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**THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM:
A User's Manual**

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Preface

The aim of this book is to make the World Social Forum (WSF) better known and highlight its newness in the context of the struggles for social emancipation of the last two hundred years. The WSF is one of the pillars of the global movement, which, about ten years ago, started to question neoliberal globalization, then emerging as the expression of the historical triumph of capitalism, hence having foresight of the future of all the societies in the world. By putting in question the historical destiny that neoliberal globalization claimed to symbolize, the movement of protest and formulation of alternatives then generated presented itself from the start as an alternative, counter-hegemonic kind of globalization, based on the articulation among local, national and global struggles, conducted by social movements and nongovernmental organizations united by the belief that another world is possible. This idea contains in a nutshell the aspiration of a set of highly diversified subaltern social groups worldwide after a socially, politically and culturally more just society, liberated from forms of exclusion, exploration, oppression, discrimination and environmental destruction, which by and large characterize capitalism and which neoliberal globalization has contributed to aggravate. After 2001, the WSF became the organization that best speaks for the emergent counter-hegemonic globalization.

Neoliberal globalization is not a completely new phenomenon, since capitalism was global from the start. But it does pose new problems as regards strategies of resistance and the formulation of alternatives, not only because the ones that in the past guided the anti-capitalist struggles failed, but also because, for the first time in modern western history, capitalism presents itself as a global civilizational model, which submits practically all aspects of social life to the law of value. To confront this model in all its dimensions is a new challenge, not only in organizational and agency terms, but also in terms of scale and types of collective action and political strategy, and even in terms of the forms and processes of knowledge that must guide emancipator practices. The WSF is the expression of the demands, dimensions, and novelty of this challenge.

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Introduction: The Newness of the World Social Forum

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a new social and political phenomenon. The fact that it does have antecedents does not diminish its newness, quite the opposite. The WSF is not an event. Nor is it a mere succession of events, although it does try to dramatize the formal meetings it promotes. It is not a scholarly conference, although the contributions of many scholars converge in it. It is not a party or an international of parties, although militants and activists of many parties all over the world take part in it. It is not a nongovernmental organization or a confederation of nongovernmental organizations, even though its conception and organization owes a great deal to nongovernmental organizations. It is not a social movement, even though it often designates itself as the movement of movements. Although it presents itself as an agent of social change, the WSF rejects the concept of an historical subject and confers no priority on any specific social actor in this process of social change. It holds no clearly defined ideology, either in defining what it rejects or what it asserts. Given that the WSF conceives of itself as a struggle against neoliberal globalization, is it a struggle against a form of capitalism or against capitalism in general? Given that it sees itself as a struggle against discrimination, exclusion and oppression, does the success of its struggle presuppose a postcapitalist, socialist, anarchist horizon, or, on the contrary, does it presuppose that no horizon be clearly defined at all? Given that the vast majority of people taking part in the WSF identify themselves as favoring a politics of the left, how many definitions of “the left” fit the WSF? And what about those who refuse to be defined because they believe that the left-right dichotomy is a northcentric or westcentric particularism, and look for alternative political definitions? The social struggles that find expression in the WSF do not adequately fit either of the ways of social change sanctioned by western modernity: reform and revolution. Aside from the consensus on nonviolence, its modes of struggle are extremely diverse and appear spread out in a continuum between the poles of institutionality and insurgency. Even the concept of nonviolence is open to widely disparate interpretations. Finally, the WSF is not structured according to any of the models of modern political organization, be they democratic

centralism, representative democracy, or participatory democracy. Nobody represents it or is allowed to speak in its name, let alone make decisions, even though it sees itself as a forum that facilitates the decisions of the movements and organizations that take part in it.¹

These features are arguably not new, as they are associated with what is conventionally called “new social movements”. The truth is, however, that these movements, be they local, national, or global, are thematic. Themes, while fields of concrete political confrontation, compel definition – hence polarization – whether regarding strategies or tactics, whether regarding organizational forms or forms of struggle. Themes work, therefore, both as attraction and repulsion. Now, what is new about the WSF is the fact that it is inclusive, both as concerns its scale and its thematics. What is new is the whole it constitutes, not its constitutive parts. The WSF is global in its harboring local, national and global movements, and in its being inter-thematic and even trans-thematic. That is to say, since the conventional factors of attraction and repulsion do not work as far as the WSF is concerned, either it develops other strong factors of attraction and repulsion or does without them, and may even derive its strength from their nonexistence. In other words, the “movement of movements” is not one more movement. It is a different movement.

The problem with new social movements is that in order to do them justice a new social theory and new analytical concepts are called for. Since neither the one nor the others emerge easily from the inertia of the disciplines, the risk that they may be undertheorized and undervalued is considerable. This risk is all the more serious as the WSF, given its scope and internal diversity, not only challenges dominant political theories and the various disciplines of the conventional social sciences, but challenges as well scientific knowledge as sole producer of social and political rationality. To put it another way, the WSF raises not only analytical and theoretical questions, but also epistemological questions. This much is expressed in the idea, widely shared by WSF participants, that there will be no global social justice without

¹ For a better understanding of the political character and goals of the World Social Forum, see the Charter of Principles, available at <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>.

global cognitive justice. But the challenge posed by the WSF has one more dimension still. Beyond the theoretical, analytical and epistemological questions, it raises a new political issue: it aims to fulfill utopia in a world devoid of utopias. This utopian will is expressed in the following way: “another world is possible.” At stake is less a utopian world than a world that allows for utopia. In this paper, I deal with the WSF as critical utopia, epistemology of the South, and cosmopolitan emergent politics.

Chapter 1

The World Social Forum as Critical Utopia

Ernst Bloch says that “utopias have their timetable” (1995: 479). The conceptions of and aspirations to a better life and society, ever present in human history, vary as to form and content according to time and space. They express the tendencies and latencies of a given epoch and a given society. They constitute an anticipatory consciousness that manifests itself by enlarging the signs or traces of emerging realities. It is therefore appropriate to ask: does the WSF have a utopian dimension? And, if so, what is its timetable?

The WSF is the set of initiatives of transnational exchange among social movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their practices and knowledges of local, national or global social struggles carried out in compliance with the Porto Alegre Charter of Principles against the forms of exclusion and inclusion, discrimination and equality, universalism and particularism, cultural imposition and relativism, brought about or made possible by the current phase of capitalism known as neoliberal globalization.

The utopian dimension of the WSF consists in claiming the existence of alternatives to neoliberal globalization. As Franz Hinkelammert says, we live in a time of conservative utopias whose utopian character resides in its radical denial of alternatives to present-day reality. The possibility of alternatives is discredited precisely for being utopian, idealistic, unrealistic. All conservative utopias are sustained by a political logic based on one sole efficiency criterion that rapidly becomes a supreme ethical criterion. According to this criterion, only what is efficient has value. Any other ethical criterion is devalued as inefficient. Neoliberalism is one such conservative utopia for which the sole criterion of efficiency is the market or the laws of the market. Its utopian character resides in the promise that its total fulfillment or application cancels out all utopias. As Hinkelammert says, “this ideology derives from its frantic anti-utopianism, the utopian promise of a new world. The basic thesis is: whoever destroys utopia, fulfills it” (2002: 278). What distinguishes conservative utopias from critical utopias is the fact that they identify

themselves with the present-day reality and discover their utopian dimension in the radicalization or complete fulfillment of the present. Moreover the problems or difficulties of present-day reality are not the consequence of the deficiencies or limits of the efficiency criteria, but result rather from the fact that the application of the efficiency criteria has not been thorough enough. If there is unemployment and social exclusion, if there is starvation and death in the periphery of the world system, that is not the consequence of the deficiencies or limits of the laws of the market; it results rather from the fact that such laws have not yet been fully applied. The horizon of conservative utopias is thus a closed horizon, an end to history.

This is the context in which the utopian dimension of the WSF must be understood. The WSF signifies the reemergence of a critical utopia, that is to say, the radical critique of present-day reality and the aspiration to a better society. This occurs, however, when the anti-utopian utopia of neoliberalism is dominant. The specificity of the utopian content of this new critical utopia, when compared with that of the critical utopias prevailing at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, thus becomes clear. The anti-utopian utopia of neoliberalism is grounded on two presuppositions: the illusion of total control over present-day reality by means of extremely efficient powers and knowledges; and the radical rejection of alternatives to the *status quo*. The WSF puts in question the totality of control (whether as knowledge or power) only to affirm credibly the possibility of alternatives. Hence the open nature, vague if you will, of alternatives. In a context in which the conservative utopia prevails absolutely, it is more important to affirm the possibility of alternatives than to define them. The utopian dimension of the WSF consists in affirming the possibility of a counter-hegemonic globalization. In other words, the utopia of the WSF asserts itself more as negativity (the definition of what it critiques) than as positivity (the definition of that to which it aspires).

The specificity of the WSF as critical utopia has one more explanation. The WSF is the first critical utopia of the twenty-first century and aims to break with the tradition of the critical utopias of western modernity, many of which turned into conservative utopias: from claiming utopian alternatives to denying alternatives under the excuse that the fulfillment of utopia was under way. The

openness of the utopian dimension of the WSF corresponds to the latter's attempt to escape this perversion. For the WSF, the claim of alternatives is plural, both as to the form of the claim and the content of the alternatives. The affirmation of alternatives goes hand in hand with the affirmation that there are alternatives to the alternatives. The other possible world is a utopian aspiration that comprises several possible worlds. The other possible world may be many things, but never a world with no alternative.

The utopia of the WSF is a radically democratic utopia. It is the only realistic utopia after a century of conservative utopias, some of them the result of perverted critical utopias. This utopian design, grounded on the denial of the present rather than the definition of the future, focused on the processes of intercourse among the movements rather than an assessment of the movements' political content, is the major factor of cohesion of the WSF. It helps to maximize what unites and minimize what divides, celebrate intercourse rather than dispute power, be a strong presence rather than an agenda. This utopian design, which is also an ethical design, privileges the ethical discourse, quite evident in the WSF's Charter of Principles, aimed at gathering consensuses beyond the ideological and political cleavages among the movements and organizations that compose it. The movements and organizations put between brackets the cleavages that divide them, as much as is necessary to affirm the possibility of a counter-hegemonic globalization.

The nature of this utopia has been the most adequate for the initial objective of the WSF: to affirm the existence of a counter-hegemonic globalization. This is no vague utopia. It is rather a utopia that contains in itself the concretization that is adequate for this phase of the construction of counter-hegemonic globalization. It remains to be seen if the nature of this utopia is the most adequate one to guide the next steps, should there be any next steps. Once the counter-hegemonic globalization is consolidated, and hence the idea that another world is possible is made credible, will it be possible to fulfill this idea with the same level of radical democracy that helped formulate it? I shall come back to this.

Chapter 2

The World Social Forum as Epistemology of the South

Neoliberal globalization is presided over by technico-scientific knowledge, and owes its hegemony to the credible way in which it discredits all rival knowledges, by suggesting that they are not comparable, as to efficiency and coherence, to the scientificity of the market laws. Since neoliberal globalization is hegemonic, no wonder that it anchors itself in the knowledge, no less hegemonic, of western-based modern science. This is why the practices and knowledges circulating in the WSF have their origin in very distinct epistemological assumptions (what counts as knowledge) and ontological assumptions (what it means to be human). Such diversity exists not only among the different movements but also inside each one of them. The differences within the feminist movement, for instance, are not merely political. They are differences regarding what counts as relevant knowledge, differences about identifying, validating or hierarchizing the relations between western-based scientific knowledge and other knowledges derived from other practices, rationalities or cultural universes. They are differences, ultimately, about what it means to be a human being, whether male or female. The practice of the WSF reveals that the epistemological diversity of the world is virtually infinite.

The counter-hegemonic globalization to which the WSF aspires thus immediately confronts itself with the epistemological problem of the validity of that same scientific knowledge to advance the counter-hegemonic struggles. To be sure, many counter-hegemonic practices resort to the hegemonic scientific and technological knowledge, and many of them would not even be thinkable without it. This is true of the WSF itself, which would not exist without the new information and communication technologies. The question is to what extent such knowledge is useful and valid, and what other knowledges are available and usable beyond the limits of utility and validity of scientific knowledge. To approach these problems raises an additional epistemological problem, indeed a meta-epistemological problem: on the basis of which knowledge or epistemology are these problems to be formulated?

The core idea that presides over the epistemological questioning provoked by the WSF is that the knowledge we have of globalization, whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, is less global than globalization itself. Scientific knowledge, however supposedly universal, is almost entirely produced in the countries of the developed North and, however presumably neutral, promotes the interests of these countries and constitutes one of the productive forces of neoliberal globalization. Science is doubly at the service of hegemonic globalization, whether by the way in which it promotes and legitimates it, or by the way in which it discredits, conceals or trivializes counter-hegemonic globalization. Hegemony presupposes a constant policing and repressing of counter-hegemonic practices and agents. Discrediting, concealing and trivializing counter-hegemonic globalization go largely hand in hand with discrediting, concealing and trivializing the knowledges that inform counter-hegemonic practices and agents. Faced with rival knowledges, hegemonic scientific knowledge either turns them into raw material (as is the case of indigenous or peasant knowledge about biodiversity) or rejects them on the basis of their falsity or inefficiency in the light of the hegemonic criteria of truth and efficiency.²

Confronted with this situation, the epistemological alternative proposed by the WSF is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. This alternative is grounded on two basic ideas. First, if the objectivity of science does not imply neutrality, science and technology may as well be put at the service of counter-hegemonic practices. The extent to which science is used is in general arguable inside the movements, and it may vary according to circumstances and practices. Second, whatever the extent to which science is resorted to, counter-hegemonic practices are mainly practices of nonscientific knowledges, practical, often tacit knowledges that must be made credible to render such practices credible in turn.

This second point is more polemical because it confronts the hegemonic concepts of truth and efficiency directly. The epistemological denunciation that the WSF engages in consists in showing that the concepts of rationality and efficiency presiding over hegemonic technical-scientific knowledge are too

² On this subject, see also Santos, 1995, 2000, 2003a.

restrictive to capture the richness and diversity of the social experience of the world, and specially that they discriminate against practices of resistance and production of counter-hegemonic alternatives. Hegemonic rationality and efficiency thus bring about a contraction of the world by concealing or discrediting all the practices, agents, and knowledges that are not accounted for by their criteria. The concealment and discrediting of these practices constitute a waste of social experience, both social experience that is already available but not yet visible, and social experience not yet available but realistically possible.

The epistemological operation carried out by the WSF consists of two processes that I designate as sociology of absences and sociology of emergences (Santos, 2002a). I mean sociologies built against hegemonic social sciences and upon alternative epistemological presuppositions. I speak of sociologies because my aim is critically to identify the conditions that destroy nonhegemonic and potentially counter-hegemonic social experience. Through the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, social experience that resists destruction is unconcealed, and the space-time capable of identifying and rendering credible new counter-hegemonic social experiences is opened up.

The following description of the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences represents the ideal-type of the epistemological operation featured by the WSF. In real life, the practices and knowledges of the different movements and organizations, as well as of the global interactions amongst them, come more or less close to this ideal-type.

2.1 The World Social Forum and the Sociology of Absences

The *sociology of absences* consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as nonexistent, that is, as a noncredible alternative to what exists. Its empirical object is deemed impossible in the light of conventional social science, and for this reason its formulation already represents a break with it. The objective of the sociology

of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects.

There is no single, univocal way of not existing. The logics and processes through which hegemonic criteria of rationality and efficiency produce the nonexistence of what does not fit them are various. Nonexistence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable. What unites the different logics of production of nonexistence is that they are all manifestations of the same rational monoculture. I distinguish five logics or modes of production of nonexistence.

The first derives from the monoculture of *knowledge* and *rigor of knowledge*. It is the most powerful mode of production of nonexistence. It consists in turning modern science and high culture into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, respectively. The complicity that unites the “two cultures” (the scientific and the humanistic culture) resides in the fact that both claim to be, each in its own field, exclusive canons of production of knowledge or artistic creation. All that is not recognized or legitimated by this canon is declared nonexistent. Nonexistence appears in this case in the form of ignorance or lack of culture.

The second logic resides in the *monoculture of linear time*, the idea that history has a unique and well-known meaning and direction. This meaning and direction have been formulated in different ways in the last two hundred years: progress, modernization, development, and globalization. Common to all these formulations is the idea that time is linear and that ahead of time proceed the core countries of the world system and, along with them, the dominant knowledges, institutions and forms of sociability. This logic produces nonexistence by describing as backward (premodern, underdeveloped, etc.) whatever is asymmetrical vis-à-vis whatever is declared forward. It is according to this logic that western modernity produces the noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous, and that the idea of simultaneity conceals the asymmetries of the historical times that converge into it. The encounter between the African peasant and the officer of the World Bank in his field trip illustrates this condition. In this case, nonexistence

assumes the form of residuum, which in turn has assumed many designations for the past two hundred years, the first being the primitive or savage, closely followed by the traditional, the premodern, the simple, the obsolete, the underdeveloped.

The third logic is the logic of social classification, based on the monoculture of *naturalization of differences*. It consists in distributing populations according to categories that naturalize hierarchies. Racial and sexual classifications are the most salient manifestations of this logic. Contrary to what happens in the relation between capital and labor, social classification is based on attributes that negate the intentionality of social hierarchy. The relation of domination is the consequence, rather than the cause, of this hierarchy, and it may even be considered as an obligation of whoever is classified as superior (for example, the white man's burden in his civilizing mission). Although the two forms of classification (race and sex) are decisive for the relation between capital and labor to stabilize and spread globally, racial classification has been the one most deeply reconstructed by capitalism.³ According to this logic, nonexistence is produced as a form of inferiority, insuperable inferiority because natural. The inferior ones, because insuperably inferior, cannot be a credible alternative to the superior ones.

The fourth logic of production of nonexistence is the logic of the dominant scale: *the monoculture of the universal and of the global*. According to this logic, the scale adopted as primordial determines the irrelevance of all other possible scales. In western modernity, the dominant scale appears under two different forms: the universal and the global. Universalism is the scale of the entities or realities that prevail regardless of specific contexts. For that reason, they take precedence over all other realities that depend on contexts and are therefore considered particular or vernacular. Globalization is the scale that in the last twenty years acquired unprecedented relevance in various social fields. It is the scale that privileges entities or realities that widen their scope to the whole globe, thus earning the prerogative to designate rival entities as local. According to this logic, nonexistence is produced under the form of the

³ See Wallerstein and Balibar (1991), Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2000). Quijano considers the racialization of power relations as an intrinsic feature of capitalism, a feature that he designates as the "coloniality of power" (2000: 374).

particular and the local. The entities or realities defined as particular or local are captured in scales that render them incapable of being credible alternatives to what exists globally and universally.

Finally, the fifth logic of nonexistence is the logic of productivity. It resides in *the monoculture of the criteria of capitalist productivity and efficiency*, which privileges growth through market forces. This criteria apply both to nature and to human labor. Productive nature is nature at its maximum fertility in a given production cycle, whereas productive labor is labor that maximizes generating profit likewise in a given production cycle. In its extreme version of conservative utopia neoliberalism aims to convert labor into a productive force among others, subject to the laws of the market as any other productive force. It has been doing this by transforming labor into a global resource while at the same time preventing at any cost the emergence of a global labor market (via immigration laws, violation of labor standards, union busting, etc.) According to the logic of capitalist productivity, nonexistence is produced in the form of nonproductiveness. Applied to nature, nonproductiveness is sterility; applied to labor, “discardable populations”, laziness, professional disqualification, lack of skills.

There are thus five principal social forms of nonexistence produced by hegemonic epistemology and rationality: the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local, and the nonproductive. They are social forms of nonexistence because the realities to which they give shape are present only as obstacles vis-à-vis the realities deemed relevant, be they scientific, advanced, superior, global, or productive realities. They are, therefore, disqualified parts of homogeneous totalities, which, as such, merely confirm what exists, and precisely as it exists. They are what exist under irretrievably disqualified forms of existing.

The social production of these absences results in the waste of social experience. The sociology of absences aims to identify the scope of this waste so that the experiences produced as absent may be liberated from those relations of production and thereby made present. To be made present means to be considered alternatives to hegemonic experience, to have their credibility discussed and argued for and their relations taken as object of

political dispute. The sociology of absences aims thus to create a want and turn the supposed lack of social experience into waste of social experience. It therefore creates the conditions to enlarge the field of credible experiences in this world and time. The enlargement of the world occurs not only because the field of credible experiences is widened but also because the possibilities of social experimentation in the future are increased.

The sociology of absences proceeds by confronting each one of the modes of production of absence mentioned above. Because the latter have been shaped by conventional social science, the sociology of absences cannot but be transgressive, and as such bound to be discredited. Nonconformity with such discredit and struggle for credibility, however, make it possible for the sociology of absences not to remain an absent sociology. Indeed, nonconformity and struggle for credibility are embedded in the practices of transgressive freedom – both practices of transformative action and practices of transformative knowledge – adopted by the organizations and social movements involved in the WSF. The sociology of absences works by replacing monocultures by ecologies.⁴ I therefore identify five ecologies.

The ecology of knowledges. The first logic, the logic of the monoculture of scientific knowledge and rigor, must be confronted with the identification of other knowledges and criteria of rigor that operate credibly in social practices. Such contextual credibility must be deemed a sufficient condition for the knowledge in question to have enough legitimacy to participate in epistemological debates with other knowledges, namely with scientific knowledge. The central idea of the sociology of absences in this regard is that there is no ignorance or knowledge in general. All ignorance is ignorant of a certain knowledge, and all knowledge is the overcoming of a particular ignorance (Santos, 1995: 25). This principle of incompleteness of all knowledges is the condition of the possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among the different knowledges. What each knowledge contributes to such a dialogue is the way in which it leads a certain practice to overcome a certain ignorance. Confrontation and dialogue among knowledges is

⁴ By ecology I mean the practice of assembling diversity by way of identifying and promoting sustainable interactions among heterogeneous partial entities.

confrontation and dialogue among the different processes through which practices that are ignorant in different ways turn into practices that are knowledgeable in different ways.

In this domain, the sociology of absences aims to substitute an ecology of knowledges for the monoculture of scientific knowledge. Such an ecology of knowledges permits not only to overcome the monoculture of scientific knowledge but also the idea that the nonscientific knowledges are alternatives to scientific knowledge. The idea of alternatives presupposes the idea of normalcy, and the latter the idea of norm, and so, nothing being further specified, the designation of something as an alternative carries a latent connotation of subalternity. If we take biomedicine and African traditional medicine as an example, it makes no sense to consider the latter, by far the predominant one in Africa, as an alternative to the former. The important thing is to identify the contexts and the practices in which each operates, and the way they conceive of health and sickness and overcome ignorance (as undiagnosed illness) in applied knowledge (as cure).

Ecology of knowledges does not imply acceptance of relativism. On the contrary, from the point of view of a pragmatics of social emancipation, relativism, as absence of criteria of value hierarchies among knowledges, is an untenable position, because it renders impossible any relation between knowledge and the meaning of social transformation. If anything is of equal value as knowledge, all projects of social transformation are equally valid or, which means the same, equally invalid. The ecology of knowledges aims to create a new sort of relationship between scientific knowledge and other kinds of knowledge. It consists in granting “equality of opportunities” to the different kinds of knowledge engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed at maximizing their respective contributions to build “another possible world,” that is to say, a more democratic and just society, as well as a more balanced society vis-à-vis nature. The point is not to ascribe equal validity to all kinds of knowledge, but rather to allow for a pragmatic discussion of alternative criteria of validity, which does not straightaway disqualify whatever does not fit the epistemological canon of modern science.

The ecology of temporalities. The second logic, the logic of the monoculture of linear time, is confronted with the idea that linear time is only one among many conceptions of time and that, if we take the world as our unit of analysis, it is not even the most commonly adopted. The predominance of linear time is not the result of its primacy as a temporal conception, but the result of the primacy of western modernity that embraced it as its own. Linear time was adopted by western modernity through the secularization of Judeo-Christian eschatology, but it never erased, not even in the West, other conceptions of time such as circular time, cyclical time, glacial time, the doctrine of the eternal return, and still others that are not adequately grasped by the images of the arrow of time. This is the case of the temporal palimpsest of the present, the idea that the subjectivity or identity of a person or social group is a constellation of different times and temporalities, some modern some non-modern, some ancient some recent, which are activated differently in different contexts or situations. More than any other, the indigenous peoples movements bear witness to such constellations of time.

The need to take into account these different conceptions of time derives from the fact, pointed out by Koselleck (1985) and Maramao (1985), that societies understand power according to the conceptions of temporality they hold. The most resistant relations of domination are those based on hierarchies among temporalities. Domination takes place by reducing dominated, hostile or undesirable social experience to the condition of residuum. Experiences become residual because they are contemporary in ways that are not recognizable by the dominant temporality. They are disqualified, suppressed or rendered unintelligible because they are ruled by temporalities that are not contained in the temporal canon of western capitalist modernity

In this domain, the sociology of absences starts from the idea that societies are constituted of various temporalities. It aims to free social practices from their status as residuum, devolving to them their own temporality and thus the possibility of autonomous development. Once these temporalities are recuperated and become known, the practices and sociabilities ruled by them become intelligible and credible objects of

argumentation and political debate. For instance, once liberated from linear time and devolved to its own temporality, the activity of the African or Asian peasant stops being residual and becomes contemporaneous of the activity of the *hi-tech* farmer in the USA or the activity of the World Bank executive. By the same token, the presence or relevance of the ancestors in one's life in different cultures ceases to be an anachronistic manifestation of primitive religion or magic to become another way of experiencing contemporaneity.

The ecology of recognitions. The third logic of production of absences is the logic of social classification. Although in all logics of production of absence the disqualification of practices goes hand in hand with the disqualification of agents, it is here that the disqualification affects mainly the agents, and only secondly the social experience of which they are the protagonists. The coloniality of western modern capitalist power mentioned by Quijano (2000) consists in collapsing difference and inequality, while claiming the privilege to ascertain who is equal or different. The same can be said of the unequal sexuality of modern capitalist power. The sociology of absences confronts coloniality and unequal sexuality by looking for a new articulation between the principles of equality and difference, thus allowing for the possibility of equal differences – an ecology of differences comprised of mutual recognition. It does so by submitting hierarchy to critical ethnography (Santos, 2001a). This consists in deconstructing both difference (to what extent is difference a product of hierarchy?) and hierarchy (to what extent is hierarchy a product of difference?). The differences that remain when hierarchy vanishes become a powerful denunciation of the differences that hierarchy reclaims in order not to vanish. The feminist and the indigenous movements have been in the forefront of the struggle for an ecology of recognitions.

The ecology of trans-scales. The sociology of absences confronts the fourth logic, the logic of global scale, by recuperating what in the local is not the result of hegemonic globalization. The local that has been integrated in hegemonic globalization is what I designate as localized globalism, that is, the specific impact of hegemonic globalization on the local (Santos, 1998; 2000). As it deglobalizes the local vis-à-vis hegemonic globalization, the sociology of absences also explores the possibility of counter-hegemonic globalization. In

sum, the deglobalization of the local and its eventual counter-hegemonic reglobalization broadens the diversity of social practices by offering alternatives to localized globalisms. The sociology of absences requires in this domain the use of cartographic imagination, whether to see in each scale of representation not only what it reveals but also what it conceals, or to deal with cognitive maps that operate simultaneously with different scales, namely to identify local/global articulations (Santos, 1995: 456-473; Santos, 2001b). Most movements involved in the WSF started as local struggles fighting against the social exclusion brought about or intensified by neoliberal globalization. Only later, often via the WSF, have they developed local/global linkages through which they reglobalize themselves in a counter-hegemonic way.

The ecology of productivities. Finally, in the domain of the fifth logic, the monoculture of capitalist productivity, the sociology of absences consists in recuperating and valorizing alternative systems of production, popular economic organizations, workers' cooperatives, self-managed enterprises, solidarity economy, etc., which have been hidden or discredited by the capitalist orthodoxy of productivity. This is perhaps the most controversial domain of the sociology of absences, for it confronts directly both the paradigm of development and infinite economic growth and the logic of the primacy of the objectives of accumulation over the objectives of distribution that sustain global capitalism. Peasant movements for access to land, land tenure, agrarian reform or against mega-development projects, urban movements for housing rights, informal economy and popular economy movements, indigenous movements to defend or to regain their historical territories and the natural resources found in them, low caste movements in India to protect their land and local forests, all these movements base their claims and their struggles on the ecology of productivities.

In each of the five domains, the objective of the sociology of absences is to disclose and to give credit to the diversity and multiplicity of social practices and confer credit to them in opposition to the exclusive credibility of hegemonic practices. The idea of multiplicity and nondestructive relations is suggested by the concept of ecology: ecology of knowledges, ecology of

temporalities, ecology of recognitions, ecology of transcales, and ecology of productivities. Common to all these ecologies is the idea that reality cannot be reduced to what exists. It amounts to an ample version of realism that includes the realities rendered absent by silence, suppression, and marginalization. In a word, realities that are actively produced as nonexistent.

In conclusion, the exercise of the sociology of absences is counterfactual and takes place by confronting conventional scientific commonsense. To be carried out it demands, both epistemological imagination and democratic imagination. Epistemological imagination allows for the recognition of different knowledges, perspectives and scales of identification, analysis and evaluation of practices. Democratic imagination allows for the recognition of different practices and social agents. Both the epistemological and the democratic imagination have a deconstructive and a reconstructive dimension. Deconstruction assumes five forms, corresponding to the critique of the five logics of hegemonic rationality, namely un-thinking, de-residualizing, de-racializing, de-localizing, and de-producing. Reconstruction is comprised of the five ecologies mentioned above.

