

## SPILLOVER OR SPILLOUT? THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AFTER 9/11\*

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*This article focuses on a seemingly paradoxical sequel to the 1999 Seattle WTO protests: the weakening of the global justice movement in the United States. While the movement has flourished in Europe, it seems largely to have stagnated in the American context. This outcome cannot be explained by either American exceptionalism or by a general decline in activism in the wake of the tragedies of 9/11 and the Iraq War. First comparing expressions of the American and European global justice movements and then turning to original data on social movement organizing in Seattle after 1999, we argue that the weakness of the American global justice movement can be tied to three key factors: (a) a more repressive atmosphere towards transnational protest; (b) a politically inspired linkage between global terrorism and transnational activism of all kinds; and (c) what we call “social movement spillover.” We further argue that the strongest movement since September 11th—the antiwar movement—exemplifies a broader trend in the United States towards the “spillover” of transnational activism into domestic protest.*

When thousands of protesters shut down the WTO Ministerial meeting in Seattle in November 1999, something new was added to the global repertoire of contention. While there had been “counter-summits” against major international organizations before, the Seattle campaign was truly transnational—coordinated with scores of protest events around the globe (Lichbach 2003; Tarrow 2005). The extent of transnational organizing was not the only innovative feature of the Battle in Seattle. Activists there had employed a set of colorful and contentious public performances that would soon be remembered and memorialized under the label “the Seattle model.” There would even be attempts to import this model into repertoires of local contention elsewhere, as Lesley Wood and David Graeber have shown (Wood 2004; Graeber 2007).

The success of the Seattle model inspired a cascade of global justice events: from Genoa to Göteborg, from Prague to Cancun, from Porto Alegre to Mumbai. But the American leadership role in that movement was not to last. Two years after Seattle, when a range of American organizations planned a demonstration against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington D.C., hopes were high for a repetition of Seattle’s success. But when, two weeks before the planned demonstration, three terrorist airplane-bombs crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, everything changed. Some participating groups wanted to cancel the demonstration altogether, while others urged that it be turned into a protest against

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\* This article draws on an earlier contribution to Donatella della Porta, ed., *The Global Justice Movement* (2007). We thank Massimo Andretta, Evelyn Bush, Donatella della Porta, Dana Fisher, Patrick Gillham, Margaret Levi, Ruth Reitan, Jackie Smith, Lesley Wood, Gilda Zwerman, the anonymous reviewers, and the participants in the Columbia University Workshop on Contentious Politics, and the Cornell Peace Studies Seminar for helpful comments on earlier versions, and Jai Kwan Jung for secondary data analysis. Mark Becker, Michael Leon Guerrero, Dan Merkle, and many others kindly shared their impressions of the movement that they have helped to create. Mario Pianta and Duccio Zola allowed us to reproduce data analyses that they graciously ran for our use. We are especially grateful to Ruth Reitan for allowing us to include a quotation from her recent paper (2007) and for providing advice on an earlier version of this article.

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resurgent militarism. In the end, plans for the protest were radically scaled down and the media largely ignored the demonstration (Gillham and Edwards 2003; Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham 2005; Reitan 2007).

This reversal cannot be seen as the result of American exceptionalism. Such an explanation is not dynamic: it cannot explain why participation in the global justice movement either rose or fell in the U.S. Nor can it be seen as the result of a decline of protest potential: there is no evidence of shrinking potential for protest after 9/11. On the contrary, Americans' reported participation in protest actually *grew* in the first five years of the new century (University of Michigan 2006). Further, there would soon be a groundswell of mobilization in the United States against the Iraq war, as indicated in Americans' participation in the landmark February 15th worldwide demonstrations. Yet despite this general rise in the reported and observed use of protest, the movement against global economic targets never again reached the initial heights of Seattle, and the American presence soon declined in the global justice movement. What had happened?

Although this article deals with a putatively transnational movement, we build our analysis on the basis of changes since the turn of the century in the structure of political opportunities in the United States. Political opportunity structure often has been seen as a static property of particular systems (Kitschelt 1986), but opportunities shift, expand, and contract (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Tarrow 1996). Even before the 2001 Washington, D.C. protests, political opportunities had begun to close down in the U.S., as police forces began to adopt a new and more repressive style of protest policing (Noakes and Gillham 2006; Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham 2005). We argue not only that Americans' response to the official drumbeat for war and their support for "homeland security" reduced the public's tolerance for the Seattle model, but also that there were reduced opportunities to organize around issues of global economic justice.

At the same time, the threats and opportunities of the Bush administration's policies were triggering a new wave of mobilization in opposition to the Iraq war. Social movement scholars have long recognized that inter-movement dynamics (for example, organizational competition, countermobilization, and social movement spillover into other movements) have important consequences for movement opportunities (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Tarrow 1998). Recognizing this dynamic, Ruth Reitan conceives of the antiwar movement as a spillover from the campaigns against global neoliberalism, using the well-known Meyer and Whittier terminology (Reitan 2007; Meyer and Whittier 1994).

We agree with Reitan that many veterans of the global justice movement joined the nascent antiwar movement in 2002-03. But rather than a simple "social movement spillover," we detect what we call "social movement spillover": *the hollowing-out of a social movement when its activists shift their activities to a cognate, but differently structured, movement*. While "spillover" implies that the original movement's "cup runneth over," spawning new movements and influencing other areas of activism, our concept of "spillover" suggests that a former movement is denuded by transmigration to a new one. While it is still too early to tell whether the global justice movement eventually will revive as the Iraq war and the Bush Administration come to a close, the rise of an antiwar coalition in 2003 and the shift of many activists into domestic electoral politics in 2004, and after, has led to the reduction of an American voice in the robust global justice coalition that has flourished elsewhere around the world. That is the central argument of this article.

We begin by examining the strength of the global justice movement on a national level, embedding in our analysis a comparison with the cognate movement in Western Europe. To add depth to the general trends we uncover at the national level, we then examine the state of the global justice movement in the city of Seattle itself, post-1999, relying on data from qualitative fieldwork and an original dataset created by our coding of a local activist calendar. Given the great regional diversity of the United States, we are of course cautious about over-generalizing from the Seattle experience. Although we have not examined the fate of the global justice movement elsewhere in this country, we are persuaded that if the movement has not survived in Seattle—the place of its birth—it is unlikely to have prospered elsewhere.

