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*Working Paper 5, December 2006*



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# **Transnational Social Movements and the Globalisation Agenda: a Methodological Approach Based on the Analysis of the World Social Forum**

**Carlos R. S. Milani\***  
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## **1- Introduction**

Globalisation is not only a competition for market shares and for economic growth well-timed initiatives; neither is it only a matter of trade opportunities and liberalization. Globalisation 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* of belonging of the global subjects, who ought to live on accomplishing short-term responsibilities at any cost. Being efficient and cultivating performance has become the new global avatar for the myth of progress and development; global performance provides a new sense of universality to national communities (Dupas 2001; Rist 1996). It goes without saying that such an over-evaluation of economic performance in general human activities that one can find in discourses of many economic global players has direct implications for democratic life. According to this viewpoint, political negotiations must also follow the pattern of efficiency and thus fall within the timetable of the market; there should be no room for doubt and long deliberation in the global risk society.

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 globalisation: the internationalisation 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, globalisation itself favours the expression of international contestation by creating opportunity structures and

favouring circumstances for the acts of anti/alternative globalisation movements. Thanks to its technological support system, globalisation facilitates rapid and immediate intercommunication, which can hardly be under the strict control of the state. Moreover, globalisation increases opportunities and, at the same time, (re) produces social and economic inequalities among and within countries.

In this context, the political mobilisation of Brazilian social movements against the globalisation process not only targets the capitalist principles of market liberalisation or the negotiations of a trade agreement in the Americas. Likewise, after the demonstrations against economic globalisation in Seattle, Prague, Nice, Genoa, and especially after the successive World Social Forums (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Mumbai, and in many other cities around the world, the so-called alternative globalisation movements have turned from a logic of reflection and debate into a 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 organised 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 development of transnational social movements also stems from the frustration of citizens complaining concomitantly about the democracy deficit at two levels: nation-wide and globally<sup>1</sup>. These movements are particularly revealing in the current world politics where the classical clear-cut distinctions between the domestic and foreign policies, high and low politics, hard and soft power, tend to melt into thin air.

Taking into account this broader context of globalisation and its different dimensions, and the political opportunity structures that emerged from a wider world social mobilisation (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005), this paper will focus the second level of this democracy 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 1990's in order to render their fight for social justice politically pertinent. Global social justice has become the motto of transnational social movements in a world politics where political decisions are not any more exclusively reliable on nation-states. In pursuance of developing this assumption, we will approach the discussion in two general parts: firstly, we

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

will present a theoretical and methodological approach for analysing transnational social movements; secondly, we will look into the World Social Forum as one of their key political expressions.

## **2- Analytical categories of collective action in transnational social movements**

Alter-globalisation protests in global cities since Seattle have not been an isolated, spontaneous series of events but rather a conscious tactic of an increasingly coordinated and powerful social movement against economic and financial globalisation that often targets international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Through these protests, and particularly by means of the series of Forums organised 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, mobilise new constituencies, alter understandings of interests and identities, and sometimes change state practices (Khagram *et alii* 2002).

As we will analyse further down in the first part of the article, there are, however, some questions that remain open: can transnational social movements be autonomous 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, three orders of transformations that alter-globalisation movements face nowadays: the re-definition of politics and the political; the social subject in a world of transnationalisation; and the search for convergences in the formation of transnational solidarities.

### **2.1- Re-defining politics and the political**

In a globalising economy, the state has no longer the same exclusive and 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 globalisation represents unprecedented breaches in power equations among states, markets and civil societies.

Globalisation defines the new modalities in the management of historical change (Dwivedi 2001; Therborn 2000; Touraine 2005). With the globalisation phenomenon there comes 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 organisations. 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 monolithical nation-state, and represent a major challenge that can hardly be dealt with only within the framework of intergovernmental relations.