The WSF is a broad exercise of the sociology of absences. As I pointed out, it is internally unequal as to its closeness to the ideal-type. If it is in general unequivocally noticeable a refusal of monocultures and an adoption of ecologies, this process is not present with the same intensity in all movements, organizations, and articulations. If for some movements opting for ecologies is unconditional, for others hybridity between monocultures and ecologies is permissible. It is often the case, as well, that some movements or organizations act, in some domains, according to a monocultural logic and, in others, according to an ecological logic. It is also possible that the adoption of an ecological logic is decharacterized by the factionalism and power struggle inside one movement or organization, and turns into a new monocultural logic. Finally, I offer as an hypothesis that even the movements that claim different ecologies are vulnerable to the temptation of evaluating themselves according to an ecological logic, while evaluating the other movements according to a hegemonic monocultural logic.

2.2 The World Social Forum and the Sociology of Emergences

The sociology of emergences is the second epistemological operation conducted by the WSF. Whereas the goal of the sociology of absences is to identify and valorize social experiences available in the world, although declared nonexistent by hegemonic rationality and knowledge, the sociology of emergences aims to identify and enlarge the signs of possible future experiences, under the guise of tendencies and latencies that are actively ignored by hegemonic rationality and knowledge.

Drawing attention to emergences can be observed in the most different cultural and philosophical traditions. As far as the western modernity is concerned, however, it happens only in its margins as, for example, in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Bloch takes issue with the fact that western philosophy has been dominated by the concepts of All (*Alles*) and Nothing (*Nichts*), in which everything seems to be contained in latency, but from whence nothing new can emerge. Western philosophy is therefore a static philosophy. For Bloch, the possible is the most uncertain and the most ignored concept in western philosophy (1995: 241). Yet, only the possible permits to reveal the inexhaustible wealth of the world. Besides All and Nothing, Bloch introduces two new concepts: Not (*Nicht*) and Not Yet (*Noch Nicht*). The Not is the lack of something and the expression of the will to surmount that lack. The Not is thus distinguished from the Nothing (1995: 306). To say No is to say yes to something different. In my view, the concept that rules the sociology of emergences is the concept of Not Yet. The Not Yet is the more complex category because it expresses what exists as mere tendency, a movement that is latent in the very process of manifesting itself. The Not Yet is the way in which the future is inscribed in the present. It is not an indeterminate or infinite future, rather a concrete possibility and a capacity that neither exist in a vacuum nor are completely predetermined. Indeed, they actively re-determine all they touch, thus questioning the determinations that exist at a given moment. Subjectively, the Not Yet is anticipatory consciousness, a form of consciousness that, although extremely important in people's lives, was completely neglected by Freud (Bloch, 1995: 286-315). Objectively, the Not Yet is, on the one hand, capacity (potency) and, on the

other, possibility (potentiality). Possibility has a dimension of darkness as it originates in the lived moment, which is never fully visible to itself, as well as a component of uncertainty that derives from a double want: 1) the fact that the conditions that render possibility concrete are only partially known; 2) the fact that such conditions only exist partially. For Bloch, it is crucial to distinguish between these two wants: it is possible to know relatively well conditions that exist only very partially, and vice-versa, it is possible that such conditions are widely present but are not recognized as such by available knowledge.

The Not Yet inscribes in the present a possibility that is uncertain, but never neutral; it could be the possibility of utopia or salvation (*Heil*) or the possibility of catastrophe or damnation (*Unheil*). Such uncertainty brings an element of chance, or danger, to every change. At every moment, there is a limited horizon of possibilities, and that is why it is important not to waste the unique opportunity of a specific change offered by the present: *carpe diem* (seize the day). Considering the three modal categories of existence – reality, necessity, and possibility – hegemonic rationality and knowledge focus on the first two and neglect the third one entirely. The sociology of emergences focuses on possibility. As Bloch says, “to be human is to have a lot ahead of you” (1995: 246). Possibility is the world’s engine. Its moments are: *want* (the manifestation of something lacking), *tendency* (process and meaning), and *latency* (what goes ahead in the process). Want is the realm of the Not, tendency the realm of the Not Yet, and latency the realm the Nothing and the All, for latency can end up either in frustration or hope.

The sociology of emergences is the inquiry into the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities. It consists in undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledges, practices and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximize the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration. Such symbolic enlargement is actually a form of sociological imagination with a double aim: on the one hand, to know better the conditions of the possibility of hope; on the other, to define principles of action to promote the fulfillment of those conditions.

The sociology of emergences acts both on possibilities (potentiality) and on capacities (potency). The Not Yet has meaning (as possibility), but no predetermined direction, for it can end either in hope or disaster. Therefore, the sociology of emergences replaces the idea of determination by the idea of care. The axiology of progress and development, which have justified untold destruction, is thus replaced by the axiology of care. Whereas in the sociology of absences the axiology of care is exerted vis-à-vis alternatives available in the present, in the sociology of emergences the axiology of care is exerted vis-à-vis possible future alternatives. Because of this ethical dimension, neither the sociology of absences nor the sociology of emergences are conventional sociologies. But they are not conventional for another reason: their objectivity depends upon the quality of their subjective dimension. The subjective element of the sociology of absences is cosmopolitan consciousness and nonconformism before the waste of experience. The subjective element of the sociology of emergences is anticipatory consciousness and nonconformism before a want whose fulfillment is within the horizon of possibilities. As Bloch says, the fundamental concepts are not reachable without a theory of the emotions (1995: 306). The Not, the Nothing, and the All shed light on such basic emotions as hunger or want, despair or annihilation, trust or redemption. One way or another, these emotions are present in the nonconformism that moves both the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences.

Whereas the sociology of absences acts in the field of social experiences, the sociology of emergences acts in the field of social expectations. The discrepancy between experiences and expectations is constitutive of western modernity and has been imposed upon other cultures. Through the concept of progress, this discrepancy has been so much polarized that any effective linkage between experiences and expectations disappeared: no matter how wretched current experiences may be, they do not preclude the illusion of exhilarating expectations. The sociology of emergences conceives of the discrepancy between experiences and expectations without resorting to the idea of progress and seeing it rather as concrete and measured. The question is not to minimize expectations, but

rather to radicalize the expectations based on real possibilities and capacities, here and now.

Modernist expectations were grandiose in the abstract, falsely infinite and universal. As such they have justified death, destruction, and disaster in the name of a redemption ever to come. With the crisis of the concept of progress, the future stopped being automatically prospective and axiological. The concepts of modernization and development diluted those characteristics almost completely. What is today known as globalization consummates the replacement of the prospective and axiological by the accelerated and entropic. Thus, direction turns into rhythm without meaning, and if there is a final stage, it cannot but be disaster. Against this nihilism, which is as empty as the triumphalism of hegemonic forces, the sociology of emergences offers a new semantics of expectations. The expectations legitimated by the sociology of emergences are both contextual, because gauged by concrete possibilities, and radical, because, in the ambit of those possibilities and capacities, they claim a strong fulfillment that protects them, though never completely, from frustration. In such expectations resides the reinvention of social emancipation, or rather emancipations.

The symbolic enlargement brought about by the sociology of emergences consists in identifying signals, clues, or traces of future possibilities in whatever exists. Hegemonic rationality and science has totally dismissed this kind of inquiry, either because it assumes that the future is predetermined, or can only be identified by precise indicators. For them, clues are too vague, subjective, and chaotic to be credible predictors. By focusing intensely on the clue side of reality, the sociology of emergences aims to enlarge symbolically the possibilities of the future that lie, in latent form, in concrete social experiences.

The notion of *clue*, understood as something that announces what is to come next, is essential in various practices, both human and animal. For example, it is well known how animals announce when they are ready for the reproductive activity by means of visual, auditory, and olfactory clues. The preciseness and detail of such clues are remarkable. In medicine, criminal investigation and drama, clues are crucial to decide on future action, be it

diagnosis and prescription, identification of suspects, or development of the plot. In the social sciences, however, clues have no credibility. On the contrary, the sociology of emergences valorizes clues as pathways toward discussing and arguing for concrete alternative futures. Whereas regarding animals clues carry highly codified information, in society clues are more open and can therefore be fields of argumentation and negotiation about the future. The care of the future exerts itself in such argumentation and negotiation.

As in the case of the sociology of absences, the practices of the WSF also come more or less close to the ideal type of the sociology of emergences. I submit as a working hypothesis that the stronger and more consolidated movements and organizations tend to engage less in the sociology of emergences than the less strong or consolidated. As regards the relations between movements or organizations, the signs and clues given by the less consolidated movements may be devalued as subjective or inconsistent by the more consolidated movements. In this as well, the practice of the sociology of emergences is unequal, and inequalities must be the object of analysis and evaluation.

Chapter 3

The World Social Forum as Subaltern Cosmopolitan Politics

The newness of the WSF is more unequivocal at the utopian and epistemological level than at the political level. Its political newness does exist, but it exists as a field of tensions and dilemmas, where the new and the old confront each another. The political newness of the WSF resides in the way in which these confrontations have been handled, avoided, and negotiated.

Before I deal with this topic, I will state more clearly what I mean by the WSF. The broad definition formulated above is adequate to capture the general outlook of the utopian and epistemological dimensions of the WSF, but it is too general to capture the more specific political processes identified with the WSF. Since the latter are my analytical interest in this section I move to a narrower definition. The WSF is the set of forums – world, thematic, regional, sub-regional, national, municipal and local – that are organized according to the Charter of Principles. The WSF is not confined to the five meetings that took place in Porto Alegre (Brazil) between 2001, 2003 and 2005 and in Mumbai (India) in 2004. It also includes all the other forums that have been meeting alongside the WSF. First, the thematic forums such as the Forum of Local Authorities (four editions); the World Parliamentary Forum (four editions); the World Education Forum (three editions); the World Forum of Judges (three editions); the World Trade Unions Forum (two editions); the World Water Forum (two editions); the World Youth Forum (three editions); the Forum of Sexual Diversity. Second, it includes all the forums that have taken place on their initiative for the past three years – national, regional, and thematic forums. These are too numerous to include in a complete list. Among the regional ones, I would emphasize the Pan-Amazonic Forum (two editions), the European Social Forum (three editions), the Asian Social Forum, the Africa Social Forum and the Social Forum of the Americas.⁵ Among the thematic forums, special mention should be made of the Forum on “The Crisis of Neo-Liberalism in Argentina and the Challenges for the Global Movement”,

⁵ The Mediterranean Social Forum will be held in 2005.

the first thematic forum, held in Argentina in August of 2002, The Palestine Thematic Forum on “Negotiated Solutions for Conflicts” in Ramallah, December 2002 and the Forum on “Democracy, Human Rights, War and Drug Trade” held in Colombia in June of 2003. Third, national or international meetings of movements or organizations to prepare the aforementioned forums must be also included in the WSF.⁶ Finally, although the Charter of Principles prevents the WSF from organizing, in its own name, collective actions, the regional or global actions carried out by the networks of movements and organizations that are part of the WSF must be considered part of the WSF-process, as long as they abide by the Charter of Principles. For instance, the actions agreed upon by the assembly of the Global Network of Social Movements, which meets alongside the WSF, are part of the WSF-process. In the assembly that took place during the Third WSF, it was decided to convene a global march against the war and for peace on 15 February 2003; in the assembly that took place during the Fourth WSF, the decision was likewise taken to convene a global march against the war and for peace, this time on 20 March 2004, the date of the first anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Even though they are not carried out in the name of the WSF, these collective actions are integral part of the WSF-process.⁷

In my opinion, the WSF will increasingly become less and less an event or set of events, and increasingly a process based on the work of articulation, reflection and combined planning of collective actions carried out by the different organizations and movements that integrate the WSF. Given this scope, the WSF is a very important component of counter-hegemonic globalization. As we shall see, some of the political tensions concerning the WSF have as their reference a narrower definition of the WSF, namely the four world meetings in Porto Alegre and Mumbai.

⁶ Information regarding the activities carried out under the scope of the WSF can be accessed through the WSF official site at <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/home.asp>.

⁷ The inclusion of these actions in the WSF-process is not generally accepted. The IC integrates organizations whose representatives on the Council reject any organic relation between the WSF and the actions agreed upon by the Global Network of Social Movements or any other network of movements or organizations. According to these representatives – one of the most prominent ones is Francisco Whitaker, one of the founders of the WSF (2003) – the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the WSF can only be preserved if no action in particular is attributed to the WSF as a whole (more on this below).

I will begin by stating what to my mind constitutes the WSF's political novelty. I shall then proceed to analyze the problems and tensions that this novelty creates at three levels: representation; organization; political strategy and political action and the future of the WSF. I should stress that the two first levels – representation and organization – conceive of the WSF in a narrow sense, that is to say, the set of four meetings so far held in Porto Alegre and Mumbai.

3.1 The World Social Forum as Political Emergence

The political novelties of the WSF can be formulated in the following way:

1 - *A very broad conception of power and oppression.* Neoliberal globalization did not limit itself to submitting ever more interactions to the market, nor to raising the workers' exploitation rate by transforming the labor force into a global resource, and, at the same time, by preventing the emergence of a global labor market. Neoliberal globalization showed that exploitation is linked with many other forms of oppression that affect women, ethnic minorities (sometimes majorities), indigenous peoples, peasants, the unemployed, workers of the informal sector, legal and illegal immigrants, ghetto subclasses, gays and lesbians, children and the young. All these forms of power create exclusion. One cannot ascribe to any one of them, in abstract, nor even to the practices that resist them, any priority as to the claim that "another world is possible." Political priorities are always situated and context-dependent. They depend on the concrete social and political conditions of each country at a given historical moment. To respond to such conditions and their fluctuations, the movements and organizations must give priority to the articulations amongst them. This ultimately explains the organizational novelty of a WSF with no leaders, its rejection of hierarchies, and its emphasis on networks made possible by the internet.⁸

2 - *Equivalence between the principles of equality and of recognition of difference.* We live in societies that are obscenely unequal, and yet equality is lacking as an emancipatory ideal. Equality, understood as the equivalence

⁸ On this subject, see Waterman, 2003a, 2003b; Escobar, 2003.

among the same, ends up excluding what is different. All that is homogeneous at the beginning tends eventually to turn into exclusionary violence. Herein lies the grounding of the aforementioned political and organizational novelty. Herein lies as well the grounding of the option for participatory democracy, as ruling principle of social emancipation, to the detriment of closed models such as that of state socialism.

3 - *Privileging rebellion and nonconformity to the detriment of revolution.* There is no unique theory to guide the movements strategically, because the aim is not so much to seize power but rather to change the many faces of power as they present themselves in the institutions and sociabilities. Furthermore, even those for whom seizing power is a priority are divided as to the strategy. Some prefer drastic breaks to bring about a new order (revolution), while others prefer gradual changes by means of an engagement and dialogue with the enemy (reform). At this level, the novelty consists in the celebration of diversity and pluralism, experimentalism, and radical democracy as well.

4 - *A new internationalism.* The internationalism promoted by the WSF represents a stark departure from the old internationalism that dominated anti-capitalist politics throughout the twentieth century. The latter was based on four main premises: a privileged social actor (workers or workers and peasants); a privileged type of organization (trade unions and working class parties together with their federations and Internationals); a centrally defined strategy (the Internationals' resolutions); a politics originating in the North and formulated according to the political principles prevailing in the anti-capitalist North. The emphasis was on social and political homogeneity as condition for unity and solidarity and on similar life trajectories and cultures as a condition for the development of strong and lasting ties.

On the contrary, the internationalism aimed at by the WSF celebrates social, cultural and political diversity within the broad limits set out by the Charter of Principles. It encompasses many different types of organizations and sees itself as a meeting ground where organizations and movements can interact freely and as an incubator of new networks generated at the exclusive initiative of those participating in them. It does not subscribe to any specific

strategic goal beyond the normative orientation to struggle against neoliberal globalization nor to any specific mechanism to carry out such struggle, except for the refusal of armed struggle. The WSF assumes that it is possible to develop strong ties, coalitions, networks among non-homogeneous groups and organizations and, moreover, that the cultural and political differences are enabling rather than paralyzing as sources of political innovation. Finally, the WSF was born in the South, in the Latin American South, drawing on a hybrid political culture growing out of grassroots movements, participatory democracy experiments, liberation theology, struggles against dictatorship, as well as on western left (both old and new) politics.

3.2 Representation

The Charter of Principles contains a double statement in this regard: first, the WSF does not claim to be representative of counter-hegemonic globalization; second, no one represents the WSF nor can speak in its name. These are two separate, yet related issues: whom does the WSF represent? Who represents the WSF?

The first issue – the WSF’s representativity – has been discussed at different levels. One of them concerns the limits of the world dimension of the WSF. The numbers and the diversity of the geographical origin of participants have been increasing steadily, from the first to the fourth WSF. Here are some statistical data (see Table 1).

Table 1
Attendance of the World Social Forum

	Total attendance	Number of delegates	Number of workshops	Number of countries represented
WSF-2001	20.000	4.700	420	117
WSF-2002	60.000	12.274	622	123
WSF-2003	100.000	20.763	1.286	156
WSF-2004	135.000	74.126	1.200	117

Although unquestionably significant, these data conceal the limits of the WSF's geographical scope. Participation is self-funded, and many of the movements and organizations have no financial capacity to support their own participation in the WSF. Those that have attended, particularly in the first three editions of the WSF, have been often funded by European and North-American NGOs. In such cases, the NGOs claim the right to choose who is to be funded. Thus, even if world participation becomes quantitatively broader and more diverse, the issue of representation will always be there until the selection criteria are more transparent and democratic. In the first three editions, more movements and organizations from Latin America have participated than from other continents.⁹ In the third WSF, of the 100.000 participants, the estimate is that more than 70.000 were Brazilian and 15.000 from other Latin American countries. If this is so, then no more than 15.000 participants from the "rest of the world" could have been there.

This fact led some critics to affirm that the WSF was far from having a world dimension. The absences of Africa and Asia in the first three editions were specifically criticized. The scarce participation from Africa and Asia was negative in itself, but it was even more so if one bears in mind that the absence of movements and organizations from these continents reflects itself, in part, in the absence of themes and debates particularly relevant for or specific of their realities. A vicious circle may thereby emerge: African or Asian movements do not take part in the WSF because the debates that they most cherish are absent, and they are absent precisely because of the scarce participation of Africans and Asians.

With this concern in mind, the International Council (IC), in its meeting of January 2003 in Porto Alegre, decided to convene the Fourth WSF in Mumbai. The decision was being prepared since the end of 2001 and the date was selected by the India committees. However polemical the decision was quite successful in facilitating the presence of Asian movements and organizations. Of the 130.000 participants, the overwhelming majority came

⁹ On the subject of representation at the WSF, see Teivainen, 2003.

from India and other Asian countries.¹⁰ The Mumbai WSF was a decisive step forward toward the globalization of the WSF-process. It extended the experience of the WSF to a new and impressive set of movements and organizations coming from countries for which the WSF was still something quite remote. Above all, it showed that the spirit of the WSF – the “Porto Alegre Consensus” (as it begins to be known, in contrast with the “Washington Consensus”), based on the belief in the possibility of another, more just and more solidary world, and on the political will to fight for it – can be recreated in other parts of the world besides Latin America. And if it can be recreated in Asia,¹¹ there is no reason whatsoever why it couldn’t be recreated in Africa. The African presence in Mumbai was not much larger than in previous forums. Africa’s problem is that the Atlantic Ocean separates it from Latin America and the Indian Ocean, from Asia. For this reason, and encouraged by the Mumbai success, the IC decided in its meeting in Mumbai that the WSF to take place after the 2005 edition – since last year scheduled for Porto Alegre¹² – will take place in Africa. In the following meeting, which took place in Italy in April 2004, the African representatives committed themselves to having the 2007 WSF in Africa, the specific location to be designated at the meeting of the IC in Porto Alegre, during the WSF 2005.¹³

¹⁰ Of special note is the participation of 600 Pakistanis. Apparently, many more would have participated if the Indian authorities had not created visa difficulties.

¹¹ “Asia” is a northcentric concept that designates too ample a region to have a homogeneous social, political and cultural content. At the CI’s meeting in Mumbai it was, therefore, decided that another WSF be planned in Easter Asia.

¹² To have the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre was the result of a compromise with those that in the IC were against Mumbai as the venue of the 2004 WSF, arguing that the organizational risks were innumerable and that the existence of the WSF as we know it might thereby be jeopardized. Locating the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre again aimed to reassure the skeptics that, should anything go wrong in Mumbai, there would always be the possibility of recovery in Porto Alegre. As we know, these pessimistic prophecies were not fulfilled. On the contrary, the exemplary way in which the Mumbai WSF was carried out has created a new standard of quality for the 2005WSF in Porto Alegre.

¹³ Likewise, at the next meeting in Porto Alegre the decision will be taken as to whether in 2006 the WSF should be carried out in the usual way or by means of various regional or thematic meetings. For some time now, the IC has been pondering if the WSF should continue to convene annually or every two years. The argument in favor of the latter option is that the annual organization demands a tremendous organizational effort that distracts the movements and NGOs from their principal objectives. In favor of the annual event the argument is that the success of the WSF resides in its symmetry with the World Economic Forum and that, while the latter continues to be annual, the decision to stop convening annually will always be understood as a sign of organizational and political weakness.

I do not question the relevance of the issue of representation, and support every effort to enlarge and balance the geographical representation of the WSF. Besides having the WSF take place in different regions of the world, other proposals have been made with a view to facilitating the participation of movements and organizations of the global South. For example, movements and organizations of the wealthier North, besides paying for their own participation, should contribute towards a common fund to support the participation of movements and organizations of the South that would otherwise be unable to participate. I believe, however, that the WSF must not be delegitimized for not being worldwide enough. If that were the case, we would be submitting it to a much more demanding criterion of globality than what we apply to organizations and institutions of hegemonic globalization. Moreover, the criterion of geographical representation is only one of the representativity criteria. There are no doubt others, with perhaps far more relevance from the political standpoint. Consider, for example, the representation of different themes and political goals, different kinds of organizations and movements, different strategies and agendas, and so on and so forth. There is a generalized consensus within the IC that, after Mumbai, all these criteria will tend to be more and more taken into account. As I will show below, when I deal with issues of political strategy, that the question of the presence and affirmation of different strategic alternatives is already in place and drawing heated debate. I will also show how the issues of representation and internal democracy (see below) are being addressed in the new organizational strategy behind the WSF 2005. I do think, however, that the criteria of representation must be brought in the discussion in such a way that they don't raise obstacles to the spontaneous congregation of movements and organizations that has been so decisive to affirm the existence of an alternative kind of globalization.

The WSF had its origin around a small group of organizations that represented only themselves. The enthusiasm the idea generated surprised even its authors. It gave voice to the need many movements and organizations felt for an arena or space that would not be circumscribed to contesting institutions of hegemonic globalization, but would rather function as

meeting point for the exchange of experiences, debate of alternatives, and elaboration of plans for joint action. The idea's success was gauged by free circulation, celebration of diversity, participation without conditions, and the absence of negotiations that might compromise the movements. Any restrictive criterion would end up bringing about exclusion at a time when only inclusion would make sense. As a matter of fact, even if one would have wanted to resort to criteria, it would have been impossible to identify them, let alone resort to an organization capable of legitimately selecting and decreeing them, and supervising their enforcement.

It is understandable that the success yielded by the WSF would have contributed to raising the issue of the representativity of participation. In evaluations of the second, third and fourth WSF this issue crops up frequently. I am sure that, if the consolidation of the WSF continues, this issue will have to be adequately faced. Further down I mention some recent proposals in this direction.

The issue concerning the representativity of participation ends up unfolding into another one, which concerns the quality of participation. The latter has to do with the different kinds of participation and how participants are placed in each kind. This issue is related to the themes that comprise the organization of the WSF, to which I now turn.

3.3 Organization

Just like the previous issue, the organization issue takes the WSF in its narrow sense. Francisco Whitaker (2002b), one of the organizers of the WSF, mentions that the idea for the WSF was struck among a bunch of Brazilians who wished to oppose resistance to neoliberalism's single way of thinking, so well expressed in the more than 20 annual meetings of the World Economic Forum in Davos. A resistance, that is, that aimed to go beyond protests and rallies. According to Whitaker,

(...) the idea was, with the participation of all the organizations that were already networking in the mass protests, to arrange another kind of meeting on a world scale - the World Social

Forum – directed to social concerns. So as to give a symbolic dimension to the start of this new period, the meeting would take place on the same day as the powerful of the world were to meet in Davos (interview 5/9, 2003).

Whitaker himself and Oded Grajew presented the idea to Bernard Cassen, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatic* and president of ATTAC.¹⁴ Cassen was excited by the idea and proposed that the Forum take place in Brazil, in the city then already praised worldwide for its municipal participatory democracy known as participatory budgeting – Porto Alegre. Soon an organizing committee (OC) was put together to organize the WSF from 2001 onwards (see table 2). During the first WSF it was decided to set up a loosely structured International Council (IC). It met for the first time after the first WSF, in Sao Paulo, June of 2001.

Table 2
Composition of WSF Organizing Committee

ABONG	Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
ATTAC Brazil	Action for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens
CBJP	Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission
CIVES	Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship
CUT	Central Trade Union Federation
IBASE	Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies
CJG	Centro for Global Justice
MST	Landless Rural Workers Movement

¹⁴ ATTAC was formerly the Association for a Tobin Tax for the Aid of Citizens; latter on it became the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens.

In June 2001, a delegation of the organizations presented the Forum to the movements gathered together in Geneva for a parallel summit to the UN “Copenhagen + 5” Summit. The idea was very well received and an International Council to support the Forum was promptly created. The first WSF was under way. The program was put together according to two dynamics. In the morning there would be four simultaneous panels on each one of the four chosen thematic areas: the production of wealth and social reproduction; access to wealth and sustainability; civil society and the public arena; political power and ethics in the new society.

Panelists, invited by the organization, were, in Whitaker’s words, “leading names in the fight against the One Truth.” (Interview, September 5, 2003) In the afternoon there would be workshops coordinated by the participants themselves to engage in debate and exchange experiences. Sessions were also planned to allow for testimonies from people involved in different kinds of struggles.

This structure was kept in the second WSF. It was somewhat changed in the third,¹⁵ though the basic structure of two kinds of sessions was still there: sessions organized directly by the Organizing Committee (OC), featuring guest speakers invited by the Organizing Committee itself and by the International Council; and sessions submitted by the participating movements and organizations. In the fourth meeting in Mumbai there were some significant organizational changes: more space was given for activities beyond conventional sessions (rallies, artistic, theatrical and literary shows) and part of the plenary sessions were self-managed by the organizations and movements, not by the Organizing Committee as it had happened in the past.

¹⁵ In the third Forum, there were five rather than four thematic areas: Democratic Sustainable Development; Principles and Values, Human Rights, Diversity and Equality; Media, Culture and Counter-Hegemony; Political Power, Civil Society and Democracy; Democratic World Order, Struggle against Militarism and Promoting Peace. The impact of September 11 and the bellicose vertigo and panic about security it generated can be seen in the change of themes. The fourth WSF in Mumbai adopted five focal themes also, namely: Imperialist globalization; Patriarchy, Militarism and Peace; Communalism (religious sectarianism and fundamentalism); Casteism and Racism (oppression, exclusion and discrimination on descent and work).

During the second WSF the decision was taken to confer more power on the International Council (IC) for the planning of the Forum, while ascribing mainly an executive role to the OC, composed of Brazilian organizations.

One of the first documents on the IC was issued by the Brazilian OC after the first meeting of the IC in Sao Paulo in June of 2001. It states that “the creation of the IC reflects the concept of the WSF as a permanent, long-term process, designed to build an international movement to bring together alternatives to neoliberal thinking in favor of a new social order, one that will foster contact among a multiplicity and diversity of proposals. Accordingly, the IC will be set up as a permanent body to give continuity to the WSF beyond 2002, to consolidate the process of taking the WSF to the world level”. Echoing criticisms of an excessive Brazilian influence in the organization and designing of the WSF, the statement goes on emphasizing that “the Council will play a leading role in defining policy guidelines and the WSF’s strategic directions. National Organizing Committees will serve as organizers and facilitators in tandem with the IC”.

The coexistence of OC – up until recently exclusively Brazilian, and now called IS and composed of Brazilian and Indian members –, and the IC is today uncontested, even though it began by giving rise to some tension, both at the organizational level and as regards the representativity of the Forum. I will deal with some of these aspects next.

Internal democracy

Both the OC and the IC were put together by cooptation. Their legitimacy derives from their having organized the WSF with relative success. Their members were not elected and they are not accountable to any jurisdiction. The OC kept its constitution from the beginning until the meeting of Mumbai. It functioned simultaneously as the local organizing committee and as the International Secretariat (IS). After Mumbai, and with the expectation that the WSF would in the future be convened in different countries, the IC decided that in the future the local organizing committees and the IS should be strictly separated and that the latter should integrate representatives of the local OCs

of the previous editions of the WSF.¹⁶ Accordingly, since the Mumbai Forum, the IS integrates some representatives of the India organizing committee. The IC has been in a process of permanent structuring since its creation in 2001 with the objective of becoming more global and balanced in terms of thematic, regional and strategic representation, a process that is far from being completed, as I will show below.

