NGOs and Social Movements

A North/South Divide?

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Acronyms

BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CSO	civil society organization
CSPI	Center for Science in the Public Interest
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
G8	Group of Eight industrialized countries
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organization
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAP	structural adjustment programme
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

This paper examines those contemporary agencies broadly termed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social movements. Emphasis is placed on political differences in approach, and the paper poses the question of how such differences coincide with geographical distinctions between the North and South. Differences in approach are also a product of different types of analysis and different strategic proposals, although among many NGOs and social movements there is a broad belief in the need to change the existing global political and economic order. While some NGOs and social movements will contest policy, others will contest power—as a result of their differing analysis of phenomena related to globalization. Such divisions are evident, for example, in the Jubilee 2000 movement, where NGOs focus largely on specific goals for countries demanding debt forgiveness; the Jubilee South movement, more tied to social organizations, insisted on the illegitimacy of all debt and demanded debt cancellation and debt repudiation. In the area of international trade, distinctions may be identified between the "market access" reformers mostly in the North and those, primarily in the South, demanding the end of the export-oriented development model. A key question posed in this paper is whether social movements (mass resistance) can absorb and reorient NGOs, or whether we are witnessing the "NGO-izaton" of movements and politics.

Many such tensions and coincidences are reflected in the World Social Forum (WSF). The paper discusses the politics of the WSF and examines the debate around its future. Attention is given to the educational dimension of the WSF's processes, as well as to the challenge it poses to existing political cultures and models. The paper points to the WSF's rejection of politics organized exclusively around the nation-state, while at the same time leading actors in the forum continue to place considerable importance on the same notion of the state. NGOs and social movements are also examined in relation to the broader challenge of transforming WSF spaces into a broad movement linking actual situations of resistance all over the world to WSF processes. Will the WSF become more than a simple space or "supermarket of ideas", able to articulate new modes of action and alliances capable of confronting the global power structure?

The paper seeks to transcend the ritual denunciations of neoliberalism and, in so doing, it argues that the WSF is contributing to a growing awareness of a new movement, or movement of movements, and also that it is contributing to the effort to move beyond fragmented local struggles, as well as beyond simple and often simplistic negations of neoliberalism in its economic, military and sociocultural dimensions.

Résumé

Ce document porte sur les institutions contemporaines que l'on regroupe sous l'appellation générale d'organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) et sur les mouvements sociaux. L'auteur met l'accent sur les différences d'approche politiques et se pose la question de savoir en quoi ces différences coïncident avec des distinctions géographiques entre le Nord et le Sud. Les différences d'approche tiennent aussi aux différences de types d'analyse et de propositions stratégiques, bien que de nombreux mouvements sociaux et ONG s'entendent sur la nécessité de changer l'ordre politique et économique mondial. Si certains mouvements sociaux et ONG contestent les politiques menées, d'autres contestent le pouvoir, résultat d'analyses différentes des phénomènes liés à la mondialisation. Ces divisions sont évidentes dans le mouvement

Jubilé 2000, par exemple, où les ONG se concentrent dans une large mesure sur des buts spécifiques à atteindre pour des pays précis qui réclament la remise de la dette; le mouvement Jubilé Sud, plus lié à des organisations sociales, a souligné avec insistance l'illégitimité de toute dette, réclamé l'annulation de la dette et prôné le refus d'honorer ses dettes. Dans le domaine du commerce international, on peut faire des distinctions entre les réformateurs, essentiellement du Nord, qui réclament "l'accès au marché" et ceux, principalement du Sud, qui exigent l'abandon du modèle de développement axé sur les exportations. L'une des grandes questions que se pose l'auteur de ce document est de savoir si les mouvements sociaux (résistance de masse) peuvent absorber les ONG et leur donner une orientation nouvelle ou si l'on assiste à une "ONGisation" des mouvements et de la vie politique.

Beaucoup de ces tensions et coïncidences se reflètent dans le Forum social mondial (FSM). L'auteur traite des enjeux politiques du FSM et analyse le débat que suscite son avenir. Il s'intéresse à la dimension pédagogique que revêtent les manifestations du FSM, ainsi qu'au défi qu'il lance aux modèles et cultures politiques existants. Il relève que le Forum semble rejeter l'organisation exclusive de la vie politique autour de l'Etat-nation, alors qu'en même temps, des acteurs de premier plan participant au Forum continuent à accorder une importance considérable à cette notion de l'Etat. Il englobe aussi les ONG et les mouvements sociaux dans son champ d'étude lorsqu'il traite de la difficulté générale de transformer les espaces ouverts par le FSM en un large mouvement qui relierait des situations réelles de résistance à travers le monde aux manifestations du Forum. Celui-ci deviendra-t-il plus qu'un simple espace ou un "supermarché d'idées", capable d'articuler de nouveaux modes d'action et de susciter des alliances assez fortes pour faire front à la structure mondiale du pouvoir?

Cette étude cherche à aller au-delà des dénonciations rituelles du néolibéralisme et, ce faisant, souligne que le FSM contribue à la prise de conscience d'un nouveau mouvement ou mouvement des mouvements, et aux efforts tendant à dépasser à la fois la fragmentation des luttes locales et la négation simple et souvent simpliste du néolibéralisme dans ses dimensions économiques, militaires et socioculturelles.

Resumen

Este documento examina esos organismos contemporáneos que existen bajo la denominación general de organismos no gubernamentales (ONG) y movimientos sociales. Se centra en las diferencias políticas de enfoque y examina como estas diferencias coinciden con distinciones geográficas entre el Norte y el Sur. Las diferencias de enfoque también son el resultado de distintos tipos de análisis y distintas propuestas estratégicas, aunque en muchas ONG y movimientos sociales existe la creencia que hay que cambiar el orden político y económico mundial actual. Mientras algunas ONG y movimientos sociales se opondrán a la política, otros arremeterán contra el poder—porque parten de distintos análisis de los fenómenos relacionados con la mundialización. Tales divisiones se hacen evidentes, por ejemplo, en el movimiento Jubilee 2000, en el que las ONG se centran principalmente en metas particulares para países específicos que piden la condonación de su deuda; el movimiento Jubileo Sur que está más vinculado a organizaciones sociales, insiste en la ilegitimidad de toda deuda y pide la cancelación de la deuda y su repudio. En el ámbito del comercio internacional se puede diferenciar entre los reformistas de "acceso al mercado" principalmente en el Norte y los que proceden generalmente del Sur que exigen el fin del modelo de desarrollo orientado hacia la exportación. Una pregunta clave que plantea este artículo es si los movimientos sociales (la

oposición de la masa) pueden absorber y reorientar las ONG, o estamos siendo testigos de una "ONGización" de los movimientos políticos.

Varias de estas tensiones y coincidencias están reflejadas en el Foro Social Mundial (FSM). El estudio analiza las políticas del FSM y examina el debate en torno a su futuro. Se menciona la dimensión económica de los procesos del FSM, así como el reto que supone para las culturas y modelos políticos actuales. El estudio señala que el FSM rechaza políticas organizadas exclusivamente alrededor del estado-nación, mientras que, al mismo tiempo destacados actores del foro siguen dando una importancia considerable a dicha noción. Las ONG y los movimientos sociales también se examinan en relación con el reto mayor que supone transformar los espacios del FSM en un movimiento más amplio que vincule situaciones reales de oposición en todo el mundo con los procesos del FSM. ¿Puede el FSM convertirse en algo más que un espacio neutro o un "supermercado de ideas"? ¿Puede llegar a articular nuevas formas de actuar y alianzas capaces de hacer frente a la estructura del poder mundial?