In our final section, we consider potential explanations for the decline of the global justice movement, focusing on the changed political opportunities in the years since 1999, and especially on the inter-movement “spillover” dynamics between the global justice and antiwar movements. After doing so, we will suggest that there is a great deal of transnational activism in America; however, much of it escapes conventional protest-based definitions of social movement activity. It takes both the familiar American form of “single issue activism” and the new form of Internet activism, but it fails to make connections across borders with the larger issue of transnational contention for global justice.

### EXPLAINING GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT DECLINE

Our approach to the study of movement trajectories draws on the familiar political process approach to the study of collective action (see, for example, McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1998; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). This perspective has focused on the ways in which state actors can alter the costs and benefits of collective action, thus encouraging or discouraging movement actors to adopt different forms of influence. But it can also focus on the ways in which one movement can alter another movement’s opportunities (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Tarrow 1998). Because of the importance of the relationships between actors highlighted in the political process approach, we focus on the dynamics of collective action (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) and particularly on the mechanism of the internalization of foreign or transnational movements (Tarrow 2005).

To do so, we must make careful distinctions between the actors and mechanisms we discuss. First, what do we mean by the “global justice movement”? Many scholars include in their definition virtually all forms of contention that cross national borders, under rubrics like “global justice,” “counter-hegemonic globalization,” or “global countermovement politics” (Evans 2005; McMichael 2005). Some see any movement against U.S. imperialism as an integral part of the global justice movement that emerged in the 1990s with protests against global neoliberalism (Starr 2004: 118). Others—while acutely aware of the shift in emphasis from global neoliberalism to antiwar activism—still see both as part of the same global movement (Reitan 2007).

We take a less expansive view. We define the GJM as consisting of campaigns of mobilization *against global or transnational neoliberalism or its agents, taking place against the policies of international financial institutions or their meetings; against regional economic compacts and summits; and global or regional social forums directed against global neoliberalism, like the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum*. There are two major reasons for insisting on a clear theoretical distinction between the GJM and other forms of transnational activism: substantive and methodological.

- *Substantive*. The targets, goals, and modes of action may differ. Other transnational movements may be *related to* the GJM; may *inherit* activists, forms of activism, and collective action frames from the earlier cycle of protest (Fisher 2006; Reitan 2007); and may make heroic attempts to *frame their opposition in similar terms* to the opposition to global neoliberalism. But to force them, through the use of an overbroad definition, into a movement of which many of its members are hardly aware is not useful empirically or theoretically. As Christopher Rootes and Clare Saunders write of Great Britain “it is a mistake simply to assimilate the antiwar movement to the global justice movement” (Rootes and Saunders 2007: 18).
- *Methodological*. Conflating a movement against global neoliberalism with campaigns against American militarism or anything else would make it difficult to examine the dynamics of contention from one to the other (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Is the transition from challenging neoliberalism to antiwar the result of “frame extension” (Reitan

2007) or of “frame transformation” (Snow, Burke, Worden, and Benford 1986)? If the former, there are grounds for assimilating the two movements to one another. If the latter, different agents are targeted, different tactics are used, and there may be costs to the originating movements. While the results are not yet in, the latter is closer to the actual pattern we have found in Seattle and elsewhere in the United States.

This takes us to our second theoretical distinction: between social movement spillover and social movement spillover. Since the path breaking work of David Meyer and Nancy Whittier (1994), scholars have been aware of the pitfalls of examining social movements or movement families in isolation from one another. What have come to be called “cycles of contention” would be far less inclusive were it not for the diffusion of movement energies from one movement or movement family to other cognate and independent actors (Kriesi, Koopmans, Dyvendak, and Giugni 1995; Tarrow 1998). But previous students working in the political process tradition, including one of the present authors, have failed to examine the potentially negative consequences of spillover for originating movements. When activists, sources of funding, and forms of protest shift from one set of targets to another, there are clear costs to the originating movement.

Finally, we call attention to the concept of *internalization*: the scale shift of foreign or transnational forms of mobilization downward into domestic politics (Tarrow and McAdam 2005). Such a process can be seen in the adoption of the social forum model by thousands of local and regional collective actors in both Latin America and Western Europe, following the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001. The internalization of external models of mobilization into the domestic politics of individual states is the most likely route to a fusion between the global and the local (Tarrow 2005: chap. 11). But the difficulties of such internalization should not be underestimated, as our analysis of the social forum process in the United States will show.

#### *Data and Measurement*

This article proposes three measures of the strength of global justice activism in the U.S.

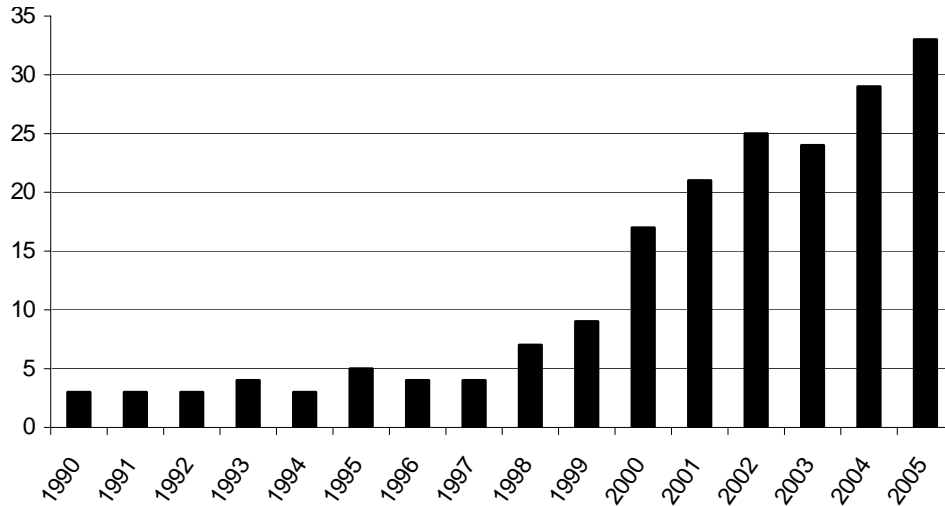
- First, we look at data on the *amount and forms of global justice protest*. At the national level, we compare global justice protest in the U.S. with similar protest campaigns in Europe. In our Seattle case, we track the amount of global justice activism and its forms over the 1998-2007 period through our coding of a local activist calendar.
- Second, we examine the *strength of global justice coalitions in the U.S. over time*. We specifically look at changes in labor organizations, environmentalists, direct action activists, and global justice organizations that have influenced their ability to form global justice coalitions with one another.
- And third, we focus on the *internalization of global organizing models*, specifically the social forum model. The social forum process has been a major outcome of the global justice movement in other regions—especially in Latin America and Western Europe. We find little evidence of the successful internalization of the social forum model in the United States, at least until the summer of 2007.