Although, according to the Charter of Principles, nobody represents the WSF, in practical terms the OC has been assuming that capacity, and that has been a source of tensions. Besides other reasons, the fact remains that the OC has been until recently exclusively Brazilian, whereas the WSF aims to be international. The IC was actually created to take care of this problem, the tendency being to strengthen the IC's role in its relations with the OC. This is no easy task. Since the WSF took place for three consecutive years in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian OC tended to play a crucial role in organizational and other kinds of decisions. The difficulties piled up during 2002, when the IC wanted to assume the WSF's strategic leadership and give general recommendations for its organization. In the course of the year, the IC held meetings in Porto Alegre, Bangkok, Barcelona and Florence, important decisions having been made each time, most of them addressing the need of internationalizing more and more the WSF. In fact the IC had declared 2002 as the year of the internationalization of the WSF (among other initiatives, through the organization of regional and thematic forums).¹⁷ It seems that it was not always easy to articulate the IC's and the OC's work. According to some members of the IC, the OC resisted its loss of autonomy. For instance, the decisions made by the coordinators of the thematic areas were not always respected by the OC, especially as far as the choice of guest speakers was concerned. Without wishing to dismiss this point, I believe that the lack of articulation had a lot to do with conjunctural conditions. The IC became

¹⁶ Foreseeably, however, the core of the IS will continue to be the original Brazilian Organizing Committee. Meanwhile, whenever the WSF convenes in Brazil, the Brazilian members of the IS will integrate the local organizing committee with consultation functions. In the case of the 2005 WSF, the local organizing committee is composed of 24 members representing as many organizations and movements.

¹⁷ Summaries of the discussion held during these meetings of the IC can be accessed at the WSF web site.

stronger in 2002, at a time when the OC lost some of its operativeness due to internal political reasons in Brazil. 2002 was election year in Brazil. There were state and federal (both legislative and presidential) elections. The Workers' Party (PT),¹⁸ ever a staunch supporter of the WSF in Porto Alegre, both at the organizational and financial levels, lost the elections in Rio Grande do Sul, whose capital is Porto Alegre.¹⁹ This fact not only provoked a financial crisis, to be solved only later on, but also upset the administrative apparatus, which had contributed so much towards the success of the two previous forums.²⁰

Be it as it may, there emerged a tense climate of mutual accusations of lack of transparency and accountability. Although none of these committees was elected by the movements and organizations that take part in the WSF, the truth of the matter is that the IC has been assuming the position of the most representative structure of the WSF, as well as a promoter of its internal democracy. Furthermore, the IC has been assuming a decisive role towards strengthening a broad conception of the WSF, turning the WSF into a permanent process and promoting the continuity among its many initiatives, so as to transform the WSF into “an incremental process of collective learning and growth”, as stated in the resolutions adopted at IC meetings during the 2003 WSF.²¹

At the several IC meetings, other decisions were made with a view to changing the correlation of force between the IC and the OC. One important decision was to hold the 2004 WSF in India. The major reason for this

¹⁸ In Portuguese, “Partido dos Trabalhadores” (PT).

¹⁹ The PT has been in power in the municipality of Porto Alegre since 1989 and in the Rio Grande do Sul state from 1999 till 2002.

²⁰ This much was recognized by the IC which, in a note circulated after its meeting in Porto Alegre in January 2003, stated, after generally praising the performance of the OC: “Notwithstanding this, clear limits can be pointed out in the performance of the Secretariat. The fast expansion of the internationalization process has meant that many times we were surpassed by the events; the Brazilian electoral process affected the organizations included in the Secretariat; the event in Porto Alegre has grown dramatically this year and demanded political investments that had to be organized with lesser local resources; information was not always passed to the IC with the necessary agility. These and other limitations are to overcome”.

²¹ The text of the resolutions taken during the Porto Alegre meeting of the IC (21st and 22nd January, 2003) can be obtained from http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/dinamic.asp?pagina=ci_resolucoes_23jan, accessed on March 21, 2003.

decision was, as stated above, the need to deepen the Forum's global nature, encouraging the participation of movements and organizations from world regions up to now with scarce presence in the WSF. But the fact is that this decision deprived the OC of its former centrality, a consequence foreseen and indeed welcomed by some members of the IC. The decision to convene the 2004 WSF in India ended up having other advantages, such as, for example, enlarging the sets of organizations with experience to put together big events. In this respect, it was interesting to observe how the mistrust of the IC members that had expressed their opposition to Mumbai as a venue (mainly Latin-Americans) was gradually overcome as the Indian Organizing Committees went on showing its organizational capacity.²² The Brazilian OC, in its turn, contributed with its experience whenever asked by the Indian OC. A relation of mutual trust was thereby created that is patent today in the fact that both OCs share the International Secretariat, even though the greater burden of the executive tasks is charged to the Brazilian OC.²³

I also believe that the relations between the OC and the IC began to change for the better after the meeting in Miami in June 2003, even though this meeting was considered a failure by some participants. I maintained above that, between 2001 and 2003, rather than fights for protagonism between the OC and the IC, what happened was that the OC inevitably had protagonism because of the IC's lack of operability. Now, at the Miami meeting measures were taken to increase the IC's operability. As soon as this process was in place, the functional complementarity, rather than political rivalry, between the OC and the IC began to be evident. In section 3.4 I describe some of these measures briefly. I will also show that the organizational innovations of the 2005 WSF are already the result of a new relationship between the OC and the IC, a relationship of productive and not destructive tensions, as threatened to happen in the past.

²² The meetings of the IC in Miami in June and in Perugia in November 2003 helped to create a climate of mutual trust between the "westerners" and the "easterners." In Perugia, the delegates of India showed unsurpassing willingness to give information and great capacity to appease the more skeptical about the possibility of a successful WSF in Mumbai.

²³ The co-presence required by some of the tasks committed to the IS render it impossible that the Indian group share the executive work on an equal basis.

Transparency and hierarchies in participation

The issue of internal democracy has other facets. Two of them seem particularly pertinent to me. The first one concerns the lack of transparency of some of the decisions, which, seemingly organizational, actually have or could have political meaning. The criticism has been swelling that such decisions are taken by a very restrictive group, without the least control by the movements and organizations affected. Such decisions may include the rejection or marginalization of proposals submitted by the movements and organizations, without explicit justification. Some groups considered themselves marginalized by the organization of the 2002 WSF, a perception that was deepened in 2003²⁴. According to them the sessions did not appear on the program, room assignment was chaotic (successive room changes, lack of simultaneous translation, etc.), and participation became very difficult as a consequence. Again without wishing to question the facts, I believe that, in this concrete case, the alleged discrimination was rather the result of the near organizational collapse of the 2003 WSF. For reasons already stated and others I shall mention below, the organization of the 2003 WSF was far from reaching the quality that distinguished the organization of the two previous Forums.

The second dimension of the democracy and transparency issue concerns the hierarchical structure of the various events at the WSF meetings and relates to the choice of guest speakers. This has to do with the already mentioned quality of participation.

The distinction between sessions organized directly by the OC and those proposed by the movements and organizations has created some tension. On the one hand, whereas those who participate in the first kind of sessions are invited by the WSF and have their participation funded (though not always), those who participate in the second kind of sessions must count only upon funding generated by the movements and organizations themselves. On the other hand, the sessions promoted directly by the organization are considered

²⁴ Michael Albert, who organized a wide group of sessions under the general title of "Life After Capitalism", considered himself discriminated against by the OC. The papers presented at this workshop can be accessed at www.zmag.org/lac.htm.

to be the most important ones and are granted time and space conditions that the others do not have. For instance, it was evident during the 2003 WSF that the most serious organizational problems affected more the sessions promoted by the movements and organizations than the sessions promoted by the OC-IC.

The idea that all different kinds of sessions should be treated the same way has been gaining strength. As much transpires from the above mentioned IC resolution of January 2003:

When holding the forums, to organize discussions and the search for alternatives giving equal weight to the activities scheduled by the organizers and to the seminars and workshops proposed and organized by the participants themselves, as well as to stimulate the international character of these forums.

Another resolution goes in the same direction of deepening the process of experimentation of horizontal organizational practices based on co-responsibility.

Criticism concerning lack of democracy and transparency has also been frequent regarding the selection of invited guests. The criticism respects both the selection process, and the specific invitations themselves (or exclusions from lists of potential invitees), namely when well-known personalities are at stake. The proposal to invite well-known names in the world left, be they Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, Ben Bella, Mário Soares have also caused controversy. Criticism also concerns the toleration of the presence of controversial figures, such as leaders of guerilla groups.

Feminist movements have been particularly critical of the selection process, because women have been scarcely represented on the panels of plenary sessions, even though they constitute such a large proportion of all the participants (in the 2002 WSF, women were 43 percent of the delegates and apparently 52 percent of the participants).²⁵ Faithful to their two mottoes –

²⁵ Grzybowski, 2002; on the 3rd WSF, see the *Declaration of the 2003 World Social Forum: Perspective of Women of the World March of Women*, at <http://www.ffq.gc.ca/marche2000/en/fsm2003.html>, accessed on March 19, 2003, and Lagunas, 2003.

“another world is possible” and “no one single way of thinking” – feminist movements have been claiming larger presence of women among guest speakers, as well as on the organizational structures, both the IC and the OC. Bearing in mind the experience of the two first forums, says Virginia Vargas of the Flora Tristan Feminist Center (Peru) and the Marcosur Feminist Articulation (2002: 56): “despite women’s more visible impact, women have not been proportionally represented in the Conferences organized by the Forum or on the Organizing Committee. This is still a single way of thinking, huddled away amidst strategies for change.”

Other critics mention the top-down nature of the conferences and the co-existence in the WSF of a top-down WSF, comprised of the initiatives of the IC and the OC, and a bottom-up WSF, comprised of the large majority of the participants. Commenting on the experience at the second WSF, Hebe de Bonafini, of the Argentinean “Mothers of Plaza de Mayo,” criticizes the inequality of representation, of which she distinguishes three levels: the organizers, the official participants and the “rank-and-file.” Says Hebe de Bonafini (2002):

There were three different levels to this WSF. First, there were the small gatherings of those who were in charge, controlling things (...). Then there were all the commissions and seminars where all the intellectuals, philosophers and thinkers participated. And then there were the rank-and-file folks.”

Viewing herself as part of the last group, she concludes: “We [Mothers of Plaza de Mayo] had participated at that level and discussed with all sorts of people. But the fact is that we were brought to the WSF so we could listen – not so the rank-and-file could participate.” Other participants are likewise critical of the forum’s top-down organization. Commenting on the third WSF, Michael Albert (2003), for instance, distinguishes it from all the others (regional and thematic forums) that have been occurring in different parts of the world, often inspired by the WSF. According to him, whereas the WSF is top-down, the others are bottom-up. “Without exaggerating the virtues of the forums worldwide,” adds Albert, “they are having positive effects and moving in participatory, transparent, and democratic directions. The WSF, however, is

different.” Michael Albert offers several proposals aimed to deepen the WSF’s participatory and democratic nature (more on this below).

Curiously enough, the organizers themselves acknowledge many of these criticisms, which make me think that these organizational tensions are part of the Forum’s growing and learning process itself. Some of the criticisms denounce accusations of less limpid intentions on the part of the OC, and some come even close to conspiracy theories. I have been following the activity of the OC and, as far as I can tell, such criticisms have no grounding. The results of the decisions, some of which are rightly criticizable, have mainly to do with the OC’s incapacity to handle an event that became unmanageable because of its dimension and complexity. By way of example, let me quote three proposals made by myself with a view to increase internal democracy and transparency: posting the decisions taken by the OC or IC in designated places; saving some space in the evening for an open debate about organization or other issues; taking advantage of the technologies of electronic democracy to carry out referendum on organizational or strategic decisions.²⁶ The two first proposals would have been easy to put in place during the Forum, had not been an administrative breakdown. Suffice it to say that during the third WSF the full program including all activities was never published.

The WSF’s organizational structure was the most adequate to launch the Forum and render it credible internationally. For instance, the idea of ascribing to the OC the promotion of some of the sessions and the choice of guests was adopted with a double goal in mind: first, minimally to structure the themes to be debated in order to go from the denouncing discourse of mass protests to the discourse of proposals and alternatives; second, to give international visibility to the Forum by addressing invitations to well-known personalities. Let us not forget that the WSF saw itself as an alternative to the WEF and was ready to dispute with it the attention of the global media.²⁷ To my mind,

²⁶ On the debates regarding the possibilities of cyber-democracy (i.e., of other forms of participation and mobilization), see Waterman, 2003a, 2003b; Johansson, 2003; Bennett (in press).

²⁷ The 1st WSF was attended by some 1.800 journalists, and the 3rd WSF by more than 4.000 journalists.

without this kind of organization and without the extraordinary devotion of the people that were charged with it, the WSF would never have accomplished what it has so far. The consolidation of the WSF will lead it to another phase of development, in which case its organizational structure will have to be reconsidered so as to adjust it to its new demands and the tasks ahead. More on this below.

Parties and movements

The relation among political parties, social movements, and NGOs in the construction of counter-hegemonic globalization is no doubt controversial. In a broad sense, it also affects the WSF. The Charter of Principles is clear on the subordinate role of parties in the WSF.²⁸ The WSF is an emanation of the civil society as organized in social movements and nongovernmental organizations. In practice, however, things are ambiguous. In this section I deal with a specific issue: the role of the PT in the organization of the three editions of the WSF. The PT, in its capacity of government party in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and in the city of Porto Alegre, gave decisive support to the organization of the WSFs, both at the financial and logistical and administrative level. Without such support it would have been impossible, at least in Brazil, to organize the WSF with the ambition that characterized it from the start. To be sure, this kind of support had its price. Particularly during

²⁸ The Charter of Principles was agreed upon by the International Council of the WSF in 2001. Later on, along the preparation of the 2004 WSF, it was discussed in various meetings in India. At one of these meetings (Bhopal, April 2002) a policy document was adopted which modified some of the clauses of the Charter and added new ones with the purpose of adapting it to the specific conditions that prevail in India today. For a while, and because it was posted on the webpage of the WSF-India, it looked like a new version of the Charter of Principles. It included specific clauses that asserted the inclusive character of the Forum, it addressed the question of 'communalism', emphasized the importance of diversity and of local idioms, and allowed for the possibility of political parties to participate in the WSF. In the Peruggia meeting of the IC the members of the Indian organizing committee made it clear that the document had no official character and that in no way could it be seen as an Indian version of the Charter. But the official documents on the methodology of the India WSF continued to state that "in India the WSF Charter has been extended to include social and political realities as they exist in the country today...This entails the opening of a dialogue within and between the broad spectrum of political parties and groups, social movements and other organizations" Because the changes introduced signal what I consider to be an innovative process of local adaptation to global dynamics, I reproduce in Annex I the two versions of the Charter (the original and the Indian policy statement) and the comparison between the two (see Annex I).

the second Forum, PT's attempt to use the WSF to spread its message and engage in political propaganda was quite visible. Many participants were ready to criticize the organization on this account. Some of them went so far as to criticize the PT for instrumentalizing the WSF. To my mind, the issue of the relation between parties and movements cannot be decided in the abstract. The historical and political conditions vary from country to country, and may dictate distinct responses in different contexts. In the Brazilian context, the PT itself is an emanation of the social movements, and its history cannot be separated from their history. Since the mid-1980s, the struggles against the dictatorship received their best support from the unions and social movements, and the PT was founded in the midst of this powerful social mobilization. Since its foundation, the PT has continued to have a privileged relation with the social movements. The support that the PT grants the WSF must be understood in this very context. The PT's attempt to use the 2002 WSF in its electoral campaign is definitely to be condemned. Contrary to what some other critics argue, I do believe, however, that the PT did not interfere substantially with the choices of the organization, whether it be thematics or invited guests. The WSF became much bigger, and the PT was in any case too small to have a significant impact in this regard.

The relation between political parties (specially parties on the left) and the WSF will no doubt continue to be debated in the different countries in which forums will be held.²⁹ In the majority of the cases, the issue is not so much whether such a relation should or should not exist, but rather to define the exact terms of such a relation. If the relation is transparent, horizontal, and mutually respectful, it may well be, in some contexts, an important lever for the consolidation of the WSF. The European Social Forum, held in Florence in 2002, clearly illustrates this. The strength of Italian social movements made possible horizontal articulations between them and the parties on the left, particularly the Rifundazione Comunista and the PDS (left democrats). Such articulations contributed decisively towards the Forum's success.³⁰ The relation between leftist parties and social movements in the European context

²⁹ In the Mumbai WSF the participation in the different organizing committees of the left parties was public and decisive.

³⁰ On this subject, see, for example, Bertinoti, 2002.

was heatedly discussed in the three editions of the ESF to this date. The latest edition, which took place in London in October 2004, was perhaps the one that generated more controversy in this regard. In part for this reason, and also because of the ever-tense relation between movements and NGOs, some movements decided to organize a parallel and autonomous event designated as “Beyond the ESF.” According to one of the organizers of the parallel forum, “local authorities and political parties were dictating the rules of the Forum through control of the budget” (IPSNews 25-10-2004). In the Mumbai WSF as well, a parallel forum took place, designated as “Mumbai Resistance”. In this case, the divergences that gave origin to it have more to do with the ideological rivalries and divergences among different Indian leftist parties. The most salient divergence may well have concerned the issue of armed struggle as political strategy, a form of struggle, which the groups in the Mumbai Resistance refused, as a question of principle, to consider unlawful, in opposition to what is stated in the Charter of Principles of the WSF.

Size and continuity

The third WSF had about 100.000 participants. Though the abovementioned local political conditions affected the OC’s efficiency and organizational capacity, the large number of participants led many of them to believe that the WSF was victim of its own success: its size rendered it unmanageable. Has this organizational form reached its limits? The fact is that the fourth WSF, in Mumbai, drew a larger number of participants and, in spite of notorious deficiencies (specially in translation services), it was unanimously considered as much better organized than the third WSF. The new organizational formula of the WSF 2005 has been designed to address, among others, the issue of size. More on this below.

Granting that the WSF is a learning process, more and more voices have been supporting the idea that the WSF should increasingly turn into a permanent phenomenon, comprised of many meetings articulated amongst themselves. Thus it will be possible to further the internationalization of the WSF, structure and focus the dialogues and debates much better, and

strengthen the formulation of alternatives. The number of participants in these other forums will certainly be lower and manageable. In this line, the IC, in its meeting of January 2003, decided to stimulate the multiplication of regional, national and even local forums, as well as thematic forums, that intercommunicate horizontally and that will not be articulated as preparatory for a larger world meeting but as meetings with their own political value.

The intention is, thus, to further highlight partial meetings to the detriment of the “global event” that WSF has been. Such a change compels new coordination tasks. Quite aware of this, the IC decided at the same meeting to take on the task of producing a continued and systematic analysis of the situation in the world and, on the basis of it, to assess

the continuity of the process, to ensure the respect for its Charter of Principles when holding regional and theme forums, to identify themes for the IC’s work, for the world events and for the theme forums to be stimulated, as well as to identify regions of the world in which the process needs to expand, acting in alliance with movements and organizations from these regions.

3.4 The New Organizational Challenges

All the important organizational problems are political as well. Even though this idea seems self-evident, it is not subscribed by all the members of the IC, or at least it is not interpreted in the same way. If some agree that priority must be given to political discussion, lest decisions upon organizational matters conceal the relations of power inside the IC, others think that the political discussion may be paralyzing and prevent organizational decisions to be timely taken. According to the latter, it is easier to reach consensus vis-à-vis concrete questions than vis-à-vis questions of principle, and so, they argue, political discussion will be more productive if it occurs in the context of concrete problems, which almost always appear as organizational problems. This latter position has prevailed both in the IS and the IC.

The years 2003 and 2004 were rich in organizational innovations aimed at responding to two main problems:

1 - How to achieve more balanced participation by organizations and movements of the different regions of the world;

2 - How to maximize the effectiveness of such participation, that is to say, how to make of such participation a factor of internal democratization.

The answers that for the past two years have been given to these questions may be arranged under three topics: systematization of past experience, what I call “the people of Porto Alegre”; composition and functionality of the IC; new organizational models.

The people of Porto Alegre: evaluation of WSF 2003

After the second WSF and having in mind the third one, Candido Grzybowski, director of IBASE and one of the founders of the WSF, took the initiative of setting up a methodology and systematization team, which he himself coordinated. This team’s task was to produce a systematic survey of the activities of the 2003 WSF. The aim was to create a database of the themes discussed at the forum; their distribution throughout lectures, panels, seminars, workshops, testimonies and controversy roundtables (“mesas de controversia”); activities organized by the OC and self-managed activities; the profile of guest speakers and participants, and so on and so forth. The question was to organize the collective memory of the WSF and create the conditions to allow for a systematic assessment of the performance of the WSF, identifying possible problems and proposing solutions. The technical production of such systematization was charged to IBASE.

The results are available and are extremely revealing as regards the performance of the WSF. The survey is divided into four volumes, three of which corresponding to the three kinds of activities of the Forum: Conferences, Panels, Self-managing Activities. The fourth volume deals with

the survey of the profile of participants. I next present the main results of each one of them.

Conferences

The conferences took place at the Gigantinho Stadium and gathered close to 12,000 people in one single day. In accordance with WSF methodology, the aim of the conferences is to allow for personalities engaged in the citizens' struggle to share their views and analyses with the public at large. The WSF invited people whose reports would contribute to strengthening a broad public-opinion movement geared to the need, possibility, and urgency of building "other worlds". Thirty-six people gave talks at the third WSF, taking up ten themes. Although the WSF International Secretariat sought a balance of gender, only 27.8% of the speakers were women – 10 women and 26 men. The best represented sociopolitical region was Latin America – 30.6% – or 11 speakers. However, if the count is made according to the country of origin, the U.S. led in representation: 4 U.S. representatives (one more than Brazil). 7 speakers came from Europe, 6 from North America (including 4 from the U.S.), 6 from Africa, 5 from the Middle East, and only 1 from Africa.

These results show that, although the IS has tried to have a gender balance, it did not succeed. Hence the justifiable criticisms of sexual discrimination in the organization of the Forum made by the women's movements. Even though the women constitute the majority of the participants, their intervention, especially in the activities of greater visibility, by no means matches such a proportion.

On the other hand, the imbalances as to regional representation are obvious. Half of the lecturers come from the North and, among those that come from the South, only one of them comes from the continent that has been most affected by neoliberal globalization: Africa.

In the seminar for the evaluation of the systematization of the WSF 2003, which took place in Rio de Janeiro, by initiative IBASE, on May 21-23 2003, Virginia Vargas concluded that " the conferences, however important, did not

allow for an exchange of ideas and conceptions among the speakers. There was more narcissistic disputing among them than real collective dialogue (Vargas, 2003b).

Panels

The panels were introduced in the third WSF to offer an alternative of great visibility vis-à-vis the lectures. Whereas lectures base their visibility on the high profile of the lecturers, panels have a wider range of participants, giving priority to activists, and depending for their visibility on the quality of the debates – spelling out the differences being highly recommended by the OC – and on the proposals of collective action presented. I reproduce below in some detail the methodology proposed for the panels to underline its innovative character and to show how difficult it is for a new methodology to be appropriated by such a vast and vastly diverse number of participants.

At the meetings of the IC preparatory to the third WSF (Bangkok, Barcelona and Florence), the five thematic axes and panel themes within each axis were decided:

Thematic axis 1 – ***Democratic and sustainable development***

- 1 – Recovering economic sovereignty through debt cancellation and capital control
- 2 – Solidarity economy
- 3 – WTO: the road to Cancun
- 4 – Full employment and labor re-regulation
- 5 – For the right to cities
- 6 – For another economy: subsidiarity, localization, devolution, and reproduction
- 7 – Beyond Johannesburg: property, biodiversity control and management, water and energy

Thematic axis 2 – ***Principles and values, human rights, diversity and equality***

- 1 – Struggle for equality, men and women: how to implement real change
- 2 – Fighting intolerance and respect for diversity: solidarity as a transformational force in the struggle against the “single way of thinking”
- 3 – For the full implementation of rights

- 4 – Beyond national borders: migrants and refugees
- 5 – For full access to water, food, and land
- 6 – For full access to the rights to education, health, housing, and social security

Thematic axis 3 – ***Media, culture, and alternatives to commercialization and homogenization***

- 1 – Globalization, information, and communication
- 2 – How to ensure cultural and linguistic diversity
- 3 – Strategies for democratizing the media
- 4 – New technologies and strategies for digital inclusion
- 5 – Culture and political practice
- 6 – Symbolic production and peoples' identity

Thematic axis 4 – ***Political power, civil society, and democracy***

- 1 – Democratizing democracy by building new paradigms
- 2 – New and old social movements: the current spaces of confluence and tension among multiple local and global actors
- 3 – Citizens' insurgence against established order
- 4 – New dimensions of the democratic state
- 5 – Strategies for citizens' oversight
- 6 – Future perspectives for the movements: new concepts and pathways in organizing social movements

Thematic axis 5 – ***Democratic world order, struggle against militarization and for peace***

- 1 – Empire, war, and unilateralism
- 2 – Resistance to militarization
- 3 – Governance, global economy and international institutions
- 4 – World order: sovereignty, role of governments and the United Nations
- 5 – Democratic strategies for resolving international conflicts
- 6 – Democratic cooperation: integration, multilateralism and peace

According to Jorge Romano (2003), member of the task force of “systematization”, the panels would be held during the Forum’s first three days. A final panel by each thematic axis would be held on the fourth day. The IC appointed two coordinators by axis and one facilitator for each panel. The Forum Secretariat appointed a team from the Systematization Group to do the work of record keeping and minutes. During the first three days, the panels were to be a space for presentation and defense of proposals by networks, campaigns, and coalitions. The idea was to visualize, confront and

consolidate proposals for the subtheme, in terms of alternatives and strategies. Panels would require a preparatory stage, including the presentation of written documents. Based on those documents, which should be broadly disseminated, delegates (always representing a diversified set of civil society actors) would be better qualified to participate actively in each panel.

The final panel was meant for sharing the discussed issues, mapping out the diversity of proposals put forward by delegates during previous panels. This would be an effort to organize the Forum's collective memory, and to record its contributions for building "other possible worlds." A methodological and political approach of valuing the inputs was recommended – avoiding their reduction to a single proposal. Otherwise the methodology would run counter the basic commitment to respect and build on diversity, established in the Charter of Principles.

Final panels were designed as a space for confrontation between thematic axes as an organized structure for planned and concerted activities (panels, conferences, dialogue and controversy roundtables, etc.), and activities proposed by delegates (workshops, seminars, etc.). Emphasis and priorities of planned and self-managed activities would be compared. As much information as possible extracted by the Secretariat from self-managed activities at the 2003 WSF was to be used as input for final panels. Final panels would be animated by axis coordinators. Each previous panel would appoint one person to make up the final panel. This person could be the facilitator or anyone else appointed by its members. It was expected that each previous panel would not present a full discussion but limit itself to present the following: diversity of views and paradigms; issues discussed; diversity of proposals and strategies, with consensuses and disagreements; emerging themes. The time and form of presentation would be decided by final panel members. A moment should also be allocated for presenting self-managed activities. After presentations, there would be debate among panelists and between them and participants. The proposal was to focus the debate on convergences and divergences, pointing out perspectives in terms of emerging themes and issues to work on.

Each thematic axis would have support from a Systematization Group team throughout the panel process. Each team would be made up of three persons. The main objective of this group was to gather the material for minutes and systematization work. This team was also meant as support to final panels. Proposals and strategies would be transformed into charts based on notes sent in by panel members. These charts could be used by facilitators. During the process, those charts would be reworked and a new version made available to the final panel. Panelists would decide on the use of these charts and notes from the systematization team. In addition to relying on the Systematization Group team, panels would also be visited by consultants, who would freely circulate throughout WSF activities. Consultants would be specialists from different areas to help the systematization process, producing documents and providing opinions on the work developed by the team more directly involved in the process.

Concerning the systematization methodology, the persons in charge of systematizing each axis or area, with the help of two assistants, would prepare the panel notes and the final panel synthesis. The latter would highlight the main issues and proposals, convergences and divergences, as well as the emerging points. Specific reports on how the different panels functioned would also be prepared, highlighting panel composition, coordinating work, panel dynamics, audience and participation of the public.

I next present the statistical data on the distribution of panelists through thematic axes according to sex and regional origin.

There was a total of 167 presentations by 66 women and 101 men. Panel gender distribution according to thematic area was the following (Table 3):

Table 3
Members of panels by sex

Thematic Axis	Total Panelists	Women	Men
1	39	17	22
2	33	14	19
3	30	10	20
4	34	16	18
5	31	9	22
TOTAL	167	66	101

In terms of regional origin, there were more panelists from Latin America and the Caribbean (52) and Europe (48). It should be noted that there was no panelist from Oceania. The following table shows the distribution of panelists according to region (Table 4).

Table 4
Members of the panel by region of the world

Thematic Axis	North America	Latin America and the Caribbean	Europe	Asia	Africa	Oceania
1	5	11	10	7	6	-
2	3	9	10	7	4	-
3	5	13	7	4	1	-
4	3	12	11	6	2	-
5	7	7	10	4	3	-
TOTAL	23	52	48	28	16	-

The analysis of these data and of the systematized information on the content and dynamics of the debates (As an example, see, in Annex III, the summary of the panels in the thematic axis 5) permits to draw the following conclusions:

1 - The panels reached a greater general gender balance. Even so, women were about half of the men in panels of thematic axis 3 (Media, culture, and alternatives to commercialization and homogenization) and 5 (Democratic world order, struggle against militarization and for peace).

2 - The regional imbalances could still be observed, the global North (Europe and North America) providing 42,5 percent of the panelists.

