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GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, LEGITIMACY AND CONTESTATION: A
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH BASED ON THE ANALYSIS OF
TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstract: The World Social Forum is an open space-movement that contrasts with the formalist self-referred political system of representative democracy and inter-State relations. Its banners, decision-making practices and political culture question the social and political orders of global governance that have traditionally been presented as balanced structures aiming at a predictable and universal material progress and a general sense of citizenship. New social movements and, more recently, transnational movements and alterglobalist networks within the WSF bring into challenge the democracy deficit and the social ineffectiveness of global governance and its international regulation mechanisms. They have shown that globalization processes bring about strong paradoxes related to a meaningful cleavage between an idealized progress promised by liberal and Keynesian democracy (not to speak of socialist experiences) and limited institutional capacities to provide equality rooted in a principle of global justice. Consequently, transnational social movements have played an important role by exposing the disconnections between liberty, distribution and recognition on a world-wide scale. This paper is based on the following assumption: transnational social movements are the expression of a new social subject and have shifted their scale of political intervention since the 1990's in order to render their fight for social justice politically pertinent. In pursuance of developing this assumption, this paper approaches the discussion about legitimacy and contestation within global governance in two general parts. Firstly, it presents a theoretical and methodological framework for analysing transnational social movements as key political players that question the legitimacy of current standards of global governance. Secondly, it looks into the World Social Forum as a relevant political expression of transnational social movements, basically through two central axes of analysis: the WSF as a community of social practices facing the challenge of a new culture of politics; and the dilemma of identity-building *vis-à-vis* its process of global expansion.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Globalization is not merely a competition for market shares and well-timed economic growth initiatives; neither is it just a matter of trade opportunities and liberalization¹. Globalization has also evolved into a social and political struggle for imposing cultural values and individual preferences (Beck 2003; Dollfus 1997; Laïdi, 1997; Santos *et alii* 1994). The current global economic system optimizes the values and criteria of performance, efficiency, and productivity; nowadays, performance defines the new *locus* for the belonging of global subjects who ought to thrive on the accomplishment of short-term responsibilities at any cost. Being efficient and cultivating performance are nowadays the new avatar for the myth of progress and development; global performance provides a new sense of universality for national communities (Dupas 2001; Rist 1996).

This global economic shift has major consequences on the development of social movements. As Della Porta and Tarrow (2005) have asserted, two concurrent processes underpin globalization: the internationalization of politics through the emergence of transnational actors, networks, and institutions, and the economic integration produced by the giddy growth of international trade, the media, and financial integration. In this sense, globalization itself makes room for the expression of international contestation by creating opportunity structures and favorable circumstances for the acts of anti/alternative globalization movements. Thanks to its technological support system, globalization facilitates rapid and immediate intercommunication which can hardly be under the strict control of the state. Moreover, globalization increases opportunities and, at the same time, (re)produces social and economic inequalities among and within countries.

In this context, the political mobilization of transnational social movements against the globalization process targets not only the capitalist principles of market liberalization, but, the negotiations of a trade agreement in the Americas. Likewise, after the demonstrations against economic globalization in Seattle, Prague, Nice, and Genoa, and especially after the successive World Social Forums (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Nairobi and in many other cities around the world, the so-called alternative globalization movements have turned from a logic of reflection and debate into dynamics of resistance and contestation against the global political and economic *status quo*. The four editions of the WSF, between 2001 and 2005 that were organized in Brazil, showed that transnational networks of social movements intended to go beyond mere street demonstrations and further discuss with other alterglobalist players possible alternatives in their fight for global social justice (Fougier 2002; Milani and Keraghel 2006). However, the growing expansion of transnational social movements also stems from the frustration of citizens complaining concomitantly about the democracy deficit at two levels: nation-wide and globally². These movements are particularly revealing in

¹ This paper draws on MILANI, Carlos R. S. & LANIADO, Ruthy Nadia. Transnational Social Movements in a Globalizing World: a Methodological Approach Based on the Analysis of the World Social Forum. Centro Edelstein (Rio de Janeiro), Working Paper Series, 2006. MILANI, Carlos R. S. & LANIADO, Ruthy Nadia. Espaço mundial e ordem política contemporânea: uma agenda de pesquisa para um novo sentido da internacionalização. In: *Cadernos do CRH* (UFBA), v. 19, p. 479-498, 2006.

² In the particular case of social movements in Europe, we should also integrate a regional (European) political scale wherein networks strike their strategies and challenge regulations and decisions from Brussels.

current world politics where the classical clear-cut distinctions between domestic and foreign policies, high and low politics, hard and soft power, tend to vanish into thin air.

Taking into account this broader context of globalization and its different dimensions, along with the political opportunity structures that emerged from a wider world social mobilization (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005), this paper will focus on the second level of this democratic deficit. We adopt the following assumption: transnational networks of social movements are the expression of a new social subject and have shifted their scale of political intervention since the 1990s in order to make their fight for social justice a politically pertinent action. Global social justice has become the motto of transnational social movements in world politics where political decisions no longer exclusively rely on nation-states. In pursuance of developing this assumption, we will approach the discussion in two general parts: firstly, we will present a theoretical and methodological approach for analyzing transnational social movements; secondly, we will look into the World Social Forum as one of their key political expressions.

2- GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION

Alterglobalization protests in global cities since that of Seattle have not been an isolated spontaneous series of events, but rather a conscious tactic of an increasingly coordinated and powerful network of transnational social movements against economic and financial globalization that often targets international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Economic Forum in Davos. Through these protests, and particularly by means of the series of meetings organized since the first edition of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001, transnational networks, coalitions, and movements attempt to transform both domestic political systems and international politics: they create or stir new international agenda issues, mobilize new constituencies, alter understandings of interests and identities, and sometimes change state practices (Khagram *et alii* 2002).

As we will further analyze in the first part of this article, there are, however, some questions that remain open: can transnational social movements be free from national constraints in their building of discourses, strategies, and power resources? Can the shift of scale (from local and national to global and transnational) also bring about a change of culture and identity to these movements as a social subject? Providing answers to these questions implies taking into consideration at least two orders of transformation that alterglobalization movements face nowadays within global governance mechanisms and structures: a) the re-definition of politics and the political field; b) the social subject in a world of transnational relations.

2.1- Global governance: redefining politics and the political field

In a globalizing economy, the State no longer has the same exclusive traditional role it used to have in international relations; non-state actors have gradually brought together an important say in global affairs. The political context within globalization represents unprecedented breaches in power equations among states, markets, and civil societies. Globalization defines new modalities in the management of historical change (Dwivedi 2001; Therborn 2000; Touraine 2005). With the globalization phenomenon there comes

not only a series of transgressions of national frontiers by flows of technology, economy, culture, and information, but also several trespassing actions by non-state actors, be they infranational political players or global networks and organizations. At the same time, transnational problems of major relevance to the system-wide functioning of the world (such as financial crises, transfrontier environmental degradation, forced migration, drug trafficking, the spread of genetically-modified organisms, civic alliances for human rights, etc.) transcend the responsibility of the single monolithic nation-state, and represent a major challenge that can hardly be dealt with solely within the framework of intergovernmental relations.

As a result, there is a profound redefining of the political field, both in the configuration of its context and in the way politics evolves as experience, method, and practice (the action). It is no longer possible to understand the political field simply as a discrete set of governing institutions and policies, including states, multinational firms, international agreements, and intergovernmental organizations, whereas politics does not happen exclusively where those subjects who possess power to rule over others are located (Osterweil 2004). As John Rawls reminds us (2002), there is a need to conceive politics in a sociological and descriptive sense; the political can be opposed to the non-political, as the public can be confronted with the private. In the political field the principle of the individual's basic liberties is under threat; political relationships mostly concern non-elected and mandatory human gatherings where institutions exercise domination and coercion over subjects from birth to death. In the Rawlsian sense, the political field requires principles of justice and calls for fundamental rules for monitoring social relationships. Therefore, it differs from the associative and voluntary sector, from family and personal ties, which are fields of sensitivity and affection in a sense that is totally strange in politics. This does not imply, of course, an absolute separation between the political and the non-political fields; however, it is in the political field where there are what Rawls calls, based on David Hume, the "circumstances of justice" which require the application of a "political conception of justice" (Rawls 2002).

This conception of the political field allows us to avoid over-estimating contexts when analyzing the actions of political subjects; however, it also entails an awareness of politics where agents and their strategies are also informed by contextual structures, actors, processes, and values. In terms of **structures**, the political field bears the marks of profound tensions between fluidity and rigidity, between the horizontality of transnational flows and the institutionalized hierarchies of (inter)governmentality, between relationships of solidarity of a stateless character and relationships of citizenship as synonymous with nationality, and between shared beliefs and legal norms of public international law. At the heart of such tensions lie the crises of traditional representative democracy and the loss of the Prince's monopoly in the production of public goods. Because the nation-state and international bureaucracies lack increasingly more political legitimacy in the management of world affairs, citizens do not accept the absolute transfer of sovereignty in decision-making to their representatives. They pose questions related to who governs and how, and on behalf of whom; this means that rooted in an ideal of social justice citizens question the legitimacy of decisions made within the framework of contemporary representative democracy, also at the global level. As a result of a protracted process that began with the failure of authorities to fulfill their commitments, citizens no longer show exclusive loyalty to representative institutions.

Moreover, the spatial dimension of structures tends to change. Global social movements share the same transnational zone, use the same technological resources, and call into question the monopoly of the state in world politics; their strategies are an expression of a process of re-signification of their territories. This does not mean that they do not use a territory, but that they occupy a territorial *continuum* running from local to national, then to global, thus, contributing to the emergence of a transnational social space (Ameraux 1999; Pries 2001). Their political identity is, therefore, located beyond the national frontier (this differs, for example, from the social movements of the nineteenth century) and can be explained by a triple shift in the structure of the political field: from the public to the private, from the national to the transnational, and, from the nation-state to non-governmental actors. Consequently, concepts such as the public space and the public good unfetter their original meanings³, and the notion of a public realm encompasses both state and society, and draws the line, instead, between private and public interests. In this context, international arenas, such as the World Social Forum, are key meeting places of distinct forms of organizations; they are new political spaces where vertical and horizontal hierarchies meet, and where there is also a clash of political purposes.