El estudio intenta ir más allá de las denuncias tópicas del neoliberalismo y, al hacerlo, argumenta que el FSM está contribuyendo a una mayor conciencia de un nuevo movimiento, o un movimiento de movimientos, y que también está contribuyendo al esfuerzo para ir más allá de las luchas locales fragmentadas, así como de las sencillas y a menudo simplistas negaciones del neoliberalismo en sus dimensiones económicas, militares y socioculturales.

Introduction

This paper deals with the tensions—conceptual, political and organizational—between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and "social movements". Although the first is usually associated with the "North" and the second with the "South", the real distinction is primarily political. In broader terms, it should be remembered that there are both Right-wing and government-created NGOs, in the same way that there are also Rightist and even xenophobic social movements. For the purpose of this essay, such expressions—albeit very important—do not concern us. The distinctions we make take place within a broader justice-oriented liberal to radical camp. The central question we pose is whether social movements (mass resistance) can absorb and reorient NGOs, or whether we will witness the NGO-ization of movements and politics. Neither a blanket indictment nor approval is in order here, because there are NGOs doing valuable work in collaboration with movements. All actors can be regarded as part of "civil society", but that term too is a site of struggle, particularly when the notions of civility—as models of analysis and action—are also shaped by existing power structures and the resistance they engender.

We, therefore, need to go a step beyond the "civil society" lens in order to sharpen political distinctions: to evaluate the contemporary NGO and social movement phenomena in a broader political context. That being said, the North-South distinction assumes analytical importance because the stronger NGOs, and particularly international NGOs, in the world today are based primarily in the North, while the more powerful social movements are found in the South. Thus, to a large degree, the political identification coincides with the geographical one, which is not to deny the increasing growth of NGOs in the South and the appearance of social movements in the North.

Definitions are a problem. Descriptions are more appropriate and a useful characterization of NGOs is provided in the United Nations (UN) report on civil society involvement, also known as the Cardoso report:

> *Non-governmental organization (NGO).* All organizations of relevance to the United Nations that are not central Governments and were not created by intergovernmental decision, including associations of businesses, parliamentarians and local authorities. There is considerable confusion surrounding this term in United Nations circles. Elsewhere, NGO has become shorthand for public-benefit NGOs—a type of civil society organization (CSO) that is formally constituted to provide a benefit to the general public or the world at large through the provision of advocacy or services. They include organizations devoted to environment, development, human rights and peace and their international networks. They may or may not be membership-based. The Charter of the United Nations provides for consultations with NGOs (United Nations 2004a:13).

Whose NGOs?

According to the 2002 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report*, nearly one-fifth of the world's 37,000 NGOs were formed in the 1990s. Much like social movements, NGOs contested spaces previously held by labour unions and political parties, in both the political and social arenas. Supposedly, the increase in numbers and presence were part and parcel of the advent of civil society—and civil society organizations (CSOs)—at the national and international level.

While the prevalent image of NGOs is that of entities independent and critical of governments, one cannot be naive. Powerful governments turn to, or even create, NGOs—government-organized NGOs—in order to further the interests of the state. While the NGO would argue endlessly that it is independent, the reality could be different, whether by direct control or by

setting a political, financial or even ideological framework defined by the powers that be. The difference may be that even governments may claim that the NGOs they work with are independent, albeit the close working relationship on many issues raises eyebrows.

Other governments have no such qualms. For example, the United States (US) government makes no apology for the use of NGO-delivered "humanitarian aid" that happens to also serve Washington's political and military objectives. The alleged neutrality reveals its true face as military and relief activity becomes mixed, sometimes at the expense not only of the aid agencies' reputation, but also at the cost of aid workers' lives. According to a US relief agency official:

> The Americans are pretending that NGOs are with them fighting the war against terror, and they are not. That puts them in danger. We want to be relevant medically and irrelevant militarily and politically (Burnet 2004:1).

The same official spent three weeks in a Chechnya cellar in part because his kidnappers questioned his group's neutrality. US Secretary of State Colin Powell, addressing NGOs in 2001, made it clear that

> just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there serving and sacrificing on the front lines of freedom. NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team.[1]

In other words, NGOs should take up combat positions in the war on terror.

In the face of tragedies such as in Rwanda, many took comfort in the close working relationship between governments and the relief and development NGOs. Humanitarian assistance was the order of the day for victims of massacres. But the alleged altruism became confused when NGO relief agencies went to work in ex-Yugoslavia, accepting funds from governments that had created much of the destruction in the first place. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) planes dropped cluster bombs, and its country donor agencies paid mine action groups to go clean them up. Were relief NGOs simply part of a larger division of labour, a clean-up brigade for NATO armies helping to "pacify" the populations in the critical postwar period? In much the same way, should money for small arms campaign work be accepted from governments dropping big bombs in Afghanistan or Iraq?

Andrew S. Natsios, administrator of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), was even more explicit, stating that NGO relief entities that received US financing were "an arm of the US government". Organizations that did not link themselves strongly to Washington's foreign policy would leave USAID no alternative but to tear up their contracts and find new partners (Burnet 2004).

For their part, powerful multinational corporations, usually the subject of criticism by social movements and many NGOs, also count with funded "non-profit" friends. Some of the most prominent health-related NGOs receive support from key corporations in the same field. What credibility can these non-profit organizations claim when, according to a recent report of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI),

> more than 170 disease-related charities, health-professional societies, and university-based institutes enjoy the largesse of food, agribusiness, chemical, pharmaceutical, and other corporate interests, but that generosity may exact too high a price on an important sector of American life (Common Dreams News Center 2003).

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[1] Secretary of State Colin Powell's remarks to the National Foreign Policy Conference for Leaders of Nongovernmental Organizations, Washington, DC, 26 October 2001. www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/sept_11/powell_brief31.htm, accessed in March 2006.

Other examples from the report of corporate-created NGOs are the Foundation for Clean Air Progress (funded by petroleum, trucking and chemical companies), the Coalition for Animal Health (funded by cattle, hog and agribusiness concerns) and the Center for Consumer Freedom (originally funded by Philip Morris, but now funded by chain restaurants and bars, although it refuses to disclose its contributors). Academia is not immune as the report also identified some 30 university research centres enjoying substantial corporate support, including university centres on forestry funded by the paper or timber industries, along with nutrition centres funded by food and agribusiness (Common Dreams News Center 2003).

The academic or non-profit veneer is useful. "People would be far more sceptical of a 'Corporate Polluters Lobbying Association' than an industry-funded 'Harvard University Center on Important Issues'", said Michael F. Jacobson, CSPI executive director. "Companies hope that a nonprofit's or university's good name will burnish their reputations. Call it 'innocence by association'" (Common Dreams News Center 2003).

Development NGOs: Attacking Acronyms or Injustice?

In the course of the 1980s, more development NGOs came to include the notion of partnership with beneficiaries in their work. Nothing could sound more progressive save if it takes into account that many of the services provided by NGOs relieved government of its own social responsibility, thereby reinforcing the state-shrinking neoliberal model. For their part, national and international "donor" agencies look at NGOs as implementation agencies for a pre-defined "development" agenda and model. In a word, instruments of policy and politics defined in the North have little or no "partnership" at the level of decision making.

