Global Crises and the Crisis of Global Leadership

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS _ CAMBRIDGE 2012

10 Global democratization without hierarchy or leadership? The World Social Forum in the capitalist world

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Summary

The globalization protest movements offer examples of the dilemmas that a search for democratic transnational political agency, and corresponding forms of leadership, are likely to encounter in coming years. Nevertheless, and despite their limitations, they have brought the question of democratic change onto the agenda of world politics, building on the alliances between transnational social movements that have existed for decades, or even centuries. It is now very difficult to ignore the social movements, non-governmental organizations, critical think tanks and other actors that are challenging the financial and cultural supremacy of transnational capitalism. Even if it is misleading to claim, as *The New York Times* did after the anti-war protests of February 2003, that they have become the world's 'second superpower', they form part of any comprehensive picture of the new world politics. What, though, is this new politics? This chapter reflects on this question without assuming that political change is necessarily tied to conquering the state. It uses the World Social Forum as a key example, as it symbolizes many questions of articulation between social movements, questions of leadership and the construction of a new common sense implicit in the new global politics.[1]

Introduction

The new global movements emerged in the eyes of the global media with the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. Since then the WSF has opened a window for contestations about the future of humanity. The deeper roots of these movements originate in the crises and contradictions of

[1] The WSF charter of principles, cited throughout this chapter, can be found at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2 (accessed 29 June 2010).

North–South relations, in particular in resistance to the policies used to download the effects of the Third World debt crises of the 1980s through neoliberal reforms. In these contestations, the various groups usually grouped together as 'global civil society' have increased in visibility and in agenda-setting capacity.

One of the novel features of many such movements is the global scope of their aims, in many cases intertwined with local and communal practices. This global focus also implies a search for less state-centred conceptions of political agency, and struggles against depoliticization and what I call 'economism': the effort to render key aspects of material life as non-political and outside political contestation – a key ideological legitimation of neoliberalism (Teivainen 2002). Another concern for some of the movements is how to democratize their own modes of action while aiming at a democratization of the world. The globalization of social movements and networks through initiatives such as the World Social Forum gives it new challenges. I use the WSF as a key example in this chapter because it raises questions of articulation between social movements, leadership and the remaking of world order.

As compared to previous transnational alliances seeking radical change of the world system, such as the early trade-union-based movements or communist-party-based internationals, many of today's movements seem to take more seriously the idea that democratic change needs to be generated through democratic forms of action. This is reflected, for example, in the emphasis on horizontal networks rather than hierarchical organization. One of its manifestations is the idea of an *open space* – a catchword of various social forums organized throughout the world since 2001. The open space idea has many democratic implications. One of them is that no single movement should be able to claim that its aims have intrinsic strategic priority over others. An example of the reasoning might go as follows: 'The class contradictions that your movement is facing should have no priority over the gender contradictions we confront. My sexual identity is no less important than your ethnicity. Therefore, none of us should have leadership over the others in our movement of movements.'

The democratic coexistence in the open spaces created by the movements has been refreshing and empowering. At the same time, its relativistic undertones can become frustrating in devising effective strategies to change the world. As frustrations have become more evident in and around the open spaces in the WSF and elsewhere, a new enthusiasm for explicit, and also hierarchical, forms of leadership has gained ground among some participants.

Prefigurative and strategic dimensions of leadership

Among today's activists, particularly within movements considered autonomist or anarchist, Mohandas Gandhi's call 'We must be the change we want to see in the world' has become an important source of inspiration. *Prefigurative* politics – trying to act today according to the principles one wants to establish in tomorrow's world – has challenged visions of social change that emphasize the need to establish strategic leadership through a party or state machinery. In the World Social Forum process, these contending visions have been expressed as differences about the articulations that the forum should seek, for example, with Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, or other 'traditionally political' leaders. Some of the activists have become frustrated with the civil-society-centredness of the WSF open space. They argue that, to become more effective, the forum needs to become more 'political' and therefore include progressive parties and state leaders, or at least consider them as strategic allies. Others claim that this would lead to destroying the civic virtues of the process and create new attempts to subordinate the civil society movements to 'politics as usual'.