3 - The preparation of the panels very seldom worked, the work of the coordinators of the axes and of the facilitators of the panels was often deficient, and even more deficient the co-ordination amongst them. The final panel seldom used the work of systematization. And the policy guideline to promote the formulation and systematization of action proposals was not accomplished.

4 - In most of the panels the discussion and divergences expected by the organizers did not occur. Quite the opposite, there was mainly consensus and repetitive, not at all audacious analyses.

5 - The logistic difficulties that the WSF had to face damaged the attendance of the panels. The spaces that could hold 2000 people never had more than 500.

Self-managed activities

For the 2003 WSF it was decided to encourage self-managed activities, that is, activities proposed by the networks, movements and organizations participating in the Forum – designated as *oficinas*, workshops – and promote the fusion of activities about similar themes in order to avoid fragmentation. According to Candido Grzybowski, the workshops are considered to be the factory of the Forum – a kind of global civil laboratory – they are meant to facilitate meetings, exchange of experiences, networking, planning and definition of the strategies of groups, coalitions, networks, movements and organizations, always directed towards present and future actions. Perhaps the main force of the WSF lies in the diversity characterized by this sort of activity. But we wonder: do we really know how to make proper use of all this potential? In this sense and above all else, what we are dealing with here is the Memory of the Forum. The living record of what NGOs, social movements, trade-union institutions, academic centers, religious groups, cooperation agencies, networks and other entities think, debate and propose. More than all this, however, the intention is to try to detect the eventual appearance of

something new, all the transgression, irreverence, Utopia and re-enchantment that sometimes do not fit into the circumspect format of the axes agreed upon” (Grzybowski, 2003b).

1619 workshops were planned, it being estimated that 1300 actually took place. Of these, 288 were the object of systematization, that is to say, of a systematic analysis of their content and of how well they fared (See in Annex IV the list of the self-managed activities by thematic axis). According to the authors of the systematization, the sample is representative. It is not possible to give here an exhaustive analysis of the collected data. From the discussion at the systematization seminar organized by IBASE (Rio de Janeiro) on 21-23 of May 2003 the following provisional conclusions can be drawn:

1 - As regards content, the oficinas/workshops fulfilled what was expected of them. They revealed the great diversity of interests and struggles that circulate in the WSF. Above all, however, they revealed that there is a significant discrepancy between the activities organized by the OC and the self-managed activities. Many of the topics that have dominated the Lectures don't seem to be priorities for debate among the organizations and movements, for only seldom are they present in the workshops. On the other hand, themes never debated in Lectures or Panels are dealt with in the workshops. The theme of spirituality, for example, which featured many of the workshops, even though many of them were proposed by the same network.³¹ This means that the workshops rebelled objectively against the choice of the grand themes (the thematic axes) made by the OC and the IC. Such a fact, while, on the one hand, giving witness to the creativity of the *base* of the WSF, on the other, revealed some distance between the concerns and interests of the *top* of the WSF and those of its *base*. This verification had direct impact on the methodology adopted in the fourth WSF and on the one projected for the fifth (more on this below).

2 - In spite of the wide space opened for the workshops, the truth is that there was unfair competition between them and the grand events (lectures and panels), since their timetables often coincided. The fact that the

³¹ One of the best-attended event at the Forum was titled “Mystics and Revolution”.

workshops and the lectures/panels were scheduled for locations very distant from one another made circulating among them impossible. In a way, parallel forums were created inside the Forum, all of them isolated from one another, with the result that the interaction between the “big names” and the “people” of the movements ended up being scarce. The tenacious hierarchies that prevail in contemporary societies penetrate the Forum insidiously.

3 - The decision to give total freedom to the organizations and movements to propose workshops and choose the day, time and often the space, increased enormously the fragmentation and atomization of the activities, making it at the same time impossible to have exact information about its realization. The fragmentation and atomization was the consequence as well of the impossibility of merging workshops on similar topics, thereby resulting much overlapping and repetition.

Roundtables of dialogue and controversy

The two great organizational innovations of the 2003 WSF were the panels and the controversy roundtables. The latter also had a pragmatic objective, namely to respond to the pressure calling for the participation of political personalities and parties, as well as governments and multilateral organizations. According to Candido Grzybowski (2003b: 7)

The tables for dialogue and controversy constituted a methodological and political novelty among the various activities planned. As a specific area within the WSF, their purpose was to confront the views and proposals of delegates with against those of representatives of political parties, governments, organizations of the United Nations system and members of parliament. This activity was a formal invitation – as established in the Charter of Principles – that allowed political personalities to attend the main events in the WSF, thus broadening and enhancing the potential of the debate that interests us.

In all, four tables for dialogue and controversy were held one each morning in the Gigantinho Stadium, which has a capacity for 15,000 participants. Each table dealt with one “hot” question in which dialogue and

controversy, according to rules agreed upon beforehand among the participants, could be used to explain proposals and strategies of civil society throughout the world. The themes of these tables and the profile of the participants were decided on at the meeting of the IC held in Florence, Italy, in November 2002, as proposed by the OC/Sl. To prepare the discussion at each table a “note of presentation” of the topic was drafted (see the list of participants in the round-tables and the “notes of presentation” in Annex V). Forwarded beforehand to each member of the table, these notes served to delimit the question and facilitate the debate. Written in four languages, they were distributed at the door of the gymnasium on the day of the debate. On the eve of the debates, all the participants, together with the respective moderator, were invited to meet with the activity coordinator to set the debating rules and get to know one another.

In all, 29 persons had a direct participation in the tables, 12 of them from civil society entities and movements, 13 from parties, governments and the United Nations system, and 4 functioning as moderators. Of this total, 10 were from Latin America and the Caribbean (4 Brazilians), 2 from North America, 10 from Western Europe, 4 from Africa, 1 from the Middle East and 2 from Asia, presenting the dissymmetry of the Forum proper. In terms of gender: 20 men and 9 women (4 from movements and entities, 4 from organizations and one moderator journalist).

From the available data, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1 - The composition of the sessions reflected the regional and gender imbalances already observed in the other activities.

2 - The sessions were viewed by some as a “giving in to the enemy” or as a “confusion with the enemy,” but the truth is that they allowed for the confrontation of ideas, the public and well argued presentation of strong divergences, and the strengthening of ideological identities.

3 – According to Candido Grzybowski “the round-tables showed enormous potential both in terms of the content of the debates and audience participation. The traditional exposition of table members for the sake of a confrontation of points of view was avoided. It is clear that, in the manner that the tables were made up and with the members having certain values in

common, there were no insurmountable divergences, only useful and fruitful differences based on the experiences and responsibilities of each and every one. The most remarkable thing of all is that, regardless of position in the official political structures (parties, parliaments, governments, the United Nations) or of political ideological options, there is a common sense of urgency and of doing whatever is possible within the limits of the current national and international *status quo*. As for the universe of movements and entities, what stands out is a broader, more radical perspective, one more clearly guided by ethical values. Even though the divergences may not express opposite positions, there is much to be done for us to build together other possible worlds (Grzybowski, 2003b: 8).

Profile of participants

During the third WSF a questionnaire was conducted among the participants with a view to assessing their social and political profile. IBASE, one of the NGO founders of the WSF and one of the strongest members of the IS, took charge of conducting the questionnaire. On the basis of the universe of enrolled participants a representative, random and stratified sample of 1500 interviewees was established.³² Participants were divided into three groups: delegates, non-delegate-participants and campers (staying at the Youth camp and other camps). The questionnaire was divided into three large themes: characteristics of participants, engagement in the social and political struggle, opinions on the public debates agenda.

Characteristics (main results)

The large majority of participants are Brazilians (85.9%). Among the nonBrazilians, 39.7% come from Latin America. The countries with the largest number of participants were the neighbor countries to Brazil, France and the USA: Argentina (13.1%), Uruguay (9.5%), Chile (8.7%), Paraguay (8.4%), France (7.2%), EUA (6.6%). 46.3% of the nonBrazilians came from the remaining 133 countries that were represented in the WSF. In the case of the

³² Sobre a metodologia do inquérito, ver IBASE, 2003, volume V.

delegates – participants that represent NGOs or movements, 23% of the total number of participants – the presence of France and the USA is even stronger. While the Argentinian delegates were 6.4% of the total, the delegates of France and the USA were 8% and 10.4% respectively. These data confirm the deficit of globality of the WSF and the difficulty of including the bottom in the bottom-up globalization.

Women were the majority, both of the participants in general (51%) and of the delegates (50.4%). The Brazilian delegates had a stronger feminine presence than the nonBrazilians, 52.7% and 45.7% respectively. As I have already said, the presence of women at the bottom had no reflection at the top of the Forum. As regards sexual preference, 6.1% of the participants stated that they were homosexual, the remaining ones, heterosexual (6.1% refused to answer).

As concerns age structure, the youth had a strong presence at the Forum: 37.7% of participants were in the age bracket 14-24 years. As to delegates, however, only 13% were in that same age bracket. In the camps, the majority was young: 68.5%. The remaining age brackets of participants were as follows: between 25 and 34 years, 25%; between 35 and 44, 19.9%; between 45 and 54, 12.6%; 55 years or older, 4.9%.

The strong presence of the young had no expression in the activities organized by the OC, and it was not possible to draw any bridge between the activities of the Forum and the Youth Camp (the same happened in all the editions of the WSF). Hence the criticism of the young, who claimed they were marginalized inside the Forum.

Literacy is perhaps among the most disturbing data about the characterization of the social base of the WSF. The level of literacy of participants is very high: 73.4% of the participants hold a college degree, whether complete or incomplete, an MA or a Ph. D. Only 25.7% have just between 0 and 12 years of schooling. 9.7% of the participants have a master's or doctorate, a percentage that rises to 17.8% in the case of the delegates, reaching the 30.1% in the case of non Brazilian delegates. The criticism frequently addressed to the WSF that it is the expression of an elite

of the counter-hegemonic globalization seems to be hereby harshly confirmed.

62.3% of the participants and 81.2 of the delegates are employed. As regards their occupation, 43.2% work for private institutions or NGOs (this percentage reaches 44.2% in the case of the delegates) and 36% are public officials. 4.3% work in manufacturing and 3.3% in agriculture. 12.9% work in commerce. The tertiary sector (services) is thus the major sector of activity: it concerns 79.5% of the participants holding jobs. As regards social class, the waged petty bourgeoisie seems to prevail. 62.6% of the participants declare they have a religion, the percentage being higher among the Brazilians than among non-Brazilians. The predominant religion is, by far, the catholic religion, reaching up to 61.6% among those that state they do have a religion. The role religion plays among the social groups fighting against neoliberal globalization is indeed striking. Religiosity is actually stronger among the delegates (66.3%). Herein resides, no doubt, one of the ideological differences between the organizers of the WSF and its social base. In the first three Forums, the theme of religion (and spirituality, as we saw above) was never considered important enough by the OC and the IC to have organized activities dedicated to it, let alone activities with high visibility. The situation changed in part in the Mumbai WSF.

Engagement in social and political struggle

The majority of participants (64.9%) is engaged in some organization or social movement, a percentage that unsurprisingly reaches 89.1% in the case of the delegates. In view of the data analyzed above concerning the occupation of the delegates, we can say that a high percentage of the delegates is employed by the organization in which he or she is involved. The question about the ambit of the organizations with which they are involved allowed for multiple answers. From the answers given the conclusion may be drawn that organizations of national and sub-national ambit prevail overwhelmingly: 33% are local, 35%, regional, 36%, national. It comes as no surprise that only in the case of the nonBrazilian delegates organizations of

international ambit have a significant weight: 36%, as opposed to 16% in the case of participants in general. These data confirm what I said above about the nature of the WSF: its newness resides in its having invested in the global articulations among organizations previously entailed to national or local struggles.

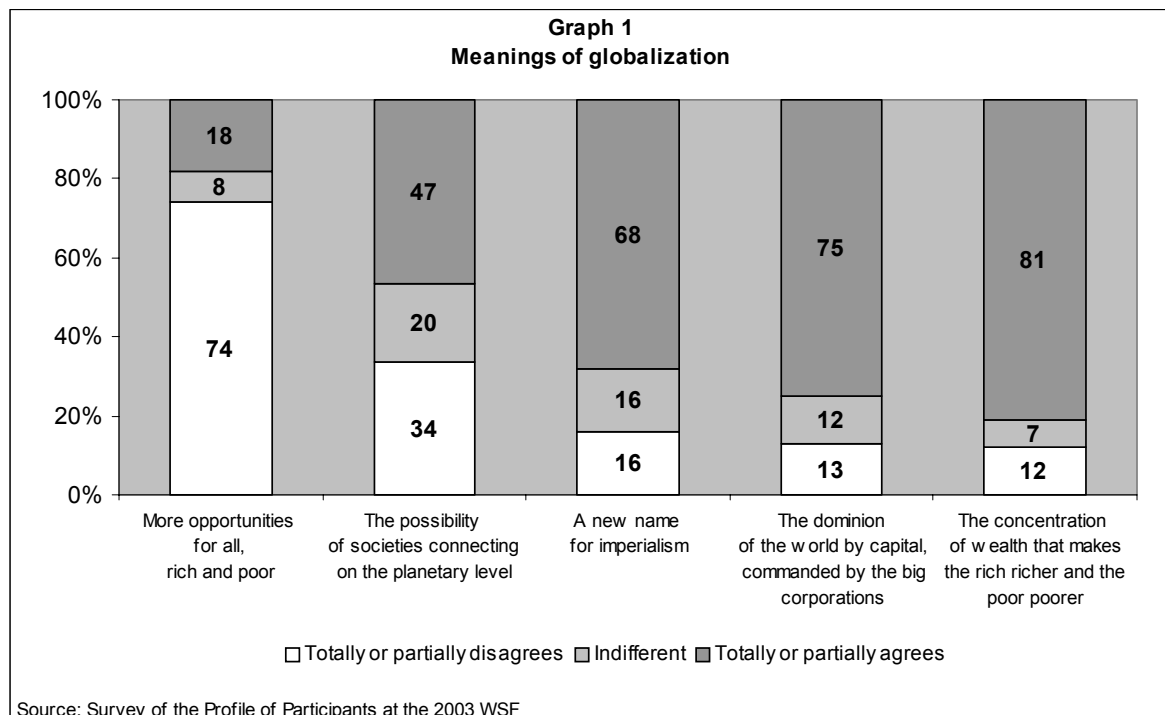
As regards the institutional nature of the organizations and movements in which the participants are involved, the strong presence of social movements (25.7%) and NGOs (19.4%) is obvious. Trade unions come next (16.3%). As to the area of action (the question allowed for multiple answers), education is by far the most prevalent, with 47%, followed by popular participation/organization, with 30%, and human rights, with 24%. 35% of the participants declared that they were members of political parties, a percentage that reaches 44% in the case of the delegates. The more intense the involvement with NGOs and movements, the less probable the party membership. In the case of trade unionists, however, the majority belongs to a political party. The more leftist the political stance stated, the greater the probability of party affiliation: 46% in the case of those that consider themselves extreme left, and only 28% for those on the center-left. This may suggest that it was the extreme left parties that invested most in participation in WSF. The extreme-left position is, however, in the minority among the participants: only 6% identified themselves as extreme-left; 15%, center-left, 63%, left. Among the delegates, the percentage of those considering themselves left is slightly higher, 67%.

Opinions on the public debates agenda

This a field in which, in questionnaires of this nature, it is very risky to draw conclusions with some degree of safety. I select those answers in which the risk seems to be smaller. As regards abortion, it was asked if the participants were totally in favor, totally against, or whether “it depends on the situation”. 40% said they were totally in favor, 36%, it depends on the situation, and 20%, against. More delegates said they were totally in favor, even so, more non-Brazilian delegates (63%) than Brazilian (40%). Not

surprisingly, religion seems to be the factor that most interferes with opinions about abortion: 26% of those professing a religion are totally against abortion, while only 9% of those not professing any religion are of this opinion. Among those participating in organization of civil society, the opinion totally in favor is significantly lower among the trade unionists (31%).

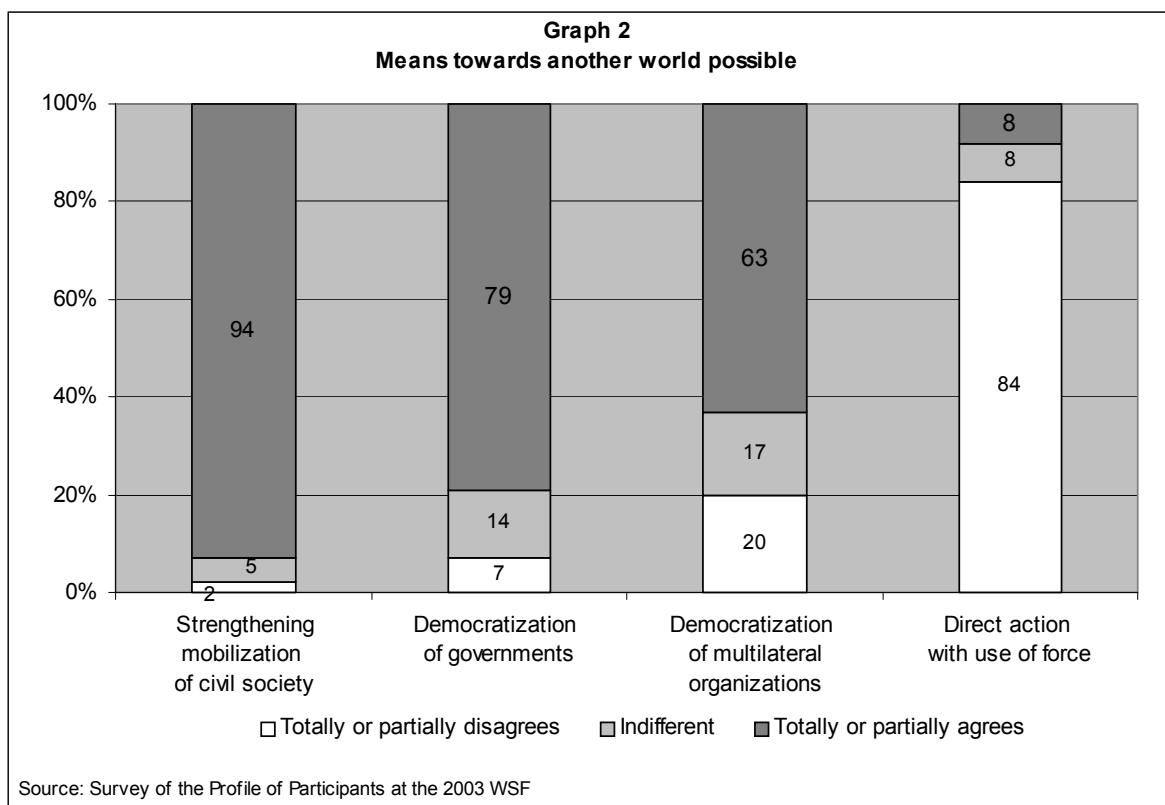
Several questions were asked concerning the processes of globalization and multilateral institutions. Participants were asked to declare their degree of agreement or disagreement³³ with the following characterizations of globalization: “a new name for imperialism,” the concentration of wealth making the rich richer and the poor poorer,” “the possibility of societies connecting on the planetary level,” “ more opportunities for all, rich and poor,” “the dominion of the world by capital, commanded by big corporations.” Graph 1 presents the results:



³³ The opinions could be expressed in five degrees from totally agree[1] to totally disagree[5]. The responses were then aggregated in “totally or partially agree”, “totally or partially disagree” and “indifferent”.

Not surprisingly, the opinion most favorable to globalization (“more opportunities for all, rich and poor”) is the most rejected. It is however significant that this rejection is lower among delegates (71%). Equally interesting is the fact that the most ideologically loaded characterization (“a new name for imperialism”) gets a higher rate of agreement among those active in social movements (72%) than among those active in NOGs (64%).

The interviewees were asked to express their opinion about the efficacy of the following mechanisms to bring about “another world”: “strengthening mobilization of civil society on the global, national, regional and local level,” “democratization of multilateral organizations (United Nations, WTO, World Bank, IMF),” “democratization of governments” and “direct action with use of force”. See Graph 2:



The total results are not surprising, but there are some significant differences among different categories of participants. For instance Brazilians – obviously under the impact of the recent victory of the PT in the presidential elections – have much more confidence in the democratization of

governments (81%) than non-Brazilians (70%). On the other hand, activists of social movements have much less confidence in the democratization of multilateral institutions (51%) than the members of trade unions or NGOs (68%). Similarly, the rejection of direct action with use of force is much higher among trade unionists (87%) and NGO members (86%) than among activists of social movements (76%) and is also much higher among delegates – 87% in the case of Brazilian delegates and 82% in the case of non-Brazilian delegates – than among the campers, that is, the students and the participants in the lowest social strata (77%). Not surprisingly, among those that see themselves as belonging to the extreme left, the rejection of direct action is significantly lower (67%).

Some reflections

We should not overestimate the value of this portrait of the people of Porto Alegre. The WSF is a dynamic process and defies rigid descriptions and peremptory analyses. The characteristics of the WSF and its participants will certainly change as the event moves from one country to another. Having said that, the data are revealing in many ways and should be pondered.

1 - The WSF is a power space. To claim the opposite and defend the idea that the WSF is a totally open space, with no center and no hierarchies and potentially all-inclusive (within the limits set by the Charter of Principles) seems to be a bit far fetched. It is true that many of the concrete limits of inclusion are not the responsibility of the organizers. Nonetheless, crucial organizational options are decided by the OC and by the IC, and they condition the types of events that will take place, the high-profile participants that will attend, the themes that will be discussed and the ambit of the discussion. It is therefore wise to recognize the existence of power relations and submit them to the same criteria we want to see applied in society at large: transparency in the operation of such relations and their submission to the mechanisms of participatory democracy.

2 - The systematization is the expression of an inward movement that I find very healthy and most necessary. As we will see below, one of the

cleavages in the WSF is whether or not the WSF should become more outward looking, more concerned with its presence in the global public opinion and with its specific contribution to bringing about concrete transformations in the most unfair societies in which we live in today. Without addressing this issue at this point I think however that an inward looking moment is most important at this juncture and the systematization is a useful contribution to that. After four editions of the WSF there is a heritage to be shared and valued. It is, however, not clear in what such heritage consists. Without a detailed knowledge of the heritage it is impossible to make it effective and forward-looking. Through the systematization, the WSF looks at itself, reflects upon its past and sets itself to derive from such reflection guidelines and energies for the future.

3 - The regional, gender and thematic imbalances are all too evident not to be object of thorough reflection in the future.

4 - The articulation between organized activities and self-managed activities cannot go on being limited to center-periphery relations. To organize it according to a more democratic criterion is certainly a very demanding objective, but that should not discourage the organizers from pursuing it.

5 - The overwhelming participation of nationals in the WSFs must be acknowledged. This is not a negative feature itself, since the local impact of the WSF should be viewed as one of the mechanisms through which the local/global linkages are strengthened. The solution, therefore, does not lie in limiting the national participation but rather in changing the venue of the WSF.

6 - The social composition of the participants (their social characteristic, modes of engagement and opinions) will certainly vary according to the venue of the WSF. But in each specific venue the participation of the most excluded and oppressed social groups should be actively pursued. The progressive activism of the middle classes or of the petty bourgeoisie is a precious political asset and as such must be cherished, but it cannot substitute for the absence of the most oppressed classes and silenced voices. The WSF cannot flourish on the premise that since the Forum exists for the sake of the oppressed the latter don't have to be present.

7 - Among the participants there is a basic agreement on several issues but there are also significant disagreements and most probably one and the others will vary from venue to venue. This raises several issues. First of all, is it possible to link up the different peoples of the WSF as an embryonic form of a counter-hegemonic civil society? Second, how to transform the areas of widely shared consensus into calls for collective action? Third, how better to explore the implications of both the agreements and disagreements? Should, for instance, the latter be object of specific discussions in the WSF? How should the relationship between participants and organizers (IS, IC and the local OC) be? In different venues there will be different emphases, but how to articulate such diversity with the common core upon which the WSF builds its identity and eventually develops its capacity to act?

8 - All these reflections and questions raise the issue of governance. Each edition of the WSF raises specific governance issues and both the principle of consensus and the principle of participatory democracy are subjected to specific pressures. But, beyond that, what is at stake is the transparency and democratic nature of the permanent governing structures of the WSF, the IS and the IC. The last one, in particular, because it is in charge of the strategic guidelines and organizational design of the WSF, must be the object of specific scrutiny. To this I turn now.

Composition and functionality of the International Council

The IC consisted originally of the groups and organizations invited to the first meeting and all that were admitted afterwards by cooptation. Up to this day the IC has no fixed number of members. In June 2004 it had 130 members and 7 observers. (See Annex VI) The IC acknowledges that it consists of a basic core wherein regional imbalances still exist (scarce participation from Africa, Asia and the Arab World) as well as sectorial ones (few young people, blacks, among others). Below I present a preliminary statistical analysis of the composition of the IC.

In view of the serious organizational problems of the third WSF, at the IC meeting that took place during the Forum, it was decided to give more

responsibility to the CI in planning and organizing the WSF. Accordingly, the following steps were considered necessary: 1) to restructure the IC in order to render it more operational, namely by approving an internal set of rules and by creating committees in charge of specific tasks; 2) to take measures to increase the representativity of the IC, namely by approving a proactive policy, both aimed at establishing criteria for the admission of organizations, and attracting organizations and movements of world regions or thematic areas with weaker representation in the WSF, and in the IC in particular. It was decided that decisions on these matters would be taken in the next meeting of the IC, set for June 2003 in Miami. In Miami, it was not possible to have the internal rules approved, but six committees were created: strategy, expansion, content, methodology, communication and funding committees. The members of the IC chose the committees on which they would like to work, one the members taking on the role of “facilitator” in each one of them. Every committee was supposed to be permanently in office and submit reports to the meetings of the IC. The criterion for creating committees had to do with the problems previously identified and the felt need to respond to them urgently. Thus, the mission of the *strategy committee* was to analyze the international situation regularly, reflect on its impact on the development of the Forum, and propose new forms of articulation between the WSF and the social movements, namely the general assembly of the social movements that runs parallel to the WSF. The *expansion committee* was charged with proposing measures to enlarge the Forum’s territorial and thematic ambit and with establishing criteria for the admission of organizations to the IC.³⁴ The *content committee* was charged with analyzing the written memory of the previous WSFs and proposing topics for discussion in future WSFs. In previous meetings of the IC, there had been exchanges on the need to tune in the debates with the expectations and interests of participants, prevent the Forum from becoming repetitive, and identify emergent topics not yet approached in

³⁴ Actually, in view of pending requests for admission, it was decided to establish a few basic procedural and substantive criteria. As regards procedural criteria, applications are to be submitted to the International Secretariat (IS), to be then forwarded to the expansion committee for reviewing and subsequent final assessment by the IC. As to substantive criteria, on the one hand, an organization is required to exist for more than two years and its activities must have international dimension, on the other, taking part in one of the committees becomes condition for admission in the IC.

previous forums. The task of the *methodology committee* was to reflect on the problems aroused by the structure of the Forum and to propose solutions. Some of these problems were: the problematical relation between the activities organized by the IS and the self-managed activities (organized by the participant organizations themselves); the method of deliberation by consensus; the creation of spaces of articulation beyond the Forums among the various organizations or movements; the systematization and agglutination of the proposals for activities, so as to prevent fragmentation and overlapping. The *communication committee* was to propose measures to improve the Forum's internal and external communication. Many of the internal criticisms about the lack of transparency of the decisions of the IS or IC result from lack of efficient communication channels covering the Forum's base overall. On the other hand, the WSF finds it difficult to inform the public opinion of its activities and messages. Finally, the *funding committee* was charged with taking care of two complex issues: the criteria for fund raising and the creation of solidary funding systems to make possible the participation in the activities of the WSF of organizations and movements deprived of resources. The former issue was particularly sharp during the preparation of the Mumbai WSF, because the Indian organizing committees refused to accept funding from the institutions that had funded the previous WSFs, the Ford Foundation among others.

In the following meetings of the IC (Peruggia, November 2003; Mumbai, January 2004; Passignano Sul Trasimeno, Italia, April 2004) most of the committees presented their reports. It is too soon to assess the performance of the committees. It looks as if the content and the methodology committees have been the most active ones, its work being directly reflected in the new organization model of the 2005 WSF. The close connection between thematic and methodological issues led to the decision, taken in the April 2004 meeting of the IC, to merge the content and methodology committees. In the same meeting it was decided to approve the admission to the IC of nineteen new organizations.

A statistical analysis of the composition of the IC reveals the nature and the extent of the imbalances already mentioned.³⁵ 92% of the organizations provide information about the ambit or territorial scale of their activity: 50.8% operate globally; 30% operate regionally; and 19.2% operate nationally. In the latter category I include organizations whose activity is basically national even though they may have departments of international relations that represent them at the IC (this is the case, for instance, of national federations of trade unions). The regional imbalances can be shown from different perspectives. 66.6% of the organizations have their headquarters either in Latin America/Caribbean and Europe, 13.5% have their headquarters in North America. 47.8% have their headquarters in the global North (Europe, North America and Australia) (see Table 5).

Table 5
Headquarters of the organizations represented at IC³⁶

	N	%
Europe	32	33,3%
Latin America and Caribbean	32	33,3%
Africa	6	6,3%
Asia	9	9,4%
Australia	1	1,0%
North America	13	13,5%
Middle East	2	2,1%
Arab World	1	1,0%
TOTAL	96	100%

Of the organizations whose scale of action is predominantly national 47.8% are based in Latin America and Caribbean, while 26% are based in the global North (Table 6).