Two other critical factors play a role in the redefinition of the structures of politics. First, there is the local-global nexus that allows avoiding localism as a theory or an ideology which ignores the global dimension of struggles, the multilevel and multidimensional expressions of today's social, political, environmental, and economic issues. The agenda that favors the delinking platform remains an ambiguous celebration of localism. As Dwivedi asserts (2001), two arguments may be advanced in support of the local-global nexus: the first is derived from the social movement theory, whose literature tends to view movements as actors, but, in the sense of networks, action-systems, and cognitive spaces. It is important to point out that these movements span locally and globally, both geographically and politically: they may, at the same time, strike a local action, a national fight, and a global struggle. Second, with this change of structures in the political field, the epistemic dimension, the power-knowledge nexus, is of crucial relevance: the struggle of transnational social movements is also about meanings and knowledge, not only material resources. One key challenge that these moving structures of the political field put forth is to take cognizance of knowledge claims and interests in the action of social movements beyond the purview of locality and materiality, because social movements are reflexive, and generate awareness of economic inequalities, social despoliation, and environmental risks (Dollfus 1997; Dwivedi 2001; Khagram *et alii* 2002). One example is the case of human rights activists who mobilize shame and publicize international norm-breaking as a political strategy (Ameraux 1999).

The political field is also marked by the presence of a myriad of voices, shifting the way social transformations appear. There is a clear increase in the relevance of non-state **actors** who develop a new form of political engagement and new languages of politics. In the case of transnational environmental activists, for instance, they may create,

³ In the case of radical environmental movements, for instance, collective actions signal conflicts and crises in the material and physical bases of life; as recalls Dwivedi (2001), because these movements question the vary basis of relationships between man, society, nature and the market, they may be defined both as public and political actions of protest, resistance and reconstruction around environmental alteration, degradation and destruction.

strengthen, implement, and monitor international norms; they may be sources of resistance under globalization that challenge the authority and practices of states and international institutions that shape the parameters for global governance. They herald the notion of a diffused political leadership deploying typical resources of soft power⁴.

Global social movements also act transnationally in order to generate domestic outcomes, but they mainly aim at changing practices and influencing ideas and norms in world politics. Some of them expect that the use of information, persuasion, and moral pressure should contribute to changes in international institutions and mechanisms of global governance. Others deploy and engage competing justifications as a political process, becoming true moral entrepreneurs in instigating campaigns around particular issues. The Narmada Movement in India, for example, as a coalition of local, national, and international non-state organizations has been able to reform and even stall the construction of a huge set of large dams on the Narmada River; huge dams are no longer a symbol of development and modernity, and are now considered to be controversial and unsustainable projects of infrastructure (Khagram *et alii* 2002; Roy 2003)⁵.

WSF members demand the radicalization of democracy on a world scale and fight for increased political participation in the forming of public opinions, as well as in the decision-making process. This request for increased political participation by alterglobalists is related to the present crisis in multilateralism: USA's unilateralism and partiality to the rules of the international system are making a decisive contribution to calling the idea of international community into question. Through this claim, transnational social movements and networks can influence the process of democratization of the global order: in this sense, a social movement's effectiveness in bringing about social change is linked to its ability to disrupt or threaten the order which is set up within the international system (Tarrow 1998). Transnational social movements may also profit from institutional breaches in order to create their political opportunity structures. The same way that the American superpower does not follow international rules, and implements its own unilateral decision in relation to Rio de Janeiro's convention on biological diversity, the Kyoto protocol on climate change, or the invasion of Iraq, transnational social movements question and protest against international agencies on behalf of their ideal of global social justice.

As far as **processes** are concerned, it is true that global politics is nowadays characterized by a complex decision-making system where state and non-state actors intervene by means of their distinct power resources (formal representation, investments, finance, technological upgrade, information production, culture, symbols) from local to global levels. This *de facto* complexity can be opposed to a *de jure* simplicity of the formal rules of intergovernmentalism, which implies a rediscussion of the legitimacy of decisions taken within governmental spheres, but, also, power distribution among those who govern and those who are governed, negotiation processes among groups of actors and stakeholders, as well as decentralization of key

⁴ Some analysts think that they fall within the category of a global civil society, and show the development of a global citizenship. We do not agree with this viewpoint. See, for instance, Jan Aart Scholte, **Globalization: A Critical Introduction**. London: Macmillan 2000.

⁵ It is interesting to notice that Khagram *et alii* (2002) develop a typology of transnational collective action and contentious politics: international NGOs (which coordinate their tactics through campaigns), transnational advocacy networks (who mainly act through information exchange), and transnational social movements (which also organize joint mobilization).

authorities and functions of those who are the central actors (mainly governments and international financial institutions). International Relations literature describes this phenomenon as complex multilateralism, heterarchic governance, and multi-level structures of transnational governance (Badie 1995; Rosenau and Czempiel 1992; Smouts 1998; Young 1999). In the political theory, the normative approach to a deliberative democracy would best correspond to the ideal of a public space where political actors are in an almost constant process of defining substantive rules and democratic procedures (Manin 1985; Habermas 1997).

