

Faith, Global Justice and Forums of Resistance to Neo-Liberalism: From the World Social Forum to Occupy!

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Introduction

This paper critically examines the role of religion and faith-based organizations in resisting neoliberal globalization, in particular since the financial crisis of 2008. It does so by looking at their role and participation in the Global Justice Movement (GJM) through involvement in two sites of resistance to neo-liberalism namely, the Occupy Movement, in particular Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the World Social Forum (WSF). By neo-liberalism the authors are referring to the set of economic policies that called for the de-regulation of economies, the shrinking of the role of the state and the reduction or removal of barriers to trade and to the mobility of corporate capital. These policies are associated with globalization and have been viewed negatively by social justice activists, particularly in Latin America.

Both the WSF and OWS represent different sides of the resistance to these policies which like neo-liberalism have taken on a global dimension themselves often referred to in terms of globality. This has been reflected initially in the creation of coalitions of non-governmental organizations and social movements engaged in acts of resistance seen, for example, in protests against key international institutions such as the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999. The desire to go beyond protest and resistance to articulate alternatives to neo-liberal globalization is reflected in the creation of the WSF in 2001 to coincide with, and contrast to, the World Economic Forum, the annual gathering of powerful corporate and state actors each year in Switzerland. The WSF became a global event held annually from 2001 to 2005 and then subsequently once every two years which gathers thousands of global justice activists under the theme, Another World is Possible! Held in a city in the Global South the WSF has been largely ignored by mainstream and corporate media in North America. However for those studying transnational social movements and in particular the Global Justice Movement it is seen as a key site of resistance to neo-liberalism and a public space where alternatives can be discussed and articulated.

Occupy! on the other hand appeared to emerge almost spontaneously as a reaction to the global financial crisis of 2008 and involved a set of actions which occurred in a number of places. It is harder to classify given its manifestation in New York and in different places at the same time. Here Ulrich Beck is apropos when he notes that “globality means from now on nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event.” (as quoted in Rieger 2011:17) Thus, while it might be tempting to isolate and view religious activism in OWS in and of itself, the reality is that this activism must be seen in terms of a larger context of religious-based activism in opposition to global neo-liberalism, opposition already most evident at the WSF. We argue that religious opposition to, and criticism of, neo-liberalism, is a salient aspect of the GJM. Indeed, some such as the philosopher and social critic, Slavoz Žižek, himself a noted critic and analyst of the Occupy Movement, goes so far as to argue that in terms of anti-capitalist resistance, “St. Paul had it right using religion to rock the foundations of authority.” (as quoted in Murtola, 2012:331)

For most social scientists studying transnational social movements and global justice, however, the role of faith-based groups has been largely ignored. We argue that this is partly a result of

the fact that this role challenges their long held perceptions of religion in society. Many see a dualistic division of society into public and private realms with the latter subordinate to the former reflected in religion's relationship to politics and to capitalism. Both Marx and Weber, for example, "concluded that religion, or perhaps Christianity, and other forms of theism, was a spent force in the world, and would eventually disappear altogether." (Wilson, 2012:34). For adherents of this perspective the last place one would look for a viable source of resistance to global capitalism is religion. Yet, today, attention is increasingly focused on the "resurgence of religion." According to Davis and Crockett the return of religion has both negative and positive implications "but one way to read the return of religion in thought and culture is to read it as symptomatic of an acute crisis of capitalism itself." (2007:6)

This paper takes religion seriously in its relationship to capitalism. While religion has historically served political-economic forms of domination and control, religion is janus faced, socially constructed and has historically and is, today, serving as a means of resistance to empire. This religious resistance can be seen as forming part of what Karl Polanyi (1886 – 1964) described as a countermovement. Polanyi was the economic historian who in his book *the Great Transformation*, challenged traditional economic thought and argued that economies are imbedded in society and culture. The development of the market and attempts to subordinate society to its laws and the resulting social dislocation imposed by an unrestrained free market led to the development of a countermovement. As the market tried to separate itself from the fabric of society, society's natural response tend to be resistance and seeking means to protect itself. The role of religion this activity has either been ignored by social scientists or met with skepticism.

This paper will be developed as follows. The first section discusses the secularization thesis and its political and economic significance including the relationship of the state to religion and the perspectives of Locke, Weber, and Marx in shaping the social sciences' view of religion. The paper then discusses the resurgence of religion and its implications for the secularization thesis. We next define religion in a manner that permits us to overcome the limitations of the public-private divide and other related dualisms and view how the resurgence of religion is associated with the expansion of neoliberal capitalism as a new form of empire, one initially centred in the United States. Our religious perspective is primarily Christian although we do refer as well to Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.

In suggesting how religion may serve as a counter force to empire the paper briefly discusses early Christianity, like its Judaic forbearer, as a form of radical resistance to Empire constituting a "liberation theology." While liberation theologies today are varied they have formed an important part of the rhetoric of resistance to neo-liberal globalization whether that be in the formation of the WSF or religious involvement in OWS.

Secularization, Politics, Religion and Capitalism

Secularization, a critical concept in the social sciences, according to Shah and Philpott, has a variety of meanings many of which "claim that as the juggernaut of modernity advances through science, economic progress, free inquiry, technological progress, political liberalization,

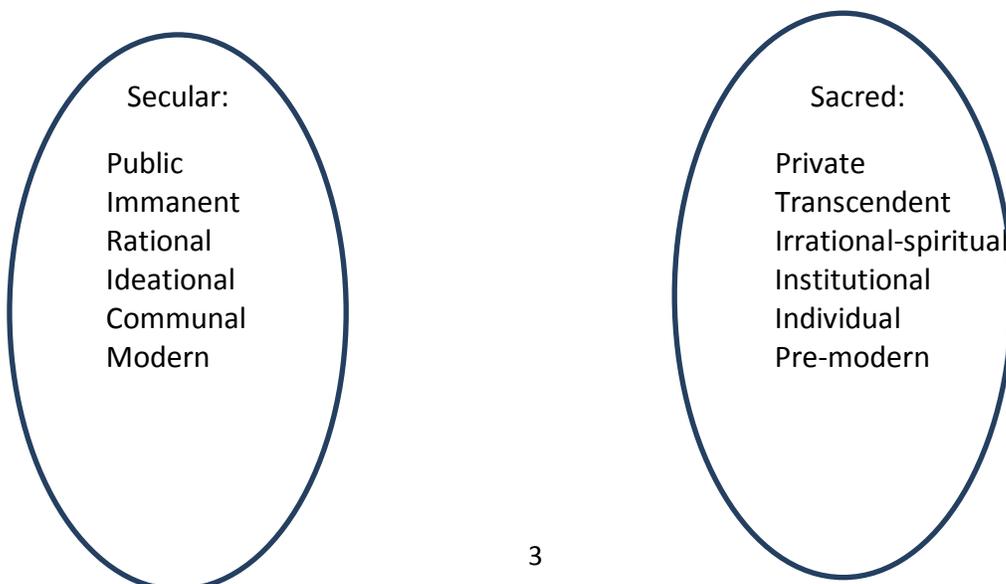
democratization and biblical criticism, religion will recede and eventually disappear.” It is argued “religion ... is on the way out.” (2011:27) This decline of religion has both political and economic dimensions.

