

# **Looking ahead : Revisiting the World Social Forum**

## Meeting on the Viral Open Space - May 23 2020

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE DEBATE**

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The introductory note that we have circulated so far on the WSMDiscuss list<sup>1</sup> was not a complete elaboration. In fact, it was at first only an answer to Jai, emphasizing some considerations, because he asked me about my opinion on the situation of the WSF, and after discussion we arrive at the common note that you received as an introductory paper for the discussion on the WSMDiscuss list.

The only thing that I know for sure in these times of great uncertainty is that contradictions will be growing and that we have to identify, understand, and analyse these contradictions.

I will just, in the ten minutes I have, present five reflections :

**First,**

**The WSF is the third phase of Alterglobalism. The fourth phase will be reinvented**

The alterglobalist movement, is the anti-systemic movement around and against neoliberal capitalist globalisation. As such, the movement extends and renews historical movements fighting for workers' rights, peasants' rights, women's rights, and decolonization.

It has - since the end of the 1970s – known three phases : From the end of the 1970s to 1989, the struggles against debt and structural adjustment programmes, especially in the Global South; from 1989 until Seattle in 1999, the large demonstrations against the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and the G7; from 2000 on, the World Social Forums and a wide range of global direct actions; Since the financial crisis of 2008 and the movements that took shape in 2011, we are in the midst of a fourth phase of alterglobalism, that is presently taking shape, under historically new circumstances – of which we are a part and which we must invent.

The 2008 financial crisis revealed the exhaustion of neoliberalism and the fragility of financial capitalism. Ecological awareness, particularly with regard to climate change, unmasked the limits of capitalism and productivism. Post-crisis policies, such as austerity plans, have exacerbated inequalities and fostered distrust of politicians. Starting in 2011, insurgencies broke out in dozens of countries as millions of people

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<sup>1</sup> Gustave Massiah and Jai Sen, May 2020a – ‘A Note towards opening fresh discussion on the future of the World Social Forum, at this world-historical juncture’. Discussion Note posted on WSMDiscuss for online meeting on Viral Open Space on May 23 2020, announced at <https://www.viralopenspace.net/en/activities/looking-ahead-revisiting-the-world-social-forum> (accessed js on 23.05.2020)

occupied the streets and public squares. The same watchwords were present everywhere: the rejection of poverty, inequality, discrimination, and repression, and the demand to reinvent democracy and take bold action to address the ecological crisis. Everywhere, new challenges arise, such as combatting corruption and rejecting the political influence of the financial classes. Although these movements were not in contradiction with the World Social Forum, they did not identify with it.

The years after 2013 have seen the emergence of counterrevolutions rooted in racist, xenophobic, and security-based ideologies, and a wave of decentralized wars. Neoliberalism in an authoritarian phase, is hardening its domination and reliance on repression, with coups d'état elevating reactionary governments into power in several countries. Several conservative counter-revolutions are underway. These developments have put social and citizen movements in a defensive posture. The situation requires a new wave of social, democratic, political, ideological, and cultural resistance.

## **Second**

### **The challenge of the new alterglobalist phase is to include all the different sets of social and citizen movements**

We need to recognise that the WSF as a space for alterglobalism has not included all the movements; even if it has been accepted and recognized by several of them, they have not really appropriated it. This was clear with the movements of 2011 (occupy, indignados).

Currently, we can identify five sets of movements that present different cultures of mobilization and elaboration :

- The social movements that represent the social struggles of working class, salaried, peasants, students and also part of the feminist movements, the defence of rights movements, the international solidarity movements – all these constitute the essential part of the anti-globalization movement.
- The movements of the popular suburbs, the racialized and part of the feminist movements that define themselves against discrimination and that have an intersectional approach reaffirm their autonomy and claim their recognition. (Some of them, particularly Afro-Brazilian women, have played a role in the forums. But on the whole, they have stayed away from the forums.)
- The climate urgency and ecological priority movements have worked with the forums several times but have developed autonomously.
- Movements since 2011, in response to the 2008 financial crisis, have been extended and gained in magnitude with major demonstrations in 47 countries in 2019. Many of their active activists have participated at the Social Forums, but they refused to join them as a movement;

And in addition,

- Since the beginning of the pandemic crisis in 2020, we have seen the rise of new local, national, and international solidarity movements experimenting with new forms of intervention.

The renewal of the alterglobalist movement does not pass through a simple convergence of struggles.

It requires acknowledging the diversity of cultures of social movements and building unity in projects and in the definition of strategies.

