

## **Justice, equality and conviviality: the World Social Forum's cosmopolitan vision**

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### **Editors' note:**

*We invite responses to this article for a special discussion in the upcoming (May 2014) issue of Interface. Please contact Laurence Cox (laurence.cox AT nuim.ie) if you are interested in contributing.*

*An earlier version of this article was published by mistake on 19.11.2013 with a slightly different title. We apologise to the author and any readers who downloaded this.*

### **Abstract**

*The World Social Forum (WSF) is the world's largest and most diverse transnational activist network. Its global events in Brazil, India, Kenya, Mali, Pakistan, Venezuela and Senegal and its regional, national and local avatars have gathered hundreds of thousands of participants and thousands of organisations and social movements. The WSF is a structure of loosely articulated networks and organisations aiming at individually and collectively pursuing transformative actions towards a just and equal world. To fulfil this goal, the WSF's participants seek to create spaces of dialogue where actors with different backgrounds and outlooks on society and the future can share their visions and design joint activities.*

*Arguably, the WSF's innovative contribution to global transformation is its articulation of emancipatory discourses and practices around issues of individual and collective identity, visions of the future and radical methodologies of change. This essay unpacks the WSF's cosmopolitan project, its vision of emancipated identities, convivial communities and a just planetary society and reflects on its challenges and currency vis-à-vis more contemporary forms of activism directly or indirectly elicited by the latest global crisis.*

## **Introduction**

The WSF is the brainchild of two Brazilian activists, Chico Whitaker and Oded Grajev, who during the year 2000 networked globally to canvas support to a counter-event to the World Economic Forum. The WEF meets annually since 1971 and gathers the world wealthiest CEOs and most influential finance ministers, academics, and militaries. Its meetings focus on subjects such as economic development and market expansion, democracy and governance, profit and sustainability. WSF activists, instead, stressed the importance of social issues over economic dynamics in imagining desirable futures. After a first edition gathering 15,000 participants, the WSF grew into mammoth events with tens of thousands of participants. Alongside its global forums, the WSF gave life to a proliferation of regional, national and local events across the planet. In 2010, 55 such events took place around the globe (Massiah 2011). While originally linked to the WEF, the WSF has increasingly emancipated itself from defensive positions and become more assertive in imagining and practicing better worlds. More recently, it has dialogued with the movements directly or indirectly connected to the 2007-8 global crisis (Arab Spring, *Indignados*, Occupy Wall Street, among others).

The WSF has developed over the years a complex organisational framework. In 2001 a Charter of Principles was approved by the International Council (IC) defining the contours of the open space and its vision. A global Secretariat was established in San Paulo, Brazil. Later the IC was complemented by five commissions dealing with strategy, methodology, resources, communication and expansion. Currently, the IC has around 200 members<sup>1</sup> including global social movements, La Via Campesina and the International Trade Union Confederation together counting a membership of around four hundred million, global NGOs, like Greenpeace and Action Aid, feminist networks like the Articulacion Feminista Marcosur and the World March of Women and networks of research-activists like the Network Institute for Global Democratization (NIGD) of which I am member. In 2007 a Liaison Commission was added to facilitate the work of the IC and to support the local organising committees. An ad-hoc working group, to which I participate, was set up in 2012 to explore the restructuring of the IC.

I have been involved in the WSF since 2002. I contributed to the work of a global network of activists Red de Resistencia Global (Global Resistance Network) started in the Intercontinental Youth Camp in 2003, I participated as a volunteer to the organisation of the WSF India in 2004 and I was involved, at

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=3\\_2\\_1&cd\\_language=1](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=3_2_1&cd_language=1)

a distance, in the communication process for the Bamako forum in 2006. I have participated since 2009 to the meetings of the IC and contributed to the work of its Communication, Strategy and Methodology Commissions. More recently I participated to the latest global WSF in Senegal, in February 2011.