Politically, the decline of religion is often linked to the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 which, according to Krasner “delegitimized the already waning role of the Catholic Church and validated the idea that international relations should be driven by balance-of-power considerations rather than the ideals of Christendom.” (Cited in Hurd 2011:69) As Thomas argues , “for the state to be born, religion had to become privatized and nationalized.” (2005:25)

The state subordinated and replaced religion in terms of societal discipline possessing as it did the legitimate monopoly of power and coercion in society. Once privatized, religion became politically marginalized, often through state policies. Laicism, meaning opposition between state and religion emerged first in France, then later in the USSR, Turkey and China. Under laicism religion is excluded from institutions of political power and authority and an effort is made to create a secular citizen. (Hurd 2011:68) Laicism created a series of hierarchical polarizations or dualisms by which religion became politically subordinate and put in a cultural and intellectual box from which it has struggled to emerge. Hurd argues that:

Laicism presents itself as public, neutral, and value-free while religion, religious actors, and religious institutions are posited as private, affective, and value-laden. Religion is denominated as the domain of the violent, the irrational, and the undemocratic. (2011:75)

Thus religion becomes separated from the secular sphere in a variety of ways as represented in Figure 1.



According to this perspective the secular and the sacral are radically divided, not mutually relational in any way, with religion subordinate to the secular and public. Thus religion is considered to have a focus on the transcendent, to be other worldly while the secular is concerned with the things of this world, the immanent. To be secular is to be rational while religion is associated with the irrational and the emotional, commonly seen as a source of disruption, violence and a danger to the political sphere. Religion is moreover viewed primarily in institutional terms not in ideational terms, of creating ideas about the world. Religion's influence, moreover, is said to be at the individual, not the community level.¹ Finally, religion is viewed in terms of its relationship to pre-modernity rather than modernity and being pre-modern it had to be pushed aside to make way for the modern, in politics and economics.

The thought of Locke provides a good illustration of this argument. Locke in his works attempted, claim Davis and Crockett, "to draw a line of demarcation between religion and civil society." (2007:1) Locke viewed religion, which, in his time had considerable secular power, as a source of unrest, violence and intolerance. Thus, if a boundary could be created with religion on one side and civil government on the other then it might be possible and to put an end to "the controversies between those who truly have or pretend to have at heart a concern on the one hand for the salvation of souls, and on the other for the safety of the commonwealth."(Locke, 1968:5) It was, then, imperative for Locke to marginalize the role of religion in society, to put religion outside the realm of the political.

The separation of religion and politics was to have important implications for capitalism. The marginalization of religion opened space for the expansion of markets and capitalism and the rise of a state that would protect and promote both. (Davis and Crockett, 2007) While Max Weber explored the relationships between religion, society and economics he was also of the view that these relationships would decline in terms of significance. Religion, to Weber, was "an attribute of mainly 'primitive' people." (Wilson 2012) There was one instance, however, in which religion played a positive role in its relationship to capitalism according to Weber. In his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (2005) explored the relationship of Protestantism, specifically Calvinism, to capitalism. Calvinism, with its emphasis on hard work and saving thus played an important role in capital accumulation and wealth creation. However, once capitalism had developed the Protestant Ethic was of less consequence and the cultural values of capitalism became increasingly rational and "secularized, that is, more concerned with the material world and less with the spiritual world, more preoccupied with attaining wealth in this world than with salvation in the next." (Bocock, 1996:166)

Marx viewed religion primarily in negative terms, most notably as a human construct created to make human misery bearable, the "opium of the masses." Religion was thus a distraction of workers from the reality of their exploitation by the bourgeoisie and a barrier to the creation of their class consciousness. Secular industrialization thus served a useful role in eroding the sway of religion.

This view of Locke, Weber, and Marx that politically and economically religion should be marginalized if not disappear altogether has become an important part of the secularization

thesis that came to permeate the social sciences in the twentieth century. Modernity and the relentless sweep of modernization were destined to marginalize the role of religion even further. As a consequence many social scientists, particularly in the West, paid scant attention to religion as a social phenomenon worthy of study. That is, until recently.

Today there is increasing awareness that secularism did not triumph and that we are living in an era of "A Globalized God" (Thomas 2010), a time when "religion is on the rise" around the world, in particular Islam and Christianity, most noticeably in the global South. Similarly Shah and Philpott claim that "religion has surged in its political influence in every region of the globe and within virtually every religious tradition, fuelling democracy movements, terrorism, peace agreements, civil war, reconciliation initiatives, economic development programs, transformation of domestic regimes, and laws that promote its cultural ends." (2011:25) Religions are in flux. Christianity "is now returning to its roots by becoming a post-Western religion dominated by the peoples, cultures and countries of the global South." (Thomas 2010:2) According to Robertson secularization is "one of the great shibboleths in the history of the social sciences" (2007:18)

This shift in the centre of gravity for religion from the global North to the global South is well documented in the case of the Christian Church. Europe and North America are increasingly less relevant to its future. Early in the twentieth century 83 per cent of Christians lived in Europe and North America but by 2007 60 per cent lived in Latin America, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa. (Wall in LenkaBula 2007:291) Christian African churches have been growing rapidly. In 1900 ten million Africans were Christians, by 2005 the figure had grown to 411 million. (Van den Bosch in LenkaBula 2007:292) The percentage of those saying religion is very important in their lives ranges from a high of 98% in Senegal, primarily a Muslim country, to much lower figures in Europe, between 8% (Sweden) to 25% (Germany). The U.S., on the other hand, is closer to many countries in the global South with 57%. (Pew, 2010)

The study of the resurgence of religion has tended to focus more on its political dimensions in terms of international politics (Rees, 2011) and less so on its relationship to contemporary capitalism. According to Mark C. Taylor, "global capitalism" is inseparable from a global religious revival." Moreover, "the resurgence of religion begins at the precise moment when the economic reforms of global capitalism were enacted." (As quoted in Davis and Crockett, 2007:7) Taylor's focus, however, is on conservative forms of religion such as political Islam resisting capitalist expansion and other conservative religions in the West, primarily the United States, aligning themselves with and facilitating the expansion of capital. Crockett argues that the U.S. is the primary source of global evangelical Christian movements. According to Crockett, in terms of rising religiosity we are "saturated by it, even drowning in it." Moreover, "it reeks of corporate capitalism and its gospel of wealth and financial prosperity" which has been spreading rapidly in Latin America and Africa. (Crockett, 2011:13)

This paper argues, however, that there is a third alternative to either conservative religious movements in opposition to neoliberal globalization or conservative religious movements in support of it. Religion, we argue, can serve as a source of criticism of the economic system and

advocacy for a fairer and more justice economic system. Indeed, if Immanuel Wallerstein is correct, that the modern world system “has now entered its terminal crisis” (2003) then the possibility exists that religion may emerge as a positive force during this chaotic period. This, we argue, is evident both at the WSF and OWS.

Clearly, however, Locke’s hope that the dualism of public and private spheres could be kept in place is now dashed. In fact, religion and secular power have always been mutually constituted. The religious wars of the seventeenth century, for example, help explain why he attempted to demarcate the line between religion and politics in such stark terms. The fact that the boundary between religion and politics and other spheres of the social world has never been fixed requires a definition of religion that rejects dualistic thinking and the dualisms discussed previously in the paper.

