Civil society on global governance: 
Facing divergent analysis, strategy and tactics

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This paper considers three different conceptualizations – three civil society perspectives - on global-scale economics and geopolitics, from standpoints that can be termed ‘global justice movements’, ‘Third World nationalism’ and the ‘Post-Washington Consensus’. These three perspectives on the fusion of neoliberal economics and imperialist politics sometimes converge, but often are in conflict. From different analyses flow different political strategies, concrete campaigning tactics, and varying choices of allies. Much transnational social movement literature is bound up in the subjects’ norms, institutions, values, logistics and organizational development (as well as issues and advocacy - as in the case of Millennium Development Goal and anti-poverty campaigning), and very little takes ideology and analysis seriously. The advent of the World Social Forum (WSF) – and sharp debates about its merits and capacities – gave rise to new literatures that put transnational networking at the centre of the analysis. However, since so many transnational networks have grown and prospered not through programmatic integration such as the WSF would suggest, but rather through sectoral processes, ideological analysis is that much more complicated. (There is no grand WSF political programme to consider, nor is there likely ever to be one generated through consensus within the WSF.) However, because neoliberalism and imperialism are the two economic and political sides of the same coin, it is logical to analyse the nature of analysis (and then strategies, tactics and alliances) that emanate from various oppositional forces.
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When the State trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only the outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks... The massive structures of modern democracies, both as State organisations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position.

Antonio Gramsci

[The] double movement [occurred when] the extension of the market organisation in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction.

Karl Polanyi

Introduction

In the transnational social movement literature, a great deal of work has gone into analysis of a Weberian, institutional character, in consideration of norms, institutions, values, logistics and organizational development. Have Gramscian and Polanyian insights into civil society legitimation and resistance to neoliberalism been adequately considered? Hagai Katz has recently argued on behalf of

the forging of counter-hegemony in the ‘multiplicity of antagonisms’ evolving in and by way of the social relations of civil society. For a historic bloc to be effective it needs to be a coalition of forces, that does not duplicate power disparities inherent in the existing world-system, that avoids localism or nationalism, and promotes global solidarity, through

1. The analysis that follows has been expanded upon in various publications, including the CCS Annual Report 1994 and my books Talk Left, Walk Right (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006) and Looting Africa (Zed Books and UKZN Press, 2006).
networking that links the local and the global – a unifying, non-homogenizing, and indigenizing strategy of resistance.\textsuperscript{4}

But such a strategy will not easily emerge in the current context. Some scholars may recognise the challenges in terms of Karl Polanyi’s view of society – as an active, countervailing force against market excesses (in \textit{The Great Transformation}, 1944) – rather than the pessimistic market picture of civil society painted by Antonio Gramsci (in his 1930s \textit{Prison Notebooks}). This dichotomous reading of civil society - as a stabilizing, conservative force (Gramsci), or instead as a ‘new social movement’ challenge to neoliberalism (Polanyi) - presents us with interesting problems, as Michael Burawoy has recently demonstrated. For Gramsci, according to Burawoy, ‘Civil society smothers any attempt to seize state power directly, so that revolutionary activity involves the slow, patient work of reorganizing associations, trade unions, parties, schools, legal system, and so forth’ - i.e., Gramsci’s ‘war of position’, in contrast to a more insurrectionary ‘war of movement’.\textsuperscript{5} For Polanyi, in contrast, the double movement was reflected in ‘the extension of the market organization… accompanied by its restriction’ in a more immediate, active sense.\textsuperscript{6}

Most of these debates play out on the home terrain (national and local). But in this paper we focus far more upon ideology and analysis in relation to ‘global governance’ challenges, posing the question as to whether a ‘new imperialism’ with relatively unified (albeit contradictory) economic, geopolitical and military agendas permits those who are supportive of global counterhegemonic forces to advance a unifying agenda of peace and justice. It is a difficult question given how many of the social justice and anti-imperialist movements cohere to ‘autonomist’ politics.

Nevertheless, such agendas are certainly available for those in civil society who would join global elite debates, including the Millennium Development Goals and ‘Make Poverty History’ campaigning, as discussed below. Moreover, since 2001 a global convergence of activists and strategists has appeared at the World Social Forum (WSF) meetings. Yet a much more robust mode of global justice and peace work is probably, this paper argues, associated not through increased programmatic integration such as the WSF would suggest, but rather through \textit{sectoral} processes. This makes ideological analysis that much more complicated, given the shifting analyses, strategies, tactics and alliances associated with

\textsuperscript{6} Polanyi, \textit{The Great Transformation}, p.76.
diverse transnational movements, especially when wide opportunities are presented to join existing (or emerging) political blocs.

**Ideologies in conflict**

There appear to have emerged at least five distinct and largely coherent ideological categories associated with, if not ‘bloc’ formation, at least general political orientations (Table 1):

- Global justice movements (often combining traditions of socialism and anarchism/autonomism);
- Third World Nationalism (with varying political traditions);
- Post-Washington Consensus (often espousing social democracy);
- Washington Consensus (neoliberalism); and
- Resurgent Rightwing (neoconservativism).

The five currents are recognisable by the political traditions from which they have evolved, their political-economic agenda, leading institutions, internal disputes and noted public proponents. Semantics need not detain us at this stage, but it is critical to recognize that these are somewhat fluid categories. Across the world, many individuals have moved, not merely rhetorically, but also substantively, from one camp to another. For example, economist Joseph Stiglitz has rapidly shifted left since the late 1990s, while Brazilian president Luis ‘Lula’ Ignacio da Silva has repositioned to the right of his Workers’ Party base. Some, like South African president Thabo Mbeki, stand in more than one camp at once, and their outlook depends partly upon the political ‘scale’ which they are contesting: global, continental, national or local.

Civil society forces are located in each camp, of course, but the crucial question is where fusion or at least critical mass may emerge to direct social resources. Whereas global justice ideologies are nearly exclusively forged by non-state actors (notwithstanding leadership from Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro and Evo Morales in Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia), there are important NGO links to progressive Third World nationalism (such as the Malaysian-based Third World Network). Most large transnational civil society agencies can be found in the ‘Post-Washington’ ideological camp. Hence in the following pages, we consider the various analyses, strategies and tactics associated with civil society within the global justice movements, Third World nationalism and the Post-Washington Consensus.