### **THE GLOBAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IN THE U.S. AND WESTERN EUROPE**

Mario Pianta and Duccio Zola have collected a wealth of data on global justice events from official and Internet sources. figure 1 depicts the global trend they uncovered in their research on such events in the United States and Europe between 1999 and 2005.<sup>1</sup>

The events in Pianta and Zola’s database took many different forms, but they often followed the pattern of “counter-summits” that were organized in parallel to, or in criticism of, official

**Figure 1.** Growth in Global Justice Events, 1990-2005



Source: Pianta, Silva, and Zola (2004); additional data for 2005 provided by Mario Pianta.

summits (Rucht 2006). Others were what Pianta and Zola call “civil society events,” that is, events that were organized independent of official summits, treaties, and international institutions. Americans hosted a significant number of parallel summits, mainly because of the presence of the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank in the United States. Beginning in 1990, Pianta and his collaborators have identified 28 parallel summits in the United States,<sup>2</sup> most of them organized in conjunction with major summits of international organizations near the sites of those meetings; almost none were civil society events or social forums, compared to over 35 percent of the European events during the same time period.

The most impressive “civil society” event in the world is, of course, the annual World Social Forum that has been variously organized in Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Nairobi, and other cities of the global South since 2001 (Rucht 2006). It gave rise to a cascade of local and regional social forums, especially in Latin America and Western Europe.

American participation in the WSF started off very slowly in 2001 and 2002. Data on the Porto Alegre forums in 2001, 2002, and 2003, however, show that Americans’ participation grew steadily, with a big jump in 2003, to 547 participants, making the United States the third biggest participating country after Brazil and France.<sup>3</sup> By 2005, American participation had increased to 1,753, a growth of over 300 percent since 2003. But when we control these figures by population size, Americans’ participation in the WSF is less impressive. For example, in 2005, European participation was 2.4 times higher in per capita terms than U.S. participation. Americans are still far less likely to participate in global civil society events than their European counterparts.

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Global Justice Movement Events, by Site of Events

	Official Sites		Autonomous Sites	
	Global Summits	Regional Summits	Social Forums	Civil Society Events
Europe	34%	30%	6%	30%
North America	75%	25%	—	—

Source: Adapted from original data provided by Mario Pianta and Duccio Zola. The global summits include the United Nations, World Bank, IMF, WTO and G7/G8 summits.

*Transnational Coalitions from Global Justice to the Iraq War*

Like many other observers, we believe that the fundamental feature of social movement organizing in the world today rests on coalition formation (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Levi and Murphy 2006). This is especially true for movements with a transnational reach (Bandy and Smith 2005; della Porta 2007; Tarrow 2005). Where activists do not know each other or have no sustained ties around particular targets or institutions, forming a coalition around events or crises is the most effective way to produce a rapid and effective transnational protest campaign.

Both in the United States and elsewhere, the global justice movement was built on the basis of such event-based coalitions, which goes far to explain how rapidly it was formed and how readily its epicenter shifted from Seattle to Genoa, Cancun to Quebec, Prague to Davos. Although the United States government was the prime protagonist of the war on Iraq, the antiwar movement that surged in February 2003 actually began in Florence, at the first European Social Forum in November 2002. The morning after that meeting, “several hundred mostly European activists gathered at a social movement assembly and took the decision to set 15 February 2003 as a global day of mobilization, a call that was reinforced at the WSF that January and via activist listservs and websites” (Reitan 2007: 2).

After 9/11, global justice movement coalitions faced a changed political environment. As Walden Bello put it, speaking as an advocate of the global justice movement, “September 11 was the cutting edge of the offensive against us” (Cooper 2002). For many, 9/11 robbed the movement of legitimacy by taking anti-globalization to its murderous extreme. One key actor, organized labor, turned its back on confrontational protest tactics altogether. As one activist put it, “the biggest problem inside the Seattle coalition is not the war... the problem is around those who want to use violence. The post-9/11 labor movement doesn’t want its rank and file to see its leaders in street demonstrations that turn violent” (Cooper 2002).

*Internalization of Global Organizing: The Social Forum Model*

A major payoff of the World Social Forum has been what we call “internalization,” or downward scale shift from the global to the local level. Following the first Porto Alegre meeting, local, national, and regional forums were created in many parts of the world using the loosely coupled “movement of movements” model of the WSF. In Italy alone, hundreds of local and regional social forums were formed after activists returned from Porto Alegre (Tarrow 2005). Until recently, there was no equivalent internalization of the social forum process in the United States. Using a web-based search using the term “social forum” in July 2006, we identified only the following seven events and organizations since the first World Social Forum in 2001: the Boston Social Forum (2004), the Chicago Social Forum (2005 and 2006); the Houston Social Forum (2006), the Maine Social Forum (2006), the Midwest Social Forum (formerly “Radfest,” 2004, 2005, and 2006), the Southeast Social Forum (2006), and the Border Social Forum (2006) at which both Mexican and North American activists participated. This list is not exhaustive, however, as websites for social forums in the US are often either pulled down or not maintained after their organizational collapse. The New York Social Forum, for example, held two successful events before its dissolution and does not currently maintain a website. Similar stories can be told for other local forums, such as that in Washington, D.C., where planning for a local social forum never reached fruition. And while the European global justice movement has strong ties with labor movements, especially in the more institutionalized movements in northern Europe (della Porta 2007: chap. 10), social forums in the United States rarely have formal ties with labor unions or political parties, though members of these organizations can attend as individuals. As one activist described the difference, North American social forums tend to come from “the independent left, not the organized left” (Rebick 2006). This has helped to limit their durability.