Wilson argues that these dualisms can be overcome by means of relational dialogism or relational thought which “proposes a ‘both/and’ approach, assisting transcendence of barriers established across existing dualisms.” (2010:744) Thus, like women men can, and should be, associated with emotion and women, likewise, with reason. Following this logic religion can be not only institutional, individual, and irrational but ideational, communal, and rational. This leads Wilson to formulate a more nuanced definition of religion that transcends narrow formulations, and is historically constituted by time, culture and place. According to Wilson religion is “an internally logical set of ideas and beliefs about the nature of existential reality (encompassing the immanent as well as the transcendent) that shapes and is shaped by both individual and community, identity and action, and which *may* be facilitated and practiced through institutional arrangements, rituals and/or symbols.”(2012:20) This definition moves away from confining dualisms and acknowledges that institutional arrangements are less constitutive in some religions. Thus defined religion can transcend the box of the public-private divide and be viewed as relevant to politics, public life, capitalism and global justice. This is represented in Figure 2 where the sacred and secular intersect but are not the same:

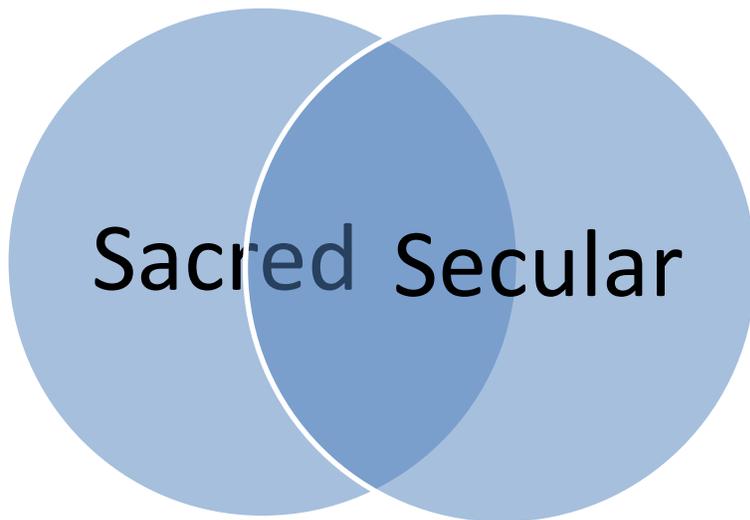


Figure 2: The Intersection of the sacred and the secular

The recognition that these dualisms were never accurate to begin with has led to a new generation of critical historical scholars to question the artificial line between politics, socio-economic life and religion. Here one focus in terms of Christianity lies in a comparison of empire now and empire then, that is, the Roman empire. What emerges is a view of early Christianity in conflict with empire, a conflict that resonates today, one at odds with Christianity's association with empire in the modern period, 1500 – 1900. An a-historical approach to Christianity's origins created a blind spot claims Hal Taussig.

How New Testament scholarship, most Christian interpretation over the last millennium, and countless assemblies of worship and research could have missed the contrast with Roman imperial power at the heart of early Christianity defies imagination. One can only account for this unbelievable ignorance as a haunting tribute to the power of denial and the complicity of Christendom in imperial domination over the past 1,200 years. (2006:2)

Works by Horsley (2003), Crossan and Reed (2004) interpret the teachings of Jesus and Paul as challenging the Roman empire's political-economic and religious-ideological structures. Here early Christianity appears as a counter-imperial Christian liberation movement, a role they argue that it can serve again today. Crossan and Reed see the imperial structures of Rome and the ones today as being analogous:

Rome was simply the normalcy of civilization within its first-century options and the inevitability of globalization within its first-century limits...We are, at the start of the twenty-first century, what the Roman Empire was at the start of the first century. Put succinctly: Rome and the East there, America and the West here. Put more succinctly: they then, we now...The clash between Paul's Jewish covenant and Rome's imperial

power was a radically transcendental one and was, therefore, both a first-century and also a twenty-first-century conflict (Crossan and Reed, page 412).

The Global Justice Movement – Resisting Neo-liberal Globalization

This paper argues that the WSF and OWS are but two manifestations of a decades old resistance movement against neo-liberalization. This is a movement that has its roots in the global South but today has its greatest resonance in the global North as a result of recent policies of austerity and restraint. Both the WSF and OWS are parts of what is often described as the global justice movement (GJM). The global justice movement has been defined by one analyst as “the loose network of organizations ... and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe.” (Donatella, 2007:6)

This movement, in turn, is a reaction to neo-liberalism, or what some describe as market fundamentalism which puts an emphasis on the market above all else in society, a market dominated by large corporations, initially American, but also European and Japanese as well. It stresses the liberalization of trade, the privatization of significant sections of the public sector, the financialization of capital and the spread of this ideology and economy on a global scale.

The GJM, aspects of which we describe later, can be seen as a form of resistance to the domination of a global political economy seen as a form of corporate rule, one aided and abetted by states. As the economy globalized so has resistance to it. This resistance has historical precedents. As Polanyi argued history moves forward through a series of “double movements.” Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century a “great transformation” led to the expansion of the free market as part of an attempt to dis-embed, or free, the market from social and political regulations. At the same time a countermovement consisting of subaltern classes, workers, and unions emerged reflecting an impulse for social protection which ultimately led to the creation of the welfare state. In both instances, the role of the state was critical. First, the state acted to “dis-embed” the economy from society and to facilitate and protect the expansion of the market. Then, the state itself came under great pressure to make the “process of economic improvement...socially bearable” (2001:40). The result which took generations to accomplish was greater social stability and a *modus vivendi* of societal interests with the market. The first great transformation described above took place on the level of the nation-state. Today, Howard-Hassmann argues that “what is happening now is the second great transformation. Globalization is the final assault of capitalism on all those areas of the globe that previously escaped it...” (p. 5) At this historical moment, she states, “the multinational corporations that are symbols of globalization are the new absentee landlords, foreign investors without obligation to their local employees or their local suppliers, and certainly without obligations to the local communities in which they make investments.” (p. 6) The excesses of neo-liberal globalization led to the financial collapse of 2008. Austerity and restraint which had been part of neo-liberal globalization in the global South since the 1970s

spread North intensifying resistance there. Earlier, in the 1970s and 80s countries in the Global South had borrowed huge sums of money, money given readily by northern financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to fund large scale industrial development projects such as dams. Falling commodity prices and higher interest rates meant that many of these countries could not pay back their loans. The result was that the World Bank and IMF forced these countries to adopt a particular set of austerity measures – the privatization of parts of the public sector, government cutbacks – in order that the loans could be re-paid. Not unlike Greece, Spain, Italy and Cyprus today governments forced citizens to bear the costs of the debt. The result was a series of “IMF riots” with citizens protesting against their governments and global financial institutions.

Since the 1980s there have been a series of historical markers of resistance, the Zapatista uprising of 1994 in Chiapas, Mexico, the Battle of Seattle in 1999, protests at other meetings of leading institutions of global governance, and the creation of the World Social Forum in 2001. Overtime, these protests produced a particular logic and culture. Here the emphasis is on horizontality – grassroots, popular participation. Horizontality or lateral organizing follows the logic of networks which favours decentralized, loosely knit networks with flat, open, non-hierarchical democratic decision-making processes. Horizontality became part of the culture of both the WSF and the Occupy Movement along with their innovations in the creation of new forms of political space.

Religion and Occupy Wall Street

The World Social Forum and the Occupy Movement represent different levels of scalar responses to neo-liberal globalization, the first the global, the second the local. Both are constitutive scales of the same movement, the Global Justice Movement. However, those participating in the WSF should not be seen as disconnected from the local. They might best be described as “rooted cosmopolitans,” by which is meant:

People and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts. (Tarrow and Della Porta 2005: 237)

Those engaged in the Occupy Movement, on the other hand, operated on the local scale and were fueled by populist anger regarding the global financial collapse which was brought on by practices of, and state policies encouraged by, Wall Street.

