

Conclusion

The translation of utopia into politics is not, in the case of the WSF, merely the translation of the long-range into the medium- and short-range. It is also the translation of the new into the old. This means that divergences about concrete political options are often mixed up with divergences about the codes and languages of political options.

It should be stressed, however, that the novelty of the utopia has managed so far to overcome the emergence of severe political divergences. In light of the argument developed in this book it is adequate to distinguish between high-intensity cleavages and low-intensity cleavages. The former are the cleavages in which radical discursive differences translate themselves into some form of factionalism, be it collective splits and abandonment of the political organization or organized tendencies within the organization; the latter, by contrast, are those in which the discursive differences, no matter how radical, do not preclude continued participation in the organization. So far, the divergences or cleavages within the WSF have been of the low-intensity kind. Contrary to what happened in the thinking and practice of the left in Western capitalist modernity throughout the twentieth century, 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 exclude themselves from the start with the excuse that they were being excluded. The WSF's 'minimalist' programme, stated in its Charter of Principles, contributed decisively to this effect: emphatic assertion of respect for diversity; access denied only to movements or groups that advocate political violence; 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. Confronted with 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. 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.

This does not mean that there are no strong disagreements. There are, and they have become louder and louder in recent years. This raises several issues. Is it possible to link up the different peoples of the WSF as an embryonic form of a counter-hegemonic civil society? How to transform the areas of widely shared consensus into calls for collective action? How better to explore the implications of both the agreements and the disagreements? Should disagreements be the object of specific discussions in the WSF? How to conceive of the relationship between participants and organizers (the IC and the IS)? How to link such diversity with the common core upon which the WSF builds its identity and eventually develops its capacity to act?

These questions lurk behind most formulations of most cleavages manifested within the WSF. In Chapter 6 I identified the following main strategic cleavages: reform or revolution; socialism or social emancipation; the state as enemy or as ally (potentially, at least); priority to be given to national or to global struggles; direct action or institutional action or relations between them; priority to be given to the principle of equality or to the principle of respect for difference; the WSF as a space or as a movement. With the exception of the last, these cleavages belong to the historical legacy of the social forces that for the past two centuries have struggled against the status quo for a better society. The specificity of the WSF resides in the fact that 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. When cleavages are acknowledged, the different movements and organizations distribute themselves among them in a non-linear way. Movements that oppose one another in a given cleavage 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. But, on the whole, 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. In this way, the accumulation and strengthening of divergences that could result from the alignment of the movements in multiple cleavages are precluded. The cleavages end up neutralizing or disempowering one another. At the same time as they tend towards factionalism, they liberate the

potential for consensus. Herein has lain, in the last instance, the WSF's cohesive power.

The Forum's future is doubly open, since the institutional changes and even its very survival may result either from its success or from its failure. This question is further complicated if a prior question is asked about what counts as success or failure. If we take some of the features most commonly attributed to the WSF – its organizational and programmatic novelty, global reach and style of consensus-building – we can reasonably argue that the WSF is a success. And yet, either because of this or in spite of this, the question of the WSF's future has become recurrent. In my view, there are two main reasons for this recurrence. The first is the WSF's novelty itself. Because the left's political thinking and practice have been historically moulded by three traditional forms of organization (leftist parties, labour unions and the Internationals), the WSF has been carrying a permanent burden of proof as to its sustainability. The permanent questioning of its future has generated an impulse for innovation which I don't see in any other organization of its size. Indeed, as I have stressed throughout this book, the WSF has been reinventing itself from the very beginning and shows no sign of exhaustion. The organizers may be exhausted, not the WSF, a fact that may recommend the renovation of the organizing movements and organizations. The second reason behind the recurrent questioning of the WSF's future is the fact that the factors that account for its success have solved as many problems as they have created. 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.