However, David Sogge offers a complementary set of overlapping typologies, considering first (Table 2) the ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ lineages of civil society, and secondly dividing civil society organisations into liberatory, reactionary and status quo groups according to their normative values:
### Table 1: Five international ideological currents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political current:</th>
<th>Global justice movements</th>
<th>Third World nationalism</th>
<th>Post-Washington Consensus</th>
<th>Washington Consensus</th>
<th>Resurgent Rightwing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tradition</strong></td>
<td>Socialism, anarchism</td>
<td>national capitalism</td>
<td>(lib) social democracy</td>
<td>neoliberal capitalism</td>
<td>Neoconservatism</td>
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<td><strong>Main agenda</strong></td>
<td>‘deglobalisation’ of capital (not people); ‘globalisation-from-below’; anti-war; anti-racism; indigenous rights; women’s liberation; ecology; ‘decommodified’ state services; radical participatory democracy</td>
<td>increased (but fairer) global integration via reform of interstate system, based on debt relief and expanded market access; democratised global governance; regionalism; rhetorical anti-imperialism; and Third World unity</td>
<td>fix ‘imperfect markets’; add ‘sustainable development’ to existing capitalist framework via UN and similar global state-building; promote global Keynesianism (maybe); oppose US unilateralism and militarism</td>
<td>rename and expand neoliberalism (PRSPs, HIPC and PPs) but with provisions for ‘transparency’ and self-regulation; more effective bail-out mechanisms; (hypocritical) financial support for US-led Empire</td>
<td>unilateral petty-military imperialism; crony deals, corporate subsidies; protectionism and tariffs; reverse globalisation of people via racism and xenophobia; religious extremism; patriarchy and social control</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leading institutions</strong></td>
<td>social movements; environmental justice activists; indigenous peoples; autonomous groups; radical activist networks; leftist labour movements; radical think-tanks (e.g., Focus on the Global South, FoodFirst, IFES, ICF, IPS, Nader centres, TNI); left media (India media, NewStandard, Pacifica, zmag.org); semi-liberated zones (Porto Alegre, Kerala); and sector-based or local coalitions allied to the World Social Forum</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement, G77 and South Centre; self-selecting regimes (often authoritarian); Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela – that lean left (but others pro-Empire, e.g., East Timor, Ecuador and Eritrea); and supportive NGOs (e.g., Third World Network, Seatini)</td>
<td>some UN agencies (e.g., UNCTAD, UNICEF, UNWTO); some int’l NGOs (e.g., CARE, Civicus, IUCN, Oxfam, TI); large enviro. groups (e.g., Sierra and WWF); big labour (e.g., ICTU and AFL-CIO); liberal foundations (Carnegie, Ford, MacArthur, Mott, Open Society, Rockefeller); Columbia U. economics department; the Socialist International; and some Scandinavian governments</td>
<td>US state (Fed, Treasury, USAid); corporate media and big business; World Bank, IMF, WTO; elite clubs (Bilderburger, Trilateral Commission, World Economic Forum); some UN agencies (UNDP, Global Compact); universities and think-tanks (U. of Chicago economics, Cato, Council on Foreign Relations, Adam Smith Inst., Inst. of International Economics, Brookings), and most G8 governments</td>
<td>Republican Party populist and libertarian wings; Project for New American Century; right wing think-tanks (AEI, CSIS, Heritage, Manhattan); the Christian Right; petro-military complexes; Pentagons, rightwing media (Fox, National Interest, Weekly Standard, Washington Times); and proto-fascist European parties - but also Israel’s Likud and perhaps Islamic extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal disputes</strong></td>
<td>role of state; party politics; fix-it vs nix-it for int’l agencies; gender and racial power relations; divergent interests (e.g., Northern labour and environment vs South sovereignty); and tactics (merits of symbolic property destruction)</td>
<td>degree of militancy against North; divergent regional interests; religion; large vs small countries; ego and internecine rivalries</td>
<td>some look left (for alliances) while others look right to the Wash. Consensus (in search of resources, legitimacy and deals); and which reforms are optimal</td>
<td>differing reactions to US empire due to divergent national-capitalist interests and domestic political dynamics</td>
<td>disputes over US imperial reach, religious influence, and how to best protect culture, patriarchy and state sovereignty</td>
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David Sogge recently contrasted the ‘mainstream lineage’ – which in Gramsci’s reading would induce pessimism – with a Polanyian ‘alternative lineage’.

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<th>Membership of civil society</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Local and intermediary NGOs, anti-government media, nonprofit service bodies such as missions, charities, professional and business associations</td>
<td>Social movements, non-establishment political parties, trade unions, activist community-based organisations, knowledge-based NGOs, independent media</td>
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<tr>
<th>Main problems for civil society to tackle</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td>Imperatives of markets, competition and modern life break natural social bonds. Tensions increase, threatening political instability. Lack of trustful relations in society sets limits to exchange and to security of private property – thus setting limits to economic growth. The state ‘crowds out’ private economic actors. Bad governance stems from oversised state apparatuses and from behaviour of government elites.</td>
<td>Domination by national and foreign state and private actors (often in collusion) generates socio-economic exclusion and insecurity. These set limits to equitable development and growth, weaken tax-based redistributive measures, frustrate democratic politics and generate dangerous social polarisation. Bad governance is a cumulative outcome of national and global politico-economic and military forces.</td>
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<th>Wider roles of civil society</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Civil society fosters bonds of trust, thus lowers business transaction costs and widens market relations. It compensates for loss of traditional social bonds, strengthening social consensus and consent to rules, thus helping prevent conflict.</td>
<td>Civil society promotes the ethic and practice of solidarity and emancipation, animating and inspiring action toward state and toward private business interests. (Nonviolent) conflict seen as a necessary motor of social change.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Organisations’ positioning and tasks</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td>Organisations together form a ‘third sector’ complementing the state and business sectors, though they are separate from the state in political terms. Via ‘advocacy and lobbying’ they hold the government to account. They promote decentralisation and reduction of central state powers. Via public-private ‘partnerships’ some NGOs provide social services, conflict mediation &amp;c. as alternatives to state providers.</td>
<td>Organisations distinct from state and from business interests. Social movements may however crystallize into parties contesting for state power. Otherwise, primary tasks are to aggregate countervailing power through mobilising and forging alliances among groups of the poor and excluded via routine and non-routine political, judicial and media channels.</td>
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<th>Level and scope</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Mainly local and national</td>
<td>Local, national and international</td>
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<th>Political premises</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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<td>Approach is premised on notions of ‘weak publics’ where opinions are formed but no active political leverage is pursued.</td>
<td>Approach premised on notions of ‘strong publics’ where opinions develop and political leverage actively pursued.</td>
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<th>Contemporary origins and backing</th>
<th>Mainstream lineage</th>
<th>Alternative lineage</th>
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• An emancipatory camp. A diverse category populated by those pursuing aims consistent with covenants of social, economic, cultural and civil rights. Having been vigorously discouraged for decades by outside powers and their local clients, it is a minority, often a besieged minority.

• A supremacist category. Also in a minority, these groups routinely pursue domination over others, denying or subverting emancipatory aims, as agents of economic or violent crime, promoters of xenophobia, ethnic hatred, denial of rights to women and girls, etc. However, in some settings they can be well-positioned and enjoy the protection or outright support of those holding state and corporate power.

• The self-regarding or inward-looking. The bulk of voluntary associations and nonprofits may best be categorised as instrumental, as vehicles for service delivery, political self-advancement, etc., or merely inward-looking, as with the most religious and cultural associations, clubs providing services to members and so forth.7

The besieged minority in the ‘emancipatory’ camp is where turn first for some of the most interesting global governance lessons. It is here, warms Demba Dembele of Dakar’s Forum for African Alternatives, that major multilateral agencies in Africa – especially the Bretton Woods Institutions, with renamed structural adjustment programmes (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) – sometimes have a dangerous agenda for civil society:

They create the illusion of ‘poverty reduction’ while pursuing the same failed and discredited policies, with even more conditionalities; promote a superficial ‘national consensus’ on short-term ‘poverty reduction’ programmes at the expense of a serious and deep reflection on long-term development policies; drive a wedge between ‘reasonable’ and ‘radical’ civil society organisations in Africa; and shift the blame to governments and citizens for the inevitable failure.8

That divide – between reasonable and radical – plays itself out across the world. My own sense of the politics of civil society is biased by the context in which I work, which is largely shaped by South African social movement struggles for fundamental human rights, typically dismissed as ‘ultra-left’ by the Pretoria

government. Those building the ‘decommodification’ agenda in recent years have established interlocking, overlapping campaigns to turn basic needs into genuine rights. These include demands for anti-retroviral medicines to fight AIDS; at least 50 litres of free water and 1 kilowatt hour of free electricity for each individual every day; extensive land reform; prohibitions on service disconnections and evictions; free education; free lifeline telephony; and even a monthly ‘Basic Income Grant’. Social movements, women’s groups, churches, NGOs and trade unions are all basically committed to this agenda, even if there are temporary divisions over political-party alignments.