As a result, there is a profound redefinition of the political field, both in the configuration of the political (the context) and in the way politics evolves as experience, method and practice (the action). It is not possible any more to understand the political only as a discrete set of governing institutions and policies, including states, multinational firms, international agreements and intergovernmental organisations, whereas politics does not happen exclusively where are located those subjects who possess power to rule over others (Osterweil 2004). As reminds John Rawls (2002), there is a need to conceive the political in a sociological and a 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 an individual's basic liberties is under threat; the political is fundamentally a non-elected and mandatory human gathering 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 to monitor social relationships. Therefore, it differs from the associative and voluntary sector, from family and personal ties, which are fields of sensitiveness and affection in a sense that is totally strange to 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, based on David Hume, Rawls calls 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 the role of the contemporary context when analysing actions of political subjects; however, it also entails an awareness of politics where agents and their strategies are largely 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 institutionalised hierarchies of (inter) governmentality, between relationships of solidarity of a stateless character and relationships of citizenship as synonymous with nationality, between shared beliefs and legal norms of public international law. At the heart of such tensions lies the crisis of the traditional representative democracy and the process of demonopolisation of the Prince in the production of public goods. Because the nation-state and international bureaucracies lack political legitimacy in the management of world affairs, citizens do not accept the absolute transfer of sovereignty in decision to their representatives. They pose questions related to who governs and how, and on behalf on whom; that means that rooted in an ideal of social justice citizens question the legitimacy of decisions taken 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 do not have a sufficient loyalty to representative institutions any more.

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 virtually “deterritorialized”. This does not mean that they do not use a territory, but they occupy a territorial *continuum* running from local to national 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: 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 meanings<sup>2</sup>, 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 organisations; they are new political spaces where vertical and horizontal hierarchies meet, where there is also a clash of political purposes.

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<sup>2</sup> 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 very 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.



Two other critical factors play a role in the re-definition of the political in its structures. First, 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 favours the delinking platform remains an ambiguous celebration of the local. As asserts Dwivedi (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 notice that these movements span the local and the global, geographically and politically: they may at the same time strike a local action, a national fight and a global struggle. Second, in this change of structures of the political field, the epistemic dimension, the power-knowledge nexus, is of crucial relevance: the struggle of transnational social movements is also over meanings and knowledge, not only on material resources. One key challenge that these moving structures of the political put forward 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, generate consciousness and 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 mobilise 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 what social transformations look like. There is a clear increase in 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, strengthen, implement, and monitor international norms; they may be sources of resistance from below to globalisation 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 power<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 to this viewpoint. See, for instance, Jan Aart Scholte, **Globalisation: A Critical Introduction**. London: Macmillan 2000.

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 organisations has been able to reform and even stall the construction of a huge set of large dams on the Narmada River; huge dams are not any more a symbol of development and modernity, and are now considered as controversial and unsustainable projects of infrastructure (Khagram *et alii* 2002; Roy 2003) <sup>4</sup>.

WSF members claim for the radicalization of democracy on a world scale and fight for an increased political participation in the forming of public opinions and in decision processes. This request for an increased political participation by alterglobalists is related to the present crisis in multilateralism: USA's unilateralism and the partiality of the rules of the international system are making a decisive contribution to calling into question the idea of international community. 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 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 the 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 Irak, 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 complex decision-making system where state and non-state actors intervene by means of their distinct power resources (formal representation, investments, finance, technological upgrade,

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to notice that Khagram *et alii* (2002) develop a typology of transnational collective action and contentious politics: international NGOs (who coordinate their tactics through campaigns), transnational

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 re-discussion of the legitimacy of decisions taken within governmental spheres, but also power distribution between those who govern and those who are governed, negotiation processes between groups of actors and stakeholders, as well as decentralisation of key 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 definition of substantive rules and democratic procedures (Manin 1985; Habermas 1997).

These changes in the political also bring in new blood to the definition of democracy itself. If democracy is founded on plurality of opinions and this plurality depends at the same time on the plurality of values, it cannot survive in a society 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 only 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 atomization of political players and fragmentation of 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 highlights Hannah Arendt (1995), politics is born when two men meet. Arendt's *vita activa* is constituted by labour (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

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advocacy networks (who mainly act through information exchange), and transnational social movements (who also organise joint mobilisation).