This essay is divided into three sections. The first presents the WSF as a complex articulation of local, national and transnational networks and organisations set in both horizontal and hierarchical arrangements with each other and with the International Council and the local organising committees. The second discusses the WSF's emancipatory cosmopolitan project aiming at challenging the domination of capital over world societies and the environment. The third section introduces the transformative methodology elaborated to pursue this vision.

The themes discussed in each section resonate with each other illustrating a recursive relationship between identity, vision and methodology. Such dynamic is underpinned by closely intertwined analytical approaches and normative postures that challenge linear and instrumental relations between actors and their objectives. Moreover, ambitious methodological formulations within the WSF on how to engage existence and transformation challenge the compartmentalisation of what is (ontologies), how it can be known (epistemologies) and how it can be transformed (activisms) and present them as function of each other.

### **The structure of the open space**

This essay dialogues with a widening and deepening debate between activists and scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political sciences, geography to mention a few, often in a trans-disciplinary engagement consistent with the WSF's values. The WSF has been conceptualised as a public sphere (Conway and Singh 2009, Doerr 2007, Yla-Anttila 2005, Glasius, 2005, Smith 2004, Hardt 2002), a network (Byrd and Jasny 2010, Juris 2008, Della Porta et al. 2006; Escobar 2004; Waterman 2004), an open space (Whitaker 2005, Sparke et al. 2005), a utopian space (Tormey 2005), a space of intentionality (Juris 2008b), an embryonic global social movement or party (Teivainen 2007, Chase-Dunn and Reese 2007, Marcuse 2005, Patomaki and Teivainen 2004) or a contact zone (Conway 2011, Santos 2005).

This literature engages issues related to the reach of the forum, its local and thematic instantiations, its institutional architectures and the articulation

between them and the situated interpretations of its vision and methodology. Though highly differentiated, the discussions on the WSF share a concern for a theorization that is consistent with the WSF's methodology and contributes to the achievement of its vision (Juris 2008b, Doerr 2008, Eschle and Maiaguascha 2006 and 2007, Willis and Roskos 2007, Wilson 2007, De Angelis 2005, Nunes 2005, Vargas 2003). Issues often raised are the extent to which the WSF can a) be open and inclusive; b) develop transformative knowledge; and c) contribute to global emancipation. In what follows I aim to problematize the tensions between aspirations and practices (vision and methods), between identity and vision (being and becoming) and between identity and practices (being and doing) and considers them as a complex creative field of forces rather than bounded oppositions (Eschle and Maiaguashca 2006).

According to its Charter, the WSF is an "open meeting place" for "groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital (WSF 2001)". Inclusive and extolling differences, the WSF is a "place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action (WSF 2001)." Participants in the WSF discuss action oriented proposals without central direction. The WSF is a "context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international" (WSF 2001).

Whereas successful in making the WSF the referent of a wide section of global progressive activists, the perceived limitations of the open space are often highlighted by those who envisage the WSF as a movement focusing on strategic targets selected following a coherent theory of society. Over the years the debate has arguably described or created a cleavage between the open space and the movement advocates (Conway, 2013; Teivainen, 2012, 2007, 2004; Juris 2008; Smith, Karides et al., 2008; Santos, 2005; Adamovsky, 2005; De Angelis, 2005; Dowling 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Whitaker, 2005).

The case for an open WSF is made on the comparative advantage of networks to foster social innovation (Castells, 2001). However, assuming (as in WSF's Charter of Principles) the inclusiveness of networks overlooks the role of structural and political factors in knowledge relations and prevents the possibility to transform them. Consider this: one of the conditions of inclusion in knowledge networks is access to shared linguistic codes. In the organisational process towards the 2004 Indian WSF, for instance, English was the shared linguistic protocol. This caused the exclusion of those who expressed themselves in other Indian languages (not to mention foreign languages) reproducing in the

WSF the divide between the English speaking elite and the vast majority of the Indian population. The ignorance of the code entailed social dynamics of subordination.

