

**On Building Another World :  
Or : Are other globalisations possible ?**

**The World Social Forum as an instrument of global democratisation**

**A Paper for the NIGD (Network Institute for Global Democratisation) Seminar at the  
World Social Forum, on**

**‘Global Democracy ? A North-South Dialogue’**

**held on February 4 2002, at Amarzen, Porto Alegre, Brazil**

**Jai Sen, March-April 2002**

*Are other globalisations possible ?*

The slogan of the World Social Forum as it stands today is ‘Another World Is Possible !’. This paper is an attempt to critically interrogate and reflect on the theory and practice of the World Social Forum as an idea.<sup>1</sup>

I want to start by asking the question I was asked last night at dinner : Just what does the ‘democratisation of globalisation’ mean ? I recognise that this is a little different from the issue of ‘global democratisation’ that we are concerned with here at this Seminar, but it is still this that is the question that is most commonly asked. To the person who asked me this question, it is a meaningless phrase; she insisted that since globalisation is – as she understands it – just another word for capitalism, and since you cannot democratise capitalism, the phrase has no real meaning – and is therefore an illusion.

This of course begs the question of whether ‘globalisation’ can indeed be equated with capitalism, and vice-versa, and beyond this – and very relevantly for this Forum as a whole – just what ‘globalisation’ is. Since the Forum originally took shape at a time of – and as part of -

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is primarily based on the presentation I made in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on February 4 2002, but it also draws on an article I have subsequently written after returning to India, titled ‘Towards Another World? - ‘Another World Is Possible’ : Some preliminary reflections on the World Social Forum’. I would like to thank Razia Ismail Abbasi and Kalpana Viswanath for their comments and encouragement on an early draft of the article, since those were also very helpful for preparing the first drafts of this paper. I now also thank Jeremy Brecher, Sundar Chaterji, Diya Mehra, and Leena Rikkilä for their comments on my last draft of this paper. Indeed, I want to express my profound debt to Jeremy and Sundar. I continue to welcome comments; my contact details are given at the end.

Note : Although I happen to still be Co-Convenor of the WSF India Working Group at the time of writing, I emphasise that I have prepared both my presentation and this paper purely in my individual capacity, at the invitation of Vijay Pratap and D L Sheth of the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* initiative at the CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies), Delhi, in relation to their contribution to the NIGD Seminar.

An abridged version of this paper has subsequently been published in mid 2002, under the title ‘Are other globalisations possible ? The World Social Forum as an instrument of global democratization’, as Chapter 8 in Leena Rikkilä and Katarina Sehm Patomäki, eds, 2002 – From a Global Market Place to Political Spaces – the North South Dialogue continues. NIGD Working Paper 1/2002, published by NIGD - Network Institute for Global Democratisation, Helsinki and Nottingham. [info@nigd.u-net.com](mailto:info@nigd.u-net.com) .

a wave of reaction against neoliberal globalisation in many parts of the world, it is understandable that it has been bracketed along with those who are said to oppose 'globalisation' – the protestors of Seattle, Washington DC, Prague, Quebec City, Gothenburg, and Genoa. But I personally have been very glad to see, at this second Forum, that many speakers are being more precise (by using more specific terms such as 'neoliberal globalisation'), and – more importantly - that many here seem to accept that the Forum has moved far past a position of being only 'anti-globalisation'.

Indeed, it can be said that in many ways, the Forum itself wants and needs to be globalised if it is to achieve its objectives, and that in this sense, it is very much a part of a broader process of cultural and political globalisation that is taking place in our times. Even if it had an 'anti' character at the first meeting, the participants at this second one have, by the sheer range of sessions they have organised, taken the Forum far past that. It is today a far wider cultural and political initiative - and seems to me to itself manifest a different globalisation - another globalisation. But I am not going to try to discuss this question here; my purpose is just to flag it as we discuss the Forum as a potential vehicle for world democracy.

I propose to make my presentation by first raising some more general issues and then moving onto some more specific analysis of certain issues that I suggest are important to the initiative's future. To make the journey easier, let me first just stake out the ground that I attempt to cover :

*Some broader considerations :*

- The historical significance of the World Social Forum
- The political significance of the Forum as an initiative from the South
- The political significance of the Forum in the context of 9/11
- The significance of the political culture that the Forum represents : The idea of open space.

*Some ideological-strategic issues :*

- The relation of 'space' to questions of power and transformation
- The question of inclusiveness : Are there boundaries ?
- The question of 'the national' versus 'the transnational'
- Bridging old politics and new politics
- The question of South-South
- Resource mobilisation as ideology
- A network of networks ?
- Recapturing the term 'civil' : Arguments for reconceptualising the Forum in terms of *civil* relations.

*Some programmatic issues :*

- Moving from event to process
- The challenge of 9/11
- Process aspects of globalising the Forum.

*Some more organisational-cultural issues :*

- Questions of structure and interrelationship
- Questions of legitimacy, authority, and representation

- Questions of intercultural diversity and communication : Fighting tendencies of homogenisation in transnational initiatives.

Finally : Are we talking of one other world – or of many other worlds ?

### *Broader considerations*

At the more general level, I firstly believe that we need to recognise much more explicitly than we have so far the historical significance of the World Social Forum. My sense is that we are too easily tending to take it for granted – and particularly since all of us here in Porto Alegre are taking part in what is obviously such a spectacular event, and since it is widely known that there are many more people here than last year, there is a tendency to revel just in this and to reflexively and subconsciously think in terms of bigger being necessarily better. The almost innate magic that Brazil and Brazilians radiate only adds to this sense of being high.

The Forum is not something that just happened by itself, nor has it been given shape just by the eight organisations on the Brazil Organising Committee.<sup>2</sup> It is something that has been thrown up by social forces, in Brazil and across the globe. At one level, and given the extraordinarily rich history of civil and political movement in so many countries across the world since the mid 60s, it is something that could have happened anywhere.<sup>3</sup> It is also quite possible that similar things might well now happen, in other parts of the world, inspired by what has taken place in Brazil. But at another level, we also need to recognise that it is something that is also the consequence of specific forces – of specific combinations of forces, forces that at this point in time apply to Brazil and not to elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> In my estimation, it has the seeds of

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<sup>2</sup> The eight organisations are (acronyms only, with their names given in English) : ABONG (Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organisations); ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens); CBJP (Brazilian Peace and Justice Commission, of the National Council of Bishops (CNBB)); CIVES (Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship); CUT (Central Trade Union Association); IBASE (Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis); CJG (Centre for Global Justice); and MST (Movement of Landless Rural Workers).

<sup>3</sup> For one history, from the perspective of a US American activist, see : Paul Berman, 1996 - *A Tale of Two Utopias*, The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968. New York and London : W W Norton and Company .

<sup>4</sup> Brazil, which was already the scene of a some very interesting experiments in local civil organisations in the 1950s, went through twenty years of ruthless rule by the generals, from 1964-84, and in the course of this its body was convulsed by the ‘miracle’ that the generals tried to wreak on it, the economic miracle of ‘liberalisation’. (See Shelton H Davis, 1977 - *Victims of the Miracle*, Development Impact and the Indians of Brazil. New York : Cambridge University Press.) The very experience of this miracle however led to the crystallisation of resistance and of new social forces as well as of deep economic contradictions that collectively led to the collapse of the military regime in 1984. The Catholic Church – which itself went through major changes during this period – played a key role in this process, both internationally and within Brazil, seeding the emergence of several civil movements in the country. (Susan Branford and Oriel Glock, 1985 - *The Last Frontier*, Fighting for Land in the Amazon. London : Zed Books.) The subsequent phase saw the emergence of a vibrant and inventive civil and political society in Brazil, manifested in an extraordinary range of movements, the best known of which are perhaps the Workers’ Party and now the MST. (For a history of the Workers’ Party and this period, see : Margaret E Keck, 1992 - *The Workers’ Party and Democratization in Brazil*. New Haven, Conn : Yale University Press.) The fact of large numbers of Brazilian activists and intelligentsia being forced into exile during the latter years of the military regime, many in Europe, led both to strong solidarity campaigns and to deep ties with European activists and movements that endure till today.

being one of the most significant initiatives of the past many decades – and perhaps even over the past one hundred years. I believe that we therefore need to critically reflect on this question and to conduct ourselves accordingly, at all levels.

We also need – I suggest – to recognise it as something that came out of a specific point in time in human history, and of a specific century. Looking back, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was truly an extraordinary and epochal period in history, at so many levels but certainly in terms of politics, technology, and culture. It was a century that changed the face of the earth – both in the sense of the manner in which it has been ravaged but also in terms of human relations. Among so many other things, it witnessed the restructuring of world politics, both at the level of state politics and of civil politics. In terms of state politics, it saw the building of history's first socialist states – based, in theory, on an ideology of the equality of human beings – and the end of centuries of colonialism (though where this is now threatening, once again) in many countries and/or revolutionary change in others. It saw the emergence of new state-nations, especially in the South, the repeated challenging of the power of the North by different state formations in the South, and the forging of international and multilateral world institutions and of new universalisms. In terms of civil politics, it saw the flowering and consolidation of civil, non-state entities at the local, national, and 'international' and transnational level in a manner never before seen in history, and the widespread recognition by the political establishment of civil, non-state and non-party entities as a legitimate new actor in domestic and world politics.

Many observers, among them Jeremy Brecher and Richard Falk, argue that what is taking place today constitutes the emergence of a new actor on the world stage, one that is challenging the hegemony of the state and the market.<sup>5</sup> In some ways therefore, in historical terms what is taking place in our times is comparable in significance to the shift that took place in medieval Europe, of whether royalty was subordinate to the Church and the Pope, or vice versa.

The Forum also needs to be seen in the context of the definitive articulation of universalities that took place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for the first time in human history – in terms of politics, science, and of our understanding of the world. Although there had been similar or related articulations in earlier centuries, this had taken place as articulations made by individuals – as in science – or by particular societies, as in the case of human rights. It was during this past century that we saw for the first time the comprehensive articulation of universalities, across nations and cultures, governing (or attempting to govern, and regulate) the lives of all human beings on this earth – universalities such as of human rights or of 'the environment'; or indeed, also of so-called 'free trade'.