(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 social subject in a world of transnationalisation

When analysing democracy deficit and unfulfilled social justice it is necessary to reconsider the idea of the subject in the different variations of world democratic experiences. Studies on social movements, since a few decades, have favoured a continuous *aggiornamento* of the idea of the subject as a bearer of will, identity (ies) and capabilities in relation to the different forms of contemporary collective action, which can be characterised as the entwining of subjectivity with the individual integration in the 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 the 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 structuring complex 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 consciousness 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 analysing social movements, Touraine (1999) states 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 about conflicts or issues of justice<sup>5</sup>. Even though emerging in a local or national space, movements always extend themselves to a wider scope, likewise asserting an epochal context (e.g. pacifism, anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid, feminism, human rights, environmentalism, among others). As we have asserted previously, politics today is different from that of the traditional forms that dominated large part of the twentieth century, such as the union or party politics or even the

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<sup>5</sup> 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 analysed. 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

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 the its bureaucratic apparatus. The crisis of politics and of the subject in politics in 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 both of having an opinion, a utopia, and of giving sense to participation and confront against adversaries, opponents or oppressors. The latter are sometimes not only persons, but ideas and principles that are not confined into rigid ideological systems, as were the revolutionary ideologies that prevailed sometime ago. As such, the relation between the subject and collective action today is pervaded by the value and the idea of liberty, combining choice (individuality) and cultural/social heritage (collectivity), 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 recognition 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 that was typical of the old left. There is not even the demand for centralised 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 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 about itself, has widened the struggles for banners or has promoted antagonistic dialogue situations, where economic categories such as poverty and necessity are transformed

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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.

into political and moral categories plunged into convictions and values in the field of social justice; that is, they are not anymore restricted to domination and economic exploitation *tout court*.

Transnational social movements are of several modalities; what they have in common is that actors move in a context where the 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 the collective action (participants from diverse countries) does not use a unique militant language or restrict himself/herself to a mono-causal centralised discourse. This is due to the fact that banners, slogans and issues, that are quite often originated in the local sphere, extrapolate to the transnational one, asserting multiple and tolerant identities (Della Porta 2005). Social movements contemplate the idea of substantive liberty, which fulfils 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 to changing worldviews. It aims at a better interaction between ideas/culture (subjectivity by all means) and power/wealth; sometimes values and culture are privileged such as in fights in favour of human rights. Accordingly, the subject is, at the same time, a product of the social order and 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 possible.

Social movements are made 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 and for transnational relationships and exchanges. Participant actors contribute to redeem the value of liberty as a basic element of emancipation, demanding that this value and its associated factors should not be understood as an abstract principle of emancipation, as it prevailed with the formation of the modern political citizen. Liberty now should be couched on and supported by experience and recognition within the social context, combining individuality and collectivity, reason and subjectivity. The virtuousness of liberty is only acquired when it is possible to live 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 contestation of transnational social movements, expressed by a critical consciousness, is not in search of 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 (organisations), combining moral values and attitude direction. It is within the field of solidarities that affinities are recognised and conflicts are negotiated (internally and externally), embracing plurality, diversity and differentiation. It is due to this continuous dynamics between integration and conflict that the political direct action is very present in transnational events, without the pre-condition of proposing political or institutionalised 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 type of concept approached by the 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 levelled 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 the transnational movements have been capable of doing so far.

### **2.3- Convergences in the formation of transnational solidarities**

One of the most relevant characters of transnational social movements is their heterogeneous composition and multiple identities structured in a fluid constitution that is made real as an open space (Wallerstein 2004). By analysing these movements it is possible to observe what we would like to call the structure of convergences, made of the elements that permit to explain the fluidity and diversity that make these movements a fact and display actions and actors in a continuous and renewable way within specific contexts. It is widely accepted that they have become the bearer of a unifying principle that summarizes social relationships at the micro and macro levels – that of social justice in a globalising perspective –, articulating

social consciousness and confrontation that emerge from injustice, inequalities and denied identities produced at the local levels and diffused transnationally. It is possible to say that the elements that propel convergences in the formation of these movements are structured and shaped according to some levels of materialisation of the collective action under a broad variety of specific practices. On one level, space, time, organisation, information, visibility, diffused leadership, together with the exposure of multiple identities and a wide spectrum of symbolic elements, structure convergences in the formation of transnational movements. They are the backbone of these flexible forms of collective action. On the other level, we would say, they couch new forms of solidarity that, in a loose approach to the typology of Sahlins (1976), articulate aspects of general solidarity (timeless and not accountable for) and of balanced solidarity (punctual and accountable for). We will make a few considerations about each of these topics aiming at a methodological design for the support of the study of transnational social movements.

