The World Social Forum and the Globalization of Social Movements and Public Spheres

Tuomas Ylä-Anttila

abstract

The intensification of social interdependencies at the global level has brought about a situation in which we must ask, how people from around the world could participate in democratic public debate over global political issues. This article investigates the World Social Forum (WSF) as an attempt to create public debate on a global scale. The WSF and the present state of development of global public spheres are contrasted with the birth of national public spheres in the early eighteenth century. It is pointed out that national social movements, media institutions with national circulation, and national identities were preconditions for the formation of national public spheres, and that from the early days of national public spheres, counterpublics contested the formal, structural and cultural exclusions from public participation. Contrasting these developments with the WSF, it is shown, first, that the conditions for social movement activity – the existence of repertoires of global collective action, associational networks and cultural frames – are increasingly being met at the global level. Second, it is shown that, as regards the media, the technological and to some extent also the institutional requirements to global debates have developed, but language barriers and persisting national characteristics of media institutions importantly shape the development of global public spheres. Third, it is noted that emerging global publics of the WSF lack a strong identity unifying the participants, comparable to national identities which served to commit citizens to common public debates in national public spheres. Last, while the WSF aims at countering exclusions from and limitations of global public debates, exclusions – formal, structural and cultural – remain within the forum itself.

Introduction

A central feature of democracy is that citizens have the right to freely debate, form opinions, and that these opinions are given consideration when political decisions are made. The turn in political philosophy towards deliberative models of democracy has laid particular emphasis on the role of public debate and will-formation as essential feature of robust democracy (e.g. Benhabib, 1996; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Young, 2000). The central principle in such conceptions of democracy is that all citizens affected by certain political decisions should be able to participate in public debate concerning those decisions.

In the present state of development of the world system, decisions taken on one side of the globe impinge upon people's lives everywhere rapidly and more profoundly than

ever before. When the Chinese economy is opened to foreign investment, workers in Europe are laid off, when the US decides to show its military force in the face of international terrorism, a Polish NATO-soldier is sent off to Iraq and so on. From the point of view of democracy, this invites us to ask whether there are possibilities of global public debate, where people from around the world could express their opinions about decisions that may affect their lives. Where should we look for to find seeds of such global publics?

The answer I offer in this article is: in global social movements, mobilized around various political conflicts. I will show that social movements have played a decisive role in the process of the formation of national public spheres, and examine the possibilities of global social movements to contribute to a similar process at the global level.

Social movements have a long history of cooperation across national borders, but the intensification of global economic, political and cultural interaction has, during the last two decades, radically intensified these relations of transnational social movement cooperation. Recent years have witnessed convergence of different global movements in mass demonstrations from Seattle to Genoa and Gothenburg, criticizing the present system of global governance. This process has also given rise to the World Social Forum (WSF), to bring together global civil society actors to take part in public debates over global political issues.

This article contrasts the global social movements of the World Social Forum with movements that contributed to the birth of national public spheres starting from the 18th century, in order to understand the possibilities and challenges faced by those that attempt to transfer the idea of democratic public debate from the national to the global level.

I do not claim that public debate is today globalized to the extent that national contexts no longer matter – far from it. Nor do I wish to imply that the WSF would represent an ideal form of global public communication. Rather, I view the WSF as a kind of laboratory of global public debate, the study of which can help us to identify both the potential and the pitfalls of democratic public debate across borders of nations as well as those created by cultural difference. Thus, I do not attempt to give a comprehensive account of the processes which have led to the increasing globalization of public communication. My goal is more modest: first, to identify some important factors that are required for public spheres to exist on a national scale, and show which of these requirements are fulfilled at the global level, and second, point out exclusionary mechanisms which have operated in national public spheres and contrast these with the mechanisms of exclusion in public spheres that are global. Analyzing these similarities and differences of national and global public spheres leads to better understanding of the possibilities and problems of the WSF in particular, and global public spheres more generally.

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Tuomas Ylä-Anttila

Three Requirements for the Formation of Public Spheres at the National Level: Social Movements, Media Institutions and National Identities

According to Jürgen Habermas' renowned account (Habermas, 1989), the idea and institutions of national bourgeois public spheres began to take form in Britain, France and Germany around the turn of the eighteenth century. The national public spheres developed hand in hand with the capitalist economy and the rise of the bourgeoisie. Their extension to cover large territories of today's nation-states was accompanied by the intensification of social interdependencies, such as trade relations, cultural exchange etc. across these territories.

National public spheres were born as a challenge to the social order of feudalism. The arbitrary rule based on hierarchical order of status given at birth was to be replaced by rule based on truth, arrived at through rational argumentation; *veritas non auctoritas facit legem* (Habermas, 1989: 82). Besides increasing social interdependencies on a national scale and the idea of rational debate, the formation of public spheres at the national level required at least three things: social movements, media institutions and finally, a national identity shared to some degree by the participants of public debate.

Social Movements and Collective Action as Continuation of Debate by Other Means

Habermas describes adequately the structural changes of society which led to the development of national public spheres and the ideas that guided the debate. However, he fails to recognize the role that social movements played in the formation of national public spheres. The bourgeoisie did not bring down the feudal order by mere rational debate, but resorted at times to collective action. Not only have social movements contributed to the processes where issues are raised to the public agenda, but the very ideas and institutions of public debate have evolved in the course of political conflicts and through collective action in social movements. The formation of public spheres at the national level has required the formation of national social movements, with their repertoires of collective action, associational networks and cultural framing of political issues. I shall examine each of these three aspects of social movements in turn.