These changes in the political field also bring new blood into the definition of democracy itself. If democracy is founded on the plurality of opinions, and this plurality depends, at the same time, on the plurality of **values**, it cannot survive in a society which is almost exclusively led by the economic market, where all goods (including the global commons) are reduced to their commodity value, and where all citizens are considered solely as consumers (Novaes 2003). This is the ethical dimension of politics wherein transnational social movements intervene, since they recall that the new individualism as an exclusive guiding tenet of an international morale cannot solve the tension between the ethics of the market and the ethics of the common good. In face of a growing process of atomizing political players and fragmenting political demands, the global market tends to consider that the idea of a democratic deliberation is excessively time-consuming, and, thus, restricts the public space to an informational space where publicity and marketing play a leading role. In fact, the problem is that politics may succumb if the contemporary political field does not allow for a plurality of values. As Hannah Arendt points out (1995), politics is born when two men meet. Arendt's *vita activa* is constituted by labor (as a biological process), work (as the unnaturalness of human existence), and action (as politics whose condition *per quam* is plurality). Politics as an intermediate space lies in human plurality, and stems from the space between free human beings. It is essentially about relationship and action; it is about inter-personal relationships. For Arendt (1995), the constant invention of politics needs a world where men and women are able to think and act with an aim of creating something new.

2.2- The actor and the social subject in a world of transnational relations

When analyzing democracy deficit and unfulfilled social justice, it is necessary to consider the idea of the subject in the different variations of world democratic experiences. Over the past few decades, studies on social movements have favored a continuous *aggiornamento* of the idea that of the subject is a bearer of will, identity (ies), and capabilities in relation to the different forms of contemporary collective action, which can be characterized as the entwining of subjectivity with individual integration in social systems. If, for a long period of time, the idea of social class was predominant, underrating individuality and culture, it is possible to say, today, that they structure the subject at individual and collective levels. The individual is constituted by multiple identities and cultural references (e.g. values, religion, ethnicity, gender) as much as he/she can occupy different positions in the social systems (e.g. worker, leader, politician, intellectual). This complex structuring of the actor and of the self unfolds a wide span of situations and opportunities in which the subject can take a critical or contestatory stand. He/she can develop a pattern of critical awareness and participative action that merge by means of the diverse opportunities of manifestation that exist for

the worker, man/woman, minorities, ethnic and religious groups, regionalist movements, among so many other possible references available today (Touraine 1995).

When analyzing social movements, Touraine (1999) argues that, in the past few years, individuals have continuously moved towards modalities of more comprehensive movements, societal or global, supported by moral references and a militant consciousness of conflicts or issues of justice⁶. Even though they are emerging in a local or national space, movements always extend themselves to a wider scope, likewise asserting an epochal context (e.g. feminism, pacifism, anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid, human rights, environmentalism, among others). As we have asserted previously, politics today is different from that of the traditional forms that were dominant during a large part of the twentieth century, such as the union or party politics, or even the nationalist politics (Wallerstein 2004). Those forms were imprinted by objective relationships within the market and institutional power, overpowered by an instrumental logic that aimed at an imposed objectivity supported by the State and its bureaucratic apparatus. The crisis of politics and that of the subject in politics over the last decades has caused the demise of the emancipation of the working class subject as a universal one.

It is now indispensable to perceive politics and the actor as an articulation between the objectivity required by the market or the bureaucratic State and a sense of community; between instrumental reason in a complex mass society and creeds (cultural, identity, religious beliefs) in their different forms of expression. Thus, it is necessary to perceive the actor as a subject capable of both having an opinion, a utopia, and of giving sense to participation and confront adversaries, opponents, or oppressors. The latter are sometimes not only persons, but ideas and principles that are not confined to rigid ideological systems, as were the revolutionary ideologies that prevailed some time ago. As such, the relation between the subject and collective action today is pervaded by values and the idea of freedom, combining choice (individuality) and cultural/social heritage (collectivity), thus, establishing what Touraine (1999) calls a conflictual dialogue.

Therefore, by revolting against oppression (material or symbolic), the subject engages in a conflict against his/her opponent. By means of contestation and the identification of a common adversary, the individual searches for echoing his/her critical ideas and sentiments at the collective level, where the worldview merges with that of the others, either because of similarities or differences. When standing for a collective goal within a social movement, the actor is not looking for a homogeneous or unitary rationality, as opposed to the arguments that supported the social class discourse, typical of the old left. There is not even a demand for centralized strategies or tactics for the different events, as has been proved by movements of national scope, such as those involved with land conflicts in Brazil, or of transnational scope, such as the Narmada Movement or

⁶ The authors are aware of the fact that Touraine (2005) changes his viewpoint on the subject as a sociological category when he asserts that the subject is the opposite of identity and loses itself in intimacy (Touraine 2005: 167). He affirms that the idea of the *self* has gained considerable relevance, not leaving much room for the subject as he had previously analyzed. The French sociologist approaches the category of self identity based on the writings of Anthony Giddens, although he points out two main differences in his analysis of the subject: firstly, Touraine defines the subject in his/her resistance to the impersonal world of consumerism, violence, and war; secondly, the subject is never completely identified with him/herself, since he/she is located in the world of rights and duties, within the order of morality and not of experience.