I therefore argue that, in order to generate significant social change, forms of action need to be both *prefigurative* and *strategic*. Given the transnational and global spaces that social movements share, this means that many dilemmas have to be confronted. Some derive from the insufficient vocabulary available to discuss non-state-driven global political agency. In the state-centric mode of transformative action it used to be relatively easy to refer to the political parties as the key organizational form that could become – for better or for worse – the instrument of change beyond 'single-issue' movements. In the global context, global civil society or transnational corporations are often referred to as significant political *actors*, but there are more difficulties in talking about global political *agency*.

With friends and colleagues I have started discussing the concept of 'global political parties' (Patomäki and Teivainen 2007). Some advocate establishing (sooner rather than later) such political parties (e.g. in a 'Fifth International', as promoted by Samir Amin, and, more recently, by Chávez). Others, including me, place more emphasis on reflecting on the possibility of global parties as a way to rethink the dichotomy between depoliticized conceptions of civil society and traditional forms of political action expressed by parties. The world as a whole is not merely an enlarged copy of territorial states. To change that world beyond the territorial limits of states, we need to develop new ways of thinking politically about transformative agency.

For the new vocabulary of political agency, a country-specific example that can offer some new language is how Bolivian indigenous movements, coca growers' associations, trade unions and other civic actors created an alliance, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), that they called a 'political instrument' instead of a political party. Both the vocabulary and the praxis of this process offer insights into a new kind of relationship between social movements and political action. The leader of the movement, Evo Morales, has been president of Bolivia for over five years, and MAS, a novel movement of movements, increasingly resembles a relatively traditional party. When MAS was an oppositional force it was easier to remain committed to the bottom-up mode of democratic organizing, in which the movements challenged the state through coordinated communal action. Once in government, various forms of hierarchical practice have become more evident. Perhaps almost by definition, groups with radically democratic aims tend to make compromises with hierarchical structures of command once they conquer the government. At the very least, the Bolivian example can help us discuss political instruments and agency without falling back on the conceptual baggage of traditional political parties. The experience of MAS also shows us how difficult it is to create radical social change inside one country. This experience points to the question of transnational transformative processes.

In order to understand broader possibilities of global democratization, we also need to focus on the political implications of new contestations and new political instruments. Debates on the globalization protest movements have all too often relied on a dichotomous separation between depoliticized civic movements and state-centred understandings of the political. This is too simplistic. The lack of attention to the political articulations among the movements is reflected in how they have been considered as part of an emerging 'global civil society'. In much of the academic and activist literature, attributes such as 'horizontal' tend to characterize the spaces of civil society, and relations of power and hierarchies among the actors of these spaces are often simply assumed away. The tendency to project desired qualities in the analysed phenomena has been strong in much of this literature. According to David Chandler (2007), who has analysed this tendency critically, the idea of global civil society as a distinct space is also seen as an aspect of its moral distinctiveness. Accordingly, using the World Social Forum as an example, I explore civic-driven struggles not only as contestations entailing efforts to transform the unjust structures of the world but also as involving contradictions and new political articulations among organizations that constitute the globalization protest 'movement of movements'.

The World Social Forum and global democratization

The WSF had its first global meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001. Thereafter it has been expanding through various mechanisms, including holding its main meetings in other continents, mushrooming into hundreds of local, national, regional and thematic forums around the world and increasing the diversity of the groups that participate. It by no means includes all the movements and networks that aim at democratic transformations. Its composition has various geographical, sectoral, ideological and civilizational limitations. However, its emergence was a key moment in the gradual shift in the aims of many of these movements. The reactive protest dimension has been partially replaced by a more proactive democratization dimension. A somewhat simplistic but illustrative way to locate this shift is to call the wave of activism that made one of its major public appearances during the World Trade Organization meeting in 1999 in Seattle 'globalization protest movements', and to use the term 'global democratization movements' to characterize the activism of the new millennium as symbolized by the WSF. In other words, the WSF has provided a channel through which many of the globalization protest movements of the 1990s have become global democratization movements of the twenty-first century.

What are these thousands of movements? As to their formal status, the World Social Forum charter of principles states that the WSF 'brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world'. The standard definition of civil society offered by the WSF charter states that it is 'a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context'. Despite the oft-repeated lip service to the WSF as an open civil society space, it is not open to all kinds of social movements and NGOs. According to the relatively wide ideological orientation of the WSF charter of principles, the organizations that can participate in the forum are defined as 'groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth'.