Repertoires of Collective Action. As soon as the idea developed that public opinion, formed in rational debates, should guide political decision-making, citizens developed a host of measures to back up the opinions they had formed in the course of such debates. Charles Tilly (1986) has famously called these measures the modern repertoire of collective action. Paraphrasing von Clausewitz, collective action can thus be seen as *continuation of debate by other means*. Boycotts, petitions, demonstrations and other means of collective action coordinated on a national scale developed in tandem with the institutions and norms of public debate.

The boycott, for example, as a part of the modern repertoire of collective action on the national scale, was born in 1765, when the inhabitants of the British American colonies organized to boycott the products of their mother country to oppose a new stamp tax. Petitioning the parliament became a part of the repertoire of collective action on the

national scale when a large part of the British population signed the great anti-slavery petition in 1787. The urban uprising, to give a third example, entered the modern repertoire of collective action in Grenoble, in a prologue to the French Revolution of 1789. The protest was initiated by officials threatened by unemployment after the decision of Louis XVI to dismantle the local *parlements*, but soon turned to an uprisal of a large part of the population of the city. (Tarrow, 1994: 40-51; Drescher, 1987; Egret, 1977).

Boycotts, petitions, demonstrations and other types of collective action are today relatively widely accepted as ways to raise political problems to the public agenda, to have them recognized as common problems to be discussed. But the movements described above served not only to establish collective action as an accepted means to continue public debate; they were important also to the institutionalization of public spheres themselves. The American boycott movement and the uprisal in Grenoble developed to the American and French revolutions, as a consequence of which the norms that guarantee the functioning of public spheres – freedom of speech and the press etc. – were institutionalized as parts of the declarations of the rights of citizens.

Networks of Associations. Advocates of deliberative conceptions of democracy today often remark that a lively civil society consisting of networks of voluntary associations provides a necessary infrastructure for the formation of public spheres. These associational networks that are today regarded as essential for a robust democracy have developed in the course of political conflicts. Associations do not only engage in political deliberation in meetings, but also contribute to public debate by participating in the mobilization of collective action. The relationship between associational networks and collective action is bidirectional. The historical cycles of protest outlined above have both required pre-existing networks of associations reaching across vast geographical distances, and given rise to new associational networks.

The movement boycotting British goods in the American colonies led to the mobilization of existing associational networks for the purposes of social movement action. Merchants' clubs, voluntary fire brigades, religious associations and others turned into a network of Sons of Liberty organizations to enforce the boycott and coordinate protest action. The network played an important role in the colonies' struggle for independence (Tarrow, 1994: 50; Maier, 1972). A similar development can be observed in conjunction with the British anti-slavery movement. Industrialists' associations had, in the beginning of 1780's, networked to oppose new taxes and a customs union with Ireland. The networks and expertise conjured in these campaigns were later mobilized for a cause of a wide moral concern by the anti-slavery movement. (Tarrow, 1994: 41-42; Drescher, 1987.)

Associational networks are, thus, essential for mobilising collective action in order to raise political problems to the public agenda. While existence of such networks on a national scale was necessary in order for cycles of political mobilization in this scale to develop, the mobilization cycles have been important in strengthening the networks and building national civil societies which are today regarded as being of great importance for democratic societies.

Cultural Frames. Social movements contribute to raising political problems to the agenda of public debate by developing and endorsing cultural framings of these problems. In order for people to mobilize around a political problem, it must be discursively framed by referring to shared cultural codes. The examples from the preludes to the American and French revolutions above illustrate the importance of framing for widespread mobilization. The boycott of British goods was initiated by merchants, but once the issue was successfully framed as a question of autonomy for all people of the American colonies, people from all social strata joined the actions which then developed to a revolutionary movement. Similarly, the uprisal of Grenoble was first limited to the officials threatened by unemployment, but subsequently framed as an issue relevant for the political influence of all citizens (Tarrow, 1994).

Media Institutions and Collective Action

A second requirement for the birth of national public spheres was the existence of media institutions which circulate discourses on the national scale. Habermas' account on the birth of national public spheres points out how the spread of trade routes to remote areas necessitated the circulation of information in newsletters to ensure success in business. He shows how these newsletters evolved into the political press, and how cafés of the bourgeoisie provided the necessary institutional framework for face-to-face debate (Habermas, 1989: 15-21). However, Habermas seems to miss the fact that periods of intense political conflict and collective action had an important influence in the development of media institutions. Social movements both made use of the existing media institutions to mobilize people across large territories and gave rise to new media institutions.

For example, the newspapers in the British American colonies spread the news of collective action and turned local events into waves of protest flushing all over the colonies. The news of the February riots in 1765 spread in newspapers of New York, Philadelphia and Portsmouth and within a few days similar actions took place in New Jersey and Connecticut (Tarrow, 1994: 49-52; Maier, 1972: 56-57). In addition to utilizing the existing press, social movements gave rise to new newspapers. Preceding the French revolution of 1789, papers published in Paris numbered 184; a year later their number had surged to 335. The wave of revolutions that swept over Europe in 1848 resulted in a similar growth of the press all around the continent (Tarrow, 1994: 54).

