

6 | Making and unmaking cleavages: strategy and political action¹

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 neo-liberalism'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 novelty of this utopia in left thinking in Western capitalist modernity 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 in concrete political options get mixed up with divergences in codes and languages of political option. Accordingly, it is not always possible to determine whether the real disputes correspond to 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 which made it very difficult for the different political factions to exclude themselves at the start with the excuse that they were being excluded. To this the WSF's 'minimalist' programme outlined in its Charter of Principles contributed decisively: emphatic assertion of respect for diversity; access broadly open (only movements or groups that advocate political violence being 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 neo-liberalism and for a more just society may have their place. In light of 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 and freedom from manipulation. Few would want to miss this train, particularly at a time in history when trains have ceased to operate. For all these reasons, the desire to highlight what the movements and organizations have in common has prevailed over 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 in which the movements relate to them are randomly distributed inside the WSF.² On the contrary, they reflect a meta-cleavage between Western and non-Western 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 meetings 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.³ 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 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.⁴ 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, to speak only of the countries that have been more directly involved in the WSF process. 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. Both fields comprise a wide variety of

positions. For instance, among revolutionaries there is a clear cleavage between the old left, which aspires to a kind of state socialism, the anarchists, who 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 (IS/IC).

This cleavage reverberates, albeit not linearly, in strategic options and options for political action. Among the most salient of these should be counted the strategic option between reforming/democratizing the institutions of neo-liberal globalization (the 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 also 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 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 – neo-liberalism. 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 a whole and not on any single one of its manifestations.

As to the evaluation of the WSF, the WSF is viewed now as the embryo of an efficacious rebuttal of neo-liberal globalization, confronting neo-liberal globalization at the global level, where more social injustice has been produced, not as a movement which, because it is not grounded in 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 rigidly assuming a given position and even greater to labelling it. The majority of movements and organizations have political histories 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 sap the energy for small changes when the big changes are not possible. Above all, for many movements and organizations, this cleavage is West-centric or North-centric, and is more useful for understanding the past of the left than its future. Indeed, many movements and organizations do not recognize themselves, for the same reasons, in the dichotomy between left and right.

Precisely because for many movements and organizations the priority is not to seize power but rather to 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. Social conflicts always start out by being fought in the terms imposed by the dominant or hegemonic forces, and the success of the struggles for another possible world is measured precisely by their capacity to change the terms of the conflict as the latter unfolds. What is necessary is to create alternative, counter-hegemonic visions, capable of sustaining the daily practices and relations of citizens and social groups. The work of the movements' leaderships is of course important, but in no way is it conceived as the work of an enlightened avant-garde that forges a path for the masses, ever the victims of mystification and false consciousness. On the contrary, as Sub-comandante Marcos (leader of the Mexican Zapatista Army of National Liberation) recommends, it behoves 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 a 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

a 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 some still have strong reservations as to the heroic tone of the idea of ‘social emancipation’ and at best accept it if used in the plural, ‘social emancipations’.

Many movements of the Global South think that no general labels need be attached to the goals of the struggles. Labels run the risk of diverging 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 West-centric and North-centric, while the concept of emancipation is equally prey to the Western bias towards creating false universalisms. Hence many do not recognize themselves in either term of this dichotomy, and don’t even bother to propose any alternative.

The state as enemy or potential ally

This is also a cleavage in which movements of the Global North recognize themselves more easily than movements of the Global 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 twenty-five years has been transnationalized and turned into an agent of neo-liberal 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. Neo-liberal globalization did not rob the state of its centrality, rather it 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 neo-liberal globalization are involved, will 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 thereby ensue, 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 globalisation 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 globalisation are and should provide the anchor to any anti-globalisation initiative at the international level. (Gobrin-Morante 2002: 19)

In other words, globalization is most effectively fought 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 centre of political decision. This decentring of the state also brought about the decentring of 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 oil drilling by a transnational corporation) 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 from 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 as to 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.