³⁵ In constructing the database I counted with the precious help of Sara Araújo.

³⁶ In this table I include only the organizations with one single address and for which information is available (73% of the organizations).

Table 6
Headquarters of organizations operating at the national level

	N	%
Europe	2	8,7%
Latin America and Caribbean	11	47,8%
Africa	1	4,3%
Asia	4	17,4%
North America	3	13,0%
Australia	1	4,3%
Middle East	1	4,3%
Arab World	0	0,0%
TOTAL	23	100%

Of the organizations, which operate at the regional level, 52.8% operate in Latin America/Caribbean and 13.9% in Europe (Table 7):

Table 7
Regional Organizations³⁷ by Region where they operate

	N	%
Europe	5	13,9%
Latin America and Caribbean	19	52,8%
Africa	4	11,1%
Asia	3	8,3%
America	2	5,6%
Middle East	1	2,8%
Arab World	1	2,8%
Australia	0	0,0%
Europe-America	1	2,8%
Total	36	100%

³⁷ Only those organizations with accessible data about the region where they operate.

There are also imbalances concerning the thematic areas in which the organizations concentrate their activity. Not surprisingly, economic justice (development, debt, trade, socio-economic equality, etc.) is the dominant area of activity: 33.3%. It is followed by labor/trade unionism (13.2%) human rights (11.4%) and feminism/women issues (8.8%) (Table 8):

Table 8
Social Area in which the organizations operate³⁸

	N	%
Trade-unionism/labor	15	13,2%
Women	10	8,8%
Economic Justice (development, debt, trade, socio-economic equality)	38	33,3%
Peace	4	3,5%
Mass Media	6	5,3%
Environment	5	4,4%
Democratization (democracy citizenship, participation, anti-racism)	7	6,1%
Human Rights	13	11,4%
Education	4	3,5%
Research	3	2,6%
Youth	1	0,9%
Indigenous peoples	2	1,8%
LGBT	1	0,9%
Ecumenism	2	1,8%
Earth	3	2,6%
TOTAL	114	100%

³⁸ Organizations with accessible information about their activities (87% of the total).

These data, however preliminary and deserving more detailed analysis, indicate that the expansion commission of the IC should take a more proactive stance in reducing these imbalances and also others once more detailed information about the organizations becomes available.

Organizational innovation

I will discuss the organizational innovation in three steps: the debates after the third WSF, the WSF in Mumbai and the organizational model of the WSF in 2005.

The debates after the WSF 2003

The third WSF sparked an unprecedented debate within its own ranks. Such debate started in the meeting of the IC held in Porto Alegre at the time of the Forum and continued throughout the year. For some the debate had mainly to do with the success of the WSF. Having gathered more than 20000 participants in the first edition, around 60000 in the second, and more than 100000 in the third, the question was how best to channel this tremendous energy. Which new and deeper or more ambitious forms of collective action could be built upon the convening power generated by the WSF. For others, the debate should focus on the problems that were now too visible to be swept under the rug. Here are very sketchily presented some of the topics of debate:

Gigantism. The WSF grew so fast and so dramatically that it may have become unmanageable. The obvious organizational deficiencies were seen by some as evidence that this format had reached its limits and that something new and different should be proposed for the future. In the IC meeting it was decided that greater priority should be given to the national, regional and thematic Forums. Some members even proposed that from now on the dynamics of the WSF should rest on these Forums, smaller and closer to people, which would choose the delegates to the WSF. In this way the WSF would become an emanation or expression of those Forums, a much smaller

event but nonetheless more representative. Others suggested that the organization of the WSF takes too much energy (both human and financial resources), draining the resources of the NGOs and social movements that should be applied to their specific objectives and agendas. Accordingly it was proposed that the WSF take place every two years and that, in the years it does not take place, local and national Forums be organized around the world simultaneously, on the same days that the World Economic Forum of Davos meets. None of these proposals were approved by the IC. It was rather decided that the 2004 WSF would be held in Mumbai, and the 2005 one in Porto Alegre, leaving open the decision as to what to do in the subsequent years.

The global deficit. The overwhelming participation of Brazilians and NGOs and movements from Latin America and North Atlantic was almost unanimously viewed as a problem of credibility undermining the WSF aspiration to be the embryo of a counter-hegemonic global civil society. Notwithstanding the resistance of some groups (in which the Cuban delegation was particularly vocal), the IC decided that the next meeting would be held in India, and that a special effort should be made to bring in more participants from Africa and also from Eastern Europe and the Caribbean.

The social deficit. In spite of its size the WSF was much less inclusive than what it proclaimed. The really oppressed people, the unemployed, undernourished, those living in the shanty towns, dispossessed peasants, the victims of the worst kinds of new and old forms of exploitation and discrimination were hardly present. As Peter Waterman (2004: 87) put it, the WSF risked being an expression of the globalization from the middle rather than the globalization from below. The “systematization” conducted in the following months confirmed these risks, as I mentioned above.

Related to this was the idea that the radical potential of the WSF was being hijacked by the NGOs that controlled it. Social movements, although present in great numbers, did not have the steering power to keep the WSF close to the grassroots movements. The NGOization of the WSF was seen as a disturbing evolution likely to bring about the discredit of the WSF in the near future. This problem was tackled in the multiple ways in which the question

was asked: how open is the WSF? The limits of inclusion were discussed both in terms of people and in terms of themes and political postures (radical action versus reasonable reformism).

A discrete event or a process. What is left after the WSF ends? For some, not much or nothing comparable to the effort put in organizing it and in participating in it. For most, the question was how to maximize the tremendous potential of this huge and emotionally unforgettable meeting of peoples, ideas and emotions. How to keep alive the contacts made and inter-knowledge obtained. In a sense, the meetings of the networks and of the social movements – in particular, the assembly of the social movements being held in parallel with the WSF – were partial responses to this question and indeed many articulations and collective actions have been forged in these meetings. The point of the debate was whether more and better could be accomplished.

Another aspect of this debate was the internal balkanization of the WSF, the danger that the scale of the event – a remarkable achievement in itself – could favor the emergence of ghettos inside the Forum. The discreteness would thus be double: in between Forums and inside each Forum. If, on one side, the big event created an atmosphere of anonymity that favored the exercise of freedom to attend whatever meeting with whatever degree of engagement, on the other side, it facilitated the formation of exclusive groups that discussed in closed circles without much connection with the rest of the Forum. As Jai Sen puts it, this self-insulation is all the more probable given “the tendencies of people belonging to particular streams of thought and action to stay within or close to ‘their’ streams. The tendency of some (many? most?) streams of thought and action, especially those from old politics but not only those, to organize their events in what amounts to being an exclusive manner: With familiar and reliable speakers, and organized in such a manner that the events ‘speak’ primarily to those within the streams, in other words with an internal discourse – and so inevitably tend to keep things separate. The intercultural differences that exist between participants from different countries and contexts, and that is likely to be all the more the case as the

Forum matures as an idea and the dominance of people from the host country reduces, whether in Brazil or anywhere else (Sen 2003b: 8).

Coordination and articulation. The third WSF raised most dramatically the question of the articulation between the different activities of the Forum, in particular, between self-managed and centrally organized activities, as I mentioned above. The sense of being neglected or even marginalized by the organization was widespread among the organizers of self-managed activities, especially among those that organized multiple activities. Notwithstanding the excesses of those that saw conspiracy where there was only incompetence or organizational collapse for lack of resources, the debate was an important starting point for the designing of new solutions, some of them already implemented in the Mumbai meeting and others to be tried in the 2005 WSF (more on this below).

The composition and tasks of the IC and IS. I have dealt with this topic above. It will suffice to say here that the debate focused on whether the composition of the IC – up until now dominated by Latin American and European organizations – should be discussed in strict terms of representativity or rather in more general terms of reducing the arbitrariness of its composition. This is a topic that is much alive in the current discussions in the IC and specifically in its expansion committee (see above).

As to the IS, many resented its enormous executive power, which, they claimed, went much beyond that of a technical body, particularly in light of its exclusively Brazilian composition. Others, however, observed that the protagonism of the IS was occurring less by design than by default, as the IC had not been able to improve its operational capacity. Moreover, the IS had accumulated some precious inside knowledge that in no way should be wasted. It was in this context that, as we saw above, the IC took upon itself reshuffling its internal functioning, and decided that, after Mumbai, some members of the India Organizing committee would integrate the IS.

The WSF as a space or as a movement. This has been the most controversial topic of discussion, as it touches the core issue of defining the political nature and role of the WSF. It became particularly heated after the

third WSF, embedded in the evaluations of the WSF that followed, and also due to some conflicts and tensions that occurred during the Forum between the OC and the Assembly of the social movements and inside the IC. This debate reflected the most deep-seated tensions inhabiting the WSF and for that reason I will refer to it in the section on strategy and political action below.

The WSF of Mumbai

The idea of holding the WSF in India emerged very early on, indeed, in 2001. Concerned with the further globalization of the WSF, the Brazilian OC and some members of the IC thought that India – a large country with a great tradition of civil society progressive activism – would be the ideal alternative to Brazil. A first visit to India occurred at the end of 2001. After a first national consultation held in New Delhi in early January 2002, it was decided that India could organize the WSF in 2004, not in 2003. Given the fact that general elections would be held in India in 2004, the WSF would be a precious platform to advance the progressive and secular political agenda. As a kind of preparation, it was also decided to organize a regional Forum in 2003, the Asian Social Forum which was held in January 2003, and whose organization was seen as a great success.

The 2004 WSF took place in a social and political context that was very different from the previous ones, a difference that traduced itself into important organizational innovations. The adopted organizational structure itself reflected the need to formalize balances among political forces with divergences that were deeply marked and defined according to party loyalties. Four committees were created, corresponding to four levels of organization: 1) the India General Council, comprised of about 140 organizations, to define the broad lines of the 2004 WSF; 2) the India Working Committee, comprised of about 60 organizations, to supervise the preparative activities all over India for organizing the Forum, and to formulate the policy guidelines that form the basis for the functioning of the WSF India process; 3) the India Organizing Committee, including 45 members, divided into eight working groups, which was the executive body of the 2004 WSF, ultimately responsible for

organizing the event; 4) and the local organizing committee, the Mumbai Committee.

One of the policy guidelines, in which transpired a criticism of the previous WSFs, was to democratize the organization of and participation in the WSF as much as possible, so as to render more visible the social inequalities that characterize India. With this in mind, five national consultations were held with the objective of bringing into the process more organizations representing critical sections of society and the economy from across the political spectrum, thus, in the words of the IOC, “putting in place a democratic transparent and accountable decision making mechanism in the WSF India process”. On the other hand, it was decided to strengthen the presence in the event of self-managed activities by participant organizations, highlighting them on program and seeing to it that their schedules would not clash with the activities put together by the organizing committee.³⁹ Finally, there was an attempt to make the social profile of the participants reflect an unequivocal option for the “social groups that remain less visible, marginalized, unrecognized, and oppressed.” In this respect, particularly significant was the participation of more than 30000 Dalits, members of the lowest caste (previously called “the untouchables”), about one third of all the participants. With the same objective in mind, 13 languages were considered official, as opposed to the 4 Indo-European languages adopted in the previous Forums: Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, Korean, Malayan, Bahasa, Indonesian, Thai, Japanese, English, French and Spanish.

In spite of the careful preparation and the policy of grounding the design of the Forum on several ample national consultations, the organization of the Mumbai WSF met with several criticisms, some constructive and engaging, others radical and confrontational. Among the more constructive criticisms, Sen’s stand out. In May 2003, Sen alerted for the fact that the preparation of the event was a less than open and transparent process strongly dominated by parties within the organized left and unwelcoming to non invited people or organizations, a process in which the novelty of the WSF was forced to co-exist with the old left political culture still prevailing in India (2003b, 25). Sen

³⁹ Already in the WSF 2002 more space had been given to the self-managed activities.

ended his analysis with some thoughtful recommendations.⁴⁰ Among the radical criticisms, I mention the report on “The Economics and Politics of the World Social Forum” prepared by the Research Unit for Political Economy, based in Mumbai and published in September 2003. It reflects the old rivalries among the old left, and, as such, it confirms, from an opposite perspective, Sen’s comment above on the political culture prevailing in the organized left in India. The report starts with a general critique of the WSF:” The WSF slogan, “Another world is possible”, while vague, taps the widespread, inarticulate yearning for another *social system*. However, the very principles and structure of the WSF ensure that it will not evolve into a platform of people’s action and power against imperialism. Its claims to being a ‘horizontal’ (not a hierarchical) ‘process’ (not a body) are belied by the fact that decisions are controlled by a handful of organizations, many of them with considerable financial resources and ties to the very countries, which control the existing world order. As the WSF disavows arriving at any decisions as a body, it is *incapable* of collective expression of will and action. Its gatherings are structured to give prominence to celebrities of the NGO world, who propagate the NGO worldview. Thus, in all the talk on ‘alternatives’, the spotlight remains on alternative *policies within the existing system*, rather than a change of the very system itself”(RUPE, 2003). This opening statement – with which many of those involved in the WSF might agree with some qualifications – is followed by a vicious denunciation of the WSF as an agent of imperialism, of the NGOs in India as

⁴⁰ “1 - be concerned and informed about larger political and social developments in India;
2 - for people in other parts of the world, try and visit India during this year for a substantial period of time, and build close working relations with like-minded people and organizations there; encourage others you know to also do this;
3 - encourage people you know in India to fully participate in the Forum – to go into the space; this is the only way to truly democratize and defend open space; equally, encourage people you know in all parts of the world to fully participate in the Forum;
4 - globalize the Forum! Insist on open, internationalist planning of the World Social Forum – which as it happens is taking place this next year in India but where this should be embedded in WSF practice, as a matter of principle and permanent practice; and on the introduction of easy, online participation in planning and policy formation;
5- resist the likely tendency of the Forum in India itself becoming a platform for building unity, however necessary this might be for some social actors within India; Insist that the role of the Forum is only to provide space for this to happen;
6 - insist on the public articulation of a larger, more strategic internationalist perspective for the holding of the Forum in India – for if this articulation is not there, and clear to all, then what is the purpose of not continuing to hold the world meeting in Porto Alegre?
7 - insist on open, inclusive, democratic, and friendly communication both from the WSF secretariat in India and from the International Secretariat in Brazil (Sen, 2003b, 31).

a counter-revolutionary force and of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI (Marxist), for having betrayed the revolution while becoming the driving force behind the WSF in Mumbai. These criticisms echo the rivalries, within the old communist left, between the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist (Maoist) parties. Indeed, the alternative WSF – Mumbai Resistance – held in Mumbai across the street where the WSF was meeting, was organized by some Marxist-Leninist (Maoist) tendencies (while others actively participated in the organization of the WSF).

In spite of the criticisms and the many deficiencies – exiguous space for so many people, activities organized as large events but drawing little participation, translation problems, impossibility of dialogue in much too large spaces – the 2004 WSF was considered an organizational success, having thereby set a higher level of exigency for the organizers of the 2005 WSF. Here are some of the reasons accounting for the success:

1 - In retrospect, one can say that the choice of Mumbai as the venue of the 2004 WSF could not have been wiser. With its population of almost 15 million, Mumbai is the living symbol of the contradictions of capitalism in our time. An important financial and technological centre and the site of India's thriving film industry – Hollywood, producing more than 200 movies a year for an increasingly global audience – Mumbai is a city whose extreme poverty easily shocks western eyes. More than half of the population live in slums (roughly two million on the streets), whereas 73 percent of the families, usually large, live in one-room tenements. The recent spread of informal economy has turned 2 percent of the population into street vendors.

2 - Moreover the Mumbai WSF succeeded in demonstrating that the spirit of Porto Alegre, while being a universal aspiration, would acquire specific tonalities in different regions of the globe. In India, the struggle against inequality gains specific nuances that left their mark on the Forum. First, on top of economic, sexual and ethnic inequalities there are caste inequalities, which, though abolished by the Constitution, continue to be a decisive factor of discrimination. The Dalits made a very strong appearance at the Forum, as I mentioned above. They saw in the Forum a unique opportunity to denounce the discrimination that victimizes them. Second, the

religion factor. As I mentioned above, religion was absent from the large events in the previous Forums. Seen from the perspective of the organizers – which, as we saw, did not coincide with that of many participants, as revealed through their social profile – this was due to the fact that in the Western culture, which grounded the first three editions of the WSF, religion tends to carry less weight in view of the secularization of power. Be it as it may, the WSF of Mumbai showed that, in the East, religion is a crucial social and political factor. Religious fundamentalism – a plague all over Asia, including India itself with the increasing politicization of Hinduism – was a major topic for debate, as was the role of spirituality in the social struggles for a better world.

3 - Having taken place in Asia, the Forum could not help but pay special attention to the struggle for peace, not only because it is in the West Asia, from Iraq to Afghanistan, that US's war aggression is strongest, but also because today South Asia (India and Pakistan) is a region full of nuclear weapons.

4 - At the Mumbai WSF the western conception of ecological struggles gave way to broader conceptions, so as to include the struggle for food sovereignty, land and water, as well as the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources, and the defence of forests against agro-business and lumber industry.

By its very success, the Mumbai WSF created new challenges for the WSF process. In a paper published shortly after the Forum I singled out three main challenges (Santos, 2004). The first was the Forum's expansion, an issue already touched upon. It was not just a question of geographic expansion, but the expansion of themes and perspectives as well. Meeting in Mumbai, the IC decided to encourage the organization of local, national, regional and thematic forums, in order to deepen the synergy of the "Porto Alegre Consensus" with the concrete struggles that mobilize such a diversity of social groups across the globe. The second challenge related to memory. The WSF had been collecting an impressive amount of knowledge concerning its organizations and movements, the world we live in, and the proposals that go on being presented and implemented to change it. Such knowledge should

be carefully evaluated to be adequately used and render the Forum more transparent to itself, thus allowing for self-learning for all the activists and movements involved in the WSF process.⁴¹ Finally, I mentioned as a challenge the fact that as knowledge accumulated and the large areas of convergence were identified, the need for developing plans of collective action was likely to increase, giving rise to new problems and tensions. The issue was not so much to augment the WSF's efficaciousness as a global actor – efficaciousness is not gauged by global as much as by local and national actions – but mainly to prepare responses to the attempts of the World Bank, IMF and the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos to coopt the agendas of the WSF and sanitize them in favour of solutions that will leave the ongoing economic disorder intact. This challenge echoed the debate on the political role of the WSF already mentioned. The Mumbai WSF showed that, even if the WSF was to keep its character as an open-space – not presenting proposals in its own name – it would have to come up with the institutional changes that facilitate the articulation between the networks that constitute it, in order to deepen plans of collective action and put them into practice.

The twofold need to evaluate and spread the accumulated knowledge and prepare plans of collective action with a sound political and technical basis led to more discussion than never before in previous Forums of the relationship between expert and grass-roots knowledge, and, more specifically, between social scientists and popular struggles.⁴²

⁴¹ The project of systematization analyzed above was a manifestation of the need to respond to this challenge.

⁴² I myself organized, through the Center for Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra, where I work, one workshop entitled “New Partnerships for New Knowledges”. The participants were social scientists and activists. Immanuel Wallerstein (USA), Anibal Quijano (Peru), D. L. Sheth (India), Goran Therborn (Sweden), Hilary Wainright (UK) and myself were among the social scientists; Jai Sen (India), Irene Leon (Equador) and Moema Miranda (Brazil) were among the activists. The discussion concentrated on themes that are at the core of the idea of public sociology: the relationship between expertise and engagement; from critique to plans for action; the reliability of the knowledge underlying social struggles and its critique; the impact on social scientists of their engagement with lay or popular knowledges; activists as producers of knowledge. A proposal for a Popular University of Social Movements was also presented at the workshop. See below chapter 6.

The WSF 2005

On the initiative of the content and methodology committees a new methodology for the 2005 WSF started being discussed from the second semester of 2003 onwards. The idea was to pursue in more intense forms the democratization of the WSF, attuning the themes and methodology of the WSF in a more systematic way to the expectations and interests of the participant organizations and movements, and maximizing the possibility of common articulations and actions. The new methodology was first formulated at the meeting of the content and methodology committees in Peruggia, in November of 2003 and was finally approved in the April 2004 meeting of the IC held in Passignano sul Trasimeno, Italy.

The new methodology aimed at two main objectives: 1- to build the whole WSF programme from bottom up, in such way that all the activities would be in a strong sense self-managed; 2- to maximize the possibility of articulation and common action among organizations, by inviting them to engage in a sustained dialogue leading to the agglutination of proposed activities for the Forum. The first practical step was a thematic consultation to all the people of Porto Alegre. A questionnaire was sent to all the movements and organizations involved in the WSF process with the objective of identifying a) the themes, struggles, questions, problems, proposals and challenges that they would like to see discussed at WSF 2005 and in which format and b) which activities they intended to organize at the Forum. The questionnaire was sent out in May and the last responses were received at the beginning of August. 1.863 organizations responded to the questionnaire. The results were subsequently analyzed in several meetings of the IC commissions of methodology and contents. Eleven thematic spaces were identified which will organize all the proposed activities to WSF 2005:

1. Assuring and defending Earth and people's common goods – as alternative to commodification and transnational control
2. Arts and creation: weaving and building people's resistance culture
3. Communication: counter-hegemonic practices, rights and alternatives
4. Defending diversity, plurality and identities
5. Human rights and dignity for a just and egalitarian world

6. Sovereign economies for and of people – against neoliberal capitalism
7. Ethics, cosmovisions and spiritualities – resistances and challenges for a new world
8. Social struggles and democratic alternatives – against neoliberal domination
9. Peace, demilitarization and struggle against war, free trade and debt
10. Autonomous thought, reappropriation and socialization of knowledge and technologies
11. Towards construction of international democratic order and people's integration

The eleven thematic spaces will be the privileged terrain for the expression of the diversity and the plurality within the WSF. Each space will be sub-divided in sub-spaces. In order to provide focus for the debates three transversal axes have been identified:

- 1 - Social emancipation and political dimensions of struggles
- 2 - Struggle against patriarchal capitalism
- 3 - Struggle against racism

The great methodological innovation the WSF 2005 is that all activities are self-managed. When proposing an activity each organization will link it to one of the eleven thematic spaces. In doing so it will be immediately in contact with all the other organizations proposing activities within the same space. The process of aggregating activities will start then – with the help of facilitators, whenever necessary – seeking to avoid the fragmentation that plagued the Forum in previous editions (different activities on the same topic being held separately and without any communication among them). As the aggregation proceeds activities will be merged and changed and as a result the organizations will be free to re-register their activities taking into account the new format emerging from the aggregation process. It is expected that this articulation and the mutual knowledge it makes possible, which will start before the Forum and will continue thereafter, will induce and facilitate the planning of common collective actions and campaigns. Moreover, with the same objective the OC has reserved a daily slot of time (5 to 8PM) for

informal meetings among the organizations active in the same thematic space in which aggregations may be evaluated and revised and plans for future common collective action may be agreed upon.

This new methodology is much more democratic and participatory. It requires higher degree of engagement on the part of the organizations for a longer period of time. It remains to be seen whether the appropriation of the methodology will measure up to the expectations.

3.5 Strategy and Political Action

While utopia, the WSF is characterized, as I have already said, by its claim to the existence of an alternative to the anti-utopian, single way of thinking of neoliberalism's conservative utopia. It is a radically democratic utopia that celebrates diversity, plurality, and horizontality. It celebrates another possible world, itself plural in its possibilities. The newness of this utopia in left thinking in western capitalist modernity – which has in Zapatista thinking an eloquent formulation – cannot but be problematical as it translates itself into strategic planning and political action. These are marked by the historical trajectory of the political left throughout the twentieth century. The translation of utopia into politics is not, in this case, merely the translation of long range into medium and short range. It is also the translation of the new into the old. The tensions and divisions brought about by this are no less real for that reason. What happens is that the reality of the divergences is often a ghostly reality, in which divergences about concrete political options get mixed up with divergences about codes and languages of political option. Moreover, it is not always possible to determine if the reality of the divergences lies in real divergences.

It should be stressed, however, that the novelty of the utopia has managed so far to overcome the political divergences. Contrary to what happened in the thinking and practice of the left in western capitalist modernity, the WSF managed to create a style and an atmosphere of inclusion of and respect for divergences that made it very difficult for the different political factions to self-exclude themselves at the start under the

excuse that they were being excluded. For this contributed decisively the WSF's "minimalist" program stated in its Charter of Principles: emphatic assertion of respect for diversity; access hardly conditioned (movements or groups that advocate political violence are excluded); no voting or deliberations at the Forum as such; no representative entity to speak for the Forum. It is almost like a *tabula rasa* where all forms of struggle against neoliberalism and for a more just society may have their place. Before such openness, those who choose to exclude themselves find it difficult to define what exactly they are excluding themselves from.

All this has contributed to making the WSF's power of attraction greater than its capacity to repel. Even the movements that are most severely critical of the WSF, such as the anarchists, have not been absent. There is definitely something new in the air, something that is chaotic, messy, ambiguous, and indefinite enough to deserve the benefit of the doubt or be susceptible to manipulation. Few would want to miss this train, particularly at a time in history when trains have ceased to ride. For all these reasons, the desire to highlight what the movements and organizations have in common has prevailed upon the desire to underscore what separates them. The manifestation of tensions or cleavages has been relatively tenuous and, above all, has not resulted in mutual exclusions. It remains to be seen for how long this will to convergence and this chaotic sharing of differences will last.

Neither the kinds of cleavages nor the way the movements relate to them are randomly distributed inside the WSF. On the contrary, they reflect a meta-cleavage between western and nonwestern political cultures. Up to a point, this meta-cleavage also exists between the North and the South. Thus, given the strong presence of movements and organizations of the North Atlantic and white Latin America, particularly in the first three editions of the WSF it is no wonder that the most salient cleavages reflect the political culture and historical trajectory of the left in this part of the world.⁴³ This means, on the one hand, that many movements and organizations from Africa, Asia, the indigenous and black Americas, and the Europe of immigrants do not

⁴³ As we saw above, India is not totally immune to this type of political culture and political cleavages.

recognize themselves in these cleavages; on the other, that alternative cleavages which these movements and organizations might want to make explicit are perhaps being concealed or minimized by the prevailing ones.⁴⁴ After this caveat, my next step is to identify the main manifest cleavages.

Reform or revolution. This cleavage carries the weight of the tradition of the western left even though it can be found elsewhere, most notably in India. It is the cleavage between those who think that another world is possible, by the gradual transformation of the unjust world in which we live, through legal reform and mechanisms of representative democracy; and those who think that the world we live in is a capitalist world which will never tolerate reforms that will question or disturb its logic of operation and that it must therefore be overthrown and replaced by a socialist world. This is also regarded as a cleavage between moderates and radicals. Either field comprises a wide variety of positions. For instance, among revolutionaries, there is a clear cleavage between the old left, that aspires to a kind of state socialism, the anarchists, that are radically anti-Statist, and some newer left rather ambivalent about the role of the State in a socialist society. Although they amount to a very minor proportion of the WSF, the anarchists are among the fiercest critics of reformism, which they claim controls the WSF's leadership.

This cleavage reverberates, albeit not linearly, in strategic options and options for political action. Among the most salient ones should be counted the strategic option between reforming/democratizing the institutions of neoliberal globalization (WTO and International Financial Institutions) or fighting to eliminate and replace them; and the option for political action between, on the one hand, constructive dialogue and engagement with those institutions, and, on the other, confrontation with them.

This cleavage translates itself into opposite positions, either as regards the diagnosis of contemporary societies, or as regards the evaluation of the WSF itself. As to the diagnosis, according to one stance, contemporary

⁴⁴ This is well illustrated by the changes introduced by the Indian Working Committee in the Charter of Principles to adapt it to the social, political and cultural realities and cleavages prevailing in South Asia. As I said above, the Indian committees disavowed later the idea of their WSF India Policy Statement being seen as an alternative Charter of Principles. See in Annex I.

societies are viewed as societies where there are multiple discriminations and injustices, not all of them attributable to capitalism. Capitalism, in turn, is not homogeneous, and the struggle must focus on its most exclusionary form – neoliberalism. According to another stance, contemporary societies are viewed as intrinsically unjust and discriminatory because they are capitalist. Capitalism is an enveloping system in which class discrimination feeds on sexual, racial and other kinds of discrimination. Hence, the struggle must focus on capitalism as whole and not against any single one of its manifestations.

As to the evaluation of the WSF, the WSF is viewed now as the embryo of an efficacious contestation to neoliberal globalization, for confronting neoliberal globalization at the global scale where more social injustice has been produced, now as a movement which, because it is not grounded on the principle of the class struggle, will accomplish little beyond a few rhetorical changes in dominant capitalist discourse.

What is new about the WSF as a political entity is that the majority of the movements and organizations that participate in it do not recognize themselves in these cleavages and refuse to take part in debates about them. There is great resistance to assuming rigidly a given position and even greater to labeling it. The majority of movements and organizations have political experiences in which moments of confrontation alternate or combine with moments of dialogue and engagement, in which long range visions of social change coexist with the tactical possibilities of the political and social conjuncture in which the struggles take place, in which radical denunciations of capitalism do not paralyze the energy for small changes when the big changes are not possible. Above all, for many movements and organizations, this cleavage is westcentric or northcentric, and is more useful to understand the past of the left than its future. Indeed, many movements and organizations do not recognize themselves, for the same reasons, in the dichotomy left and right.