No attempt will be made here to discuss the origins and character of the Occupy Movement in any detail. That task has been left to others.² Suffice to say it was inspired by the Arab Spring and the *Indignados* movement in Spain both of which represent efforts to create new forms of public space organized around horizontalist principles. Unlike others who claim that the Occupy Movement was global in scale we argue that, in fact, it was decidedly regional, centred primarily in the north, especially the United States and Europe. Using online blog data the *Guardian Newspaper* mapped the Occupy protests of October 11, 2011. While the protests took place in 951 cities in 82 countries around the world they were overwhelmingly focused in the U.S. and Europe.



► Figure 3 Source: The Guardian UK <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map?newsfeed=true#data>

Where was religion in this process? Regrettably, social scientists paid scant attention to a religious presence in the Occupy Movement. From a European context where few people identify themselves as religious (though many continue to believe in God) this not surprising. (Pew, 2010) In the U.S., however, where 57% of the population identify themselves as religious, a figure more in line with countries from the global South, one would expect greater engagement from faith-based groups and more analysis by social scientists as well.

In analyzing the presence of religion in Occupy the focus will be on Occupy Wall Street. This is an obvious choice given that Wall Street can be said to “a metonym for global financial capital ... a symbol of injustice” which “also became a prism through which the movement understood itself, a master signifier which gave meaning to events, and a frame through which direct actions were planned” (Gluck, 2012, <http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/647>) OWS represented local opposition to this global symbol of injustice. The theme of injustice resonated strongly with religious activists at OWS. This section draws upon interviews of twelve religious activists conducted in July 2012 supplemented by online research and secondary sources. Those interviewed came from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist faith traditions.

Religious involvement in progressive causes is very much a part of American history. Religion offered a moral sanction for independence from the British Empire, inspired the ant-slavery movement, the Social Gospel Movement, support for the New Deal, and imbued the struggle for civil rights. In sum, the dualist notion that religion should be relegated to the private sphere is not an accurate depiction of American public life. Religion here is viewed as being immanent in public life, a part of the history of real people, engaged in their struggles.

Religious engagement in the societal and community struggles vitiates any notion of a public-private divide. This was clearly an aspect of religious activism at OWS. All interviewees made it clear that religion should be in the public square. According to one rabbi, “all religions have a mandate for social and economic justice,” and “if religion is not engaged in the public square it is a fossil.” When it was suggested to one leader of a Black church that reverends should stay in the pulpits and congregations in their pews, the response was “This is insanity. Churches are violating the Gospel if they are not out in the world.” A reverend in an activist church agreed, stating “if you are only preaching in the pulpit you are not doing much.” A young Jewish seminarian put it this way, “What value is religion in speaking about the good book without reference to real life situations?” For a Buddhist monk, “religion is concerned with social order, justice, mutual respect, preservation of the natural order” and “must enter into public discussions.” The separation of public and private made no sense to one seminarian who noted that “religion is already in the public square, we live in a pervasively religious country.” The rabbi made one important caveat on the role of religion in public life, that “religion and state should be separate but not faith and the issues of the day.”

The creation of OWS as a public space was thus taken as an important opportunity for religious activists. According to one “it opened up a public square to address the issues of the day.” For Reverend Michael Ellick who, along with his Judson Memorial Church, was a key supporter of OWS there had been too many failures to create space and transcend a focus on single issue politics. The question for Ellick was “how do you create big faith organizing?” (Interview, July 9, 2012) Ellick, in particular, recognized the importance of re-imagining politics, of creating public spaces of diversity and drawing people to them. In this regard his outlook is comparable to that of Hannah Arendt. Arendt viewed politics as a cultural phenomenon, as a realm of appearance, performance and drama. According to Arendt communication is not strictly rationalist, “passion, drama, and the visual are all assumed to be features of public discourse” and action. (As quoted in Dahlgren, 1995:145) Through performance and communication we attract the attention of spectators with the purpose of communicating something about our common world. As Arendt observes, “no one in his right mind would ever put on a spectacle without being sure of having spectators to watch it.” (Arendt, 1958:62)

Ellick stressed the significance of spectacle that was at the heart of the performative configuration of Occupy as street theatre, poetry and symbolism. Spectacle was necessary to attract an audience and media attention. Ellick helped organize and lead an interfaith march from Judson Memorial Church to Zuccotti Park where an interfaith service was to be held. At the centre of the march was the golden calf, a symbol of idolatry in the Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions.



Figure 3 Golden Calf, from Bud Meyers blog spot <http://bud-meyers.blogspot.ca/2011/10/99ers-join-billionaires-tour-nyc.html>

The calf, which resembles the Wall Street bull, represents the idolatry of greed, of the 1%. The symbolism worked. According to Reverend Jennifer Butler, “in the streets, the cheers and prayers were overwhelming. Photographers and TV crews flocked to us.” (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-jennifer-butler/golden-calf-occupy-wall-street_b_1009455.html) The presence of the golden calf at OWS was a media image that went viral on the internet framing for many what Occupy was all about and giving rise to the creation of networked interfaith Occupy Faith groups across the United States. (Ellick) Symbolically as well Ellick and many other religious leaders made a point of wearing religious garb to signify both the presence of faith in the movement and that there was a progressive alternative to conservative religions so dominant in the mass media.

While it cannot be claimed that the faith groups present at OWS represented anything but a minority of faith-based organizations in New York City or a minority of participants they were a presence and performed some very important support functions. Many churches and Muslim organizations supplied shelter and resources - food, tents, showers, and social media support. When OWS was raided churches took in the displaced for up to a period of two months. Churches helped mobilize congregations to march to Zuccotti Park bringing, for example, African-American churches into a space that was overwhelmingly white and middle class. Religious activists also performed an important educational function. Several interviewees reported going back to their more conservative congregations using their experiences at OWS to explain what the Occupy Movement was all about.

When asked what religious values motivated them to participate in OWS all interviewees stressed the important of social and economic justice. Protestant activists drew from the Gospels and the Prophets of the Old Testament – Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and Isaiah – to draw attention to issues of justice, poverty and debt forgiveness. Some spoke in terms of religion as liberation, that “God is the God of the oppressed.” The emphasis on social and economic justice by interviewees tended to draw upon patriarchal figures in the Bible and omit feminist perspectives. Others, however, provided some balance. In an interfaith service on November 13, 2011 in Zuccotti Park, theologian Traci West drew upon Mary of Nazareth’s announcement

in the Gospel of Luke that “God has lifted up the lowly, God has brought down the powerful from their thrones.” West spoke directly to those women neglected by the existing economic system stating:

If you are a poor single mother on welfare, if you cannot feed your family no matter how many part-time jobs you have, you feel lowly and defeated and no greedy, corrupt politician cares, listen to the radical Christian gospel of economic equality from a poor, unwed, pregnant prophet of God. (West, 2011)

Those interviewees in the Jewish tradition drew extensively from the Prophetic tradition of the Old Testament with its emphasis on speaking of the need for justice and alleviation of poverty. The Muslim interviewee stressed that justice was at the heart of Islam.

While these religious activists were strongly supportive of OWS, one going so far as to intone that OWS “was almost like visiting heaven – it was incredibly beautiful.” Heaven, however, it was not, particularly in the latter stages of the occupation. OWS was a space of tensions, “a grimy earthly place”, increasingly full of the homeless, drug dealers, and others dropped off by the police. (From interviews) In the end stated one female activist “it had become dysfunctional and dangerous, no longer safe to sleep at night.” When the evictions came they were depicted by religious activists as brutal and violent. Many young seminarians who formed part of what become known as Protest Chaplains performing pastoral work at OWS rushed down from their seminary wearing clerical garb to form a cordon between the police and the occupiers but were beaten back.