Social movements, then, do not only contribute to public debate by raising new issues to the agenda. Rather, they have played an important role in the formation of the institutional backbones of public spheres – media institutions as well as associational networks – as we know them today.

National Identities, Mobilization and Commitment to Public Debate

Political mobilization at the national level has required the creation of national identities. The nationalist master frames of the revolutionary movements described above evolved into collective national identities that are exclusive, dividing the world into those who belong to the nation and those who do not. Mobilization of groups other than national seems to have required such exclusive identities as well. The opposition

between workers and capitalists is the most obvious example, but so called new social movements, like those of women or ethnic minorities have often created their own essentialist, exclusive identities (see Phillips, 1996: 145). Exclusive identities have been necessary for the formation of communities of solidarity and political mobilization.

But it is not only mobilization to collective action that has required exclusive identities. The commitment to debate over common political problems in the national public spheres seems to have required, to some extent, an exclusive national identity as well. Recognition of others as legitimate participants in public debate has required that they be recognized as equal citizens, belonging to the nation, and thus having the right to take part in debating the political problems common to that nation (see Calhoun, 2002).

It can be concluded that collective action, associational networks and cultural framings of social movements were an important requirement to the development of national public spheres. The formation of national public spheres also required media institutions which developed hand in hand with social movements, and national identities which evolved from the cultural framings endorsed by social movements. These observations provide an analytic framework for the assessment of the WSF as an attempt to create public debate on the global level. But before turning to the analysis of the WSF, a further characteristic of national public spheres needs to be investigated, namely, the mechanisms of exclusion which have limited the scope of public debates and the attempts of excluded groups to gain a position as legitimate participants in the public sphere.

Exclusions From National Public Spheres

Public spheres have always been sites of contention. Struggles are waged in public spheres not only over certain political issues, but also over the norms of debate itself, including the conditions of participation in the debate. Various mechanisms operate to exclude some social groups from public participation. There are at least three different types of exclusionary mechanisms, which I shall refer to as formal, structural and cultural.

Workers and women were *formally* excluded from the early national public spheres. Even though the principles of equality and open access to all citizens were important parts of the self-understanding of bourgeois publics, 'all citizens' here included only property-owning white males. The rules guiding the political institutions denied workers' and women's electoral participation, and the institutions of the public sphere – newspapers and cafés – were equally off-limits to these groups. These formal mechanisms of exclusion were cemented by structural and cultural mechanisms. The *structural* constraints to workers and women's participation stemmed from the economic and social relationships of early bourgeois societies. Many workers and women lacked the resources – financial resources, social networks and education to name a few – to participate in public as peers with bourgeois men. Furthermore, discursive use of power in public legitimized the exclusion of workers and women from

the public sphere *culturally*. They were portrayed in public debate as unqualified for independent, rational political reasoning and debating (see Fraser, 1992).

To combat their formal exclusion from public spheres, workers and women had to overcome the resource constraints imposed by structural conditions and struggle against the cultural conceptions portraying them as politically incompetent. This struggle took place in counterpublics excluded from the hegemonic public sphere. Elite women founded charities and other organizations that functioned as sites of debate. The non-property owning classes participated in debates in various associations and political movements of their own, and working-class newspapers and pamphlets were strong already in the early days of modern public spheres (Fraser, 1992: 115-117; Ryan, 1992; Eley, 1992: 303-306; Curran, 1991).

Counterpublics, then, can be defined as publics that aim to make new things public and include new groups as legitimate participants of public debate (see Fraser, 1992; Warner, 2002; Negt and Kluge, 1993 [1972]). The counterpublics of workers and women made workers' and women's rights public issues and their discourses penetrated the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, resulting, in the end, in formal inclusion of both groups as legitimate participants in the public sphere. By the means of debate and collective action the position of the two groups in question was politicized and both finally achieved formal rights of participation.

Even though the formal rights of these groups are instituted in the countries we regard as democratic, the struggle against structural and cultural mechanisms of exclusion is far from being over. Structurally imposed inequalities still prevent many groups from participating as peers in public debate, and discursively operating cultural mechanisms of exclusion still remain. Arguments presented, for example, with a working-class or an ethnic minority accent or those offered by women are still labelled as less worthy in certain debates (see Fraser, 1992: 199; Mansbridge, 1990: 127).

The World Social Forum and the Requirements for Global Public Spheres

As I have pointed out in the introduction, the intensification of social interdependencies at the global level has brought about a situation where political decisions taken on one side of the globe have increasingly significant effects on the lives of people everywhere. In the following, I shall examine the Global Justice Movement (GJM) as an attempt to bring these interdependencies and the political issues related to them to the global political agenda. I point out how repertoires of collective action and associational networks which were essential for the formation of national public spheres have been globalized, and how these developments coupled to the creation of the cultural frame of 'alternative globalization' have given rise to a new global social movement. I then move on to show that despite the conditions for global social movement activity being met, and media institutions functioning at the global level, the linguistic barriers, persisting national characteristics of the mass media and the lack of a unifying identity result in global public spheres being different from their national counterparts. Last, I examine

the ways in which the WSF aims to counter exclusions in global public spheres, and the exclusionary mechanisms operating in the WSF itself.