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My understanding is that most members of the WSF Brazil Organising Committee came out of this particular history, both individually and organisationally. Although, as I say, the period since the 60s has seen rich and powerful experiments in many parts of the world – including, for instance, South Africa and India – the very particular history of Brazil, and the very particular civil and political culture that Brazilians experimented with and forged during this period, would seem to have produced a unique soil – and a unique crop.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, 2000 – Globalization from Below, The power of solidarity. Cambridge, Mass : South End Press, and Richard Falk, 1993 - The Challenge of Globalisation and the Emergence of Global Civil Society. New Delhi : Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Contemporary Studies - RGICS Paper No 5; and 1999 – Predatory Globalization, A Critique. Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, and Malden, Mass : Blackwell.

There are several such universalities that were articulated during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in many ways we need to see the Forum as being a creature of the period. Indeed, in many ways it itself is something of a universality, having taken shape on the assumption that forces such as globalisation are universal processes that affect all human beings in somewhat similar ways. There are both strengths and weaknesses in this assumption, and the way the Forum is developing reflects this. It is both tending to be universal and wanting to be this, and at the same time it is wanting to recognise the individual and the specific characteristics of the concrete contexts in which individual women and men are struggling. I believe we need to read these contradictory tendencies, and to recognise that just as in the case of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is every possibility of the Forum becoming a kind of mini dogma by itself – that this is the future, and that this is, for instance, The Alternative to the United Nations, with all its faults.

While asking these questions, we also cannot avoid the other question - of the degree to which the Forum is, indeed, a part of the wave of 'anti-globalisation' that has taken shape, and whether it would have taken shape if, for instance, Thatcher and Reagan had not been in power, and if Gorbachev had not played his role in helping history to unfold. And moving on from this, we need to ask whether – if the Forum has indeed been born of these processes but wants now to help in building a new future – it is not essential that it now break free of these bonds of history.

The second significance of the Forum, in my understanding, is that it has arisen from the South. It is perhaps the first truly global *civil* initiative – widely linking and bridging South and North – that has been taken from the South. There have been several important other initiatives of course, which have also played (and are still playing) significant roles in recent history, such as the Third World Network, and there have been others that have been more regional in nature, but it is perhaps the first that would appear to have this global potentiality. At this level, I think it can be compared, in many ways, to the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s and to the articulation of the New International Economic Order in the 70s.<sup>6</sup>

It is also of considerable significance, I suggest, that this initiative is being led by civil actors in a country in the South, thereby challenging the conventional – though usually undeclared, unspoken - dominance of the civil North in world civil affairs. This said, it is useful and important to of course also keep in mind the role in this history of both the Catholic Church, as already mentioned, which fostered the emergence of most if not all the movements that have been involved in this formation, and also of certain political actors in the North, especially perhaps in France. I do not yet know the contours of these relationships, either past or present, but this aspect should clearly not be ignored in celebrating the Forum as an initiative of the South.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it might even be more accurate to see it as being a truly internationalist civil

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<sup>6</sup> There is not space or time in this paper to attempt this, but as Sundar Chaterji has suggested, a comparative examination of the Non-Aligned Movement and the World Social Forum could be very fruitful.

<sup>7</sup> See Francisco Whitaker, nd [January 2001] – 'World Social Forum : origins and targets'. Typescript in English, 3 pp. Available on the Forum website, <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>. Originally appeared as an article in Portuguese, in *Corrie da Catatonia*, January 22 2001. Translated by Jesus Bengoetxea and Sandra Guimarães. According to this report, one of the founders of the World Social Forum is Bernard Cassen, editor and publisher of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the influential French paper, who is also president of ATTAC in France. Another key ally is Susan George, noted author (such as, with Fabrizio Sabelli, of *Faith and Credit*, The World Bank's Secular Empire. London : Penguin Books, 1994) and ATTAC ideologue, who lives in France.

initiative – but, along with the Third World Network and a few others, the first to be led from the South.

Making these assertions in itself forces me to clarify that I believe that these categories ('North', 'South', etc) themselves need to be rethought – both in our new context and on account of the rise of civil / non-state politics as a category, and coming as they do from a history and tradition of academic and media obsession with state and inter-state politics. My attempt to modulate them – by using terms such as 'civil South', 'state North' - is obviously insufficient to address the reality that there is no universal 'South' or 'North'. We need new categories, a new lexicon.

But at the same time, even as we struggle for this reconceptualisation I believe that the historical significance of the emergence and successful articulation of the Forum should not be underestimated. We urgently need to internalise this – not reading it as just another ngo initiative, nor just as a carnival of ideas (however spectacular the experience), but as something that carries the seeds both of past struggle and of the future.

In short, I believe we need to see the Forum within this extraordinary period of history, as a product of this history and of new relations of production and social reproduction that are emerging, with all the contradictions that are contained in all such processes. And we need to attempt to discern the historical responsibilities that this brings upon us.

The third observation I would like to make is in regard to the importance of this initiative in the post 9/11 world – in the space that is being defined for us by the perpetrators of 9/11 and by its aftermath, and specifically the so-called 'war on terrorism'. I would tend to agree with those who have said that 9/11 and its aftermath constitute a turning point in history – at least, in this period of history. As we see all around us, it has allowed the American imperium to rise and to attempt to impose itself on us as The Global Power. And as a part of this, we have seen the self-appointed 'leaders of the free world' attempting to equate criticism of or opposition to neoliberal globalisation with terrorism – and governments and ruling elites in several parts of the world using this opportunity to decisively reduce and constrict democratic space, within countries and globally, in particular by introducing so-called 'anti-terrorist' legislation.

Although the crisis that has erupted in the Middle East in the months after the Forum – and the global powers' evident inability to control it – is one more indication that all is not well for the new order, the question is : What do these developments have to say for the Forum ?

Well, as someone in the WSF Brazil Organising Committee remarked in its first meeting after 9/11, if the Forum had not existed before there was now a very concrete reason for it to do so: To provide a space (a major space, not a small one) for free and open thinking. I would only add a few thoughts to this.<sup>8</sup> One, that the extraordinarily fluid and volatile new world context only brings added responsibilities on initiatives such as the Forum. The situation both creates opportunities for new transnational and other transborder civil action and also demands the capacity for and exercise of strategic insight. The task now must be not merely to provide a space for free exchange but also to struggle to defend and constantly expand this space. The reduction of civil and political space that is taking place or is threatening to take place in so many countries across the world is not something that the Forum will necessarily want to take

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<sup>8</sup> I thank Jeremy Brecher for pushing me to think this through.

on as such, or as a whole, and it remains to be seen in what ways it or those who take part in it respond to this new situation, but that it should play a role in the emerging situation seems indisputable.<sup>9</sup>

Second, I believe that the Forum – and its participants – need to remain acutely aware of the lesson of history, that hegemonic forces tend to address the challenge that open space - and free thought - represents not by attacking them openly but by taking over the space covertly, and strategically. It is precisely one of the hazards of open space that it is difficult to defend. As Susan George has pointed out, the current complacency – or paralysis ? - of liberals and the left does not help.<sup>10</sup>

The very fact that there has been a tremendous increase in the size of the event and in global participation however, from the first one in January 2001 to the one this year, is also of considerable importance.<sup>11</sup> This growth is clear witness to the relevance of the Forum to concerned people all over the world – and that they have not been deterred by this threat. Since the Forum does not pay for participants to come – other than for a handful of invited speakers – this growth itself reflects and speaks for the intense interest and relevance it has aroused in so many parts of the world, and not heavy centralised funding. And both the growth and the fact that this very real threat did not deter people from organising the resources to attend are of considerable significance (and also to the credit of the myriad organisations who made the resources available to those who wished to attend).

Finally, I want to discuss the political culture of the Forum itself, and what I believe to be its contribution in political-strategic terms. The Forum, as designed by those who initiated it, is not an organisation or a movement, or a world federation, but a *space* – and to boot, a non-directed space, from and within which movements and other civil initiatives of many kinds can meet, exchange views, and find space to take forward their work, locally, nationally, and globally. The organisers of the Forum see their task as being not the building of movement, or of the coordination of opinion and position, but simply as the building of space – literally and metaphorically - where free exchange is possible and making it available as widely as possible.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I should perhaps add a clarification here, in this regard. In a Note I wrote in early January 2002, I commented that the call issued by the International Council of the WSF in November 2001 in this regard - to social movements, trade unions and others across the world to address the question - seemed to me a rather general statement, given that the war on Afghanistan had by then already been launched, and that the Resolution did not have any teeth. I therefore called upon the IC of the WSF to translate its Resolution into “resolute strategic action”. Jai Sen, January 2002a – ‘Thinking Strategy : Some Suggestions for the World Social Forum’s Strategic Perspective’, p 3.

After attending the second World Social Forum, and more closely understanding the political nature – and, I hope, significance and potential - of the Forum, I realise and accept that such a Resolution is not possible for the Council as it is presently constituted and, moreover, would contradict the political culture of the Forum as a space (rather than as an organisation). I discuss this question of culture further on in this paper. But if this is its self-defined character, then it must also struggle to find appropriate modes of action.

<sup>10</sup> I thank Sundar Chaterji for reminding me of this. For Susan George’s arguments, see her ‘How to Win the War of Ideas : Lessons from the Gramscian Right’. Manuscript, nd, c.2001.

<sup>11</sup> Whereas in 2001 there were some 4,000 registered delegates, in 2002 there were more than 15,000, representing 4,909 different civil entities from 131 countries (aside from some 40,000 more local participants); and there were some 750 seminars in 2002 versus 400 in 2001.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Francisco (Chico) Whitaker, February 2002 – ‘*Lições de Porto Alegre*’ / ‘Lessons of Porto Alegre’. Ms, 3 pp, dt February 21 2002. Revised version of Note to the Comissão Episcopal de Pastoral of

Although I understand that there are – even now - pulls and pushes among the organisers in this regard (with some wanting to make it more directed), in my understanding it is this open and plural character that is the most significant contribution of the Forum, rather than the admittedly important polemical challenge that it offers to the World Economic Forum – and for which it is best known -, or the equally significant opportunity that it gives tens of thousands of concerned people from many parts of the world to meet.