Efforts to organise a summit or a forum are based on the understanding that, as an open space, the encounter should not be associated with any particular country or minority; the hosting country is firstly a participant, a generous one, and will offer the guest participants hospitality combined with a general logistic support and security. However, the **space** element is far beyond this first step of putting together an enormous contingent of people. Space provides for convergences because it approaches participants by facilitating the mutual awareness of being part of a movement in the sense that it is 'there' where it is possible to debate and advocate ideas directly and to do so because they also have something to say to an external public. The space of encounter provided by transnational social movements approaches the voices of the militants as opposed to the void that separates the citizen voters from their political representative or the latter from his/her own constituency. In the case of the Brazilian electoral system, for example, which scatters voting through a very wide geographical region, the relationship between the constituency and its representative is almost non-existent, except for a minority which have access to the elected politician in a clear exchange of favours, typical of a more or less clientelistic approach. Space is also the moment when action, individually or group action, is put into practice as a political direct action to the extension to which the effects, results and success (or their opposite) of that political moment are possible to be observed and evaluated *in locus*, irrespective of agreements or other arrangements for future action. Thus, collective action is not only to participate but it is to do so by 'being



there', the place where the associative logique (Pouligny 2001) materialises in a very large scale.

**Time** is another important element of convergences for transnational social movements. It can be explained according to two dimensions. Firstly, it is the extended time of the political and cultural aims of these movements that have the paramount issue to fight for social justice as well as for the more radical slogans of anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberalism. In this sense time is a fluid dimension of the concrete collective action and is the non-measurable and non-immediate condition of expected consequences or results. Secondly, time is the very present moment (somewhere and measurable); it is precisely the 'when' of communication and interaction in its immense variety; it is the face to face moment of direct politics, that is, when action and reaction are mutually perceived by those involved in individual or organized groups' participation. Basically, time and space are the first dimensions of locating transnational movements, making possible to observe their structure, strategies and content. Symbolically, transnational events are referred to by the city and the year of its occurrence just as in other world-wide organised encounters such as the Olympic games – being somewhere and everywhere every time.

**Organisations** contribute to the formation of transnational movements because they are the basic condition for making participation collective and viable; they are the core resource of convergences of individuals, ideas, proposals, tactics and action. They integrate the theoretical elements with the practical ones, and make it possible to transform individual convictions and motivations into collective ones. Thus, they approach different views about common issues of discontent or contestation related to social justice in any possible shape (exclusion, discrimination, human rights, environmental degradation, status affirmation, etc.). They have the capability of producing the material and symbolic resources necessary for collective action, whether on a large or a small scale. It is in the organisation that a social movement is capacitated, producing renewed values of heterarchic relationships, establishing dialogic propositions about specific issues and diffuse (educate) values and ideas (be they cultural or ideas of identity) that connect the local with the national and transnational. In relation to collective action as approached in this paper, organisations are the very first moment and *loci* of legitimating the group in society (producing acceptance, consensus or multifaceted approaches). Thus, they organise the internal with the external repertoires, empowering actors, establishing connections and integrating networks. Finally, they aspire to influence

institutionalised significations and norms, and to be included in institutionalised systems or non-institutionalised situations of political activities.

The intense degree of connectivity of contemporary collective action is no doubt favoured by the communication facilities provided by modern technology, such as Internet and others. Despite the digital divide among and within countries and regions, the available technology covers, *mutatis mutandis*, most places of the global frontiers. This accelerates **information** and intensifies conditions for debates, exchanges and mobilisation. Nonetheless, the most significant aspect of information in relation to convergences is the building up capacity to circulate ideas and to transform contents very quickly, thus favouring what Tarrow and McAdam (2005) call relational diffusion and, consequently, a complex scale of coordinated mobilisation and organisation at the global level. Information has, we would say, a crucial role for convergences at two levels. On the intellectual one, it nurtures the capabilities for (de) constructing discourses and issues by capacitating knowledge, critical analysis and propositional attitudes. Still, it provides actors with the intellectual tools to create discernment about conflict, contention, dialogue and agreement, contributing to reshaping politics and the sense of being a political actor as discussed above. It is possible to say that it contributes, together with experience and values, to the development of expertise knowledge and to empowerment. On the practical level, information fosters purposive mobilisation, integrating actors in different scales and providing substantive platforms to join wider scenarios and deal with multiple organisation fields (Agrikoliansky *et alii* 2005) and multiple political environments. That is to say, it expands political opportunities and strengthens organisations themselves.