The longest lasting social forum in the U.S. actually preceded Seattle and was domestically born: The Midwest Social Forum grew out of a group that was founded at the Havens Center for

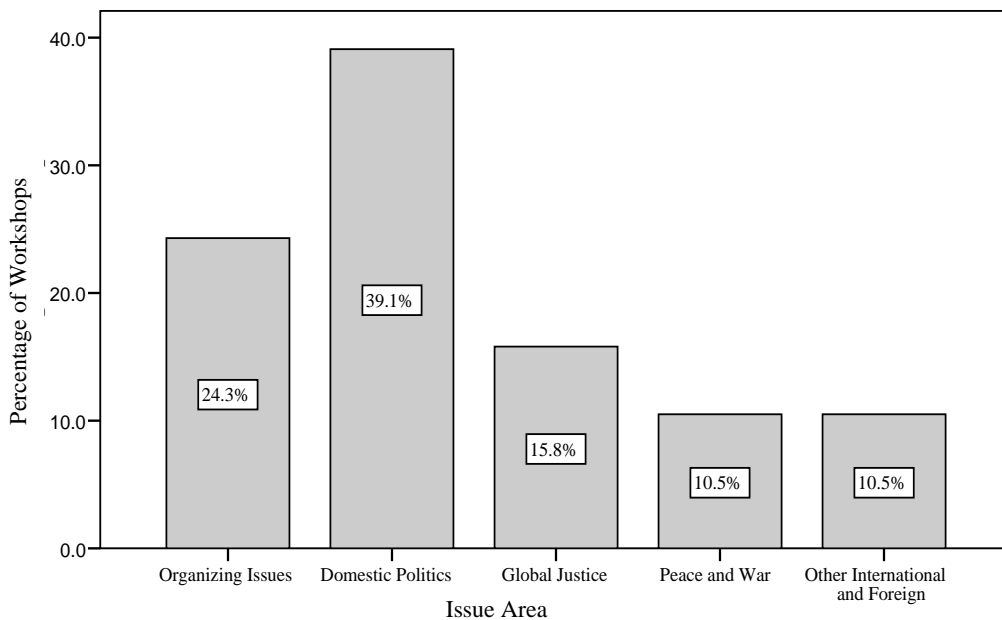
the Study of Social Structure and Social Change at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1983, and was later called “Radfest.” It adopted the title “Midwest Social Forum” in 2003 and convened in Milwaukee. The Midwest Social Forum was able to attract about 1,000 participants to its most recent event (Becker 2006). But in contrast to the European experience, both the participants in this forum, and the issues dealt with, were overwhelmingly domestic. Rather than seeing this local focus as a lacuna, many U.S. activists see this type of forum process as more fully embodying the strategy of the Porto Alegre World Social Forum itself: “keep it local, keep it decentralized, keep it small.”

What of social forums at the national level? American activists were urged by the International Council of the World Social Forum to organize a national social forum in 2003 (UE Vermont n.d.). At the time, however, activists felt that there was not enough support for and knowledge about the social forum process in the United States to risk a failure. By 2004 activists decided that developing a United States Social Forum (USSF) would be worth pursuing, but were still unsure of how to go forward with the project. A plan was made to organize a national forum in the summer of 2006, but because of organizing issues and Hurricane Katrina, it was finally moved to the summer of 2007 in Atlanta.

This event attracted thousands of activists, many of them people of color. But like many other events that have been framed as part of the global justice movement, the bulk of its activities were domestically oriented. In figure 2, we report on a content analysis we carried out of proposals for workshops that were submitted to the organizers of the USSF, which we drew from the organization’s website (United States Social Forum 2007). We hasten to add that not all these workshops were eventually accepted or held, and that our coding is based only on their listing on the USSF website. Yet we think the “supply” of topics from the prospective activist base of a national forum will give us a rough picture of the “demand” for domestic versus global organizing in the United States eight years after Seattle.

Many of the workshop proposals aimed at discussing how to organize collective action and

**Figure 2.** Workshops of the U.S. Social Forum, Atlanta, Georgia, June-July 2007



Source: Authors’ coding of submitted workshops from the U.S. Social Forum website, [www.ussf.org/en/submitted\\_workshops](http://www.ussf.org/en/submitted_workshops) (accessed July 7, 2007).

did not aim at a particular policy sector. These we coded as “organizing strategies.” These “non-territorial” workshops constituted just under one quarter of the proposals. With respect to the “territorial” proposals, we divided them into four groups:

- Those that related to domestic issues, such as poverty, health issues, race and immigration;
- Those that took up issues that related to issues of global justice, international neoliberalism, or issues related to them, for example, globalization, international food supply, and international trade;
- Those that dealt with issues of war and peace, imperialism, the military, and human rights abuses; and
- Those that dealt with other foreign or international issues.

Activists who adopt a broad definition of global justice to include all kinds of transnational activism will find in figure 2 support for the view that American activists are “going global.” But as we specified in the first section of this article, we think such a definition is far too broad. We are struck with the fact that by far the largest number of workshops proposed for the internalization of the World Social Forum (74) focused on domestic issues. Only 15.8% focused on global justice issues, while another 10% each raised issues of peace or war or other international and foreign issues. Why has the social forum process had such a disappointing track record in the United States? We can do no better than to quote one activist, who saw three main obstacles:

- First, the “political baggage” of the Bush administration’s focus on security issues and the repressive climate since 9/11 have made organizing more difficult;
- Second, the organizing culture of the U.S. is such that many organizations are financially dependent on foundations, which have become increasingly more cautious in what they will support; and
- Third, there has been an overall faltering of momentum for global justice in the United States after Seattle, which makes establishing connections between actors and organizations more difficult, but also more urgent (Guerrero 2006).<sup>4</sup>

We do not argue that this faltering of the momentum for global justice is equivalent to the collapse of activism in America after 9/11. On the contrary, there has been a revival of social movement activism in the United States, often in new and innovative forms, like the Indymedia network that was born in Seattle and spread around the world. What we do argue, however, is that there has been a shift of American activism away from the global justice movement that is thriving in Western Europe and elsewhere (della Porta 2007). The shift away from global justice can best be seen where Americans made their most dramatic contribution to the global justice movement: in the city of Seattle itself.

### *Sleeping in Seattle*

After the dramatic success of the 1999 protests that shut down the WTO ministerial meeting there, the name “Seattle” became synonymous with protest against global neoliberalism. While “Seattle” was a truly transnational global justice event, research by Mark Lichbach has shown that the majority of the organizations and individuals involved in the protests were of local origin (Lichbach 2003). What happened to this local organizing after the events of the WTO?