For me, what is important about it is the manner in which it does these things and the political culture that the initiative represents. It is the concept that underlies it – of it being a *space* (very literally, a forum or arena) and not an organisation or world federation of any kind – that is most crucial. And the real ‘success’ of the Forum is that it is permitting a scale of talking across boundaries – of cross-fertilisation – that has rarely been dreamt of before, and that it is thereby powerfully contributing to building a culture of open debate across conventional walls and boundaries. The real ‘alternative’ that it therefore has to offer is that it does not try to formulate any one alternative but rather is showing that it is possible to create, and to sustain, a non-directed space. Literally, a free space, for free thought. In some senses, in philosophical and political terms its role in encouraging and facilitating free thought – and a culture of free thought – is in fact even more important than that of actually providing a space.

The actual exercise of this freedom however, is not a simple matter. Indeed, I suggest it poses a profound challenge. The Forum’s Charter of Principles (that was formulated by the WSF Brazil Organising Committee in April 2001, after the experience of the first Forum in January 2001) states clearly that no one can speak on behalf of the Forum, and no statements or declarations can be issued in its name – though all participants in the Forum are free to express their own views, individually and collectively.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, the Forum – and taking part in it (and thinking of organising it, as we are in India today and the Brazil Organising Committee is trying to do, in several parts of the world) – is a challenge because it represents a vision that is radically different to conventional organisational thinking - certainly at the global level, which has tended to be either federative or associational, but also at more local and national levels. It frees us to think and act freely, but it then equally places a demand on us that we keep the space free of control and resist temptations to try to control it. It is therefore a challenge not only to mainstream, orthodox, and conservative thinking and practice but also – and perhaps even more so - to all those organisations and initiatives that claim to be working in terms of ‘alternatives’ but that are doing so through forms and relations that remain conventionally bounded and territorial. It therefore represents a radical challenge to most existing organisations and movements at a very basic level.

We should not however regard it as being at all surprising if there are tensions arising among the organisers (or among participants) about this character. Given that it is an arena where a very large number of movements and organisations now meet, and given the urgency of the issues that most of these actors struggle with, it is almost inevitable that there will be almost

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the CNBB, on February 19 2002. Original in Portuguese; translated into English by Thomas Ponniah and Flávia Miranda Falcao. Whitaker represents the CBJP on the WSF Brazil Organising Committee.

<sup>13</sup> ABONG, ATTAC, CBJP, CIVES, CUT, IBASE, CJG, and MST, April 2001 – ‘World Social Forum Charter of Principles’, dt April 9 2001. 2 pp.

reflexive tendencies among some to try to use the Forum to build one big united movement, or at least to build the famous ‘network of networks’ that activists and movement theorists have talked about since the 70s.<sup>14</sup>

In this context, keeping the space open and yet making it attractive to all kinds of activists is going to be an extremely fine balance to strike and to sustain. There will always be, I believe, constant pressures pushing and pulling it in the direction of being a platform or movement rather than an open arena, as well as internal tendencies to move that way in order to address the requirements of existence in a world full of conventions, and in my understanding, it will be crucial for its leadership and its participants – if it is to survive as an idea – to read and to resist these pressures in creative ways.

They – we - will also have to look ahead. One of the most profound challenges that I think the Forum will come to face is whether it should retain this character for all time to come or whether, under changed circumstances – such as a world war or deepening repression – it might need to change.

I feel I should explain why I believe that this concept, and this resistance and insistence, is of such profound importance. The first reason, I suggest, is because we are at a crucial juncture in history when we are moving from old forms of both organisation and politics to new forms. This is so to different degrees, and in different ways, in different societies, but there is an unmistakable rise of a new politics, all over the world, one that is more concerned with people’s participation in and control over their lives – in other words, with direct democracy and with people being the agents of history. In part, this change is taking place because of a deep and growing disillusionment with ‘old politics’ and with traditional political actors and their concerns and ways of doing things. But it is also taking place, I suggest, because we are living in a new world, with new modes of communication, with a huge increase in the amount and quality of information that is available to many (if not all) of us, and where mobility – and a consequent crossing of all kinds of borders - has enormously increased. All this has changed the world, at so many levels. But whereas so much is changing, the dominant institutions of our social and political life have so far changed very little. The Forum is one of the several new kinds of institution that are today emerging.

I perhaps need to explain this point. Put bluntly, almost all the forms and modes of organisations that are the elements and vocabulary of old politics (and much of ‘old’ social life) are products of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and accompanied the forging of what were then radically new modes of production that emerged at that time. (Think of them : Parties, unions, cooperatives, and societies (in the sense of registered associations) – all of these forms and modes of organisation emerged during that period.) These were ways of doing and organising things and life that were appropriate to situations where people had begun to dominantly work in factories, where the mass of people still lived locally (notwithstanding some massive migrations that also took place, especially from Europe to North America), and where available information and communication technologies were extremely limited compared to what we have today - and therefore also people’s experience and knowledge of the world.

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<sup>14</sup> There is in fact something called the ‘World Social *Network*’ already in place in Brazil, with a declared objective to transform the World Social Forum into a World Social Movement. Some of its members are members of the WSF Local Committee in Porto Alegre.

In contrast, we are today living in a world where, once again, radically new forms of production are in the process of being forged and radically new information and communication technologies are available. International travel is also far more possible, and affordable for larger numbers, than ever before (though this has changed substantially, if not radically, after 9/11). As a consequence of the very nature of the new technologies and the feasibility of travel, people all over the world now have an entirely new access to the world at large, either in real or virtual ways, and this access is widening. Aside from vitalising and deepening more conventional bilateral solidarity alliances, completely new organisational possibilities and strategies are emerging through the internet. In my understanding, this is contributing to a process of new modes of social, economic, and political organisation being forged, both in the market and among civil actors.

Reflect, for instance, on how commentator Naomi Klein describes the series of global civil protest actions that have taken place in cities from Seattle to Melbourne since late 1999 :

“Although many have observed that the recent mass protests would have been impossible without the Internet, what has been overlooked is how the communication technology that facilitates these campaigns is shaping the movement in its own image. Thanks to the Net, mobilizations are able to unfold with sparse bureaucracy and minimal hierarchy; forced consensus and labored manifestoes are fading into the background, replaced instead by a culture of constant, loosely structured and sometimes compulsive information-swapping.

“What emerged on the streets of Seattle and Washington was an activist model that mirrors the organic, decentralized, interlinked pathways of the Internet--the Internet come to life.”<sup>15</sup>

In short, the world as it is unfolding is both demanding new responses and offering new possibilities. I believe that it is inevitable – hopefully ! – that as sentient beings, we are forging new relations, to live in this new world. The Forum is in many senses just a reflection of this wave - of these underlying currents.

But it is precisely in this context that the significance of the Forum lies. Unlike earlier processes and traditional political actors, it is not just bringing together people, insisting that we agree on single conclusions / manifestos / declarations but rather offering a space where people from many different cultures and streams of thought can intermingle, come to their conclusions, and strike alliances as they wish. The Forum’s Charter of Principles both reflects and guarantees this pluralist culture. (In this sense, the Forum is itself a reflection of the web and the net, where the workshops, seminars, conferences, and testimonies that make up the activities of the Forum are all hyperlinked to each other.)

The Forum is also interesting as a cultural phenomenon in our present world of intensifying e-contact and e-culture, because while it also uses the web and the net to get across its message and is, as I suggest, a reflection of the web itself, it also represents a powerful reaffirmation of the importance of and need for face-to-face contact - literally, for listening to each other, at many levels. This experience is limited only by the extent to which you can actually find people of common interests in that madness of thousands of people and meetings –

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<sup>15</sup> Naomi Klein, July 2000b – ‘The Vision Thing’, in *The Nation*, July 10 2000.

and in my understanding, this is one of where one of the key organisational challenges lies, as the Forum evolves, to make this experience ever more possible and more ever meaningful.

One of the many ways in which this can happen, I believe, is by our not celebrating scale (the bigger the better) and instead trying to see what, in different contexts, might be the kind of scale to aim for – and even while accepting that in an open-ended enterprise such as this there is no way of closely controlling size. This in turn will be made easier by the globalising of the Forum that is today taking shape – through holding a number of World Social Forum meetings in different parts of the world, rather than only one big annual global meeting, though with each one being ‘internationalist-globalist’ in character. (I present and discuss this development later on in this paper.) This will almost certainly lead to each specific meeting, including the one bigger ‘global’ meeting, perhaps progressively reducing in scale.

In this way, the Forum is very much a creature of its times. It belongs to the age we are living in and to the stage of social relations we are going through. In some ways, of course, this idea of open-endedness is not new at all; academics could well say that they have always done this. The issue here is that for the first time, this principle is being adopted as a part of political vocabulary.

### Some issues

The significance of the initiative notwithstanding, I believe that there are nevertheless several issues contained in this formulation - and in the Forum as reality - that need to be drawn out. I believe that these are issues that the Forum needs to address and that therefore, in my assessment of the Forum, all of us who are taking part in it or wish to take part, also need to address, individually and collectively, in our different ways. I want to therefore now move to some critical reflections on the initiative. For the sake of convenience only, I broadly group the issues into those that are more ideological-strategic in nature, those that are more programmatic, and those that are structural-cultural in nature. Necessarily, these are overlapping categories, as much as the issues themselves overlap and intersect. But it is perhaps still useful to view them in clusters.

#### *The ideological-strategic*

First : The idea of an open space is clearly very important – but how does it relate to crucial background questions, most especially of power in society ? Of power at all levels (in individual societies and countries, in regional and global terms, and also perhaps within organizations, communities and families), and of bringing about change and transformation ? Does the open-ended and plural nature of the initiative tend only to blur or hide these questions ? And thereby imply that it is only serving to rationalize and perpetuate existing power relations ? As one faction of one of the key organisers of the Forum have already asked, is the Forum only serving to put a human face on neoliberal globalisation ?<sup>16</sup> Or should one see the Forum as being a place and process where fertile cross-fertilisations take place, subversive to all power structures, seeding open-ended processes of challenge and transformation ? And not expect more than this from it ?