Cultural protocols are as different as languages. In the WSF idioms of protest and cosmologies of the oppressed represent a variety of perspectives on the future and their unequal relations often generate oppressive communications informed by unaware ethnocentrism and other forms of embodied domination. When not engaged they reproduce dynamics of oppression. Illustration of this is the case of Muslim activists excluded by the Indian WSF due to the uncritical secularism of the organisational setting which prevented the engagement of issues of religious communalism (Caruso, 2004; Khan, 2004).

Networks operate at different scales from the local to the global and they balance autonomy and horizontality through self-organisation of heterogeneous entities and full autonomy of their components (Escobar 2004 Waterman 2004b). On the other hand, the paradoxes of informal organisation have been highlighted (see for, instance, Freeman's seminal 1970 essay). Hierarchy in autonomous networks is determined by the density of informal relations. In the WSF, Teivainen suggests, this ambiguity generates opaque and undemocratic organisational structures and a potentially authoritarian leadership which can only be made visible through an accountable and transparent organisational architecture (2007 and 2012).

Polarization of the debate notwithstanding, multiple organisational arrangements are articulated in the WSF. *Networks* of activists share communicative infrastructures, *commissions* mobilise resources and design WSF's methodology, ad-hoc *organisations* are established to coordinate and direct the efforts to hold global and local events, *executive leaderships* undertake organisational coordination, a *moral leadership* is widely acknowledged by WSF activists, *coalitions* and *alliances* are created around specific issues to carry out the political decisions taken in the deliberative spaces of the WSF, and insurgent, feminist, queer, liberated *spaces* are created and recreated.

However, dynamics of exclusion based on class, caste, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, physical ability and generation (among others) are also at play in the WSF and power/knowledge dynamics have alienated past and potential partners. For instance, at the IC meeting in Dakar in November 2010, a participant reported that social movements in Europe steered away from the WSF which they consider marred by hegemonic strategies lead by the sectarian Left. Engaging unequal social dynamics and the manipulation of difference in

the WSF could have crucial implications on activists' and commentators' projections of the WSF's vision and methodology. To these I turn in the next two sections.

### **Towards a new universality: the WSF's cosmopolitan vision**

The most recent elaboration of the WSF's vision aims at inspiring "a new universality" aiming at "rebuilding relations between humans, the environment and living beings on the basis of justice, solidarity and diversity, by giving precedence to groups and social categories which have suffered most from the dominant hegemonic model during the last five centuries, that they may have a voice. The people involved are in particular workers, peasants, diasporas, migrants, women, 'native/autochthonous' peoples, peoples struggling for independence and groups struggling for economic, social and cultural rights and for gender equality" (WSF 2011). This convergence would not be designed by a small leadership but democratically negotiated by those who "have suffered most from the dominant hegemonic model". The process to articulate this vision has gained momentum since the 2008 global crisis and it has catalysed converging imaginations of a world beyond neoliberal capitalism (WSF 2011).

At the core of neoliberalism is a social epistemology centred on the belief that the building blocks of humanity are individuals who are free by nature and are constrained only by limitations they voluntarily accept. Moreover, they are rational actors and perform best in regimes of multiple choices such as free markets. Free markets, in turn, are the most efficient tool to allocate scarce resources. Finally, scarcity induces competition, the necessary amoral good which delivers (via Invisible Hand) progress. WSF activists claim instead that the expansion of markets caused the destruction of other cultures and the forceful imposition of a civilization whose universality rested on an oppressive exercise of violence (Dussel 2002, Mignolo 2000, Quijano 2000, Chakrabarty 2000).

