

## **Interview with Boaventura de Sousa Santos**

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## **Introduction**

Boaventura de Sousa Santos is Professor of Sociology, School of Economics, University of Coimbra and Distinguished Legal Scholar Law School, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is also director of the Center for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra.

Santos is one of the outstanding theorists of our time. His extensive and expansive corpus of work engages with pressing social and political questions: of social structures, institutions, imagination, movements and change. His seminal work – *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* – engages in a series of sociological analyses of law in order to illustrate the need for a profound theoretical reconstruction of the notion of legality based on locality, nationality and globality. This work was preceded, surrounded and followed by research concerned, ultimately, with states, economies and societies, especially in the semi-periphery. As Santos made clear in our interview with him, the insights into our condition are more likely to come not from the centers of power but rather, from the margins and the periphery; from those who on a daily basis experience domination, poverty and social injustice.

Santos is concerned, always, to show how developments, including supra-state organisations such as the European Union, and international human rights law, can be given their proper place in the sociology of law. Boaventura's substantial

engagement with the phenomenon of our time – globalisation – has led him to challenge its assumed unitary force and hegemonic nature. We must talk about globalizations, he says, not globalisation. We must also talk about globalizations not just from the center, or above, but from below. Working always to generate an emancipatory map as a way of imagining and living new and different possibilities, Boaventura de Sousa Santos shows us that there is another way, a different route, a new space to inhabit, an alternate way of being and acting. His work in the World Social Forum is one instance (among many) of an engagement in hope, a politics of resistance and an effort to find new ways of living in the world. As an inspirational intellectual and an activist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos strategically shows us how to name that which has been denied, to reveal that which is concealed, and from there to imagine and create a more just social world. It is this process that is emancipatory – a way of living in the world.

In our interview with Boaventura de Sousa Santos conducted at the University of Coimbra, Portugal in January, 2004, we ranged over the core of his ideas, concerns and practical engagements. Before introducing you to him, we would like to thank him for being so generous with his time and so open with his responses. Our hope is that those working in education and the social sciences more generally will immediately see the importance and relevance and of his ideas not only to their own projects and practices but how these might inspire us to imagine and work toward a better world for all of us.

**RD: Could you elaborate on the distinction between hegemonic and anti-hegemonic globalisation?**

**BSS:** That's an important question and an important distinction. The dominant view is that there is a single form of globalisation. Together with it prevails the idea that we are entering an historical period characterized by the end of deep ideological cleavages and the collapse of the distinction among rival models of

social transformation. However, if we look at the different sets of social, political and cultural relations that are considered to be constitutive of globalization, we easily reach the conclusion that the latter is a very complex phenomenon ridden by deep cleavages and contradictions. I identify three main contradictions. The first contradiction is between globalisation and localisation. As interdependence and global interactions intensify, social relations in general seem to be increasingly more de-territorialised, opening up the way towards new *rights to options*, which cross borders that until recently were policed by tradition, nationalism, language or ideology and frequently by a combination of all these factors. Yet, on the other hand, in apparent contradiction to this trend, new regional, national and local identities are emerging, constructed around the new preeminence of the *rights to roots*. Such local factors, though they refer to real or imaginary territories as much as to ways of life and social relationships, are based on face-to-face relationships, on closeness and belongingness.

The second contradiction is between the nation state and the transnational non-state. If, on the one hand, the State seems to have become obsolete and on its way to extinction or, at the least, very much weakened in its capacity to organise and regulate social life, on the other, the State continues to be the central political entity, not only because the erosion of sovereignty is very selective but also, more importantly, because the institutionalisation of globalisation itself – from the multilateral financial agencies to the deregulation of the economy – is created by the core nation states. The third contradiction, the most relevant for your question, is of a political and ideological nature. It consists of those who see in globalisation the finally indisputable and unconquerable energy of capitalism and those who see in it a new opportunity to broaden the scale and the nature of transnational solidarity and anti-capitalist struggle.