Both the question of the ambit or scope of the struggles to be prioritized and the question of how best to coordinate national, regional and global struggles came to the foreground in the discussions leading to two little-known changes introduced into the Charter of Principles as the WSF process unfolded. The Charter of Principles was agreed upon by the IC of the WSF in June 2001, on the basis of a proposal presented by the OC in April 2001.⁵ Later on, during the preparations for the 2004 WSF, it was discussed in various meetings in India. As Sen describes it (2004: 72), the organizations that took the responsibility for organizing the Mumbai WSF came to the conclusion that the Charter of Principles, as it stood, did not fully address social and political conditions in India. Accordingly they decided to modify the charter to suit local conditions. After some months of discussion, a policy document was adopted at a meeting in Bhopal, in April 2002, entitled 'WSF India Policy Statement: Charter of Principles – World Social Forum India'. This document 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 website of 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 participating in the WSF. In the Perugia meeting of the IC (November 2003), 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.' In my view, the changes introduced signal an innovative process of local adaptation to global dynamics. Through it, national conditions and struggles are embedded in a broader global context, but at the same time invite the latter to recontextualize itself in light of the specificity of national realities and their ways of inserting themselves in the counter-hegemonic globalization.

The same can be said of the 'Charter of Principles and Values of the African Social Forum', adopted in January 2003 in Addis Ababa. This important document takes an explicit regional stance, focusing on the specific problems confronting the continent as a result of the particularly devastating impact of neo-liberal globalization. It conceives of the Forum as contributing to regional integration (Pan-Africanism) and puts special emphasis on 'the power of democracy as the preferred channel for conflict negotiation within societies and between States'. Worth mentioning is the fact that, as regards the non-admission of violence-promoting organizations, both the African charter and the Indian policy statement adopt the formula (or some variation) of the original version of the Charter of Principles, as proposed by the OC, rather than the formula of the final version. In the OC proposal Clause 11 of the charter stated: 'The meetings of the WSF are always open to all those who wish to take part in them, except organizations that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action.'⁶

Direct or institutional action

This cleavage is clearly linked to the first and third cleavages. 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 those who disparage the newness of neo-liberal 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 working 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 co-optation, betrayal or trivialization. But even in the rare cases 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 and strikes will yield success for the struggles. The working classes have no weapon but external pressure on the system. If they venture into it, they are defeated from the start.

On the other hand, the supporters of institutional struggles assume that the 'system' is contradictory, a political and social arena where it is possible to fight and where failure is not the only possible outcome. In the course of the twentieth century the working classes conquered important institutional spaces, of which the welfare system in the Global North is a good example. The fact that the welfare system is now in crisis and the 'opening' that it offered the working classes is now being closed 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 make up 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 Global North than of the Global South. The 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. One of the most influential movements in the WSF, the MST (the movement of the landless rural workers in Brazil), is known for resorting both to direct action (land occupation) and institutional action (negotiations

with the government, judicial action), sometimes within the ambit of the same struggle or campaign. Historically, direct action was the basis of progressive juridico-institutional changes, and it was always necessary to combat the co-optation 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 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 in two principles – the principle of equality and the principle of respect for difference. The struggle for each of them must be linked with the other; otherwise both will end in defeat. Nevertheless, there is a cleavage among the movements and even, sometimes, within the same movement, as to whether priority should be given to one of these principles, and if so to which. The cleavage is between those who give priority to the principle of equality – for equality alone may create real opportunities for the recognition of difference – and those who give priority to the principle of the recognition of difference, for without such recognition equality conceals the exclusions and marginalities on which it rests, thus becoming doubly oppressive (for what it conceals and for what it shows).

This cleavage occurs among movements and within the same movement. 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 to the detriment of the former. But the most common position is indeed that both principles have equal priority, and that it is not correct to prioritize either one in the abstract. Concrete political conditions will dictate to each movement which 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. Virginia Vargas (n.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.

Vargas 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 within 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 strategic 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 little-known clashes within the Organizing Committee for the first meeting of the WSF. But it was during and after the third WSF that this cleavage gained widespread notoriety and involved a large number of participants. The sheer size of WSF 2003 and the organizational problems it raised prompted the discussion about the future of the WSF. It soon became clear to the broader membership 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 is 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 right it will soon be discredited as a talking 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 paralysing effect and will play into 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 meeting of the WSF, and for that the Charter of Principles must be revised. Horizontal organization based on consensus should be replaced by (or at least be linked with) a democratic command capable of acting in the name of the WSF.