The WSF's activists stress how social and epistemological exclusion are tied together in a regime where technical expertise defines the rules of social and cultural interaction between societies and with the environment (Escobar 1995, Kennedy 2005). Political and institutional power of expert knowledge conflates the normative and analytical dimensions of neoliberal epistemology and in so doing it naturalises it (Bourdieu, 2001). In other words, neoliberal ideology attempts to ontologise the outcome of a representational (epistemological)

process<sup>2</sup>. Engagements in the WSF, based on personal, cultural, social and political negotiations, aim to challenge (applying Calhoun's words from a different but congruent context) "technocratic insistence on the application of expertise, as though such expertise (or the science that might lie behind it) embodies perfect, unchanging, and disinterested solutions to problems" (2002:165). Against the politics of naturalisation and de-politicisation of neoliberalism, WSF activists claim a renewed role for politics in defining values and setting agendas for global change (Teivainen 2007).

The WSF's vision, as articulated in its Charter, connects the macro-level (globalisation) to the micro-level (individual injustice). Its cornerstones are "difference", the "open space", and "non-violence" (WSF 2001). What would, then, the WSF's "other world" look like? A note by the 2003 Asian Social Forum's organisers explained that "participants (...) have a commitment to democratic values, plurality and peace". A South-American IC member stressed "the affirmation, amplification and construction of rights in the global arena. (...) widening democratic, subjective and symbolic horizons – for the recovery of a utopian perspective" (Vargas 2004). The Indian WSF stressed that "the path to sustainable development and social and economic justice does not lie in neoliberal globalisation but in alternative models for people-centred and self-reliant progress" (WSF 2003). Sustainable development, social and economic justice, people-centred and self-reliant progress are the pillars of the WSF's vision. In sum, the WSF would contribute to "a plural, just, responsible and shared world which accords equal dignity and rights to all its people" (WSF 2003).

The vision for a better world advocated by the WSF is a constellation of connected goals. Ideas are linked to each other as the movements that foster them. Networks of relations and imaginations constitute the WSF's contribution to an emergent cosmopolitan vision. Some suggest though that the WSF's vision is best understood in terms of multiple cleavages (Santos 2005). I observed, instead, how contingent polarisations of discourses in and on the WSF are escalation of potentially creative conflicts and their very existence is often a projection of simplifying analyses onto actual conflicts. In this sense, framing binary political options and, overtly or covertly, eliciting head counts, could be understood as part of a political struggle to foster particular interests rather than the transformation of those conflicts (Bush and Folger 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> A flawed process as it is built on the following three inconsistent steps: 1. the separation of ontological and epistemological truth domains; 2. the privileging of the former while 3. pretending to transform the latter into the former.

Recent developments around a “new universality” suggest WSF activists’ growing awareness by of the emergent nature of their vision and of the mutually constitutive relationship between cosmopolitan imaginations and solidarities (Eschle and Maiaguashca, 2007; Calhoun, 2002). Justice, freedom, equality, self- and collective realisation, recognition and respect of cultural differences, and radical democracy are, at the same time, methodologies and objectives of this new political subject. The WSF could develop political tools to enhance communication, interaction, intelligibility, recognition and conflict transformation the relevance of which might extend beyond its immediate reach and contribute to develop emancipatory cosmopolitan visions (Mignolo 2000, Beck 2006, Pieterse 2006).

Such emancipatory cosmopolitan visions are positioned beyond benevolent recognition and humanitarian offers of hospitality by the noble powerful, and beyond aprioristic universalism (often of Greek or Enlightenment origin) and advocate critical and dialogic negotiation of difference (Eschle and Maiaguashca 2007). This emancipatory cosmopolitan vision constitutes a path beyond the radical opposition of universalism (a la Nussbaum) and pluralism (a la Kymlicka) (Hollinger 2001). In the sense discussed so far, the WSF could contribute to the constitution of a collective subject and a shared “universality” *while* in the process of articulating deliberative and transformative solidarities rather than *a priori*. Decision-making practices as those envisioned by the WSF’s activists are about forming global solidarities, not only about steering them (Eschle and Maiaguashca 2007; Calhoun 2002). I turn now to the methodology experimented in the WSF for the construction of such global solidarity.

