

Conceptualising agency through the World Social Forum Process: A layered analysis of alternative globalisation

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Abstract

Ulrich Beck's notion of sub-politics, in describing civil society's trans-national responses to the challenges of late industrial capitalism, embodies implicitly the power of civil society and the third sector to create desired social changes within a widening arc of risk horizons. Subsequent to Beck's 1999 writings, we have seen the emergence of the World Social Forum Process, which has become a platform for the global justice / alter-globalisation movement, and has worked as a catalyst in bringing together civil society / the community sector into new meta-networks, in order to address such meta-problems. A primary question explored in this paper is how communities address the large scale global challenges of neo-liberalism turn neo-conservatism, through a globalisation from below. This paper addresses this question through an examination of the World Social Forum Process as complex agent of social change, arguing that the World Social Forum is a platform for social innovation, which can be seen through a 'layered complexity' perspective. Causal Layered Analysis developed by Sohail Inayatullah and Dennis List, and the complex adaptive socio-ecological systems perspective (Panarchy) developed by Lance Gunderson and Buz Holling, offers a layered framework that can be used to understand the World Social Forum Process as platform for social innovations. From this view Social Forums can be seen to be platforms for fast moving resistance, to deeper policy, law and institutional innovations, and on to even deeper worldview shifts, epistemological reconstructions (the epistemology of the Global South), and a culture of 'horizontalism', and through to the emergence of deep narratives for a Global Commons, people's power and building a planetary society, paralleled by new myths and metaphors. Using this approach, Beck's notion of sub-politics is expanded, as the construction of a cosmopolitan world order takes on a multi-causal dynamic.

Introduction

In Ulrich Beck's notion of sub politics, social movements are fundamental in exposing the contradictions in late industrial society. In particular Beck shows how industrial societies' manufacture risk by institutionalise a diffusion of innovations which has unintended and un-imaginable consequences (Beck 1999) (p67). It is thus citizen activity and movements which must take responsibility for ensuring public goods and security. In this cosmopolitan vision, Beck sees transformed and enhanced public participation in what have otherwise been seen as state and 'expert' level issues. The public sphere is empowered to act as an 'open upper chamber' (p70).

The cosmopolitan vision has been commented on and articulated by many (Bindé 2004, Boulding 1988, Cohen 2000, Hardt 2004, McGrew 2000, Scholte 2000). Generally it sees civil society playing a large and fundamental role in local to global governance and in providing leadership and direction for planetary society generally. Implicit in this

vision is a hope that civil society can play an important role in creating a more socially just and ecologically sustainable world, and an assumption that civil society has the power to do so. This paper draws upon this hope and this assumption, in examining the World Social Forum Process (WSFP), which has become a global scale process through which civil society has converged to provide leadership and create social change under the banner 'Another World is Possible'. Through this examination Beck's notion of sub politics is expanded which provides a dynamic view in the construction of a cosmopolitan world order.

Topic of investigation

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a 'political invention' conceived of in 2000 amid consultations between civil society groups in Europe and Latin America opposed to corporate led economic globalisation (Leite 2005). It defined itself against both the content of neo-liberal globalisation, and the exclusive style in which neo-liberalism is pushed forward as a global development agenda by peak global institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Economic Forum (WEF). It was designed as an open space for civil society to discuss issues such as the erosion of democracy, third world development, sustainability, biodiversity and the visionary aim of building a planetary society, focused on alternatives and solutions (as opposed to critique and protest), and one that would transcend the problem of 'one idea' vanguardism and the identity politics which often typified resistance to neo-liberalism (Leite 2005) (p83).

The WSF does not present itself as a body representing 'world civil society'. Instead, a broad charter of principles sets thematic parameters for the event and process, and an open space format is used, by which organisations and individuals can take control of running their own events (Leite 2003) (p10). The Open space format allows any civil society group to hold a workshop or presentation, make proposals and collaborate, so long as they adhere to the charter of principles. The result has been an explosion of participation through thousands of self-organised events and workshops.