The Global Justice Movement and Recognition of Global Political Problems: Repertoires, Networks, Frames

In academic discussion of economists, sociologists and political scientists, globalization has been *the* buzzword for quite a while now. The debate on political problems related to globalization has slowly spread to the mainstream media as well, but it burst to everybody's living room trough TV and newspapers with the wave of mass demonstrations which started from Seattle in 1999. The movement was made possible by the extension of repertoires of collective action and associational networks to the global level, and by the creation of the cultural frame of alternative globalization.

Repertoires of Global Collective Action. The central elements of the repertoire of action of the GJM are globally coordinated demonstrations and counter-summits. Demonstrations have been organized against the institutions of global economic governance in individual countries for a long time. In Latin America, the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank have been protested against since the 1970's (Teivainen, 2002, 1991); in France, the movement to cancel the debts of the poorest countries gained much attention with a massive outdoor concert event at Place de la Bastille on the day of bicentennial commemoration of the French revolution in 1989 (Agrikoliansky, 2003); and in Germany, some 80,000 people marched against the IMF and World Bank meeting in Berlin in 1988 (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992: 561).

Despite their focus on global political problems, these protest events remained, to a degree, as a national phenomenon. At least they did not give rise to a global political movement at the time – even though they, presumably, paved the way for the GJM.

The wave of protest that started from Seattle marked a shift from the national repertoires of collective action, which developed along with national public spheres, towards collective action coordinated globally in a more immediate way than before. Huge numbers of people from several countries have been mobilized to the main site of demonstration, and tens of thousands of people in hundreds of cities around the world have participated in demonstrations staged simultaneously (Almeida and Lichbach, 2003). The February 2003 demonstrations against the war in Iraq, organized using the internet and the networks of the GJM, gathered 11 million participants in 800 cities. This amounts to the largest one-day protest in history, leading the New York Times to declare global public opinion "the second superpower of the world" (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2003: 3). The internet has provided the tools required for the organization of such events and can, perhaps, be regarded as the most important explaining factor for the new wave of globalization of collective action.

Like their precursors at the national level, the global movements of today combine collective action with public debate. From town meetings and pamphlets, the sites of debate have been changed to global counter-summits and the internet. Counter-summits have been organized at an increasing pace starting at least from 1984, when a group of economists and activists countered the meeting of the G7 in London (Agrikoliansky, 2003: 4). The above-mentioned demonstrations in Berlin in 1988 and Paris in 1989 were

both accompanied by counter-summits. These summits have now evolved into a new element in the repertoire of global movements, the most important example of which is the World Social Forum (WSF), a permanent institution for conducting public debates by movement activists from all around the world.

Global Networks of Associations. The demonstrations and counter-summits referred to above did not, of course, come out of thin air. Like the national social movements linked to the formation of national public spheres, the demonstrations of the GJM and the WSF were made possible by networks of associations – and have also contributed to the creation of new global associational networks.

Global networks of associations have expanded dramatically during the past decade. The membership of international non-governmental organizations grew by 70% in the 1990's, and the steady growth rate of their number since WWII increased sharply during that decade. The growth has been particularly rapid in the field of development cooperation. At the end of the decade, the monetary value of aid by NGOs had surpassed that of all national governments combined (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2003: 11-14). These global networks of associations have been an important precondition for the mobilization of the GJM and the birth of the WSF. The coalition that initiated the first WSF formed in a node of a network of Brazilian (the trade union federation, CUT, the movement of landless peasants, MST, and others) and European (most notably Attac) organizations. The International Council (IC) making the decisions concerning the WSF has also been built on pre-existing associational networks. The IC was composed by all participant organizations inviting groups that they had worked with on previous occasions. Other networks besides those that cross in the IC are involved in the organization of the WSF: most events at the forum are set up by networks of organizations independent of the IC. Besides being a prerequisite for organizing the forum, global networks of associations are also produced and strengthened at the WSF. The IC has become an important node in global networks of civil society, and the events at the Forum are sites of creation of connections – formal, inter-organizational ones as well as more informal personal ones – that function as basis for future cooperation.

The Alternative Globalization Frame. In addition to the new global repertoire of action and associational networks, the unification of several national struggles to a global movement required a common cultural frame: alternative globalization. To begin with, the concept of 'globalization' and some shared understanding of it must exist before the concept 'alternative globalization' can emerge. The academic discussion on globalization began in the 1990s and began to spill over to the mainstream of public debate only towards the end of that decade. The Latin American, French and German demonstrations against the IMF and WB and for the cancellation of the debts of the third world in the 1970s and 1980s remained rather isolated national events not only because there was less means to coordinate collective action globally, but because there was no 'globalization' to resist, no cultural frame to unite these mobilizations to a movement. The fact that there is no consensus over whether the movement should be called anti-globalization, alternative globalization, critics of globalization, the Global Justice Movement or whatever – to take examples of terms used in different national contexts – demonstrates that the frame is not yet very well established. The definition

struggles over what is globalization and is it to be resisted or redirected are still a central feature of the movement.[1]

The conditions for a movement to arise and take on the task of raising global issues to the political agenda have been, to some extent realized. We have every reason to believe that despite short-term ups and downs of the waves of mobilization, in the long run the new repertoires, networks and frames will contribute to intensification of global social movement activity and consequent increase in the recognition of global political problems by the world's citizens and decision-makers.