If we start from the idea that globalisation is about social relations, as the political meaning of these social relations changes, the political meaning of globalisation changes as well. I will start from my definition of globalization: it is the process by which a given entity reaches the globe by enlarging its own ambit, and by doing so, develops the capacity or the prerogative of naming as

'local' all rival entities. The most important implications of this concept are the following. First, there is no genuinely global condition; what we call globalisation is always the successful globalisation of a particular localism. In other words, there are no global conditions for which we cannot find local roots, either real or imagined, as a specific cultural insertion. The second implication is that globalisation presupposes localisation. The process that creates the global as the dominant position in unequal exchanges, is the same one that produces the local as the subaltern position. For instance, we have now the idea that the European social model is a local model. It is a European model only adequate to European conditions and therefore not susceptible of being exported. The only model of capitalism that can be exported is the American version: liberal capitalism. As liberal capitalism gets globalised as a version of capitalism, the European social model gets localized.

In fact, we live as much in a world of localisation as in a world of globalisation. Therefore, in analytical terms, it would be equally correct if the present situation and our topics of investigation were defined in terms of localization rather than globalisation. The reason why the latter term is preferred is basically because hegemonic scientific discourse tends to favour the history of the world as told by the victors.

This tension between globalisation and localisation means that the local may also become global if it manages to deglobalise itself from the set of conditions that has localized it and reglobalises itself in an alternative set of conditions. That's where the distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalisation comes in. Hegemonic globalization is not merely a dominant form of globalization; it is the form of globalisation that is assumed by lots of people – including its victims – as the only one. In the 1990s, however, a new movement or a new political initiative has emerged which starts from this very simple conviction: to be not against globalization as such, but rather against *this kind of* globalisation. While hegemonic globalisation deals with transnational interactions from above, it is conceivably possible to develop transnational interactions from below — that is, from the victims, the exploited, the excluded and their allies — which fight against hegemonic globalization and

in so doing generate a counter-hegemonic globalisation. This enabling possibility has been grasped so intensely by so many thousands of social movements and progressive NGOs in the last ten years that it is today widely accepted that side by side with hegemonic globalization a counter-hegemonic kind of globalisation is emerging.

And what is counter hegemonic globalisation? It consists of resistance against hegemonic globalization organized (through local/global linkages) by movements, initiatives and NGO's, on behalf of classes, social groups and regions victimised by the unequal exchanges produced on a global scale by neoliberal globalisation. They take advantage of the possibilities of transnational interaction created by hegemonic globalisation, including those resulting from the revolution in information and communication technologies. They include transnational advocacy networks of South/South and North/South solidarity; articulations among workers' organisations in countries integrated into the different regional blocs or among workers of the same multinational corporation operating in different countries (the new labor internationalism); international networks of alternative legal aid; transnational human rights organizations; worldwide networks of feminist movements; networks of indigenous, ecological or alternative development movements and associations; literary, artistic and scientific movements on the periphery of the world system in search for alternative non-imperialist, anti-hegemonic cultural and educational values. From Chiapas, 1994, to Seattle, 1999, to Porto Alegre, 2001, 2002, 2003, and Mumbai, 2004, this very heterogenous set of movements and organizations have gained momentum in showing that the world as such is today an important social field of struggle for progressive social transformation: "another world is possible". Local struggles or national struggles continue to be decisive, but we are in a new stage in which it is necessary to articulate these scales of struggle with the global scale. The movements cannot afford to concentrate themselves on a specific scale of struggles; they have to fight local, national and global struggles, because they are intertwined.

So I think that at this stage the distinction between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalisation has an analytical and a normative dimension.

Analytical, because there are so many initiatives, movements and organizations fighting worldwide against globalisation that to call this new political phenomenon an alternative form of globalization seems adequate. But there is also a normative dimension in naming it as such, which consists in giving visibility and credibility to these practices. Since they are not hegemonic, these initiatives are easily discredited, as we have seen regarding the World Social Forum. First, it was deemed impossible, then it was constructed by the corporate media as a bunch of rioters and violent anarchists. Gradually, though, it managed to be credited as a sustained initiative.

The distinction brings also complexity to the discussion about globalisation by stating that there is not one kind of globalisation; there are basically two kinds, one on the side of capitalism and the other fighting against capitalism, whatever the agenda is. There is a critical utopian element here that focuses on affirming that another world is possible rather than on defining its content. Herein lies the ecumenical character of the World Social Forum: a global resistance against the exclusion and destruction that hegemonic globalization is producing worldwide, a resistance conducted with full respect for the diversity of alternatives that the different movements are fighting for.