The combination of policy failures, on the one hand, and the pressure of social movements, on the other, forced modifications in official policy rhetoric and style. The World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) sought out what it termed CSOs to carry out consultations and assist in the development of "national ownership". Methodologies and policy framework discussions, however, were tightly controlled. Questioning of the broader development model and the extreme enrichment by a few and the ensuing income maldistribution were out of the question. After two years it was clear, according to various comparative studies, that the community-based organizations and their consultations had no or little impact on the development of poverty reduction strategies, let alone the sacrosanct macroeconomic frameworks upheld by the international financial institutions (IFIs) and the donor community in general. A Danish study concluded that:

> Guidelines on C[ivil] S[ociety] participation are few and vaguely formulated,
> and there is little discussion on which groups constitute legitimate participants
> in the process—and why. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and
> largely based on non-formal relationships (Possing 2003:68).

The problem, however, is not one of guidelines or inclusion in the policy processes. Processes could vary, but the policy was largely predetermined in Washington and the local finance ministries. Small wonder that important social movements and unions refused to participate or be included among those "consulted". To the contrary, movements and their NGO support network maintained a hard stance toward the IFIs and the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), insisting—accurately as it turned out—that the PRSPs were simply old wine in new bottles. Critical voices were excluded from the consultation process, particularly where the intention of consultation was to help achieve consensus between government and civil society around "poverty reduction" programmes that did not address the sources of illicit enrichment and cutbacks in social services. The problem, they insisted, was more a question of "impoverishment" than poverty: a poverty reduction strategy was no substitute for a national development strategy, and poverty reduction needed to be accompanied by greed reduction. As

the same study admitted, "in many cases, 'participation' has been confined to carefully selected CSOs; the process has often been more exclusive than inclusive" (Possing 2003:69).

Not surprisingly, social movements were excluded, or excluded themselves, from these and other exercises purporting to build "consensus" for softened versions of neoliberal development. It was not a question of obstinacy because there was, and is, a price to be paid for participation in PRSPs or other donor-driven "civil society" initiatives. Crucial social agendas, often necessitating broad-based unity, were sacrificed. A cleavage emerged between intellectual, urban-based NGOs, and poor urban and rural majorities. A comparative review of PRSP processes in Africa, Latin America and Asia undertaken by three independent NGOs found that:

> [F]rom the standpoint of the CSOs closest to the interests of the poor, the real issue was whether that space can be used effectively to challenge structural adjustment and structural and global injustice. Another question posed insistently in the various workshops was whether the CSOs are consciously or unconsciously diverting scarce human and organizational resources away from fundamental development and mobilization work, or giving confusing signals as to where they stand in regard to corporate-driven globalization. … Where civil society formations have achieved a certain degree of maturity, their advocacy traverses a wide spectrum of issues, and most often includes the advocacy of policies that directly challenge those prescribed by the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the World Bank. Many concluded that where governments joined the IMF/WB in making economic reform prescriptions a non-negotiable matter, then the possibility of meaning of genuine participation, broad based consultation, citizen ownership and even democratic process were all being pre-empted (Centro de Estudios Internacionales et al. 2001).

Eurodad, a European Commission-funded debt and development network based in Belgium, summed up the dilemma when posing the question:

> Although we—NGOs and other advocates for change in the development industry—are winning a few policy battles in our assault on the acronyms, are we losing the war for social and economic justice? (2003:9).

Ironically, the field was left open for the organizational efforts of social movements determined not simply to "hear" the "voices of the poor", as the World Bank would have it, but also to allow the voices to self-organize not simply to be heard, but to force changes as well. Sustaining local organization did not figure as a priority for government, let alone the IFIs, but it was the core of the mobilization agenda of movements. Invariably, this meant engaging in debates forbidden by the IFIs yet central to development and self-determination, such as trade policies, privatization, foreign investment regulation, food sovereignty, protection, labour policies, among others, and not least the search of economic self-determination as a means to help underpin real sovereignty.

The Politics of Accountability and Control

As membership organizations, most social movements—and some NGOs—refer to their own constituents as the ultimate authorities. But it is not the case with many NGOs, which increasingly are the target of criticism precisely for the confused line of accountability, and with it their claim to legitimacy. Critics could in reality care less about transparency other than when it serves as a convenient vehicle to put political adversaries on the defensive.

At the end of the day, accountability is not technical, but political. And accountability to donors makes for confused politics, reducing the rendering of accounts to bookkeeping matters as if the transparent use of funds were an indication of political impact and purpose. Indeed, rendering of accounts becomes a time-consuming end in itself. For example, international donor pressure

forced the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in India to track 89 different statistics, such as births and deaths, farm yields and school graduations in the rural villages where it was working (Ebrahim 2003:87). According to Christensen (2004:9),

> I think it's a general assumption that the more rigorous you can make performance measurement, the better...and in principle that's not a bad idea. But in reality it takes scarce resources away. So there's an opportunity cost. If we were to focus instead on measures that make a difference, rather than measures that are countable, I think we would have more accountability.

Yet, the more accountability to the donor, the greater the dependence on towing the donor's political line. The question remains: Accountable to whom and how? Who is to judge success: the donor or the recipients? And according to what standard, those within or outside the organization? Clearly the system lent itself to abuse, possibly making the "accountability squeeze" inevitable. The trouble was that the new watchdogs were often found on the Right—as with the NGO Watch Web site[2] created in 1993 by the conservative American Enterprise Institute, itself an NGO. Political motivations were clear as the intent was to go after the more liberal and progressive NGOs making these, in turn, all the more "careful" in their programme orientation.

If measuring performance is more than an accounting matter, new standards are necessary to gauge non-financial political impacts. A worthy example is ActionAid International, an NGO with a $120 million[3] annual budget committed to fighting hunger and poverty in 30 countries. It recently decided to do away with data-centred reports because, according to its impact assessment officer:

> We realized we had no end of upward accountability systems in place, but what we really didn't know was what difference our work was making (ActionAid International 2004).

In 1998, ActionAid International—while acknowledging its accountability to 150,000 donors, governments and its own board—decided that its primary accountability was to the poor people, especially women and children, that it served. Performance is now measured from the partner's point of view, who decide along with programme managers whether the initiatives are succeeding and how they should be changed (Christensen 2004:9).

According to Lisa Jordan of the Ford Foundation, "the tools for measuring are developed by someone, made for someone, using a select method". Methods cannot be divorced from politics, and hence it is not surprising that many monitoring systems were developed to "answer questions about NGOs that donors feel need to be answered". According to Jordan, there are problems with this approach and adds that

> in some circumstances they can be quite helpful, but in other circumstances they are inadequate, they do not address the needs of the NGOs, they are divorced from missions, they do not address moral obligations (Christensen 2004:9).

In fairness, progressive NGOs may find it difficult to address those moral issues while they are the subject of pressure and political attacks not only by their conservative counterparts, but also by governments, particularly in the South, that regard the "CSOs" as unwelcome intruders into what they regard as their exclusive political domains. According to the Cardoso report:

> Governments do not always welcome sharing what has traditionally been their preserve. Many increasingly challenge the numbers and motives of civil society organizations in the United Nations—questioning their representa-

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[2]   www.ngowatch.org, accessed in July 2005.

[3]   All $ figures refer to US dollars.

> tion, legitimacy, integrity or accountability. Developing country Governments
> sometimes regard civil society organizations as pushing a 'Northern agenda'
> through the back door (2004b:7).