Via Campesina. This implies that the idea of the subject itself, as argued in this paper, is not bound to the principle of a full domination of the actor by the system. The new approach in relation to the subject, and of the subject to itself, has widened the struggles for banners or has promoted antagonistic dialogue situations, where economic categories, such as poverty and necessity, are transformed into political and moral categories plunged into convictions and values in the field of social justice; that is, they are no longer restricted to domination and economic exploitation *tout court*.

Transnational social movements fall into several modalities; what they have in common is that the actors move in a context where public life is less confined to the limits of normative formality, and collective action is more diffused and discontinued despite its power for contestation (Taylor 1994). The subject of collective action (participants from various countries) does not use a unique militant language or restrict himself/herself to a mono-causal centralized discourse. This is due to the fact that banners, slogans, and issues, which quite often originate in the local sphere, extrapolate to the transnational one, asserting multiple and tolerant identities (Della Porta 2005). Social movements contemplate the idea of substantive freedom, which fulfills men and women objectively and subjectively as a social subject, and allows them to fight against deprivation and exclusion. It is possible to say that this struggle is not only against the monopoly of power and concentration of wealth - typical of advanced capitalism - but it intends to be a constructive fight directed towards changing worldviews. It aims at better interaction between ideas/culture (subjectivity by all means) and power/wealth; sometimes values and culture are privileged, such as in the fights which favor human rights. Accordingly, the subject is, at the same time, a product of the social order, as well as the spokesperson of a critical view of this same order - that is to say, he/she is a bearer of a will to change. The social role and the identity of the movements expose the critical aspects of capitalist domination and the opportunities to confront the power structure as being possible.

Social movements are made up of actors with a creative capacity and a desire to transform, thus, they contribute to the debate and the outlining of the virtuousness of social justice as the foundation of societies, as well as for transnational relationships and exchange. Participant actors contribute to redeeming the value of freedom as a basic element of emancipation, demanding that this value and its associated factors not be understood as an abstract principle of emancipation, as it prevailed in the forming of the modern political citizen. Freedom should now be couched on and supported by experience and recognition within the social context, combining individuality and collectivity, reason and subjectivity. The virtuousness of freedom is only acquired when it is possible to experience it according to the material, institutional, cultural, and moral progress of society and its diversity, or as Fraser (2000) puts it, combining distribution and recognition.

The sense of contestatory transnational social movements, expressed by critical awareness, is not a search for simplified or excluding identities (either worker or woman); collective action promotes the development of the elements of solidarity that integrate actors, social conditions, and movements (organizations), combining moral values and attitude direction. It is within the field of solidarities that affinities are recognized and conflicts are negotiated (internally and externally), embracing plurality, diversity, and differentiation. It is due to the continuous dynamics between integration

and conflict that direct political action becomes so present in transnational events, without the pre-condition of proposing political or institutionalized solutions.

Solidarity within contemporary social movements outlines the fields of production of contestation and confrontation related to distribution and recognition as mentioned above. It works as a structuring unity of strategies for changing situations and contexts. Therefore, it is not the way the concept was approached by classical sociology, which affirmed solidarity as the ace of cohesion for understanding society as a totality, based on social bonds of long durability, with a deterministic effect of the system over the actor. In the complex arrangements of transnational collective action, the new solidarities are continuously leveled by protest and the desire for changes; they produce social bonds of reciprocity of short durability as related to the fluid and transitory relationships established through networks and punctual events. Nevertheless, the new solidarities of the social movements give an impetus to the effective diffusion of meanings (values, identities, contestation) and definition of goals (to be there, to expose banners, to demand participation), such as that which the transnational movements have been capable of doing so far.

3- ALTERGLOBALISM AND THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

Social movements and diverse protest organizations from all over the world have, since the 1990s, profited immensely in terms of framing their discourses and organizing their strategies for an alternative globalization. They have been able to gather together in order to demonstrate against the hegemonic economic globalization and its *pensée unique* at several meetings sponsored by the multilateral institutions in charge of implementing neoliberal policies, and were identified as the main global economic players. Apart from this, they have also created their own political opportunity structures, particularly through the several events organized within the World Social Forum process.

Nevertheless, the WSF faces some key obstacles in remaining plural with its member organizations and movements, and, at the same time, in conserving its cohesion, centered on its Charter of Principles. One of the questions that remains unanswered so far is that of the sustainability of its political approach based on plurality of membership within an open space. The difficulty that the WSF experienced in January of 2005, when a group of intellectuals and political leaders launched the “Manifest of Porto Alegre” as a counter-proposal to the Consensus of Washington, is an example of the constraints that this space-movement goes through when trying to avoid deliberation on unified and concrete declarations for an alternative globalization⁷. Can the philosophy of an open space produce political results that are compatible with the logics of international and institutionalized political decision-making? Will this multiplicity of actors and opinions