Transnational social movements are an open space as compared to conventional organisations or to agencies; that is to say, they present a fluid structure and loose boundaries. Nonetheless, they concretely form a visible event. As an element of convergences **visibility** is not only part of the strategy of putting together so many issues, organisations, personalities, people and ideas. Visibility has to do with the assertion that the gathering has taken place however contentious are the ideas, banners or tactics advocated by so many different participants and militants together, providing strength to the movements. But most of all it has to do with, as we see it, legitimising social movements as an actor that cannot be ignored by governments and international agencies, those who do not dispute power and space because they are the dominant power. In this sense visibility, through confrontation or dialogue, could, eventually,

facilitate the negotiation on issues that governments and agencies might consider relevant to take into account. Finally, visibility is important for convergences because it is strongly related to content transmitted by information and messages, what could be called a continuous process of attribution of similarity (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). Actors that are present and active on the scenario send an explicit message to those who are concerned, however remotely, with the same issues and values, bridging participants and connecting supporters in an extensive network of a wide range of convictions and interests.

**Diffused leadership** is an innovative value for situating power in modernity and, within the argument of the structure of convergences, it has an important contribution to explain the dynamic and mechanisms of power in the collective action under focus. We could retrace the democratisation of leadership in the experience of the new social movements that developed since the sixties, couched on values that confronted the democratic centralism of left-wing parties and unions, among other organisations, and the very tight hierarchies existing then between leaders and followers (Wallerstein 2004). Taking politics into ones' hands has been a long thought ideal of radical politics and the critical left; not only as a potential condition for exercising power through free thought and dialogical critic, but being capable of confronting, from within, one's own organisation or group. That is to say, diffused leadership is a by-product of a new sense of politics, which widened the space for active and contestatory involvement as opposed to hierarchical and obedient politics in the tradition of republican representation as discussed above – thus, increasing the social subject's potential capacity of enacting. As a metaphor, it is possible to say that transnational social movements provide a stage for everyone through the World Social Forum, creating the transitory situation of public exposure and free saying. These, combined with an eclectic and varied scenario and the image of self presentation (from style to attitudes), express politics within the field of identity and self recognition; they also demean the role of leadership as a central figure and pervade the exclusive legitimacy of leading as such. In spite of the new configuration of politics, it is not possible to say that charisma, in the weberian sense, is dead. Charismatic figures (such as Sub-Comandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement or Arundhati Roy from India) and other constant characters in the transnational movements exist; however, in the same way of the core structure of the movements and of the new structure of politics they are fluid, less persistent, and they have a segmented influence on the movements and participants.

Structures of convergences in transnational social movements are certainly imbued by **identities** in their multiple forms. The affirmation of identities represents an immense advance in politics renewal, not only because its focus pervades the constraints of the universal mono-identity of the political subject (the one inherited from the advances that resulted from bourgeois democracy in opposition to the society of privilege and idleness of the *Ancien Régime*) but because it also brought about the understanding of the politics of recognition itself as argued by Fraser (2000). Elements of identity are made of values and symbolic elements that materialise in social relationships at all levels (religion, race, gender, class, nation, minorities, etc.) and reshape and/or re-construct dialogue (Taylor 1994). They also condition the disposure of individuals and groups in a way that confronts traditional power structures and hegemonic positions that result in exclusion or despise the importance of difference and alterity. As discussed above, political pluralism in conventional politics has been based on a subject conceived, in political philosophy, as unique in form and content, dominated by reason and with the capacity of converting will into decision. The redemption of subjectivity has emancipated the plurality of the self (as opposed to the mere plurality of representation) and reintroduced it in all aspects of social life that conform the identity of the subject. Identity now is no stranger to politics and collective action, for it provides the meaning and sense of belonging for individual action and its associative capacity to engage actors into commitments. It configures the social representation of the individual status and exposes the position of the actor in society, both in the intimate sphere and in the public sphere (Taylor 1994). It is possible to say that identity enables awareness of the over-determination of the actor by the system on the one hand, and the reflexive condition of the actor influencing the system on the other. This makes the sense of participation in transnational collective movements connected by symbolic elements as well as meaningful relationships between actors, wherever they are and despite national, cultural and economic differences. Hence, participants from the North and South (peripheral or poor countries) recognise factors of connection that they share in the fields of cultural and political significance, by means of the relational diffusion (Tarrow and McAdam 2005); this creates a concerted movement towards convergence of action and ideas. Identity in these movements does not require homogenous or simplified values for mutual recognition; it allows for self-representation of their own making (Fraser 2000). As connected to the renewal of the political discussed above, multiple identities bridge and accommodate diversity and difference (Taylor 1994), pursuing a continuous way of making sense of action and giving sense to the context (event) of its own occurrence. We could say that identity in contemporary politics, as

concerning the transnational social movements, is a field of production of collective social action (on a small or large scale) in its own right, positioned in the paramount moral and political value of global social justice.