As might be expected, the months immediately following the WTO were a period of jubilation for activists who had worked to mount the protests in Seattle (WTO History Project).<sup>5</sup> Yet with a few exceptions, including a flurry of WTO anniversary events a year later, global justice issues receded within two years as a main focus of Seattle activists. As one activist



described it, after the WTO “everyone went back to their own business” (Anonymous 2007). As another activist said: “the global justice movement was never really a *movement*, it was an *industry*, and everyone was very competitive with one another.” The Seattle WTO protests were an example of an “event coalition,” one that was mounted with fairly shallow organizational cooperation and left very little behind when the teargas cleared (Tarrow 2005: 171). But given the proven ability of local organizations to mobilize around global justice issues, as well as the increased public support for the movement’s key criticisms of the WTO (Bullock et al. 2002: 443), scholars and activists might therefore expect Seattle to be the most likely place for the emergence of a vibrant and sustained global justice movement. Why were activists unable to build on these coalitions and sustain a local global justice movement?

In the short term, not all global justice movement activism dried up in Seattle. People for Fair Trade’s post-WTO local agenda emphasized the importance of a citizen review of the police actions at the WTO and legal defense for those arrested during the WTO, which became a rallying point for many of the organizations involved (WTO History Project).<sup>6</sup> The Direct Action Network (DAN), perhaps one of the most visible components of the post-WTO global justice movement, planned activities including an action targeting Microsoft, and supported locked-out workers in an effort to build on the WTO coalition. Activists were also beginning to organize to undertake further U.S. actions, such as the IMF/World Bank protests in April 2000.

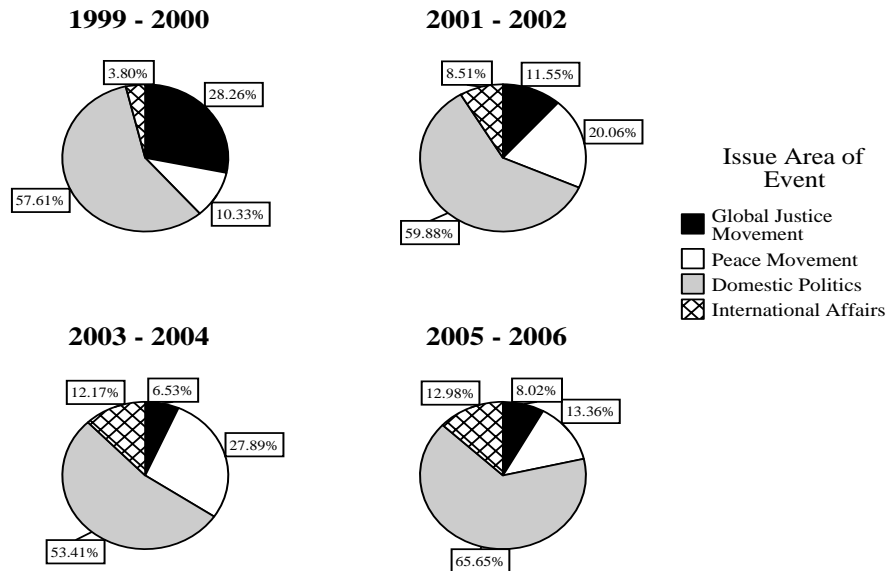
Further, many locals began working to implement principles of global justice within the Seattle community. Many of these actions took forms that are often ignored by scholars of public protest events, for example by lobbying for fair trade coffee at local coffee shops and universities. This seems to have been an important internal outcome of the movement in Seattle: while in 1999 Transfair USA listed just 18 places in Washington state to buy fair trade coffee, by 2007 the organization listed over 200 fair trade coffee outlets (Transfair USA 2007).<sup>7</sup> These actions suggest to us potential for continued global justice activism in Seattle after the departure of the WTO.

#### *Evidence from an Activist Calendar*

But the 2000 election results and then the events of 9/11 had a dramatic impact on the Seattle global justice movement. Local organizations responded to these events in different ways, and many began switching their focus to new issues of domestic importance. In order to get a sense of where activists were putting their time and energy, we obtained an activist calendar from a Seattle area alternative newspaper and coded it for the types of issues that Seattle activists were addressing.<sup>8</sup> The events uncovered in our sample of one week per month over eight years represented a wide range of tactics and types of events: from petitions to potlucks, from support groups to strikes, from public meetings to marches. Our data allow us to eavesdrop on the issues that were most important to activists in Seattle and on how they changed over time.

What do these data show us? One thing that becomes immediately apparent is that participation in the global justice movement became increasingly less common among Seattle activists over time. In figure 3, we employ the four-fold categorization for Seattle events that we used to classify proposed workshops for the U.S. Social Forum in figure 2.<sup>9</sup> As figure 3 shows, events coded as global justice events accounted for 28.26% of the total events in 1999-2000; but by 2005-2006, they had declined to only 8% of the total. At the same time, events connected with the peace movement were experiencing dramatic growth. According to our data, the number of peace movement-related events grew rapidly from 2001-2004, in roughly inverse proportion to the declining number of global justice events. As figure 3 shows, global justice events far outpaced peace movement events in both 1999 and 2000.

The number of events connected with each movement were virtually equivalent in the first half of 2001. After 9/11, the number of peace movement events exploded, while global justice events dramatically declined. In fact, during the height of the peace movement (from

**Figure 3.** Percentage of Planned Events in Seattle by Issue Area

Source: Author's coding of activist calendar: January 1999 to December 2006.

2002 to 2004), it seems as though virtually *all* global justice movement activism had given way to opposition to the Iraq war.<sup>10</sup> It was during this time period that Sound Non-Violent Opponents to War (SNOW) held weekly neighborhood vigils all over the Puget Sound, requiring a very high level of commitment. But despite this intense involvement in protest, global justice movement events were practically absent from the calendars of activists during this time period. The shifts in activist attention in Seattle from global justice to peace and war are traced in figure 4.