On the other side is the conception of the WSF as a space, a meeting ground on 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 that oppose neo-liberalism as possible to come together freely. Once together, they can listen to each other, learn from the experiences and struggles of others, discuss proposals of action, and become linked in new nets and organizations without the interference of leaders, commands or programmes. 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 the 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 association, should be preserved at all costs. 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 associations 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. (Whitaker 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.⁷ For instance, Cândido 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* (2003a):

To try to eliminate contradictions at the core of the WSF and turn it into a more homogeneous space and process for confronting neo-liberalism 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, a 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 mechanisms and procedures mean more possibilities for getting things done. (Teivainen 2004)⁸

This cleavage, however intensely promoted 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 be so led.

This cleavage surfaced with some intensity in WSF 2005 and afterwards in the aftermath of the presentation by some high-profile participants of a declaration entitled 'Manifesto of Porto Alegre'. The idea of drafting a document that would synthesize the major points of agreement among the movements and NGOs participating in the WSF dates back to the second meeting, in 2002. Impressed by the enthusiasm with which so many organizations across the world responded

to the call of the WSF and the atmosphere of general consensus on major global issues expressed in so many meetings convened by so many different organizations, some intellectual-activists started discussing the idea of putting together the main points of agreement in a document. The document would have the twofold purpose of providing the participants with an overview of the diversity of the WSF and showing to the outside world that such diversity was neither chaotic nor devoid of concrete orientations for collective global action. The success of the third WSF (2003) was interpreted as providing further justification for the idea of a document in light of the immense range of topics discussed and the generalized view that the lively debates were not being used to generate concrete proposals for action against neo-liberal globalization. In the WSF held in Mumbai, Bernard Cassen, founder of ATTAC, was particularly insistent on the idea that the growing strength of the WSF demanded that the alternative provided by the WSF to the World Economic Forum of Davos be sharpened and made visible worldwide. If the WEF had been for many years the think tank of hegemonic globalization and the legitimizing amplifier for the Washington Consensus, the WSF should present itself to the world as being the major manifestation of a counter-hegemonic globalization and the bearer of an alternative global consensus, the Consensus of Porto Alegre. How to accomplish this, having in mind the informal and horizontal structure of the WSF and the terms of the Charter of Principles? The idea of a manifesto of the WSF was ruled out by the charter. The charter, however, did not prevent the participants from drafting manifestos and from presenting them as expressing the political will of the signatories. The political weight of the manifesto would depend on the number of participants willing to sign it. The manifesto was finally drafted during the fifth WSF, signed by nineteen well-known participants⁹ and presented to the media outside the World Social Territory (the grounds where the WSF was convened) as a document open to the subscription of all participants in the WSF. The focus of the document was on concrete proposals, 'twelve proposals for another possible world'.

The document met with strong criticism. Two major types of criticisms can be identified: methodological and substantive. The methodological criticism stated that the manifesto either violated the Charter of Principles or came close to doing so. By presenting their document as the Manifesto of Porto Alegre, the signatories induced the media wrongly to take the terms of the document as an authoritative interpretation of the political will of the WSF. The WSF does not provide for any

mechanism by means of which such a political will may be determined, for the simple reason that such determination is ruled out by the spirit and the letter of the charter. In other words, the document violated the idea that the WSF is an open space where different political wills can be formulated. As might be expected, Francisco Whitaker was the most vocal critic, minimizing the importance of the manifesto by viewing it as one among hundreds of proposals being presented at the Forum. When the signatories responded that this was precisely what they had tried to do (to present as a proposal a document to be signed by whoever agreed with its terms), Whitaker argued that, such being the case, they should not have used such an ambiguously all-encompassing title as 'Manifesto of Porto Alegre'.