Beginning as a gathering in January 2001 in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, which brought together 4,000 delegates, 16,000 registered participants, and 1,870 journalists from 117 countries, the following two forums (again in Porto Alegre) brought over 50,000 participants in 2002, and 100,000 participants in 2003. The 2004 WSF was a crucial step. Held in Mumbai, it attracted over 115,000 participants and proved that a call for alternatives to convention globalisation was alive and well in Asia. After the WSF returned to Porto Alegre in 2005 and drew approximately 155,000 participants, there was a further push to spread the social forum movement throughout the globe. Instead of one global meeting (as in previous years) it was decided that the 2006 WSF would be a 'polycentric' event, held in different locations simultaneously around the world. Four locations were chosen for this; the cities of Bamako (in Mali - Africa), Caracas (in Venezuela - Latin America), and Karachi (in Pakistan - Asia).

As conceptually distinct from the WSF as an event, a dramatic World Social Forum Process (WSFP) has emerged. One important aspect of this process has been the emergence of local and regional social forums in dozens and dozens of cities, from London to Buenos Aires, Gujarat to Sydney, which are not organized by the WSF, but rather autonomously organized by coalitions from within civil society in particular regions. In fact, over one hundred and sixty local and thematic social forums have been held since 2002 alone, in well over a hundred cities around the world.¹ Thus in addition to the manner in which the WSF has become a global enterprise, a tapestry of regional and local social forums and networks now live within its orbit. This has catalysed a process of convergence and / or integration among trans-national networks within global civil society, which is creating new alliances and coalitions previously considered impossible. This reflects a new acknowledgement between global advocacy groups and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) that many of the issues that are addressed through disparate means and approaches are linked at deeper levels, and new levels of collaboration are needed. Wallerstein recently argued that the WSFP is the only real anti-systemic process at the moment challenging the *status quo* futures of the world capitalist system, and believes the WSF has already exceeded the global scope and depth of previous anti-systemic movements (Wallerstein 2004) (p629-637).

Methodology

The challenge of conceptualising advocacy at the WSFP is immense, as it is possible over 100,000 organisations have taken part in the social forum process, with perhaps over a half million participants. In this paper the specific task I put to myself was limited to creating a model for understanding how change agency through the WSFP is expressed, or in related but different terms, what futures do groups at social forums struggle to create? Yet rendering an ‘accurate’ picture of this would have been a quixotic endeavour, and I therefore followed a theoretical approach termed ‘layered complexity’.

Layered complexity acknowledges our own complicity in the production of knowledge, not reducible to perceptual determinants, nor reducible to empirical determinants, but inclusive of both how worldviews and ideologies shape the nature of the ‘facts’ that we acknowledge as important, and how the ‘facts’ influence our understanding of the world. The work of Maturana and Varela on cognition embodies this type of layered complexity, which includes an ontological analysis of the nature of self-organising systems, as well as an epistemological analysis of the nature of cognition. Their epistemological position shows cognition as interpenetrated by material conditions and *visa versa*, situated in historical contexts and expressed through the concept of ‘ontogeny’, the history of being for auto-poetic systems, such as biological systems, and socio-cultural systems (Maturana 1998). Layered complexity acknowledges how knowledge is situated in the perspective of the researcher-author, his or her culture, and attendant social interests, not simply a dead artefact of the world. As Inayatullah writes:

Complex analysisseeks to reveal how our knowing efforts are complicit in our conclusions – on the politics of knowledge. But complex and layered analysis is not easy to engage in. This is generally because we do not desire to account for how our own worldview interests shape the future we predict, or the alternative scenarios we posit. (Inayatullah 2002) (p298)

In this paper I examine agency in social change through the WSFP, and the futures orientation that runs through the WSFP. In doing this, however, I do not presume positivist certainty, but rather attempt a creative depiction of this as a cognitive construction based on observation as a researcher, rigorous documentation and my experience in participating and collaborating with others, in combination with analytic models. Over the past 3 years I have participated in the WSFs in Mumbai and Caracas, and have been one of the organisers for the Melbourne Social Forum (MSF) over the past 2 years. Through this period I have documented some of the various groups that run through social forums, and their orientations. As representationalist depictions of the WSFP are impossible, as the process is far too complex and fluid to render with the empiricists' notions of certainty. Therefore, I rely upon this layered complexity approach, as hybrid analytical approach based on Causal Layered Analysis (and discourse analysis generally), and the 'Panarchy' model of nested socio-ecological systems, in order to find coherences.