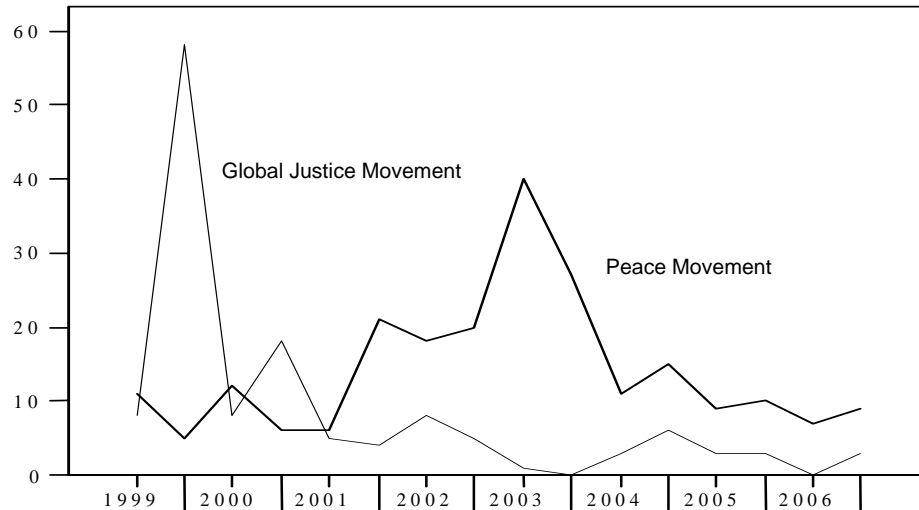
#### *The Northwest Social Forum: A Failed Internalization*

There was one other major attempt to internalize global justice in Seattle, which began with the idea to hold a Social Forum in the Pacific Northwest. The first World Social Forum in 2001 had attracted a large number of Seattleites involved in a broad spectrum of issues, including farm workers in contact with the Brazilian MST and an Indymedia team that helped cover the events. During the second WSF, a small group of these Seattle activists met and decided to try to bring the social forum model home to the Pacific Northwest.<sup>11</sup>

For those involved, the social forum process was the next step for the global justice movement, and would combine the open participatory model of Indymedia with a conscious effort to build a local activist network. In April 2004, a planning retreat was held with a diverse group of individuals interested in the forum process. There had been much criticism of the WTO protests because some felt that minorities were kept out of the planning process (Martinez 2000). Organizers viewed the Northwest Social Forum as an opportunity to broaden the movement to include marginalized communities. Symbolically, the date selected for the NWSF was the five-year anniversary of the WTO protests.

The NWSF was remarkable in comparison to other U.S. forums in that its focus was from the beginning international and very much tied to the global justice movement. Of the 200 total events planned, 35 focused on "economic alternatives," "economic globalization and economic justice," and "global justice." Other time slots (23) were occupied by events focused on "media democracy," "movement building," and "social forums." The other two major topics

**Figure 4.** Number of Planned Events in Seattle by Issue Area



Source: Author’s coding of activist calendar: January 1999 to December 2006.

were “human rights, immigration, and racial justice” as well as “peace and militarism” (38 total events). Building on this internationalism, in the late summer, a new day of activities was added to the schedule as a “kick-off event” that would focus explicitly on global justice issues. This event featured a panel organized by the International Forum on Globalization, and was set to include such global justice icons as Lori Wallach, John Cavanagh, Martin Khor, Maude Barlow, and Jerry Mander.

About this time divisions began to emerge within the Planning Committee. The process had been difficult from the beginning because of activist efforts to reach out to minority and disadvantaged communities—groups that some organizers felt may be more interested in local and domestic issues, such as criminal justice reform or labor rights, than in international and global justice issues. Building an open, participatory process with such diverse participants was a huge challenge, and many felt like the planning process was too rushed, and that there was not enough time to internalize the forum process. The addition of the kick-off event angered those who felt that the process had gone too fast, and that it focused on international issues at the expense of local struggles.

The Native American community was especially angered at what they perceived as a “non-consensual” decision to invite outsiders to launch the NWSF. One participant emphasized the importance of asking Native Americans to open the event, and having a Native design on the Forum’s poster, honoring the fact that the NWSF was taking place on Native soil. While national indigenous leader Tom Goldtooth was on the schedule of speakers, the Native communities perceived this as an afterthought, and not sufficiently respectful of their involvement. As one participant put it, “Native Americans are place-based people. You can’t replace one with another” (Anonymous participant 2007). In the end, the Indigenous Planning Committee eventually decided to step down. Soon after, the Youth Planning Committee followed suit. Quickly thereafter the Planning Committee decided that they could not go forward without the support of these groups, and the NWSF was cancelled one month before it was scheduled to occur.

*Why GJM Decline?*

At the outset of this article, we argued that the decline of global justice activities in the United States after Seattle can best be understood as the result of shifts in the domestic structure

of political opportunities. Of course, the Iraq war was not only domestic; as is well known it triggered a vast wave of popular protest around the globe (Verhulst and Walgrave 2003). But elsewhere in the world, for example, in Western Europe, the global justice movement continued to expand, both internationally and internally (della Porta 2007). In the United States participation in this movement declined. What explains the rapid shift we have seen in the United States away from the movement that Americans helped to launch in Seattle in 1999? We suggest three main factors that help to explain why the movement declined in this country:

- the shift in U.S. protest policing from a strategy of negotiated protest management to one of “strategic incapacitation” and extra-police suppression of contentious protest;
- the Bush administration’s strategy of linking democracy to the war on terrorism; and
- Social movement spillout.

*Shift in Protest Policing.* As is well known, after the 1960s, U.S. police forces developed a strategy of negotiating the management of protest with organizers that both legitimated unconventional activities, within limits, and removed much of its sting (McCarthy and McPhail 1998). These tactics involved a recognition that protest was an expression of First Amendment rights and not a threat to public order; collaboration in working out the processes and the trajectories of demonstrations; regular contact and information exchange with protest leaders during demonstrations; and making a sharp distinction between peaceful protesters and violent fringes and making serious efforts to isolate the latter. These tenets of negotiated protest management eventually diffused across the industrialized West and became the modal method for dealing with protesters (della Porta and Rieter 1998).

After Seattle, there were clear shifts away from this policy. Police appeared at demonstrations in military gear, set rigid limits on the sites and trajectories of demonstrations, held back on information sharing with protest leaders and—at least in practice—failed to recognize the difference between peaceful and violence-prone demonstrators. Police seemed to go out of their way to attack the most ludic expressions of the Seattle model, the giant puppets (Graeber 2007). As della Porta, Peterson, and Rieter write:

“Red zones” were established as part of larger efforts to remove the targets of the protests in time or space from demonstrators; individual police officers are more commonly equipped with “less-lethal” arms; data banks of “traveling troublemakers” have been constructed; special anti-insurgent units have been created; and in some cases the military has also been deployed for public order tasks (2006: 2).

Suppression went well beyond repressive police tactics. The provisions of the U.S. Patriot Act made domestic spying and harsh punishments for so-called “ecoterrorists” and other subscribers to the direct action philosophy an easier task. Those using the radical tactics that produced the Seattle events found themselves under increased scrutiny, in what some have called the “green scare.”<sup>12</sup> Further, in 2004, U.S. intelligence began demanding access to Indy-media servers such as the New York Indymedia Center during the Republic National Convention and to a server located in London later in the year (Independent Media Center 2004). This had the effect of diverting resources to legal battles, and shut down important movement communication channels for a period of weeks. As the ACLU reports, this extensive surveillance eventually extended to the peace movement as well (ACLU 2007).