**RD: How do you see the relationship between globalisation and neo-liberalism, and capitalism?**

Neo-liberalism has nothing to do with historical political liberalism; neo-liberalism is neo-conservatism. It is not a new liberalism. It is conservatism because it is hostile to concessions to the popular classes (social and economic rights) and to the state as a promoter of non-mercantile interactions among citizens. It is "neo" because, while historical conservatives didn't want the state to grow, the neo-conservatives want the state to shrink, and, more importantly, because neo-conservatives do not value national sovereignty, a core value for historical conservatives.

Neo-liberalism is the political form of globalization resulting from US type of capitalism, a type that bases competitiveness on technological innovation

coupled with low levels of social protection. The aggressive imposition of this model by the international financial institutions worldwide not only forces abrupt changes in the role of the state and in the rules of the game between the exploiter and the exploited, as well as between the oppressor and the oppressed, but also changes the rules of the game among the other kinds of developed capitalism (corporate Japanese capitalism and social-democratic European capitalism) by forcing their localization (by being considered improper for exportation) .

Not surprisingly, the complicities but also the conflicts between the European Union and the USA have to do with these different conceptions of capitalism and the tensions and ambiguities they produce within hegemonic globalisation. As to the ambiguities, suffices it to note that Europe distanced itself from the USA in the case of the invasion of Iraq, but joined the USA in the meeting of The World Trade Organization last Fall in Cancun. On the other hand, it is now evident that one of the main reasons for the USA to invade Iraq was to intimidate Europe, now rising as the most powerful economic bloc and holding a currency that will be increasingly appealing to Third World savings (mainly to oil producing countries). The economic decline of the USA as the Hegemon is evermore evident. Both uni-lateralism and militarism resorted to in recent years, although aimed at decelerating such decline, have, indeed, accelerated it. We will see more of this together with economic conflicts, some of them fought within the WTO and others in other instances. For a while, however, will see neo-liberalism and US capitalism marching together triumphantly.

**SLR: Do you see the success of neo-liberalism lying in the extent to which it has been constitutionalised in various types of legally-binding agreements?**

**BSS:** Definitely, and I think that this constitutionalisation process is taking place at two levels. It is of course influencing the national Constitutions of countries in the global South. For instance, all the recent transitions toward democracy in Africa and Latin America, after periods of different kinds of authoritarian rule, occurred together with neoliberal transitions in the economy and the role of the

state. This twin process can be equally identified in the Constitutions of Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and Mozambique.

The second level is what we could call a global constitutionalism. It is basically the idea that, as we have now a universal human rights legislation aimed at protecting individuals, we should also have an international legislation protecting the multinational corporations, a kind of "human rights" for corporations, that is, for the most powerful non-state global actors. The aborted Multilateral Investment Agreement was the first attempt and the creation of the WTO, the second. It is a global constitutionalism whose main objective is, in my view, to neutralise the revolutionary potential of human rights and even of democracy particularly when representative democracy is combined with participatory democracy, as we have been witnessing in so many cities in the South. Until the end of the Cold War human rights were very much a kind of a capitalist ideology against socialism and revolution. After the end of the Cold War the opportunity arose for counter-hegemonic conceptions and practices of human rights struggles and therefore their transformative potential expanded enormously. I think that this global constitutionalism is trying to neutralise this potential and neutralize it both at the level of national constitutions and at the level of the treaties and all the international agreements that states enter and therefore are committed to.

**SRD: Were the political liberalisms that you mentioned earlier historically always national?**

**BSS:** Yes, and in fact that's the problem! The modern world system is based on two very clearly defined pillars: the world economy, on the one side, and the interstate system, on the other. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have, of course, the global economy and we have still the inter-state system, but we have new global political entities that are emerging, new political forms which up until now have not converged into a new political form, a super-state political form. We have already some political bits and pieces of this new political form. On the side of capitalism, the WTO, the new rules for the multilateral financial institutions, and even these new forms of aggregation



among the developed countries, like the G8 and so on. All these are really the embryonic forms of a new form of world government, if you want, for capitalism. On the other side, there are very embryonic and very fragmented forms of global political action against capitalism centered around the global justice movement.