### **The WSF’s emancipatory pedagogy**

How is the WSF going to achieve its vision? Whereas few advocate vanguardism *tout court* (Callinicos 2004), many are aware of the exclusive nature of hegemonic processes (including those that assume organisational horizontality and inclusiveness) and of purely processual approaches that eschew decision making beyond absolute consensus. The majority of WSF activists aim at articulating a methodology of transformation centred on a conception of knowledge as relational and pursued through an emancipatory pedagogy. Such pedagogy is built on an awareness of social dynamics of exclusion and emancipation and their ambiguous nature.



As seen above, some point out a cleavage in the WSF between those advocating political engagement and those highlighting the need to remain an open space of deliberation (Pleyers 2010, Santos 2005). This debate is influenced by specific visions of the world and human nature. These, in turn, influence ideas on how knowledge about the world, existence and their transformations is acquired (Eschle and Maiaguashca 2007). The variety of positions expressed by WSF activists about knowledge, being and change are often simplified (in ways and for reasons mentioned above) along the spectrum of political methodologies that range from political to deliberative action.

According to some the two extreme positions are incommensurable. However, in practice, these positions are often vigorously negotiated and the result is often suggestive of potential transformations of the same assumptions on which oppositions are built. Illustration of this, for instance, is the statement of a member of the Strategy Commission of the WSF IC according to whom the opposition between advocates of the WSF as movement or space have been surpassed by the growing recognition that the WSF is a “space for the organisation of actions”<sup>3</sup>.

WSF activists suggest that the mediation process of this and other allegedly incommensurable oppositions could be transformative if informed by knowledge relations elaborated in collaborative pedagogical processes emancipated from the (embodied) epistemology of neoliberalism. An organiser of the 2009 WSF stated, at the IC meeting in Rabat in May 2009, that while advances are made in articulating strategies to implement the WSF’s pedagogical vision, further energy should be applied to develop “its pedagogy of liberation”. These views notwithstanding, the WSF’s pedagogy could be more closely implemented both in the IC meetings and during the events as transformative relationships between activists are often penalised by, to mention but two recurrent criticisms, organisational settings privileging verbal expression over other forms of communication and logistical failures challenging even that basic form of mutual engagement.

In the Mexico City IC meeting of May 2010, during a seminar on the WSF’s methodology, a debate took place between participants on issues regarding the methodology of the seminar itself, on the understanding of time and its management and on the nature of the communication between participants. Some challenged the relatively obsolete methodology of the meetings in which only few members had the chance to speak and for only few minutes in a day-

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<sup>3</sup> IC meeting, Dakar November 2010.

long seminar. Two days after, the plenary session on the WSF's communication was introduced by dance and songs in an attempt to explore alternative forms of exchange.

Pedagogical suggestions as the ones referred to above, informed by reciprocal responsibility, aim at inspiring dynamics of mutual emancipation of those involved in the knowledge relation, and are central to the original inspiration of the WSF (Eschle and Maiaguashca, 2006; Whitaker 2005; Giroux 2001; hooks 1994; Freire 1970). The WSF aims at elaborating a "strategy for pedagogical interventions attempting to deal with complexity and uncertainty in a responsible way. This strategy tries to avoid normalising subjectivities and does not propose consensual outcomes for dialogue, which can be seen as an innovative aspect for pedagogical processes, but which by no means offers a universal or 'ultimate' solution for all educational challenges" (Andreotti 2005, see also Teivainen 2003).

WSF pedagogies directly engage the assumptions on which the oppositions between epistemology and ontology, theory and practice, acting and thinking, being and becoming are constructed by challenging the dominant normalisation of subjectivities and naturalisation of knowledge fostered by neoliberal pedagogy. The WSF's pedagogical potentialities are expressed through the uniqueness of its political project and its fluid shape based on the daily multi-logic construction of a vision for another world. The radical pedagogy that informs the WSF according to its initiators and many of its supporters is the corner stone on which is built its most coordinated, innovative and potentially transformative challenge to neoliberalism. How is the emancipatory pedagogy of the WSF articulated?