There is no ideological litmus test to screen the participants. One of the differences between the movements is the extent to which the desired change means building a 'social' counterpart to balance the 'economic' emphasis of the dominant institutions of the world, such as the initial symbolic adversary, the World Economic Forum at Davos. Even if the participating movements are, at least in principle, committed to the intrinsically political aim of structural and institutional changes to

the world order, some have more limited 'social' aims, such as making the voices of their constituencies heard or alleviating the suffering of marginalized communities. Although these differences sometimes create tensions and suspicions about the level of radicalism of one or another, the WSF has been relatively successful in accommodating groups that in many other contexts have tended to accuse each of being excessively 'reformist' or 'revolutionary'. The overall WSF slogan, 'Another world is possible', has been sufficiently imprecise to allow for such coexistence.

The Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire (2000) has stated that, in order to change the world, it is first necessary to know that it is indeed possible to change it. This helps us understand one dimension of why, during its early years, the World Social Forum experienced such spectacular growth and provided so much inspiration for social movements and other actors engaged in processes of democratic transformation. The apparently simple WSF slogan, 'Another world is possible', generated enthusiasm precisely because it helped undermine the demobilizing influence of another simple slogan, generally attributed to Margaret Thatcher, according to which 'There is no alternative' to the existing capitalist order.

Following the repetition at forum after forum that another world is indeed possible, many WSF participants have become eager to know what that other world may look like and how people are supposed to get there. One of the main problems haunting the WSF is its perceived incapacity to provide adequate answers to these questions. Many of its participants and observers have become increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the open space method. Over the years the question of politicizing the WSF has thus become an increasingly controversial issue. One of the dimensions of this question is how to be politically meaningful without being traditionally political (traditional politics is generally understood as what parties and governments are engaged with).

The road from politicizing protests to transformative proposals is filled with dilemmas. The dilemmas become particularly thorny when the aim is to articulate the proposals of many movements into collective projects to create a radically different and more democratic world, as reflected in the World Social Forum charter of principles.

When speaking about 'globalization of solidarity as a new stage in world history', the charter says that it will rest on 'democratic international systems and institutions'. It also tells us that the WSF upholds respect for the practices of 'real democracy' and 'participatory democracy'. Various other parts of the charter can also be regarded as expressions of a radically democratic spirit. Even if democracy is not formally defined in the charter, my interpretation is that it refers to a world in

which people have increased possibilities to participate in the decisions about the conditions of their lives, through participatory and representative mechanisms alike.

Various formulations of the charter express the prefigurative idea that democratic changes must be achieved through democratic means. In particular, it defines the WSF as an open meeting place for the 'democratic debate of ideas'. Especially during the first years of the process, there was relatively little attention to how democratically the space was, or should be, organized. Even if the forum asserts 'Another world is possible', it is embedded in the existing one, and many of its inequalities are reproduced in the internal mode of organization of the WSF. While speaking the language of a leaderless open space, the WSF cannot totally escape the hierarchies and command structures that exist in the capitalist world system.

Confronting economism outside and inside the World Social Forum

For the reproduction of the capitalist world system, one of its key ideological mechanisms has been the depoliticization of power relations, especially but not only those located in the socially constructed sphere of the 'economic'. The expansion of capitalism in the past few decades has expanded the boundaries of the economic institutions through economic crises, privatization processes and the strengthening of economic ministries, central banks and other private authority mechanisms vis-à-vis other state organs, such as the increased importance of credit-rating agencies. Among the most visible global vehicles of this expansion have been the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank. However, one of the ideological contradictions of the crisis-ridden contemporary expansion of capitalism is that, when the 'economic' institutions of governance become more powerful, their political nature becomes, at least potentially, more evident. In this sense, the expansion of capitalism has created possibilities for such responses to challenge the legitimation of neoliberal capitalism that stems from how economic institutions are represented as non-political, and therefore not subject to democratic contestation. This is a key form of 'economism'.