The problem is that it is very difficult to reinvent, at the global level, the tensions between democracy and capitalism that developed under political liberalism at the national level. Popular struggles and movements for inclusion in the social contract, such as labour union struggles and movements, have until now been based on the national unit, and all our public policies, as well as the social sciences that analyze them, have been based on the same social unit, the national unit. We lack the political, institutional and cultural resources to fight global forces at the global level. Indeed, neo-liberal globalization is precisely designed to prevent the emergence of this global progressive politics of resistance. That's why labour is today a global resource but there is no global labour market. If workers could have the same freedom of movement as capital, global capitalism would be unsustainable. So you're right, we lack global counter-hegemonic political entities, and I think that all these movements, the World Social Forum and so on, mean precisely the aspiration to develop such forms.

**SRD: You refer to neo-liberalism as a combination of political democracy and social fascism, and that it is what you describe as an 'anti-utopian utopia'. Can you say more about these ideas?**

**BSS:** As I said before, the historical tension between democracy and capitalism derives from the fact that it was through democratic struggles—at least in the core countries—that some kind of social redistribution was achieved (social and economic rights). All this started to change in the 1980s when democracy became the other side of global capitalism and the same agencies that had been promoting capitalism started promoting democracy, such as the World Bank and the IMF. This was made possible by the meanwhile successfully launched attack against the redistributive capacities of democracy: the attack

on the welfare state; or, whenever there was no welfare state, on social policies other than the merely compensatory ones. Once its redistributive functions were neutralized, democracy became the ideal form of government for global capitalism: it is the most legitimate form of the weak state, and that is basically what neo-liberal capitalism wants at this stage.

How was this possible? What happened to the democratic struggles for inclusion in the social contract, for social and economic rights? They have been suppressed, illegalized, criminalized, while the organizations that conducted them have been under attack and often dismantled. A new virulent counter-reformism emerged, determined to erode or to eliminate social and economic rights, expanding the market economy in such a way as to transform the whole society into a market society. Herein lies also the deepest source of the crisis of left politics. Since whatever is being proposed as a reform (of education, health, social security, etc.) is definitely for the worse, the left is often forced to defend the status quo. And the left has never been very good at defending the status quo.

Two main political processes can be identified in this regard. First, many social actors at the global and national level are becoming very, very powerful and many of the violations of human rights are coming not from the state but from these non-state actors. For instance, when the state privatizes water. As we see now everywhere, the companies that own the water have a right over people's lives since their lives depend, among other things, on free or affordable drinking water. Public goods at the disposal of citizens are thereby being delivered as private goods only accessible to solvent consumers. The distinction between public and private — the cornerstone of modern political theory — is being disfigured beyond recognition. A new indirect rule is emerging bearing some similarities with the one exercised by the colonial state, whereby these powerful non-state actors perform political functions under no effective political control. Thus, the veto power they command over the exercise of the rights of citizens is fascistic in nature.

The same veto power is emerging whenever social inequalities reach extreme levels. This is happening all over the world. Extreme forms of social inequality

give rise to forms of sociability in which the weaker side is at the mercy of the stronger one. Under these conditions and in the absence of effective countervailing instruments, the formal existence of citizenship rights becomes virtually meaningless. That is, social relations become fascistic. In my view, we may be entering a period in which societies are politically democratic and socially fascistic. This new fascism is a social regime, not, as in the past, a political regime. It is not generated in or by the state, though it cannot reproduce itself without the complacency of the state. Rather than confronting democracy, social fascism coexists with it and indeed flourishes in it. I distinguish five types of social fascism. Since I don't have time to go into details here I give just a few examples.

One of the types of social fascism is the fascism of *social apartheid*, the fact that throughout the world the cities are increasingly divided into 'civilised zones' and 'savage zones'. The same democratic state, the same police behave very differently in civilised zones or in savage zones. The civilized zones feel constantly threatened by the savage zones and defend themselves in closed condominiums guarded by private police forces. The public space is thereby privatized. Another type of social fascism is *contractual fascism*. It occurs when individual contracts are celebrated between parts in extremely unequal power positions. If we take a worker and an entrepreneur entering an individual contract, one fighting for survival, the other for profit, of course, they are formally equal citizens, equally free to accept or not the contractual conditions. But what kind of freedom is this if, by not accepting the conditions, the worker puts his/her survival at risk? This is what I call veto power, the source of social fascism. As I said above, through popular struggles the modern capitalist state was led to create non-mercantile interactions among the people. If one wants his/her children to be educated and has no money to buy education in the private school, there is a public free school the children can attend. What we are seeing, now, is that the state has become the agent of the *remercantilisation* of interactions among people.