The unifying methodology of the WSF is non-violence in all dimensions of human existence, physical, psychological, emotional to oppose the logic of war and the epistemology of violence of patriarchal neoliberalism. Non-violence can bring about social change through individual transformation expressed in political action. Moreover, it challenges the ethical and moral foundations of political systems based on oppression and exploitation. Nonviolence is central to the process of *conscientization* (Freire, 1970) of the learning individual struggling for liberation. This approach is reflected in the understanding that radical change is a long process which needs a continued commitment to transformation rather than contingent strategies replicating the epistemology of violence they wish to replace (Whitaker 2005). This slow process engages the complexity of the issues at stake; not only the political governance of

neoliberalism and the social structures on which it is predicated, but also its moral and epistemological assumptions.

The WSF's activists understand their political practice in terms of learning processes in which all actors value their own and each other's knowledge. This approach to the struggle against neoliberalism is subject to criticisms as some consider the WSF a "talking shop" unable to foster real alternatives to capitalism. Responses to those criticisms stress that the WSF could facilitate a true revolution in the very understanding of politics and social change. In this sense "(t)he other world we are trying to build has to be built first in each of us and in our organisations. We are what we do not what we think, so our world will be the outcome of what we do not what we say" (Grajev in Whitaker 2003). Self-education is understood as outcome of the multiple networked interactions of ideals and aspirations of those converging in the open space (Whitaker 2005).

Slowness and the rejection of strategic shortcuts are a moral and political commitment against the speed of unreflexive neoliberalism and the postponement of the fulfilment of human potentialities to "after the revolution". At the same time, however, slowness is object of frustration among activists who face the real or perceived urgency imposed by exploitation and inequality. At the IC meeting in Montreal, for instance, as participants took stock of the crisis of the global left vis-a-vis the ongoing global crisis, emotional calls were made by some to the need to forcefully respond to the human and social devastation caused by the crisis. I do not have the space here to delve in detail on the issues related to the conditions whereby appeals to urgency turn against themselves, but I might in passing suggest that they often slow down and weaken political processes as potential allies resist calls in the name of immediate necessity often perceived as hegemonic and instrumental, in this compounding the practices referred to above: binary framing and head counts.

The WSF's methodology can be the context in which the negation of capitalism is transformed into the affirmation of a cosmopolitan society inhabited by individuals and communities engaged in recursive processes of emancipation and constructed around values of conviviality, equality and justice. Consider the following document drafted by the WSF's International Secretariat:

*To imagine that another world is possible is a creative act to make it possible. The WSF releases contradictions and makes them operate, catalyzing, liberating creative energies. (...) The WSF intends to be a space to facilitate pulling together and strengthening an international coalition of the most diverse social*

movements and organizations, adhering to the principle of respect for differences, autonomy of ideas, and forms of struggle. (...) *It's an initiative of the emerging planetary civil society. (...) It's a movement of ideas that feeds on human diversity and possibilities, opposing the "single way of thinking".* (...) The WSF is a living laboratory for world citizenship (original italics) (WSF, 2003).

The WSF's pedagogy works at the borders, where differences touch (Mignolo 2000); it involves both symbolic aspects and practices (Eschle and Maiaguashca 2007); it is motivated by the necessity to complement a perceived incompleteness felt by the actors involved in the process; it is often facilitated by formal and informal mediators; it may best express its creativity within intentional frameworks; it entails conflicts and power dynamics. Intentional transformative processes are predicated on the awareness of political and pre-political (structural, symbolic and affective) reasons and are informed by processes of personal, cultural and social mediation (Goodwin et. al 2001, Melucci 1996). Transformative negotiations have taken place in the decade of WSF history illustrated, for instance, by the negotiations over aspects of the methodology of Dakar's event.