To some extent these repressive practices have been adopted throughout the industrial West (Scheppele 2006), but they have been used with particular energy and viciousness in the United States. The nadir was the militarized response to the anti-FTAA protests in Miami, where the police—tutored by federal intelligence officers—went on a preemptive offensive against peaceful demonstrators trying to follow the Seattle model.<sup>13</sup> The atmosphere of fear and suspicion generated by the mounting confrontations between Islamist terrorism and the

American-led “war on terror” has even led to a linkage between terrorism and the global justice movement. As we learn from the recently revealed National Intelligence Estimate:

Anti-US and anti-globalization sentiment is on the rise and fueling other radical ideologies. This could prompt some leftist, nationalist, or separatist groups to adopt terrorist methods to attack U.S. interests (*New York Times* 2006).

*Frame Bridging between Democracy and the War on Terrorism.* A second reason for the decline of the global justice movement in the United States turned on the strategy of the Bush administration in bridging the themes of democracy with the fight against terrorism, and the negative effect of this bridging frame on activism. It is well known that 9/11, the defeat of the Taliban, and the war in Iraq enabled the Bush administration to temporarily change the subject of public debate from domestic issues like the environment and the economy to the self-proclaimed “War on Terror.” The Bush-Cheney foreign policy drew on muscular militarism and the desire to clamp down on the imagined military threat of Sadaam Hussein. But when that justification proved unsustainable and as the number of body bags of American troops arriving home began to grow, the Bush-Cheney administration turned to the more traditional “liberal” policy of foreign intervention in the name of democracy.

That justification may have left opponents of the war unconvinced, but it was intended to reach out to moderate opinion, leaving the radical left without potential allies in its attempt to characterize the war as an expression of imperial expansion. In the language of contentious politics, the administration was bridging the ever-popular domestic frame of liberal democracy with the post-9/11 frame of protecting Americans from harm. In doing so, the administration hardened the boundary between “good” American support for democracy abroad and “foreign” pusillanimity and self-centeredness.

*Social Movement Spillout.* We think the shift of activism from global justice to the antiwar movement, which we term “social movement spillout,” is the most important reason for the decline of the former movement. U.S.-based activists, both those who had cut their teeth in the global justice movement and many others, participated in great numbers in the February 15, 2003 antiwar protest. As far away as Antarctica, National Science Foundation-funded researchers stretched out on the snow in a visual symbol of peace. The movement in the United States was coordinated by two main groups: ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) and UFPJ (United For Peace and Justice), which represented, respectively, far left and the progressive center-left coalitions (Cortright 2004). But after the failure of the MGJ demonstration in Washington in 2001, much of the transnational fire went out of American activism and “tremendous attention and resources . . . were shifted from the existing movements against neoliberalism, and in particular from the anti-World Bank and IMF campaigns, to the re-emerging peace movement” (Reitan 2007: 17).

Many of the groups who participated in global justice protests eventually reappeared in peace demonstrations, and many others turned their attention into electoral politics to try to defeat the administration that had brought the country into an immoral and un-winnable war. But unlike the early days of the global justice movement, when Seattle inspired hundreds of thousands of activists abroad, U.S. activists grew less involved in the campaign to harness global neoliberalism. After February 2003, what had seemed like a dynamic “social movement spillover” evolved into a spillout of American activists into domestic politics. We can see the steady detachment of U.S. activists from the global justice movement in the weakness of the internalization the World Social Forum model.

Our Seattle data reinforce this impression with concrete findings. After the failure of the NWSF project, many activists confessed that they had been too involved in the 2004 election to devote the time needed to making the Forum happen. Typical activist issues like the lack of time and internal movement cleavages also hurt the organizing effort, but the biggest setback was a global-local tension over which issues should be prioritized. Even after the cancellation of the

event, some activists felt that the NWSF could have been successful; some of these participants later went on to support the effort to mount the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta. But there too, as we have seen, the main focus was on organizing tactics and domestic issues. Both the failure of the NWSF and the shift of American activists to the peace movement, and then into domestic politics, suggest a process of social movement spillover.

Of course, changes in the external opportunity structure profoundly shaped the environment for activism after the turn of the new century. We do not ignore the repressive climate following 9/11 or the pursuit of an aggressive imperial war with its disastrous consequences. However, we argue that these “external” factors are insufficient to explain the striking decline of global justice activism in the United States. In order to do so, we turn to the importance of inter-movement dynamics, and particularly to social movement spillover.

The spillover of the global justice movement into antiwar and electoral activism raises a number of questions about the future of social movements in the United States. For example, what has been the effect of the diversion of the American campaign for global justice for the overall struggle against the excesses of neoliberalism? Has the absence of U.S. activists from this struggle weakened the global GJM? Second, what will be the consequence for the generation of activists who earned their spurs in Seattle and similar venues when, as will inevitably occur, the Iraq adventure ends and the administration that fostered it recedes into history? Will they return to their previous commitment to global justice, move into new domestic movements, or retreat into private life? Third, what has been the result for the transnational commitment of American activists? The GJM began to produce creative links between Americans, Europeans, and their counterparts elsewhere in the world, for example, in the internationalization of Indymedia.

In both the proposals we examined for the USSF workshops and the Seattle activist calendar, we found evidence of substantial international commitments. But there is less evidence of coordinated collective action with global justice activists outside the United States. With the collapse of the Iraq misadventure and the end of the Bush administration will we see a fusion of domestic and transnational activism, or continued parallel tracks between international and domestic commitments? These are all questions that our analysis raises but, for the moment, cannot begin to answer.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we argued that the global justice movement has declined in the United States, while flourishing elsewhere in the world, due to changes in political opportunities in the U.S. While cross-U.S. generalization is always difficult, we observed in our case study of Seattle a decline in global justice-related events, a general weakness of global justice movement coalitions, and great difficulty in internalizing global organizing models such as the social forum. We explained this decline by focusing on repression, frame bridging, and particularly social movement spillover as key dynamics.