Causal Layered Analysis

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a post-structural approach in so far as it seeks to problematise existing future oriented thinking; exploring the assumptions, ideologies, worldviews, epistemes, myths and metaphors that already are embedded in images, visions, proposals, statements or policy oriented research about the future. It has also developed as a way of opening up spaces for alternative futures. These alternative futures are not based on extrapolating trends or tweaking the assumptions in a systems model, as is common in scenario building, but through deconstructing/reconstructing critical assumption about the way we constitute the world (Inayatullah 1998). While the theoretical underpinning of CLA is based on post-structuralism, the approach is layered, that is, it is a method of analysis which is inclusive of accounting for various streams of causality operating in unison upon an issue. CLA is a way of integrating four primary levels of causation, which include: Litany, Social Causes, Worldview, and Myth / Metaphor.

Litany	This refers to the most superficial aspects of social life: headlines, fads, fashions, common sense, miracle fixes, etc.
Social Causes	This refers to academic / scientific explanations of the world, such as in: economics, technology, ecology, sociology, political science, etc.
Worldview	This refers to what underpins academic explanations: the epistemes, ideologies and worldviews through which the world is interpreted.
Myth / Metaphor	This refers to the core images or narratives that operates like a gestalt perspective on the world.

Table 1: Description of levels in Causal Layered Analysis

Panarchy

Research into complex adaptive systems, pioneered by Gunderson and Holling, in particular the 'Panarchy' model, has yielded insights into socio-ecological dynamics (Gunderson 2002). In their *holarchical* view of socio-ecological systems, every system is

part of a larger system, and has within it many smaller sub systems. More importantly, larger systems move and change slower, smaller systems move and change more quickly. The big systems are characterised by slow moving variables, the small systems by fast moving variables. In formulating layerings of social change, and their speeds, they argue that small groups can undergo fads in days or months (they are fast variables with short cycles), social shifts in policy, values, and law can take years or decades (they are medium speed variables with medium cycles), and shifts in larger bodies (i.e. constitutions / culture / civilisation) can take hundreds of years and a millennia (they are slow moving variables in long cycles) (p111).

Using layered complexity to theorise change agency

Does the WSFP represent reactions to the global system, policy alternatives to neo-liberalism, or a more fundamental transformation / reconstruction of meaning and culture within a greater time scale? I argue here the WSFP reflects all these dimensions of change. Here a proposition is made about the types of alternatives offered through the WSFP, developed using this layered complexity model derived from the work of Gunderson and Holling (2002), Inayatullah (1998) and List (2004), who have developed frameworks in the layerings of alternative futures, their (relative) speeds of change and the type of change.

Rate of change	CLA - Inayatullah & List	Panarchy – Gunderson & Holling	World Social Forum Process: some examples
<i>Fast</i>	Litany	Policy / contracts / fashions / fads	Global Day of Action Struggle against FTAs
<i>Medium</i>	Structures / systems	Laws / Institutions – 5 to 50 years	Tobin Tax / Coordinated campaigns Reformed lending systems Reformed institutions
<i>Slow</i>	Worldview / Ideology / Epistemology	Traditions / constitutions 50 - 100 years	Spiritual Politics Epistemology of the South Global Commons
<i>Very slow</i>	Myth / Metaphor – Core narratives; Macro-history	Culture – 100 to 1000 years	Building a planetary society Narrative of the tribes People’s social justice histories

Table 2: Correlations between CLA, Panarchy and the WSF

While CLA makes the distinction between Litany, Policy, Worldview, and (deepest) core Myths / Metaphors, List (2004) recently added speeds of change to this, arguing that Litany changes fast, Policy has a slower rate of change, while Worldviews, Myths and Metaphors are the slowest to change (List 2004) (p225-238). This correlates with Gunderson and Holling’s formulations of speeds of change and types of change. Drawing together these theorists into a framework helps to conceptualise how the WSFP is a platform for sub political action and innovation at very different levels.