**RD: How do you see the driving forces of capitalism affecting education systems?**

**BSS:** At this stage, the forces that are driving capitalism are the forces that have been able to break away from the national boundaries of politics where resistance, opposition and countervailing powers have been defined and legitimised. It took a long historical period to legitimise labour unions, feminist movements, ecological movements, and so on. But finally they became legitimate social actors and some of their demands were satisfied. Why was it possible for capitalism to override these popular victories in the 1980s? As Schumpeter said in the 1940s, capitalism will be a victim of its success, not of its failure. The fall of the Berlin Wall is the metaphor of the triumph of capitalism, finally set free of any countervailing forces. Until then, there was a powerful countervailing force; state socialism functioned as a reminder of the revolutionary alternative to the social democratic reformism. Once freed from such constraint, capitalism entered a period in which absolute triumph seems to be the other side of self-destruction. The crisis of revolution and Marxism brought with it the crisis of liberalism and reformism. The state ceased to be the controlling agency over the articulations among the three pillars of modern regulation (state, market and community) to become a servant of the market and redesign the community to become the same. It is ironic that the crisis of Marxism occurs together with the vindication of its theory of the state.

In the meantime, the multinational corporations, which have been there since the birth of modern capitalism, gained unprecedented protagonism. They are the core driving force behind neo-liberal capitalism. Their political leverage resides in the way in which they articulate global endeavours with national roots. They are indeed national corporations and mobilize their countries' diplomacy to further their interests. The political processes that seek to liberate the state from pressures from below are the same that offer the multinationals the opportunity to privatize the state and put it at their service.

The impact of these transformations on education is enormous. To limit myself to a field in which I have also done research, let me point out that university education is undergoing neo-liberal globalization led by corporate universities

and by the traditional universities--both public and private--now transformed into global universities, exporting educational services worldwide. The latter are already a major industry in countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The new round of trade liberalization being now negotiated at the WTO, the General Agreement on Trades in Services includes education among the twelve services covered. It embraces all the sectors: primary, secondary, higher, adult and "other". The last residual category may include language testing, student recruitment and quality assessment of programs.

This neo-liberal agenda is also being implemented in the European Union. The Declaration of Bologna and related documents are basically aimed at preparing the European universities for the coming international competition, conceived of as a trade competition. In modern times, the universities have been key constitutive components of national projects of development. It is therefore easy to imagine the devastating effect of World Bank policies, imposing throughout the global South that the peripheral countries cease to invest in university education given its "low return". They are said to be better off buying university education services in the global market. Of course, the World Bank retains the privilege of determining the criteria that define "return".

I should also mention the fact that universities have a long tradition of international networking based on common scientific and intellectual interests. This kind of globalization goes on today, and, as it refuses itself to be based on profit considerations and on rules of international trade, is becoming a counter-hegemonic globalization.

**SLR: How do you view the state in this more 'global era? Are states once nationally-located functions are now being dispersed over a number of different scales?**

**BSS:** Definitely. Micro-states are emerging within the state, a kind of parallel state within the state. Some times these dualities assume legal form giving rise to what I call internal legal pluralism. This disjunction has much to do with the fact that the impact of hegemonic globalization is both very intense and very

selective. There are areas profoundly affected (take, for instance, social policies, labor relations, natural resources) and others left relatively untouched (for example, family policies, criminal law, religion). The peripheral states in particular are often forced to adopt sectoral legislation that contradicts not only their Constitution but also their whole legal and political culture. The versions of these phenomena are very different in the core and in the periphery of the world system. To mention an extreme case, in Mozambique in the different regions of the country we may find different health policies according to the different foreign agencies that fund them. In Europe we have a different phenomenon, the fact that the state is being localised. The state is becoming a local unit within the new political entity being forged by the European Constitution. The state is being localized. Some of its functions are not located at the national level anymore.