The perception is not exaggerated given the overwhelming representation of North-based organizations in proportion to South-based counterparts in the listings of NGOs accredited to participate in UN meetings. The Cardoso report states that it was necessary "to redress the evident and lamentable imbalance between the voices of Northern and Southern actors in international policy forums" (United Nations 2004c:29, paragraph 35). Only 251 of the 1,550 NGOs associated with the UN Department of Public Information are based in developing countries. Such a situation faithfully mirrors the skewed nature of power relations between the North and South.

Not that governments, North and South, are above using the NGO modality for their own benefit. The same Cardoso report complained

> about the growing phenomenon of accrediting non-governmental
> organizations that are sponsored and controlled by Governments. Not
> independent, these 'government-organized NGOs' reflect their Government's
> position. The speaking opportunities they use in United Nations forums
> would be better used by others (United Nations 2004d:54, paragraph 127).

Social Movements and Campaigns

Definitions of social movements abound, but few apply exactly to what is on the ground. Perhaps it is best to work with self-definitions as in the case of the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil, one of the leading social forces in Brazilian politics and a driving force in the transnational farmers' and peasants' movement, Via Campesina. Gilmar Mauro, a member of the movement's national directorate, describes the organization as "a mass movement, of a popular character, but also a union and political, that struggles for land, agrarian reform and social transformations".

As in Latin America and elsewhere, he claims, in Brazil the struggle for land and agriculture reform seeks to articulate people in order to attain immediate agrarian objectives, but recognizing "that the struggle should not remain circumscribed in a purely economic struggle". Given the nature of the Brazilian elite and the nature of Brazilian society, the struggle for agrarian reform and other social struggles cannot be divorced from the issues of political power, which is why Mauro stated in 2004 that:

> From the beginning we organized our movement taking into account that the
> capitalist system has profit as its core, exploiting workers and upholding
> private property. In order to be sustainable, changes in land tenure had to be
> accompanied by broader social changes, which in turn could only be the
> product of mass struggle. It is not that we disagree with the idea of
> negotiation…but negotiations are the product of an accumulation of forces
> developed in the process of struggle, and not the product of the abilities of
> any leader in particular…negotiations are the fruit of the people's struggle…It
> is important to have articulated calendars and forms of seeking solidarity and
> continental political articulation, as takes place for example in the struggle
> against the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement.

Of course, not all social movements will be that explicit in referring to the capitalist system, although in Latin America most are. A broader common denominator takes the form of a shared analysis and condemnation of neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization. And given the technologies generated by globalization, NGOs and social movements have both taken their organization and lobbying to the international level. However, there is a world of difference

between the time-fixed "global campaigns" that can have specific goals to achieve, on the one hand, and the movement-guided networks that are undertaking systemic changes on the other.

This has led to no small amount of tension between NGOs and movements. The contradictions are not inevitable, but are frequent, given the polarization of international politics and economics that are characteristic of the last decade. A problem arises with the emergence of so-called "global campaigns" usually emanating from the North that seek to extend their top-down methodology to the South, sometimes to the detriment of local movement organization and of heightened political awareness or systemic understanding. Campaign themes and goals are defined in the North, and then followers are recruited in the South.

While changing social policies—or political and economic policies with a social impact—may be a common goal, the strategies will differ, particularly when it comes to engaging in alliance building. The social base an organization can purport to represent in turn will influence alliances. Social movements, therefore, develop an organizing dynamic quite different from the networking carried out by entities fundamentally dedicated to policy advocacy, service delivery and monitoring, which are characteristic of many NGOs. That circumscription, or absence of a social base, in turn influences the degree of dependence on external funding and with it the need to take positions that do not upset the funders. Policy reform may be a first step, but it can become the last when the analytical and organizational framework has no room for addressing structural and global causes of poverty, inequality and violence.

In this context, it is possible to review the various "campaigns" that have caught hold of the international community from time to time and in which Northern NGOs have been leading forces. Landmines, child soldiers, small arms, external debt, fair trade, global warming, the International Criminal Court, corruption, governance, famine and others stand as campaigns in which NGOs have managed to secure the support of various UN agencies and the "middle powers" to push for action on the international stage.

Many of the campaigns have often been considered successful, but by whose criteria? Critics, usually from the South, will argue that the narrow nature of the campaigns tends to take away attention from the broader problems of development and peace—simplistic slogans reinforce and reflect simplistic analysis. Humanitarian crises also have political roots, and responses tend to be selective and media-guided, particularly when strategic interests are at stake. It is much easier to deal with the public images of the problem and not the essence of the conflict itself, particularly the role played by past and ongoing global power structures that no rich government seriously wishes to reform.

Thus, the debate between campaigns and movements is less about organizational expressions than political objectives. Politics shapes the organizational. Most "radical" groupings in a given society—in the North, but mostly in the South—believe that only a systemic and structural change will pave the way toward democracy and a society characterized by equity and non-discrimination. It is not a question of rejecting reform in favour of revolution, but one of acknowledging the limitations of reform while pushing on both fronts for deeper change and enhanced awareness. It follows that the sustained organization and "conscientization" of the population—as opposed to momentary mobilization outbursts—beginning with its most marginalized elements, will slowly but surely create forms of countervailing power to challenge local and global elites.

Much different is the perspective of those, principally in the North but also in the South, who believe that the system can be influenced or changed with the right amount of strategic lobbying. In this mindset, campaigns should be "professional" and highly focused. Specialists in marketing and media are brought in to ensure public impact of the host population, utilizing tearful degrading images of victims in the South, hoping to inspire shame in government circles and charitable responses among the population in their countries. With luck, the very same governments will provide them with funding and thus gain legitimacy and liberal prestige.

Short-term goals with timelines are set, after which the campaign will dissolve in order to get on with a new cause.

Differences between campaigns and movements—greatly simplified here for the purpose of analysis—are, therefore, political and contextual. Campaigns can contribute to movement building if they are explicitly designed to educate populations about the systemic elements and the need for sustained mobilization. Otherwise, campaigns undermine movement building by limiting participation to a given monetary contribution or being present at a sympathetic rock concert or Sunday afternoon demonstration. Much, of course, depends on context: cultural, but also political, as it presupposes the existence of governments that respond to such pressures (usually in the North) as opposed to those that do not (usually in the South) or, worse, respond with repression. There is no inherent contradiction if it is clear that campaigns can take place in a way that contribute to a deeper understanding of political, economic and global dynamics.

Campaigns may bring policy change and public awareness, albeit not the changes and awareness demanded and required by the most vulnerable in the South or by those opposing suffering the effect of global neoliberalism's militarism. The indicator of success should not be a favourable editorial in the mainstream media, but whether there are positive changes in the slums of Managua, Manila or Maputo. It is not peace for the sake of stability, but justice as a precondition of real peace.

In the absence of substantive change, many in the North followed the lead of the South in "taking it to the streets" against the institutionalized violence protected and promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the group of eight (G8). At Seattle, Prague, Cancún and Genoa, campaigning took the form of street presence and the application of non-violent power. As more Northern governments gave up their "soft" politics and caved in to the US demand that they join the "coalition", much of the cosy relationship between certain NGOs and their governments became strained. Overall, this is perhaps a healthy development because polarization also dealt a blow to those in the North holding the abusive notion that the voiceless poor in the South somehow needed a benevolent ventriloquist from the North.