While there are all manner of problems with ‘rights discourses,’ they do parallel the kinds of reactions to rampant market penetration now underway across the world, in the sphere of ‘reproduction’ of the broader social system, since civil society organisations are expected to stand in when neoliberal policies shrink the state. Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill have recently shown how, in rich and poor countries alike,

Reprivatisation of social reproduction involves at least four shifts that relate to the household, the state and social institutions, and finally the basic mechanisms of livelihood, particularly in poorer countries:
- household and caring activities are increasingly provided through the market and are thus exposed to the movement of money;
- societies seem to become redefined as collections of individuals (or at best collections of families), particularly when the state retreats from universal social protection;
- accumulation patterns premised on connected control over wider areas of social life and thus the provisions for social reproduction;
- survival and livelihood. For example, a large proportion of the world’s population has no effective health insurance or even basic care.

To illustrate, the denial of Africans’ access to food, medicines, energy and even water is a common reflection of this latter tendency, as people who are surplus to capitalism’s labour power requirements find that they had better fend for themselves - or simply die. In even relatively prosperous South Africa, an early death for millions was the outcome of state and employer reaction to the AIDS epidemic, with cost-benefit analyses demonstrating conclusively that keeping most of the country’s five to six million HIV-positive people alive through

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9. Many of these are surveyed in Richard Ballard, Adam Habib and Imraan Valodia (2006), *Voices of Protest*, Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
patented medicines cost more than the people were ‘worth’.12 There are many ways, Dzodzi Tsikata and Joanna Kerr have shown, that mainstream economic policy ‘perpetuates women’s subordination.’13

In these respects, we can find a ‘new imperialism’ seeded in older forms of global-scale capital accumulation. Nearly a centurgy ago, Rosa Luxemburg’s thesis on imperialism was straightforward:

Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organisations, nor ... can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible... The relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system - a policy of spheres of interest - and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting, are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.14

In the contemporary ideological tangle, divisions sometimes become debilitating, especially when the question of state/political power arises. Only a few years ago, it appeared that even post-colonial African civil society organizations which once had a more radical developmental agenda were largely civilized, tamed and channeled into serving each new incarnation of elite interest. In reaction to the excesses of exhausted, corrupt and repressive nationalist political parties, many of which were tossed from power in the early 1990s, there emerged a new generation of democratic movements, human rights advocates, NGOs, churches, youth and women’s groups and a variety of civil society groups. Structural adjustment meant the loss of state welfare programmes, and in turn the need for civil societies to pick up the pieces. When amidst the wreckage, alternative political parties emerged from the grassroots and shopfloors (most spectacularly in Zambia, perhaps), they

12. In the case of the vast Johannesburg/London conglomerate Anglo American Corporation, the cut-off for saving workers in 2001 was 12%. The lowest-paid 88% of employees were more cheaply dismissed once unable to work, with replacements found amongst South Africa’s 42% unemployed reserve army of labour, according to an internal study reported by the Financial Times. For more, see Patrick Bond (2005), Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Afterword to the 2nd edition.
too often fell into the trap of deepening the market’s rule, at the expense of popular interests.

With few exceptions, the state remains the primary agency through which social welfare is delivered, through government’s command over significant fiscal resources. But because most governments’ control over policy is increasingly challenged or indeed captured by international financial and trade agencies, multinational corporations, and foreign donor governments, civil society ‘advocacy’ can sometimes do more harm than good, as social welfare functions are devolved to households and communities (with women, in particular, bearing an added burden of caring for multiple family members, a catastrophic development given the emergence of more than a million AIDS orphans).

How, then, will relations develop between civil society agencies associated with amelioration of neoliberalism on the one hand, and on the other, social movements aiming at underlying causes of the problems? According to Alan Fowler,

Troubling questions for many Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs), particularly in the South, relate to their place in society. Do they belong and will they be sustained within an eventually unaided civic institutional ecology? … A driver for this reflection is the emergence of influential member-based social movements, notably in the South. These entities and the ‘tracks’ they pursue are particularly visible at regional and the World Social Forum and in protests during meetings of international institutions and the Davos World Economic Forum. They are also often at the forefront of group mobilisation, for example to challenge economic policies that increase the vulnerability of those already at most risk. Flexible, dynamically organised groupings of activists and disadvantaged people are growing in scale, number and political significance... In comparison, with a few exceptions, NGDOs feature less and less as agents of systemic change or offer viable alternative social and developmental models. In part for reasons of aid system architecture, there is a prevailing tendency for NGDOs to act as incremental improvers within a technocratic, logical and linear framework allied to a ‘partnership’ or ‘harmony model’ of change employed by most official agencies.¹⁵

To consider the prospects of member-based social movements in a sober manner requires us to draw lessons from across Africa, perhaps the weakest site for ‘unaided civic institutional ecology’. As civil society counterparts and researchers

across the continent have shown, under conditions of never-ending structural adjustment most Africans who lobby for democracy and basic socio-economic services from their state regimes are and will continue to be frustrated.

Some evidence from Africa

Across Africa, heroic anti-colonial movements of the last century have their echo, today, in a diverse set of ecological, community, feminist and labour struggles. In addition to South Africa, in recent years Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe have been among the most intense sites of conflicts between social activists, ruling parties and big capital. The continuation of ‘IMF Riots’ in many African countries confirms that the global justice movement’s critique of neoliberalism remains valid and relevant.

The destruction of democratic possibilities was perhaps preordained, in many cases, by the character of the colonial inheritance. Even in Museveni’s Uganda, where local-level power relations inherited from centralised-despotic rule had to be thoroughly broken, there remained a ‘bifurcated’ duality of power: between a centrally-located modern state (sometimes directly responsible for urban order in primate capital cities) and, according to Mahmood Mamdani, a ‘tribal authority which dispensed customary law to those living within the territory of the tribe’. This understanding helps us contextualise the struggles for human rights, democratisation and socio-economic justice, as Mamdani links the global-national-local scales:

In the absence of democratisation, development became a top-down agenda enforced on the peasantry. Without thorough-going democratisation, there could be no development of a home market. The latter failure opened wide what was a crevice at Independence. With every downturn in the international economy, the crevice turned into an opportunity for an externally defined structural adjustment that combined a narrowly defined programme of privatisation with a broadly defined programme of globalisation.16

However, the critique of neoliberalism is not limited to globalisation, ‘Washington Consensus’ macroeconomic policies, debt peonage and unfair terms of trade. (The Africa Trade Network, the Gender and Trade Network and Jubilee Africa’s affiliates are regular intellectual critics – and active protesters - at the sites of global-scale negotiations and African elite summits.) In addition, the micro-

developmental and ecological damage done through market-centred policies is now also widely recognised.