And then we have a third phenomenon, which is that the more powerful state, the USA, is also a global state. How important are the elections in the USA for the counter-hegemonic globalisation movements? Is this a national question or is it a global question? In my opinion, what happens in the USA is of global importance. That is why the left in the USA needs to abandon its parochialism and take a global view of the world. More than in any other country, US left politics must be of a trans-scale nature. Because they are internally differentiated and often contradictory, the state allows opportunities for struggle. Under the current conditions I consider the state to be the newest social movement. In my view, it would be a very tragic mistake for the left to accept that the state is an obsolete political entity and not worth fighting for. I think that we don't yet have any super-state political entity in which we can anchor our struggles. Globalisation is, after all, a state production. The WTO is an association of states; it is not an association of multinational corporations. It is the state that creates the non-state. The neo-conservatives know too well that they end up expanding the state in the process of trying to do away with it. Their objective is to replace the welfare state for people with a welfare state for multinational corporations.

**SLR: What type of organization is the WTO?**

**BSS:** Both the UN and the WTO are state organizations and both base their decisions on one country one vote. But while in the UN voting is frequent but seems increasingly irrelevant, in the WTO, where voting could be very relevant, there is no voting, because everything is decided “by consensus” in the so-called Green Room, in which the most powerful countries decide everything.

But since nothing functions in society without contradictions, we saw in the Fall of 2003, at the Cancun meeting of the WTO, how three major semi-peripheral countries (Brazil, India and South Africa) combined to cause the collapse of multilateral negotiations. They based their action on the simple and obvious idea that free trade, in order to be what it claims to be, must work both ways, from the core to the periphery and from the periphery to the core. The hypocrisy of neo-liberalism was thereby exposed. This brilliant move, led by Brazilian diplomacy, shows the counter-hegemonic potential of both non-state and state practices in countries of intermediate development with large populations. The same three countries have also been pivotal in forcing the pharmaceutical companies to renounce their patent rights in the case of HIV/AIDS retro-virals.

**SRD: What is the role of the semi-peripheral countries in the transitions taking place in the world system?**

**BSS:** We have now two forms of hierarchy and, therefore, of unequal exchanges in the world. One is the core/peripheral/semi-peripheral divide, which is typical of the modern world system. Semi-peripheral countries tend to experience highly concentrated versions of the contradictions that capitalism generates. They are for that reason particularly unstable, but they are also especially open to social experimentation. I mentioned above their vitality being displayed in Cancun.

The second hierarchy system is the global/local divide. The global/local cannot be superimposed on the core/periphery/semi-periphery, and not just because it is dyadic. The core/periphery/semi-periphery still has an economic ring to it; an

economic accent. And when we define Brazil, South Africa and India as semi-peripheral, we are basically looking at their position and role in the global economy. For instance, Arrighi even defined the semi-periphery by the GDP levels, that is to say, the existence of an intermediate level GDP as lasting feature of global modern capitalism. The global/local divide is, in my view, much broader; it expands into most areas of social life and cuts across the core, the periphery and the semi-periphery. It has to do with ideologies, with ethnicities, with discriminations, with cultures, with identities.

Hegemonic globalisation is what I call a globalised localism. In cultural terms, it means an originally local artifact that manages to globalize itself, very much in the same way as it happened with McDonald's hamburgers, originated in the USA midwest. As these globalised localisms develop, they localise whatever is rival to them (like the healthy slow food of so many different nationalities). The latter become typical, vernacular, the specific mode of being either marginalized or put at the service of hegemonic globalization. The beaches in Haiti, in Thailand or North-East Brazil are very typical, very vernacular, with lots of Indians and "ancient" dances in order to fit the global industry of tourism. The key question in the global/local divide is: who localises whom or what? When you ask this question, you are asking about power relations and unequal exchanges.

**SLR: What about Castells idea of the Network Society, where hierarchy and the power disappear? Are we on the verge of a world emerge where there is the likelihood of more equal social exchanges?**

**BSS:** That's why I don't agree with Manuel Castells. The sub-text of his theory is a triumphalistic conception of neo-liberal globalization, and an emphasis on interdependence and horizontality. It systematically bypasses the question of unequal power relations. This is very clearly the case of education discussed above. In the global market of education we are going to see a lot of networking, but in what meaningful sense are the children in Maputo equal to the children in Boston by following the same curriculum, produced by Harvard University, and whose patent costs a lot of money to Mozambican parents?