The political nature of economic institutions therefore does not become evident automatically, since, to use the Gramscian term, it has become part of the 'common sense' of disciplinary neoliberalism. Indeed, although the contradictions of capitalism create the conditions for critical responses, these responses are not generated without active social forces. The new transnational activism that emerged in the 1990s

has made it more visible that the 'economy' is a political and historical construction. To the extent the movements can convincingly demonstrate that apparently economic institutions are in reality important sites of power, it becomes more difficult for the latter to be legitimately based on inherently non-democratic principles, such as 'One dollar, one vote'. The logic bears many similarities with the way that feminist movements have politicized patriarchal power by claiming 'The personal is political'. Their insistence that the patriarchal family is not a neutral space but consists of political relations that need to be brought under democratic control has been an important factor in creating legal and informal norms to regulate issues that range from childcare to domestic violence. Global civic-driven democratization projects should keep learning from this politicizing spirit of the feminists so as to legitimate the validity of democratic claims upon global institutions.

The doctrine of economic neutrality is most obvious in institutions such as the IMF, but it also manifests itself in the World Social Forum process. Especially during the first years of the process, questions of funding, labour relations and the provision of services within the WSF were considered mainly technical issues, handled through a depoliticized 'administration of things'. The fact that the WSF is organized inside a capitalist world is also evident in the disadvantaged structural position of participants from relatively poor organizations and countries.

To claim that the World Social Forum is an open space may sound like a joke in bad taste for those who do not have the material means to enter the space. In simple terms, to send representatives to faraway WSF events, an organization needs to have money or friends with money. There are examples of people compensating the lack of material resources with enthusiasm, such as the case of the dozens of young Peruvian activists who travelled for days in harsh conditions, including being held at gunpoint by robbers, with inexpensively organized bus caravans to the WSF events, where they held dance parties to collect money for the return trip. However, in general terms, the question of which organizations get to be represented by delegates in the WSF has been heavily conditioned by unequally distributed material resources. Furthermore, even if the organizers of the WSF have increasingly tried to apply the principles of a non-capitalist 'solidarity economy' in the forum itself, the apparently mundane issue of the logistics of accommodation has been greatly conditioned by local hotels heavily increasing their prices in order to make more profit from the events.

One example of the dilemmas that structural inequalities cause for the attempt to practise democracy inside the World Social Forum became evident in 2005. During the previous years there had been a debate on

whether the organizing committees should single out certain key events in the programme. Various criticisms had been made of the undemocratic dimension of the organizers creating a hierarchy of events, based ultimately on political considerations. As a result, when the fifth forum was held in Porto Alegre in 2005, the printed programme was for the first time horizontal, in the sense that it did not designate any key panels. However, with this apparently democratic coexistence of events, the market mechanism became an important factor defining the relative importance of panels. Organizations with more resources to produce colourful posters and leaflets or distribute T-shirts and other paraphernalia became the visible ones. After that experience, organizers sought to give more equitable visibility to disadvantaged groups.

More generally, over the years there has been a learning process, and increasing attention is now being paid to the ways in which structural inequalities affect the process. Solidarity funds have been strengthened to help organizations from poor countries (and sometimes poor organizations from rich countries, such as the Poor People's Human Rights Campaign from the United States) to participate in the decision-making organs of the World Social Forum. The choice of the venue has become an object of debates about its ownership structure and labour conditions. The question of the funding for the process has also become more politicized, especially after there were various controversies related to the role of the Ford Foundation in the preparations for the forum held in Mumbai in 2004.

Enlightened tyranny of structurelessness

There are various depoliticizing elements of the World Social Forum charter of principles and other guidelines that have problematic consequences for democratic practice within the WSF. The dilemma is that these elements help avoid conflicts within the WSF and have therefore contributed to its success, but at the same time they make the WSF governance bodies vulnerable to accusations of reproducing undemocratic practices. The widely held idea that, in order to be an 'open space', the WSF cannot be considered an 'organization' or 'institution' also contributes to its internal depoliticization. To use an expression derived from the feminist movements of the early 1970s, the unwillingness to consider the WSF an organization politically, with rules and regulations, contributes to a 'tyranny of structurelessness'.

In civic-driven contexts based on principles of horizontality and a lack of élite leaders, there exists the danger that dominant cliques emerge without procedures to constrain their power. Jo Freeman (1972), who

coined the concept of the tyranny of structurelessness, has analysed the proliferation of groups that claimed to be leaderless and structureless among the feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the attempted structurelessness was impossible. For Freeman, to strive for a structureless group was 'as useful, and as deceptive, as to aim at an "objective" news story, "value-free" social science or a "free" economy'. In the WSF, the analogy with the illusions about a 'free economy' is evident in accounts that explicitly or implicitly consider the WSF an unregulated 'marketplace of ideas' – an example of which I have described above regarding the dilemmas of designating key panels in the programme.