### **Third**

#### **Pandemic and climate change reveal a crisis of civilization**

The exacerbation of ecological, social, democratic and geopolitical contradictions reinforces the hypothesis of a crisis of civilisation. What the covid19 coronavirus pandemic reveals is the low resilience of the international system, particularly the occidental one, to an unforeseen event of such magnitude. Pandemic and climate participate to a crisis of civilization. The ecological rupture leads us to reflect on what a crisis of civilization implies, without falling into millenarianist fears, but by taking the measure of the upheavals that result.

In 2019, 47 countries, a quarter of the world's countries, experienced civil revolts and massive demonstrations that continue into 2020. Let us recall Gramsci's premonitory sentence in 1937, the old world is dying, the new world is slow to appear, and in this chiaroscuro the monsters are rising.

Profound changes are building the new world and prefiguring the contradictions of the future. Let us propose to identify five mutations in progress. The women's rights revolution challenges millenary relationships of domination. The rights of peoples, the second phase of decolonization, after the independence of States, emphasizes the liberation of peoples and questions the multiple identities and forms of the nation-state.

The ecological awareness is a philosophical revolution, which publicly rests on the idea that we live in a time and space that are no longer unlimited. Digital technology is renewing language and writing, and biotechnologies are questioning the limits of the human body. The upheaval in the world's population is in progress; migration is one aspect of a global demographic revolution. These are unfinished and uncertain revolutions. There is no guarantee that they will not be crushed, deviated, or recuperated. But there is also no reason to say that they will be. For the time being, they are provoking rejection and great violence and allowing monsters to emerge.

### **Fourth**

#### **The challenge of alterglobalism is to define a strategy taking into account the new period and the evolution of contradictions.**

It is on this issue that we must open the debate and confront the options. As we leave the confinements, the contradictions will sharpen.

Proposals depend on the situation, but they also require horizontal strategic thinking on a global scale. The approach is to articulate three strategic moments according to time horizons.

### Resistance to the shock strategy

Evolution from the authoritarian neoliberalism after 2008 to a dictatorial néoliberalism and to the multiplication of wars, decentralized wars and civil wars

The immediate strategy is that of urgency and resistance to the dominant racist, securitarian and xenophobic ideology. It proposes the contestation of capitalism, including green capitalism and authoritarian neo-liberalism, the rejection of the merchandisation of Nature and Life, and the effectiveness of rights and freedoms.

It is not excluded that The resistance on social, ecology, democracy and geopolitics could create contradictions in the dominant block, between the extractivist and the GAFAM, between state politics and multinationals, between emerging countries and occidental block

### Definition of alternatives

The challenge is not to define the perfect model of socialism or communism. It is to enter in the cultural hegemonic battle define by Gramsci

And on this we have some news proposals emerging from the pandemic situation. It is the progress in the perception of rights. For example, health rights, educational rights, income rights

The need of relocation, the ecological imperatives, the legitimacy of public actions in front of the market hegemony

The long-term strategy is that of alternatives, for another possible world, involving the overcoming of capitalism. This involves access to fundamental rights for all and a co-construction of a new universalism. It is based on the concepts in definition, common goods, buen-vivir, social and collective property, free and public services, radical democratisation of democracy, etc. It is a project to be invented so that the overcoming of capitalism does not result in new forms of domination.

### The third level of strategy is the midterm strategy

It depends of regional and national situations. The medium-term strategies for the coming decades define the stages for social, ecological, democratic and geopolitical transformation and the policies to be undertaken. It may be that of prosperity without growth and the Green New Deal. It includes a new international system and can be adapted to different situations. One example is the Green New Deal proposal developed, in the case of the United States, by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortes for a democratic socialism.

In the immediate term, there is an urgent need to link alterglobalism and internationalism. Alterglobalism is built by the diversity and convergence of social and

citizen movements; it needs to enter in a new phase. Internationalism was concerned with organizational capacities, the specificity of politics, and the articulation of the local, national and global levels. It needs to be reinvented.

This strategic approach recalls the importance of revolutionary periods but is not expecting a magical change. Revolutions can accelerate evolution, they invent new ways, they do not eliminate the long time of history.

### **Fifth In conclusion**

What can we say about the WSF ?

The proposal is to start from the social movements, in their diversity

To ask each movement to define its strategy taking into account the new period and the new contradictions, to define the international dimension of this strategy, and to participate to the building of an unified common international strategy.

The new form of the new phase of the alterglobalist movement will be defined by the new movements that will emerge. The WSF could be part of it, as a step of the evolution and the invention of the new movements.