Precisely because for many movements and organizations the priority is not to seize power but rather change the power relations in oppression's many faces, the political tasks, however radical, must be carried out here and now,

in the society in which we live. It makes no sense, therefore, to ask a priori if their success is incompatible with capitalism. Gramsci's concept of hegemony is useful to understand the movements' political actions. What is necessary is to create alternative, counter-hegemonic visions, capable of sustaining the daily practices and sociabilities of citizens and social groups. The work of the movements' leaderships is of course important, but in no way is it conceived of as the work of an enlightened avanguard that breaks the path for the masses, ever the victims of mystification and false consciousness. On the contrary, as Subcomandante Marcos recommends, it behooves the leaderships to "walk with those who go slower." It is not a question of either revolution or reform. It is, for some, a question of rebellion and construction, for others, a question of revolution in a non-Leninist sense, a question of civilizational change occurring over a long period of time.

Socialism or social emancipation. This cleavage is related to the previous one but there is no perfect overlap between the two. Regardless of the position taken vis-à-vis the previous cleavage, or the refusal to take position, the movements and organizations diverge as to the political definition of the other possible world. For some, socialism is still an adequate designation, however abundant and disparate the conceptions of socialism may be. For the majority, however, socialism carries in itself the idea of a closed model of a future society, and must, therefore, be rejected. They prefer other, less politically charged designations, suggesting openness and constant search for alternatives. For example, social emancipation as the aspiration to a society in which the different power relations are replaced by relations of shared authority. This is a more inclusive designation focusing on processes rather than on final stages of social change.

But many movements of the South think that no general labels need be attached to the goals of the struggles. Labels run the risk of taking off from the practices that originated them, acquiring a life of their own, and giving rise to perverse results. As a matter of fact, according to some, the concept of socialism is westcentric and northcentric, while the concept of emancipation is equally prey of the western bias to create false universalisms. Hence many do

not recognize themselves in either term of this dichotomy, and don't even bother to propose any alternative one.

The State as enemy or potential ally. This is also a cleavage in which movements of the North recognize themselves more easily than movements of the South. On the one hand, there are those who think that the State, although in the past it may well have been an important arena of struggle, for the past 25 years has been transnationalized and turned into an agent of neoliberal globalization. Either the State has become irrelevant or is today what it has always been – the expression of capitalism's general interests. The privileged target of counter-hegemonic struggles must, therefore, be the State, or at least they must be fought with total autonomy vis-à-vis the State. On the other hand, there are those who think that the State is a social relation and, as such, it is contradictory and continues to be an important arena of struggle. Neoliberal globalization did not rob the State of its centrality, it rather reoriented it better to serve the interests of global capital. Deregulation is a social regulation like any other, hence a political field where one must act if there are conditions for acting.

The majority of the movements, even those that acknowledge the existence of a cleavage in this regard, refuse to take a rigid and principled position. Their experiences of struggle show that the State, while sometimes the enemy, can often be a precious ally in the struggle against transnational impositions. In these circumstances, the most adequate attitude is, again, pragmatism. If in some situations confrontation is in order, in others collaboration is rather advised. In others still a combination of both is appropriate. The important thing is that, at every moment or in every struggle, the movement or organization in question be clear and transparent regarding the reasons for the adopted option, so as to safeguard the autonomy of the action. Autonomy is, in such cases, always problematical, and so it must be watched carefully. According to the radical autonomists, collaboration with the State will always end up compromising the organizations' autonomy. They fear that collaborationists, whether the State or the institutions of neoliberal globalization be involved, end up being co-opted. According to them, an alliance between the reformist wing of counter-hegemonic globalization and

the reformist wing of hegemonic globalization will ensue thereby, ending up compromising the goals of the WSF.

National or global struggles. This is the most evenly distributed cleavage in the totality of movements and organizations that comprise the WSF. On one side, there are the movements that, while participating in the WSF, believe that the latter is no more than a meeting point and a cultural event, since the real struggles that are truly important for the welfare of the populations are fought at the national level against the State or the dominant national civil society. For instance, in a report on the WSF prepared by the Movement for National Democracy in the Philippines, one can read:

(...) the World Social Forum still floats somewhere above, seeing and trying yet really unable to address actual conditions of poverty and powerlessness brought about by Imperialist globalization in many countries. Unless it finds definite ways of translating or even transcending its "globalness" into more practical interventions that address these conditions, it just might remain a huge but empty forum that is more a cultural affair than anything else... national struggles against globalization are and should provide the anchor to any anti-globalization initiative at the international level. (Gobrin-Morante, 2002: 19)

In other words, globalization is most effectively fought against at the national level.

On the other side, there are the movements according to which the State is now transnationalized and thus is no longer the privileged center of political decision. This decentering of the State brought about as well the decentering of the civil society, which is subjected today to many processes of cultural and social globalization. Furthermore, in some situations, the object of the struggle (be it a decision of the WTO, the World Bank, or the oil drilling by a TNC) is outside the national space and includes a plurality of countries simultaneously. This is why the scale of the struggle must be increasingly global, a fact on which the WSF draws its relevance.

According to the large majority of the movements, this is again a cleavage that does not do justice to the concrete needs of concrete struggles. What is new about contemporary societies is that the scales of social and political life – the local, national, and global scales – are increasingly more interconnected. In the most remote village of the Amazon or India the effects of hegemonic globalization and the ways in which the national State engages with it are clearly felt. If this is the case with scales of social and political life in general, it is even more so with the scales of counter-hegemonic struggles. It is obvious that each political practice or social struggle is organized in accordance with a privileged scale, be it local, national, or global, but whatever the scale may be, all the others must be involved as conditions of success. The decision on which scale to privilege is a political decision that must be taken in accordance with concrete political conditions. It is therefore not possible to opt in the abstract for any one hierarchy among scales of counter-hegemonic practice or struggle.

Direct or institutional action. This cleavage is clearly linked to cleavages 1 and 3. It specifically concerns the modes of struggle that should be adopted preferably or even exclusively. It is a cleavage with a long tradition in the western left. Those for whom this cleavage continues to have a great deal of importance are the same that slight the newness of neoliberal globalization in the historical process of capitalist domination.

On the one side, there are the movements that believe that legal struggles, based on dialogue and engagement with State institutions or international agencies, are ineffectual because the political and legal system of the State and the institutions of capitalism are impervious to any legal or institutional measures capable of really improving the living conditions of the popular classes. Institutional struggles call for the intermediation of parties, and parties tend to put those struggles at the service of their party interests and constituencies. The success of an institutional struggle has, therefore, a very high price, the price of cooptation, decharacterization, and trivialization. But even in the rare case in which an institutional struggle leads to legal and institutional measures that correspond to the movements' objectives, it is almost certain that the concrete application of such measures will end up

being subjected to the legal-bureaucratic logic of the State, thereby frustrating the movements' expectations. In the end there will be only a hollow hope. This is why only direct action, mass protest, strikes will yield the success of the struggles. The popular classes have no weapon but external pressure on the system. If they venture into it, they are defeated from the start.

On the contrary, the supporters of institutional struggles assume that the "system" is contradictory, a political and social relation where it is possible to fight and where failure is not the only possible outcome. In modernity the State was the center of this system. In the course of the twentieth century the popular classes conquered important institutional spaces, of which the welfare system in the global North is a good manifestation. The fact that the welfare system is now in crisis and the "opening" that it offered the popular classes is now being closed up, does not mean that the process is irreversible. Indeed, it won't be so if the movements and organizations continue to struggle inside the institutions and the legal system.

This cleavage is not spread out at random among the movements that comprise the WSF. In general the stronger movements and organizations are those that more frequently privilege institutional struggles, whereas the less strong are those that more frequently privilege direct action. This cleavage is much livelier among movements and organizations of the North than of the South. The large majority of the movements, however, refuse to take sides in this cleavage. According to them, the concrete legal and political conditions must dictate the kind of struggle to be privileged. Conditions may actually recommend the sequential or simultaneous use of the two kinds of struggle. Historically, direct action was at the genesis of progressive juridico-institutional changes, and it was always necessary to combat the cooptation or even subversion of such changes through direct action.

The principle of equality or the principle of respect for difference. As I have already said, one of the novelties of the WSF is the fact that the large majority of its movements and organizations believe that, although we live in obscenely unequal societies, equality is not enough as a guiding principle of social emancipation. Social emancipation must be grounded on two principles – the principle of equality and the principle of respect for difference. The

struggle for either of them must be articulated with the other, for the fulfillment of either is condition of the fulfillment of the other. Nonetheless, there is a cleavage among the movements and even, sometimes, inside the same movement on whether priority should be given to one of these principles, and in that case to which one. Among those that say yes to first question, the cleavage is between those that give priority to the principle of equality – for equality alone may create real opportunities for the recognition of difference – and those that give priority to the principle of the recognition of difference, for without such recognition equality conceals the exclusions and marginalities on which it lies, thus becoming doubly oppressive (for what it conceals and for what it shows).

This cleavage occurs among movements and intra-movements. It traverses, among others, the workers', the feminist, the indigenous, and the black movements. For instance, whereas the workers' movement has privileged the principle of equality to the detriment of the principle of the recognition of difference, the feminist movement has privileged the latter in detriment to the former. But the most shared position is indeed that both principles have priority together, and that it is not correct to prioritize either one in the abstract. Concrete political conditions will dictate to each movement, which one of the principles is to be privileged in a given concrete struggle. Any struggle conceived under the aegis of one of these two principles must be organized so as to open space for the other principle.

In the feminist movement of the WSF, this position is now dominant. Virgínia Vargas (s/d) expresses it well when she says:

At the World Social Forum, feminists have begun (...) nourishing processes that integrate gender justice with economic justice, while recovering cultural subversion and subjectivity as a longer term strategy for transformation. This confronts two broad expressions of injustice: socio-economic injustice, rooted in societal political and economic structures, and cultural and symbolic injustice, rooted in societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Both injustices affect women,

along with many other racial, ethnic, sexual and geographical dimensions.

She asks for new feminisms – feminisms of these times – as a discursive, expansive, heterogeneous panorama, generating polycentric fields of action that spread over a range of civil society organizations and are not constrained to women’s affairs, although women undoubtedly maintain them in many ways. And she concludes: “Our presence in the WSF, asking these very questions, is also an expression of this change.”

The WSF as a space or as a movement. This cleavage occurs at a different level from the previous ones. Rather than concerning the political differences of movements/NGOs inside the WSF, it concerns their differences about the political nature of the WSF itself. Indeed, this cleavage runs through all the others since differences about strategical goals and forms of action often boil down to differences about the role of the WSF in those goals and actions.

As I have already indicated, this cleavage has been present from the outset. It led, for instance, to some scarcely known clashes within the organizing committee of the first edition of the WSF. But it was within and after the third WSF that this cleavage gained widespread notoriety and involved a large number of participants. The sheer size of the WSF 2003 and the organizational problems it raised prompted the discussion about the future of the WSF. It soon became clear to the broader public of the WSF that the discussion was not about organization issues but rather about the political role and nature of the WSF. Two extreme positions can be identified in this discussion, and between them a whole range of intermediate positions. On one side, the conception of the WSF as a “movement of movements”. This conception has been expounded almost from the very beginning by influential members of the global network of social movements whose general assembly meets in parallel with the WSF. The idea behind this conception is that unless the WSF becomes a political actor in its own name it will soon be discredited as a talk shop and the anti-capitalist energy that it has generated will be

wasted. The celebration of diversity, however praiseworthy, if left alone will have a paralyzing effect and will play in the hands of capitalist domination. In order to be enabling, diversity must have an organizational and political core capable of deciding and carrying out collective actions in the name of the WSF. Such decisions should be stated in a final declaration of each edition of the WSF and for that the Charter of Principles must be revised. Horizontal organization based on consensus should be replaced (or at least be articulated with) by a democratic command capable acting in the name of the WSF. On the other side, is the conception of the WSF as a space, a meeting ground in which no one can be or feel excluded? The WSF is not a neutral space though since its objective is to allow as many people, organizations and movements as possible that oppose themselves to the neo-liberalism to get freely together. Once together they can listen to each other, learn with the experiences and struggles of others, discuss proposals of action, and become linked in new nets and organizations without being interfered with by leaders, commands or programs. The extreme version of this conception has been expounded by Francisco Whitaker, one of the founders of the WSF and an influential member of the IS and IC. According to him the nature of the WSF as an open space – he uses the metaphor of the public square – based on the power of free horizontal articulation should be preserved at all cost. After counterposing the organizational structure of a space and of a movement, he lashes out against the “so-called social movements” that want to transform the WSF into a movement: “those who want to transform it [the WSF] into a movement will end up, if they succeed, by working against our common cause, whether they are aware or not of what they are doing, whether they are movements or political parties, and however important, strategically urgent and legitimate their objectives might be. They will be effectively acting against themselves and against all of us. They will be hindering and suffocating its own source of life – stemming from those articulations and initiatives born in the Forum – or at least destroying an enormous instrument that is available for them to expand and to enlarge their presence in the struggle we are all engaged in” (2003).

The second conception is by far the dominant one both in the IS and in the IC but it is rarely defended in Whitaker's extreme version.⁴⁵ For instance, Candido Grzybowski, another founder of the WSF whose NGO, IBASE, is a very influential member of the IS, wrote in the first issue of the journal of the Forum, *Terraviva* (January 17, 2003):

To try to eliminate contradictions at the core of the WSF and turn it into a more homogeneous space and process for confronting neoliberalism is the aim of certain forces, inspired by the classic political partisanship of the left. I would even say that this struggle within the Forum is legitimate and deserves respect, given its visions and values. But it destroys innovation of the WSF, what it possesses in terms of potential to feed a broad and diverse movement of the global citizenry in building another world.

Another intermediate position in this cleavage but closer to the movement position has been taken by Teivo Teivainen, member of the IC, representing NIGD:

We have to move beyond rigid movement/space dichotomies if we want to understand the role of the WSF. The WSF can play and has played a role in facilitating radical social action. One example is the fact that the massive antiwar protests of 15 February 2003 were to a significant extent initiated and organized from within the WSF process. We should use this example more consciously to counter the claims that the WSF is politically useless. We should also use it as a learning experience, to build more effective channels for concrete action without building a traditional movement (of movements). The WSF should not be turned into a political party or a new International. It should, however, have better mechanisms for exchanging, disseminating and debating strategies of radical transformation. More explicit

⁴⁵ During the WSF 2003 there were severe tensions within the OC and between the OC and the assembly of the social movements concerning the fact that, by being held on the last day of the WSF and ending with a final document or declaration, the assembly was allegedly trying to present its declaration to the participants and international media as the final declaration of the WSF.

mechanisms and procedures mean more possibilities for getting things done (2004).

This cleavage, however intensely fought among some leading figures in the WSF, does not resonate among the social base of the Forum. The vast majority of the movements/NGOs come to the WSF to exchange experiences, learn about relevant issues and look for possible alliances that may strengthen the struggles in which they are already involved. The contacts made at the WSF may lead them into new struggles or courses of action but only if they choose to do so.

Except for the last one, the tensions and cleavages mentioned above are not specific of the WSF. They in fact belong to the historical legacy of the social forces that for the past 200 years have struggled against the *status quo* for a better society. The specificity of the WSF resides in the fact that all these cleavages coexist in its bosom without upsetting its aggregating power. To my mind, two factors contribute to this. First, the different cleavages are important in different ways for the different movements and organizations, and none of them is present in the practices or discourses of all the movements and organizations. Thus, all of them, at the same time that they tend towards factionalism, liberate potential for consensus. That is to say, all the movements and organizations have room for action and discourse in which to agree with all the other movements or organizations, whatever the cleavages among them. Second, there has so far been no tactical or strategic demand that would intensify the cleavages by radicalizing positions. On the contrary, cleavages have been fairly low intensity. For the movements and organizations in general, what unites has been more important than what divides. In reckoning of union and separation, the advantages of union have overcome the advantages of separation. Third, even when cleavages are acknowledged, the different movements and organizations distribute themselves amongst them in a nonlinear way. If a given movement opposes another in a given cleavage, it may well be on the same side in another cleavage. Thus, the different strategic alliances or common actions featured by each movement tend to have different partners. In this way are precluded the accumulation and strengthening of divergences that could result from the

alignment of the movements in multiple cleavages. On the contrary, the cleavages end up neutralizing or disempowering one another. Herein lies the WSF's aggregating power.

Chapter 4

The World Social Forum and the Future: From Realistic Utopias to Alternatives

I suggested in the first section that, the WSF's critical utopia, contains an imbalance between negative expectations (what is rejected) and positive expectations (what is proposed as alternative). Recognizing such imbalance, the organizers of the WSF have been emphasizing from the very beginning the need to formulate concrete alternatives to neoliberal globalization. This appeal has been made over and above the cleavage on the nature of the WSF (space or movement). The idea being that, even though the proposals originate in concrete organizations or networks, once formulated, they become a common patrimony to be taken up by all the organizations and movements that will feel motivated to subscribe them and struggle for their implementation. Herein lies the networking potential of the WSF.

Contrary to what the corporate media has been suggesting, the concern with concrete alternatives has been central to the WSF. From the very beginning, the WSF has been not only a "factory of ideas" but also "a machine of proposals." Particularly after the first WSF and in light of its notorious success, both the OC and IC thought that the event might be entering a new phase, a politically more consistent one, which would require a higher level of concretization of alternatives. Once the idea of an alternative globalization to hegemonic globalization was consolidated, the political strength of the WSF would depend on its capacity to formulate credible proposals and to generate enough political leverage to press them on to the political agendas of national governments and multilateral agencies. Moreover, as the consolidation of the WSF would tend to sharpen the cleavages about strategies and political action (analyzed in the previous section), the most fruitful way of discussing and clarifying them would be by focusing on concrete alternatives and proposals.

By the middle of 2001 the WSF's organizing committee was spreading among movements and organizations, the coordinators of the five major themes, as well its guest speakers, the recommendation that interventions

and debates in the second WSF were to focus on concrete proposals. The *mot d'ordre* was: "we must advance more proposals." Hundreds of proposals were submitted. The great majority of these proposals were presented and discussed in the self-managed workshops. In the following editions of the WSF the focus on concrete proposals and the struggles around them remained central. They deal with an enormous variety of themes. As an illustration, the theme of economic and institutional change covers, among many others, topics such as: the reform or elimination of the multilateral financial institutions; the reform of the UN; taxes and other controls on international financial transactions such as the Tobin Tax; elimination of tax havens and controls on banking confidentiality; corporate accountability; cancellation of the Third World debt; mechanisms guaranteeing better prices for the basket of products exported on the world market by developing countries, stabilizing the prices of raw materials and building up regulatory stocks; food security and sovereignty; excluding services of general interest from the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS); abolition of trade related intellectual property rights (TRIPs); agrarian reform and access to land; collective forms of land tenure; protection of forests; water as a common good and struggles against the privatization of water; moratorium on new dams.

The design, complexity, and technical detail of many of the proposals are of higher quality than many of those presented by the institutions of neoliberal globalization. The challenge ahead is to press these proposals on to the political agendas of the different states and the international community. It is a long-range challenge because, for these proposals to become part of the political agendas, the national and transnational political institutions must be changed. And, as I mentioned in the previous section, many such institutional changes will occur only on the basis of non-institutional struggles. They will require rebellion, nonviolent but often illegal direct action.

Not surprisingly the call for concrete proposals sparked an interesting debate upon the principles that might ground such proposals. François Houtart presented a series of strategic recommendations that might strengthen the coherence among the different proposals, thus preventing the

WSF from becoming a supermarket of alternatives. According to him, “There is need for both coherence in the proposals and an ample vision of the alternatives” (Houtart, 2001). As a guide, he proposed thinking of alternatives on three levels: 1) in terms of “reconstructing the utopias,” not in the sense of impossible ideals but rather in the sense of mobilizing objectives; 2) in terms of medium-term alternatives, that is, of likely results of prolonged and arduous social struggles against the capitalist system itself; 3) in terms of short-term alternatives: those which are feasible within a foreseen future and which can be mobilizing even though the objectives are limited.

In addition, Houtart emphasized the importance of strategizing in the struggle against the globalization of capital and listed the main elements of strategy as follows: 1) de-legitimize the “logic” of the capitalist system; 2) build convergence among efforts and networks to work against the system; 3) formulate alternatives at the three levels mentioned above: utopias, medium-term and short-term; 4) find formulas for political expression; 5) do not allow to be marginalized as participant in a “folkloric”, “violent” or “rare” movement. He also stressed three criteria for selecting the themes and actions upon which to concentrate efforts: 1) the need to keep in mind the popular contemporary sensitivity of certain themes; 2) the importance of linking up “events of the moment”; 3) the need to address themes on which considerable preparation has already been done by specific groups and which can lead to concrete alternatives.

Other participants were more concerned with the overriding political principles that must govern not only the formulation of proposals but also the political processes and struggles to fight for them. Vandana Shiva, for example, defended the idea that by keeping the commitment to high intensity democracy alive – what she termed, “the living democracy movement” – the people would both create and sustain an alternative world:

Living democracy is about life, at the vital everyday level, and decisions and freedoms related to everyday living - the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the water we drink. It is not just about elections and casting votes once every 3 or 4 or 5 years. It is a permanently vibrant democracy.” (Shiva, 2002).

In the same line I presented the following Fifteen Theses for Deepening Democracy:⁴⁶

First Thesis

The struggle for democracy must be a struggle for demodiversity.

Even as there is biodiversity and it must be defended, there is also demodiversity, and it must be defended as well. There is not, therefore, one form of democracy alone, i.e. liberal representative democracy. There are several other forms, such as direct, participatory, deliberative, intercultural democracy.

But outside the Western world and culture there are still other forms of democracy (multicultural democracy), which must be valorized. Take, for example, the autonomous government of the indigenous communities of the Americas, India, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the government of the traditional authorities in Africa or the *panchayats* in India. The point is not to accept critically any of these forms of democracy but rather to make possible their inclusion in the debates about the deepening and radicalization of democracy.

Second Thesis

Transcultural criteria must be developed to identify different forms of democracy and to establish hierarchies among them according to the collective quality of life they provide.

I offer the following criterion: democratic are those systems of public or private interaction that aim to transform power relations into relations of shared authority.

Shared authority resides in the twofold logic of reciprocity between the principle of equality and the principle of difference acknowledgment: we have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us.

⁴⁶ The theses were reformulated in the Third WSF.

This means that the scope of democracy is potentially much broader than what we know. And that there are different degrees of democraticity. The truth is, democracy is not, there is only democratization.

Third Thesis

Democracies must be ranked according to the intensity of the processes of shared authority and reciprocity of acknowledgment.

The more authority is shared, the more democracy is participatory. The richer reciprocity and acknowledgment are, the more direct democracy is. According to these criteria, we must distinguish between high-intensity democracies and low-intensity democracies.

Fourth Thesis

Representative democracy tends to be low-intensity.

This is so for the following reasons: by giving a restrictive definition of the public space, representative democracy leaves intact many relations of power, which it therefore does not turn into shared authority; by relying on ideas of formal and not real equality, it does not guarantee the conditions that make it possible; by juxtaposing citizenship and identity in the abstract, it acknowledges difference surreptitiously from the standpoint of a dominant difference (class, colonial, ethnic, racial, sexual, religious) that becomes the norm — the dominant identity — on the basis of which the limits are set, within which the other differences are allowed to be exerted, acknowledged or tolerated.

The low intensity of this democracy consists in the fact that, were the demands of capitalism to impose restrictions on the democratic game, this form of democracy would have few conditions to resist. Its surrender takes several forms: banalization of political differences and personalization of leadership; privatization of the electoral processes through campaign funding; mediatization of politics; distance between representatives and represented; corruption; increase of abstentionism.

Low-intensity democracy calls for a twofold task: to denounce it as such; and to propose alternatives to increase its intensity. In the context of low-intensity democracy, the most important task is to democratize democracy.

Fifth Thesis

In many societies, representative democracy is extremely low-intensity indeed.

Democracy is extremely low-intensity when it does not promote any social redistribution. This occurs alongside the dismantling of public policies, the conversion of social policies into compensatory, residual and stigmatizing measures, and the return of philanthropy as a form of solidarity not grounded on rights.

I speak of societies in which social inequalities and hierarchical differences reach such high levels that the dominant social groups (economic, ethnic, religious, etc.) constitute themselves as *de facto* powers that assume the right of veto on the minimal democratic aspirations of the majorities or minorities. In this case, social relations are dominated by such power asymmetries that they configure a situation of social fascism. The societies in which such asymmetries prevail are politically democratic and socially fascist.

Sixth Thesis

Counter-hegemonic forms of high-intensity democracy are emerging.

Through more developed states and multilateral agencies, neoliberal globalization has been imposing forms of low- or extremely low-intensity democracy on peripheral countries. Such an imposition, however, doesn't occur without resistance. Forms of high-intensity democracy are emerging. The popular classes and oppressed, marginalized, and vulnerable social groups are promoting forms of participatory democracy in many parts of the world, forms of high-intensity democracy based on the active participation of the populations. Through these forms, which are kept under constant

renovation, the populations try to resist social inequality, colonialism, sexism, racism, and the destruction of the environment.

These initiatives have occurred so far at the local level alone. A few examples: the municipal management through participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and many other cities in Brazil, Latin America and Europe; the peace communities in Colombia, with special mention to the one in São José de Apartadó; the forms of decentralized planning in the states of Kerala and West Bengal in India.

Seventh Thesis

The potential of democratic forms of high intensity is enormous, but we have to acknowledge their limitations.

The most obvious limitation of local high-intensity democracies is precisely the fact that their ambit is local and they cannot, by themselves, contribute to confronting the anti-democratic nature of the political, social and cultural power exerted at the national and global level. These limitations are not ineluctable and must be engaged with. Forms of high-intensity democracy must be devised, both at the local and at the national and global levels, and articulations among the different levels must be promoted.

At the national level, participatory democracy must be deepened through complementariness with representative democracy, a complementariness that is necessarily tense but critical as well. Such complementariness will always be the result of a political process whose earlier phases are not of complementariness but rather of confrontation. The articulations may begin at the local level, but they have potential to reach the national level.

At the national level, the articulation between forms of participatory and representative democracy must be deepened to prevent them from becoming a trap that legitimizes the State to go on managing the business of capitalism in capitalism's interest as if it were the interest of all. Never before has the State been subjected to massive privatization process, as happens today. Much of the rhetoric concerning the value of civil society is part of a discourse to justify the dismantling of the State. The crucial tasks are, therefore, the

democratic reform of the State; and the public control of the State through the creation of non-State public spheres.

Eighth Thesis

In the long run, local participatory democracy does not sustain itself without participatory democracy at the national level, and neither of them without participatory democracy at the global level.

Local, or even national high-intensity democracy is not sustainable if forms of global democracy are not evolved. It makes no sense today to speak of global civil society because there is no global mechanism to guarantee global civic rights. But if nonetheless we want to speak of global civil society, then it is necessary to distinguish between liberal global civil society, which feeds on neoliberal globalization, and emancipatory global civil society, which promotes counter-hegemonic globalization, the globalization of solidarity of which the World Social Forum (WSF) is an eloquent expression.

A new democratic institution at the world level must be created, a United Nations of the Peoples that may re-found the Organization of the United Nations as we know it today. The institutions that are responsible today for blocking global or even national democracy, such as the World Bank or IMF, must be abolished, or else radically changed. In all its scales or dimensions, but particularly at the global scale or dimension, democracy is a comprehensive exigency that is not confined to the political system and does not exist without social redistribution. Global collective actions must be organized, and global institutions must be created to allow for immediate, if minimal, global social redistribution, such as, for instance, debt pardon for peripheral countries and the Tobin tax.

Nineth Thesis

There is no democracy without conditions of democracy.

It is imperative to fight against the perversion of democracy. Democracy, which emerged as government by the people, is today often used as

government against the people. That which was the utter symbol of popular sovereignty is today the very expression of the loss of sovereignty (as, for instance, when democracy becomes an imposition of the World Bank).

In the present context, to speak of conditions of democracy implies to speak of the radicalization of democracy. The democracy that exists in the great majority of countries is false simply because it is insufficient. Democracy must be taken seriously. To be taken seriously it must be radicalized. There are two ways of radicalizing democracy:

First, to deepen authority sharing and respect for difference in the social domains where the democratic rule is already acknowledged. For example, participatory budgeting is a form of deepening the pre-existing municipal democracy.

Second, to spread democracy to a larger and larger number of domains of social life. Capitalism accepted democracy in as much as it reduced democracy to a specific domain of public life, which it designated as political space. All the other areas of social life were left outside democratic control: the space of production, consumer society, community life, and international relations. Capitalist societies thus constituted themselves as societies with small islands of democracy in a sea of despotism. To radicalize democracy is to transform it into a principle with the potential to regulate all social relations.

In capitalist societies, I believe, it is not possible to spread this principle to every relation. We must, therefore, on behalf of democracy, start thinking of a post-capitalist world and engage in action to make it possible. Left to itself, capitalism only leads to more capitalism

Tenth Thesis

The democratic imagination has today in the World Social Forum an eloquent expression but only just emerging. Its development requires conditions.

The World Social Forum and the regional, thematic and national forums are evolving into the most developed form of our democratic imagination.

However, as it nurtures this imagination, the WSF process must itself mind the conditions of its own enlargement and democratization. I distinguish two such conditions:

First, following September 11, the international (dis)order, of which the USA is the most prominent protagonist, aims to criminalize the demonstrations that it designates as anti-globalization and that we see as being for an alternative, solidary globalization. Indeed, the aim is to criminalize all the actions of popular organizations and movements. Local, national and global struggles must be launched against such criminalization. It was, therefore, important for the 2002 Forum of Local Authorities to state that the cities therein represented are committed to defend the right to public and peaceful demonstrations against neoliberal globalization.