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<sup>16</sup> ILC – International Liaison Committee for a Workers International, January 2002 – Open letter to the Trade Unionists and Activists Participating in the World Social Forum 2002 in Porto Alegre, Brazil : ‘Is it possible to put a human face on globalisation and war ?’. Dated January 2 2002, posted January 8 2002. Signed by Julio Turra, National Executive Committee, CUT trade union federation, Hécia de Oliveira, Vice President CUT-DF, and twelve others.

The Charter of the Forum says that it wants to see another world – and this is also the motto of the Forum, “Another World Is Possible”. But this is, in many ways, a somewhat coy statement. It is talking about transformation, and about the removal of oppression. It is implying supporting people to gain their freedoms by overcoming decades, even centuries of oppression - both structural and newer forms that are constantly reproducing themselves. But is it enough to have a space where people can meet and talk, maybe once a year, maybe even several times a year ? Can this – and the cross-fertilisation that takes place in each encounter - by itself generated a sufficient momentum that it will be able to address the question of transformation, and the power that people need in order to gain their freedoms ?

I am not sure that the matter is closed as yet. As Jeremy Brecher – co-author of Globalisation from Below - has reminded me, this is basically a question of different approaches to social change, where the organisers of the Forum have so far elected to not follow the tradition of debate and resolution that is followed by most civil and political organisations, whether party-affiliated or independent, which can broadly be characterised as democratic-centralist. As a consequence,

“While some complain that the WSF has not produced a blueprint for global social reform, its emphasis on pluralism and diversity manifests the spirit of a movement that seeks a future based on open global dialogue, not decisions imposed by a new elite.”<sup>17</sup>

This question - of whether what the Forum is doing is enough - is in fact one that participants at the Forum could themselves be encouraged to ask. At the risk of according excessive significance to my own presentation, this present paper was possibly the only attempt made during and at the Forum to critically reflect on the Forum as an exercise.<sup>18</sup> Is it possible that this kind of ‘internal reflection’ – and strategisation sessions - could and should be made a regular feature of Forum meetings in the future - at Porto Alegre 2003 and also at the various continental and thematic WSF meetings planned for late 2002, and so on each year ? And could the Forum perhaps consider establishing a listserv – perhaps in different languages – where questions of this order could be discussed, throughout the year ?<sup>19</sup>

A second issue : In order to be open-ended, the Forum has also taken a very inclusive approach to who can take part in it : In theory, anyone who agrees with its Charter of Principles. But is this not being innocent ? What can, or should be, the boundaries of inclusiveness ? Can anything that defines itself as a civil or social initiative, and that declares its agreement (and even commitment to) the Forum’s Charter of Principles, be part of the Forum ? In principle, yes ! And there is therefore no reason why fundamentalists – whether religious, communal, or economic – cannot also be there.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brecher and others, op cit, Afterword to 2001 edition.

<sup>18</sup> Since I was invited to prepare this paper and make a presentation at this Seminar – on the basis of notes I had circulated in January 2002 – I take no credit whatsoever for the idea !

<sup>19</sup> The Forum’s website makes available assessments and reflective pieces that various people have written on the Forum, but this does not of course allow for any participation, in the sense of expression and exchange of ideas.

<sup>20</sup> Other than organisations that seek to take people’s lives as a method of political action (Clause 11), political parties as parties (Clause 8 – though not to members of parties if they are representing organizations affiliated to parties), and governments and those in positions of responsibility unless they are willing to come

Just to illustrate the point, for participants at the Forum from India it was not amusing but alarming to see the *Ananda Margis* (or 'Proutists', as they also call themselves abroad) taking full part in the events, including organizing seminars and prayer sessions – both within halls and out in the public spaces of the meeting. Their vibrations were felt just as much as any other group that was taking a part in the meeting. In India, we see them as a very regressive force; but in an open forum, are there any boundaries, and if there are who defines them - and how should they be enforced? On the one hand, what does a regime of enforcement do to a politics of openness – but conversely, what is the role of a politics of complete openness in a situation of inequality, prejudice, and fundamentalism? How can the Forum become and remain not just plural and inclusive but *critically* so?

This question of the boundaries to inclusiveness arose in what was perhaps one of the very first Forum-related meetings in India (in January 2002).<sup>21</sup> Given the complex nature of our polity, this question is bound to keep rising. It is possible that it arose in a meeting in India precisely because of the complex – or rich, depending on how you look at it – nature of Indian society. It is also of course not a new question, but rather one of the classic issues in, for instance, the civil liberties debate, in all liberal-democratic contexts, including India. I do not know Brazil sufficiently well to know whether this openness – and an insistence on openness - is an inherent quality in the polity. But in my understanding, India will not be the only society where this question will rise, and especially in the world we live in today, of structural adjustment and wars against terrorism – where ordinary people are being forced to retreat to (or being lured by) fundamentalisms of various kinds.

Given this, given that this is precisely in this context that the Forum is taking shape, and as the Forum becomes increasingly globalised, I believe that this is a bundle of questions that it urgently needs to address. The Forum will probably also need to consider going beyond a simple Charter of Principles, and moving – for instance – to progressively and consensually drafting some kind of code of conduct for participants, however disagreeable this might at first sound, in order to at least address possibilities of disruptive actions; just as moderated listserves do.

The third ideological issue that I believe the Forum might find useful to reflect on is the question of 'the national' versus 'the transnational'. I am not sure how or where it could do this, but during the recent second Forum I sensed 2-3 related tendencies that I believe will be of considerable importance to its future.

Put crudely, one was that the 'the transnational' – and being transnational – is progressive and 'good', and that conversely, by implication, 'the national' and being national in concern are regressive, limited, and not actually 'bad' but questionable (and certainly, somehow 'less good and progressive' than being transnational in concern). I never heard this being openly said, but it was often there in an implicit kind of way. The second, which I see as related and intertwined, was the tendency by newer actors to ignore the State – specifically, the national

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to the Forum in their individual capacities (Clause 5), there is no bar on anyone taking part in the Forum, providing they "...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 centred on the human person."

<sup>21</sup> The comment was made by someone who had attended the very first Forum in January 2001, Aruna Roy, of the National Campaign for the Right to Information.

state – as an important political actor in today’s world of resurgent imperialism; and indeed, to sometimes not recognise it as an actor at all. And third, I also sensed a related tendency by both newer and older political actors to ignore, or downplay, the importance of relations with the other, both within specific countries and international levels; and to not always seem to be listening to the other. I do not want to overstate this, because I also heard many struggling with how to relate – and the Forum is a perfect place for this – but I was left with the impression that there is still a long way to go.

The second and the third are familiar features of movement politics, at least in India, and I highlight them here precisely because of what the Forum offers us – an opportunity to talk across these experiences and histories. These are also of course not absolute distinctions, by any means, since many activists in newer movements have equally developed political perspectives, and people dropping out of the old have been the founders of many of the new initiatives; and conversely, where many young people are still joining - and sometimes helping to transform – the older initiatives. So these of course remain very broad generalisations.

It is also very possible that I experienced the first tendency - and maybe even the second and third – precisely because I attended sessions that were more ‘international’ in character and concern and more to do with ‘social’ movements than other actors, but this does not reduce the negative importance of the tendencies, if I have read them correctly. In my understanding at least, it is extremely important for us to keep in mind the importance of ‘the national’ and of the potentiality of a democratic state; and if the Forum is tending, in any way, to give vent and form to these kinds of fundamentalism and/or sectarianism, and to reinforce them, then – quite aside from the weakness and inadequacy of these perceptions - we need to reflect on this carefully.<sup>22</sup>

These tendencies are important to the Forum both because they potentially threaten it and also because the Forum is a powerful vehicle for addressing and overcoming them and can contribute to a wider transformation of discourse. Given this, I was therefore of course very happy to hear Samir Amin so strongly underlining in his presentation to this Seminar that organisation at the national level is essential, and that without this, there cannot be a meaningful global initiative. But on the other hand, I feel that two critical related points were left un-addressed in this formulation. First, as I understand it ‘organising at the national level’ does not mean only at an all-India (or all-Brazil, all-South Africa, whatever) level but, crucially, also *relating to* the nation-state and engaging structures of state power - and to *working with* conventional political actors who have historically worked at this level and know its geography. In my experience, this is one of the biggest gaps between what one could loosely characterise as ‘new politics’ and ‘old politics’.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I make this comment here so emphatically in part because of the strongly positive reception I got in the Forum sessions where I made these points, from people from different parts of the world – implying that some (or even many) other participants, at least, also had a similar reading of the debate – and of the tendencies. On further reflection however, it has been interesting to realise that by and large it was older people – whether activists, professionals, or academics – who actually came up and discussed the point with me. I now wonder whether there was a pattern in this. Is it that the nation-state is of greater importance to older people – in other words, those who recall earlier days when the post-colonial, post-war nation-state was in its heyday – and less so to younger people? Or was it just my age that determined the age of those who approached me?

<sup>23</sup> For one exploration of new politics, see Hilary Wainwright, nd, c. January 2002 – ‘Notes towards a new politics – New strategies for people power’. TNI Briefing Series, no 2002/3, Porto Alegre Special. Amsterdam : Transnational Institute, and [www.tni.org/newpol](http://www.tni.org/newpol).

To illustrate my point, I refer to two examples. The first example comes from my own experience in this field. About a decade ago, when structural adjustment was first brought to India, a range of civil and political initiatives managed over the next some years to generate a fairly broad-based opposition and in some ways to partially abort (or at least, distort) the process. In the course of this, some of us working in otherwise very serious civil initiatives tried raising in several forums the possibility (and strategic necessity) of looking to see whether we could not find common space with strategic sections of the State in India, in the struggle against structural adjustment. This was not however, a ‘popular’ position, at least at that time. On one occasion for instance, that would have been amusing if it had not been tragic, I had the unfortunate experience of not only being ruled out of order and told that the meeting could not and would not discuss such questions, but also made to feel that I was welcome to leave the room if I insisted on raising such issues.