Debt Campaign versus the Debt Movement

Inspired by the biblical themes of Jubilee and forgiveness of debt, a new debt cancellation initiative appeared determined to secure the writing off of debt for the poorest countries by 2000. Churches played an active role by mobilizing constituents and placing governments, particularly the G8, under pressure. From the perspective of South-based antiglobalization activists, however, there was something profoundly wrong in the campaign spearheaded by Jubilee 2000 in the United Kingdom that proclaimed itself the leader of an international global coalition. A more critical focus proposed not simply "debt forgiveness" but debt repudiation, not only for the "poorest countries", but also for all poor countries and, above all, recognition of the real debt by the North to the South as a result of abusive colonial behaviour.

Over and above the question of whether a single global campaign was appropriate given the different perspectives, or whether civil society groups could speak for themselves, there was the question of whether "debt relief" was any solution at all or simply a write-off designed to make new borrowing possible. Jubilee South defended the inclusion of countries whose per capita was "too high" according to World Bank criteria. Indeed, even from the standpoint of education and awareness raising, many in the South and some in the North worried about the simplistic and false assumption that "dropping the debt" would equal eradication of extreme poverty. More worrisome still was the insistence by campaigners in the North that governments in the South be required to spend the proceeds of any debt relief on social programmes. South campaigners rejected this type of "conditionality" as a matter of principle, but the World Bank welcomed such a criteria that gave it even more negotiation power.

Drawing on movements and antidebt campaigners in the South, Jubilee South came into being in 1999 on the basis of different assumptions. Southern countries were not debtors, but creditors as a result of historical, moral and environmental damages incurred by Western colonialists, including their support of dictatorships and regimes such as apartheid. "Don't owe, won't pay" was the Jubilee South slogan contesting the "debt relief" for the poorest countries approach: debt was an ideological construct no matter what the accounting books said.

It proved difficult for Jubilee South to work together with those they defined as Jubilee North, since historical and analytical understanding of the debt question were considerably different. Jubilee South stated its assumptions thus:

> It makes little sense to engage in and for social change without clarity about our starting point and our objectives. Only then can alliances and forms of engagement enter into the picture. Jubilee South along with other organizations have for this reason often insisted about political discussions and analysis preceding considerations of campaigning and advocacy. In this day and age, we cannot simply assume we all share the same departure point, and we should be honest in putting this forth. Campaigns and advocacy are not 'apolitical': they presuppose political and analytical assumptions. Tactics are one thing but elevating the technical engagement to the level of programmatic engagement simply presupposes a greater degree of consensus than may exist. For the sake of avoiding excessive tensions within campaigns—lest these healthy phenomena be perceived mistakenly as divisive—it is important to place matters on the table. Recognize our political differences and then explore the basis of common engagement, but not simply gloss over these pretending that 'depoliticization' is indeed not a form of politics itself that can work to the benefit of the very structures we wish to change.[4]

Jubilee South blasted the same governments and insisted that addressing mass poverty could not be separated from the analysis of mass enrichment characterizing the broad pattern of North-South economic relations, including trade, SAPs and historical patterns of dependent development. However, governments in the South, with precious few exceptions, stood on the sidelines enjoying the spectacle and not daring to assume radical positions. Their arguments and positions coincided more with those of Jubilee North than with their own movements: unsurprising because Jubilee South felt that debt should be either cancelled or repudiated—the word most governments dared not pronounce for fear of lowering their international credit rating and being scolded by the World Bank and the IMF.

Movements, and movement-oriented NGOs, insisted on the systemic perspective lest everyone miss the proverbial forest for the trees. For them, debt was part of a larger issue, and demands could not be reduced to a matter of "relief" or a one-off cancellation for some countries or even all impoverished nations. Being systemic in the analysis was crucial to the educational and mobilization efforts being carried out in their countries, with the goal of building social movements as engines of systemic change—particularly in countries where political parties, including those on the Left, had once tried to change the very system that eventually winded up changing them. According to a Jubilee South position paper:

> Campaigns, as often initiated in rich countries by well meaning persons, can fall prey to the politics of asking for too little. True, spaces for engagement in the North appear to be limited, often employing the feel good Madison Avenue techniques that pose for politics in so many countries. But there are two considerations here: first the problem of debt and impoverishment cannot be seriously addressed, let alone sustainably resolved, outside the framework of principled politics. And second, history would also teach us, that power concedes nothing on its own volition but is more often than not the product of putting heat on the street. It is the people that empower the negotiators and advocates, not the other way around.

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4   From discussion documents prepared by the author for Jubilee South.

> If one must deal with bureaucracy, then it must also be accepted that bureaucracies move in millimeters—the essence of system stability and adjustment for self-preservation and reproduction. Suffering demands epochal shifts. And if that suffering, pain and sense of moral outrage is not taken to the street and the negotiation table, NGOs or campaigns, like governments in the South can become, consciously or not, co-agents of system reproduction celebrating 'shifts' that have little impact on the ground.[5]

From a political and South perspective, campaigns were meant to influence policy, not to substantively change it, let alone question the power structure that underpins governmental stances. And emphasizing policy, to the point of becoming technocrats who relished debating their governmental counterparts, came at the expense of questioning the power relations, that is to say, real politics. In time, some NGO technocrats assumed governmental or intergovernmental positions, dealing with policy matters assuming liaison duties with civil society groups. Foundations and church charities each year selected "themes" for their campaigns, but in almost all cases the efforts were purposely, like presidential elections, short lived and simplistic in message, seeking out the broadest alliances on the skimpiest of propositions. That is, what many at this point in time regarded as conservative or feel-good liberal politics—celebratory media savvy actions driven by marketing and publicity dynamics.

Globalization, on the other hand, is nothing if not comprehensive and multifaceted. Corporations, governments, media and academia continue to advance intellectually and operationally across the board. The power structure is so confident that it can in fact afford, tolerate and even fund civil society campaigns on subsets of problems, for example, debt relief, trade access, child soldiers, land mines, small arms—none of which seriously threatened the system of war and exploitation.

Governments and the World Bank now proudly point to their efforts to "engage" civil society (meaning NGOs) in "informed" discussions (meaning their information), insisting that their institutions were open to dialogue and even change (the small changes necessary to ensure that there are no big changes). Where many NGOs called for engagement, most social movements called for the dismantlement of the IMF and the World Bank. So, some debts could be cancelled, but structural adjustment packages were not—indeed, write-offs of uncollectable debt were made contingent on following IMF prescriptions. Yet, the Clinton, Blair and World Bank administrations publicly proclaimed having responded positively to the Jubilee call. And some Jubileers believed them. Campaigners could now go home, because campaigns had clear end points. Those mobilized were now told to demobilize.

Market Access versus Market Models

In early 2002, Oxfam Great Britain launched a market-access campaign geared to lowering protectionist barriers in the North to key exports to the South. As with the debt campaign, Southern organizations questioned the strategy being proposed from the North to deal with the unequal trade problem and corporate-driven globalization in general. Oxfam responded by calling its critics "globaphobes", referring broadly to the antiglobalization movement, of which Oxfam apparently did not feel a part. A senior Oxfam staff resigned over the terms of her organization's new campaign priority that, she claims, calls, over the life of its three-year campaign,

> for more market access and trade for poor countries as the solution to poverty. Nor can I support the year-one campaign objective: market access for textiles from least developed countries as the solution to, or even a solution to poverty in these countries (Bello 2002).