The evidence of these structural inequalities is leading people to resist. I myself proposed to the World Social Forum the creation of a Popular University of the Social Movements, a global university from below, indeed a counter-university aimed at bringing together activists of social movements and social scientists/artists engaged in participatory research-action. You can consult the proposal at [www.ces.uc.pt](http://www.ces.uc.pt).

Other forms of resistance in the field of education will involve a complex articulation between participatory democracy and techno-democratic qualification. We need qualified citizens for the tasks ahead but not in such a way that they become professionalised participatory citizens; a danger that I identified in my study on the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre. That's why I try to bring Paulo Freire into the ideas of participatory democracy. Without a very wide range of qualifications for common citizens it will be impossible to promote forms of participatory democracy capable of being the organising element behind the counter-hegemonic forms of globalisation.

**SLR: Do you see this wider range of interests and qualifications as central to a politics of inclusion?**

**BSS:** Yes. Actually, I believe that, for instance, the World Social Forum is, among other things a new epistemology; an epistemology of the South. I wrote an article on this topic that you can download (see [www.ces.uc.pt](http://www.ces.uc.pt)). Hegemonic globalisation was constructed by conventional social science (mainly, neoclassic economics) as a naturalised non-political, scientific picture of society and social transformation. At a much more general level, modern western science, by disqualifying alternative knowledges has, for a long time, been part of imperial designs. The dark side of the triumphs of science is littered with epistemicides.

The World Social Forum symbolizes the struggle against this monoculture of knowledge in the name of an ecology of knowledges within which both scientific and lay knowledge can coexist. The basic premise of the ecology of knowledges is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. In Europe, when we talk about citizen science, we are talking about the

new ways in which citizens claim their qualifications to enter supposedly technical but indeed also political debates, whose outcomes may affect their lives. I think we have to construct really enabling qualifications, and for that we have to create an educational ecology that is not school centered, a much broader pattern of education that brings these qualifications into new forms of interaction at global, national and local level and into the sites of participatory democracy. The so-called 'knowledge society' is geared to the needs of the market. We need alternative knowledges for alternative societies and sociabilities.

**SLR: In your work you are concerned with ways of naming what is hidden from view. Can you tell us more about this?**

**BSS:** In what I call the sociology of absences I have been developing is precisely directed at showing that in most relevant cases, what is seen as not existing has been actively produced as non-existent; that is to say, it has been made absent by being suppressed, discredited, disqualified, marginalized, in sum, by being outside epistemological and social monocultures, such as the monoculture of knowledge, social classification, conceptions of time, dominant scales and productivity. They comprise a gigantic mode of production of silences, unpronounceabilities and absences, mostly in the South. One of the most destructive developments in the North-South relations since the fifteenth century is that the South has lost the capacity to name itself. For instance, I am now doing a project in Mozambique involving different ethnic groups that we call *Makhuwas* and *Shangaans*. These names were given to them by colonial anthropologists in the early twentieth century. I mean, not long ago. And now they see themselves as Makhuwas and as Shangaans, which means that they have lost the power of naming themselves. The epistemology of the South faces thus a double task of deconstructing colonial naming and reconstructing it in an emancipatory way. This is a crucial linguistic and cultural process aimed at giving credibility to the alternative language by which you name yourself.

Neo-liberalism has been creating devastating new forms of absence; absences that are more radical than ever. In the recent past, in the 1950s, new African states followed one of two alternative paths of development, some followed a capitalist type of development, and others a socialist one. In spite of the fact that both models were anchored in Euro-centric modes of thought and practice, Africans were able to adapt them creatively to African conditions. It is true that they also produced massive absences and silences, as later on became clear. However, it was possible to trace autonomous local appropriation, as shown in such concepts as "African nationalism" and "African socialism". Today it would make no sense to speak of African neo-liberalism. Neo-liberal globalisation does not allow for local nuance and appropriation. That is why the struggle for language is so crucial, because concepts like neo-liberalism become so prevalent; they never work without being appropriated by local elites, of course—the elites that gain with these processes, naturalise them internally and then prevent alternative namings of reality from emerging. Herein lies another enabling feature of the World Social Forum: to promote and give credibility to alternative namings.