The second example is an extraordinary conjuncture that took place in mid April 2000. Just as A16 was taking shape (the major civil demonstrations that took place around the Bretton Woods institutions in Washington DC, starting on April 16 2000), the Havana Summit of the state South – the Group of 77 - was closing. What was extraordinary that each formation declared itself to be The Torchbearer of Seattle – that it was carrying forward the torch of Seattle - and neither one could (or was willing to ?) see that there was another torchbearer standing on the same world stage (and in this case, in the very same hemisphere) !<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding all the inherent difficulties of such an enterprise, the possible potential that there might have been of forging at least a tactical front between civil and state critics and opponents of the North-dominated WTO process at that point in the struggle and looking ahead to the next stage, was completely lost, at least at that juncture.<sup>25</sup>

As is well known, the next WTO meeting, held at Doha in Qatar in November 2001, was a disaster for the South.<sup>26</sup> Given what happened there – the immense (and totally unprincipled) pressure that was brought on the state South by the state North, that led to its buckling, and where civil actors were largely rendered marginal by the design and location of the meeting - I think we need to ask ourselves whether another outcome might have been possible if some initiative had been taken in or after April 2002, and what lessons that holds for us even today.

Indeed, as I understand it, helping to bridge old politics and the new, in different countries and historical contexts but at the same time in history – in part, because of the sheer

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<sup>24</sup> Although some news items did appear on the net soon after this conjuncture – based on a release by the organisers of A16 – that the Havana Summit had declared its support for the A16 demonstrations, this turned out not to be the case. (Rather, the Secretary of the Havana Summit had, when asked a question by a reporter, only said that he personally supported the demonstrations that were about to take place in DC.) Personal communication during 2000 between JS and Soren Ambrose of the 50 Years Is Enough Network USA, which provided the Secretariat for the A16 demonstrations.

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Jai Sen, April 2000 – ‘Who is the real torchbearer ? Which is the real torch ? Happenings in Washington DC and Havana : Challenges for civil movement worldwide and for the state in the South’. 7 pp, privately circulated on the net but unpublished; subsequently revised and expanded.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Caroline Lucas, January-February 2002 – ‘Doha : Not a development round but a disaster’, in *Nai Azadi Udhgosh* (India), pp 14-15, reprinted from *The Guardian* (London), and : World Development Movement, January-February 2002 – ‘Doha : a disaster for the world’s poor’, a Statement issued by the World Development Movement, in *Nai Azadi Udhgosh* (India), p 13, credited to Barry Coates.

compulsions of the times we are living through - is going to become one of the most crucial and most difficult challenges for the Forum, and quite possibly also one of its historically most important. There are of course many aspects to this. Among other things, it will be vital to not assume a homogeneity between conditions in different parts of the world – in other words, that even if there are newer and older actors in different situations, that the relations between them and the conditions they work under are always the same. At a different level, it will also be essential for the Forum to move from focussing on exchange among the converted and already committed to progressively opening itself up to the non-converted – to professionals, academics, people in the creative worlds, and generally to the middle classes, and also those in the corporate world – and to encourage within these worlds the culture of free thought and exchange on which it is founded.

The growing sophistication and strength of civil actors at both national and international levels – and where the mounting of the Forum itself is an indication of this – demands new perspectives, new strategies. On the one hand, Samir Amin and others who have spoken at this Seminar have argued the nation-state (and a democratic, decentralised nation-state, one that we will have to struggle for since this is not a given in almost all contexts) is not just an actor but arguably must be the central actor in the struggle against the rampant imperialism that we face today.

On the other hand, whereas nation-states have tended to be relatively slow and ponderous in terms of transitional action, civil actors such as transnational civil alliances and networks are constantly breaking new ground and showing themselves as being vital actors on the international stage. And as Keck and Sikkink and others have shown, the establishment of strategic linkage between civil entities and elements within states has become – has perhaps long been - a crucial part of the vocabulary of transnational civil action.<sup>27</sup>

Given this, I believe that the building of strategic overt and covert alliances between civil and state actors is not just an option any longer; it is mandatory that we do so. In my understanding, difficult as this terrain is the organisers of the World Social Forum must – again, especially at the present critical juncture in world history – examine this question and consider the possibilities of moving in this direction, in a cautious and strategic manner. Along with this, it should also examine the possibilities of contact with, at one level, political parties and groups, and on the other, with UN and other inter-state bodies such as the Group of 77. I believe that it also needs to take the initiative of doing so, rather than run the risk of being approached by elements of the state South that it might find it difficult to align with. What can and should be the relations between civil and state entities, which state entities should be approached and what the criteria should be for deciding, and so on, are all subordinate questions. The primary question to be addressed is whether the historical juncture we are at demands such a step. And finally in this regard, we need to keep in mind that whatever we do, we must do it with a long view on history, not the short – or certainly, not only the short.

My fourth question in this area has to do with South-South relations. This is a delicate question, for an initiative that is internationalist in character. In short, even as it speaks of ‘the world’ is the Forum willing to privilege South-South relations, for strategic reasons? And if it

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret E Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, 1998 - *Activists Beyond Borders*, Advocacy Networks in International Politics. Ithaca : Cornell University Press.

does so, how is the range of the Forum's partners in the civil North going to look at this - from its strategic political partners to its strategic financial partners ?

The next point I want to flag is directly related : The question of resource mobilisation and its relationship to internationalism on the one hand and to self-reliance on the other. To some, this may seem to have nothing to do with the Forum, but in my understanding and from our perspective from India, it is centrally and crucially related.

In short, my question is : Can the WSF be a process, both in of itself and also symbolically, of the crystallisation and practice of a more conscious, strategic ideology of resource mobilisation as an integral – and not optional - part of the struggle against imperialism and for another world ?

Since this terrain may be a little less than familiar to some from other parts of the world (and on the other hand is, in bits and pieces, an intense part of thinking in India), I perhaps need to explain my question a little. But before I do this I just want to emphasise that as I see it, there has – arguably – never been an opportunity quite like the Forum for addressing this fundamental, underlying question; and that doing so substantively could well contribute in its own way to transforming world politics.

The issue is complex, and I will attempt to only frame it here by sketching out four interrelated parameters. I am aware that it bears much deeper and more elaborate interrogation than I can do here, and I hope that this will take place.<sup>28</sup>

First, and put in a nutshell, in popular perception – at least in India – there is something fundamentally contradictory about the fact that many of us who are campaigning against so-called 'globalisation' are so heavily globalised in ourselves and in our lives, and in particular that many of the organisations involved in such activities are heavily (and sometimes totally) dependent for their existence on resources – funds – from abroad. I am referring here not only to voluntary organisations ('NGOs') but also to researchers and research organisations and, especially earlier on, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, also to some party-related trade unions and other organisations. This contradiction deeply blurs the message/s such organisations and individuals – and the fora they are associated with – are trying to put across, and in a way, half the battle they are waging is therefore lost. If we want to win the hearts and minds of ordinary people – and not talk only to those who are just like us, warts and all - then

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<sup>28</sup> The points I raise here come out of a long-standing and largely subterranean debate in India, that periodically erupts, sometimes violently – and so far always inconclusively. It is rising again at the present moment, both in the context of the building of a WSF process in India and also of a much more restrictive law that the present government has proposed on the flow of foreign funds to both civil and non-government state entities in the country (such as judges). In India, some of us are hopeful that the Forum process itself can provide a process of addressing this question substantively.

In raising this point here, I therefore acknowledge my debt to the debate in India more generally and currently to others in the WSF process in India, and where some of us are trying to formulate policy informed by these ideas.

For an idea of this ground in India, see Prakash Karat, September 1988 – Foreign Funding & the Philosophy of Voluntary Organisations, A Factor in Imperialist Strategy. New Delhi : National Book Centre. Expanded version of article in The Marxist, 1984; and Harsh Sethi, November 1984 – 'Some Dilemmas Facing Non-Party Political Groups : A Response to the Party Based Critiques', in Lokayan Bulletin, 2:2, November 1984, pp 17-26.

we have to ask ourselves the question of whether this contradiction is sustainable, and if not then how we want to address it.

Second, and predating these doubts, there is a long-standing and more general debate in India about the role of what are termed ‘foreign funds’ in influencing social, economic, and political developments in the country, with both the left and the right taking sharp stands in this regard.<sup>29</sup> Partly as a consequence of such nationalist sentiments (and more sentiment than a debate), there is strong legislation already in place in the country that attempts to control and regulate the flow and utilisation of such funds – and with a rightist government in power, even stronger legislation is now on the anvil.<sup>30</sup> This legislation is being fought by one section of voluntary organisations on the specific ground that it violates the spirit of the ‘liberalisation’ and ‘globalisation’ that the government is otherwise pushing (and that they, presumably, would like to also have the full benefits of). The WSF is not yet much known in India, and so there is as yet no question of it being seen in this way, but given the scale of the event in Brazil and the role of international funders in at least partially supporting the Porto Alegre meetings, the question has already arisen.

Thirdly, and again speaking only from experience in India, it is widely believed that there is something profoundly important, valuable, and empowering about raising and utilising indigenous resources – and thereby about being ‘self-reliant’. This is a political culture that is reflected in everything from the work of farmers and artisans at the most local level to the struggle of the country for independence during the 1920s-40s, led by Mahatma Gandhi, and to at least the first phase of national development and international policy in post-independent India. This worldview is even today widely shared among activists and thinkers of most persuasions, across the board.<sup>31</sup>

This ideology is sometimes invoked in the criticism of foreign funds, but it is not limited to funds from abroad. There are, for instance, movements and activists within the country who believe in complete local self-reliance and that resources even from another part of the country, and especially from the government, sap the vitality of local action. Although this vision is getting blurred today because of the enormous changes that have been wrought in the country over the past two decades through the politics of liberalisation, structural adjustment, and globalisation, which has widely included the internalisation of consumerism and cooption, this remains a strong and emotive refrain in the subconscious of the Indian polity – and of the current struggle against ‘globalisation’ and for alternatives.

