced by OWS groups and by many previous movements reflects this aim of learning from one another, of building a collective wisdom about how to move forward together (see Polletta 2002; Smith and Glidden 2012).

I think a key lesson from the WSF process is that our effort to oppose dominant structures must be seen as secondary to the work of movement-building. For too long the reverse has been true, and building relationships in the movement was subordinated to the task of challenging those in power. How can we build unity among “the 99%” which is characterized by vast inequalities and differences? How can we build trust among groups that have long been pitted against one another by the forces of global capitalism? How can we restructure our relationships to base them on cooperation and solidarity rather than on competition, as is required by the capitalist world-system?

Defeating capitalism requires overturning its divisions and hierarchies. Thus, the key challenge for the Occupy movement right now is to focus much of its energy on the work of building alliances and trust among diverse segments of the 99%, even as it challenges power and builds alternatives. Clearly these are not mutually exclusive tasks, but without conscious attention to the former, the latter will be far more difficult to achieve. We must learn to come together in new ways in order to engage in the work of rolling back and building alternatives to globalized capitalism. All three of these tasks are interdependent and all are essential for our alternative political project to succeed. Fortunately, there are seasoned activists in the ranks as well as important stories from movements past that can provide lessons, warnings, and inspiration for the work ahead.

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