The WSF and Media Institutions

Another precondition to the formation of global public spheres is the existence of media institutions functioning on the global scale. Media institutions with a national circulation were essential forums for debate at the national level. But these institutions also served to spread waves of collective action on the one hand, and were developed in the course of these waves of protest on the other. In the present situation where mediascapes are an increasingly important part of our daily lives, the interaction between social movements and media institutions is even more important than before.

The decision of the actors of the GJM to concentrate their debates to a huge annual meeting to be held at the same time as the World Economic Forum, according to the WSF organizers, motivated by the will to seek the attention of the global media (Teivainen, 2002b). The meetings of those who hold political and economic power, like the WEF, are automatically news. Since citizens are affected by the decisions taken as a result of the debates in these meetings, they are, and ought to be, informed by the media about these meetings. The WSF seeks to make use of the fact that in order to offer balanced coverage and fulfill their democratic functions, media institutions also have to give voice to those opposing the meetings of the power-holders when covering their meetings. This does not mean that the WSF and the WEF would get equal and impartial coverage in all of the world's media, but it does entail that the WSF cannot be left with no attention whatsoever.

Thousands of journalists from around the world have, indeed, arrived at the WSF each year. The organizers have treated these gatekeepers of the global public sphere well. Numerous press conferences are organized, press centers with internet and telephone connections are provided free of charge and a press card opens the doors to all events even if they are too full for anyone else to enter. Although comprehensive data on the reporting on the WSF around the world does not exist, it seems that the WSF has managed to grab the attention of media institutions. Even though the media has concentrated rather heavily in a few global mega-corporations (see Held et al. 1999: 347-349), the counterpublics critical of these corporations seem to have possibilities to

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1   I prefer to use the term Global Justice Movement rather than anti-globalization, because, like many activists involved remark, a large part of the movement is not opposed to intensification of global social interaction as such, but rather, to the ways in which the global economy is governed. However, I choose to use the term alternative globalization frame, rather than the global justice frame, in order to emphasize the fact that the existence of the concept of globalization and the attempt to formulate alternatives for its directions were essential for the movement to be born.

surface in the mainstream of the global flows of information. In addition to relying on the established global media institutions to voice their concerns, the GJM and the WSF have created new ways of using electronic media. As I have pointed out above, the internet has been an important tool for coordinating collective action at the global level. But like social movements linked to the formation of national public spheres, the GJM has also given rise to new media institutions and practices, including news sites for free publication such as Indymedia and practices of non-profit collaborative journalism based on the principle of *copyleft* such as Ciranda.net.

However, media institutions have not been globalized to the degree where we could properly speak of a global public sphere. The most obvious obstacle are language barriers. Despite satellite TV, the internet and news agencies whose material is translated to several languages, the global public sphere still consists mainly of national public spheres operating in national languages. Even though English seems to be gaining an increasingly strong position as the lingua franca of the global age, the system of national language media institutions is still relatively stable, and most people prefer to read their papers and watch their news in their mother tongue.

This is particularly true with regard to those forms of public communication where political opinions are most explicitly expressed. Entertainment is a highly globalized part of public communication. The same music and movies are listened and watched all over the world (even though this globalization of entertainment is to a great extent a one-way street with most material originating from the US). News, as well, spread rather extensively around the world. But are there opinion columns, letters to the editor of political TV talk shows, where the issues and participants of debate would come from every corner of the globe? Hardly. For example, the large protest events of the Global Justice Movement have been covered by newsflashes and images of the international news agencies, but when it comes to debating their meaning, the protestors' demands and the consequences of the protest, the commentary articles, columns and TV debates seem to be more confined to the national level.

As regards the media, the technological and to some extent also the institutional preconditions for the move from national public spheres to the global level have been met. However, many slowly occurring changes in national media institutions, media consumption habits, national cultures of political debate and language proficiency would have to take place before we could properly speak of a global public sphere. Due to the persistence of these differences, the global public sphere will most likely never be a simple replication of national forms of public communication at the global level.

Identities and Commitment to Global Public Debate

The processes of mobilization linked to the formation of national public spheres led, eventually, to the conversion of their central mobilizing frames into nationalist, exclusive identities. Mobilization required the formation of such identities and communities of solidarity formed around them, but they have fostered also the commitment of citizens to participate in public debate with those who they take to share an identity and be part of the same political community.

Perhaps the most marked difference between the nascent national public spheres and those global public spheres that are developing today, is the fact that the latter seem to lack any identity common to all participants. National identities, of course, were never uniform and uncontested, but they were, nevertheless, an important factor in creating commitment to public participation. In addition to the persisting national characteristics of media institutions and the importance of national languages, this lack of a unifying identity is one of the main reasons why 'the global public sphere' will never be a unified whole, even to the degree that national public spheres have been. If there is no such identity, what, then, can create the commitment to participation in public debate at the global level?

The global public sphere consists of circulation of discourse by various publics, some of which are connected to institutions of political power and some to their challengers. Many of them are constituted around certain exclusive identities. Very often these different discourses do not even cross each other's ways. But if the notion of global public sphere is to have any meaning, sometimes they must face each other and engage in debate conducted in such arguments that the opposing side can understand them and accept the justifications that are presented, even though they do not agree with the conclusions.