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[5] From discussion documents prepared by the author for Jubilee South.

Walden Bello, Director of Focus on the Global South and a leading global activist, protested that the designation of critics of globalization as globaphobes, a term employed by *The Economist*,

> is an opportunistic ploy that is designed to project Oxfam as taking the rational, sensible middle road between two irrational blocs. Whether that was, in fact, the intention, that is in fact the effect. And the storm of protest this has evoked from so many activists that are otherwise respectful of Oxfam's work should tell Oxfam that you can't have it both ways: You can't say you're part of us then score with the Establishment by caricaturing us in the crudest Economist fashion (2002).

From the movement perspective, the issue was not about export agriculture or market access—the wrong argument—but to address the question of what priorities the movements should have and how to go about achieving them in the present circumstances. Apparently Oxfam and others gave priority to the market-access campaign and sought to organize a global campaign around it. Bello insisted that the strategic goal should be much broader, namely to halt or revert the WTO-mandated liberalization in trade and trade-related areas. He says that the

> expansion of the free trade mandate and the expansion of the power and jurisdiction of the WTO, which is now the most powerful multilateral instrument of the global corporations, is a mortal threat to development, social justice and equity, and the environment. And it is the goal that we must thwart at all costs, for we might as well kiss goodbye to sustainable development, social justice, equity, and the environment if the big trading powers and their corporate elites have their way and launch another global round for liberalization during the WTO's 5th Ministerial Assembly in Mexico in 2003 (2002).

Simply ensuring market access did not bring people in the South closer to the construction of an alternative development model. The "fair trade" campaign presupposed the continuation of an export-driven model inherited from the colonial period—an arrangement that Southern elites were only too happy to maintain. The goal then was to reverse the trend toward liberalization in the developing countries, not broaden it nor clamour for the same liberalization in the protectionist North. Stopping the WTO—the key force of liberalization—was a step in the right direction: stopping the advance of "free trade" and all of the concessions that it implied involving agriculture, services, industrial tariffs along with new issues such as government procurement, competition policy, investment and trade facilitation.

The movement-led assumption was that globalization was indeed reversible; and that movements and non-violent tactics had to complement, and if need be, substitute, NGO lobbying and quiet discussions. According to Bello, there was a need for

> working with national movements, such as peasant movements for food sovereignty in the South and citizens' movements in the North, to build massive pressure on their governments not to agree to further liberalization in agriculture, services, and other areas being negotiated; skillfully coordinating global protests, mass street action at the site of the ministerial, and lobby work in Geneva to create a global critical mass with momentum (2002).

Bello reflected the concern of many movements, including some in the North, that an influential organization such as Oxfam could wage a market-access campaign with

> all the hallmarks of a campaign that is driven not by a strategy derived from the global conjuncture on the trade front but by an internal organizational imperative to have a "winnable" short-term campaign. ... Oxfam should realize that there is a great difference between doing an expose and mounting a campaign, that is between exposing the double standards and hypocrisy of the big trading powers when it comes to market access and actually launching a campaign for greater market access. Campaigns must focus on promoting

> the strategic priorities of a global movement that is finite in its resources and energies instead of waylaying the movement into side streets where the results can even be counterproductive (2002).

Bello's point seemed to be confirmed when the WTO director-general said he could support the Oxfam market-access campaign as a means of pressuring the big trading powers to dismantle their quotas systems so as to increase their leverage on the developing countries. The result was confusion among WTO critics, detracting from the possibility of reaching a much-needed consensus on strategy and action. Bello insisted that:

> Oxfam can only be an effective partner if it first clarifies to itself and the movement where it really, really stands on the issues of globalization, trade liberalization, and the World Trade Organization. … The era of top-down, go-it-alone campaigns is over (2002).

Capacity Building or Capacity Mobilization?

Many specialized NGOs would have us believe that "knowledge" is the key to sustainable development and that knowledge or expertise is in the North and needs to be transferred to the South by way of "capacity building". Sometimes more modest NGOs admit the learning process is a two-way street, although on closer examination there is little implementation of the principle.

The research organization British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) found that

> while there appears to be a growing emphasis on the importance of learning, the dominant attitudes and practices of NGOs have not seen much change. Some crucial areas of learning, notably those pertaining to partnerships between North and South—e.g. local experience, local perspectives, differences in history, poverty, and so on—continue to be highly undervalued (2003).

What was worse was a "'not so uncommon' practice in the North of extracting ideas and information from the South, analysing and repackaging these and then presenting them as their own" (Ludin 2003)—a trait also found among researchers.

More often than not, North-South capacity building takes the form of adoption by Southern actors—usually local NGOs—of Northern prescriptions and methodologies, very often funded by governmental donor agencies. One need only witness the uniformities in diagnosis and policy remedies adopted across the South—from development, conflict resolution, gender sensitivity training and human rights education—explained by the application of a common Northern learning template. Colonialism, of course, was the original template, but of late the North provides the manuals to deal with many of the problems created by the North in the first place. While finance ministers in the South faithfully adopt IMF prescriptions for "growth", many NGOs adopt the poverty alleviation work also prescribed by the IMF and World Bank to mitigate the social impact of the original economic growth formula. In a virtual division of labour, NGOs—North and South—develop coping strategies to assist civil societies to accept the macroeconomic impositions, and not to change them. NGOs and CSOs are invited to take up functions that were once the responsibility of the pre-neoliberal state.

The measure and impact of Northern hegemonic thinking on the South is not simply a governmental matter, it also became manifest in the appearance of numerous NGOs in developing countries during the 1990s. Many NGOs define their politics by positioning themselves clearly in relation to movements, parties and government. Others claim to be non-political and non-confrontational. But this is more easily proclaimed than practised. Critical observers hold that most NGOs, foreign and national—and sometimes the difference is not manifest, which is part of the problem—contribute to the depolitization of poverty by adopting

the discourse and outlook of technocratic bureaucrats of the World Bank and finance ministries, which also claim to be non-political, but, of course, are not.

Thus, some NGOs are happy to occupy the limited space assigned to them by the multilateral institutions and government not necessarily to influence policy, but in order to evidence the "participation" of civil society in the setting of policies largely defined in Washington. The prevailing self-image is, according to the same critic, one of working in "partnership" with government with assigned roles as advocates for the poor, as monitors and as service deliverers, but also as paid subcontractors to help ensure the "civil society participation" and the organization of the "consultations" that embellished the image of governments and multilaterals. This is otherwise known as developing country "ownership" (of policies and frameworks emanating from the North).

Of course, securing foreign and local NGO participation in service provision and poverty alleviation programmes fitted neatly into the "new" World Bank outreach programmes. Participation is supposed to entail non-confrontational tactics if not complementary ones as NGOs lost the independence necessary to openly challenge policies detrimental to the poor. Public positions took the form of technical recommendations avoiding at all costs references to the key structural causes of poverty. The result is confusion at a grassroots level as people are told, in effect, that adopting the language of efficiency and competitiveness should dilute demands for changes and justice. Such understandings in effect reduce the space for civil disobedience and mass resistance along with an acceptance of a "normality" that is responsible for deaths and impoverishment the world over. "Realism" has its price: the diffusion of popular anger and with it the possibilities of substantive political change (Barya 2001). Roy (2004) states that in acting this way, NGOs

> alter the public psyche. They turn people into dependent victims and blunt the edges of political resistance. NGOs form a sort of buffer between the sarkar and public. Between Empire and its subjects. They have become the arbitrators, the interpreters, the facilitators.