For many feminists of the early 1970s, the attempts at structurelessness were a reaction against a society and particular political institutions and organizations that were perceived as over-structured. In the World Social Forum, the attempts to avoid a structured organizational form have various explicit and implicit references to the kinds of organizations that need to be avoided or excluded. The WSF was conceived as something that is not a political party, not a non-governmental organization and not even a social movement. All these presumed to rely on excessively hierarchical forms of leadership; at the beginning, the openness of the WSF was regarded as virtually synonymous with structurelessness, with similar dilemmas for democratic process.

When analysing the World Social Forum space, one needs to distinguish the WSF events as gathering places from the governance organs that make the decisions about organizing the events. Although the former have more of the attributes of an 'open space', in the case of the latter the open space discourse is more misleading. In the WSF governing organs, practices based on depoliticized understandings of an open space have had paradoxical consequences. On the one hand, it is sometimes argued that, because the WSF is an open space, its organs should have few explicit rules or procedures. On the other hand, if there are no procedures for including new members in its governing bodies, such as the International Council, they can become closed spaces by default. From 2002 to 2004 the International Council was unable to process membership applications because there were no rules on how they should be processed. The illusion of structurelessness contributed to the strengthening of organizational structures that prevented the inclusion of new members.

According to the WSF charter of principles, the forum 'does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants'. As an empirical description, this part of the charter is obviously erroneous, because various kinds of disputes of power have always existed within

the WSF. As a statement of wish, it can also be considered problematic because it obstructs the possibilities to create procedures through which the disputes can be channelled in a transparent and democratic manner.

Some of the disputes inside the World Social Forum in general, and the International Council in particular, are more traditionally ideological, such as the perennial intra-left ones between 'social democrats', 'communists' and 'Trotskyites', reflecting the fact that WSF participants have various political affiliations. However, many, and perhaps most, disputes are difficult to classify along the traditional divides of the historical left. Nonetheless, the difference between the advocates of conquering state power, either through elections or other means, and those who emphasize more autonomist strategies is one of the main cleavages in the WSF as a whole.

According to Boaventura Sousa de Santos (2005), the multiple cleavages are one of the main strengths of the World Social Forum. For example, many of the radical activists of the WSF Youth Camp may agree with Francisco Whitaker, one of the original 'founding fathers' (sic) of the WSF, on the importance of keeping the WSF as horizontal as possible, even if they may disagree with him on various substantial issues about the future of the world. Although I find the general point of Santos correct, it would be a mistake to assume that it results in an overall harmony. Political disputes have existed, will exist and should exist in the organizational structure of the WSF. They sometimes take place in the plenary debates of the International Council or the organizing committees, but often they are waged in the corridors or through private e-mail exchanges, hidden from the public eye of the other WSF participants and observers.

As long as there are no clear procedures for resolving disputes within the governance bodies of the WSF, the workings of power will continue to take place mostly through mechanisms that have not been collectively agreed on. It is sometimes argued that this in itself is not a problem as long as the WSF process produces 'results' (e.g. enthusiasm, mobilizations or plans to democratize the world) that legitimate the way it functions. In other words, even if the WSF has elements of a tyranny of structurelessness in the sense described above, it should not matter as long as the tyranny is enlightened. This pragmatic argument, even if seldom stated in such explicit terms, has been reproduced from the beginning of the WSF organizing process. The depoliticized structurelessness was undoubtedly an important element in the initial enthusiasm about the novelty of the WSF. However, the WSF needs to take the political more seriously if it is to become an increasingly important platform for democratic transformations. This means recognizing relations of power in order to democratize them.

Moreover, the World Social Forum never had a 'democratic founding moment' that would have given it a clear democratic mandate. This paradox of democracy is common to most real-world processes in which a relatively democratic order has been established. Even if many national constitutions establish that the 'people have the power', the people were often absent at the moment of establishing the first constitution (Doucet 2005: 137–55). Similarly, it is logically impossible for a civic space such as the WSF ever to construct a totally democratic basis for its governance, but this paradox should not prevent it from constantly attempting to democratize its internal governance. In this issue, as in many others, there has certainly been a learning process, and questions of internal democracy are now taken more seriously than beforehand.