Layered Analysis and discussion

Various distinctions have been used in order to understand agency and advocacy through the WSFP, including reformist / radical, North / South, as well as thematic distinctions

(Buckman 2004). While these are all valuable, I hope to make a further contribution to analysis based on the layered approach outlined above. In the following section, I will therefore break apart agency and innovation through the WSFP based on the four levels described. The first level I describe as resistance, which signifies fast moving citizen responses to crisis and threat. This type of activity self organises (relatively) quickly, to block, stop or protest certain changes. The second level I describe as policy, law and institutional advocacy / innovation, which signifies advocacy by groups or networks for political, economic and institutional changes. This type of advocacy takes a longer time to develop and implement. Moyer, for example, developed models for understanding the transition from protest to advocacy in social movements (Moyer 2001), which reflects corollary time scales to this layered complexity model. The third level I describe as culture, which signifies slower moving changes in worldviews, ideologies, or epistemology. Finally, the fourth level describes shifts in core narratives, myths or metaphors, many of which are unconscious systems of ordering perception, culturally specific.

Resistance

The politics of resistance has in some senses defined the global justice movement through the 1990's, through a ubiquitous series of protests in both the North and South. As neo-liberalism expanded in the 90's, resistance was articulated as an approach in the face of overwhelming force. In this respect, the WSFP is, at a basic level, a platform for fast moving collaborations of resistance.

At the *micro* level, of individual actions, projects, and protests, there are groups that use the open space to formulate this resistance. Examples include indigenous groups under threat, such as the *Naga* people of Burma, the *Adavasi* of India, and a whole number of other indigenous groups, well documented (Mander 2005). A local variant were local groups at the Melbourne Social Forum (MSF) using the space to formulate resistance to the proposed dredging of Port Philip Bay (which would have harmful ecological consequences), as well as the work of Sea Shepard, an organisation which confronts illegal whalers on the high seas through direct action.

At the *meso* level are larger scale campaigns of resistance which are inter-organisational efforts and which arguably take on more than single issue problems and begin to take on more complex problems. Examples here are efforts to oust particularly exploitative corporations like Monsanto, Shell, and other mineral companies from remote regions, or the 'Captain Hook Awards', to raise awareness around the worst bio-piracy offenders, an issue championed by Shiva (Shiva 2000a, Shiva 2000b). Boycotts, such as one organised by the Tibetan Youth Congress with other free Tibet groups against Chinese products, are another example. A number of groups also come to address crisis in particular war regions, such as the wars in Palestine-Israel, Colombia, and other areas. There are also specific thematic forms of resistance, such as the struggle against water privatisation, and resource privatisation generally, highlighted for example by the Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development.

Resistance to state repression is a common theme at social forums, for example against the jailing of Puerto Rican activists for independence and ‘the Cuban Five’ by the US government. At the Melbourne Social Forum have been many examples which addressed state illegality by the Australian government such as human rights violations against Aboriginals, the deportation of US activist Scott Parkins (through the Friends of Scott Parkins network), and Australia’s involvement in the occupation of Iraq, through the Iraq Solidarity Committee, and the detention of asylum seekers.

Finally, at the *macro* level are examples of resistance, which take on global scale issues. Climate change advocacy is an example, such as through the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change, and the International Day of Action to address climate change, endorsed by the Assembly of Social Movements at the 5th WSF. Reflecting this larger scale is a trade related example through the campaign to stop the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), organised through a wide network from a whole number of positions from Canada, the US and through-out Latin America. Scaling up from this are organisational efforts to shut down the WTO trade liberalisation process, and report backs / reflection sessions on the recent WTO protests in Hong Kong, highlighted by Walden Bello at the recent Caracas WSF.

A spectacular example is the Global Day of Action (GDA). Plans for a coordinated Global Day of Action to protest the Bush II administration’s plans for the invasion of Iraq were initiated at the third WSF. In March of 2003 a ‘pre-emptive’ protest occurred simultaneously around the world, which consequently became the single largest (simultaneous) protest of any war in history. Another example is the Brussels Tribunal, in which many associated with the WSFP put the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) on public trial.²

Policy, law and institutional innovation

Policy shifts, and larger legal or constitutional changes understandably have longer development and implementation periods than resistance efforts. At the *micro* level are projects, innovations and proposals that address specific problems. For example a whole number of eco-designed community development approaches are on display at social forums, such as restored wetlands (in Taiwan), parabolic cooking systems (for boiling water and cooking in villages without electricity), and other small scale technologies. One of the most profound alternatives brought into social forums has been in the area of Open Source software, such as GNU and Linux (Lessig 2005), also related to the free culture movement.