Second, the network of organizations that convene in the WSF are movements of the most diverse features that fight for a more democratic society. For this struggle to be consequent, the organizations themselves must be fully and thoroughly democratic. And their democracy must be twofold: internally, that is to say, inside every organization or movement; and in the relations among movements and organizations. Hegemonism, sectarianism, and fractionalism must be fought.

Eleventh Thesis

The struggle for high intensity democracy starts with the social forces that fight for it.

The WSF process integrates many non-governmental organizations involved in partnerships with the State. On the other hand, many organizations of the countries of the South are financially dependent on the organizations of the countries of the North. To avoid leaving high-intensity democracy at the door of the organizations, these relations must be transparent and subjected to the control of the members or target-publics. Partnerships and agreements must be constructed democratically, and measures must be taken to prevent financial dependency from becoming a form of anti-democratic submission.

Twelfth Thesis

Self-democracy is one of the most important challenges faced by the WSF process.

The WSF cannot be happy with its current democratic level. It must be democratized in terms of its territorial ambit. To a large extent Africa and Asia are still absent, in spite of the enormous success achieved, in the case of Asia, by having the fourth WSF convene in Mumbai in 2004. But democratization must involve the thematic, strategic and organizational diversity as well. The organization of the 2005 WSF is based on a more democratic program building, since it relies on ample consultation with the NGOs and movements. It is not unthinkable that forms of more intense democracy be experimented with during the forums: plebiscites, consultations, electronic voting.

Thirteenth Thesis

There is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.

However democratized social practices may become, they are never democratized enough, if the knowledge guiding them is not democratized itself. Antidemocratic repression always includes the disqualification of the knowledge and ways of knowing of the repressed ones

There is no democracy without popular education. There is no democracy of practices with democracy of knowledges.

Fourteenth Thesis

The democratic imagination and the democratization processes must include the democratization of the subjectivities.

Low-intensity democracy is conducted today by non-democrats, if not indeed by anti-democrats. Only democrats construct democracy and only democracy constructs democratic subjectivities.

Democracy does not have a historical subject. In the struggle for high-intensity democracy, subjects are all those that refuse to be objects, that is to say, to be reduced to the condition of vassals.

Fifteenth Thesis

If socialism has a name today, it can only be that of democracy without end.

The justification of this thesis is in the preceding theses as a whole. All of them are to be discussed, approved, changed, and enlarged in the work places, cities and villages, inside families and organizations. Their aim is to give some coordination to the movement for an alternative globalization on its way to a fairer and less discriminatory society. The struggle against global capitalism has to emerge from ever more places, it must be made of very diverse struggles guided by a common principle: participatory democracy without end to bring capitalism to end.

Chapter 5

The Future of the World Social Forum: Self-democracy and the Work of Translation

In the WSF the new and the old face each other. As utopia and epistemology, the WSF is something new. As a political phenomenon, its novelty coexists with the traditions of thought on the left or, more generally, counter-hegemonic thought, both in its western and southern and eastern versions. The newness of the WSF is consensually attributed to its absence of leaders and hierarchical organization, its emphasis on cyberspace networks, its ideal of participatory democracy, and its flexibility and readiness to engage in experimentation.

The WSF is unquestionably the first large international progressive movement after the neoliberal backlash at the beginning of the 1980s. Its future is the future of hope in an alternative to *la pensée unique* (single thinking). This future is completely unknown, and can only be speculated about. It depends both on the movements and organizations that comprise the WSF and the metamorphoses of neoliberal globalization. For instance, the fact that the latter has been acquiring a bellicose component fixated on security will no doubt affect the evolution of the WSF. In light of this, the future of the WSF depends in part on the evaluation of its trajectory up till now and the conclusions drawn from it, with a view to enlarge and deepen its counter-hegemonic efficaciousness.

The evaluation of the WSF is one of the exercises that best discloses the confrontation between the new and the old. From the point of view of the old, the WSF cannot but be assessed negatively. It appears as a vast “talk-show” that hovers over the concrete problems of exclusion and discrimination without tackling them; a cultural movement without deep social roots, therefore tolerated and easily coopted by the dominant classes; it has no definite agents or agency, because, after all, it doesn’t have any definite enemies either; its inclusiveness is the other side of its inefficaciousness; its efficaciousness, besides having an effect on the rhetoric of hegemonic discourse, has been minimal, since it has achieved no changes as far as

concrete policies go, nor contributed to ameliorate the ills of exclusion and discrimination.

In this evaluation, the WSF is assessed according to criteria that prevailed in progressive struggles up until the 1980s. Such criteria do not concern strategies and tactics alone; they also concern the time frames and geopolitical units that are the reference of their applicability. The time frame is linear time, a time that it gives meaning and direction to history; the temporality or duration is that of the State's action, even if the action aims to reform or revolutionize the State. From the standpoint of linear time, the counter-hegemonic experiences and struggles, particularly the most innovative or radical ones are either unrealistic or residual. It cannot conceptualize the multiple temporalities that constitute these experiences and struggles, from the instant time of mass protests to the *longue durée* of indigenous peoples' struggles for self-rule, not to speak of the infinite temporality of utopia. The same is true of the conventional geopolitical unit of progressive politics. Such unit is the national society, the boundary within which the most decisive progressive struggles of the last 150 years have occurred. On the contrary, as I analyzed above, the geopolitical unit of the counter-hegemonic experiences and struggles convened by the WSF is trans-scale: it combines the local, the national, and the global.

Let's call the epistemology underlying this evaluation, positivist epistemology. It seems obvious that this epistemology is completely different from the one I ascribed to the WSF above. In order to be minimally adequate, the evaluation of the WSF must be carried out according to the epistemology of the WSF itself. Otherwise, the assessment will be always negative. In other words, the evaluation must be carried out on the basis of the sociology of absences and sociology of emergences.

In this light, the evaluation of the WSF cannot but be positive. By affirming and rendering credible the existence of a counter-hegemonic globalization, the WSF has contributed significantly towards enlarging social experience. It has turned absent struggles and practices into present struggles and practices, and shown which alternative futures, declared impossible by hegemonic globalization, were after all giving signs of their

emergence. By enlarging the available and possible social experience, the WSF created a global consciousness for the different movements and NGOs, regardless of the scope of their action. Such a global consciousness was crucial to create a certain symmetry of scale between hegemonic globalization and the movements and NGOs that fought against it. Before the WSF, the movements and NGOs fought against hegemonic globalization without being aware of their own globality.

The decisive importance of this consciousness explains why the WSF, once aware of it, does everything to preserve it. It explains, ultimately, why the factors of attraction and aggregation prevail over those of repulsion and disaggregation. This consciousness of globality was decisive to make credible among the movements and the NGOs themselves the trans-scale nature of the geopolitical unit wherein they acted. By encompassing all those movements and NGOs, however, the WSF incorporated that same trans-scale nature, and that is why its efficaciousness cannot be assessed exclusively in terms of global changes. It has to be assessed as well in terms of local and national changes. Given all the levels involved, the evaluation of the WSF's efficaciousness is undoubtedly more complex, but for that same reason it does not allow for rash assessments derived from positivist epistemology.

The WSF is today a more realistic utopia than when it first appeared. Increased realism, however, poses considerable challenges to utopia itself. The challenges consist in deepening its political existence without losing its utopian and epistemological integrity. I identify two main challenges, one short-range, the other long-range: self-democracy and the work of translation, respectively.

5.1 Self-democracy

The first, short-range challenge I designate as self-democracy. This is a crucial challenge and I already mentioned it in the theses 10, 11 and 12 in the previous section. The WSF's utopia concerns emancipatory democracy. In its broadest sense, emancipatory democracy is the whole process of changing power relations into relations of shared authority. Since the power relations

against which the WSF resists are multiple, the processes of radical democratization in which the WSF is involved are likewise multiple. In brief, the WSF is a large collective process for deepening democracy. Since this is the WSF's utopian distinction, it is no wonder that the issue of internal democracy has become more and more pressing. In fact, the WSF's credibility in its struggle for democracy in society depends on the credibility of its internal democracy.

In spite of all criticisms and shortcomings, the organizing structure of the first four editions of the WSF has been, to my mind, the most appropriate. Admittedly, the criteria of representation and participation could have been better tuned up to the diversity of the movements and NGO's. But it should be stressed that the successive editions of the WSF have tried to respond to the criticisms advanced. If the response has not always been satisfactory, I believe the reason has more to do with administrative incapacity than politically motivated design. The fourth WSF, in Mumbai, aside from organizational innovation, represented a breakthrough in dramatically expanding the social base of participation while the fifth WSF, in Porto Alegre, is posed to be equally a breakthrough in what concerns the bottom up construction of the programme.

Assuming that the WSF may be entering a new phase, the challenge consists in changing the organizing structure according to the demands of the new phase and in respect for the objective of deepening the internal democracy, a most consensually objective in the IC. Two paths to reach this goal may be identified, a moderate and a radical one. The first one consists in expanding the representativity of the IC and in transferring the WSF's core from the discrete global events to a continuous process consisting of national, regional, and thematic forums taking place around the world according to a planned schedule. The idea is that at more circumscribed levels the issues of representation and participatory democracy are easier to solve, while the recurrence and diversity of the events will allow for the application of multiple criteria of representation and participation. The WSF, as a global event, will continue to affirm the globality of counter-hegemonic globalization, but it will lose some of its centrality. The IS will continue to have a decisive role, an

executive and coordinating role, while the IC will continue to be charged with defining the broad strategic, thematic and organizing options. The democratizing effort must therefore focus on the IC, urging it to go on reflecting on the multiple diversities that congregate in the WSF. This path, which seems to be close to what the majority of the members of the IC have been proposing, assumes its continuity with the previous phase. The aim is to introduce changes that represent unequivocal gains in terms of representation and participation without putting at risk the extraordinary successes achieved so far.

This path does not claim to solve the issue of participatory democracy. That is to say, however representative and democratic the organizing structures of the forums may be, the issue of the deliberative participation of the rank-and-file participants will be always there. As I have suggested above, the information and communication technologies offer today new possibilities to resort to voting and carrying out referendums during the forums. If it is true in general that cyber democracy has an individualistic bias in its reducing the citizen's political capacity to handling the computer terminal, it is no less true that such a bias is neutralized in the meetings of the forum, where the exchange of experiences and points of view is so intense, precisely among the rank-and-file. Of course, deliberative democracy at the meetings will not solve the problem of the democratic inclusion of movements and organizations eager to participate but unable to do so.

The second, far more radical path would increase the WSF's internal democracy by constructing it from bottom up. On the basis of the smaller forums or forums of narrower scope, such as local or city forums, representative structures would be created at the different levels in such a way that the structures at the higher ranks were elected by the immediately lower ranks. The result would be a pyramidal organization having at the top the WSF turned into a forum of delegates.⁴⁷ This type of proposals may

⁴⁷ A recent version of this path has been proposed by Michael Albert, of Znet (2003). Here are the main points of his proposal:

1. Emphasize local forums as the foundation of the worldwide forum process;
2. Have each new level of forums, from towns, to cities, to countries, to continents, to the world, be built largely on those below;
3. Have the decision-making leadership of the most local events locally determined;

include measures that aim at correcting a plurality of structural imbalances of representation, derived from sexual to North/South inequality and difference. It involves, however, a radical break with the organizational model adopted up until now and, even if there is a widespread feeling that the present model needs to be drastically revised, one fears that such a radical break may be throwing away the baby with the bath water. Needless to say, any proposal, especially one so radical, must be debated and ultimately voted. But by whom? By the current IC, certainly not representative of the whole WSF let alone democratically elected by its members? By the participants of the forums? Which forums? These questions show that there is no machinery of democratic engineering capable of solving the problem of internal democracy at a single blow. To my mind, such a problem will end up being taken care of through successive partial solutions. Its cumulative effect will be the result of a learning process, which, on each democratization landing, consolidates its force and gathers energy to venture on to an upper landing.

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4. Have the decision-making leadership at each higher level chosen, at least in considerable part, by the local forums that are within the higher entity. Italy's national forum leadership is chosen by the smaller local forums in Italy. The European forums' leadership is chosen by the national forums within Europe, and similarly elsewhere.
 5. Mandate that the decision-making leadership at every level should be at least 50% women;
 6. Have the forums from wealthier parts of the world charge delegates and organizations and attendees a tax on their fees to apply to helping finance the forums in poorer parts of the world and subsidize delegate attendance at the world forum from poorer locales, as well.
 7. Have the WSF attendance be 5,000-10,000 people delegated to it from the major regional forums around the world. Have the WSF leadership be selected by regional forums. Mandate the WSF to share and compare and propose based on all that is emerging worldwide – not to listen again to the same famous speakers who everyone hears worldwide all the time anyhow – and have the WSF's results, like those of all other forums, published and public, and of course reported by delegates back to the regions;
 8. Ensure that the WSF as a whole and the forums worldwide not make the mistake of trying to become an international, a movement of movements, or even just a voice of the world's movements. To be a forum, the WSF and the smaller component forums need to be as broad and diverse as possible. But, being that broad and that diverse, is simply being too broad and too diverse to be an organization.
 9. Mandate that the forums at every level, including the WSF, welcome people from diverse constituencies using the forums and their processes to make contacts and to develop ties that can in turn yield national, regional, or even international networks or movements of movements which do share sufficiently their political aspirations to work closely together, but which exist alongside rather than instead of the forum phenomenon.

5.2 The work of translation

The second challenge is long-range. The challenge of internal democracy concerns the processes of decision making, rather than the content of the decisions, let alone the practices of struggle that may evolve thereof. In the long run, the evaluation of the WSF will depend on its capacity to transform the immense energy that is congregated in itself into new forms of counter-hegemonic agency – more efficacious forms because combining the strength of different social movements and NGOs.

The political theory of western modernity, whether in its liberal or Marxist version, constructed the unity of action from the agent's unity. According to it, the coherence and meaning of social change was always based on the capacity of the privileged agent of change, be it the bourgeoisie or the working classes, to represent the totality from which the coherence and meaning derived. From such capacity of representation derived both the need and operationality of a general theory of social change.

The utopia and epistemology underlying the WSF place it in the antipodes of such a theory. The extraordinary energy of attraction and aggregation revealed by the WSF resides precisely in refusing the idea of a general theory. The diversity that finds a haven in it is free from the fear of being cannibalized by false universalisms or false single strategies propounded by any general theory. The WSF underwrites the idea that the world is an inexhaustible totality, as it holds many totalities, all of them partial. Accordingly, there is no sense in attempting to grasp the world by any single general theory, because any such theory will always presuppose the monoculture of a given totality and the homogeneity of its parts. The time we live in, whose recent past was dominated by the idea of a general theory, is perhaps a time of transition that may be defined in the following way: we have no need of a general theory, but still need a general theory on the impossibility of a general theory. We need, at any rate, a negative universalism that may give rise to the ecologies made possible by the sociology of absences.

What is the alternative to the general theory? To my mind, the alternative to a general theory is the work of translation. Translation is the procedure that

allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world, both available and possible, as revealed by the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, without jeopardizing their identity and autonomy, without, in other words, reducing them to homogeneous entities.

The WSF is witness to the wide multiplicity and variety of social practices of counter-hegemony that occur all over the world. Its strength derives from having corresponded or given expression to the aspiration of aggregation and articulation of the different social movements and NGOs, an aspiration that had been only latent up until then. The movements and the NGOs constitute themselves around a number of more or less confined goals, create their own forms and styles of resistance, and specialize in certain kinds of practice and discourse that distinguish them from the others. Their identity is thereby created on the basis of what separates them from all the others. The feminist movement sees itself as very distinct from the labor movement and vice-versa; both distinguish themselves from the indigenous movement or the ecological movement; and so on and so forth. All these distinctions and separations have actually translated themselves into very practical differences, if not even into contradictions that contribute to bringing the movements apart and to fostering rivalries and factionalisms. Hencefrom derives the fragmentation and atomization that are the dark side of diversity and multiplicity.

This dark side has lately been pointedly acknowledged by the movements and NGOs. The truth is, however, that none of them individually has had the capacity or credibility to confront it, for, in attempting it, it runs the risk of falling prey to the situation it wishes to remedy. Hence the extraordinary step taken by the WSF. It must be admitted, however, that the aggregation/articulation made possible by the WSF is of low intensity. The goals are limited, very often circumscribed to mutual knowledge or, at the most, to recognize differences and make them more explicit and better known. Under these circumstances, joint action cannot but be limited.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ A good example was the first European Social Forum held in Florence in November of 2002. The differences, rivalries, and factionalisms that divide the various movements and NGOs that organized it are well known and have a history that is impossible to erase. This is why, in their positive response to the WSF's request to organize the ESF, the movements and

The challenge that counter-hegemonic globalization faces now may be formulated in the following way. The forms of aggregation and articulation made possible by the WSF were sufficient to achieve the goals of the phase that may be now coming to an end. Deepening the WSF's goals in a new phase requires forms of aggregation and articulation of higher intensity. Such a process includes articulating struggles and resistances, as well as promoting ever more comprehensive and consistent alternatives. Such articulations presuppose combinations among the different social movements and NGOs that are bound to question their very identity and autonomy as they have been conceived of so far. If the project is to promote counter-hegemonic practices that combine ecological, pacifist, indigenous, feminist, workers' and other movements, and to do so in an horizontal way and with respect for the identity of every movement, an enormous effort of mutual recognition, dialogue, and debate will be required to carry out the task.

This is the only way to identify more rigorously what divides and unites the movements, so as to base the articulations of practices and knowledges on what unites them, rather than on what divides them. Such a task entails a wide exercise in translation to expand reciprocal intelligibility without destroying the identity of the partners of translation. The point is to create, in every movement or NGO, in every practice or strategy, in every discourse or knowledge, a *contact zone* that may render it porous and hence permeable to other NGOs, practices, strategies, discourses, and knowledges. The exercise of translation aims to identify and reinforce what is common in the diversity of counter-hegemonic drive. Canceling out what separates is out of the question. The goal is to have host-difference replace fortress-difference. Through translation work, diversity is celebrated, not as a factor of fragmentation and isolationism, but rather as a condition of sharing and solidarity.

In the following I provide some illustrations of translation work.

NGOs that took up the task felt the need to assert that the differences among them were as sharp as ever and that they were coming together only with a very limited objective in mind: to organize the Forum and a Peace March. The Forum was indeed organized in such a way that the differences could be made very explicit.

The work of translation concerns both knowledges and actions (strategic goals, organization, styles of struggle and agency). Of course, in the practice of the movements, knowledges and actions are inseparable. However, for the purposes of translation, it is important to distinguish between contact zones in which the interactions incide mainly upon knowledges, and contact zones in which interactions incide mainly upon actions.

Translation of knowledges

Translation of knowledges consists of interpretation work between two or more cultures – those to which the different movements/organizations in the contact zone see themselves as belonging to – to identify similar concerns or aspirations among them and the different responses they provide for them. For instance, the concern with and the aspiration to human dignity seems to be present, however in different ways, in different cultures. In the Western culture the idea of human dignity is expressed today by the concept of human rights. If we look at the thousands of movements and organizations that gather at the WSF we will observe that many of them don't formulate their concerns in terms of human rights and many may even express an hostile stance against the idea of human rights. Does this mean that these movements don't care for human dignity? Or is it rather the case that they formulate their concerns for human dignity through a different set of concepts? I think that the latter is the case and accordingly I have been proposing a translation on concerns for human dignity between the western concept of human rights, the islamic concept of *umma* (community), and the hindu concept of *dharma* (cosmic harmony involving human and all the other beings) (Santos 1995: 340).⁴⁹

In this case the work of translation will reveal the reciprocal shortcomings or weaknesses of each one of these conceptions of human dignity once viewed from the perspective any other conception. Thereby a space is open in the contact zone for dialogue, mutual knowledge and understanding and for identification, over and above conceptual and terminological differences, of

⁴⁹ On the concept of *umma*, see, for example, Faruki, 1979; An-Na'im, 1995, 2000; Hassan, 1996; on the hindu concept of *dharma*, see Gandhi, 1929/32; Zaehner, 1982.

commonalities from which practical combinations for action can emerge. A few examples will clarify what I mean. Seen from the perspective of *dharma*, human rights are incomplete in that they fail to establish the link between the part (the individual) and the whole (cosmic reality), or even more strongly in that they focus on what is merely derivative, on rights, rather than on the primordial imperative, the duty of individuals to find their place in the order of the entire society, and of the entire cosmos⁵⁰. Seen from *dharma* and, indeed from *umma* also, the Western conception of human rights is plagued by a very simplistic and mechanistic symmetry between rights and duties. It grants rights only to those from whom it can demand duties. This explains why according to Western human rights nature has no rights: because it cannot be imposed any duties. For the same reason, it is impossible to grant rights to future generations: they have no rights because they have no duties.

On the other hand, seen from the perspective of human rights, *dharma* is also incomplete due to its strong bias in favor of the harmony of the social and religious status quo, thereby occulting injustices and totally neglecting the value of conflict as a way toward a richer harmony. Moreover, *dharma* is unconcerned with the principles of democratic order, with individual freedom and autonomy, and it neglects the fact that, without primordial rights, the individual is too fragile an entity to avoid being run over by powerful economic and political institutions. Moreover, *dharma* tends to forget that human suffering has an irreducible individual dimension: societies don't suffer, individuals do.

At another conceptual level, the same work of translation can be attempted between the concept human rights and the concept of *umma* in Islamic culture. The passages in the Qur'an in which the word *umma* occurs are so varied that its meaning cannot be rigidly defined. This much, however, seems to be certain: it always refers to ethnical, linguistic or religious bodies of people who are the objects of the divine plan of salvation. As the prophetic activity of Muhammad progressed, the religious foundations of *umma* became increasingly apparent and consequently the *umma* of the Arabs was

⁵⁰ I analyze in greater detail the relationships between human rights and other conceptions of human dignity in Santos (2002b).

transformed into the *umma* of the Muslims. Seen from the perspective of *umma*, the incompleteness of the individual human rights lies in the fact that on their basis alone it is impossible to ground the collective linkages, duties and solidarities without which no society can survive, and much less flourish. Herein lies the difficulty in the Western conception of human rights to accept collective rights of social groups or peoples, be they ethnic minorities, women, or indigenous peoples. Conversely, from the perspective of the individual human rights, *umma* overemphasizes duties to the detriment of rights and, for that reason, is bound to condone otherwise abhorrent inequalities, such as the inequality between men and women and between Muslims and non-Muslims.

In sum, the work of translation in the intercultural contact zone among movements/organizations expounding different conceptions of human dignity allows us to identify the fundamental weakness of Western culture as consisting in dichotomizing too strictly between the individual and society, thus becoming vulnerable to possessive individualism, narcissism, alienation, and anomie. On the other hand, the fundamental weakness of Hindu and Islamic culture consists in that they both fail to recognize that human suffering has an irreducible individual dimension, which can only be adequately addressed in a society not hierarchically organized.

The recognition of reciprocal incompleteness and weakness is a *condition-sine-qua-non* of a cross-cultural dialogue. The work of translation builds both on local identification of incompleteness and weakness and on its translocal intelligibility. In the area of human rights and dignity, the mobilization of social support for the emancipatory claims they potentially contain is only achievable if such claims have been appropriated in the local cultural context. Appropriation, in this sense, cannot be obtained through cultural cannibalization. It requires cross-cultural dialogue by means of translation work.

In light of the political and cultural characteristics of the movements/organizations present at the WSF two other exercises of translation strike me as important. I just mention them here without going into details of translation. The first focuses on the concern for productive life as it is expressed in the modern capitalist conceptions of development and in

Gandhi's conception of *swadeshi*.⁵¹ The conceptions of productive life deriving from capitalist development have been reproduced by conventional economics and are often implicitly or explicitly accepted by social movements and NGOs particularly in the global North. Such conceptions are based on the idea of infinite growth reached through the increasing subjection of the practices and knowledges to mercantile logic. The *swadeshi*, in turn, is based on the idea of sustainability and reciprocity that Gandhi defined in 1916 in the following way:

“swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion... If I find it defective I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proven defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbors and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting” (Gandhi, 1941: 4-5).

This brief description of *swadeshi* and the weight it carries among NGOs and movements in South Asia, as it could be observed at the WSF in Mumbai, shows how important the work of translation might be to bring about North/South and East/West coalitions among NGOs and movements concerned with development or production.

The other exercise of translation in the knowledge-based contact zone among NGOs/movements focuses on philosophies of life, on concerns for wisdom and enabling world views. It may seem strange to speak of philosophy when dealing with the knowledges of grassroots movements fighting for “another possible world”. After all, in the Western culture at least, philosophy is the utmost expression of elitist knowledge. The fact of the matter is that, however implicitly, philosophical ideas are often the driving

⁵¹ See Gandhi, 1967, 1941. On *swadeshi* see also, among other, Bipinchandra, 1954; Nandy, 1987; Krishna, 1994.

force behind grassroots mobilization and it is not uncommon that the leaders of movements and the latter's organic intellectuals get involved in vivid debates on philosophical ideas to ground both their divergences and convergences. The work of translation must take place between western conceptions of philosophy and the African concept of sagacity.⁵² The latter underlies the actions of many African movements and organizations.⁵³ It resides in a critical reflection on the world that has as its protagonists what Odera Oruka calls *sages*, be they poets, traditional healers, storytellers, musicians, or traditional authorities. According to Odera Oruka, sage philosophy "consists of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between *popular wisdom* (well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general commonsense truths) and *didactic wisdom*, an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community. While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set-up and the popular wisdom. Thoughts can be expressed in writing or as unwritten sayings and argumentations associated with some individual(s). In traditional Africa, most of what would pass as sage-philosophy remains unwritten for reasons, which must now be obvious to everyone. Some of these persons might have been partly influenced by the inevitable moral and technological culture from the West. Nevertheless, their own outlook and cultural well being remain basically that of traditional rural Africa. Except for a handful of them, the majority of them are "illiterate" or semi-illiterate" (Odera Oruka, 1990: 28).

The work of translation among knowledges starts from the idea that all cultures are incomplete and can, therefore, be enriched by dialogue and confrontation with other cultures. In my view the WSF has granted this idea a new centrality and a higher urgency. To acknowledge the relativity of cultures does not imply the adoption of relativism as cultural stance (the idea that all cultures are equally valid and that no judgment can be passed on them from the perspective of another culture). It does imply, however, to conceive of

⁵² Similar conceptions may be found, for instance, among the indigenous peoples.

⁵³ On sage philosophy see Odera Oruka (1990, 1998) and also Oseghare, 1992; Presbey, 1997.

universalism as a western peculiarity, whose idea of supremacy does not reside in itself, but rather in the supremacy of the interests that sustain it. As I referred to above, the critique of universalism derives from the critique of the possibility of a general theory. The work of translation presupposes, rather, what I designate as negative universalism, the most commonly shared idea of the impossibility of cultural completeness.

The idea and feeling of want and incompleteness create motivation for the work of translation among social groups. In order to bear fruit, translation must be the crossing of converging motivations with origin in different cultures. The Indian sociologist Shiv Vishvanathan formulated eloquently the notion of want and motivation that I here designate as the work of translation. Says Vishvanathan (2000: 12): “My problem is, how do I take the best of Indian civilization and at the same time keep my modern, democratic imagination alive?” If we could imagine an exercise of work of translation conducted by Vishvanathan and a European or North American intellectual, it would be possible to think of the latter's motivation for dialogue formulated thus: “How can I keep alive in me the best of modern and democratic western culture, while at the same time recognizing the value of the world that it designated autocratically as noncivilized, ignorant, residual, inferior, or unproductive?”

Translation of practices

The second type of the work of translation is undertaken among social practices and their agents. All social practices imply knowledge, and as such they are also knowledge practices. When dealing with practices, however, the work of translation focuses specifically on mutual intelligibility among forms of organization and objectives and styles of action types of struggle. What distinguishes the two types of translation work is, after all, the emphasis or perspective that informs them. The specificity of the translation work concerning practices and their agents becomes clearer in situations in which the knowledges that inform different practices are less distinguishable than the practices themselves. This happens particularly when the practices take place inside the same cultural universe. Such would be the case of a work of

translation between the forms of organization and the objectives of action of two social movements, say, the feminist movement and the labor movement in a western society.

The relevance of the work of translation as regards practices is due to a double circumstance. On the one hand, the WSF meetings have enlarged considerably the stock of available and possible social struggles against capitalism and neoliberal globalization. On the other, because there is no single principle of social transformation, as the Charter of Principles emphasizes, it is not possible to determine in abstract the articulations or hierarchies among the different social struggles and their conceptions of social transformation, both of objectives of social transformation and of means to achieve them. Only by building concrete contact zones among concrete struggles is it possible to evaluate them and identify possible alliances among them. Reciprocal knowledge and learning is a necessary condition for agreeing on articulation and building coalitions. The counter-hegemonic potential of any social movement resides in its capacity to articulate with other movements, their forms of organization and objectives. For these articulations to be possible, the movements must be mutually intelligible.

The work of translation aims to clarify what unites and separates the different movements and practices so as to ascertain the possibilities and limits of articulation and aggregation among them. Because there is no single universal social practice or collective subject to confer meaning and direction to history, the work of translation becomes crucial to define, in each concrete and historical moment or context, which constellations of subaltern practices carry more counter-hegemonic potential. For instance, in Mexico, in March 2001, the Zapatista indigenous movement was a privileged counter-hegemonic practice inasmuch as it was capable of undertaking the work of translation between its objectives and practices and the objectives and practices of other Mexican social movements, from the civic and labor movements to the feminist movement. From that work of translation resulted, for example, that the Zapatista leader chosen to address the Mexican Congress was a woman, Comandante Esther. By that choice, the Zapatistas wanted to signify the articulation between the indigenous movement and the

women's liberation movement and thus deepen the counter-hegemonic potential of both.