The evictions were by all accounts traumatic and a great loss to movement building. Yet, it can be said that OWS and the Occupy movement in general spawned considerable religious activism which, while reduced, has not faded away. Many activists reported they were still politically engaged, moving out into the communities fighting foreclosures, slum landlords, organizing rent strikes often getting arrested when doing so. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy many members of the Occupy movement, religious activists and churches organized relief efforts in hard struck areas. Similarly, Occupy Faith NYC, an interfaith group, has continued to meet, organize and participate in direct action. While Occupy in general has been criticized for their lack of specific proposals groups like Occupy Faith have been much more specific about their intentions and policy proposals drafting, almost a year after the evictions, a mission statement. The statement opens by saying “Roused by Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Faith New York sets forth a moral and faith-based imperative for the regional and global movement for change.” Based on their principles Occupy Faith stated that among other things they would work for a “fair tax policy”, “promote fair wages for all”, work to “get money out of politics and limit the power of corporations,” and take part in direct actions “consistent with their faith traditions and moral principles.” (Occupy Faith Statement, October 10, 2012). Specific actions targeted at the American context were coupled with a continuing commitment to global justice.

WSF and Faith Groups

Like Occupy the creation of the WSF was a response to neo-liberal globalization. However, there are a number of contrasts and complementarities which we outline below in terms of origins, purpose and the role of faith groups, churches and spirituality. Like Occupy the WSF created a space where global justice activists could challenge neo-liberalism but the intent was to go beyond critiquing neo-liberalism and articulate alternatives. At the outset it had the appearance of excluding faith groups yet their presence among forum participants and the non-rational and spiritual aspects of movements and groups associated with the social forum tells a different story. We use a case study of role of the World Council of Churches to illustrate both the institutional presence of religious organizations in the WSF and the way in which their critiques of neo-liberalism have formed an important element of the ideas generated in the forum process.

The World Social Forum, Spirituality and Religion

We turn now to the question of how relevant are spirituality and religion to the WSF process? The World Social Forum began in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil but subsequent global events have been held in India and Africa as well. Participants have numbered between 70,000 and 150,000. Today the WSF and the continental, regional, national, and local forums it spawned (Smith and Smythe 2011) have been key focal points in resisting neo-liberal globalization. According to its Charter of Principles:

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 neoliberalism and domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships between Humankind and between it and the Earth.

[\(http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/\)](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/)

On the surface spirituality and religion would not seem to be part of the social forum process. Its Charter proclaims that the WSF is a “plural, diversified, non-confessional ... context...”, ie, secular. Initial analyses such as Lechner’s claimed “religion appears to play a minor role” and “religious responses to globalization seem to contribute little to the overall globalization critique that is evolving in such venues.” (2005:115) Instead, the WSF seemed to be evolving along secular lines. Given that religion is the largest constituent of global civil society Lechner finds this omission, surprising. Referring to only the first two forums in 2001 and 2002 was his observation valid then and is it still?

Subsequent forums would seem to reinforce the notion that the WSF had a secular bias, based on dualistic thinking which views religion as a source of instability, violence, fundamentalism, and oppression. At the WSF 2004 in Mumbai, for example, religious oppression and fundamentalism were highlighted. All this underscored, according to Anila Daulatzai, a secularist bias in the WSF. Daulatzai called into question the

particular secularistic vocabulary, grammar, and culture of politics exhibited at the Forum in Mumbai (similar notions of secularism inform many cultures of politics,

especially of the Left, in South Asia and elsewhere). Must the political arena of the WSF, which is defined as an 'open space', necessarily be a secular one? (2004:562)

Even where religion is visible at the WSF its presence is often viewed negatively as it was in Nairobi where "the ubiquitous activities of the religious groups [became] a growing concern for many participants". (People's Parliament 2007) Nanga, for example, described the anti-capitalism of Caritas, a global Roman Catholic charity, in essence as false, stating that "participation by reactionary Christianity threatens feminist and LGTB movements." (Nanga 2009:289) Thus religion, whether present or not, at the WSF is viewed as a problem.

In contrast we argue that the presence of spirituality and religion at the WSF deserves to be taken more seriously because religion played a positive role in the founding of the WSF, most participants at the WSF view themselves in religious, not secular terms, and religious institutions have always been active at the WSF providing critical analyses of neoliberalism. In addition spirituality in its emphasis on affect, emotion, authenticity, relating to others, interconnectedness with one another and the Earth has always been part of the global justice movement and the WSF process though seldom recognized as such.

Religion and the founding of the WSF

Religion has been present at the WSF since its inception. Here place matters. That Brazil would be friendly space for the first WSF is due to the role of religion in creating a receptive host political culture. During the years of Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) the Catholic Church became "the most legitimate nation-wide, and useful organizational resource for the oppositional forces of civil society." (von Sinner 2007:174) In so doing it also became theologically progressive giving rise to, for example, liberation theology. Liberation theology has suffused the ideas of key individuals, organizations, and social movements associated with the WSF. Here one must acknowledge the formative role played by Francisco (Chico) Whitaker. Whitaker along with a left wing Brazilian businessman, Oded Gradjew, and Bernard Cassen, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and president of the French advocacy organization, Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens (ATTAC) are considered to be founders of the WSF. Whitaker is credited with conceiving the WSF as an open space for the convergence of social movements and non-governmental organizations opposed to neo-liberal globalization. Long associated with the progressive wing of the Catholic Church in Brazil Whitaker takes his theological inspiration from Archbishop Helder Câmara and the Liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff. Since 2001 Whitaker has also served on the Brazilian Catholic Bishop's Justice and Peace Commission, one of the eight organizations credited with organizing the first WSF and has been associated with the Brazilian Worker's Party (PT) an amalgam of trade unionists, intellectuals and proponents of Liberation Theology founded in 1980 and one of the first sponsors of the WSF in Porto Alegre. In addition one of the organizations that organized the first WSF was the Landless Rural Worker's Movement (MST) which according to Reitan "owes much to the dissemination of liberation theology in the 1960s and 1970s among activist Catholic priests." (2007:153) Thus while religion *per se* was not a driving force behind the WSF its cultural presence animated many of the key actors who organized it.

Religion and WSF participants

Whatever the claim that the WSF is a secular space, research shows that space is occupied by participants who are overwhelmingly religious. A number of surveys show that participants, particularly those from the global South identify themselves in religious terms. A survey of the WSF in Porto Alegre in 2003 indicates that 62.6% of those surveyed claimed to be religious.³ Keeping in mind that about 85 per cent of all the participants were Brazilian this is probably no surprise.

A survey of WSF 2007 participants in Nairobi by the Transnational Social Movement Research Working Group at the University of California Riverside found that over 90 per cent of those that identified themselves as very religious came from the Global South (many of them African)

Table 2 Religiosity of surveyed participants WSF 2007

	North	South	Total
	% (N)		
Not religious	60.6 (100)	39.4 (65)	100 (165)
Somewhat religious	20.2 (26)	79.8 (103)	100 (129)
Very religious	9.8 (18)	90.2 (165)	100 (183)

Source: Transnational Social Movement Research Working Group, University of California Riverside

Of the total number of participants from the South (333) approximately 70 percent (268) are somewhat or very religious. In contrast surveys by the same group indicate that participants at the 2007 and 2010 United States Social Forums were much less religious than their southern counterparts.