Rather tragically, the altruistic image of the NGOs can draw on political energies of newer generations that have little time or respect for political parties. A social movement alternative is not always present or made politically attractive. As a result, potential activism is neutralized as NGOs become "alternatives" to politics. Thus the gulf grows between civil society and political society, but also between the NGOs and social movements.

Building Counter-Hegemonic Power

Although seemingly distant today, the immediate post–Cold War period opened new spaces to build unprecedented alliances between the "civil society" forces and what the then Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy termed the "soft power" of liberal like-minded governments. A chief example was the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which worked very closely with the Canadian, Nordic and Swiss governments to give birth to a convention whether the United States and other powers liked it or not. A similar civil society-led coalition helped ensure the Rome protocol establishing the International Criminal Court. While campaigns dealing with small arms and child soldiers did not achieve similar juridical victory, important resolutions and United Nation conferences placed these and other humanitarian causes squarely on the international agenda.

By the end of the 1990s, however, it was clear that the honeymoon between the "middle powers"—the United Nations and the Northern NGO community (that is, "civil society")—was waning. In regard to international trade and finance, the "soft" powers manifested hard attachments to neoliberal principles and the Washington consensus. Indeed "development assistance" continued, for the most part, to be tied to the enactment of structural adjustment

measures and strict application of the "sound" macroeconomic principles, no matter what the social consequences. The World Bank–defined mantra was that poverty reduction could only take place by way of economic growth, which in turn could only be the product of the removal of virtually all shackles on private investment, particularly foreign.

Many Northern NGOs rejected the orthodoxy, but continued to receive funding to assist "development" projects in the South, including the propagation of "know-how" of dealing with the multilaterals. The presumption was that there was no alternative to engagement. By this time, the term "cooperation" had substituted "solidarity", popular forces gave way to civil society and "profit-generation" along with cost-recovery was the norm for development. An ideological shift slowly took place during the 1990s, often provoking internal divisions within the big NGOs—"charities" in Britain and Ireland—between the policy people at headquarters and the programming staff in the "field".

More and more resources went to "advocacy", often at the expense of projects, yet the advocacy shifts for the most part targeted particular policy goals such as debt relief, increased development assistance or providing market access to developing countries' export products. That top NGO officials easily assumed jobs in the government development agencies and even the World Bank, spoke volumes about the shifting trends—as governments and the IFIs astutely made it a point to work closely with the campaigners and build up the "civil society" departments.

Was civil society being built up at the expense of the state? For many Northern NGOs the answer was yes, arguing that the state shrinking was an irreversible reality, that good governance entailed creating the right conditions for private enterprise and profit and that state functions and enterprises needed to be transferred to the private sector. From a social movement perspective, the premises were unacceptable. Many insisted on defending the notion of popular sovereignty and the social welfare notions that should guide the state. NGOs should not be asked to pick up the social slack or substitute for state functions. If there were fewer resources to go around, then what was in order was not submission but organizing alternative national and international orders. There is in any case an undeniable correlation between the advent of neoliberalism and the explosion in the number of NGOs.

Constructing a different world began with the construction of a political space in which different organizations could engage in dialogue and planning. This was the World Social Forum (WSF). Parameters for discussion were antineoliberal and social movements were privileged participants. According to the 2001 WSF Charter, the forum was to hold open meetings that were plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party, for those "groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism". The WSF defined itself as a process and not simply an event.

Development and peace NGOs from the North realized that they could not be absent from the WSF process, but in taking part many of these organizations felt obliged to review their own politics. Of course, the parallel failure of social democratic tendencies to reign in globalization's negative social effects and the militarist policies following the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 played their part in pushing advocacy efforts to the Left. Traditional political parties were also challenged and asked to recognize the ascendancy of social movements, as a point of principle and practice. The question today at hand is whether the stage is being set for a new basis of unity or common action as the basis for a new politics and effective resistance. Or, as Roy warns, the

> NGO-ization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered,
> reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance
> has real consequences. And no salary (2004).

Brought together, WSF participants became more explicit and radical in the discussion of strategies to resist and roll back what was increasingly identified as the capitalist and imperialist system. This global milieu upheld fundamental principles concerning the oppression of women, the recognition of sexual choice, environmental sustainability along with the recognition of a need to bring local, national and international actors together, including parties, unions, movements and NGOs. If these were not part of the new politics, then the politics was not new at all. The challenge is to arrive at new global visions and new organizational forms capable of integrating the particular into the universal struggles and vice versa. Could social movements and NGOs work together or at least converge, along with political parties, in the development of new and/or diverse forms of collective actions within the context of antineoliberal and, increasingly, antiwar principles?

The ongoing debate in and on the forum is part of a more general reflection on how to generate, from the common perspective of radical critique of neoliberalism, spaces of inclusion that could both deepen the reflection and better define the critique, alternatives and strategy against the neoliberal model: how to make the WSF a useful tool for the coordination among movements and struggles to oppose neoliberalism and war (Nicholson and Egireun 2004:92).

The forum's diversity is as much a virtue as a problem, however. The WSF only makes sense and has a future in the sense that it strengthens the struggles against neoliberal globalization and provides relief to them. It must combine "non deliberative" spaces such as conferences, seminars and panels with other more deliberative ones as the activities promoted by diverse social movements. Among them is the Social Movements Assembly, which has been a reference point in the struggle against neoliberal globalization due to its role in social mobilizations, such as those in Quebec against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), Cancún against the WTO, Genoa against the G8 and the global anti-war march. Such actions have contributed to raising the awareness of the WSF as a reference in the struggle against "the system". Social mobilizations have had the greatest impacts where they have put the relation between "the social" and "the political" at the forefront and where the relation among social movements, political parties and institutions is at the centre of the debate (Nicholson and Egireun 2004:92, 94).

But is debate an end in itself? Would the WSF continue to be a "supermarket of ideas"? After three forums, each building on the other as well as on the important regional social forums, questions remain: Where does this notable process of interaction go next? Does the WSF simply weaken itself by remaining a simple "space" for popular education, networking campaigns, planning action, debating strategy, etc.? Within the WSF, social movements regularly took the initiative of self-convening themselves in assemblies and coming out with fixed positions. But the question remains unanswered: how could that space be opened to the most excluded and unorganized—the fundamental building block in the effort to create another world?

Perhaps this combination of forces and events is pushing many NGOs in the North and South to re-evaluate their own politics and hopefully re-engage the social movements. (The other option is to simply transform themselves into professional bodies and abandon the non-profit system.) A combination of movements and NGOs were able to jointly claim success for temporarily derailing the WTO at the Cancún Ministerial meeting in September 2003. The viciousness of the war against Iraq—and the inability of the liberal forces to stop it—also convinced many that building a counter-power to end the war would only take place by way of a concerted movement of movements. The massive international protest of 15 February 2002 against the war demonstrated the convening power of the WSF.

Nonetheless, the road ahead is not clear. Forums and occasional demonstrations, albeit global and massive, run the risk of making politics a question of momentary action and annual gatherings. Nor can they stop the war. At the third WSF in January 2004, Mumbai, Arundhati Roy, an activist and writer from India, underscored the task at hand:

> What we need to discuss urgently is strategies of resistance. ... While our movement has won some important victories, we must not allow non-violent resistance to atrophy into ineffectual, feel good, political theatre. It is a very precious weapon that needs to be constantly honed and re-imagined. It cannot be allowed to become a mere spectacle, a photo opportunity for the media.[6]

Mumbai also showed that there are movements that oppose neoliberalism, but do not feel comfortable with the working and acting procedures of the WSF, and that there are many spaces to be built in order to integrate as many movements as possible.