And fourth, there is the possibility – and perhaps even the necessity – of two shifts in perception : One of, viewing external / non-local resource mobilisation in terms not merely of necessity but also of solidarity and partnership; or certainly, of distinguishing between mere

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<sup>29</sup> For the position in the eighties of one section of the Left, the CPI(M), see Karat, 1988, op cit.

<sup>30</sup> The legislation in place is the Foreign Exchange (Control and Regulation) Act 1976, as revised in the 80s. The legislation was brought in during the so-called ‘Emergency’ (read authoritarian rule) in the mid 1970s, ostensibly to restrict funds coming in from abroad to finance terrorists. But the powers defined also covered voluntary and other civil organisations, and judges, whose untrammelled dissent and opposition were then proving awkward for the authorities.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, M P Parameswaran, August 2001 – ‘To Be or Not To Be’ : A War Against the Necessity of Wars’. Paper for Workshop on ‘Rural Transitions : Coping with Globalisation’, held in Beijing, China, August 25-27 2001.

necessity and solidarity. And the second, as a part of solidarity and partnership, of expanding one's perception of 'the local' to including the ground where one's partners and comrades in struggle stand, and thereby viewing resources raised by them in their context as being appropriate for use in one's own territory.

I have no doubt that this formulation raises more questions than it resolves, but that in part is part of the reason for spelling it out. As I say, these issues dominantly rise from our experience in India, but together they seem to define territory that is perhaps also relevant to others in other contexts. And as I understand it, taken and addressed together they seem to have the potential of redefining the ground for collective world action.

My own experience is that there are few countries in the world where this terrain is as live a concern as in India. (There are of course other countries, such China, where the flow of funds is heavily proscribed, but I am not aware of the other sides and dimensions of this debate there – of whether this policy simply reflects the insecurity of the rulers or whether there is a wider political culture and history to this.) Most countries I have been to seem to be, in these terms anyway, completely 'integrated' into the world system (and not always, of course, in terms of solidarity). Even though the situation has been fast changing in India also, we are therefore perhaps going to have to engage with this question here far more strongly than elsewhere, if we are to build a World Social Forum process in the country.

But – and without wanting to impose this history on others – I am led to nevertheless ask the question of whether the essentials of this frame are at all familiar to others in other countries – and relevant to them in their debates. If the World Social Forum is about the struggle against the singular future that the hegemonic world system offers, then will it not have to include debate about how participants themselves are located within this system? If imperialism is about the control over resources and futures, then can it be fought without the comprehensive mobilisation, deployment, and – crucially – control over local and 'national' resources? And if so, then is there not a need to forge a framework of thought and action of resource mobilisation that strategically locates mobilisation of resources both from local and national sources and from international sources? Can this not also be a way of building strategic alliances both within national boundaries – such as with national capital and with more conscious and critical elements within the state – and also internationally and indeed, across all conventional boundaries? Would the Forum not be a most appropriate arena for discussing these questions, formulating strategic perspectives, and practising and living out the perspectives that are forged?

I now move on to my sixth concern: As I have already mentioned, the Forum seems to offer the distinct possibility of creating the 'network of networks' that has now been mooted for decades – and there is already a somewhat related initiative building up towards this in Brazil. Quite aside from how it would be seen in state circles, a development like this would fundamentally alter the topology of global and regional civil politics. So it needs discussion.<sup>32</sup>

While the work, functioning, and politics of civil networks has now been fairly widely documented and written about, much less is known about networking *between* networks, and especially in what ways this would contribute (or is already contributing) to the dynamics of transformation. Although creating such mega-networks is not what the Forum has been set up to

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<sup>32</sup> I thank Jeremy Brecher for reminding me of this.

do, at least overtly, and although in some senses such a development could be seen as being contradictory to the open-ended nature of the Forum as an idea, we also need to recognise and confront the reality that this (or some variance of this) is equally definitely one of the possible outcomes of the Forum as an open space. It is also useful to keep in mind that this kind of development might also take shape not through deliberate planning, or even as a consequence of differences in tactics and strategy, but simply because it is precipitated by some external event, process, or opportunity. How should the Forum look at such a possibility?

My seventh and last concern, in terms of ideological-strategic concerns, relates to re-appropriating the civil - and in that sense, it relates also to the name of the Forum, the World *Social* Forum.

In January this year (2002) I made a suggestion in a Note that I circulated to the WSF International Council and a few other people that the Forum consider – before and during the second Forum - changing its name to the World *Civil* Forum.<sup>33</sup> The objective of my doing so was to deploy this extraordinary initiative and the respect that it has gained, to bring out the importance of civil activities and relations in social life, and thereby – as I say – attempt to ‘regain the civil’.

Of the several proposals I put forward in that note, this one attracted the most criticism and comment, as did the earlier draft of this section in this paper – primarily on the ground that this can easily be understood as merely a hair-splitting, semantic issue. Respecting the comments I have received, I rest my case for a name change – but I nevertheless wish to use this context for arguing for a shift to a more robust use of the term ‘civil’.

Aside from the practical difficulties involved in a world enterprise changing its name midstream, almost everyone who reacted to my proposal has also been sensitive to the fact that the term ‘civil’ has been co-opted by neoliberals, especially in the term ‘civil society’. My first level of argument is that there is no need to be so defensive about concepts and terms – and especially in this case. There is a wide usage of English where other conceptions of the term exist: Reflect, for instance, on the terms ‘civil rights’ and ‘civil disobedience’, which surely have a much longer and more distinguished history than the current use of the term ‘civil society’ – which is relatively recent, only since about the mid 80s-early 90s, arising primarily from US and eastern European experience. There is also the use of terms such as ‘civil service’ in countries such as Finland, which refers not to governmental service – which, ironically, is the way the British and ex-British colonies use this term – but to the option that conscientious objectors can take in place of military service, in the form of time spent with civil organisations.

My second level of argument is that we need to find and forge vocabulary that can express emerging relations in society – and in this case, I am looking for a term that describes political relations between non-state ‘social’ and political actors and institutions that are parallel to state relations between governmental and other state actors. I again remind ourselves that we are, I suggest, in a new phase of history and social relations. It seems to me that the term ‘civil relations’ fits this bill well.

In my understanding, the term ‘civil’ defines a space that is at the same time much wider and also more political in nature than ‘social’ and than the common equivalent organisational

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<sup>33</sup> Jai Sen, January 2002a, as in footnote 9 above, pp 5-6.

concepts, either ‘NGO’ (referring to ‘the non-governmental’, the term that is more commonly used in many countries and also internationally), ‘social organisation’, or ‘voluntary organisation’, the term that is still more common in India. (As I see it, the term NGO is a deliberate attempt to blur differences and to depoliticise meaning and relations.) And beyond this, I believe that it is also a useful (and perhaps even important) political-strategic task to re-appropriate the term ‘civil’ and to define a more radical and generic use for it than its current strongest usage (in the neo-liberal term and conception of ‘civil society’).

In proposing this usage, I finally perhaps need to return to my first argument and emphasise that I am of course *not* using the term ‘civil’ in the sense that it has been co-opted to mean by neo-liberals, as in ‘civil society’, an apolitical sphere of free association. To the contrary, I am using it in the Gramscian sense, denoting a dialectical - and distinctly political - set of relationships between individuals, their associations, and the state. In addition, I use it deliberately to signal the equally dialectical relationship – and struggle - between the civil and what I term ‘the uncivil’, the marginalized, excluded, and unintended world that exists in all societies.<sup>34</sup> In the Indian context, deeply divided as it is on a caste and class basis, the uncivil (in my sense of the term) resist having to join dominant civil society on terms set by those who have been historically dominant, and are today building what in some ways is their own ‘civil society’. The term ‘civil’ is therefore strategically useful at several levels.

While respecting Marx’s interpretation of the term ‘civil society’ in his earlier writings (referring to bourgeois society), I believe and propose that the term ‘civil’ can stand and should also be used by itself, and that it is strategically useful to do so, at this juncture in history, at least in India but I suspect also more widely and perhaps globally, when the state has been, for the moment, so heavily threatened by control by global capital. It is precisely at this time and juncture that a strong assertion not only of ‘the social’ but also of relations parallel to the state – civil relations, in short - is vital.

I now wish to move on to some more programmatic concerns. But before doing so, I feel I should emphasise that my sense is that if the Forum does not constantly address strategic questions such as the above – and I am sure there are others that others will identify that are equally if not more urgent – then it stands the chance of gradually disintegrating into a liberal process, where everything is possible : Including, yes, the possibility of no real change in social relations as they exist and only an existential understanding that it is merely ‘concerned’ with issues of change, as an armchair actor. Such a drift would not only be sad but also tragic, because it would implicitly legitimise the resurgence of imperialism and fundamentalism that we are today seeing all around us.

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<sup>34</sup> Jai Sen, April 1975 - The Unintended City, An Essay on the City of the Poor. Published by Cathedral Relief Services, Calcutta. Reprinted in The Hindustan Times (New Delhi), August 1975; in Fulcrum (Bombay), February 1976, and in Seminar (New Delhi), April 1976. Reprinted by Unnayan, Calcutta, June 1980 (mimeo) and in Seminar 500, April 2001, pp 38-47.

I acknowledge that I have recently run across a completely different use of the same term, ‘uncivil’, referring to what in India is broadly (if inadequately) is called ‘anti-social’: The mafia, the criminal lumpen. See, for instance, Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce, 1998 – Civil Society & Development, A critical exploration. Boulder, Colorado, and London : Lynne Rienner. Since I am also now suddenly seeing others from Britain using the term in this way, I am left wondering whether this is not a particularly British use of the term, and – since I do not remember it from earlier literature - a new development there, growing as a part of the ‘civil society’ debate taking place there.

### *The programmatic*

First, there is – there has been, so far – a strong and perhaps understandable tendency to conceive of the World Social Forum as an *event*. Again, and especially in today’s post 9/11 context, I believe that if the Forum is to realise its potential there is an urgent need to make the shift to viewing and conceiving it as a *process* – of making the global meeting that has so far been ‘the World Social Forum’ only one event in a wider and sustained programme and process of mobilization and, importantly, of ‘regional-global’ meetings.