Can an open space generate action?

Apart from the depoliticization that hinders democratic practices within the World Social Forum, there exists another kind of depoliticization: that which consists of such rules and practices that reproduce the idea that the WSF is an open space, an arena that should have no attributes of a movement or a political actor (Whitaker 2002a, 2002b). The WSF provides a space for actors that may construct projects of democratic transformation in different contexts, both local and global. However, the WSF itself has avoided issuing declarations of support for any particular political processes, mobilizations or even responsibilities (Grzybowski 2003).

Relying on a more pronounced dichotomy between the forum as a space and the forum as a movement, Whitaker (2002a) has criticized the 'self-nominated social movements' seeking to serve their own mobilizing dynamics and objectives. Within the International Council, Whitaker has been the staunchest defender of maintaining the WSF as a space without ownership.

Among the World Social Forum activists, Walden Bello has challenged the open space method defended by Whitaker. In the International Council Bello represents Focus on the Global South, a Bangkok-based radical think tank. Like many who criticized the limitations of the open space method, Bello approves of Hugo Chávez's call to the 2006 forum in Caracas to enter 'spaces of power' at the local, national and regional levels. Pointing to the difficulties the open-space-oriented WSF has had in developing a strategy of counter-hegemony, Bello asks whether the new stage in the struggle of the global justice and peace movement means that the WSF should give way to new modes of global organization, resistance and social transformation (Bello 2007).

The pressures for more explicit political will formation are also expressed by and through the media. The press has tended to look at the World Social Forum as a (potential) political actor in itself, while many of the organizers have wanted to downplay this role and argue that they simply provide a space for different groups to interact. These different conceptions of the event have clashed, for example, when the press has asked for final declarations and considered the lack of any such document a proof of weakness in the organization. This perspective ignores the fact that the intention of most organizers has never been to produce any official final document that would pretend to represent the views of the thousands of other organizations that have participated.

This perspective is also sometimes expressed by arguing that the forum 'talks the talk' but does not 'walk the walk'. However, the example of the anti-war demonstrations of February 2003 reveals that it is at least partially misleading to call it a mere talking shop, even if it never made an official declaration against the US-led war in Iraq. Of course, the transnational anti-war demonstration of 15 February 2003 did not stop the war, but it was the largest civic-driven single-day mobilization in the history of humankind. Moreover, to a significant extent it was generated from within the social forum processes, especially the first European Social Forum, which took place in Florence in October 2002, and the Assemblies of Social Movements, which gather inside the WSF events without claiming to represent the WSF process as a whole.

The way the World Social Forum related to the anti-war demonstrations of 2003 turns the argument about it being a mere talking shop on its head. Was it not rather that the WSF did not talk the talk (i.e. pronounce anti-war statements with a unified voice through its governing bodies) but focused on walking the walk (i.e. helping to facilitate and organize the demonstrations and integrating the war theme visibly in its programme)? This example does not in itself invalidate the more general criticism about the WSF being of too little use for projects and movements of social transformation, but it shows that the real issue is not between 'talking' and 'doing'. It is between different conceptions of the WSF as a political process.

In the debates on the political usefulness of the WSF, there has been a tendency, on the one hand, to call for more traditional forms of political agency, such as making strategic alliances with progressive states and parties. On the other hand, those who have defended the open space orientation of the process have had difficulties in showing that the process has already been politically useful, and has indeed generated various kinds of action. One of the problems for the latter is the difficulty of establishing connections between what happens inside the forums and

what happens outside. For example, we can speculate on the impact of the social forum process on the left turn in most South American elections since the first World Social Forum was held in 2001. To what extent have the enthusiasm and articulations generated by the WSF played a role in these concrete results? Some of the founding fathers of the WSF may emphasize its role in private conversations after a couple of drinks, but tend to avoid making such declarations publicly in order to avoid sounding arrogant or eager to assume leadership over people's campaigns. From an academic perspective, it is difficult, though not impossible, to show causal connections in this issue. The most concrete outcomes of the WSF consist of the dialogues, articulations and learning processes that take place in the workshops, panels, seminars, festivities and corridors of the events. I would argue that these encounters have helped generate political action, of which the above-mentioned anti-war demonstrations are one example.