Some of the most notable recent upsurges of protest have been in areas of environmental justice, exemplified by 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai’s struggle, two decades ago, to build Kenya’s Greenbelt Movement against the interests of the corrupt national state and big capital. More recently, women in the oil rich Nigerian Delta regularly conducted sit-ins at the local offices of multinationals. Oil workers have vigorously protested at several Delta platforms over not only wages but also broader community eco-social demands, even taking corporate managers hostage for a time.

In Botswana, indigenous-rights campaigners lobby the DeBeers diamond corporation, the World Bank and the Botswana government against the displacement of Basarwa/San Bushmen from the central Kalahari. According to the Guardian, the San targeted for relocation away from diamond exploration areas ‘had their water supplies cut off before being dumped in bleak settlements with derisory compensation.’ Solidarity was sufficiently powerful that by August 2002, the Botswana Gazette described the government as a ‘disease-ridden international polecat’. In the same spirit, activists resist large dams that threaten mass displacement in Namibia (Epupa), Lesotho (Highlands Water Project), Uganda (Bujagali) and Mozambique (Mphanda Nkuwa), as well as the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. Support from northern environmentalists has been crucial.

Efforts to bridge global-local and Northern-African divides are being advanced in many other areas, including (but not limited to) Treatment Action advocates breaking the hold of pharmaceutical corporations on monopoly antiretroviral patents; activists fighting Monsanto’s GM drive from the US to South Africa to several African countries; blood-diamonds victims from Sierra Leone and Angola generating a partially-successful global deal at Kimberley; a growing network questioning Liberia’s long exploitation by Firestone Rubber; Oil Watch linkages of Nigerian Delta and many other Gulf of Guinea communities; and Ghanaian, South African and Dutch activists opposing water privatization.

Solidarity has also been a feature of reparations campaigners, led by South Africa’s Jubilee and Khulumani, who reacted to 2004 court defeats with pledges to campaign yet harder. They, in turn, were inspired by the work of Nigerian church and debt activists who several years ago focused attention on the role of British and Swiss banks in Sani Abacha’s 1990s looting spree, and won significant concessions that will deter illicit capital flight (still amongst Africa’s most debilitating economic problems).
There are ongoing civil society campaigns underway elsewhere in Africa against environmental racism, toxic dumping, asbestos damage, incinerators, biopiracy, genetically modified food, carbon trading and air pollution. Movements against privatisation of Africa’s basic services - mainly water and electricity, but also municipal waste, health and education - began in Accra and Johannesburg in 2000 and quickly attracted global solidarity. A PanAfrican Treatment network of AIDS activists is taking forward the work of South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign, to challenge unfair monopoly patents on life-saving medicines.

Can such efforts – largely within Sogge’s ‘alternative lineage’ - become more coherently aligned, and will they persuade those in the traditional lineage to take up more serious social-change activism? If so, it is possible that the African Social Forum (ASF) will be the source of such coordination and consensus-building. The ASF’s emergence has not been easy, because of regional differences, languages, cultural styles and different political priorities. In January 2002, dozens of African organisations met in Bamako, Mali, in preparation for the Porto Alegre World Social Forum. Bamako was one of the first-ever substantial conferences to combine progressive NGOs, labour, activist churches and social movements from all parts of the continent. It was followed by ASF sessions in Johannesburg (August 2002), Addis Ababa (January 2003), Maputo (December 2003), Mumbai (January 2004), Lusaka (December 2004) and the Bamako session of the WSF’s ‘polycentric’ meeting (January 2006).

In the spirit of Polanyi, the original Bamako Declaration insisted that ‘the values, practices, structures and institutions of the currently dominant neoliberal order are inimical to and incompatible with the realisation of Africa’s dignity, values and aspirations.’ Of particular concern was the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD): ‘The Forum rejected neoliberal globalisation and further integration of Africa into an unjust system as a basis for its growth and development. In this context, there was a strong consensus that initiatives such as NEPAD that are inspired by the IMF-WB strategies of Structural Adjustment Programs, trade liberalisation that continues to subject Africa to an unequal exchange, and strictures on governance borrowed from the practices of Western countries, are not rooted in the culture and history of the peoples of Africa.’

However, reflecting Gramscian concerns, a critique of the ASF emerged in Lusaka from South Africa’s Social Movements Indaba network: ‘The under-representation of social movements in relation to NGOs is reflected in the political content of the forum. It manifests in the persistence of the notion that the ASF is nothing other than a space, in contrast to the perspective that it should have a programme to

advance our struggle against neoliberalism.’ Hence, as Centre scholars Amanda Alexander and Mandisa Mbali wrote of the ASF, ‘Capturing Social Forums and blunting their impact is a tantalising outcome for the World Bank and “third-way” politicians’. Yet they also point out that because of strong advocacy by social movements, that danger was averted in Lusaka. Indeed, as Console Tleane of the Johannesburg-based Freedom of Expression Institute reported in the ASF’s daily *African Flame* newspaper, ‘The message was clear: there [was] no way that the ASF would entertain any dealings with the World Bank.’ Observed Alexander and Mbali, ‘Activists in the NEPAD session came to the same conclusions on the potential of neoliberal institutions and policies.’

To help counter cooption, much is to be learned from other Third World movements. Moreover, how much progress African activists can make in part depends upon how far valued allies in the advanced capitalist financial and corporate centres recognise the merits of their analysis, strategy and tactics — and offer the solidarity that African and other Third World activists can repay many times over, once the Northern boot is lifted from their countries’ necks and they gain the space to win lasting, emancipatory objectives, as the Latin American case now shows. But setting out solidarity campaigns is only part of an even bigger challenge for bottom-up construction: establishing a durable programmatic approach that the world’s progressive movements can unite behind.

**Programmes, spaces and networks for change**

Is a formal *programme* a prerequisite for political coherence during times of simultaneous deep civil society construction and urgent social movement mobilisations against neoliberalism? We should address this question first, given how much debate exists over whether global civil society is ripe for a programmatic orientation. For example, in early 2005 at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, 19 well-known movement intellectuals and activists gathered to produce a draft of ‘Twelve proposals for another possible world’ (abridged as follows):20

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20. The signatories – regrettably 18 men and just one woman - were Aminata Traoré, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Eduardo Galeano, José Saramago, François Houtart, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Armand Mattelart, Roberto Savio, Riccardo Petrella, Ignacio Ramonet, Bernard Cassen, Samir Amin, Atilio Boron, Samuel Ruiz Garcia, Tariq Ali, Frei Betto, Emir Sader, Walden Bello and Immanuel Wallerstein. In a comradely critique, published at [http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/22bond.cfm](http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-02/22bond.cfm) on 22 February 2005 (‘Discussing the Porto Alegre Manifesto’), I offer minor friendly amendments. A much longer effort along these lines was made in January 2006 – the ‘Bamako Appeal’ - at the polycentric WSF.
1. Cancel the external debt of southern countries;
2. Implement international taxes on financial transactions (most notably the Tobin tax on speculative capital), on direct foreign investments, on consolidated profit from multinationals, on weapon trade and on activities

But these efforts risk the ‘top-down’ danger of imposing programmatic ideas upon fluid movements and campaigns. Still, taking the same risk, it strikes me that to answer the question ‘What is your alternative?,’ a variety of existing/potential campaigns within Africa and other Third World sites may ultimately have these kinds of policy menu objectives:

- with regard to aid, the simple refusal of tied aid and phantom aid might be accompanied by an international ‘naming and shaming’ exercise, which some campaigners have already embarked upon;
- under the slogan ‘Don’t Owe Won’t Pay’, the obvious policy implication of overindebtedness is systemic Third World default, a policy successfully carried out in earlier periods en masse, but also hinted at by Argentina’s contemporary example;
- as for uneven private sector capital flows in Africa, there are also well-tested strategies – such as prescribed assets – that can force the domestic reinvestment of pension and insurance funds as well as other large institutional investment reserves;
- for controlling capital flight, it will be crucial to address offshore tax havens through national-scale regulation and even prohibition of financial transfers from these sites, as part of a more general reestablishment of exchange controls to limit currency convertibility, and through revitalized state financial regulation;
- for trade relations, an inward-oriented development strategy is preferable (entailing infant industries and judicious tariff and quota policies), given the decay of prices for non-petroleum exports, which in turn represents a treadmill to rising physical output and declining revenues;
- regarding migration, both increasing freedom of movement and increasing incentives to maintain residence after local tertiary and professional training are required, in balance, with internationalism a central value;
- foreign direct investment should also be, in future, carefully measured so as to include natural resource depletion and many other costs (such as transfer pricing and profit/dividend outflows), not simply benefits – and then permission refused if these calculations are not favourable, as was successful in South Korea’s initial post-war industrialization drive;
- fiscal austerity, monetarism, privatization, liberalization and other macroeconomic policies should be firmly resisted given their maldistributive impacts, while civil society intensifies budget oversight;
- politically, the deep democratization of all African societies will be required to rid the ruling circuits of corrupt comprador elements, which in turn implies more attention to not only contesting aspects of state power and capital accumulation (as so many civil society groups are doing), but also ultimately taking power through progressive political parties;
- a dramatic change in the national balance of forces across Africa, following the transitions underway in Latin America, is in turn the prerequisite for gaining sufficient political weight to begin installing vital global-scale measures (such as Tobin Taxes, greenhouse gas mitigation, and reparations for ecological debt); and
- while a progressive change in government is a long way away for most countries, in the meantime it is feasible to amplify existing activist initiatives aimed at controlling the outflow of African resources, and ensuring that the redistributive strategies are catalysed and owned at the level of households, grassroots communities and shopfloors.
accompanied by large greenhouse effect gas emissions;
3. Progressively dismantle all forms of fiscal, juridical and banking paradises;
4. All inhabitants of this planet must have the right to be employed, to social protection and retirement/pension, respecting equal rights between men and women;
5. Promote all forms of equitable trade, reject all free-trade agreements and laws proposed by the World Trade Organization, and putting in motion mechanisms allowing a progressive upward equalization of social and environmental norms;
6. Guarantee the right to for all countries to alimentary sovereignty and security by promoting peasant, rural agriculture;
7. Forbid all type of patenting of knowledge on living beings (human, animal or vegetal) as well as any privatization of common goods for humanity, particularly water;
8. Fight by means of public policies against all kinds of discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, antisemitism and racism. Fully recognize the political, cultural and economic rights (including the access to natural resources) of indigenous populations.
9. Take urgent steps to end the destruction of the environment and the threat of severe climate changes due to the greenhouse effect, resulting from the proliferation of individual transportation and the excessive use of non-renewable energy sources;
10. Demand the dismantling of all foreign military bases and the removal of troops on all countries, except when operating under explicit mandate of the United Nations, especially for Iraq and Palestine;
11. Guarantee the right to access information and the right to inform, for/by all citizens;
12. Reform and deeply democratize international institutions by making sure human, economic, social and cultural rights prevail.

Excellent ideas notwithstanding, it is fair to ask: did those who authored these proposals think them through as thoroughly as possible? Should critiques of their process - namely, launching a major manifesto into the WSF without proper consultation (and with extreme gender imbalance) - be joined by concern that, for whatever reasons, the authors are perhaps not sufficiently close enough to the issues to have resolved some of the problems noted in the endnotes?

But these are minor concerns in relation to the more important question: does the WSF represent an appropriate process for arriving at programmatic and practical strategic unity? Trevor Ngwane of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee offers these reservations:
The WSF governing structures - its international council and secretariat - are unwittingly allowing the marginalization and eclipse of social movements by their hands-off, laissez-faire approach to the organization of events and activities in the WSF space… The WSF 2007 in Africa cannot afford to be a talk-shop. We should consider a specific concrete campaign and outcome which will benefit the African masses practically.21

Whatever its shortcomings, Porto Alegre has served as an unprecedented ‘space’ for these sorts of debates. Likewise, at a key Addis Ababa meeting in 2003, the ASF Forum described itself as ‘a pluralist and diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-partisan space, which links, in a decentralized way and in networks, entities and movements engaged in concrete actions, from the local to the international level, for the construction of another Africa and another world.’22

But beyond serving as a sort of leftwing trade fair, it is probably overdue that the WSF and its affiliates democratically develop programmatic points of convergence. It is crucial for any such programme of global justice to emerge from real social struggles. And unfortunately, it is likely that the ideological diversity encompassed within the WSF will prove a serious barrier to addressing problems of the sort raised in the ‘Twelve proposals’, especially over whether we should ‘fix’ or ‘nix’ embryonic global-state institutions.

Instead, I think real progress in these directions will be found in transnational sectoral forums, of which there are many examples, some of which are already generating the global-scale analysis, demands, strategies, tactics and alliances to which the 19 authors should have made reference. Serious activists who are increasingly crossing borders, races, classes and political traditions to find a unity of purpose in sector after sector: land (Via Campesino), healthcare (International Peoples Health Council), free schooling (Global Campaign for Education), water (the People’s World Water Forum), energy/climate change (the Durban Declaration), debt (Jubilee South), democratic development finance (IFIs-Out! and World Bank Bonds Boycott), trade (Our World is Not for Sale) and so on.

Of course, it is not at all easy to interlock the already overlapping grassroots and shopfloor justice campaigns into a coherent political approach. South Africans now campaigning for an overall programme of decommodification and socio-economic rights know this, thanks to the various movements’ political splits (mainly over the merits of alignment to the corruption-ridden, neoliberal ruling party of Thabo Mbeki, at a time when trade union allies themselves concede

signs of an emerging ‘dictatorship’).

Would having a more rigorous set of national social forums – affiliated to the WSF but with federalist autonomy – permit the development of a universal programme of action? Probably not, for in South Africa and elsewhere, there are far too many divisions between the key organizations representing oppressed peoples, to forge the necessary unity for a workable national forum. (However, in Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi, the Social Forum has already become the venue for a national regroupment of the left forces, in the best spirit of coalition-building and programmatic work.)

The problems with the WSF model to date are in part rooted in the initiative’s 2001 origins: amongst elite social democrats who, activist critics regularly point out, mirrored the Davos World Economic Forum with a top-down call for an expensive gathering in a symbolic site. At the 2003 Porto Alegre WSF, organizers were accused of systematically sidelining more radical forces such as Indymedia, the youth network Intergalactica and the ZNet network. Asked anarchist writer Andrej Grubacic after the 2003 WSF, ‘Do we really want to create a movement that will resemble a cocktail party in the lounge of the Plaza São Rafael Hotel in Porto Alegre? Do we want a movement dominated by middle-aged bureaucrats wearing Palestinian scarves…?’

(This isn’t a matter of insufficient grassroots participation; it is about the accountability, vision and militancy of the leading layers.)