The next aspect we would like to point out for a methodological study of the structure of convergences that emerges from the analysis of transnational social movements is that of **symbolic elements**. They are language and comprehension itself, fusing social representation of social life, the evolution and emancipation of cultures and the received as well as constructed social meanings for men and women. As a very complex worldview (extensively qualitative) of reality and portraying the complex data (extensively quantitative) of this same reality, the symbolic elements are a fundamental ace of analysis for comprehending contemporary collective action. They express how actors feel and act in their own way of approaching conflicting or converging views of social issues (made of values, experiences and objectivity), and are in the basis of contention. In fact, they are part of the intelligible structure of expressing politics, ideologies and action orientation, however spontaneous or objective action is. On the one hand, they materialise through signs (language or others), production (material or not), information and attitudes that are present in the act of participation (in all sector of human life); they also materialise in received and produced knowledge, in interaction through communication (dialogue, debate, contention), in the designed goals and in propositions (production, government, education, among others). On the other hand, symbolic elements are always the frame of an epochal content; they represent the issues (politics, wars, production, science, culture) that widely mobilise society or sectors of it, fleshing out the factors that better represent the aspirations of a collectivity, which could be progressist or conservative ones. Transnational social movements are allegedly related to values that, by opposing democratic deficit, injustice and neo-liberalism, present a symbolism associated to a new stage of emancipation of the subject, that which stems from the understanding of global social justice. Is it possible to think of a new virtue for the understanding of liberty, equality and solidarity (fraternity)?

We assume that, at the global level, transnational social movements have revealed new forms of social solidarity. The transformation of the subject as an objective and subjective agent of his/her own world in a specific social context – within multiple identities, recognition and reflexivity between the actor and the social system – re-qualified the meaning and the living experience of liberty and equality. Likewise, the sense of contemporary solidarity does not

restrain itself to a unilinear qualification of the systems of reciprocity and social exchanges. Of all the elements that contribute to the structuring of convergences, solidarity is probably the most complex character of the social action and social relationship. Considering our approach to Sahlins' typology (1976), we would say that the solidarity that emerges from the forms of transnational movements articulates aspects of reciprocity that produce commitments at two levels: that of general solidarity (timeless and not accountable for) and that of balanced solidarity (punctual and accountable for), entwining the elements of reciprocity on which solidarity stands: trust, cooperation and engagement<sup>6</sup>.

Solidarity in the transnational events emerges from exchanges that are certainly non-symmetric; different nations, communities and organised groups take part in the World Social Forum moved by converging identities and goals as much as by a blind degree of trust. Despite the unequal conditions of the societies of origin, participants, militants and advocates can share common perceptions and can produce actions and projected goals related to the convictions that had mobilised them in the first place. The kind of trust that make people act together on such a large scale is made possible on the same ground of the motivations that make the structure of convergences materialise collective action. Trust underpins the conditions by which actors want and accept to interact with others. In this sense trust is a device for coping with the freedom of others (Gambetta, 1988) in order to experience beliefs (mutual or different) and to act accordingly (confrontation, dialogue, agreement, success or failure). People trust each other about the fact that they can express themselves freely, that their identity and claim for recognition will have room in the organised encounter. They trust the (broad) platform of the movement and give credit to the possibility, however remote, that they might influence others, governments and international agencies because the scenario and the visibility guarantee the diffusion of their messages, values and symbolic elements. This is in fact the substantive matter of cooperation through exchanging information, constructing networks, connecting newcomers, relying on diffused leadership. It is a structuring condition that permits the World Social Forum to repeat itself for consecutive years since January 2001, making efforts to obtain some success through continuous cooperation of material and

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<sup>6</sup> The authors are aware of the analytical principles that support Sahlins' theory of reciprocity, where bonds, obligations and generosity are essentially connected to the structure of the social order in primitive societies, an order with rooted traditions, hierarchies and assigned roles. The collective action under focus is, accordingly, the opposite model of social order: non-hierarchical, no boundaries, no obligations. However, the author's typology is extremely rich for a contribution to the understanding of 'modern bonds' and values of the political culture made possible in the social systems of contemporary democracies, especially in the case of the Brazilian historic experience that we qualified as a democratic deficit (see Laniado, 2001).

symbolic elements (the international committee, preparatory meetings, the Charter of Principles). Trust and cooperation give the basis for the production of solidarities that are sustained by the commitment of actors to their values, the common causes and the reciprocity produced within a transnational movement. In this case solidarity is produced on more than one level.