The WSF is an example of a forum for global debate, where there seems not to be a very strong identity uniting all participants. The publics that meet at the WSF are formed around different political problems and often held together by shared identities, but the only thing committing all of the participants to the common debate seems to be the alternative globalization frame – which, as I pointed out above, is in itself contested. It does not seem very likely, that the alternative globalization frame would evolve into an identity that would unite the participants of the WSF to a revolutionary political movement akin to those linked to the formation of national public spheres. There are attempts at conceiving and mobilizing a revolutionary subject at the global level, most notably, perhaps, that of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004). Despite the popularity of these authors, not nearly all of the participants of the WSF, however, identify themselves with Hardt and Negri's 'multitude' or their revolutionary project. The WSF is, thus, far from being a revolutionary movement or even a political actor with set goals.

The WSF is an example showing that public debate on a global scale, across cultural and linguistic difference is possible, and that commitment to such debate does not necessarily require an identity uniting the participants, but can rest on narrower grounds. However, the WSF does not attempt to be *the* global public sphere in a miniature form, inclusive of all possible actors and points of view. It is founded on the alternative globalization frame that is defined in opposition to neo-liberal forms of globalization and its agents. The WSF struggles against exclusions and narrowing mechanisms of global public spheres, but this counterpublic nature leads to exclusions within the WSF itself.

The Exclusionary Mechanisms in Global Public Spheres and the WSF

The WSF aims at countering various mechanisms of formal, structural and cultural exclusions in global public spheres. Many excluded or marginalized groups have been able to voice their concerns to the global political community through the WSF, and on the whole, the WSF process can be seen as an attempt to counter economistic tendencies in global governance, which act as a discoursive mechanism of culturally isolating economic issues outside the scope of public political contestation. However, exclusionary mechanisms still operate not only in global public spheres at large, but also within the WSF itself.

The WSF Countering Exclusions from Global Public Spheres

On the one hand, the WSF is engaged in the same struggles for political inclusion as the counterpublics of workers and women referred to above. The WSF has aimed at giving voice to those who are formally, structurally and culturally excluded or marginalized in global public spheres. Women in many countries do not have even the formal right to vote, not to speak of the resource constraints imposed by structural factors and mechanisms of cultural exclusion which remain strong. While far from bringing down these mechanisms with the help of the WSF, feminist movements have had a strong presence at the Forum and have been able to introduce the gender perspective in many of the debates conducted there. The same holds for some groups of the poorest workers of the world. Although endowed with formal rights to political participation, structural and also cultural mechanisms exclude them from or at least heavily marginalize them in public political debate. Brazilian landless peasants and Indian dalits,[2] to name two such groups, have participated actively to the WSF and thus taken the opportunity to voice their concerns to global publics. The WSF process, in particular the European Social Forums, have also offered possibilities of political participation to a group that is formally excluded from political participation in the well-off, relatively democratic countries of the North, namely, illegal immigrants or *sans-papiers*. Despite being able to use the WSF to some extent as a forum for public participation, these excluded of marginalized groups may not have had the possibility for equal participation even within the WSF. But before addressing this problem, I shall shortly examine a discursive mechanism which is narrowing the scope of global public debate and which the WSF is attempting to contest, namely, neo-liberal politics of economism.

The WSF brings together struggles of many groups excluded from or marginalized in public participation. The alternative globalization frame which unites the movement, however, does not refer to unification of all of the world's excluded or the like. It is a counter-frame, defined by what it is opposed to: 'neo-liberal globalization' and the institutions that are seen as its agents. According to its charter of principles, the WSF is:

> …an open meeting place for...groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism… The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests…They are designed to

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2   See also Wright, this issue.

ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. (The WSF Charter of Principles, 2001)

The structural power of transnational corporations in the world economic system has indeed grown significantly during the recent decades due to a combination of deregulation of financial markets and technological innovations, which have put corporations in the position to pressure states for policies that are useful to them. The international institutions seen as serving these corporations' interests, most importantly the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, have also strengthened their influence in global governance at the expense of some of the more democratic global decision-making structures such as the UN General Assembly and the UNCTAD (Patomäki and Teivainen, 2003: 30-38).

The discursive strategy that is used to legitimize these institutional changes can be called neo-liberalism as in the WSF charter, but from the point of view of public debate, the concept of economism, as defined by Teivo Teivainen, seems more apt. Economism is "a strategy of defining certain institutions and issues as 'economic' and using the doctrine of economic neutrality to produce a boundary between the 'economic' and political spheres" (Teivainen, 2002: 1). Economism, then, is a strategy used in scientific-political public debate to demarcate 'the economy' as a sector whose governance is founded on rational optimization and to protect it from critical public debate by ordinary citizens by accepting as legitimate only arguments based on a certain type of rationality and presented by experts with certain qualifications. Economism is not exactly a mechanism of exclusion, but one that seeks to limit the public sphere. The counterpublics of the WSF contest the demarcation of the economy as an apolitical sphere of society, outside the scope of democratic public debate. The measures required of the debtor countries by the Bretton Woods institutions are a case in point. Presented by these institutions as politically neutral (like privatizing water distribution to make it more efficient and thus better for all), these measures are insisted by the counterpublics of the WSF to be political, serving the interests of some more than others (a company may, for example, make profit by purchasing a privatized water distributor, but the ensuing hike in prices may leave some with no water at all).