New empirical research is needed to establish other connections. For example, to me it is obvious that the constantly intensifying articulations of the Andean indigenous movements, both between them across national boundaries and vis-à-vis other movements, have benefited from the social forums. The members of the different movements have been able to use the World Social Forum space to plan common action and to find various kinds of allies in other movements. They have also been able to strengthen their presence in the local and national politics of their own regions, either through participation in victorious electoral campaigns, as in the case of Ecuador and Bolivia, or through assuming an increasingly important role in protests against governments and corporate power, as in Peru. Some participant observers of the process, such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Vijay Pratap, have also claimed that organizing the WSF in India in 2004 played a significant role in the national elections later that year, in which the United Progressive Alliance defeated the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Be that as it may, the more general point here is that the WSF initiative has been able to generate politically relevant agency without relying significantly on traditionally political forms of organizing.

What about changing the whole world? The World Social Forum has been useful for articulating campaigns around world trade, as evidenced by the coordination of action around the WTO negotiations. The transnational peasant alliance Via Campesina has been an important actor in these campaigns, and also in the WSF process, even if in recent years it has often raised criticism of the limitations of the open space method. Other concrete examples could be mentioned, but here, towards the end of the chapter, I would like to take up the role of the

WSF in facilitating a debate and learning process on the institutional features of the possible futures of the world.

Towards possible worlds

The emergence of the globalization protest movements since the mid-1990s may imply a world-historical possibility for transnational democratic changes. Whereas in the early 1990s the belief in the non-political nature of the global economic institutions was still relatively strong, today, as the world economic crisis has globalized, articulated in a wider organic crisis, more people are likely to laugh at the claim that the IMF and World Bank are purely technical and non-political institutions. Apart from the politicizing efforts of the movements, several self-defeating actions, such as the scandals related to the nomination and sacking of Paul Wolfowitz as the president of the World Bank, have certainly contributed to this situation. As regards transnational corporations, the appearance of the corporate social responsibility talk is one of the defensive mechanisms that the rulers of these institutions resort to when their political nature becomes more evident.

In this context, the global democratization movements are facing an important window of opportunity. The doctrine of economic neutrality, or economism, has been a key ideological mechanism defending the undemocratic governance of global economic institutions. However, as Stephen Gill points out in Chapter 13, the so-called 'independent central banks' that have led many of the gigantic bailouts that have one-sidedly been in support of financial capitalism in 2008–10 are in fact not independent at all; they are controlled by the very same sets of private financial interests that generated the financial collapse – the very institutions that failed to regulate and adequately govern global finance. By showing that the actions of these constitutionally independent and apparently technical institutions are by no means neutral, non-political or beyond the realm of politics, the movements can in principle further open up the spaces constituted by their praxis for democratic demands.

This would leave the rulers of the undemocratic institutions of global governance with a dilemma. Either they would have to admit that they in fact favour authoritarian political rule to democracy, or, preferably, they would have to participate in the democratization of their institutions. By focusing on the inherently political nature of the transnational and global 'economic' spaces and by insisting on the thereby legitimated need to democratize them, the ideologically

empowering banner of democracy may be taken out of the hands of neoliberals. It is, of course, open to debate as to the extent to which this shift of emphasis has happened in the global media, but the problems related to the global crisis of accumulation and undemocratic global governance are mentioned more often than previously. In addition, empirical findings, even before the current post-2008 crisis, have confirmed that the concerns expressed by the globalization protest movements 'are shared by a large majority of the national public opinions', at least in Europe (della Porta 2007). One of the often heard counterclaims is that globalization protest movements themselves are organized in a not too democratic fashion, which is one of the reasons why the question of internal democracy should be taken more seriously in spaces such as the World Social Forum. Another counterclaim is that, beyond repeating that another world is possible, the movements cannot offer any concrete alternatives for future institutional arrangements.

The political usefulness of formulating models of transnational, cosmopolitan or global democratic institutions of the future is not only that they can provide inspiration for those who might struggle for their realization. Such models are also important for the task of undermining the existing networks of power, because the legitimacy of the latter has been largely based on the 'There is no alternative' discourse. As analysed above, the movements participating in the World Social Forum have played a part in undermining the hegemony of this discourse. Among the events of the WSF, there have also been many debates on alternative institutional orders of the world.