Firstly, taking into account the organising principle of a global social justice and its associated values, the solidarity produced through the process of promoting continuing events is of a general type; it is extended in time and it is not measurable because it concerns values and perceptions that form collective action on all levels. General solidarity presupposes long term gains related to justice and liberty on a world-wide scale; these can change the understanding of governments, agencies, parliaments and many sectors of civil societies in relation to poverty and inequality and to the rights to difference and recognition (the individual's status in society), both among developed and non-developed countries and within nations. On a second level, when the events take place as an associative force, it is possible to speak of a balanced type of solidarity, where reciprocal exchanges are produced within the boundaries of the action performed in each event. Here, cooperation and commitments are according to the punctual expectations and to the immediate consequences of a major transnational gathering. In this sense, the balanced solidarity is produced within a frame of calculability (results, failures, stand-by situations) and in a specific period of time (the preparation, the event, the post-event).

When studying the structure of convergences concerning a systematic understanding of transnational movements, solidarity is a concept that pervades the core of democratisation of social opportunities and power transcribed by these events. It is an analytical support in order to explain, among other arguments, what makes transnational collective action, at the same time, a very fluid format and a concrete fact.

### **3- The World Social Forum: a transient space-movement or a new social subject?**

Social movements and diverse protest organisations from all over the world have since the 1990's profited immensely in terms of framing their discourses and organising their strategies for an alternative globalisation. They have been able to gather together in order to

demonstrate against the hegemonic economic globalisation and its *pensée unique* during several meetings sponsored by the multilateral institutions in charge of implementing neo-liberal policies and identified as the main global economic players. Apart from this, they have also created their own political opportunity structures, particularly through the several events organised within the World Social Forum process.

Nevertheless, the WSF faces some key obstacles in order to remain plural with its member organisations and movements and, at the same time, conserve its cohesion centred 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 lived in January 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 globalisation<sup>7</sup>. Can the philosophy of an open space produce political results that are compatible with the logics of international and institutionalised political decision-making? Will this multiplicity of actors and opinions keep their membership in the long term, once concrete proposals are set out on the negotiating table devoted to issues of an alternative globalisation? 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 culture of politics**

As a community of social practices and a political process, the World Social Forum<sup>8</sup> can be viewed as an integral part of a broader movement commonly referred to as the alterglobalist

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<sup>7</sup> *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 organisation, and that no one can talk on its behalf. This Manifest had not been discussed within the international committee before its launching.

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



movement fighting 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 globalisation. 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 1996 when the Zapatistas held a 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 mobilisations in the form of counter-summits and assemblies in Seattle, Prague, Nice and the first counter-summit to the Davos Economic Forum, which then led to the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre in January 2001. In 1999, Seattle was characterized by continuous demonstrations from November 30 to December 3 with the participation of some 350 organisations facing up to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and, according to statements by alterglobalists, to the liberal system that it is part of. 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 participation of civil society in decision-making at different political scales (Coburn 2003).

One question raised after the events in Seattle and the others that followed is that of the organisation of protest as a key social practice in community building. Social movement leaders formed the habit of seeing each other by holding strategic meetings to discuss the mobilisation calendar, and to link the networks of the North and those of the South. The importance of the International Forum on Globalisation can be noted in this regard: this Forum has defined itself as an alliance of economists and activists<sup>9</sup> whose main objective is to lead protest against the neoliberal economy. Discussions in alliances such as this Forum have been centred on the four main campaigns: writing off the debts of developing countries; reforming international financial institutions; taxing movements of capital; and new rules for world trade that award importance to sustainable development.

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<sup>9</sup> 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 centred on the regulation of world trade was initially less organised, 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 public their concern with regard to food security, genetically-modified organisms and environmental protection. Furthermore, these organisations 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 capital<sup>10</sup>.

