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**World Social Forum 2015: positive points and ambiguities**

On March 28th the city of Tunis said goodbye to the 10th edition of the World Social Forum (WSF). The capital of Tunisia became, together with Porto Alegre, another large WSF identity territory, since it has hosted the global edition of the event more than once. This 2015 WSF edition, whose theme was “Dignity, Rights,” took place under unexpected adverse conditions that partially changed the course of and expectations regarding the event and made its organizers as well as participating people, institutions and movements make decisions and adapt.

**The launch of the WSF 2015 in the Tunisian post-attack political context**

The first unexpected event was a political one: on March 18th, six days before the beginning of the Forum, the country and the world were shocked by an attack against the famous Bardo National Museum, which is next to the Tunisian Parliament. 24 people were brutally murdered, 45 people were wounded, mostly tourists from different countries and regions of the world. “The blood of the peoples were mixed together,” declared the heads of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (FDTDES), which coordinates the organization of the event. The WSF 2015 was not cancelled and the fact that most delegations confirmed their participation expressed their support to the Tunisian people in their fight against anti-democratic and conservative forces. During the entire event, participants from other regions of the world repeatedly heard Tunisians saying to them on the streets: “Welcome!” and “your presence is important for the Tunisian people!”

The March 18th attack was unanimously condemned by local politicians and society and recognized as a direct threat against the democratic institution under construction in Tunisia. From this small country, with a population of 11 million people, a revolutionary process emerged in early 2011. The Arab Spring reached seven countries in the regions of Maghreb and Mashriq, in Northern Africa and in the Middle East, and overthrew four dictators. In March of 2015, four years later, Tunisia is the only country engaged in strengthening democracy.

The Bardo Museum attack may also lead to more severe consequences for the Tunisian population. Some of these concerns are a decrease in tourism, which is one of the main sectors of their economy. As for national security policies, the fight against terrorism may end up being translated into restriction of individual freedoms in the name of democracy. In the field of international politics, the attack was widely covered by the mainstream media around the world; it took place two months after the attack against the headquarters of the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, in Paris, and brought back debates on policies to fight terrorism practiced by extremist Islamic groups. The Tunisian government announced and held a march on March 29th, one day after the end of the WSF, in which European heads of state participated.

This context had great impact on the organization and the launch of the WSF. As expected, security was strongly reinforced in the main places where WSF participants would be, hotels, lodging spaces, streets, and squares. All delegations received instructions. To enter the campus of El Manar University, the event’s central headquarters, participants had to pass through metal detector and bags were searched. Although probably necessary, these measures were, at least, surprising in a space such as the WSF in which issues like mobility and the end of borders are discussed.

However, the main consequence of the attack for the WSF was of political nature. The launch of the event, which had a debate with Tunisian society and local media about the WSF, ended up addressing the fight against terrorism. The route of the Opening March was changed. The meeting place was transferred to elsewhere (Bab Saadoun) to end at the Bardo Museum, the symbolically ideal place for peoples from all over the world to express their solidarity. Different views regarding the meaning of the march divided the organizations collective that coordinated the participation of the Brazilian delegation, as well as of other organizations and movements of the International Council (IC), and the coordination of the local organizing committee, which hastily disseminated information focusing exclusively on the fight against terrorism.

At the WSF launch press conference, on March 23rd, the Associação Brasileira de ONGs (Abong), the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and the União Brasileira de Mulheres (UBM), which represent the Brazilian delegation in the organizing committee, made clear what the motto of the march was: “Peoples together for freedom, equality, social justice and peace, in solidarity to the victims of terrorism and of all forms of oppression.” Nevertheless, the local media, which had been misinformed, did not change its understanding. When being interviewed for Tunisian television, a representative of Abong was asked the following question: “what is your message, and the message of all the peoples gathered here, to the terrorists?”

**The WSF 2015 and the Brazilian delegation**

The political mistake involving the march would have been even more serious if it weren’t for an unexpected fact: an intense rain that fell during the opening of the WSF. Whether it was consequence of climate change, of the dissatisfaction of Iansã, of Saint Peter, of Allah, or a mere weather coincidence, the march was strongly affected. Under severe rain, some thousands of participants paraded, with a strong presence of Algerian representation. There was no platform, but many watchwords instead, and the crowd dispersed. Differently from the WSF 2013, the march was not a meaningful moment that marked the beginning of the event.

The WSF activities actually began the following day (25th) at the campus of El Manar University. Huge lines were formed for registration. There was plenty of delay, difficulty to inform participants and lack of organization, but what stood out was the diversity of peoples and the causes they defended.

The campus was divided in large thematic spaces: the crossroads of citizenship, which mostly held debates on the process of transition; a space dedicated to the self-determination of peoples, such as the Palestinians and the Sahrawi; the planet district that housed environmental issues, such as access to water and the preparation for the COP 21, which will be held in Paris the end of this year; the Social Justice Square in which human rights issues were discussed; the Equality, Dignity and Rights district, which gathered people with disabilities, migrants, women, the LGBT and traditional peoples, among other groups; and, finally, the Square of Economy and of Alternatives.

A total of nearly 45,000 people and 4,400 organizations and movements from 122 countries were present. They were mostly from Northern Africa and the Middle East, but also from Europe, from various African countries, as well as from other regions of the world. The number was smaller than expected (before the attack, the expectation was to gather 60,000 people), but the number remained significant. Over 1,000 self-organized activities were held during the event.