The counterpublics of the WSF demand the scope of public debate to be widened to include economic issues, and the group of legitimate participants of debates concerning decisions on economic policy to be expanded beyond a small group of experts. It is demanded that, in principle, all that may be impinged upon by such decisions should be able to participate in debating them. The WSF aims at countering formal, structural and cultural exclusions from global public spheres and the economistic mechanisms of narrowing down the scope of public debate. However, many exclusionary mechanisms remain within the WSF itself.

Exclusions Within the WSF: Formal, Structural, Cultural

The WSF declares itself to be an open forum for all. In practice, however, some restrictions have been introduced even explicitly, at the formal level. First, organizations engaging in armed political struggles and political parties are excluded from the WSF. These exclusions are introduced in order to keep the WSF as a forum for non-violent political debate and to avoid being overtaken by some political party. In other words,

they are essential for the preservation of the Forum's nature as a forum for debate, as described in its charter of principles. Allowing political parties to participate could lead, it is feared, to a takeover by parties with a certain ideology and subsequent exclusion of all those who do not adhere to this ideology from the forum. A formal exclusion is needed, paradoxally, to protect the inclusiveness of the WSF.

A second form of formal exclusion from the WSF stems from the forum's counterpublic nature. As the alternative globalization frame defines the WSF as being against processes of globalization commanded by multinational corporations and international economic institutions, participants representing these organizations are not allowed. World Bank representatives have been told that they have enough forums in the world where they are listened so in the WSF they are not allowed to speak; the Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt was banned from participating on the grounds that his policies are neo-liberal and thus do not conform to the WSF charter of principles; and the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, who had expressed his willingness to participate, was not welcomed. The first WSF included a debate via satellite with the WEF in Davos and the third WSF did introduce 'roundtables of controversy and dialogue' to invite representatives from intergovernmental bodies that are otherwise banned. Despite these openings, dialogue with its opponents has not been very central to the WSF.

These attempts at dialogue have been sharply criticized by those participants of the WSF who see the institutions banned from the WSF as so illegitimate that they are not even worth talking to, and should rather be abolished than recognized as legitimate partners of dialogue (e.g. Aspects of India's Economy, 2003). There is, thus, a strong element at the WSF which wishes to retain the WSF's counterpublic nature as a forum where the GJM's arguments are refined and solidarities formed. These arguments may then enter debates in the global public sphere at large and confront arguments presented by the movement's opponents, but according to these critics, this is not to happen at the WSF itself. The WSF is continually balancing between the forces calling for dialogue and those denying it.

If this situation is contrasted with the early counterpublics of workers and women contesting the legitimacy of the hegemonic bourgeois public sphere, we can see that counterpublics may need to first concentrate on their internal debates, but sooner or later the goal is to have the arguments enter wider public spheres and contest the lines of argumentation that may be in hegemonic positions there. In the case of the worker's movement, change has occurred in part through violent revolutions or the threat of such, in the case of the women's movement the process has been more pacific. But processes of influence through the public sphere are of course extremely complicated and slow; change through public debate does not occur rapidly and is not easy to measure. If influencing via the public sphere is the goal of the WSF, however, engaging in debate with its opponents is necessary at one point or another. If the goal is something else – forming a pressure group or a political party or a revolutionary movement – then dialogue with opponents may not be necessary.

Moving from formal to structural exclusions within the WSF, it is easy to see that resource constraints due to structural inequalities keep the WSF far from being an

inclusive forum for global deliberation. The most disadvantaged of the world obviously do not have the means to travel to meetings on the other side of the globe. The question of equal participation turns to a question of representation: since the poorest of the poor cannot be present, can some groups or persons be considered truly their representatives? Critiques of this kind at a general level are easy to present and impossible to answer conclusively. Political representation is always continually contested. Some persons claim to represent some group, the members of the represented group may contest the authenticity of the representation, and the representative needs to respond to these concerns or she may lose legitimacy as a representative. The elite women developing feminist counterpublics in their salons or the editors of the working class press in the 18th century were most likely not the most disadvantaged women or workers, but their role in raising debate on the position of these groups was nonetheless crucial. Similarly, the WSF may be of use in voicing the concerns of the world's disadvantaged, but only if it keeps its representativity open to continuous public contestation.

Culturally, many exclusionary mechanisms which are operating elsewhere, cannot be closed outside the WSF either. The WSF makes much of its openness: anyone can organize events at the forum, provided that they adhere to the WSF charter, (which does, as we saw, entail some exclusions). Despite, as many commentators have pointed out, those who dominate global public debates in general – white, older, academically educated men from the North – seem to have dominated, to some degree, the largest and best-publicized events at the WSF as well.