Through the Melbourne Social Forum, a number of groups advocate for proposals of local significance. The Australian Centre for Democracy and Justice have launched Lobbyocracy.org, an internet intensive effort to track corporate contributions to politicians, and create greater political transparency and accountability. Groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth present campaigns against uranium mining in Australia. A number of local Victorian groups have developed a fairware network, to promote sweatshop free consumer products and their producers.

At the *meso* level are projects, innovations and proposals that address regional issues. Examples here include the relatively new satellite channel TeleSUR, which was highlighted at the Caracas WSF as a counter hegemonic media alternative to CNN, an important theme generally (Kellner 2005). In Mumbai Delegates from ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens) Germany proposed the creation of a co-operative global television station for the global justice movement. *Meso* level innovations might also include Participatory Economics (Paracon), as articulated by Michael Albert, and in the film ‘The Take’, through the development of worker owned cooperatives. The group Alliance21 promotes a whole number of local and regional alternatives of a practical nature. Groups like UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternatives) in India promote a suite of educational and practical initiatives through a whole number of networked organisations. Wider initiatives promoting support for alternative, local farming (The Small and Family Farms Alliance), based on principles of organic farming and bio-diversity, such as permaculture, are also common. Groups like Business Watch Indonesia (BWI), which challenge the pharmaceutical patenting system and advocate for drug research and production for tropical regions, are present. Regional scale advocacy naturally follows regional contexts, and thus at the Caracas WSF, various Latin American women’s empowerment groups marched for the de-criminalisation of abortion, and campaigns to change the Vatican policy which prohibits the use of condoms and other types of contraceptives.

The *macro* level in policy, legal and institutional reform is arguably where there is the greatest debate and activity through the WSFP. ATTAC puts forward a whole number of proposals aimed at reforming the international financial system. ATTAC is particularly well known for promoting the Tobin–Tax, a tax which would fall on financial speculation in equities markets. CADTM (Comité pour l’Annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde) and Jubilee South are other similarly oriented organisations which seek reform of the international lending system, and abolish the odious public debts of the third world. In a similar vein are debates about whether to reform global institutions like the IMF and World Bank, from proponents such as Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2002), or de-commission them outright (Bello 2000).

In the area of global law are groups like the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (ICC), backed by FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), which have advocated for the universal adoption of the ICC through a combination of high level advocacy and grassroots support. Global alliances also feature prominently, such as the Global alliance against dirty money and corruption (Forum Solidaridad Peru). Other alliances include work on the World Breastfeeding Charter, to promote the benefits of breastfeeding, as well as the creation of an International Tea Day at the 5th WSF, to promote the rights of tea workers around the world. These are all example where groups advocate for global scale policy and / or institutional reforms and changes.

Advocacy for alternative political economy is also quite important. The International Forum on Globalisation is one of the more prominent West based groups, advocating for what it terms ‘Localisation’, a comprehensive alternative political economy based on

principles of deep ecology (Cavanagh 2003). A whole number of people now use the term 'Post-Capitalism', to describe a hypothetical system beyond the current corporate dominated capitalism (Korten 1999). Along side this at the Caracas WSF were many advocates of Bolivarianism, a term used to describe the shift toward participatory democracy and socialism in Latin America, especially in Venezuela. Bolivarianism describes a comprehensive shift, which as well might be seen as alternative political economy. Also indicative of such a political-economic shift, but more visionary, are a variety of proposals for a World Parliament, from people such as Johan Galtung and George Monbiot (Monbiot 2003). Like Monbiot, many of the advocates for alternative political economy link current problems with the way the global economy was established through the post-war Bretton Woods agreement, and seek a reconstruction of the features of the global economy which address many of the problems associated with the 50+ years of US hegemony (Bello 1996, Korten 1996, Mander 1996).