It is true that these various organisations 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 negotiations<sup>11</sup>. 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 of and lived. Also focusing on a register that includes cultural values, subjective feelings and energy, the WSF

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> One example was the alliance formed at the WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun in September 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.

may look like a “jam session” where politics can cope with uncertainty and is not 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 organisation 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 work through social norms, experiences, ideology and values. Politics and culture are clearly interdependent in the Forum’s organisational and working methods, which reminds us of the definition of a culture of politics that is embedded in the practices, relationships, and processes that define social movements, their spaces and events. As recall Alvarez *et alli* (1998), “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, and the diversity of sometimes contrasting objectives have not prevented the emergence and the development of the several editions of the WSF. On the contrary, they have rendered possible a new epistemology of the South (Sousa Santos 2005), 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 get far away from 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 organisations 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 organisations; however, the Forum’s culture of politics also draws considerably from its micro practices and organisational processes (Osterweil 2004). How meetings are run, the way the space is organised, 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 alter-globalist movements can express their own views on globalisation; it is also seen as a political and cultural space where civil society groups exchange on social and economic alternatives to the hegemonic globalisation. The WSF has provided a platform suitable for reflection on the possible alternatives to the neoliberal globalisation 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 organisation” (Fisher and Ponniah 2003).

The idea of a political pedagogy is at the heart of identity-building for WSF member organisations, and is constantly challenged with the need to integrate new organisations and social movements, and expand this space-movement to new geographies, as shows 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 (Rojó *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 so different movements and organisations is a political and a cultural critical factor for the evolution of the WSF in its resistance to what they identify as the homogenising forces of globalisation.

There is no doubt that a tension can be generated between the “reformist alterglobalists” (for example, the organisations that are part of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and that attended the Millennium Summit in May 2000) and the “radical anti globalisation 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 are in and out this space-movement. Alterglobalists are also concerned with social representations of globalisation: they know that the unequal structure of political participation in the world affairs is a reflection of the inequalities in social forces, and are therefore slowly trying to change this unequal structure in their favour by working on symbols and cultural values.

This political identity, as an affirmation of the *self* of the WSF, is not necessarily recognised 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 behaviour (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, because it is a category of the social 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 motors 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 themselves 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 2003, the agenda favoured 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 globalisation or another form of globalisation. 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 in the search for possible alliances and pathways for changing the world society.

It is true that the alterglobalist movement has gained political maturity and that the question of its identity is increasingly raised. Alterglobalists portray themselves as an emancipation movement aiming to uncovering the lies of neoliberalism and provide information and options

on the political issues of globalisation. 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 practised. Even if the political orientations 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 the WSF identity include, *inter alia*, avoiding unified statements, recognition of difference as a common denominator<sup>12</sup>, defining itself as a space-movement in which distinct cultures meet politically, avoiding the emergence of a spokesman for the movement, using confusion as a tactic, refusing urgency and working on a long-term basis (Biagiotti 2004). These features contrast clearly with those of the institutional stakeholders normally present in the field of international development cooperation.

At last, it is important to notice that the WSF and its social movements do not have a national territorial base in the definition of their strategies; in most cases they operate independently of a 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 the 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, meeting and alternative media (Dufour 2005). Indeed, the media visibility of alterglobalist meetings has given these movements an opportunity to make them known at 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 for media

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<sup>12</sup> 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

coverage and visibility is also a key element in the process of identity building for the alterglobalist movement.

#### **4- Epilogue: open questions for discussion**

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 traditional international 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 international regulation of world politics which have resulted from this received model of society. Globalisation forces the emergence of the strong paradoxes of both contemporary democracy and the asymmetric international relations. It uncovers the enormous cleavage between an idealised progress promised by liberal and Keynesian democracy (not to speak of socialist experiences) and the limited institutional capacity to guarantee liberty and to provide equality world wide 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, as we see them, are a starting point to organise and deepen the discussion about 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 permit to sketch three levels of questioning concerning the following aspects:

- (a) In respect to **results and expectations**, can the transnational social movements deliver concrete outputs and overcome the unpredictable development of their mobilisations, considering the strong capacity of the capitalist economy to overcome crises?
- (b) In respect to their **internal dynamics**, can the transnational social movements guarantee their self-sustainability by being able of continuously converting

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justice, solidarity and democracy as global values, at serious reflection on the practice of alternatives to neoliberal globalisation and to considering putting into practice the issues discussed at the Forum.

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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