One of the internal tensions of the WSF has been that those who organize panels on global democratic orders are often perceived as disconnected from concrete grass-roots struggles. One reason for this is the tendency of many analysts of alternative world orders to extrapolate the institutions of the existing territorial states to the global level. Especially, though not only, within the world federalist tradition, it is common to argue that we need to create a world parliament and the corresponding executive government and judiciary, just as in existing democratic states but on a larger scale, in order to democratize the world. A perceived problem in these kinds of global utopias is that they often seem to assume that the current institutional order of the 'liberal democratic' states is a sufficiently democratic model for future world orders. For those sectors of the movements that have radical critiques of the existing states, this assumption does not hold water. Apart from the desirability of this kind of world governance, the extent to which it is feasible is also questionable.

Even if another world is possible, not everything is. For example, it is not realistic to imagine that the World Bank, or in particular the narrower IMF, could be significantly democratized, especially in their current form. As stated above, it may still be useful to demand their democratization in order to delegitimate, sink or shrink them, but we should not have unwarranted illusions. The WTO, even now ultimately based on the possibility of using the 'one country, one vote' mechanism in its decision-making, is more ambiguous. Somewhat similar ambiguity exists in the United Nations, with its (somewhat democratic) General Assembly and (highly undemocratic) Security Council (Patomäki and Teivainen 2004).

One of the difficult questions is that, although the principle of the 'one country, one vote' mechanism is in theory the main decision-making method of these institutions, in practice it is often overruled by other mechanisms (more common in the UN) or not put into practice at all (as mostly happens in the WTO). The limited but real formal equality is not translated into democratic practice. Thus, it is tempting to conclude that formal equality does not matter in global affairs, and that therefore global civic-driven projects should discard attempts to democratize global institutions. However, it is important to understand why the moderately democratic international decision-making models such as the UN General Assembly are in such a bad shape. One of the main factors here is that the institutions themselves and their member states are both often subject to disciplinary mechanisms, especially related to their financial dependence.

It is not that formal equality would be unimportant; it is, rather, that the movements should pay particular attention to the various forms of conditionality and dependence that make the practice of democracy so difficult in international contexts. In other words, campaigns for global democratic institutions cannot have much hope unless there are successful campaigns to tackle issues such as foreign debt and the other forms of financial or commercial dependence that the members of these institutions face.

Global democratization movements, like all others, should undertake a realistic analysis of what is possible and what is not, and then make strategic prioritizations based on that analysis. This does not mean falling back to the 'old-left ideals' of focusing almost exclusively on some particular contradiction of the world, defined by a central committee, and leaving everything else to be resolved after the great transformation. Neither does it mean that everything about the internal organization of the process needs to be politicized all the time. At certain moments, such as the creation of the World Social Forum, an avoidance of explicitly

political questions may be useful for establishing spaces of learning and articulation. Nevertheless, when these kinds of civic spaces expand across continents and civilizations, it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid explicitly political questions of leadership and future institutional orders.

This groundbreaking collection on global leadership features innovative and critical perspectives by scholars from international relations, political economy, medicine, law and philosophy, from North and South. The book's novel theorization of global leadership is situated historically within the classics of modern political theory and sociology, relating it to the crisis of global capitalism today. Contributors reflect on the multiple political, economic, social, ecological and ethical crises that constitute our current global predicament. The book suggests that there is an overarching condition of global organic crisis, which shapes the political and organizational responses of the dominant global leadership and of various subaltern forces. Contributors argue that meaningfully addressing the challenges of the global crisis will require far more effective, inclusive and legitimate forms of global leadership and global governance than those that have characterized the neoliberal era.

'This book provides an insightful Gramscian analysis of the forms of the privately based expert leadership that characterizes the current global order. The authors explore the weak material foundation of this leadership – made evident by climate change, water shortages and the end of cheap oil – and they point to the emergence of new potential sources of global leadership in professions (such as medicine) and a new global network of courts committed to a broad interpretation of human rights, in global social movements, and in the transformation-oriented traditions of a politically energized Islam.'
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NEIL BRENNER, Professor of Urban Theory, Harvard University

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Cover illustration: *In The Beginning 2* by Pete Scarth.

Cover designed by Hart McLeod Ltd

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ISBN 978-1-107-67496-7