The other concept which I am working on, and which belongs together with the concept of social fascism, is the concept of coloniality of power, originally formulated by the Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano. By this I mean the fact that the modern world system is not just capitalist; it is also colonialist in nature. The implication of this is that the end of colonialism has not meant the end of colonial relations; the latter go on reproducing themselves as racist disqualifications of the other. The concept of class does not suffice to explain the range and intensity of unequal exchanges in post-colonial societies for the simple reason that class was from the very beginning a racialised category. Class exploitation must, therefore, be integrated in a much broader network of unequal social relations and the grievances and sufferings they give rise. Based on class, it would be impossible to mobilise the Indian Adivasi peasants, or, for that matter, Indian peasants in general, against the dams in the Narmada river. And this is the case of most struggles converging in the World Social Forum.

**SLR: How important is your activism to your intellectual project?**

**BSS:** It's very important. I think that particularly in the North, the social sciences have ceased to be a source of creative new thinking about society. Moreover, conventional social theories and methodologies are more and more inadequate to grasp the inexhaustible variety of world-making. The most innovative ideas and practices are coming from the South. For instance, if you take the most interesting new democratic practices in Europe, you will see that they are inspired by the experiments in participatory budgeting in Brazil (Porto Alegre and many other cities). We must de-provincialise our euro-centric and north-centric social theories. Since theories don't arise out of nothing we must start by trying to understand the struggles that are going on around the world; and in order to do so we have to get involved through different forms of critical engagement. In this respect our situation and posture differs considerably from those that grounded critical theory throughout the twentieth century. For instance, if we compare our time with the 1960s, when many public intellectuals also got involved in social and political struggles, we will notice two major differences. On the one hand, they were then involved in struggles taking place in a small corner of the world. Now there is an effort. I'm not saying that we are succeeding – especially considering a demanding exercise of the sociology of absences. On the other hand, the public intellectual then saw himself or herself as the possessor of a privileged knowledge – scientific knowledge or scientific Marxism, a kind of knowledge that granted him or her the status of *avant garde*. Now there is no *avant garde*. There is no form of knowledge to which we can attribute, in general, an epistemological privilege. Moreover, as Subcomandante Marcos says, we have to walk with those that go the slowest, not the fastest. On the contrary, for instance, Bourdieu always saw himself as part of an *avant garde* endowed with a privileged understanding of social reality made possible by scientific knowledge. I think that Bourdieu's position, however honorable, is untenable today. Activists don't tolerate enlightened recipes anymore, particularly having in mind the destructive outcomes they led to in the past. The public intellectual is a facilitator. He or

she is someone that facilitates the contact among different experiences, different ideologies, different knowledges, different aspirations for social justice and democracy. He or she does that by bringing into the social movements cross-national comparisons and intercultural translation. There is here no search for any abstract universalism but rather for intellectual clarity and for contextualised bottom-up cosmopolitanism; an understanding of similar aspirations for human dignity and emancipation formulated in different languages and bearing different names. The quality of the engaged intellectual's contribution lies in her or his capacity to articulate the ecology of knowledges. In the new knowledge constellations, critical social theories will be reinvented in such a way as to remain incomplete and open-ended. Otherwise, they will cease to be ways of seeing and become prey to what I call the epistemology of blindness.

### **Thank you Boaventura de Sousa Santos!**

Relevant publications, in English, for the themes dealt with in this interview are:

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (forthcoming), "A Critical Lazy Reason: Against the Waste of Experience", I. Wallerstein (ed.), *The Modern World System in the "long dureé"*. New York: Paradigm Publisher.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (2003), "The Popular University of Social Movements", <http://www.ces.fe.uc.pt/universidadepopular/indexen.php>.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (2003), "The World Social Forum: Toward a Counter-Hegemonic Globalization", presented at the XXIV International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, 27-29 March, 2003, <http://www.ces.fe.uc.pt/bss/fsm.php>.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa (2002), *Toward a New Legal Common Sense: law, globalization, and emancipation*. Londres: Butterworths.

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