One object of contention referred in that context to the relationship between, on the one hand, assemblies of convergence organised by the participants aimed at coordinating actions after the Forum and, on the other, the Social Movement Assembly (SMA). The SMA gathers advocates for a more politically active WSF. Its demands to conclude the WSF events generated concerns in those believing that such prominence would project a skewed image of the WSF as observers could mistakenly confuse the declaration issued by the SMA for a declaration by the whole WSF. At the Dakar IC meeting in November 2010, it was agreed that all assemblies have the same importance and that the SMA will be "neither exclusive nor conclusive"<sup>4</sup>. A member of the Strategy Commission further remarked that "the space/movement debate is by now an empty debate as it is clear that the WSF is a space of convergence aimed at organising actions"<sup>5</sup>. These formulations show viable ways to mediate apparently incommensurable positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Personal notes.

<sup>5</sup> Personal notes.

## **Conclusion**

The WSF aims at contributing to an emancipatory cosmopolitan vision to replace capitalism and the institutions that sustain it and propagate it. The WSF's activists advocate cooperation against competition, community values against radical individualism, exchange relations over consumerism and solidarity over the survival of the fittest, with in mind a convivial and peaceful world. These values and objectives have inspired an institutional structure that aims to facilitate the building of a global alliance of social struggles across the planet. Crucial towards the construction of such alliance is a radical pedagogy that extols different knowledge and is aware of the differences of cultures, subjectivities, worldviews and aspirations among activists. Transformative pedagogy and differences transformation are supported by formal and informal, conscious and unconscious, practices of cultural, linguistic and conflict mediation.

Issues of organisational structure, vision and methodology of transformation are linked in a recursively constitutive dynamics. To respond to the challenges presented by its epistemology of differences and the conflicts that spark at their cultural, social, personal and political intersections, the WSF has been striving to articulate an institutional and organisational architecture that both responds to the challenges of a continuously changing (internal and external) environment while being faithful to its values and vision. Deliberate engagement of differences and conflicts through an intentional institutional arrangement within the WSF could contribute to facilitate an adaptive, flexible and responsive institutional and organisational architecture and to spell out and develop its emancipatory cosmopolitan vision.

The WSF has burst into the world scene with a goal of inspiring profound and lasting global transformations. Criticisms, even scepticism, have surrounded its history since its inception and internal conflicts have fragmented its membership and alienated partners and potential allies. Some have suggested that its innovative thrust has been exhausted and that it is time for global activists to develop new forms of engagement which are both more focused and more ambitious. Scholarly and activist debates have explored its organisational structure, its cultural and social base, its vision, its methodologies and have questioned its viability and legitimacy. These discussions and conflicts, some of which I reported here, show both possibilities for mediation and for escalation and fracture. These dynamics influence, in turn, normative and analytical considerations on the WSF and guide its organisational development. Hopeful projections might have generated excessive investment in the WSF about what it

could realistically help activists to achieve. It has, however, contributed to gather the widest activist convergence to date. This is no mean achievement.

Let me add a final word on the current debates, in and on the WSF, about its relationship with the new wave of transnational movements developed as direct or indirect response to latest global crisis. Whereas in many cases activists involved in the WSF are also involved in such movements as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and the Indignados, the converse is not true and some suggest that a new pole of attraction of global activism may be developing.

At the same time the flow of activist practices across different strategies does signal both resilience and adaptive capacities. Indeed activists occupy streets in some moments and converge in open spaces in others; they fight in the Tunisian streets and meet their regional and international counterparts in WSF events and, at the same time, they oppose land grab in their local farmland or urban slum, tend their urban gardens or develop fulfilling forms of care work in their communities (Federici 2012). The articulations of the current wave of movements seems to suggest, alongside expected practices and visions, further and sophisticated developments of the vision developed around the WSF in the past decade, a further widening and deepening of radical transformative relations on the planet.

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