⁷ *Twelve proposals for another better world* (including external debt relief programs, the taxation of international financial flows, the end of fiscal heavens, a deep reform of the UM system, etc.) integrated the Manifest of Porto Alegre. It was signed by nineteen intellectuals and political leaders, such as José Saramago, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Ignacio Ramonet, Emir Sader, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Aminata Traoré (the only woman), Eduardo Galeano, Ricardo Petrella, Tariq Ali, Walden Bello, and Immanuel Wallerstein. This Manifest was seen as the result of a clash within the international committee of the Forum: making proposals on behalf of the Forum goes against the Charter of Principles, which says in its sixth point that the WSF is not a deliberative organization, and that no one can talk on its behalf. This Manifest had not been discussed within the international committee before its launching.

keep their membership in the long term, once concrete proposals are set out on the negotiating table, devoted to issues of an alternative globalization? Can the Forum be seen as a transient space-movement or as the emergence of a new social subject? We will attempt to bring some light to these questions through two central axes of analysis: the WSF as a community of social practices facing the challenge of a new culture of politics; and, the dilemma of identity-building *vis-à-vis* its process of global expansion.

3.1- Community of social practices and the culture of politics

As a community of social practices and political process, the World Social Forum⁸ can be viewed as an integral part of a broader movement commonly referred to as the alterglobalist movement, one which fights for global social justice ideals. The term “alterglobalist” has replaced the original “antiglobalist” movement, thus, marking, in 2002, a major and uneasy switch from the *anti* to the *alter* position. The roots of the movement lie in the 1990s with the emergence of the Zapatista movement in Mexico which can be considered to be the first key insurrection against neoliberal globalization. The Zapatistas stated their rejection of neoliberalism and decided to focus the movement on the increase of international trade and private investment at the expense of local cultures. Action started in July of 1996 when the Zapatistas held their first intercontinental meeting against neoliberalism, and called for the setting up of a network of resistance (Le Bot 2003).

Since the end of the 1990s, the protest movement has used mobilization in the form of counter-summits and assemblies in Seattle, Prague, and Nice, as well as in the first counter-summit to the Davos Economic Forum, which then led to the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre in January of 2001. In 1999, Seattle was characterized by continuous demonstrations from November 30 to December 3 with the participation of some 350 organizations facing up to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and, according to statements by alterglobalists, to the liberal system of which it is a part. The Seattle demonstrations clearly expressed protests participating in a broader anti-neoliberal movement; they were not an isolated event, but a process that planned to strengthen the participation of civil society in the decision-making process on different political scales (Coburn 2003).

One question raised after the events in Seattle, and the others that followed, is that of the organization of protest as a key social practice in community building. Social movement leaders formed the habit of getting together by holding strategic meetings to discuss the mobilization calendar, and to link the networks of the North to those of the South. The importance of the International Forum on Globalization can be noted in this regard: this Forum has defined itself as an alliance of economists and activists⁹ whose main objective is to lead protest against the neoliberal economy. Discussions in alliances, such as this Forum, have been centered on four main campaigns: writing off the debts of developing countries; reforming international financial institutions; taxing movements of capital; and, creating new rules for world trade that award importance to sustainable development.

⁸ This part of the paper draws mainly from MILANI and KERAGHEL (2006).

⁹ The list includes, *inter alia*, Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians, Vandana Shiva of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, Walden Bello of the Focus on the Global South and Martin Khor of the Third World Network.

Each of these four enlarging issues is set in a broader network of actions. Although the campaign, which is centered on the regulation of world trade, was initially less organized, the militants of the NGO Friends of the Earth, of Via Campesina, and consumer associations profited from the non-adoption of the Multilateral Investment Agreement (MIA) by OECD, in 1998, to make their concern with regard to food security, genetically-modified organisms, and environmental protection public. Furthermore, these organizations started another kind of political combat by condemning the excessive protection awarded to the investments of multinational corporations through the clause on the expropriation of capital¹⁰.

It is true that these various organizations and social movements within the WSF quickly came up against the main difficulty of taking a position as a coherent joint force for proposals. Nevertheless, they themselves see their plurality as an advantage thanks to the mingling of ideas and experiences in the setting-up of political alliances, also with certain representatives of institutions and governments during international trade negotiations¹¹. The acceptance of the different viewpoints and the negotiations that follow are part and parcel of their political culture as an open space-movement. Herein lies a profound change in the way culture and politics are perceived within the Forum. As Keraghel and Sen (2005) affirm, when it calls itself “social”, the Forum is fundamentally a political idea and promotes a specific vocabulary, grammar, and culture of politics. The Forum represents an experiment of social practices aiming at a cultural change in the way politics is conceived and experienced. Also, focusing on a register that includes cultural values, subjective feelings, and energy, the WSF may appear to be like a “jam session” where politics can cope with uncertainty, and not be constantly straining for formal harmony (Osterweil 2004; Wainwright 2004).