In short, while also undertaking and/or encouraging and enabling events, my sense is that ‘the Forum’ needs to shift to an emphasis on building mass awareness and involvement. In other words, I believe it needs to move towards making ‘openness’ a broader political culture, and a part of everyday life. It needs to work towards creating maximum opportunity for mass participation. ‘The Forum’ needs to be made manifest in as many contexts as possible, across the globe, and be available for achieving at national levels what the global meeting is doing at the global. This cannot happen through annual global meetings alone, and can only happen if the ‘World Social Forum’ becomes a truly global process, manifested in myriad local, ‘national’, and regional forms. And it is only through this that it will, I believe, realize its full potential.

I might add that this is the position that civil groups from India also took in the WSF International Council in January 2002, in response to the invitation of the International Council and the Brazil Organising Committee late last year to host the next Forum.<sup>35</sup> This was in complete conformity with the Forum’s own formulations, where there has been a recognition – if low key – of the importance of process right from the beginning.<sup>36</sup> But perhaps understandably, the practical emphasis in the Forum process has been in organising the global meeting, which could also be said to be only a means towards the end of building the Forum as process.

We from India were of course therefore very glad to understand from the meeting of the IC that to a large extent at least, there seemed to be broad agreement in the IC with the spirit of the idea. In particular, it was agreed in principle that several ‘continental’ as well as thematic meetings would be held over this next year, in different parts of the world (including in south Asia), and that the third global meeting that will take place at Porto Alegre in January 2003 will therefore take its place within this larger process. It was also announced at the conclusion of the Forum itself that the following global meeting, in January 2004, is expected to be in India, again preceded by regional-continental meetings.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Letter of January 12 2002 from the WSF India Working Group to the WSF International Council and the WSF Brazil Organising Committee.

<sup>36</sup> Clause 2 of the Charter of Principles : “The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that "another world is possible", it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.”

<sup>37</sup> The interpretation of this formulation that appeared in some sections of the international press during the World Social Forum 2002 in Porto Alegre itself, such as in *The New York Times*, was that interests who wanted to keep the Forum in Porto Alegre ‘won out’ over those who wanted to see it moving elsewhere. This is perhaps not quite correct. Civil groups from India had made earlier clear to the WSF International Council in their acceptance letter that they could not accept the responsibility for the global meeting before January 2004, and that they would like to see this preceded by a global mobilisational process. The formula agreed upon in the Council, of having the next (2003) global meeting in Porto Alegre but as a part of a global

The Brazil Organising Committee and the International Council will now be struggling with how to make this vision become a reality across the globe, and in particular with the question of what shape the next global meeting in Porto Alegre should take, given that it will now be part of a larger – and increasingly global - process. We from India look forward to seeing how they respond to this challenge and to working with them in making their vision come real. But even as they do this, it will of course be the mass participation in the Forum – this year and next, in the major events and in associated activities in between the events – that will play the real role in transforming the Forum from an event into a process.

Second, I have already argued that there needs to be a recognition by the Forum of the situation we are in today, post 9/11. I personally believe that the WSF Brazil Organising Committee (and the IC) now needs to look carefully at the difficult question of how the Forum process can be consciously oriented towards defending and expanding democratic space, but without in any way contributing to making Forum more closed (in the sense of more specific and limited) in its vision.

To some extent, the Forum is already – as I have already mentioned – doing this by instinct and nature, just by taking place and by providing space for free exchange and debate. On the other hand, I believe that in the specific context of post 9/11 perhaps five critical shifts are required : (a), it needs to recognise that civil and political space – which lies at the very heart of what the Forum is about – is today under grave threat, and is getting increasingly restricted, including in the heartland of the ‘war on terrorism’ and the war for ‘free trade’ : In the US itself. It needs to recognise not just that those criticising or opposing neoliberal globalisation are being equated with terrorists – which is grave enough - but that there are signs that the space for dissent itself, in the US and elsewhere, is being squeezed. This is not marginal to what the Forum is about; it is central.

(b), the Forum - and all its participants – need to realise that the Forum could only be organised because the civil and political space for this was available at this point in time, in Brazil and globally. (Imagine, for instance, trying to organise this meeting – or anything like it - back in the late 70s or early 80s, when the military regime was still in place in Brazil; or trying to organise such a Forum in China as it is today.) We need urgently to recognise that democratic space is not a given, but has constantly to be struggled for and to be seen strategically. (c), seeing and seizing the opportunity of available space needs to be not just an assumed ‘natural’ character of the Forum but rather a conscious, strategic posture and stance. This will be all the more the case as the Forum globalises, and as attempts are made to organise Forum events and processes in different parts of the world.

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process, and then having the following (2004) global meeting in India, therefore in fact substantially addressed everyone’s concerns.

This is not at all to deny that there indeed seems to be a section of the Brazil Organising Committee that would like to see the global meeting kept permanently in Porto Alegre. It remains to be seen therefore, whether the global meeting is at all allowed to be held elsewhere in the world. But as is perhaps clear, now that the decision to hold continental meetings has been taken and those initiatives are underway, this is now of less consequence than it was earlier. The Forum can now still be globalised, even if the once-in-a-year ‘global’ meeting continues to be held in Brazil.

There are also several other options that are available to the Forum for transforming itself into a process. Some of these are laid out in my January 2002a note, as above.

(d), my sense is that the movers of the Forum perhaps need to more explicitly recognise the obvious, and act on this : That democratic space and opportunity is not homogeneously available across the world, but rather in widely varying forms and ways, and this is highly volatile and will also constantly keep shifting, especially under the pressures of the twins wars being waged on us. And (e), the Forum needs to consider the possibility of being interventionist in character : Will it actively try to encourage Forum-related activities – in other words, encouraging free space and debate - in areas where space is either already restricted or tending to get restricted ? Will it in any way defend the freedom of space, and the right of peoples to free exchange ?

In my understanding, these questions demand programmatic debate and formulation, and not just a laissez-faire position. At the same time, it also demands extremely sensitive formulation that is sufficiently open-ended that it does not end up making the Forum itself a prominent political actor. It is of course already a political actor, by the very act of providing a space for free debate (and especially in the context of reducing space) – but it perhaps needs to be careful to not start thinking that it also represents the interests of civil movement across the world. It is only a short step from one to the other.

Third, I believe that there are going to be several important organisational-programmatic implications of – indeed, imperatives of – globalising the Forum as a process. Here, I want to focus only the question of transferring responsibility for the Forum Secretariat – which is something that will be an inherent part of holding the global meeting in a new location, as has now been decided. (I would guess that similar or related considerations would need to be there in terms of new initiatives being taken in the name of the Forum, by new groupings of people.) Since this decision has now been taken however, I must emphasise that these proposals – which were also originally formulated before the meeting of the WSF International Council where the decision was made – are not addressed to the proposed shift from Brazil to India alone, but are rather put forward as longer-term, generic considerations for organisational culture.<sup>38</sup> Changing rhythm, I am going to here just list these points out, in a sense more as illustrations than as a total formulation. That job of course belongs to the members of the WSF Brazil Organising Committee and International Council :

- i) If the process of organising major global meetings is going to continue, and if the location of the meeting and the Secretariat is going to be shifted, then the new Secretariat should ideally be asked to take up the responsibility for two successive years, not one. It would be a tremendous waste of organisational experience gained by each successive Secretariat, if it is only going to be used for one meeting and one year.
- ii) The Forum as a larger process needs to explicitly recognise that each country (and in some countries such as India, almost each region within some countries) have different political and organisational traditions – which includes things such as organising meetings. Indeed, it would be to the Forum's strength if it even celebrated this diversity of tradition, rather than assume (and worse, demand) homogeneity of approach.

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<sup>38</sup> This section, even more than the preceding, draws heavily on my January 2002a note, as above, pp 6-7.

- iii) Even while respecting that each location / country will have its own organisational history and culture, and even while celebrating the strength and richness that this can and will bring to the WSF process, the IC must nevertheless place before civil entities in any country who are considering the possibility of hosting the next Secretariat the full list of basic responsibilities that they must assume if they accept the responsibility, so that there is complete (or substantial, at least) continuity.
- iv) The event, and the Secretariat, should ideally be shifted each time to a context that already has in place an active MC (Mobilisation Committee) – or in other words, a strong experience of WSF mobilisation. This will especially apply as the Forum process matures.
- v) Given the nature and potential of the WSF process, the IC must insist on the prior formation of a broad-based, non-partisan, and purpose-made committee or platform within the location being considered, which will collectively take the responsibility of generating the Secretariat and of overseeing its work, and will turn be accountable to the IC. Broad guidelines for such a committee or body could perhaps be formulated and adopted as an indicative code.
- vi) In any case, in no circumstances should such an important responsibility be handed over to a single organisation or even to, say, an existing campaign committee (since both of these categories are by definition going to have their own specific prior agenda). The danger of the WSF process becoming captive to partisan concerns is very real, even if this is not the situation at first.
- vii) Assuming that conditions (i)-(v) are met, there should be a conscious and planned process of transfer of experience, systems, and data from one Secretariat to the next Secretariat, including through a training and skill-building process, and also a clear definition by the IC that while each Secretariat will necessarily invent new and often better systems, that sustained implementation of certain defined elements of the earlier systems is mandatory.
- viii) The IC must also be prepared from ahead of time, with appropriate policies and provisions in place, for the possibility of failure of the new Secretariat to manage its responsibilities and therefore for a rescue, retrieval, and salvage operation. It is mandatory that it is politically willing to assess management, to make recommendations, and to take action if required, and this must be specifically and explicitly agreed to with those forming the new Secretariat. I wish to only underline this point, because the WSF process is far too important either for the IC to be unprepared for such situations or for political embarrassment to come in the way. It may also be useful to point out the formation of an organic secretariat such as was the case in Brazil, and handing over responsibility of such an important process to a new formation, are two very different matters. In short, the IC must suitably equip itself before transferring any responsibilities.
- ix) The IC could consider instituting, from this coming year onwards, a process such as discussed above, of de-emphasising the major events and of placing increasingly greater emphasis on activities in-between.

