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Introduction

Gone are the days of the hegemony of *la pensée unique* (or the one-and-only-way of thinking) and the euphoria created by the globalization of markets. Rising unemployment and insecurity, the insidious dismantling of public services, repeated financial crises, ecological imbalances and US unilateralism: all these have helped to undermine the neoliberal discourse. People have lost their confidence in the capacity – or will – of those who govern to guarantee priority for collective security, even rights, over the interests of powerful private groups. This is responsible for the emergence of a ‘world citizens’ movement’ that seeks new forms of collective and democratic regulation. It has taken only a few years for the ‘alternative world galaxy’ to force its way, often in a spectacular fashion, on to the international scene and attract responses from broad sectors of the population.

The alternative world ‘events’ that have had the greatest impact – counter-summits, demonstrations and social forums – show the range and diversity of the various forms of resistance to liberal policies. However, we perceive the characteristics and potential of the struggles against globalization only partially and are often conditioned by national viewpoints and the generalizations of the media. Mobilizations against neoliberal hegemony have their own peculiarities, in range, social composition and political culture, according to the different regions. To understand the dynamic of social conflicts, certain aspects of the various national societies have to be seen in perspective, such as the evolution of the social and economic structures resulting from the type of modernization adopted by the elites, the way in which liberal policies have been put into practice – rapidly and radically in certain cases, more hesitantly and partially in others – and the various impacts that these policies have had on different social groups.

The kind of political power and the type of relationships that have been historically established between the power structures – parties and State – and popular organizations affect the margin of manoeuvre and the mode of expression of these organizations. In many countries, particularly in Africa and the Arab world, they are far from having acquired the right to express their views and make their claims. The holding of elections, more or less regularly, as well as concessions made

to external fundraising bodies, have in no way hindered numerous regimes from controlling and blocking the political and social life of their countries through a subtle combination of clientelistic practices, co-optation and intimidation. In such authoritarian and paternalistic environments, participation in political activities outside the control of political power is an everyday challenge. The presence of 'apolitical' NGOs that loudly proclaim their role as actors in civil society contributes to the marginalization, even asphyxiation of popular initiatives contesting structural adjustment.

In countries where there is more massive contestation of neoliberal policies, it is often led by trade unions or popular movements – movements of peasants, women, students and indigenous people – that have been organized over a long period of time. These struggles against neoliberalism are thus part of a broader project for political and cultural emancipation, in the same way that they are the prolongation of historical struggles against the unequal social structures that liberalization and privatization are reproducing and accentuating. It is through a long process of confrontation of ideas and experiences that these actors have identified the new dynamics of the global powers, made the linkages with their local situation and incorporated these new realities into their agendas.

In the North as in the South, the question of how to translate these struggles into political action lies at the heart of many of the discussions. The militant organizations are sometimes linked to political parties, to which some identify as being in the same broad political movement. These alliances are important, as they give greater publicity to the demands being made by the movements. However, they do imply allegiances that can be very ambiguous, for example when competition between parties leads to a fragmentation of social forces (as in the *piqueteros* of Argentina or the mass movements of India). Also, sharing power with 'allied' parties leads to the institutionalization of movements and trade unions, who are invited to give their opinions, but also to soft-pedal some demands so as not to weaken their political partner (as in the Cosatu trade union confederation in South Africa or the CUT in Brazil).

At the same time, new forms of organization – more autonomous and less formal – are emerging, from day to day, in the field, to oppose privatization policies and the pillage of natural resources. Whether they are the unemployed, the precarious, the urban poor or rural communities threatened by the construction of dams and the destruction of their natural environment, they often take direct

action such as occupying the land or official buildings, barricading roads, sit-ins, diverting water or electricity supplies. It is also necessary to stress the tendency for flexible and decentralized coordination between organizations that normally work on different issues but decide to join forces to make progress on cross-cutting issues. These new groupings, like the Coordination for Water and Life in Bolivia (Coordinadora por el Agua y la Vida de Bolivia), Jobs with Justice in the USA and the Assembly of the Poor in Thailand, go beyond specific interests, rise above particular struggles and promote new forms of solidarity.