The Forum attempts to fight against cultural uniformity through an inclusive atmosphere with respect for diversity, but, also, through its organization as a forum of open-spaces and the non-deliberative nature of its meetings (Pleyers 2004). In this case, politics goes beyond formal rules, and also works through social norms, experiences, ideology, and values. Politics and culture are clearly interdependent in the Forum’s organizational and working methods, which reminds us of the definition of a culture of

¹⁰ The MIA established that each part of the Agreement should treat the investors of other member countries and their investments as favourably as its own investors and their investments (national treatment clause) or the investors and investments of third countries in similar circumstances (most-favoured nation clause). Each party to the Agreement would be obliged to guarantee the most favourable regime between the national treatment clause and the most-favoured nation clause. It is important to remark that these clauses are taken up in Articles 11, 1102 and 1103 of NAFTA. In both of these agreements the notion of investment applies to goods and services, transactions and financial holdings (stocks, shares, options, etc.), to natural resources, to real estate, land and agricultural, and intellectual property. Laws requiring fair prior compensation exist in practically all countries in the case of the seizure of the property or holdings of a domestic or foreign company; the dead MIA and the living NAFTA add the notion of measures “tantamount to expropriation” that would give the right to compensation for “loss of future profits”, for example, in the case of a new regulation concerning environmental protection or public health. This expropriation clause might prevent the member states party to the agreement from making any sovereign effort in social or environmental policies as these policies can be considered by business as a barrier to the free expansion of investment.

¹¹ One example was the alliance formed at the WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun in September of 2003 between the governments of Brazil and India (among others) on the one hand, and the alterglobalists on the other, against the maintaining of non-egalitarian rules for trade in agricultural products between countries in the North and the South.

politics that is embedded in the practices, relationships, and processes that define social movements, their spaces, and events. As Alvarez *et alli* (1998) recall, “culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power. That is, when movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, race, economy, democracy or citizenship which unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics” (Alvarez *et alii* 1998, 7).

Therefore, the multiplicity of speakers and actors, along with the diversity of sometimes contrasting objectives, has not prevented the emergence and the development of the several editions of the WSF. On the contrary, they have rendered a new epistemology of the South (Sousa Santos 2005) possible, which can be defined as a process and event that, through its very plurality and openness, attempts to produce ways of knowing that work against the monocultures of the mind and distance themselves from the traditional scientific logics of Western modernity (Shiva 2003). Because their conception of political culture does not only result from the enunciation of words in a top-down perspective, social movements and organizations within the Forum have had to move beyond in defining their own horizontal methods of work and informal systems of knowledge production and exchange. This does not mean that the Charter of Principles is not a key guiding document for the WSF member organizations; however, the Forum’s culture of politics also draws considerably from its micro practices and organizational processes (Osterweil 2004). How meetings are run, the way the space is organized, or how expertise and knowledge are distributed (the “how”) are as central to the WSF as its debates on external debt relief, international migrations, or contemporary forms of war (the “why”).

3.2- Political pedagogy, identity-building, and strategic global expansion

The Forum has, thus, become a place where several alterglobalist movements can express their own views on globalization; it is also seen as a political and cultural space where civil society groups exchange ideas on social and economic alternatives to hegemonic globalization. The WSF has provided a platform suitable for reflection on the possible alternatives to the neoliberal globalization model, and can be considered as a group of open areas for meetings, discussions, and proposals or, as suggested by Fisher and Ponniah, “a pedagogical space enabling learning, networking, and political organization” (Fisher and Ponniah 2003).

The idea of a political pedagogy is at the heart of identity-building for WSF member organizations, and is constantly challenged with the need to integrate new organizations and social movements, as well as to expand this space-movement to new geographies, as is seen in the recent development of multi-centric forums in Bamako, Caracas, and Karachi. Nevertheless, although there is much convergence in struggles and discussions, management diversity in this network of networks (Rojo *et alii* 2004) or this agglomeration of anti-systemic movements (Wallerstein 2004) is still a challenge, as is the question of a consensus on projects for a socially just and an environmentally sustainable society. Learning by means of social practices throughout the process, and avoiding a false consensus amidst such different movements and organizations is a political and cultural factor critical to the evolution of the WSF in its resistance to what they identify as the homogenizing forces of globalization.

There is no doubt that tension can be generated between the “reformist alterglobalists” (for example, the organizations that are part of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and that attended the Millennium Summit in May of 2000) and the “radical anti globalization movements” (be they internationalists or nationalists). This tension stems from a two-fold strategy whose political result is not yet clearly defined within the WSF. Some will choose to negotiate with international agencies and attempt to change the world order through existing institutional breaches, while others will systematically oppose all agencies (from UNDP and ILO to World Bank and IMF) since they would represent the neoliberal principles that underpin the global economic system.

The notion of identity-building serves the purpose of reaffirming something that WSF members have in common; it provides an answer to the question: as a WSF member, who am I socially? However, it also hides what makes these members so different. The political pedagogy is, in this context, a key feature since it contributes on a regular basis to constructing the social representations of those who enter and leave this space-movement. Alterglobalists are also concerned with social representations of globalization: they know that the unequal structure of political participation in world affairs is a reflection of the inequalities in social forces, and are, therefore, slowly trying to change this unequal structure in their favor by working on symbols and cultural values.

This political identity, as an affirmation of the *self* of the WSF, is not necessarily recognized by other global players (for instance, “the WSF fights for a world that is socially more just”); nonetheless, some elements of this identity may be given to WSF members by other global players who invest them with patterns of an expected international behavior (for example, “the WSF as a group of protesters who never make any concrete proposals”). It is widely known from political theory that the affirmation of an identity, defined both by rules of belonging and particular features of a group or individual, is essential for the development of interest and passion (reason and subjectivity), the two main factors for any possibility of integration in political relationships (Wendt 1994). In other words, identity also plays the role of naming who is who in the “political game”. In order to build a common denominator around any issue, WSF members must confront each other with what they share in common (or not).