I would like to end this rather more detailed point by emphasising that while these may seem like mere bureaucratic procedures, I make them on the basis of two specific cases where I have seen major initiatives – one ‘national’ and one ‘international’ – collapse or disintegrate because of the inability or unwillingness of subsequent secretariats to manage the

responsibilities given to them; and most crucially, where territorial politics came / have come in the way of attempts to salvage the situation, and where the larger initiatives just fell apart and died (in one case, is dying) as a result. It is surely not difficult to appreciate that this is an unacceptable risk in the case of something such as the World Social Forum. It would be nothing less than tragic to see the Forum fall into such a swamp.

### *The organisational-cultural*

Finally, I would like to outline some more organisational-cultural questions that I believe the Forum will need to address. Clearly, the point just made above also has a strong element of this rather than only the programmatic, so we are in fact already into this discussion.

The first question in this area of course concerns making some strategic sense of the structure that has already developed. At present, there is the Brazil Organising Committee – that is the main decision-making body; the International Council, that the BOC set up last year, after the first global meeting, to act as a kind of loose consultative body; the Forum Secretariat, that works – as I understand it – under the guidance of the BOC and is more a professional outfit than a decision-making body but that inevitably, by its very existence and character as well as by the myriad day-to-day decisions it has been taking, the website it maintains, and so on, contributes strongly to the political culture of the initiative (and in many ways, is the most public face of the Forum !); and then there are Mobilization Committees that have now been set up in different ways in different locations, ranging from the ‘national’ level in some contexts to the local, in others.

My understanding is that while the BOC has fairly clear relationships with the IC and the Secretariat respectively, its relationship/s with the MCs is much less than clear, and in turn the relationship of the MCs with ‘representatives’ from different countries on the IC is completely undefined. It hardly needs to be said that while not suggesting at all that the Forum needs to adopt a tree-like federative structure, the various relationships that are contained in this constellation need to be worked out somewhat more than this – and once again, especially as the Forum globalises and especially if it is going to view the context in which it is growing strategically. While things go well, there is little problem with a lack of clarity; the problem arises when problems arise.

It is important to note that there are two somewhat different dynamics at play here, and also to place these within the political-organisational culture that the Brazil Organising Committee has so far defined for the Forum. On the one hand, the BOC and the Mobilisation Committees (MCs) are, normatively, ‘geographically’ based, relating to particular territories / contexts and defined in terms of place. On the other hand, the IC, while clearly made up of people from many countries and of all (most) kinds of races, notionally ‘comes from’ not countries but representing particular organisations and networks.

The organisational culture defined for the Forum in its Charter of Principles is as follows :

- “5. The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends neither to be a body representing world civil society nor to exclude from the debates it promotes those in positions of political responsibility, mandated by their peoples, who decide to enter into the commitments resulting from those debates.

“6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No-one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body.”

The ‘we do not represent’ culture is also reflected in the fact that, for instance, the BOC does not claim in any way to represent Brazil as a whole, and acknowledges that is an ad hoc body. Similarly, the MCs have also not been constituted on a representative base, but are more in the nature of related initiatives taken by people who happen to be based in particular locations.

This is difficult terrain, however. The Forum is growing – and is being built – within a wider context of conventional political-organisational culture, and where those participating in it are to a greater or lesser extent creatures of that conventional and wider culture. Even though a formal claim of ‘non-representation’ has been made, it was clear from the exchanges at the IC meeting and during the Forum itself that territoriality was nevertheless always straining to emerge from the shadows – that some degree of ‘staking out’ of territories was taking place, and that legitimacy was being claimed on this basis. This however runs counter to the reality that the more open transnational civil networks often reach out widely – if usually on an uneven basis – into many territories, and do not respect territorial claims, and that this is increasingly happening as e-culture spreads. But this, in short, means that two competing organisational cultures are emerging simultaneously.

These cultures are not necessarily exclusive, provided claims of superior legitimacy do not rise. But my own sense is that this is already beginning to take place, and is something that both the IC and the BOC need to reflect on.

The core questions that are contained here, of course, are of legitimacy and authority, and the difficult question of representation.<sup>39</sup> Answers to these questions in turn of course have deep implications for the ‘structure’ that has already taken shape. Almost by definition, civil organizations are not representative in character and nature. This is the case even if it is too commonly the case that the representatives of civil entities occasionally make unfortunate claims of ‘representing’ large sections of people, usually the oppressed and unrepresented, to give them voice. But where they get this right from, is too rarely clear. This is one of the accusations that are most commonly levelled at them. And in building a process such as the Forum, and in opening up civil and political space and struggling to keep it open, those involved with the Forum are almost certainly going to have to increasingly face this question and this challenge, even if there is little doubt that in today’s conditions at least, civil organizations in most contexts have so far gained and enjoy a legitimacy and authority that few traditional political actors can match, at this time in history.

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<sup>39</sup> For a very useful discussion of this question in terms of the work of particular and more directed transnational civil networks and campaigns, see : Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl, January 1998 - ‘Political Responsibility in NGO Advocacy : Exploring Emerging Shapes of Global Democracy’. Paper presented under the ‘States and Societies’ Research Seminar Series, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, on January 20 1998. 26 pp; subsequently published in *World Development*. We now need similar analysis of larger and more open phenomena such as the World Social Forum.

I believe that the Brazil Organising Committee – and the IC – needs to critically reflect on how and why this is the case, on where this legitimacy comes from and on how it varies across different contexts, and on how to build on all this; and especially since the Forum's very slogan is about building another world – an alternative to the present world. It also needs to reflect, however, on the reality that along with legitimacy, there is also a deepening malaise within the larger body of civil organisations as a whole – including questions of corruption, absence of internal democracy and accountability, and so on - which is beginning to threaten this wider legitimacy and authority. This could all too easily infect the Forum itself. Working for greater transparency within civil culture may be one means by which both issues can be addressed, as well as the progressive definition of the code of conduct I have already suggested, here focussing on transparency and accountability.

Once again, at first glance all this may seem – at this stage of the Forum's life – to have nothing to do with the Forum, and not the Forum's concern. But I believe that even limited reflection will reveal that these issues have everything to do with it and its future – and especially if we move from seeing the Forum not only as an event.

These questions of legitimacy and authority of course also apply to the Forum itself. Questions relating to the structure of the International Council have already – inevitably – arisen, at its recent meeting in Porto Alegre and perhaps also before this, and are going to be further discussed at its next meeting. In my understanding, the Forum would do well to discuss its internal structure within the broader frame of the civil and political culture that it can so strongly contribute to. It also needs to address the question of bridging the gulf between the civil society of which it is a part, and the 'uncivil societies' that exist in all contexts, historically subordinated and oppressed.

At the same time, I need to perhaps emphasise the obvious - that none of this is to suggest that the Forum should even consider playing any role in monitoring the civil world at large, in these or any other terms.

Directly related to this is the question of the logistics of the transfer and spreading of responsibility that I have already raised - for the global meeting, and perhaps also for other Forum-related activities – which is so essential if the Forum is itself to be globalised. It is one thing to start a process in one country, and quite another to spread and transfer already-formed responsibilities - and in that sense, estates - to others in other contexts. All sorts of questions and expectations – including regarding legitimacy and power – are going to arise. Given the responsibilities that civil groups in India have accepted, we are certainly going to have to deeply think about these questions, and I am sure that our friends and comrades in the Brazil Organising Committee and in the IC will also be doing this.

Finally, in this task of highlighting issues of concern, is the crucial and sensitive question of intercultural communication in the course of building the Forum process. In the flush of the success of the Forum in Porto Alegre in these past weeks, it will all too easy to forget that notwithstanding globalisation and the globalising effects of the universalistic regimes that most of us work with, such as human rights and the environment, and despite the fact that an increasing number of us are, as individuals, more than a little transnational in our identities and cultures, we all still live in substantially different cultures that have different ways of doing everyday things such as speaking, negotiating, and coming to decisions, as well as – I suspect – crucial 'background' activities such as cooperating and strategising. I believe it will be crucially

important for a process such as the Forum to recognise these differences and to consciously build on them directly, even to celebrate them – and to not in any way gloss over them or, worse, attempt to homogenize them.

So-called ‘international’ processes and bodies have a way of doing this, and of attracting and inducting ‘those who fit’ – and in turn, of subordinating ‘lower-level’ ‘national’ processes, identities, and cultures to ‘higher-level’ international ones. This will be all the more the case when the BOC and the IC start to look at the questions of how decision-making should take place. It is very likely that subconsciously, there will tend to be a process of using commonly agreed or already-accepted norms – but where it is precisely these norms that most deeply represent homogenized and/or dominant culture. If this is recognised, the Forum has the potential of playing the historic role of forging new norms and new vocabularies.

Closer to home, I believe it will also be especially important for us in India to think carefully about our tendency of dominating debate in international meetings and processes, especially the regional, by virtue of our proficiency in English or the hyper-complex reality we speak from.

The tendency towards homogenisation and domination will equally express itself, at other levels. There will be the tendency for people – in India, and internationally – to assume that when we in India host the global meeting, we should do it ‘just like’ the Porto Alegre meeting (and preferably only ‘bigger and better’). There might well be a tendency for a WSF house-style to grow – for a WSF logo to develop – for a brand name to be established. There will be a tendency for people to assume that out of this will come a common vision of the future – of the other world that is possible.

But is this really what the Forum is about ? One common vision ?

The powerful and resonant motto of the Forum today is ‘Another World Is Possible’. The organizers of the Porto Alegre meeting even commissioned a wonderfully catchy song with this name, which was played repeatedly at the opening and closing sessions and became popular in its own right. But as someone at the opening party said, “Is this vision – one other world – really what the Forum is about ? Should the Forum’s motto not be ‘Other Worlds Are Possible ?!’”.

A difficult question – almost as difficult as the one I mentioned at the beginning, concerning the democratisation of globalisation. But if we are going to work for another world, then whose vision will apply ? Can there be – and should there be - only one other vision ? *Are other globalisations possible ?* The phrase my friend suggested is not nearly as elegant (or, importantly in politics, as catchy) as the original - but this is surely one of the many difficult issues with which all of us who are involved with the Forum are going to have to struggle.

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