Some readers may find it surprising that we should paint so bleak a picture of the movement for global justice in the U.S. After all, U.S. activists mounted the Battle of Seattle, and provided large numbers of participants to the campaign against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. On single issues, like landmines and help for HIV/AIDS victims in Africa, U.S. activists, and U.S.-based NGOs played, and continue to play, a leading role.<sup>14</sup> And the tremendous success of the immigrant rights movement of 2006 speaks volumes about the potential for contentious politics among people who have crossed borders to live in the United States. These single-issue tendencies are real, but they mainly take two forms that keep them out of the public sphere:

- Quiet advocacy in the corridors of power (for example, in the successful landmine campaign, which depended heavily on activist ties with middle-sized states like Canada, France, and Belgium);

- Service provision at the sites of social crises (for example, the leading role that U.S. advocacy groups are playing in Darfur).

We do not belittle these forms of mainstream advocacy. But their sectoral focus, their dependency on foundation and government funding, and their relatively non-contentious forms of action inhibit the formation of transnational coalitions and thence of the frame-bridging that could add U.S. weight to the global justice movement. While Europeans were inspired by the insurgency in Chiapas, Mexico, by Seattle, and by the series of counter-summits that followed to form a transnationally organized global justice movement, the Iraq war and internal U.S. politics proved an irresistible draw for many who were socialized into politics in the name of fighting global neoliberalism.

This has produced a paradoxical inversion of the often-noted relationship between transnational and domestic activism. We often think of transnational activists as people who are socialized into politics at home and later “externalize” their activism abroad (della Porta and Tarrow 2005: 5-6). But the two stories at the beginning of this article tell a different story. In the transposition of the U.S. global justice movement from Seattle, Washington to Washington, D.C., there was an implosion of transnational protest into domestic politics. The consequences of this spillout are still unknown; if this engagement in domestic politics ultimately brings about an end to the Iraq war and a new politics in the United States (for example, one that heeds the call to action against climate change and in favor of a decent national health system), it may be that the movement spillout we have seen will have cleared the ground for a vibrant global justice movement to reemerge.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our warm gratitude to Mario Pianta and Duccio Zola for sharing these data and their reflections on them with us.

<sup>2</sup> Pianta’s data are gathered from a survey that reports on the nature of the parallel summit, the events that occurred, their forms of organization, and their impact. His questionnaire was distributed to hundreds of organizations; researchers also monitored newspapers, journals, and websites. More information can be found in Pianta (2001: 169-95) and Pianta, Silva, and Zola (2004). Moreover, except for the Seattle protest, where the numbers were swelled by the massive participation of trade unionists worried about the loss of jobs (Lichbach 2003), these events, on average, were smaller in the U.S. than were corresponding events in the same period in Europe. Of the events that Pianta and his collaborators identified, 71.2% in Western Europe had over 1,000 attending, compared to 57.1% with that level of participation in North America. The Florence European Social Forum alone had a reported 30,000 participants, according to authorities, and more, according to the organizers.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are based on our analysis of the “Numbers” page of World Social Forum website ([www.Forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=memoria\\_numeros\\_ing](http://www.Forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.php?pagina=memoria_numeros_ing), last updated June 26, 2006; and the Ibase Survey on the World Social Forum 2003 and 2005 (<http://www.ibase.br/fsm2003/ingles.htm> and [http://www.ibase.br/userimages/relatorio\\_fsm2005\\_INGLES2.pdf](http://www.ibase.br/userimages/relatorio_fsm2005_INGLES2.pdf) (retrieved June 2006). Participation in 2003 World Social Forum is measured as a sum of the number of delegates and non-delegate participants (excluding campers).

<sup>4</sup> There are some reasons for cautious optimism about the prospects for a U.S. social forum process to develop. Funders have begun recently to step up to the plate, providing money as well as key office space and administrative help in Atlanta. Unions seem to be supporting it in ways they were not doing previously. More broadly, the social forum model may be catching on, as the recent U.S.-Mexico border forum suggests ([www.migrantdiaries.blogspot.com](http://www.migrantdiaries.blogspot.com)) and as the massive turnout for the U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia testifies.

<sup>5</sup> The WTO History Project is a collection of primary documents collected from individuals and organizations involved in the 1999 WTO in Seattle, WA. Portions are available online through the University of Washington Manuscripts, Special Collections, and University Archives Collection (<http://depts.washington.edu/wtohist/>).

<sup>6</sup> The lawsuits of those arrested during the WTO continued until April 2007. The City of Seattle paid an estimated total of \$1.8 million dollars to those arrested during the protests (Shokovsky 2007; Democracy Now 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Figures from 1999 are from the web-archived site dated November 10, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> The planned events comprising our sample (n=1,377) were drawn from an activist calendar published in the alternative newspaper, *Eat the State*. The newspaper is distributed bi-monthly in the greater Seattle, Washington area, in print as well as on the web (<http://www.eatthestate.org>). We selected one week of events per month from November 1998 to March 2007, rotating the selected week to avoid calendar effects. We purposely use the period of November 28 to December 3 of every year so as to maximize the number of global justice events in our sample. The following specific issues were coded as part of the global justice movement: anti/alter-globalization, global economy,

fair trade, anti-sweatshop activism, protest against international financial institutions (IMF/WTO/World Bank), trade agreements or multinational corporations, and social forums.

<sup>9</sup> We were not able code the Seattle activist calendar for “organizing events” as we did for the U.S. Social Forum workshop proposals in figure 2.

<sup>10</sup> Our data collection shows that there is a significant organizational-level transition from the global justice movement to the peace movement. Our interviews also suggest that many of the same individual activists “spilled out” of the GJM to the peace movement and domestic politics, although a systematic study of at the individual level is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> This chronology is based on a wide variety of primary documents, including meeting minutes, organizational documents, published statements and letters, and event schedules provided to the authors by the organizers of the NWSF. Many of these documents were at one time available publicly on the Internet ([www.nwsocialforum.org](http://www.nwsocialforum.org)). This timeline has been confirmed in interviews with key participants in the NWSF planning process conducted by Jennifer Hadden in January 2007.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the “Green Scare,” see <http://greenscare.org/> and <http://portland.indymedia.org/en/topic/greenscare/>. For information on “Operation Backfire,” see <http://www.fbi.gov/page2/jan06/elf012006.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> See generally, Benfrank.net ([http://www.benfrank.net/nuke/ftaa112003/Police\\_Brutality\\_in\\_Miami.html](http://www.benfrank.net/nuke/ftaa112003/Police_Brutality_in_Miami.html)).

<sup>14</sup> Donatella della Porta emphasizes this point in her comments on an earlier version of this article. We hope to take her up on this point at a future time.

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