The process of critical reflection on its own identity has also intensified within the Forum. At the second European Social Forum held in Paris, Saint Denis, and Bobigny just before the WSF in Mumbai (India) in November of 2003, the agenda favored the refocusing of discussions on the strategies and identity of the alterglobalist movement. Changing from the *anti* to the *alter* position implied a need to seek alternatives in order to achieve a more human globalization, or another form of globalization. The second European Social Forum revealed the need for further analysis and discussion on the nature and identity of the movement itself as a *sine qua non* condition for the Forum as a space-movement to produce a better definition of political strategies, and to search for possible alliances and pathways for changing the world’s society.

It is true that the alterglobalist movements have gained political maturity and that the question of their identity is increasingly rising. Alterglobalists portray themselves as an emancipation movement aiming at uncovering the lies of neoliberalism and providing information and options on political issues of globalization. It is a movement in which

cultural and social diversity is considered by militants to be a vital force in the way in which democracy is conceived and practiced. Even if the political orientation of the participants (both individuals and associations) diverge, their union is based on the shared conviction that rights and social justice should outweigh profit and trade opportunities. Identity-building through a political pedagogy can, therefore, be found in the very heart of the alterglobalist movement. Deep-seated features of WSF identity include, *inter alia*, avoiding unified statements, recognition of difference as a common denominator¹², defining itself as a space-movement in which distinct cultures meet politically, avoiding the emergence of a spokesperson for the movement, using confusion as a tactic, refusing urgency, and working on a long-term basis (Biagiotti 2004). These features clearly contrast with those of the institutional stakeholders who are normally present in the field of international development cooperation.

At last, it is important to point out that the WSF and its social movements do not have a national territorial base for defining their strategies; in most cases they operate free from national sovereignty. Their field of action is a transnational area of projects, practices, symbols, and utopias. Therefore, we can say that alterglobalists, as a new social subject, try, in their own way, to participate in the management of world affairs. Even if they also use a modern set of collective actions that are typical of the nineteenth century (street demonstrations, marches, and petitions), transnational social movements have promoted at least three new strategies in order to guarantee their global visibility. First, their actions must always be a happening in the tradition of the 1968 movements, and the protest calendar must evolve as neoliberal plans spread; second, they make their actions a media event, and include acts of civil disobedience; third, they use second expert evaluations through reports, meetings, and alternative media (Dufour 2005). Indeed, the media visibility of alterglobalist meetings has given these movements an opportunity to be known on the world scale, especially in the early days of their protests in 1999. As Susan George said at one of these meetings, referring to their direct opposition to the Davos Forum, WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF: “Wherever ‘They’ are, some of ‘Us’ will be also” (Fougier 2002). Seeking media coverage and visibility is also a key element in the process of identity-building for the alterglobalist movement.

4- CONCLUDING REMARKS

The World Social Forum is a relevant open space-movement precisely because it contrasts with the formalist, self-referred, political system of representative democracy and inter-State relations. The social and political orders (national and international) of modern societies have been observed as balanced structures that have supposedly contemplated a predictable and universal material progress, and a class society based on interests and a general sense of citizenship. The new social movements, and later the transnational movements, question the democracy deficit and the ineffectiveness of

¹² The political consensus, defined as both the recognition by all of the existence of different visions of the world but also as agreement on a common denominator of strategic action, is based on the Charter of Principles of the Forum in an approach that refuses both neoliberalism and imperialism and the politics of violence. The significant changes that took place in 2004 in India (the extension to other subjects of struggle, opposition to the caste system and to religious fundamentalism and the massive, broader participation of women) strengthened the objectives drawn up at the 2003 WSF. These were aimed at considering the best ways of promoting social justice, solidarity and democracy as global values, at serious reflection on the practice of alternatives to neoliberal globalization and to considering putting into practice the issues discussed at the Forum.

international regulation on world politics which have resulted from this received model of society. Globalization forces the emergence of the strong paradoxes of both contemporary democracy and asymmetric international relations. It uncovers the enormous cleavage between an idealized progress promised by liberal and Keynesian democracy (not to speak of socialist experiences) and the limited institutional capacity to guarantee freedom and to provide equality worldwide and within the principle of justice. Consequently, the transnational social movements have played an important role by exposing the disconnections between liberty, distribution, and recognition.

The arguments stated above are a starting point for organizing and deepening the discussion on the new sense of politics and of the new individual and collective subjects that emerge from the repeated experiences of the World Social Forum. They allow us to sketch three levels of questioning concerning global governance structures and their legitimacy:

- (a) In respect to **results and expectations**, can the transnational social movements deliver concrete output and overcome the unpredictable development of their mobilizations?
- (b) In respect to their **internal dynamics**, can the transnational social movements guarantee their self-sustainability by being able to continuously convert convictions and beliefs into political energy, as well as visibility and exposure into political appeal?
- (c) As to their **relationship with institutional politics**, can the transnational social movements, through the World Social Forum as an open space for contestation, build bridges and dialogues with the formal national and international political actors?

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