Interpreting the radical political potential of the WSF given such beginnings is one of the most interesting dilemmas for the global justice movements. WSF organisers are now more than a bit embarrassed that their Workers Party comrades performed so ably in the service of Brazilian neoliberalism, subimperialism (in Haiti for instance) and imperialism (at the Hong Kong WTO summit). As one reflection of its failure to deliver meaningful change, the Workers Party lost elections and hence state power in the very city and province which became synonymous with the WSF, Porto Alegre.

Regardless of the venue, what is surely the main accomplishment of the WSF is the construction of dialogical spaces. These spaces might ultimately support ideological, analytical, strategic and even tactical convergence between far-flung movements which span the globe. Indeed, the Social Forum network is potentially a means by which the ‘globalization of people’ can become real, a genuine counterpoint to the ‘globalization of capital’.

As Helmut Anheier and Hagai Katz put it, ‘global civil society is a very relational, “networky” phenomenon’ drawing upon ‘interconnected and multilayered social space’, ‘chains of interaction’, ‘horizontal relations’ and, harking back to Manuel Castells’ analysis, providing new opportunities for ‘decentralised concentration where a multiplicity of interconnected tasks take place in different sites’. In the process, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri insist that their new category, ‘the multitude’ of oppressed people (as distinct from the ‘masses’), might also ‘be conceived as a network: an open expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common.’

Again, ideally, the network form provides ‘the model for an absolutely democratic organization that corresponds to the dominant forms of economic and social production, and is also the most powerful weapon against the ruling power structure’. According to Hardt and Negri, the challenge is ‘to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different’. Whereas previously, dissenters were divided along sectoral, geographical and other lines, ‘today network movements are able to address all of [the grievances] simultaneously’. Drawing upon Ashwin Desai’s pathbreaking book about South African urban social movements, We are the Poors, Hardt and Negri note both the remarkable non-racialism through which Africans and people of Indian descent struggle in unison, and the global vision through which these movements ‘target neoliberal globalization as the source of their poverty’. But in targeting neoliberalism in this manner, dangers certainly arise, according to Desai and Richard Pithouse, from the political current promoted by Hardt and Negri, amongst others: ‘Autonomism’s fetish of spontaneity means that it lacks any meaningful capacity for posing, let alone answering, the important questions about democratic structure, practice and leadership within movements.’

One way to consider the autonomist project is as a set of ‘militant particularisms’, as Raymond Williams and David Harvey have posited. For Harvey,

At this conjuncture, therefore, all of those militant particularist movements around the world that loosely come together under the umbrella of environmental justice and the environmentalism of the poor are faced with a

critical choice. They can either ignore the contradictions, remain with the confines of their own particularist militancies - fighting an incinerator here, a toxic waste dump there, a World Bank dam project somewhere else, and commercial logging in yet another place - or they can treat the contradictions as a fecund nexus to create a more transcendent and universal politics. If they take the latter path, they have to find a discourse of universality and generality that unites the emancipatory quest for social justice with a strong recognition that social justice is impossible without environmental justice (and vice versa). But any such discourse has to transcend the narrow solidarities and particular affinities shaped in particular places - the preferred milieu of most grassroots environmental activism - and adopt a politics of abstraction capable of reaching out across space, across the multiple environmental and social conditions that constitute the geography of difference in a contemporary world that capitalism has intensely shaped to its own purposes. And it has to do this without abandoning its militant particularist base.\(^{28}\)

In one of the most important concrete eco-justice cases, Sanya Osha argues that struggles in the Niger Delta have degenerated into ‘militant particularisms’. To move beyond these counter-productive particularisms, a new ethics of solidarity will have to be forged. Arguably, the energy that the Ogoni protest movement unleashed did not quite establish a rigorous dynamic of solidarity with other similar social movements within the Niger Delta. Perhaps the politics of divisive ethnicity is responsible for this lapse. Also, intellectuals of the Ogoni protest movement such as Ben Naanen failed to develop an appropriate ideological framework upon the more progressive and spontaneous elements in Saro-Wiwa’s work that addresses 1) the imperial project of global capital, 2) the need to de-fetishise a rather provincial politics of ethnicity and 3) the necessity to nurture and disseminate a rigorous culture of democratisation at multiple levels within the movement.\(^{29}\)

Hence, returning to the broader question of whether a coherent political and programmatic strategy can emerge from the various strands of African, Third World and indeed global justice activities, the other crucial flaw of autonomism is its disdain for the state. So on the one hand, it should be clear that any genuine programme of liberation will have to emanate from grounded mass democratic struggles and the networks which bring these together (probably first in sectors and then later in African Social Forum and World Social Forum venues).


But on the other hand, the activists are continually confronted with globally-imposed national-scale initiatives by elites, and are often compelled to reply with an ‘alternative’ national strategy. What are they to do, given how far the left is from power in every African country? In contrast, Latin America is a more hospitable site to pose and answer these questions, from semi-liberated sites – Cuba, Venezuela and perhaps Bolivia – to terrains where centre-left governments (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay) are rejecting the IMF and privatization under pressure from social and labour movements.

It is not at all unusual in Africa for activists to refer to the admittedly rancid and repressive national state apparatus as a potential saviour. This is not naivety, but instead reflects the concrete sense of so many movements, that their states – once democratized - are ultimately the only real site of countervailing power against market excesses. And given the weaknesses in recent global-elite and African-elite policy proposals aimed at reversing the continent’s socio-economic collapse, these activists are continually pressed to develop new policy options that are more amenable to society and nature.

To reiterate, it is unquestionable that such options will have to emerge from the bottom-up, through activism and critiques that emanate from Africans themselves. In the aftermath of struggles against colonialism, Walter Rodney was one of the leading admirers of

the vital activity of the broad African masses, including the sacrifice of life and limb. In brief, it is enough to say that the African people as a collective had upset the plans of the colonialists, and had surged forward to freedom. Such a position may seem to be a mere revival of a certain rosy and romantic view of African independence which was popular in the early 1960s, but, on the contrary, it is fully cognisant of the shabby reality of neocolonial Africa.30

To replace shabby neoliberal projects such as NEPAD with a bottom-up programmatic strategy requires not only the rapid development of mass democratic movements across the continent, suffused with values of liberty, equality (including between the sexes) and solidarity. In addition, a healthier skepticism about global governance is required from many who risk being seduced by talk of Millennium Development Goals.

**Major distraction gimmicks**

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Global civil society campaigning via Make Poverty History, Live 8 rock concerts and the Global Call for Action against Poverty (GCAP) peaked in July 2005. But notwithstanding high visibility at that year’s G8 meeting in Gleneagles, a rather more telling elite reaction to the global governance project occurred just over two months later, during discussions in New York of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These aspirations were generated five years earlier by the United Nations, itself simultaneously moving to embrace the Washington Consensus with its pro-corporate Global Compact, endorsement of ‘Type 2’ Public-Private Partnership privatization strategies, and growing collaboration with the World Bank. To activate the MDGs, United Nations General Assembly resolution 55/2 set seven targets:

- reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half between 1990 and 2015;
- enrol all children of school age in primary schools by 2015;
- make progress toward gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005;
- reduce infant and child mortality ratios by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015;
- reduce maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015;
- provide access for all who need reproductive health services by 2015; and
- implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.