Spirituality, reason and the forum process

Surveys have thus addressed the question of religiosity at Forums, however, but not the question of spirituality. In order to ascertain whether or not spirituality is relevant to the global justice movement and the forum process alternative means are necessary. One is suggested by by Geoffrey Pleyers, in his book *Alter-Globalization: Becoming Actors in the Global Age* (2010). Pleyers does not use the expression, spirituality, but employs a suggestive analytical tool in this regard. Within the alter-globalization movement (what has been referred to here as the global justice movement) there are, claims Pleyers, two analytically (but not necessarily empirically) distinct trends, one which he calls the “way of subjectivity” and the other the “way of reason”, each embodied in distinct types of actors opposing neo-liberal globalization.

Subjectivity refers to the irrational side of political activism, emphasizing creativity, the experiential, the relational, and the emotional. The way of reason emphasizes knowledge, rationality, expertise, and hierarchy. Each becomes a basis for resisting neo-liberal globalization but in different ways. According to Pleyers, “Instead of theoretical arguments or economic calculations activists of the way of subjectivity strive to resist neo-liberal globalization and to construct themselves as actors through performances and lived experiences.” (2010:35) Pleyers claims,

Those associated with the way of reason are more likely to be found in larger, traditional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and movement organizations which accentuate the importance of rationality, expertise and knowledge in critiquing, analyzing and formulating alternatives to neo-liberal globalization. These NGOs provide valuable expertise, suggest alternative policies, and articulate the need for a more engaged informed citizenry. They are, however, more likely to be top-down, hierarchical organizations led by engaged intellectuals and experts but less likely to practice internal democracy themselves. (Pleyers 2010:13)

While the way of reason and of subjectivity are analytical categories in practice as Pleyers acknowledges it is not a case of either/or but both/and. Emotional and experiential politics are not antagonistic to or bereft of the exercise of reason. Similarly, large NGOs are not devoid of emotion and passion. These trends are intertwined in both types of organizations to a greater or lesser degree and are present at social forums, but often in tension with another. Horizontally-based activist groups are frequently critical of the hierarchical practices of large scale NGOs. (Smith, et. al. 2008) Pleyers's categories, we argue, can be usefully applied to the analysis of the role of spirituality in challenging neoliberalism in the social forum process. Spirituality is an important but too often unrecognized dimension of many activists opposed to neoliberalism. It is manifested at the WSF both in the growing numbers of panels and workshops dealing with the solidarity economy and with the growing assertion of indigenous spirituality which the WSF, especially since the 2009 meeting in Belém Brazil, has reflected. (Becker and Koda, 2011). In contrast to the reaction to faith-based groups the presence of indigenous people and their spirituality has been embraced and celebrated within the WSF even if attention to their concerns and their influence over forum processes has been more limited. The influence of spirituality runs even deeper, as authors like Sylvia Marcos have argued at the recent Tunis WSF, in the inspiration which the Zapatistas with their rich cosmological tradition, have provided to global activists, to organize on horizontal bases which was itself a practice of the indigenous people.

Religious organizations and the forum process

If spirituality thus deserves more careful consideration in terms of the global justice movement so too do religious organizations providing rational critiques, analyses of, and alternatives to neoliberal globalization. Contrary to early analyses of the forum process religious organizations, primarily Christian, have played an active role at the WSF from the outset. These activities include providing program content through their involvement in seminars and workshops often in cooperation with other organizations. Perhaps most prominent is the World Council of Churches network. "The churches' place is at the World Social Forum" said Geneviève Jacques, director of Programmes of the World Council of Churches (WCC). (January 2004)

An opening for them was provided in the 2004 decision of the International Council of the WSF to adopt a more bottom up consultative and self-organizing process for the WSF program. Previously organizers decreed a number of themes but the 2005 broad consultation process involved 1800 groups and organizations resulting in 11 themes which served as a basis for organizing more than 2500 Forum activities. The seventh theme was: "Ethics, cosmo-visions

and spiritualities - Resistances and challenges to a new world.” Viewing this as a positive sign welcoming their presence ecumenical organizations like the World Council of Churches responded and in July 2004 held a meeting with a broad range of organizations where:

It was agreed that the main priority of the ecumenical presence at the World Social Forum is to ensure a visible and meaningful ecumenical contribution to the WSF. Based on the desire to achieve something significant together, common planning and coordination, identifying common areas of concern, expected outcomes and methodology, and avoiding overlap, duplication and contradiction were seen as essential. The need to improve solidarity with social movements and NGOs with similar goals was also stressed. Ecumenism understood as going beyond merely church unity can bring much to the WSF, including faith and cultural perspectives on the struggle for alternatives and the building of just societies. ...Rather than promoting the image of individual organizations, the goal of a visible ecumenical presence is to show the common witness of Christians in the world today - a witness which does not claim to be "better" but to be an authentic alternative voice. (WCC 30-January 2005)

It was however, the 2007 WSF in Nairobi Kenya that brought faith-based organizations to the forefront. Even a cursory view of the program for the 2007 WSF shows the very strong presence of Christian Churches. The Catholic charity CARITAS had a large delegation from Europe which along with the All African Council of Churches (Protestant) created the Caritas-AACC ecumenical platform. In addition many other Christian churches had a strong presence as did other faith-based development and ecumenical organizations such as the Economic Justice Network, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Catholic Overseas Development Agency UK (CAFOD) the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, and the World Council of Churches.

Local Nairobi churches and those across the continent played a role in facilitating and mobilizing African participation at the forum. Local churches demonstrated their much deeper roots in the community than many of the NGOs by mobilizing people from the slums. A series of workshops including Voices from the Slums were sponsored by churches such as the Kutoka network of 18 Catholic parishes in Nairobi, most of them based in the slums. The focus of churches was not narrowly religious including such issues as debt, global poverty, the right to water, HIV/Aids and human rights.

The World Council of Churches and the WSF

Churches are not only involved in organizing and mobilizing they are also engaged in what Pleyers describes as the “way of reason” providing critiques and analyses of the impact of neo-liberal globalization. Among these is the WCC although other large ecumenical organizations such as the World Communion of Reformed Churches are working along similar lines. In stressing the rational side the WCC rejects such dualisms as the economy and ecology, man and nature instead seeing them as interrelated. The WCC has been present at the WSF since its inception in 2001 becoming more active in organizing workshops in the 2003 WSF. The WCC has increasingly identified with the WSF and its struggle against neo-liberal globalization evident in a number of its key documents.

The WCC is the largest ecumenical movement representing 560 million Christians, the majority of which reside in the global South. Founded in 1948 it includes “349 churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world.” (2011) Its list of programs indicates engagement on a variety of social, environmental and economic issues, in particular, globalization. Its assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998 the WCC “recognized the pastoral, ethical, theological and spiritual challenges that globalization poses to the churches and the ecumenical movement” and has become active in opposing and critiquing globalization. As one document states:

From the very beginning of this process, the WCC has made a clear distinction between globalization as a multi-faceted historic process and the present form of a pernicious economic and political project of global capitalism. This form of globalization is based on an ideology that those groups and movements involved in the World Social Forum have described as “neoliberalism.” (AGAPE 2005:1)

In its initiatives on globalization it has collaborated with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) composed of 145 member churches in 79 countries representing over 70 million Christians. (2011) Like the WCC the LWF has been engaged in issues of economic globalization and been a regular participant at the WSF.

Although present at the first two WSFs it was in 2003 that the WCC assumed a higher profile presenting workshops on water, economic globalization, peace, violence and youth. Framing its participation in terms of a “spirituality of resistance” program organizer, Rogate Mshana argued for a “need to recover the long tradition of a Christian spirituality critical of power. It is a spirituality which has given those without power the strength and courage to oppose those who abuse it.” (January 21, 2003) At the forum the WCC acted under a broad ecumenical umbrella including the WLF and a coalition of Latin American and Brazilian churches.