The Brazilian delegation, which was the most significant Latin American delegation, stood out due to its diversity. Nearly 200 people of over 100 organizations and movements from all over Brazil represented different segments: black movement, youth movement, women’s movement, people with disabilities movement, rural reform, health, education, trade unions, cultural movements, right to the city, environmental justice, LGBT, traditional peoples, democratization of communication, solidary economy, among others.

The participation of the Brazilian delegation resulted from a national collective project: a participatory project held mobilization events throughout the last two years, such as an international seminar to prepare for Tunis held last January, in Salvador, and an open process to select organization representatives. Simultaneously, organizations from different states made their own arrangements and articulations, such as Bahia (where some delegates received support from the State Government), Rio Grande do Norte, Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo and Amazonas. The national project, which was coordinated by seven organizations (Abong, Ciranda, CUT, Flacso, Geledés, Instituto Paulo Freire (IPF) and UBM) and managed by Abong, received support from Petrobras and the General Secretariat of the Presidency.

In the WSF space, the tent Casa Brasil was a reference and meeting point. Brazilian organizations proposed a set of debates on topics of common interest, in partnership with other international civil society actors and with Brazilian government representatives. Overall, the high quality of the following roundtables was highlighted: social and peoples’ participation, experiences and democratic models, Post-2015 Agenda, fight against racism, and democratization of communication. It is also worth noticing the reception for the Brazilian delegation organized by the Embassy of Brazil, held in the evening of the 26th, with the presence of representatives of the federal government, of São Paulo and Bahia States, among others.

It is important to note that the Brazilian delegation organized a voluntary mission to Palestine, immediately after the WSF, to check human rights violations and express their solidarity to the local population.

**The need to reinvent the WSF**

It is still too early to make an evaluation of the WSF 2015. Differently from the WSF 2013, when the success of the event was unanimous, WSF 2015 participants have expressed a wide variety of opinions. There are as many views as there are participating people and movements, each one seeing from his/her/its own specific place and according to a view that is attached to certain expectations.

Some people highlight the strengthened expression of movements, such as the LGBT movement, which held, for the first time in the country, a march on the theme; the fight against racism, which is established as a fundamental issue in the WSF dynamics and in the human rights issue in Tunisia. The region’s unemployed movement was also able to create and launch the Global Network to Fight Unemployment and Precarious Labor and called for the participation organizations from the rest of the world.

As for the Brazilian presence, the first analysis elements gathered in the meetings of the Brazilian delegation and its facilitating collective at the end of the WSF show a overall positive evaluation regarding the event, the Brazilian participation, as well as the way the mobilization project was conducted, in a transparent and democratic manner, which enabled the delegation’s plural composition, and the partnerships established with organizations and supporters. The presence in Tunis enabled spaces for political and social formation, as well as both national and international exchanges and articulations in a wide variety of fields of action.

However, there was more criticism when we compare it with the 2013 edition. The Tunisian youth, for example, lost part of its post-revolutionary enthusiasm that had characterized the previous WSF. Their enthusiasm was replaced for certain skepticism regarding the country’s ongoing democratic process after the victory of a coalition party dominated by the liberals in last year’s election. Most organizations of the Arab world, in view of civil wars, militarization of regimes, or the persistent existence of anti-democratic extremist groups, also expressed this concern with the social and political situation in the region. Not all of them could restore, during the WSF, the flame of Utopia and of hope for a better world.

We do not know up to what extent the new movements, which originated the popular uprisings in several parts of the world since the beginning of the decade, were able to establish articulations with the more traditional movements, even in the region. What called the attention were conflicts between some Algerian movements and some movements from Tunisia and Morocco, as well as the strike of the volunteers during the event, which mobilized hundreds of young people from all over Tunisia and revealed a certain uneasiness regarding both the working conditions and how the event was being conducted.

It is still early to say whether the WSF 2015 was able to outline an articulated strategy to overcome capitalism and provide viable answers to the civilization crisis humanity currently undergoes. In general, the WSF biggest challenge continues to be converging different struggles in common agendas: the final moment, the ultimate convergence, as in previous editions, was not successful. The result of all the convergence assemblies is not available yet and it should help us to better answer this question, the main objective of the WSF in the current scenario.

Establishing the articulation of struggles and convergences in common agendas was among the main challenges of this edition and remain this way at the global, regional and national levels. In the case of the Brazilian delegation, its participation was diverse on one hand, but diffused on the other. Brazilian organizations and movements also face the challenge of establishing a more global articulation. In this sense, Brazil began to establish a dynamics of articulation among organizations around the WSF and it must continue: it may help beyond the country’s borders and point directions to the WSF process itself.

Amidst the above-mentioned indeterminations and ambiguities, what may be said is that the WSF is undergoing political and methodological difficulties, to say the least. The WSF risks becoming a large reflection fair coordinated by few organizations that are distant from the reality and the actions of grassroots movements. And NGOs, which are mistakenly dealt with as a monolithic block, are in the center of the complaints regarding the governance of the WSF process.

During the International Council meeting, which took place in the two days that preceded the event, many young people cried: “you behave like a government!” or also “you do not represent us!” These statements indicate the need for a new governance for the WSF process and the need to reinvent how politics is done. The IC decision to confirm that the next global edition of the event will be held in Montreal, Quebec (Canada), in August 2016, may help in this sense: to respond to an initiative of that country’s youth movements, which, just like in Tunisia and in Brazil, demonstrate to have a new political culture.