Consistent with the critique of ‘traditional’ civil society noted above, it can be argued that the MDG process and the concrete strategies and tactics for achieving these objectives – including privatization of basic services such as water and electricity -- do more harm than good. This is conceded not only by radical critics within civil society and academia, but also by some in the United Nations itself. To be sure, there may be some benefits associated with globally-constituted, universal objectives. As Peggy Antrobus of DAWN puts it, ‘Viewed within the context of “the new aid agenda”, the MDGs provide a common framework agreed to by all governments with measurable targets and indicators of progress, around which governments, UN agencies, International Financial Institutions and civil society alike could rally.’

They permit at least notional accountability for donor agencies and states, which civil society activists are already pointing to as a guilt trip reminder.

31. Peggy Antrobus (2003), ‘Presentation to Working Group on the MDGs and Gender Equality’, UNDP Caribbean Regional Millennium Development Goals Conference, Barbados, 7 July. Cites below are from this paper.
However, speaking the language of many feminists and social justice activists, Antrobus is blunt: ‘I do not believe in the MDGs. I think of them as a Major Distraction Gimmick’:

There is evidently widespread awareness of their limitation: their inadequate targets and indicators; their restriction to indicators that are quantifiable, when much of what is most important – such as Women’s Equality and Empowerment -- is not easily quantifiable; their omission of important Goals and Targets, such as Violence against Women and Sexual and Reproductive Rights; their silence on the context and institutional environment in which they are to be met... In fact, a major problem of the MDGs is their abstraction from the social, political and economic context in which they are to be implemented – the ‘political economy’ of the MDGs.

Central to MDG political economy is that the Bretton Woods Institutions and WTO – acting mainly for G8 governments and corporations -- appear intent upon bringing ever more aspects of life under the rules of commodification, attributing market values to society and nature. Hence, as the UN itself admits, ‘International Monetary Fund programme design has paid almost no systematic attention to the goals when considering a country’s budget or macroeconomic framework.’ A 2005 UN report complains that ‘In the vast number of country programmes supported by the IMF since the adoption of the goals, there has been almost no discussion about whether the plans are consistent with achieving them.’ The report documents how budget constraints prevent scaling up sectoral strategies for some of the MDGs, and that in some cases, ‘countries are advised not to even to consider such scaled-up plans’ by the Bretton Woods Institutions.

UN Habitat’s website also admits ‘the common criticism of MDG as a “top-down” process, which excludes Local Authority and other stakeholders’ involvement... There is, thus, an inherent danger that even if the targets are achieved, the inequalities within a nation across people and places would still persist.’ Minority Rights Group International agrees: ‘There is a genuine risk that the strategies used to achieve the MDGs will be less beneficial for minority groups, might increase

32. Antrobus argues: ‘The deliberate exclusion of this fundamental indicator of women’s human rights and empowerment from the MDGs symbolises both the lack of sincerity on the part of the majority of those who voted on them, and the struggle that lies ahead for anyone who seriously seeks equality, equity and empowerment for women.’
inequalities and may harm some minority communities. That risk was acknowledged in the UNDP’s Human Development Report 2003: Millennium Development Goals, which conceded that ‘Women, rural inhabitants, ethnic minorities and other poor people are typically progressing slower than national averages -- or showing no progress -- even where countries as a whole are moving towards the Goals.’

The MDGs themselves are sometimes ridiculed for their lack of ambition. Kumi Naidoo of Civicus – responsible for energetic advocacy of MDGs within GCAP – concedes that ‘Those that use the MDG framework do so on a strategic level and are pushing for goals beyond the MDGs, i.e. Vietnam speaks of MDG Plus, and other speak of “beyond MDGs”’. Civicus staff sometimes refer to the ‘Minimalist Development Goals’, even though MDGs are the central focus of the GCAP. The disappointing minimalism is evident in a 2003 article by leading UNDP bureaucrats, who argued that the MDG commitments to a ‘global partnership’ on aid, trade and debt find their current official commitments in the Monterrey Consensus on development finance, the Doha ‘development’ round on trade, and the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, respectively. Progress on global commitments for improved aid, fairer trade and steep debt relief will determine, to a large extent, the successful achievement of the first seven MDGs by 2015 in most if not all developing countries.

If so, that official commitment worsens poverty rather than reduces it. The UN bureaucrats do admit that while ‘Monterrey, Doha and HIPC hold great promise to make significant contributions to the achievement of the MDGs, however, progress thus far has been extremely slow.’ As Monterrey, Doha and HIPC all show, global elite commitments on aid, trade and debt relief are, in short, so far short of progressive change, that reaching the MDG targets is impossible.

37. Kumi Naidoo (2005), ‘Civil Society Gears up for a Major Global Campaign against Poverty, CIVICUS Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer, Johannesburg, 21 January.
This was abundantly clear in September 2005, by the time of the heads-of-state summit meant to celebrate progress on the MDGs. As South African president Thabo Mbeki observed with uncharacteristic pessimism, ‘our approach to the challenge to commit and deploy the necessary resources for the realization of the MDGs has been half-hearted, timid and tepid.’ According to an apparently surprised Vicente García-Delgado, the UN representative for Civicus,

What took place at the UN during the few weeks leading to the Summit was a disgrace -- an ugly diplomatic spectacle where a large majority of Member States saw their carefully drafted outcome document blown up before their eyes, and where the entire process of delicate inter-governmental negotiations was held hostage to a small minority pulling in opposite directions.

Nevertheless, García-Delgado claimed, GCAP ‘actions have not been in vain. Without their participation and activism, the results of this Summit might have been much, much worse.’ But to be quite frank, weren’t these efforts in vain given that no new resources or strategic changes emerged? Didn’t the September 2005 fiasco demonstrate the need for the much deeper and also much more urgent work of expanding existing organic activist initiatives?

Perhaps once the dust has settled on the wretched deals done by the G8 to the applause of coopted NGOs, and once it is evident to all that the MDGs were a charade, the latest version of the Africa charity fad will be buried. Then the more durable activists will again be on the frontlines and front pages, whether through specific campaigns against state and corporate malfeasance (such as the Iraq war and occupation), or other forms of progressive mobilization and democratic advocacy, or the construction of national Social Forums and internationally-networked sectoral forums that deliver serious solidarity.

**Conclusion: Ideological directions**

Returning to the array of political forces noted at the outset, it is likely that, as in the 1930s, the Rightwing Resurgence will grow and will fuse with the economic interests of the Washington Consensus (and its US/UK corporate and banking backers), notwithstanding the ideological contradictions. Supporters of the Post-Washington Consensus will probably seek closer alignment with more ‘responsible’ Third World nationalists (e.g. Lula), and will tackle the more principled, radical

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40. Thabo Mbeki (2005), ‘The UN Millennium Review -- Time Running Out!’, Address of the President of South Africa at the United Nations Millennium Review Summit Meeting, New York, 15 September, p.3.
forces within the *global justice movements*. Civil society forces will be faced with more difficult choices.