In its critiques of globalization the WCC linked itself to the WSF. Two documents in particular stand out, *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE)* (2005) and *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology* (2007). AGAPE clearly identifies the WSF as the major expression of resistance to neoliberal globalization. AGAPE was prepared under the direction of the WCC Secretariat but in response to local pressures. According to one of its authors, Rogate Mshana, what the WCC articulates “at the global level are issues that the churches raised and doing not the other way round.” (Mshana April 19, 2011)

The AGAPE document represents a detailed analysis and critique of neoliberal globalization and posits an alternative set of values and possibilities. Neoliberalism, it claims, “is an economy of death” (p. 4). As part of the process of “breaking free from the death-dealing paradigm of neoliberal globalization” it proposes a life-affirming vision of “an Earth community where all peoples live in just relationships with each other, with all creation and with God.” (p. 37) Neoliberalism, it asserts, is but the latest version of empire to which resistance is necessary. In calling for an “economy of life” it calls for transformation of the current system drawing upon the Sabbath-Jubilee traditions.⁴

Here, it speaks to the necessity of “eco-justice” seeing the economy and ecology as interrelated and inseparable. Moving beyond the notion of third world debt it speaks to the idea of ecological debt which the WCC highlighted in the 2007 and 2011 World Social Forums. The ecological debt is one that the North owes the South, a re-framing of debt as a Northern responsibility. Ecological debt may be defined as:

The debt accumulated by Northern, industrial countries toward Third-World countries on account of resource plundering, environmental damages and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes, such as greenhouse gases, from the industrial countries. (Acción Ecológica 2005)

All these issues are addressed in a critical, empirical manner as are issues of what constitutes just trade, just finance and an economy of life. Conceptually, an economy of life is close to the Andean indigenous spiritual belief in “buen vivir” mentioned previously.⁵ The economy of life is inseparable from an economy of solidarity. Moreover, the “transformation to an economy of solidarity is a transformation led by society as the agent of its own development.” (2005:44)

A later WCC document, *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology* (2007) broadens the concept of ecological debt to discuss how wealth and wealth creation are related to poverty and ecology. It notes that “wealth and poverty are intrinsically linked as two sides of the same coin” (3) opposing the growth model of economists which argues “that generating more prosperity – narrowly defined as increases in income and consumption and, at the macro-level, growth in the gross national product – is the best way to reduce poverty.” (3) The result is over production and over consumption which lead “to the degradation, depletion and appropriation of natural resources.” (10) Rather than promoting growth, it argues “that income redistribution is substantially more successful in reducing poverty” (10), an implicit affirmation of the “economy of enough.”

In rejecting the development model of economic growth as unsustainable the WCC has come down on one side of a debate dividing the contemporary left. Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein describes this as “the crucial debate of the coming decade” between those who believe “that what the world needs is more development, more modernization, and ... those who believe that development and modernization are the civilizational curse of capitalism and that we need to rethink the basic cultural premises of a future world, which they call civilizational change.” (Wallerstein 2011)

In 2007 and 2009 the WCC sponsored WSF workshops on eco-justice advocating the recognition of ecological debt. It also focused on the damage caused by the economic system, particularly the financial collapse in 2008. In terms of its ongoing critiques of neoliberalism the WCC in collaboration with the Fellowship of Christian Churches in West Africa, the Ecumenical African Alliance, the United Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast, the Third World Network – Africa, and SEATINI (the Southern and Eastern Trade Information and Negotiation Institute) participated in a workshop entitled “Economic Partnership Agreements Imposed on

the African Continent” which provided detailed analyses of these one-sided trade and investment agreements negotiated between groups of African countries and the EU and their devastating impact on the African continent. Here the analyses parallel those one might see in any critical NGO report.

At the WSF 2011 the WCC supported Jubilee South efforts to establish an International People’s Tribunal on Ecological Debt and Climate Justice. Jubilee South had been pursuing this idea since 2009 in an effort to reframe the issue of debt making the countries of the global North creditors to the global South obligated to make reparations along with providing assistance in moving to an ecologically sustainable economy. At the workshop “Towards a People’s Tribunal on Ecological Debt - Focus on Extractive Activities” co-sponsored by the WCC and others Jubilee South discussed the consequences an “ecological war” on the global South by the North. Establishing a people’s tribunal was seen as a helpful instrument in this struggle improving public knowledge and awareness of the issue and serving as a means of transferring demands on ecological debt into international and legal protocols. A spokesman for WCC indicated that it was committed to ecological justice and would actively support the creation of a tribunal on ecological debt.

The case of the WCC shows that a deeper understanding of religious participation in the WSF is necessary. Such an understanding would incorporate rational critiques as well as acknowledging spirituality. The participation of religious organizations at the WSF shows no signs of diminishing. From the program of the 2013 forum in Tunis, Tunisia this would seem to be the case. Here the context varied widely but also reflected, as the WSF often does, the major issues of the geographic locale in which it is imbedded despite its global focus. For example many networks of faith groups from churches in West Africa and across Europe provided content to workshops. They addressed a wide variety of issues from climate justice to food imports and food sovereignty in Africa. Islamic and other faith groups addressed questions such as whether a separation of religion and state is necessary to preserve democracy and the protection of the rights of women in an Islamic context.

The WSF and Theology: From the WSF to a Theology of Liberation

In addition to the role of faith-based groups in the WSF, the impact of the WSF process has been felt in turn by theologians of liberation. While our focus in this paper is on the role of faith-based groups in the Occupy movement and the WSF as aspects of the global justice movement we must acknowledge the impact of the WSF in turn on some faith-based organizations and individuals. Shortly after the first three WSF gatherings theologians supportive of the WSF and its principles and desiring a forum where they could meet created the World Forum on Theology of Liberation (WFTL) with a view to.. “connect our deliberations with the values and proposals of the World Social Forum”. In each subsequent WSF gathering beginning in 2005 the WFTL has met as part of the WSF holding a series of panels and

workshops bringing a group of theologians together united under a set of principles which they adopted in October 2007. These describe the WFTL as follows:

The WFTL converges with the WSF and other alternative social and intellectual spaces and initiatives. It is not a parallel event to the WSF. Its plans and methodologies are developed in harmony with the WSF and with similar initiatives. The WFTL takes place immediately before or after the WSF, and is integrated in WSF programs through different forms of participation. These theologies are identified with practices of liberation, resistance, and transformation, opposing all kinds of structures which oppress and deny the fullness of life, justice, dignity (www.wftl.org)

Themes have varied widely from issues such as water, earth and theology (2009) to

2013 issues of peace, patriarchy.

Conclusion

At the outset we noted that religious organizations are critical players in the struggle against neoliberal globalization. Christian churches not only educate, organize and mobilize they provide detailed reasoned critiques of neoliberalism. Our case study of Occupy Wall Street shows that while faith groups were coming to the aid of the occupiers they were making conscious decisions in their wearing of clerical garb, their employment of symbols such as the Golden Calf, to insert themselves and their faith values into important public debates on social and economic justice. While the Occupy movement, in contrast to the WSF, was much more about direct action, confronting the 1% and reacting in a somewhat hostile, but peaceful way, to the economic crisis. By involving themselves some faith groups also were transformed as they raised awareness in their congregations and began to organize ongoing networks seeking change. The subjective, irrational, emotional, if not spiritual, side of political activism was evident there in the global justice movement just as it was in the WSF process. A pointed reminder that passion and emotional expression are fundamental ingredients of politics and “can be strategically used by activists” as “an aspect of all social action and social relations” (Goodwin, *et. al.* 2001:6). As David Korten has pointed out spirituality plays an important role in political activism. That it is seldom acknowledged by critical social scientists is puzzling.