The WSF while showing the diversity of social struggles fighting against neoliberal globalization all over the world call for a giant work of translation. On the one hand, local movements and organizations that are not only very different in their practices and objectives but also embedded in different cultures. On the other, transnational organizations, some from the South, some from the North, that also differ widely among themselves. How to build articulation, aggregation and coalition among all these different movements and organizations? What do the participatory budgeting practiced in many Latin American cities and the participatory democratic planning based on *panchayats* in Kerala and West Bengal in India have in common? What can they learn from each other? In what kinds of counter-hegemonic global activities can they cooperate? The same questions can be asked about the pacifist and the anarchist movements, or the indigenous and gay movements, the Zapatista movement, the ATTAC, the Landless Movement in Brazil, and the Rio Narmada movement in India, and so on and so forth. These are the questions that the work of translation aims to answer. It is a complex work, not only because the movements and organizations involved are many and diverse but also because they are embedded in diverse cultures and knowledges.

Conditions and procedures of translation

The work of translation aims to create intelligibility, coherence, and articulation in a world that sees itself enriched by multiplicity and diversity. Translation is not a mere technique. Even its obvious technical components and the way in which they are applied in the course of the translation process must be the object of democratic deliberation. Translation is a dialogical and political work. It has an emotional dimension as well, because it presupposes both a non-conformist attitude vis-à-vis the limits of one's knowledge and practice and the readiness to be surprised and learn with the other's knowledge and practice.

The work of translation is based on the premise that for cultural, social and political reasons specific to our time it is possible to reach a broad consensus around the idea that there is no general, all-encompassing theory of social transformation. Without this consensus – the only kind of legitimate (negative) universalism – translation is a colonial kind of work no matter how postcolonial it claims to be. Once such postulate is guaranteed, the conditions and procedures of the work of translation can be elucidated on the basis of the following questions: What to translate? From what and into what to translate? Who translates? When should translation take place? Why translate?

What to translate? The crucial concept in answering this question is the concept of *contact zone*. Building coalitions to further counter-hegemonic globalization presupposes the existence of contact zones conceived of as social fields in which different movements/organizations meet and interact to reciprocally evaluate their normative aspirations, their practices and knowledges. In view of the history of progressive politics in the twentieth century it is probably unavoidable that unequal relations of power are present in the first steps of the construction of contact zones. The work of translation will be possible to the extent that the unequal power relations yield to relations of shared authority. Only then will the cosmopolitan contact zone be constituted. The cosmopolitan contact zone starts from the assumption that it is up to each knowledge or practice to decide what is put in contact with whom. Contact zones are always selective because the movement's or NGO's knowledges and practices exceed what of them they are willing to put in contact. Indeed, what is put in contact is not necessarily what is most relevant or central. As the work of translation advances it becomes possible to bring into the contact zone the aspects of knowledge or practice that each NGO or social movement considers more central and relevant.

In multicultural contact zones, it is up to each cultural group to decide which aspects must be selected for multicultural confrontation. In every culture, there are features deemed too central to be exposed and rendered vulnerable by the confrontation in the contact zone, or aspects deemed inherently untranslatable into another culture. These decisions are part and

parcel of the work of translation itself and are susceptible of revision as the work proceeds. If the work of translation progresses, it is to be expected that more features will be brought to the contact zone, which in turn will contribute to further translation progress. In many countries of Latin America, particularly in those in which multicultural constitutionalism has been adopted, the indigenous peoples have been fighting for the right to control what in their knowledges and practices should or should not be the object of translation vis-à-vis the “sociedad mayor.” Once involved in the WSF process, the indigenous movements conduct a similar struggle vis-à-vis all the non-indigenous movements.

The issue of what is translatable is not restricted to the selection criterion adopted by each group in the contact zone. Beyond active selectivity, there is what we might call passive selectivity. It consists of what in a given culture has become unpronounceable because of the extreme oppression to which it was subjected during long periods. These are deep absences, made of an emptiness impossible to fill; the silences they produce are too unfathomable to become the object of translation work.

What to translate stirs one other question that is particularly important in contact zones between groups from different cultural universes. Cultures are monolithic only when seen from the outside or from afar. When looked at from the inside or at close range, it is easy to see that they are comprised of various and often conflicting versions of the same culture. For example, when I speak, as I did above, of a possible multicultural dialogue about conceptions of human dignity, we can easily see that in the western culture there is not just one conception of human rights. Two at least can be identified: a liberal conception that privileges political and civic rights to the detriment of social and economic rights; and a radical or socialist conception that stresses social and economic rights as condition of all the others. By the same token, in Islam it is possible to identify several conceptions of *umma*; some, more inclusive, going back to the time when the Prophet lived in Mecca; others, less inclusive, which evolved after the construction of the Islamic state in Medina. Likewise, there are many conceptions of *dharma* in Hinduism. They vary, for instance from caste to caste.

The most inclusive versions, which hold a wider circle of reciprocity, are the ones that generate more promising contact zones; they are the most adequate to deepen the work of translation.

To translate from what into what? The choice of knowledges and practices among which the work of translation occurs is always the result of a convergence among movements/NGOs concerning both the identification of a lacking or deficiency in one's knowledge or practice, and the refusal to accept it as fatality and the motivation to overcome it. It may emerge from an evaluation that current performances don't measure up to the group's expectations and from a sense of crisis developing there from. As an example, the labor movement, confronted with an unprecedented crisis, has been opening itself to contact zones with other social movements, namely civic, feminist, ecological, and movements of migrant workers. In this contact zone, there is an on-going translation work between labor practices, claims, and aspirations, and the objectives of citizenship, protection of the environment, anti-discrimination against women and ethnic or migrant minorities. Translation has slowly transformed the labor movement and the other social movements, thus rendering possible constellations of struggles that until a few years ago would be unthinkable.

When to translate? In this case, too, the cosmopolitan contact zone must be the result of a conjugation of times, rhythms, and opportunities. If there is no such conjugation, the contact zone becomes imperial and the work of translation a form of cannibalization. In the last two decades, western modernity discovered the possibilities and virtues of multiculturalism. Accustomed to the routine of its own hegemony, western modernity presumed that if it were to open itself to dialogue with cultures it had previously oppressed, the latter would *naturally* be ready and available to engage in the dialogue, and indeed only too eager to do so. Such presupposition has resulted in new forms of cultural imperialism, even when it assumes the form of multiculturalism. This I call reactionary multiculturalism. On the contrary, the success of the WSF signals the emergence among social movements of a reciprocally experienced, widespread sense that the advancement of counter-hegemonic struggles is premised upon the possibility of sharing practices and

knowledges globally and cross-culturally. Upon this shared experience it becomes possible to build the horizontal conjugation of times upon which a cosmopolitan contact zone and the emancipatory work of translation may emerge.

Who translates? Knowledges and practices only exist as mobilized by social groups, both movements and NGOs. Hence, the work of translation is always carried out among representatives of those social groups. The WSF is a facilitator of cosmopolitan contact zones among NGOs/movements and a meeting ground for their leaders and activists. The workings of the contact zone generate a new kind of citizenship, a cosmopolitan attitude of reflection and self-reflection, reaching beyond familiar territories, be they familiar practices or familiar knowledges. As argumentative work, the work of translation requires argumentative capacity. The partners in the cosmopolitan contact zone must have a profile similar to that of the *philosophical sage* identified by Odera Oruka in his quest for African sagacity. They must be deeply embedded in the practices and knowledges they represent, having of both a profound and critical understanding. This critical dimension, which Odera Oruka designates as “didactic sageness,” grounds the want, the feeling of incompleteness, and the motivation to discover in other knowledges and practices the answers that are not to be found within the limits of a given knowledge or practice. Translators of cultures must be good cosmopolitan citizens. They are to be found both among the leaders of social movements and among the rank and file activists. In the near future, the decision about who translates is likely to become one of the most crucial democratic deliberations in the construction of counter-hegemonic globalization.

How to translate? The work of translation is basically an argumentative work, based on the cosmopolitan emotion of sharing the world with those who do not share our knowledge or experience. The work of translation encounters multiple difficulties. The first difficulty concerns the premises of argumentation. Argumentation is based on postulates, axioms, rules, and ideas that are not the object of argumentation because they are taken for granted by all those participating in the same argumentative circle. They constitute what is evident to everyone, the *commonplaces*, the basic consensus that makes

argumentative dissent possible.⁵⁴ The work of translation has no *commonplaces* at the outset, because the available *commonplaces* are the ones appropriate to a given movement, hence not acceptable as evident by another movement. In other words, the *commonplaces* that each movement brings into the contact zone cease to be premises of argumentation and become arguments. As it progresses, the work of translation constructs the *commonplaces* adequate to the contact zone and the translating situation. It is a demanding work, with no safety nets and ever on the verge of disaster. The ability to construct *commonplaces* is one of the most distinctive marks of the quality of the cosmopolitan contact zone.

The second difficulty regards the language used to conduct the argumentation. It is not usual for the movements in presence in contact zones to have a common language or master the common language equally well. Furthermore, when the cosmopolitan contact zone is multicultural, one of the languages in question is often the language that dominated the colonial or imperial contact zone. The replacement of the latter by a cosmopolitan contact zone may thus be boycotted by this use of the previously dominant language. The issue is not just that the different participants in the argumentative discourse may master the language unequally. The issue is that this language is responsible for the very unpronounceability of some of the central aspirations of the knowledges and practices that were oppressed in the colonial contact zone.

The third difficulty concerns the silences. Not the unpronounceable, but rather the different rhythms with which the different movements articulate words with silences and the different eloquence (or meaning) that is ascribed to silence by the different cultures to which the groups belong. To manage and translate silence is one of the most exacting tasks of the work of translation.

Why translate? This last question encompasses all the others. Very succinctly, the work of translation enables the social movements and

⁵⁴ On common places and argumentation in general, see Santos (1995: 7-55).

organizations to develop a cosmopolitan reason based on the core idea that global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice.

The work of translation is the procedure we are left with to give coherence and generate coalitions among the enormous diversity of struggles against neoliberal globalization when there is no (and would not be desired if existed) general theory of progressive social transformation to be brought about by a privileged historical subject according to centrally established strategies and tactics. When social transformation has no automatic meaning and neither history nor society or nature can be centrally planned the movements have to create through translation partial collective meanings that enable them to coalesce on courses of action that they consider most adequate to bring about the kind of social transformation they deem most desirable.

It may be asked: if we do not know if a better world is possible, what gives us legitimacy or motivation to act as if we did? The work of translation is a work of epistemological and democratic imagination, aiming to construct new and plural conceptions of social emancipation upon the ruins of the automatic social emancipation of the modernist project. There is no guaranty that a better world may be possible, nor that all those who have not given up struggling for it conceive of it in the same way. The objective of the translation work is to nurture among progressive social movements and organizations the will to create together knowledges and practices strong enough to provide credible alternatives to neoliberal globalization, which is no less no more than a new step of global capitalism toward subjecting the inexhaustible wealth of the world to the mercantile logic. In the cosmopolitan contact zone the possibility of a better world is imagined from the vantage point of the present. Once the field of experiences is enlarged, it is possible to evaluate better the alternatives that are possible and available today. This diversification of experiences aims to recreate the tension between experiences and expectations, but in such a way that they both happen in the present. The new nonconformity results from the verification that it would be possible to live in a much better world today and not tomorrow. The possibility of a better future lies therefore not in a distant future, but rather in the reinvention of the present

as enlarged by the sociology of absences and by the sociology of emergences, and rendered coherent by the work of translation. To affirm the credibility and sustainability of this possibility is, in my view, the most profound contribution of the WSF to the counter-hegemonic struggles.

The work of translation permits to create meanings and directions that are precarious but concrete, short-range but radical in their objectives, uncertain but shared. The aim of translation between knowledges is to create cognitive justice from the standpoint of the epistemological imagination. The aim of translation between practices and their agents is to create the conditions for global social justice from the standpoint of the democratic imagination.

The work of translation creates the conditions for concrete social emancipations of concrete social groups in a present whose injustice is legitimated on the basis of a massive waste of experience. The kind of social transformation that may be accomplished on the basis of the work of translation requires that the reciprocal learning and the will to articulate and coalesce be transformed into transformative practices. In the following section I present a concrete proposal aimed at expanding, deepening and consolidating the work of translation.

Chapter 6

The World Social Forum and Self-learning: The Popular University of the Social Movements

The work of translation is a daunting task and it will not be carried out easily. It involves a complex process of global self-knowledge and self-training aimed at increasing reciprocal knowledge among the movements and organizations. The ecologies of knowledges I referred to in section 2 of this book, as one of the features of an epistemology of the South, will not emerge spontaneously. On the contrary, because it confronts the monoculture of scientific knowledge, it will only develop through a sociology of absences whereby suppressed, marginalized, discredited knowledges are made present and credible. As I said the sociology of absences is no conventional sociology and cannot be pursued in the conventional sites for the production of hegemonic scientific knowledge, the universities and research centers. This does not mean that in those sites counter-hegemonic scientific knowledge cannot be produced. It can and the WSF has benefited from it. What such sites cannot produce is ecologies of knowledges, that is, promoting meaningful dialogues among different kinds of knowledges (science being one of them, and an important one in many instances), identifying alternative sources of knowledge and alternative knowledge creators, experimenting with alternative criteria of rigor and relevance in light of shared objectives of emancipatory social transformation. The ecologies of knowledges call for context-bound, situated, useful knowledges embedded in transformative practices. Accordingly, they can only be pursued in settings as close as possible to such practices and in such a way that the protagonists of social action are also the protagonists of knowledge creation.

In this line I proposed in the third WSF 2003 the creation of a popular university of the social movements (PUSM) with the purpose of self-educating activists and leaders of social movements, as well as social scientists, scholars and artists concerned with progressive social transformation. The designation of “popular university” was used not so much to evoke the working class universities that proliferated in Europe and Latin America in the

early twentieth century as to convey the idea that after a century of elitist higher education a popular university is necessarily a counter-university.

The first version of this proposal was presented in January 2003.⁵⁵ In the months that followed it was discussed on several occasions with different groups and people involved in the WSF.⁵⁶ The present version is the result of these discussions.

The name and the thing

There is no consensus on the name to be given to the proposed institution. Some consider the term “University” elitist. Others think that the term “Popular University” entails identification with initiatives of communist parties and other left organizations of the first decades of the twentieth century. School? Academy? Open University of the Social Movements? Global University of Social Movements? Knowledges Network? At some point the organizations that decide to take upon themselves the task of actually creating the popular university will have to come to an agreement as to its designation. Since none of the alternatives so far seems preferable, in this version I stick to the original designation.

What is and isn't the PUSM?

PUSM is not a school for training cadres or leaders of NGOs and social movements. Although PUSM is clearly oriented towards action for social transformation, its aim is not to offer the kinds of skills and training that are usually provided by such schools. Nor is PUSM a think tank of NGOs and social movements. Although it highly values strategic research and reflection,

⁵⁵ It was published in *Democracia Viva* (IBASE), No. 14, January 2003, pp. 78-83.

⁵⁶ It was discussed in Madrid, on April 25, 2003 at the headquarters of ACSUR-Las Segovias, with Pedro Santana, Tomas Villasante, Juan Carlos Monedero and several other activists of Spanish and Latin-American nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); in Amsterdam, on May 18 at the meeting of fellows of The Transnational Institute; in Cartagena de Indias, in June 16-20, during the Thematic World Social Forum on Democracy, Human Rights, Wars, and Narcotraffic, in a workshop coordinated by Pedro Santana, Giampiero Rasimelli, Moema Miranda and myself; and finally in Rio de Janeiro, on September 2, at the IBASE headquarters, with Candido Grzybowski, Moema Miranda, several other members of IBASE and Jorge Romano of Actionaid.

PUSM rejects the distance that one and the other usually keep vis-à-vis collective action.

The major objective of PUSM is to help make knowledge of alternative globalization as global as globalization itself, and, at the same time, to render actions for social transformation better known and more efficient, and its protagonists more competent and reflective. To meet its goals PUSM will have to be more international and intercultural than similar existent initiatives.

Rationale

As I argued above, the movement for an alternative globalization is a new political phenomenon focused on the idea that the current phase of global capitalism, known as neoliberal globalization, requires new forms of resistance and new directions for social emancipation. From within this movement, made up of a large number of social movements and NGOs, new social agents and practices are emerging. They operate in an equally new framework, networking local, national, and global struggles. Present theories of social change, even those concerned with emancipatory social change cannot adequately deal with this political and cultural novelty.

This gap between theory and practice has negative consequences both for genuinely progressive social movements and NGOs, and the universities and research centers, where scientific social theories have traditionally been produced. Both leaders and activists of social movements and NGOs feel the lack of theories enabling them to reflect analytically on their practice and clarify their methods and objectives. Furthermore, progressive social scientists/scholars/artists, isolated from these new practices and agents, cannot contribute to this reflection and clarification. They can even make things more difficult by insisting on concepts and theories that are not adequate to these new realities.

The proposal for a Popular University of Social Movements is meant to contribute to filling this gap and correcting the two deficiencies it produces. Ultimately, its objective is to overcome the distinction between theory and practice by bringing the two together through systematic encounters between

those who mainly devote themselves to the practice of social change and those who mainly engage themselves in theoretical production.

The kind of training envisioned by PUSM is therefore two-pronged. On the one hand, it aims to self-educate activists and community leaders of social movements and NGOs, by providing them with adequate analytical and theoretical frameworks. The latter will enable them to deepen their reflective understanding of their practice – their methods and objectives – enhancing their efficacy and consistency. On the other hand, it aims to self-educate progressive social scientists/scholars/artists interested in studying the new processes of social transformation, by offering them the opportunity of a direct dialogue with their protagonists. This will make it possible to identify, and whenever possible to eliminate, the discrepancy between the analytical and theoretical frameworks in which they were trained and the concrete needs and aspirations emerging from new transformational practices.

In this two-pronged educational approach lies the novelty of PUSM. To achieve this objective, PUSM must overcome the conventional distinction between teaching and learning – based on the distinction between teacher and pupil – thus creating contexts and moments for reciprocal learning. Recognition of reciprocal ignorance is its starting point. Its final point is the shared production of knowledges as global and diverse as the globalization processes themselves.

Beyond the gap between theory and practice, PUSM intends to tackle two problems that currently permeate all movements for a counter-hegemonic globalization. First, the scarcity of reciprocal knowledge that still exists among movements/NGOs active in the same thematic area and operating in different parts of the globe. The WSF and all the other regional and thematic forums have been powerful instruments in arousing this need and showing the importance of reciprocal knowledge. However, given their sporadic nature and short duration, they have been unable to fulfill this need. Without this reciprocal knowledge, it is impossible to increase the density and complexity of movement networks. Without this expansion it is not possible to augment significantly the efficacy and consistency of transformational actions beyond what has been achieved so far.

The other problem is the lack of shared knowledge among movements/organizations active in different thematic areas and struggles. This gap is even wider than the previous one, and bridging it is equally important. Because, as I said, a general theory globally encompassing all movements and practices in all thematic areas is impossible and undesirable, we need to create conditions for reciprocal intelligibility among movements through the work of translation laid out above. The PUSM is a permanent workshop of translation aimed at enhancing the density and complexity of the movements' networks fighting against neoliberal globalization.

Activities

PUSM is constituted of three principal activities: pedagogical activities, activities of research-action for social transformation, and activities for spreading capabilities and tools for inter-thematic, transnational and intercultural translation.

Pedagogical activities. PUSM will be structured on the basis of workshops, attended by a limited number of activists/movement leaders, and social scientists/scholars/artists. Each workshop will last two weeks on a full-time basis, alternating periods for discussion, study and reflection, and leisure.

Each workshop will have about 10 sessions for discussions. Activists/movement leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists will take turns in preparing and running these sessions. Study materials will be of various kinds: oral narratives and documents presented by movements and organizations, and theoretical and analytical texts proposed by social scientists/scholars, dramatic plays⁵⁷ and art objects and activities proposed by artists.

Each workshop will have 2 coordinators, one an activist/leader and the other a scientist/scholar /artist. Both activist/leaders and artists/scholars/artists will work as consecutive translators, whenever needed and feasible.

⁵⁷ For example, the Theater of the Oppressed, the methodology proposed by Augusto Boal and used today in 70 countries.

Each workshop will consist of two phases: thematic and inter-thematic. The thematic phase will be concerned with deepening the theoretical and practical knowledge of movements and organizations working in a given area, be it labor, indigenous, feminism, environment, peace, human rights, fair trade, peasant agriculture, intellectual property rights, and so on.

The inter-thematic phase will be concerned with having experiences and knowledges shared between at least two fields of collective action and their respective movements and organizations.

To this effect, at least two workshops will be held at the same time at PUSM. The first week of each workshop will be dedicated to deepening the theme. In the second week, activists/leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists participating in two (or more) workshops will meet together.

In its thematic phase, workshop discussions will deal, among other things, with the following:

1. Accounts and trajectories of organization and action;
2. Reflection on successful and unsuccessful practices;
3. Discussion of the most complex issues, the most felt wants;
4. Discussion on objectives, strategies, and methodologies.
5. Discussion of topics proposed in the ambit of the two other activities of PUSM (see below) deemed by the coordinators as having particular relevance for the NGOs and movements that participate in the workshops.

Activists/leaders in particular will discuss and reflect on the basis of their practices. In addition to their role as discussion facilitators, social scientists/scholar/artists will have the specific task of conveying the compared experience of movements and organizations that are not present, but have accumulated relevant knowledge. Participation of social scientists/scholars/artists from the South is particularly desirable, as in general they have more experience with articulating theory and practice.

At the conclusion of the thematic phase, workshop participants will define by consensus a set of issues to be discussed with the other workshop (or workshops). The two (or more) sets of issues – one set for each thematic workshop – will be the basis for the inter-thematic phase of the workshops.

At the conclusion of each workshop, a rapporteur chosen by the participants will present a detailed report on discussions and main conclusions. This report will be disseminated to all movements, associations, and social scientists/scholars/artists who have joined the PUSM network.

Fellowships and grants will be available for movement leaders/activists and social scientists/scholars/artists unable to pay for their participation

Activities of Research-Action for Social Transformation. Besides being a network of plural knowledges, PUSM aims to be a network for the creation of plural knowledges. As the pedagogical activities evolve, themes and problems deemed relevant but as yet little known and understood will emerge. Workshop participants will be encouraged to identify these topics and problems, forwarding them to the Translation Coordination. The selected topics and problems will be researched by the PUSM Network in the light of various participatory methodologies.⁵⁸

Activities for Diffusion of Translation Capabilities and Tools. These activities consist in the diffusion of the translation methods and the concrete results obtained with them in the different workshops, namely in terms of new knowledges, designations, concepts, principles and methods of collective action, etc. For example, the concepts of democracy, direct action, social emancipation, socialism, nonviolence, sagacity, Satyagraha, human rights, swaraj, multiculturalism, strike, sovereignty, revolution, umma, dharma and so on, and so forth. Every one of these items is less global than globalization from below. Some are of current usage within a given regional or thematic ambit, but totally unknown within others. Some are valorized positively by given movements or ONGs, but rejected by others. Different items are

⁵⁸ One such methodology could be the one developed by the Institute of Liberation Philosophy (Brazil) after Paulo Freire's pedagogy.

adequate in different ways for different scales of action (local, national, global).

Based on the analysis of the final reports of the workshops, the Translation Coordination will propose criteria to assess the limits and potentialities of each item for inter-thematic, transnational and intercultural usage. Such proposals will be organized according to two large sets: the Lexicons and the Manifestos.

The *Lexicons* concern items that are mainly discursive: designations, concepts, knowledges, classifications, etc.

The *Manifestos* concern items that are predominantly performative: principles and methodologies of action, instances of successful articulations among practices, etc.

The proposals will be refined through the PUSM Network as well as through the set of networks that make up alternative globalization, namely those participating in the World Social Forum.

Organization

PUSM comprises two operative units: PUSM-Headquarters and PUSM-Network.

PUSM-Headquarters. They will operate in a country of intermediate development (Brazil, India, South Africa, Mexico, etc.). It includes the Coordinating Committee, the Translation Coordination, and the Executive Committee. The first workshops will take place at the headquarters. PUSM-Network will be managed here as well.

The *Coordinating Committee* is constituted of representatives of all the movements and NGOs that are part of PUSM-Network. Its job is to coordinate the activities of PUSM and select the Translation Coordination and the Executive Committee.

The functions of the *Translation Coordination* are:

1. Select workshops and its participants;

2. Supervise the activities, both pedagogical and of research-action for change;
3. Generate the materials for diffusion as translation capabilities and tools;
4. Grant scholarships to activists/leaders and social scientists/scholars/artists that are not self-funded.

The *Executive Committee* handles the administration of PUSM-Headquarters, prepares and manages the budget, and takes care of fund raising.

PUSM-Headquarters will establish a relationship of privileged collaboration (namely as concerns training and rendering of services) with the organizations and movements of the city or region of its location.

PUSM-Network. PUSM-Network is comprised of the set of organizations and movements that adhere to PUSM's Charter of Principles and Commitments, and engage significantly in any one of the three major kinds of activities that constitute PUSM. The Charter will be drafted by the NGOs/social movements that take responsibility for the foundation of the PUSM.

(In)Conclusion

In spite of the success of the WSF – its organizational and programmatic novelty, global reach, style of consensus building – the question of its future has become recurrent. In my view, the reason lies in the fact that the factors that account for its success have solved as many problems as they have created them. The new problems account for the ambivalence in the evaluation of the past and for the uncertainty as to the future. They can be formulated in terms of strong questions.

1. The question of efficaciousness. As I showed above, this is one of the most divisive questions since efficaciousness can be measured in terms of different criteria and there is no consensus about which to adopt. The evaluation of the efficaciousness of the WSF is one of the exercises that best discloses the confrontation between new and old conceptions of social transformation. From the point of view of the old ones, the WSF cannot but be assessed negatively. Evaluated in terms of the new conceptions of social transformation it advocates, the WSF cannot but be positively assessed. The emergence of a global consciousness among movements and NGOs, regardless of the scope of their action has been crucial to create a certain symmetry of scale between hegemonic globalization and the movements and NGOs that fight against it. The dozens of forums held since 2001 bear witness of how precious this consciousness is and of how much is to be done in order to preserve and strengthen it. This explains, ultimately, why the factors of attraction and aggregation prevail over those of repulsion and divisiveness. The question however remains how this global consciousness and the potential it has generated can be best put to task of bringing about progressive social transformation on a global scale. On the other hand, in light of the trans-scale nature of the struggles encompassed by the WSF it is inadequate to assess its efficaciousness exclusively in terms of global changes. It has to be assessed as well in terms of local and national changes. Given all the levels involved, the evaluation of the WSF's efficaciousness is

undoubtedly more complex, but for that same reason it does not allow for rash assessments.

2. The questions of representation and organization. The newness of the WSF is consensually attributed to its absence of leaders and hierarchical organization, its emphasis on cyberspace networks, its ideal of participatory democracy, and its flexibility and readiness to engage in experimentation. But, of course, the reality is much more complex and, as I discussed above at length, the questions of representation and participation are likely to remain wide open in the foreseeable future. Even if the limits of the world dimension of the WSF are pushed back as much as possible, the issue of representation will always be there until the selection criteria are more transparent and democratic and the conditions for participation more equally distributed. It will definitely help to adopt a broad conception of the WSF, turning the WSF into a permanent process and promoting the continuity among its many initiatives, so as to transform the WSF into “an incremental process of collective learning and growth”, as stated in the resolutions adopted at IC meetings during the 2003 WSF.

The WSF’s utopia concerns emancipatory democracy. Since the WSF pretends to be a large collective process for deepening democracy, it is no wonder that the issue of internal democracy has become more and more pressing. In the coming years, the WSF’s credibility in its struggle for democracy in society will depend more and more on the credibility of its internal democracy.

3. The question of how to combine the celebration of diversity with the construction of strong consensuses leading to collective action. The celebration of diversity is one of the most cherished characteristics of the WSF. I identified above some of the outstanding cleavages that divide the social movements and organizations and showed how, in spite of them, the aggregating power of the WSF has so far remained intact. For how long? The problems for the future in this regard can be formulated through the following questions:

1. Through the celebration of diversity and its aggregating power the WSF has managed to liberate a tremendous energy: is it now making the best use of such energy? Is it possible that the process that has liberated so much energy may also be the same that neutralizes or stifles it for lack of keeping pace with the changes produced by the energy itself?

2. Since aggregation of movements and organizations is not a value in itself, what is its political objective? Can we build strong consensus on the basis of the celebration of diversity? And if yes, what to do with such consensus?

3. Having been in its origins an highly political phenomenon, is the WSF renovating and strengthening its political potential or is rather being transformed into a politically diluted umbrella for more or less depoliticized forms of collective action?

These problems reveal in my view the current vitality of the WSF and there is no reason to believe that it will not respond successfully to the challenges confronting it. It seems however clear that in order to do so, the WSF has to undergo a demanding process of self-learning guided by the following normative orientations:

1. Take all the measures feasible to make the WSF as global as its name indicates;

2. Uproot the organization guided by the very same idea of participatory democracy that the WSF has been advocating for society at large;

3. Create internal "schools" of global self-knowledge and self-training aimed at increasing reciprocal knowledge among the movements and organizations;

4. Promote strong sectorial consensus capable of sustaining global struggles and durable collective actions.

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