Besides the obvious reason that speakers belonging to this category are, in general, better resourced to participate events like the WSF, there are other reasons, which have to do with the cultural conventions of public debate. The institutions of the global economy which the WSF aims to challenge, are supported by the economistic power-knowledge constellation and run, by and large, by white, older, academically educated men from the North. Challenging economism and engaging its proponents in a debate in which both sides agree to some rules of the debate and comprehend each other's arguments (which does not mean the same thing as accepting them) requires a certain amount of expertise and the mastering of some cultural conventions directing the debate. Those who govern the global economy are more likely to engage in a meaningful debate by those with a similar cultural background and, thus, a similar understanding of what debate means; to speak with those in power one has to, to some extent, speak the same language with them.

This is one important explanation to the fact that the same exclusionary mechanisms which operate elsewhere in global public spheres, are easily carried over to the WSF itself. It does not, however, mean that the WSF should content itself with the existence of these mechanisms. To the contrary, challenging hegemonic norms of public debate and economistic forms of argumentation is one of the most important contributions the WSF can make. But the only way to influence through public debate is to continue the debate with the existing rules, and question these rules at the same time. Debate must here be understood in the broadly defined sense that I have been advocating, including the presence of counterpublics and collective action. The complete denial of all the existing conventions at the same time and the refusal of any dialogue whatsoever with

those holding opposite views would amount to a denial of public debate, even in the broadly defined sense, as a means of exerting political influence.

The WSF, thus, is in the difficult position between internal pluralism and the acceptance of various styles of argumentation and a variety of speakers on the one hand, and the requirement to formulate arguments so that its opponents may understand them and take them in consideration, on the other. This continual balancing seems to be part of the essence of the WSF as a public forum – otherwise the alternatives are either turning inwards and denying dialogue, or setting an aim other than influencing through public debate.

Conclusion

I have contrasted the GJM and the WSF with the social movements that contributed to the birth of national public spheres, in order to understand the possibilities and challenges faced by those who attempt to create public debate on a global scale. The birth of national public spheres has required national social movements, media institutions on the national scale and national identities.

A repertoire of nationally coordinated collective action, associational networks extending across nations and nationalist framings of political conflicts have been necessary for social movements to mobilize on a national scale, to make political problems recognized as common to the national political community. The protests of the GJM have marked a shift to a repertoire of action coordinated on a global scale more immediately than before; expanding global networks of associations have provided the base for global mobilization; and the alternative globalization frame has unified various political struggles to a global movement. This meeting of the requirements for global mobilization is a reason to expect more social movement activity on the global level, despite the periodical ups and downs in the levels of mobilization.

The birth of national public spheres also required media technologies and institutions making possible debate across vast geographical distances. National social movements utilized the media for combining public debate with collective action. The media was also used to spread waves of mobilization, and mobilization led to the creation of new media institutions. As regards the media, the technological, and to some degree the institutional requirements for global public debate have been met. This can be observed by looking at the GJM and the WSF: an important factor motivating the establishment of the WSF was the will to attract the attention of the existing global media institutions, a strategy which seems to have achieved some success. The Internet has been used as a technological resource to spread the wave of mobilization of the GJM across the globe, and the GJM and WSF have, like their national counterparts earlier, given rise to new institutions and practices of media production. The comparison between national and global public spheres points out, in addition to these similarities, an important difference: linguistic differences and the persistence of the national character of media institutions do not permit the creation of a global public sphere based directly on the model of the national ones.

Political mobilization on a national scale required the transformation of the mobilizing cultural frames of national movements into national identities, and these identities have also served to strengthen the commitment of citizens to participate in public debate with those sharing their national identity. At the global level, no such identity unifying the participants of public debate exists. The WSF is an example of debates in which the participants do not seem to be unified by a strong identity, but only the alternative globalization frame, which is not very likely to evolve into a strong identity. However, the alternative globalization frame is defined by what it is opposed to, giving the WSF with a counterpublic character.

Counterpublics at the national level have struggled against formal, structural and cultural exclusions, and the WSF does the same at the global level. The alternative globalization frame uniting the participants does not, however, refer to the unification of the world's politically excluded or disadvantaged, but is defined in opposition to the economistic strategy which aims at pushing economic matters outside the scope of public debate. This counterpublic nature of the WSF leads to the formal exclusion of those defined as opponents from the WSF, which does not, then, represent the whole of the global public sphere in a miniature form, but only a certain part of it. The comparison of the WSF with conterpublics at the national level, however, shows that if it is through public debate that the WSF's aims to influence, then engaging in dialogue with its opponents is necessary at one point or another.

Structural factors also exclude many from participating to the WSF. These exclusions can only be combated by distribution of resources needed for participation among the groups participating at the WSF and keeping the question of representativity open to debate.

If the WSF aims at dialoguing with those in power, cultural exclusionary mechanisms present elsewhere are easily carried over to the WSF itself, as this requires, to some degree, the formulation of the WSF's demands in a way that conforms the conventions of debate accepted by the WSF's opponents. This requires a continual balancing between conducting debates by the existing rules and questioning those rules at the same time – which, in a sense, is the essence of counterpublics as political actors.

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the author   Tuomas Ylä-Anttila is a researcher at the Department of Sociology, University of Helsinki, Finland. He
currently works on the Global Justice Movement and the World Social Forum as initiatives to globalize
public debate, and comparative research on the reception of this debate in different countries through
national media institutions and policy networks.
Address: Department of Sociology, Po. Box. 18, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland.
E-mail: tuomas.yla-anttila@helsinki.fi
Web address: http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/blogs/ylaantti/english.htm