Cultural shifts

At a micro scale we can see the work of small organisations who work on a local level in the area of education for cultural change. Local versions of this at the Melbourne Social Forum include the OASES graduate program and research initiative through Borderlands Co-operative and the Augustine Centre, to develop alternative education for personal, social and global wellbeing. Other examples include peace education and activities through the One World Network, and workshops on simple living (through the Western Buddhist Order of Melbourne).

As an open space for civil society, it is no surprise that social forums are attended by religious organisations, from a variety of traditions. Indeed the convergence (or post secular re-convergence?) of politics and spirituality is one interesting theme that has run through many of the social forums. An example is the group Ananda Marga, present at both local and global social forums, who promote PROUT (Progressive Utilisation Theory), which combines spiritual and economic development. In Latin America Liberation Theology forms an important backdrop and influence in many of the people's movements there. At the Mumbai WSF there was a 'Forum for Celebrating Diversity', put together by the Forum of Peace Loving Faith Based Organisations.

Social forums provide a space for the loosening of identity politics, through a new cultural process of communication between diverse groups. This has been referred to as 'horizontalism' by Tormey, who argues social forums embody a new cultural orientation (Tormey 2005). Parallel to this is what Susan Hawthorne refers to as the 'Diversity Matrix' of resistance to homogenising global capitalism (Hawthorn 2002). She and others, like Edward Goldsmith, argue for the need of an ecological worldview based in principles of diversity. Participatory democracy is arguably the political side of this coin, through which decision making can be done with a maximum of cultural, community and social inclusion.

Along side this valuing of diversity, many groups through the WSFP challenge forms of discrimination, based in sexual preference, gender, ability / disability, color, race, ethnic

differences and discrimination against other species. Part of the project for building a planetary society is to end forms of discrimination against difference, and create a world accepting (and protecting) of difference and diversity. At the Mumbai WSF a large number of forums and discussions took place about ending castism and untouchability in India, SouthEast Asia, and around the world. At the Melbourne Social Forum, the group Madpride advocated on behalf of those who are mentally different, and groups and individuals also came to discuss discrimination against women and indigenous people.

The articulation of a Global Commons is an important conceptual shift. Resistance to the neo-liberal privatisation of natural and cultural resources, which has expression in social innovations such as Open Source and policy alternatives for collective control and ownership of resources, has deeper foundations in a perspective based in the value of a Global Commons. For example, in Mumbai the group Friends of the Earth held a workshop for the Our World Is Not For Sale Network. Following on the general expansion on progress indicators, the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World promotes a Co-existence Index, which parallels this shift. This can also be seen through an articulation of the politics of responsibility versus the 'egocentric cry of rights', a concept championed by, for example Alliance21 and UBINIG. Mutual co-existence, and the protection and development of that which we all depend on, such as social / cultural knowledge (seed varieties, software, medicines), ecosystems (fisheries, forests), and resources (minerals, water), are articulated as fundamental to a Global Commons.

Finally, Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues the WSF is an example of an emerging epistemology of the Global South. *Status quo* globalisation relies on the hegemony of techno scientific knowledge. It discredits rival ways of knowing by enforcing its own criteria of validity based in efficiency and coherence: 'discrediting, concealing and trivialising counter hegemonic globalisation go largely hand in hand with discrediting, concealing and trivialising the knowledges that inform counter hegemonic practices and agents'. He argues the vast majority of literature on globalisation is produced in the wealthy North and: 'The knowledge we have of globalisation, whether hegemonic or counter hegemonic, is less global than globalisation itself.' In this respect the WSF represents diverse counter-hegemonic ways of knowing, the practices and knowledges that run through the WSFP express distinctly alternative epistemological assumptions, in particular embodying the social experiences of the Global South at odds with Western techno-science. 'Hegemonic rationality' discredits the social experience of the South, constituting a 'waste of social experience, both social experience that is already available, but not yet visible, and social experience that is not yet available but realistically possible.' Because of this 'the epistemological alternatives proposed by the WSF is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice'. Santos formulates the epistemology of the South into two sociologies, the sociology of absences, which analyses how counter-hegemonic globalisation is neutralised, and the sociology of emergences, which analyses how counter-hegemonic globalisation is epistemologically empowered (Santos 2004) (p13-14).