Under these circumstances, Samir Amin argues the necessity of a broadly unifying political project. Beginning with the global justice movements and Third World nationalists, he observes, ‘The reconstruction of a Southern Front capable of giving the peoples of Asia and Africa, together with their solidarity across three continents, the capacity to make their voices heard will come about by liberating ourselves from the illusions of a “non-asymmetric” globalised liberal system, that will allow the nations of the Third World to make up their “backwardness”.’ Drawing inspiration from the February 2003, Kuala Lumpur meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, at which Mbeki turned over the chair to Mahathir, Amin elaborates: ‘The Southern countries are becoming aware of the fact that the neoliberal globalised management has nothing to offer them and that being the case, the neo-liberal system had to use military violence to be established, thereby playing the game enshrined in the American project. The [Non-Aligned] Movement is becoming - as suggested - that of “non-alignment with liberal globalisation and US hegemony.”’ Post-Washington Consensus advocates in a ‘social Europe’ would, in this scenario, join the Southern Front: ‘There exist conditions capable of promoting closer relations between at least all the peoples of the ancient world. This union could be given concrete expression at the international diplomatic level by thickening the Paris-Berlin-Moscow-Peking axis... by developing friendly relations between this axis and the reconstituted Afro-Asian front.’ No matter how unrealistic in the present conjuncture, Amin’s is an attractive scenario: a global popular front against the United States: ‘[With] an authentic cohesion between Europe, Russia, China, the whole of Asia and Africa will constitute the foundation on which will be constructed a multi-centrist, democratic and pacific world.’

However, as Amin conceded, the challenge for civil society is formidable:

> The political regimes set up in many Southern countries are not democratic, to say the least, and are sometimes really odious. These authoritarian power structures favour comprador groups whose interests consist in expanding the global imperialist capitalism. The alternative - construction of a front comprising peoples of the South - can materialise through democratisation. This necessary democratisation will be a difficult and long process but it certainly

42. Amin, S. (2003), ‘Confronting the Empire,’ presented to the conference on The Work of Karl Marx and the Challenges of the 21st Century, Institute of Philosophy of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment, the National Association of Economists of Cuba, the Cuban Trade Union Federation and the Centre for the Study of Economy and Planning, Havana, 5-8 May. Subsequent references are also from this paper.
cannot be realised by establishing puppet regimes to open their countries’ resources to plunder by North American multinational companies, regimes that will consequently be even more fragile, less credible and less legitimate than those they succeeded under protection by the American invader.

A stronger case for the global popular front comes from Jeremy Brecher:

If the Bush program is regarded as little but the continuation of US imperialism as usual, then I understand the logic of saying that popular movements require no new alliances with national elites and governments. But if it represents a greatly augmented threat to the peace and future well-being of the world - as the (very different) phenomenon of Nazism represented something far more threatening than traditional German capitalism and militarism - then one must consider all the forces that could possibly be brought to bear to defeat it. Let me add immediately that I entirely agree that various governments and elites I discuss as potential coalition partners ‘should not be part of the global peace movement’ and that they are ‘never going to be reliable allies.’ Indeed, there were other errors of the left in the 1930s and 1940s that grew in part from subservience to the state interests of one or another power (the capitalist powers for the Social Democrats; the USSR for the Communists). I emphasise the need for the new global peace movement to remain independent of the dominance of any of the various forces with whom alliances need to be constructed. The movement’s independence from elites and governments should go hand in hand with its effort to move them toward collective resistance to US dictation and aggression.43

What historical precedents give grounds for optimism, in these respects? William Martin points out that, ‘for at least several hundred years there have been successive, waves of movements which have attacked and destabilised the capitalist world-economy, its hegemonic powers, and yet, at the same time, come to provide the foundation for a new ordering of accumulation and political rule on a world scale. Seen from this perspective, present movements take on a distinctive meaning, and pose for us quite different possible futures.’44 Martin and his

Binghamton University colleagues have identified four ‘waves of movements’: 1760-1848, 1848-1917, 1917-68, and 1968-2001. The most recent left movements have ‘a solid understanding that capturing national power could not be equated with capturing control over economic or cultural lives, embedded in the much deeper and wider domains of the capitalist world-economy,’ Martin insists. ‘This strategic advance presented a dilemma, however, that remained unresolved: how does one organise and attack capital and inequality, if even the capture of state power leaves its global foundations unchecked? Inability to resolve this dilemma was considerably complicated by faltering attempts to bridge the differences of race and gender across the core-periphery divide.’

The answer lies in actual grassroots struggles, especially, as Martin puts it, in ‘the demands for the decommodification of land, labour, and cultural life, demands so prominent in the local, but increasingly globally-integrated, struggles against the privatisation of basic human needs (land, water, education, health).’ Late-capitalist antisystemic movements may find much to learn from earlier movements against incorporation into the capitalist world, movements which have often been dismissed as attempts to retain “pre-capitalist” modes of life and production.’

Finally, it is in searching for historical, comparative, abstract and strategic options that the committed intellectual plays a potentially crucial role. The possibility of a revived global civil society intent on halting and reversing neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, eco-destruction and militarism depends upon the nurture of independent-minded nationalists, feminists, critical political economists and anti-imperialists who are already helping to shape the progressive movements’ strategies. Perhaps Frantz Fanon set out the challenge most forcefully, in his discussion of intellectuals in liberated zones of Algeria, circa 1961:


45. Going back to the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires, Martin continues, ‘It is possible to trace trans-national networks of not only ideological opposition to older imperial networks, but also increasingly inter-connected revolt against core agents of the rising capitalist world-economy... Merchants, mariners and diasporic networks, integrally tied to global economic processes and political struggles, began to fuel nationalist and revivalist revolts’ that reached as far as Indonesia. In the 18th century, ‘a rising tide of revolts against the central, proletarian base of the eighteenth century existed, leading to the destruction of a world-wide system of enslavement and slave-based commodity production.’ This entailed ‘extensive networking and clustering of emancipatory struggles across colonial boundaries prior to, rather than derived from, the French (and American) Revolution,’ of which Haiti was a crucial example. The mid-nineteenth century was the period of state-oriented party-building, and from 1917 national independence revolutions were common, all based upon the ‘expectation that state power would bring emancipation.’ (Martin, ‘Three Hundred Years of World Movements.’)

46. Of course, conditions are not easy in most sites of Third World – especially African - intellectual work, with many academics surviving on less than US$100 a month pay. Even in once proud universities like Dar es Salaam and Makerere, former progressive intellectuals are prone to taking jobs or consultancies with multilateral agencies, donors, corporations and wealthy Northern NGOs,
One of the greatest services that the Algerian revolution will have rendered to the intellectuals of Algeria will be to have placed them in contact with the people, to have allowed them to see the extreme, ineffable poverty of the people, at the same time allowing them to watch the awakening of the people’s intelligence and the onward progress of their consciousness...

Today, the people’s tribunals are functioning at every level, and local planning commissions are organizing the division of large-scale holdings, and working out the Algeria of tomorrow. An isolated individual may obstinately refuse to understand a problem, but the group or the village understands with disconcerting rapidity. It is true that if care is taken to use only a language that is understood by graduates in law and economics, you can easily prove that the masses have to be managed from above. But if you speak the language of everyday, if you are not obsessed by the perverse desire to spread confusion and to rid yourself of the people, then you will realise that the masses are quick to seize every shade of meaning and to learn all the tricks of the trade.47

In a world with scarce revolutionary opportunities at present, one responsibility of applied progressive intellectuals is surely, in the same humble spirit, to help develop issues and identify sites of interrelationship between sectors, spaces and scales of radical politics. An April 2002 conference of two such committed organizations - the Council for Development and Social Research in Africa and Third World Network-Africa - called upon ‘scholars and activist intellectuals within Africa and in the Diaspora, to join forces with social groups whose interests and needs are central to the development of Africa’.48 This is a good mandate: in Africa, everywhere, very urgently indeed.

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47. Frantz Fanon (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, p.189.