From Global Discussion to Global Action

There is a danger that the WSF can end up as a privileged space for privileged discussions, or for the repackaging of old ones. And there is an awareness of that danger—that discussions, and the way those discussions are defined and organized, fail to move away, or transcend, older political cultures and methods. Ironically, many of those that insist on more radical positions and of checking the influence of NGOs and socially moderate organizations are also the ones tending to be more affixed to the older methods of the radical Left, employing the language of power, control and domination.

A way out of this is to put more energy into the building of networks of autonomous movements together with the ethical recognition of multiples sources of knowledge. Clarity around this objective may cut to the core of the debate between those who view the WSF as a "space" as opposed to those who wish it to be an "instrument" or "actor" in its own right. In this way the taking up of "positions" need not entail a return to traditional political practices. If the movements are the subjects, then they that can help take positions that need not weaken nor disperse the WSF. Indeed, a number of regional and national forums has already managed to move beyond that debate and practice.

The heart of the matter, as argued by many activists participating in the forum, is for these spaces to become better organized in a way that better facilitates and supports the development of multiple social actors and their possibility for networking and joint action. A social movement–driven forum in this context becomes instrumental in the development of new alternatives, attracting individuals and forces, in particular the young who are sceptical of conventional politics, Left and Right. Whether political parties join in becomes a secondary matter once the principle of forum autonomy from parties (or governments) is established, instead of highlighting the need for parties or trade unions to be more open to the dynamism and creativity of movements. The end is the same: the nurturing of a new political culture; the promotion of the self-assertion and self-confidence of movements and civil society actors in general; and the creation of a new political culture.

The dynamic plurality that marks the forum does not facilitate an easy answer. Certainly, power as embedded in the nation-state is not tossed out the window, but neither does it retain the Leninist mystical attraction associated with the capture of power. We now should understand that cultural power or hegemony is rooted in language, structures, civil society and everyday life, reinforcing economic dominations. Power relations are gauged differently across not only geographical lines, but also across gender, cultural, environmental and, of course, global lines—they are not the subjects of capture, but of taking back.

Counter-hegemonic and liberation agendas cannot afford to minimize the links between neoliberalism's ongoing military war, economic war and sociocultural war. The agenda needs to make the links. Resistance and recruitment for resistance must also diversify across the

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spectrum of power relations in order to probe the vulnerability of the larger neoliberal system—as well as bridge the diverse political experiences that are spontaneous but increasingly connected. Still, there is no consensus as to whether it is imperative to arrive at a unitary "strategy" or "programme", or whether such notions—close to the idea of a single truth that has to be grasped—are part of an old political thinking.

If the WSF process or processes mean anything, it is that there is little to fear and much to be gained by the sponsorship of different views and debate (within the broad antineoliberal parameters defined in the WSF Charter). Given the nature and outreach of neoliberalism, new agencies must continue to be born and brought together in a process of convergence. Yet, the process itself must reflect and embody the new more coherent politics—capable of action, without falling into the trap of generating new monopolies on decision making or centralized representation. To its credit, the WSF in its own organizational structures has taken important steps to "prefigure" the new politics by avoiding centralism and practising new politics—from the banning of Coca Cola to the use of bioconstruction techniques, new non-commercial translation contributions, a horizontal decision-making process and placing culture increasingly at the centre of the events.

In this way the forum processes become a laboratory of experimentation and horizontal education, characterized by, for example: (i) the rejection of politics organized exclusively around the nation-state; (ii) the discovery of plural sources of power and citizen representation; and (iii) putting practice before theory. Making an effort to transcend the ritual denunciations of neoliberalism, the forum builds awareness that a new movement, or movement of movements, is being created to go beyond fragmented local struggles. In this way the "movement" is developing paths of social transformation—that is, the transformation of power—that transcend the simple negations of existing neoliberalism in its economic, military and sociocultural dimensions. Our concrete and permanent challenge and duty will be to move beyond the familiar analysis and simple condemnations to transform the WSF spaces into a broad movement through linking actual situations of resistance all over the world to the WSF process.

Social Movements and Political Society

If we have argued that "new" social movements helped politicize "old" NGOs, the next question to appear is whether that politization, or repolitization, can also extend to political parties, the traditional political institutions par excellence. Many social movements prefer not to answer this question, rejecting any ideological label and sometimes disdaining all political parties along with traditional forms of political representation. Indeed, the first two WSFs, while on the Left in orientation and analysis, explicitly excluded political parties as such from participation. However, political parties played an important role at the third WSF held in Mumbai in 2004. And at the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, the prominence given to government leaders such as Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela raised eyebrows among many participants.

But the question holds: Can the social Left come together with the political Left? The answer, of course, varies according to national and international contexts, with many movements actually becoming parties, as in Bolivia, or others, as in Central America, adopting openly hostile positions to parties of the Left and Right. Of course, the social and governmental Right may benefit from the dichotomy, but where social movements are clearly more combative than parties, what could be the basis of unity?

Answers again will vary, but the more powerful social movements generally accept the need to forge appropriate creative political instruments in order to face new global and ideological challenges. Parties must change too, it is argued, turning the old Leninist conception of vanguards and top-bottom transmission belts all on its head. The problem is strategic and not

simply tactical, for it is not a matter of only having temporary coincides or alliances. Marta Harnecker, a Cuban analyst and long-time observer of the Left, argues that

> given their sector nature and corporative character of their objectives, social movements face difficulties in thinking and proposing solutions for the entire country, let alone the transnational character of processes (2001:32).

This indictment may be too hard because movements link up with each other, reflecting the opportunities and necessities posed by neoliberal globalization. At the same time, it must be admitted that the much-criticized hierarchical, male-dominated nature of many parties is not unknown among movements. Nor are cases of co-optation of the social Left far and in between.

A central strategic task today is to bring together analogous parties, social movements and NGOs in a way that none loses its autonomy and each contributes according to their particular strengths. No doubt a complex task, but an indispensable first step is to stop each component from the troublesome habit of assuming the representation of the other.

Unity can arrive in stages as part of a single process of elaborating common national and international projects. This is part and parcel of the broader task of democratizing the state and, in time, the global order. Participative politics could be reflected in state institutions as a product of new political cultures characterized by transparency, decentralization and citizen participation. In the final analysis, parties, social movements and NGOs may all need to change and become more creative in order to build the new forms of political and social expression that can most effectively challenge the hegemonic national and international order.

Conceivably, a new political instrument could reflect the positive characteristics of all three, allowing the oppressed and marginalized to reassume politics. And reassuming politics does not mean giving up on the state, but rather the opposite: to transform it. A change in the conditions of the lives of people necessarily entails changing the ways in which political struggles are historically and organizationally conceived. There is no alternative to the deepening of democracy. Wainwright sums it up well:

> The profound crisis of democratic institutions, a growing gap between the people and the political institutions that claim to represent them, can be addressed by recognizing the new sources of power that reside in society. Only where democratic movements and organizations within society are already exercising all sorts of economic, social and cultural power, can electoral victory of a progressive party produce real change (2004).

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