One answer is the dominance of analyses of the global justice movement and the WSF process by intellectuals themselves who are invariably secular. This produces a blindness, an occlusion of sociological reality. Santos has called this disconnection “the sociology of absences”, processes that create non-existence of an entity “ whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible or irreversibly discarded”. A counter hegemonic movement such as the WSF should address these absences he argues. In the case of religion, such a movement should “allow for mutual clarity among the experiences of the world, both available and possible. For example, between the concept of human rights and the Hindu and Islamic concepts of human dignity, between western strategies of development and Gandhi swadeshi. “(as quoted in Daulatzai: 571). The WSF should expressly recognize religious experience, its link to global justice and call for a better world. Similarly, Santos argues that it is

important to recognize the “role of spirituality in the social struggles for a better world.” (2004) It is not a question of either/or but both/and.

Yet, some words of caution are in order. As the 2010 Pew foundation study cited earlier indicated both Muslim and Christian faiths in the global South remain traditional and patriarchal when it comes to the role of women and LGBT groups. It is particularly in the area of gender issues that the presence of some churches within the Global Justice Movement as well as WSF have been viewed with concern. Among the issues with a great deal of currency at the Nairobi 2007 WSF, for example, were gender equality, female genital mutilation, reproductive rights (especially abortion), HIV/Aids prevention and questions around sexual orientation and human rights. The latter three were sites of tension within the WSF between some religious organizations and other movements including feminists and LGBT groups. Most provocative on the issue of reproductive rights was the statue of a visibly pregnant young teenage girl, hung on a cross Jesus-like, by Danish sculptor, Jens Galschiott titled “In the Name of God” and dedicated to all of the victims of fundamentalism. This was just one of many events that drew attention to the tension between conservative churches, religious fundamentalism and women’s rights. Some churches in the global north such as the Catholic Church even though critical of neoliberalism remain staunchly patriarchal regarding women and the control they exercise over their bodies, a position that is anathema to many participants at the WSF.

At the WSF in Tunis 2013, so soon after the Arab Spring and elections that brought Islamist parties majorities in legislatures in Egypt and Tunisia the issues of tensions between the secular and Islam, especially in relation to the rights of women were evident in many workshops which dealt with these issues. When it comes to globalization we must also acknowledge too that Christian churches as with many faith groups are hardly unified. For example, in his analysis of *Poverty, Wealth and Ecology* Rogate Mshana of the WCC admitted:

Economic concerns have emerged as a divisive issue for the churches. The AGAPE process in particular revealed that many of the old North–South tensions and conflicts remain. Differences in analyses and recommendations among churches and ecumenical partners stem largely from divergences in ideological standpoints that are, in turn, determined by social and historical locations. (2007)

This was also stressed in the WCC’s 2007 Dar es Salaam Statement on Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology in Africa which noted that “Churches have often neglected to challenge the death-dealing effects of the degradation of God's creation and the unjust sharing of God's resources.” (2007)

In other ways the churches of the WCC and other ecumenical organizations find themselves in competition with Pentecostalism the world’s fastest growing religious movement. According to Yong and Zalanga the prosperity gospel espoused by many Pentecostal Churches make it a potential accomplice of empire rather than a subversive movement. (2008:242) The 2010 Pew study indicated that “although Pentecostals comprise no more than one-quarter of Christians in any one African country more than half of Christians believe in the prosperity gospel – that God will grant wealth and good health to people who have enough faith.” (2010:2)

Clearly, then, ecumenical organizations such as the WCC which are critical of neoliberal globalization do not have an easy road ahead although this could be said of the global justice movement as a whole. This is a reality that these organizations recognize. They know that they are engaged in political struggle and must do so in concert with other, secular forces - hence the attractiveness of the WSF. However, the WSF and its International Council have remained silent on the issue of religious presence at the WSF preferring to maintain a veneer of secularity over the event. In terms of sheer numbers and demographics religious organizations cannot be ignored. Those striving for change must confront the reality of the religious presence in the global South. In Africa, for example, Knighton claims “ change, especially abrupt transition, is mediated through ... religion.” (2006:71)

However uncomfortable it may be for secular forces opposing neoliberal globalization it is necessary to recognize that organizations such as the WCC have developed one of the strongest and holistic critiques of neoliberal globalization. Their rejection of the growth model, their emphasis on a solidarity economy, the Earth as a living entity, and on spirituality have inserted the WCC into the debate on the “civilizational crisis”, of hegemonic Eurocentric modernity. The critique is trans-modern, grounded on theological premises and biblical interpretation. In this regard the Sabbath-Jubilee tradition has proven to be remarkably elastic capable not only of speaking to poor country debt but also to the environment, climate justice and ecological debt. This is consistent too with a reviving indigenous movement and its emphasis on spirituality, the rights of Mother Earth and living well, and the increasing emphasis on the way of subjectivity in political activism.

An emphasis on subjectivity in political activism resonates in the North as well. At the 2010 United States Social Forum in Detroit, for example, 36 panels had a religious emphasis including Sabbath economics, social justice, debt, sustainability, spirituality and a solidarity economy along with environmental justice. Similar to Africa churches in the United States were important vehicles of mobilization at the USSF 2010 particularly among the poor and black communities. (Copeland 2011) Churches and other faith-based institutions, in circumstances of poverty and deprivation and crises, the outcomes of neoliberalism, are often the only social institutions sufficiently well organized to provide services, educate and mobilize the population. Thus, for the Global Justice Movement and the World Social Forum they remain the elephants in the room.

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¹ This section of the paper is indebted to the work of Erin Wilson, 2011 (a) and 2011 (b)

² See, for example, see the online articles from *Cultural Anthropology*, sponsored by the *Journal for the Society of Cultural Anthropology*, July, 2012, <http://www.culanth.org/?q=node/641>

³ Source: Survey of the Profile of WSF Participants IBASE 2003

⁴ Three aspects of this tradition are of particular importance:

- The seventh day or Sabbath as a day of rest;
- The seventh or sabbatical year; and
- The fiftieth or jubilee year.

Both the seventh day and the seventh year are periods of rest. The seventh day is to be a break from work, production and consumption. In the seventh year tilled land, the Earth, is to be given a rest. As well the seventh year is to provide for a cancellation of debts and the liberation of debt slaves. The jubilee represents the seventh of seven sabbatical years and calls for a redistribution of land so that every family can possess the means for subsistence. Here the entitlement to land is not absolute and land is not to be viewed as a commodity. Underlying this tradition is the rejection of the classical economic notion of scarcity. Instead the tradition is premised on the story of manna (Exodus 16) that the bread provided by God is sufficient for all if stored and shared to provide for a day of rest. This is the foundation of the biblical “economy of the enough for all,” that the Earth is abundant and can provide for all if we share and do not accumulate too much. According to Lowery “by celebrating a divinely ordained cosmic order built on natural abundance, self-restraint, and social solidarity, sabbath critiques the oppressive consequences of a royal-imperial system built upon on tribute, forced state labour, and debt slavery.” (2000:3)

⁶ For more on the concept of buen vivir and the role it has played in the social forum process see Marc Becker and Ashley N. Koda, (2011) *Indigenous Peoples and Social Forums*. Jackie Smith, Scott Byrd, Ellen Reese, and Elizabeth Smythe (eds) *Handbook on World Social Forum Activism* Paradigm Press: Boulder, CO