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 in creating 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 to how precious this consciousness is, and to how much remains to be done in order to

preserve and strengthen it. This explains, ultimately, why the factors of attraction and cohesion prevail over those of repulsion and divisiveness. The question remains, however, as to how this global consciousness and the potential it has generated can be best put to the 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 complex, but for that very reason it does not allow for rash assessments.

The questions of representation and organization. The novelty 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 have discussed in the previous chapters 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 it into a permanent process and promoting 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 is one of emancipatory democracy. Since the WSF claims 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.

The question of how to combine the celebration of diversity with the construction of strong consensus 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 cohesive power of the WSF has so far remained

intact. For how long? The problems for the future in this regard can be formulated in terms of the following questions:

- a) Through the celebration of diversity and its cohesive 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 one that neutralizes or stifles it for failing to keep pace with the changes produced by the energy itself?
- b) 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 so, what to do with such consensus?
- c) Having been at its inception a highly political phenomenon, is the WSF renovating and strengthening its political potential or is it rather being transformed into a politically diluted umbrella organization 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 clear, however, that, in order to do so, the WSF has to undergo a demanding process of self-learning guided by the following normative orientations: all possible measures must be taken to make the WSF as global as its name indicates; its organization must be guided by the very same idea of participatory democracy that the WSF has been advocating for society at large; internal 'schools' of global self-knowledge and self-training must be created, aimed at increasing reciprocal knowledge among the movements and organizations; strong sectoral consensus must be promoted, capable of sustaining global struggles and durable collective actions.

The implementation of these orientations may give rise to new institutions and practices that will take us beyond the WSF. Though the WSF does not seem to believe in dialectics, the movements and organizations gathered around it do not exclude the possibility that the very accomplishments of the WSF will lead us beyond the organization as part and parcel of the ever unfinished historical tasks of the left.

At any rate, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the WSF has already contributed significantly to the renovation of leftist thinking and practice. I highlight two instances, one concerning scale, the other concerning political philosophy. The internationalist left at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, far from being a global left, was a European and North Atlantic one. From the

1950s on, it broadened its range, along with the anti-colonial liberation movements and the movement of the non-aligned countries. The profound differences between the European societies and the societies of the emerging 'Third World', however, did not allow for a consistent dialogue between leftists in both regions, not least because a large part of the European left had been colonialist, and never assumed a post-colonial stance, not even after the independence of the colonies. Furthermore, the beginning of the cold war deepened the divergences both within the European left and the left of the Global South. For all these reasons, the emergence of a global left was precluded. The WSF may be considered the first manifestation, however embryonic, of such a left. Its global nature does not derive, at least for now, from positions or actions of global range, but from serious reflection about its own possibilities, from inter-knowledge that is exponentially superior to what existed before, and from the construction of local and national political agendas, maintaining relevance of its global impacts and the experiences and teachings of the agendas of other leftists in other parts of the world. Second, the WSF's contribution to the emergence of one or several global lefts has to do with political philosophy. It concerns the new political culture whose major features I traced in Chapter 9. A new relationship within the various lefts is in question, between the theories and emotions of separation, on the one hand, and the theories and emotions of union, on the other. This new relationship is based on the general idea of politicization by means of depolarization. The principal elements of such an idea are: concentration on productive issues, i.e. the issues that maximize the capacities for resistance against and the formulation of alternatives to the exclusions, inequalities and discriminations created or worsened by global capitalism; recognition of the very diverse and intercultural character of leftist thinking and practice when the world is taken as the unit of analysis and action; a pragmatic conception of the aggregation of wills that makes possible regional linkages (as is notably the case in Latin America), and even global linkages, without loss of autonomy and identity on the part of the movements, parties or organizations therein engaged; consensus on the need to construct new political organizations devoted to global action, and to reinvent the relations between parties, unions, social movements and progressive organizations, bearing in mind that no one holds the monopoly of organized representation of interests.

All these contributions will bear fruit in the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles, both in the Global South and the Global North, no matter what the future of the WSF may be.