Moreover, campaigns against regional integration projects that are dominated by liberal principles – like the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the proposed European constitution and the NEPAD for Africa as well as the campaigns against the WTO and Third World debt – greatly contribute towards creating political ties between the movements that are emerging and operating in very different national contexts. In this respect, the development of the international movement against the war in Iraq – which culminated in the demonstrations of February and March 2003 – provides valuable lessons. The extent and synchronization of these demonstrations were the result of a long process of networking by organizations and movements at the world level. Reaching beyond national contexts and specific *problematiques*, this method of horizontal coordination makes it possible to form and reinforce flexible and effective international coalitions and even to mobilize millions of people on the same issue at the same moment.

The convergence of these different movements in the same demonstrations and in the same public places is indisputably an important development, linked to increasing awareness of the global and interdependent nature of problems – socio-economic, cultural and ecological – which used to be considered separately. Clearly, it is also linked to the disappearance of a doctrinaire and exclusive concept of militancy. This convergence does not come about automatically, however. Simply bringing people together under the same banner condemning neoliberalism and affirming that ‘another world is possible’ is not enough to produce political proposals or development strategies that are unanimously accepted.

The discussions now taking place in world, regional and national social forums are certainly the best way of tackling the divergences between organizations that are pursuing the same general objectives while expressing their own ideas on citizen action and its relationship

to politics. Such debates should contribute to the political maturity of these convergences. Not, however, as an artificial alignment of everyone on one position or another: there must be an effort to distinguish what separates and what unites them so that the struggles for another world are articulated more effectively.

In treating these different aspects lucidly but from a committed standpoint, *Globalizing Resistance* sees itself as a crossroads between the militant and the academic. The authors include key actors in various mobilizations who have undertaken to step back for a moment from their daily activities in order to understand them better, as well as researchers who have been close to the movements and contribute original analyses of how they are developing. They hail from all five continents and show their involvement and understanding of the struggles for another world, so they are particularly well qualified to present their findings to a wider public.

The first part of the book invites readers to take a trip round the world to sample the resistance to the neoliberal model of globalization. This unusual circuit consists of a series of 'incursions' into the dynamics of resistance that are at work in the different regions of the world. Concise and representative presentations give an idea of the vigour and diversity of these struggles, which are not given much publicity or not well understood, whether it is the 'gas war' in Bolivia or the claims of the Maori in New Zealand, the coalitions against privatizations in South Africa or the *dalit* movement in India, not forgetting the new forms of opposition to unbridled capitalism in China. These accounts go beyond the purely anecdotal in order to give readers an overall and consistent framework of interpretation, to help them grasp the sense and range of these struggles.

In the second part we focus on key discussions that bring together networks, movements and unions in the social forums, as well as in the anti-war movement. What kind of relationships should there be with the State or with international institutions? How to articulate local or national struggles with global campaigns? Which is better, direct action or action through the institutions? What positions should be adopted on such issues as global governance, international trade and the solidarity economy?

In the third and last part of the book the emphasis is on several of the crucial challenges faced by the social movements, of which media strategies are one of the first. How to make use of the mass media at the same time as developing their own information channels? The climate created by the 'war on terror' is another such challenge.

This has now become generalized, giving numerous governments the opportunity of setting up new mechanisms for control and surveillance and to adopt measures to criminalize the actions of those who oppose the state. At the same time international institutions have been trying for years to co-opt part of what they call 'civil society' in order to domesticate NGOs and marginalize those who 'refuse to dialogue'. And finally powerful private actors impose the rights of business over the rights of peoples. Another challenge faced by social movements is to recover the principle of the common good and to develop its applications in texts that are universally relevant.

Contestation of neoliberal globalization is no passing phenomenon. It is highly contemporary, as it is gradually integrating the 'global' dimensions of today's problems, in both analysis and practice. And it is a long-term proposition, to bring social forces gradually together, across frontiers and above political sensitivities. This collective work stems from the conviction that the different viewpoints involved need to be put into perspective and disseminated, and the belief that this is an indispensable stage in the long process of exchanges underpinning the political, cultural and thematic convergences that are taking shape today.

François Polet

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