Myths, Metaphors and Narratives

In addition to cultural shifts, the WSFP is also the site where new narratives, myths, and metaphors can be seen emerging. These can vary depending on the issues being discussed, and the scope of the stories. Two themes stand out. The first is the articulation of people's histories, framed from a number of marginalised perspectives, that take on a social justice perspectives, and the second are narratives for 'planetization'.

In respect to people histories, US historian Howard Zinn, as an example, articulates a people's history of the US which situated the institutional history of the US as a product of elite capitalist knowledge production, and develops a deep and nuanced alternative narrative that gives voice and body to those marginalised throughout history (Zinn 2003). His work shows how completely the hegemonic narrative of capitalism disowns and silences voices for social justice. By developing alternative histories, new social justice heroes, and the story of human rights struggles, inspiration, clarity and an alternative view of the future is possible. Another example is Robert Marks' world history, which specifically critiques 'rise of the West' conceptions of history, and develops a multi-civilisational history that gives credit to all the cultures that are cast aside by the 'rise of the West' assumptions. Marks' world history address the ideological appropriation of social change to fit colonialist ends, and how development has been framed and promoted through such a history, which makes alternatives to Western developmentalism more possible (Marks 2002). While these two historians have not specifically used the WSFP as a platform, their work is demonstrative of alternative narrations which are present through the WSFP. This is specifically so because many discussions that run through the WSFP link neo-colonialism (Western economic dominance) with the 500 year history of Western colonialism. While colonialism may have been conveniently forgotten in the West, it's still fresh in the minds of many in the Global South, along with the need for emancipation from the West's ideological, political and economic dominance.

In a related theme, at the WSF in Caracas, the closing ceremony featured what I would call a 'Dance of the Tribes'. As is well known, the colonisation of Latin America by the Portuguese and Spanish began with genocide and progressed into a feudal like enslavement of the local populations. Through this 500 plus year history of domination, indigenous peoples have endured injustice after injustice, as the caste like social stratification was embedded and widened through centuries. In this Dance of the tribes, this history was replayed. The first procession was of indigenous peoples, the second of Europeans, the third of Africans (brought as slaves). The dance ended with an integration between the three tribes, a kind of healing. This reflects the narrative transformation from a dissociated caste society based on racial discrimination, to an integrated Latin American society, which acknowledges the regions need for psychic healing, through this new vision of racial and cultural integration.

In respect to such deep narrative dimensions of change, the language of 'planetary society' stands out as well. Thus while the WSF renounces its right to speak for all, it engages in the facilitation / scripting of a narrative of planetary citizenship. 'Building a

planetary society' addresses the historical problems of nationalism and ethnocentrism that have plagued humanity, as well as anthropocentrism and the human species' devastating effects on the Earth through many different eras. Implicit in this is a narration of a Global Commons, the common destiny we all share, the deep interconnectedness and interdependence of all people and all life on Earth.

This theme is not new and unique to the WSFP, and is implicit in the work of earlier thinkers. Economist Kenneth Boulding was one of the first to articulate this through the concept of 'spaceship Earth' (Boulding 1966 / 1995), while Elise Boulding was one of the first to apply this general theme to civil society (Boulding 1988), expanded upon in respect to globalisation by Henderson (Henderson 1996). Finally, W.I. Thompson has developed the theme of planetization through many of his books, and argues we are entering a transformative period in human consciousness (Thompson 1987). Yet distinct from the writings of visionaries, the intention to form a praxis for building a planetary society through the WSFP is unprecedented in its scale and scope. As the first article in the WSF charter of principles states:

The WSF is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed toward fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth. (Sen 2004) (70-71)

¹ See: http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=foruns_nacionais_por accessed May 2006.

² For The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) go to <http://www.newamericancentury.org/> and for the The Brussels Tribunal: Questioning the New Imperial World Order, A Hearing on the "Project for the New American Century" 14-17 April 2004 Brussel, see: <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/> accessed March, 2005.

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