The second kind of criticism was substantive. It focused on the content of the document, and on the methodology used to produce it. Two different kinds of criticisms should be mentioned, both of them emphasizing the reductionist view of the 'consensus' presented, which allegedly suppressed the diversity and the pluralism present at the Forum. One of the criticisms, originating in the feminist movements and organizations, stated that the document had been drafted and signed by eighteen white men and one African woman. Not surprisingly, it was argued, sexual discrimination was mentioned in only one of the proposals (number 8), among many other forms of discrimination, and there was no trace of a gender perspective in the rest of the document (Obando 2005). The other criticism, originating in the radical leftist groups, alleged that the manifesto was a reformist or neo-reformist document, drafted by a small group of intellectuals (the same old types). Most proposals, even if correct, were limited in scope, so the argument ran, thus contributing to the illusion that imperialism may be successfully confronted by non-radical measures and struggles.

As one of the signatories of the document, I responded to these criticisms (Santos 2006a: 73-8). Starting with the substantive criticisms, and in a kind of voluntary self-criticism, I fully accepted the feminist critique. As for the anti-reformist criticism, I started from the assumption that social revolution is not on the political agenda (for the time being at least) of short-term or medium-term social transformation. If we bear this in mind, the proposals formulated in the manifesto, both individually and taken together, were very radical indeed. Concerning the methodological criticism, I saw a point in Whitaker's stance, since I fully share his idea that the strength of the WSF lies in the rich diversity of the participants and in the celebration of pluralism and horizontality. But I also emphasized that the strength of the WSF may become

its weakness if more and more groups reach the conclusion that the costs of getting involved in the WSF are too high when compared with the real impact of the WSF in making the world less comfortable for global capitalism. The danger of being prey to factionalism is as real as the danger of being dismissed as irrelevant. The manifesto was aimed at addressing the latter danger, even if, as I admit, it was not carried out in a consistent and correct way. Rather than being dismissed, it should be reworked using a new and more participatory and democratic methodology. I also thought that the idea that nobody and no group owns the WSF was a most precious heritage. But it applied both to those who tried to write a manifesto that might be taken as binding on all participants and to those who criticized the initiative on the basis of the seemingly sole authorized and authoritative interpretation of the Charter of Principles. Otherwise the commitment to horizontality might end up a dogmatism like any other.

The 'incident' of the manifesto highlighted the cleavage between those who conceive of the WSF as a social space and those who conceive of it as the embryo of a global civil society, constituted by a wide range of global or globally linked social actors. But, as I said above, this cleavage was confined to a group of high-profile participants. My guess is that most people did not know about or read the manifesto, and that those few who did find it obvious, neither dangerous nor important.

Except for the last one, the tensions and cleavages mentioned above are not specific to the WSF. They belong in fact 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 cohesive 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 of a fairly low intensity. For the movements and organizations in general, what unites has been more important than what divides. In terms 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 among them in a non-linear 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 involve different partners. In this way the accumulation and strengthening of divergences that could result from the alignment of the movements in multiple cleavages are precluded. To the contrary, the cleavages end up neutralizing or disempowering one another. Herein lies the WSF's cohesive power.

Notes

- 1 I will return to some of the questions dealt with in this section in Chapter 9.
- 2 A good overview of the cleavages and conflicts is available in Fisher and Ponniah (2003).
- 3 As we saw above, India is not totally immune to this type of political culture and political cleavages.
- 4 This is well illustrated by the changes introduced in the Charter of Principles, first by the Indian Working Committee of the WSF and later by the African Social Forum, to adapt it to the social, political and cultural realities and cleavages prevailing in South Asia and Africa, respectively (more on this below).
- 5 There are some significant changes between the original proposal and the final version. The existence of two documents may have caused some confusion (the proposal was taken for the final version by some). On the case of India, see Sen (2004: 72-5). This fact is, however, irrelevant to the argument I am making in this chapter.
- 6 In Annexe II I reproduce the three documents (the official charter, the Indian policy statement, and the charter of the African Social Forum) and compare the differences between them.
- 7 During 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.
- 8 On this subject, see also Teivainen, forthcoming.
- 9 The first signatories were Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Aminata Traoré, Eduardo Galeano, José Saramago, François Houtart, Armand Matellart, Roberto Sávio, Ignácio Ramonet, Ricardo Petrella, Bernard Cassen, Samuel Ruiz Garcia, Tariq Ali, Frei Betto, Emir Sader, Samir Amin, Atílio Borón, Walden Bello, Immanuel Wallerstein and myself. See the text of the manifesto in Annexe III.